The *networked learning* change agenda for local authorities

By Aubyn Howard

Abstract

Networked learning is proving to be a powerful strategy for educational reform and improvement. The impact of learning networks is as much about making a difference to the children and adults involved, in terms of personal motivation, professional development and engagement with learning, as about achieving measurable improvements in attainment and achievement. Learning networks help bring about a shift towards a more collaborative and network-oriented culture as well as growing a new generation of system leaders and hence they are helping build capacity for problem-solving, innovation and standards improvement.

Networked learning is part of a system-wide shift towards a more collaborative and interconnected way of working – the system Local Authorities support is becoming more networked. Alongside this, Local Authorities are also being asked to network internally to deliver Every Child Matters (ECM). However, many don't know either how to do this or how to reconfigure to support school-to-school networks – why would they? Moving into networked learning mode themselves (within services, between services or agencies and between Local Authorities) such that they model practices and apply them in new forms of engagement with networks of schools, is a good way to start. This means embracing collaboration, networking and learning within the way they work. There is much learning from the NLC programme – good and bad – that can help them with this. Many Local Authorities are already playing significant roles in brokering, facilitating and supporting learning networks between their schools, and their ongoing learning can be exchanged through authority-to-authority networking. The LEArning project in particular has provided a powerful example of this taking place.

However, Local Authorities also need to engage in a deeper internal process of organisational and cultural change if their efforts to model networking and work differently in support of Every Child Matters are to be sustained. Effective organisational change starts with leaders at all levels engaging with personal and professional change and exemplifying the desired behaviours, attitudes and values to the rest of the organisation.

Acknowledgments

Introduction

The Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme represents an unprecedented investment in establishing and experimenting with networked learning within the education system. As it comes to an end, there is a need to review the impact and implications from a local authority perspective, within the larger context of the challenges driving their change agenda. This paper tells the networked learning story for those who are unfamiliar with the NLC programme or who still need some convincing about the impact networked learning can have, and then explores the role of networked learning for local authorities in meeting their future challenges.

The paper is in five sections:
Section 1: The story of networked learning so far
Section 2: The context for change within Local Authorities and some frameworks and maps to help to navigate change
Section 3: The impact story of learning networks from four essentially different perspectives
Section 4: The role of Local Authorities in networked learning and the role of networked learning in Local Authorities
Section 5: Facing the new change agenda

Through these sections, this paper explores the following key questions for Local Authorities.
• What is networked learning? What is its role within the school reform and improvement agenda?
• What is the nature of the change that Local Authorities are facing, and what role is networked learning playing within it?
• What impact has networked learning had? Does it make a difference?
• What is the role for Local Authorities in supporting networked learning, and what are the different ways that you might approach it within your authority?
• What are the implications for you – for your authority, for your service and for you as a leader of change?

The core purpose of the report is to provide a more complete map of the change Local Authorities are facing than is available elsewhere, along with some perspectives and approaches that will help them navigate successfully through this change.

In getting to the heart of this, I will touch on some of the ground that has already been well covered elsewhere within the networked learning literature and have therefore quoted directly and liberally where relevant (also clearly referencing where to find the original text). In this way, the report also acts as a brief summary and guide to other networked learning literature produced by NCSL.

Section 1: The story of networked learning so far

Now, there's networked learning, and there's learning networks…

Over the past few years, the majority of schools in the UK have been incentivised by national policies to form school-to-school networks. These have included Leading Edge partnerships, Primary National Strategy Learning Networks, Education Improvement Partnerships and school-to-school programmes such as Excellence in Cities, federations, specialist schools and NLCs. This approach is likely to expand as other services are linked to education in line with the Every Child Matters agenda (Church et al, 2006).

This report focuses on the networked learning experience of the NLC programme since this is where my direct experience has been, but it is important to remember the other pathways along which schools are coming across similar ideas and practices.

Some background to NLCs

Out of 150 Local Authorities in England, 90 have schools that have been involved with the NLC programme. Altogether, more than 675,000 pupils and 35,000 teachers within 1,533 schools have come together within 135 networks. These were intentionally diverse in situation and type.

The goals of the NLC programme were primarily two-fold:
* creating excellent networks that would make a difference in their own right
* learning about networked learning and making this learning available to influence the wider system, through generating knowledge as part of a development and enquiry programme

NLCs were designed as an intervention that would impact at six different levels of learning:
* pupil learning (a pedagogical focus)
* teacher or adult learning (creating professional learning communities for continuous professional development)
* leadership learning (at all levels, not just headships)
* organisational or school learning
* school-to-school learning (within networks)
* system-wide learning (between networks)

There were four non-negotiable principles for how NLCs should be established:
* sharing an underlying moral purpose
* shared leadership of the networks
* enquiry-based practice
* adherence to a model of learning

Local Authorities have been involved in NLCs from the start in different ways, particularly in the role of brokering between schools to help those with similar needs or interests to come together within learning networks.

For those readers new to the Networked Learning Communities programme, this introduction from the second annual review report provides some more background.

In 2002, the National College for School Leadership (NCSL) supported the establishment of 'networked learning communities' (NLCs). These are clusters of schools which work together to improve pupil learning and achievement, enhance the quality of professional development and promote school-to-school learning. Networks range in size from the minimum of 6 schools up to 24 schools – with an average of 11. The programme offered matched funding of up to £50,000 per year for three years and was intended to run for a four-year period. Just over 40 networks (Cohort 1a) started in September 2002 and a further 40 (Cohort 1b) started in January 2003. Others have joined the initiative since and there are now 135 networks across 90 local authorities in England. The networks cover 1,533 schools with a teacher population of over 35,000 and a pupil population of over 500,000. Of these, 70 per cent are primaries, 25 per cent are secondaries, 4 per cent are special schools and 1 per cent are others – nurseries, middle schools or sixth forms. The Networked Learning Group (NLG) at NCSL supports the networks and manages the programme as a whole with a view to generating and making widely available a body of learning to support leadership within a network-based system.

Also, in the words of David Jackson, in a letter to the rest of the NLG Group:
Four years ago members of what was then NCSL's Research and School Improvement Group set out to do serious work in the field of school-to-school collaboration. The idea was to utilise best available knowledge from practice and theory to generate a 'design intervention'. It had to prove sufficiently compelling for schools to want to break away from historical models of competitive practice and to problem-solve the complexities of interdependence. One of the mantras came to be learning from, with and on behalf of one another in the interests of every child. The design we called Networked Learning Communities, which was a metaphor intended to house both the fields of theory that informed the work and the moral purposes that underpinned it. The original plan was to generate knowledge from a small cohort of NLCs. The subsequent scale of the programme – never originally intended – gave a system-wide significance to the work; the chance to take the idea to scale.

As the NLC development and research programme drew to its conclusion, considerable energy was directed towards three main ends:
• researching and gathering together what has been learnt about networked learning
• assessing and evaluating the impact and outcomes of the programme
• leaving behind a legacy in terms of a valuable body of knowledge and making this available to specific audiences

In consequence, a significant body of material has been produced about networked learning that can be accessed online. A good starting point is the publications directory, which along with everything else can be found at www.ncsl.org.uk/networked/index.cfm

As part of the strategy to evaluate the programme and draw out key learning, a three-phase external study was commissioned (Earl et al, 2006). Phase 1 involved charting the territory by searching existing literature, interviewing key players, commissioning papers and running an international seminar on the subject. Phase 2 identified key features of networked learning, and phase 3 involved using survey instruments based on these key features to assess the impact of the NLC programme on school improvement.

The theory of action arising from the survey says that there is a logical relationship between what happens in learning networks and their ultimate goal of enhancing learning for pupils. Key features of

successful learning networks were identified as: focus and purpose, relationships, collaboration, enquiry, leadership, accountability and capacity-building. These factors can be seen to work at both network and school levels to bring about professional learning and conceptual change within the adult learners involved, which in turn results in 'distributed, deep and sustained changes in the practices and structures of schools' (Earl et al, 2006, p 6). It is these changes in school practice and structures, emerging from 'joint work that challenges thinking and practice' (Earl et al, 2006, p 11) that really bring about changes and improvements in children's learning and attainment. The study shows that this doesn't automatically arise from establishing a learning network and that a sustained level of engagement by a critical mass of participating teachers and school leaders is required. The role of Local Authorities in helping create and support the conditions that bring this about is crucial and will be explored more fully in section 4.

Collaborative ways of working in general and networked learning in particular can be seen as reform and improvement strategies that are in the process of being taken to scale within the education system. This involves two particular challenges (as identified by Coburn, 2003) that are of great relevance to Local Authorities. The first is the need for a shift in ownership of the reform from external agencies (such as NCSL) to 'teachers, schools and districts'. To become self-generative, any reform must transition from 'an externally understood and supported theory to an internally understood and supported practice' (McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001, p21). In some instances, there is a role for Local Authorities to take the lead in this process and in others the schools they are supporting are leading the transition and their Local Authorities need to catch up. The second challenge Coburn describes as 'spread' – not just in terms of numbers of classrooms and schools participating but from externalised activities (eg structures, materials, classroom organisation) to an internalised culture (underlying beliefs, norms and principles). A central theme of this paper is that to successfully support collaboration, networking and learning within their schools, Local Authorities need to engage in a deeper process of internal change. This paper aims to help Local Authorities explore their role in taking ownership of networked learning as well as to map out the organisational change needed to support this.

