Communities of practice: building organisational capability through an undergraduate assurance of learning program

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ABSTRACT

This study explores academic perceptions of organizational capability and culture following a project to develop a quality assurance of learning program in a business school. In the project a community of practice structure was established to include academics in the development of an embedded, direct assurance of learning program affecting more than 5000 undergraduate students and 250 academics from nine different disciplines across four discipline based departments. The primary outcome from the newly developed and implemented assurance of learning program was the five year accreditation of the business school’s programs by two international accrediting bodies, EQUIS and AACSB. This study explores a different outcome, namely perceptions of organizational culture and individual capabilities as academics worked together in teaching teams and communities. This study uses a survey and interviews with academics involved, through a retrospective panel design consisting of an experimental group and a control group. Results offer insights into communities of practice as a means of encouraging new individual and organizational capability and strategic culture adaptation.

Keywords: Assurance of Learning, Communities of Practice, Organizational Capability.
Introduction

In an atmosphere of change tertiary institutions throughout Australia are currently addressing questions of quality assurance in learning and teaching. “Quality assurance” is defined as the process by which educational institutions measure learning outcomes against a set of specific goals and objectives (Hall and Kro 2006). Questions regarding quality in tertiary education in Australia have been linked to government funding decisions for institutions, increased numbers of international students choosing to study in Australia; increasing numbers of students generally seeking to continue their education after high school and the need for greater national consistency. New regulations were released by Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA 2011) in April, 2011. TEQSA is an independent body with powers to register university and non-university higher education providers, monitor quality and ensure standards.

TEQSA is a Commonwealth statutory authority established under the Financial Management and Accountability Act 1997. The Agency identifies that institutions will be required to demonstrate that their graduates have the capabilities that are required for successful engagement in today’s complex world. The benefits are identified as multiple and suiting a range of stakeholders. Taxpayers benefit through identifying value for money in the national interest; employers have greater confidence in graduate capabilities; higher education providers can clearly demonstrate students’ academic performance from the documentation of what students learn and know and can do. Students benefit from improved information on what institutions offer, helping them to make informed decisions about what and where they will study (TEQSA 2011).

Assessment of Learning or assurance of learning is one of the most frequently discussed topics in tertiary education today (Martell and Caldron 2009). In the past, indirect measures such as student feedback from specific units and course experience questionnaires and reports from courses identified as underperforming for reasons related to enrolment and retention have provided measures of quality. Direct measures involve capturing, monitoring and evaluating data specific to student achievement related to program goals. Developing programs for capturing and monitoring direct measures are providing a new direction for quality in tertiary education. Assurance of learning involves choosing, creating and innovating effective measures for assessing student accomplishments. The measures selected need to fit with the goals determined for the program and the pedagogues used as well as the circumstances of the institution (Zhu and McFarland). In addition it is recommended that if assurance of learning is to be effective academics need to be involved in this process of determination. Hollister and Koppel (2007) identified that the assessment process requires the broadening of thinking from one of being unit or subject centred to one of focusing on the program as a whole, to build program goals, measure program outcomes and make adjustments to the program curriculum. However academics have traditionally been the experts in their own fields with little requiring them to work across disciplines within programs. Working across disciplines within programs requires new skills not encouraged in the past.

One Australian Business School (The School) that chose international accreditations more than 10 years ago as part of its strategic competitive advantage, recently
implemented an assurance of learning process to assure quality in its program. Establishing a competitive advantage is increasingly important in the Business School environment and indeed within Higher Education generally. Australian Universities face increasing competition both nationally and internationally (Coaldrake 2, March 2011 National Press Luncheon). In order to compete internationally for high quality faculty, students, and research collaborations it is essential to have an international focus and a quality product that predicts excellence in the student experience and graduates that meet industry needs. A focus on the quality of a program rather than merely the quality of its parts presents a new understanding for those working in academia.

