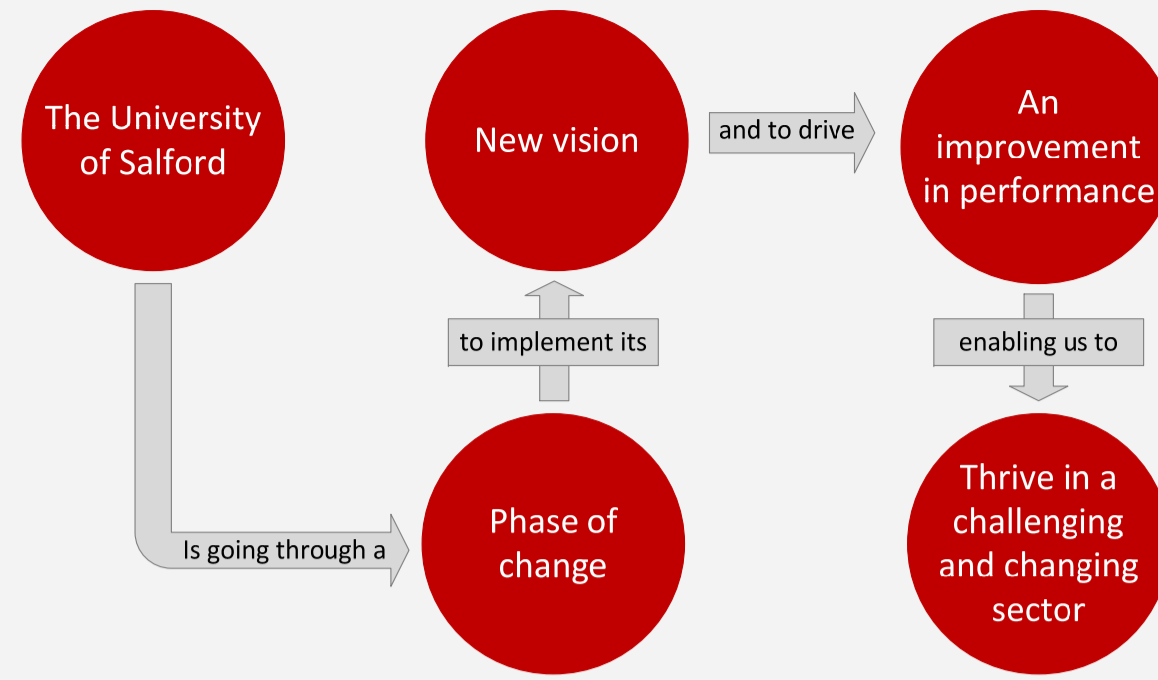




University of  
**Salford**  
MANCHESTER

## Salford Dialogue

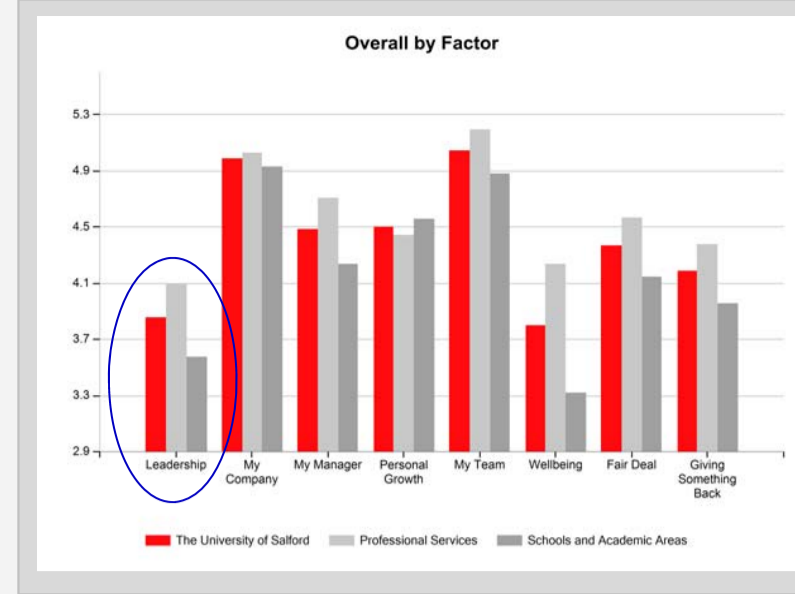
### Background



In July 2015 our performance at Salford was not where we wanted it to be:

- ✗ NSS overall satisfaction = 83%
- ✗ Guardian University league table = 94
- ✗ 'Leadership' score: Best Companies survey = 3.86 (indicates that most colleagues are disengaged with leaders)

Diagnostic conversations highlighted a lack of trust and collaborative working, hence the need to develop **emotionally intelligent leaders** who are high-performing and capable of leading others in the same way. Through improving leadership capability, the Salford Dialogue aims to enhance the experience of students and colleagues, driving engagement and improvements for our students.



