NEW CAPABILITIES IN VET

Insights from Reframing the Future project teams on how to build capabilities for implementing the national training system

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# Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Adult and Community Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANTA</td>
<td>Australian National Training Authority</td>
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<td>ERTOF</td>
<td>Enterprise Registered Training Organisiation Forum</td>
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<td>HRD</td>
<td>Human Resource Development</td>
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<td>LLN</td>
<td>language, literacy and numeracy</td>
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<td>IT</td>
<td>information technology</td>
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<td>RTO</td>
<td>registered training organisation</td>
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<td>TAA</td>
<td>Training and Assessment Training Package</td>
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<td>TAFE</td>
<td>Technical and Further Education</td>
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<td>VET</td>
<td>vocational education and training</td>
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KEY MESSAGES

1. Implementing the national training system requires VET practitioners to undertake a very broad range of activities, from researching industry skill needs, to negotiating with enterprises, adapting Training Packages, designing assessment tools and delivering and assessing in the workplace.

2. Implementing the national training system is also complex because VET is a demand-driven sector, requiring providers to develop and sustain productive relationships with industry clients and individual learners.

3. Implementing the national training system is more complex again, because the training needs of each and every enterprise are potentially unique, requiring providers to develop exceptional capabilities for customising training and assessment.

4. Implementing the national training system requires responsive providers that can continually develop improved resources, processes and strategies and pursue ever-higher quality outcomes from training.

5. To meet this raft of challenges, extensive and ongoing staff development is required for the large numbers of personnel in VET.

6. Reframing the Future is the national staff development and change management program that supports the implementation of the national training system.

7. Reframing the Future project teams are guided to select staff development and change management methods that fit their unique set of needs and challenges.

8. The overarching methodology used by Reframing the Future project teams is workbased learning, which links theory and practice and can include methods such as coaching and mentoring, action learning, networking and communities of practice.

9. The use of the workbased learning methodology by Reframing the Future project teams regularly results in individuals enhancing their practice, providers improving their performance, industry benefiting from collaboration with providers and Australia achieving better quality outcomes from training.

10. VET practitioners emerge from this report on Reframing the Future’s 2005 projects not only demonstrating new capabilities for implementing the national training system, but also modelling skills in areas such as change agency and strategic management that will enable them to continue to bring about change in the future.
METHODS USED AND NEW CAPABILITIES DEVELOPED

The following diagram portrays on the left hand side the staff development activities and methods used by Reframing the Future project teams and, on the right hand side, the sample capabilities that are developed by these project teams that assist with the implementation of the national training system.

Diagram: Staff development methods used by teams and sample new capabilities developed
INTRODUCTION

Purpose
The purpose of the document is to share with the vocational education and training (VET) sector insights into how over four thousand VET practitioners increased their capabilities to implement the national training system, as evidenced by their participation in the Reframing the Future program in 2005.

Evidence base
The document provides insights on skill building drawn from the final reports of many of the more than two hundred project teams that undertook Reframing the Future projects in 2005. These detailed final reports completed by project team convenors clearly identify projects’ challenges, processes and achievements, providing highly informative data for this document.

The positive approach and tone of this report is validated by quantitative data collected from project teams during 2005 which demonstrates the impact of the program on participants’ skill building. In 2005 all the project convenors were required to complete a survey indicating the level of skill and understanding of participants in implementing aspects of the national training system such as Training Packages. The surveys were completed at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of each project, as part of formal reports to Reframing the Future. The results show that the level of skill and understanding of participants increased over this period, right across the set of projects, from an ‘average’ level to a ‘high’ level.

Program aim and sponsors
Reframing the Future is the national staff development and change management program for skilling Australia’s VET workforce to implement the national training system. It provides a professional learning framework for educational change, staff learning and organisational capacity-building in vocational education and training. The professional development model and methodologies advocated by Reframing the Future were rated as world class by an independent evaluation of the program in December 2004.

Reframing the Future is funded by the Australian and State and Territory Governments and complements other staff development programs provided by State/Territory bodies, other agencies and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). The program provides funding and support for groups of VET personnel to undertake activities in a range of sub-programs listed below.

Support for national framework
The program contributes to the development of a National Skills Framework, which sets out the system’s requirements for quality and national consistency of qualifications and the delivery of training. The program provides opportunities for project teams to support the Guiding Principles of the new national training system, particularly:

- Better quality training and outcomes for clients, through more flexible accelerated pathways
- Processes are simplified and streamlined and enhance national consistency
- Young people have opportunities to gain a wide range of lasting skills that provide a strong foundation for their working lives
- Training opportunities are expanded in areas of current and expected skills shortages.

The program supports the implementation of recommendations of the High Level Review of Training Packages, including Action 5.1: To support high quality delivery and assessment under Training Packages and to enhance VET professionalism.

The program also supports the aims of the National Training Quality Council (NTQC). For instance, the program supports Outcome 10 of the NTQC Plan ‘Strengthening teaching, learning and assessment’ and in particular Action 5.1 in the NTQC Training Package Work Plan by strengthening a sense of professional identity and opportunities for networking among practitioners, building RTO capability in Training Package implementation and providing better guidance to teachers, trainers and assessors on teaching and learning approaches.
Structure
The structure of this document is based on the sub-programs of Reframing the Future, as follows:

- Sub-program 1: Skills Development for VET Practitioners (see chapter 1)
- Sub-program 2: Strategic Management and Change Management (see chapter 2)
- Sub-program 2: National Training Change Agents (see chapter 3)
- Sub-program 3: Engaging VET Practitioners (see note below)
- Sub-program 4: Effective Networking – Communities of Practice (see chapter 4)
- Sub-program 4: Effective Networking – Industry Training Networks (see chapter 5)
- Sub-program 4: Effective Networking – Teaching and Learning Networks and Assessor Networks (see chapter 6)
- Sub-program 5: Applying Information and Research (see chapter 7).

Please note that this document provides insights from teams in all but Sub-program 3. Insights from the latter sub-program are the subject of a separate resource on professional judgment, entitled “Professional Judgment in Vocational Education and Training: a set of resources” produced by Reframing the Future in 2006 and available from www.reframingthefuture.net.

Selection of exemplars
The exemplars and quotations used in this document are taken from selected final reports prepared by 2005 project teams and submitted from late 2005 to early 2006.

The set of selected exemplars met some or all of the following criteria:

- the project teams represent a range of different types of providers – for example, public and private, metropolitan and regional or rural
- the project teams’ insights are likely to be of interest to the VET audiences
- the insights are easy to read and understand.

The selection of exemplars was made by Reframing the Future’s national project director Suzy McKenna, program consultant John Mitchell, senior project officer Cheryl Bald and project support officer Wendy Perry. Each of these people is a mentor for Reframing the Future project teams and has in-depth knowledge of the projects selected as exemplars.

How to use this document
While the document will inform and enrich the work of Reframing the Future project teams, it is relevant to all VET practitioners.

The document could be used by the following VET people:

- individual practitioners interested in enhancing their own capabilities
- groups of practitioners involved in building the capacity of their organisations.

Whether using the document on your own or in a group, you are encouraged to:

- relate the readings to your own experiences and practice in VET
- reflect on and plan for new ways of working in the future
- adapt and adopt new ideas for your own context.

Managers of VET organisations are encouraged to use the document to:

- review your current strategies for developing staff
- reconsider your approaches to implementing Training Packages, including your approaches to work-based learning and assessment
- re-examine your current approaches to industry networking and partnerships.

Policy makers in the VET system can read the document to find out about the varieties and quality of leading practice in the sector and the many different ways in which VET organisations assist their staff to develop new skills.

To find out more about the exemplars selected for this report, action plans for each of the projects can be found at www.reframingthefuture.net. Products of projects mentioned in the report can be accessed by contacting the project convenor, whose contact details are provided in the action plan.
**Workbased learning**

Reframing the Future project teams frequently use the approach called workbased learning, an umbrella term that refers to structured learning that is organisationally managed and provided in association with paid or unpaid work. The focus of workbased learning is learning through work. Workbased learning includes a range of different staff development methodologies and techniques, from coaching and mentoring to action learning, networking and communities of practice.

Given this broad definition of workbased learning, it could be said that those personnel and project teams involved in change agency, change management and strategic management are also involved in workbased learning.

To learn more about the application and benefits of workbased learning in different VET domains, readers are encouraged to access a wide range of other publications and resources available at www.reframingthefuture.net

**New capabilities**

This report responds to the challenge set out in a range of documents in recent years that staff in the vocational education and training (VET) sector need to develop new capabilities. The challenge was set by researchers such as Mitchell, Chappell, Bateman and Roy (2005), who listed some of the specific skills or capabilities needed by VET practitioners:

- New skills and resources are needed in VET to implement creatively competency-based Training Packages, particularly by teachers and trainers schooled in the previous paradigm of teacher-dominant, classroom-based instruction.
- New skills and resources are needed to take advantage of the options created by new digital technologies, such as broadband transmission and mobile telephony. New skills and resources are needed to meet the challenges of teaching, learning and assessing in each and every workplace. (p.14)

One major reason why a vast range of skills is required in VET is because of the different types of learning that need to be supported:

- New skills and resources are needed because there are different types of learning, for example: deep versus surface level learning, informal and formal learning, self-directed and structured learning, and learning focused on technical skills and learning focused on generic skills. Each of the different types of learning has implications for program design and for the skills required by teachers and trainers. Each of the different types of learning impacts on VET providers and systems. (Mitchell et al. 2005, p.14)

Schofield and McDonald in the final report of the High Level Review of Training Packages project (2004), found that what is needed in VET overall is ‘a capacity-building approach that emphasises quality, creativity, professional judgement and growth rather than simply compliance’ (p.5).

In response to the challenge to develop more skills, VET practitioners emerge from this report on Reframing the Future’s 2005 projects clearly demonstrating their development of new capabilities.

**References**


1. DEVELOPING NEW SKILLS

This chapter provides insights into how VET practitioners developed new skills or enhanced existing skills, in relation to implementing the national training system. These skills ranged from developing assessment tools, to contextualising Training Packages to suit an enterprise, through to customising training delivery that catered for individuals’ learning preferences.

Key insights

Key insights provided by convenors and facilitators in their final reports on 2005 projects included the following:

- Implementing the national training system involves many skills and challenges, from understanding workplace learning, to working in partnership with industry, to validating assessment instruments, to improving methods for recognition of prior learning.
- In response to the multitude of challenges, VET practitioners benefit from sharing ideas, working collaboratively with peers and clients, accessing industry experts and critiquing their own practice.
- To improve performance, VET practitioners commonly ‘unpack’ Training Packages such as the new Training and Assessment package, develop individual learning plans, identify and adapt existing learning materials and construct assessment strategies and tools.
- In Reframing the Future project teams, VET practitioners not only develop skills specific to their work, but also develop generic skills such as communicating effectively, reflecting critically, problem solving, working in teams and sharing practice.

Background

This chapter provides insights from the convenors and facilitators of the over sixty project teams who participated in this sub-program on Skills Development for VET Practitioners during 2005. These teams used workbased learning methodologies to enhance and develop skills and knowledge to implement the national training system – specifically Training Packages, the AQTF and workplace delivery and assessment. Fifty two projects were conducted by organisations or business units that were new to Reframing the Future and twenty four projects focused on implementing the Training and Assessment Training Package (TAA04).

The overall goal for this sub-program is as follows:

*to enable VET practitioners to become highly-skilled in implementing the national training system.*

Key resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks are cited below. A fuller list is provided at the end of this section.


Collaborating, networking and sharing ideas

Funding from Reframing the Future in 2005 provided project participants with opportunities to collaborate in order to develop and update knowledge, skills and strategies to better implement the national training system. For example, Jill Crane from Wide Bay Institute of TAFE in QLD reported on a forum conducted as part of her Reframing the Future project:

*The opportunity to network extensively throughout the forum, as well as the themes of so many of the participant presentations, strongly emphasised the value of working cooperatively and collaboratively with others to achieve synergies of outcomes, shared enthusiasm and cross fertilisation of skills and knowledge.*

Similarly, Joy Sharpe and Hazel Widtmann from the Adult and Community Education (ACE) South East Community College in NSW reported that while the theme of their project was workplace
learners and industry partnerships, overall the project enabled participants to reflect upon and improve their professional practice:

The theme of workplace learners and working in partnership with industry was followed through, especially through sharing of experiences and case studies by the participants. Many of the trainers have a wide experience in different RTOs and businesses and were able to share their knowledge and expertise. The discussions did not always focus on this theme, however the aim to “reflect and improve on professional practice” was certainly achieved.

Trisha O’Donnell from Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE reported that representatives from over thirteen RTOs participated in her Queensland project, strengthening professional networks:

The development and strengthening of professional networks was achieved. Contributions were made to the project from within all 13 TAFE Institutes. In addition, representatives from priority training areas of construction and manufacturing attended the workshop. Input and LLN resources were also received from Tropical Education Training Company. A number of participants have made networks within their Institutes to work with IT staff and vocational trainers.

