

New Practice in Flexible Learning: it's clearly fuzzy!

Port-ability: integrating learning options, skilling people, growing business, building community project case study

Marie Jasinski

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1 Introduction

This is a case study on the 'Port-Ability' New Practices in Flexible Learning Project. It focuses on the complexities, challenges and triumphs faced by a diverse multi-disciplinary team working together in uncharted territory for five months to reach a common goal. That goal was establishing a Work Studio model within a community-based Small Business Incubator in Port Adelaide, South Australia.

The case study is not about the Work Studio. It is about a committed project team willing to experiment, take risks, hold their dreams, acknowledge diversity, deal with conflict and above all, share their learning. It documents what it is like to participate in a new practice! This is often an untold story.

The case study is not a complete picture, but a snapshot of the project at the half-way mark. It is a result of observations, reflective practice, formal and informal interviews and research. It is accompanied by full transcripts of interviews with three project team members, the business mentor and the project sponsor. These were recorded in August 2003. The transcripts make compelling reading as they highlight the complexities of setting up a Work Studio and introducing a new practice into a large organisation.

A most heartfelt thank you to the project team:

- Pauline deVries, Project Manager
- Suzie McAuley, Retail and Tourism Facilitator
- Kym Bond, IT Vocational Placement Facilitator
- Ted Schwerdt, Employability Skills Mapper
- Pene Davey, Project Sponsor

The project team would particularly like to acknowledge the significant contribution of Ms Lynette Hay to the success of this project. Lyn is the manager of Todd Street Business Chambers and the project's industry partner. Lyn, your vision, leadership, wisdom, business savvy, advocacy and unwavering support were valued and appreciated.

This is not a glossy story of an ideal, but a messy picture of reality. It is based on the premise that a new practice in flexible learning, rather than being clearly defined, is a fuzzy concept.

Marie Jasinski

December, 2003

Acting differently is the heart of a new practice

Thinking differently may be its soul.

2 Summary of key points

Here are the key points emerging from the project that relate to team development, project management and systems issues:

- The thinking behind a new practice has a long history. It's the opportunity to test out that thinking that's new.
- A key person with the vision will drive the project.
- Make sure someone on your team has well-established business networks. This is a key to success and cannot be underestimated.
- Whatever the vision, something different will emerge.
- A different outcome may not mean compromise. It may mean discovering something new together.
- It can be a challenge for innovators to work together as they are used to toughing it alone.
- The multi-dimensional nature of the project requires multi-dimensional perspectives, which have the potential for both conflict and growth.
- Working with contradictions is a fact of life and learning how to 'agree to disagree' is an important communication skill.
- No matter how busy you are, build in time for reflective practice. It is worth the investment.
- Explore new models of thinking as well as new models of learning. Don't get stuck in old ways.
- The balance between a business model and an educational model needs to be sorted through as both learning and business development are happening simultaneously.
- Start planning for 'post-project' sustainability from the start. What happens next is just as important as what is happening now.
- Project team members may not always be in a position to influence or make decisions at a strategic level. This is why the project sponsor has a critical role.
- Your organisation is a complex beast. There are many competing priorities so it may not regard your project with the same esteem you do. This is why being strategic is so important.
- Put your Sponsor to work as your advocate at a strategic level.
- Make sure the Sponsor is well briefed, as they need to be clear about what to fight for.
- Target people with 'clout' – they get things done.

- People who are once or twice removed from your project can impact on it. Identify all possible stakeholders and keep them informed throughout the project. Better still, involve them.
- The system is set up for established practice, not new practice. You'll spend a lot of time stretching boundaries and sometimes you'll have a win. Make improving systems processes one of the project goals.
- The project's industry partner has a critical role to play. Listen and learn from their business experience.
- An independent observer can give you additional insights as they are once removed from the action.
- The best vision is 'poly-ocular' – seeing the same situation from many angles.

3 Project overview: definitions and who's who

One of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) initiatives to encourage training providers to explore innovative practice in flexible learning is the *New Practices in Flexible Learning* Program. In its second year, it encouraged leading edge practitioners to apply for funds to explore a diverse range of flexible delivery initiatives, programs, products and services that have potential for wider application within the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. In 2003, through a competitive process, 10 projects were funded up to \$60,000 each. This is a story about one of them – the development of a Work Studio model within a community-based Small Business Incubator.

Background to the project

The project aimed to develop and trial a Work Studio Model to provide a bridge between the simulated world of Practice Firms and the real world of Business Incubators.

A key outcome of the project is a community-focused flexible learning initiative, which provides a pathway to support young learners through a series of stages from Practice Firm to Work Studio to Business Incubator to Employment.

The rationale for this project is twofold:

- community capacity building with a focus on small business development
- the need for expanded learning options and pathways to employment for young people.

The project is a joint venture between Douglas Mawson Institute of Technology (DMIT) in South Australia and Todd Street Business Chambers, a national award winning Small Business Incubator located in Port Adelaide.

Definition of terms

Practice Firms: The Australian Network of Practice Firms (ANPF) is a network of training businesses that students manage and operate as part of their learning program. They trade within each other within a virtual economy. Practice Firms are formed from a partnership between a training provider (school, TAFE, university, private provider), a real business that agrees to mentor the students, and the ANPF central office. Each firm is tailored to suit vocational outcomes, with a strong emphasis on developing a wide range of competencies that fit within the Australian Training Frameworks and qualifications structure.

Small Business Incubator: Small Business Incubators are designed to assist new and growing businesses to become established and profitable by providing premises, advice, services and other support. The 'incubation' period is usually one to three years, during which time fledgling businesses can become established before graduating into the wider business community. The recent National Review of Small Business Incubators, November 1999, cited that the primary objectives of a small business incubator are to:

- foster self-employment, business development and accelerate business growth;
- reduce the failure rate of new start-up businesses; and
- assist businesses to operate, graduate and create jobs and wealth.

Todd Street Business Chambers: Todd Street Business Chambers is the Australasian award winning Small Business Incubator that was the project partner. The Work Studio was a tenant of Todd Street Business Chambers, which is based in Port Adelaide.

Vocational placement: In a vocational placement, students who have satisfactorily completed their theory-based competencies, gain on-the-job experience by working within a simulated or real industry environment for a period of time. They are assessed on their performance. The aim of vocational placement is job readiness.

Work Studio: The aim of a Work Studio is to act as a bridge between a Practice Firm and a Small Business Incubator. Like Practice Firms, the concept of a Work Studio is based on the premise that learning is best achieved through activities embedded in authentic and meaningful contexts. As learners progress from Practice Firm to Work Studio to Business Incubator, they require less structure and guidance. Just as a construction worker uses a scaffold to support the building of a complex structure, and then removes the scaffold once the structure can stand on its own, the learning facilitators and business mentors provide additional support in early stages, only to gradually remove those supports as learners gain confidence and expertise.

Creative Resolutions Enterprise Studio (CRES): This is the business name for the Work Studio operating as a tenant within the Todd Street Business Chambers.

Port-Ability: This was the name given to the project. It was a play on the fact that the project was based in Port Adelaide, aimed to contribute to community capacity building in the Port area and that the employability skills being developed are portable.

Who's who

A number of stakeholders will be referred to by name in this case study and quotes from their interviews will be highlighted.

They are:

Pauline deVries: Project Manager

Pauline is a Lecturer in Retail and Tourism. She established the Practice Firm model at DMIT and has worked in a Practice Firm environment for seven years. Pauline was the TAFE SA gold medal winner in 2002, is an executive member of the Port Adelaide/Enfield Chamber of Commerce and has been a small business operator.

Lynette (Lyn) Hay: Project Partner and Business Mentor

Lyn is the Manager of Todd Street Business Chambers, the Small Business Incubator in which the Work Studio was housed. Lyn was the business mentor to the Work Studio participants and worked with them to develop their business and marketing plans. Todd Street Business Chambers has won the Australasian Small Business

Incubator of the Year Award for the last two years. Lyn is an Executive Member of the Port Adelaide/Enfield Chamber of Commerce and, more recently, a member of the Douglas Mawson Institute Council. She is a staunch advocate of the Work Studio model.

Suzie McAuley: Work Studio Facilitator

Suzie is a Lecturer in Retail and Tourism at Port Adelaide campus of DMIT. She has been a Facilitator in the Retail and Tourism Practice Firm for several years and for this project, facilitated the Retail and Tourism Work Studio.

Kym Bond: Vocational Placement Facilitator

Kym is a Lecturer in IT Studies at the Panorama campus of DMIT. He has specific responsibilities for co-ordination of the Vocational Placement Program. Kym's role in the project was to facilitate the IT studies Vocational Placement component of the project. Vocational Placement students provided an IT Help Desk Service to the Work Studio and also to the tenants of Todd Street Business Chambers.

Ted Schwerdt: Mapping of Employability Skills

Ted is a Lecturer in Vocational Education at the Panorama campus of DMIT. Ted initiated and authored a computer based, self-diagnostic Generic Skills Assessment and Remedial Program to prepare clients for selection testing.

Pene Davey: Project Sponsor

Pene is the Executive Director of Educational Development at Douglas Mawson Institute of Technology.

Pam Brooks: Facilities Manager

Pam is the Personal Assistant to the Managing Director of Douglas Mawson Institute and is the Facilities Manager for the Port Adelaide campus. Pam was responsible for procuring all facilities to outfit the Work Studio space at the Todd Street Business Chambers.

Deanna Mavrandonis: Technical Support

Deanna is an Administrative Services Officer at MindMedia, Port Adelaide campus, DMIT. She provided technical support to the project team.

Jenni Chappel: Administrative Support

Jenni is the office manager at MindMedia, Port Adelaide campus, DMIT, who kept the books in order!

Marie Jasinski: Case Study

Marie is the Principal Lecturer of MindMedia, Port Adelaide campus, DMIT, a research and professional development unit at Douglas Mawson Institute. Marie's role was to develop a project case study.

4 A new practice: going fuzzy in our thinking

In this section, we examine the models used as the basis for the case study and examine participants' reactions to working with a 'fuzzy' framework.

This is a case study of a project team that explored two types of new practice in flexible learning:

- A new model of learning – a Work Studio located within a Small Business Incubator
- A new model of thinking about the new model of learning – a fuzzy framework.

A new practice is about exploring the unknown and making sense of something new. It needs a contemporary way to think about this exploration.

For this project, that way was 'fuzziness':

Fuzziness is expressed in our actions – when we act without being sure about what we really do and aim for, or act with information about the goal but ignorant of how to approach it. This is usually the case when we act in a complex or sensitive-to changes situation. Our approach to life is full of such situations.¹

The rationale for this fuzzy approach is twofold:

1. Flexible learning is a fuzzy concept

The Work Studio is a new practice in flexible learning. However, flexible learning is not, and never has been, a clearly defined concept. It's hard to pin down what flexible learning is. It can be simultaneously vague and clear, imprecise and precise, measurable and unmeasurable, consistent and inconsistent. It varies in degree, and is full of contradictions. Simply put, flexible learning is a fuzzy concept.

Fuzziness means multivalence. It means three or more options, perhaps an infinite spectrum of options, instead of just two extremes. It means analogue instead of binary, infinite shades of grey between black and white.²

In a recently released discussion paper titled *Your Future, Your Choice: Flexible Learning Futures*³, in which the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) invites Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector stakeholders to 'shape the future of flexible learning', this fuzziness is implied in the first chapter heading:

What is flexible learning? 'Flexible learning' is a term that means different things to different people.⁴

¹ Dimitrov, V. Fuzziology and Lifelong Learning. Retrieved, August 2003: www.uws.edu.au/vip/dimitrov/fuzzlearning.htm. p.2.

² Kosko, B. (1993). *Fuzzy Thinking: The New Science of Fuzzy Logic*. Hyperion New York, p. 19.

³ Australian National Training Authority. (2003) *Your Future, Your Choice: Flexible Learning Futures*.

⁴ Australian National Training Authority. (2003). *Your future, Your Choice: Flexible Learning Futures*.

If flexible learning is fuzzy, then so is a new practice in flexible learning. Working with the fuzziness of a new practice and the contradictions it entails could be an asset if it is matched with a model of thinking that is also fuzzy.

2. New models of learning require new models of thinking

The project team decided to work with fuzziness as a conceptual framework. They saw benefit in exposure to an alternative conceptual framework which encourages more flexible thinking about flexible practice.

So what is fuzzy thinking?

Fuzzy thinking originates from Complexity Theory and falls within the broader concept of Social Fuzziology. Social Fuzziology studies fuzziness inherent in our understanding and dealing with the complexity of life. It focuses on embracing and working with uncertainty, imprecision, contradictions and paradox as part of the dynamics of life. It can be summed up in Socrates' famous 'paradox of knowing':

The less we know, the more certain are our explanations; the more we know, the more aware we are about the limitation of being certain.

Fuzziology challenges rigid, fixed, pre-imposed beliefs and ways of seeing the world as restrictive, narrow and obstacles to progress. It supports the premise that a fast changing dynamic world is better served and understood through a fuzzy lens.

In other words, new practice is not clearly defined or understood but fuzzy and:

- is a matter of degree
- is not black and white, but shades of grey
- has blurred edges, not sharp boundaries
- is contextual and variable

New practice also involves:

- working with contradictions and paradox
- working in the present and working in the future
- being flexible and being compliant
- playing by the rules and playing with the rules.

Fuzzy logic provides an alternative way of understanding uncertainty – an alternative the project team was willing to explore. Appendix 3 provides an overview of the main concepts and principles of fuzzy sociology.

Why use a fuzzy framework?

A telling paragraph in the recent *Your Futures Your Choice: Flexible Learning Futures* discussion paper gives a clue. Despite the many incentives offered by the Australian Flexible Learning Framework to provide more flexible learning services, many providers are choosing not to participate. The paper concedes that the uptake of flexible learning by training organisations has been disappointing:

But old ways die hard. The vast majority of vocational training in enterprises and in training organisations is still provided through conventional trainer-led face-to-

face or classroom sessions which offer limited choice and limited flexibility. Many and perhaps most training organisations have not yet incorporated the new models of learning into a systemic approach and management culture that builds on technologies already adopted by the community. The vision is to include flexible learning skills and techniques in every training experience.⁵

The reasons why it is so difficult for an organisation to embrace new practices designed to enhance the core business of teaching and learning are without doubt complex. One reason could be that new models of learning are stuck in old models of thinking.

While the investment in flexible learning has targeted and promoted new models of learning, an equal and targeted investment has not been made in exploring new models of thinking about the new models of learning.

The project team saw this as an opportunity to become more 'cognitively flexible' by exploring an alternative conceptual framework for the project.

The interview process and structure

Three of the four project team members, the project sponsor and the business mentor were interviewed separately in August 2003 - about half way through the project. At this time, the project was well underway but issues were still being worked through. So this is a snapshot of a project-in-progress. It has already moved on from this point, but the learning is valuable.

Each interview, which lasted between forty-five minutes and two hours, was recorded, transcribed, and sent back to each person to review, modify and sign off.

The full transcripts are included as an attachment to this case study in Appendix 4.

IN-NO-VAT-E Model

The interview was structured around a four-quadrant model of innovation developed by Marie Jasinski (2000) which highlights why innovative practice in flexible learning requires a whole-of-system approach to ensure success and sustainability. An outline of the model is included in Appendix 1.

Through a series of questions which touched on each of the four quadrants, participants identified points of opportunity and challenge in establishing the Work Studio and for leveraging its impact and sustainability beyond the funding cycle.

A 'fuzzy framework' – a list of contradictions and paradoxes identified during the project and then used as triggers to discuss emerging issues and insights – overlies the interview. An example of this process is found in Appendix 2.

⁵ Australian National Training Authority (2003) *Your Future, Your Choice: Flexible Learning Futures*.

5 A new practice is clearly fuzzy!

If it's not fuzzy – hey! Who wants to be there? We like the fog!

– *Pauline deVries, project manager*

This section examines the project in more detail and highlights the issues and ideas that were emerging half way through the project. It was decided the half-way mark was a good place to start capturing the learning from the project, as the dynamics were forming and many issues were becoming clearer.

What was new about *Port-Ability* was that it provided the opportunity to test out the feasibility of the Work Studio idea. What was not new was the conceptual thinking that shaped that idea. It had a long history.

By the time it reached the stage of being selected and funded as a new practice, the Work Studio concept already had a long gestation period in the hearts and minds of its initiators. The concept had undergone several iterations and refinements. It had been discussed, researched, formed, shaped, negotiated, articulated, documented and promoted on-and-off for several years.

The key driver for the project was Pauline deVries, the project manager. Pauline has seven years experience with Practice Firms at the Port Adelaide Campus of DMIT. She has well-established business and community networks and is an executive member of the local Chamber of Commerce. She has an excellent working relationship with Lynette Hay, the manager of Todd Street Business Chambers. Pauline was keen to find a pathway for Practice Firm 'graduates' and Lyn's interest was supporting young entrepreneurs in small business contexts. Together, Pauline and Lyn initiated and shaped the concept of the Work Studio and recognised its potential. Without this foundation, there would have been no project.

This was recognised by Pene, the project sponsor:

Pene: Well I know for a fact that Pauline [project manager] and Lyn [incubator manager] have talked about something along these for over three years. I'm aware that Pauline talked to X [manager] about three years ago, a proposal to rent some space over there. It looked different three years ago. The Incubator was new and probably Lyn's thinking and Pauline's thinking was probably not what we've got now, but the seed of that was there.

Like many good ideas, the Work Studio lay dormant, waiting for the right opportunity to bring it to life. There were no illusions that what brought this project to life was the opportunity presented through the *New Practices in Flexible Learning* initiative:

Pene: I think the reason we've been able to do this – and this is critical – is that we have got some money. The Institute didn't have the money to invest in trialling something like this. We needed to get some seed money and that's exactly what the New Practices in Flexible Learning Project has given us.

It was able to survive to that point because the key drivers and advocates saw the possibilities and held the dream and actively searched for ways to make it a reality. This required a clear vision, belief in the idea, strong ownership and even stronger will and determination:

Pauline: The students will be much finer people because of this. You know, if it's in our power to change what we do to empower people to give them a better chance in life, then we need to change – that's what TAFE needs to do. We've always been there, in that transition – we need to modernise too. We need to move.

... it requires guts to stand up there by yourself despite everything else. You have to have a fair bit of grit and I think that I've got a fair bit of grit. And you have to put up with a lot. And I think that's the nature of innovation I'm sure.

So by the time it became an official 'New Practice in Flexible Learning project', the Work Studio had been hard fought for. It had withstood a rigorous application and interview process which required clear articulation and documentation of intent, process and deliverables. This honing helped reinforce the crispness and ownership of the Work Studio concept for those involved in the application process. They had a clear idea of what they wanted to achieve and how they would do it. It would be a Work Studio for Retail and Tourism 'graduates' of the Port Adelaide Practice Firm.

Then it became fuzzy!

Fuzzy vision: not everyone will have the same version

In the initial planning meetings, Lyn identified a specific need for the Todd Street Business Chamber tenants that could also generate 'business' for the Work Studio. This was an IT help desk support service.

Lyn: We are desperate for an IT help desk within the Incubator. We've piloted it with a couple of high schools as you know and it worked well. So I thought 'Right! This would be really good'.

In an attempt to meet the need for IT help desk support at Todd Street, it was decided to provide a vocational placement opportunity for IT students. The IT students would become a sub-contracted help desk service to the Todd St Incubator tenants. A member of the Work Studio undertaking management studies in Retail would manage their work.

Immediately, there were two additional challenges:

1. The focus of the Work Studio was on Retail and Tourism, not IT.
2. The role of the IT students was that of sub-contractors in a vocational placement program, not as members of the Work Studio.

This created a significant challenge for the project team. Kym, the Lecturer who managed the Work Placement Program in IT Studies, became a member of the project team and although he had experience in establishing and facilitating a Practice Firm, his focus, expertise and passion was Vocational Placement. He had not been involved in the initial concept development or application and selection process for this Work Studio and a vocational placement program was not in the original plan. Kym had a lot of catching up to do and also a vocational placement program to run at short notice. He hit the ground running!

The addition of the IT Work Placement program added another layer of complexity to the project and created inevitable differences within the team. In initial planning meetings when they started to articulate their ideas in more detail, it became increasingly evident that there was variance in how a Work Studio was understood and

interpreted by individual team members. Each had a slightly different perspective on what a Work Studio was and how it would operate. Another level of complexity was its location as a tenant within the Todd Street Business Chambers – a fully functioning Small Business Incubator providing business mentoring services to the Work Studio.

Initially, and quite reasonably, team members operated from their own 'conceptual systems' of a Work Studio, so in the early stages, three versions were operating simultaneously in the hearts and minds of the project team.

Lyn, the Small Business Incubator Manager had a business perspective:

Lyn: From where I sit it's about providing an environment for business students irrespective of their speciality, to allow them to develop and apply those employability skills. And so by paying in many ways, more attention to the employment part of VET rather than the vocational training part, it's providing an opportunity for the students to develop those employability skills and build on what they already have because they have certainly got them – to varying degrees – but they've got them.

Kym, the IT Studies Lecturer with a background in Practice Firms and Vocational Placement, had more of a training perspective:

Kym: I think it is important to have some element of reality in the training that we are doing. As a trainer, obviously I want to train, deliver and assess. The Training Package says that there is an element of client focus there, so I should be delivering and assessing my core group, my customers in a setting where there is a client focus. The Incubator down here captures that beautifully because there is a somewhat shielded environment, but there is a focus on having customers that are real.

Pauline, the Project Manager and the key visionary for and driver of the project had extensive experience with Practice Firms and was keen to extend the concept via the Work Studio. Even before the project began, she was already focusing on advancing the Work Studio from the status of 'project' to a sustainable practice:

Pauline: We probably couldn't keep sustaining it in this environment. We probably can't. But I don't see why we couldn't put that model in that campus. To me, we should rethink the use of that whole campus. My vision is still there. I can see it in my mind exactly what it should look like. I can see Lyn walking in and out of there all the time as the mentor for all those simulated businesses and all the people who are involved with us constantly. You know the Chamber of Commerce. Everyone could hold lots of things there. We could really be part of the Community. There's a shift happening, but you're pretty well on your own pushing it until you can hook up with someone as 'quirky and noisy' as you are.

Suzie, who had worked with Pauline in the Retail and Tourism Practice Firm for several years, had an established working relationship with Pauline. The vision of her role as the Work Studio Facilitator for Retail and Tourism aligned well with Pauline.

Ted, a Lecturer from Vocational Preparation didn't know much about Practice Firms or what a Work Studio was, but had extensive experience in generic skills development. His role was to identify the employability skills required to run a business within the Work Studio and map them against Training Package competencies:

Ted: My purpose is aligned with the original intentions of the project, though I have autonomously defined in my head what the mapping is going to be as we haven't discussed it too much as a project team.

Marie: So tell us a bit more about what is emerging in your head about the mapping process.

Ted: Mapping – I know you know as you introduced me to mindmaps – mapping means different things to different people. I think the map I want to work on to both satisfy myself and to fit the project is a rather complicated one. I feel I should map the relationship between the employability skills I've chosen to identify them the same as the ACCI [Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry] and BCA [Business Council of Australia] set of descriptions.

As an Executive Director of Educational Development at DMIT, Pene the project sponsor was looking for positive learning outcomes and the potential of this new methodology:

Pene: Who leads? I suppose each member of the team has a slightly different vision. I believe I've got both a responsibility and also the way I am – a focus on outcomes I want us to achieve. Not the original outcomes, but I want us to achieve learning outcomes that we can feel positive about. I think that's really crucial because I keep saying to everyone 'We're in a new practice'. We're doing things differently, but it's a new practice that doesn't have pre-determined outcomes. It has visions and goals, but that's different from outcomes. So who leads? I think that each member of the team has a leadership role. I think that was how we tried to select people.

Each perspective was equally valid, as all had come from the foundations of sound research, solid experience, acknowledged expertise and successful operations within respective contexts.

But the Work Studio was something different. Although it had significant elements of a Business Incubator, a Practice Firm and a Vocational Placement model, it was none of these. So stakeholder perspectives of the Work Studio were simultaneously aligned and not aligned, new and not new.

This fuzziness in stakeholder perspectives was recognised early on by the Project Manager, who saw it as a challenge to be resolved:

Pauline: You have to have your staff sharing the same philosophy straight away. And understanding exactly what is needed. And the trouble that we have had is that we've been put together and we have people who have experience in running similar operations, but quite different operations. And so there is no clear understanding of where we should have been going with this. Our Practice Firm is probably quite a different style of Practice Firm than the other ones.

Team members were also aware of this fuzziness and the differences in ideas, goals, objectives and operational processes within the team. Here they explored what it meant for the team and for themselves:

Kym: The issues we need to deal with now is that a team has been formed, and there are some issues that are starting to sneak in, in regard to the team and how functional that team is. And what I want to ensure is we revisit the nature of a

team, do some team building and focus on what the goals and objectives and re-evaluate those goals and objectives, get some clarity and move forward.

There was frankness about differences within the team:

Kym: But besides all of that, the most damaging thing to our project is what's happening within the team itself – the clarity of roles, responsibilities, competing directions.

There was a lot of sorting through processes:

Kym: There are many ways we could have gone in this particular project. However, we all needed clarity on the particular direction we were going to walk down. I believe that with the initial brief of getting vocational placement students to staff the IT Help Desk, I have attempted to achieve that. However, it has not been as smooth or as sweet as I would have liked.

It was a conflict not easy to resolve and this took a personal toll on everyone:

Pauline: It's become a real chore. The first time I've ever thought about stopping work was this weekend. It's the first time I've thought about that. It's a terrible thing. I hate that thought. There's so much I can still give, but I'm really tired now. Some of it is too hard.

The project sponsor also recognised the tensions of difference and the compromise it entailed:

Pene: And that's very hard when you have a dream...I guess dreams are never implemented exactly how you envisaged them in the first place and that's learning isn't it?

This snapshot of the team's evolution into a high performing team demonstrates the complexities of the process and the skills required.

Clear and fuzzy: the difference-similarities paradox

As the awareness of these differences grew, the team initially addressed this fuzziness by trying to achieve clarity. They initially did this by holding on more strongly to their individual perspective of how the Work Studio should operate. There was a period of loud voices, blocked ears and bids for supremacy.

Paradoxically, while these differences polarised opinions about how the Work Studio should operate, something stronger held them together. The team also shared complementary beliefs, viewpoints and experiences. All had faced and were facing again, the challenge of introducing new teaching and learning methodologies into a system where it was acknowledged that '*old ways die hard*'⁶. What kept them together was their commitment to '*new ways*'.

The team shared a belief in providing authentic learning experiences for their students, in developing their employability skills, in expanding their networks and in increasing their employment options and pathways.

⁶ Australian National Training Authority. (2003). *Your Future, Your Choice: Flexible Learning Futures*.

The team had come face-to-face with the difference-similarities paradox:

...while differences in interests and values are important for the survival of any human system, *they* have meaning only because of the similarities that also exist and provide a basis for any collective behaviour. This paradox can be handled if both similarities and differences are balanced by fuzzy logic in a way that excludes too much emphasis on them. When a suitable fuzzy framework is created, differences between people and the viewpoints they represent become complementary and necessary to one another, instead of being contradictory and opposite.⁷

The team's dynamics were based on exploring, challenging, questioning, supporting, tolerating, reflecting and learning from seemingly opposing mental models, which simultaneously clashed and informed. There were many of these contradictions or opposites that seemed to co-exist and we started to document them. The team started to map their own dynamics!

Soon, a number of these contradictions – or 'opposites in co-existence' – were identified, collated and used to trigger discussions about issues and concerns arising from the project. Team members continued to extend the list of contradictions impacting on interactions with each other and with other stakeholders during the project. They were able to comment on them in detail, as the interview transcripts explain.

Documenting the contradictions that needed to be dealt with by the team, clearly demonstrate the complexities confronting the project team. The final list of contradictory elements that impact on a project such as this is presented in Table 1.