Section 2: The context for change within Local Authorities and some frameworks and maps to help navigate change

The context for change

Local Authorities are aware they are facing an unprecedented organisational and cultural change, driven by a number of factors, including:
- Every Child Matters and the need for a multi-agency approach to child well-being
- the need to break through the standards improvement plateau
- the challenges of succession planning and the need to create the next generation of leaders

Arsing from these are several relevant current policies directed mainly at schools, including:
- Primary Strategy Learning Networks
- Educational Improvement Partnerships
- 14–19 reforms
- personalisation
- governance reform

This is set within the context of seismic ongoing change taking place within the education system as a whole, perhaps partly catalysed by an evolving policy landscape that has children's welfare, well-being and learning at its heart as well as an unwavering focus on standards. However, this is an emergent, viral change which has a life and intelligence of its own and represents a fundamental shift in paradigms, worldviews, value systems and mindsets – basically, how people view and engage with the world around them, the kinds of issues, problems and challenges they focus on as well as the way they go about meeting them. A difficulty with this kind of change is that it is messy, uneven and uncertain, and that different parts of the system and people within it embrace it to varying degrees.

To help create a picture of this change, I have illustrated below some of the many ways it is being described and characterised by different authors.

In terms of growing complexity and interconnectedness

"Ever-increasing complexity is a given, so what we need now are the strategies that can achieve the best out of society's diverse problems and richness; in a word, solutions that are systemic …. the need, then, is to seek new strategies which capture the hearts and minds of all participants: to seek, in other words, to galvanise the commitment and ingenuity of large swathes of the system."

Fullan, 2004

"The system needs to encourage greater collective capacity-building within and between schools. What is clear is that top-down, hierarchical models of control are, it seems, unlikely to work well in the medium to long-term. The next wave of school reform needs to create greater local capacity to foster what David Hargreaves calls 'disciplined innovation' within schools, and spread those innovations laterally between different schools. This form of innovation is disciplined both in creating the spaces for processes and practice, while at the same time maintaining a focus on outcomes. It converges on good things and builds commitment to a culture of collaboration, rather than one of splendid isolation. LEAs are well placed to be

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strategic partners in the facilitation of this collective capacity-building locally and regionally because of their legitimacy, permanence and local knowledge."

Horne & Rogers

"The influential think tank, Demos, writes that: 'a profoundly disruptive shift has occurred in our societies, making networks the most important organisational form of our time'. This has pressing relevance for education. Michael Fullan is one of many who is advocating an increasingly network-based system in pursuit of innovation, peer learning, knowledge transfer, contextual solutions and the mobilisation of system leadership capacity. We are also waking to an understanding that to move beyond mere rhetoric about supporting every child to be successful will require collaboration – within school networks and between networks and a range of other public service, voluntary and community providers."

Jackson & Hannon, undated

"A set of principles, practices and strategies is emerging through which the simultaneous tasks of radical innovation and outcome improvement can be achieved … we need systems capable of continuously reconfiguring themselves to create new sources of public value. This means interactively linking the different layers and functions of governance, not searching for a static blueprint that predefines their relative weight. The central question is no longer how we can achieve precisely the right balance between different layers – central, regional and local – or between different sectors – public, private and voluntary. Instead, we need to ask How can the system as a whole become more than the sum of its parts?"

Wilsdon & Bentley, 2003

"In education, personalisation means constructing pathways through a flexible curriculum, which is crafted to reflect the intelligences and capacities of the individual learner. But it also means linking the professional input of teachers and mentors to wider sources of support for independent learning."

Wilsdon & Bentley, 2003

The message for Local Authorities

"Every LA across the country is engaged in a major programme of organisational and cultural change … an increasingly common element is the recognition that partnerships and networks, rather than individual institutions, are the critical 'units of engagement', and that the current challenges offer real opportunities to profoundly reshape, for the better, the relationship between Local Authorities and their schools."

Farrar & Mongon, 2006

"We have to think differently about schools and colleges and how they operate. Increasingly what is on offer to young people cannot be limited to what a single institution can provide. There has to be a broader perspective. … One-size-fits-all implementation won't work. It's about capturing the work of the enthusiasts, the innovative practices which are happening locally and enabling everyone to learn from them."

Jon Coles, Director of Qualifications and Young People, DfES in *Nexus* 6 Autumn 2005, pp 20–21

The implications for leadership

"The leadership of organisations as natural systems wedded to modern networked communication patterns can help us work with rather than against the cultural diversity of our students, the professional diversity of our teachers, and the organisational diversity of our schools."

Hargreaves & Fink, 2006

> *"Outward-facing leadership for me is being in a position from within to influence what is happening on a wider scale. It is a move away from government directives to enabling people to grow the change from within the system intelligently."*
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> Jo Cottrell, Headteacher, Halterworth Primary School, Romsey (formerly facilitator and team leader in NCSL's NLG), in *Nexus* 6 Autumn 2005, p 39
>
> *"All organisations, whether they are in the public or the private sectors, are under strain. They are constantly struggling to meet the combined expectations of their customers and the demands of accountability. They are learning that to satisfy both these pressures they need to participate in networks of different organisations that bring together people, knowledge and resources in new ways. Splendid isolation is out. Collaboration is in. And schools, more often than not, are leading the way. But this radical disruption also spells trouble for many of the assumptions we have about what good leadership means. This increasing interconnectedness does not reduce our requirement for leadership, it actively increases it."*
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> Skidmore, 2005, pp 24–5

In summary, the change is variously characterised as: complex and in need of systemic solutions; requiring creative innovation that comes from within the system rather than from the top; drawing upon the emergence of collaboration, partnership and networking as new ways of working in an increasingly interconnected world: challenging all levels of the system to look outwards as well as inwards; forcing leaders to constantly innovate and adapt to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world; and requiring distributed as well as system leadership as part of an expanded concept of school leadership. Within this context, there seems general agreement that the top-down policy directive approach is reaching its limits in terms of incremental standards improvement and that the creativity and innovation within the system needs to be released through more collaborative, bottom-up or lateral (middle-out) approaches.

Unbundling the elements of networked learning driven change

One of the reasons for the success of the NLC programme and the brand of networked learning created by the NCSL Networked Learning Group is that it bound up networked learning with a shared set of values, practices and ways of working that are all part of a greater organisational and cultural change taking place. So when NCSL literature talks about networked learning, it implies a set of cultural values, mindsets, practices, skills and so on that are needed to support and enable the NCSL model of networked learning.

However, in moving forward, it may help to make some key distinctions and unpack some of the terminology used in this field.
- Networking – this can be any form of formal or informal working relationship between different autonomous entities within a system, for a range of purposes which include but are not restricted to learning.
- Collaborative ways of working – this is where people come together to work, learn and share in support of common purposes and aims or to solve shared problems, possibly within networks but also within groups and project teams within individual schools and Local Authorities.
- Networked learning – this is where the specific purpose of a network is learning and improvement focused on children's learning and professional development.
- Collaborative and network-based culture – this is the type of organisational culture that gives rise to or supports networked learning and other innovative ways of working.

To enable Local Authorities better to understand, manage and navigate the change they are going through and perhaps to 'bring about a more networked and collaborative world', it will also help to unbundle some of the distinct elements that are part of the broader organisational and systems change that is taking place. The four essential perspectives of this change are (i) objective behavioural change, for example in practices; (ii) personal subjective change, for example in motivation or development; (iii) collective cultural change; and (iv) social or systemic change (these are elaborated in the model below and also expanded upon in section 3).

Focus	Subjective	Objective
Individual	Individual personal and professional change – mindsets, thinking patterns, attitudes and beliefs in relation to issues and solutions	Changing work practices – behaviours, actions, plans, use of resources, processes and measurement of outcomes
Collective	Cultural change – the shared values and prevailing worldviews which shape our reality	Social systems change – strategies, social and organisational structures, systems and strategic interventions

Networked learning as an intervention is primarily about introducing, encouraging and building capacity for networked and enquiry-based learning – which belongs in the lower right quadrant of social systems change supported by new practices, in the upper right quadrant. These in turn are supported by change in the personal and cultural dimensions.

Where do Local Authorities fit in?

It could be argued that Local Authorities initially got left out of the networking revolution as funds for many of the policy initiatives were distributed directly to schools, bypassing Local Authorities. As these initiatives developed, the importance of Local Authority involvement in brokerage, facilitation and knowledge management became more apparent, but a piecemeal approach to this has left a rather chequered landscape of Local Authority capability in supporting networks. Some NLCs were established with the active support and participation of Local Authorities and some were not, particularly in cases where a key driver for schools to form an NLC was that they didn't feel they were getting the support they wanted from their Local Authority.

In summary, different Local Authorities have grasped the nettle of change to varying degrees and in different ways, which now means that there is enormous diversity in terms of the strategies, structures, skills and practices in relation to this change.

The very architecture of the role of Local Authorities within the education system is changing too. Replacing the traditional hierarchical model of policy implementation is a more dynamic and interactive process in which Local Authorities are active agents, working with networks of schools as well as individual schools, and the networks are also interacting and exchanging learning with each other (see diagrams below). Models of these new practices exist across the country, as recent work by the DfES Innovation Unit in partnership with NCSL and IDeA (2005) has shown.

from   to

Jackson & Hannon, undated, pp 5 - 6

This model might be expected to develop further, with lateral networking between Local Authorities as well as between networks within different Local Authorities. To some extent, when network leaders become systems leaders, they are replacing the role traditionally taken by Local Authorities. This doesn't mean there isn't now a role for Local Authorities as agents, brokers, sponsors and facilitators within this new configuration, but it may take time to find and adapt to the new roles.

