

A study in difference: Structures and cultures in registered training organisations

Support document 3

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Contents

Overview	3
Methodology	4
Project Documentation	7
Consent form	8
Questionnaire for interviewees	9
Question schedule for interviewees	12
Question schedule for focus groups	13
Diagrams of organisational structures	15

Overview

This document supports the report *A study in difference: structures and cultures in registered training organisations*. The first section outlines the methodology used to undertake the research and covers the design of the research, sample details, the data collection process and the strategy for data analysis and reporting. The limitations of the study are also set out.

The materials included in the second section formed the basis for data collection during the conduct of the study.

Methodology

Design of research

This research activity was designed to complement other research activities in the consortium research program, in particular research activity 2: *Career pathways*, research activity 6: *HR Practices*, and research activity 7: *Educational leadership*. In the design phase, it drew on information gathered from the consultations across Australia that formed research activity 1: *Visions and options*.

The complexity of the vocational education and training sector plus the significant differences in structure and culture across public and private providers and between state-based approaches, determined the choice of a qualitative research approach for the study.

The major research methods used were a review of the relevant literature, in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. Participant questionnaires were also developed to support all interviews. A review of organisational documents and the collection of interviewer observations completed the research.

Sample details

Ten registered training organisations participated in the research – seven TAFE institutes, one small private provider, an Adult and Community Education (ACE) provider and a large enterprise-based provider. These organisations were drawn from all states and one territory, the Australian Capital Territory, while the enterprise-based training provider delivers training for its employees nationally.

Each participating RTO was selected because it was representative of the diverse organisations that populate the sector - small and large, metropolitan and regional, geographically dispersed, dual sector and nationally-focussed. Each was selected to provide an example of the different experiences of cultures and structures in Australian vocational education and training.

Informants within individual RTOs came from four different levels within the structure: the chief executive officer, two senior managers, two middle managers or supervisors and two work teams which worked directly to the middle managers involved in the study.

In total, 43 interviews and 16 work team focus groups were conducted. Decisions about who would be actively involved in the research largely rested with the executive of the participating organisations.

The interviews with chief executives included two joint managing directors of the small private provider, and the recently retired Institute Director as well as the acting Institute Director of one TAFE institute. Senior managers included general managers and senior managers, and directors of educational programs, information services and educational leadership. The middle managers worked directly to the senior managers included in the study, and usually managed one of the work teams. Again, they were representative of either the teaching or administrative/support areas of their organisations.

Teams, which were nominated by the senior executive of the organisation as being markedly different from each other because of the way they worked, were drawn from teaching and non-teaching areas. They ranged in size from three to four people up to fifteen members and were drawn from some cross-organisation policy/process groups such as human resources, administrative support, finance, client and student services, a literacy and numeracy project, and information and communication technology, plus teaching program areas such as Business Studies, Plumbing, and Furnishing.

Data collection process

The literature review which provided the base information for the research, relied on material drawn from a wide variety of fields such as organisational theory, organisational behaviour, management and managing change, selected because it dealt with the cultures and structures of organisation.

Interview schedules were developed to ensure that information was gathered in a systematic and consistent way given the material was being collected by a team of researchers. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, with several by phone to fit in with availability while some joint interviews were conducted with managers.

Both individuals and work teams were provided with participant questionnaires designed to focus the informants' thinking. Copies of the interview schedules, the participant questionnaire and consent forms are included as Appendix F in this Support Document.

Where available, documentation relating to organisational visions, missions and values together with organisational charts outlining structures was collected. Material was also accessed from the websites of each of the organisations.

Data analysis and reporting

Tape-recordings and notes of the semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews were transcribed. From the transcripts, major themes relating to the research questions and sub-questions were identified. These themes were then populated by supporting detail from the transcriptions, questionnaires, the organisational documents and researcher observations. Illustrative quotations and vignettes were identified from the data. Cross analysis of this information was carried out to identify consistencies, variations and interrelationships between various levels of managers and between work teams, and well as between provider types.

Limitations of the study

In defining the scope of this research activity, one of the difficulties that emerged was of focusing research within a vast field of knowledge about organisational culture and structure. The concepts of culture and structure had been appropriated by many fields of study, ranging from the social sciences to commerce, management and ethics. To make the enterprise and its results manageable, one of the biggest areas of knowledge was largely excluded from this research – that of change and change management.

