# Using GROWCAT® to become more commercial

## An interview with Janine Loves, R/Manager Organisational Capability, TAFE NSW - South Western Sydney Institute

*Based on an interview conducted by Dr John Mitchell, 22 August 2014. The interview was fully transcribed then edited by Dr John Mitchell and validated as accurate by Janine Loves and approved for release by Institute Director Peter Roberts.*

Purpose and audience

The purposes of this interview are to:

- stimulate ideas about how to use GROWCAT® to improve VET professional 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 Janine Loves.

Background

GROWCAT® was conducted at TAFE NSW-South Western Sydney Institute (SWSi) in August 2013. This interview was deliberately conducted one year later, to see what strategic responses had been taken to the data and what benefits had accrued.

*THE INTERVIEW*

Why did SWSi implement GROWCAT® in 2013?

We implemented it because we needed to be more commercial in our approach, more business-like. That idea emerged long before the NSW Government's policy Smart and Skilled was on the radar. Other RTOs have been in the marketplace for a while now, and TAFE is not the monopoly we were pre-1995. But in the last couple of years, once the COAG [competition] reforms hit home, it became really clear that what we'd been incrementally working towards was now an imperative. Time was ticking by and we really needed to find out where we were at in being more commercial, so we could work on where we need to be.

What were the major findings from SWSi GROWCAT®?

One interesting thing was that, across the Institute, between the faculties and the units, the results were quite different. There was a range of capabilities. Sometimes that was logical

and understandable. To give you one example, the finance unit scored low on entrepreneurship and innovation but scored very high on managing entrepreneurship and innovation. That's what we wanted to see; it was affirmation that the finance unit was where it needed to be for those specific skill sets.

In other areas there were some clear gaps. For example in innovation and entrepreneurship, we knew we had pockets of excellence, but the GROWCAT® results really brought home the fact they are pockets. While we don't need everybody to be good at all things, it helped us look at where we perhaps needed to start targeting skill development; targeting where we needed to do more work.

If our financial people are not entrepreneurial it's not an issue, but if we have teaching sections that are in growth areas we want to see innovation and entrepreneurial skills being demonstrated, not by everybody but certainly by enough people so that they are having an impact.

Another major finding was with the results in business acumen, the baseline skillset. That skillset is where you want to score 100% across the board, so the report gave us a starting point, a bit like VETCAT® did a few years ago, of where we were at. We know where we would like to be and it showed us the hotspots.

Which of the GROWCAT® results were surprising?

The surprise was the range of capability levels across our faculties because they are our core business. The differences between the faculties were more marked than we expected and the reports reaffirmed that the idea of targeting training [to address the gaps] is not pie in the sky, it's a must-do. The data gives us something to work with.

What did the findings from GROWCAT® indicate about staff capability?

We're a large institute, we have many people and there is a range of capabilities. There is also a lot of talent out there, and GROWCAT® did enable some of that talent to bubble to the surface. Also, the "partially skilled" data indicated that there are a lot of people who do have some capability; so we're not starting from a base of zero.

The GROWCAT® survey was more uncomfortable than VETCAT® because GROWCAT® was asking people to step outside their comfort zone. On the other hand, GROWCAT® reminded us that not every individual has to have all the skills; but we do need them across each unit, section and faculty.

What were some of the planning responses to these findings by SWSi's Capability Development unit?

Our first plan was to ensure everyone is on the same page in terms of language and understanding who is a customer and what our products are. Even though we achieved good scores in GROWCAT® we went right back to the start and asked ourselves again what are the required skills in business acumen; what are the basics?

The topics in GROWCAT® created a timeline and identified where to start. For a long time individuals have been making statements such as "I've been told that I need to be more businesslike, more commercial", but were unsure about where to start.  GROWCAT® splits

up into various categories the skills required to be more commercial and gave us a road map of where we need to go.

In terms of planning, there has always been a targeted approach to skill development at SWSi, but GROWCAT® has allowed us to be even more specific.

We've mapped GROWCAT® data to the 70/20/10 model of professional development. We've looked at the skills in GROWCAT® and asked the questions: what would the 70 look like? What would the 20 look like? What would the 10 look like?

How did you communicate with the staff about the findings from GROWCAT®?

First of all we had a team member in the organisational capability unit who unpacked the GROWCAT® data. They manipulated the data and created various graphs to suit the needs of our clients, which are the faculties and units, to inform discussions.

We took the GROWCAT® information, the report plus the short-form summary of the findings, with us to our annual planning meetings. We incorporated the GROWCAT® results into the planning conversation that we had with each unit and faculty.