Frameworks and maps

Any explorer embarking upon a challenging journey should have some reliable maps if at all possible. Below I introduce two sets of maps – the first involves mapping out key dimensions of networked learning for Local Authorities. The second is a set of maps to help guide organisational and cultural change, including an integral model of organisational change that I have used extensively with change managers and facilitators in other sectors.

Key dimensions of networked learning for Local Authorities

1 Levels of engagement

There are three key levels at which Local Authorities can engage with networked learning and collaborative working.

1.	School-to-school networks
2.	Authority-to-authority networking
3.	Within the LA (between services, agencies and departments etc)

There is a strong argument that to be able to successfully support school-to-school networked learning, Local Authorities need to model networked learning and collaborative ways of working within their own organisations first; in other words, to bring about a cultural shift or transformation that mirrors the shift they are seeking to support within schools. It could also be suggested that, given the differences in how local authorities have so far engaged in networked learning, authority-to-authority networking has enormous potential for releasing innovation and creativity.

2 Networking strategies for Local Authorities

The way in which Local Authorities support networked learning within their areas varies considerably, for example, between those that encourage voluntary networks to evolve organically according to shared interests and purposes and those that, to a greater or lesser extent, impose a structure upon schools, most commonly a geographically based cluster structure that might have been developed for

managerial or resource-sharing purposes. There are also key differences in the way that Local Authorities relate to school networks, ranging from highly facilitative to a more prescriptive leadership style. Combining these two spectrums (structure and style) gives rise to a simple model for reviewing your LA's approach (see below) in which we might characterise each LA's approach as either traditional–directive, traditional–supportive, collaborative–directive or collaborative–supportive. There is an argument that different approaches suit different circumstances or even phases in the life of a learning network. In the very early stages, a directive approach might be valuable, but in order to achieve long-term sustainability, the balance of ownership and direction needs to be taken up by the network leaders.

	Imposed structure	Self-organising structure
Strong leadership	*traditional–directive*	*collaborative–directive*
Facilitative leadership	*traditional–supportive*	*collaborative–supportive*

An alternative but similar model emerges from the LEArning project, which identified six key approaches to initiating and supporting school networks within Local Authorities:
- consulting (low influence)
- directing (high influence)
- enquiring (knowledge creation)
- replicating (knowledge transfer)
- responding (cultural coherence)
- landscaping (structural coherence)

Although each local authority was seen to identify with one of these in its current way of working, these approaches should be seen as dynamic and shifting over time (Chapman, Allen & Jopling, 2006).

3 Brokerage roles

Brokerage concerns the act of arranging or negotiating relationships or partnerships and there are several roles for Local Authorities in brokering school networks including brokering:
- network membership
- network relationships
- partnerships beyond the network
- the network's access to resources
- knowledge exchange within and beyond networks

Local Authorities are well placed to perform these roles because their responsibility for ensuring that children have access to high-quality education gives them legitimacy, their permanence gives them long-term continuity and their local knowledge gives them authority (adapted from Horne & Rogers, undated).

Key dimensions of change for Local Authorities

1 The organisation change cycle

Effective change management involves following a cyclical process of diagnosis, intervention and evaluation or review. Although the phases of the process can be broken down further (eg Edgar Schein's model of process consultation) and it is possible to view the phases as running concurrently in some instances, the basic process remains the same; ie investigation and diagnosis, followed by an intervention of some kind, followed by an evaluation or review of the outcomes of the intervention. Another way of describing these phases is in terms of planning, implementing and sustaining change.

Phase	Description	Example in relation to LA change programmes
Diagnosis	What's going on and what's needed	What are the issues facing the schools in this area? What has been tried before? What forms of networking and networked learning already exist? How ready is the LA for change?
Intervention	Strategy development Intervention and solution implementation	What interventions are needed to support change at different levels of the organisation? How are people engaged in the change? How do we create an emotional connection to the change? How do we address barriers and resistance? How are the changes communicated?
Evaluation	Periodic reviews or assessments Impact evaluation	What has worked and what hasn't? What is needed now? How can we consolidate and embed the change? What has been learnt for the future?

2 Levels of organisational change

Bringing about the kind of organisational cultural change that is needed to support a new way of working can be focused at four distinct levels: individual, organisational sub-unit, organisational unit and system-wide. If any one of these levels is ignored, naturally the process of change tends to be slower and more difficult. Successful change management usually involves appropriate diagnoses and subsequent interventions at each of these levels working in synergy. Most organisational development interventions can be classified according to these levels.

Levels	Examples
Individual	Leadership, personal and professional development
Organisational sub-unit	Teams, departments and services within Local Authorities
Organisational unit	The local authority as a whole, individual schools, DfES
System-wide (inter-organisational)	The whole education system, networks of schools within a locality

3 Organisational change elements

There are many different models of the elements involved in organisational change and the one below in an example. Within this model, the contextual elements of leadership, culture, vision and strategy set the boundaries for what is possible and provide direction for the organisation. Strategy is the pivotal element which translates the vision into achievable reality and is implemented in terms of organisational structure, processes, systems and people infrastructure. Many problems of organisational change can be attributed to a lack of attention to one of these elements. Of course, there are many different types of organisational change, and we are most concerned here with strategic or cultural change, which is about changing the way an organisation works to achieve its objectives.

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                        ┌──────────┐
                        │  Vision  │
                        └──────────┘
┌────────────┐      Contextual elements      ┌──────────┐
│ Leadership │                               │ Culture  │
└────────────┘       ┌──────────┐            └──────────┘
                     │ Strategy │
                     └──────────┘
┌────────────┐                               ┌──────────┐
│ Structure  │                               │ Process  │
└────────────┘        Design elements        └──────────┘
         ┌──────────┐            ┌──────────┐
         │  People  │            │ Systems  │
         └──────────┘            └──────────┘
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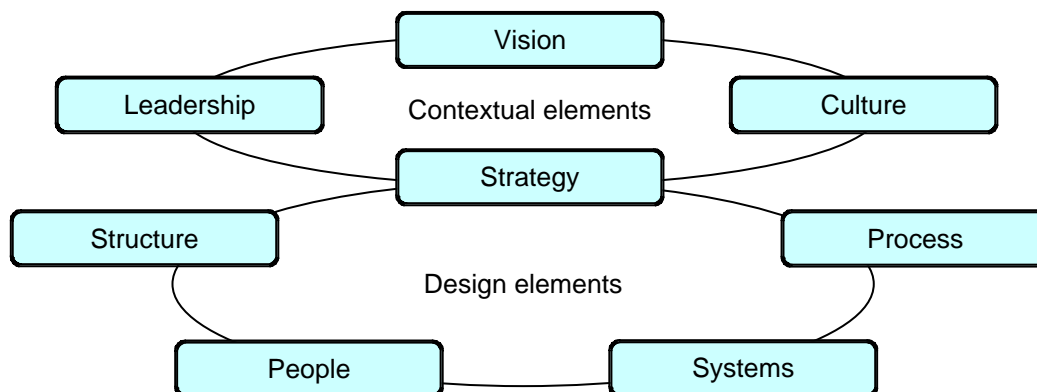
This model helps explain why changing the organisational structure and the names of key roles is not enough to bring about real change within local authorities in support of a strategy such as Every Child Matters – processes and systems infrastructure needs to reflect a new way of working and the context needs to be created through vision building, leadership and culture.

4 An integral model for navigating change

Organisational and system-wide change is a complex phenomenon which can be approached in different ways as well as at different levels. In effect, different approaches tend to emphasise different dimensions of organisational change, because it is too complex a phenomenon to grapple with all in one go. However, it is possible to reduce the ways in which you can approach organisational change to four essential perspectives. A change leader needs to develop an ability to manage change through each of these perspectives.

The four essential perspectives arise from the need to work with objective and subjective realities at both individual and collective levels. This gives rise to four different ways of seeing and engaging with the world, which are, in the slightly technical terminology of the model: (i) objective/behavioural; (ii) subjective/psychological; (iii) inter-subjective/cultural; and (iv) inter-objective/social.

The integral model	Interior/inner world	Exterior/outer world
Micro/ individual	**Subjective/intentional** Psychological perspective *Focus on individual development*	**Objective/behavioural** Rational perspective *Focus on performance improvement*
Macro/ collective	**Inter-subjective/cultural** Cultural perspective *Focus on shared values*	**Inter-objective/social** Systemic perspective *Focus on system-wide learning*

Adapted from Wilber, 2000

These are expanded upon in the box below.

Objective: rational–behavioural dimension
Change is seen in terms of: behaviour, skills, practices and actions
Impact is evaluated in terms of: performance, results (both short-term and long-term – sustainable)
Perspective: rational–behavioural thinking, focus on practice and performance

Subjective: intentional–psychological dimension
Change is seen in terms of: individual experience, intention, mindsets, learning and development
Impact is evaluated in terms of: motivation, morale, awareness and understanding, levels of personal and leadership development etc
Perspective: psychological–experiential thinking, focus on people, development and motivation

Inter-subjective: cultural–dialogical dimension
Change is seen in terms of: collective purpose, values, value systems within schools, Local Authorities and the system
Impact is evaluated in terms of: the collective context and consciousness, prevailing worldviews and value systems profiles within schools and school leaders
Perspective: cultural–dialogical thinking, focus on culture, context and moral purpose

Inter-objective: social–systemic dimension
Change is seen in terms of: social and organisational structures, systems, strategies and in the wider environment
Impact is evaluated in terms of: the whole system, seen through the impact working through inter-relationships within the system between people and all levels of entity
Perspective: social–systemic thinking, focus on whole systems and systemic change

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This is a generic framework that can usefully be applied to any field of interest; to the leadership of organisational change, to educational reform and improvement and to specific interventions such as networked learning. It can be used at each phase of the change management cycle:
• diagnosis – what's going on from each of these perspectives?
• intervention – which interventions are needed in each dimension to bring about holistic change?
• evaluation – what has been the impact of our intervention strategy from each perspective?