Participants in the project facilitated by Lesley Wemyss from Gold Coast Education and Training (QLD) anticipated the business value of collaboration, beyond the life of the project:

Greater levels of partnerships, and collaborative arrangements, alliances between the participants to forge a business advantage. Many realised after the first workshop that they should be leveraging off each other for development of further business.

Developing strategies and tools

In many project teams, strategies and tools were developed and validated by industry and RTO participants, ensuring consistency and standards were met, in accordance with the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) requirements. Phill Bevan from Esset Australia in Tasmania described how his project involved a range of staff who were able to access the experience of industry experts:

Project participants were sourced from all levels of the organisation (administration, practitioner, management) and included full time, part time and casual team members in a work based learning process. The project drew on the experience of an external facilitator and several industry experts in the area of VET.

The Esset project was built around four one day workshop sessions that were based on the following topics:

- Unpacking the TAA04 competency standards and development of individual learning plans
- Development of learning and assessment strategies
- Development of example assessment tools
- Exploration of available learning materials.

These workshop topics illustrate the way many project teams unbundle the AQTF, enabling teams to focus skill development around specific topics. For example, reported Phill Bevan, the individual learning plan development process was very effective “in providing an individualised direction for engagement in components of the project, in preparation for the future undertaking of the Training and Assessment (TAA) qualification itself by some participants”.

Phill Bevan also reported that through these workshops and follow-up group activities and individual activities, participants engaged in the learning process, and “it was identified that the learning activities impacted heavily on the roles and responsibilities of all participants in the implementation and achievement of TAA outcomes over the medium to long term”.

Michele Dawkins from the Queensland Police Service also focused on the TAA Training Package and reported on new skills developed by VET practitioners – new skills for delivering and assessing the Training Package as well as new generic skills:

In addition to enhancing the capacity of participants that will deliver and assess TAA40104, the learning process has begun to develop individual self-directedness, critical reflection and problem-solving skills, while encouraging a climate of continuous improvement for the organisation.

Benefiting from relationships with industry

Linda Farrington from Launceston Student Works noted that her project elicited support from industry, which ensured the currency and relevance of participants’ training and assessment practice:

The collegiate support engendered by this project was unexpected in its magnitude, with local industry pledging greater ongoing support not only for this project but the organisation generally. Participants’ exposure to current industry practices and trends has ensured currency and relevance of their training and assessment practice.
Often there are ongoing benefits for the VET system from the work of Reframing the Future projects, as discussed in this final report by Andrew Nicholson of Great Southern TAFE WA:

All outcomes of the project were achieved with some of the outcomes projected to be reached beyond the life of the project being achieved earlier than forecast. The project evolved differently from the initial action plan, due to the scattered nature of the workforce involved in the project. However the final result has achieved more than anticipated due to the close relationship established between industry and the RTO. The work of the project will be ongoing, and in fact has become a model for the way industry based training will be done in the Primary Production and Natural Resource Management section of the College from 2006 on.

Jill Crane from Wide Bay Institute in Queensland found that the increased confidence participants gained from the project will ensure the positive effects of the project will continue into the future:

I believe that we have achieved anticipated outcomes, but the most exciting part of this process is that the project has given us the confidence and means to establish this new way of supporting our trainers, so the project philosophy will continue into the future.

Learning from experience

The skills and knowledge developed by participants in this sub-program are often the result of the use of workbased learning – an umbrella term that arches over a range of different staff development methodologies and techniques, ranging from facilitation and mentoring to action learning. Workbased learning includes learning from reflection on action.

Learning by doing and reflecting is a new concept for some in the VET sector, however others find this is the most practical and effective way of developing and improving their skills. Robyn Herdman from Westpac reported on learning from doing and reflecting:

The greatest unexpected outcome of the project was the realisation that the learning was in the doing and that much could be learnt from reflecting on the experiences of all concerned. As mentioned earlier the initial reaction to the program and the work that it entailed was one of confusion and anxiety as individuals made it harder than it needed to be. Once the group activities started and the participants started to share their diverse ‘learning’ knowledge and skills they found that it was not so much hard as it was different. The realisation that greater understanding was achieved in the actual doing as opposed to the learning of the theory was at complete odds with their expectations and/or their experiences at university.

Rose Vallen from the Australian Institute of Management reported that workbased learning was also new to some of her project participants, but they came to appreciate it as a methodology for taking charge and deciding what and how you learn:

Those participants who had previous exposure to work-based learning were very keen to take charge of their own learning, but some participants who had never experienced this kind of learning needed extra support and help with the concept of it being OK to take charge and decide what and how you learn. Participants appreciated the approach taken as it made efficient use of their time and took into account the already considerable skills and knowledge of some members of the group.

Growing professionally

Project convenors and facilitators found that the learning experiences for staff extended far beyond original goals and expectations. Jill Crane from Wide Bay Institute of TAFE reported on the many outcomes of a forum she convened:

The changing nature of VET which focuses more than ever before on learning in the workplace and the realisation that learning and demonstration of competency through assessment practices can be achieved through limitless possible means, was a central tenet of the forum. The tremendous range of examples of workplace and action learning topics showcased, provided stimulation for future projects to be undertaken by our Institute.

It reinforced that the more you give, the more you get! Opportunities for personal growth and cross organisational learning were being showcased in every session, including throughout the excellent networking occasions. These principles are readily transferable to the workplace but require frequent revisiting to encourage staff to see the benefits. These are just a few of the take home messages from the forum.

The project conducted by Garry Reid and Kevin Peaches from West Australian Police involved the use of workbased learning in relation to the promotion of language, literacy and numeracy issues. They concluded that “it is clear that the Reframing the Future project will succeed in embedding action learning amongst staff”.
Workbased learning also enabled the project team led by Ros Butcher and Cate Thompson from the Centre for Adult Education (VIC) to develop greater awareness “of opportunities and examples to customise and adapt teaching and learning strategies for a diverse range of learners, including those with language and literacy needs”.

Workbased learning often helps participants to learn, despite thinking initially they knew everything that they needed to know. Suzanne Campbell from Orion Training and Performance Management (QLD) noted this phenomenon:

Participant feedback has also shown that learning more about assessing recognition of prior learning (RPL) has provided them with further skills when assessing in a training environment. At the commencement of the project some participants thought that there was not much more for them to know about Training Packages. However, at the end of workshop one, a couple of the more experienced trainers said that they were surprised at how much more they had learnt.

Impacting on the future

Industry was involved in many of projects and the benefits for both the VET system and industry are evident in the 2005 final reports. The benefits flow from the communication and collaboration which takes place during the life of projects, leading to increased understanding among the stakeholders. As cited earlier, the benefits of collaborating with industry for Andrew Nicholson from Great Southern TAFE in WA included the development of a new model for providing industry based training.

Craig Walker from Australian Central Credit Union commented on the impact of his project on human resource development (HRD) consultants within his organisation:

This project has had a profound effect on the HRD consultants in terms of building their own networks, knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies in training and assessment design using the national training system.

Michelle Elliot from TAFE SA reported that her project team achieved “a culture of lifelong learning” so staff will be able to “adapt skills developed to assist in the implementation of other Training Packages”.

Summary points

Echoing major themes in this chapter, Judy Gronold from TAFE QLD found that her project achieved more than originally anticipated and that this was due to the interaction made possible by a structured project:

This project definitely challenged all those involved and has achieved much more than was initially anticipated in the depth of professional development activity across a broad range of participant expertise and has provided a support base for implementation which I believe would not have been possible without the interaction the project activity provided and the future collaboration opportunities which it has generated.

Major themes in the chapter include:

• the challenges in implementing the national training system, from customising Training Packages to collaborating with industry
• the benefits of undertaking structured staff development with peers and, where appropriate, with industry representatives
• the demonstrable determination of VET practitioners to improve their practice
• the ability of VET practitioners to develop, through staff development, generic skills such as teamwork and critical reflection.

Reframing the Future project teams are windows into active and effective skill building of practitioners across the system.

KEY RESOURCES

Reframing the Future resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks included the following. A number of the generic resources on workbased learning were used in other sub-programs but are only listed here. All of the publications are available on www.reframingthefuture.net


Reframing the Future (2005), Participating in workbased learning groups.
Reframing the Future (2005), *Facilitating workbased learning groups.*
2. UNDERTAKING STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

This chapter provides insights into how VET practitioners developed new skills or enhanced existing skills in strategic management and change management, in order to implement the national training system. This increase in capability resulted in the development of more demand-driven, customer-responsive provider organisations that seek to be high-achieving.

Key insights

Key insights provided by convenors and facilitators in their final reports on 2005 projects included the following:

- Implementing the national training system involves many skills and challenges, from continuously scanning the external environment to changing internal structures and cultures.
- In response to multiple strategic and change challenges, VET practitioners in Reframing the Future project teams in 2005 used a range of techniques to develop skills in strategy-making and change management.
- To improve organisational performance, VET practitioners identified the aspects of high-performing VET organisations and set about achieving those aspects.
- Beneficiaries of strategy-making and change management included not only the individual managers and other personnel involved in the projects, but also providers, organisations and industry.

Background

This chapter provides insights from some of the project managers of the twenty two strategic management and change management project teams in 2005 who participated in a structured sub-program that enabled them to develop their capabilities in strategy-making and strategy implementation, in relation to the national training system.

The overall goal of this sub-program is as follows:

*to enable VET managers to develop new skills in leading strategy-making and strategy-implementation so their organisations become high-performing in responding to the needs of the national training system.*

Key resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks are cited below. A fuller list is provided at the end of this section.


Achieving high-performance

Helen Smith from RMIT in Melbourne reported on the result of the data gathered and disseminated through her project and the tools developed in consultation with other RTOs and program leaders:

*there is now an increased awareness of the options available to us in striving to become a high-performing organisation, and initiatives are underway to review current processes and implement new approaches.*

Lesley Wemyss from Lesley Wemyss Training Consultancy in Palm Beach Queensland, managed another of the projects. She compared the different ways in which organisations she assisted in this project became more highly-performing VET organisations:

*Professional development is highly valued not only by the staff but managers as well
The organisations becoming proactive rather than reactive with their business*
Development of more collaborative arrangements with industry partners, and clearer application of workplace skills

A change in mindset from this is a problem, to ‘wow what a challenge’, let’s see how creative we can be.

Aspects of high performance achieved by these providers were cited by Lesley Wemyss as follows:

A more innovative response to the challenges of distance and scant funding, such as grouping assessments, using local content experts and so on.

A more entrepreneurial approach to the services the companies offer

A ‘sense of responsiveness’ rather than just supply

Recognition that professional judgement was allowable

Recognition and action towards developing a higher skilled group of training professionals.

Donna-Maree O’Connor from Tropical North Queensland Institute summarised the achievements of her Institute’s project:

As a result of strategy-making by the Project Team, Tropical North Queensland TAFE became more of a high-performing VET organisation through:

- Customer focused (internal and external) – centralised functions to focus on the needs of the client will result in a shift from reacting to changing industry needs to being proactive through strategic workforce planning.
- Centralised services with job rotation will result in flexible staff with broad/transferable skills.
- Greater understanding of recruitment and/or staff training needs to ensure quality administrative support outcomes.

Examples of the achievement of high performance arising from her project were summarised by Annelieske Noteboom from Challenger TAFE in WA:

Enhanced understanding of the rapid changes occurring in the national and state VET sector environment and the imperative to adapt to these changes.

Wider acceptance of the need to move quickly to meet the changing requirements of government, industry and students.

Understanding of strategy-making as complementary to strategic planning. Using strategy-making to respond to strategic issues as they arise (agility). Managers undertake regular updates of the environmental scan.

Broadening of skills requirements of senior managers.

Strategies for managing change – developing the manager as a change agent.

Continuing support for teachers and managers in their rapidly changing roles.

Redesigning structure and modifying culture

A large number of the projects developed more customer-focused, demand-driven structures and cultures to enable them to fit with VET’s overarching goal as a service sector, not a supply-driven sector. For example, RMIT provided an example of a project team that used a range of management strategies to review and redesign their structures and modify their cultures, in order to become more high-performing. RMIT’s Helen Smith described the structural changes and cultural shifts:

The second structural change came about when the Director TAFE reported to VCE that RMIT had been awarded the RTF project to design and implement innovative approaches to VET program quality management. Following discussion of the need for change and the commitment to streamlining processes made in 2004, VCE determined that a new delegated process for approvals and QA would be implemented. The RTF project was able to capitalise on the VCE decision by focussing on how to best implement improvements working with senior managers at a portfolio level, rather than having to mount a case for the initial changes. In turn the RTF project acted to reinforce the cultural shifts stimulated initially by the other institutional changes.

The strategy that will lead to the development of a customer-centric culture as a result of her project was described by Kate Niblett from Wide Bay TAFE in Queensland:

Over the life of this project key staff have been developing a philosophy that customer needs should be fundamental to the activities of the Institute. It has been expounded that a customer centric culture should permeate all departments and work areas.