**Collaboration** is key to our vision and also embedded in programme methodology. We worked with a leadership focus group, senior leaders, and leaders at all levels to ensure that Salford's unique needs and challenges were embedded in the design of the programme, making the programme real and impactful.

We also engaged with specialist partners to support our programme:

'**Bridge Partnership**' to design and facilitate an interactive leadership programme that shows us 'ourselves in our very best light' and unlocks possibility, courage, genius, loyalty, connection, innovation, co-creation and above all a lasting sense of purpose.

'**Action Learning Centre**', who trained 13 colleagues to facilitate Action Learning Sets which will support leaders in embedding the learnings from the programme through 2016 and into 2017.

Culture is about the ways we do things around here and about the conversations that are had, which collectively influence the atmosphere, relationships and therefore performance.

In the Salford Dialogue, our core purpose was to get people throughout the University to talk, to listen, to understand and to differ, positively engaging with each other individually and collectively create a culture which enables rather than restricts. We have delighted in helping people to acknowledge prejudices and judgments, to listen more attentively to each other and to acknowledge that we are all leaders and have the power to influence those around us.

*Simon Linssen and Colin Russell - Bridge Partnership*



It's been a privilege working with the OD team on this ambitious project; they have been thorough, professional and willing to invest on many levels to create the desired organisational change and transformation across the University. Support for the internal facilitators is excellent; and the enthusiasm and dedication from all those involved has been outstanding. Using Action Learning as part of the Salford Dialogue programme maintains momentum and a focus for learning alongside supporting leaders to take action to change culture and performance. Offering staff a cross organisational opportunity to work on what really matters will build relationships, skills, knowledge of the University as a system and hopefully a sense of 'we're in this together and we can create a University to be proud of'.



What's it got to do with me?

Exercises based in dialogue and establishing a psychological contract that 'I have a part in this'.

The essence of the day is built around energy and connection, hence "The Salford Dialogue"

### The Programme



The session starts with an honest picture of 'how it is' at Salford. A different senior leader opened each session with the rationale for the programme: we have our vision in place (WHY) and we are progressing with our academic and functional strategies, operational planning and objectives to achieve the vision (WHAT). To be successful requires alignment and commitment of our **biggest asset – our people – and the right culture, with an engaged workforce and strong and committed leaders, are critical enablers for success (HOW)**. We were honest about the fact that we've had challenging times at the University and that leaders haven't always been supported to be their best. The purpose of the Salford Dialogue is to ensure that **leaders are supported and able to deliver the culture required to make this shift in performance** to succeed in our vision and to take us forward positively in this challenging era for HE.

Table discussions drew out delegates' sense of involvement and their part in of this:

- What have you heard?
- What stands out?
- What are your feelings/thoughts?

The conclusion was always that this can be a better place to work: **there is a serious case for change and it involves all of us.**

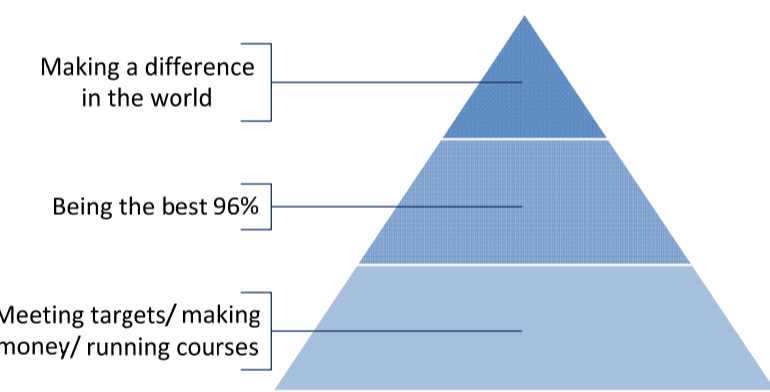
Management	Leadership
Set goals for the future	Know your role and lead by example
Create simple plans and budget to meet targets	Self awareness & authenticity
Manage and organise resource	Establish direction by developing a vision to attain long term goals
Control and monitor plans against Key Performance Indicators	Gain peoples' commitment
Deliver results and solve problems as they arise	Motivate and inspire people by appealing to their needs, values and emotions