Research methods initially proposed were also modified for practical reasons. The questionnaire for informants had been planned to make sure that informants were prepared in a uniform way for the interviews and focus groups, as well as to collect some easily comparable data. However, not all informants completed the questionnaires, or submitted them even when they had worked through them. Their usefulness as a data collection tool was therefore largely discounted.

The initial plan to research influences on individual (and organisational) capability was also changed to researching influences on team (and organisational) capability to more closely reflect the fact that data coming from work team focus groups and interviews with managers was not individual in nature.

In conducting the research, the researchers were confronted in a number of the participating organisations by what is fairly typical in the vocational education and training sector – ongoing changes to structure and personnel. These changes, ranging in magnitude from moderate to significant organisational upheaval, influenced informants' perceptions of organisational capability and tainted their views of the future to some degree. For example, several of the TAFE institutes were waiting the appointment of new chief executives, which impacted considerably on the views of all interviewed at these organisations.

In several instances, the selection of contrasting work teams by participating organisations proved not to be an effective strategy. In these cases, expected variations were not demonstrated during focus group sessions, leaving the research team to assume that the selection of participants for the research had been made on the basis of convenience rather than contrast.

Finally, the sample size of ten providers is not large enough to make wide-scale and generalisable claims. The findings therefore represent a profile of difference, which is only indicative of the broader experience of registered training organisations across the sector.

Project Documentation

In this section, copies of the following documents are included:

- ✧ Consent form
- ✧ Questionnaire for interviewees (to focus thinking prior to interviews)
- ✧ Question schedule for interviewees provided to chief executives, senior managers and middle managers
- ✧ Question schedule for focus groups consisting of a range of work teams
- ✧ Diagrams of organisational structures provided to interviewees to assist in their description of their own RTOs. For explanation of the various structural forms go to the first section of Support Document 2 – *Structures and cultures: a review of the literature*.

Consent form

University of South Australia

Centre for Research in Education, Equity and Work / Hawke Research Institute

CONSENT FORM

Project title: Exploring the impact of cultures and structures on organisational capability

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Ms Andrea Bateman, Bateman & Giles Pty. Ltd.

- I have received information about this research project.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interview.

Name of participant:

Signed:**Date:**

I have provided information about the research to the research participant and believe that he/she understands what is involved.

Researcher's signature:**Date:**

Questionnaire for interviewees

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEWEES - Please complete this questionnaire before the interview.

QUESTION 1: A general definition of culture is “the way we do things around here”. Give **examples of how culture is passed on**—or changed—in your organisation and your work group (if you are a member of one).

Type of worker	How culture is passed on in your organisation	How culture is passed on in your work group
Existing members of your workforce		
New entrants to your workforce		

QUESTION 2: Cultural evidence/artefacts include “all the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels” in a particular culture (Schein, *Organisational culture and leadership*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2004. p. 25). Together with values and assumptions, artefacts give insight into cultures. Please give **examples of cultural artefacts that are typical** of your organisation and your work group (if you are a member of one) and readily observable.

Evidence of culture/artefacts	Typical examples of culture in your organisation	Typical examples of culture in your work group
Common behaviour <i>eg working hours, socialising</i>		
Myths and stories told about the organisation <i>eg a David and Goliath type story</i>		
Rituals, ceremonies and symbols <i>eg after-work functions, symbolic dress like a chef's hat</i>		
Traditions <i>eg succession to a position</i>		
Dress codes <i>eg wearing ties in classes</i>		
Communication products (internal or external) <i>eg policy, websites, PR brochures</i>		
Technology <i>eg use of equipment and access to equipment</i>		

Evidence of culture/artefacts	Typical examples of culture in your organisation	Typical examples of culture in your work group
Language and jargon <i>eg language specific to trades or professions</i>		
Physical environment <i>eg buildings, physical layout, office layout</i>		
Desired modes of behaviour <i>eg addressing the boss, or others</i>		
How time is perceived <i>eg doing one thing at a time, doing many things at once</i>		
How space is used <i>eg according to status or function</i>		
What kinds of emotions one sees <i>eg positive or negative emotions</i>		
How people get rewarded and disciplined <i>eg overtly or covertly</i>		
How one gets ahead in the organisation <i>eg by networking, by achievement</i>		
Leadership <i>eg style of leadership</i>		
Examples of anything else you think is important		

QUESTION 3: A general definition of structure is “the framework for communication, decision-making and organisation of work.” Please give **examples of what is typical of the structure** of your organisation, and your work group (if you are a member of one).

