The Shape of Things to Come: Creating a planning culture in TAFE

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Declaration of candidate

I certify that this Exegesis titled *The Shape of Things to Come: Creating a planning culture in TAFE* and submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Project from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University is the result of my research undertaken within a workplace environment. This work has not been submitted previously in whole or part to qualify for any other academic award. It does not contain material previously published or written, except where due reference has been made.

The ideas and interpretation from the activities and journey described are my interpretation as both researcher and practitioner.

As the research was undertaken within a workplace, the artefacts and supporting materials belong to the workplace in which the work was carried out. Sensitivity in judging those materials is requested.

Signed...........................................................................................................................................

Date........................................................................
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I wish to acknowledge a diverse range of people who have assisted me along this journey. Dr Brian Nussey, Executive Director of the Alliance between Onkaparinga and South East Institute of TAFE for his faith and support in providing me with the workplace environment under which this study has taken place.

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<td>ABEF</td>
<td>Australian Business Excellence Framework</td>
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<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<td>ANTA</td>
<td>Australian National Training Authority</td>
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<td>AQTF</td>
<td>Australian Quality Training Framework</td>
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<td>AQC</td>
<td>Australian Quality Council</td>
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<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>BSC</td>
<td>Balanced Score Card</td>
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<td>FAP 2002</td>
<td>Financial and Activity Plans 2002</td>
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<td>II&amp;AD</td>
<td>Information Industries and Applied Design</td>
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<td>ISO</td>
<td>International Standards Organisation</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
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<td>National Council for Vocational Education Research</td>
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<td>Organisational Self Assessment</td>
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<td>QETO</td>
<td>Quality Endorsed Training Organisation</td>
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<td>QTT</td>
<td>Quality Task Team</td>
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<td>REM</td>
<td>Regional Educational Manager</td>
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<td>RTO(s)</td>
<td>Registered Training Organisation(s)</td>
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<td>SA</td>
<td>South Australia</td>
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<td>SMS</td>
<td>Student Management System</td>
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<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
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<td>TAFE in SA</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education in South Australia</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>Vocational Education and Training</td>
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Abstract

This action learning action research project was undertaken as a Ph.D by Project. It focuses on two TAFE institutes in South Australia that were brought together to form an Alliance in 1999 during a time of turbulent change. At this time the TAFE sector in Australia was responding to and continues to respond to external and internal influences. The task was to initiate and implement a planning and performance framework, using quality assurance continuous improvement and change management principles, embracing organisational learning and development processes and practices, across the two institutes that comprised the Alliance.

The action learning action research methodology used a project management approach as its change management strategy. The project entailed an ongoing process of reflection, planning, reviewing and improvement as the researcher and the institution worked to improve workplace practices at the macro level as well as within a subset of the organisation.

This research explored the interface between practitioner, researcher and planner working in an organisation. The project’s cycles of activity undertaken with reference to the literature provided a rich resource to bring together the elements of research and practice. The connectivity of these experiences and the new knowledge and understanding gained, highlight the importance of the emergent planning, implementation and sustainable principles and practices identified as a result of this project. The project was an intervention in an organisation’s development at a point in time. It has highlighted strategies needed to be flexible to accommodate emerging divergent external influences with staff commitment and participation essential at all stages of change management practices. It highlights the importance of strong leadership in such a process.
Chapter 1: Introduction

In late 2000, I was commissioned by the Executive Director of an Alliance of two TAFE colleges in South Australia, to develop an approach to quality assurance across the two member TAFE Institutes. The result was a lengthy period of practical work on my part to engage in a combination of organisational review and organisational change within the Alliance.

This process I will refer to in the thesis as the Project. As a Ph.D thesis by project I faced the difficulty of having to both represent the project as well as submit an exegesis on it to draw out a range of theoretical or scholarly insights. It was essential that all staff with whom I worked be aware at the outset that I was undertaking the project in a dual capacity: as an employee of the institute in a planning and analysis role and at the same time as a Ph.D student who was documenting the process of change.

The form of this Ph.D by project thus expresses a functional division of labour. In part A (Chapter 2), I describe and represent the project as it unfolded across a series of stages or, as they are described here, as cycles. For obvious reasons the sheer bulk of the documentary materials generated in the cause of the project renders it difficult to reproduce in the form of and ‘appendix’ to this thesis. It is available however on request, should the examiners of the thesis wish to peruse it. In Part B (Chapters 3-7), I set about developing a theoretical exegesis or exercise in sense-making. This is designed to contextualise the project in a larger body of applied research and scholarship, addressing the key question which led the project and animates this second order exercise in interpretation: how is organisational change best carried out?

As will become clear the putative distinction between the project (Part A) and the exegesis (Part B) is not quite as clear cut as might be imagined. The project itself clearly belongs to a tradition of educational theory and research practice encapsulated in ‘action research’, some of whose chief exponents and exemplars are Australian educationalists (Dick, 1992; Wadsworth, 1998; and Cherry, 1999). Equally, the exegesis, conceived of as a theoretical ‘sense-making’ exercise, is to a very considerable extent constrained by the ‘change management’ process that evolved during the project. In effect, what is understood as the project and what is understood as the exegesis or research component of this Ph.D by
project is very much framed as a dialectical process of theory-and-practice. The form and presentation of the Ph.D by project thesis therefore allows this functional distinction.

In Part A, I describe the action-research project of change. This is supplemented and complemented by a significant ‘archive’ of organisational papers, reports and auxiliary documentation which is clearly referenced. Part B is conceived of as a theoretical interpretative essay designed to elucidate and draw out the links between significant aspects of the project and the scholarly tradition of organisational and management literature. The heuristic principle which guides this exegesis is supported by the literature which highlights, as it were, key ‘learnings’ and insights suggested by the praxis of the project. This dialectical heuristic informs this thesis by project.
Chapter 2: Part A:  The Project:
Strategic change management with a focus on ‘planning’
Creating a planning culture in a TAFE context

In late 2000 I was commissioned by the Executive Director of an Alliance of two TAFE colleges in South Australia to develop and implement a planning and performance framework. The institutes concerned were the South East and Onkaparinga Institutes of TAFE. This required me to consider the type of platform or model that would be most useful in guiding the Alliance in developing a quality performance framework. Having experienced and used the Balanced Score Card approach (Kaplan and Norton, 1996) in the South East Institute of TAFE in the late 1990s, I felt this model could best assist the Alliance to improve its planning practices and establish a culture of continuous improvement. To understand why this project was deemed to be an appropriate intervention in 2000 we need to understand something of the evolving national and state-level framework of policy making in the vocational education and training sector.

In 1994 the national strategy for Vocational Education and Training (VET) had identified quality improvement as a key objective for the VET sector. During the mid 1990s the quality system for the VET sector in South Australia was designed to continually improve the standard of VET services. The system established was based on quality principles drawn from the Australian Quality Council (AQC). It built on the standards and requirements for registration under the Australian Recognition Framework and complied with the national standards for Quality Endorsement as outlined in A Guide to Quality Endorsement (Vocational Education and Training, Department of Education, Training and Employment, SA Book 3, 1998, p. 5). At this time institutions in South Australia were required to be registered as a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation (QETO).

Subsequently in 2002, the state requirements were replaced by the Federal Government mandating the need for all Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) to meet the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) (Scollay, 2002, p. 3). The Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) became the nationally recognised education standard, for business and industry. As time progressed, there have been further developments involving both International Standards Organisation (ISO) and AQTF quality systems to the extent that both external auditing processes are now recognised standards used in VET. This has minimised the auditing processes because each system gives some recognition to the other. Which ever system operates, organisations need to demonstrate planning and performance
compliance and continuous improvement actions as part of the quality validation processes. This national framework had its impact in all TAFE systems which, then as now, were substantially funded and managed by state governments.

During the late 1990s the South Australian Liberal Government restructured its education portfolio within the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) combining its education, employment and training services into one large department, during mid to late nineties. The South Australian public provider for vocational education and training (VET) was one education sector within the DETE portfolio. VET was no longer a department in its own right as had been the case prior to the policy changes. The result was that TAFE Institutes in South Australia (TAFESA) no longer had their own overarching CEO who reported to a Government Minister. Instead, under the new structure TAFESA reported to the Deputy CEO of DETE who in turn reported to the CEO and it was he who reported to the Minister. The Kirby Report critically highlighted a number of issues resulting from this arrangement (Kirby et al., 2002). In July 2002, VET and the schooling sectors of DETE were separated by the Labor Government, and departments were reorganised with different structural reporting arrangements as separate departments and reporting to different Ministers. Taking a broad view the restructuring of education in states like South Australia can be seen now to have set loose a certain degree of instability or turbulence, which may not have been intended, or necessarily conducive to the ambitions of the policy makers.

In addition to these state imperatives, VET sector training in Australia established a high quality competitive edge under the direction of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) which introduced its Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). Improvement in the system nationally was seen in the quality of outcomes and delivery performance as identified by Kirby (2002, p. 40).

It was inevitable that the change in policy directions as a result of the introduction of AQTF in 2002 at both state and national levels in the VET sector would clearly impact on the operational environments in TAFE institutes. The resulting turbulence has been highlighted by both Kirby (2002, p. 28) and Mitchell (2003, p. 5). Policy makers wanted increasing responsiveness from TAFE institutes / colleges so as to deliver planned performance outcomes. Mitchell (March 2003, p. 11) for example claims much of the turbulence manifest in TAFE institutions was the result of new policy initiatives, funding changes, government reviews of VET and amalgamations and restructuring of RTOs.

Consequently the workplace environment of many colleges was close to breaking point. This was reflected in the commitment by managers of the Alliance of the two TAFE institutes in
SA, which are the focus of this study, to embark on major change management processes (Bell, *Partners in Progress 2001-2004*). Mitchell and Young (2001, p. 69) argue that VET organisations need to use both strategic management and change management strategies. It was these external impacts that would influence the way the Alliance identified its strategic direction.

One way this policy climate impacted on the VET sector in South Australia was the way TAFE institutions were required to embrace a validation process. The objective of this was to enable TAFE in SA to be assessed as a Quality Endorsed Training Organisation (QETO) during 1996-2001. As a result of this requirement both institutes that comprised the Alliance independently put in place planning improvement strategies to address issues identified in the assessment process. While both South East and Onkaparinga Institutes continued to demonstrate planning improvement strategies to meet QETO requirements, senior managers understood they faced an ongoing need to develop a planning culture and thereby embed their planning practices as the Alliance continued to develop its operational directions. In effect, to use an automobile metaphor, these two institutes were required to keep driving a complex car at high speed, whilst reengineering and redesigning its engine. As a result of a quality validation process in 1998 both institutes were identified as requiring improvement in the way they implemented planning. This point was clearly understood by the Executive Director of the Alliance, Dr Brian Nussey (2003). What is also interesting is of the eight institutes in SA at the time, these were the only two that formed an Alliance. (It should be noted that the researcher had already commenced working with South East Institute to address planning issues.)

Greater complexity was added following a further change of direction regarding registration requirements for RTOs. Until November 2001, TAFESA was validated as the RTO for all Institutes in South Australia, as the Quality Endorsed Training Organisation (QETO). TAFESA managed its scope of registration, delivery, accreditation and qualifications as one organisation. With the pending corporatisation of institutes in TAFESA, key institutional parameters were changed. Individual institutes were to be made responsible for their own registration and were required to seek and meet quality RTO standards. Pre-empting this, the Alliance chose to seek ISO 9001:2000 certification in the first instance, prior to the introduction of the AQTF being implemented in July 2002, in South Australia. In addition to choosing ISO certification, the Alliance was required to demonstrate its compliance with those aspects not covered under ISO. Seeking certification using both ISO and AQTF provided the Alliance with international quality endorsement as well as national requirements for RTOs. Criteria to be met under both systems involved planning and performance outcomes as highlighted under Planning Standard 5.4 contained within the ISO principles.
(2001, p. 28) as well as the focus areas of Planning and Performance within the *Framework for Sustainable Business Excellence* (AQC 1999). The Alliance needed to demonstrate ongoing improvement, integration and compliance with these requirements. Ironically, with a change of government in March 2002, TAFE institutes were no longer part of the DETE portfolio and TAFESA had their CEO appointed, directly reporting to a Minister. Individual institutes were not in fact made responsible for their registration as had been proposed under the former government: it was to be the overarching responsibility of TAFESA. Nonetheless the work the Alliance had undertaken placed the two institutes in a strong position.

It was against this backdrop of rapidly changing policy imperatives that I took on the task in 2000 of developing a change management process, designed to assist the two institutes in the Alliance to meet the demands of the quality assurance framework.

In setting out to develop and implement a planning and performance framework for the Alliance, I quickly realised that I had become a key catalyst in developing change management strategies. Though I did not know this, the many changes in direction, experiences and shifts in agendas that were to follow could not have been envisaged in the initial planning of this project.

Initially, I recognised it was important to use an underlying strategy of project management to establish, implement, review and improve planning processes and practices. As Chappell (2003, pp. 9-11) argues, the use of project-based learning provides a basis for addressing a range of situations in contemporary vocational learning settings. To this end, I found it was essential to seek sponsorship to support the project, particularly as it was based in my workplace. My past experiences supported Briner et al. (1996, pp. 75-87) and Sankaran’s (2001, p. 8) findings that projects are likely to be more successful when top level management support is in place. I continued to get that support from the top level of management in the Alliance throughout this project.

I planned four major action learning action research cycles in this project as indicated in Table 1 below. As part of the project’s iterative development, each cycle comprised a number of activities. The project management strategies used gave direction to the many mini cycles of learning and research that often occurred simultaneously within each cycle. Each cycle involved planning, acting, observing and reflecting on the development and actions implemented, albeit often on the ‘run’. The cycles identified solutions designed to improve the planning culture and practices of the Alliance. Consultation and investigation with key participants were ongoing aspects that I continued to rely on for each cycle. The outcomes from these activities have been recorded in the portfolio of project materials. The initial cycles
were focused on the whole of the Alliance, while the final cycle was focused at an operation level, on one faculty in the Alliance.

### Table 1: Research Action Cycles

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<td>Cycle 1</td>
<td>Establishing data benchmarks</td>
<td>Green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 2</td>
<td>The Alliance review</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 3</td>
<td>Planning and performance integration</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle 4</td>
<td>Working at an operational level</td>
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There were four major action learning action research cycles. However, within each cycle many sub activities with additional interactions occurred. These additional interventions impacted on the development and implementation of the framework. This exegesis outlines the journey and identifies the many interactions and connections of my investigations. Informing the actions was the work of diverse researchers’ whose writing related to the practice of managing and implementing change, planning, research methods, learning organisations and the context of the workplace environment. My research explored the strategies and issues of workplace organisational development undertaken in a complex, dynamic and changing workplace environment. I provided the leadership and facilitation to develop and implement improvement planning practices in my workplace. The workplace covered a large geographical area in the south east of South Australia inclusive of a combination of metropolitan and regional rural centres involving sixteen campuses and learning centre sites.

### Research questions

The primary research questions are:

- How can a culture of planning be built into a TAFE institute?
- What elements of a planning framework will bring about a planning culture change?
- What strategies are effective in implementing a planning framework?
- What principles underpin the development of a culture of planning in TAFE?

Further questions were identified during the project. They were identified as having both technical and process dimensions. The technical question related to the content of the development of a planning framework and required research in order to achieve the key objectives.

Process-oriented questions were also required. Helping to establish an environment in which staff could develop the kinds of knowledge and skills they needed as they became involved
in the development and implementation of this project were critical aspects. One key issue was how to create ownership of and commitment from workgroups to ensure their activity was embedded in their daily business. This involved asking questions like:

- How was the planning and performance of the organisation integrated into daily activity that informed individuals, workgroups and the organisation to assist in meeting its business plans and targets? Therefore, what processes and tools were required for groups to monitor their plans and achievements against those plans?
- How were staff able to influence changes made to systems, to assist them gain the knowledge and skills to monitor their performance against their plans?

Project management strategies and action learning action research techniques were used to bring together people from across the Alliance and manage the processes involved. I soon discovered what I planned on behalf of the Alliance was not always what actually happened in practice. The changes that did occur added to the rich diversity and development of the Alliance and the experiences of its staff and myself. During this research project an increasing number of perspectives were considered and integrated into the action learning strategies and activities being undertaken. I gained a wealth of experience, which further heightened my knowledge and understanding of the culture and diversity of the Alliance and provided an increased knowledge and understanding in the practice of implementing change within complex organisations.

In this description of the project, I do not dwell at length on the theories of strategic planning, but rather on the strategies to assist the change processes as an organisation’s planning culture was further developed. (A number of the planning tools created throughout the project will be referred to during the analysis in the exegesis.) The content of the plans, the objectives, performance measures, monitoring and reporting structures are the intellectual property and responsibility of the Alliance and as such are not the subject for examination in this exegesis. However, it is the processes and strategies used in the development of the tools and products that are the subject of this descriptive account of the project.

During the period when I was completing the research for this project, policy changes resulted in the termination of the Alliance, the separation of the Institutes and a reorganisation of TAFESA. This project nevertheless had an impact on the development of each institute’s planning practices as well as the manner in which managers reviewed their planning resources and practices.
The Project Begins....

The first cycle of this project began during the early part of 2001. It involved identifying key data sources, including:

- Collecting the benchmark evidence.
- Using the Alliance institutes’ data obtained through the Organisational Self-Assessment process and analysing this information to represent the Alliance culture of planning and performance.
- Developing Council Reports.

Each institute’s respective Council and the Alliance’s executive members were involved in data collection. This included individual Council and executive members, Alliance directors, executive managers and administrative managers for finance, productivity and quality. A total of 37 people were involved. I reported to and provided a planning and analysis service to the executive level personnel for both the Alliance and each institute’s Council members. These people were selected because their roles were central to the whole project and they played a critical role in the organisation. In addition, I needed to have the benefit of their experience and their ongoing support for the project.

I found this group of senior managers to be extremely helpful. They helped me to clarify the nature of the project and provided invaluable feedback that guided the development and implementation of this project. Their feedback helped me to further identify aspects in this first cycle of the action learning action research activities. Particular issues were:

- The impact incorporation (being promulgated by the South Australian Government) would have on the Alliance and Council members.
- Inability of one of the Alliance partners to demonstrate planning requirements during quality audit processes in 1999, which had the potential for TAFESA to fail its quality audit validation process as a Registered Training Organisation.
- The urgency to establish a planning framework and the type of planning model to be used to provide consistency across all levels of the Alliance planning activity.
- How to implement the components of planning at all levels across the Alliance.
- What information managers required to make informed financial, program delivery, student enrolment, staffing and resourcing decisions to ensure each segment of the Alliance met its negotiated and agreed annual teaching, resourcing and financial targets.

As I worked through this initial phase of the project, I discovered that both institutes were financially operating deficit budgets. Additionally, staff surveys indicated there was poor communication emanating from the executive level of each institute. However, within their
own workgroups communication was rated highly. The frequency of restructuring institute management positions and personnel was identified by Stanford (2001, p. 16) in his report, as an additional issue impacting on staff moral and attitudes. Collectively these issues provided inconsistent perspectives regarding the management of the Alliance. Indeed, the South East Institute of TAFE Council undertook to seek a political intervention to fully ascertain what was occurring during Cycle 2 of this project. This was to become a point of contention as the project progressed.

During this initial process and discussions in Cycle 1, the managers raised themes and questions for me to consider. How did the plans relate to the organisation and the distribution of managers’ responsibilities? Which planning theories and models were likely to be useful? What evidence was needed to evaluate the planning process of an organisation? What business culture developments, governance, quality management systems, reporting processes would be required? Identifying these issues in the first instance helped me to ‘kick-start’ my thinking for this project. Some of the ideas were later used while others were left unused.

Given this was the first stage of the project, I decided I needed a range of data sources to assist me to establish benchmarks which could help me work out how much change was being achieved. I felt it was important to bring together a range of qualitative and quantitative data and information to do this. As I began this process, I soon realised the data sources were not in one place while responsibility for getting the data and making it useful was in a number of places and was not necessarily produced by people in the same role, in each institute. What I did not fully appreciate at this point was the effort required for me to get access to this data.

The data I wanted included:

- Financial reports from both institutes.
- Profile productivity reports for both institutes from the student management system as well from the annual statistical reports used by TAFESA (DEET, Primary Management Data 1997-2000).

From my earlier planning activities during 2000, I researched and facilitated the development of the following Alliance documents, which were readily available to me:

- Partners in Progress 2001-2004, (Bell, 2000) developed by senior staff during 2000, with my leadership and guidance.
• **Alliance Planning Framework**, (Bell, 2000) developed by me during 2000 in consultation with staff and other references.