While it is anticipated that this cultural change will take effect over a long period, key strategies have been implemented to raise awareness and change prevailing attitudes. Strategies included:

- Direct dialogue with Industry to identify needs and preparation of a gap analysis
- Interviews with each VTA (vocational training area) to encourage industry involvement and customer focus
• Series of workshops to develop Institute KPI’s, strategic plan and marketing plan
• Formation of a marketing focus group (which includes cross section of work areas) to implement marketing plan.

A number of outcomes from her Institute’s project that led to cultural modifications were underlined by Donna-Maree O’Connor from Tropical North Queensland:

These include the introduction of a performance development system, identification of strengths and recommendations for actions to be taken to improve the effectiveness of operations within the business units/faculties, comprising but not limited to the development of centres of skills and centralisation of key functions to ensure the flexibility required to respond quickly to customer demand and to fully implement the NTF.

Wendy Morrow from the South Australian College of Natural Medicine described changes in her organisation that will support an increased student focus:

We have maximised the time afforded to us by this project to plan some ways in which we could become more student focused. Some of these included changes to the processes underpinning: student induction; recognition of prior learning; and student support. These discussions have underpinned our continued progress through this project.

Managers learning

Carolyn Grayson from Melbourne’s Swinburne University of Technology, TAFE Division, reported that the major benefit of the project was the acceptance by managers of the complexity of VET and the development of a new culture. The benefits include the following:

the mainstreaming of frank and fearless dialogue at the middle management level about the complexity of the current and emerging environment impacting the VET system and the creation of a culture among this group in accepting their role as active participants in strategy-making and implementation to assist their teams to embrace the change agenda.

Lyn Farrell from Swan TAFE in Perth reported on how her project assisted middle managers to focus on change intervention at the inter-group and personal level:

Stace and Dunphy’s ‘Levels of Change intervention’ worked well for our project. When we considered the different levels of change intervention that they identify:

• Macrointervention (affecting the whole organization or system)
• Major Intervention (affecting the business unit)
• Intergroup intervention
• Personal intervention.

we determined that our College had experienced in the last three years the first two levels with very little focus on change intervention at the Inter-group or Personal level, with the result that many lecturing and support staff are disgruntled, disillusioned and resistant to change. The project team felt that given their role in the organization as middle managers they needed to focus on change intervention at the inter-group and personal level.

So this approach suited both the needs of the organisation and the ‘influence’ levels of the participants of the project.

Kirstie Tonkin from Central West Institute of TAFE in Geraldton WA commented on the focus of her project on the senior management team, as follows:

to provide skills development to the senior leadership team in change management and to effect a change in culture amongst the senior leadership team to reflect the principles of openness, inclusion, combined leadership, a sense of shared vision and a sense of team rather than individual responsibility. The success of this project in achieving these aims will have a significant positive influence on the future strategy making of the team through:

An increased recognition of the skills and knowledge of all members of the senior leadership team resulting in a broadening of scope and input into College strategy making beyond the members of the Corporate Executive group.

Increased communication within the leadership team.

Increased awareness of each others strengths and limitations and how to best utilise each member of the team in the development and implementation of strategies.

Learning by individuals and work groups

This sub-program impacts on both individuals and work groups. For example, project convenor Janine Piip from TAFE SA reflected on her own growth:

Reframing the Future has been a fabulous learning experience for me personally especially allowing me to meet other colleagues from other states, networking and for own personal development. With both projects I have convened
over the last 2 years, I have been able to present my findings at the National (New Ways of Working in VET) Forum in both Melbourne 2004 and Adelaide 2005. This personal growth has been extremely rewarding and has allowed me to develop confidence and propel my career forward.

Helen Smith from RMIT commented on her personal learning about change management:

As the project manager I have learned a significant amount about the theory and practice of change management by being obliged to review the literature and asking how it may apply to my own situation. I also gained a lot from the RTF forums at the commencement and mid-point of the project. It was great to meet and have an opportunity to discuss the issues of change management with others facing similar issues. Also the forums were really valuable in underlining the importance of customisation of change management approaches to fit local needs, and in reassuring us all that nothing ever goes according to plan, and that the real sign of success was the capacity to roll with the punches and progressively shape strategies to the evolving opportunities.

Joyce Lloyd from Holyoake in Perth is confident that the ongoing skills development for individual staff involved in her project “will give participants the confidence in their own capacity to question, analyse and problem solve and identify opportunities to improve service delivery which is more open and responsive to the client”.

Denise Stevens from Holmesglen Institute in Melbourne commented on the different dialogue started within the Business Services Centre about the need to respond to Victorian Government changes:

Part of the focus of the Reframing the Future project in the Business Services Centre was about developing staff capability to respond to these changes. As a consequence a cultural shift is required with respect to how the Centre provides training, increasing our flexibility and meeting the changing needs of our clients. This change to culture is not something that can happen easily within the life cycle of a 6-month project, but the RFF initiatives in the Centre have opened up a different dialogue amongst staff to consider and clarify some of the major VET issues.

Lyn Farrell from Swan TAFE noted the impact of her project on individuals and groups within her Institute:

This project contributed to overall change management occurring within the College but while other change occurring is focused on larger macro and major interventions this project focused on individuals and groups.

This focus provided those individuals and groups the opportunity to reflect on change, have a voice, take on a team based approach to the implementation of Training Packages. This acknowledgement of the experience of the individual within ‘turbulent times’, began the process in our organisation of assisting staff to feel in control of their work environment despite consistent change.

VET providers and industry benefiting

Rosemary Gore from the Queensland Ambulance Service summarised the benefits for her organisation of undertaking strategy-making:

Awareness raising regarding the issues of change management
Clarification of issues associated with effective change management i.e. communication and effective information flow
Articulation of the importance of the Training/Learning function within the organisation.

Terrie Gardner from the Parramatta College in Sydney listed three benefits of her project for the organisation:

new understanding of how the college needs to position itself in a small number of skill ecosystems
new appreciation of the value of developing at least one specialist section of the College
development of marketing plans and strategies to enable the College to increase its impact.

Lesley Wemyss from Queensland summarised how organisations involved in her project modified their structure to become more responsive:

They employed more people with specialised skills, and deployed them into the respective areas of high demand
They became focussed on more innovative practices, rather than continuing to do the same things the same way
They set up focus teams, that were given goals to achieve and action plans to report back to the group
They re-organised many of the tasks that needed to be completed, according to the skills sets of each member of the team, rather than just basing allocation of tasks to a role.

Donna-Maree O’Connor considered that the proposed structural changes to Tropical North Queensland will have the following impacts:

A shift from a supply-driven to a demand-driven culture
Client focused – more responsive to external clients
Flexible structures to ensure an ongoing continual strategy-making process
Centralised functions to result in a shift in internal cultures and increased cooperation.

A number of the projects noted their impacts on specific industries. For example, the project facilitated by Lesley Wemyss focused on the mining industry in Queensland. The project convened by Joyce Lloyd in WA will impact on the drug and alcohol component of the health industry, as follows:

Holyoake as a peak training provider in the Alcohol and other Drugs field is in a position to provide cutting edge training and assessment in the workplace. Competitors in the market do not currently offer this training providing the opportunity for Holyoake to step into the gap.

Summary points
The following comments by Carolyn Grayson from Swinburne University on the impact of the program on managers in her organisation demonstrate the achievement of the overall goal of this sub-program: that is, to enable VET managers to develop new skills in leading strategy-making and strategy-implementation so their organisations become high-performing in responding to the needs of the national training system. She reported:

Individual managers have reported a sense of emerging change in culture that has enabled them to contribute to the strategic and change management ‘debate’, to openly ‘question/challenge’ directions and to ‘own’ issues/problems/difficulties experienced in their teams with a focus on actively and openly seeking solutions.

Managers have expressed a desire to take a stronger, active leadership role within the organisation particular in regard to strategic decision-making.

Individual managers have reported a sense of empowerment in moving to more ‘risk taking’ business strategies as a function of their role. Rather than being passive recipients of ‘instruction’ they feel there is a developing a culture that recognises and supports them actively engaging in innovation and entrepreneurship.

Major themes in the chapter include the ability of VET managers to achieve high performance through innovative strategy-making – in order to deliver additional benefits to industry and individual learners. Reframing the Future project teams are capable of designing innovative strategies and managing complex changes, to continually improve their organisations’ effectiveness.

KEY RESOURCES
Reframing the Future resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks included the following publications available on www.reframingthefuture.net


Mitchell, J.G. and Young, S. (2002), Strategic management and change management and the National Training Framework, Core Ideas, ANTA, Melbourne.


3. USING CHANGE AGENCY

This chapter describes how VET practitioners developed new skills as change agents. These skills included negotiating, influencing and persuading others about improved ways of implementing the national training system. The use of these skills enabled the change agents to improve the client-focus of their own and other organisations and to assist industry more effectively.

Key insights

Key insights provided by the change agents in their final reports included the following:

- Implementing the national training system involves many change agency skills, such as diagnosing the need for change, developing change interventions, winning support and employing a suite of change strategies.
- Two concrete goals achieved by National Training Change Agents in 2005 were the development of ways to implement the Training and Assessment (TAA) Training Package and ways for providers to become more client-focused.
- Beneficiaries of change agency included not only the work groups that change agents assisted within their own organisations, but also other providers, enterprises and industry associations.

Background

This chapter provides insights from a number of the National Training Change Agents in their final reports for 2005.

The overall goal of this sub-program is as follows:

to enable VET practitioners to build their capabilities as change agents within the VET sector, to bring about changes required to implement the national training system.

The ten National Training Change Agents in 2005 participated in a structured sub-program that enabled them to develop their capabilities, in relation to the national training system.

Key resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks are cited below. A fuller list is provided at the end of this section.


Developing an improved client focus

One of the detailed goals for this sub-program was to enable the change agents to model an increased client focus among VET practitioners. Sue Hubbard from Learning Partnerships in Townsville reported on the success of her project in changing the attitudes of her staff:

All employees are more aware of the customer and their needs as many of them have been involved in some of the stakeholder meetings and all have been involved in the analysis stage. All employees now have a defined role in terms of customer service and monitoring within our strategic plan.

Annie Archer from TAFE Tasmania implemented a mentoring program that “supports teams to self analyse their current client focus approach and identify areas in which teams could improve, and implement change”. Archer provided this example of how the mentoring system she implemented led to the improved customisation of delivery and to the development of client-focused models that can be promoted to others:

For example, one of the trial mentor arrangements has been for an enterprise focussed teacher to partner with individuals from our plumbing team, to support them to change their delivery approach, which as resulted in that team not requiring businesses to send staff off the job for all their training.

Through the Enterprise Learning Community of Practice, we have worked with those members to identify current best practice in client focus within TAFE Tasmania, and we have documented these models of delivery
and assessment, to use as a showcase or example for teams who are considering making the change to workplace delivery.

Diane Noel from Swinburne University TAFE Division achieved the following goals in her change agent project:

- focusing more on clients’ outcomes, not our inputs as providers
- moving away from a curriculum and teacher-dominant culture to a service culture
- defining the changing role of the VET professional amidst the move to workplace training and assessment
- building our capacity to form and maintain partnerships with industry.

David Morgan from The Work Lab in Tasmania reported that the two RTOs he worked with were assisted to become more client focused:

- The whole initiative also involved a parallel managed process of involving registered training organisations (RTOs) in the delivery of training support and assessment. These two organisations were assisted to become more client-focused through a preparatory workshop (exposing the characteristics of the driving instruction industry), a series of meetings with representatives of the industry, mandatory responses to expressions of interest and the creation of a ‘limited’ competitive training environment where two RTOs were forced to compete for clients (and thus the best client focus won!)

Implementing the TAA Training Package

Another of the detailed goals for this sub-program is to enable individual change agents to assist colleagues in their own and other VET organisations to implement the Training and Assessment (TAA) Training Package. Margaret Gannaway from Challenger TAFE in Perth reported on her change management challenge:

- The major change management challenge was to work with a small group of well-respected and highly motivated lecturers to develop a professional development strategy and RPL benchmarks for the TAA04 qualifications which would:
  - change the attitude of College lecturers who have not updated their professional teaching skills by enticing them to participate in structured professional development targeting training and assessment competencies
  - encourage the College’s lecturing staff to gain the new TAA04 qualifications through a supportive professional development program
  - provide a supportive environment to assist lecturers gain the new qualifications by developing RPL benchmarks.

Margaret Gannaway also described how lecturers undertaking the TAA Training Package will be exposed to recent innovative approaches:

- By encouraging and supporting lecturers to see the importance of maintaining current training and assessment qualifications, they will be better able to provide high quality, client-focused, flexible learning and assessment in partnership with businesses and other organisations. One of the objectives of the national training system is for employers and individuals to have greater confidence in the quality and consistency of vocational education and training and its qualifications. By updating lecturers training and assessing skills they will be better able to deal with these new demands. By having a focus on the TAA04 qualifications, the College’s lecturers will be exposed to recent innovative approaches in training and assessment and encouraged to explore how they can be applied to their own situations.