One of the reasons The School established a new quality assurance program was the accreditation process of two accrediting bodies was imminent. While other reasons such as effective assessment processes; measurable student outcomes and industry inclusivity, were important, timely addressing of the needs of accreditation were paramount. In establishing the process The School recognised that many academics had not participated before in decision making across disciplines for the greater good of the program. Traditionally academia has been the premise of the individual as the “expert”, the harbinger, of all that is the accepted ‘body of knowledge’ in an area. The ability to acquire, share and utilise knowledge has become a critical organisational capability in academia overcoming discipline boundaries that can restrict effective collaboration. Institutions of higher education now require faculty staff to acknowledge the increasing rates of knowledge creation, identify the relevant, over the ‘fad’, and work together to continuously improve programs and meet changing demands (Tippins 2003).

Two communities of practice were established in the school to support the process; the academics and teams of academics involved in the decision making in the program. A community of practice provides a forum through which members can meet and exchange ideas and form support networks. It can provide benefits in support and mentoring of those new to the group; a network for learning and sharing information and a development opportunity to identify those members who are suitable for further experience or more career opportunities. Stoll, Bolam, Wallace and Thomas (2006, p. 223) found a lack of agreement as to a definitive definition, though identified a general consensus in the literature that a community of practice involved a “group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning orientated, growth promoting way, operating as a collective enterprise”. A common feature of communities of practice is a regular meeting often in the form of a seminar or workshop with guest presenters (Turner 2009).

Over the course of 18 months, the assurance of learning process was developed and established. The communities of practice met regularly to discuss the process of developing quality assurance as well as the outcome of the program which measured student achievement within program goals. Senior members attended external conferences and workshops and guest speakers were introduced to the communities. The groups analysed information and advised on and implemented changes to the undergraduate program and the assurance of learning process. The accreditation process with the two international bodies was undertaken approximately two years later. One review board wrote “there is a very well developed and executed AoL
program for undergraduate programs that is widely known and understood by faculty and students”. The communities of practice achieved their goals; that of including faculty into the decisions related to student achievements and program goals and to analyse these to determine required changes. This study seeks to understand the developments in organisational capability and culture that may have occurred as a result of the implementation of the communities of practice. It asks the question: Are there differences of perception of the school’s culture and organisational capability between those academics working in communities of practice to implement an assurance of learning process and those not involved?

**Organizational capability**

Organisational capability is defined as an ability to perform a coordinated task, utilizing organisational resources, for the purposes of achieving a particular end result (Helfat 2003). It has developed in importance over the past decade to acknowledge the rapidly changing nature of organizations and the inter-complexity of restructuring and culture change in searching for competitive advantage. Turner (2009) suggests that an organization can have capability over and above the competency of its individuals as the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. But clearly these individual competencies need to be shared, managed and encouraged through new ways of thinking and acting in order to meet the needs of the organization and its strategic direction. “Capable people are those who: know how to learn; are creative; have a high degree of self-efficacy; can apply competencies in novel as well as familiar situations; and work well with others.” Hase (2000). It differs from competency in that it is an holistic attribute. Further, capable people are more likely to deal effectively with a turbulent environment through their preparedness for continual change. Graves (1993); and Stephenson and Weil (1992) suggest that the application of capability is through the creation of innovative learning experiences which develop the individual elements of capability. They believe this to be true in educational settings as well as other workplaces. Hase, Cairns and Malloch (1998) undertook a two part process of identifying what is a capable organisation and interviewed approximately 80 people to understand the factors of capability in individuals. These factors include working in teams; competent people; visible vision and values; ensuring learning; managing complex change; demonstrating human aspects of leadership; change agents; involving people in change; management development; commitment to organisation development.

**Organizational culture**

Today the powerful links between an organisation’s culture and its performance are well recognized however managing these links remains difficult. Organisations endeavouring to change their culture to influence performance have implemented TQM initiatives, downsizing and reengineering initiatives as well as quality initiatives but quality initiatives usually fall short (Cameron 1997). Culture is defined as: “A pattern of shared basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration - that have worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 1992, P. 9).

A variety of measures of organisational culture have been proposed and one widely used in Australia is that based on Quinn’s competing values model. It originally
emerged from empirical research on the question of what makes organizations effective (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1983). It has since been extended as a framework that makes sense of high performance in regard to numerous topics in the social sciences and organizations.