I felt that this body of information would help to establish a series of benchmarks to provide the Alliance executive and management team with relevant information. It would help me to review and evaluate performance and its progress, identify improvement opportunities and plan actions as part of the work of managers in setting up planning processes with staff. In testing this belief, I consulted with some of the key stakeholders initially identified in establishing this project. Much of the previous practices as reported by Dr Nussey (2000), indicated that managers were not necessarily fully aware of the kind of relevant data they could access to assist them in their planning strategies on behalf of the Alliance and their centre or faculty.

One of the most useful kinds of information came from the Organisational Self Assessment (OSA) activities undertaken by each institute since 1997. OSA data provided snapshots in time of staff views, concerns and opportunities for improvement. For example, the OSA had collected staff views on each institute’s planning ability, practices and opportunities for improvement. This provided an indication of the views of staff from the previous three years. However, setting up a format to obtain a picture of trend information using the OSA data proved to be quite difficult, since there was a lot of information. While I was developing this trend summary, executive managers had other priorities. I was left with the impression they did not see this action as being relevant. It wasn’t until much later in the year and in another cycle that this information was seen by others as being both useful and important. When this occurred, I was pleased to be able to share this benchmarking activity with the relevant executive and managers. They found the details offered useful insights and were surprised about the work I had undertaken. The information provided insights into staff perspectives on planning as well as offered a wealth of other details relating to staff concerns and opportunities for improvement. The 3-year trend overview highlighted a number of additional issues associated with managing each institute’s business, but as this information was not related to the project, I have not recorded or referred to it in this exegesis.

During my initial analysis of the data I soon realised there were many anomalies. Each institute had its own processes and formats for presenting information. Trend data was sparse and often not available readily, although annual financial and productivity data information and monthly reports were readily available. However, there was no consistency between the ways the institutes collected the information. I discovered it was readily produced when called upon, but was often in different formats which I found frustrating and I am sure others found likewise. This frustration was further highlighted when I was asked to
provide annual Council reports for both institutes. This request was the first of many requests throughout this project that I was responsible for facilitating.

In February 2001, when I began to analyse the information, my research plans were interrupted or so I thought. What I set out in my project plan was quickly overrun by a range of other workplace expectations and demands. These included my division director within the Alliance wanting me to facilitate the division’s planning process, the South East Institute director requiring me to draft and write each institute’s Annual Reports for Council (inclusive of financial and productivity data by all fund sources, student enrolments and results by program and location of delivery, staff and student survey results, use of information technology, and any community feedback received) as well as assisting the Alliance Council executive to develop their strategic plans. I was also required to collect Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data related to each campus and learning centre’s community and relate the statistics to the programs delivered by each institute to each community. Whilst investigating and collecting the data sources, I was asked to develop the annual report format for both institutes, something I had not been asked to do when I began the project. At the same time, I was being requested to establish the planning framework to implement across the Alliance as its key planning strategy. It was unfortunate that these personnel did not understand my role within the Alliance; in other words, my role as understood by the Executive Director was not interpreted in the same way by others.

After consulting with Council representatives, directors, executive and managers, I was able to draft an outline of the type of information they wanted. At this time Councils were concerned mostly with their financial status and the institute’s ability to meet their productivity targets. Productivity reports were the outcomes of total hours of training delivered across each of the teaching program areas. These hours were broken into targets to be met, hours enrolled, hours resulted and the number of module load completions within a calendar year. TAFE institutes in SA were paid by the State Government for resulted hours. It was these resulted hours that financed each institute’s government funded national accredited training programs. In providing the Councils with such data, I was assisting them in the development and writing of their annual reports. I included financial, productivity, student satisfaction and graduate study survey summaries, staff survey summary and community based statistical comparative overviews in this prototype. Whilst these taken individually may not seem to be rather comprehensive or detailed, these overviews were what Alliance Council and executive members were seeking. I found the processes, negotiations and deliberations by all relevant parties involved me in constant and exhausting work. However, after a lot of work, I got agreement on the format of the prototype. The content of the reports were developed and
completed as part of Cycle 1 activities. It needs to be noted that for a number of years no formal annual reports had been provided by either institute.

Given the lack of activity in such data collection and report writing, I felt I was swimming in uncharted waters and had to learn as I progressed and did not have Alliance ‘established practice’ to guide me. The central aspect of this activity was to get details about the expectations of the client group, do a lot of listening and put together a draft report of what I believed was being wanted, then get comments and suggestions for improvement. I found this invaluable as the process assisted me to build and gain confidence in my work while it meant Council members from both institutes were getting what they wanted. This experience was interesting for me. The more information people were given the more they wanted and the more changes continued to occur. Whilst I found this process frustrating, I also discovered that the process was a learning experience for others as well as for me. At the end of the activity, I found many more people had increased their understanding of the issues related to the type of information available, the difficulty in providing consistent information from the financial and staffing data systems, the diversity of productivity data available and the range of student and staff survey results.

During the process of getting information, I discovered a number of managers in the Alliance had access to a range of other information. I found my division director had the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) information and a set of strategic and business planning folders on the office shelf. I found both resources useful and was able to negotiate an electronic copy of the ABS data to assist in formatting the data to meet the Alliance needs. The business planning folders were a useful resource to assist in further developing the planning implementation phase. Another executive manager provided me with information and access to standards for financial accounting reporting. The human resource manager gave me electronic copy of the data from staff surveys. From the quality coordinator I was able to receive the electronic copy of student feedback surveys to add to my NCVER student graduate survey information. I began receiving information from different Alliance executive members and in a sense I became a collector of Alliance information and data and the repository for it.

Until this development, I felt I was working in isolation. This sudden flurry of support and provision of data and information assisted me to develop my contacts across the Alliance. I felt I was beginning to get some acknowledgement and recognition for the work I was undertaking. I felt executive managers were beginning to take me more seriously and regarded the work I was undertaking with increased interest. I observed a change in attitude developing. Rather than withholding information, as ‘knowledge is power’, I realised
executive managers and key coordinators were sharing their knowledge with a focus on supporting and sharing the information and data related to the overall organisation’s systems and structures. This change of attitude whilst slow was nonetheless an important development in managers working more collaboratively and sharing their knowledge. The attitude was no longer you must find this out for yourself; rather, let us work together for the ‘good of the organisation’. An example was in the development of the financial reports where organisational development and prudential executive managers and their respective work team coordinators jointly worked through the financial reports with me as I facilitated the process to finalise the format of the annual Council reports and their content. We were able to meet face to face on two separate occasions, as well as on an ad hoc basis to finalise the format and financial details. I felt this change was the beginning of the collaborative effort with team members contributing to the work. For me this example and others, reinforced the importance of how working collaboratively with staff assists in their commitment and understanding. This is further supported by Solomon et al. (2001, p. 7) who aptly highlights in his research where collaborating in the workplace involves connectivity between stakeholders.

My work day was very full. I had to deal with numerous activities occurring at the same time. My experience of the project was not a linear progression. Rather, I was being pulled in a range of different directions as I tried to analyse and make sense of the data in a manner that would provide useful information for the Alliance managers. This did not occur as cleanly as I had planned and anticipated for the project. As I concurrently worked through each set of data, the next cycle of action learning action research began in quite an unexpected manner. Whilst I tried to complete the data collecting and establish their formats for the annual Council reports, I was taken in what appeared at the time quite a different direction.

During my data collection actions in this cycle of the project, I discovered the Alliance did not have any structured approach to report its data. During the intense activity of responding to the Alliance Council and executive management team, I accepted the fact that it was important for me to develop appropriate processes and formats. I was required to use different strategies as I worked with different groups of senior managers and their staff in drafting each of the segments of the annual council reports. During my formal and informal meetings I was able to gain agreement on the format and content for the financial (income and expenditure for different funding sources), productivity (student enrolments and results per program), student and staff survey information and other community comments for inclusion in the Council reports. This action involved staff participation, where their views and ideas for improvements were valued and acknowledged. Through these actions those staff involved generated new knowledge and willingly used the new reporting formats. I talked to a
range of people about the idea and or concept, drafted out the idea, organised a time for key stakeholders to focus on the issues and gain agreement on the actions to be taken. The importance of gaining staff commitment in this way has been discussed by More (2003, p. 1) and Senge (1999, p. 63). McNiff (2000, p. 59) takes this further, indicating participatory action research involves practitioners reflecting and evaluating together to become part of a process of constant upgrading and improvement. Appelbaum and Goransson (1997, pp. 115-128) and Senge (2000, p. 24) further reinforce this process as continuous improvement.

It had become clear that the kind, quality and accessibility of the information available was not very good:

- Data needed collating and formatting into user friendly mode. For example, the extensive information from the OSA annual reports did not correlate with one another, making analysis a long process with no summary information and no comparison between each OSA report. Given the diversity of the large body of feedback, the key stand out issues became one of communication with staff and community and lack of confidence in the executive management of the institutes.

- Data sources needed to be identifiable, reliable, valid and accurate. For example, the financial reports for the same month were inconsistent, with varying profit, loss and debt balances. Through the initial phase of establishing clarity about the financial status, we identified each institute was using different reporting systems and processes.

- Different data requirements required different strategies and formats. In developing productivity reports, Council required different student enrolment and result reports from what the Alliance executive wanted, which was different from what faculty and their program managers required. However, the National Council for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) student graduate surveys used different survey questions from the institute current student feedback questionnaires. The results provided different types of information. Collectively they offered increased information about students’ views on their study experience and employment outcomes. However, the student survey results required a different format to their enrolment and result reports. One set of results indicated South East Institute was achieving higher than the national average of student employment and study experience, however, students also indicated they were not able to extend their study easily beyond current offerings and remain living locally.

- No one format or data source provided the whole picture on which decisions were to be made. An example to highlight this further was the engineering enrolments and results were lower than negotiated targets, however, ABS statistics indicated strong engineering skills were being sought in the community.
• Alliance executive and management continued to request from me more financial, student enrolment and program delivery details by fund source to assist in their decision making processes. The more details they received, the more information was requested.

Whilst undertaking the data collection and establishing the annual reporting format and their relevant content, the Alliance received a ministerial instruction to undergo a comprehensive review of its operations. This involved the appointment of an independent consultant as well as a senior manager to provide the consultant with in house support and assistance. I was selected by both the Alliance Executive Director and the independent Consultant for this role. This appointment occurred in mid March 2001, as I was trying to complete each institute’s first draft of their Council reports for 2000. That a Ministerial Review occurred while the Alliance was still being established was surprising.

**Cycle 2: The Alliance Review**

I began Cycle 2 with unfinished work from my first cycle. I was also feeling that this research project had been hijacked, by the Ministerial Review. I was concerned this new priority would divert my efforts and make the study impossible. However, I soon discovered that I had increased access to a range of data and state level support in ways I had not expected. Cycle 1 data collection and analysis activities continued, albeit with varying bursts of speed during the next three months. It was not until the end of Cycle 2 that I fully realised how much the initial data collection activities had been critical to Cycle 2 activities and how much more access and information had been collected and further developed. In Cycle 1, I began my data collection with limited access and support. However, throughout Cycle 2, I was provided access to TAFESA state financial and institute data resources, as I progressed the development of the review.

This second cycle focused on a review of the Alliance undertaken by an independent consultant appointed by the Minister. I became the executive officer supporting the consultant as he responded to the Terms of Reference for the Ministerial Review. There were some 60 people involved in this cycle. This involved the Alliance Directors, both institute Councils, the Alliance Executive, Alliance Performance and Academic Board members, senior managers and coordinators, a range of corporate staff as well as key administrative personnel from TAFESA.

The Alliance review provided an opportunity to build on the data sources established during Cycle 1. Whilst I had not completed the Council reports with all their content, this cycle assisted me to finalise and consolidate the institutes’ financial income and expenditure
against each fund source, cash flows and profit and loss balance, student enrolment and results data (known as productivity data) for each fund source and student and staff feedback as reported by Stanford and referred to as the Stanford Report (2001). In addition, I was able to complete the analysis of the NCVER survey data (Bell, 2001) and the regional community statistics incorporating ABS data and student enrolments by program (Bell, 2001). Table 2 below, visually shows the results of this cycle’s activity, referenced with yellow covers.

<table>
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<th>Table 2: Cycle 2 sub projects</th>
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The data gathered throughout this cycle became the evaluating basis of the Stanford Report (2001). I gathered and analysed the finance, productivity, NCVER graduate survey data, student satisfaction survey reports and staff surveys from 1998-2000. The additional data sources were:

- Financial data and information identifying management positions, inclusive of expenditure, particularly focused on travel and accommodation.
- Student enrolment by post code by campus and learning centres against program areas and different fund sources.
- ABS data as it related to the post code communities associated with the Alliance campus and learning centres.
- Historical information regarding both institutes’ leadership.
- Employee numbers against different employment categories.
- My recorded notes from discussions taken during the review.
- Support statements from a range of staff, managers and the Alliance Executive Director.

The Minister's independent Consultant was appointed in March 2001 to undertake the Alliance Review. The Alliance received a draft copy of the Review’s Terms of Reference at the same time. These were discussed initially with senior staff at their meeting on Tuesday 20 March 2001. By the end of March staff received a copy of the draft Terms of Reference. Given my findings during Cycle 1, and adding to the lack of confidence South East Council members placed in the Alliance Executive Director, the South East Council believed their institute was being amalgamated with a larger metropolitan TAFE College and would lose its identity. The Terms of Reference were developed to guide the Review and assist the two institutes’ Councils to determine the impact the Alliance had on each institute's performance (Stanford, 2001, p. 6). The Terms of Reference required the past two years of the Alliance’s operations, identifying qualitative improvements in student satisfaction, employee surveys,
Organisation Self Assessment and quantitative improvements in achievement of performance agreement targets including the level and quality of services, costs of service provision and comparison of other state and national TAFE institutions, Fee for Service development and balance sheet and debt reduction details. Further information was requested comparing the operating cost of the Alliance with each individual institute with a focus on management costs, travel and associated costs, staffing arrangements, duplication of functions and utilisation of equipment and property. In reviewing the operations of the Alliance the Terms of Reference required an investigation into the suitability of the current organisational structure, management relationship with staff and the Councils, trends of staff attitudes, funding constraints and commercial focus and the suitability of current financial allocations, reporting and management arrangements. The Review required recommendations regarding the future directions of the Alliance, strategies to achieve those directions with timelines and identification of specific issues for Boards of Directors under the new governance arrangements.

As I began my work as Executive Officer to the Review, I discovered there was no evidence of long term trends about any aspect of the Alliance or its individual institutes. I decided to set about gathering some trend data covering at least three years (1998-2000), to include one year prior to the current Alliance arrangement. It seemed self evident that data of this kind would be more useful than annualized data sets. Prior to the appointment of the Minister’s consultant I had encountered issues in getting access to certain kinds of data. But, in my role as executive officer to the review, problems of access were no longer an issue. This data was sensitive and at times confidential in nature as it had the ability to target individuals. TAFE employees in South Australia were and still are government employees.

This cycle provided additional opportunities to extensively extend the data and information base that was used in the drafted 2000 Council reports. Throughout this three month cycle, I met weekly with the independent consultant, with at least ten formal meetings where we reviewed progress and edited the review report. To do this either one of us was required to travel between Adelaide and Mount Gambier where I was based. Additionally, we shared electronic documents at least three times per week between the formal face to face meetings as well as at least one phone call per week. In addition, I had at least two formal meetings with each of the data owners (managers and coordinators), as well as ad hoc informal meetings to verify information, data sources and format details relating to each of the qualitative and quantitative data requirements. I was working intensively during this time, handling and juggling thirteen different data sets, directly involving approximately 60 people at varying stages. Further investigations and details were regularly being sought of me by the consultant during this time. It was my role to delve into the organisation’s data information.
sources to ascertain the relevant details and organise their format in ways that were easily readable and fitted with the needs of the review.

Some of my data provided information related to staffing of both institutes. Emphasis was placed on the number and type of executive and senior management positions, organisational structures, and total number of employees against the type of employment categories. For me to gather the data required, I met with key human resource personnel within each institute, as well as the TAFESA Human Resources Director, seeking their assistance initially and with follow up drafted information asking for verification. Where there were gaps, I was provided with names of others who could assist. As a consequence of many formal and informal discussions, I was able to collate and draft the staffing statistical data into tabular format, as indicated in the Stanford Report (2001, pp. 27-30). Each institute Director was named including their length of service. The 1998-2001 trend showed an increased growth of staffing by Onkaparinga Institute whereas South East Institute staffing was declining, albeit slightly. However, in the case of both institutes their director’s length of employment was two years or less during 1998-2001. As Stanford (2001, p. 28) states, there was no longevity of senior personnel suggesting this statistic had an impact on community confidence. Organisational development and management structures identified the core business and services provided by each of the divisions and faculties. The range of issues confronting the Alliance that needed to be addressed (Stanford, 2001, pp. 34-45) includes:

- Large and diverse geographical regions involving rural and urban communities with sixteen delivery sites.
- Development of effective commercial business funded activities.
- Establishment of a customer focus culture for all communities and delivery sites.
- Development of relevant partnerships to assist in growing business and meeting community education and training needs.
- Use of technology to enhance organisational operations and the learning environment.
- Establishment of relevant professional development programs for staff and improvement in workplace systems.

Employee feedback surveys which highlighted strengths and opportunities for improvement were included (Stanford, 2001, pp. 27-31) in the review report. With the endorsement of senior staff, I contacted and worked with the consultant who had designed and collated each of the annual staff surveys from 1998 to 2000. He undertook to provide a summary of the staff surveys over this period and related the results to the restructure that resulted in the Alliance. Staff concern was related to the restructure of each institute and the Alliance structural development. Staff believed translation of decisions for the customer at the local
level was not visible by program managers. South East Institute staff gave a strong message as they fundamentally disagreed with the Alliance and its restructure and did not see any benefit in the new arrangement.

April 2001 proved to be an extremely hectic time for me. Where there were no identifiable custodians of the data being sought, I had acquired additional responsibilities in accessing and reporting it. One example of this was the Organisational Self Assessment information. Since 1997, both institutes had undertaken organisational self assessment reviews as part of their quality continuous improvement approach to managing their business. Staff generally supported the activity to participate in these reviews. However, from each annual review staff identified immediate actions for improvement, from which priorities were established and actioned. However, no-one had collated the results of these annual reviews. After gathering each institute’s report, I proceeded to collate an at-a-glance summary of each institute’s details. I was able to build on the OSA data work started during Cycle 1.

Further data gathering work involved the ABS data, which identified different community information based on post codes, historical information reflecting each institute and its leadership as well as the validation of financial data from TAFESA.

Student information was identified in the Terms of Reference for the independent Review as an aspect that required further investigation. I used the student participation rates data sources to extract enrolments by campus based on post codes and enrolments against fund source codes. This data proved to be extremely useful as it assisted managers to more effectively make judgments and decisions based on facts. Results from different student satisfaction surveys were collected and analysed (Stanford, 2001, pp. 21-25). The information was both qualitative and quantitative, a combination which had not previously been developed.

Further quantitative measures were required as part of the Review process. These highlighted the financial position of the Alliance from 1998 to December 2000, total cost per student hour, consultancy commercial structure and financial position as well as management costs including travel and associated costs. The cost of operating the Alliance compared with operating as two separate institutes (Stanford, 2001, pp. 47-62) was also required.

One of the most challenging tasks for me in this Review was to ensure the financial reports were reliable, consistent and were also able to be verified. It was this matter that proved to be the most difficult aspect of the Review. This was further complicated prior to the Review being announced. The Alliance Council had received different financial reports providing
conflicting information about the financial state of each institute, thereby lacking clarity. This had come to light while undertaking the collation of the 2000 Reports for Council, during Cycle 1. This was an issue that presented some challenges for me. I was starkly aware whatever actions I undertook had the potential to disengage managers and staff responsible for the financial management in both institutes, a situation I could not afford to create.

The Minister’s Consultant assisted me by identifying key personnel in TAFESA who could provide the relevant details and this helped to work through the critical issues. This process required me to undertake extensive negotiation and consultation from visits, appointments, emails and telephone discussions with a range of people including directors, finance managers and central office staff. Resulting from this intensive and rigorous activity, I was able to obtain a collective signed-off agreement on the financial position for each institute (Stanford, 2001, pp. 47-49). Consistency and reliability of the financial position between the years being investigated was obtained. The information highlighted the slow and cumbersome financial system the organisation was required to use. During this process it became clear it was important for the organisation to have staff completely familiar with the systems, otherwise this type of situation would continue to arise. I was extremely careful throughout this process to confer with the financial managers at each step of the process, seeking their opinions, views and suggestions from the information I was receiving. This action directly assisted me in gaining their confidence and support as I continued to support them in their role.