⁷ Dimitrov, V. *Use of Fuzzy Logic when Dealing with Social Complexity*.

Disempowered	AND	Empowered
Undefined	AND	Defined
Unstructured	AND	Structured
Unsupported	AND	Supported
Unclear	AND	Clear
Polarised	AND	United
Strong	AND	Vulnerable
Dormant	AND	Active
Guidance	AND	Autonomy
Disagree	AND	Agree
Unaligned	AND	Aligned
Disinterested	AND	Interested
Unplanned	AND	Planned
Experienced	AND	Inexperienced
Individual	AND	Team
Progressing	AND	Stalling
Knowledge	AND	Ignorance
Skilled	AND	Unskilled
Educational model	AND	Business model
Espoused	AND	Actual
Strategic	AND	Emergent
Energised	AND	Exhausted

Table 1: Contradictions in a new practice – ‘opposites in co-existence’ identified by the project team.

For example, when asked about choosing the dimension *polarised/united* in his interview, Ted commented about the value of conflict within the team:

Ted: I think in the longer term, the clash of culture is good. In a shorter term, it may make it a bit slower for the operation to proceed. But I think it's good. If you have a focused or a polarised way of looking at it, as we all know, out of those collisions, good things often happen.

The interviews revealed there were both awareness of and an acceptance that these contradictions did co-exist within the project. Once team members were aware that contradictory elements were an essential part of the process, they saw how to use this diversity as an opportunity to expand the ways of seeing the situation and getting a better grip on the complexity of the project. The Fuzziology approach was an effective way to focus individuals who showed great understanding and insight from a Fuzziology perspective.

Pene: We're doing things differently, but it's a new practice that doesn't have pre-determined outcomes. It has visions and goals, but that's different from outcomes.

But I think they are the key people with the vision and they have a lot of similarities, but I don't think we have got them quite aligned at the moment, but they are more aligned now than they were earlier. They've had to be.

Marie: Do they need to be?

Pene: No. You're absolutely right. They don't need to be. I was writing down my goals the other day and I wrote down the words 'multiple visions'. So it's true, no they don't need to be. But there's got to be enough-people have got to share enough alignment and similarity. They've got to be able to recognise that there is enough togetherness as well as hanging on to their own visions as well.

Recognising and appreciating multiple visions is different to compromise. Compromise was not on the agenda of the Project Manager, nor of the project team members.

Pauline: We wouldn't have many great inventions or unexplored territories if there had been great or general compromise. However, something new discovered together is a different thing.

The 'something new discovered together' was that the Work Studio was in fact a new business and not a replication of what had gone before. Yet what had gone before informed the new business. Everyone contributed to the new business. A fuzzy framework helps the apparent contradictions make sense:

With Fuzzy Logic we can create an imprecise and easy to re-shape and modify framework in which the 'either/or' approach to contradictory concepts expressed in the paradox is replaced by a 'both/and' relationship and their parallel acceptance. For example, a fuzzy framework created in management practice can meaningfully transform expressions like 'collaboration OR competitiveness' into 'collaboration AND competitiveness', 'reorganisation OR stability into re-organisation AND stability.'⁸

⁸ Dimitrov, V. Chaos, Complexity and Fuzzy Logic. Course Notes, p. 92

By using this approach, some very fine insights about the complexities and subtleties of the project emerged and resulted in some productive discussions. It was clear that the multi-dimensional nature of the project required multi-dimensional perspectives, which had the potential for both conflict and growth.

The project through a fuzzy lens

Social Fuzziology principles like Fuzzy Reasoning, the Principle of Incompatibility, and the Principles of Parallelism, Non-exclusion and Non-isolation provide alternative thinking models. By engaging with an interview and reflective process based on Social Fuzziology, team members were able to give meaning to and reframe the messy business of innovative practice. They discovered that difference is OK.

Fuzzy reasoning highlights the benefits of intermediate values and the 'unity of opposites':

Fuzzy reasoning reflects Heraclitus' view of the world as unity of opposites – it's a multi-valued logic that allows intermediate values to be defined between opposite evaluations like yes/no, true/false, black/white, hot/cold etc. Between yes and no there are different degrees of doubt...between true and false there are different degrees of ambiguity...between black and white – different degrees of grey.⁹

Here we can see how the principles of Social Fuzziology could be used to both describe the project team and point to strategies for dealing with the issues that emerged.

The **Principle of Incompatibility** states that 'as complexity rises, precise statements lose meaning and meaningful statements lose precision'.

The beginnings of this project highlighted a number of incompatibilities:

- the teachers were also learners
- motives were both professional and personal
- the Lecturers were experts in their respective environments, but novices within a Work Studio
- each had been an autonomous operator and was now working as a team member, and
- what seemed easy to achieve on paper was hard to achieve in practice.

⁹ Dimitrov, V. *Introduction to Social Fuzziology*. Retrieved, August 2003. <http://www.zulenet.com/VladimirDimitrov/pages/IntroSocialFuzz.html> p.4

The Principle of Parallelism states that a statement can be true and false up to some degree in parallel. The individuals in the team were both an excellent combination and a poor combination.

They:

- worked individually and they worked as a team
- spoke in loud voices and kept their voices quiet
- listened and they did not hear
- were tolerant and not tolerant
- competed and cooperated.

There were times of professional tolerance and personal frustration.

The Principles of Non-exclusion and Non-isolation reinforced the concept of fuzzy reasoning and the importance of all team members having a voice and considering every option knowing that there may never be a best fit:

Non-exclusion means that no options or alternatives, however improbable they seem to be for inclusion in future scenarios, should be excluded from consideration.¹⁰

In this project, no matter how well the idea of a Work Studio was documented, in practice it was unlikely there would be an exact translation. There may be no optimal solution, so all input needed considering:

Non-isolation means that chaotic behaviour does not privilege one optimal solution. To isolate only one option, alternative or strategy by describing it as the best, the optimal or the most efficient, from whatever point of view, is senseless: turbulent dynamics do not tolerate any pre-imposed isolation, however 'optimal' it may appear to the decision-maker.¹¹

Key words like 'multi-valued logic', 'unity of opposites', 'intermediate values', 'shades of grey' and 'degrees of doubt' help shape a picture of possibilities about how new models of thinking may be just as important as new models of learning for their long term future.

What the team came to appreciate and practice was a new form of vision – poly-ocular vision!

Use of unanimous consensus making in decision-making; assumes existence of one 'best' solution; based on the principle of 'sticking to the point;' in contrast, the Navajo and Mandenka cultures use the principle of 'poly-ocular' vision, that is, it is taken for granted that people have different ideas or views of the same situation, and these differences, rather than being discarded, are incorporated into the understanding of the situation.¹²

¹⁰ Dimitrov, V. *Use of Fuzzy Logic when dealing with social complexity.*

¹¹ Dimitrov, V. (2003) *Fuzzy Logic: a practical tool for working with social complexity.*

¹² Puntenney, D. (2002) *Measuring Social Change Investments: A Research Project of the Women's Funding Network.* <http://www.wfnet.org/documents/dpuntenney-annotated.doc>

By using this approach, several insights were discovered and lessons learned that help to re-frame challenging experiences:

1. Expect unanticipated twists and turns. Embrace them. You never know where they will lead.
2. Be prepared for loud voices, blocked ears and bids for supremacy. Don't avoid them – participate! They are a valuable part of the dynamics.
3. A new theoretical framework can give you alternative perspectives and help you understand what is going on. It can be empowering.

6 The role of corporate services

This section looks at the impact on the project of stakeholders such as Executive Management, Finance Officers, Facilities Managers and IT Services Staff who were once or twice removed from the project but had a significant influence on it.

A new practice is about changing more than teaching and learning practice. What became clear as the new practice unfolded was that there was a flow-on effect which had implications for a diverse range of stakeholders who may be once, twice, or three times removed from the activity of the new practice. This made a new practice vulnerable as these stakeholders can impact indirectly – and sometimes without awareness - on project processes and outcomes.

What follows are the insights that the project team gained about the role of Executive and Corporate Services in supporting a new practice.

Insight 1: It's easier when the climate of the organisation is conducive to innovation and there is a champion at the helm

Support for a new practice at Executive Management level is critical as it creates a climate conducive to new practice. If the person at the helm supports innovation, opportunities to participate are expanded:

Pene: At the Executive level, I think it aligns very well, because I think Mike [Managing Director] has made it quite clear that innovation is part of what we do. I mean I think he's very good at supporting innovation and challenging people to try new things. And by and large, he will really get behind people who have good ideas and want to innovate and do things differently.

Insight 2: Focus on planning the next step early and target those who can make decisions

A 'new practice' is at risk of never becoming an 'old practice'. If there is no planning for the next step well in advance, it runs the risk of a quick death once the funding cycle is over.

Pene: I actually think you've got to think about that from the start. I mean I think when we were writing that proposal we knew it was a one-off injection. You either look around for new money and the opportunity to apply for this innovation at the State level as part of the VET planning process, only came up at the beginning of this month. So that had to be done quickly to get it together.

During the project, the project sponsor investigated a range of funding opportunities to continue the Work Studio concept. An application has just been successful, so the future of the Work Studio is promising.

Insight 3: Nurture your advocates and expect them to advocate – and have a backup system

One of the key lessons was to nurture your advocates. Sometimes it is only when the advocate is absent that their real value is realised and appreciated. The absence of the project sponsor for seven weeks at the beginning of the project placed extra and

unreasonable demands on the Project Manager and this was later recognised by the project sponsor:

Pene: My learning from that has been that I was away for the first critical seven weeks of that project and I think in retrospect what I should have asked was another member of Executive to have taken over my role as project sponsor for those first seven weeks.

My role would have been to make sure that sort of thing didn't happen. My role was to make sure that Pauline personally didn't have to deal with that. She is the educator. She has not managed a project of this magnitude before and she was thrown in the deep end and I recognise that and I guess I thought because we'd shared the proposal when it went in.

Insight 4: The system is set up for established practice not new practice, so expect some challenges – and challenge as well

When a new practice meets 'the system', expect an inevitable clash. While there are well-established procedures for dealing with established practice, it was not always the same for new practice. The role of new practice in an organisation is often tenuous.

This was a challenge recognised by the project sponsor, an Executive Manager who in her interview acknowledged that the relationship between established practice, new practice and business development was still a fragile one. It was as if DMIT was still coming to terms with innovative practice 'in practice':

Pene: Because of the different portfolio responsibilities at Executive, those responsibilities are about grounding, are more about systems, are more about, I suppose, regulations and how things are done. So there is likely to be a 'Yes, but' approach I think in Executive. So I think that our role is probably aligned with supporting innovation as I see it, because just the word 'development' implies moving forward - change in the education area. But we've got to make that work as an organisation. And I think as a learning organisation, we still don't cope all that well with innovation.

Marie: How aligned do you think innovation is with the business development side of an organisation?

Pene: I think probably not particularly well at this stage.

Marie: Why do you think that is?

Pene: Well...business tends to deal with concrete things. I think that it doesn't deal terribly well with uncertainties or trials of things. It usually needs to know what the outcomes are going to be. And therefore you cost on the basis of those outcomes and what your costs are to achieve those outcomes. Whereas new practice, you're actually trialling new ideas, bedding them down, maybe changing tack a bit, re-looking the anticipated outcomes and maybe re-scoping those anticipated outcomes and I don't think that a business outcomes approach – a costing approach – copes very well with that.

Marie: Should it cope better?

Pene: Yes. I think so and I think that's something that we have got to take on board. And perhaps then after the event...that if we get this proposal up for next year, that we invite someone from the business area to be part of the team right from the start and to be able to...and then maybe the understanding of the need for flexibility in implementing a new practice and the requirements of being a business – as we are...

Insight 5: Targeting people with 'clout' is a strategic move

Targeting people with 'clout' was identified by the project team as a key difference between why certain things got done and other things were a struggle when dealing with stakeholders at the Executive and Corporate level.

The following examples provide an insight into the impact the people with 'clout' had on the project.

The Facilities Manager

The Work Studio started out as a bare room. The Port Adelaide Facilities Manager procured furniture, computers and other facilities. The students then set up their own space in the Work Studio. The Work Studio was well serviced with facilities.

Marie: How important is the Facilities Manager?

Pauline: Facilities – it's imperative. It's probably one of the smartest moves we've made.

Marie: Can you tell me a bit more about that? You're actually quite well stocked over there. What was the process as far as facilities?

Pauline: OK. It gets back to someone who has some clout. You need someone with some clout. And Pam has that because she does a lot of work with facilities at the Port Adelaide campus, so it's nothing new for her to procure things. And she's the boss's right hand woman. So what she wants she should be able to get.

Marie: And she has!

Pauline: And she has.

The strategic role played by the Facilities Manager was also recognised by the project sponsor:

Pene: I think it was a very strategic position. That was very smart. And also, it involves a non-teaching person and I think that that was important. That's been very good I think.

From a business perspective, however, Lyn felt they were over-serviced and supported and an important business and team-building opportunity was lost:

Lyn: Initially I felt that the students were provided with a lot of direction about the furniture they were getting and when it was arriving. The Facilitators put themselves into a situation where they were taking on more than they needed to. The students could have coordinated that. It would have given them something to do upfront. But there was a very high level of direction from the Facilitators – with

the very best intentions in the world because it was, you know, a bit of anxiety starting something new.

There are two issues here that need to be separated:

1. Procurement of facilities. There was no doubt this was critical.
2. How those facilities are used as part of the Work Studio program needs to be thought through carefully.

IT Support Services Staff

The Work Studio was rented as a bare space, so everything had to be set up from scratch, including IT systems, computers and networks. Establishing a good working relationship with DMIT IT support services was critical not only in the setting up period, but throughout the project:

Pauline: X's [IT support services] been good because Pam has been involved with that as well, so it's the personal relationship we have got with those people over there.

Marie: How important is that?

Pauline: That's very important. It's all in the approach. And also X wants this project to succeed. That's what he said to me. And I had to call him in for an emergency one day and he said he would do anything to see the project succeed. That's because we brought him with us and involved him with us almost from the beginning. We talked to him about what we are doing.

These examples clearly demonstrate how stakeholders indirectly involved in a project can substantially impact on its success, and highlights how important it is to lobby and include them in the project right from the start. They can make a difference to the outcomes of your project – and to stress levels!

7 Fuzzy teams – phases in team dynamics using a fuzzy framework

What follows is a fuzzy way of thinking about the different phases of team dynamics and the communication processes within a team. This section uses key words, a graphical representation and quotes from the literature to describe the four phases of the team's experiences.

By engaging in reflective practice and some 'double loop' learning – thinking about the thinking – the team has developed a tool that can be used to raise awareness of, promote discussion about and debrief experiences using fuzzy communication principles.

The four phases representing the project team's experiences are:

- **START-UP – Clear AND Fuzzy:** the vision seems clear, but it turns out fuzzy.
- **ON-THE-WAY – Focused AND Blurred:** reality testing gets in the way.
- **THE EYE OF THE STORM – Stable AND Unstable:** the dynamics of the individual and the collective recognised and utilised.
- **EMERGENCE – New AND Not New:** the emergence of something new discovered together.

Each of the four phases is presented in three ways:

- **Key words and phrases** capture the essence of the dynamics observed at particular phases in the group process.
- **A graphical representation** of this process provides a visual cue about the team dynamics at each phase.
- **Quotes** from the Fuzziology literature to ground the observations. These can be used in any project to trigger questions, seek clarification and promote discussion and reflective practice in order to raise awareness of team dynamics from a fuzzy perspective.

PHASE 1: START-UP – Clear AND Fuzzy

- At project start-up the vision seems crisp and communication precise.
- Each team member has a high personal investment in the idea being developed.
- Stakeholders assume a shared meaning of the concept as they have a common goal – but that assumption is fuzzy.



Discussion starters for the START-UP PHASE

The paradox of artificially created realities

The paradox is that the artificial representations and models we create often appear crisp – non-fuzzy, precise and logically grounded. Unfortunately, the largest part of them are distorted and illusory, as they have explored and explained the phenomenon, which they represent, separated from their roots in the inner dynamical space of those who have created the models. The more we immerse into ‘crisp’ modelling of nature and life, the less our chance to grasp the essence of them.¹³

Precision is fuzzy

In a broad sense, fuzziness is the opposite of precision. Everything that cannot be defined precisely...and everything that has no clearly described boundaries in space or time is considered a bearer of fuzziness.¹⁴

Fuzzy minds

The greatest source of fuzziness is our mind. The powerful rational thinker never ceases to divide the whole of reality into fragments in order to analyze, classify and label them, and then to toss or scrap together to piece out a world, which has very little to do with unbreakable wholeness of reality – a wholeness to which we inseparably belong.¹⁵

¹³ Dimitrov, V. *Discovering Fuzziology* <http://www.uws.edu.au/dimitrov/discovering-fuzziology.htm>. p. 4.

¹⁴ Dimitrov, V. *Introduction to Fuzziology*. <http://www.uws.edu.au/vip/dimitrov/fuzzysoc.htm>. p. 1.

¹⁵ Dimitrov, V. *Introduction to Fuzziology*. <http://www.uws.edu.au/vip/dimitrov/fuzzysoc.htm>. p. 5.

Phase 2: ON-THE-WAY – Focused AND blurred

- Reality starts getting in the way, as you start moving from a crisp, established practice to a fuzzy, new practice.
- Crispness of the vision starts blurring, as ideas are reality tested and 'goodness of fit' is not as snug as expected.
- Different perspectives and viewpoints start to surface.
- Boundaries become fuzzy and edges blurred – what are we doing?
- A time of conflict, tension, doubt, concern and clinging to the familiar.
- Taking a stand to hold the dream to keep control of the vision.
- Focus on communication and let the healthy vibrations emerge.



Discussion Starters for the ON-THE-WAY Phase

The Drowning Man Paradox:

The more unstable we feel the more we gravitate to stability, to something that is familiar, secure, habitual and known. The fuzzier the environment appears the stronger the attachment to what seems non-fuzzy in it.¹⁶

Incoherence Principle:

The more certain (non-fuzzy, determinate) each individual's choice, the more uncertain (fuzzy, indeterminate) the democratic choice of the whole group and on the contrary: the more fuzzy the individual choices, the greater the chance for the group to negotiate a socially satisfactory deterministic (categorical, non-fuzzy) choice.¹⁷

¹⁶ Dimitrov, V. Introduction to Fuzziology. Retrieved August 2003. <http://www.uws.edu.au/vip/dimitov/fuzzysoc.htm>. p. 7.

¹⁷ Dimitrov, V. Use of Fuzziology when dealing with hard negotiation. Retrieved August 2003. <http://www.zulenet.com/VladimirDimitrov/pages/negotiation.html> p. 5.

PHASE 3: THE EYE OF THE STORM – Stable AND unstable

- A move from individual to collective intelligence
- More open to other perspectives and a time to test your own.
- Dynamic interplay between individual and collective knowledge, interests, motives, values, goals, positions.
- Open to the emergence of something new.
- Recognising the co-existence of difference as an asset: knowing and not knowing, defined/undefined, supported/unsupported



Discussion Starters for the EYE-OF-THE-STORM Phase

Poly-ocular vision: expanding the ways of seeing the world

Use of unanimous consensus making in decision-making; assumes existence of one 'best' solution; based on the principle of 'sticking to the point;' in contrast, the Navajo and Mandenka cultures use the principle of 'poly-ocular' vision, that is, it is taken for granted that people have different ideas or views of the same situation, and these differences, rather than being discarded, are incorporated into the understanding of the situation.¹⁸

Non-linear dynamics

The dynamics of fuzziness never move in a straight line – from the unknown to the known; one can imagine them in a vortex-like motion, like the dynamics of a whirlpool or tornado. What we assume as known today becomes fuzzy tomorrow only to appear clear after a while and again fuzzy a moment later. The natural ebbs and tides of fuzziness continue forever.¹⁹

Shifting boundaries

Boundaries become fluid and permeable and expand, shrink, combine, fractalize, bifurcate, etc. As far as the whole process of human knowing is based on these emanations, our knowledge is inherently fuzzy.

¹⁸ Punttenney, D. (2002). *Measuring Social Change Investments: A Research Project of the Women's Funding Network* <http://www.wfnet.org/documents/dpunttenney-annotated.doc>

¹⁹ Dimitrov, V. *Discovering Fuzziology* <http://www.uws.edu.au/dimitrov/discovering-fuzziology.htm>, p. 3.

PHASE 4: EMERGENCE – New AND not New

- Something new emerges out of the vortex of turbulent interactions.
- Allowing for emergence and appreciating the value of fuzzy communication and individual and collective wisdom.
- The fuzziness of BOTH/AND is clear – what emerges is BOTH the same AND different to the original concepts.



Discussion starters for the EMERGENCE Phase

New and old meaning

In the moment when meaning emerges, we are able to make sense of what we experience – what we see and hear, touch and smell, read and contemplate, create and discover. Once merged, meanings immediately reflect the way we think.

Tolerance of difference

Fuzzy Logic opens the eyes of the leaders to the futility of black-and-white dreams of universality, 'unique solutions' and best answers'. With Fuzzy Logic, leaders learn not only how to be tolerant to different and contradictory viewpoints, but also how to look for and create conditions which facilitate the switch from contradictory value differences to complementary ones. And this is the way of wisdom.²⁰

New models of seeing and doing

Fuzzy logic provides an alternative way of understanding uncertainty. From this new way of understanding can be derived innovative approaches and strategies for working with the uncertainty that so often characterises social systems.²¹

²⁰ Dimitrov, V. *Chaos, Complexity and Fuzzy Logic: Working with Chaos and Complexity. Study Guide.* University of Western Sydney. p. 93.

²¹ Dimitrov, V. *Use of Fuzzy Logic when dealing with social complexity.* Retrieved August 2003. <http://journal-ci.csse.monash.edu.au/ci/vol04/dimitrov1/dimitrov.htm>.

Communication: the heart of the matter

If there is one theme emerging from this project, it is that interpersonal communication is the heart of the matter for teams, their sponsors, advocates and critics.

When a new team forms to reach a common goal, it is not uncommon or unexpected that they initially seek consensus – to agree on a shared vision, meaning and action. This may be faulty thinking in a complex, unstable dynamic environment:

Consensus ceases to be a peaceful long-term commonality of stakeholders' interests. Such commonality grows on determinacy and stability. Unfortunately, neither determinacy nor stability characterise complexity of human interactions and communication. The more we reach for commonality in human interactions, the farther away it seems to be. No wonder that, in the post modernist framework, 'consensus is a horizon that is never reached' (Lyotard 1984).²²

As this project discovered, consensus was not be the path to mutual understanding and project enhancement:

Paradoxically, instead of consensus being the power-house of common social action, it is 'dissensus' which operates in a consensus seeking enterprise, permanently implanting chaotic vibrations in the process of communication²³.

Dissensus – agreeing to disagree – may be something that needs to be embraced rather than avoided.

This is a key theme emerging from the popular innovation literature. For example, in Robert Sutton's (2001) best seller *Weird Ideas That Work: 11 ½ Practices for Promoting, Managing, and Sustaining Innovation*²⁴, Sutton challenges innovators to think differently about what they do and presents an array of strategies and tactics for bridging the innovation gap. One of them is to find happy people and let them fight:

Weird Idea #5. Find happy people, and let them fight. If you want innovation, you need upbeat people who know the right way to battle. Avoid conflict during the earliest stages of the creative process, but encourage people to fight over ideas in the intermediate stages.²⁵

Healthy egos, firm ideas, strong beliefs and dynamic interaction often drive innovative practitioners and are part of the creative process. They can also be a major source of conflict! However, this conflict need not be avoided, but rather harnessed.

²² Dimitrov, V. & Russell, D. *The fuzziness of communication: a catalyst for seeking consensus*. Retrieved September 2003. <http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/books/seized/fuzcom.html> p. 1.

²³ Dimitrov, V. *Introduction to Social Fuzziology*. [http://www.zulenet.com/Vladimir Dimitrov/pages/IntroSocialFuzz.html](http://www.zulenet.com/Vladimir%20Dimitrov/pages/IntroSocialFuzz.html) . p.7.

²⁴ Sutton, R. (2001) *Weird Ideas that Work: 11 ½ Practices for Promoting, Managing and Sustaining Innovation*. Free Press.

²⁵ Sutton, R. (2001) *Weird Ideas That Work: 11 ½ Practices for Promoting, Managing, and Sustaining Innovation*. Free Press.

A suitable fuzzy framework can honour rather than dampen or smother creative expression and frank discourse. It can encourage people to discover how to act together in order to benefit from differences in their knowledge, beliefs and values and to construct something new from this collective intelligence. This was a key learning point for all the project team and can be summarised by these reflections from a team member:

Kym: I usually have to put up my guard more, to defend my ideals, etc.

I have never participated on a team that was able to discuss differences, interact with each other and support each other. The group dynamics was a pleasure to be a part of.

What emerged was second order consensus - consensus for seeking consensus. This new type of dynamic consensus between stakeholders is where:

...people try to seek consensus by exploring different virtual (possible) meanings of the issues of common concern that might lead to mutual understanding and preparedness to move together – to make the next step into fuzziness of common expectations.²⁶

The acceptance of difference, honouring the familiar and being open to the undiscovered is the beginning of trust and with trust an openness to new ways of thinking and a 'preparedness to act together':

Stakeholder's preparedness to act together (that is, 'consensus for seeking a consensus') can be expressed as fuzzy composition of three major components:

- willingness to engage in dialogue (communicativeness),
- deservingness of trust or confidence (trustworthiness), and
- ability to create options (creativity).²⁷

The Work Studio model which is emerging from the dynamics of this project-in-action will not be the ultimate answer or the best solution and this is acknowledged by all. While it has its own uniqueness it will inevitably change shape. What that shape will be we do not know, but what we do know is that a suitable fuzzy framework helps us think in new ways about new possibilities – and new practices!

²⁶ Dimitrov, V. *Introduction to Social Fuzziology*. Retrieved August 2003. <http://www.zulenet.com/VladimirDimitrov/pages/IntroSocialFuzz.html> .

²⁷ Dimitrov, V. *Use of Fuzzy Logic when dealing with social complexity*. Retrieved August 2003. <http://journal-ci.csse.monash.edu.au/ci/vol04/dimitrov1/dimitrov.htm>

8: Sustainability: embedding new practice

As a direct result of the success of this *New Practices in Flexible Learning Project*, Douglas Mawson Institute of Technology applied for and was successful in obtaining funding from the SA Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology to extend the Work Studio concept in 2004.

This 'Innovative Initiatives' funding will be part of DMIT's Purchase Agreement for 2004. This success highlights the value of projects such as this in providing Registered Training Organisations with opportunities to trial innovative strategies. Project staff worked with key managers to explore avenues for embedding the innovation into mainstream practice. It also helped identify change management and resource implications that need addressing as part of the implementation process.

All key stakeholders could see a life for the Work Studio beyond the project. They believed the concept was sustainable; but they also understood that sustainability, was not a clear-cut, foregone conclusion.

What does it take to embed a new practice? Pauline believes that being clear about intent is critical:

Pauline: What do we actually want to do with the project – are we using it as a showcase, or a strategy that we are serious about? If we're serious, then we need to have a bigger vision for its replication.

It requires belief in the process and commitment to it:

Pauline: Of course it's sustainable! We just have to be committed to diversity as a growth industry, giving the customer what they need to develop in Vocational Education and Training.

Pauline: It is unsustainable if we are not identifying that this is part of our strategic direction and encompassed in our mission statement as ongoing product development for the benefit of all our customers.

Suzie: Definitely sustainable. I think if we can continue and slowly introduce other programs even if just for a visit or a business activity then once some of them see what is happening then they would have to be converted. I think we use those we have a relationship with and try and introduce them bit-by-bit.

