

JMA ANALYTICS

QUANTITATIVE MEASUREMENT

Linking staff engagement, currency, motivation and professionalism

An interview about the benefits of CURCAT™ with David Kemp, Manager, Workforce Planning and Development, TAFE NSW – New England Institute

Based on an interview conducted by Dr John Mitchell, 1 March 2011. The interview was fully transcribed then edited by Dr John Mitchell and validated as accurate by David Kemp.

Purpose and audience

The purposes of this interview are to:

- stimulate ideas about how to use CURCAT™ to revitalise VET practice
- encourage the development of a national community of practice among users of VETCAT™ and CURCAT™ who are focused on improving quality in their registered training organisations (RTOs).

The intended audience for this document are workforce development peers of David Kemp who can use CURCAT™ to enhance VET practice.

Background

The CURCAT™ survey was conducted at New England Institute in November 2010. The Institute later received five reports of thirty pages or more for CURCAT™ – one for each of the four faculties and one whole-of-Institute report. The Institute is undertaking VETCAT™ in March 2011.

THE INTERVIEW

David, in terms of VET practice and vocational currency, why is it important to review and revitalise your TAFE teaching workforce?

The focus on industry currency is a national direction and it is important that the institute is managing the new requirements and engaging practitioners in that change.

VET changes rapidly and to have teaching staff engaged in the changes by continually being involved and updating incrementally we will avoid any major transformation requirement to move from, say, an old school to a new school.

By involving the teaching staff and letting that influence where things are going and letting them know why the change and what are the benefits for them, you get the mobilisation of the teaching staff. And as part of their normal practice they ask: What's changing? Why do I need to change? And by default you get that inbuilt self-leadership, that inbuilt desire to be a current practitioner.

What were some of the key insights provided by the CURCAT™ data about your teaching practitioners?

In the dialogue between management and VET practitioners, between government and industry, there are multiple definitions around what is currency. With so many opinions and definitions people will then go off and develop a currency development pathway based on 'Well this is what I think it means'. We needed something objective like CURCAT™ to identify what is currency and how in fact do VET practitioners develop and maintain currency.

Currency has been hidden from view because VET practitioners do a lot in the workplace; they do a lot to develop themselves. It has been invisible. Instruments like CURCAT™ allow VET practitioners to communicate and to demonstrate that they're current.

From the organisation-side we were wondering about the level of currency of our teachers. We looked forward to the staff using CURCAT™ to self-assess their currency because we know self-assessment is quite powerful in terms of validity.

When we received the CURCAT™ results we saw that the currency level in the Institute was high and we then connected that result to our engagement survey which demonstrated that our workforce is passionate about what they do. So we have a passionate workforce and their currency level is high, and we're starting to see a great relationship between engagement and currency and workforce motivation.

How has the CURCAT™ process been helpful to you, in your role, in reconceptualising and revitalising TAFE work and workers?

It's revitalised in that we've given VET practitioners a platform to have a say. We know there is a lot of national research, and we know the key goals of federal and state governments, but we often don't provide a platform for VET practitioners in the workplace to have a say or to have influence around their own practice. I think CURCAT™ has allowed them the opportunity to say 'This is what I'm doing, this is what's happening, this is how I do it'.

We now have an opportunity to go to the staff and say 'Alright, how can we maximise the benefits of that self-knowledge?'

Predominantly we see in VET that a major strategy recommended for maintaining currency is 'return to industry'. But that is from the perspective of people looking from the outside into VET practice. What actually now is happening through CURCAT™ is that we're getting inside the VET practitioner who is saying 'I'm a current practitioner and look at the pathways and look at the strategies I'm using'.

From our perspective within Workforce Planning and Development we've now got a great platform to have that dialogue with VET practitioners. We can say to them 'How can we strengthen and support your strategies for maintaining industry currency to ensure that it's [funding support] equitable and accessible to everyone?'

What actions have you taken, or might you take, to unpack the CURCAT™ data and its implications with the faculties?

We have the CURCAT™ data now and from that we have an interpretation of how we are placed as an Institute. In terms of industry currency we look good, but what we want to be able to do is to develop [with Institute managers, practitioners and support staff] a common focus and a common language about the results. It is important that all of us say what we consider are the high priority areas around industry currency, so that we can say 'This is where we're at, this is what we need to be focusing on'. Then we can promote the key messages in terms of currency for NEI: 'These are the shared five priority areas on which we have to work'.

I think that approach opens up the shared meaning, the shared understanding, from management, practitioners, support staff. We all can see why we're doing certain things about industry currency.

What new strategies (eg PD programs) have been or might be developed as a result of this dialogue across the Institute?

[Prior to CURCAT™ data becoming available] if you had asked people what is a definitive pathway that builds currency you'd have a high percentage of respondents saying 'Oh, it's return to industry'. I think the risk was that we may have been imposing one pathway on practitioners, saying 'Yes, if you do this industry release you'll be current'. I think that we run the risk that that pathway really may not fit the development pathway of many individual VET practitioners.

The CURCAT™ data has given us an insight into many strategies that people can use to build currency and a lot of those strategies include the practitioner's own workplace development. So rather than offering the traditional PD of 'You'll have to be released to do it', [we can now ask the question] how do we help a VET practitioner in their everyday practice to access and continually develop currency so that it doesn't become separate to their practice? Currency is part of their practice.

In terms of reconceptualising and revitalising TAFE work and workers, what do you expect to be the long-term benefits of CURCAT™ and these new strategies?

Rather than using a supply-driven strategy where we say 'This is what we can do from a workforce development unit, and if you want it there it is', CURCAT™ has given us the opportunity to become a demand-based workforce development unit where we have intelligence from the workplace. We can now say, 'This is the demand, work with us and why not do that [to maintain your currency]'. So we now have a self-led demand-driven platform of workforce development that is a major change from a supply-driven model.

Is there anything else that you'd like to add or comment on?

When we did CURCAT™ we took a passive approach meaning there weren't any incentives, there wasn't any 'you have to do it'. We took very much a personal approach and went to campuses and talked to people. The take-up response rate was 50% through this passive approach. That's high, and it shows VET practitioners want to have a say.

What it has demonstrated to us is the more you involve teachers and allow them to influence, the more teachers will mobilise because they are a professional part of the organisation. And as a profession we need to allow them the self-leadership to influence their own profession, and not dictate to them. CURCAT™ has allowed us to do that.

Teachers are a professional group. Let them decide and influence how they maintain their currency.