"The basic framework consists of two dimensions—one drawn vertically and the other drawn horizontally—resulting in a two-by-two figure with four quadrants. When studying the effectiveness of organizations more than two decades ago, we noticed that some organizations were effective if they demonstrated flexibility and adaptability, but other organizations were effective if they demonstrated stability and control. Similarly, we discovered that some organizations were effective if they maintained efficient internal processes whereas others were effective if they maintained competitive external positioning relative to customers and clients (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1981; Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Cameron, 1986). These differences represent the different ends of two dimensions, and these dimensions constitute the rudiments of the CVF." (Competing Values Company (accessed 2011).

Lamond (2003) studied 462 Australian managers’ perceptions of their organizations and concluded that the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument used by the Competing Values Framework provides a measure that is a useful one in an Australian context.

The Australian Higher Education sector has experienced numerous declines in funding, increases in student numbers and a heightened institutional emphasis on research output (McDonald & Star, 2008). This has led to a tension between traditional academic values and the corporatisation of higher education (Ryan & Guthrie, 2009). The sector continues to grapple with the development of curricula designed to cater to government and industry pressure for the production of graduates fit for a knowledge economy, within the bounds of larger class sizes and a reduction in financial support offered by the government. As a result, academics are resentful that resources have become scarce and the sense of being a "socially altruistic and purposeful community of scholars" has been eroded (Duke, 2004 cited by Nagy & Burch, 2009, p.239). In response to this pressure Dawson, Burnett and O’Donohue (2006) suggest higher education institutions are changing their organisational culture to implement new principles of community.

**Method**

This project uses a cross sectional or co-relational design. It involves researching an issue after the fact through a survey of two groups of people, after the event. One group is a random sample of people who were part of the communities of practice and the other group consists of a random sample of people who were not members of the communities of practice. Conclusions are drawn about the effectiveness of the communities of practice. The benefits of this design is that it is better than interviewing one group i.e. those who were part of the project, but the potential problem is that the two groups may differ in other ways apart from their involvement in this project (DeVaus, 2002), for example those in the community of practice may be there because they wished to work in teams and those outside the communities of practice may not wish to be part of academic design teams.

The two groups were surveyed through a questionnaire and face to face interviews. The first group was a sample of academics working in a community of practice group to implement a new process of quality assurance of learning. The second group was a sample from a control group consisting of individuals not working in a community of
practice to implement assurance of learning. Those surveyed were interviewed to confirm their different perceptions of the school’s approach to organisational capability and culture.

**Population and Sample**

There are approximately 250 members of the academic community in the school. Of this number 30 members were part of the Assurance of Learning community of practice within the school. Volunteers were called for from each group. A sample of 10 members of the community of practice groups and 8 members of the school not working in the community of practices participated in this study.

**Data Collection Survey and Interviews**

Two survey instruments were chosen. The Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) was used to diagnose the culture of the organisation as perceived by its members. The short version which contains 6 items was used. Although there are longer versions, the short version has been found to be equally predictive of an organization’s culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2004).

In determining critical elements of organisational capability Hase Cairns & Malloch (1998) interviewed 80 people from organisations that had been previously identified as “capable”. Their organisation capability questionnaire was tested on a random sample of MBA students. Using principal components analysis with equamax rotation and Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Test, ten factors were identified which explained .67 of the total variance. A sample of their Organisational Capability Questionnaire (OCQ) was used in this study. Finally, five open ended questions were put to each participant at the interview.

**Results**

Eighteen people agreed to participate in this survey and completed the questionnaire and were interviewed by the researcher. Ten people were part of the community of practice for assuring learning and eight people were not. The results from the questionnaires and the interviews are outlined below in two groups – the in-group consists of those people from the community of practice(s) and the out-group consists of those people who were not part of the community of practice(s).

**Questionnaire**

**Capability**

The OCQ offers 23 questions regarding individual and organisational capability. The first five questions regard the employees’ capability: to be creative; to use their competencies creatively; to learn from what they do; use initiative and develop confidence in their own abilities. Respondents are asked to agree or disagree with the statements on a Likert Scale of 1-5 where 1 is Disagree and 5 is Agree.