However, it takes more than that:

Pauline: It needs the will. Determination. There are some people I work with who have got the will and the determination to do it, but they are not in the right spot to be able to push that through. It needs will and determination and you can't impose and leave that to people who are not in the position to influence as well as they can.

What follows is the current thinking and list of suggestions from the project participants about what it will take to transform the Work Studio model from a new to a sustainable practice.

1. Ensure senior level advocacy

There was a general feeling that if senior management is not involved in maintaining the momentum, the project will face sudden death. The project team are all educators and not in positions of power to make key decisions at strategic levels. The role of the Sponsor is critical to what will happen next as the ongoing funding success attests to. The Sponsor recognises this:

Pene: Senior level advocacy and a relatively high level on involvement from start to finish - and beyond. This is important for sustainability as well as helping break down the barriers. Step in and support/problem solve when blockages occur.

2. Develop business processes for innovative practice

While DMIT has established a unit to support innovative practice, this is not tied to business development in a strategic way. This makes new practices initiatives vulnerable at an Institute level. If the business of running the Incubator does not have effective systems in place, this in turn impacts on the Work Studio business. Many of the gaps identified during this project are now being addressed. A stronger link with the Business Development Unit would be strategic.

3. Plan early for the next step

Start to plan the next step early on and seek alternative sources of funding, lobby decision makers. The worse thing that could happen is to let your efforts come to a grinding halt.

4. Make sure you are sharing the same concept

Be sure there is a shared conceptual understanding for what you are trying to achieve. There are fine lines between Practice Firms, Work Studios, Vocational Placement, Simulated Business Environments and Business Incubators. If stakeholders are not clear about what they are fighting for, advocacy can be blurred.

5. Market to the business community to ensure their support

The industry contacts and strong networks within the Small Business community already established by Project Manager Pauline deVries cannot be underestimated. Representation on Chambers of Commerce and other business networks is critical in keeping the business community up-to-date and for getting their support:

Pauline: The marketing activities worked well because they were subtle in many instances, showcasing our efforts to link our students with jobs or small business entrepreneurship in many different forums.

6. Recognise that the business mentor is central to the success of the Work Studio

Lyn Hay's role as a *'high profile and pro-active Business Mentor'* was unanimously acknowledged as central to the success of the project.

Pauline: The business mentor worked well because she knew what was needed to develop an entrepreneurial mindset – in both the students and the staff.

The unique value of locating the Work Studio with the Small Business Incubator was recognised by the project team:

Pauline: The Incubator space worked well because it brought our students closer to industry, the business mentor and real life opportunities.

7. Consider industry sponsorship

Seeking support from industry sponsors was an idea explored more than once:

Kym: To be sustainable, I can see that sponsorship from Industry is required. If so, anything is possible. There are sufficient runs on the board that indicate the model works!

8. Consider a Professional Development Incubator for Staff

In this project, there were two businesses running simultaneously:

- The business of the students within the Work Studio
- The business of DMIT setting up the Work Studio model in a Small Business Incubator.

There was a recommendation from Lyn Hay to consider some the value of having an Incubator model for professional development. To ensure students get the full value from the experience, staff also need experience working within a business incubator environment.

Lyn: Experiencing exactly the same process and by doing it – you may want to run a six month program – the first three months may be setting up a business within the incubator and setting up a learning project and then the second three months might be – OK, well the business is up and running, we might choose to evaluate what we are doing. We'll put two hats on.

9. Ensure stakeholder Involvement

Involve and inform every possible stakeholder from the outset, even though they may appear once or twice removed from the project. Having a stake in the project helps it progress. These include Education, Executive and Corporate Services stakeholders.

Pene: Corporate Services support is essential, but make sure those relevant staff are briefed and involved from the start – especially IT and Facilities.

10. Work with the philosophy, as the detail may change

The idea of the Work Studio has wide applicability. Other program areas are already expressing interest in the concept and will undoubtedly shape the concept to suit their context.

11. Ensure that the National Project Management Team targets decision makers

The National Project Management Team was in close contact with the Project Manager and focused on the details of the project activities and the deliverables. There would have been great benefit in working more closely with sponsors and decision makers to influence planning beyond the funding cycle.

12. Value the role of our business partners

Lyn Hay had many suggestions about the potential of the Work Studio and her interview transcript is essential reading. Her recommendation to 'incubate' staff involved in this methodology in order to develop business acumen is sound business advice.

Marie: Where could this go?

Lyn: Well I think it could be a semi self-managing methodology that is economical for TAFE to run and I think that it could provide TAFE Facilitators with an opportunity to get out of the classroom and to find out more about their students in terms of their capabilities and motivation which of course if you complete the loop then and go back to the training environment of course that allows an opportunity for the facilitator to modify their training style recognise the level of competency that already exists and build on that competency rather than go over old ground.

It also provides DMIT staff with an opportunity for closer contact with Industry:

Lyn: Alternatively, you may already have someone who is skilled in developing adult learners, but maybe not be interacting with businesses and some of that business acumen stuff, or looking at trends within the tourism industry or IT industry or whatever.

If there is any doubt in considering the value of the Work Studio model, please reflect on this comment from Tony, a tenant of Todd Street Business Chambers, at a morning tea to launch the Work Studio.

Marie: So why do you think this is a great experience Tony?

Tony: I reckon it's a great experience because these guys get to interact with the real lumps and bumps and the splinters of the world.

They get a chance to get jabbed and cut and healed and get on with it, then be successful.

Appendix 1: Inspired Minds – Harnessing your power to innovate, lead and change

Marie Jasinski, Design Planet Pty Ltd.

Email: mariejas@designplanet.com.au



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The word **INNOVATE** can be traced all the way back to 1440. It comes from the middle French word 'innovacyon' meaning 'renewal' or 'new way of doing things'. In short, innovation is the process of creating new or better products and services or new ways of producing or supplying them. ANTA defines **FLEXIBILITY** as 'anticipating, and responding to, the ever-changing needs and expectations of VET clients - enterprises learners and communities'. There is no doubt that innovation and flexibility are closely aligned.

Innovation is often a messy business not given to formulas or right ways of doing things. Innovations often emerge from gut feelings, mistakes, improvisation, false starts and set backs. The same could be said for flexible learning! The challenge for both is sustainability. How do you take the seed of an innovative idea for flexible learning and grow it so that it becomes embedded as a sustainable practice within an organisation?

What are the responsibilities of different stakeholder groups in supporting new practices in flexible learning and especially in supporting innovative practitioners who frequently identify and initiate these opportunities?

The collective intelligence of over 100 VET innovators, leaders, change agents and their sponsors has been harnessed in a dynamic and practical model of innovation based on chaos and complexity concepts. It highlights why innovative practice requires a whole of system approach to ensure success and sustainability.

The interviews focused on these four phases of the IN-NO-VAT-E framework:

IN-no-vat-e



PURPOSE – Who and what do you have to be IN with to support and sustain innovation within an organisation?

- Exploiting your organisation's strategic directions
- Identifying factors that influence the acceptance of innovation
- Aligning projects to who and what counts in an organisation

In-NO-vat-e



SYSTEMS: Know the NOs and how to work with them to support your innovative practice.

- Understand the role of different structures in an organisation and how to work with structural gatekeepers. Who are they? What do they NO? Why do they NO?
- Identify the multiples roles flexible learning advocates need to work effectively within these structures.
- Innovative thinking moves faster than the systems needed to support its wider application and implementation. What influence has this had on your project?

In-no-VAT-e



IMPLEMENTATION: The delicate fermentation process in the VAT of action

- Understanding the role of an innovator in an innovation cycle and how best to use their talents
- Identifying why embedding an innovation as a sustainable practice within an organisation is often such a challenge
- Appreciating the role of all stakeholders in the adoption and diffusion process

In-no-vat-E



REVIEW: Reflecting on what's been done and taking the next step involves a lot of E words! Excite! Encourage! Enthuse! Engage!

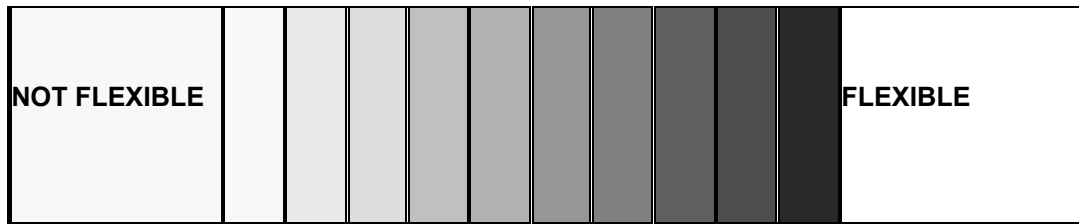
- Highlighting the critical role of reflection and renewal in an innovation process
- How to recognise the importance of celebrating achievements as well as identifying gaps for improvement.

Appendix 2: New practice in flexible learning: where does it start?

These are some of the interview tools which introduce the concept of fuzzy flexibility and where new practice in flexible learning fits.

Two questions on flexible learning and new practice started off the interview.

Question 1: Where does flexible start?



Each individual was asked to identify where they believed flexible started along the continuum and to give reasons for their choice.

The results are collated below.

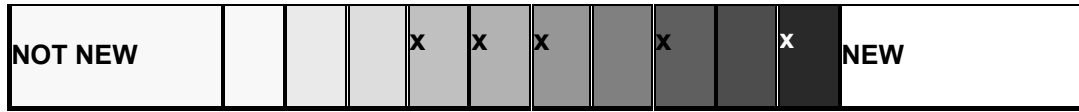


All team members identified that flexible started by taking an initial first step towards flexibility, so the first point beyond 'not flexible' was a starting point for Flexible Learning:

Pauline: Once people start on that little movement, they will keep going if that movement is supported and encouraged.

Kym: Flexible learning starts from the lessons learned about non-flexibility. To invent strategies that become more flexible, so I would put flexible learning starting at the non flexible end.

Question 2: Where does new practice start in relation to flexible learning?



Where a new practice in flexible learning started was fuzzier. While the X markings indicated the perceived starting point was further up the scale than the starting point for flexible learning, the spread indicated some differences of opinion:

Pauline: New practice is a more extreme version of flexible learning. Flexible learning means you are prepared to have a shift in your thinking. But you don't need to define how deep that shift could be. Flexible is more about accommodating different things, and to tolerate some of them. New practice is where you are looking for change. You go out in search of it.

Pene: Presumably, a new practice assumes that it has been through the various gradations. And so that you have actually got a new way of doing things. So, in relation to what we are looking at with our new practice, that would have been through all this learning that is moving from the 'not new' to the 'new'. I took it in a bit because I think there are some steps that need to happen before you actually can start talking about new practice rather than just a movement into flexible learning.

Kym: To me, 'new practice' conjures up thoughts of a new paradigm, a new way of thinking, a new way of doing particular training.

To the team, starting a new practice was different to flexible learning. While flexible learning was a first step, a new practice was a search for change, a bifurcation point and new way of thinking and doing. These two diagrams served to highlight that flexible learning and new practice were simultaneously the same and different – that is, they were multi-valued.

Appendix 3: Fuzzy thinking: quotable quotes

The project team took a fuzzy approach to understanding the dynamics of a new practice. Some basic Social Fuzziology principles and ideas are outlined in the quotes below.

There is no clear and unequivocal correctness in human communication

No one is justified in believing that they have a correct understanding of the world and that others are wrong - there are not clear and unequivocal criteria for 'correctness' in human communication.²⁸

Everyone has a unique and valid perspective:

If we want to coexist with the other person, we must see that his certainty - however undesirable it may seem to us - is as legitimate and valid as our own...²⁹

What we think is crisp turns out to be fuzzy:

The paradox is that the artificial representations and models we create often appear crisp – non-fuzzy, precise and logically grounded. Unfortunately, the largest part of them are distorted and illusive, as they have explored and explained the phenomena, which they represent, separated from their roots in the inner dynamical space of those who have created the models. The more we immerse into 'crisp' modelling of nature and life, the less our chance to grasp the essence of them.³⁰

Our actions are fuzzy:

Fuzziness can exist in our actions – when we act without being sure about what we really do and aim for, or act with information about the goal but ignorant of how to approach it. This is usually the case when we act in a complex or sensitive-to changes situation. Full of such situations is human life.³¹

In a broad sense, fuzziness is the opposite of precision. Everything that cannot be defined precisely...and everything that has no clearly described boundaries in space or time is considered a bearer of fuzziness.³²

²⁸ Dimitrov, V. & Russell, D. *The fuzziness of communication: a catalyst for seeking consensus*. Retrieved September 2003. <http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/books/seized/fuzcom.html> p. 1.

²⁹ Maturana, H and Varela, F. (1988). *The Tree of Knowledge*, London: Shambala. p. 245.

³⁰ Dimitrov, V. *Discovering Fuzziology*. Retrieved August 2003. <http://www.uws.edu.au/dimitrov/discovering-fuzziology.htm>. p. 4.

³¹ Dimitrov, V. *Fuzziology and Lifelong Learning*. Retrieved August 2003: <http://www.uws.edu.au/vip/dimitrov/fuzzlearning.htm>. p.2.

³² Dimitrov, V., *Introduction to Fuzziology*. <http://www.uws.edu.au/vip/dimitrov/fuzzysoc.htm>. p. 1

Our minds are fuzzy:

The greatest source of fuzziness is our mind. The powerful rational thinker never ceases to divide the whole of reality into fragments in order to analyze, classify and label them, and then to toss or scrap together to piece out a world, which has very little to do with unbreakable wholeness of reality – a wholeness to which we inseparably belong.³³

When things are unstable, we seek stability:

The Drowning Man Paradox: the more unstable we feel the more we gravitate to stability, to something that is familiar, secure, habitual and known. The fuzzier the environment appears the stronger the attachment to what seems non-fuzzy in it.³⁴

Poly-ocular vision expands the ways of seeing the world:

Use of unanimous consensus making in decision-making; assumes existence of one 'best' solution; based on the principle of 'sticking to the point;' in contrast, the Navajo and Mandenka cultures use the principle of 'poly-ocular' vision, that is, it is taken for granted that people have different ideas or views of the same situation, and these differences, rather than being discarded, are incorporated into the understanding of the situation.³⁵

Nothing is linear:

The dynamics of fuzziness never move in a straight line – from the unknown to the known; one can imagine them in a vortex-like motion, like the dynamics of a whirlpool or tornado. What we assume as known today becomes fuzzy tomorrow only to appear clear after a while, and again fuzzy a moment later. The natural ebbs and tides of fuzziness continue forever.³⁶

Boundaries shift all the time:

Boundaries become fluid and permeable and expand, shrink, combine, fractalise, bifurcate, etc. As far as the whole process of human knowing is based on these emanations, our knowledge is inherently fuzzy.³⁷

³³ Dimitrov, V., *Introduction to Fuzziology*. <http://www.uws.edu.au/vip/dimitrov/fuzzysoc.htm>. p. 5

³⁴ Dimitrov, V. *Introduction to Fuzziology*. <http://www.uws.edu.au/vip/dimitov/fuzzysoc.htm>. p. 7

³⁵ Punttenney, D. (2002) *Measuring Social Change Investments: A Research Project of the Women's Funding Network* <http://www.wfnet.org/documents/dpunterney-annotated.doc>

³⁶ Dimitrov, V. *Discovering Fuzziology* <http://www.uws.edu.au/dimitrov/discovering-fuzziology.htm>, p. 3

³⁷ Dimitrov, V. *Discovering Fuzziology* <http://www.uws.edu.au/dimitrov/discovering-fuzziology.htm>

Different and contradictory viewpoints are tolerated:

Fuzzy Logic opens the eyes of the leaders to the futility of black-and-white dreams of universality, 'unique solutions' and 'best answers'. With Fuzzy Logic, leaders learn not only how to be tolerant to different and contradictory viewpoints, but also how to look for and create conditions which facilitate the switch from contradictory value differences to complementary ones. And this is the way of wisdom.³⁸

New models of seeing and doing:

From this new way of understanding can be derived innovative approaches and strategies for working with the uncertainty that so often characterises social systems.³⁹

³⁸ Dimitrov, V. Chaos, Complexity and Fuzzy Logic. Working with Chaos and Complexity. Study Guide. University of Western Sydney. P. 93.

³⁹ Dimitrov, V. Use of Fuzzy Logic when dealing with social complexity. Retrieved august 2003. <http://journal-ci.csse.monash.edu.au/ci/vol04/dimitrov1/dimitrov.htm> p.1.

Appendix: 4 Mid Project Case Study Interview Transcripts

- 4.1 Pauline deVries, Project manager
- 4.2 Pene Davey, Project Sponsor
- 4.3 Lynette Hay, Project Partner and Business Mentor
- 4.4 Ted Schwerdt, Lecturer, Vocational Education, DMIT
- 4.5 Kym Bond, Lecturer, Work Placement Co-ordinator

1. Pauline DeVries: Mid Project Case Study Interview

Interviewee: Pauline DeVries, Project Manager

Position in Organisation: Lecturer, Retail and Tourism, Business Services.

Interview date: 21/08/03

Interview length: 1 hour 33 minutes

Interviewed by: Marie Jasinski

What is New Practice?

New Practice is a more extreme version of flexible learning. Flexible Learning means you are prepared to have a shift in your thinking. But you don't need to define how deep that shift could be.

What the difference between Flexible and New Practice?

Flexible is more about accommodating different things, and to tolerate some of them. New Practice is where you are looking for change. You go out in search of it.

How new is our New Practice?

Ours is an unknown as we don't know if anyone else has done this. It's pretty new in TAFE.

You can be simultaneously NEW and NOT NEW in your practice.

That's exactly right! It's probably how I've been feeling with this.

What drives you?

To do the job well. You can't stand still in your job.

Is the role of the innovator to challenge?

Yes – I am a doer and a finisher. It gets done and we usually have a reasonably positive result, and I don't know why that is a threat to people.

The role of the innovator is to identify opportunity and introduce possibilities – this may challenge the status quo but that would depend on the environment surrounding the innovator.

Let's talk about the broader Institute and how this New Practice aligns with what DMIT stands for.

I would have thought that everything we are doing now is what DMI stands for. It's talked about, there's hype around it. We've got some really clever people. They all talk about giving you support. But I would have thought by now the whole campus would have been a Practice Firm.

I can't change that, unless I am an EM4 or a Director of Education. Those decisions can be made and could have been made. It depends on the way you do it. You just have to be subtle with the way you do it.

Everyone resisted it and we persisted.

The definition has told us we need this, this Port-Ability now. And of course you have everyone slowly picking up on this.

No one actually comes in and says: '*How are you doing it?*' The only people who are coming in and saying it to us are the schools. LeFevre and Ocean View are coming in. What does that say about our Institute?

What does it take to make this New Practice a sustainable Practice?

It needs the will. Determination. There are some people I work with who have got the will and the determination to do it, but they are not in the right spot to be able to push that through. It needs will and determination and you can't impose and leave that to people who are not in the position to influence as well as they can.

If we can pull this off, they could have pulled a lot of things off.

What would the ideal be once this project is complete?

We probably couldn't keep sustaining it in this environment. We probably can't. But I don't see why we couldn't put that model in that campus. To me, we should rethink the use of that whole campus. My vision is still there. I can see it in my mind exactly what it should look like. I can see Lyn walking in and out of there all the time as the mentor for all those simulated businesses and all the people who are involved with us constantly. You know the Chamber of Commerce. Everyone could hold lots of things there. We could really be part of the Community.

There's a shift happening, but you're pretty well on your own pushing it until you can hook up with someone as 'quirky and noisy' as you are.

So the shift's happening within the community, but not within the TAFE?

I think so.

Why do you think that is?

Because everyone is looking after their own interests I suppose.

I don't know.

In-NO-vat-e

Let's move on to systems. The New Practices is the idea and purpose, but once you hit systems, you often get NO. Systems is any sort of infrastructure that supports core business. How has the SYSTEM supported the project?

We are here aren't we? We are here because of a **project** and not because the Institute put money into it aren't we?

It's probably finance – we have to remember that too.

Management systems – they would balk doing something like this

Human Resources – the issue of getting staff has not been easy. Even with this project where you get the money for it.

Allocation – signing forms

SYSTEM SUPPORT

How important is the Facilities Manager?

Facilities – It's imperative. It's probably one of the smartest moves we've made.

Can you tell me a bit more about that? You're actually quite well stocked over there. What was the process as far as facilities?

OK. It gets back to someone who has some clout. You need someone with some clout. And x [Facilities Manager] has that because she does a lot of work with facilities at the Port Adelaide campus, so it's nothing new for her to procure things. And she's the boss's right hand woman. So what she wants she should be able to get.

And she has!

And she has.

So if you didn't have that in place, and she wasn't the person she is...

It would have been a struggle. We would have to be dealing with everyone else's dodgy stuff no doubt.

IT SUPPORT

X's [IT Support] has been good because X [Facilities Manager] has been involved with that as well, so it's the personal relationship we have got with those people over there.

How important is that?

That's very important. It's all in the approach. And also X [IT support services] wants this project to succeed. That's what he said to me. And I had to call him in for an emergency one day and he said he would do anything to see the project succeed. That's because we brought him with us and involved him with us almost from the beginning. We talked to him about what we are doing. Reliable and empathetic. It's the understanding about the project.

FINANCE

X has been very helpful. However, I think I was a bit disappointed with them in a way as they have not seen this as an opportunity to really look at how well we support projects and be prepared to tackle X on his demands. And I expected more. I've been to X [Business Development Manager] about that too. I think I just expected more from people than I got and that's probably been a bit disappointing in a way.

So this project wasn't seen as a way to move the system on, but as a way to get the best deal?

Yes.

The dollars were the driver?

Yes. It was a very interesting experience.

So different formulas were used for different staff? Is that how it was?

I think it was very flexible formulas!

You've had a good balance there. There has been a lot of good system support too.

In-no-VAT-e

Fermentation is something that needs to happen and about timing and judgement. If ferment for too short a time it is unformed, if too long, it gets stale. Have you seen any fermentation issues re timing, pacing and judgement. How important was it for students to come into an empty place and see it built?

I think it was very important for them. For them to take ownership and to have a bit of input.

Student Induction

The other important thing is not to tell the students too soon about it, because otherwise you may have found that half of them wouldn't have come back, it would have been quite daunting the thought of it.

We said we were going to do something different with them, but we didn't overwhelm them as to what it would be. I think that was critical. When we told them, we were able to bring them over here instantly, so that they could see how exciting that would be for them.

So you gave them an immediate concrete experience?

I think that was a much better thing to do.

So you have to be a bit selective in your briefing – because it is a big adjustment?

I think so, and also the concept is very hard for them to grasp.

How would that relate to the lecturers who were involved?

It was probably very difficult concept for many people to grasp. Hypothetical and simulated work for many people it is a very difficult concept.

How are the students now – five weeks in?

I think they are OK. They are frustrated now. They want to be getting on with something. I think this is the problem. We just have to get on with it now.

Observing them, if you were having a look at employability skills versus competencies, where's the focus been in the last five weeks? Has there been a division?

No, we haven't had ... though I have to be careful about that because on Thursdays they have to come into TAFE to make sure the competencies are being met. And certainly in the first few weeks we were in here, we were looking for opportunities to develop those projects for them to enable them to develop those competencies. But I guess the passed few weeks, those projects are sitting there waiting to happen while we've been trying to get other things up and running. What's it's probably doing is what we were talking about the other day ... that attributes thing. What's been happening is some of those attributes have probably been heightened.

Which ones?

Certainly the ones that develop a sense of independence, developing a sense of responsibility and motivation and they've done a good job of that. Then there's conflict resolution. They are learning a lot of diplomacy I'm sure. And tact – an amazing amount of tact. So there has been a lot of learning happening that we would never acknowledge if we didn't reflect on it quite specifically.

Can you see that the employability side of things have been getting a good run?

Absolutely.

Would they have got an equal run if you hadn't set up this environment? If you had set up the Studio in the Institute?

It's hard to say. It depends on how we would have done this. If we had a lot of interaction with Lyn ... because I don't feel they've had a lot of interaction with people in the Incubator as yet. As they haven't had a reason to do it. We haven't had the opportunity because we have hindered that to a degree and slowed it down.

We've pulled them back, because we have been hanging on. We've needed to put them on looser elastic.

So what have you learnt already about the VAT and fermentation and implementing the Studio? If you were to say what were the key learning points so far, about the operation of it and how it is succeeding.

You have to have your staff sharing the same philosophy straight away. And understanding exactly what is needed. And the trouble that we have had is that we've been put together and we have people who have experience in running similar operations, but quite different operations. And so there is no clear understanding of where we should have been going with this. Our Practice Firm is probably quite a different style of Practice Firm than the other ones. I think that might have been the measure of our success too – the length of time we have been able to maintain it and build it.

So how do you get staff to share that philosophy? What's the formula? What would be the secret for that?

You have to get to know each other and also perhaps visit the work site and get a feeling for the work site. I think you need lots and lots and lots of informal chats. Informal chats are very beneficial.

I think we need to develop a culture of facilitation which we don't have.

What do we have?

We've got lecturers. We've got people who can facilitate, but we have to develop that culture of facilitation.

And how do you think that's going to happen?

The Institute has to get on and facilitate it. To be facilitators themselves – to put in the money and the training.

When you say facilitation, so you mean facilitation in a generic sense, or facilitation specifically related to PF and WS?

I think you need specific. I think if you are going to come up with something like this, then to make this work really easily...

The thing is that we are learning. We haven't done it. It wouldn't be as exciting if they knew what they were doing and could do it so easily. Then you would be moving on to the next challenge wouldn't you because you can all do it. However, you have got to take a step back to make this work better. You've got to take a step back, get it all happening from behind so everyone sees where we're going. At the moment we can go and talk about this as it seems really exciting to us but quite dreary or too complex or irrelevant to others.

The students will be much finer people because of this. You know, if it's in our power to change what we do to empower people to give them a better chance in life, then we need to change – that's what TAFE needs to do. We've always been there, in that transition – we need to modernise too.

We need to move.

Do you think we have the capacity to do it?

I think we have the capacity. Once again do we have the Will? Do we have the guts? Because it requires guts to stand up there by yourself despite everything else. You have to have a fair bit of grit and I think that I've got a fair bit of grit. And you have to put up with a lot. And I think that's the nature of innovation I'm sure.

You know you get a fair bit of flak – you know – you'd have had a fair bit yourself.

In-no-vat-E

So let's move on now then – because we can return to these at any time – that if you looking at REVIEW.

What sort of e-words pop into your head as far as review and the description of how you've seen anything to do with this project so far.

OK, the first words I'd say are:

- Exciting
- Enlightening
- Exhausting
- Entertaining
- Enabling

Questions now, if you're looking at review and reflective practice, here we are five weeks in, what comments, remarks opinions you could offer about the vision and where we first started out to where we are now? What's the alignment been?

I don't think I saw it any differently to where we're going. You have to have a sense of reality as well. I know what it's like to come up with something new, a new model that you have to keep persevering with. I think we have done very well despite the challenges we've hit. The model is just the vehicle – what we are really doing is putting them through the Studio from the Practice Firm. Lyn has been impressed with them. If we had been able to let them do what they needed to do unfettered, which was what the challenges was for us and that was probably my frustration in a way. Is that they have not been able to put what they have learnt in the PF. They didn't need to be directed. They could have done that. How they would have done that might have been totally different, but that didn't matter. The aim of the project was to bring it in to a different environment and they could have done that quite well. That has been my frustration. I think we can catch up. I'm not going to panic about that. I think there is still time to cut free from that stuff and to move forward with both or with one Help Desk. They have a great project happening now with X and with X [Incubator Tenants] and they can get serious.

What needs to be happening within the Institute to ensure the sustainability of this project beyond the life of the funding?

We need to capture the people who have been involved in the project and enable them to help and support others.

How can that be achieved?

They need to know that they have a job next year, that would be very helpful. And also to give them some excitement at work. It's become a real chore. The first time I've ever thought about stopping work was this weekend. It's the first time I've thought about

that. It's a terrible thing. I hate that thought. There's so much I can still give, but I'm really tired now. Some of it is too hard.