Another change agent who placed some focus on the implementation of the TAA Training Package was Annie Archie from TAFE Tasmania, who reported:

- The mentor program will allow people that participate as mentors or mentees to collect evidence towards the Training and Assessment Certificate IV unit TAADEL404A Facilitate Work-based Learning.

Implementing other aspects of the national training system

The outputs sought from the sub-program included demonstrated examples of change agents using change management strategies to assist with the implementation of the national training system. Patrick Gavaghan reported on his awareness raising initiative:

- Through an awareness program I was able to influence a detailed review of the relevant Training Package be conducted to be more aligned with operating process’s and business needs of the industry.
- The involvement of a wider range of interested parties in the review was also a major achievement resulting in a more diverse qualification framework.
A series of briefing to industry bodies, groups, companies and individuals resulted in better understanding of the qualification system, the responsibilities of industry and the roles of various structures such as ITABs and Skills councils.

David Morgan pointed to statistical evidence of the impact of his work as a change agent:

As a result of this activity, 58 driving instructors will complete their Certificate IV in Driving Instruction, 32 of which will also receive formal training in business management issues. This group was previously entirely unengaged from the training system.

Catherine Curry from CHARTTES Training Advisory Council in Darwin focused on changing attitudes towards Indigenous participation in VET, changing the focus from failure to striving for success:

The change management challenge I tackled in this project was the challenge of changing general attitudes towards Indigenous participation in VET. Rather than focussing on failure such as drop out rates, low retention and literacy issues, training providers, government and indeed Indigenous people themselves need to recognise and strive for success.

One of her achievements was as follows: “Improved knowledge of Indigenous communities about the National Training System and how it can work for them – choices.”

### Improving VET providers

Sue Hubbard also reported on the impact of her change agent work on her own organisation:

The very nature of our changing organisational structure is based around becoming more client focused, by having business groups it is clearer for clients as to how to access appropriate training. By talking to key stakeholders with in our partner organisations we were able to value their opinions and involve them in the changes they could see happening in their interaction with us.

Our resulting organisational structure has client focus at its heart, even though we now have business units, we have clearly identified relationships that have been used to build up rapport and trust with our partner organisations and are seen as an integral part of selecting who will be the key contact person for an organisation or business unit within an organisation.

The National Training Change Agents worked with a variety of work teams. For instance, Margaret Gannaway reported on her work with lecturers at her college:

One of the aims of this project in working with a small group of highly-motivated lecturers was that through their involvement they would be able to assist in the implementation of the PD strategy within their own areas by taking on the role of a change agent. Involving these lecturers in the change process was a way of exposing them to the skills they would need to sustain the change across the whole College. I can drive the change but with their help and assistance the implementation stage will be more effective.

Margaret Gannaway found that the TAA units of competence provide an excellent vehicle for introducing concepts of flexibility to lecturers:

The needs of industry and our clients today are far more complex than they have ever been in the past. No longer is a “school-based classroom” the work environment for a lecturer. A lecturer is expected to train and assess in a multitude of delivery modes and locations, e.g. face to face, online, self-paced, on-the-job, off-the-job, to name but a few. The TAA04 units of competency provide an ideal vehicle for introducing these concepts and equipping lecturers with the ability to better meet the needs of our clients.

Annie Archer introduced a mentoring program to assist lecturers involved in workplace delivery:

In order to increase the quality and quantity of enterprise learning, and to promote and share best practice within the organisation, the idea of a trial mentoring program was established. Using a method of supporting individuals to shadow Workplace Learning Mentors the program aims to create a supportive culture to make change, where the change may be quite daunting for some individuals. This approach incorporates adult learning principles; allows for continued support, and promotes not just a passive ‘visit’, but ensures that an implementation of workplace delivery will occur.

Based on the evidence above, change agents clearly have significant impacts on their organisations. As an example, Diane Noel notes:

Participation in the Reframing the Future National Change Agents Program has greatly assisted Swinburne School of Engineering to implement its 2005 re-structure and implementation of Senior Educator roles in an effective manner. Benefit has been gained by myself in terms of developing and enhancing my skills as a change agent and the School and its management team have been able to access more professional development than what would have been possible without the funding provided.
Assisting industry

A number of the change agents impacted on their industries, such as Patrick Gavaghan who commented on his impact on industry:

> A major challenge that affected the floor covering sector of the industry was the lack of understanding of the roles of the Skill Council and ITABs and the failure of those organisations to respond to industry. I was able to work with the MSA & ITABs to promote both their role to industry and the industries need in VET changes.

> Due to concerns from the industry I was able to work with the ITABs and Skills councils to provide better communication and clearer lines of responsibilities for varies activities in the VET sector.

> Through my facilitating of a web-based conference program I was able to develop an informal network of associations across Australia. This has resulted in the associations mitigating (sic) better with their clients, other Associations, ITABS, Training providers and members of the associations.

> Another side issue has been the floor covering Association’s increase in confidence in speaking to the general public regarding floor-covering issues.

David Morgan reported on the business benefits for organisations with which he worked:

> In developing individual members of the industry the project was couch as a business development program supported by action oriented planning workshops (underpinned by balanced scorecard methodologies). All organisations involved have reported enhancements to their professional business activity, across all four scorecard dimensions (one of which is customers/client orientation).

Change agent Leanne Shephard from Workplace Capabilities in NSW aimed to break the traditional mould of how the national system is implemented by enterprises, through promoting her new model:

> The challenge I aimed to address in this program was to break the current “traditional” mould of how the National Training Framework (NTF) is utilised by enterprises by developing a Competency Framework model for enterprises. The model is based on integrating the NTF with human resource systems and workplace learning strategies.

Patrick Gavaghan from the Council of Textile & Fashion Industries of Australia in Melbourne was proud of his successes in influencing his industry regarding national training:

> I was able to influence the re-aligning of the trade qualification to industry current needs by raising it as an issue to various groups. MSA then convened a major Training Package review. This has resulted in wider industry input and major changes to the qualification including flexibility, alignment and streaming options.

> There is a critical shortage of qualified floor covers across Australia. I was able to unite the industry and developed a skill shortage audit. This is being collated and sent to the Federal government to review and determine if it meets the skills shortage criteria. This is a major change for the industry regarding working together for a common goal.

Skilling of VET change agents

Annie Archer focused on implementing a mentoring scheme to support staff to change “from a campus based, classroom-focused delivery approach, to delivery in the workplace”. As a result of participating in the sub-program, she now finds her capability as a change agent has increased:

> I am becoming much more aware of the importance of communication at all levels of the organisation and its role in relieving fear and anxiety for staff going through change. Also, to never ignore the skills and knowledge that staff bring to any process, rather than dismissing their previous experiences.

Sue Hubbard summarised the outcomes for her as a change agent:

> I have used SWOT analysis before, however I now feel that I am able to tackle the information that comes from this better by using other problem solving and decision making tools in order to use the information that has been generated.

> I believe that I have a greater understanding of the impact of change on different people and the awareness not to make assumptions about how people will respond.

Examples of the impact of Reframing the Future on the individual change agents include the following example from Diane Noel who reported on the value of the sub-program for her:

> heightened awareness of my stance towards change, work and the people who populate the School of Engineering at Swinburne University of Technology – TAFE

> improved ability to think creatively, reflectively and with focus and to take action to achieve pre-determined outcomes

> a validation of the change management concepts and theories that I have been exposed to over many years and a developing confidence in my ability to use my change agent skills.
David Morgan summarised the benefits for him, in learning more about resistance:

I became aware that resistance is easier to deal with (from a change perspective) than complacency. Resistors, by their stance, ‘show their hand’, whereas complacent participants tend to ‘go with the flow’ until it becomes uncomfortable (at which point the change project has inevitably moved on). As a result of extensive preparatory work and planning of the entire change process resistance was far lower than expected. I think that part of the reason for this was that each change activity was focused on changing milieu, thus as the project progressed so did the climate for change.

Leanne Shephard benefited from learning that she needed to focus on engaging her audience:

In relation to my own development, my biggest challenge was to focus on how to initiate change through engagement – unlocking the key ingredient to change management. For me the challenge was to keep focussed on how to engage my audience as opposed to reaching my goals. Although I have not yet undertaken extensive engagement, I now know how to go about it through learning more about the change management process and my role as a change agent.

Catherine Curry learnt how to deal with resistance to change:

I now realise the biggest change in my skills to deal with resistance to change, came from within. I needed to be able to understand people better and to not be so hung up on what ‘I knew’ was right, but what each individual perceived was right. I learnt far more about others and in doing so learnt far more about myself. The opportunities to read, network, learn and try, meant I had a fantastic opportunity for action learning. In doing so I think my skills in reading people and dealing with resistance to change improved measurably.

David Morgan found that his profile as a National Training Change Agent enabled him to influence more organisations:

Formal involvement in the program has raised my ‘profile’ amongst professional networks and peers that are aware of Reframing the Future’s work. This has lead to numerous invitations to present this project and its underpinning methodology at conferences and seminars. One of the consequences of taking up these invitations has been the need to thoroughly ‘understand’ the topic so as to be able to withstand the scrutiny of peers.

Patrick Gavaghan reported how he learnt to be patient and to negotiate better:

Due to the fragmented organisation within the industry I had to develop patience and accept that the pace of change required would be at a pace the industry could work with. My negotiating skills has also improved allowing me to conduct negotiations at different levels, with a wider range of clients over a similar timeframe.

I have also increased by project manager skills. I do still need to work on delegation skills as this has proven to the challenge for me.

Summary points
Annie Archer from TAFE Tasmania reported on her growth in capability, in a manner which typified the growth in awareness of all the change agents:

I believe that my capabilities as a change agent are improving, although I still have some way to go. I have tried to apply the skills I am gaining through this process to other areas of major change that I am working with, in particular our Team Leader Training and Development Program, as well as our Leadership Program. This has allowed me to slow down my approach to these important programs, where before I would have leapt in feet first without regard for change management processes.

Key themes in this chapter were that the specialist skills of a change agent are valuable for undertaking the following tasks:
• helping VET practitioners to develop an improved client focus
• assisting the implementation of a new Training Package
• improving approaches by VET providers
• increasing industry’s understanding of the national training system.

Change agency is a high-level but necessary skill area in VET, given the complexities of the sector and its changing nature.

KEY RESOURCES
Reframing the Future resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks included the following available from www.reframingthefuture.net
Mitchell, J.G. and Young, S. (2002), Strategic management and change management and the National Training Framework, Core Ideas, ANTA, Melbourne.
4. FORMING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

This chapter describes how VET practitioners developed new skills through participating in communities of practice in 2005. These skills ranged from developing learning resources and assessment tools through to building strategic alliances between industry and providers – activities designed to improve the implementation of the national training system.

Key insights

Key insights provided by convenors of communities of practice in their final reports included the following:

- Communities of practice can be effective mechanisms for building relationships between disparate and dispersed groups who are focused on implementing the national training system.
- Communities of practice are sometimes ideal opportunities for providers to interact with industry and for rival providers to explore common ground, hence improving the overall VET sector.
- Communities of practice can extend the knowledge base of each participant and lead to changes in their practice.
- Communities of practice are not straightforward to foster and convene – for example, some participants might feel marginalised, depending on the composition of the community – but resolving such an obstacle can open up new learning opportunities for participants.
- Communities of practice can enable participants to become familiar with good practices elsewhere in VET and can enable groups of participants to positively influence their colleagues who are not members of the community.

Background

This chapter provides insights from convenors of communities of practice from their final reports for 2005. Thirty one communities of practice were formed. Five of these projects focused specifically on the TAA04 Training Package.

Communities of practice are defined broadly as groups of people who share a common interest or passion and who interact regularly. Participants in this sub-program are introduced to and expected to familiarise themselves in the literature on the nature and applications of communities of practice, and to develop communities of practice that suit their particular context.

The overall goal of this sub-program is as follows:

- to enable VET practitioners to develop communities of practice – reaching across organisations, industries and borders – to better implement the national training system.

Key resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks are cited below. A fuller list is provided at the end of this section.


Collaborating builds relationships

Collaboration within a community of practice can improve industry training and longer-term industry-provider relationships, as indicated by the statements below. For instance, Pam Jonas from Group Training Association Victoria found that “to a large extent the benefits … for individuals … translate to their respective organisations”:  

Involvement in the community of practice enabled organisations to have staff members undertake professional development and develop new understandings and approaches to issues. The benefits to organisations stem from better able staff who can apply new learning in their daily activities and share this with other staff in achieving the overall strategic goals of their organisations.

Sharon Guscott from DFEEST in SA formed a national community of public providers of VET to assist the review and implementation of the Community Services and Health Training Packages across Australia. She found that her national community of practice was effective in building relationships as follows:

Building and/or enhancing the relationship between key Community Services and Health public provider personnel in each jurisdiction and the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council (CSH ISC).

The formation of a community that the CSH Industry Skills Council can liaise with regarding the implementation of its products within the public provider of VET.