The following sections identify the results for both questionnaires using the groups nominated as in-group and out-group.
Individual Capabilities

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All respondents in the in-group significantly agreed with all the statements in the individual capability section: that the school actively enables its employees to be creative; use their competencies in novel ways; learn from what they do; demonstrate initiative and develop confidence in their ability. The lowest score was on: the school supports employees being creative; and, the highest score was on: the school supports employees learning from what they do.

OUTGROUP

The results for the respondents in the out-group were not so strikingly positive. Low scores were evident on all questions so that results were mixed. While some respondents did believe that support was available from the school for individual creativity and innovation, not all respondents felt the same and the scores were lower. The lowest scores were for the question that the school actively enables employees to learn from what they do; while the highest score was for the question which says that the school actively enables employees to use their competencies in novel rather than just familiar circumstances. It is noted that more than 50% of all the scores from this group of respondents were in the neutral or disagree categories for statements in this section.

Organisational Capabilities

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1. **Working in teams:** Respondents perceive that team based structures are a feature of the school, (90%) but they do not believe that these teams are self managing (60%).

2. **Competent People:** Respondents from the communities of practice did indicate that competency in individual is important to the school. They indicated people are able to accept responsibility for their own work.

3. **Visible Vision and Values:** 90% of respondents supported the view that the school’s vision and values are consistent with a preparedness for change.

4. **Ensuring Learning Takes Place:** Results show that while more than 50% of all respondents did perceive that the school actively enables employees to learn from what they do, more than 60% of all respondents in the in-group did not believe that the development of employees’ competencies was an important faculty goal or that it was valued in the school.

5. **Managing the Complexity of Change:** Results show that overall, respondents in the in-group agreed that managing the complexity of change is a critical management function in the school. In looking further at other change variables respondents were less committed to the time spent preparing the school for change, with 60% of respondents believing that not enough time or resources were spent on preparing and managing change. On the question of whether only a few key people were involved in the change process, there was disagreement with 50% believing that the school did
use only a few key people in change and 50% indicated that they did not agree that only key people were involved in change. There was unanimous agreement from all participants that the CEO provides highly visible support for change processes that prepares the school for the future. There was also 90% agreement that the school’s vision and values are consistent with a preparedness for change.

6. **Demonstrating the Human Aspects of Leadership**: Results show that 90% of in-group respondents agreed that managers were involved in human resources development, that leadership was not seen as a low level skill in the school (100%) and that managers were helped to develop their leadership skills (90%). Only one respondent disagreed that managers were helped to develop their leadership skills. There was general disagreement that the school made little effort in developing good managers (90%) with strong agreement that the school made effort to develop good managers.

7. **Change Agents**: Results show respondents did not wholeheartedly agree the school was committed to spending time and resources preparing for change, with 60% of respondents believing that not enough time or resources were spent on preparing and managing change. On the question of whether only a few key people were involved in the change process, there was disagreement with 50% believing that the school did use only a few key people in change and 50% indicating that they did not agree that only key people were involved in change. There was unanimous agreement from all participants that the CEO provides highly visible support for change processes that prepares the school for the future. There was also 90% agreement that the school’s vision and values are consistent with a preparedness for change.

8. **Involving People in Change**: Results show a disagreement on the involvement of people in change processes with 50% of respondents agreeing that few people are involved in organisational change processes. However there was a 70% agreement that strong people oriented skills is a feature of how change is managed in the school.

9. **Management Development**: Results show a disagreement regarding the comment that little effort is put into development good managers (with only one respondent agreeing). In addition there was agreement that managers are helped to develop their leadership skills with only one respondent disagreeing. 100% of respondents disagreed that leadership is seen as a low level management skill in the school.