I think it would be a shame to lose those people. I think it's a shame not to build on the momentum of it, and I think you have to have a good hard look at what you are going to do with that campus. If we have got two years there, why would you want to put it any where else when the community is starting to open their arms to you. You can never do this anywhere else. You know you've got me running around doing all the right things. The Chamber of Commerce and WABEC [Western Area Business Enterprise Centre] . I'm not saying this in a negative sense, I'm having to pick up the tab mentally for all that extra stress.

Mental tab?

That's right! And always having to present a good image. You know, DMIT they'd have to think about it when I'm around as I hope to give a good impression. I always give a good impression. So why would you want to have to start to do they again? It would just be ridiculous. You'd just never be able to do it. It's taken seven years.

So this is the seventh year of this story?

I've always been involved in WABEC and always been involved in anything around here. We hosted *Links and Drinks*, for the tourism community – we've done heaps of stuff.

So if it wasn't for you as the catalyst for this project, could something like this get up and running without those networks set up in the first place? Without that seven year history?

I think it could, but you'd have to have a good team. I'm not saying that it depends on me, but you'd have to have lots of energy to get out there and do it. It's a big selling job. I reckon people could do it. I'm not saying it's impossible, but I think it is the location as well. If you've already invented the wheel, why wouldn't you just make the wheel a bit bigger? Instead of having to start again.

In rounding off this section, is there any statement at this stage of the project?

I think it is a great opportunity and I'm trying to promote it through Centre for Innovation Business and Manufacturing because the Business Incubators are a wonderful vehicle for this type of VET collaboration.

2. Pene Davey: Mid project Case Study Interview

Interviewee: Pene Davey, Executive Director, Educational Development, Douglas Mawson Institute of Technology, South Australia.

Role in Project: Project Sponsor

Interview date: 24/08/03

Interview length: 1 hour 12 minutes

Interviewed by: Marie Jasinski, Project Case Study.

Flexible Learning

Where does flexible start?



Once people start on that little movement, they will keep going if that movement is supported and encouraged.

New Practice

Where does New Practice start in relation to Flexible Learning?



In terms of getting to a New Practice, I think probably about the fourth or fifth square in.

Want to tell us a bit more about that?

Presumably, a New Practice assumes that it has been through the various gradations. And so that you have actually got a new way of doing things. So, in relation to what we are looking at with our New Practice, that would have been through all this learning that is moving from the Not New to the New. I took it in a bit because I think there are some steps that need to happen before you actually can start talking about New Practice rather than just a movement into flexible learning.

Do you want to expand on that?

No, I think that's how I feel. I feel that when we start at learning, we start and the new and start to move gradually, but suddenly...for me there's a difference when I look at this again, I see there's quite a difference in shading between the fourth and the fifth block. To me that represents a quantum leap.

A critical point?

Yes

[Marie explains fuzzy concepts]

Working with contradictions in paradox sheet

As it stands right now, are there any of those dimensions from your perspective as the project sponsor, and also as key stakeholder in the decision making as to where this [project] might lead. Are there any of those dimensions that stand out for you right now that you would like to comment on?

Stand out in what way ... as being critical as moving to a New Practice?

No. As far as what's happening now that we're half way through the project right now. I realise that you were away at that forming stage so you've come in, you've observed what's happening...

OK, I think the not cohesive – cohesive dimension has been critical. That to me really links to the team – the individual and the team. And it probably also has a close associated with planned and unplanned. I don't think the support was in doubt. I don't think the interest was in doubt. I have to think a bit more about the unaligned-aligned. I don't think that unstructured – structured was an issue.

So the ones that are an issue – which are the dimensions of not cohesive-cohesive, individual – team, unplanned-planned, what comments would you like to make about any or all of those?

I think that my observation is that there wasn't enough clarification initially – and I am at a disadvantage as we heard that we got the project on my last day here, and then I was away for seven weeks. Now I really would have liked to have been part of those initial meetings to make people clear about what they were letting themselves in for. And that I am particularly concerned about the issues around the IT program, and I guess it relates to the unclear-clear. Maybe the lack of clarity about how the IT program would be involved. I've also got concerns about the perceptions of costing there, because I think the rules seems to have changed there. That's been an issue I think.

We'll pick that up a bit later.

So I think that's one of those things that happen and you've just got to cope with that so I think what I could have bought to those early meetings was a clear commitment at Executive level that would have said ...made sure that we had those things clearly talked through. I guess previous experiences in projects for me is that this is really important to do, so we are all one the same wavelength as much as possible, that we have some clear rules. And I know now that Pauline has put down some protocols, but should have been there at the beginning. And I feel that this has been good learning for all of us. And very good learning to pass on to the national system.

Although there was that lack of clarity, what's emerged from that is some really clear issues in a way.

Yes. Absolutely.

From unclarity comes clarity.

Yes. Absolutely. And I think it gives participants a sense of... sort of knowing what they are doing. They may not know the final outcomes, but we have a sense of team and learning together is absolutely critical to the success of any project. Anything new...you need the passion, but you also need the grounding. You need that moving ahead together and almost being a team against the world kind of stuff. I think that any

successful expedition has a team approach. And ones that fail tend to be where the team pulls apart.

OK. Which is a good way to lead into the structure we're using today

[Marie explains IN-NO-VAT-E model]

IN-no-vat-e

How well do you think that this New Practice project is aligned with the purpose of DMI and what it stands for? From the perspective of an Executive Director who has got that influence and is a key decision maker and influencer.

At the Executive level, I think it aligns very well, because I think Mike has made it quite clear that innovation is part of what we do. I mean I think he's very good at supporting innovation and challenging people to try new things. And by and large, he will really get behind people who have good ideas and want to innovate and do things differently.

So I would say, I'm not sure that that is embedded as a clear way forward that Executive works. I'll be quite honest about that. I think Mike and I have that very clearly in mind. Because of the different portfolio responsibilities at Executive, those responsibilities are about grounding, are more about systems, are more about I suppose regulations and how things are done. So there is likely to be a 'Yes, but' approach I think in Executive. So I think that our role is probably aligned with supporting innovation as I see it, because just the word development implies moving forward, change in the education area. But we've got to make that work as an organisation. And I think as a learning organisation, we still don't cope all that well with innovation.

So with the concept of innovation and that shared vision, is there a shared vision at Executive about education and innovation and that cohesiveness within Executive itself?

I think that one of the things that's brought that together has been strong support for the educational brief which is two years old now. And that gave us a vision about where education would go and I think that has actually been quite an important document because building on that Educational Brief, we then we did the Project Plan for how we would implement it. And X [Executive Corporate Manager] had a strong role in developing that with the infrastructure committee and they've really taken that forward now into a concrete reality of what that vision was. I think that part of it has worked well. And I think there is a shared purpose there and I think that now the Department has said 'Yes', that Marlestone campus is going to have some upgrade – not what we wanted at this stage, but there is actually something there that says that.

And Mike has actually started talking about his new vision in the context of the Kirby Report and in the context of the Skills Enquiry, and the fact he's shared that right across the Institute now, I think Executive is right behind that.

So how important is it to have a Managing Director with that vision?

Critical in my view.

What would happen if he wasn't there?

My job would be a lot harder. I mean I sort of instinctively know now that Mike supports the kind of work I do with MindMedia, with Professional Development etc, but I think a different Director would do it differently.

So in a way, are New Practices vulnerable?

Very. Very. And I think our matrix approach in our Executive Team works pretty well. I know that I work particularly closely with X. I usually talk through what I am trying to do there and I think she is very supportive of that and I think that is very critical from Corporate Services side of things.

I think X is still finding his feet in a way with the Business Development side of things, but he is still trying to get systems in place to better support business directions for the Institute. We've just gone through Strategic Planning which has a different approach to Strategic Planning through the balanced score card. And in actual fact, I think that approach has helped support both innovation and New Practice as it actually talks about innovation as part of what we do – looking ahead and developing our people. That has been quite important. So I think we have got the right structure. Certainly in my view got a better structure than most Institutes.

Has that got to do with the vision of the people at Executive who are driving and supporting that?

Partly. And I also think it's been reasonably stable now – X I guess is the last entrant there...

So how long has that team been together?

Probably I'd say about three years.

Is that stability important part of it?

Yes, because you understand each other and know where each other is coming from. You value where people are coming from. I know when X first joined, I think we didn't quite know quite how that position was going to evolve and how X was going to handle it. I think we are much clearer now about it now. So once that clarity was improved, you start to work more productively together because your storming, forming and norming ...we're getting into the norming in that sense.

With our New Practice, we're pretty well aligned with educational development. How aligned do you think innovation is with the business development side of an organisation?

I think probably not particularly well at this stage.

Why do you reckon that is?

Well ... business tends to deal with concrete things. I think that it doesn't deal terribly well with uncertainties or trials of things. It usually needs to know what the outcomes are going to be. And therefore you cost on the basis of those outcomes and what your costs are to achieve those outcomes. Whereas New Practice, you're actually trialling new ideas, bedding them down, maybe changing tack a bit, re-looking the anticipated outcomes and maybe re-scoping those anticipated outcomes and I don't think that a business outcomes approach – a costing approach – copes very well with that.

Should it cope better?

Yes. I think so and I think that's something that we have got to take on board. And perhaps then after the event ... that if we get this proposal up for next year, that we invite someone from the business area to be part of the team right from the start and to be able to ... and then maybe the understanding of the need for flexibility in implementing a new practice and the requirements of being a business – as we are.

I guess there's a view that innovation and New Practices is about building a business.

Yes it is about building a business.

And if there's not alignment between the innovation and the business development then it makes it even more vulnerable because there is not a business process in place to actually grow it.

And that's where I'd like to move on... I know you've put in an application for funding to extend this project's life. What happens if we don't get that funding? What happens to this project?

Then we've got to look at how we ... we obviously wouldn't be able to implement all that we suggested we could do. I think there is a number of things that would continue. I think the project has incorporated that. First of all there's working with another Institute that is working in similar areas and has a reputation for innovation. So I think that that can still go ahead.

I think the work that Ted is doing with employability skills are an ANTA priority. There maybe another source of funding and Andrea Sainsbury from TAFEbiz is keeping a good look out for me as far as what areas of funding we might apply for to continue that kind of work. I think that the work that Ted is doing with employability skills, we're getting a bit of momentum there. There were seven of us that went to the recent NCVET forum on the employability skills area. Actually, what I was working on when we started this was summarising their feedback because I asked each of them some questions about what they got out of it and what we can implement from that. So I have got some good feedback. So I want us as a group to continue and maybe bring in other people in. So there is another aspect of that innovation proposal I think we can work on.

What would be difficult is how we might continue to work together if there is no more money to hire space in the business incubator. That would be the part that would be at risk because they are a commercial business and cannot give us the space for nothing. But Lyn I think is really keen to keep the collaboration going and whether we move the concept of incubation and what we've learnt from how we work in an Incubator – how an educational organisation can work in an Incubator for mutual outcomes – whether we could physically locate that at the Port Adelaide campus and it would be different, because you wouldn't have the tenants of the incubator businesses all around you, but we could probably still do things and that would get around the issue of paying the rent money.

So this is Plan B?

I didn't write that innovation proposal to say this is an all or nothing thing. Shivers!

Never do that.

So you always need to have an alternative plan?

Yes!

We're half way through the project and we're all thinking about the completion of it. How far into a New Practices project do you have to think about Plan B or Phase two?

I actually think you've got to think about that from the start. I mean I think when we were writing that proposal we knew it was a one off injection. You either look around for new money and the opportunity to apply for this innovation at the State level as part of the VET planning process, only came up at the beginning of this month. So that had to be done quickly to get it together. But I think I couldn't have done that...it wasn't just me, I got some really useful feedback...I just pulled it together. We had that up here already. We couldn't have pulled it together as quickly as we did without that already being there.

You intimated earlier on when we talked about the Not New- New dimensions of New Practice, that there's been a fair bit of lead up time to enable us to do what we are actually doing in this New Practice. So what's the history? How long is the lead in time to enable us to get to where we are today?

Well I know for a fact that Pauline and Lyn have talked about something along these for over three years. I'm aware that Pauline talked to John about three years ago, a proposal to rent some space over there. It looked different three years ago. The Incubator was new and probably Lyn's thinking and Pauline's thinking was probably not what we've got now, but the seed of that was there. And the Practice Firm and the way that that has worked I think – seven years Pauline has been running the Practice Firm there – so it's often a set of circumstances that come together. We wouldn't have thought of putting in for this if the Australian Flexible Learning Framework hadn't last year introduced its Innovation in Flexible Learning which is now New Practices in Flexible Learning. So things come together. You think 'Ooh! That's a nice lot of money, how can we go for it?'

We put in another one on employability skills last year and that also got our thinking going as well.

Many people I've been talking to who are innovators say that this is the sixth or seventh year story. The fermentation time is often six to seven years.

I mean Practice Firms have been around in VET not ten years probably. I don't know when the first one came in Australia. And the other thing that has always been in VET is the close links with industry. You know that's working in industry. I think that assessment in the workplace is a more recent thing in the last ten years or so, but you know apprenticeships have always been about trying out your skills in industry. So VET lends itself well. It's not a University type of project, I don't think.

In-NO-vat-e

What I'd like to do now while it's emerging is to move on to systems, because when you are actually dealing with or addressing New Practice, it's basically saying you're testing the status quo or try to stretch the boundaries. From your perspective in the Executive, what systems have been tested across the Institute with this New Practice project?

I don't think our IT systems have been tested.

Some of the complexities of New Practices are actually not to do with the New Practice itself, it's to do with meeting the system head on and try to facilitate that New Practice in a system that doesn't necessarily support it in the way that it could. And I guess they're the type of things I am touching on. Are you aware of any systems issues or barriers?

I'm probably not the best one to talk to about that because I know that ... I mean the students are enrolled in competencies that they are undertaking while they are working over there. So we had to ensure that they were really working in a different learning environment, but they were still going to achieve what they would have achieved in the Practice Firm by the end of the year.

What we are trialling is a new learning environment that is better aligned to the community and small business.

So there is certainly a challenge to make sure that whatever the students did there, they were not disadvantaged in any way. In fact we hoped they would be advantaged and that's another issue that we should think about in our evaluation. Have the students who'd worked in the Incubator, are they better placed to move into employment, are their networked better to help them get started in either their own business or to gain employment. Yes so it's something we need to think about in our evaluation. We haven't set up a way to test that I don't think at this stage and maybe we just need to go with gut feeling there.

I think the reason we've been able to do this – and this is critical – is that we have got some money. The Institute didn't have the money to invest in trialling something like this. We needed to get some seed money and that's exactly what the New Practices Project has given us. I think the learning from that at a national level will be very interesting. One of the things we had to look at in applying for this Innovations proposal for next year was that one of the criteria is that it needs to be able to become sustainable. Now my belief is that this can be sustainable because you're really swapping one learning environment from each other. So there's a real challenge there to ... I'd say the challenge was more to the staff than to the students because what I ... I'm not able to observe this as I'm not over there all the time ... but Lyn seems very positive and very enthusiastic about the students. It's probably a bit of nervousness, they want to make sure they get their Certificate IV at the end of the year.

There's a certain sense of excitement as I understand it- Suzie and Lyn and Pauline is talking to them. I think in three years I think you could have that embedded, and certainly in the Shaping the Future strategy of ANTA, talks about community capacity building. They are looking for strategies that link vocational education and training in a more integrated way with the community. There is no doubt about that. And so the timing nationally and at State level is right to trial something like this.

One of the challenges that is consistently coming our with New Practices, and with professional development that is funded like this, is the sustainability of it once the project is complete and there has been different viewpoints about that. Some say, like you're saying is that it's seed money. It's an acceleration or boost to what you were planning to do anyway. Others will say, if you don't get the money it won't happen. So where does attitude, commitment, drive, will, and determination within the organisation to make something with potential like this to actually happen in spite of maybe not getting funding. I mean you talked about the staff and I'm just looking at the whole issue from the perspective of change management and sustainability. What's the role of an Executive Director in facilitating that process of sustainable practice?

It's a driving role. That's the most exciting part of my job. To be out there to try and make judgements about what will provide better learning outcomes for our students, taking into account the research. I think MindMedia's role has been critical in this kind of intelligence it brings to the Institute. The benchmarking that MindMedia can do out there around Australia and overseas to a degree. So I think my role is really to pull that together. For example, with these employability skills, I went to a research forum. I think it is my role to make the best use of the learning from the seven people who participated in that forum from DMIT.

So how did you do it?

Well, I sent out an email to them all and gave them two questions:

1. What was the most useful thing you got out of today?
2. What was the most practical thing you think that DMIT can do to capitalise on the directions you think employability skills are going?

And as I said I was just summarising the responses and will now use them as a seed group. I think we need to start talking about employability skills again on an across Institute basis. We were trying to do it eighteen months ago when we applied for the Innovations project at the beginning of last year. I don't think we'd done enough seeding and talking – ANTA hadn't put its money on board. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and collaboration with the Business Council of Australia hadn't completed their report on employability skills which gave it the blessing which industry regarded as important employability skills.

So we were a bit ahead of our time eighteen months ago, and now the time is more favourable. And I think my role is very much to ... I've got to keep challenging people in the thinking out there and I've got to support people like yourself who are out there at the fringes of innovation to try to look at the practical implications of what you are bringing back.

My role is to try to translate that at the Institute level in conjunction with yourself and the whole MindMedia unit, but also with Mike and other early adopters. And I think we have got a pretty good idea of who the early adopters are across the Institute.

I'd like to tackle a toughie now. Just observing the whole process of project management for Pauline up till now, a lot of her complexities and frustrations that she's had is not actually to do with the project. It's to do with hitting the system head on, things like getting staff release, things like inconsistencies with finance and what the demands are for staff release. It seems to me that the biggest barriers have not been associated so much with but with the effort that goes in to establishing a project. What learning do you think the Institute needs

to take from that clearly difficult and frustrating and time consuming and energy draining time on the role of the Project Manager that if the systems were better and more supportive were not necessarily have to happen in the first place.

My learning from that has been that I was away for the first critical seven weeks of that project and I think in retrospect what I should have asked was another member of Executive to have taken over my role as project sponsor for those first seven weeks. That's a really good question Marie because this is the first time I've thought about that, but as soon as you started talking like that I realised that that what was missing in those early seven weeks.

Is that advocacy?

It's advocacy and support and saying 'Hey, You've signed up to this project. You wanted to be involved.' [Talk on management issue]

See one of the interesting things I've observed from that is the attitude towards the project. Many people saw it as an opportunity for growth and sustainability and capacity building and keeping us in the forefront. There's another attitude that 'Ah, here's a source of funding' and many people saw it as a fee-for-service rather than a professional development project. So what is the role of Executive in dealing with those issues to enable the people whose core business it is to be innovative in New Practices to not have to deal with that sort of stuff?

My role would have been to make sure that sort of thing didn't happen. My role was to make sure that Pauline personally didn't have to deal with that. She is the educator. She has not managed a project of this magnitude before and she was thrown in the deep end and I recognise that and I guess I thought because we'd shared the proposal when it went in. I remember me talking to X about it before I went away. I sent X a copy of the project hoping that it would get funded and 'yeah' they wanted to be part of it. But because I wasn't here, I couldn't go back and say this is the way it is. I feel bad about that.

One of the interesting things about New Practice, is that it effects every component of the organisation and aims to influence it. And that's when you get the No often with the System because the System isn't mature enough to deal with it. What would be an outcome that you'd be seeking as a result of that experience as far as dealing with New Practice and dealing with these sorts of things? There didn't seem to be any policies or procedures we could hold on to.

No there probably isn't. As I said I maybe should have shared it better with Executive. It was just the timing! Even if I had just had one more week!

Remember we are talking about Fuzzy – there is no right or wrong to this!

I know – I say I feel bad about it. It's just the reality and I'm not going to lose any sleep over it. That's a really important learning.

But it does highlight some critical gaps in our system that doesn't facilitate the process.

I probably haven't even now sent out – it's changed so much too. Pauline has talked about it at both council and Executive. There's been some good things. We've involved X in this. I think that has been really useful because X is a doer and she knows how things work. I know she ruffles feathers the wrong way – myself included from time to

time. But she's a doer and I really like that energy that she's got. And she will ride rough shod over people and by and large Mike will back her up.

How important is it to have someone in a strategic position like that?

I think it was a very strategic position. That was very smart. And also, it involves a non teaching person and I think that that was important. That's been very good I think.

You've got to have backups and as I say I think I should have asked X or X.

So you're talking about backup in a position of influence at Executive level?

Yes. And then Pauline could have gone to that person and said 'Look I'm running into these issues' early on.

I suspect that Pauline has tried to take on too much herself rather than ..it has been her baby in a sense. It has been her and Lyn who have had this vision for a time. People like you and I could provide them with a way of how to start to implement that vision. I think you and I play that kind of role. And Janet also was able to bring in some really practical experience. So I think that Pauline's learning - you know that session we had at your place where we two and fro'd all those versions - was rally good learning for Pauline. I don't think she's worked with people like that before. And then I think that she felt that she had to DO it and I should have thought that through in retrospect a bit more carefully in terms of ... I like working with Pauline as she does things I admire enormously. Her networking, those links with the community are very exciting in terms of 'Yeah' it gives us a basis to do this. But managing a project like this where you are working across work groups you are not familiar with ... some of the complexities involved there are huge. That was the really tricky part. If we'd linked in X a bit better we could have linked in a finance person a bit better too.

One of the things that's come back since I've been talking to a lot of Innovators around the system is their sense of isolation. Even though they do get support through the fact that 'Yes, you can go ahead with it' it's almost because they are so capable and got this vision and drive, they can be left too long...

And also I think here there is a certain amount of ... I think professional jealousy is too strong...but I think that the history of IT and ADMIT and the fact that that had to be scaled down - once again through funding issues; they couldn't afford the rent - once again what they trialled there was fantastic. They got it to the first year rent free because Speakmans saw it as a means of I guess building that kind of relationship, but for various reasons they weren't prepared to do it beyond a year.

One of the complexities we actually introduced here was having three different models coming together.

That's right.

The Practice Firm, the Incubator and the ADMIT work placement, which had similarities but quite clear differences. And it was how to juggle the passions within those whole three areas that added to a lot of complexity.

And I know that I had a long conversation with Kym Bond and I know what he is passionate about is vocational placement and I'm sure he's said that to you. But vocational placement is not what we are trying to do here. There are elements of it, just as you said, but this is not a vocational placement project. It is actually a New Practice

that is trying to bring the best of vocational Place, the Practice Firm and business Incubation together and what you come out with there is something aligned hopefully, but it is a New Practice. It is not any one of those things.

And that's the challenge!

That's right.

In-no-VAT-e

That leads beautifully into the fermentation stage and being in the VAT. The VAT is about fermentation...

One of the things I've discovered about innovators is that when they originally get their idea, they are very passionate about it and they hold it because they've had to build it and articulate it and there's a high level of ownership. Once it moves in from innovation to New Practice through implementation, it distorts. The process of implementation changes it. And I think that what we are in at the moment is in thick of the distortion phase.

And it's very hard if you are the innovator to see how you might modify and achieve a win win. And I think that ... I suspect that ... to some degree Pauline has given herself a really hard time over that. I think she's coming through it. The more conversations we've had together, she's seeing a way forward, but Lyn probably has modified her thinking further possibly. She's a very smart person in that regard ... because she's there on the spot, she has more of a gut feeling. And that's very hard when you have a dream ... I guess dreams are never implemented exactly how you envisaged them in the first place and that's learning isn't it?

I think the same thing with Kym. I think Kym saw this as an opportunity to really bring back and continue on the good stuff that came out of ADMIT vocational placement. And obviously what he'd seen with the growth of the students who had that opportunity, that he'd had to modify as well. He almost found it harder in a way as he is a more passionate person as a personality.

And the complexity is that both of our DMI projects – both the ADMIT experience and the Practice Firm experience are actually moving into the Todd St Incubator space where Lyn had got a vision and she's not operating from an education perspective. She's operating from a business and an employability perspective, and so who leads on this?

Who leads? I suppose each member of the team has a slightly different vision. I believe I've got both a responsibility and also the way I am – a focus on outcomes I want us to achieve. Not the original outcomes, but I want us to achieve learning outcomes that we can feel positive about. I think that's really crucial because I keep saying to everyone 'We're in a New Practice'. We're doing things differently, but it's a New Practice that doesn't have pre-determined outcomes. It has visions and goals, but that's different from outcomes.

So who leads? I think that each member of the team has a leadership role. I think that was how we tried to select people.

What you're doing now is taking leadership by trying to capture learning that has gone on to date and obviously you're talking about what we do want to see now at the end of

it. But I suppose the key people in this are Pauline, Kym and Lyn in terms of achieving. Susie and Pauline are very much a team. They talk a lot obviously. They have the common students. Kym has a different set of students and different goals for his students. And Lyn has the tenants and the business of the whole incubator. But I think they are the key people with the vision and they have a lot of similarities, but I don't think we have got them quite aligned at the moment, but they are more aligned now than they were earlier. They've had to be.

Do they need to be?

No. You're absolutely right. They don't need to be. I was writing down my goals the other day and I wrote down the words 'multiple visions'. So it's true, no they don't need to be. But there's got to be enough – people have got to share enough alignment and similarity. They've got to be able to recognise that there is enough togetherness as well as hanging on to their own visions as well.

How important is trust?

Critical.

Do you think this Institute's got trust?

In some areas yes and not in others. I think we are probably better than a lot of Institutes from what I understand. And I think Mike is really good in getting out and talking to people about ... I mean I think what he's done recently with his vision about Kirby and the Skills Enquiry might be implemented and actually talking it up and sharing it is a smart strategy. Talking it up and sharing it.

How are we talking it up and sharing this project? Are we talking it up and sharing enough.

Yes! I've talked to a lot of people about the project in different forums and you've obviously done the same and I think that's part of our role. As project sponsor, I want people to know about this. And I talk it up as often as I can.

In what sort of forums?

Well I just did it on Friday in the Marion Learning Communities Conference I was at. I talked about this as an example of community development and community capacity building.

What sort of response did you get?

People were really interested to hear about it. I needed to have something to really give them. I think what would be really ... I think one thing we do need from this is to have a little flyer which says what we think we've achieved from this and where we are going with it. Just for us.

So marketing is an issue?

Yes, Marketing, talking up and I'm sure that the others do.

In-no-vat-E

So moving onto this one as we're getting into the reflective process and reflective practice, what 'E' words pop into your mind when you think about where this project has been and where it's travelled so far?

Evaluate, Explore, Expedition, Extend, Examine, Elucidate, Explain, Example, Excite. Will that do?

Yes fantastic! And if you have a look at those words, they are so positive and energetic. One of the interesting things about innovation and embedding things into the System, is the reflective practice that goes on around it. Not just for the project and the project team, but how you actually have a reflective practice as far as sustaining it within the organisation. What occasions or opportunities for that sort of reflective practice can you see happening or needs to happen to capture that beyond the project team?

As I said, I think that at the end of it for us, we need to encapsulate – there's another word: Encapsulate! – the vision. We need to identify the positive outcomes, but also be reflective about where we see it going and how it fits into the strategic plan of the Institute and the directions of both the VET system – about where it is going nationally and so I would see part of this, it would be good early on in the new year in a Manager's Forum. Even at Executive – though I think executive is reasonably aware of what is going on as I talk about it all the time. Whatever we are going to do to develop and take further the Fleet Network and also I think if we get this Innovation proposal up to think very carefully which of the work groups we can extend to influence. Strategically, there would be some work groups around the place to bring into the fold so to speak. And certainly we would talk to the whole team.

So maybe going around to all of the work groups and to talk about the learning and invite participation. And not make assumptions about which work groups would come on more quickly but I could be wrong. I always get thinking if I had said Building and Construction would be where they are now, I would never have thought that five years ago – never! And yet look at that! That's a fantastic example of not taking stereotypes and assumptions too far. About being very open about who's going to be involved.