She also found that the knowledge base of each participant was enhanced and that this will have flow-on effects in other networks:

Increasing the individual knowledge base of participants through discussion amongst the community of practice and the involvement of guest speakers with expertise related to VET and/or the Community Services and Health industry. This will have a flow-on effect to the teacher/facilitator networks facilitated by participants within each jurisdiction.

A community of practice convened by Dorne Wallace from Central Queensland Institute of TAFE resulted in inter-organisational collaboration:

By establishing a professional support network, strong working relationships have been built which will not only promote sharing, communication and goodwill within the VET sector, but also facilitate inter-organisational collaboration which is an important ingredient in a truly national system. This is already evident in several partnerships which have developed in the life of this project, in response to student and practitioner needs.

David Jones formed a community of practice among representatives of the Agrifood Industry Skills Council and found there were significant benefits for participants new to VET:

The face to face sessions provided a forum for the dissemination and sharing of knowledge which could not have occurred without this form of contact. I feel the greatest benefits were gained by those present who were new to VET and were confronted by a wealth of knowledge of and experience in assessment methodologies of more experienced practitioners. This was reinforced by the feedback gained from participants. There was a significant transfer of knowledge between all RTO participants and the Industry representatives who were made more aware of the variety of management, auditing and financial frameworks under which RTOs operate within the VET system.

Collaborating requires skills and effort

Communities of practice encourage participants to commit to the process of constructing new relationships and investigating new ideas together, so it is not surprising that communities of practice meet barriers that need to be overcome. Helen Strickland from South East Education and Training Association noted how her community overcame two common barriers, marginalisation and stratification, in order to achieve cohesiveness:

The key challenge faced by the community throughout the project has been marginalisation. Focussed discussion about data which has been gathered by survey and visits to individual businesses has successfully lessened this issue.

In addition, the core group of members is a small part of the industry as a whole, so the risk of stratification, with distance between this core group and other participants, was an issue. The decision to survey and visit all participants, the distribution of minutes and project updates alleviated this issue. In addition the forum held for all participants created a strong sense of cohesiveness.

Instead of avoiding differences between individuals within her community of practice, Elaine Hall from the Textile, Clothing, Footwear and Leather Industry Advisory Board, used the differences as the basis of learning:

The group was diverse and brought different agendas, methodologies and solutions to the community. Issues that were raised were sometimes challenging and provocative. Differences within the group were the very basis for learning by the participants and the facilitator used these constructively to increase understanding and knowledge.

The group operated in an atmosphere where opinions were valued and there was respect for differences. Opinions were examined, challenged then researched and follow up discussions enabled the group to further expand, accept or reject ideas or suggestions.
**Skill building by individual participants**

Individuals participating in a community of practice are often drawn from a range of organisations within the system, including enterprises, industry associations and training providers. This diverse range of participants often benefit from interaction with other VET practitioners and from the exposure to best practice across the system. Such benefits are highlighted by Pam Jonas from Group Training Association (GTA) of Victoria:

> The opportunity to forge new relationships which cross the traditional roles/responsibilities of those involved in other GTA and VET networks (e.g. managers usually networking with other managers, field officers with like etc).

This community of practice was deliberately more diverse and cross-functional and the members have enjoyed their interaction with one another.

The participants benefited from the opportunity to put aside the competitive aspect of their daily role while engaged in the community of practice and developed a sense of trust with the other members which enabled them to share freely knowledge and practices that can contribute to areas of common importance.

A key to the learning that occurred across this mixture of participants was the establishment of a safe learning environment, reported Pam Jonas:

> They were assisted to build relationships with other members of the community of practice largely by providing them with a ‘safe learning environment’ in which to talk together about common issues/challenges across their different companies and to help them to establish some strategies for shared action. Participants shared information freely when they met and when they ‘talked’ across the email.

Christine Hayes from Swinburne University of Technology, TAFE Division, reported that the sessional staff involved in her community of practice appreciated the opportunity to meet with other staff and reduce their isolation:

> There is no doubt that individuals felt part of a common purpose. The community of practice has been instrumental in creating and strengthening partnerships, networks and enabled individuals not to feel like they were doing it alone. As a quote from one of our community of practice members highlights: “as a sessional staff, it was a good opportunity to not only meet but interact with other staff. Sometimes one can feel isolated as a ‘sessional’ and sharing experiences with others was useful”.

**Capability building by groups of VET practitioners**

Communities of practice enable groups of practitioners to become empowered by accessing new information and noting effective practices. This empowerment can benefit not only the participants, but those they interact with in the sector, as explained by Karen Nicholas from Learning Options:

> Effective networking of practitioners delivering the TAA04 Package was appreciated by all, as was the opportunity to discuss the delivery and assessment strategies of peers delivering the package. There were some components of the package that were unsure of or had difficulty interpreting. These were discussed, along with AQTF Standards 7, 8 & 9 as a group and deciphered. The group also took advantage of the ability to collaboratively ask questions and gain clarification of some aspects of the package from TAE (ACT Dept of Education and Training), ACTARC (ACT Accreditation and Registration Council) and DEST (Department of Education Science and Technology).

> We were also thrilled when we had some new members travel from Sydney as they had heard of the group and wanted to be involved. The community of practice discussed and agreed on best practice methods whilst sharing information and ideas, as well as personal skills and knowledge.

Margaret Thornton from TAFESA commented on how one small piece of information often led to a dynamic exchange of information among participants in her community of practice:

> Opportunity for dynamic exchange of information...dynamic in the sense that from one small piece of information, other pieces were able to be added to enlarge and develop the information.

A community of practice convened by Jacky Ryles from Capital Careers Pty Ltd came to be called the "VET Translators":

> Our community became known as the VET Translators; a group of people that share an overall view of commitment to the national training system and help others translate it to make it meaningful in their context – working within enterprises, within Registered Training Organisations, with business and industry (including small business), with indigenous communities and equity groups.

**Improving VET providers**

Staff from VET providers commonly find that participating in communities of practice increases their
confidence and enhances their motivation. For example, Wayne Chrimes and Helen Bath from the Gordon Institute of TAFE report on the usefulness of participation in a community of practice:

One of the major benefits for the community of practice members is the knowledge that there is support available through the networks that have been developed, either by telephone or the web forum.

We are currently developing a matrix which will profile the various Training Packages and Programs that are being delivered within the Corrections facilities we have contacted around Australia. This will provide a valuable resource for community of practice members and further enhance the usefulness of membership of the community of practice.

Christine Hayes from Swinburne University of Technology, TAFE Division, found that participating in a Reframing the Future project gave her community of practice legitimacy in others’ eyes. Leveraging off this legitimacy, the community put “focused energy” into its activities and involved individuals who may not normally have participated:

We have greatly benefited from the funding made available to establish this community of practice. Having a project under the auspices of Reframing the Future gave the community of practice legitimacy in the eyes of both the organisations and the individuals. The funding made it possible for some focussed energy to be put into development and for us to involve individuals who would otherwise have not participated (sessional staff).

Providers from all seven states and territories will benefit from the community of practice convened by Bettina Hiscock from the Canberra Institute of Technology:

The organisation will benefit from an accounting program that has had input from representatives from seven states and territories. The organisation will also benefit from its members having a better understanding of the programs offered by other states and improved consistency in interpretation of the training package and the UOC’s. This will assist with recognition for students moving interstate.

Providers across the ACT training market were affected by a community of practice, reported Sharon Carter-Figueiredo from the Association of Providers of Training Services:

Participants were exposed to differing ways of working and differing points of view about practice. This led to some lively debates and insights into new ways of working. This has led to changes in work practice for some of the participants, flowing onto their organisations and supporting the development of a dynamic, innovative and responsive ACT training market.

Impacting positively on industry

Through participating in communities of practice, VET providers can consult with industry stakeholders, for example to enhance and validate their delivery and assessment practices in line with AQTF requirements. A diverse group of businesses that were industry competitors found they could all benefit in a community of practice by focusing on common issues such as future planning in relation to skills shortages, reported Elaine Hall from the Textile, Clothing, Footwear and Leather Industry Advisory Body:

Communication was crucial in establishing with participants a reason to be involved in the first place. There was a potential risk to combine businesses that were competitors, but this was quickly realised in early meetings that the issues were not about business practices but about common issues that skills development and future planning for skill shortages and skill gaps was imperative for the business. The value that was gained from sharing information was clearly a benefit and not a threat.

Mal Gammon from the WA Arts Sport and Recreation Industry Training Council found that the development of a combined voice from industry is possible:

The equine industry now has a combined voice and a forum for discussing issues of a mutual nature even though their individual areas of training are covered in five (different) Training Packages.

Isabel Maurer from the Department of Further Education Employment Science and Technology (DFEEST) in South Australia reported that her community of practice benefited industry participants in a number of ways:

- providing workplace assessment. Participants learnt from each other about how to provide RPL (recognition of prior learning) and CT (credit transfer) services in close liaison with the workplace supervisors and the candidates themselves.
- developing multiple relationships between training providers, industry and individual enterprises. The participants shared with each other how they formed multiple and many-layered relationships, to underpin their service provision.

Isabel Maurer concludes: “In general, this community provided VET personnel with a mechanism for developing the knowledge, relationships and expertise required to meet the challenge of the NTF (national training framework).”
Summary points

Communities of practice are challenging to form because they require a high level of commitment from participants, but in encouraging trust and goodwill they can often deliver high-order benefits such as the sharing of information and ideas that can improve the whole sector. For example, participants in communities of practice often discover a range of different topics and issues that even competitors can talk about openly, such as improvements to Training Packages.

Communities of practice can provide excellent opportunities for members from different types of organisations to explore complex VET issues, so communities of practice fit well with an educational sector that is complex because of the need for providers to work very closely with industry to ensure the system remains responsive to changing needs.

KEY RESOURCES

Reframing the Future resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks included the following available from www.reframingthefuture.net


Mitchell, J.G. (2002), The Potential for Communities of Practice to underpin the National Training Framework, ANTA, Melbourne.


5. DEVELOPING INDUSTRY TRAINING NETWORKS

This chapter describes how VET practitioners developed new skills through building and participating in industry training networks that were focused on implementing the national training system.

Key insights

Key insights provided by convenors of industry training networks in their final reports included the following:

• Industry training networks are useful mechanisms for providers to collaborate with industry in order to enhance industry knowledge of the national training system and in order to inform providers about what industry wants from training.
• Industry training networks can create goodwill, trust and sharing between providers and industry on a national scale, bringing together stakeholders from across state/territory borders.
• Industry training networks can impact widely across an industry, as sometimes participants in a network share their learning with other networks.

Background

This chapter provides insights from convenors of industry training networks from their final reports for 2005. Twenty four industry training networks were formed during the year. For Reframing the Future, “industry training networks” are networks consisting of both providers and industry representatives that focus on improving or extending accredited training.

The overall goal of this sub-program is as follows:

to enable VET practitioners to establish innovative and effective networks between industry and providers and other stakeholders, to improve the implementation of the national training system.

Key resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks are cited below. A fuller list is provided at the end of this section.


Impacting on a range of industries

This sub-program impacts on a wide range of industries and enterprises. For example, Dr Damira Lopez from Victoria University’s Western Business Enterprise Centre reported on how small business training in the western suburbs of Melbourne benefited from her project’s development of a Small Business Industry Training Network:

A network has been formed that involves small business trainers, industry (small business operators), other RTOs and small business mentors and coaches.

The network has provided an opportunity for dialogue between industry and RTOs to ensure that small business training is industry led and demand driven.

The network has increased industry awareness of the Business Services Training Package and contributed to the implementation of the national training system, that is an increase in RPL requests, increased interest in on-line learning.

The feedback from industry will contribute to better quality small business training.

The project has assisted in improving staff skills in networking and played a major part in VET practitioners’ professional growth, for example staff members participated in presentations to industry, gave workshops and prepared materials for the project events.

Sandra Stott and Susan Moustaka reported on the major achievements of an industry training network within the childcare industry, sponsored by Central TAFE in Western Australia:
The trust and goodwill that developed between competing RTOs (RTOs are generally autonomous and competitive in WA). The industry training network highlighted that this is an outmoded and very traditional way of operating, and not in the best interests of the thoughtful development of industry-led training.

The collaboration and willingness to share and the development of trust and understanding between very diverse groups of people – this has led to building strong relationships between industry, training bodies and regulatory bodies. Through this the industry training network has determined each area’s need and issues and identified that (Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE) Innoven’s model (enterprise-centric, leaner-centric) is a way we should be headed in order to meet training needs of the childcare industry, also that the innovation process is the key to successful business. Other achievements include:

- the opportunity to share information about critical issues in a safe environment
- the growth of the network, new members are still joining
- the commitment to continue the network, including plans for an industry forum in March 2006.