Typical examples of structure	Within your organisation	Within your work group
Communication <i>eg how you find things out</i>		
Decision-making <i>eg who makes decisions</i>		
Ways of dividing up work <i>eg in faculties, hierarchies, according to geography etc</i>		
Ways of coordinating people and tasks <i>eg by audits, policies, procedures</i>		
Examples of anything else you think is important <i>eg rules, regulations</i>		

QUESTION 4: How does your organisation respond to demands for change in its structure? For each sentence below, circle the description **closest to what you have observed** in your organisation, and your work group (if this is applicable).

My organisation structure is able to adapt	Quickly and easily	With some difficulty	With extreme difficulty
My work group structure is able to adapt	Quickly and easily	With some difficulty	With extreme difficulty
My organisation is responsible for its own decision-making	Predominantly	Partially	Marginally
My work group is responsible for its own decision-making	Predominantly	Partially	Marginally
The things that are meant to happen in my organisation do happen	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely
The things that are meant to happen in my work group do happen	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely

Question schedule for interviewees

(40-45 minutes, with approx 5 min per question x 9)

Topic	Questions
The culture of your organisation	1.What words best describe the culture of your organisation?
Culture change	2.Give some examples of how culture is changed and transmitted in your organisation.
Multiple cultures	3. Are there multiple cultures in your organisation? If so, describe them. 4.What are the strengths and weaknesses that multiple cultures bring to your organisation?
The structure of your organisation	5.Looking at the diagrams supplied, how would you describe the overall structure of your organisation? (See handout: ‘Diagrams of organisational structure’)
Structure change	6.Describe the changes in structure that have occurred in your organization in recent years and how various parts of your organization are now working differently to meet new demands. 7.Why have they changed in this way? What were the imperatives for change?
Impact of culture and structure on capability	8.How have changes to culture and structure impacted on your organisation’s capability?
Future	9.In the near future what structural and cultural changes would you like to see made to improve your organization’s capability?

Question schedule for focus groups

FOCUS GROUPS (approx. 15 mins per question x 6)

Topic	Question	Method/Prompts
Artefacts Values	1. Describe the culture of this organisation – its artefacts and values.	<p><i>What is going on here?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit the group's answers to question 2 (2ND COLUMN ONLY) of the questionnaire (the evidence of the organisation's culture that you observe or experience daily eg behaviour, language, rituals, traditions, myths) To focus discussion, capture on butcher's paper an example on which there is group consensus from each heading in the questionnaire <p><i>Why are you doing what you are doing?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building on this evidence of culture, brainstorm a description of the organisation's culture using words that show what are its dominant values eg task culture, macho culture, entrepreneurial culture, innovative culture (Note that for analysing purposes, each of these prompt examples comes from a different perspective: power, management, values and change) Record values on butcher's paper and keep visible to stimulate later deeper thinking about assumptions shared
Assumptions	2. Does the culture of your work group fit comfortably within your organisation's culture?	<p><i>Are there deeper assumptions operating that explain behaviour?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask group to think about similarities and differences between the values of organisation and work group (what is the level of comfort/discomfort) You could brainstorm a new set of words to compare with the first set. Ask "Why?" to try to establish whether it is just a difference in values, or whether there are deeper tacit assumptions that might explain the level of discomfort Record assumptions on butcher's paper
Link between culture and capability	3. Give examples of how culture influences the capability of your organisation or your work group? ***	<p><i>What impact has culture on capability?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check handout definition of capability: competencies such as professional, functional, skills-based, social and leadership, plus organisational ability Ask group to think how culture influences