In section 3, I have applied this integral model to telling the story of the impact of the NLC programme as an intervention.

Section 3: The impact story of networked learning from four essentially different perspectives

> *"When complexity ends up creating clutter, it is time then to rein in the phenomenon. In my view, this is where we are with networked learning. It is time to stand back, take stock, and re-examine purpose, strategies and impact."*
>
> Fullan, 2005

Impact studies

The NLG has approached the need to evaluate the impact of the NLC programme in a variety of ways, which can be summarised as:

- network self-review
- programme enquiry and research
- external evaluation
- externally commissioned research

Taken as a whole, these pieces of work present a story that overwhelmingly validates the difference made by the NLCs both individually and collectively, and provides evidence for the effectiveness of networked learning in general. This paper is itself an example of externally commissioned research.

Why is the impact story important? Because we operate within an evidence-based, policy-making, achievement culture within which it is necessary to be able to prove the value of something before you can expect someone to pay for it. Few people would argue with the principle that it should be possible to show the positive impact of networked learning as more than adequate return on the funds and resources that have been invested in it. Evidence-based practice is an important discipline which has become embedded within the education system over the last decade or so, much in the same way that enquiry-based learning is starting to become an accepted discipline in the emerging collaborative culture.

The problem around evidence-based impact evaluation arises when it is applied in practice to complex, real-world systems in which it is not necessarily possible to isolate the different input variables (eg strategies, initiatives, people, resources etc) and their individual impacts. Real life is not a laboratory experiment in which cause and effect are always easily identifiable. Instead we have a messy, complex, confusing world which is always moving on so that by the time the full effects of an intervention can be seen, we may no longer be interested. If the evidence-based culture over-dominates in such a world, we would end up only investing in strategies and quick-fix solutions that are too simple and short-term to address our most important problems.

Fortunately, there is plenty of good, measurable evidence about the impact of networked learning and NLCs in particular to satisfy most doubters as well as to show which networked learning approaches are most effective and which factors are important in success. For those of you who want an immediate view of some of the evidence, a good place to start is *Evidence from Learning Networks* (Crowe, Noden & Stott, 2006) followed by the external evaluation report *How Networked Learning Communities Work* (Earl et al, 2006).

However, on closer scrutiny, what does this kind of evidence really tell us? It tells us that the NLC programme has made a significant and measurable difference to pupil attainment and achievement, and that anecdotally this also frequently links to improvements in both pupil and adult motivation and engagement on a day-to-day basis. But as we have already commented, the NLC programme has involved an exotically diverse mix of different child- and adult-focused learning approaches within a host of different networked learning practices. To what degree can the success of a particular networked learning community be attributed to its choice to focus on, for example, assessment for learning (AfL), or the way in which a school-to-school collaborative enquiry project was designed and facilitated or to the way in which the network was supported by LA and higher education resources? In practice, all the elements come together to make the difference they have made, and it doesn't always make sense to try to isolate the impact of different parts of it. Would there have been a greater return on investment from a programme to introduce AfL to schools in a completely different way that did not involve school-to-school networks? Does it make sense to try to find out? Some will always want to, but this misses the point.

This is why there is a need for a broader-based approach looking at impact rather than a purely quantitative approach focusing on pupil attainment and achievement – one that can help explore impact within a complex systemic environment such as the current education system. The integral model I introduced in the section 2 is such an approach to help us consider impact in relation to all the key perspectives on the underlying systemic challenges we are facing.

This model helps us shift from a narrow focus on the measurement of improvements in pupil learning to including the health and development of the system, schools, pupils and the growth and development of leaders within it. In simple terms, there are four essentially different ways of looking at impact:
• achievement story
• developmental story
• cultural change story
• systemic change story

The integral model implies that to be able to assess impact, we need to look at what is happening in several different ways simultaneously and inter-relatedly. It is not enough to evaluate impact rationally and analytically (which may come naturally to the traditional LA mindset) in terms of improvements in attainment. We also need to be able to think psychologically, culturally and systemically about the impact that is taking place and support each of these different ways of thinking, we need to select an appropriate model or methodology to help us in our diagnosis or evaluation. For the purpose of this report, I have chosen models for each perspective, which can be summarised as (i) attainment and achievement analysis; (ii) a developmental model; (iii) a cultural change model; and (iv) a systemic change model. These are elaborated below.

	Interior/inner world	Exterior /outer world
Micro/ individual	**Subjective/intentional** Psychological perspective *Model: individual development at three levels:* • *affective/emotional* • *cognitive/intellectual* • *operative/motivational*	**Objective/behavioural** Rational perspective *Model: attainment and achievement measures analysis*

Macro/ collective	Inter-subjective/cultural	Inter-objective/social
	Cultural perspective	Systemic perspective
	Model: cultural change in terms of evolving worldviews or value systems (spiral dynamics model)	*Model: child-centred concentric levels of learning or change, ie child, adult, school leadership, school–school, system-wide*

In the next part, I have used this model to organise some of the evidence I have gathered to tell the impact story of networked learning, in terms of (i) practitioner quotes from NCSL literature; (ii) my own research from attending completion visits to several NLCs; and (iii) indications of where else to go for more detailed impact accounts. This is also followed by a more in-depth impact analysis from each of the four perspectives.

A four-dimensional impact story

The achievement story

	The objective perspective – the *achievement* story
Evidence from practitioners	"Through working in partnership with colleagues, we have been able to plan, monitor and discuss our own and pupil learning throughout the research process. Formulating a baseline measure across three settings in the network has given us the ability to analyse our own, each other's and pupils' learning." Opportunity Zone NLC "Within the class of 29, 10 pupils had Level 2b and 19 had Level 2c. By June, there were significant measurable gains beyond those that were predicted. ... this is also evident in their written work especially where they have to express ideas and give reasoned arguments." Opportunity Zone NLC Wendy Allen (South Cumbria Secondary Learning Innovation NLC) says: "There is a readiness to share good ideas and resources and draw inspiration from others. This is having a real impact on pupil learning, where, as a result of the collaboration, applied GCSE coursework results are above local norms."
Visiting the NLCs	Individual Fischer Family Trust (FFT) analysis was produced for all the NLCs: this is an example for CONE NLC. FFT improvement scores Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2: +5 = faster improvement than schools nationally Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3: -2 = slower improvement than schools nationally Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4: +1 = faster improvement than schools nationally Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4: +5 = faster improvement than schools nationally
Where else to look	> Earl et al, 2006, *How NLCs Work* Some highlights include: • significant positive correlations found between Key Stage 2 (KS2) value-added improvements in maths and changes in thinking and practice • positive correlations between formal leadership, relationships and

	collaboration and KS2 English results
	• six factors identified; factor analysis showed at KS4 all correlated significantly with 5+ A–C scores
	• respondents perceived positive impact on attainment and especially on pupil engagement and motivation
	> Crowe, Noden & Stott, 2006, *Evidence from learning networks*
	> Church et al, 2006, *What does network practice tell us about the impact of networked learning?*

I have already touched upon one of the major pieces of impact work, the external evaluation study (Earl et al, 2006). Through extensive surveying of the schools taking part in the NLC programme and analysis of attainment data, the researchers have been able to show that 'when networks of schools work together, there is an impact on pupil learning'. Although there were quite erratic variations in results, which is not surprising given the complexity of the factors involved, the authors were able to distinguish some distinct patterns. They found that 'the number of people in the school who are active in the network was positively correlated with pupil outcomes in English, maths and science at KS2 and value-added scores at KS3', p 8. They were able to validate a connection between the level and quality of participation in a network and improvements in pupil attainment.

An earlier study, *Evidence from Learning Networks* (Crowe, Noden & Stott, 2006), sought to show the impact on pupil learning in a number of ways. Below I have selected a couple of graphical snapshots that show the positive impact that learning networks are having. Given the difficulties of attribution within the complex environments we have discussed, perhaps the real point here is to show that in terms of raising the bar and closing the gap, learning networks are at least not having a negative effect. Given the considerable benefits that learning networks have had on individual motivation, energy, engagement and development for the leaders, teachers and children involved in them, given the cultural shift they have helped initiate or consolidate, given the systemic effects of sharing learning, resources and support between schools, it can be argued that anything more than a neutral, short-term difference in attainment and achievement outcomes is a bonus.

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At KS4, the difference between 2003 and 2005 shows that NLC schools rose more than non-NLC schools in the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*– C grades. A much smaller difference was observed for the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A*–G grades, with NLC schools showing a small rise over non-NLC schools.

This analysis shows how the gap between the highest and lowest average point scores closed between 2002 and 2005. At the same time, the bar was raised across the network and the average point score for the networked schools increased by 0.4 points between 2002 and 2005, compared with a national increase of 0.2 points.