John Cross, Executive Officer of Museums Australia, reported on the achievement of his national industry training network:

For me, the greatest achievement was to bring a diverse group of people together and have this group exchange ideas and information freely. Because funding for Museums comes largely through local and state governments, it is often hard to establish national level dialogue about universal issues. Usually geographically specific concerns and interests dominate. In the face to face meeting of the Museums Australia Vocational Education and Workplace Learning Network, there was a strong sense of esprit de-corps and valuable discussion of common issues, rather than statements of regional difference.

Eddie Taburo from TAFE NSW South West Institute (SWSI) captured some of the excitement in his network and resulting partnerships:

The community has developed as a vibrant, intrinsically driven network which has now developed partnerships between TAFE NSW SWSI, Sydney Turf Club, Campbelltown Catholic Cub and Pacific Hotels group.

Developing new or regional networks

Some industry training networks focused on creating partnerships that previously did not exist or were underdeveloped. For example, Arnold Rowntree of the Advanced Technologies Training Capability Alliance (ATTCA) network, convened by Swinburne University of Technology TAFE Division, reported a range of achievements from the project. The project involved collaboration between seven Victorian TAFE Institutes with industry clients on six pilot implementations of the Competitive Manufacturing Training Package. The achievements included:

- The CMI implementations were in one or two cases continuations of existing institute/client relationships but in all other cases resulted in the establishment of valuable ongoing training relationships
- The Competitive Manufacturing pilots were successful and will result in case studies that will potentially win access to client networks and create demand. ATTCA members are planning a joint marketing strategy.
- Discussions between members enabled ‘best practice’ to be commonly understood and pursued.
- ATTCA members shared information on capital equipment funding in order to gain economies of scale when approaching equipment vendors
- ATTCA member institutes have adopted a protocol for announcing intention to tender on large projects where other institutes are required as venture partners. Members have shared information on strengths and capability.
- ATTCA members jointly evaluated software for the purpose of gaining stronger negotiating position with supplier.
- A strategic plan has been formulated to allow teachers to specialise and develop expertise in CAD CAM software and then make that expertise available to students across the system.

Some industry training networks focused on developing partnerships which were specifically focused on increasing the quality and quantity of training, for instance, in one industry or region. DESART provided an example of a project team that developed partnerships focused on increasing the quality and quantity of training in the visual arts industry in Central Australian Indigenous communities. Jill Gientzotis and Graeme Smith reported:

The network has established the basis of collaboration between the following: between art centres; between organisations; between governments; between RTOs and art centres; between RTOs and Desart; between RTOs

Without the collaboration and participation of DESART members, the knowledge of the Business Services (Small Business Management) Training Package and the national training system at the beginning of the project was
fairly limited except for the RTOs. The project has developed that knowledge by offering insight and more detailed understanding of what is involved in the delivery of small business management training within the national training framework. We have observed high levels of interest in flexible learning options among small business operator as well as more enthusiastic approach to small business training in general among the network members.

The staff involved in the project have also benefited greatly from the project by acquiring a better knowledge of industry needs and standards that will allow us as an RTO to review some of the assessment strategies and teaching methods.

Sustaining collaborative networks

The outcome sought from the sub-program was “the development and sustaining of collaborative networks with industry that assist with the implementation of the national training system”. Sandra Stott and Susan Moutsaka of Central Institute of TAFE in Western Australia reported an example of a common theme in developing and sustaining networks – about defining a common issue and building relationships, as follows:

*Pruskak and Cohen (2001) find that because knowledge lies in groups, networks are the bases of knowledge sharing, as long as there is a trusting relationship. Therefore knowledge can be increased and shared in this emotionally secure environment.*

The level of collaboration between members varied. Some of the participants already knew each other and they were able to work comfortably and easily immediately. For others it took time before they spoke in front of the group.

Due to the critical shortage of childcare workers (a situation that affects all members of this network) a central goal was selected by all members as their priority concern. This goal was to find methods and means to attract and retain childcare workers. All members collaborated to achieve a solution.

Moderate collaboration was achieved between the RTOs. Collaboration centred around the formal meeting with discussion mainly surrounding clarification of training, clustering units of competency and special courses and skills recognition processes.

In another example, also involving the child care industry, Chris Mahoney of the Kath Dickson Institute of Early Childhood Studies in Queensland, set up a network of multiple local childcare services and training providers. She reported as follows:

For some participants this was the first time they had come face-to-face with the realities of the NTF and the formal and informal discussions with RTO representatives and New Apprenticeship Centre staff enabled people to focus on various aspects:

- Clarification of the regulation and legislative aspects of the system eg gaining an understanding and consistency around scheduled release time for trainees and how this could be best implemented in the childcare environment.
- Specific information and knowledge of the Training Package and details on particular units of competency. In this instance, many of the questions people had about the training package and competencies were due to the fact they did not have a deep level of understanding of the competencies and many of their questions were easily answered and within the scope of the package.
- Looking at a range of options for ‘pooling’ of trainees from smaller centres is a way to establish learner cohorts to maximise RTO and trainee time in training delivery and support.

In addition, the convenors of these two networks had dialogue at Reframing the Future national forums and are now sharing their experiences and strategies.

In another a national network, John Cross from Museums Australia reported that there were three clear areas in which collaboration occurred as a result of the network activity:

- Developing and piloting a RPL/RCC program. One member of the network has received money from their state government to develop easy RPL program. The network has allowed people from other states to find out about the program and express their interest in helping out. As a result people from at least three other states have become involved in contributing to draft materials and possibly in piloting the program in other states.
- Developing project based learning. As a result of the network, several participants have agreed to an ongoing sharing of ideas, reports of projects and material relating to project based learning.
- Introducing learning circles. Two people introduced the concept to the group and it is likely that other members will introduce the methodology.

Practitioners benefiting from engagement

Participating individuals derived many different benefits. For example, Tarnya Cruikshank from Business SA summarised outcomes for individuals in a project involving RTOs and the construction industry:
The network provided a range of opportunities for individuals. The impact of these outcomes will vary depending on the levels of participation but have included:

- Direct and indirect enhancement of VET practitioners, industry leaders, DFEEST Quality Branch, OCBA to share information, to learn from and about each other and extend personal and professional networks.
- Increased understanding of RPL, mentoring and supervising using alternative on the job training and assessment strategies, Contracts of Training, licensing arrangements in relation to occupations and training packages, flexible off the job learning methodologies, the role of various agencies within the training system.
- An opportunity to review and improve own practices and build professional skills to improve quality and consistency.
- An opportunity to network with other stakeholders, either within their sector (peer support) e.g. TAFESA, or small business or across organisations/sectors. They feel they will not need to cope with issues alone and feel comfortable to call on these networks in the future.
- Greater knowledge of resources, contacts/connections, links and information available.

Warren West from the Floor Covering Association of Victoria facilitated a national network involving the floor covering industry. The outcomes for individuals from this project included the following:

- being able to discuss critical issues with experienced people from similar organisations; expanding individual networks; sharing information and ideas; becoming better informed of state differences and regulations for IR and training; feeling at ease in asking questions and getting good responses; and, understanding that other Associations had similar challenges.

Project convenor Steve Parkinson from TAFE NSW MECAT Centre reported on what participants gained from his project:

- participants gained an overall improved understanding of the necessary strategies required for TAFE to effectively implement the Competitive Manufacturing Training Package (CTMP) and support workforce skill development requirements of industry.
- In addition, participants gained an understanding of benefits and elements of fostering effective and sustainable collaborative networks and partnerships, and the CTMP and how it can be a catalyst for flexible, adaptable and innovative workforce skill development.

Danielle Andrews from the Motor Traders Association of NSW noted the benefits of informal communication:

- The benefits were many, with one particular area being the networking that occurred after the session. During the period between meetings, much of the networking established links amongst individuals that provided positive outcomes for those involved. The opportunity to have an informal coffee with someone and solve a problem that previously had no solution was an incredible bonus.
- The greatest change for the group was to finally obtain an understanding of the individual pieces that together form the training system. As each session had a different focus, the ‘jigsaw’ pieces ultimately formed a complete picture.

Lynne Stockdale from the Victorian Food Industry Training Board cited the breadth of achievements of her network:

- Greater understanding of processes – many said they were going to set up assessment committees at their institutes to achieve broader assessment validation and moderation. Other comments on evaluation sheets said
- Reinforced their training and assessment approach
- More informed about the requirements of the AQTF
- Understood the process for validation and moderation
- Upgraded their assessment tools
- Discussion helped understanding.

Craig Walker Australian Central Credit Union highlighted the new level of sharing in his network:

- This was one of the first times a collection of people from the Financial Services Industry has come together. With the involvement of Enterprises, Industry Skills Council, Financial Sector Union and RTO providers a new level of sharing among these individuals developed.

Providers and industry benefiting from collaboration
Arnold Rowntree of ATCCA at Swinburne University is confident that participants in his network will realise bottom line business benefits for their own provider organisations:
Member institutes have availed themselves of the opportunity to participate in CMI pilot implementations and interactions between staff at multiple levels in member institutes have ensured high quality. Member institutes have enhanced their ability to participate in joint ventures and tackle major international tenders. Members have set in place a process to enable them to negotiate as a group with capital equipment. Client companies have had uniformly positive outcomes from the pilots. Their bottom line business benefits are likely to open doors within their own networks by enthusiastic word of mouth referrals.

The network convened by Damira Lopez from Victoria University attracted 200 participants to an expo:

A Small Business Expo and Forum attracted 200 participants, feedback indicated that the event helped them to better understand the Business Services (Small Business Management) Training Package and better access the network.

The network convened by Eddie Taburo from TAFE NSW South West Institute clarified that industry wanted more training in the workplace:

The project has focussed on the demand for a better understanding of work based training. Working closely with industry has allowed the network project to understand the need to assess and develop training through customising/ contextualised training each establishment needs. One of the outcomes from the project was industry needed and wanted training in the workplace. This has lead to industry partnerships that will provide better opportunities for project partners, (as well as) students and trainees.

Knowledge sharing about the national training system by a network can lead to outcomes for industry. Dr Damira Lopez from Victoria University reported on the impact of the knowledge shared and generated by her project for both industry and VET practitioners:

The knowledge of the Small Business Management Training Package and the national training system at the beginning of the project was fairly limited except for the RTOs. The project has developed that knowledge by offering insight and more detailed understanding of what is involved in the delivery of small business Management training within the national training framework. We have observed high levels of interest in flexible learning options among small business operators as well as more enthusiastic approach to small business training in general among the network members.

The (RTO) staff involved in the project have also benefited greatly from the project by acquiring a better knowledge of industry needs and standards that will allow us as an RTO to review some of the assessment strategies and teaching methods.

The network has brought together individuals, business and the community at large. It has provided individuals with access to information and resources and an opportunity to gain and develop knowledge by being part of a network (62% of participants stated that the network plays an important part in knowledge creation and 99% are willing to continue to support the network).

The network has had a positive effect on uptake of clients in small business management training (20% increase in enrolments for early 2006).

Danielle Andrews from the Motor Traders Association in NSW reported on how dealing with sensitive issues through the network benefited both industry organisations and RTOs:

Previously, considerable misunderstanding and confusion were a part of the culture in dealing with this (RTO) group. Once the participants had the opportunity to deal first-hand with the training provider, solutions were found and other encounters from that point in time were positive and outcome based. RTOs also gained greater credos, once the members understood the rigours that they encounter on a daily basis to remain an accredited body.

Numerous outcomes for all kinds of organisations involved in a project sponsored by the Victorian Food Industry Training were reported by Lynne Stockdale:

Organisations have commented on the benefits of:

- Getting people together and talking. Building relationships was highly valued (this was facilitated by making the most of opportunities due to changes in organisations eg inviting organisations which were moving away from being enterprise RTOs so they could form a relationship with an RTO).
- Drawing together new stakeholders (the university sector attending workshops was ground breaking!)
- The diverse representation of the food industry (most hadn’t met before)
- Human resource managers, TAFE and private RTOs training managers and trainers realised the full extent of the knowledge that could be tapped during such events and the value of sharing knowledge across their organisations also.
- Exchange of information on future skill needs and training provision.
Summary points

Industry training networks emerge from this analysis as valuable mechanisms for creating dialogue between industry and providers about the national training system. This dialogue often leads to providers becoming more customer focused, demand driven, agile and nimble. In some cases collaborations and partnerships formed within the network then impact on the extended networks of the participants, beyond the boundaries of the project.

KEY RESOURCES

Reframing the Future resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks included the following available from www.reframingthefuture.net


Skippington, P. (2002), Learning@Work, Good Practice in Workbased Learning, ANTA, Melbourne.


6. ENHANCING TEACHING AND LEARNING NETWORKS AND ASSESSOR NETWORKS

This chapter describes how VET practitioners developed new skills through participating in teaching and learning networks and assessor networks, some of which were state-wide or national. These skills ranged from developing practical resources, to improving processes for recognition of prior learning to refining delivery strategies – all designed to improve the implementation of the national training system.