The group aligned themselves to numbers across the room in response to statements, e.g.:

- "I see myself as a leader"
- "I have a role in leading for a high performance culture at the University"

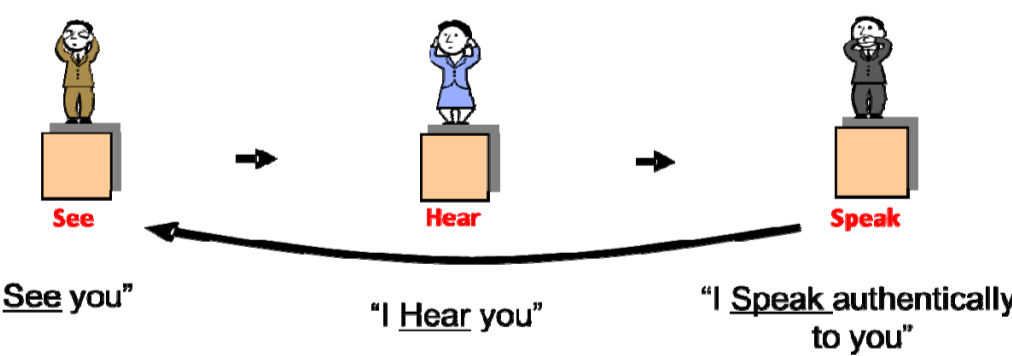
After each line-out, there was a discussion on perceptions, and delegate responses were used to establish that **leadership is not a status, but a behaviour**.

We all influence others around us at work: this is something that we all **understand and value** and want to do well for our **own happiness** as well as the **success of our teams and the university!**



We then had pair discussions on: "What am I here to do?" eliciting colleagues' purpose. When colleagues discussed their core sense of their purpose/mission, this created lots of energy, enthusiasm and clarity. It was very motivating to hear statements such as "I create the next generation of engineers".

Using principles of cognitive behavioural therapy, this exercise allows each leader to focus on their own real life situation, enabling immediate and impactful reflection, learning and action. It was very helpful to see how thoughts drive feelings which drive behaviours; applying this approach (which we called the 'Box') to challenging work situations was very impactful and helped leaders understand and begin to address their personal triggers and barriers to being at their best - as well as building resilience to deal with change.



Pair discussion on the behaviours of a person who truly saw, respected and influenced them: responses were collated as 'See/Hear/Speak' - we see that great leaders truly see and hear us. We clarify that this is how we designed the programme: we saw/heard before we spoke.

Pairs practice with a listening exercise: listening for content and feelings on a challenge at work. We review the experience for both speaker and listener and confirm that the skill of listening improves confidence, culture and performance.

I choose to...  
Certainty  
Productive

I can learn from...  
Open  
Creative

#### In the box

I can't...  
Hopeless  
Blame

I have to...  
Tense  
Blinkered focus

I should...  
Resentment  
Do what someone else wants me to

I'll give it a shot...  
Confident  
Take risks

#### Out of the box

I want to...  
Passionate  
Problem Solve

The aim of all development is to 'do' or change something. We invited colleagues to consider, discuss and note what they will commit to as a result of today.

The session finished with an acknowledgement of each other through appreciative feedback. The purpose of this exercise was to practice feedback, to give confidence and to build trust – all of which impact mind-set and performance at work. In table groups, leaders shared:

1. One area I want to develop
2. Two strengths I have as a leader
3. My 'Commitment' to do/change based on my learning today

and then received appreciative feedback from their group. We reviewed the exercise: did it achieve the purpose of increasing confidence and being honest? Implications for our culture, our performance?



The provision of Action Learning Sets enables leaders to continue their cooperative and reflective journey and to embed the culture change we seek.



### Impact

163 academic and professional services leaders participated on a voluntary basis in the planned workshops in Spring 2016; 120 chose to continue their development through Action Learning.

A measure of success was significant additional demand due to word of mouth and recommendations. 165 leaders participated in additional sessions requested, meaning that the programme reached 328 colleagues in total. 153 leaders chose to continue their development through Action Learning.