During the data collection process, I realised a number of myths were developing amongst staff. One such myth was the Alliance had more managers than the two institutes combined prior to the development of the Alliance. However, the statistics collected highlighted there was a decline in the number of managers during the three-year period and the percentage of managers was less than 10% of the total number of staff (Stanford, 2001, pp. 29, 30). Another myth dispelled was that managers were spending more on travel and its associated costs. This task involved some extensive collection of the raw information. Without the assistance and help of the finance staff this information would not have been possible. The result of this work clearly highlighted another measure that was available for the Alliance to use on an annual basis (Stanford, 2001, pp. 55, 56).

The data fell into a range of categories which included finance, productivity, staff, student and community based data. This was obtained from ABS, NCVER, TAFESA and institute statistics. Additionally, this data was presented in a range of formats which reflected the type and style of data being accessed. No one particular format or formula was suitable. The utilisation of a range of data collection methods (Fielden, 2003, p. 4) provides just-in-time
data collection that was especially appropriate to the Alliance’s organisational planning. The Stanford Report provided the summary details taken from all these data sources. I felt that this experience had improved my confidence and ability to effectively use a wide range of data sources and present them in diverse formats where not just one format fitted each situation. Recognising and valuing the wide range of personnel involved in this process provided me with opportunities to gain increased insight in the different functions and operations of the Alliance and its complexities.

Stanford (2001) indicated to me his surprise that someone in my position not been given all the relevant data to assist me in the work I was undertaking prior to the review. This of course was the situation that I had been attempting to change. As already noted, I had experienced considerable difficulty locating data sources and negotiating with each custodian to obtain relevant reports and documentation. This process became much easier as the Ministerial Review was being implemented; indeed the change in attitudes and support from staff was startling. Suddenly staff recognised my requests and negotiations were for the provision of evidence required by external stakeholders.

The Stanford Report (2001) and Cycle 2 documentation provide the details related to the research undertaken during this cycle. As a consequence of the review, I was able to collect all relevant information identified initially in this study.

The review resulted in 19 recommendations in five categories (Stanford, 2001, pp. 64-66). The first category focused on the overall organisational issues of institute leadership and recommended that the Institute Directors focus on their institute’s community. Other recommendations in the category focused on the organisation’s management structure and how the Alliance would address its obligations in relation to incorporation. The second category of recommendations highlighted the need to strengthen campus delegations and responsibilities to assist in addressing local community education and training needs. The third category identified a range of issues including planning, finance and the adoption of clear performance measures to provide benchmarks for the Alliance to improve its performance monitoring. The forth category highlighted the Alliance’s need to focus on business growth. The final category of recommendations focused on core business activities and highlighted a number of priorities to be addressed.

It became clear as the review progressed that all stakeholders were extensively involved not only in a review of the management of the Alliance but also on a learning journey with respect to the organisation’s performance and reporting systems. McNiff’s (2002, pp. 266-269) co-enquiry process focusing on real problems with management taking intervention
highlights the importance of transformational change and double loop learning: this is precisely what was happening with the Alliance. Senior staff were able to develop understanding and clarity about the type of performance data and the manner in which it was to be presented. Recommendations 8-11 of the Stanford Report (2001, pp. 64-66) identified the need for the Alliance to:

- Embed the planning process across the Alliance within the functions of Organisational Development Services.
- Develop financial statements to ensure integrity and validity to allow the Alliance to effectively monitor all aspects of the financial position and its associated quantitative outputs.
- Capitalise on the information obtained from the review to establish clear benchmarks across the organisation for use as management tools to measure and monitor the organisation’s current and future performance.
- Use the services of a statistician to ensure integrity and validity of data, its collection and use, as this became a key issue during the review.

As the data collection developed throughout this cycle, I gained an increased awareness of the different internal and external cultures impacting on the Alliance. This was particularly highlighted when presenting the data related to community trends and study programs based from each of the campuses. The following statement from Haythorpe (2003) highlighted this further:

*Once again thanks Denise for that enrolment and community statistics data. This has assisted me in ensuring that our advertising is targeted to the relevant audience using a planned approach.*

*The process involved in the development of the Stanford Review, provided me with an insight in to the wider Alliance issues and how they impact on the operational issues for my Campus operation.*

The review provided an opportunity to fast track the data collection commenced in Cycle 1. The reason for collecting this data of course was to provide the Alliance with an overview of trend activity, to assist in future decision making. This was further reinforced through comments offered by the Alliance Executive Director, Dr Brian Nussey (2003):

*In 2001 the Minister of Further Education commissioned a Formal Review into the operation and development of the Alliance. This Review was conducted by an ex Chief Executive of the Department Mr Brian Stanford. The Review endorsed the essential directions of the Alliance, pointed to a number of areas that were impeding progress, and suggested a number of solutions that would address the identified issues. Some of the issues raised by Mr Stanford identified the unreliability of our management information systems (thereby presenting us with numerous opportunities for improvement) while some focused on our operating procedures (e.g. how we organise and manage our commercial operations (causing us to fundamentally rethink our approach) while some of the issues challenged our Organisational arrangements. In each case the issues raised by Mr. Stanford were pursued by groups of Alliance staff as alternative solutions were investigated and developed. The iterative process used by the reviewer was designed to (and was successful in) gaining staff commitment to finding workable solutions to a number of issues that had stalled organization development. The Review helped us to work through several issues that were causing us severe angst.*

The key findings from this cycle provided the Alliance with:
• Increased reliable and accurate sets of data built on the data sources from the first cycle.
• An additional range of data and information not identified initially from Cycle 1.
• An iterative process of continuous improvement in relation to systems and their systems ability to assist and or detract in providing reliable information.
• Increased knowledge and understanding of qualitative and quantitative data to assist in decision making processes.

Whilst it was impossible for me to be involved in all activities during these two cycles, where I was involved, I was able to facilitate the involvement of others and collectively we learnt from our shared experiences. I made every effort to get feedback on what I was writing and in the process, quickly learnt the value of this because of the range of perspectives and insight that my colleagues brought to the situation. This required an extensive range of interpersonal skills on my part and on the part of others. Although time consuming, the broad sharing of ideas gave all stakeholders an increased sense of ownership as we worked in teams to gain consensus or agreement.

I quickly discovered how important it was to involve a range of people in any development a point Rylatt (2000), McNiff (2000) and others have highlighted. As the process evolved more and more people understood what we were trying to achieve and support increased accordingly. As a consequence the changes progressed at a faster rate; this phenomenon has been discussed by Callan (2001, p. 11) and Fraser and Novak (1998, p. 109). At a personal level the involvement and commitment from staff provided me with a valuable insight into the value of teamwork and staff participation in solving workplace problems. Staff in turn felt more comfortable working in a supportive environment where they were able to explore, consider and resolve issues.

Cycle 2 ended in June 2001. The next cycle required rethinking and forward planning on my part. For the three months that I had been working on the Review, I had been out of the ‘normal’ loop of activities. The next cycle focused on where to next and how it might fit with my role as well as progressing the research project.

A number of planning and performance priorities had not been addressed while the Alliance was focused on its review issues. It was now my task to give direction to the Alliance which had committed itself to an external ISO audit, scheduled for November 2001, as an international marketing tool to develop business partnerships. Additionally, I had responsibility for the planning for 2002. These tasks as well as working through a range of operational issues directed the next cycle of events and experiences.
Cycle 3: Integrating planning and performance

The strategies and activities developed during this cycle related to improving the Alliance planning culture. It became clear to me that a critical aspect of these activities needed to be focused on establishing a planning framework. The framework needed to integrate planning and performance across all levels of the organisation. (Detailed documentation from this cycle and its activities has been addressed in the purple referenced artifacts.)

Cycle 3 developed a range of organisational tools, using two specific planning models identified by the Alliance. We adopted, and where appropriate, adapted the Balanced Score Card (BSC) model introduced by Kaplan and Norton (1996), which I had used previously with a team of senior staff from another TAFE institute. The model uses four key areas for planning: finance, staff learning and growth, customer focus and a focus on the internal business processes of quality for service delivery as further highlighted by Parmente (2002, p. 2).

The Alliance Executive Director decided to base the forward planning of the Alliance on the Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF); this was an initiative of the Australian Quality Council (AQC) (Partners in Progress 2001-2004, p. 3). The ABEF is based on seven key areas: leadership, client and market focus, information and analysis, people, planning and systems, quality of products and services and business results. The BSC and the ABEF models were used to guide the Alliance’s continuous improvement planning strategy. Collectively they provided the link between the strategic direction and operational annual plans within the Alliance. In implementing the continuous improvement planning framework, workgroups were required to draw on their specific workgroup planning activities as well as use the strategic direction of the Alliance to frame their annual planning developments and actions.

The ABEF model was designed to assist organisations explore and assess their beliefs, strategies, activities and link these to performance (AQC, 1999, p. 3). It assumed a holistic systems view and provided guidance for organisational analysis, design, planning and improvement. The framework was used to assess the organisation and at the same time integrate planning. It provided a tool to improve the organisation’s bottom line across both financial and non-financial performance requirements (AQC, 1999, p. 3). The following Figure 1 (Bell, Partners in Progress 2001-2004, p. 3) highlights this model’s application as developed by the Alliance.
During this research, I used a diverse range of strategies to underpin the implementation of the Alliance’s planning directions. Key participants actively involved in this cycle were the Alliance executive members, corporate operational coordinators and the external ISO auditors, a total of 21 people. A further 35 managers and coordinators became involved from September 2001 as the 2002 annual planning actions were undertaken. I initiated the development of a diverse range of processes, systems and tools through consultation and cooperation with relevant staff.

The following identifies the diversity of the processes, systems and tools developed. As discussed, they involved linking a number of key aspects of the both BSC model (Kaplan and Norton, 1996) and the ABEF (AQC, 2000) model to fit the Alliance’s context and needs. At the macro level of the organisation these were:

- Levels of planning and related proforma.
- Planning tool kit for executive and managers.
- FAP (Financial and Activity Plan) folders for executive and managers annual planning processes.
- Enhanced student management monthly reporting format for all workgroups.
- Continuous improvement process for integrating planning and performance.

At the micro level of the organisation within a faculty these were:

- Faculty continuous improvement plan for reflecting on and improving practices.
- Systems established to document and manage operational issues related to staff, students, program development, delivery, evaluation, moderation and validation.
These also supported compliance requirements for a 2003 AQTF external quality audit.

- Annual and planning implementation activities to address agreed key priorities.

Following is summary information in relation to levels of planning, annual planning proforma and resource developments, the planning and performance framework model and the assessment review of performance. A summary is also included of the external auditors’ report.

Data and information sources used during this cycle include:

- Proposals presented to Alliance Executive.
- Draft planning tool kit.
- Memos and correspondence.
- 1999, 2000 and 2001 financial income, expenditure and productivity data by cost centres, programs and income sources.
- Student and staff survey data.
- Journal notes, including discussions with managers and support staff.
- Statements from a range of staff and managers.

Levels of planning

The preliminary work that assisted this study commenced early in 2000, with senior staff planning workshops for the Alliance. This work provided a useful basis when the study formally commenced later in the year when I enrolled in this Ph.D by project. One of my tasks early in the process was to get agreement on the draft levels of planning and accountability that I had developed prior to the commencement of this study. Figure 2 (Bell, 2000. Taken from Onkaparinga and South East Institute Planning Framework, February 2000) indicates the four levels of planning and their respective levels of accountability.
This figure highlights the interconnections between the four levels of planning. It depicts the linkages between the overarching business plan for the Alliance and the annual plan, faculty / service division annual plan and the activity annual plan. It also indicates that individual annual planning derives from the four levels. It was apparent to me that there was a need to bring together all levels of annual plans in a manner which would offer a whole of organisation overview. Considerable time was given to teasing out the linkages between the longer term business plan and the annual plans.

As I accessed, analysed and reflected on the literature, I was able to identify a range of researchers who discussed organisational planning, which related to the context in which I was working. Coulthard (1996, pp. 39, 95, 104) suggests planning frameworks are likely to incorporate a number of strategic plans, namely financial, human resources, marketing and infrastructure plans. Implementing these plans involves a range of operational plans for each division. Consistent with this, I set out to implement the Alliance Partners in Progress 2001-2004 that took into account a range of operational plans existing within each division. Morden (1989, p. 5) provides some clarity as I embarked on this process, indicating that the development of organisational blueprints required management participation and commitment and involvement of motivated employees collectively focusing on facts. Customer needs were also critical issues for consideration during the development and planning phases. It was these aspects, in the development and subsequent use of planning and performance integration tools, which assisted to drive this project's development across the four levels of planning and accountability.
Annual planning proforma developments

The challenge for me was to develop and implement a tool to assist the linkage between the respective annual plans and the Alliance’s business plan. A number of writers O'Regan et al. (2002), Morden (1989), Coulthard (1996), Matthews (1999) and Michaluck (2002) have discussed the importance of making a commitment to implementing organisational strategic plans; in other words ensuring that they do not merely ‘sit on shelves’. I began to explore and use the action planning processes from the BSC model to ensure that the business plan was implemented. In the process I engaged in various brainstorming sessions with a number of my colleagues. As I listened to their stories, interpretations and issues, I became more clearly focused and relevant processes began to take shape. Eventually, after broad consultation, I was able to provide the Alliance with an annual planning proforma, customised for each division and faculty and linked to the Alliance strategic directions document. In undertaking this task, I was extremely grateful for the invaluable assistance of my support staff who became intently involved with this process and the development of other tools.

The process involved careful consideration of the seven areas from the business plan. Each faculty and division annual plan proforma was customised with reference to the business plan and included:

- Alliance goals for each area.
- Alliance owner for each area.
- Customers, both internal and external, identified for each area.
- Objectives for each business goal.
- An action plan that required completion by each faculty / division and which identified targets, actions, by when and by whom as well as the responsible person for ensuring and reporting on actions taken.
- Staff development priorities.
- Faculty division agreement and signature.

All plans had to be signed off by the relevant director, after which they were passed onto me. In the process, I worked with most managers prior to their plans being signed off. The Alliance Executive Director provided strong leadership and offered me guidance and support to ensure that the process was conducted with an emphasis on quality and consideration of timelines. The success of this process in 2001 led it to also being adopted for 2002.

Annual planning resource

While this process was proceeding in 2001, I was asked to prepare for a managers' 2002 annual planning meeting, scheduled for early September 2001. Reflecting on my past roles, responsibilities, experiences and research activities to date, I thought it was important to
provide a useful resource for managers at the planning meeting. This was greatly appreciated by all and assisted in facilitating the decision making process. In getting to this point, I set up a task group. This group involved the institute's finance managers, SMS coordinators, my support staff and human services representative. A flurry of activity followed. We had two weeks to draw together an extensive list of data and information. Whilst some of the information required was already available from earlier activities, other information had to be gathered. Where new details were required, tasks were allocated and actioned with the executive officer for my division being the recipient of all data and information. As time was limited, we met twice as a group, using telephone links as required for those not located on site.

The outcomes from this flurry of action continued to support the leadership I provided to the Alliance. During the managers’ meeting on 3 and 4 September 2001 the resource, now titled 2002 FAP (Financial and Activity Plan) Folder, was handed out to each manager. I provided guidance on its contents and suggestions on how to use it. Positive comments were forthcoming:

> As a result of the development of this folder, the managers had a comprehensive package of all the information, which they would require to produce their draft targets, budgets and annual plans. Since all of the information had been provided to each manager, there was no time wasted by them each searching for their data and resources, across the Alliance.

(Darren Edgeworth, 2003)

Over the next two months, I provided one-to-one support for managers as they completed their annual plans for 2002. In collecting annual plans, it became clear some managers had not recognised their role and responsibilities to translate the vision and objectives into tangible operational goals for their staff, a problem identified by Brooksby (2002, p. 35).

**Planning and performance framework model**

Figure 3 below, was developed by me (Bell, 2001) during Cycle 3 as I attempted to diagrammatically represent the linkages between planning and reporting. I was trying to present the relationships between the Alliance’s Partners in Progress 2001-2004 planning directions and the continuous improvement platform in a visual format. I felt if I could represent these linkages in a picture, it was more likely to assist the organisation to make the connections.
Ultimately this format represented the Alliance planning change management strategy and established the Alliance’s planning and performance integration framework. This was very much a developmental process that built on previous activity, as knowledge understanding and learning occurred across the organisation.

More (2003, p. 1) and Senge (1999, p. 63) argue that no single strategy is applicable to all organisations: strategies must be developed in consideration of the particular needs of the organisation. Figure 3 represents the Alliance model, however contained within it are many different processes, methods and tools for its implementation. The development of the underpinning processes, methods and tools resulted from a wider range of action learning action research development. These developments occurred simultaneously at times, while at other times they occurred in isolation.

This visual representation resulted as a consequence of my attempt to bring together many different aspects of the spirals of activity and reflections on the pieces of the jig-saw. I engaged in an ongoing process of consultation in order to ensure maximum input from stakeholders and to get their support. As McNiff (2000, p. 59) notes such participatory action research results in increased commitment and action by staff. This emerged as part of a process of constant upgrading and improvement. The actions resulted as others participated to develop solutions, which in turn valued and acknowledged their views and ideas. My experience indicated the concept of continuous improvement was beginning to be practiced willingly by those involved.
Assessment review of performance

Another task was to demonstrate how to integrate planning and performance. This task was begun as I was finalising the resource folders for the managers’ annual planning meeting early in September 2001. Reflecting on my involvement at this time, I believe I provided a catalyst for the Alliance Executive Director to create an environment that assisted a macro level assessment review on progress against the Alliance business plan. However, at the time, the pressure of activities and expectations required of me did not offer me this insight.

The process of bringing together both the Alliance planning framework and the development for performance reporting was both frustrating yet challenging. Initially this did not fall into place easily. I began working through the seven focus areas contained in the Partners in Progress 2001-2004 action plan in order to ascertain what was needed to demonstrate achievement. In consultation with both the manager of Organisational Development and the Alliance Executive Director, I identified what evidence I knew that demonstrated achievement in each of these areas. This enabled me to develop proformas to be used by each executive member who had responsibility for each of the seven focus areas. Following the executive meeting in October 2001, the executive members used this proforma to provide further details, thus enabling me to complete the documentation (‘Assessment of the Alliance against Goals Report’ (Bell, 2001, Planning and Performance Integration Framework). In addition to the completed assessment review, opportunities for further improvement and refinement were identified. At the same time, I realised that the review against the seven focus areas could not stand alone: it needed to be placed in the context of the Alliance’s plans for the future. This meant that consideration had to be given to revisiting the strategic plan of Partners in Progress 2001-2004 document.

Quality external audit: ISO 9001:2000

One of the given priorities for the Alliance for 2001 was identified as achieving ISO 9001:2000 certification. Standard 5.4 from the Education and Training ISO Standards clearly identified that top management should ensure that quality objectives are established within an organisation (Standards Australia, HB90.7-2000 Education and Training Guide to ISO 9001:2000, p. 28). The ISO external audit was scheduled for November 2001.

My role during the preparation for the ISO audit was to ensure that the links of planning and analysis at the macro level were implemented across the Alliance. Given the planning framework and the manner in which the plans were integrated across the organisation, the auditor was able to confirm those links were being established. As part of the continuous improvement approach to work practices, opportunities for improvement from the review and analysis undertaken during the executive meeting in October 2001 had been identified and
submitted as part of the audit process. Dr Nussey’s (2003) comments highlight the importance of this process:

As the Alliance sought ISO 9000 Certification it naturally built on the Strategic Plan developed from the ABEF. As this quality agenda unfolded the reporting mechanisms developed for the Strategic Plan (Partners in Progress) proved a useful starting point for not only macro system analysis, the establishment of planning and improvement priorities as well as Microsystems development within the Alliance. Similarly, the data measurement systems developed to accompany Partners in Progress formed both the basis for measuring progress against our benchmarks as well as forming the platform for the further refinements demanded by the additional rigour of ISO Certification. These results provided the intelligence that resulted in our ability to make informed judgments about the future. I believe that the Alliance was only able to meet the rigors of ISO because it had a sound-planning base in Partners in Progress (established within your project) already in place.

Further significance of this work became apparent during the ISO (2001) audit validation process as the Lloyd’s Auditor ISO (Auditor Report, November 2001) completed his review. Not only had the Alliance implemented a planning framework, but it had already begun the implementation of it. This continuous improvement process in itself was identified as ground breaking:

…the organisation is able to clearly demonstrate a well managed and fully implemented management system,….There is clear evidence of a system based on measurable objectives, which is regularly reviewed and used as a tool for achieving continual improvement…. There is clear and obvious commitment at all levels in the Organisation…. The Strategic Planning System is an excellent value-adding management system, likely to be an industry benchmark for achieving continual improvement.

During 2002 an executive member of the Alliance, Wendy Brooksby, who had been on leave for twelve months, undertook a review of the Alliance’s strategic planning process. This process occurred after I had taken 12 months leave. The result of Brooksby’s (2002), review identified:

...there was evidence of a commitment to planning and performance review…. supported by processes, documentation and records and resources. A performance management process is being implemented and is supported by training and materials. Performance reporting of the productivity and financial targets outlined in the Performance Agreement are subject to planning and review schedules. The review identifies a range of improvement opportunities particularly around the objective of an integrated planning process and stakeholder involvement that are identified in Partners in Progress 2001-2004.