Just last week we had a meeting with the Institute Executive team and we unpacked the Institute results with them as well. We were also able to discuss the qualitative feedback and some of the things that emerged from discussions around the whole Institute. With the Executive, we talked about it in terms of "now we've got the information, where to next".

Have you conducted discussions at each college?

Pre-GROWCAT® we went to every college and had a "commercial conversation" about topics such as what is business acumen? That was one strategy to get people on board to do GROWCAT®.

It is now a year later, and in the next month or so, we're having another road show to talk to SWSi staff to show them the self-directed learning tools and other strategies that are now in place to help people develop new capabilities. We also will talk about what the 70/20/10 model means and emphasise that not all learning is about sitting in a workshop. We all learn through doing, coaching, mentoring and teamwork for example. We will talk to them about some of the capability development strategies they can discuss when they are developing their PD plan with their line manager.

The findings of GROWCAT® and VETCAT® can be embedded in that discussion; it's part of the mix that can inform their thinking: the surveys should not sit out there like satellites on their own.

What were some of the interventions you made, in response to the GROWCAT® data?

We have a training program running now [in commercial skills]. We've started with head teachers because they're so critical, but eventually there will be a wider program. The program is about improving our customer service. It addresses some of the elements of business acumen in GROWCAT® such as understanding customers, improving business responsiveness and working collaboratively. The training will roll out eventually to everyone and encourage the use of the same language.

The second thing we've done is develop what we've called WeLearn. We have several categories within WeLearn and GROWCAT® helped us think through what some of those categories might be. For each category there's an explanation of what the skill is, who needs it, and why; and then links to relevant resources. There are a variety of resources. The aim is to use a flipped classroom approach for any training that is delivered. Staff will be sent to WeLearn before they come into training; that way they walk in ready to workshop concepts and the pre-learning that they've already done.

We're encouraging that cultural shift of staff taking more personal responsibility for their professional growth. It links to the fact that we all add value to the organisation in some way. This approach is also relevant to ASQA requirements such as maintaining currency.

How strong was the demand for PD, as recorded in the GROWCAT® reports?

It was strong: there was demand right across the Institute. The bigger the skill gap the bigger the demand, which was good because people are identifying that there are areas where they need to improve. The really important thing about the strong demand for PD is that people do have that sense of professional responsibility: "I do want PD, I do want to move forward, I do want to increase my skills".

How is SWSi's Business Development and Marketing Unit intending to get involved with the GROWCAT® findings?

The unit, in collaboration with the faculties, will use the faculty GROWCAT® reports to help identify talent, as well as ways that the unit can support business growth. This newly integrated unit will also take the GROWCAT® survey [a second time] as they want a GROWCAT® report that reflects the new team. It's partly to identify their own strengths and gaps and help them decide what PD they might need as a unit. They're also looking at GROWCAT® from the point of view of thoroughly understanding the survey.

If there's an agreed high priority capability gap, a collaborative approach will be taken by the faculty, the Business Development and Marketing Unit and the Organisational Capability Unit to identify the best approach for filling that gap. These internal partnerships are continually being strengthened. Traditionally the Business Development Unit and the Marketing Unit have focused on what they do and haven't been so involved in developing the business skills for the rest of the Institute. Now, as an integrated unit they see value in being more involved because they have a wealth of knowledge and skills that can contribute to the development of the whole organisation's capability. This is an opportunity to identify what some of those skills might be and how they can inform PD activities across the Institute.

The idea is to cascade the skills down. The Business Development and Marketing Unit have a specific role to play. However, the reality is when we talk about business we take a whole of Institute approach: everybody has a role to play.

What is the long-term goal of SWSi regarding staff capability in business skills?

In a perfect world we'd all be good at everything. Our core business is still education but we're now in a very competitive situation and it's no good having the best product in the world if people out there don't know about it or aren't engaging with it. The aim is to build

those business skills across the board. But not every individual, every unit or every area has to be a champion in every aspect of those skill sets. There are some skills that you need everybody to have and then there are other skills that are role-specific. We will be targeting the development of those role-specific skills in tandem with continuing across the board development of generic skills.

One of the advantages of GROWCAT® is the language it uses and the way it breaks down the skill sets so people understand those particular skills. Individuals can identify: what skills do I have and what do I need for my current role.

Also the GROWCAT® skill sets can help people [to clarify and develop new skills] if they have aspirational or career planning goals.

How else is the Institute linking the GROWCAT® findings to winning awards and new business?

Nationally SWSi is the 2013 Large Training Provider of the Year. Our previous CATs data indicated that we have a quality workforce.

Our new look unit, Business Development and Marketing, is moving forward very, very quickly. The unit will be undertaking GROWCAT® again and will look at the results, to help us move forward with business success. We have to continue to grow and we're working at that, at a fast pace, across the Institute.