10. **Commitment to Organisational Development**: Respondents did not agree on the question of whether only a few key people were involved in the change process. There was disagreement with 50% believing that the school did use only a few key people in change and 50% indicating that they did not agree that only key people were involved in change. Results show that 90% of in-group respondents agreed that managers were involved in human resources development and 100% of respondents agreed that development of employee competencies is an important school goal. There was general disagreement that the school made little effort in developing good managers (90%). Only one respondent agreed that the school made little effort to develop good managers.
OUTGROUP

1. **Working in teams**: 80% of Respondents from the out-group did not perceive that team based school structures are a feature of the school and 80% of respondents did not perceive the school’s capability is increased by self managing teams.

2. **Competent People**: 60%-80% of respondents disagreed that individual competency is important to the school. They did not believe that “people feel their skills are valued and used”; “the development of employee's competencies is an important faculty goal”; “employee needs are recognised as much as their skills in our faculty”.

3. **Visible Vision and Values**: 60% of respondents disagreed with view that the school’s vision and values are consistent with a preparedness for change.

4. **Ensuring Learning Takes Place**: Results show that more than 60% of all respondents believe that the school does not value learning, the development of individual competencies or people learning from what they do.

5. **Managing the Complexity of Change**: Results show that overall 60% of all respondents in the out-group disagreed that managing the complexity of change is a critical management function in the school. In looking further at other change variables respondents did not believe the school spent time preparing for change, with 80% of respondents believing that not enough time or resources were spent on preparing and managing change. On the question of whether only a few key people were involved in the change process, there was agreement with 100% believing that the school did use only a few key people in change. There was 60% disagreement from participants that the CEO provides highly visible support for change processes that prepares the school for the future. There was also 60% disagreement that the school’s vision and values are consistent with a preparedness for change.

6. **Demonstrating the Human Aspects of Leadership**: Results show that 80% of out-group respondents agreed that managers were involved in human resources development, and 60% agreed that leadership was not seen as a low level skill in the school. However there was 60% disagreement that managers were helped to develop their leadership skills. There was general agreement that the school made little effort in developing good managers (100%).

7. **Change Agents**: Results show respondents did not agree the school was committed to spending time and resources preparing for change, with 80% of respondents believing that not enough time or resources were spent on preparing and managing change. On the question of whether only a few key people were involved in the change process, there was 100% agreement that the school did use only a few key people in change. There was 60% disagreement that the CEO provides highly visible support for change processes that prepares the school for the future. There was also 60% disagreement that the school’s vision and values are consistent with a preparedness for change.

8. **Involving People in Change**: Results show a disagreement on the involvement of people in change processes with 100% of respondents agreeing that few people are involved in organisational change processes and 80% disagreement that strong people oriented skills is a feature of how change is managed in the school.
9. **Management Development**: Results show agreement regarding the little effort put into the development of good managers (100%). In addition there was disagreement that managers are helped to develop their leadership skills (60%). 60% of respondents agreed that leadership is seen as a low level management skill in the school.

10. **Commitment to Organisational Development**: Respondents agreed that only a few key people were involved in the change process (100%). Results show that 80% of out-group respondents agreed that managers were involved in human resources development although 80% of respondents disagreed that the development of employee competencies is an important school goal. 60% of out-group respondents disagreed that the school made little effort in developing good managers.

**Culture**

The Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument assesses six key dimensions of organisational culture. It provides a picture of the fundamental assumptions and values on which an organisation operates. Respondents answer 6 questions and divide 100 points among 4 alternatives for each question. The respondent is asked to give higher points to the alternative most like their organisation. Scores are totalled and divided by 6 and mapped on a graph to show the respondents view of their organisation current assumptions and values and their most preferred view of an organisation’s assumptions and values. In this study the graphs have been plotted with a view to identifying whether the two groups have different perspectives on the organisation’s culture.

**INGROUP**

Results show that respondents in the in-group perceive the culture that dominates this organisation to be of an hierarchical nature very formalised and structured. Efficiency is valued along with long term stability and smooth operations. Success is defined in terms of dependable delivery, smooth scheduling and low cost. The management of employees requires secure employment and predictability.
**Figure 1:**
*In-group’s Current View of Faculty Culture*

Results show that respondents in the out-group perceive the culture that dominates this organisation to be of both hierarchical in nature and market oriented.
In both these cases stability and control are paramount. One has a greater internal focus (hierarchy) than the other (market) which has a greater external focus. The market culture is a results-oriented one, where employees are competitive and goal oriented. Leaders are perceived as hard drivers and producers. Success is defined in terms of market share and penetration in the market. The style is hard-driving and competitive.