Brooksby drew attention to the fact that my position as Planning Manager had been vacant for six months and that this had not assisted the Alliance to progress its planning developments. She identified a range of opportunities for improvement that targeted the executive of the Alliance.

In reflecting on the developments from this cycle, I had provided a number of original pieces of work for the Alliance. These included:

- Articulating the different levels of planning formats and their accountabilities.
• The Planning Tool Kit and the resources for managers to use during their planning processes with staff.
• Linking the planning process to a range of qualitative and quantitative data (FAP 2002 Folder) as well as the annual planning and budgeting processes.
• Drawing together the macro level planning and performance review processes and identifying the links to the Alliance’s Partners in Progress 2001-2004 and its quality system.

From the development of these original pieces of work, I continued to gain a greater understanding of the political arena in which I was operating. I had gained insights into how best to operate at an executive and operational level within an organisation. Creating teams of people and working together to develop opportunities to improve the environment, became the key to unlock many of the workplace constraints I had been tackling earlier in this project.

Two staff members Finn (2003) and Haythorpe (2003) indicated the broader impact my intervention actions had created. They argued that the Alliance had begun to recognise the value of having readily accessible reliable data sources and a range of planning and performance tools. Nussey (2003) provided further support to this.

Linking strategy to organisation implementation as a two-way process were critical issues that I explored throughout this cycle. These critical issues have been identified by a number of researchers (O’Reagan et al., 2002, pp. 663-671; Morden, 1989, p. 5; Coulthard, 1996, pp. 5, 19, 95, 104; and Mickaluck, 2002, p. 17). As Rylatt (2000, p. 16) has said a challenge is to skilfully blend the implementation strategy in order to enhance planning and performance. This was achieved within the Alliance and greatly assisted the outcomes of this cycle’s activities.

It became paramount to me, staff involvement and active participation was necessary to link planning practices with performance. Integrating these activities into the Alliance’s annual planning cycle was a critical concern. Mitchell et al. (2003, p. 1) suggests that the key to assist in addressing organisational issues can be defined as:

…the implementation of new and improved knowledge, ideas, methods, processes, tools, equipment and machinery, which leads to new and improved products, services and processes.

By the end of this cycle it was generally felt that this had been achieved. McNiff (2000) indicates that as knowledge emerges and is transformed so too are limits constantly pushed. Cycle 3 in many respects also reflected this thinking.
Cycle 4: Working at the operational level

This cycle focused on my examination of the developments that occurred at an operational faculty level within the Alliance. My role was one of facilitator, developer, supervisor and change manager catalyst as I supported the faculty to examine, develop, refine and improve its processes and operational practices. This role provided an additional resource for the faculty. I was fully aware I had to establish my credibility with the faculty members as they had experienced many management changes in recent years and were cynical of management in general. Establishing my credibility with staff occurred as I worked through the project and its activities.

The project focused on the Information Industries & Applied Design (II&AD) Faculty and its associated workgroups, based at Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE. A total of 64 people were involved in this cycle. Of these approximately 25 faculty members actively participated on a regular basis. Ten of these staff members were intimately involved with the actions from the II&AD Quality Task Team (QTT) steering group. The QTT steering group members were representatives from each of the faculty’s seven teaching program workgroups and included administrative support staff. This cycle offered the faculty an opportunity to develop and implement its planning and performance activities using a continuous improvement approach. By focusing on operational practice, my actions in this cycle provided an ongoing integrated planning and performance improvement strategy. I developed a system for teachers to reflect on and continuously improve their practices, rather than simply responding to meet audit requirements each time they occurred.

This cycle’s portfolio of products has been documented with blue covers. The artifacts identified are the results from working with the II&AD Faculty during the first half of 2003. The resources resulting from Cycle 4 activities have been identified in Table 3 below.

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<th>Table 3: Cycle 4: sub projects</th>
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<td>II &amp; AD Faculty tools and products Quality Journey</td>
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<td>II &amp; AD Faculty Record of Quality Journey</td>
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Faculty workplace context

Historically, this Faculty had experienced ongoing changes in management and staffing. As identified by Stanford (2001, pp. 27, 28), the faculty’s leadership mirrored the director leadership level changes for each institute of the Alliance. The faculty’s changing leadership provided a number of challenges for me; my role was to implement a range of holistic approaches to systems and to address the operational layer of the faculty’s business. In the process of implementing change teaching staff continued with their work albeit with low staff morale (Stanford, 2001, pp. 15, 16). Attitudes of “You’re the manager, you do it, I will work
my hours but no more” or “Not another manager, what are they going to do for us!” were stated during conversations with me early in my role. These were the undercurrent responses I found present as I took up my appointment on return to Onkaparinga Institute in February 2003.

The II&AD Faculty had established a Quality Task Team (QTT) during 2002 with limited representation from workgroups. The purpose of the QTT was to assist the workgroups address an ISO audit. However, after the 2002 audit had been completed the QTT activity declined. On further investigation, I discovered there were limited ongoing continuous improvement actions occurring with this group. The Faculty Plan for 2003 (II&AD Business Plan, 2003) indicated there was an intention to:

…continue the Quality Task Team (QTT), in providing leadership and guidance in meeting AQTF Standards and continuous improvement strategies.

Establishing research cycle 4

In undertaking the project’s final cycle during 2003, I believed it was important that the planning and performance integration experiences were drawn together to assist the faculty with respect to its workplace requirements. The evolution of the faculty’s continuous improvement practices needed to continue to cater for both individual and organisational needs. It was obvious to me that there was a critical need to integrate a range of strategies and learning processes for all staff in order to assist the faculty address its organisational needs. These strategies needed to continue to support the organisational priorities, while at the same time promote behavioural, attitudinal and organisational change in the workplace culture. During these activities the processes undertaken continued to address real workplace faculty issues and problems. I was cognisant that the work of McNiff (2000, p. 94) and Skippington (2002, pp. 13-16) who indicate that focus on workplace issues offer increased knowledge and understanding which in turn better underpin staff practices in their operational environment. This view gave me confidence in progressing with the actions undertaken during this cycle. Working with staff provided opportunities to review, reflect and improve day-to-day practices of faculty operations as we addressed and embedded characteristics of an Alliance planning culture.

From the perspective of staff, meeting students’ needs and ensuring the learning environment supported practices focused on student learning were the core values of teaching. To staff these values did not appear to be enshrined in the corporate agenda. The following comments shared with me by staff supported my interpretation of this workplace culture:
As long as we meet our hours, nobody is concerned with what we are delivering.
If we stay within budget, meet our hours, managers leave us alone.
(Lecturers’ comments, March 2003, received by researcher during development of quality processes)

From a lecturer’s point of view, Continuous Performance is something that means added work, “and we’ve no time for this”, which may have an impact upon delivery.
(Chris McGee, Lecturer, July 2003)

For any change to occur, working with the faculty staff was essential. Given that the AQTF audit was scheduled for May 2003, there was an imperative to collectively establish practices that would meet the AQTF standards. To assist with the planning of this final cycle my initial consultation in February 2003, identified a range of key personnel:

- Faculty manager.
- TAFEBizSA key personnel who had a focus on Faculty programs and AQTF requirements. (TAFEBizSA was the Central Office for managing the state operational activities for TAFE Institutes in South Australia in 2003).
- Workgroups and staff within the faculty.
- Faculty office staff.
- Faculty Quality Project Officer.
- Onkaparinga Institute Quality Manager.

I believed the actions required of me as manager and researcher needed a range of different strategies. Whilst I set out initially to assist the faculty to be compliant for their AQTF quality external audit, scheduled for May 2003, I was aware of the massive amount of activity and possible distraction an audit preparation can have for a workplace. With this in mind, I was determined to ensure the actions and activities undertaken would provide the faculty and its staff with a relevant system, tools and resources to assist in continuously improving teaching and learning practices for staff and students. The products that we planned to produce in this cycle included:

- QTT statement of its role and its operational processes.
- Plan to prepare workgroups for the AQTF Audit 6 May 2003.
- Faculty system for documenting evidence against the ANTA AQTF standards required of an RTO.
- QTT first cycle of business in preparing for the AQTF audit scheduled for 6 May 2003.
- Faculty planning process, actions and its forward plan for ongoing business improvement strategies.

QTT establishment
I discovered at an early phase in this cycle that faculty members understood little of what they were required to do to address and demonstrate compliance against the AQTF
standards. This was a concern, particularly as they were faced with an AQTF audit within 2
months. Given this situation and the attitude of staff, I recognised the importance of gaining
their commitment and involvement. Whilst collecting information about the QTT’s past
activities, it was apparent that relatively little work had been undertaken. The group had been
operating during 2002 with minimum membership. To address the problems, I set about
establishing terms of reference for the committee and appropriate processes. (QTT, February
2003, meeting minutes). Additionally, I was nominated by the faculty manager to chair this
group and lead the change management activities. To assist me with this, I sought staff
representation across all program areas for the QTT. The first meeting was held in February
2003. The draft terms of reference became the first focus of discussion. Where this group
fitted into the operation of the faculty and what the operational processes would involve was
discussed at length and once understood, agreement was gained.

In order to gain commitment and agreement from the workgroups, I identified a program of
improvement as the next step in the change management process. I believed the task would
require different activities involving and revolving around staff. Additionally, the impact of any
change management process would be far more effective and lasting when key stakeholders
were committed and involved in the conceptual, developmental, implementation, evaluation
and continuous improvement processes. This has been highlighted in the literature (Rylatt,
Kanter, 1989; and O'Regan et al., 2002). Additionally, my experiences from the previous
research cycles supported this thinking. Given the members of the QTT were representatives
from each of the different program and administration workgroups, it was particularly
important that their commitment and agreement were obtained. These people acted as the
link between QTT faculty initiatives and the faculty workgroups. Their commitment was
essential to ensure faculty members were informed and the planned and agreed actions
were undertaken and completed.

Whilst preparing the terms of reference for the QTT I developed a tool derived from the
AQTF standards. This was interpreted and written in language teaching staff would more
likely recognise. The discussion paper provided a useful mechanism for QTT members to
gain knowledge and understanding of audit requirements and processes. Extensive
discussion and points of clarification occurred on what the standards meant and who in the
faculty was responsible for the actions. Resulting from the QTT’s first meeting, the members
realised how important it was in the first instance to prepare for external audit. However, staff
continued to test me, believing the requirements were not part of their daily business, but
rather the responsibility and realm of the manager to fix! Comments included.
A key issue continually challenging me during this process was how could attitudes of staff be changed in a manner to assist them to address their changing workplace requirements? Kirby (2002) identifies that from a staff perspective changes are due to external influences and outside of the staff's sphere of influence and control; he referred specifically to AQTF audits and TAFESA structural changes. This faculty had not been involved previously with many of the institute’s quality developments and this presented a major challenge for me. I saw my role as being one of empowering them to respond to the issues presented as distinct from merely giving them the solutions that some had requested. In the process, I encouraged them to take ownership of the issues and seek solutions that they could work with collegiately. Chris McGee (July 2003), one of the lecturing staff, further summed up these thoughts:

*It was therefore necessary to persuade the lecturers to understand and then take ownership of the Continuous Performance concept. I, having come from a business background, understood this process and was happy to assist in the learning process. The leadership shown by management and the processes put in place were a vital ingredient for me in helping my colleagues in this learning process.*

**Faculty actions**

Collectively QTT agreed on a draft set of actions, timelines and responsibilities for each part of the activities required. Monitoring the actions was critical as the timeline was tight, with limited space for overrun. The faculty manager and I reviewed the progress of each workgroup and provided the necessary support to ensure that they met the compliance requirements of the AQTF 12 standards (AQTF 2001), for the external audit scheduled for 6 May 2003. The actions undertaken and the resources developed offered the faculty processes and tools for future audits and continuous improvement actions.

A consultation process was used to develop the continuous improvement framework, taking into consideration the many concerns and issues raised by staff. This feedback ensured the system established would reflect staff focus on learning, delivery and assessment issues.

The faculty Continuous Improvement System (CIS) identified:

- Faculty QTT administration and its management.
- Information needed by students prior to and post enrolment.
- Staff employment processes, qualifications and competencies and staff development priorities.
- Program overviews.
• Units / modules / subjects being delivered from either Training Packages or curriculum documents.

Through continuous consultation with the QTT members, weekly tasks were planned and actioned. Feverish activity began for workgroups and faculty members as the timeline for May 2003 shortened. Over the ensuing weeks, working with the assistance of the faculty Project Officer, Stephen McCarthy, much activity and development occurred. This project officer resource provided workgroups with additional support and assistance to draw together the evidence needed to address the AQTF standards. These actions assisted staff in reviewing their performance as part of the evolving continuous improvement strategy.

With the assistance of the project officer, I was able to initiate the development of a diverse range of tools. The style of tools developed needed to be kept clear and concise and provide a quick snapshot of completed work and the tasks still to be actioned. Working through a small task group with assistance from the faculty project officer, draft checklists were developed, tested and adjusted where necessary. Actions undertaken included developing checklists and internal audit tools, monitoring workgroup progress and providing workgroups with feedback. Regular agenda items at weekly QTT meetings reported workgroup progress as they developed their evidence. This provided a more global update of the faculty's progress. Establishing electronic support and mediums for storage of workgroup tools and documentation was also developed and provided to workgroups for their use. These activities involved the continual collection of evidence and ensuring the evidence addressed the AQTF standards. A wide range of checklist tools was developed and used during this phase. Following the audit, the CIS that we had developed continued to be employed.

Throughout this process, I was acutely aware of the importance of listening to staff views. I felt it was critical to listen to the messages staff were providing and reflected on these issues. These views directly assisted the development of CIS, a system for teaching and administration staff. The system needed to respond to teachers' needs and be recognised and valued by them. It was imperative that it be useful, easy to use and something they would want to use. With this in mind, I prepared a second paper in consultation with key staff, titled System for Managing Continuous Improvement, which identified a system for managing continuous improvement across the faculty (Bell, 2003. Paper titled II&AD System for Managing Continuous Improvement). This paper provided the QTT with a structure to assist in advancing its business of continuous improvement for the faculty and its members.

Another invaluable strategy used during this intensive time involved organising and running a series of workshops for faculty staff. These workshops provided staff with an opportunity to
develop their knowledge and understanding regarding the development of the faculty’s system as well as the policies impacting on them. The workshops also provided staff with opportunities to share their delivery and assessment practices. These workshops focused on issues workgroups were required to address. They included:

- Delivery and Assessment Strategy (DAS), a requirement of TAFEBizSA and AQTF.
- Equity and access issues as they related to students.
- Assessment and moderation activities of students’ work and the program themselves.
- Faculty Continuous Improvement System (CIS).

Faculty staff feedback indicated these workshops were beneficial. They assisted in increasing staff knowledge regarding AQTF and audit requirements as well as providing opportunities for sharing improvement in teaching and learning practices. The workshops provided an additional communication strategy where all faculty members were able to gain knowledge of their peer workgroups’ program practices. The workshops sent a strong message to staff regarding the value of sharing their knowledge and practices and the importance of talking-up educational practices.

Staff found these workshops informative and useful. The opportunity to focus on delivery and assessment issues and practices started to change the focus of the culture across the faculty. Responses provided in the feedback sheets from the workshops and weekly QTT meetings highlighted the importance of the content presented at the workshops and the workshops themselves. The change by staff in their involvement and commitment highlighted the importance of valuing what teachers / lecturers do best; that is, classroom and delivery practices in vocational education and training and the assessment of student work. Results of these activities had a major impact on the culture of the faculty and the manner in which the staff saw their work practices. Fiona Thomson, Institute Quality Manager (May 2003), through the following comments provided during the QTT workshop after the external audit process, validated this cultural change by staff:

They as in the Faculty staff now understand what is meant and required under the quality banner and have finally got it. Throughout the audit the three program areas covered the process of the 12 standards painingly and what’s more the process was enjoyable. From attendance at the TAFESA Quality Network meetings and the feedback from this audit there has been a totally opposite response from other institutes experience. The staff from II&AD Faculty have taken ownership of the process, which was clearly articulated throughout the audit process. Students interviewed were complimentary, confirming their faith and support in the staff and the systems. As the Quality Manager for the Institute, I felt very proud of II&AD Faculty and its staff during the audit. The changeover within the Faculty has been major in the last 4 months.

Staff participation

I was somewhat surprised just how strongly staff appreciated the valuing of their work practices related to the delivery and assessment of student progress. My ongoing acknowledgement of staff assisted greatly in changing attitudes, motivation and commitment.
Teachers were asked to consider what documentation would assist them in their daily teaching practices to more effectively deliver and assess their programs and student progress. I was able to identify information that staff needed in their operational environment to be better informed and understand the imperatives impacting on them. In addition to identifying relevant resources, we were able to develop internal partnerships to support staff in improving student learning outcomes. My credibility increased as staff began to recognise my focus was on improving practices for them and their students.

Rylatt (2000, p. 16), Miller (2003, p. 7) and Senge et al. (1995, p. 23) suggest that a critical success factor in change management entails working with cross functional members of teams. To this end, we arranged for academic and non-academic staff members to work together and for those working in different teaching areas to share their experiences. All of this ensured that the strategies and support structures developed for the faculty’s workgroups assisted them to gain an understanding of their new environment and insights into the requirements and standards being asked. This provided the workgroups with the necessary knowledge to meet the compliance requirements for quality audits, as stated by one of the teaching staff and a QTT member (Chris McGee, July 2003):

*Change can be a daunting thing for most people and it takes careful planning and administration to ensure that the changes go through smoothly and efficiently. This was demonstrated extremely well by our facilitator, which helped in the ‘ownership process’ and ultimately in the glowing reports emanating from the auditors.*

Throughout this journey, as manager and researcher, I continued to offer support, leadership and direction to the faculty. The focus was one of facilitation, where work-based action learning principles were being integrated to bring about change management initiatives as the faculty strived to address the external pressures and respond to these imperatives in a timely and positive manner. Using a flexible, responsive leadership style involving trust, support, participative collaboration in a team based work environment had been the focus of the facilitation process. These were the very qualities that Callan (2001, p. 11) identifies in his report for VET management of the future as being essential.

**Results of faculty actions**

The initiatives and activities undertaken offered staff the opportunity to develop an increased understanding and knowledge of the external factors impacting on their day-to-day operations. I was able to observe the efforts of staff during their external audit. The manner in which they worked as a team to bring together the faculty’s QTT continuous improvement system was extremely effective. Feedback the teams received after the AQTF external audit process (AQTF Audit Report, 31 July 2003) further highlighted this:

*The uses of simple checklists and proformas to ensure consistency and quality assurance of training (ie traineeship checklist, staff mapping grid, counselling checklist etc) have been effectively demonstrated. Student information, the RPL/RCC process*
The excitement and ‘proud attitude’ that resulted from the audit was further highlighted through the comments of the faculty’s Quality Officer. Stephen McCarthy played a key role working with me and assisting the workgroups collect their evidence and address the audit requirements. His comments (Bell, 2003. II&AD Record of Faculty Quality Journey, May 2003, p 16) attest to the changing attitudes of the team members:

I have been very proud to be part of the Faculty’s audit process. During this time I have seen an amazing shift in team motivation and attitudes since 2002. It has been extremely satisfying to see the melding of the teams as their learning has increased. The work teams seem to value input from other work teams, continually seeking areas to improve on. Staff now have a positive attitude towards the continual improvement process.

McCarthy’s insight represents a major shift in the faculty’s work environment. In effect we had demonstrated what Kotter (1995, pp. 59-67) identifies, namely that in changing attitudes of staff it is essential to increase their level of enthusiasm and confidence about the nature of their role within the ‘organisation’. This was an exciting journey for me as it triggered and assisted in unlocking and facilitating workplace change processes for the faculty.

Margie John’s comments as faculty manager (Bell, 2003. II&AD Record of the Faculty Quality Journey, May 2003, p. 15) highlight the resultant changes and changing attitudes for the Faculty during these activities.

As the Faculty Manager I was delighted to note the developments that had taken place over the 12 months, and particularly with the leadership demonstrated since February this year when comments from the auditors validated the work undertaken by the members of the Faculty in being motivated either to complete the work they had begun or to use the agreed Faculty continuous improvement system to improve their own practices including the documented processes implemented. The outcome of the audit validated and provided the Faculty work teams with positive feedback and reinforcement that they were on track. All staff can stand proud as I am extremely proud of all of them.

