Using COMPLETIONCAT® to lift staff capabilities in engaging with students

An interview with Patricia O'Donovan, Faculty Manager, Health Sport and Community Services, The Northern Sydney Institute – part of TAFE NSW

Based on an interview conducted on 9 February 2016 by Dr John Mitchell, Lead Consultant, ACER JMA Analytics. The interview was fully transcribed then edited by John and validated as accurate by Patricia.

Purpose and audience

The purpose of this documented interview is to:

- stimulate ideas about how to use capability analysis tools (CATs) to improve staff capability and organisational performance, and

- encourage the development of a national community of practice among users of capability analysis tools who are focused on improving their organisations.

The main intended readers this document are workforce development or other educational management peers of Patricia.

Background

The Northern Sydney Institute implemented COMPLETIONCAT® in September-October 2015. The interview was conducted in February 2016, three months after the COMPLETIONCAT® data was delivered to the Institute.

THE INTERVIEW

(John Mitchell) What were the main reasons why the Institute implemented COMPLETIONCAT®

(Patricia O'Donovan) The first reason was to identify any capability gaps in the organisation that were preventing us from supporting a student through to completion. And the second reason was to enable us to develop a very targeted approach to individual professional development that aligns with the strategic priorities and would promote a culture of change within the organisation.

How did you go about obtaining senior management support for the project?

Initially that was not a very easy task, as there appeared to have been little engagement with the challenge of completions or grappling with the financial imperative to look at our organisation's capability around completions. So I spent a considerable amount of time with individuals on the Institute Executive, promoting the importance of doing COMPLETIONCAT® and informing them about its benefits.

I ensured that the information provided by the ACER team was presented in an accessible way so that managers could understand what the tool did and it's benefits. I then developed a business case in terms of the financial benefits. It was a fairly relentless approach but it did the job and set us up really well, garnering support for the implementation for the CAT

What strategies did you and your colleagues use to promote COMPLETIONCAT® to other staff?

A few weeks before the survey opened we had an announcement made by the Institute Director that COMPLETIONCAT® was coming. We then put a banner on the front page of the Institute website that went into a countdown 10 days out from the launch. We'd placed the image of a big cat on the website and as we counted down the days the cat's eyes went from red to yellow to green. Daily emails went out reminding staff that the CAT was coming. Everybody knew that it was happening.

A few days before the launch we got the whole of the Institute Executive to complete the survey. Then the managers of each portfolio had to complete the survey, so they understood exactly what it was like and then they could champion the survey in an informed way.

The top 50 influencers in the organisation were then invited to attend the launch workshop and complete the CAT survey to get their own report. Following that they were then asked to go out and encourage people individually to complete the survey by talking about the value of obtaining their own individual COMPLETIONCAT® report and talking about the benefits of COMPLETIONCAT® to the whole organisation.

Given the other time pressures on the staff, the number of response was high. Why do you think so many people completed the survey?

I could be very flippant around that and say that the use of KitKats did the job – we were playing the music "What's new, pussycat?" and handing out KitKats around the Institute – but on the whole I think the reason for the strong response rate was that people understood that it would benefit the organisation.

When people had completed the CAT they were provided with a blank copy of their professional development plan that is filled in every year. We showed them how to map their COMPLETIONCAT® report to their own professional development plan. That generated a certain amount of peer interest and peer discussion and there was certainly a fear of being left out if they didn't have their COMPLETIONCAT® report. And so it became the talk of the organisation to participate in COMPLETIONCAT®.

What were some of the most gratifying aspects of the results?

I would have to say the appreciation shown by portfolio leaders, that when they looked at the COMPLETIONCAT® data they were able to identify exactly where the gaps were. They could then develop a targeted approach to filling those gaps.

I went around the Institute and debriefed with key managers. In fact when I went to see the new manager of the Sales and Customer Experience team and went through the report with him he said, and I quote, it was gold in his hands. He'd been in his job for four weeks and he knew exactly what the levels of capability of his staff were, so he was able to work with them straight away, knowing what their skills were.

After receiving the data how else did you brief the senior managers about the results?

I went into a senior executive meeting after sending the whole-of-organisation COMPLETIONCAT® report to them a week before. At the meeting I unpacked the report with them, identifying the key challenges and the key areas where we were doing quite well. Once they had an understanding about how to actually interpret the report themselves I said, "OK now I'll send you your individual portfolio report".

So before they received their own group reports, they knew what a report looked like because we'd unpacked one together and they'd been able to ask questions and then later they could work with their leadership teams on unpacking their portfolio report.

Which sections of the Institute are leading the way in responding to the survey data and why?

As I said before, the director of the Sales and Customer Experience portfolio took immediate notice. In the Institute we were having considerable problems with some marketing and he could identify what was going well and immediately address the deficits in his team.

Campus Services also ran with it very, very quickly. They are a frontline service and they reacted very quickly to fill the gap in capabilities identified in their COMPLETIONCAT® group report.

The Workforce Development Team has already used the CAT as a culling tool for the leadership program. Applicants who had completed the CAT were given priority as we used it as an indicator for engagement with the Institute's attempts to improve its performance with completions.

Those were the three portfolios that took up the challenge very quickly. The faculties have been a little bit slower in responding, but we are rolling out an extremely difficult LMBR (learning management and business reform) system and it is a distraction for them.

Will you use a 70-20-10 approach to the capability development?

In the Workforce Development Team we had already established how we wanted to roll out the results of the COMPLETIONCAT® survey and develop a 70-20-10 professional development approach for the organisation. We knew that we wanted to roll the COMPLETIONCAT® findings into individual professional development planning and use it to lead a culture change strategy.

Say two years from now what do you think will be the two or three main benefits of using the COMPLETIONCAT® data?

I think it's going to be the catalyst that will inspire two types of change, a cultural change within the organisation largely led by the financial imperative of completions and a

professional change driven by the challenging results relating to digital delivery, which is the driving force behind educational transformation.

One of our really critical results was finding the big gap we had in our digital capability. The 2016 Horizon report describes exactly what educational organisations are going to need to do going forward to provide education into the future. Fortunately the CAT tells us exactly what we need to do going forward, so I think that will be the biggest benefit from the COMPLETIONCAT® now.

Is there anything else you'd like to say about how the data will be used?

One of the things that we hadn't anticipated using it for is as an indicator to identify the levels of interest in the how the organisation is performing, the level of engagement with change and with the transformational agenda that we have underway in TAFE New South Wales.

Recently people nominated themselves for positions of influence in the organisation and we've said "Have you done COMPLETIONCAT®?" We shortlisted the people who've done the CAT, so it is used as a lever to help us to identify who is really engaged with change. They've taken the time to do it and they've got a report supporting their capability development

Any other comments?

We have also been using the COMPLETIONCAT® report as a reflective tool to investigate our capability around the digital requirements and how we're going to develop the role of the teacher. That has become another challenge the CAT threw at us.