The difference between the perceptions of culture identified by the two groups lies on the internal versus external locus of control axis. With those in the communities of practice recognising the culture an internally driven culture of rules and policies to ensure efficiency of operations. Whereas those outside the communities of practice recognised the external forces of the market on the organisation’s culture. The similarity lies in the stability and control aspects of the culture recognised by both groups rather than a culture of flexibility and discretion.

Interviews

Each respondent was interviewed after they had completed the questionnaire. They were interviewed in their own offices and the interviews were approximately 20 minutes in length.

Every respondent was able to identify an area where their own creativity and innovation had been trialled and accepted. Both those from the communities of practice and those outside the communities of practice identified that creativity and innovation are easily achieved in their own discipline areas, specifically in their teaching. Two people from the communities of practice suggested that trust was important. “Building a base of trustworthiness was vital in order to get room to play” or that individuals needed to “couch things well in order to hide the innovation until it could be accepted by all”. Those outside the community of practice also identified that...
innovation was acceptable but talked about innovations within their own teaching teams rather than any School, Faculty or Institution levels. In all cases the respondents discussed their innovations in teaching or work teams where they were the leaders.

All respondents acknowledged that resourcing was plentiful within the school. However there was some difference between the two groups on how people could get access to these resources. Those in the communities of practice discussed how they got access to resources. They believed that seeking out the money was an important factor. One suggested that “you need to find new ways to get the money you need to resource innovations”. Another suggested that moving out of the school and finding the money through university channels was the way to go. Another suggested that planning days were helpful in accessing money. Most suggested that Heads of Departments were the way to get money.

Those individuals who were not part of the communities of practice suggested that money was available but not easy to access. That is, it was usually for others rather than them. One suggested that the resources were available in areas that were so narrowly defined they were difficult to access, while another suggested that resources were available to “better researchers” rather than “great innovators”.

In developing competencies the in-group suggested that development was very much an individual issue requiring individuals to identify what they wanted or where they wanted to go and to do what was needed to get there. The respondents from the out-group identified that developing competencies was an individual task and that their own discipline heads were the best people for discussion. All respondents discussed how they had themselves discussed this with others including their department heads in developing their own program for development.

Respondents from the communities of practice discussed their teaching teams and their creativity. Each had individual stories of the innovations they had shared within the specific unit(s) they led. Yet none of them discussed the group innovations from community of practice in which they had been participating for the assurance of learning project or the cross disciplinary innovations they had participated in. Interestingly, it is noted that none of these communities of practice were rewarded for their innovations or their work on assurance of learning. All extra duties were incorporated into the individuals’ required duties also without individual or team recognition.

Those who had not been part of the communities of practice discussed the fact that there were no teams, just great individuals doing innovative stuff “who share their time and their war stories”. When specifically probed about their teaching teams they acknowledged that when teaching their units (subjects) they did work with a team of others and they discussed these as supportive groups consisting of tutors and learning designers, rather than a team.

Every respondent discussed the schools external focus particularly its international accreditations and its assurance of learning as an example of the forward thinking of the school. On this issue there was no discernable difference in the answers from those who were and those who were not in the communities of practice. However
most respondents regardless of their group membership, identified the single nature of this strategy with the question of “where to now?” being prevalent.