I observed throughout this process that there was an increased willingness to share ideas and information between teaching areas. This sharing included working together to prepare a faculty perspective on critical issues. It was extremely uplifting to observe staff taking on leadership roles during this process. Following the AQTF audit early in May 2003, I facilitated a QTT workshop in which staff openly acknowledged they had moved from being negative to accepting and feeling positive about their work. Improved documentation was now in place with strategic plans for the faculty being shared with all faculty members (Bell, 2003. II&AD Record of the Faculty Quality Journey, p. 10). It was extremely encouraging to find that faculty members could see that the development had occurred for the benefit of the workgroups and not just for the audit.
Whilst setting out and meeting the planned actions for the faculty, Cycle 4 resulted in outcomes that had not been identified even though it was hoped they would occur. These were:

- Confidence by teaching staff to respond to external quality requirements.
- Teaching staff enthusiastically sharing their delivery and assessment strategies with other program areas.
- Agreement and establishment of a system to manage the delivery of teaching, learning and assessment operational actions by programs incorporating continuous improvement processes.
- Faculty staff committed and actively participating in ongoing improvement activities for the benefit of staff, students, faculty and the institute.
- Faculty external audit achievements acknowledged as an institute and a TAFESA benchmark.
- Teaching staff collaborating in the development of future information technology needs.

The Institute’s Quality Manager (Bell, 2003. *II&AD Record of the Faculty Quality Journey*, May 2003, p. 16) summed up the outcomes from this cycle and provided confirmation evidence that cultural change had occurred within the faculty:

> The Institute has undertaken a radical change from the first quality audit in 1999 where Onkaparinga was the worst to now with AQTF strong compliance and II&AD Faculty now the best. Work teams were well prepared with many participants 5 - 6 - 8 people (which was unusual), clearly demonstrating embedded knowledge and understanding shared amongst the whole team.

In closing this description of my research project, I feel the following so aptly highlights the experiences this journey has provided.

> No one person has the answers to … questions. But there are answers. They … emerge from the collective experience of people working to increase learning in a wide variety of settings.

(Senge et al., 1995, p. 5)

> Guiding ideas are not static. Their meaning and sometimes their expression, evolve as people reflect, and talk about them; and as they are applied to guide decisions.

(Senge et al., 1995, p. 24)
Chapter 3: Part B: The Exegesis: Introduction

In Part A I described the action-research project which I undertook in 2001-2003. The project, which evolved across 4 stages addressed some fundamental challenges faced in many if not most contemporary work organisations. Those challenges may be simply stated in the form of several questions. Firstly, how can and does any organisation identify issues and problems deemed worthy of being addressed and resolved? We need also to ask, how can organisations engage in serious, high quality processes of change? Thirdly we might properly ask, can organisations reliably make a distinction between change for the sake of change, and change that will produce demonstrable benefits for its workforce, including senior managers, and those people who use or buy the products or services it makes or offers? Finally, by what means can workers in an organisation become involved in desirable change and good practices? These questions in effect were implicit in the project I undertook.

In Part A, I described with what, from my perspective was an appropriate level of descriptive accuracy, the things I did and saw in my work for the Alliance, a network of two TAFE institutes in South Australia, as I designed to introduce a quality assurance planning framework. As my description made clear, there were persistent and serious problems in the way the institutes in the Alliance had been managed. This is evidenced in the failure to identify useful and usable information about itself and poor staff morale as a consequence of having to confront more change without any obvious rationale or describable benefit to anyone. I described the steps I took to address some of these problems. In addition, I collated a large body of documentary and ‘archival’ materials which ‘fleshed out’ as it were the change management project.

In this section, I offer an exegesis of that project. Originally a Biblical term to nominate the function of the exegete (or interpreter), exegesis is a combination of commentary and / or interpretation of an original or primary text. In this case, my exegesis addresses the project. The point of my exegesis likewise addresses several questions:

- What sense can be made of the project?
- Set against a potentially very large body of social science research drawing variously on disciplines like sociology, economics, psychology, anthropology and more recent area of studies like organisational and management studies, which address some of
the four major questions I identified above, what is the relationship between my project and that body of theoretical and empirical work?

Identifying this relationship may be handled in a number of ways. For example, I might ask did any of this literature on organisations and organisational change 'predict' or explain what happened during the course of the project? Or, I might ask, did anything that characterised the project, or which emerged in the course of it, challenge or shed new light on old or conventional theories or unite ideas? Does the project suggest new ideas, or does it point to large holes in the fabric of contemporary or classical organisational literature? I might ask what key learnings and insights came out of the project? Additionally I might ask, what kinds of adjustments might need to be made to what is frequently criticised as the abstract and over-generalized nature of organisational studies, so as to permit a closer and more useful alignment of the theory of organisation and actual case studies like this one?

In this exegesis, I have chosen to focus on the sequence or stages of the project. In the simplest sense I began with a plan of action; I then did certain things from which there were certain consequences or, as the modern cant has it, there were 'outcomes'.

Equally, this conforms with the account of human action provided by Max Weber (1978 pp. 63-74, 340) which has become known as a rational action model. Alfred Schutz (1973, pp. 28, 138, 145) famously indicated why we might properly be suspicious of something so obviously flawed by Weber’s own narrow obsession with promoting a rational action account of social processes (Sica, 1998, p. 48). Interestingly Weber himself indicates unintended consequences of so much intentional or planned action and why a rational action model may be inadequate to the task of describing or explaining the nature of social action as it actually unfolds. Weber’s machinations derived from Aristotle’s famous description of the nature of human work which stressed a linear, rational and coherent logic working across the rational intent, the action and the consequences. Schutz, writing after the impact of Freud and the Auschwitz movement, took issue with two fundamental underpinnings to Weber’s theory of rational action. Schutz suggested that not all rational intentions were necessarily rational, pointing to the play of fantasy, interest, self-deception and prejudice in shaping assumptions; it is too simplistic to assume that actions and consequence simply and unequivocally flow from intent.

These remarks serve to position my own exegesis of this action research project. The project may be abstractly represented in terms that say almost nothing and conceal what was acutely happening as diagrammatically represented in Figure 4:
This diagram represents an ideal typical process of rational planning applied to the Alliance project. It envisages, in time-honored fashion, the idea that a process of planning precedes a process of implementation, which in turn produces what are called ‘outcomes’. How adequate is this abstracted model of organisational change to the project? It is this elementary question which guides my exegesis. I use the three elements of planning, implementation and ‘outcomes’ to structure this exegesis.

In each chapter, I will discuss the experience of the project and certain findings drawn from the project. My experience of the project and analysis of the data and information gathered during this project, highlight a range of issues as well as suggesting certain ways of thinking about how best to introduce organisational change.

The action learning action research cycles support a methodology well able to address workplace issues and get practical solutions (Gollan and Davis, 1999, p. 89; and McNiff, 2002, p. 205). The research was located in my workplace where problems could be addressed and practical solutions sought (Ellis et al., 2000, p. 4; and Mitchell et al., 2002, p. 27). It was the unique quality of my workplace that required the development and use of specific strategies and tools as we collectively identified and tried to use an idiosyncratic range of capabilities with respect to the Alliance (Mitchell, 2003, p. 22).
The decision by the Executive Director of the Alliance to identify a focus person, (Wredden, 2002, pp. 3-5) in this case myself, to drive and lead the development of the strategies and planning tools drew on Mintzberg and Lampel’s (2001) planned and emergent approach. My experiences exemplify an intuitive approach using the action learning action research style as suggested by Cherry (1999, p. 38). This action learning action research style involved a diverse range of people committed to continuous improvement strategies (Mitchell and Associates, 2002, p. 11). Devising an implementation strategy using a planning and performance framework was integral to the project’s development. The framework became a fundamental aspect of the Alliance’s dynamic planning culture (O’Regan et al., 2002, pp. 663-671).

Rylatt (2000, p.16) summarises this idea succinctly:

Developing a skilful blend of implementation strategies will ensure that change becomes reality. .... Successful action planning requires the input and contribution of a community of people, including individuals, groups and key decision makers.

Senge (1995, p. 33) takes this thinking further and suggests the role of planning was to provide an infrastructure to enhance learning throughout the organisation. He further stated:

... planning is ... a process whereby management (and) teams ... change their shared mental models of their company, their markets and their competitors.

Productivity reports were further developed by the five faculty academic administrators in partnership with the Alliance Student Management System (SMS) Consultant and myself. This activity demonstrated the importance of building partnerships, operating in teams to resolve workplace issues and the use of teamwork principles as highlighted by Callan (2001, p. 11), Adiviso (2001, p. 11) and Gollan and Davis (1999, p. 70). My experiences confirmed Rylatt’s (2000, p. xx) and Fraser and Novak’s (1998, p. 109) research in the use of these principles which proved extremely powerful in changing the structures being imposed by the decision makers within the Alliance.

The final cycle offered an opportunity to work within a faculty environment. My role provided the faculty with opportunities to extend its own knowledge, skills and planning practices as it made sense of the emerging changes it was required to make. It was in this environment that I felt the plan surely became the tool to assist the faculty to address its performance in relation to meeting the AQTF standards and in planning its future directions. Shared leadership as identified by Mitchell et al. (2001, pp. 21, 22, 38) and Skippington (2002, pp. 6, 25) involve high levels of team participation to improve current practices, knowledge and understanding as Howell (1994, p. 17) and Graham (2003, p.14) indicate, can assist to employ the faculty to develop practical solutions to real issues. Processes further supported by McNiff (2000, pp. 138, 266). In this environment, learning together enabled a
transformational process of change in the faculty (Bell 2003, *II&AD Record of the Faculty Quality Journey*) further confirming Ellis et al.’s (2000, p. 4) comments on transformational change.

Apart from using this formal analytic approach to structure the exegesis, my exegesis is also guided by the specific institutional and policy setting of TAFE. Many researchers have identified the value, role and special character of TAFE understandings which properly also need to inform any exegesis. Researchers like Mitchell and Associates (2002, p. 6), Mitchell (2003, p. 2), Mulcahy (2003, p. 84) and Waters (2005, p. 6) have all highlighted the importance of VET remaining a dynamic, adaptable and responsive education sector. Their research points to the need of TAFE managers to acquire and develop new skills and strategies to ensure that the VET environment remains stable.

One way of thinking about this project has been provided in terms of the ideas of a learning organisation (Senge, 2000 p. 168; Rylatt, 2000, p. xxi; McNiff, 2000, p. 38; and Billett, 2001, p. 19). Much of the literature about learning organisations is couched in chokingly bland and abstracted terms and appears to be derived from much of the 1990s literature on learning. An exemplary text like Ramsden (1992, pp. 40, 252), like the above literature, treats learning as a process of change, though he clearly acknowledges the complexity and difficulty of achieving the learning organisation framework where learning-as-change takes on a somewhat uncomplicated character.

Workplace learning practices according to Skippington (2002, pp. 6, 7) has a number of characteristics which are core components to support workplace development. These characteristics include collectively catering for individual and organisational needs and integrating a range of learning processes and strategies. Skippington adds that organisational change promotes and focuses on 'real' workplace issues and problems. Precisely what Skippington means by much of this is not always clear. Much of this literature relies on reification. The 'organisation' is treated as if it were analogous to a 'subject', that is 'it' is presumed to have rationality, valuing and goals separate from any people who work inside that organisation. More often than not, this process of reification is mirrored by the way managers of varying degrees of authority and seniority claim the right to speak as if they are 'the organisation'.

Rylatt (2000, p. xxi) also points to a range of characteristics of any learning environment or organisation. He suggests this requires everyone involved in an organisation to work together collectively to improve their capacity to accept and generate change. These characteristics include the encouragement of best practice, innovation and self-management
where ‘the organisation’ and its employees work in partnership to support continuous improvement. In this environment managers encourage employees to seek and review their goals and visions in line with ‘the organisational’ priorities (Skippington, 2002). Rylatt (2000, p. xx), Callan (2001, p. 11) and Fraser and Novak (1998, p. 109) all point to the use of teamwork as a key leverage mechanism to bring about change. McNiff (2000, p. 81) argues that if people start sharing ideas and creating communities, the result is a learning culture where human relationships foster learning. Guastavi and Oxtoby (1998, p. 83) take this further and suggest that the condition for transformation to take place needs to be one of continuous learning by individuals, teams and the whole organisation, though quite what they mean is not clear.

Matthews (1999, p. 8), Billet (2001, p. 14) and Mitchell et al. (2001, p. 41) all identify workplace learning as the kind of learning that takes place in a work environment. It can be a variety of formal, informal and or ad hoc learning and influenced by the personal, cultural and contextual features of any workplace (Solomon et al., 2001, p. 8). However, Matthews (1999, p. 4) complicates matters and suggests behavioural workplace learning requires a change on the part of the individual and the organisation. This change requires an adjustment in an individual's thinking and actions. Matthews indicates how a person's or an organisation's response to change can have an effect on the workplace learning. She states that the type of learning is dependent on the learning paradigm of the organisation. Miller (2003, p. 7) adds that workplace learning needs to be accompanied by planned strategies to encourage staff to work together in a collaborative manner, because addressing each work issue is likely to require different approaches. Matthews (1999, p. 8) more usefully suggests that workplace learning and planning will work well if it is based on increased involvement in decision making and planning by all workers: this she says will improve commitment to teamwork and continuous improvement.

As a number of popular educationalists like Wadsworth (1998, p. 5) and McNiff (2000, p. 16) have shown, some of the rather abstracted advocacy takes on a more robust quality when the learning organisational model is framed as an action research process. The VET sector has used Mitchell’s et al. (2001, p. 42) treatment of work-based learning as an integrative approach, where the learning is an integral aspect of the workplace experience to resolve work-based problems. This action learning action research is a learning methodology used in the VET sector along with mentoring, coaching and project-based learning for staff development initiatives. Henry (2003, p. 6) and Mitchell et al. (2001) in particular argue that work-based learning enables staff to play a critical role in the development, planning and implementation of change so as to address the workplace problem(s) or issue(s) to be resolved (Skippington, 2002, pp. 6, 25). This requires high levels of communication,
participatory planning and lots of commitment, collaboration and the full involvement of staff. The VET Learnscope initiatives, which use work-based projects, offer a key example of this one standard version exemplified by Harris et al. (2001, pp. 22, 44, 51). These projects involved a high level participation and commitment from staff to address diverse work issues and result in staff learning new skills and developing new practices.

Learning organisations are supposed to make change a key feature of their collective life. Appelbaum and Goransson (1997, pp. 115-128), Senge (2000, p. 24), More (2003, p. 1) and Dore (1999, p. 31) have all identified organisational learning as the best way to assist organisations to engage in continuous change. Innovation, staff development and empowerment activities have all been used to bring about change. In complex organisations where change is consistently occurring More (2003, p. 1) and Senge (1999, p. 63) believe there is no straightforward answer or best way to create sustainable organisational change and development. Senge (1999, p. 64) goes further and suggests that answers evolve from the collective experience of people working together through taking actions, reflecting on the results and drawing conclusions about their meanings, and then planning for the next actions and so on. Whilst some experiments may go wrong, he believed new actions could be designed with successful results which might not have been anticipated. Where managers consulted and worked with staff, successful organisational change was more likely possible as Gollan and Davis (1999, p. 70) suggest. They believe strategies in which managers and employees meet regularly, discuss work related problems and issues to work out solutions, lead to the creation of improved efficiency and productivity. Gollan and Davis (1999, p. 89) emphasise that improvement in an organisation’s performance is the result of this practice.

A NCVER study by Johnston et al. (2002, pp. 4-6) highlight the value of having diverse approaches to enable employees to participate in workplace change. Particular emphasis is placed on employees contributing to decision making, policy making and work processes about workplace practices. While looking to increase the participation and involvement of workers in change making projects may seem to be an ‘obviously’ good idea, it clearly sets up political issues variously involving managers, unions and employees. Whether these issues are acknowledged or not by the learning organisation is another question.

Clarke (1993, p. 385) and Adiviso (2001, p. 11) rather self-evidently argue that if an organisation was to modify any important aspect of its operations, then the process of change needs to be planned.

Swain (1999, pp. 30-37) highlights the impact of both internal and external forces on an organisation, where internal priorities can be redirected when policy changes occur - as
experienced with a change of government during the life of the Alliance in 2002 in this project. More (2003, p. 3) insists that the all important factor is the human dimension, because the development a learning culture needs to build on employees' capabilities. McNiff (2000, p. 5) believes the results of research are more likely to be unique because different situations involve experiences with different people. She further suggests learning organisations are educative, where managers as educators assist to create the conditions for people to learn.

Limitations of project
In developing this exegesis, I also need to acknowledge some of the constraints and limits of the project.

My project was based in my workplace, where I needed to ensure that directors, managers and staff were informed about my work role and its relationship to my studies. My Ph.D research was undertaken in tandem with my ongoing consultation, negotiation, clarification and working through issues with the people directly related to and involved with the workplace priorities in which I was involved. Even where people were external to the Alliance, I ensured that I acquainted them with my dual role of researcher and change agent. Of course, to a large extent these roles were complementary for the most part.

Mitchell et al. (2001, p. 38), McNiff (2000, p. 16) and Zuber-Skerritt (2002, p. 122) highlight the importance of maintaining motivation and focus for workplace research projects. The initial time scale for the project that I commenced with the Alliance in 2001 was for two years. At the planning stage, I felt two years was a long time. However, in hindsight, my experience suggests that this was not long enough as organisational imperatives of reviews and realignment of the organisation's structure were not initially considered.

The fact that the TAFE system was managed by a central body at the state level limited or at least sometimes made it difficult to obtain information relating to the two institutes that comprised the Alliance. Initially at least this problem was compounded by the inability and at times reluctance of certain people within the Alliance to provide the data and information I requested. Gradually, however, the problem was addressed to a large extent as I gained trust from within the Alliance; this was further assisted when I undertook the role of executive officer to the external Consultant who conducted the Review of the Alliance in the 2001. Another breakthrough came when, TAFESA agreed to give each institute electronic access to the state databases. Having access to raw data for the first time enabled us to develop our own reporting processes suitable to the needs of the institutes within the Alliance.
Staff participation and support at all levels were necessary to assist in changing the Alliance’s planning culture. To some extent the staff were at times a limiting factor because of resistance to change and indeed the very bringing together of the two institutes to form the Alliance. Getting staff on side required considerable skill, patience and time. Of course in all negotiations I had to be cognisant of the unions’ perspectives.

Finally, my changing work roles were a constraint and provided some limitations. I was strongly supported and encouraged by the Alliance Executive Director as my workplace sponsor throughout the earlier phases of this project. However, as he became extremely ill, changes to the commitment in the organisation’s directions impacted on the continuity of the research. This change re-emphasized for me the importance of consistency in executive direction of an organisation when undertaking large change management initiatives. During this project’s extended time, I have been able to reflect, draw on the collected data and become more objective as I have fine-tuned the emergent themes, principles and processes emanating from the action learning and action research activities.

**Ethical considerations**

> Action research has the potential to raise many questions of ethical practice, both for the researcher and the ‘others’ engaged in the process. Its origins highlight its power to challenge not only existing practices and behaviours but also the values, which underpin them.

(Cherry, 1999, p. 14)

My project involved me as both a researcher and a manager. This raised a number of ethical issues. Fielden (2003, p. 6) points to the ethical tensions when researchers are also employees in the organisation being investigated. It was important I acknowledge to staff that I was undertaking a research project and that the project was part of the developmental and implementation activities being supported and endorsed by senior managers. As a manager, my role could easily be seen as giving me power to challenge and influence decisions impacting on staff and making judgments that they may have felt were not relevant to their work. However, getting the endorsement of senior managers helped my work to be seen more as an organisation development initiative to integrate planning and performance as part of the Alliance’s change management strategy.

This required in turn that all written information needed to be available for scrutiny by all stakeholders and potential interested parties. Fielden (2003, p. 2) highlights the need for transparent written information as a key aspect of any research undertaking. Opportunities were given to all participants to review and comment on written information. These materials were provided as part of the ongoing development and continuous improvement activities with the groups in which I as the manager / researcher participated. At the outset the Alliance
Executive Director endorsed my undertaking this project in relation to my Ph.D and informed all staff members of this.

In volunteering their participation in various aspects of this project staff were reminded that in addition to institutional considerations the project from my perspective was part of my Ph.D (Fielden, 2003, p. 3). In a number of cases individual staff offered to write their thoughts and views and provided me with their comments to support the work being undertaken. These comments have been used throughout the descriptive and exegetical documentation.