Crowe, Noden & Stott, 2006, pp 2-6

The development story

	The subjective perspective – the *developmental* story
Evidence from practitioners	"Becoming part of the NLC programme was a terrific boost to our confidence. Ideas, ways of doing things differently flowed through our schools. We felt energised to make changes to our pedagogy." Mike Sykes, Key Stage 4 Co-ordinator, Merrill College, Derby City NLC "I am now convinced that *Philosophy* is a powerful tool in the teaching of thinking and also improves speaking and listening … it has improved the pupils' personal and emotional skills as well as their comprehension of stories." Opportunity Zone NLC "The experience has raised my self-esteem in terms of my ability to lead small groups of professional people and has improved my management skills to ensure targets are achieved. The most significant benefit of working in a school-to-school way was the chance to discuss current issues relating to our project with other practitioners outside our school to gain a shared and broader perspective on how we can achieve what we want to achieve." Creative learning group, Success Through Learning NLC "Working with other staff from different schools has been beneficial in that it widens your knowledge and experience. Our work in the NLC has provided a real opportunity for professional discussion, a professional dialogue around teaching and learning … an opportunity which is not often given in schools. The key was that the project has provided structured time, and a purpose for this dialogue, rather than just snatches of conversation which often, in school, is all you have time for." Effective learning environment group
Visiting the NLCs	"The network has had an impact upon the new teachers in the schools involved, providing new motivation and fuelling enthusiasm. Teachers are able to get excited about the curriculum again. There has been a sea-change in the professional culture with increased pride and professionalism within participating schools. We spoke to a participant researcher for whom from the network programme has made a huge difference. She has gained skills in a range of areas, including research, dissemination, networking and sharing knowledge which she feels have helped her gain her new job as

	deputy head.
Where else to look	> Earl et al, 2006, *How Networked Learning Communities Work* > Church et al, 2006, *What does network practice tell us about the impact of networked learning?*

Everywhere I have been in learning networks I hear stories of how people have become inspired and re-motivated through their involvement with a learning network. There is a tangible sense of excitement and enjoyment about professional learning and development that is reinvigorating the profession in a practical way and which also makes an immediate difference to the children within the schools involved. Involvement in NLCs has made a real difference to the adult learners involved and the longer term knock-on effects of this could be substantive – keeping teachers in the profession, reducing staff turnover, helping find new headteachers and system leaders, addressing succession planning issues and so on. These are the measurable and visible signs of a subjective but very real experience for which there is now plenty of evidence, for example in terms of some of the testimonies I have included above.

A simple model I use to help make sense of personal and professional development involves considering development at three levels: affective, cognitive and operative or in terms of emotional, mental and spiritual intelligence.

Level	Typical models	Examples
Affective/emotional	Emotional intelligence	• pupils' emotional skills • raising teacher self-esteem
Cognitive/mental	Leadership development	• developing the systemic skills needed to become systems leaders in action • gaining competences needed to apply for deputy headship role
Operative/motivational	Spiritual intelligence	• being re-energised to engage in professional development • shared moral purpose experienced again

Within NCSL, there has naturally been a great deal of interest in understanding how participating in and leading learning networks has helped to develop the system leaders of tomorrow. In many ways, network leadership is being considered as the proving ground for system leadership, the natural first step for leaders to broaden their horizons beyond the single school and develop the systemic and integrative competences needed to lead across the system. Network leadership opportunities are helping to develop the 'systems thinkers in action' that Michael Fullan (2005) refers to.

David Jackson summarises it well: 'Emerging evidence suggests that networks are creating environments in which school leaders are responding to the challenge of leading and learning beyond their own schools. Networks create joint work arrangements that are developmental of leadership, making leadership more widely available and developing system leaders.'

(Crowe, V, Noden, C, Stott, A, 2006, Evidence from Learning Networks, p 5)

The cultural-change story

	The inter-subjective perspective – the *cultural* story
Evidence from practitioners	"The key ingredient was us all agreeing to collaborate in what was essentially an enquiry where we took risks together." Mike Sykes, Key Stage 4 Co-ordinator, Merrill College, Derby City NLC Brian Wood, 14–19 Regional Development Manager, thinks the Furness experience demonstrates the importance of "getting the movers and shakers around the table and building a community around shared principles." He recommends "investing time in building relationships among network members to release the energy, enthusiasm and commitment of individuals for working collaboratively." "The school-to-school partnership has provided an opportunity to work alongside colleagues with a similar ethos and philosophy towards teaching and learning. The sharing of approaches, expertise and success has been crucial in realising our aims. The collaborative approach has been truly beneficial with regards to time – we are not having to constantly re-invent the wheel!" Thinking classroom group
Visiting the NLCs	In every NLC I visited, there was sense of how the culture within participating schools had changed.
Where else to look	> Church et al, 2006, *What does network practice tell us about the impact of networked learning?*

To help map and manage the complex currents of cultural change, I will introduce a model called spiral dynamics devised by Beck & Cowan (1996). Spiral dynamics describes a series of systems or worldviews that emerge and evolve within human beings, organisations and societies according to prevailing life conditions. Each value system represents an increasingly complex expression of a worldview or way of relating to the world, which tends to emerge in a predictable sequence as if to solve the inherent problems of the previous value system. Value systems alternate between individualistic and collectivist expressions in a spiral revisiting of the contrasting challenges of expressing the self and sacrificing the self, of seeking individual freedom and belonging to something greater than the individual. Each value system is more or less activated in every person, organisation or society; in other words we all have the potential to express any combination of these value systems.

The five value systems that are of the greatest relevance to organisations in western society (such as schools or local authorities) can be summarised as egocentric, absolutist, multiplistic, relativistic and integrative. There is a general evolutionary progression over time through each of these systems (ie from the bottom to the top in the table below). Each system transcends and includes what has been learnt from the previous system.

Value system in terms of thinking *key orientation*	Leadership style and *primary motivations*	Structures and forms	Key characteristics and examples Learning styles
Integrative *knowledge*	Integrative leadership *Learning and synergy*	Self-organising networks, virtual communities	Draws upon the previous value systems appropriately to meet the presenting challenges Network-based learning Working with complexity at system level Personalised self-directed learning
Relativistic *relationship*	Social leadership *Participation and growth*	Collaborative groups, communities of practice	Collaborative ways of working Collaborative enquiry Participative and observational learning Experiential learning
Multiplistic *achievement*	Enterprising leadership *Goal achievement and progress*	Flexible hierarchy, matrix organisations and project teams	Uniform national strategies Target-setting and external accountabilities Expectant learning
Absolutist *role*	Hierarchical leadership *Responsibility and order*	Hierarchies, bureaucracies, command and control	Uniform policies and dictates Tightly prescribed curriculum Avoidant learning
Egocentric *power*	Autocratic leadership *Rewards and respect*	Autocracies, empires, power bases	Arbitrary directives Charismatic hero leaders Operant conditioning
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Adapted from Beck & Cowan, 1996

This model implies that instead of facing a single cultural change from one old paradigm to another new one, the education system is undergoing a series of significant shifts between essentially different worldviews. The importance of recognising this is that different people, schools, services or Local Authorities will face different developmental or evolutionary challenges at different times. This is compounded by the fact that each individual, group or organisational unit will have its own unique profile in terms of these five value systems (in fact there are others, but I won't complicate the picture with them here, these five are the most important).

Within this model, each value system is important and essential in the overall evolution of the system: we can't skip one or discard any of them. So for, example, the more collaborative and learning-oriented culture (relativistic) that is currently emerging needs to be built on firm foundations of evidence-based accountability in an achievement culture.

There are three cultural shifts that are important to local authorities, as summarised below.

Shift	Description of key elements
Absolutist -> Multiplistic	From hierarchy to meritocracy, from following the dictates of the role to trying ideas out to find a better way of doing things, make improvements and get ahead, from deference to the higher authority to competitive gaming with some co-operation where it's in your best interests
Multiplistic -> Relativistic	From competing to collaborating, from putting yourself first to considering the needs of the group, from results to meaning, from focusing on goals and targets to focusing on inner growth and development, from work team to community
Relativistic -> Integrative	From our group or community to the whole system, from personal growth to making a difference, from learning to knowing, from valuing to creating value from

There is evidence that networked learning has helped create a cultural shift towards a more collaborative culture within schools as well as some signs of this culture needing to exist before networked learning can take hold.

Participating in learning networks can be seen to have activated relativistic and integrative value systems which are either latent or haven't previously been given much opportunity for expression within teachers and school leaders. The really important question is how widely these value systems are ready to be activated across the whole school system. Have the existing NLCs been focused on the most fertile ground in terms of teachers and leaders ready to take this on, or can we expect a widespread response? There is some evidence that without the kind of funding that comes along with the NLC programme, the capacity for networking can easily fall away. In other words, funding might be used to create a temporary shift to the integrative value system, but this value system may not be activated widely enough in school and network leaders for networked learning practices to sustain themselves without funding. However, there is also evidence in many networks that they will sustain themselves after funding has finished, so perhaps it could be argued that NLCs have helped activate the integrative value system as well as the relativistic system. These are important issues of capacity-building and leadership development.

In summary, the impact of networked learning interventions (such as the NLC programme) in cultural terms is possibly very significant in that it appears to help activate the relativistic and integrative value systems within network participants and leaders. The activation of these value systems helps create a shift in culture which is needed to meet emerging challenges within the education system and break through the improvement plateau. However, more research and investigation is needed to test and explore these assertions. It may also be the case that other types of intervention are needed to help activate the relativistic and integrative value systems and thereby create conditions more conducive to networked learning taking hold, particularly in the absence of funding from policy initiatives.