So we all know that in about two years time you are retiring.

Yep.

This project and the passion that you have for this project is something that you have advocated for a long time. If you were to leave a legacy in two years time and looking at where this could be developed, what would the possibilities be? What would be the ultimate for you as driving it and leading it in two year's time?

I guess what underpins all of this for me is that we need to develop a new learning environment. New ways that match the coming generations. We need to be cognisant of how ... and I think we don't do this too badly ... we get the primary schools in and the secondary schools.

We need to be cognisant of how people are going to want to be learning in the future, but we also need to extend thinking and possibilities and I think utilising a business incubator to me is such a sensible thing to do because the word incubation means that you are growing something. You're nurturing something. So most of our students come here, because they want either new skills or improved skills to enhance their

employment opportunities. Primarily that's why 95% of the students are here. And that is absolutely what we should be doing. We should be enhancing their employment opportunities and I see this as one way of doing this.

Now I reckon before I go ... it's actually only really eighteen months now ... and one of reasons for talking it up Marie is what I was talking about before. If you talk something up, it becomes a reality.

Ah OK! Yeah

I mean if I – and this is partly me locking myself into this – and I'm not going to be maybe six month out I'll stay for another year. I mean I've got the option to do that but unless life circumstances for me change., I'm not going to. Part of me is talking it up so I can't get out of it! ☺

You commit yourself by talking it up!

Yes! That's right. It's lucky because I'm very lucky I've got a great job I enjoy now, so your question to me is very very relevant. So I would certainly see that we – I would like to feel that we have explored to the full the potential of using the Incubator environment to enhance those employment outcomes for all our students, not just the coming generations but we need to be cognisant of that. And so people have this focus on community that does seem to be picked up. I was just reading this for example – the Salisbury Learning Directions. There was a speaker at the communities conference the other day who was speaking about the strategy for the Salisbury Council area and their council is taking on much more of a co-ordination and promotion role for learning in the Salisbury council area. And I think there is a growing move Australia wide with an emphasis on learning communities and the role of learning in community development socially and economically. And so I think this kind of learning environment we are looking at developing is in line with that thinking. It's in line with other things that are happening in society. So it's not just what's happening in the VET system. Emphasis on employability skills, emphasis on employment outcomes and pathways, but I think it is aligned with what's happening in the broader society. And I think that Kaye Schofield with her work with the Skills Inquiry and Peter Kirby to a lesser degree picked some of that up.

So look at the words here – New Times, New Ways, New Skills!

And we're looking at New Practices. It aligns nicely with that. So I would like to see not just an Incubator learning environment, but us thinking as a TAFE Institute if we're going to move future in a positive way, we need to be thinking about new learning environments. And part of Mike is talking about – part of his vision – is to have this place over at Marion that is just really a Business Centre kind of thing. Not just classrooms and using it to provide a different kind of learning environment.

Is this where you could take this learning?

I think there would be learning out of this team that would have implications for that. And I think there are others that are set up. And I think that Marion would be set up. I haven't talked with them, as I want us to be a bit clearer whether this is going to be a possibility that I think the Marion Council would be very receptive to that kind of thinking. So I guess my vision is recognition and acceptance of new learning environments. And that's come about because we've moved from- over the last five years – from that more teacher focused, teacher driven learning to individual student focused, student-centred learning. I guess that's what I've got passion about.

That's the heart of flexible learning.

Absolutely.

And that's a really good place to finish! Thanks Pene, that's been great!

3. Lynette Hay: Case Study Interview

Interviewee: Lynette Hay, Manager, Todd Street Business Chambers

Role in Project: Business Mentor

Interview date: 20/08/03

Interview length: 1 hour 39 minutes

Interviewed by: Marie Jasinski

Background:

Marie explained the IN-NO-VAT-E model and the concept of New Practice being a fuzzy concept which could include continuums like:

- unaligned/aligned
- unsupported/supported
- undefined/defined

The interview starts with Lyn identifying some of these continuums as they relate to this project, starting with unsupported/supported.

Unsupported and supported

Initially, the feedback from the students was that they were being over coordinated, over managed. And that was true. I think subsequently when we chose to pull the plug, (though the support was really there for a period of 2 weeks), gave them the scope didn't overtly support them and allowed them the chance to settle down. Now of course, they have come to the conclusion they are not being supported enough and hence the group put together a letter to the Project Manager and requested that there be more support.

I think they flip flop between seeing themselves as students and seeing themselves as business people.

And when they see themselves as students, that's when they seek support?

Well that's the language they used in their correspondence: 'After all we are students and we've decided we need to get support'. Which I saw as a really positive thing because the worse thing they could have had was three to four months of completely being over managed and smothered. That would have thrown them into the continuum of being cohesive and then not cohesive as a team.

In summary I'd say supported unsupported

Structured and unstructured – because they are used to being supported in a structured environment within the context of their program anyway. So they flip-flop between those a bit and experience that.

Progressing and not progressing

They progressed very well initially when they set up a structure for themselves and to find their roles. I thought they really did a good job on that actually. That was all lovely and we had our names tags on our computers and we had our structure on the board. And then everybody forgot about that as work in progress began. And what they have found difficult is that there is not one person managing that business for the duration of the project. In any given week, you may have six people involved or two to three that may be in a couple of days a week and the rest may be in for one day. So I would say that the continuum around the individual and the team there's a bit of push and pull around that too. Some individuals have chosen to take responsibility and what I like about what they have done, is that they have communicated pretty well amongst each other given the circumstances. And they've treated each other with respect. So they've really got a good sense of values, this group. And I think that has allowed them to come to their own conclusions such as to say look we need more support.

The other side of the coin is that they have achieved quite a lot on their project. They are quite a long way to completing their business plan, they've drafted a budget, they've drafted a survey they are going to send out to their clients. They've had discussions with the sub-contractors. So a number of things have occurred – that has all occurred within the two weeks they have been left to their own devices since the initial guidance or over guidance.

Underguidance and overguidance?

Well, I think from where I sit as an Incubator Manager I'm involved in adult learning in a business environment. I'm not involved - directly anyway - in a training type of environment. And I'd guess I'd have to qualify my comments around that perspective.

Initially I felt that the students were provided with a lot of direction about the furniture they were getting and when it was arriving. The Facilitators put themselves into a situation where they were taking on more than they needed to. The students could have coordinated that. It would have given them something to do upfront. But there was a very high level of direction from the Facilitators – with the very best intentions in the world because it was, you know, a bit of anxiety starting something new. And also wanting to make sure that the old Maslow's hierarchy of needs were being satisfied first and that all took time.

That level of direction continued on, so once we had the furniture in place etc, it continued on to for example, feedback about how to answer the phone and some very detailed instruction about customer service. Now the group at that stage had not undertaken any group or leadership activity which subsequently worked quite well when we sat down and talked about their structure. That was a really good thing. And from there on they started to work quite well. I guess it was about a high level of direction and almost paternalistic concern for the fledglings, sitting all alone in this nest in this big old Incubator! And no-one's there to feed them! The trouble was, that there were so many mums and dads bringing in the goodies that they were becoming obese chicks in the first two weeks!

I think that this is probably understandable and that's something we've discussed as a group and amongst the Facilitators as well. The level of briefing needs to be clear and we could have moved in much more quickly about role definitions and structure. And that would have given them a map and a framework in which to operate. Because what they did from that is to work very quickly, moving on to developing schedules and timetables for themselves and I thought we could have backed off at that point a bit.

You need to focus on some direction and then you need to pull back depending on how well the group is evolving. And I think the danger is that if we hadn't pulled back, we would have seen motivation deteriorate, affecting the ability of the students to apply their existing skills and knowledge. For example, one had been working in her father's retail premises. Another is actually a bookkeeper for her husband's contracting business. So these are two significant examples let alone the employability skills – problem solving, negotiation, communication, team work. They actually have very high order skills in that area which they subsequently proved they had. Over directing consistently would smother that. We might as well have them sitting in a classroom. So that's been an interesting learning experience.

The issue there is making enough spaces for these skills to emerge?

Yes and timing is everything.

Can you tell us a little more about that? That timing is everything?

Well I don't know that there is a straight answer to that one, but I have thought that for some groups with a relatively high level of maturity, you might well provide them with a solid briefing up front and you would typically allow them two to three weeks up front to bed down their project and their roles and probably by the third week to begin intervention again, particularly a finance and marketing strategy, to know what they are charging and what expenses they have to control. I mean as an Incubator Manager, I have already sent them two invoices. But they haven't sent out market surveys or had any contact at all with clients. So there needs to be some level of direction upfront to make sure they focus on the right things at the right time. At the moment, I've got a number of clients who have projects lined up ready to go and they have never met any of these people. So that to me is very important – to focus on those things rather than to worry about whether they have a desk or not.

Because the clients are there and ready?

I believe the tenants will help them. I believe that in a mixed use Incubator anyway, they are available. We even had an IT resource here who said that if you need any assistance, just let me know. It may have even saved a lot of TAFE in-house resources coming over at great expense to the management. I mean they were willing and it was costing time and money [to the Institute]. We could have added assistance, so there are a whole lot of resources around this group that they couldn't possibly know about.

In going through this exercise again, I would perhaps work more closely with the Project Manager to consider these things. But it's all the benefit of hindsight now isn't it? But I think that could have helped the group settle in and that would have been a more meaningful business structure. They just have no idea what's around them at the moment and I'm not really sure how to actually make them aware. If I do too much it might be too invasive and the environment here relies very much on people letting me know when they are ready. However, I must say in the first three to six months in particular, I generally spend a fair bit of time with people, but this is where the context is slightly different. My current tenant businesses don't have studies to worry about necessarily – or stuff that invades their day.

Is there a lot of stuff that invades their day?

Well they have lectures and I do appreciate they are studying and completing accredited training! It's logistics. They have to organise to be here. No one tenant in Todd St has started a business in a team. No one can afford a team. You'd be lucky if there's more than two starting a small firm from scratch like that. So all of a sudden,

they've got logistics. And throw in the fact that they've got the best of the IT and they've all got computers and they're networked. It's bigger than Ben Hur. So then they've got infrastructure to manage. A whole lot of things complicate it. The idea of the sub-contractors. The idea of subcontracting IT resources I think is a little bit complicating. It probably would have been better to have one to two fixed resources. I think that is the conclusion that we'll come to in the project.

It is important for the group to recognise the need to modify their program instead of following the bouncing ball from what was originally decided upon. Particularly as the group worked out that the needs of the small business operators in the incubator were likely to be different than originally thought. That their IT Help Desk needs are very basic like getting the most out of Outlook or getting a bit of coaching on Excel – you know, that type of thing.

IN-no-vat-e: THE PURPOSE

How well are we IN with the PURPOSE of what we set out to do?

Well initially ... I'm one cog in the wheel, I'm the tool, so comments around that won't be in relation to the overall program..

This is from *your* perspective as you are a very important cog in the wheel, as we [DMIT] are actually coming into this [Incubator] environment.

From where I sit it's about providing an environment for business students irrespective of their speciality, to allow them to develop and apply those employability skills. And so by paying in many ways, more attention to the employment part of VET rather than the vocational training part, it's providing an opportunity for the students to develop those employability skills and build on what they already have because they have certainly got them – to varying degrees – but they've got them.

So I saw that the idea was that whilst the Incubator was providing that environment and that opportunity, simultaneously the vocational training was being done as it normally is very well within the Institute. And therefore there was an opportunity within a five month period for the students to be given a chance to pool their technical know how – for example market research: 'let's design a questionnaire and we'll work with our Tourism lecturer to do that'. The Incubator environment allows them the opportunity to actually test that with clients, service them and hopefully run a profitable business.

How has that vision been align to the reality of what's happened?

I think it's taken a while, a little bit longer than I thought it would. However, I believe it is beginning to align itself fairly closely now. And one of the reasons I think is the students – business operators – aren't being preoccupied with filling in the business plan template - which I have given them by the way to have a look at. What they are doing is living it and completing it at the same time. So it's not about the theory totally, it's about experiencing it almost before they write anything down. They haven't had to write anything. I think having an environment where they don't feel there is a safety net even though there is one, has probably led them as I mentioned earlier to approach us to say that we are ready now for a little bit more support and direction.

Were they able to articulate to you the support and direction they required?

Yes

And what was it?

It was focusing on their respective areas of expertise such as Retail, the contact with the Retail Lecturer, the Tourism Lecturer. So it was actually reaching out and reaching back to the vocational training area. They wanted to reinforce their personal objectives, the reasons they'd undertaken the course and to ensure there wasn't going to be vocational training slippage. They knew that this experience is part of their curriculum and they wanted to ensure that it was aligned. They didn't want to ride into the wild blue yonder setting up this business, simply because the business is establishing an IT Help Desk and none of them in reality have a technical interest in doing it.

That was my fault because I saw a need. We are desperate for an IT Help Desk within the incubator. We've piloted it with a couple of high schools as you know and it worked well. So I thought right! This would be really good. But to honestly expect Tourism and Retail students to work on a topic area that is not really of interest to them, OK they can say they are getting all these management skills and they do appreciate that, but I think that is why they have sought guidance and connection with their own disciplines. Most of them are Tourism students. So we have set up a second project now which is Tourism oriented which is undertaking marketing research and developing a tourism strategy with a particular firm within the Incubator. And I'd have to add by delivering this program within the walls of a mixed use Incubator allows us to do this very thing. For example we could dump the whole IT concept tomorrow.

Could we do it?

Well I think it's up to the business group to make that decision because they have invested five to six weeks of their time, and they've designed that questionnaire. I've actually floated with them that perhaps they may have to be prepared to do that because they don't know what the customers needs and wants are. I know three or four, but that's not going to carry them through to make any money over the three to four months.

I think I'd probably be inclined to align work which was a little bit more relevant. I just think it makes it easier. Also next time I wouldn't involve other students in a so called sub-contract role. I think they need to do the work themselves and deliver the service themselves, simply because they've got six to eight people within this group. That way those popping in and out and are not present all of the time, because of study commitments can easily play a role and they may be the ones who are conducting the market research.

And the IT Help Desk Students themselves are not part of the whole process.

That's right. And I don't see that as particularly relevant to the project. They could have been anybody doing that. It could have been LeFevre High School students, Douglas Mawson students, or in fact a couple of the tenants would have been happy to provide that kind of support. So that is where I sit. I think it was a bit idealistic bringing the IT students in because when they get here they don't really necessarily have a clue about what's going on.

So now that that's raised and I think everyone is aware of it, as part of learning about doing the business, where in this process do we reconsider the role of the IT Help Desk? Do you continue it on, or do you stop, reflect and make a decision right now to change direction?

I've thought about this as there's no point digging a hole to China. My thinking around this is that you look at it from a business point of view. That's the position we've placed this group in. We're running a business. And this happens a lot! People say 'this is a fantastic idea, let's go'. We've encouraged them to do some Market research. We've encouraged them to get there and it's taken forever, but they've finally got there with market research. Now if we'd encouraged them to do the market research up front fairly early, we would have had the data to say IT has got to go and let's not discuss it any further. And that's where I was coming from. I was really hot on that. But for some reason or other it just ... you know ... the bedding down issues ... in fairness, there's a lot to get through from an Institute's point of view in getting this up and streamlined. And that's OK.

So in answer to the questions I think we go back to the same position. Get that group to do their market research. They are in control, they are in the driver's seat, so let's not take that control away from them. We're about empowering them. They have a look at that information. What they may choose to do is to service the four to five clients that do have a need and then don't do any more. Don't open up Pandora's Box.

They might say that this isn't viable anyway. They can decide based on the facts – either the need or the cost of the service. And the great advantage now with them actually having a group is of course they can have the other half of the team working on the market research. This is highly manageable and they can go as far as they want in the time. It will be interesting to see, though I wouldn't intervene around it because there is an opportunity for mutiny.

If they make a business decision that their IT Help Desk is not a goer from a business perspective, should we pull it?

If they demonstrate that it isn't a goer and they have come to that conclusion as business people, then absolutely and I think that should be driven by them.

So even though we are saying that it might not be a goer, it's not our business to make that decision?

No. One of the other issues may be that the subcontractors may have logistical problems and can't deliver. This happens in business all the time. Have you ever renovated a house? So there could be quite a number of factors that come in to play here and really, what this is telling us I think, is that we should look at this project in two parts.

The first part is in setting up a business. It's not about setting up a business in full flight from Day one. It's about setting up a business.

If the objective is for the group to demonstrate employability skills, then what difference does it make if half the process is setting up the business and the other half is having a month or what ever it happens to be, to run it. And I think the question might be do we tell them that. I'm not sure. Ask me that at the end. I'm not sure what we actually communicate.

In-NO-vat-e: THE SYSTEMS

Now that we are half way through, a lot of things have emerged about systems and the Nos and Yes's associated with systems. I'd really like to hear your perspective on that. If we were going to repeat this process, what have emerged about our systems that need to be addressed?

As from where I sit, I am the meat in the sandwich – and I like it as I can see both sides. I think firstly in start up, the Incubator can be used to help the Facilitators and the business. Because the operating systems here can save duplication and help this business get settled for a start. We could look at what the curriculum requires and what the project brief requires and the facilitators could use the Incubator to bring the two together.

We are actually running two businesses. The business of the Institute looking at a new methodology. And the business operators of the students running their business. If our business – the Institute business – is not set up and the systems are not in place, that in turn influences the Incubator

The old domino effect.

So looking at how we've set up our business,

Take a step back then. The Project brief – there has to be a lead time I think, for the vocational lecturers and the Project Managers and the Incubator Manager.

Now there was a lead time, but it was very much 'What do you think' kind of a meeting. I think there needs to be a little bit more direction and here's the brief, this is what we are to achieve. Here's the model and this is how we are going to start going about it. Now I know there's a lot of other stuff like measuring employability and God knows what that comes out of that, but if you look at the key players – the ones you are interviewing, there's Ted with employability, you are doing the watching the goldfish bowl thing, me as Incubator Manager and a couple of others. So really, there is a small core at least. Whatever happens beyond that is up to the Project Manager. So that I think that not having that [initial briefing meeting], resulted in a fair bit of confusion at times.

If you had that initial meeting, what would have to be on the agenda from your experience now? What would have to be addressed to have a shared sense of purpose?

The objectives of the project and methodology

The role of the Incubator

A review of the employability skills that are being assessed as that certainly wasn't apparent to me until a week ago.

A profile with student permission of the students involved – who they are, a bit about their background, where they perceive their strengths and development lie, what they would like to get out of the project, and that should be documented so that it is something that can be tracked. Certainly, I would have been happy to track that. – I didn't actually know their names until they rolled up on the doorstep.

I think in hindsight, we could have spent a bit more time with the clients. And I suppose I am sure that did occur as I'm sure Pauline is very familiar with them and I suppose the other Lecturers are. I wasn't, and I'm living with them!

And probably a profile of us as a reciprocal thing?

Exactly. We provided them with profiles of our tenants, for example photographs, a little story. They've got a booklet. There wasn't an opportunity for that as far as I was concerned. Next time I would focus on that a bit more...

So those important establishing protocols were missing?

Yes.

Anything else that was really missing?

No I don't think so. I think that from a systems view, what was very impressive was the quality of the student if you like. In relation to the suitability of this project, very compatible.

They were well selected?

Well selected. And I think that is absolutely critical, above any of those other protocols.

What is that criticality?

Had a degree of maturity

Motivated to become involved in the business

Being clear about where their study was taking them

What they wanted to do with it

Interestingly, they have all got a degree of assertiveness and preparedness to communicate, and you know, quite good teamwork skills really. I don't know if it's because some of them had exposure to the Practice Firm.

Do you think that because these students have been through the Practice Firm this is an opportunity to develop those skills?

Without question. Look I'm making a very heavy assumption which I don't think is far off, that their experience in the Practice Firm really has made a difference. I say that, because I have worked with albeit younger groups fifteen to seventeen who obviously haven't had that experience and typically out of ten in the group, three to four may have it, six to seven don't have the level of maturity. The latter are just not going to get as much out of it. So in terms of systemising the Practice Firm and the work Suzie and Pauline have done there, I think certainly is commendable and provides the group and individuals with sufficient confidence and awareness, because what we are asking them to do is to apply these skills in something that approximates a real environment.

They've got to have them in the first place.

Exactly. This is application now. They can't be wondering what a budget is and what the features of a budget are. They've got to be able to now work towards at least having a go at completing one.

You know when you have tenants come in here and they actually go through an interview process with you, would that be a worthwhile process to go through for potential students within the Incubator?

Actually, that's not a bad point because if that occurred, they would overcome perhaps the gap that I mentioned before about getting to know the profiles and the individuals.

And also it provides the individuals an opportunity to self select. To come out and really wanting to be part of this or thinking no, it's really not for me. In fact what we would have got out of it was the fact that none of them were the least bit interested in IT and I think I am very grateful to TAFE because I think that TAFE was wanting to accommodate me as an Incubator Manager and my need as a client which I really do appreciate. It's just that we could have had some other options. I can come across pretty strongly only because I was really enthusiastic and Gee! Here you go! Isn't that a lesson learnt! Come to a solution before assessing what everybody wants and what a mistake! What a boo boo!

But we didn't know that at the time!

No. And I've had two other projects – one of them is a retail project where tenants have come up to me and said 'Gee I hear they've got retail students in there and I wouldn't mind...' Now I've kept that door shut as I wouldn't want to complicate things as we don't have enough time.

So if the projects were generated here within the Incubator and the tenants, would that be a more valuable way to go?

I reckon it would. I think if we had the students go through our selection process which is really just a personal and a professional needs analysis, and that's how it's presented and they have some documentation to complete and an interview to attend, and they come back a third time a put it all together and have a broader discussion around a one to two page response about a business idea.

There might be possible potential businesses that have already been generated through the Incubator they have a look at and decide 'I want to go with that'. They could have a range of options and some choices.

That's right. We could run it from an action learning point of view where it's about looking at ability and enthusiasm and negotiating that through. And they may well choose three projects in order of preference.

Bid for them?

Yeah. And I think now that the tenants know that the group is here and this idea is possible, I think you would find there would be no trouble getting more than half a dozen different options. I think that what we would need to look at though, is not overloading the group and their enthusiasm as they would have no idea what it would actually involve. Now this marketing strategy for this tourism project I've mentioned earlier, that begins with market research and I've asked the client to segment the project into three manageable chunks so that this group don't get completely overwhelmed once they take it on. Because what they haven't been able to do is manage two things at once. One person has worked on the Business Plan template with input from others, but one has taken responsibility. One has accepted responsibility to focus on the budget, but hasn't completed that yet.

It could be done to provide sufficient guidance up front to steer them in the right direction on the specific tasks to be allocated. Then there probably needs to be a little bit there so they can plant a few seeds and build on that. That would be the key issue with multiple projects. That would be the weakness of the group – multitasking and completing those tasks on time. Meeting the deadlines. For example members of the team have forgotten to turn up to a budget meeting; if two are working on a job and one is away, that job comes to a halt or at least is slowed right down. Of course you've got to remember that they are on this project rotation thing through their studies, so I think that that compounds it.

How well informed do you need to be in what is happening as far as their learning program goes?

Probably not everything – not in a lot of detail. I would like to meet the lecturers. Get to know them, get to know the students as we've mentioned and probably in the 5 week period an informal meeting about the list of topics they were going through. So if I knew that the Tourism Lecturer was talking to them about marketing stuff, I could have steered them there and timed things – the alignment. Like I'll be dealing with this in Week three – and that'll work out really well. So I'd be happy to work that way – or in turn the lecturer concerned could let me know.

Your business is really with you, your students and the Project Manager.

Yes. I look at them as business operators. They are a team, a client and I think that if my role is largely a responding and occasionally a guiding one, and the role of the TAFE Lecturers and facilitators is one of perhaps directing and guiding, with an awareness of the vocational and employment competencies and I would only be focusing on the employment competencies so that you get both ends of the spectrum there. I think initially I was directing and so were the lecturers and so was the Project Manager. We were all having a go. I was being quite directive about the structure – let's get this happening. We did it as a workshop. The business plan and marketing strategy were also my responsibility so I was just being reasonably directive and to look at the deadlines and provide a couple of templates. I was also responsible for working with them on the budget. I know you feel a bit overwhelmed but you've got to look at your structures and decide who's responsible for what.

Now I can't keep doing that. It's not good if I keep going and that's why I backed off, because everyone else was doing the same thing about different topics. Different things. I did what I normally would do, but of course this is not a normal situation so I know that I've got to be aware.

One of the complexities that someone bought up yesterday was the concept of defined and undefined. Looking at role definition and who does what as there is some sense of encroachment across the different facilitator roles and responsibilities and also with you. This is a New Practice as far as the role of Lecturers go, as well as someone who is also giving business coaching to their tenants. Have you experienced any undefined and defined dimensions?

With the Facilitators?

Yes.

I'll always clearly define, so I haven't experienced any thing that is undefined for very long because I can't stand it. I really can't deal with something that's undefined, particularly if at the end of the day as an Incubator Manager I am responsible for the success of the tenant in collaboration, and I have to do everything I can to make sure that they are successful. Now what I was really clear on was when the team said to me there were 'too many chiefs', I said: 'Fine, then we'll remove them.' We'll all remove ourselves. I said 'Tell me what is it what you want. What do you want to do?', because I thought that if this group is not going to be empowered, then we are going to lose them and their motivation was going down the gurgler.

So that's when I'd actually said to Pauline and Suzie 'Well, you know I think we have all got to back off because we are smothering them to death.' So, I certainly put myself in that camp. So I certainly indicated to Suzie and Pauline – and they seemed rather accepting (they are great participators), so I probably took a bit of leverage because of the comfort zone that we all had together. I indicated to them that I felt there were several discussions I'd observed where – I was starting to participate in it as well – where we were talking about the project, things I didn't think that the business owner operators/students, really needed to know. They were getting involved and over hearing logistics discussions about cross-charging with one resource to another within the TAFE system etc. They were taking that information and incorporating it into their business context when it really wasn't relevant at all.

That was very messy

It's a bit like switch on switch off – it's a bit like Goofy in Disneyland. He never takes his head off in front of the five year olds. He goes behind the curtain and works it out there.

So part of that defined undefined, is defining what is TAFE business and defining what's operator business.

I think that was defined. It's just that we discussed it in the Creative Resolutions Office in front of them ad nauseam in the first two to three weeks in particular. And it wasn't any of their concern and they didn't need that additional information. It was like – and this is probably some of the overlap – but I'll give you an example, a very simple one that separates out the project implementation and the project brief. We talked about marketing the project launch and whether the students should do it. In the meantime they'd been given a marketing project brief for an incubator tenant. Now, instead of the marketing division working on that marketing strategy or the strategy for the IT Help Desk the students were concerned about this apparent extra task associated with the launch. The launch project was bought in from far left field and began to unnecessarily take up there time.

This was a left field thing?

It was a left field thing and that was the day they said there were too many chiefs. So Pauline, Suzie and I basically had a chat about that and we ended up agreeing to have that off and the project team will manage that and what they need to be briefed upon – the Creative Resolutions team – is their presentation at that launch. They need to be concerned about nothing else other than maybe booking the room and see it as a PR exercise. But gee they'd better make sure that they've done their market research and met some of these people beforehand because we want to make sure they optimise their credibility. But that's an example. From the systems point of view, the most important lesson so far, is I would certainly separate out any discussion with them about what the Institute's requirements are. I mean that might even be discussed with them in the class. You can't confuse that with this environment I feel. I think it's too grey. We are moving into that really grey area and they're finding that it's not their business. And I don't know if they would normally. But I think by talking out loud sorting things through and consulting with the group about 'back room issues' is not advisable. The students knowledge and willingness around that stuff was zero. They had too many other things to panic about. And that would apply to the competency assessment process all the way through.