Where staff worked through their line manager, it was important that they did not feel intimidated and were always aware of their rights in relation to the development and implementation of this project. Participants involved in the data collection techniques of reports and transcripts of activities and specific feedback, for example, were provided with opportunities to review and validate the content prior to its use. As a line manager, I was continually aware of and sensitive to the possibility of the use of the work done as part of the project being misused when working with the task groups. Throughout this project all development work was considered to be a trial or a draft until such times as staff involved were prepared to agree and sign off on the outcomes. Collaborative consultation was continually used during these activities to ensure staff were satisfied.
Chapter 4: The planning phase

The idea that planning is a good idea has achieved a highly conventional status and reputation in the social science literature on organisations and organisational change. This is apparent in the smallest selection of literature represented by writers like Mitchell (2003), Miller (2003), Michaluk (2002), Schraeder (2002), Hamel (1996, 2003), Senge (1995), Kotter (1995), Kanter (1989) and O'Regan (2002). In principle, as these writers attest, the ideas behind planning is that it helps to harness the intelligence, creativity and energy of people working in an organisation. Planning is then placed alongside other important concepts like ‘workplace change’, ‘leadership’ and ‘workplace as a learning environment’ - all ostensibly designed to add further momentum and motivation for change. This enthusiasm for planning is evident in work by researchers such as Fraser et al. (1998, p.108), Applebaum et al. (1997, p. 115), Francis et al. (1996, p. 24) and Morden (1989, p. 5). Each highlights the need for ‘organisations’ to identify their strategic directions and to use a continuous improvement model as part of their planning processes.

The enormity of the challenge that was faced in this project becomes apparent when it is considered that each of the TAFE institutes that were part of the Alliance already had an existing work load that involved engaging students, teaching them and administering all of the systems needed to support staff and students. On top of this another layer of work was now being imposed. The thought has to be entertained that those who provide strategic planning and change management do not have very much to do with the daily grind of doing the work which defines and constitutes the raison d’etre in this case of several TAFE colleges. At any rate it was a received wisdom which I accepted at the start of the project that ‘the Alliance’ and its constituent institutes would be embracing a ‘model’ of continuous improvement as part of an approach to quality assurance.

It is an entirely conventional idea that organisations undertake planning activities and processes to set directions for themselves. Often the term ‘strategic planning’ is used. Equally traditionally it is something undertaken by senior and executive management.

As I was to discover, this traditional assumption opened up certain difficulties as it became apparent that enthusiasm for yet another top down project of ‘change’ and ‘quality improvement’ was decidedly thin on the ground. It became apparent, as my description of the project indicates, that a much flatter, more inclusive even democratic approach was needed if
any of the valuable aspects of the project were to be successfully introduced and sustained. In effect one key insight I was to achieve went to the value of thinking about ‘planning’ as an inclusive process involving everyone in the two institutes in understanding and being committed to new strategies, directions and practices. In this way planning itself might become a new kind of dynamic participatory process in which the very idea of involving and including more and more people in the change process, beginning with the planning stage, helps to ensure a deeper and more engaged process of change that is both sustainable and meaningful. In effect, the planning phase in such a reconceptualised approach to planning is as much about setting objectives as it is of getting agreement about the means to be used.

The following table is the first of two tables. Table 4 provides an overview of the core ideas, emergent themes and principles drawn from my experiences and reflection on the project; the researchers I identified helped me to see better how planning might be done on a participatory basis. This table provides an overview of researchers and the kinds of emergent principles and themes which proved to be the points of interest persistent in my analysis of the data and information arising out of the project.

### Table 4: Plan key messages linked to researchers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key messages</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Core Ideas</th>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Methodology Principles Used</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workplace change</strong></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Change is not linear, but occurred in different directions</td>
<td>Mitchell (2003), Rice (2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Plans as tools</td>
<td>A plan becomes a tool to evoke action within an organisation and acts as a living document to guide the activities of the organisation</td>
<td>Schraeder (2002), Coulthard et al. (1996)</td>
<td>Commitment by sponsor &amp; stakeholders</td>
<td>Briner et al. (1996), Sankaran (2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The point of this table is both simple and clear: if an ‘organisation’ like the TAFE institute I worked in wants to embrace a project of change it needs to develop a model of the learning organisation based on the principle that all the workers in the organisation need to be involved in each stage, including the planning, action and outcomes phases. In turn for this to happen, as I stress here, ultimately comes down to the capacity of people in senior positions to exercise appropriate kinds of ‘leadership’.

Researchers’ planning context

There are many definitions of ‘strategic planning’. I looked long and hard to find something to describe this project activity. O’Regan et al. (2002, p. 69), for example, observes that the term ‘strategic planning’ is widely used by senior managers and seems to have a multitude of meanings. However, MacDonald (1996, pp. 5-28) provides a definition which on balance does not seem all that clear or revealing:

….. strategy encompasses the following elements; a focus on long-term direction of the organisation, matching the activities of the business to the environment in order to minimise the threats and maximize opportunities to the resources available.

Likewise with Hewlett (1999, p.26):

Strategic planning focuses on the direction of the organisation and actions necessary to improve its performance. It is the process by which firms derive strategy to enable them to anticipate and respond to the changing dynamic environment in which they operate.

MacDonald’s definition suggests that strategic planning is best focused on identifying future directions of an organisation, minimising the threats and maximising the opportunities with the resources available. Hewlett on the other hand focuses on actions necessary to improve an organisations performance which involves anticipating and responding to the changing dynamic environment. Coultard et al. (1996, p. 5), more in line with the approach taken in this study, defines strategic planning as the planning processes operating across an organisation. He observes that operational plans specify the details about how the overall objectives are to be achieved. Planning frameworks, he suggests, are likely to incorporate a number of strategic plans (Coultard et al., 1996, pp. 39, 95, 104). Further, in line with the
approach taken in this study, operational plans (annual plans) provide a focus on annual activities to address issues of quality, cost, delivery, innovation and flexibility for the organisation to achieve its business results. Morden (1989, p. 5) adds to this debate by indicating that the development of organisational blueprints requires management participation and commitment, involvement of motivated employees collectively focusing on facts and customers needs as critical issues for consideration during the development and planning phases. Linking strategy to organisation implementation was identified as a key issue by O'Regan et al. (2002), Morden (1989), Coulthard et al. (1996), Matthews (1999), and Michaluk (2002). Cycles 3 and 4 in the present study and the portfolio of products from these cycles provided examples of the mechanisms and the strategies used to develop the links between macro planning and the operational levels of the organisation.

Hamel (1996, pp. 2-8) for example says that this kind of strategic planning is a calendar-driven ritual, not an exploration of the potential for ‘revolution’. Important for this study, he shows understanding of the problem when strategic planning stays locked up in Boardrooms in organisations. As he notes, senior executives have traditionally had responsibility for strategic direction setting in organisations and that once developed these plans were often difficult to implement across an organisation. In this traditional approach senior executives were solely responsible for the planning process, which harnessed only a small proportion of an organisation’s creative potential. Hamel argues that the executives of organisations need to engage and harness the diversity of all of their organisation’s intelligence. Harnessing the whole organisation’s intelligence as an open ended process of strategic discovery assists in ensuring the success of the organisation’s planning process. Rylatt (2000, p. 16) and McNiff (2000, p. 254) likewise point to a model of shared leadership involving active consultation and teamwork across an organisation that will promote the kind of understanding of organisational planning directions and help to ensure that when change takes place it is embraced and takes on depth.

Bamford and Forrester (2003, pp. 2-4) suggest organisational planning is most effective when emergent change approaches are used. They argue for the use of a ‘bottom up’ action process rather than ‘top down’ processes and point out, for example, that failure to do this means that it is impossible for senior managers to complete and implement every action. Change according to this model is the responsibility of a collective, with senior management being facilitators in the change management processes. The point and value of this proposition became clear as the planning process unfolded during this project. Many of my experiences suggest that senior leaders need to both drive issues and involve as many people as possible, otherwise implementation is less likely to occur.
I feel Michaluk (2002, p.16) is closer to say what I think when he defines planning as:

*the process of discovery of what is required to be done in order to achieve a specified goal. ... The process of thinking, deciding between options and articulation is planning.*

It is true that Mintzberg (1994, p. 2) distinguishes between planning and strategy making. He treats planning as contributing to the development of a strategy making process whilst planners act as catalysts by assisting managers to think strategically. Mintzberg et al. (1999, p. 5) suggest that strategy making is more about judging, design, intuition and emergent learning.

However, Kaplan and Norton (1996, 1998) argue, and I think carefully, that strategic planning cannot be detached from operational processes. Kaplan and Norton claim that the closer these two elements are linked, the more effective the strategic plan becomes. Michaluk (2002, p. 17) suggests this link is a two-way process. Hamel (1996, p. 7) argues that taking a deep diagonal slice through an organisation engages the organisational thinkers to assist in developing innovative strategies to achieve both unity and diversity. Through engaging senior executives in a learning dialogue with the employees, senior managers get more insight into their organisation’s knowledge. In addition, this approach gets more commitment from staff and accelerates the implementation process. As O'Regan et al. (2002, pp. 663-671) argue there is little purpose in having a range of visions, aims, and objectives if there is no attention given to how they can be deployed effectively. I found these ideas helpful in the implementation process. They certainly influenced the development of this project.

Coulthard et al. (1996, p. 5) claim that organisation wide planning establishes some key overall directions for the organisation. At least he established what some strategic planning writers often omit, namely the fact that an organisation has a past and is in the present when a process of change is suggested. He suggests that an organisation’s present and past activities are important features of these plans. Knowledge of the organisation has the capacity to ground any change process dramatically. Schraeder (2002, p.6) explores this further arguing that strategic plans need to consider both the unique qualities and context in which the organisation operates. When the plan enables action within an organisation, it functions as a living document, guiding the activities of the organisation in a purposeful manner.

On commencing this project, and reflecting on my past experience, I was conscious, as Mintzberg (1994, pp. 1-8) states, that organisational strategic plans often tend to 'sit on the shelf'. I was therefore aware of the importance of ensuring that the planning activities of this project were linked to Alliance’s organisational structure and processes. Equally, I set about to ensure that the changes in practice would mean plans were a functional part of divisions
and workgroup operational practices for reviewing and evaluating progress against planned actions during regular meetings. O'Regan et al. (2002, pp. 1, 7) further suggest an organisation's ongoing commitment to implementing and actioning its planning directions are major issues as to why strategic planning activities are likely to fail. The following discourse is aimed at providing a range of strategies to continuously improve an organisation's planning capability and capacity. Equally, in the empirical context of this project, considered as an action learning action research project, it is a point to be clarified how much innovation was either required or introduced during the life of the project. Certainly, as my description of the project has suggested there were some late-in-the-process 'learnings and insights' which led to some innovations and change.

**Strategic directions**

Mitchell and Young (2001, p. 69) argue that in order to become high performing education institutions, VET organisations need to use both strategic management and change management strategies. Mitchell and Associates (2003, p. 1) suggest that innovation is the key to addressing the 'external pressures'. He defines innovation as:

…the implementation of new and improved knowledge, ideas, methods, processes, tools, equipment and machinery, which leads to new and improved products, services and processes.

Mitchell and Associates (2003, p. 22) take this further and suggest innovation was ideally non-linear, customised, inclusive and transferable. Factors to foster and impede innovation are dependent on the perspectives of those involved and the context in which the developments operate. Again it seems that in our time the idea of innovation has acquired an entirely conventional, even clichéd, character. The presumption that by virtue of being 'new' any x-factor is inherently superior to any old y-factor is essentially either factious or foolish, or both. The possibility has to be thought for example, that working within existing policy objectives but holding people more to account than has been the case, might prove far more effective an approach to getting improvement than simply introducing some new x-factor. In the case of the Alliance, some degree of change at least was essential if only to meet new VET requirements imposed by both national and state governments.

O'Regan et al. (2002, pp. 663-671) argue there is little value in having a range of visions, aims and objectives if there is no attention paid as to how the visions, aims and objectives will be deployed. Linking these elements to each of the focus area action plans of the *Partners in Progress 2001-2004*, as well as identifying executive managers responsible for each area, assisted each division and their workgroups to identify their key stakeholders as they became engaged in the planning process. The plan became a tool which documented action and acted as a living document to guide the activities of each division in focusing on their core business of teaching, learning and / or service in a purposeful manner (Schraeder,
Solutions emerged from the action learning action research activities to support the introduction of the planning process as the Alliance adjusted and changed to improve its practices (Mitchell, 2002, p. 11). The implementation phase will be discussed in the next chapter.

Schraeder (2002, p. 6) suggests that any planning process adopted needs to acknowledge and ‘fit’ an organisation’s unique qualities and context. According to Huy (2001, p. 11), in fast changing environments, organisations need to discipline themselves to manage change, and in particular plan their change strategies according to their structures and capabilities. Development and adaptation of the ABEF platform provided something of the overall direction and structure of the Alliance’s *Partners in Progress 2001-2004* documentation. These actions reflected the needs of the Alliance as exemplified by its Executive Director’s explicit directives, as well as the expertise and capacity of those involved.

The point that kept coming home to me throughout this project was that organisational planning and performance required a whole-of-organisation inclusive approach. The Alliance Executive Director, during a joint presentation with myself at a VISTA conference in 2002, made this very clear. Getting and confirming agreement at each phase of the planning process with executive and managers, while ensuring knowledge and understanding of the planning requirements and expectations, became the consistent challenge for me.

In effect my experience and the relevant research literature remind us that planning is not linear, rather a social process of reconstructing practices (Kemmis, 2000, p. 28, 1995 p. 35; McNiff, 2002, p. 138; and Mitchell, 2003, p. 22). The actions in the project emerged as a result of dynamic and ceaseless exchanges supporting further Mitchell and Young (2001, p. 15) comments. One cycle became part of a wider pattern in a network of interconnecting activities in both form and practice. My experience was iterative. I was constantly reviewing and reflecting on the many cycles of plan, act and review actions (Wadsworth, 1998, p. 7) as they were occurring, often at a rapid pace.

**Leadership**

Kotter (1995, p. 2 and 1999, p. 3) highlights the need for organisations to generate high performing leadership practices to energise staff attuned to the organisation’s strategic goals. He suggests that strong leaders create effective internal change processes. These processes, in turn, assist the organisation to effectively cope with external change. Wreden (2002, pp. 3-5) suggests that where organisations use the strategy of appointing executive champions as leaders, they provide the organisation with a focus to remove obstacles and at the same time build consensus for new strategic imperatives. Through these actions Wreden
believed effective organisations are able to lead and energise staff to transform themselves to address and change their workplace practices.

Clarke (1993, p. 385) and Adiviso (2001, p. 11) claim that if an organisation wishes to modify an important aspect of its operations the process of change needs to be planned. Using change management strategies that ensure staff involvement, provides essential, important and powerful strategies to assist the organisation to change. Integrating work and learning, focusing on group and team learning, networking, and changing the emphasis from information control to information sharing are all important aspects of this. Adiviso (2001, p. 12) further suggests that where organisations encourage individuals to grow in the process, they can transform the organisation. He believes employees can teach the organisation about efficiency, quality and innovation. Callan (2001, pp. 10-12) observes that enterprises become more flexible, innovative and people focused when leaders use transformational style approaches. Leading from within rather than from the front is one strategy to promote the responsibility of followers. Communicating often and clearly, working with people at all stages while building partnerships and operating in teams further supports this transformational approach.

Teamwork is suggested by Rylatt (2000, p. xx), Callan (2001, p. 11) and Fraser and Novak (1998, p. 109) as a key characteristic in change strategy designed to stimulate growth and achievement within the organisation. McNiff (2000, p. 81) suggests that people who share ideas and create meaning develop an educative culture where relationships foster learning.

The principle of shared leadership and teamwork was consistently employed throughout the four cycles of this research project. Through active consultation involving a diverse range of people across the organisation (Kotter, 1995, p. 2, 1999, p. 3) planning the change strategies together (Morden, 1989, p. 5 and Huy, 2001, p. 11) were constant principles that I employed. These principles evolved and emerged as the cycles occurred.

**Emergent planning guidelines**

The following Table 5 summarizes my analysis of the work that has emerged from this project. More specifically, I have identified the emergent principles and processes as they relate to my experience and the writing of key researchers. Throughout the research project, I continued to test the value of these principles and processes.
Table 5: Emergent planning guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PLAN</strong> Model used is dependent on leadership from the top</td>
<td>• Ensure commitment and direction meet goals of CEO / executive and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply strategic thinking throughout all phases of activity</td>
<td>• Identify where initiative fits within organisation’s business directions, strategies and priorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gain endorsement from the ‘top’ leadership of the organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Link to business practices, processes and key positions of responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Link to sustainable operational activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Operate at all levels in the organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans are tools to assist organisational development and direction</td>
<td>• Use project management practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Start up phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Action plan implementation agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Review cycles of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Evaluate outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>o Celebrate success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure stakeholder involvement at all phases of activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan an implementation strategy</td>
<td>• Designated champion with support from ‘top’ leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Management commitment and actions articulated and signed off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Cross segment of organisational staff involved in development and directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reinforcement and monitoring processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify and promote good practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve staff to commit and take action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Operate at all levels of organisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given there are different kinds and levels of planning which organisations undertake, planning in this project was done when it needed to be done and integrated into day-to-day operations as best as could be managed. Planning always took place in consultation with the key stakeholders. Whether planning was undertaken at the macro level within the organisation, tactical level in determining the implementation of the strategic direction, workgroup or personal level, the development of the planning process and its product became an important tool in providing directions, actions and commitments which the relevant groups and individuals used in implementing their business activity. This was in accordance with the work of Michaluk (2002), Hamel (1996, 2003), Senge (1995), Kotter (1995), Kanter(1989) and O’Regan et al. (2002) who support performance strategies being developed as part of the planning process. The integration of performance outcomes became an essential aspect of the planning process.

However, as my analysis and reflection suggests, strategic planning alone is insufficient when attempting organisational change management. Integrating the plan and its processes into actions for implementation was critical for change to take place. The next chapter explores the fit between what happened and the literature.
Chapter 5: Implementation phase

In terms of the triadic scheme of planning, implementation and outcomes, this middle phase of ‘implementation’ was as Schutz (1973) has argued, integral in a number of ways. As Coulthard et al. (1996, p. 5) observe, perhaps gratuitously, linking the overall strategic plans of an organisation to implementation of those plans is critical if an organisation is to successfully implement its planning processes across all levels of the organisation.

What has been established to my satisfaction is that any process and change, such as the quality assurance project in the Alliance, if it is to be successful, needs to be as fully inclusive and participatory as possible. That is, as many of the members of an organisation need to be brought into the planning and action phases of the project as possible. As I have shown, there is a substantial literature which reflects or makes this point. Writers like Wadsworth (1998), Pedlar (1983), Reason (2001), McNiff (2000) and Mitchell et al. (2001, 2005) all point to the value of people working collaboratively and inclusively as a group to identify and address workplace problems to introduce appropriate change.

In suggesting that staff were collaboratively working together as a group to resolve workplace problems, does not mean that there were periods of blind, unreflective doing. At its best there was a complex process of activity and reflection as people struggled to get on top of doing things in a ‘new’ way and to think about this as it was being done. This can make, as Howell (1994, p. 17), Ellis et al. (2000, p. 4), Barton et al. (2003, p. 3) and Coughlan et al. (2002, p. 233) indicate, for a sometimes ‘messy’ quality to some of the activity.

In the development or planning phase of this project careful consideration was given to the subsequent implementation phase. As O'Regan et al. (2002, pp. 1, 7) and Alfred (2006, pp. 233-245) point out, if planning is to be successfully implemented across an organisation, committing and actioning processes and resources are essential, otherwise the plans tend to ‘sit on the shelf’. They suggest that organisation’s lack of commitment to the implementation phase is often a major issue as to why strategic planning activities are likely to fail. This project developed both the framework for the Alliance planning processes as well as its implementation.

What is clear is that during the implementation phase of the project we discovered that we needed to ensure that we had a number of different tactics and methods ‘up our sleeves’. A
part of the commitment to getting some appropriate change in the ways people did things, and to ensure that we did this, is the basis of a strong commitment to teamwork and strong staff participation. Table 6 summarizes these themes and links them to the core ideas I have identified.

**Table 6:** Analysis of researches linked to implementation emergent themes and key messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key messages</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
<th>Core Ideas</th>
<th>Principles</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
<th>Methodology Principles Used</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuous improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>The use of diverse approaches assisted in engaging employees’ participation by integrating work and learning activities</td>
<td>Johnston et al. (2002), Clarke (1993) and Adiviso (2001)</td>
<td>Focus on existing groups to obtain rich descriptions of what is occurring in the groups</td>
<td>Stake (1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff participation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging and involving staff in the development, implementation and review phases of development, systematic participation of staff</td>
<td>Huy (2001), Johnston et al. (2002),</td>
<td>Structured process of cycles of learning, knowledge and change.</td>
<td>Cherry (1999)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning levels</td>
<td></td>
<td>High level of participation and commitment from staff to address diverse work issues</td>
<td>Harris et al. (2001), Skippington (2002)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants worked through issues and problems using action learning, sharing their views and knowledge. In doing so, they were able to develop an increased knowledge of the
issues and collectively were able to provide workable solutions, or ‘fit’, for the situation. One such example was the development of faculty monthly student enrolment reports, where the group’s actions meant a change in the type of monthly reports each faculty received. In this case the group and its individuals felt more powerful as they had been given permission to suggest and make relevant changes to the monthly reporting format. As McNiff (2000, pp. 266-269), Sankaran et al. (2001, p. 11) and Kemmis (1995, p. 35) point out such social activity has the ability to change and to continuously improve organisational practice, as it encourages staff to take responsibility and ownership for aspects of their work.

