



# How MANAGECAT® can inform management development

An interview about the value of MANAGECAT® with Anne Dening, Senior Educational Manager – Innovations, Teaching & Learning, TAFE SA Regional

*Based on an interview conducted by Dr John Mitchell, 30 Oct 2012. The interview was fully transcribed then edited by Dr John Mitchell and validated as accurate by Anne Dening.*

Purpose and audience

The purposes of this interview are to:

- stimulate ideas about how to use MANAGECAT® to improve management practice
- encourage the development of a national community of practice among users of capability analysis tools (CATs) who are focused on improving performance in their organisations.

The intended audience for this document are workforce development or other educational management peers of Anne Dening who can use MANAGECAT® to enhance management development.

Background

The MANAGECAT® survey was conducted at TAFE SA Regional in June-July 2012. The Institute later received 12 reports of thirty five pages for MANAGECAT® – one for each of 11 sections and one whole-of-Institute report.

66 managers completed the survey – a response rate of 90% – and each person received a 15-page individual report within ten seconds of completing the survey. Regional deliberately included in the cohort a group of young, new managers who work at supervisor level.

THE INTERVIEW

What are some of the special challenges currently faced by managers in TAFE SA Regional?

In the last two years we have had three major changes that have been taxing for staff and therefore for managers.

First, the implementation of the new student information system was very time consuming, involving managers and staff at every level of the organisation. Until recently, it's been very difficult for managers because they've not been able to get appropriate or adequate data, so they have felt as if they are managing in a vacuum.

The second change has been the implementation of the *Skills for All* VET reform policy and that came in before the student information system was completely bedded down. These two major changes of course impacted on each other and the effect was cumulative in some instances.

The third thing that's been really difficult for managers is the ambiguity about the restructure in TAFE SA and what will be the impact on Regional. Regional may probably feel the impact of that restructure more than the two metropolitan based institutes, because our geography's very different, we manage in very thin markets and our methodologies are necessarily different. We've built a business that's based on flexible learning methodologies over a long period of time, and our industry engagement at the local level is very strong and it needs to continue to be so. If we move to a state-wide program structure, whoever takes over as the director of each of those whole-of-state programs will have a learning curve in terms of understanding the way things have been done in Regional. And our staff will have big learning curves as well!

Why do you particularly need highly skilled managers?

Our managers have big jobs. They're big jobs in terms of the number of staff they're accountable for. They have increasing accountability in the ASQA context and the statutory authority context. So there's lots of responsibility for staff and for students and a big role in terms of just keeping the business going and expanding. More highly skilled people will do that management job more easily, so I think it's imperative that people have skills to do the jobs, as the job keeps getting bigger and changing.

What did you do when you first received the MANAGECAT® results?

I read the executive summaries from each area, and by the time I finished reading all of those executive reports I had a feel for our staff skills. Then I made an appointment to speak with Institute Director Denise Janek for about an hour and a half, just to put on the table with her my preliminary findings; and also to talk with my immediate manager Chris McCann.

I find it useful to bounce ideas off Denise and Chris because sometimes when I look at the data I find surprises in it. And to have other senior managers' opinions and to have them identify key issues from the data is always useful. Or even just to validate what I am thinking is useful.

What was the first pleasant surprise you received from the MANAGECAT® results?

The first pleasant surprise was a very high score for managing innovation: we are a very innovative organisation and we've needed to be and it was good to see that reflected in the survey results.

We had high scores too in areas like managing teams and team effectiveness, managing team diversity and culture, and managing our customers and our stakeholder

communication. We've put a lot of emphasis on building really good networks with local communities and with local enterprises and business so this result about stakeholders was pleasing.

What was a promising or encouraging aspect of the MANAGECAT® results?

A promising or encouraging aspect is the buy-in from the managers to the MANAGECAT® process of self-rating, and the fact that they were positive about the process. In some areas there are skill gaps of course, but people are not overly worried about that. They are very practical people who are able to say "OK, I need to brush up on that or I need to do more work on that skill area". For me, that's always an encouraging aspect of the CAT process.

What MANAGECAT® result did you find challenging or confronting?

'Managing change' was a low score and given the amount of change we've had, it said to me that we haven't actually spelled out what happens in a change process so that people could follow the process objectively.

As a follow-up on the implications of that finding, we have a PD activity planned for a day in early February, and the presenters have been asked to focus on the process of change.

To date, how have you unpacked the MANAGECAT® results with groups of managers?

I have meetings booked in with all of the faculties to go and speak to them about their MANAGECAT® results. I've already met with the PACS (administration) managers to talk to them and I'm going to our Institute Executive to make a presentation at their next meeting. I need to continue that work. I have a road trip planned for Mt Gambier and then to the north of the State where I will meet with both management groups and individuals about their faculty reports. These meetings will help to form the PD Plan for 2013. I believe that it is very important that priorities for PD are worked out in this collaborative way.

What will you do next, to leverage off the results?

We've put a lot of work already into the PD plan for managers for the next 12 months, as a result of MANAGECAT®. For example, risk management was a low score for us in MANAGECAT®, so early this month we ran a workshop on it. The consultant spent a good bit of time on the theory of compiling a risk register and an understanding of the concept of risk. And then for the rest of the day, each faculty had an opportunity to complete the Risk Register for that team. Given what staff have told us about their preferences for PD, this Workshop worked really well as a format for ongoing workshops.

We did get our PACS (administration) team leaders involved in MANAGECAT® and of course their scores were quite low because they're our 'succession planning' group; they're our inexperienced new younger people coming through who are managing larger campuses where there might be a group of administration staff. We have developed a customised first line management certificate ready to roll at the beginning of next year for them and this program will take on board the MANAGECAT® results. The aim of the training program is to ensure that these inexperienced managers will get a chance to get a qualification that's customised and hopefully picks up both their existing workplace skills and the skills sets that they're lacking.

Will you discuss MANAGECAT® results in the performance review discussions?

That approach is taken as read in this organisation since we did VETCAT® nearly three years ago; the CAT individual report becomes the subject of an individual's performance review and the subject therefore of the annual professional development plan. I hope managers are using these as the basis for the conversation with staff and that staff are using their reports as tools for conversations about PD and skills development.

What are some of your goals over the next 12 months, in using the MANAGECAT® data for management development?

I will focus on the areas where we have skill gaps. We have a one day workshop every term for our managers and those four workshops for next year will be on the key skills that we're lowest on with MANAGECAT®.

Our areas of need are managing change, managing marketing – and that was another surprise for me - and managing compliance and risk, managing business operations, and managing sustainability.

Is there any other topic raised by MANAGECAT® that I haven't asked about that you would like to comment on?

I think the professional development we offer managers needs to really hone in and target their skill gaps, particularly for inexperienced managers and younger people coming into management. MANAGECAT® identifies those skill gaps. In our Institute the PD needs to be very practical and have tangible outcomes. This is partly a reflection of who the staff are; but it is also a big reflection on the workload that major change brings with it. If staff are to spend a day or part thereof in PD there needs to be a tangible outcome and it needs to assist in lightening the workload.