So clear protocols about what is appropriate – in fact it's the inappropriate – appropriate dimension that we are looking at here.

Yes. And that's undefined/defined as well.

Is there anything else about systems – for example with facilities and populating that space. How important was it for the students – or the business – to be involved in populating that space and setting up those things?

I think it is really important. And I would actually... When any business comes in here, they start with not very much. A desk and chair and obviously a work station and that's pretty much it. Now the students were highly excited when they came down and fossicked around in the basement because the Institute's lovely furniture – by our standards lovely – hadn't arrived. They were dealing with ad hoc stuff for a week and a half. And they loved that. They got into that. It's all the excitement. It's their space and they could have sat in that with temporary picnic chairs while they got onto the business of setting up the business. Then bringing in work stations – once they defined their roles and responsibilities, then you work out how many computers you need. So that in itself is a business establishment thing. I mean what they had of course was lots of things provided, that in terms of the environment also cluttered up the space as well. Now they may have come back and said this is exactly what we need, but they were quite keen on having that second space as a meeting areas and they were going to have a reception desk and a couple of work stations and I think we could even have taken a step back and say OK, this is the equipment that is available for this project. And we just need to let that group know that they have to confirm their requirements by end of Week three or whatever.

So put it in storage? Clean it out!

Yes! That way, they get to know and own their space and build their own environment. I may be putting too much emphasis on that, but in those first few days it was highly motivating for them and you know it's like going to the shed and fossicking around. It kind of takes you back to when you were a kid. Oh! There's a chair and there's a table and making do.

It's like building a cubby house!

Yes it's very much like a cubby house. That's exactly right.

And it also gives a message that you can run a business without a glamorous environment.

Well of course a lot of people who don't succeed in business totally overcapitalise when they start and it's a disaster. Particularly when the group started focusing on their business cards and their logo. It's one area where my advice perhaps crossed over with the advice they were given by other sources in TAFE because I just said to them well my advice is don't even go there. You don't even know what your clients need and if they have got their letterhead and card and it's got IT Help Desk and they don't want to do that anymore. So that is was that type of example.

With the furniture and equipment, would you go so far as to give them all a price and then get them to do a costing for the furniture and for all their supports?

I think you could quite possibly. That crossed my mind.

They'd have to budget for it.

Yes. And wait for it to come and all those sorts of things. Or they would hire it. They would have worked out that I would have charged them the equivalent of all of \$5.50 a week for an office suite. So for \$10-\$11, they could have had two suites, and then decided they would have purchased a couple of computers. It would have been cheaper to rent than buy for the five month period they required it. So they would have got all of that.

I guess the challenge there is that they still have their competencies to meet and there is a time limit. Dealing with the contradictions of business vs training.

That's right and this is where I have taken a step back because this is something I've thought about with this. I think that's true to say – absolutely. However, if you think about the skills they would have had to put into place straight away they would have been into budgeting. What can we afford? Oh I don't know, but I really want a chair. I mean very simplistically of course, it's going back to budgeting. They would have had to do it straight off. Equipment installed too early can bring its own worries which of course happened. They had to deal with the computer socket not working –and of course there was the phone! How relevant are these items when you haven't defined your business yet?

Do you think they had too much systems support in setting up their IT services?

Well it depends. They are fully networked and all of that.

Do you just give them a list – these are the services available, this is what is costs, work out what you need and then you've got to negotiate to buy it all in. Would that be a different approach than saying we're going to set all this up for you – and that's part of having too many chiefs I guess.

I think the interesting thing with this project as I said to Pauline the other day, is that from a resource point of view, this could be very efficient. If we're looking at the fermentation/implementation point of view.

In-no-VAT-e: IMPLEMENTATION

From a resource point of view it's very interesting. Because you've got a system which you believe as an organisation will get you what you want as far as your academic standards. Your clients get that. Assuming that, and you have a system in place that runs with this project. My role is to mind the shop, so you don't have to worry about issues around safety and on site support as needed.

Your resource use becomes very efficient indeed. If we hadn't selected IT, and kind of locked on to that, it would be a different ballgame and you could have that group running quite efficiently, with the Facilitators offering the vocational support through the study programs. As long as we knew that say the Tourism Facilitator was looking after marketing. I would know and I would say fine, I'm here to provide you with a client base, and where the crossover came in ... just coming back to systems for a minute – my role as defined in the project brief was to be responsible for evaluating and making sure that the business plan and marketing strategy incorporated in the finance kind of all came together and was completed to a commercial standard and this business started to apply that. Now I don't know how I do that – which was the question I had right at the beginning – without crossing over the responsibilities of others.

So if there is one thing that then impacts on implementation it is clarifying what the Institute wants from me in that regard. And what I've chosen to do is to adopt a more responsive role provide the templates, have a standing meeting once a week with the finance manager. The group for the first time last week brought their market research proforma in to me for information. I might provide some suggestions or comments and just talk to them generally about it. They go back and do that and I think actually, that that could work very well. My role then becomes more of a sounding board, in which case I would evaluate the Business Plan, but where I have some difficulty now is that I feel a responsibility and accountability to make sure that a standard is met.

Yet I have no defined role to play in my interaction with them. I don't want to overcomplicate. So that ball is in the students' court at the moment until I'm advised that they want something different if that's what they do. So what I've decided is that when they present the final business plan, and budget, I'll continue on with our meetings and just build them up and provide a sounding board which I think is a better way to go.

As far being in the VAT and fermenting in there, what's the process, so if you are the winemaker ... because we were talking about timing and judgement being critical ... we've already talked about it as being really important in the beginning to get them more responsibility right from the outset and no be over protective like mother hens and letting them make do until things turn up...So there's a huge range of things we can do quite differently. What's working well as far as their development? If our focus area is to develop employability skills and capability, how do you think that's progressing?

Well what's quite obvious is that they are progressing towards running a business. They've set it up, they've got a number of strategies in place and they are doing things more efficiently, they are beginning to multitask and they do have a sense of urgency. So all of those ... everything we've set out to achieve with them, the group is now demonstrating that behaviour as we speak. They are working very cohesively. I think there is a couple in there that are a little bit at odds, but you're going to get that in any group anyway. But they are working very well together in the main.

I can't answer the part of the equation about the demonstration of competencies as far as the Institute is concerned – I'm not sure what the goal posts look like there, but what they have demonstrated with me directly is their capacity to negotiate, problem solve, clarify roles, and they've demonstrated flexibility and their teamwork is excellent. So just off the top of my head there is a swag of key competencies that are glaringly obvious. If you have anything at all to do with them, you soon pick that up.

I think too, I was concerned that they were a starting as a group. I think they've handled that pretty well. They know what their commitments are as far as studies are concerned and having them project manage themselves and manage their time and that interface between their study and their commitment here at the Incubator, they've done a really good job there. Also, they have responded well to having a Project Manager in Pauline and Susie supporting her. That has been a very important role because it doesn't confuse ... it's the Project Manager, it's not the Facilitator or the Lecturer or the Incubator Manager. They've had some positive experiences in some areas in where they feel there's need to have some changes, it's good to recognise that.

To have someone who's not involved in the day-to-day operations?

Yes. I mean that's how I see Pauline. I don't know what she's involved in from a lecturing point of view.

So once removed from the action?

That's a good term for it. Having someone heading up the Practice Firm and was part of that was the obvious choice, having the relationship, the history, the relationship with each other, having been through the business or a business experience before.

I think probably what's been critical to implementation is the passion and the high level of motivation from the Institute's point of view. To experiment and not ... the issues we've talked about being too paternal, I mean that's driven from the point of view that there is care and consideration about the development of these people. So everyone wants to make sure it goes well. While I've mentioned a few examples of that, I'm actually not wanting to detract away from what's motivated that and I think that's really important.

I mean that system that implemented from the learning from this and the system next time will fix all that anyway, so I think that is critical. I think that students in this environment feel alone and that's part of the design. But at the same time, they have a need – they are students. They haven't made a conscious choice to give up their study and go into the wild blue yonder and start this crazy business. And they kind of feel a bit fearful about being alone and the appropriate use of support and understanding...

What are they – appropriate levels of support and understanding?

I think it is about regular contact with listening, but without necessarily saying very much. And it's about having a system that links the vocational training with the employment skills. Once the students are comfortable with their role as students and with their role as business operators – and that should be laid out so it is quite logical in their minds – you know the support they're after is basically a 'G'Day, how are you going?' person. Pauline and Susie obviously have that relationship with that group anyway. It's been instrumental and it's obvious that that group needs it and they've asked for it now and they know when to ask.

So it's taken a bit of time to get to there.

I think that probably being a little patient with the timeframe. I know I've relaxed on it in the last week. In the last couple of weeks I've felt 'Well, let's have a look at what they are achieving rather than being too concerned with what they are not.' In fact when you peel those layers away, they are achieving a lot. And then if you really look at the purpose of what this exercise is, it's about building these competencies, and that's when the penny dropped for me. Until I'd seen those competencies, I thought Oh well OK – here we go. It's not really about starting and running a successful business per se, it's about finding an opportunity to demonstrate these competencies. Now as long as that group thinks that they are here to start and run that business, and develop those other skills – the business acumen and financial management skills and all those things, I think it's the value add.

If employability skills are the objective, and they are being assessed on it at the end of the day, good and well. Of course, what we are going to be assessed on is the quality of their business acumen isn't it? And maybe that is a bit of an issue.

So there's a difference between employability skills and business acumen?

Well, no there's not. Business acumen I think involves some of the vocational business skills put it that way, such as financial management which produces financial savvy if you like. Being able to look at your business records and make decisions. The decision making largely is being entrepreneurial. Identifying opportunities, using information and making decisions and having the skills in planning, sales and finance. That's what I describe as acumen. Now you can know all those things, but unless you can negotiate, problem solve, or communicate, work as a team and be a good leader and have all the employability skills, well you're in trouble aren't you?

Do you feel confident that at the end of this, those students will have those employability skills?

Yes.

And that they would be in a position to go about setting up their own business?

I would say at this stage, three of them would be showing a capacity to be able to do that at this half way point. And the main reason for the difference between those that are showing that level of competency at the moment, and those that aren't is that they are putting in more time. They are here more often, putting in more time.

So there really has to be a legitimate drive to want to come here and do this and have a vision?

I was a little bit surprised that I haven't paid attention to who's not here. I've paid more attention and been more focused on who is here. And I guess from an implementation point of view and when it comes to the review and evaluating process, if someone is here one day a week, there should be a different level of competency expected. I'm not sure, but it may be an issue that could affect the evaluation.

In-no-vat-E: THE REVIEW

So moving on to that evaluation and review, can you think of some 'e' words that would describe this project so far from your experience.

Excellent!

Has it been a worthwhile thing?

Oh yes! Absolutely! No question at all about it. It's been 'evolutionary', 'engaging', I think it could be 'economical'. When I think of the Facilitation team and the project team, we are good conceptual thinkers as a group.

Let's get onto that – good conceptual thinkers. And a high benchmark. We've really set the standard high for this project. So we were quite comfortable to start with the ideal and attempt to implement what we thought could work. Not what we thought would work, what we thought could.

So if you do that then, you have to be prepared in the exercise to step back from the process, observe the process and the results as they unfold, and really evaluate one by one. Let's sit down once a month and have an evaluation session is not a good idea. Its the ongoing communication ... I speak with Pauline three times a week, I've had three discussions with Pene Davey, We talk about what's working and what could be improved.

More than that, the discussion has gone to where could this take us?

I think that is really important because you could really get bogged down in what isn't working when actually, the whole point of this is that it is a pilot and I think having your role is going to be increasingly important through the second half of the project, so I think this process we are undertaking where we do have someone who sits outside the whole thing is a really good role from an evaluation point of view – independent – a third party thing.

And where *could* this go?

Well I think it could be a semi self-managing methodology that is economical for TAFE to run and I think that it could provide TAFE Facilitators with an opportunity to get out of the classroom and to find out more about their students in terms of their capabilities and motivation which of course if you complete the loop then and go back to the training environment of course that allows an opportunity for the facilitator to modify their training style recognise the level of competency that already exists and build on that competency rather than go over old ground.

There are some lecturers – like Deb in tourism who is a business owner/operator and you know, someone coming from that perspective is valuable to a project like this.

Alternatively, you may already have someone who is skilled in developing adult learners, but maybe not be interacting with businesses and some of that business acumen stuff, or looking at trends within the tourism industry or IT industry or whatever.

It's really an opportunity to for those Lecturers to reconnect with their business.

Yes. It's almost like a refresher.

When we first put this together, one of the visions we had was an immersive return to industry. Instead of going on a one-to-one, a group of people who are almost in here learning about business themselves.

Well one suggestion that has passed my lips is if Lecturers are going to run the gauntlet on this, I mean why wouldn't you afford an opportunity for a group working exactly the same in a team situation. You've got to start a business from scratch. I don't suggest that everyone from the courses has to start a business. I mean we have to get some economies of scale and it becomes very expensive of course. So, let's work on an assumption you get a group of six lecturers or eight lecturers at a time, doing what their students have to do. Experiencing exactly the same process and by doing it – you may want to run a six month program – the first three months may be setting up a business within the incubator and setting up a learning project and then the second three months might be – OK, well the business is up and running, we might choose to evaluate what we are doing. We'll put two hats on.

Have you identified Professional Development needs of the Facilitators here if they were going to continue within this environment, have you noticed any gaps in their particular way of operating?

Probably from where I sit, it's ... you could argue that why I'm here ... it's the business acumen. When we initially talked about the brief for this project, there was a big emphasis on planning and marketing, but no emphasis on the financial. And I was the one who actually suggested let's create units of tender, so at least we have some transactions happening within the business. So I think there's a bit of work that's needed in this area.

The interested thing is that Pauline is certainly a very experienced business person. Where she is coming from is looking at it in terms of the curriculum requirements. It's not that that experience isn't there. Obviously it is. It's about a consciousness about what could happen here. There would be no action if there was no financial component to this.

And I know in the Practice Firm, everything costs and they've got to make a profit and it should be even more so here.

In concluding, is there anything we've touched on that you'd need to emphasise a bit more or anything you need to add that needs to be documented to improve this process and help us and people who would like to take it on, to do it successfully?

I think the main thing I'd say is keep it simple. That there's no need to over-complicate this. There could have been a whole lot of stuff going on around the market research that could have taken up three months of this group's time if you really want to go the whole marketing strategy, plan, forecasting and analysis and God knows what. But if the goal of this project is to bring students closer to the reality of what it's like to set up their own business – if that's the goal – If the goal is to further develop their marketing expertise, then that's a different thing, so I'll qualify in that regard.

Now I've taken that it's about experiencing what it's like to set up a business which means you have to multitask. You can't work on any single thing excessively. You have

to work on a bit of a plan, goals, directions; you've got to look at your marketing strategy; you've got to do your budget; you've got to work on those things at the same time and move them forward based on the bit of data you gather about your business and be smart about recording a bit about what you are spending. Recording your customers and prospective clients – some don't always do this – the successful ones do I might say.

One thing that has delineated itself, by working on smaller tasks, you eventually end up with a very good marketing strategy over a period of about two years. Your budget means something to you after you have been trading for two years. You've got to work out where the peaks and troughs are and all of this stuff. Your business direction has probably changed five times and will change another five, but you will at least have a common view about what your purpose is and clearly define your primary services or products.

So I see this as an evolutionary process over two years, so to take a snapshot, the decision that really needs to be made by the lecturers concerned and the Project Managers, is whether they want to tackle the business start up situation or whether they want to give the students an opportunity to work on a more detailed project that develops a skill set around finance, marketing and IT or whatever it might be.

Any recommendation about which way to jump there?

I'm not sure that it actually matters. I think the model could be applied either way and obviously in an Incubator, the benefit of co-locating with people that are doing this in reality and starting up their own business and working on everything at once, I think there are some advantages to be gained there. If you went specialised, say as a marketing person, marketing consultant, and therefore you might want to spend a bit more time on the intricacies of what marketing is about because you have got to provide information about that to your clients, then that could work equally well. Its just in the time available, you'd probably have to look at it a little differently.

Obviously, if that person wanted to set up their own business, say, after that six month period, well they frankly would be no better or worse off than anybody else. They may be better off because they have spent more time testing their business acumen.

It's almost worth thinking about setting this up as a niche market for setting up a small business and advertising it as a way – as a partnership type of thing. If you want to set up a small business, here's a model.

Actually, just reflecting on my previous comment, most small businesses start out as technically competent – like the X here is a terrific X – his challenge is developing his business skills. It's the same for most people. So I guess if you look at the objectives of this process, the idea is you get someone to pick up that agenda and you want to prepare people to start their own business, you'd have to go down the multiskilled avenue I would think. And it would be up to the Institute to prepare them for the technical side of the business – that's the vocational part of it.

IT would be a very good example there. It's about building up that technical competence and for them through this experience to define whether or not they want to manage their own business or to deliver the technical (and import the manager)

It's decision making time isn't it because then they are immersed and they get a real feel for applying those skills.

That's right. And the capacity of an Incubator to joint venture with somebody with a resource that they see as good value ... I spoke to as an instance one of our firms here who was someone who is technically competent in graphic design, but who is also capable when's there's a bit of down time to get on the phone and to interact with clients and take on a bit of a customer service and sales role.

So it's all about multi-skilling and multi-tasking?

That's right! If they have a go at that then they'll know they are a graphic designer that doesn't want to interact that way, they know to say no. They know what to focus on and that could be looking at a larger organisation in a specialised department, or alternatively, if they like doing that, then hey they could go the other way. And quite likely find themselves commencing as part of a partnership or as a contract opportunity – they'd be sub-contracted as a business. The reason I guess I focused on IT here, was that I felt there was a real chance of a business being established if someone had picked it up, as there is a glaring need here and anyone who began a service of that nature, there would be an ongoing need. And I was thinking of the next group next year, that went through, could pick up the business and run it that way. I was thinking along those lines, but the problem with that is that I think it is just too limiting. It's all very nice, but it is too limiting. The students need to begin with a bit more scope and your curriculum has got other needs as part of their process.

Well I think we've done pretty well today!

Yes. It's been a bit of an eye opener!

4. Ted Schwerdt: Mid Project Case Study Interview

Interviewee: Ted Schwerdt, Lecturer, Vocational Education, DMIT

Role in Project: Mapping Employability Skills to Training Package

Interview date: 25th August, 2003

Interview length: 56 minutes

Interviewed by: Marie Jasinski

[Interview introduction by Marie]

In the course of my chat with them [Work Studio students], it seemed to be the case that they weren't clear on what their project was, although their business planning with Lyn took them to another dimension of security, it seemed based on what they said.

But I felt they weren't experiencing a cohesive input from us.

They had no input from me prior to last week, so they probably accept from what they heard about this bloke doing some mapping of skills.

They didn't know what their role was or who you were?

And while I was there, Kym came in and he and I chatted about things and there seemed to be a lack of cohesion between the role the Retail and Tourism were engaged with and the IT students. So even though Creative Resolutions as a company ideally is a viable operation, different people working for the same goals, probably toe reality is that it is not together yet, mainly because of the nature of the population to date.

Can you just talk a bit more about the nature of the population?

The bit of dealing I've had, made it reasonably clear to me that the Retail and Tourism students know where they are headed, even though they are not quite sure of the interim steps. Better than the IT students who I imagine are in the process of being selected and all that clarified. And by saying that, I'm not in anyway having a go at Kym. I think he has a complicated role to play in that process – It's hard.

Yes, because the IT students really aren't part of the integrated Work Studio, they are a sub-contractor. Are there any comments you'd like to make about your observations about the roles of the two different student groups?

I think it would be easier for the Retail and Tourism students to satisfy the demands of their Work Brief than it will be for IT, because not only do they have to identify what it is that they will be doing, and Kym wants to have them to have some autonomy in that as part of their experience, but they also have to develop a working culture with the Retail and Tourism students. So I think they have got double banger. You could say the same in reverse. Retail and Tourism students could feel the same way, but I think they have got an allocated work brief of potential services and they have got that set up. While I imagine – I don't for sure – I don't know them, I don't think the IT students have the same concrete visualisation of what they are about to do.

And is that cohesion leading to any of these other dimensions?

Well, I think structured and unstructured is a corollary and again I appreciate Kym's wanting students to autonomously develop or not develop skills that the project has engaging or otherwise and I would imagine that he idealistically will allow them to blunder more perhaps than other students – I don't know that for sure. That's my feeling. I suspect without knowing the Retail and Tourism students will be a bit umbrellered at least by Suzie and the rest of the team down there and partly because it is the local areas anyway and naturally it is easier to move around down there than it would be for the Panorama students who are entering foreign territory as it were.

And this gives them another level of complexity and demand?

So I've related that to structured and unstructured. I think that if an ideal is to allow the students autonomy in making their own blunders, it will probably mean at the same time that it is less structured than other approaches that may be more guided democracy. I don't know for sure.

That leads me a question of unaligned and aligned. And if we look at the philosophy of what we are trying to do there, if in hindsight – because now we are half way through – the introduction of the IT as a sub-contracting service and the Retail and Tourism as part of the business, how well is that aligning?

I honestly don't know. I'm not there enough yet.

Because the only real contact you've had of first hand experience is that first contact?

Which was last Wednesday. And there are difficulties with that, but we don't need to talk about that now do we?

We will, but I just want to start with any of these other dimensions. That's a really important point to raise that you've just raised there. Any other continuum there?

Another continuum I imagine would be unsupported – supported. Again if one is going to be autonomous in a sense that's being unsupported – actually unsupported at the time but of course, supported overall. Umbrellered support.

So when you say they are autonomous, can you just extend that a little bit?

Let's say an IT student wanted to do something while down in the Work Studio, but wasn't quite sure what to do but figured 'I won't do anything, I'll ask Kym, or someone else on the project team', that wouldn't be an autonomous way of operating. By autonomous, I mean that the student decides 'OK, I've got the bare bones of this project in my head, I'm going to do something. Do you want me to install Outlook?'

They take a pro-active role.

So they are looking for opportunities, rather than having opportunities presented to them? How's that working?

I don't know.

This might be a good time to move into how I'd like to structure this interview.

[Marie explains the IN-NO-VAT-E model]

IN-no-vat-e

If you think about the purpose of this process, how well are we IN or achieving what we set out to do around this half way phase? How IN are we with the purpose from a project perspective?

Just purpose alone. I think our purpose is strong and robust. I think that has been well clarified and the documentation that Pauline has distributed is clear. I think our meetings have reaffirmed the purpose.

So we are pretty well aligned?

Yes. I'd say so. In terms of purpose.

That's from a project perspective. Now from your perspective as a participant in the project and your particular role in there, how aligned are you right now with the purpose of what you set out to do?

My purpose is aligned with original intentions of the project, though I have autonomously defined in my head what the mapping is going to be as we haven't discussed it too much as a project team.

So tell us a bit more about what is emerging in your head about the mapping process.

Mapping – I know you know as you introduced me to mindmaps – mapping means different things to different people. I think the map I want to work on to both satisfy myself and to fit the project is a rather complicated one. I feel I should map the relationship between the employability skills I've chosen to identify them the same as the ACCI and BCA set of descriptions.

What's the ACCI?

Australian Chamber of Council and Industry.

And BCA?

The Business Council of Australia. They together forged a set of descriptors of employability skills, so I'm going to adopt those. That's a safe set to adopt and map the relationship between those, the competencies in the Training Packages which I hope to determine the relevant ones in relationship to the project. It would be impossible for me to do a mapping in relationship to all the competencies in the Training Packages even though generically, one could imagine, they could be done at any time during this project in my view any way.

Which ones are relevant?

The ones relevant to customer relations, working in a team with colleagues, technology skills. They are the main relevant ones. Under those heading there are embedded

competencies or in fact specified competencies. Taking those unit headings and mapping them against the ACCI and BCA ones. Here's the first part of the map as I am envisaging it. Shall I keep going?

Yes! This is great. It's really important that we capture your process.

There are other parts of the mapping that have to be done as well. I'll need to identify what actual skills the Creative Resolutions as the company requires the workers there to have. And the way I plan to do that is to ask the employees – the students themselves – what their perspective is and the relevant other stakeholders what their perspective is.

Those other stakeholders are X and X from [Work Studio clients] and Lynette Hay. They are the major other stakeholders. Probably also I will ask Suzie in particular and Kym what their perspective is – and by asking, I mean interview them. So that will be another map.

Then there's a third map. I think I said the other day when we were at our meeting, I'm pretty keen on this sort of thing because it allows me to further my own interest in things like that. I am trying to develop an alphabet of all the skills and attributes which are sometimes referred to as transferability skills, generic skills, sometimes employability skills, sometimes competencies and I want to make some sense of that in this project if the project guidelines allow me to do that and I hope they will. Rather than ending up with a list which may be a bit of this and a bit of that, so I'm hoping I can do that which means drilling down part of the time. As part of the project, giving exemplars of drilling down these surface global competencies to what I call underpinnings.

If you are looking at those three levels of mapping, where are you right now with that process?

Well I've got the Training Packages and know how Training Packages work now. I've investigated how they work and the rubric of them and the purpose of them. So I've got a handle on that. I'm selecting some favourites from the array of competencies. The other thing I have to determine is which students are Certificates II, III and IV because the competencies will be worded differently even though they are often the same. So those units there are currently my favourites as they seem to be the ones most specifically applied to the students who are doing it.

So the favourites are matching with the work practices?

Yes. That's applying the competencies with what they are actually doing. Which I'm assuming – you make your own assumptions about what mapping is – I'm assuming it's a valid way of doing the mapping process. It's not the only way, but a valid way.

Because mapping itself is a fuzzy concept isn't it?

Yes. It means different things to different people. Mindmaps are different from what I'm, doing. I looked up mapping on the Internet to see what mapping's about, but I got mostly geographic responses.

And what we're looking at is...

Developing matrices, linkages and relationships.

Have you started the matrices, linkages and relationships yet?

I'm not sure what it's going to end up looking like. It might need to be three dimensional just to do it. I might need to build one rather than draw one. But whatever the case, there'll be a way of doing it – Matrix 1, Matrix 2, Matrix 3 - like that. I'm heading conceptually towards matrices as a way of doing the mapping.

So how well do you think you need to inform or align what you are doing here, with the other stakeholders in the project? Because you've just mentioned previously, up until now, the mapping really hasn't been on the agenda at our meetings. At what stage is it appropriate to put it on the agenda so we are all getting some information and feedback?

I think two thirds of the way through. I need to work with the students. I need to find out what their perspectives are. I've got to interview the students and because they are only just starting on their work brief, there is not a lot of point interviewing them yet.

So the outcomes of the mapping is going to be a later deliverable?

Yes. In fact I think this project will involve a tumultuous burst of activity nearing completion time, probably for a lot of us, but certainly in regard to the mapping.

In-NO-vat-e

I think it's time now to look at the system. In setting up a New Practice Project, we've got three quite discrete areas trying to work together. In fact more. There are a whole range of different stakeholders who haven't worked together before within a system. Have you noticed any systems challenges as far as getting this project under way that you'd like to comment on?

Yes, there are structural features of timetables that probably led to me not getting to the IT students at all yet.

So not being able to get access to them?

Well I can, but I'm not sure who they are yet. Kym and I were talking about that last week. I'm .1 on this project. It would be from that perspective. It would be silly for me to go down five days a week to Port Adelaide, hoping to meet up with the students. They are there two by two at this stage, so that's a difficulty I've got.

So logistically, you have to be really clear.

Logistically, it is very difficult to do that. Ideally, it would be good if they were all there and I could interview them one by one. Go for coffee around the corner or whatever and have a chat and start the process off and getting them to identify what skills they believe they require to make this work - operate successfully. And because of that I imagine now it will be a real burst of activity towards the end of the project where I will have to bring things together. I won't have time prior to that because of these logistics just to interview the students. I'll have time to talk to Susie, Pauline, X and X and Lyn – I can do that. The students will be more difficult.