The systemic change story

	The inter-objective perspective – the *systemic* story
Evidence from practitioners	"Each school posts work onto a shared website, allowing any student who is unable to attend lessons to access a wider curriculum easily and effectively. For this network of schools, collaboration has brought an innovative technological solution to the personalisation of learning for a group of

	young people who were previously difficult to reach. In doing so, it offers new possibilities for all children. " Rossendale Virtual School The key message from SWAN NLC to others involved in leading 14–19 provision is that "Teachers working together across schools can work smarter and not harder, by sharing resources and developing units of work together – particularly for new qualifications." Sarah Graham recommends: 'Working towards a distributed model of leadership – involving everyone in all network activities and drawing energy from the bottom up, with top-down support and facilitation. It's the energy that sustains the network!" At Lipson Community College, a large secondary school in Plymouth, the pool of potential leadership talent is drawn very widely. In fact, it extends to students themselves. Older students have received coaching as mediators to help younger pupils settle disputes or other problems getting in the way of their learning without involving staff. Candidates for new teaching posts are asked to teach a lesson, and students in the class give feedback on their performance to the school's management team. Smaller groups of students who have been given special training then comprise one of the interview panels, and often have the main say in who is appointed. Steve Baker talks of "playing a long game" through a sustained programme of activities that brings in, reaches out to, and raises expectations of the whole community.
Visiting the NLCs	Key achievements of the CONE NLC included: - sharing good practice in AfL: "website as a learning platform enables process of sharing"; "sharing INSET and feedback on courses attended"; "takes away 'island' mentality"; and "sharing best practice and not re-inventing the wheel" - looking outwards not inwards: "we have shifted the focus outwards and enabled broader perspectives and increased range of opportunities" - linking primary and secondary schools: the group "informs and enables cross-phase work" Notes from a visit to CONE NLC, Cambridgeshire
Where else to look	Church et al, 2006, *What does network practice tell us about the impact of networked learning?*

The systemic aspect of the impact of networked learning can be explored in many ways, but perhaps the most relevant to Local Authorities given their current priorities, is in terms of the Every Child Matters agenda. Many of the LA projects that were part of the LEArning project (which will be described in section 4) were focused on how learning networks could help with Every Child Matters. Some of the answers to this include:
- schools becoming more outwardly focused towards the community
- developing systems leadership capabilities within schools – many leaders of learning networks could go on to play a role in leading Every Child Matters networks

- creating a context for collaborating with other agencies – schools realising that they can't achieve educational improvements in isolation

A useful model for exploring the systemic impact is the key features model used in Church et al, 2006. This model is systemic in that it shows the relationship between all the key entities within the social system – starting with children, linking to the professional practice of teachers and school leaders and beyond this, growing leaders of the future and system leaders. On the 'outer ring' is the impact at the system level, such as an increased capacity for change.

Systemic impact is about changes in the structures and relationships between people within the system, as well as about how impact works its way through these relationships and interactions over time. Today we can observe changes in structures and relationships taking place within and between schools as a result of participation in an NLC, most strikingly in terms of an increase in distributed leadership and therefore the capacity for schools to tackle a whole range of issues not directly related to networked learning. We can also start to see the longer-term systemic impact, as network leaders and participants move on and take up new responsibilities. A tracer study by Ann Lieberman focuses on the stories of some of the system leaders who have emerged from learning networks and demonstrates that through the development and movement of the individuals involved, the eventual impact of the NLCs programme will be much wider than just in the schools and localities directly involved. Again, I would suggest that further research is needed to evaluate adequately this aspect of impact in the long-term.

Section 4: The role of Local Authorities in networked learning and the role of networked learning in Local Authorities

An extract from *Local Authority Wide Support for School Networks*

The establishment of learning networks is not about Local Authorities 'delivering' to a target. It is about groups of schools within an area taking collective responsibility for all the children in their patch and renegotiating a set of relationships with their LA to challenge and support them in doing this. The shift is crucially important. It is about the LA asking good questions rather than providing good answers; about facilitation rather than direction. It is not about 'buy-in', but about ownership. It means transferring substantive and strategic decision-making from the authority to school and network leaders, ensuring that those leaders have appropriate knowledge on an ongoing basis and that they have the scope to be able to use it to sustain the reform in work with peers.

McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001

Many leaders within Local Authorities will have become aware of an upsurge in networked learning within their region which may have already had an impact on how they operate and support their schools. In some cases, schools are helping them to adapt to these new roles. Just as the motivational and cultural terrain is changing within schools as a result of networked learning, so will responses to LA requests and interventions by schools and school leaders change.

As already highlighted, there are different levels at which Local Authorities are engaging with networked learning:
- Networked learning is something that Local Authorities can support taking place between their schools, both within any existing cluster or network arrangements or across such boundaries in endlessly new configurations.
- Networked learning is also something that Local Authorities can engage with themselves in terms of how they learn from other authorities and collaborate to find solutions for new challenges and enduring problems.
- In addition to these, networked learning is a strategic reform intervention which reflects a changing organisational culture, a new way of working, a new way of solving problems and a new worldview that is emerging and becoming more widespread.

The primary challenge is to help schools take advantage of networked learning, which can take place in a number of ways, through brokering networks, as well as providing the resources and infrastructure to support and challenge networks. A critical issue is whether Local Authorities can do this effectively without first embracing the new way of working themselves – in other words, being more internally networked, and taking a learning orientation rather than just a delivery or accountability stance. In this section, I will explore both how local authorities are supporting networked learning as well as how they can embrace the greater change of which networked learning is a part.

"I see things differently, I bring ideas ... some of the London Challenge work I did is relevant; keeping Local Authorities close to schools through establishing networks; designing and agreeing new role s... As I am building a new team, I am trying not to focus only on Children's Services, but build on the good practice that's already here in the city. I see lots of potential networks in leisure and neighbourhood working."

Edwina Grant, Corporate Director of Education and Children's Strategy, in *Nexus* 6 Autumn 2005 p 9

The LEArning project

The LEArning project was set up to explore the role local authorities could play in developing partnerships and how this might enhance the learning and well-being of young people. It involved the participation of chief officers and other participating officers from 22 Local Authorities over more than two years. Project objectives were to:
- help Local Authorities develop their capacity for facilitating and supporting networks of schools and multi-agency partnerships
- research and share knowledge about the most effective ways in which Local Authorities can support networking and collaboration
- develop models and new practices within local authorities which will influence and shape policy

The key features and findings of the LEArning project were the:
- importance of shared purpose
- contribution of an enquiry approach
- value of trust
- effect of facilitation
- impact of power and authority

Spreading innovation across Local Authorities (a concurrent Innovation Unit project working with Local Authorities) identifies five key challenges for Local Authorities:
- focus – defining the key strategic challenge you are facing
- ownership – how to create the authority-wide vision and will for making networks core to the new culture
- structures – within and across school networks
- capacity – how do you grow the capacities that the new organisational structures and cultures require?
- effectiveness – the role of the authority in supporting networks and how it differs from the traditional one

Michael Fullan (2006) identifies four similar challenges:
- ownership with respect to core values and vision
- coherence amidst complexity
- capacity for continuous and sustained progress
- impact which is evidence-driven

A key piece of systemic learning from the project is that 'we cannot assume that the skills needed to engage in or facilitate network learning already exist within authorities, and in particular facilitation skills were not well developed in local authority staff and an enquiry-based approach was found to be challenging for many local authority officers'.

The project got to the heart of the cultural change that is needed within local authorities if they are to move with, lead or even catch up with the emergent change that is described in this paper.

This is illustrated by this extract from *Creating a National Network* (Farrar & Mongon, 2006, page 7): 'Most of the places where chief officers talk about their work require them to appear as efficient managers and charismatic leaders. The think tank, which included members from local authorities, NCSL and the Innovation Unit, had become a place where people could engage in mutual enquiry and

joint learning about the complex and at times overwhelming demands of their roles.'

> Consider some of these messages from practice from the same document, p 6 & p 8.
>
> *Talking about real issues to people from other authorities was an empowering and trusting process … The core contact days were as much about our personal needs as our local authority learning needs. Networks start with relationships – not necessarily common tasks.*
>
> *Networked learning being diverse, nonlinear, non-incremental did cause some tension, as learning in networks is not the same as attending a structured course knowing what the expectations and outcomes may be. [It] meant it was not always easy to report to senior officers of our local authority a direct and tangible impact from the core group network sessions … the local authority has clear and tight timeframes to work to and the slow and messy nature of networked learning did not sit easily with the pressure to respond to a central government agenda in relation to the Every Child Matters agenda, the focus of our enquiry.*

The learning of the project is summarised as follows.
- If you want to use partnerships and networks for effective service delivery, this approach needs to be experienced and modelled throughout the education system.
- Collaborative partnerships cannot be taken for granted, in or between national and local government agencies any more than between schools. The models of brokerage, facilitation and skill development that are proving useful to school partnerships are equally necessary at other levels in the system.
- Unless the emotional needs of senior local authority officers at times of major upheaval can be beneficially acknowledged and supported, those needs will inhibit creativity and progress.
- The willingness to reflect on practice through enquiry is important in a system that is complex and rapidly changing, yet this is not fully valued in current practice.

It also adds that 'If a system is to support and encourage networks as part of its drive to achieve better outcomes, then the system itself needs to adopt collaborative and networked approaches in its own work. This is what the LEArning project has encouraged local authorities to do, and in so doing has defined key features of such an approach as well as identifying specific learning points.'

