Findings from repeat uses of VETCAT® and CURCAT®, after 2.5 years

An interview with Anne Dening,
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Based on an interview conducted by Dr John Mitchell, 19 February 2013. 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 VETCAT® and CURCAT® 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 Anne Dening.

Background

VETCAT® and CURCAT® were conducted at TAFE SA Regional in June 2010 and again in November 2012.

THE INTERVIEW

Why did you decide to conduct VETCAT® and CURCAT® again, 2.5 years later, in November 2012?

Two and a half years was a little earlier than I would have liked; I would have liked to have done it three years later. However, as TAFE SA Adelaide North and South Institutes undertook VETCAT® and CURCAT® in the middle of 2012, and as the three Institutes are restructuring to form TAFESA, I thought it was important for Regional staff to have current VETCAT® and CURCAT® reports.

If 2010 VETCAT® and CURCAT® reports had been given to a new Director of a faculty across TAFE SA in the new structure, their impression of Regional staff would have been quite false. It would have sold Regional staff very short, quite frankly, and would not have given a clear impression to the Director of that faculty about the skill set of Regional staff. Also, the skill profile of the Institute had changed significantly since 2010.

Looking back, what were the major insights you gained about the Institute's teachers, from your June 2010 VETCAT® results?

The first thing I was surprised by in 2010 was that the Certificate IV was the highest educational qualification for 46% of our teachers.

The thing that I wasn't surprised by, but I felt needed dealing with, was that the average age was in the 50 to 54 bracket: I figured we had a succession planning issue.

In 2010 the teachers felt that the available professional development met about 63% of their requirements, which was better than the national average.

What else surprised me? If half the staff only had a Certificate IV in TAA as their highest educational qualifications, there were things that followed on from that which were not surprising: like low scores in 'learning styles' and 'learning theory', and low scores in 'research'. All our scores in areas like 'foundation learning facilitation', 'course organisation management' and 'foundation assessment', were under the 80% national benchmark. And our 'advanced learning and assessment' level was at 53% in 2010.

Another finding in 2010 that wasn't a surprise, but was something we needed to work on, was that a large proportion, 58.9%, of staff were in the category of 'Foundation Established'. We had nearly 60% of our teaching staff sitting in the category of Foundation Established, when we needed more staff to be Learning and Assessment Specialists, to take leadership roles in that area. This was an important issue that needed to be dealt with.

Also we were underdone in Novices at 8.1%; so we had a succession problem.

What did and did not surprise you in the VETCAT® results from the November 2012 survey?

I'm pleased to say and a bit surprised that with all of the work that we've done in that two and a half years, the adequacy of professional development has gone to 73%, which is much better than the 55% national rating.

The teaching staff also believe that the overall level of their skills has gone up to 84%, from 80% in 2010, which is also pleasing.

The profile of the group has changed significantly to 7% Novices, 18% Foundation Established and 49% Commercial Specialists. The Institute now has 24% of the staff as Advanced VET Practitioners. So even though there is still only a small number of people who are Learning and Assessment Specialists, the 24% in the Advanced VET Practitioner category and the 49% Commercial Specialists will really stand the organisation in very good stead.

The other difference in 2012 is in the qualifications of staff. The number who have the Certificate IV in TAE as their highest educational qualification is now 36% of the staff. The

number of people with a Diploma of VET or VET Practice has risen from 11% to 19%. And there are 22% now who've completed their degree.

And I'm informed by some faculties that they have many more people undertaking the Diploma qualification part time over this period of time. In another year the percentage with the Diploma of VET or VET Practice will be even higher.

We still have some problems with learning styles and learning theory but on the whole the scores are moving in the right direction. Foundation learning facilitation was 77% in 2010, and now it's risen to 81%. Learning styles was 73%, and it's increased to 78%. Learning theory was 72% and it's increased to 78%. Skills in course organisation and management have gone up as well. Learning facilitation has gone up. They are significant increases, and it seems to be allied to the significant increase in the number of people doing education studies as part of their professional development.

What were the major insights you gained from 2010 and 2012 CURCAT® results?

In 2010 21% of our people were concurrently employed in industry and in the Institute; and there were a large number of people who had not undertaken paid employment in their industries for three to four years or more. And while it is not necessary to undertake paid employment in order to be current, it could be something that is looked at as an indicator.

In 2010 47% of the teaching staff had as their highest industry qualifications either a Certificate IV or a Diploma. I was compiling some statistics for the Primary Industries Faculty yesterday and their statistics in that area have taken a massive jump; a high number of the faculty staff now have diplomas or higher in their current industry.

The 2010 CURCAT® data also told us that the Institute really wasn't giving them a hand, in terms of the culture or support or the procedures and processes in the Institute. And although in 2012 those figures have moved in the right direction, there's still work to do there and it is important that the work from 2010-2012 is not lost.

I suspect that the large proportion of people who've moved into the category of Commercial Specialist in VETCAT® - we had about 26% last time and now we have 49% of people as Commercial Specialists - that's probably related as much as anything to all the extra study they've done in their vocational area.

Some of that increase in the number of Commercial Specialists is due to the Institute moving into the delivery of higher levels of certificate courses.

Some of it is due to reviews of Training Package and the fact that staff have taken the opportunity to do further study as they implemented a new Training Package.