In a way, they are a critical part of the whole thing.

It's their employability skills we're ... well I think it is. It's a question I have. Well let's say their skills are not as complete as they might have been because the people on the project team didn't get their act fully together to help them get started. I'm not really sure whether that could be or should be included in the mapping or not. I'm going to talk to Pauline about that to see what she thinks about there.

My general assumption is that we are mapping these students' skills.

So you think there might be an avenue for mapping staff skills?

Well if there are skills deficits among the students which haven't been addressed or in fact may have even been caused, by us as the project team, I am wondering – wondering not suggesting – I'm wondering whether that should or could be part of the project mapping.

In its pure form no, if all I'm doing is mapping the student – the presence or absence or mingled-ness of their employability skills, I don't need to worry about the rest. But when I do that is also significant. So far I'm not keeping a log. I could also have taken that approach. I found that too difficult. It's too hard to take a log with the nature of the logistics. I'd do it by interview and get to know them than employ the other sort of map. Does that make sense to you?

Yes. So if you were to map staff skills, what sort of things would you be looking for?

Communication, team work and the effects of team work. There needs to be a consistent message to students. Probably I'd add personality in there as well, because different personalities have different outcomes, though that's difficult to map.

But, is the package that the students got about what they are supposed to be doing a consistent package? Probably it isn't which is the nature of reality. It's hard for a group of people working with another group to produce a perfect package when people are individually involved in delivering that package.

One of the things that has come up to do with systems is in fact we've got the Work Studio – CRES – in there setting up a business and one of the things that has come out is that we are in fact running two businesses. We're running the business of the students setting up their Studio. And we're also running the business of DMI setting up that business – the process of moving into an Incubator. That requires an interesting set of skills on their part and what you're referring to here, is in fact that we might need to identify the types of employability skills needed for the staff participating in these types of projects. Is that what you are saying.

I'm wondering. I'm mainly thinking about the effect on students' skill development rather than mapping the staff. I'm sure that's none of my business, or a legitimate focus I should say! In terms of the effect on student skill development.

And you think there has been?

Well I imagine there has been. Well I think there has been. I think as I said before in relation to these descriptors here, I imagine some staff – take Kym for example. He's had an ADMIT [IT Practice Firm] background and with that background, he's got a

particular set of views I think regarding the best outcomes for students involved in his project. That may not be the same as Pauline and Suzie's who've got a Practice Firm background which is similar I suppose to ADMIT, but different in the kind.

In our meetings, different focuses and different perspectives are expressed. I've used the word autonomy before and I believe Kym has ideals regarding the autonomy of his students and probably Suzie has a similar ideal, but perhaps in actuality is more hands on. She and her students are just around the corner, whereas Kym is up here [Panorama campus of DMIT] most of the time. I imagine there are differences like that.

So is that clash – it's almost like a clash of cultures and perceptions and frames of reference, is that – of we are looking at continuums – a productive or unproductive to this project?

You mean the head culture or the IT/Tourism culture?

The head culture. They are coming from two different frames of reference to do with the Practice Firm or the work placements.

I think in the longer term, the clash of culture is good. In a shorter term, it may make it a bit slower for the operation to proceed. But I think it's good. If you have a focused or a polarised way of looking at it, as we all know, out of those collisions, good things often happen. I'm not describing this as a collision.

No, No but points of difference.

The degree of autonomy is probably the sticking point and real frame of reference here – the degree of autonomy.

For the students?

Yes. What they are given to make mistakes.

Tell me a bit more about your observation there.

Alright. Well I haven't had much direct observation – in fact only a couple of hours worth – but in terms of what I'm picking up from meetings if students sink or swim that's entirely their own business. They've had some training, they're doing their study at DMIT, they understand the rubric of this project and part of our interest is seeing how well they get on. So we let them sink or swim. That would be one extreme.

The other extreme view is – let's guide and mentor their development as time is short, it's only a few months long this project, so we've got to get them actually doing something so we can then write our report and assess the feasibility.

So they are the poles as I see it. And I think I'm not just creating them as conceptual things. I feel that they realities in the heads of stakeholders. And I also think it is good as I said before for longer term outcomes.

But not short term projects?

It might be tricky.

Is it slowing it down?

I can't say for sure. The IT students have taken a while to come on stream. I know Kym's got logistical problems with them ... Is this alright by the way? I don't want to say anything about other staff that might be construed as negative as I don't feel negative. I feel that Kym's an excellent chap.

You're really an independent observer in a way because you have got no attachments.

Yes I suppose that's right. I'm a mapper.

Yes, you are mapping.

Well, I think Kym has logistical problems. I think the other staff in IT might not have the same degree of idealism that Kym has got – in inverted commas 'uprooting students from classes' and go down and satisfy the demands of our project and help the staff out – which some students might see it as. I don't know. And who's going to take up the slack when those students do miss classes. I asked Kym that and he said he will, he'll have to do it. So it's logistically pretty hard for him.

Oh it is. So if you look at these dimensions, there's an element of support and unsupport in his own work team.

I think so, based on what he has told me. I imagine there is.

Looking at that from a systems perspective, this whole project is based on community capacity building in the Port Adelaide community.

I don't know what that means. 'Community capacity building' – what's that?

Looking at building up the skills within the Port Adelaide community to increase employment opportunities and build community as far as employment. Looking at the potential for that as a local community capacity building. And yet a lot of those IT students are imported from here [Panorama campus], so the identity that these students have with the Port Adelaide area might be different to students who are studying and perhaps living in the Port Adelaide area. So the alignment of that identity might be one of the issues. Because originally, we had thought of it coming from Port Adelaide.

Well some students are from Port Adelaide – IT students. I don't know the ratios. In fact Kym said last week, there were about 20 IT students involved, but I don't know the ratios.

Any other comments about the system and how the system has supported you to do the project or any systems support that you've seen that DMIT has provided. For example how important was having a facilities manager to populate or furnish or provide support to the students in those early stages?

Very. If we didn't have that, then they wouldn't have a sense of identity. They wouldn't have functional requirements. IT students need to have at least a computer to work with.

From a mapping perspective with employability skills, a lot of that early facilities collections of things was actually done for the students. Do you see any

advantage of having in those really early stages of having those students having to identify what their furnishing, computer IT skills and facilities needs were?

Only if they knew what their work was. If they knew what the work was and they had a good fix on that, then yes, it would be an excellent idea. And that would have probably brought the IT students in naturally fairly quickly.

So ideally then, if you were going to map this, would it be appropriate to work with the students this way?

No. I would have preferred to work with them earlier. To have more lead time to explore other possible ways to do the finishing touches to the mapping.

So have you felt you've come in a bit late?

No. I was there at that first meeting. No I came in at an appropriate time. It's the students getting a fix on what their job is – that was later than I anticipated it would be.

So they have got to identify what their job is before you can map.

I can't see much point in doing that in the abstract, because the Training Packages do that. I think I should be mapping the concrete employability skills to their work.

And then aligning it to the abstract?

Yes.

That's a very good point.

In-no-VAT-e

So if we move on then to the VAT and fermentation in that VAT over in the Incubator and for the project itself, how well do you think it's going – the implementation – at any level you'd like to comment on.

Well in terms of my understanding of the IT involvement – that was a week ago, they seem to be behind the eight ball a bit. It seems that the other students – I've only spoken to two of them – they are probably a bit late too in getting started and getting a real fix on what they are supposed to be doing. If this is to be completed by November, they are not going to have too much time to work with Andrew and Jane as I see it, unless there is a guided approach to that, rather than let them autonomously do it.

Have you got an opinion about which way that should go?

I think it should go the guided way in this project from now on to get the project completed, but get them to make mistakes part of the time to see what sort of mistakes are made. I think it would be a pity if this project looked like it fell into any sort of disarray in terms of any future projects. Pene wants this to continue and so does Mike [Managing Director]. So I suppose if there was a guided approach to getting real outcomes that'd be better than being too idealistic in a sense. If they want to be workers, they've got to find out what it's like to do it themselves. The main problem is they don't have a clear boss.

So is that role of having a boss in there who is an identified leader, do you think that was an important role amongst the students?

I do. Most businesses have a boss. Team work without a team leader is a lovely ideal sometimes if you have the skills, the infrastructure, the competence and the experience to do it together. I've seen in my life samples of that. In this particular project I think one of the teachers is the boss, or one of the students is the boss. It has to be with mentoring from Lynette. I don't think Lynette should be the boss. She brings the cold hard world of business reality to the project from an mentoring perspective and that's a good part of the model.

Just moving on to roles and role definition and role clarification, would the members of the project team and those directly involved with the students – do you think the roles of the facilitators are clear?

I don't know if their roles are clear or not. I'm not clear of their roles in the same way as I've suggested a couple of times now the debate between autonomy and guidance. Right now, I don't know what role for example Suzie plays in that – how far she mentors or guides or facilitates what the students are doing. I'm not clear and I don't know whether I need to be.

That's right. Your focus is on the students. But looking at the students, you've mentioned that the development of employability skills can be influenced by the role that the mentors and facilitators take.

That's right.

So from a student perspective, have you got any comment you would like to make about the role of the facilitator could or should be to help the employability skills?

For this project?

Yes, because this is the experience we are having.

Let's say I was in Susie's role I can imagine – and she's probably already done this – I can imagine me talking to Kym and saying 'how are the IT people going to fit?' And Kym saying 'well, can your students make a good brochure?' And Susie saying 'Well some can and some can't'. I can imagine at the end of that dialogue with Kym, if the students aren't doing it themselves saying 'now look, have you created a brochure?' Or 'x [Work Studio client], have you thought of making a super duper brochure and liaising with them to see if they want your skills'. If I were Susie, I'd be very inclined to do that as it would be something tangible outcome.

A bit of leading and pacing?

Yes, I guess. For this project. Now let's say it was a year long project I'd be much more interested in a sink or swim approach as long as all stakeholders knew what the guts of the project was early on. If they knew the guts of it early on, then I think sink or swim is pretty good.

So the timing or the length of an Incubation project is critical to how you go about it?

Yes it is. It is probably unrealistic to expect students, giving them autonomy to do things that are actually going to exhibit the skills that are going to be required in a workplace. Unless they had it all pat before the three months started or however long it is – four months.

And Ted, from your initial contact or interview with the students, because I know you are going to have a lot more, is there any pattern of skills or skill deficits or skill enhancements that you have observed?

No pattern. Too early. And too small a sample! 😊

And you aim to interview all the Retail, Tourism students there?

And the IT. I think the map has to include their perspective, as well as some of my observations.

And you've got some pretty good observations that are emerging already here.

Yes, that's right.

So with implementation, is there anything else you feel that needs to be commented on, suggested, raised, reflected on.

In terms of my role?

In terms of your role and how you see the project – the whole issue of employability skills and what's happening there.

At our last group meeting, I mention in response – I think to one of your questions – I gave a quick explanation of what I said today. Probably that needs to be a bit more fleshed out and I think I should do that fairly soon. Perhaps in the next three weeks, when I get a better fix on the student end of it, to the project team, so I can get feedback from the rest of the team about the errors they think I might be making in terms of my focus. I think that would be an advantage to me.

It might also be an advantage to them because if they know exactly how I am going to go about the mapping, it might perhaps encourage some members of the team to focus on those areas with the students. I don't know, I'm just talking right now, I don't know. But I'm very conscious of timelines. So there has to be some alignment between the different roles and functions and the different outcomes the project is expecting and that's fairly timely to happen fairly soon.

In-no-vat-E

So moving on now to the review process, and reflecting on what's happened and where you'd like to take the next step, what 'E' words that just pop into your head that are associated with your experience, observations, perceptions etc of this project to date and also anticipating where it could head.

'Elegant' – I think the project itself is an elegant way to find a middle ground between the Practice Firm and the Business Incubator. I like it. It's still virtual, but it's getting pretty real as it's getting real customers. That's pretty elegant I reckon.

'Elastic' – there is a fair bit of elasticity, because when we have our meetings things have changed a bit. There's no dominator apart from Pauline who's dominated by the rigours of getting the project materials in on time. I think it's fairly elastic, probably in good ways. None of the people on the team are robots.

I can't think of any more! 😊

Better to have two great words that have meaning than to make them up!

Those are two great words and how you've developed them and explained them are really excellent. So looking at the review as far as where this could go – considering where it's travelled to now – have you any vision of the possibilities of this as far as moving it from a New Practice to an Implemented Practice?

My bottom line answer is – I don't know enough. I don't know enough to have a proper fix on that. All I can say is what I've heard from Pauline who wants to advance it and further implement this sort of activity and make the Port Campus an Incubator. I don't know how that would be done, because that's very paradigm shifting to do that.

Let's go back to your frame of reference and the work you have been doing with generic skills and portability, key competencies etc, and knowing enough about the model that's developing there and the work that you've got a lot of expertise in, where's the alignment between what you are doing and what's happening there and the possibilities?

I'd say DMIT people – eg people in this work group, his project and similar, made a good fist of it and out of the mapping of employability skills, key pictures emerged that these are the key employability skills that are connected to the Training Packages and so on, high on my wish list for a tangible outcome would be a Generic Skills Centre of Excellence, where people who have deficits like active listening. We all over our time in TAFE probably referred to in class to. We need active listening skills and we do a bit of that and a bit of a role play. But if we actually had a Centre of Excellence where you learn how to actively listen, it might be fairly rigorous, that would be for me a way of wedding my general work interests with this.

Would that be a Centre of Excellence for students, staff or both?

A Centre of Excellence for the acquisition of generic skills as I understand that for anybody, but run by DMIT in this instance. It takes certain infrastructures to progress that. A fair bit of work has been done on this. A centre where people can go to get a rapid up skill which is sustainable. It's got to be sustainable, otherwise it's just a magic trick. And we don't want those.

Do you think there are a lot of magic tricks that go on?

Yes. I think competency-based training has got lots of magic tricks! 😊

In fact, that's a really good place to start to actually wind it down. Any other concluding or finishing statement that you would like to make that we haven't covered during this time, this conversation together?

Yes. I would like to applaud Pauline. I think she is terrific. And with her pretty well at the helm of this, apart from being the project manager, her energy and her vision. And this isn't me just sucking up to Pauline via a tape! It's real. I think she is terrific for the role she has and I wish it and her the best of success. I think it's idealistic. I'm a bit sceptical. It's a bloody hard thing to do to have tangible outcomes in a fairly short space of time like this, but if the future included something like a DMIT Incubator, then as Pauline has projected, she would be terrific in the role of facilitating that. And I'd bet she'd grab people who could help her do it. So most of that was applauding Pauline.

On that happy note, we'll turn it off!

Alright.

Thanks for that Ted. You've got a lot of insights and wisdom that has come across and I think that your role as an independent observer, with a particular focus on employability skills has given us probably a bit of a breadth of vision about what needs to happen for both students who are working in this environment and maybe for staff as well. Thank you.

5. Kym Bond: Mid Project Case Study Interview

Project Team member: Kym Bond, Lecturer IT, Work Placement Coordinator

Project Role: Facilitator, IT Vocational Placement

Interview date: 22/08/03

Interview length: 1 hour 39 minutes

Interviewed by: Marie Jasinski

Background:

Marie explained the IN-NO-VAT-E model and the concept of New Practice being a fuzzy concept which could include continuums like:

- unaligned/aligned
- unsupported/supported
- undefined/defined

The interview starts with Kym identifying some of these continuums as they relate to this project, starting with unsupported/supported.

Where does Flexible Learning start?

Flexible Learning starts from the lessons learned about non flexibility. To invent strategies that become more flexible, so I would put flexible learning starting at the non flexible end.

So any time you jump onto the flexible learning bandwagon, you become more flexible?

Absolutely.

So if we looking at New Practice within a flexible learning framework, where would New Practice fit?

I would see it as the same criteria as the flexible. If you are going for the full bells and whistles, then obviously on the right hand side [of the Not New/New continuum] where it is new. You have evolved the model to some type of entirety and robustness. However, that robustness only begins when you jump on board and start trying something, developing it, iterating it, evaluating it, going to the next level, to the next level...

Where do you think our project is on that continuum?

I don't think there is anything new about Incubators or Practice Firms with regard to the research that I have seen in the last four or five years. Whether the pathway to employment and the focus on employability skills is becoming increasingly clear to multiple people and that emphasis that we have to get our employability skills mapped in this particular project I think indicates some type of maturity. Therefore I do not think we are NOT NEW, I don't think we are NEW. I think we are probably three to four years

from the very end. To take some of the lessons learnt and then start developing that into some kind of maturity.

So if you were to define New Practice, what would your definition of it be?

To me, New Practice conjures up thoughts of a new paradigm, a new way of thinking, a new way of doing particular training. So for me a New Practice could be a Simulated Business Environment that is bordering on – whether it is an Incubator or not – traditionally have a Practice Firm; you have a SBE on campus; you have an Incubator either on campus or off campus. The blended scales here [on the grid] do capture the transition from SBE to Incubator. That's where I think our project is at and I do have ideas of how we can improve that of course.

And is this a New Practice to position our project within a small business Incubator in the community?

I think it is important to have some element of reality in the training that we are doing. As a trainer, obviously I want to train, deliver and assess. The Training Package says that there is an element of client focus there, so I should be delivering and assessing my core group, my customers in a setting where there is a client focus. The Incubator down here captures that beautifully because there is a somewhat shielded environment, but there is a focus on having customers that are real.

Would that be the New Practice? Customers that are real?

Well I believe so. That's what I would like to be working towards. That transition from pure theory-based classroom environment, into the application and assessment of that skill set in a live scenario.

What is happening here is the application of that skills set to a live environment?

Yes.

[Fuzzy concept explanation by Marie]

I agree with that

Is that a model that makes sense to you?

Absolutely.

It picks up if you are critical on what you are attempting to achieve. It picks up the ability to be able to apply your lessons learnt and further develop that model and this is what I refer to as more mature, more robust.

One of the things that people have to come to terms with in working in New Practices is that they are constantly working with contradictions and paradox. We have to work in the present and work in the future and though we are looking at a New Practice, that we are still exploring, we've also got operational things to do in day to day work. We've got our competencies to assess, we've our outcomes etc. So one of the contradictions is that we are working in the present and in the future. The other one is, we're asked to be flexible and be compliant. Because even within this New Practice, we've got competencies, AQTF standards, a set of things we have to deal with, etc. How do you deal with those consistent sets of contradictions? Is there anything there along those

continuums that pop out for you where you think 'that's right, we're in that contradiction right now'?

If you are asking me to capture a snapshot of the issues we need to deal with now. The issues we need to deal with now is that a team has been formed, and there are some issues that are starting to sneak in, in regard to the team and how functional that team is. And what I want to ensure is we revisit the nature of a team, do some team building and focus on what the goals and objectives and re-evaluate those goals and objectives, get some clarity and move forward.

Some of them have got to do with cohesive and not cohesive, some has got to do with planning and what we haven't planned for. I think we have got sufficient support for most of our things and interests and I think we are aligned to our training package. The structured and unstructured nature of it, I think we have got sufficient structure in there. But the real issue that I see, like Suzie, the expertise that I bring in is reasonably well defined in my mind and for me to articulate those to my IT students and to the other students is a bit of a challenge. The challenge for me in my team as in the project team is for people to trust my judgement. It is hard for vocational placement students to staff full time a business off campus when they have got these competing work duties. And unless I am going to turn my students into a Trainee and deliver and assess in this environment, then it really comes down to the one or two people that I can get that are already highly skilled gems to do vocational placement in a continuous block. Now if I had those gems of students, we wouldn't be having this conversation. I don't have at the moment, so the timing of the project is the issue.

But besides all of that, the most damaging thing to our project is what's happening within the team itself – the clarity of roles, responsibilities, competing directions.

We'll bring this up a little bit later on because I've got a structure that I'm working in so that we are all focusing on the same areas. What I'd like to use. Considering the fact that we're working with fuzziness, that there are no rights or wrongs in this, because I think that is the nature of new practice, and exploring, what I want to work you through, is how innovation – because that's what we are really on about – fits into an organisation.

[Marie explains the IN-NO-VAT-E model]

IN-no-vat-e

If you start here with purpose and alignment, how well from your individual group and where you've progressed – we're now into Week 5 of the students being in the Incubator – how aligned are you with what you set out to do with the purpose of being involved in the project?

It's hard for me because my purpose was established many weeks ago, because that's when I started working on the systems. Now I'm in systems development mode. If I was to ask myself whether I had achieved the goals I set out as regards to the purpose, at the moment I feel I have. We have identified what it is we are attempting to achieve. How we are going to achieve that to starting to put systems in place – actually begin implementing some of those. So at the moment, I feel comfortable with the initial briefing. There are many ways we could have gone in this particular project. However, we all needed clarity on the particular direction we were going to walk down. I believe that with the initial brief if getting vocational placement students to staff the IT Help

Desk, I have attempted to achieve that. However, it has not been as smooth or as sweet as would have liked.

Do I elaborate now or later?

Let's wait until we get down to the systems.

With the concept and the purposes of the New Practices Project, moving away from your IT section with all the complexities that you've got, are you moving towards the alignment of what you have set out to do? How well do you think your goals are aligned with the goals of your IT program and your Work Team.

We've had a model like this put in place since ICA came up in '99. And this is just another example of students working with clients. So this is the first alignment we have got with our particular program? No. Are we aligned? Yes – it fits the criteria we are looking for in our Training Package quite well.

So if you jump up one more level and look at DMI and what DMI stands for, is this New Practice aligning with the purpose of DMI and its strategic directions and visions?

I believe if the strategic directions of the Institute that have been well documented – the ones that have been released, this project does align with that very well.

How?

By strengthening the partnerships with Industry. By encouraging flexibility in regards to how students learn. By introducing the concept of a client. By providing staff with professional development opportunities. I think they are the main focus. They are the main tangibles I can tweak the project to.

So if you just move on now to the systems, if the vision the move to alignment is basically happened, you talked before about some of the systems issues that you faced and some of the complexities there, how well do the systems – either your local systems, the Institute systems, or what is happening here, is supporting the implementation or transition of this project?

I've got to be honest in regard to the issue of staffing a business, for this learning experience, it is not desirable for the lecturers to go down and do everything for the students. Lecturers are facilitators or mentors or support mechanisms. Provision of advice and trial and error for the student must be paramount. Having said that, the difficulty I have in coordinating staff. I located the students, spoke to the main person I thought was going to be the HR person – I'd work with that person ... if you like I hear rumblings that it is too difficult to organise. And that if you like is my responsibility, to get IT people here. And I've always maintained that I've got to get up to 20 people down here to staff from Monday to Friday the Help Desk and on that particular day, I will not be able to guarantee that that student has the skills to do that particular role. So that's one issue. But that's not the real issue here because I don't have Monday to Friday in its entirety as there are few little sessions there I haven't got staff for.

How have you gone about that in your IT work team in getting those students?

Canvassing, going to classes, notices on the board, emails, in my vocational placement class, selling the concept to the students. The difficulty is it's based at Port Adelaide. The majority of our students are at Panorama, and we have a partnership with [Industry X] that is providing vocational placement opportunities with law firms, in [Industries mentioned] and large organisations that are perceived by the students to be potential employers. Therefore it is not necessarily attractive to come to the other side of the city to work for other people trying to set up their business to do low level type duties. It would be attractive to those two or three gems who have matured through their course and they believe they want to provide IT support as a job. They are the people I would target to get into this environment. That would have been the ideal, but that hasn't happened. Several suitable students are staffing CRES, but only on a part time basis. If the same students could do their vocational placement on a continuous full time capacity, these students would have been the ideal gems that I was searching for.

So [Industries] are competing for the student placements?

Absolutely. And if I go into the classroom and say 'OK, there's a vocational placement opportunity open at [Industry] on that same day, I'll get five or six people chase me vehemently. If I say I've got a vocational placement opportunity at Todd Street at the Business Chambers, they say 'What's that?' So I describe it and I get those initial people not interested any more and I've got the people genuinely interested in – 'OK I've got an interest. This is something I'd like to do.' They come out of the woodwork if you like.

So the ones that have come out of the woodwork, are they the ones interested in setting up an IT support business?

I believe that the ones I have got down here, now, can see the benefit in themselves in their skill development to confirm they do know how to do this and the trade-off is that several of them I would do delivery and assessment down here, that has been attractive for them. Because they already know the majority of their class content. So it makes sense to bring them down here, practice particular skills, have a look at maintenance of standards, have a look at what customers they can service to do, what they should be doing in the classroom, even sitting an assessment they are doing in the classroom to make sure that the height of the bar is raised.

One of the complexities that the IT component is facing, is that the concept of the project is about community capacity building within the Port Adelaide community. And so most of the students in Retail and Tourism are local Port Adelaide student who are actually working with local businesses, so they can see what's in it for them. Is one of these systems complexities that whole dislocation with Panorama students not being Port Adelaide focused?

Of course.

Will that be something we will have to think about in the future?

Of course. We should integrate the training at DMIT to prepare for CRES. That would maximise opportunities and minimise delays due to lack of preparation.

What you are really saying is, they probably don't have the same commitment to this area.

Of course. And why should they go down here out of their way when they can go somewhere where there is a higher profile. But an incubator is not for everyone. I believe an incubator is for a highly skilled staff member that wants to embark upon a business learning opportunity in a supportive environment.

There's more in it for them. If they went to a higher profile placement, from their perspective, there might be a job opportunity. Is the job opportunities really the driver?

We are starting to track the students who have completed a placement and have been put on a contract immediately after the placement or within a month after. They've created a role for that person because that person was attractive to that organisation.

So the word gets around?

Absolutely. And that's something you can't advertise in the program because giving people false illusions that you will get a job no matter where you do your placement – no – your role is to ensure that you do the best possible opportunity and if you like a potential referee said you did a fantastic job while you were there for them.

So, I wonder why – are there enough IT students at the Port Adelaide campus?

Absolutely. If we had integrated this as part of the assessment, for example..

One of the issues for me which I can't get my head around is why are we sending students from Panorama when this is a community capacity building project and you have got IT students at Port Adelaide?

Last semester, Enterprise Skills I provided one-to-one instruction. I proposed as part of this assessment, to have the students have a live client they would train. And they wouldn't necessarily even know the topic they would train. They were client support type students who should be self directed and empower themselves to do their own learning and touch base with someone who doesn't know how to attach files using email or macros in Word and work with that person to provide a training session for them. And in return get mentoring on how well you perform, how well you communicated and how well you observed your deadlines.

This was too far out, too new, too much effort if you like.

And these were the Port Adelaide people?

Yes that's my perception. When discussing my suggestion with one of the 'resistant' staff I said 'Can you imagine, if you were doing Enterprise Skills I, we could have had the entire class – 25 people – each to be assigned to one business down here right here right now. And part of their assessment instrument was to provide training and instruction for a client down here. We could have had this whole project rolled. You could have been using it as a focus in your delivery of the class to prepare people for this, to integrate what it is we are doing in the classroom and capping it off with what we are doing here in the workforce'. And now, they can see that vision.

So at the moment, what's the opportunity for IT Port Adelaide students to come down here?

Well if we could have this as a long term arrangement, there are multiple classes back at the campus at client support level in IT where students could be prepped in the classroom, capped out down here. It aligns itself with the classroom responsibility and teaching and industry relevant skills and client focus on the customer. If a client at Todd St wanted more than one off assistance – then we've got the vocational placement tool that could provide service for the Semester.

So from your observation here, the mix between client support and the high level skills, there's room for both?

Absolutely. A person coming in new to Client Support may have direct entry. And if they were to go to CRES on the first week of their training courses – just land there – they would be overwhelmed. They need preparation.

What I want to talk to you about is mixing and matching different program areas in one Incubator. We've got Retail, Tourism and IT. And in a way, they can be quite different cultures. And already there are some complexities in that. But there's also some strengths in that. Like we are dealing with contradictions all the time. What are some of the complexities of systems that you see in that mixing and matching of the programs within the one business?