**Diverse Tactics**

As I have indicated in the project description, the institutes in the Alliance had limited organisational planning framework, lacked systematic sets of resources to provide managers with data and information on which to make informed planning decisions and limited accessibility to effective reporting mechanisms, mixed with constant restructures driven by government policies and changes in executive and senior management appointments. It was these problems we wanted to fix.

Developing and managing the change process was an ongoing challenge as we did not have a text book specifically written for our situation, showing us how to do the project (McNiff, 2000, p. 5). During the first three cycles of this project I operated at an Alliance level, reporting to the Alliance Executive Director while the Alliance’s planning and performance framework was developed. It was critical to use a diverse array of tactics and skills (Mitchell, 2002, p. 11; Johnston et al., 2002, pp. 4-6; and Rylatt 2000, pp. 2, 8, 9, 10). Throughout the project I worked in partnership with staff using different teams as each new problem was identified. From the diverse problems addressed, a diverse range of tools and artifacts were produced, each related to the type of activity being undertaken at the time (Mitchell and Associates, 2003, p. 9 and Skippington, 2002, pp. 6, 25). These strategies involved a high level of staff participation as Callan (2001, p. 53) suggests is needed when leading organisational change.

For example, the project required the collection and analysis of data. However, we needed to collect different kinds of data and use different methods (Hou, 2003, p. 2) in its collection as well as different formats in its reporting. During Cycle 1’s data collection, this involved access to institute financial statistics, student contact hours, student and staff feedback as well as staffing statistics, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. However, the data came from different sources and the formats were often not suitable for the specific audience. One example that exemplifies this was the financial data. Different stakeholders required different formats so that the Alliance, its executive, management and staff could use these readily and
effectively. The precise format varied according to the level to which the data was being presented. Thus a range of formats from each of the data sources was developed and provided in a manner suitable for its targeted audience. This became a clear issue when reporting monthly productivity performance to Council, executive, senior management and work teams. The style of the report format and the amount of productivity data provided became audience specific, taken from the student management reporting task group actions during Cycle 3.

Senge et al. (1995, p. 5) insists rightly that in any process of large scale change we cannot expect that any one person will have the answers. Rather that they will emerge out of the collective experiences and sense-making of people working together. The project certainly produced a lot of things, including a box of reports and formats for producing more reports. These products include:

- Implementation of *Partners in Progress 2001-2004*.
- Consultation process of the Alliance Review (Bell, 2001 report).
- Organisational assessment report and recommendations (*Consultation Process for the Alliance Review Onkaparinga and South East Institutes of TAFE* pp. 3-5).
- Performance Review Framework – macro level (*Assessment of Alliance Against Goals* section contained in *Planning and Performance Integration Framework* for Onkaparinga and South East Institutes of TAFE, 1/10/01).
- Project investigating and recommending productivity reporting format (Finn, 2003).
- Financial and Planning (FAP) 2002 folder resource for all managers distributed to all senior staff during Regional Educational Managers / Academic Board workshop 3 & 4 September 2001 - Victor Harbour.

Apart from these ‘products’ the project also involved processes of change in the way people did things as related to each other. For example, senior staff began sharing their knowledge and resources with one another. I found this willingness to share resources and knowledge a major shift, representing as it did a change of attitude as I was being offered resources to assist me in bringing together the vast and wide range of data, trying to make sense of it and develop it in easy-to-use formats for management. Rather than being a lone voice, I began to have other senior managers working with me and promoting the actions and their developments. I felt that managers were beginning to work together as one voice rather than many individual voices.

Where there had been no processes or format prescribed for doing things, I soon learnt that this did not matter. I learnt to develop format processes to fit the specific purpose myself. To do this, I talked to a lot of people about ideas or concepts, drafting out the ideas, organising a
time for key stakeholders to look at them and tried to get agreement on the actions to be taken (including by whom and by when), as supported by More (2003, p. 1) and Senge (1999, p. 63).

The project required the use of a wide selection of diverse approaches, different data sources and data collection techniques to meet the needs of the organisation and the stakeholders in the project (Fielden, 2003, p. 3; Sankaran, 2003, p. 2; and Dick, 2002, p. 5). I needed to extract information from both within the Alliance and the wider TAFESA sector. This entailed networking with an increasing range of support services to provide the statistical data sources in relation to finance, productivity, student and staff surveys, community information and ABS data. In addition, I brought together the available Alliance qualitative data. This particularly reflected the organisational self assessment case study from Cycle 1 and the artifacts from Cycle 2. These activities required extensive conversation with people even though some of the information obtained was still only ‘patchwork’.

Another such approach was the development of the continuous improvement system developed with staff in Cycle 4. Working with faculty staff, I was able to help them review and consider how they would improve the management of their course materials for students. For example, many casual teaching staff would join a team mid-way during the teaching program and often have difficulty in not being able to locate relevant information and resources. Through many conversations with staff, we were able to establish a system that would record and ‘house’ the required information in a format that was easy for staff to use and build as they worked through the different units of study. From regular work team meetings, the content of the system was easily reviewed and adjusted as the team identified areas for further development and improvement. This system provided teachers with an organised set of documentation for their teaching resources, assignments and assessment information, student brochures and marketing materials and teacher and student course guides for all units. It was available and referred to by individuals and groups and used in discussions to make changes as part of their planning review processes. Where changes were made these improvements were documented and available for use in ISO and AQTF regular audit processes. An electronic format assisted with storage of these materials. This system included student administration details, staff employment information, faculty management as well as course information related to the content of the programs covered by the faculty. The systems contained a series of checklists and proformas enabling staff to network, workshop, share and improve knowledge across the faculty.

To some extent the idea of ‘continuous improvement’ has achieved a taken-for-granted status in a lot of the management literature and in organisational practice. This was not the
case in the present study. The continuous improvement change management process described in this project had strong support from the executive and senior staff and this gradually extended to the rest of the staff.

As many writers indicate (More, 2003, p.1; Senge, 1999, p. 64; Rylatt, 2000, pp. 2, 8-10; and Stace and Dunphy, 1998, p. 93) there is no consensus at all about how a regime of continuous improvement is best introduced or indeed what will actually facilitate its introduction. As we have seen McNiff (2000, p. 59) argue, participatory action research requires the practitioners to reflect and evaluate together, identifying the things that require attention. A number of writers argue that working in this way is the best basis for making continuous improvement happen (Appelbaum and Goransson, 1997, pp. 115-128; Senge, 2000, p. 24; Fraser et al., 1998, pp. 24, 108; and Morden, 1989, p. 5). This was especially apparent as I began work on the final cycle of this project.

The final cycle of the project involved engaging Information Industries & Applied Design (II&AD) faculty staff members in a participatory process and building partnerships in the cause of the developmental improvement activities (Harris et al., 2001, pp. 22, 44, 51 and Skippington, 2002, p. 25). These partnerships and teams added knowledge as the faculty worked through the issues to develop answers and solutions to situations they faced (Sankaran et al., 2001, p. 11 and Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 38). Where non-compliance of computers was identified during the AQTF audit in 2003, a team of staff with different functional responsibilities pulled together to share their expertise and knowledge to put in place the required corrective actions for executive to agree to purchase new computers in order for Certificate IV and Diploma of Multimedia to continue being taught. McNiff (2002, pp. 138, 266) has commented on the usefulness of staff with different functional responsibilities and expertise working together in this manner. In this case a team of staff worked together to plan and develop practical solutions to address and resolve the workplace problem (Schraeder, 2002, p. 6 and Huy, 2001, p. 11). This was one example of many, where faculty members worked collaboratively to address a range of critical issues, creating a transformational change within the faculty as occurred during Cycle 4 (Ellis et al., 2000, p. 4).

These processes improved staff practices and understanding of both the organisation and the influences impacting on the workplace environment (Wadsworth, 1998, p. 7; McNiff, 2000, p. 253; Zuber-Skerritt, 2002, p. 115; and Dick, 2002, p. 5). This reflects the point that some staff were not aware or did not want to acknowledge the external policy changes impacting on the Alliance and driving some of the changes in the management of their teaching and learning practices. For example, to deliver a qualification the approvals process was changed to include a statement requiring specific detailed information about the type of
students, support for students and the methods used to involve industry in the moderation and validation processes for assessments and course materials. Teachers could no longer consider their teaching in isolation. The AQTF standards forced a series of operational practices to change whereby all staff, including teaching staff, were required to work in much closer partnership with each other. This sharing and close collaboration has been strongly endorsed by Adiviso (2001, pp. 11, 12), Dore (1999, pp. 29-31), More (2003, pp. 6-10) and McNiff (2000, p. 94).

**Learning levels**

The project was designed to be proactive in that the Executive Director and others wanted to change the planning practices of the two institutes that comprised the Alliance. Central to this project was the idea that an action learning action research activity approach, grounded in a broadly inclusive and participatory model, was the approach most likely to be successful. Again while these cant phrases trip off the tongue, it was not necessarily clear to all involved what particular notion of learning was at stake or involved. The issue confronting me was what kinds of insights about learning could I draw on and what kinds of activities would best support the kind of learning?

Ramsden (2000, p. 158) views good teaching as starting from the conviction of what students do, rather than what the teachers do. In espousing this point of view he believes that teaching is inseparable from learning. Appropriate teaching methods assist students to relate to the content of the subject being studied in a purposeful way. Matthews (1999, p. 8) and Mitchell et al. (2001, p. 41), discuss learning from another perspective, namely, workplace learning, which they see as the form of learning that takes place within a work environment. It can be formal, informal or *ad hoc* learning. Billet (2001, p. 19) suggests that the workplace structure provides learning experiences as part of everyday work activities. It is supported through the guidance of other workers collaboratively sharing experiences, and listening and reflecting on those experiences. Testing ‘new’ ideas and experimenting with ‘new’ solutions becomes part of these experiences as individuals together create an environment of ‘new’ workplace knowledge and practice. In such settings learning can take place without the presence of teachers (Billet, 2001, p. 21; and Henry, 2003, p. 6).

Mitchell et al. (2001, p. 42) argues that work-based learning is an integrative approach where people draw on a number of theoretical frameworks, including adult learning principles and learning organisational development, to assist in the professional growth of staff. Watts (2007, p. 10) suggests that effective teachers (to which we might add ‘managers’ ‘leaders’ or ‘co-workers’) engage in the activity of inquiry regularly. Ramsden (1992, p. 56) treats learning as a process that involves ‘deep learning’ where permanent changes of skills, abilities and
insights occur in the way one thinks, feels and acts. Senge's (2000, p. 441) focus is on organisations rather than the individual as he describes learning as cooperative and constant, with people sharing ideas and creating meaning through educative conversation.

I would argue that my project has supported the practice of inquiry. It was designed to engage staff in a high level of participation and commitment in combination with ‘experts in their field’ sharing and learning together from each other to create meaning and understanding of their workplace problems. For example, when working through the issue of financial reports during the Alliance Review, the independent consultant assisted me to set up a meeting with the TAFESA accountant. My task was to obtain reliable, valid and consistent financial information for the Alliance institutes. Through this process each institute’s financial manager and director was involved. We tried to make sense of what the information meant. After many discussions and in clarifying the detail of the financial reports, each institute’s representatives had a greater understanding of the process and the financial systems. It was apparent that the reporting mechanisms and, indeed, the financial systems themselves, needed to be improved (Stanford, 2001, p. 47).

The process I used to introduce the 2002 planning resources, provided opportunities for the Alliance senior managers to go through the materials as a group during the 2001 senior managers’ meeting, as well as independently pull the information apart with their workgroups. I assisted them in this task. Often this involved numerous meetings and discussions, with groups seeking clarification and advice as they developed their annual plans. From these sometimes ad hoc and informal meetings, senior managers and staff involved got an increased awareness of the new processes. Senior managers were more able to make decisions on data not previously available. Dr Nussey’s (2003) comments highlight the importance of this process:

One of the most difficult planning tasks attempted as the Alliance introduced its improved planning regime was to inculcate planning thinking into Alliance Managers (near enough and guess work is not good enough any more) on the one hand and getting all the Managers to report their intentions and plans in the same way (to allow satisfactory aggregation or analysis). The Financial and Activity Plan (FAP) folders were a way of tackling this two sided problem. They provided examples of the whole range of management information required by the Alliance for planning and management purposes (i.e. it showed what we wanted), as well as setting out the formats of the requested data (i.e. how we wanted it).

I believe this initiative was very successful as the level of understanding amongst Managers almost universally improved as was evidenced by the level of completeness of 2002 work unit plans. This greater level of understanding was also reflected in many planning discussions undertaken at work unit level. In summary, the FAP folders and the professional development that accompanied their introduction were one of the major initiatives that successfully raised our awareness and our ability to plan while at the same time putting us in a much stronger position to monitor our progress against our benchmarks.

It would be fair to say that there were different kinds of learning occurring at all levels of the Alliance.
Let me begin with the learning achieved by senior managers. In preparing for their meetings to negotiate their next year’s annual plan, they were required to demonstrate their knowledge of the planning process including information about how the finances and student enrolment targets were to be distributed to each of the courses. Other resources such as staffing, facilities and equipment, learning materials, staff development initiatives and new development activities were included in the process. The increasing detail and negotiations to account for the public dollars meant managers and executive were required to be more diligent in their planning processes. As a consequence this meant senior staff needed to develop their knowledge about the type of performance data available and be clear about how to use the range of data, while at the same time they were being challenged to improve their planning practices.

The learning achieved as a consequence of the Alliance Review covered a wide range of issues. Firstly, it became clear that the strategic directions established prior to the review provided the Alliance with a sound foundation on which to lead its future business developments. This was reinforced by the ISO Auditor (November, 2001) in his report which clearly stated that the planning system that had been established was integrated into the Alliance and demonstrated clarity in its planning processes.

Secondly, the range of data developed, relating to finance, student enrolments, community statistics, and student and staff feedback, used different formats relevant to each of the accountability levels across the Alliance. This meant the reports began to be relevant for each of the target audiences. For example, in the case of the student management data, Council required information regarding total hours being delivered by each institute against the agreed target hours; each director, on the other hand, needed to have reports that indicated monthly achievement of student enrolments against each fund source for each institute, each campus and each division; faculty managers however, required monthly reports that provided a breakdown of hours for each course being delivered, by location and campus for each fund source. As these reports developed, minor changes were made to include percentage of achievement against targets and resulted hours. At each level staff willingly offered suggestions as to how to improve the format and information presented. It was this feedback that suggested staff were finding the new style of reports relevant, easy to read and were using them to more closely monitor their progress of achievement. Finn (2003), one of the Student Management System’s coordinators, suggests that in undertaking the process she gained:

- A greater knowledge and understanding of the Faculty requirements and relevance of the information that I am using in order to produce these reports.
- In developing these new monthly reports, I have learnt new skills and gained further expertise and experience in the programs to be used in producing these reports.
With the introduction of % achieved to date, I have been more able to assess and identify problem areas prior to the distribution of the monthly reports.

Confidence in the work that I am doing.

Working at the operational level in a faculty in 2003, I was operating with all staff. At the beginning staff were somewhat skeptical about my appointment and involvement. Staff were encouraged to share their ‘stories’ with each other and across groups about how they approached aspects of their teaching. This occurred particularly during the workshops held prior to the 2003 AQTF audit. The faculty Quality Task Team (QTT) members asked for an increased number of such workshops as part of their future activities as they saw the value of sharing their knowledge and talking about teaching and learning and other pedagogical issues. The following comments reflect what faculty members said about their faculty prior to 2003 (Bell, 2003. II&AD Record of Faculty Quality Journey):

- This faculty was a ‘hard nut to crack’; members are passionate and skilled on their own area.
- Prior to this experience I felt a strong sense of helplessness, was out of control and people had no control over what was happening.
- We had felt isolated and people did not know each other and where we fitted.
- There was a distinct lack of leadership.

However, as a result of the developments that occurred during 2003, the feedback faculty members provided indicate (Bell, 2003. II&AD Record of Faculty Quality Journey):

- The QTT group has been a major change agent, which has developed positive processes for the whole faculty.
- Huge change of staff attitudes the emotion of negativity to positive energy being displayed with productive communication occurring.
- By working together we can learn so much more from each other.
- There has been a change of focus from justifying hours and budgets to including teaching and delivery methodologies, assessment and professional development of staff.

Throughout this project I was an action researcher. Reason (2001, pp. 4-6) indicates there are at least three kinds of learning. The first person level of development and change involves a focus on self, where as the action researcher I was able to learn from my experiences and do things differently as I improved my practice. The second level of action research started when I engaged with others in face-to-face activity. This involved the group sharing individual knowledge, learning from each other and together finding solutions to problems, changing previous knowledge and developing ‘new’ practice. The third level of action research occurred when the inquiry processes empowered participants to develop new insights and practice in collaboration with others, while developing system-orientated holistic solutions to complex problems within a wider community (Sankaran et al. 2001, p. 11).

I learnt a wide range of things throughout the project. On the technical aspect of using data I learnt about the importance of having different sets of data to assist in making decisions, where no single set of data in one particular format provides all the information. The 3-year
trend data provided a useful indication of past activity which was helpful in forecasting future decisions. Through the use of different types of data, information and approaches, a wider ‘picture’ for making informed decisions was made more possible, as explained by Cherry (1999, p. 62) in discussing Dick’s (1992) ‘dialectic’ concern regarding the use of triangulation of data and information sources.

In the role of action researcher I was what Cherry (1999, p. 2) termed an agent-actor, who to achieve results must work with others. I found that through working with others my knowledge and understanding of the content we worked on was extended beyond what I would have imagined possible. Through these experiences, I value more highly the use of team work, partnership and learning collaboration in addressing problems and finding workable solutions (Sankaran et al., 2001, p. 11; and McNiff, 2000, pp. 54, 267). I found that by working with ‘experts’ and in developing people to champion and promote the change processes, I was given more credibility and there was also an increasing degree of proficiency as we proceeded (Senge, 1995, p. 5). I also discovered, as Cherry (1999, p. 17) has noted, that there is a level of uncertainty, fuzziness, risk, ambiguity, conflict and surprise in the role of manager and action researcher. I was able to observe how other people operated and in so doing gained an increasing awareness of the extent to which planning intentions and interventions can in fact be different from the actual events that occur (Cherry, 1999, p. 93). This was very evident, for example, that at the operational level in the development of the faculty’s continuous improvement system. I knew from my previous role that this faculty had not addressed a number of quality assurance priorities. However, it was not until I was working inside the faculty that I began to recognise the gaps and actions required. One of the key aspects that surprised and delighted me was the emergent themes and guidelines with respect to planning, implementation and outcomes that have developed from the project. Although this insight and clarification of what I had been doing was not apparent at the commencement of the project, it has served to provide further guidance into my own practice as I continue to reflect on and extend my learning.

Reason’s (2001, p. 7) third level of action research practice focused on community. This project with the Alliance, which effectively was the community, began with a change management focus. As I challenged myself and gained increased insight into the operations of the Alliance, managers were also being challenged to reflect on their practices as we collectively made sense of the new national and state policies and changes impacting on the Alliance as well as changes associated with the government review (Stanford, 2001). The final cycle focused on a faculty within this community. After the many pressures, tensions and frustrations I had experienced during the first three cycles, in working with the faculty
during the forth cycle I had more control on events and less subject to opposing and coercive pressures of the broader community.

