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Culture and Quality Assurance

**An exploration of the relationship between
organisational culture and the introduction of quality
assurance in small training organisations**

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Preface

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Abstract

This thesis explores the impact that small training organisations expect as a result of the introduction of quality assurance. It also explores how the culture of small training organisations affects, and is affected by, quality assurance. The current requirement for small training organisations to undertake quality assurance processes represents challenges and opportunities. However, there is little information available on the relationship between organisation culture and quality assurance in small training organisations, and therefore little guidance on implementing quality assurance in such organisations.

The relationship between organisational culture and quality assurance in small organisations was examined from an interpretive approach that used both quantitative and qualitative techniques. 78 respondents from 34 separate training organisations responded to a survey comprising a questionnaire developed by the author concerning the expected impact of quality assurance, and an organisational culture instrument. The organisation culture instrument, which was adapted by the author from the Organisational Culture Diagnostic Instrument (Cameron and Ettington 1988), aimed to assess both **current** organisational culture, and **expected** organisational culture after the introduction of quality assurance. Further in-depth data were gained in focus groups held with two of training organisations surveyed. Results were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and content analyses.

For most small training organisations, the opportunities provided by quality assurance, especially in providing consistency through devolved responsibility for management tasks, were perceived to outweigh the short-term

problems, especially resource issues and frustration with inconsistent external requirements. Change for the most part was perceived to be at the level of procedure and formal policy, rather than at the level of underlying values or philosophy. The organisations tended to have flexible cultures ('Clans' and 'Adhocracies' – Cameron and Ettington 1988), and expected to become more predictable ('Hierarchies' and 'Markets' – ibid) after the introduction of quality assurance. However, there were variable paradoxical effects in relation to the impact of quality assurance on organisational culture.

The study identifies some key issues for those implementing and/or designing quality assurance systems in small training organisations and suggests that, in comparison with large organisations, more attention needs to be given to technical and resource issues than to changes in orientation or values. The study identifies a number of complexities in the relationships between different aspects of organisational culture, between organisational profile and expected impact, and between expected and actual impact. Further research on these complexities is suggested.

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