> ## The Lancashire story in depth
>
> One of the participants in the LEArning project in Lancashire focused their own enquiry on:
> - What types of external facilitation and consultancy from the LEA contribute to effective networking in schools?
> - In what ways can networks of schools use their collaborative work to address Every Child Matters outcomes?
>
> They identified many important factors in terms of the Local Authorities role in networks, including the need for network leadership support, training, mentorship and critical friendship, and the value of pump-priming to get networks going. They realised the importance of situationality; that authorities should aim to support networks according to the stage of development and context of the network, and that there are stages where LA involvement may not be appropriate or may even be counter-productive. They learnt not to be precious about others promoting and supporting the idea and practice of networked learning. Their evolving understanding of the support role for Local Authorities was similar to that discovered elsewhere: providing access to wider knowledge; critical friendship and challenge; making ideas available to a wider audience; providing relevant focus-specific expertise; brokering technical support and other resources; and ensuring the availability of high-quality CPD.

They also learnt much about the messy culture of networked learning, the need to remain open to new ideas and ways of doing things, in short to accept that they will never have 'sorted' networking in the authority. They see 'the need for all local authorities to model networking and adopt networking (and networked learning) principles in the way in which we engage with partners in improving outcomes for young people, to learn about and know what it is you're promoting'. They also highlight the 'potential of inter-local authority collaboration as a means of jointly solving problems in very different context' and are looking to 'ensure that headteachers are networked across local authorities in this way'.

Levels of LA engagement with networked learning

Authority-to-authority networking

Some Local Authorities are already leading the way, offering operational images of practice and process from which others can learn. Some are also doing so through authority-to-authority collaboration, learning together how to broker a new local system on behalf of all children.

Jackson & Hannon, undated, p 6

The LEArning project has shown the viability and value of authority-to-authority networking and collaborative learning, but it has also shown that it does not come easily. In some form, the LEArning project is likely to continue and may even transform into something new, but there will remain many Local Authorities not engaged in any such networking. Local Authorities need to take the initiative in starting to form learning networks, as well as to think about how some of the school-to-school networked learning practices might translate to authority-to-authority networking, and perhaps evolve new networking practices and types of network that meet the specific needs of Local Authorities in this situation.

Inter-service networking within Local Authorities

It is becoming clear to many in education that they have hit a glass ceiling in terms of what schools can do directly without the involvement of other agencies. Community capital needs to be built to tackle the most deep-seated issues. The key is that there are ways of working that are more likely to enhance outcomes for young people, and much of this concerns the way that teams are designed and services work with each other within local authorities. The appointment of directors of children's services with corresponding structural changes in the design of teams and ways of working have taken place in most Local Authorities in response the Every Child Matters agenda. However, the question for these new appointments to consider is how deeply these changes run and whether a more fundamental programme of change is needed to transform the way that services work together.

LAs supporting school-to-school networking

One of the key issues about the role of Local Authorities in supporting networked learning concerns the extent to which the authority imposes or facilitates a networking structure within its locality. At one end of the scale, there are those such as Lancashire Local Authority who feel strongly that you can't impose a network structure on a group of schools and that the rationale for LA clusters created for management purposes does not always match the reasons for schools wishing to network with one another. On the other hand, there are examples, such as Kent Local Authority (where I visited the very successful neTWorks NLC, based on an existing geographical cluster structure) or Liverpool or Bedfordshire local authorities that might argue that within the overall cluster structure there is plenty

of freedom for smaller groups of schools to come together to explore common child-centred learning topics of interest. There is also the argument that if schools want to cross-network between clusters within an authority, they can still do that, even if initiative funding and resources are cluster oriented.

Below I have selected some quotes from *Spreading Innovation across Local Authorities* (DfES, NCSL & IDeA, 2005) and from the IDeA Knowledge website, that illustrate some of the diverse work that has been undertaken by local authorities in relation to networked learning and suggests that success is being achieved following a variety of paths.

In **West Sussex**: "School networks are therefore at the heart of the dynamic multi-agency services which the local authority supports".

In **Wiltshire**: "Education Improvement Partnerships provide the architecture for collaboration in the county, allowing functions to be increasingly delegated to schools and for the local authority to become a commissioner rather than a deliverer of services".

Sheffield's "vision is to create successful neighbourhoods, which place schools at the heart of communities. Networks of schools are central to this".

In **Leicester City** "the authority is reluctant to overburden the new structures, particularly as so much energy has been exerted, encouraging a bottom-up approach to collaboration".

Lancashire "is taking a more active stance in brokering membership of networks through a 'Learning Networks Advisor' who takes a strategic overview and acts as a critical friend to schools."

"In open consultation with headteachers and governors, **Derbyshire** has developed a structure for supporting and challenging clusters of schools … school-based network champions, or 'lead developers', empowered by their headteachers, work with all staff and children in designing innovative strategies to raise standards through wider collaboration".

In **Liverpool**: "Although the enthusiasm of existing networks has been a key driver in Liverpool's decision to take forward a networked strategy, the local authority has recognised the need to generate the desire for participation beyond enthusiastic schools. A year of extensive consultation with schools has led to jointly-owned structures, and all headteachers and schools participating. In autumn 2004, all schools were asked to form themselves into networks, with primary schools (which have historically been less networked) taking the lead".

In **Southwark**: "All senior local authority personnel, including the director of children's services, work specifically with one [NLC] to help promote collaboration across agencies".

For **Redbridge**, "having successfully developed this way of working with NLCs, the authority is now looking to create a similar structure with seven thematic Primary Strategy Learning Networks for its 51 primary schools".

In **Sunderland**, "schools have worked with the local authority to create a system of inter-school support, based on a 'hubs and spokes' model, which seeks to utilise a school's recognised strengths and expertise".

Bedfordshire "has created seven geographical learning communities which include all the schools in the authority. Membership was decided centrally; every school had to join, and work cross-phase. Each

learning community could, however, choose what to focus on. The aim is to reach a point where the learning communities are self-governing and the structures established at this point prove sustainable in the long term".

In **Kingston-upon-Thames,** "the local authority is working towards having permanent network co-ordinators, but these roles are currently being undertaken by authority staff so that they better understand what this involves". Also, "priority is being given to the facilitation requirements of the clusters and to how the local authority can move from leading to facilitating".

In **Knowsley,** "the headteacher's role is more strategic than in the past and is based on outcomes for the whole borough rather than just their own school".

In **Cornwall,** "the authority has established the multi-agency extended school steering group to address the core challenges of working together collectively."

Essex "has four regions, each of which contains school networks (local delivery groups) that have been constructed strategically according to geography. These groups are being used as a focal point for national and local initiatives to drive collaboration, but each is adapted to the local context and vision".

The question that seems to follow on from this is: How do local authorities create the kind of transformational change that fully supports this way of working, not just between schools but within and between local authorities and the agencies involved in implementing Every Child Matters?

Strengths can also be weaknesses: a critical view of how to build on the NLC experience

Over the last year, I have been frequently amazed and moved by what has been achieved within the Networked Learning Communities programme, both by individual NLCs and by the Networked Learning Group in its supporting role. However, the brightest lights can also cast long shadows, and as a critical friend to the Networked Learning Group, I have identified some aspects of the programme culture which, although not necessarily lessening the value of what has been achieved, may *in my view* affect the ability of local authorities to engage successfully with this model of networked learning.

As an external observer, I see four issues that stand out. The first is the tendency for NCSL literature to seem to promote networked learning as a universally applicable solution to school improvement issues. This isn't surprising, given the NLG's work *is* networked learning; however, there could be more recognition of the range of other types of solution that might also be valuable in different situations. Advisers within local authorities should develop their diagnostic skills and a critical awareness of how best to use networked learning and combine it with other solutions.

Second, within the NCSL's branded concept of *networked learning*, the idea of learning networks has become conflated with a number of other intervention elements, including: collaborative working and enquiry, new approaches to developing self-awareness and self-sufficiency in children's learning, and innovations in continuous professional development. Local authority policy-makers and advisers may want to separate these elements when they consider how they can support and encourage them within schools.

Third, the NLC programme has been well funded and it is difficult to distinguish sometimes whether learning networks or the funding that has come with them has made the greater difference. This makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of networked learning as an intervention strategy in its own right. One

cohort of NLCs without funding was established and supported. The learning that has come out of this about how to seed and sustain the growth of networks in the absence of special funding is particularly relevant and needs more exploration.

Finally, there seems to be a strong bias in the learning networks community (as well, to some extent, in the teaching profession in general) towards the collective voice, with a consequent muffling of the individual voice. Building shared purpose and vision is important and very powerful, but it can also mask individual difference. Individual passions, feelings, learning needs and development challenges are important, too. Individuals don't just exist in relationship to others (through the knots and threads of a network), but also in relationship to themselves.

These issues and a few others are summarised in the table below.