And some of it has been related to the work in teams that managers have done, in order to encourage people to continue to gain higher qualifications.

I think that getting the CURCAT® data helped us to bring about a learning culture in program teams and to provide a focus for staff training.

What major interventions such as professional development programs did you put in place, in response to 2010 VETCAT® data?

A major intervention was the Certificate IV TAE10 Training and Assessment. We started with enrolling the novices and any other staff who needed updates in the Certificate IV in TAE. The program began with an Induction to Teaching and Learning for the hourly paid instructors. This course ran for three weeks by videoconference, and the students then began the Certificate IV in TAE. The first half of this was called TALENT and included a formal mentoring program that was supported by program managers.

It was compulsory to go through this program which was customised for regional staff. For instance, in city Institutes they may not have focused on flexible learning methodologies initially in a Certificate IV, but the Regional Institute needed staff who understood flexible delivery philosophies and pedagogy from the beginning.

With the Certificate IV in TAE, I unashamedly planned it to run over three terms, telling the staff who were delivering it that I wanted people to learn slowly and thoroughly on the job as they practiced. And then instead of getting staff to constantly update their Certificate IV as that certificate changed, I introduced customised Diploma of VET programs. One program was customised generally for the Regional Institute and the second program was customised specifically for the engineering faculty.

We started with 30 trade lecturers doing a customised program that involved them coming to Adelaide one day a term at the beginning of the term, then having a Moodle and tutorial assistance. They were learning by Moodle in the hope that they would then put Moodle into the courses they were teaching. Further help was offered by video conference tutorials, teleconferences or contact with the lecturer. The program delivery modelled a flexible methodology for their learning as well.

TAFE SA has a very good relationship with the University of South Australia so that those who complete the Diploma of VET in TAFE gain significant credit for the degree. So our staff were then encouraged to enrol in the university course and complete their degree. Several staff were also given opportunities to do a Masters in Education.

Apart from these accredited programs I organised training on learning styles for anyone who wanted to participate and the take-up rate was fantastic. The Institute has some registered 4MAT delivery staff and the program has been really well received.

Online learning had been a skill gap in our first survey in 2010. An extensive Moodle training and e-facilitation and e-assessment training program ran across all faculties and all campuses. Initially, anybody could come to it, but then the program was organised in stages: skill development for beginners, and separate sessions for intermediate skills and 'gurus'.

The staff are now at the stage of developing, with deep knowledge about education online, the gurus in each faculty. The expectation is that they will roll it out further for new people coming into their team. The emphasis is on the education of our lecturers and the leaders in each team.

What major interventions did you put in place, in response to the 2010 CURCAT® data?

The intervention that probably had the most impact was to quarantine some funds as projects with established criteria that related to improving industry currency. Of course, the projects varied enormously across faculties. Most of the projects ranged from $5,000 to $8,000.

On Thursday and Friday of this week, we have a professional development two-day workshop via video conference, and members of five of those projects will get up and tell everyone else what their project entailed and what an impact it has made in their team.

We have had half a dozen similar videoconference sessions where we've had four or five teams get up and talk about what they've done in their CURCAT® projects. That was my major response to the CURCAT® data.

I know that every program manager took their CURCAT® data seriously and the team discussions have developed a range of responses. There are different levels of responses at different layers in the Institute.

The other really important intervention is that I worked with the Human Resource Department in our Institute to include CURCAT® and VETCAT® terminology in performance management interviews. And that happens across the Institute now as a matter of course.

I understand you are commencing your doctorate on VETCAT® and CURCAT®. What will be the main focus of your doctoral study?

In my PhD, I want to look at the VETCAT® and CURCAT® results in 2010, and look at them again in 2012, and analyse the strategies that I've put in place as a result of the 2010 surveys, and form some conclusions about how VET lecturers develop skills in both their teaching and their vocational currency and see if there is any relationship between the strategies I put in place and the obvious development of skills.

As part of the study I would like to look at a group like the Community Services and Health Faculty, who had a big response to both surveys, and analyse what they specifically did to build their skills from mid-2010 to late 2012.

I would also like to look at whether the VETCAT® and CURCAT® survey tools are actually the catalyst that get people thinking about what their skill development needs to be. What Regional staff really appreciated about the whole survey approach was that they received their individual report, and they could look at their skills set, they could analyse what their gaps were and then fix those gaps.

Their professional development program was individual and customised and about their own growth and development. It wasn't just a program driven by compliance.

You seem to use the CATs data for customised interventions, not blanket strategies.

Using the CATs, we've created a common language around skill development for lecturing staff, and so you don't just make a blanket statement about lecturers need to do this particular topic or managers need to do that. It's about seeing where people's current skills are and not making them waste their time doing something they already know.

Any brief suggestions to other CAT users about how to extract optimum value from the CAT data?

I used your national indices template with the national benchmark data to develop a spreadsheet for all of our senior managers, comparing our results in each faculty with the national indices for VETCAT® and CURCAT®. I think that senior managers need to use the national benchmarks and to say to themselves "In which three or four areas are we really under the national benchmark, and why is that so, and what are we going to do about it?"

Senior managers can also look at the benchmark data, the comparison data, and pick out the surprises. Pick out the areas where you're surprised that you haven't done so well, and work on those areas, because you can't do everything at once.