		<p>capability, and therefore influences how effectively the organisation achieves its business and educational outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record examples of influences on butcher's paper Record positive and negative examples separately (or mark examples as +ve or -ve)
Structure	<p>4. Is your work group different in structure from others around you in your organisation?</p>	<p><i>What makes your work group structure special – or different from others in this organisation?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit the group's answers to question 3 of the questionnaire (1st COLUMN ONLY) to focus on structure Ask the group what is the structure of the work group Ask group to think of similarities, differences of structure between their work group and others, under the headings from the questionnaire: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> lines of communication decision-making division of work, or coordination of tasks and people other Record examples on butcher's paper
Past changes	<p>5. What changes in structure have occurred in recent years that have impacted on your organisation and your work group – positively or negatively? ***</p>	<p><i>What's already changed in the work group and organisation structure, and why?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask group WHAT changes in structure have occurred Ask group to think WHY changes might have occurred eg are they responses to changed demands (for autonomy, responsibility, accountability) Record on butcher's paper positive and negative changes separately
Future changes	<p>6. What changes in either culture or structure would help build the capability of your organisation and your work group? ***</p>	<p><i>How would I like the culture and structure of my work group and organisation to be?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask group to think about changes in the organisation and the work group For each, ask if a change in the other is necessary Record changes on butcher's paper

*** Questions 3, 5 and 6 are phrased openly so that the selected organisations can answer by referring to work groups AND/OR the organisation as a whole. They can then answer appropriately, depending on whether they are ACE, private provider, TAFE or dual provider organisations.

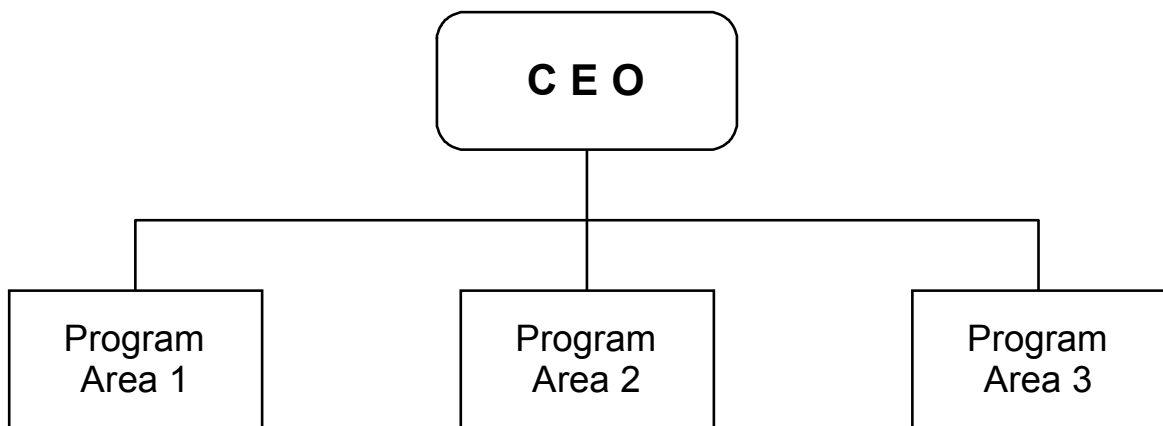
Diagrams of organisational structures

STRUCTURES HANDOUT

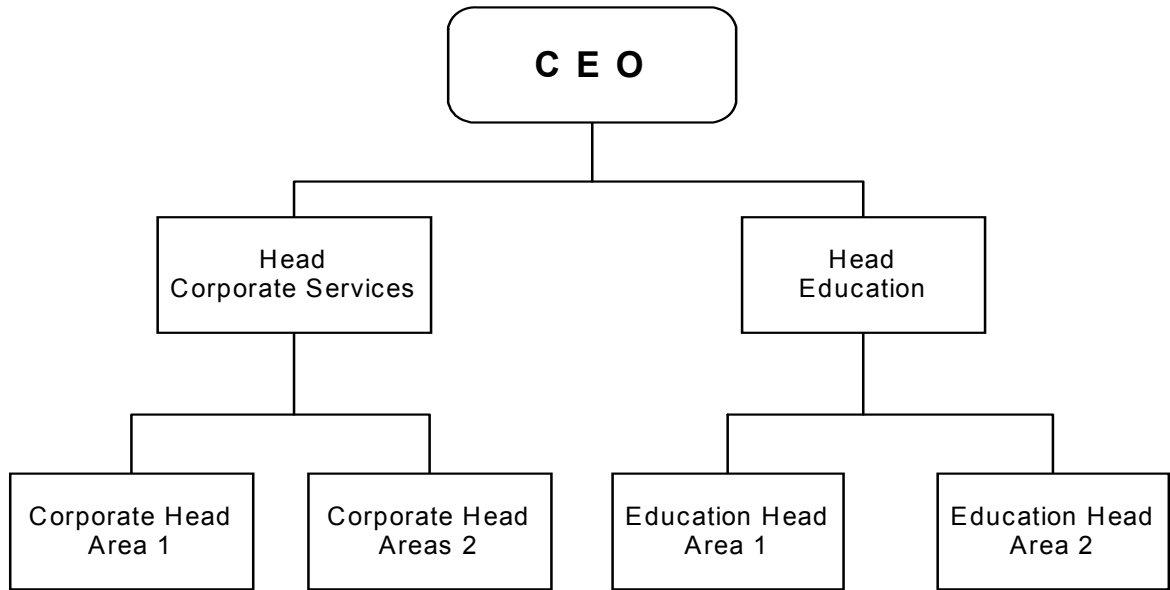
Structures of organisations have different configurations, depending on the context in which they have been developed. Each structure has its own characteristics, distinct strengths and potential weaknesses.