Networked learning strengths	Networked learning weaknesses	The role for local authorities as brokers and facilitators of learning networks and collaboration
The diversity, divergence and complexity within the NLC programme, in terms of types of network, child-centred learning topics of focus, adult CDP approaches and network leadership learning	Possible lack of coherence about what the programme has been about, due to the richness of individual NLC outcomes and learning	Find out about specific provision and specialist resources which are available, both to help you bring about the cultural change needed as well as to be part of your provision to support schools in your locality
The prolific production of excellent material on every aspect of learning networks and the superb communications expertise that has made these available to a wider audience	Sometimes its difficult to know where to start in terms of reading material, even though NCSL has produced highlight lists and directories – it is easy for newcomers to the subject to be overwhelmed by it all	Local authority facilitators can become familiar with the body of material and help direct schools to the most relevant materials (eg theory pieces, case studies and practical tools) for their needs
A rich language of networked learning, network leadership and collaborative enquiry	A tendency to generate jargon which can make it difficult for new people to access the topic and could put them off	Create gateway materials (ie your own introductions to initiatives or schemes you are offering) with simple and relevant language tailored to the needs of the audience
Promoting the universality of networks and networked learning, showing how it can help in any circumstance or situation	Lack of critical thinking about where and when to introduce networked learning. There is a risk of networked learning becoming a solution in search of problems. Lack of critical evaluations such as this which highlights the up-sides and well as downsides of networked learning and other options	Local authority facilitators can learn to advise when networked learning is most valuable and when other types of learning intervention or approach may work better
A richly integrated concept of	Conceptual conflation on several	It may help local authorities to

networked learning that combines the strategy and practices with a whole ethos and moral purpose	levels – firstly between networked learning and the culture of collaboration that supports it. Also in the evaluation of the impact of networked learning with the specific child-centred learning topics and CPD practices that were engaged within particular NLCs	separate the different elements of what you are dealing with (and supporting schools with) – I have started to do this in section 5, for example, distinguishing between networks and learning networks, between networked learning and the collaborative culture needed for them to be successful
Programme-funded support for selected networks has allowed amazing things to happen that wouldn't otherwise have been given the opportunity	Has the laboratory experiment been over taken by the reality out in the wider field? How do we encourage networking where no special funding is available? Has enough thought been given to how to support the emergence of networks outside policy initiatives?	One of the lessons has been that seed funding of some kind is very important in getting learning networks going, but local authorities also need to focus on how to help schools form or sustain networks using existing available resources and funds
Strong shared purpose and collective ownership from all those involved in facilitating networked learning	Loss of the individual voice? Is there an opportunity for our individual visions and biases to be expressed? Are we paying attention to our own needs as learners fully enough?	Use the integral model (see section 5) for managing change within the authority and facilitating change within schools to make sure that all the perspectives are included; individual and collective, objective and subjective

The heart of change

Current change programmes in local authorities are 'typically centred upon the requirement to appoint a Director of Children's Services and to work across social care, education, health and other agencies to make sure that competing priorities no longer get in the way of the best deal for children'. (*Spreading innovation across Local Authorities – Realising the potential of school-based networks*, NCSL, DfES Innovation Unit and Idea). Following the initial impetus from an organisational structure change, local authorities now face the challenge of how to bring about more deep-seated change in the organisational culture to support their aims. The essence of the change is about creating a shift in the ways of working and mindsets:
- from authority to agency
- from directing to collaborating
- from controlling to connecting

Lancashire local authority's learning from its LEArning project (see section 4) highlights an elementary principle of change management: that you need to go through a change first before you can expect others to do the same (or to be able to facilitate them in doing so). The change needs to be embraced not just in terms of the way that local authorities work to support schools, but it needs to go to the heart of the culture within the local authority and the leadership behaviour of its senior officers.

The experience of all of the participating local authorities in the LEArning project also supports the realisation that any transformational change starts at the individual level of personal and professional development, and, within this, it starts at an emotional level, because all negative or unproductive mindsets are held in place by unconscious or unexplored emotions.

Implementing educational reform may seem to be mostly about remodelling service delivery, or about new policies, strategies, structures, skills and practices, but these need to be underpinned by a more essential cultural change that starts with an individual personal process of change.

The cultural change challenge is defined in terms of the existing culture and the desired culture and a process of transition or transformation between the two. Invariably, the existing culture is the result of a complex combination of factors – historical, political, personal, organisational etc. Most attempts to change culture focus on the new culture and encouraging the new values, mindsets, styles and behaviours that represent this new culture. However, first you need to let go of the old culture, removing the reasons for defensive, bureaucratic or hierarchical behaviours and helping those in key roles to develop the skills and competences needed in the new reality, as well as to manage their personal emotional journey of change.

The public education service is a system that has historically relied upon blame being placed in both directions in order to maintain and defend itself. The reasons for this are understandable but are also slowly being removed. A collaborative culture means we all need to take responsibility and that it doesn't help to blame up-line for a lack or resources or down-line for a failure to implement.

Section 5: Facing the new change agenda

> In a recent article, Valerie Hannon has argued of education networks that 'sooner or later – kicking, screaming or rejoicing – this is the way our too-insulated world of education will go'.
>
> Jackson & Hannon, undated, p 2

It is critical that local authorities start to use networking and collaboration more widely to share their existing and ongoing learning (both internally and externally), not just about networking but about their experience of tackling the Every Child Matters agenda and the wider organisational challenges they are facing. The key challenge is for local authorities to embody and model the new ways of working that they are seeking to encourage in and between schools. The real world of education is constantly moving on in a way that is beyond the control of any of the individual elements, agencies or policy-makers within it, (DfES, local authorities, NCSL etc), whether they like it or not. The choice for local authorities is whether to be leading or lagging behind this process.

The NLC programme was a development and research project which postulated a hypothesis about how networked learning can make a difference in the real world and tested it to scale through a diverse programme of networking experiments. There is little doubt that the majority of NLCs made a significant difference to all those involved and that improvements in pupil learning and attainment have followed. The overall impact of networked learning can be explored from a number of different perspectives, as we have started to do in this paper. A considerable body of knowledge has been generated about networked learning that is now available in the public domain for use by schools and local authorities alike. There is also a new generation of experts and experienced practitioners in networked learning, within schools and local authorities as well as consultants and facilitators moving around the system to provide help where it is needed.

Some big questions for local authorities now include:
* How has the networking, collaborating and learning agenda moved on since this experiment started?
* How have collaboration and networking already started to become part of the fabric of the way we work to achieve our objectives? How can we remove barriers to this becoming more widespread?
* How do we adopt and adapt the learning and apply it to what is needed by the schools and young people in our communities?
* How do we need to change within our local authority, at individual, team and authority-wide levels?

In summary, the challenge (as articulated by Michael Fullan, 2006) is to consider 'how we now build on these early initiatives to accomplish the greater ownership, coherence, capacity and impact which systemic change beyond the plateau demands of us all'.

Some conclusions

In this paper, I have attempted to provide a big picture overview of the networked learning territory for policy-makers within local authorities and to show how the challenges of building and supporting collaborative networking practice at all levels are part of the greater organisational and cultural change that local authorities are going through. I have also provided some models and maps to help local

authorities (i) develop their policies in relation to learning networks; and (ii) to navigate their own process of organisational change. This is a summary of some of the key ideas within the paper.

- Networked learning is proving to be a powerful strategy for educational reform and improvement. Schools working in splendid isolation is increasingly not seen as a viable option.

- The impact of learning networks has been as much about making a difference to the children and adults involved, in terms of personal motivation, professional development and engagement with learning, as about achieving measurable improvements in attainment and achievement. Sustainable improvement must be built upon a healthy and happy system which is culturally congruent with the challenges it is facing.

- There is evidence that learning networks are helping (i) bring about a shift towards a more collaborative and network-oriented culture; and (ii) grow a new generation of system leaders, which together make an enormous difference to schools' capacity for problem-solving, innovation and performance improvement. However, further investigation could explore the extent to which the right cultural conditions need to pre-exist the successful establishment of learning networks.

- Networked learning is one aspect of a system-wide shift towards a more collaborative and interconnected way of working, which means that the system local authorities support is becoming more networked.

- Alongside this, local authorities are also being asked to network internally to deliver the Every Child Matters agenda. However, many don't know either how to do this or how to reconfigure to support school-to-school networks. Moving into networked learning mode themselves (within services, between services or agencies and between local authorities), such that they model practices and apply them in new forms of engagement with networks of schools, is a good way to start. There is much learning from the NLC programme – good and bad – that can help them with this.

- Many local authorities are already playing significant roles in brokering, facilitating and supporting learning networks in their schools and they are doing so in a wide variety of ways. It makes sense for local authorities to network and learn with and from each other, not just about networked learning but about all sorts of challenges they face. The LEArning project has provided a powerful example of how this can take place.

- The first step for local authorities seeking to improve their support of school-to-school networks is to look for ways in which they can embrace collaboration, networking and learning within the way they work – within services, between services or agencies and between authorities.

- This will not be easy without embracing and embarking upon deeper internal organisational and cultural change. Effective organisational change best starts with leaders at all levels engaging with personal change and modelling what is needed to the rest of the organisation.

- This could be an exciting time for local authority leaders in managing change throughout their organisations, but they cannot do it on their own. They may need to find new ways of supporting and developing themselves to meet the challenge.

Questions to help define the agenda for change in your local authority

As a next step, you and your team might want to engage in dialogue about some of the following.
- What do you consider to be the key issues and challenges facing your local authority in relation to collaborative working and (i) school-to-school networking; (ii) authority-to-authority networking; and (iii) inter-service networking within local authorities for Every Child Matters?

- Does your local authority have a coherent vision for the future that embraces collaborative working, networking and learning? How would you articulate it in a simple statement?

- How would you characterise the current and the desired culture for your local authority (perhaps using the spiral dynamics value systems model outlined in this paper)? In other words, how does the internal culture need to change in support of the external practices, strategies and activities you want to implement?
- What are the most counter-productive mindsets, attitudes and behaviours that need to change within the authority for this to happen?
- What are your needs for personal, professional and leadership development in support of this cultural change? What are your team's needs?
- Who could you be learning from and with (i) within the authority; and (ii) outside the authority, and how could you initiate this?
- Who could you be supporting or coaching to help adapt to the change? Who could be supporting or coaching you in your process of change?

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