Key insights

Key insights provided by convenors of networks in their final reports included the following:

- Teaching and learning or assessor networks can facilitate a greater consistency of teaching, learning and assessment across training providers.
- Teaching and learning or assessor networks can foster a better understanding of industry standards and expectations in the workplace.
- Teaching and learning or assessor networks can encourage knowledge sharing often between providers who are normally competitors.
- Teaching and learning or assessor networks can enable a diverse range of VET practitioners to envisage, develop and strengthen innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Background

This chapter provides insights from convenors of teaching and learning networks and assessor networks from their final reports for 2005. Forty six networks were formed, involving over 1000 participants. Although no target was set for the number of networks focusing on the implementation of the TAA04, eleven projects focused on this Training Package.

The overall goal of this sub-program is as follows:

*to enable VET practitioners to establish innovative and effective networks between VET teaching and learning practitioners or assessors, to support the implementation of the national training system.*

This sub-program provides opportunities for project teams to support the implementation of recommendations of the High Level Review of Training Packages – particularly the development of a “capacity-building approach that emphasises quality, creativity, professional judgment and growth rather than simply compliance”.

Key resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks are cited below. A fuller list is provided at the end of this section.


Developing resources efficiently

A number of networks found that efficiencies were gained through the collaboration. For instance, Peter LeCornu from St John Ambulance in Canberra, noted the following achievements of his national network:

*The major achievement was the establishment of the St John TAA Trainers Network across Australia. There are currently 14 active members of the network with members from all states and territories, all involved in implementing the TAA package or purchasing TAA courses from other providers.*

*The project has made a significant contribution to the implementation of TAA in St John. If the Reframing the Future project had not been conducted, each individual state and territory would have separately developed or selected resources for the program. By establishing the network, each state and territory has cooperated in developing and evaluating resources to implement the program.*
Leanne Fitzgerald from Coonara Community House Inc found her network a great source of general information, best practice and resources:

As a new provider of community services training I found the cumulative knowledge of the network members a great source of general information, best practice and resources. Without access to this group I would most certainly have reinvented the wheel. We work in a very stressful environment at times and the opportunity to debrief with peers is essential to our success/survival/sanity! Networks such as this also provide the opportunity to work collaboratively so that human resources are maximised and delivery across the network is complimentary rather than competitive.

The network formed by the New England and North West Region Secretariat produced products to support the implementation of Training Package:

An outstanding amount of products is in development by the three focus groups that have arisen from the network in terms of the development of assessment tools that can be used regionally to support the delivery of a range of qualifications from the CHC02 Training Package. These products will be provided on CD ROM for all stakeholders to use.

Julie Proudfoot from the NSW Board of Adult and Community Education reported that her network established four online assessor networks for the four Training Package areas of TAA, IT, Community Services and Business Services.

Rediscovering confidence and passion

Participants in the network convened by Virginia Hilliard from the Australian Drilling Industry Training Committee developed increased confidence as assessors:

There is great emphasis in the industry on valid, reliable and fair assessment leading to qualifications outcomes against DRT03 in which companies, individuals and the industry can feel confident. The need for confidence in consistent and valid assessment outcomes, collection of appropriate and sufficient evidence and a valid evidence trail lies in part in the potential for legal proof of competence to be provided in the industry.

All assessors participating report confidence in an increased awareness of the industry benchmarks and in their own ability to work within those consistent parameters.

Annissa Villegas from TAFE NSW Riverina Institute found that participation in a network reignited a passion for the industry and the profession:

Working through the RPL process has forged bonds between network members who, although they work for the same Institute and deliver in the same discipline area, had never met or communicated prior to this project.

Coming together to share concerns and ideas has not only created a strong bond, it has also encouraged us to ‘think outside the square’ and reignited our passion for the industry and the profession.

Bob Taylor, Michelle Strapp and Dominic Schipano, reporting on a project sponsored by the ACT Utilities and Light Manufacturing Industry Training Board Inc (ACT ULMITB), observed that their network developed an increased knowledge of the industry’s training and assessment requirements, resulting in a more consistent approach to training delivery and assessment:

Network members have been encouraged to become ‘catalysts’ of best practice for other assessors and trainers within their organisations.

In this light, organisations, through their network membership, now have increased understanding of the industry, its training and assessment requirements, National Training Packages, the organisations that support industry training (i.e. the ACT ULMITB, Communications and Information Technology Training Ltd (CITT) and Innovation and Business Skills Australia (IBSA)) and the support materials and activities (e.g. forums, professional development, courses etc) that can be accessed through these organisations.

Through this improved level of knowledge, industry and its training partners in the ACT are now achieving a more consistent approach to training delivery and assessment. This improved approach should ultimately translate to greater uptake and more seamless implementation of the revised Information Technology Training Package.

Participation in the network has also led to business and training arrangements being established between network members outside of the network.

Kelly Edwards from Central West TAFE reported that collaboration between TAFE/Industry and TAFE/School has been exemplary in her network:

The levels of collaboration within the network easily reflect our diagrammatic representation of the ‘open’ or ‘loose’ network. Whilst linkages for collaboration between TAFE and Schools and between TAFE and Industry were strong one of our main challenges was to forge the relationship between Schools and Industry. TAFE has too often been the ‘piggy in the middle’. Whilst collaborative efforts have seen a realisation of the values and goals between school and industry we would possibly not consider this relationship as sustainable beyond the life of this project.
Collaboration however between TAFE/Industry and TAFE/School has been exemplary with both sectors having strong input in varied ways for the project. Schools for example have participated strongly in the pre-assessment validation of assessment tools and tasks where Industry has provided much needed information in terms of ‘which’ qualifications to pursue, assessment strategy and relevant employability skills. The recognition by the school sector regarding the rigour and vigour for the development of competency based assessment tasks has seen a renewed positive outlook.

Enhancing practice

The impact on an individual participant of a Reframing the Future network can range from the development of basic skills and knowledge, to the individual improving his or her practice for the benefit of students and the organisation. Celeste Howden from Manufacturing Learning Australia noted an increased awareness in her network’s members that there are still areas where learning can occur:

Increased awareness that there are still areas where we can all learn and develop, especially in the current environment where the bar is continually being raised (AQTF & auditing, regulatory requirements, Training Package requirements).

Joy Sharpe from Adult and Community Education (ACE) NSW facilitated a state-wide ACE Assessor Network involving industry, to further develop assessment practices in a range of Training Packages. She reflected on the increased awareness by some of her network members of the value of a blended approach to sharing information, which included both face to face and technological interaction:

The project has deepened the understanding (or brought home the reality) of participants that a blended approach to sharing information is what works. Technology will never replace the value of face to face meetings but it does add an option that is cost effective, provides storage of information that can be accessed at convenient times and is embraced quickly by some and ever so slowly by others.

Annissa Villegas from TAFE NSW Riverina Institute noted the positive impact on practitioners of sharing experiences and concerns in a network:

I believe that most of the participants benefited greatly from sharing experiences and concerns – often as part time VET practitioners we work alone, so just knowing that we are all working in similar ways has built our confidence and allayed some of our fears.

We have also been able to generate some ideas that may not only sustain our employment in the long term, but also better promote TAFE NSW, Riverina Institute and the Retail Training Package.

Practitioners operating at higher levels

Participants in networks often develop stronger bonds within their work teams and the ability to work at a higher performance level because of the knowledge development gained from network participation. Leanne Fitzgerald Coonara Community House Inc. comments on the benefits of “working in unity” as a result of networking:

The major achievement of our network in 2005 has been the degree of collaboration and trust that has developed between the individual members and member organisations. The strength of working in unity has been proven to us on several occasions.

The large group of casual staff in some providers are often unable to participate in professional development activities. Kelly Edwards from Central West TAFE in WA reported that casual staff within her Institute gained considerable knowledge and understanding from participating in the network:

Our casual staff learned more about the organisation in which they work and the greater framework within which it sits – “A huge thankyou! [for the project]. Not only did the network sessions help me to understand what is expected of us, it also provided us with an understanding of what goes on behind the scenes within the other areas [of the organisation] so as we can help one another to keep the wheels turning”, said Melanie Comito. “I found it very informative and it made a few procedures [AQTF] and the necessity for them much clearer. All up it was an excellent project and I think it helped make us [casuals] feel more part of the team”, said Mark McCauliffe.

Maryanne Barclay from Chisholm Institute of TAFE in Victoria also noted that sessional teachers in her Institute who have participated in Reframing the Future have now “gone on”:

Our casual staff learned more about the organisation in which they work and the greater framework within which it sits – “A huge thankyou! [for the project]. Not only did the network sessions help me to understand what is expected of us, it also provided us with an understanding of what goes on behind the scenes within the other areas [of the organisation] so as we can help one another to keep the wheels turning”, said Melanie Comito. “I found it very informative and it made a few procedures [AQTF] and the necessity for them much clearer. All up it was an excellent project and I think it helped make us [casuals] feel more part of the team”, said Mark McCauliffe.

Maryanne Barclay from Chisholm Institute of TAFE in Victoria also noted that sessional teachers in her Institute who have participated in Reframing the Future have now “gone on”:

to take up further professional development opportunities, including undertaking accredited qualifications. In these instances, the involvement with the Reframing the Future project provided the trigger for developing a greater sense of connectedness to the organisation and interest in the professional development opportunities available to all staff.

Rob Young from TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute (SWSI) found higher levels of collaboration between individuals than between organisations in his network:
There was more collaboration and sharing between the project members than there was between the RTOs. This is one of the areas that needs a lot more work. Some RTOs said they didn’t have the funding to be involved, some said they wouldn’t fund involvement of their staff and one RTO said they would do their own thing and didn’t want to be involved with any other RTO.

Individuals were fairly happy to share materials, approaches and ideas, although some still see that what they have developed belongs to them alone. This is another area that needs work to bring down the barriers.

One positive example of collaboration occurred when I was invited to participate in the Newcastle validation project to present what we were doing in SWSI. It turned out that they were doing something similar to our project, although on a smaller scale. The end result was that we decided to work together on developing the question bank for the CAVN website. Newcastle developed a bank of questions for the OH&S UoC and we worked on the next group. We now have a substantial number of questions for all teachers to access.

VET organisations benefiting from networks’ ideas

Networks can impact positively on VET organisations, varying from the provision of professional development for staff, to the development of improved partnerships and business development opportunities, to the recommendation of changes to policies. For instance, Wing-Yin Chan-Lee from DFEEST SA reported that her language literacy and numeracy (LLN) network had influenced policy decision makers:

One major achievement that exceeded the scope of the action plan was that the network has been successful in influencing senior management and decision makers at organisational and departmental levels through demonstrating the rationale, methodologies and benefits for integration of language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) with vocational training. The network has raised high level awareness of the national and international trend of multidisciplinary approaches of LLN in VET. Recently, some concrete changes have been made at systemic level that will support the integration of LLN with vocational training. Examples as follow:

The recently released Pre-Apprenticeship Training tender by Skills Formation Directorate of Department of Further Education, Science and Technology (DFEEST) has specified the involvement of LLN programs to support learners in pre-apprenticeship training in the selection criteria (this explicit requirement has not happened before). Resource allocation from DFEEST has considered allowing flexibility in moving the resources between Programs to encourage LLN program to be embedded in vocational programs. Hence the message of the benefits of integration and sharing the responsibility of meeting the LLN needs of learners has been heard.

Maryanne Barclay from Chisholm Institute of TAFE gave the example of how a 2003 Reframing the Future project on mentoring is still impacting on the Institute and then argues that networks benefit not just the individual participant but also the participants’ organisations:

Mentoring skill development was conducted as part of a 2003 RTF project. This has had continuing benefits for the organisation as the mentors apply their skills on a daily basis. In some cases, the mentors have encouraged others to take up opportunities for mentoring training.

We are of the belief that anything that benefits individual staff members participating in a network also adds to the organisation. After all, what is the organisation if not the sum of the individuals who work here?

By being part of a Reframing the Future network, key training staff from St John Ambulance SA were able to access a range of services that benefited the organisation, according to Karen Henry:

The organisation’s senior training quality staff were able to access numerous Reframing activities that provided much needed professional networking and information around current practice within the VET sector. These opportunities were opened up through being part of a funded network this year. These opportunities are limited usually within our organisation and have not been able to be sourced easily through current networks within our state. The professional conversation in VET forum was an outstanding PD event for organisational staff to access.

Although Jobquest in NSW formed a small network, it enabled Jobquest to develop strategic partnerships, according to Corinne Stevenson:

Considering the size and limited amount of people involved in our project, JobQuest was pleasantly surprised with the interest our network generated from the NSW Department of Education and Training and NSW WRAPS. This assisted us to develop strategic partnerships with these stakeholders and explore possible avenues for sustaining the network and opening membership to a broader target group.

Annissa Villegas from TAFE NSW Riverina reported that a benefit of her network was the realisation of the need to influence decision makers:

According to Cohen and Prusak (Mitchell, 2004), “networks are based on collaboration and can provide access to power, information, knowledge and to other networks”; as a result of our workshops our small network has realised
that, as a united group of retail practitioners with extensive industry experience, we must not only share resources and information, but we must also access those with power in an attempt to influence Institute decision makers (or at least demonstrate the benefits of collaboration and innovation). This latter aspect is something that we hope to pursue in the new year.