Diagrams such as those below are often used to describe typical organisational structures.

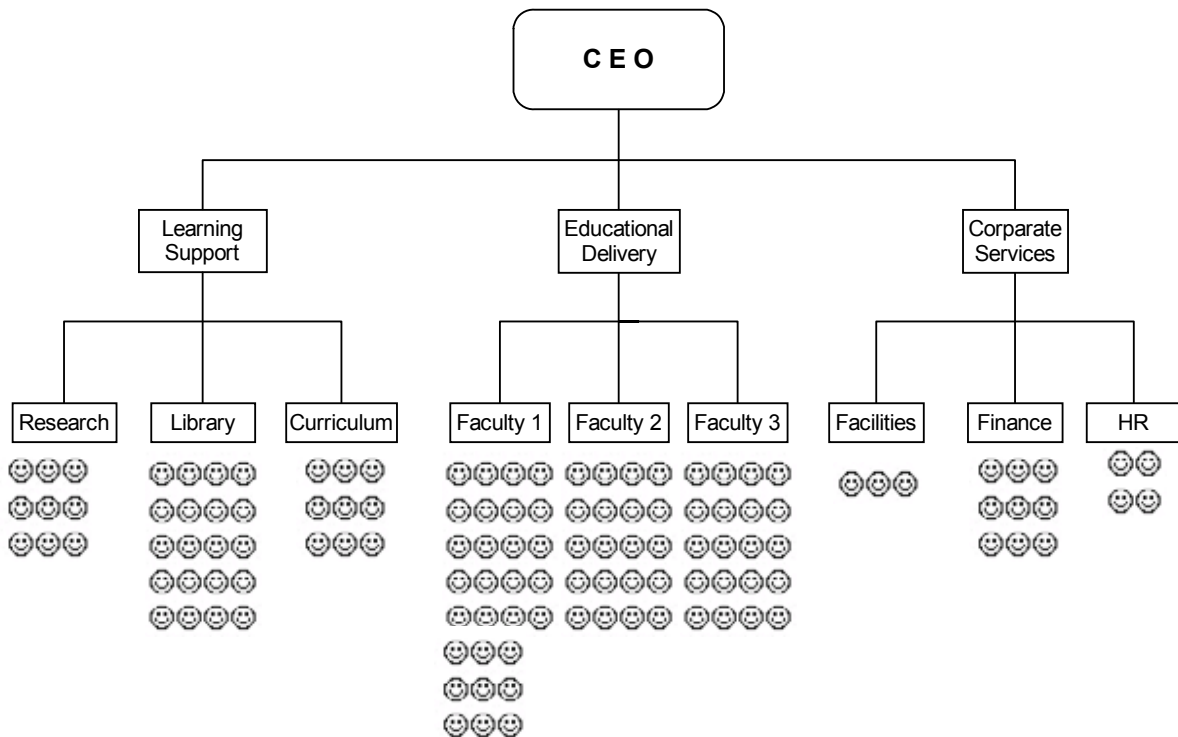
Structure A



Structure B



Structure C



Structure D