Key outcomes included clarity on what being a Salford leader means (the individual responsibility, behaviours and mind-set required). On feedback forms, 94% were "feeling energised to change how you lead"

L1 evaluation demonstrates 'Salford Dialogue' is positively impacting culture:-

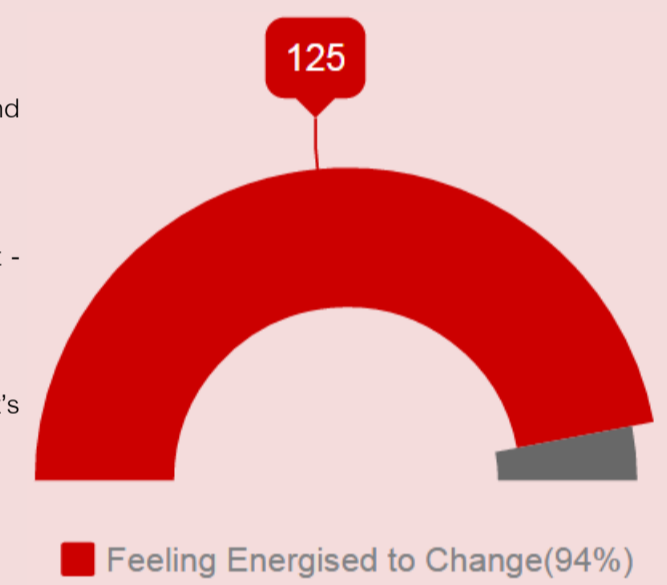
'**Work better with colleagues:** 'all participants were wanting to change and lead their teams to make a better place of work'; 'positivity within the room and enthusiasm to take the lessons experienced back to the floor'; 'unity and passion staff have for Salford University'

'**Leadership Style:** 'Really put the ownership on us to make the change which is the message we so desperately needed'; 'practical skills to implement - wasn't just 'talk'; 'champion 'people focus' to our work'

'**Managing EI:** 'review self-talk and pick out the truth in order to change my attitude'; 'recognise and challenge negative emotions'; 'recognising that it's about me working on me'

The programme established a common, positive language and toolkit that leaders can use daily to promote and embed culture change..

Organisational learnings include: need to engage Academic colleagues more; colleagues feel empowered with leading their own teams, but less so in influencing across the University; feeling that things are changing for the better (and looking to the past is holding us back).



#### POTENTIAL FOR OTHER ORGANISATIONS

The Salford Dialogue approach would be useful for any organisation looking to drive culture change, specifically to ensure leaders are engaged, high-performing and capable of leading others in the same way. Aspects of both methodology and content could be successfully applied in other organisations.

#### Methodology

- Programme design was closely aligned to the development focus required to achieve our vision and strategic priorities and grounded in the current cultural reality of the university
- Pilot programmes tested that the approach was the right one for the University
- Partnering with suppliers enabled specialist content, and co-delivery with the OD team built credibility for the team
- Impact was gained from support of the Vice Chancellor (video for pilot sessions) and senior leaders who, following attendance on pilot sessions, volunteered to open sessions with the Salford context and their own experience of the programme
- Involvement of 13 academic and professional services colleagues as Action Learning facilitators created a network of advocates across the University to embed learnings ongoing
- Mixed cohorts of academic and professional services colleagues promoted cooperation, understanding and trust across these populations
- An intense one-day session with a focus on dialogue created high levels of trust and engagement
- Action Learning Sets enabled embedding of skills, a focus on real, in-role issues, stronger networks and increased organisational learning

#### Content

The design of the initial section of the programme was very specific to Salford; this approach worked as colleagues were able to discuss how challenging the recent transformation had been for them. It was a cathartic exercise where colleagues felt 'seen' and realised that this development event was different as it was grounded in their reality. Everyone agreed that there are many great colleagues who work hard for our students across the institution, and that we want and need to move on from negativity and embrace our future. We'd recommend building honest and open discussion specific to the organisation as an approach for building engagement both for the programme and beyond.

The programme reviewed key leadership skills, many aspects of which can be applied at other organisations: e.g. leadership vs management; Adair's 'task, team, individual' model; and 'See, hear, speak': a deep listening exercise for really understanding others' perspectives. It helps leaders to have a refresher of key skills and to reflect on how they're applying these day-to-day.

Another recommendation for other organisations is adopting an approach embedded in Emotional Intelligence. The focus on individual purpose and emotional intelligence enabled leaders to work proactively together, increasing motivation, understanding and accountability for driving performance to a much greater degree than traditional 'transactional/skills-focused' training programmes and giving leaders a great foundation to face the ongoing changes and challenges in the HE sector positively and successfully.

Other exercises focused specifically on driving confidence and engagement – for example the 'Personal Purpose' and 'Appreciative Feedback' exercises. While some colleagues were initially wary of this, the experience was resoundingly positive due to the impact it had on them personally. We'd recommend this approach to any organisation wishing to build leadership confidence.

Putting it into practice

Practice and sustain skills and behaviour.

Thus overall, from Agreement to Action in a day!