I am well aware of this mix because of previous experience and because of that, I do not want to open the doors for trading down here until I have those systems in place that protect the people for the issues I know are going to pop up. That is one of the criticisms from Suzie and Pauline – Kym it's been a long time, why haven't you got IT support down there yet? Well when I have arrived, I developed and adapted systems and process as quick as I could and have been told they are too complicated. This is my core business, please trust me, I need to put something in place to take care of these issues and if you want a quality product some systems must be in place before trading can occur. So from a negative, IT type thing, I was hoping to be able to hand over a pool of people that these people would staff the IT Help Desk.

X is the X person down there. That was her role and responsibility. I've overwhelmed her with staffing Monday – Friday. X has had their email addresses to contact now for some time. She's not comfortable on the use of email yet. Plus we've had a couple of technical glitches down there and we haven't had email for very long. So there are issues there in terms of the skill level of some of the other faculties to be able to be placed in this environment where – let's OK – let's open doors for trading in an area where some staff have little or no knowledge and understanding.

So in other words, her technology deficit has not enabled her to do her job.

Absolutely.

Having said that, if she had a mentoring program, and it was proactive planning, then we could have a look at the roles of this person had to do and the professional development to be comfortable to do those roles, that would be a different scenario, but that takes time.

Say if a student was coming in as a management student like, their needs to be some pre-requisite technology skills to do that management job?

This in my opinion is one small business that we are running, not three faculties. This business is to provide IT support and Tourism. Therefore, the people who operate in that business have got to wear multi hats. They can't just take a tower of one particular skills set and put them down there. You need other skills in order to perform. It is a problem based learning methodology where you draw upon your skills in many areas to solve the problem. For example, my IT students, I would expect them to staff the reception desk to say 'Yep, not a problem, I can take those details down and pass the details on to the appropriate person at CRES'.

Now we haven't got a method of communication yet. We haven't got the folders in place. We don't know the roles and boundaries well enough for that level of service. But I would fully expect my IT person to speak on the phone, capture the details, know who the contact person is and where to feed that information to the right person within that small business.

So one of the blocks in not getting the IT students up and operational here, has been the lack of ability to use email on the part of the person who is managing the process?

That's a minor role. The other issue is from the IT people that they feel that they can just arrive and everything is just going to fall into place. Some people are quite risk averse. Even though they have expressed interest, I have encouraged them to contact HR or contact the department down here and indicate when you are going to be able to provide services. Because they don't know the person down here, they still feel reluctant. They still want me to do the legwork for them.

So it's almost as if they need an introduction

Absolutely. I need to be able to say 20 people, come to this meeting at X time and we will meet collectively, but we can't do that because of the students' timetables.

So they are having a little trouble initiating contact.

To a certain extent yes. Having said that, I also did indicate that HR down here would be contacting you if you haven't contacted them. Because I wanted to hand over those responsibilities and let the students go once I had cleared the path.

So it's almost that undefined/defined role clarification there?

Yes. The very first meeting when I met the students – when I walked in, they had the white board beautifully written down to roles and responsibilities, not people. So there was a HR, there was a marketing person. And that's what I have used and I've just assumed people have got this, because I needed clarity on who I would go to. I've been working very well with X to take care of the systems to put in place. She's been very, very proactive to do those. Not to take any of that work personally. To outsource to some of my IT students. She has played the role perfectly.

What is X's role?

She is Admin – front desk

And she's been very good?

Not very good. Brilliant!

Which leads into the role of the students within an Incubator versus the role of the Facilitator. Have you any thoughts on that? Where the line is. We're talking about blurred boundaries and when you pull back. What does that take?

Each scenario is different for me. It needs to be done on a case by case basis. There are times when for example database development, I need systems put in place. None of my people have got the skill to be able to do that. I did it myself. Then I handed that over to staff down there to maintain it. And the database needs more work and that can be a project for them to develop that. And on some things, I've just got in there and done the work myself and implemented it, if I need something quick and it was going to be more efficient for me to do that, I would do that.

However, there have been other times where I could have implemented something in five or ten minutes, but one, two, three weeks have gone by and I still haven't got the quality of product I am seeking. And my role is to work with that person to make sure that they feel comfortable. And they learn – they review – to go through a continuous improvement process until they get to a stage where they are self directed. I'm referring about documents, processes put in place. So I haven't got a magic wand that says I shall do these roles and not these roles. It comes down to a case-by-case gut instinct, the nature of work to be performed and the skills of the staff member to be capable of performing the tasks.

I believe in the use of an Incubator – but I don't see that we have an Incubator down there. Because there is delivery and assessment occurring down there. That is a simulated business environment.

It's a Work Studio, it's not an Incubator

An incubator to me is 'you've been there, done that and you're ready to establish a business in your chosen profession'.

It's not an Incubator. It's a simulated business environment. It's the transition between the Practice Firm and an Incubator.

That's why I said there is shades of grey and SBE and Incubator. That's where we are. We are bordering on delivery and assessment and assessment only if you like. We're using a tool that helps use to deliver and assess competencies, but the exciting thing is the amount of problem based learning the students experience.

Can you say a bit more about that – for assessment only? And the borderline?

The vocational placement program in the IT section has evolved from being linked to certain competencies in an award mainly for administrative purposes. For example in Client Support there is both Enterprise Skills – provide instruction, provide advice to clients, project information and relating to clients level. If we are going to make them the focus of vocational placement, we are ignoring the Key Competencies in the other subjects. The key competencies are across the board. We've got that mechanism now – we've evolved to that level. So our model is that you go to the classroom. You are delivered and assessed, then you have the vocational placement component which allows a mechanism for final completion of assessment. The nature of the placement is at the level of the AQF, so it should be at a level of client support. You should be able to do client support roles when you are assessed for that. So I see that as – I've been here nearly two years now – it's a lot different to what it was two years ago. So we've gone through several iterations. I think we are as mature a model as we can take that within putting more systems in place with more purpose from the Institute.

That's the IT model?

Yes

See one of the things I want to talk to you about there, is when you are talking about models of Work Studios or Work placements or Practice Firms, the model themselves are really fuzzy. The way that you developed it for IT within that IT environment, and your students, is very customised to that environment. And you've got that experience. So you come here to be involved in this New Practices Project working with another team that has got a 'same, same but different model' – there similarity, but there's quite differences too from my observation. In their way of framing, and structuring it, and supporting their students. Sometimes the concepts may be a little bit different. Lots of similarities, and lots of differences. Does that make it a challenge for you? Having one model implemented. Then coming into another model where you are actually part of the Project Team rather than managing it yourself?

It's definitely something I am aware of. Originally, I was not part of the project team. When I did join the project team obviously I did want to tread very carefully because Pauline's experiences are in the Practice Firm and I've spoken to her about what we had in our Practice Firm and I'm the first person to say it was not a good Practice Firm or a good SBE. But there were enough lessons in there to grow and get something happening if we had the right resources. So that is something I feel strongly about and sometimes I've got to pull back a bit. I certainly do not want to be hostile. I want to be a good team member. It has not challenged me. It is not something that Susie, Ted, Pauline or anyone in there has said 'Kym pull your head in, you are up in the clouds, pushing your won barrow.' CRES is a tool for your tool kit. You've got a different scenario, a different problem. Let's look at what we need to do now, and which tool is the most relevant to solve the problem we have got now. So that is my strategy that I want to be using in this team.

It's almost about using the Key Competencies and employability skills yourself.

Of course. How you take risks and transfer your knowledge into a new environment. You've got this whole set of lessons that you are learning. They've got lessons they've learnt from the Practice Firm and they might be different lessons. You just can't list this person's opinion, you just can't push your view point to other people in there. If we are going to be a true team, you've got to value each person.

In one of the interesting things too, is what happens when you get a whole bunch of Innovators together. Often innovators can be isolated.

Very much so.

Where you've got new ideas, you've got ways and means to have to get it to where you are. One of the common themes about innovators is that sense of isolation. Now all of a sudden, this group are being brought together. So there's bound to be clashes ideas – because you have to be strong yourself to get to where you've got to. It takes a lot of resilience to bring it all together and form a new team that are supportive of each other, that respect each other's ideas, that have got very strong ways of seeing things that may not be the same. And so have you got any comment about bringing a team who are used to different ways together?

That story you have just told me is me to a tee. One pathetic little example I've used about Enterprise Skills I about how we could have used this and that typifies many numerous suggestions that I have had that I have had to walk away from. And then six months, a year, two years later, they then pick up. So my comment is, I do not have the skill to sell this concept to other people and make them feel it is their idea. Because if I could do that, I could get my ideas implemented a whole lot faster. So I need to learn this skill

Pauline for example, she is Project Manager. I believe she would benefit from doing some Professional Development in Project Management and we've spoken about that together. And I've given her a little bit of assistance and she's been very supportive and appreciative of that. I've only given her that assistance because I feel I need to establish some of these things if I am going to work on a project team like this.

Do you think a bunch of Innovators can be a team?

Of course innovators can be part of a team. But first they have to win each others respect and establish the team rules and protocols.

I don't see that I am a real Innovator myself. My strength is problem solving and I don't like red tape or boundaries. Now that's typical of most Innovative type people. They want to get in there and solve those particular problems that sneak in at that time. So am I at the forefront of solving problems? Yes! Am I an innovator? Jefferson was an Innovator to me. But in regard to educational programs, what I have done is to some reading in NCVET, to look at the strategic directions of ANTA, to look at the Strategic directions of DMIT have produced and my conclusions are NOT rocket science, they are practical based solutions to introduce real work for real clients.

My Project Management experience suggests to me if you align a project to the strategic directions of this organisation, you have a better chance of gaining support for that project. What can I do now to have other people that are the risk averse, or resistors adopt change? ... Start chipping away at preliminary concepts and good news stories. I don't know if it is a good strategy, but my strategy is to sow a few seeds and let the forest grow. Depending on the outcome you can either chop it down, water it or ... I know that this is a deliberate strategy that I use.

OK, we were talking earlier about PD needs, have you identified any PD needs for yourself?

Yes. I am in IT and my technical skills are quite limited. I have a good background in Project Management but lack non educational project management experience I would benefit from some technical updates and PD that strengthens my project management experience.

[Discussion on project management in IT program context]

In-no-VAT-e

I want to change tack and focus on this one here [VAT]

One of the unique things here is that we are here at the Todd St Incubator, where Lyn has been very supportive to get us to this point. What do you think our responsibilities are to work within that complexity – in so far as what Lyn I trying to achieve with the business development of those students and what her role is.

I think Lyn was frustrated as on my arrival, because she was hoping to have three to four people that she could speak to and she could mentor. Lyn went off at my students the other day because there were so many likely to attend CRES to cover Monday to Friday, nine to five Help Desk support which was my initial brief. I indicated I if I do have so many people that are likely to be here for the duration of the project, I would like to have a register at the very front so should there be a fire, you would know to get that particular person out on that day.

In-no-vat-E

So if we move now to looking at the review process. What 'e' words pop into your mind associated with how things have progressed to date and what it's been like for you?

The enthusiasm I have seen in the marketing, retail and tourism students when we started talking about setting up a business. The excitement they share when the process is completed. E – down words – give me some down words.

We're fuzzy, there's no negatives or positives.

The first thing I experienced was the enthusiasm and excitement in those students. Then I focused on the skills to run the business. There was a perception painted in people's heads that we would be able to do this. But the reality was far different to perception. And my particular challenge ... If you open the doors for trading and you haven't got systems put in place, then the flood gates of business activity could be very damaging. We need some systems in place before we begin 'trading'.

Where does your role start and stop in regard to the Retail and Tourism students compared to Susie's responsibilities? Have you sat down and spoken to her about that? Where are the boundaries?

I have spoken to Suzie. I don't want to do any boundary at all within retail. I want to know what projects they are doing so I can get my people to the IT support, the project management experience for those projects. Why? They are doing our marketing plan for the IT business and the Tourism business. I don't want my IT people to feel like these marketing students support my IT students. I want deliberate attention the IT students supporting the IT students so it is much more equitable in terms of team. I have discussed that with Susie and Pauline and they think that is a good strategy.

The positives experiences are that you cannot run an IT business without input from others. If we are going to run the business down there, we should have an administration type person. A management type person, and IT type person and a marketing type person. And that gives us input from all our program areas. If it is totally dominated by IT, then their influence would suppress

So there's a gap you have identified?

That gives us an opportunity because they are developing their marketing skills.

So you are saying that the mix of students to run a business is very important?

Absolutely.

So maybe to run something like that, you need a broader range than what we have. The part that is missing is the Office Admin?

The Office Admin definitely. Alley fits that role, that's why I say she is brilliant because she can wear multiple hats. But while she's wearing those multiple hats, what is going on behind the scenes I suspect, there are competing work duties.

If we are looking at that fermentation of timing and judgement, it seems to me you are raising the issue that as we go through the process, there are different phases or stages, that you need to go through as a Facilitator and so the very first stage is putting systems in place. For example, how important was it for those students to go in there to an empty room and to work through building up their business?

Fantastic! Absolutely fantastic. The ownership, the buy in. It gives me goose bumps talking about it because the smiles as you walk in, that sense of being human. That they can see the fruits for their efforts and how quickly things have happened and the impact on the team and the morale and the vision – rather than just talking about something, it's tangible, it's touchable. So for those people who need that, it's terribly, terribly exciting.

So actually, going through that painful part of setting up their business, being hooked up to the Internet and getting IT support from DMIT over here is a critical component?

I believe so yes. If we are best going to simulate what it's like to simulate a business.

So if you were going to repeat it next year, you'd clean the room out and get them to start again?

I would.

Is that a bonding or a team development activity in itself?

Of course it is. And that's if you like, where the team starts to come unstuck because the roles and responsibilities and boundaries become fuzzy when there is little interaction between individuals.

Is that part of the learning for them?

Of course. If you come into the environment where that is established, then there is a whole heap of learning that will not be experienced. But that's OK if what we are attempting to do is to run a business. There would still be problems, there would still be continuous improvement. There would still be processes that you could revisit and map and take to the next level and iterate. So even we thought the shade of grey you were talking about, even if we thought we were at the very black area and mature, well that could be a whole other sequence that we need to go to...

Another colour chart?

Yes. Whereas if you go back to the very beginning again, that same group of students get to learn what the other group does, but you don't actually get to extend that continuum. So it depends on the boundaries. If you were to ask me about team building, from a staff morale, from getting it set up, from ownership, if it is a Semester based thing, I'd dismantle and I would revisit again.

Let's talk a bit more about employability skills. In the initial stages, there's a whole range of things the students have to do – get to know each other and team building etc. So they are developing employability skills. And they are also there to develop their vocational skills. Is there a time when people need to focus on developing their employability skills and a time to focus on vocational skills? How do you see the relationship between that?

These people have got their technical skills in the areas they bring with them already and they'd be quite confident – that would vary according to the person. Add to that, most of these are high level students. They've studied together so they know each other. They've developed that. It's only when you start throwing other people into that environment to change some of those boundaries and parameters, and then immediately the pecking order effect will kick in. The personal issues – it's all those employability skills that you have got to focus on, that you've got to deal with there and then to establish roles, responsibilities, professional working relationships.

[discussion of student skills]

As far as developing employability skills, they certainly are?

Absolutely. This will be the main learning experience for them. The confidence they gain in themselves knowing they can do this. The reality that there are various people around you can go to for support. To know that you are not alone in the world to pull this project off.

The issue for you there is that Lyn is their business mentor. So where are the boundaries for what you do and what she does?

This is what I've spoken to the students about. I've said I want to give you the options for you to decide and if it is an issue, speak with Susie, speak with Lyn.

It must be very complex, because if you look at the roles, you've got the Marketing, Retail, and IT students. Then you've got Marketing, Retail and IT as sets of Lecturers. Then on top of that you've got is the business and development planning that Lyn is offering. So there is amazing skill sets going on, and like you say, everyone is wearing multiple hats.

The critical challenge here I guess, is where your role stops and where your role starts. Say for example, Lyn's role is business mentoring, your role is IT support, Susie's role is the Retail and Tourism support, you're going to be observing in Retail and Tourism their IT skills. If Susie was working with your students she may be observing their marketing and other sets of skills. So she could easily be working with them. So you know that complexity – the juggling of the contradictions all the time. Constantly dealing with 'I can see a better way here and I can see a better way there' And everyone could be doing it. I guess that is where the melting pot of potential conflict – and also actual conflict. I guess this is suddenly why we have got this role clarification statement. Because there is a blurring of the boundaries. Do you think it takes a little while to work out as a group? Do you think there is room for encroachment onto other people's patch.

There are primary, secondary and tertiary roles. To me, your primary role is your IT students and their IT support, and although you are observing with the marketing students that their systems might not be in place, that's a secondary role. So the challenge for you is ... you can easily get in there and fix it up for them and help them.

But Lyn obviously has a different framework she is working from. And that is her primary responsibility. And it's that where conflict can occur and maybe is occurring about where is the blurring of the boundaries. And it is very fuzzy. Everyone in that team has got multiple skill sets. You're not just an IT person, You've also got experience in ADMIT and huge experience in the workplace already. I mean you could run the whole thing yourself. So could the others in their own particular way and style. It would probably be different. But I guess one of the challenges we have all got is that we have chosen to come into this environment – to this Incubator. We are employing Lyn to be the business mentor and the marketing mentor for those students. And so one of the complexities I think we are dealing with is if there are too many chiefs – telling them one way and telling them the other – we are not supporting the students in the best way that we can.

And that's the sensitivity I think that we are all trying to deal with. This is hard because none of us are self-contained. You, me, Lyn - we are all co-dependent in a way, and I guess if this is going to work, it's how we define or undefined. Does that make sense?

I know exactly where you are coming from and I'm very sensitive to that. When I have recognised that I'm crossing that boundary from primary to secondary role, I flag it to the students immediately. 'Say listen, I don't want this actioned. I'm giving you this information and you need to discuss it as a group and you need to go back to the person you are directly responsible for to work through that.' So if you like, I was just a conduit.

If this is a channel they wanted to go, I believe it is my role ... it may not be other people's perception... I've got to identify risks on the project and that's just not my role, that is everyone's role.

But that's your advanced knowledge and that's the way you see it. Lyn may have a different perception of that.

But that's OK. Lyn and I should discuss it. I believe on this one issue that the students should be aware of what their options are and know who to go to, to consult on that. There have been multiple other times when I have thought ... 'No, I'm not going there.'

In a way Kym, we are running two businesses. We're running our business – the business of setting up Incubators. And the students are running their business. I guess this is their business. This is our business, and we've got to deal with a whole lot of stuff like setting up our team. And they've got to set up theirs. And sometimes there might be cross over and this is where we've got to be really careful. That if there are issues that are coming up, that we can see, should we be addressing it s our business, or do we involve the students as part of their business. And this is a sensitivity I think that's emerging for me. What do we have to own and deal with and impose on the students, and what is it we have to deal with and agree on here that we all agree 'Yes' it would be supportive for the students. Because one of the things that is coming out – what Lyn was saying 'Step back' That there was some overload with the students. That we might be imposing too much and encroaching on their territory.

It's about wanting to do the very best – but they are also trying to learn.

Having said that though, Lyn is generally dealing with a clientele that has got an idea themselves, self driven, self motivated and doesn't even consider that aspect.

That's part of what we are all learning about and I guess it's how to....

If an individual stuffs up their spreadsheet for example in their business, then that particular individual learns from that, but then the individual suffers to consequence.

I know where you are coming from. I am sensitive to that. Except on the one issue of MYOB about how many students have spoken to me about ... I've spoken to Pauline and Suzie. My main motivation is fingers burnt at ADMIT. People who haven't got the right skills to be capable of successfully completing a role. There is so much to learn and I would argue that we need some reasonably robust systems in place to assist those with few technology skills.

Who's business is that? Is that business we have to raise in our group or is it your role to do that with those students, or is it Susie's role to do it with those students?

Well it's not their core business in their faculty. Spreadsheet and data bases is more my core business in my faculty.

But what are they in there to learn?

There's so much they have to learn. The students have got many agendas. They've got the CRES business to run. They have got their competencies to take care of. And they have got their own value judgements about what they perceive to achieve – the added value type things.

So they are actually taking on quite a workload by choosing this methodology. And what you've been saying before is that you can see there are definite benefits to that. It's how you give them the appropriate level of things to deal with that's going to make or break them. Because one of the things we don't want is to push them over the edge.

The other thing is too. I didn't necessarily know what the project was all about until really really late. Then is was boom – get down there and get it happening. To me, an IT business requires some tools, systems and techniques, and I believe it is my

primarily responsibility to identify what I think I *must* – not could or should – what I *must* do to get that IT business functional.

To get that IT business functional, you've got to get the Retail and Tourism students at a certain level of functionality. Is that what you are saying?

Of course, the IT business requires an account payable and receivable section and each individual at CRES needs to know about CRES. Intimate knowledge about CRES. This is the best way to ensure that customer service is optimised

Is that the IT students' systems?

The marketing students are at least familiar with in their Practice Firm. Did they do accounts receivable and accounts payable ? They have it in Office Administration. I don't know if they have it on Retail. And I have a look at the people who are responsible for that portfolio at CRES, and they don't necessarily have the skills to do that role. Therefore immediately it is a concern for me...

Because it impacts on your students?

Yes and on team morale. So you go to Plan B. If I could do something that is far more error free and easy to use , I would favour using it rather than working with something that has got the potential for huge errors. You make mistakes and you learn from them. That is fine if it a one person show. But we have got up to twenty-odd people on a national project. So that's if you like, where I'm coming from on this one issue. I need to ensure some systems are robust and in place, with staff that are trained on the systems.

So to do your job, those systems have got to be in place. So does that mean, you know when we were saying we were setting up from scratch as far as building the environment, is there some things that we DON'T set up from scratch to ensure the acceleration of the core reason for being here?

If you were doing again, what would you make sure was in place that wasn't in place this time so that whoever was in there – marketing, retail, tourism – for your IT students to do their job, what needs to be in place in a generic way?

I nearly had it. I want a software package. I need an industry-based software package that takes care of the PC support business. I nearly had the appropriate tool and it was called Infra Lite, a help desk package.

Does that mean then, as part of the student induction and set up, you pre-install on everyone's computer and there needs to be across the board PD for everyone – staff students. This is what you need to offer your IT support. That's one of the frustrations isn't it?

Absolutely! And other people do not understand that. If we are an IT support business providing support to others, we need a decent tool. The other thing is that if we are going to be a simulated business, we need an accounting system. We need to have a robust bullet proof system that takes care of the payment of the staff that go down there and to follow any expenditure that we occur and any income that we receive.

So you need constants that are in place and variables that they build? One of the things that need to be in place rather than built – which is happening now – is some sort of system that everyone is aware of and uses if IT students are going

to be involved in the Help Desk. Because that is what is impeding some of your progress. Is that it?

Yes.

And that system is some sort of software package that everyone gets PD in that has the basics that include job tracking and some sort of accounting system would be the absolute minimum for you to be able to work with the IT students. Is that the heart of it?

Absolutely

If that IT business wasn't here, could that project still run?

To switch over from a Practice Firm from a simulated business environment, to the incubator, of course. Focus on marketing, focus on Tourism. Get some real clients. Get a marketing plan for them, get the students mentored. And again I'm trying to be a good boy, because I'm dealing with student with good skills, but they don't know about the IT business, so I've got to impart that knowledge, because they (marketing and retail) are going to be the one who are really the front line of this.

Do you think that including the IT Help Desk was a good idea or a bad idea?

If you were to withdraw now, could the Work Studio still run?

It's a step backwards for me to be down here because of where our model has got to. If we can get people going to [Industry] – and I have difficulty getting them down here and I have difficulty staffing and it's not incorporated into the mainstream classes at the Port Adelaide Campus. You can image that the barriers I am up against to try to get this thing happening. And then when I get down here, I've got to deal with people who don't necessarily know how to run an IT business and in some respects don't want to even listen to the ideas. That's happened a little bit. But then again, this is where I have to exercise my employability skills. So the answer to the question is, yes the studio could easily function without the IT component and in many respects, it would have been better not to complicate the project by including PC support.

And looking at it as solution finding.

Of course

The other thing you're raising there ... I think when we look at the VET sector, we look at it too generically. Each Work Team is quite unique. They're almost like sub-cultures.

Exactly.

The way that you see the world as an IT person is very different to the way that Retail might see the world. So although you are working on the same project, the frames of reference that you are bringing to it are at odds with each other. So you can see your way of doing it – whatever the combination is – and I think that's one of the complexities with across with cross-program collaboration.

If you ask me how to do this again, incorporating back at the campuses would be a PS/SBE. This would be the feed in for the Incubator. So what we are doing now with these particular students, would probably be the legwork that is happening back there to polish their skills. Now those particular people who then want to establish that from

scratch – BINGO! Beginning of the semester – bare room. Away you go – get it happening. Focus on one business. Not marketing, not Tourism, not Retail. Not our faculties. Focus on the skills of that particular group coming through. Their strengths. Because you've got to focus on their strengths. If they've got too many weaknesses, they'll have trouble coping with problem based learning and the expectations of establishing and running a business.

So do you think they are being ... with the advent of IT coming in over the top of their core focus, has that added a level of complexity that has been value adding or a liability?

At the moment, it is a huge liability because I've got to get it to come to fruition. If I can get it to come to fruition and it works well, it will add an enormous value to them. Why? Because I am interested in every one of those students down there as a commercial marketable product. Therefore, if they are going to wear multiple hats, then we can cope with our workload and we can rotate our roles around. The professional development that they can participate in is just amazing. I've witnessed that previously and I want to get back to that this year.

So the concept has got legs. The process can be improved, but the service component...

All I needed if you like was one month lead time to be able to get in and put some systems in place ... the outcomes would have been much better.

Before they came in you mean?

Probably before they came in. One change I haven't spoken about at the moment, is that the IT people have been brought in as sub-contractors at the end. This is so damaging to the CRES business. They don't get ownership, they don't get buy in – all that enthusiasm, that excitement, that sense of achievement is lost.

So they just in and do there job?

Yes.

It's not much value adding for them?

That's why it's difficult for me to get them on board. So if was doing this again, I would definitely get the core group. I'd try to get consistency of the core group rather than sub-contract with 20 odd people. I'd just get a few, go down there. I'd want them to know that the core group that we chose, at least on paper had the skill sets to do the roles that were expected for the outcomes. If that was the case, I'd be standing back and letting them go. If it wasn't the case, then I would be in there as the Studio model. The only way I think we could do that is by a case by case basis. What business is this? What skills are required?

Just to finish up then, is there any concluding statement you'd like to make about the project concept, how it's going and where it should go to?

I think the project is fantastic, purely from the point of view of the buy in from Pene and Mike. I couldn't even get Mike or Pene to visit us at ADMIT. Mike has been down here. Pene has agreed to sponsor. Pene has directed IT support get down here because there are jobs to do. That's fantastic from a strategic point of view.

So Executive support provides the value add that you've seen?

Absolutely. And my experience in Project Management is that you don't participate in a project unless you have keen support from Executive.

And that's what you feel – there was a lack of support with ADMIT?

Of course. I was constantly told admit was a workgroup problem. The potential of admit was outstanding. We had buy in from several workgroups, we had a PF / SBE / incubator model that students loved. We had real work for real customers. It was fantastic.

Has it been a big difference?

Chalk and cheese. Am I sad or bitter about it? No way. This is the part of the challenge – you've been out there and tried that. Some people will take a while to catch on. If I was clever about what I was doing at ADMIT and marketing at the same time, rather than focusing on the negatives and the too hard basket, I could have been a lot more advanced than now by show casing the good news stories to Executive and to Industry. However, I need to make sure I have things working first before I can market the product. I was too heavily involved with problems and solutions to focus on the potential and good news stories.

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For more information contact:

Framework Communications Team

Phone: (07) 3234 1852

Fax: (07) 3237 0419

Email: enquiries@flexiblelearning.net.au