**Discussion**

In one Business School two academic communities of practice were established across disciplines to develop, implement and manage a direct and inclusive program of assurance of learning for an undergraduate degree. The outcomes included cross disciplinary innovation towards a well developed assurance of learning program that received accreditation and acclaim from international review panels. In discussions with members of these communities and others who were not members of these communities other outcomes were identified. Differences in perception of the organization’s capability and culture were recognised between respondents who were part of the communities of practice and those who were not. On nine (9) of the ten elements of organisational capability those people working in the communities of practice supported the view that these capabilities are of genuine importance to the school and are genuinely available. The only capability that was not supported was that of managing change with both groups supporting the view that not enough time or resources were spent on preparing and managing change. On all ten (10) of the elements of organisational capability, those people not in the communities of practice did not support the view that any of these capabilities were of value to the school. Only one aspect of capability was viewed in a positive light with the majority admitting that managers were involved in human resource development and that leadership was an important skill in the school.

A further distinctive difference between the two groups involved the perspective and experiences within teams. Members of the communities of practice believed that teams were an important part of the school whereas others favoured individual application. Those within the community of practice discussed their own experiences in their teaching teams as a positive one and acknowledged their innovations as team innovations and highlighted their own support for their team and their team experience. Those who were not part of the community of practice did not recognise their own teaching groups as teams or as places of innovation. They discussed any innovation in their work life as an individual accomplishment that was unsupported by the school. Interestingly, no respondent discussed the innovation of the cross disciplinary communities of practice or their experiences in them. Further, competencies of change management were acknowledged as unsupported in the school regardless of individual experiences in the communities of practice.

Previous studies have shown that the strains on academia through changes to Australian government policy and modernization practices implemented in universities result increasingly in academics withdrawing into their own work to overcome changing values in academia including limited empowerment; academic freedom, increasing managerialism and decreasing job satisfaction and commitment (Harman 2000, 2005; McInnis 2000; NTEU 2000; Winter et al. 2000; Kayrootz et al. 2001; Winter and Sarros 2001, 2002; Anderson et al. 2002; Winefield et al. 2002). Ryan and Guthrie (2008) recognize collegial entrepreneurism as a potential conqueror of this disengaged individualism. The necessary elements include empowered academics; new partnerships between academics and administrators; strong
leadership that is not equated to hierarchical authoritarianism and equitable central university resource distributions.

The new imperative is the support of teams and team experiences (Nagy & Burch, 2009; Ryan & Guthrie, 2009). McDonald and Star (2008) suggest supporting academics to negotiate the challenges and expectations of the competitive turbulent environment involves ‘communities of practice’. However these communities of practice require new ways of resourcing and rewarding. Green and Ruutz (2008) identify that communities of practice require money for administrative and technical support and time from academics who are already struggling with increasing teaching and research workloads, within a culture they feel devalues this aspect of their role. These elements combine to influence the success of implementing an effective program involving communities of practice.

Greater recognition of the team outcomes and achievements of multi-discipline teams may assist the understanding and valuing of outcomes and learnings. Acknowledgement of the innovations of the teams and recognition of the leadership of individuals working in these teams may offer the means to demonstrate the value of new engagement models in academia. Building rewards into team accomplishments may assist individuals to value their experiences. Greater recognition by senior management of the accomplishments of teams and team successes in change situations would provide the link between change complexities and the innovations of the teams set up to address these issues.

Conclusion

In order to compete internationally for high quality faculty; students; strategic partnerships and research collaborations it is increasingly important for Australian Universities to develop and maintain an international focus and a quality product that predicts excellence in the student experience and graduate outcomes designed to meet industry needs. Developing, marketing and delivering that quality product indicates the need for an organizational strategy to which all members of the organization are empowered to contribute and to adhere including both academics and administrators. It also requires a strategy which the organisation willingly resources. Preliminary evidence from this study indicates that communities of practice have practical outcomes for building inclusivity in innovation and decision making particularly related to quality assurance.

The ability to acquire, share and utilize knowledge has now become a critical organizational capability in academia as well as other industries. Knowledge management and shared learning can achieve strategic and operational benefits equally within academia as within other industrial enterprises but it comes at a cost. Traditional structures with academics who act like individual contractors empowered through their own discipline expertise which stands outside any administrative hierarchy, served different strategic needs in another time and required fewer resources from management. Collaborative structures and greater links between academics and administrators requires a different approach by management to resourcing, recognising and rewarding both individual academics and their teams, as well as incorporating new models of empowerment.
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