Anne Carlin from Logan Institute of TAFE found that her network enabled her Institute to develop partnerships with other parties:

Through the network, participants have developed a greater understanding of the VET sector and possible training pathways for young people have been developed. Since the commencement of the network Logan TAFE has developed training partnerships with three of the organisations involved in the network to deliver accredited VET within their programs and will continue to do so with these and other organisations in 2006.

**Influencing industry attitudes**

Networks have the capacity to impact on industry attitudes. For example, Marcia Kelly from Charttes Training Advisory Council in the Northern Territory reported on the shared vision developed by her tourism network:

Building a stronger network of tour guides, operators, trainers and assessors has increased the ability for tourism to lobby for changes to licensing and legislation. By forming a strong network of people all with a shared vision will have more impact on both local and federal government.

The participants of the network voiced their need to form an association, to provide a constant link to all in the Tourism industry who want to be part of steering the ‘Big Picture’ for the NT tourism future.

Virginia Hilliard from Australian Drilling Industry Training Committee (ADITC) explained how her network of assessors developed an agreed position on the need to review elements of a Training Package standard:

A very small network of 5 assessors – all the assessors then in the industry - was created by an early Reframing the Future program in 2001. This network has lasted as an informal network of the individuals. ADITC Ltd has facilitated and extended this nucleus in the interim, with a focus on the self-employed individual assessors who do not have company support. The aim of the current project was to network a fuller range of personnel – again, probably the quantum of assessors in the industry – and to provide an opportunity for them to meet face to face.

This industry based network came to agreement on various issues including development of a recommendation to be passed on to the Resources and Infrastructure Industry Skills Council to review elements of one standard, DRTNHB24A, where legislation is not consistent across the nation but the standard requires meeting certain aspects which are legislation-dependent.

Claire Thomas from the Chamber of Minerals and Energy WA valued the opportunity for her network to take the initial steps of bringing together TAFE and the Chamber:

The challenges for this project have been varied, however the biggest challenge for this project has been the ability for an external organisation to engage with the TAFE sector and seek collaboration and active participation to the networking events.

Ongoing challenges for this project are: active participation by the VET sector; creation of links with the VET sector by industry; lack of collaboration and understanding by the two groups.

CME and the resources sector understand the critical nature of training and the value that training adds to their existing and future workforce. The industry is seeking to further enhance its linkages and relationships with the VET sector by formulating strong value based collaborative partnerships. This Reframing the Future project is an initial step to assist the two groups to come together and CME anticipated and hopes that this forum will operate for some years to come.

**Summary points**

Approaches to teaching, learning and assessment can be improved through collaboration and the sharing of ideas between practitioners. This collaboration and sharing can lead to a deeper understanding of clients’ expectations and learners’ needs and to the development of processes and resources that more adequately meet this range of expectations and needs. Collaboration and sharing increase practitioners’ confidence and their passion for their profession; enhance elements of their practice; positively impact on groups of practitioners such as sessional teachers; and influence decision-making about systemic policies and resource allocation.
KEY RESOURCES

Reframing the Future resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks included the following and are available from www.reframingthefuture.net


7. APPLYING INFORMATION AND RESEARCH

This chapter describes how VET practitioners developed new skills through participating in the sub-program on applying information and research. These skills ranged from investigating the changing role of the VET practitioner, to developing models for innovation, to making detailed recommendations for organisational implementation of the national training system.

Key insights

Key insights provided by convenors of projects in their final reports included the following:

- Applying information and research projects assisted practitioners to develop critical thinking, to identify gaps in the existing research and to question their current practice.
- Applying information and research projects resulted in the development of new strategies or recommended strategies for participating organisations.
- Applying information and research projects impacted on industries involved, and increased understanding by providers and enterprises of what each could offer the other.

Background

This chapter provides insights from the final reports for 2005 of convenors of twelve projects on applying information and research.

The overall goal of this sub-program is as follows:

to enable VET practitioners to develop skills in accessing and applying information and research findings.

A variety of proponent organisations were involved in the sub-program, including dual-sector Universities, TAFE Institutes, Adult and Community Education colleges, a body of enterprise-based registered training Organisations, a government department and a union. The 2005 projects included representatives from New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Western Australia.

Key resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks are cited below. A fuller list is provided at the end of this section.


Practitioners learning from research

VET practitioners such as RTO managers, head teacher, trainers, assessors, ACE coordinators, library staff, union representatives, Indigenous community workers, professional development coordinators, LLN specialists and executive staff were involved in the 2005 Applying Information and Research projects. Liz Renshaw, project convenor for South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE’s project, commented on the multiple roles she needed to perform in her project:

Having multiple roles and participating at different levels was challenging and demanded strong analytical and conceptual skills which I haven’t tested for a while.

Josie Rose and Louisa Ellum from The Southern Western Port Council of Adult Community Education observed how participants began to use critical judgement in their project:

Participants clearly began to use critical judgement when gradually venturing into the research at various levels and were found to start to share their findings with their learners’ group team to compare experiential understanding of its future application. They also started to devise strategic questions to allow them to search for research that was outside of their own experiences and knowledge. One interesting factor toward the end of the project was the identification of ‘gaps’ or ‘outdated’ areas in research that has encouraged them to look at this in the future within their organisations.

Dr Lyn Wakefield, convenor for the Gordon Institute of TAFE’s project, reported that “evaluating the research was a task that all team members enjoyed, and they took a great deal of time in comparing the outcomes of the review”.


Robyn Parkes, convenor for the Royal Adelaide Hospital’s project, observed that sometimes participants needed assistance linking two sets of information:

> It is often assumed that people will immediately see connections between two sets of interacting information. However, one’s expertise in one area, and low knowledge base in the second may interfere with the ability to develop actions that require understanding of both fields of knowledge.

Liz Renshaw, project convenor of the South Western Sydney Institute’s project on employability skills and LLN, reported that individuals kept reflective logs. The themes in reflection were as follows:

- Initial feelings of fuzziness and confusion giving way to clarity
- Initial lack of confidence in applying research to practice giving way to a sense of empowerment
- Initial thoughts that someone had ‘the answer’ and a strong sense of ‘just tell me what to do’ being replaced with increased skills at using research to change practice.

Comments from the University of Ballarat’s participants documented in their final report by Claire Rasmussen and Anne-Maree Haintz included:

- “we need to change our teaching styles”
- “I understand now how LLN issues are intrinsically connected to the training package”
- “… the methodology of embedding LLN into the design of training resources, delivery and assessment is the most fundamental outcome of this project.”

The Applying Information and Research projects positively affected groups of VET staff and other participants, resulting in higher levels of professional judgment and improved skills in research evaluation. Tony Marsh and Pat Grosse from Goulburn Ovens Murray Regional Council of Adult and Community Education stated that project participants tested the research in their own localities:

> Project partners tested the research, its application and their own assumptions in their own localities – this was one of the single-most important features of the project – and provided the foundation for the individual projects.

Barbara Morgan and Beth Marr from RMIT described the positive impact of their language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) project on the project team:

> There has been considerable workplace learning through discussions and development of the LLN handbook. The participants have gained from clarifying their understandings of teaching practices and delivery methods across the VET sector which has informed the scope and development of the handbook.

### VET organisations benefiting from information and research

Applying information and research projects impacted on organisations in 2005. For example, the impact on the ACE organisations involved in Goulburn Ovens Murray Regional Council of Adult and Community Education project were significant, resulting in the some new strategies:

- Change in thinking in ACE organisations towards accepting and investigating and delivering at venues away from ACE premises…. [and]… Changes to presentation of ACE premises to be more welcoming to men.

Tony Marsh, facilitator, and Patricia Grosse, convenor, indicated that as an outcome of their project there was “Proactive engagement of post 45 year old males with ACE centres resulting from an innovative action based learning project”.

Dr Lyn Wakefield, convenor of the Gordon Institute of TAFE’s project stated that,

> From the perspective of the organisation, major outcomes were growth of skills and knowledge in the areas of RPL/ RCC and Graded assessment, and the increasing development of a research culture.

The Gordon Institute project made a number of recommendations to the Institute’s executive including:

- Implement 2006 research projects that further investigate the Institute’s research capability and development of an Institute research culture
- Develop relationships with the identified ‘models of good practice’ for knowledge gathering and dissemination.
- Identify qualifications in research practice, process and methodology, to accommodate a range of current skills from novice researcher to research practitioner.
- Offer and engage staff in Professional Development that supports research and develops associated skills.
- Grow a Centre for Research as the repository for Institute-wide knowledge, and offer practitioner support.

In relation to the first detailed goal, Jennifer Nevard from Challenger TAFE described the features of their project to develop an innovation framework:
collation and summary of relevant research on innovation and innovators
cross sector working groups (representatives drawn from within Challenger TAFE, industry, other learning institutions, innovative organisations and innovators)
facilitation of a half day workshop to define the learning territory and brief the participants
separate facilitation of a number of task group working party meetings
identification of realistic goals for each aspect of the project
incorporation of group processes
information sharing strategies that take account of geographical relevance in developing solutions (i.e. circulation relevant information to metro and regional locations, and to multiple work sites in WA and off-shore)
collaboration models: internal to Challenger TAFE and between Challenger TAFE and other learning institutions and industry sectors.

In relation to the second detailed goal, to provide leading-edge insights into VET client needs, Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE aimed to develop a sustainable “Market Responsiveness Model”. The project highlighted the importance of talking to customers, according to Francis Howes, convenor of the project:

We learned the importance of talking regularly to our customers and potential customers. The industry breakfasts and student interviews were major eye openers for the Institute and threw up many issues beyond the scope of this project. This has therefore had major flow on effects in other areas of the Institute’s business activity. The participant feedback significantly changed the draft model – particularly in terms of ensuring simplicity, ease of communication and alignment with existing processes.

Clarifying industry needs
Applying information and research projects impacted on industries. For example, the project sponsored by the Enterprise Registered Training Organisations Forum (ERTOF) enabled the following: “A clearer picture as to how existing research aligns to the practices and models used by existing Enterprise RTOs and clear identification where research gaps exist.” The project achieved the following benefits:

Improvements to the VET system and actions as a result of the paper including changes to policy. The strong interest shown by DEST in ERTOF provides the groundwork for ERTOF’s continued impact on policy and the VET system.
Changes to states and changes to VET strategy. These benefits are expected to follow, at a later date.
A clear definition of enterprise based RTOs with an acknowledgement of their differences. This was achieved in the ERTOF documents produced in the project.
Comparison against previous research conducted about enterprises use of VET? This was achieved in the literature review produced within the project.
A piece of research that has been developed by enterprise RTOs showing what it is to be one, how they got to that position and how they are maintaining their position. Such a powerful outcome can become a major piece of knowledge for DEST.

For ERTOF, a clear definition of “what is an Enterprise RTO” and the understanding of “the special challenges and features of an enterprise RTO was articulated in the Knowledge Bank of Issues”. Other outcomes for the VET system from the ERTOF project included models of engagement with research; examples of professional development models and approaches; dissemination of knowledge, tools, frameworks and good practice; and a model that is widely applicable that links industry needs to delivery decisions.

The Enterprise Registered Training Organisation Forum also developed the following:
…a collection of information and research items that can be utilised at government level, in industry, enterprises and the VET sector with the aim of influencing the VET system to advance focus on learning in industry.

Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE’s project reviewed its draft model through both formal and informal meetings with key stakeholders and clients:

Formal processes with our key client gave very valuable feedback on the quality of the information we had collected for them. We learned that what we thought was important was not necessarily the same for them. We also learned to carefully negotiate political considerations as well as issues around confidentiality. These learnings are quite critical to the implementation of the model and cannot be ignored. The political and market landscape therefore needs to be a fundamental part of the early market research for the model.
Robyn Parkes, from Central Northern Adelaide Health Service, aimed to influence policy formation and used a “summary compilation of current VET research” as a “resource for health employers and HR staff”. Numerous health industry representatives and speakers from around Australia attended a project forum where “a range of case studies stimulated discussion about the potential use of VET training to assist workforce redesign in health”.

Summary points
VET practitioners in these projects accessed, critically examined and applied learning from the following sources: research reports, good practice models and other resources and information sources. Participants benefited from undertaking many of these activities in groups, as the groups provided an opportunity for sharing, comparing and exploring ideas and creating new frameworks. Participating in groups enabled tacit knowledge held by participants, and sometimes stemming from considerable practical experience, to be made explicit and available for others to access. This group knowledge was often positively directed at seeking improvements to participants’ organisations, in order to better implement aspects of the national training system such as Training Packages or industry-provider collaboration in designing customised training and assessment.

KEY RESOURCES
Reframing the Future resources used by project teams to inform participants’ conceptual frameworks included the following and are available from www.reframingthefuture.net
McKenna, S. (2004), Making the connections, ANTA, Melbourne.
Reframing the Future (2004), Introduction to the Reframing the Future website, ANTA, Melbourne.