Guidelines for Action

If we step back from the project and the plethora of management literature, organisational research and ‘how-to-do-it’ guides, I think a few simple guidelines and ‘principles’ emerge. The value of creating a learning environment or culture and doing this on a very inclusive basis is the one that stands out. This is what Nussey (2003) emphasizes when he points to the value of creating or sustaining a learning environment. In Table 7, I draw together the key guidelines based on a review of the literature and the practical experiences of my project. The table suggests there are four key ‘principles’:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7</th>
<th>Emergent implementation guidelines</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principles</strong></td>
<td><strong>Processes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLEMENT</td>
<td>Create a learning focus and environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop and use a communication plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve participants and management in briefings and progress updates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure capability development of participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use adult learning principles and practices</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Work with teams of people, where different skills are valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept that no one solution/process/model fits all situations</td>
<td>Details, processes and practices will be situation specific and reflect the business drivers and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Different skills, models, tools and strategies will be used within the same project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Type of structure used is likely to be required from the ‘top’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know the organisation and its rationale</td>
<td>Work with the organisation and its people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Work with people as part of a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Seek out the champions to support, lead and grow the development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involve staff</td>
<td>• Identify key stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Involve key people in all phases of initiatives, development, planning, activity, review and evaluation and improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relate to people’s context and their role in the business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus on staff knowledge, skills and expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Continue to ask questions of how</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Develop draft documents and web details for comment – seek input and views</td>
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</table>

In working with the Alliance I discovered that involving staff created its own energy and activities. Staff recognised the activity they initiated and took responsibility for reviewing and improving their practice. As staff were encouraged and supported, their enthusiasm motivated them to do more and more and move beyond the initiatives originally identified and actioned. My task as manager within the faculty was to ensure that any over-commitment was managed effectively and empathetically, so as to avoid staff taking on more than was feasible in the environment they were operating. The value of this approach was confirmed by the external auditor’s (AQTF Auditor, 2003) comments provided during debriefing with the faculty workgroups after the audit. Comments like:

- It was exciting to audit these teams as they were positive towards the audit process as the staff wanted to know how they could improve.
I have rarely had the number of staff involved in the audit process before, their attitudes were refreshing and encouraging. Staff were conversant with the standards and understood the requirements, easily able to demonstrate their practices.

Linking the commitment and involvement of staff to the improvement of their planning and performance actions was a great step forward. However, embedding the new practices into ongoing operational practices was another aspect of the project. In the next chapter I explore this concept further.
Chapter 6: What happened – and why?

The whole point of this exegesis outlined in Part A of the thesis was to get some useful changes introduced into the two institutes that make up the Alliance, and to do this under the rubric of establishing a quality regime committed to continuous improvement. How effective was all the planning and general ‘business’ described in Part A? What changes were introduced that worked? In this chapter, I focus on these questions, again reflecting on the interplay between what the research and theory literature suggest and the experiences of the project. As I will show, one thing I learned was the value of not adding new layers of management structure but, rather, getting people already in the organisation to take on new activities and responsibilities and in the process encouraging people to become champions of the new initiatives.

Thinking about Continuous Improvement

Any organisation change process as it unfolds is a kaleidoscope of meetings, telephone and corridor conversations, email exchanges, papers, decisions taken and undone, late night anguish, and lots of people trying to make sense of what is going on. This can be and often is talked about rather abstractly and smoothly as a process of ‘continuous improvement’ (Cherry, 1999, p. 1; McNiff, 2000, p. 267; and Mitchell et al., 2001, p. 38).

Establishing ‘new’ ways of doing things was a major challenge facing the project as it got underway. In this chapter, I will discuss the problems organisations face when people try to introduce change as part of the introduction of continuous improvement cycles. I focus on the introduction of strategies which seem most likely to work.

The processes of change, as Wadsworth (1998, p. 7) notes, often operates simultaneously and at other times independently of each other. For example when working on the development of the Council reports in Cycle 1, I also was gathering a variety of data. Initially, I saw these activities as separate from one another. However, I realised after I had been intensively involved with both activities and working with different groups of people, how closely the work related to each of the separate activities as McNiff (1999, p. 205) has argued. This experience assisted me to recognise the correlation of my work as I continued to action the project activities. In Cycle 4, I soon discovered that the history of the faculty and its members’ past experiences were strongly influencing staff views about the faculty’s day-to-day administration practices. Previously the faculty had had limited leadership and support in
assisting its members to address a range of Alliance operational planning and quality assurance issues. Chris McGee, (July, 2003) one of the lecturing staff, summed up these thoughts through the following statement.

Change can be a daunting thing for most people and it takes careful planning and administration to ensure that the changes go through smoothly and efficiently. This was demonstrated extremely well by our facilitator, which helped in the ‘ownership process’ and ultimately in the glowing reports emanating from the auditors.

Establishing a system of continuous improvement on behalf of the II&AD faculty was a big step for the faculty members. As reported in Part A, Cycle 3, I worked with the faculty QTT to establish a system to document the teaching, learning and assessment practices for each of the program areas as well as removing duplication between faculty office and teaching areas. Through the use of regular weekly meetings with the QTT members, other staff group meetings and faculty workshops, staff were encouraged to question, interpret and ask questions about the AQTF standards and the faculty continuous improvement system. This helped to increase their knowledge and understanding of the system’s structure and content. By engaging staff in this way, they began to offer ideas and suggestions. The consequence of their participation resulted in a system which addressed issues such as student information prior to and post enrolment, resources for inducting students, staff information related to AQTF Standard 6 (that is, a statement regarding staff qualifications and competencies in order to teach a particular subject, unit or competency), current training packages, staff and student course outlines, staff and student learning guides and so on. Whilst this information may have been available for some staff, it was not easily accessible and readily available for all staff in a consistent format across the faculty program areas. Margie John’s (2003, II&AD Record of the Faculty Quality Journey, May 2003, p. 15.) comments as faculty manager highlighted the changes and changing attitudes that resulted during these activities:

The faculty started two years behind everyone else where there was no evidence of any quality focus by the faculty members. Faculty members thought quality was an add-on and not something that required attention. The change has been dramatic, and a credit to everyone in assisting getting the message through to staff. QTT group has been the major change agent, which has developed a positive process for the whole faculty while it has been painful, tiring & personally exacting. Now the culture has changed so much its like chalk & cheese, from what was to what is now. Huge change in staff attitude, the emotion of negativity to positive energy being displayed with productive communication occurring. I am proud of the change development that has been the making a faculty, with commonality and synergy of purpose and action being established.

One of the administration staff (II&AD Record of the Faculty Quality Journey, May 2003) from the II&AD faculty, highlights the importance of staff collaborating during the faculty’s 2003 workshop:

Working together is fantastic, we can learn so much more from each other. Those work teams were resistant (except IT) have come full circle and are now working together. The resistance isn't there any more. This process has assisted succession planning from a clerical perspective.
Progress validation

Each of the different activities of this project required different validation approaches. For example when working with the II&AD faculty the audit preparation and forward planning processes helped staff to review and reflect on what was happening. Ensuring regular meetings reported progress of action at QTT meetings as well as at each program workgroup meeting, greatly assisted with communication and dissemination processes. This also assisted managers to provide and receive updates.

Throughout the Alliance Ministerial Review, I ensured that there were regular opportunities to review progress and to validate the reports being presented. For example, the Council members of the reference group met with the external consultant regularly during the three months of the Review. Where there was no agreement about the data that Stanford was presenting, further development actions were required. During this process I was required to gather alternative data and information to be presented. The process involved a great deal of talking, reworking and the collection of more information from the Alliance data custodians. One such instance was with the financial statements for both institutes. This involved investigations with the TAFESA financial accountant and extensive discussions between key stakeholders to ensure that there was agreement on the financial balances by central office, finance managers and the directors of each institute. A signed statement from the TAFESA accountant validated these discussions. It was at this point that the reference group accepted the financial report (Stanford, 2001, pp. 47-49).

Annual plans required input from all staff. In determining the priorities of division or faculty allocation of resources, managers actively engaged their staff with the planning process. I was often asked to support the division and team’s planning process by working with them as they discussed their priorities, actions for development and identified their priorities for the next planning year. When completing the annual planning proforma, managers were required to include the divisions’ professional development requirements, identify occupational health and safety commitments, and new initiatives as well as sign an agreement to meet the financial commitments and student contact hours targets. Staff workload allocation, including individual staff development priorities, became part of the individual staff annual plan agreement. Actioning and recording the staff development participation provided another way to confirm and validate the planning requirements.

Alignment to organisational roles and responsibilities

Throughout the project I took on at least five roles. I was variously

- A researcher.
A planner and developer of products for consultation and negotiations.
A facilitator to lead, support and implement core activities.
A manager and coordinator of activities as they related to the role of planning and analysis which was integral to the research role.
A designer, writer and editor of the products.

These different roles occurred sometimes at the same time and in different situations independent of each other.

Table 8 provides an overview of the different roles I undertook during the project. At times these roles were in opposition to one another. On these occasions extra clarity of purpose was required and clearly articulated to those people with whom I was working.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8: Role of researcher in the development of products</th>
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<tr>
<td>Est %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Researcher Facilitator Developer Manager Writer/Editor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Electronic Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alliance Planning Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partners in Progress 2001-2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisational Self Assessment Summaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Council Reports</td>
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<td>Data Collection</td>
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<td>Alliance Review</td>
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<td>Analysis NCVER Graduate Survey 2000</td>
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<td>Regional Community Statistics by Campus 2000</td>
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<td>Planning Tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Productivity Reports</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAP Folder 2002 development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning &amp; Performance Integration Framework</td>
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<td>II &amp; AD Faculty Quality Journey</td>
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<td>II &amp; AD Faculty Record of Quality Journey</td>
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(Bell, 2005. Role identification and estimate %)

The table suggests I had a strong facilitation and manager’s role. However, I also provided a range of researcher and writer / editor roles during the project. The impact of withdrawing this focus person (namely myself) was quite catastrophic, as indicated by Brooksby (2002) who returned to the Alliance and undertook a review of the Alliance’s strategic planning process. As previously noted, this process occurred after I had taken twelve months leave. It will be recalled that Brooksby (2002) identified a range of opportunities for improvement that the executive of the Alliance needed to address. At the time of taking leave I felt that sufficient planning mechanisms had been put in place to continue to drive the Alliance’s planning processes. However, I had not anticipated that the Alliance would be unable to find a suitable replacement.

Throughout the project, establishing ‘champions’ proved to be an ongoing task. This also assisted with promotion and validation in the implementation of the changes. For example, emerging from the Alliance plan was the need to articulate and align responsibilities of
‘champions’ for each of the seven areas within the *Partners in Progress 2001-2004*. In designing the planning model, I included a number of critical aspects to strongly embed the model into the organisational structure of the Alliance. Assigning ‘champions’ to promote progress and report on results became part of the design structure of the strategic goals. These included:

- Executive members’ names were placed on their area of responsibility in the strategic plan, for each of the seven criteria.
- A strategic action plan for each of the seven criteria was established identifying actions with timelines and performance measures to be achieved.
- Each faculty or service division’s annual planning documentation identified annual planning actions against each of the seven criteria.
- Templates and resource toolkits to assist managers when working with staff to develop division and workgroup annual plans.
- Annual plans signed off with the relevant directors.

During the preparation of the 2001 ISO audit, I was asked to see that the planning and analysis at the macro level was linked to all levels across the Alliance. The auditor subsequently verified that those links were made. The ISO (2001) audit validation process confirmed that not only had the Alliance implemented its planning framework, but it had identified and linked its planning and performance activities in a way that captured the various process elements. The Auditor (2001) highlighted how well the organisation had introduced a well managed and fully implemented management system. He added that the strategic planning system in the Alliance was likely to become the industry benchmark at the time.

Figure 3 developed by Bell (2001) repeated below from Part A, outlines the alignment of the Alliance’s planning process with its performance review processes.
This figure shows how these processes linked to the Alliance’s quality assurance structure. It also shows where the planning and reporting elements link and support the Alliance strategic plan. Sitting behind the reporting processes, for example, are a range of tools (Bell, 2001, *Alliance Performance Reporting - Overview*) outlining annual time lines and reporting actions to guide and monitor the performance of the Alliance against its plan. These reporting actions identify what quarterly reports are required, who is responsible for their production and what groups require which reports. The ‘Assessment of the Alliance against Goals Report’ (Bell, 2001, *Planning and Performance Integration Framework*) has been described in Cycle 3 in more detail. Suffice to say here, it provides a review of what actions have occurred to reflect the planned strategies. For example, one of the planning strategies was to establish a range of planning tools such as an annual proforma and financial and planning folders, copies of which were given to all key stakeholders. This is in accordance with the view of Mitchell and Associates (2002, p. 11) argue that effective strategy making draws on both the planned and emergent approaches in developing and managing an organisation’s planning activities. This was what occurred.

**Emergent outcomes guidelines**

It is important to stress that unlike the linear process model, most of the activities occurred simultaneously without any resemblance to a linear step-by-step process. Hayes (2002, p. 58) and Mulcahy (2003, p. 84) indicate that experiences such as mine are not unique. Their point is that action learning action research projects can have many sub cycles of activities occurring together.

Table 9 identifies the project’s emergent principle associated with embedding new practices into organisational continuous improvements strategies. Much of the literature search focuses on macro planning models. When examining the literature, I found limited reference on how to sustain new practice. I feel this is an emerging issue which has begun to be discussed more recently. Alfred (2006, p. 243) argues that sustaining the implementation of new initiatives needs to be the responsibility of top management. However, he does not address how to embed changes into operational practice. Senge (2000, p. 529) identified that sustainable development is still relatively new to business and the corporate world, however, he does not provide an argument about the range of processes to guide this thinking. I believe the processes identified in Table 9 offer guidance to support the phase of sustaining improved practice. This set of guidelines has identified processes to help embed organisational change improvement actions.
From my reflections during this project, I tried to isolate each cycle’s development as an individual entity. However, on each occasion I attempted this approach, my analysis came up against the range of consistent themes of planning, implementing and embedding practice from all of the cycles and their activities.

Figure 5 developed by Bell (August 2004) shows the interconnections of the different aspects of the project. The emergent themes of organisational planning, implementation and outcomes are underpinned by guidelines identified as key principles and processes.

These three themes became an integral part of the development of the artifacts and the cycles of action learning action research. However, the development of each of the cycles required further sub cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection, often simultaneously and not in step-by-step order. Each of the steps became intertwined with the next steps of observation and reflection. Re-planning was often occurring as the new activities emerged from the previous actions.
I thought that the action learning action research method I would be using was clear at the start of this project. However, and especially during Cycles 2 and 3, I experienced the process as very blurred and confused. My experiences suggest that those researchers, who treat action learning action research projects as a linear process, may be avoiding the dynamic and iterative nature of this method. My experience assisted the Alliance in the provision of tools, strategies and mechanisms to support the development, implementation and review of the planning and performance framework. What I learned from these cycles assisted me greatly as I embarked on the developments and actions in Cycle 4. In Cycle 4 I was able to use planning as a tool to assist the II&AD faculty as it tried to change its operational practices. It was only at this time that the emergent principles were more deliberatively used as part of the planning, action, review and reflection phases to replan and reset the faculty’s directions.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

... I believe adequate planning is at the centre of all organizational success. Prior to my appointment the Alliance undertook a QETO assessment. I was advised by VET Quality Branch that the Alliance was very weak in the area of planning activities. Consequently, I saw a definite need to establish a rigorous planning base for the Alliance. I was very happy to endorse your project and sponsor your research, as it presented an excellent opportunity to first develop and then introduce the rigorous planning regime required for the Alliance to be successful. In my view, your research was to be germane in establishing a planning culture within the Alliance and so it proved to be critical driving force in confronting managers with the need to plan (and control) their futures.

(Nussey, 2003)

In thinking about what planning meant in my project work, I took the stand that the organisation, namely, the Alliance required a planning framework. It was envisaged that this framework would provide some direction to facilitate the strategic planning process that I established. Everyone in the organisation needed to understand the value and role of the planning framework if the Alliance was to meet the various demands being put on it. The framework provided a holistic strategy which assisted the divisions to link and work together to try and meet the Alliance’s overall commitments and directions. Linking strategy to organisation implementation was a critical aspect of the project’s quest in assisting the integration of the Alliance’s planning and performance framework. The importance of such an approach has been highlighted by O’Regan et al. (2002), Morden (1989), Coulthard et al. (1996), Matthews (1999) and Michaluck (2002).

Staff involvement was strongly encouraged during the development and implementation phases. Opportunities were provided for us to focus, refocus and reflect on what was happening and what was important. The importance of such an approach has been argued by a number of writers, including Wadsworth (1998, p. 7), McNiff (2000, p. 253), Zuber-Skerritt (2002, p. 115), Mumford (1996, pp. 4, 9) and Kemmis (1995, pp. 36, 37). The experiences and the resources developed during the project gave the Alliance an increased range of data and information not previously available as stated by Dr Nussey (2003):

I was keen to move the Alliance decision making from its basis of ‘gut feel’ and guesswork towards more order by placing emphasis on planning, establishment of targets and benchmarks and then measuring or actual performance against these benchmarks. The Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF) as developed by the Australian Quality Council was used as a template for our planning (your project) because it places focus on the key segments of Institute business that are either ‘drivers’ or enablers’ of success. Your project was to adapt the ABEF to the needs of the Alliance, work with staff at all levels of the organisation, and translate their input into our strategic plan and finally devise a suite of measures that would measure progress against the benchmarks.
Throughout the entire project, I was an employee and a researcher. I used a range of methods to involve staff as I worked through the different project activities. I frequently used individual and group reflection activities to develop solutions to the workplace problems being faced (Howell, 1994, p. 17; Ellis et al., 2000, p. 4; Barton et al., 2003, p. 3; and Coughlan et al., 2002, p. 233). In the process, collectively we shared and reviewed what was happening, what was useful and what changes were needed.

Consultation and support was continually sought throughout the development, trial and implementation of this project. I needed to continually engage key personnel to gain support and commitment while identifying and establishing the processes to be used. I believed that seeking and gaining feedback from directors, line managers and key stakeholders was critical. Ensuring the commitment of key stakeholders was essential from the outset. Briner et al. (1996, pp. 75-87) and Sankaran (2001, p. 8) argue that the critical phase for any project is to ensure commitment by sponsor and stakeholders. It was this agreement, support and commitment that I needed and generally obtained and which enabled me to action the project through its cycles.

I examined and reflected on my actions from this project using both the comments I was receiving from staff as well as the literature I read. Four aspects became pre-eminent and guided me in my questioning and examination of the literature. Whilst I have discussed these at length in the body of this exegesis, I wish to restate them in my concluding comments.

Firstly, I wish to strongly question the thinking that the nature of action learning action research is a linear process. When I began planning my project I expected it would entail one cycle of development after another. However, this was not my experience. In practice, it was often the case that a new cycle commenced prior to the previous cycle being completed. It was in fact even more complex in that planning in Cycle 1 from the outset began affecting my thinking and that of others in relation to Cycles 2, 3 and 4 and in a sense this forward thinking and reflection even at the planning stage influenced and mediated what was subsequently undertaken in Cycle 1. At times this dynamic interplay of ideas both transcended and underpinned all cycles. Not surprisingly therefore, the project took me in directions I had not considered and provided me with experiences that I had not expected. It is quite unprecedented, for example, for an Alliance or ‘amalgamation’ such as this, to become the subject of a Ministerial review so early in its establishment.

Secondly, in developing and implementing the planning and performance framework for the Alliance, I discovered that there are higher imperatives operating than the mere choice of one strategic planning model over another. I would argue that what matters most is the...
organisation itself, and in particular, those working at the ‘top executive’ level, and their ability or otherwise to provide appropriate leadership to involve all stakeholders in a meaningful manner such that all members of the organisation are empowered to work for change for the benefit of the organisational community. Any change of key personnel (as happened with the Alliance), or the failure of an organisation to commit appropriate resources or personnel to underpin change, is bound to affect the possibilities that are envisioned at the outset. At the same time, this is not to say that a change in key personnel for example will necessarily have a negative effect in the long term.

To underscore this second aspect, I would stress that an overriding consideration to emerge from this project is that the process of change management depends highly on the capacity of people in senior positions to exercise appropriate kinds of ‘leadership’. Without such leadership the opportunities and the likelihood for change are at best extremely limited. In other words, the best planning in the world will readily come unstuck if the leadership is not there.

Thirdly, I would argue that there appears to be limited literature on how learning within and across an organisation can occur such that staff are enabled or empowered to reflect, criticise and offer creative solutions that will support the organisations continuous improvement practices. Certainly, in the case of the Alliance, once staff were provided with an opportunity to question and think about their work-based problems and how to go about actioning their ideas, my experience was that they created the energy and impetus to find effective solutions consistent with organisational imperatives and directions. The learning processes underpinning such activities benefited the staff involved, myself as both employee and researcher, and the organisation itself. I feel more work could be undertaken to explore this further.

Finally, the study serves to highlight the need for continuing research into how to embed new practice into an organisation’s ongoing operational activity. To some extent, this entails the need for ongoing research into cultural change within an organisation for the benefit and satisfaction of all stakeholders. There is some interesting research being finalised by a consortium project funded by NCVER (2007) which is beginning to identify some of the guidelines I have suggested. I would argue that with all the ‘new’ initiatives sponsored by funding bodies or being undertaken within organisations, an exciting challenge would be to extend the creating a planning culture and its planning and performance integration framework ideas emanating from this project and to explore how change of workplace practices can be sustained and continually improved in educational organisations, not just TAFE.
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Appendices:

**CD Roms:** Presentations
- Conference Presentation July 2000
- Planning and Performance Framework
- Planning and Performance Framework (2)
- Planning and Performance Framework conference presentation
- Planning Tool Kit
- Preparing a TAFE Institute for the 21st Century

Exegesis electronic record