The role of an academic development unit in supporting institutional VET learning and teaching change management

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the role and impact of a central academic development unit (ADU) within an institutional strategic and operational change management project. The primary goal of this project was to improve vocational education and training (VET) learning and teaching practice in an Australian dual-sector regional university. This driver of this change management project was in preparation for an external accreditation audit with the Australia Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). This paper presents perspectives from the ADU director and a specific ADU team (six senior educators and nine administrative staff) employed for 16 months to enact partial project goals. The ADU director utilises narrative methodology to describe the enactment of the project at the ADU level within the context of *Kotters 8 Step Change Model* (Kotter, 2012). An open and closed item survey approach was used to capture the perceptions of the ADU team regarding demonstrated leadership, management and team functionality throughout the duration of the project. The survey data also captured their perceptions regarding the value placed on change management requirements and indicators and their most rewarding experiences throughout the project. This paper highlights challenges and key lessons for ADUs associated with change management in a dual-sector environment. It also highlights the importance of utilising a suitable change management framework to initiative, lead and support meaningful, sustained changes in the dual-sector education environment

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Introduction

This paper uses a case-study approach to explore change management focused on improving vocational education training (VET) learning and teaching practice. It briefly reviews the literature on change management and leadership within a dual-sector higher-education context. It then uses narrative methodology to explore the lived experience of enacting a change-management project from within a central academic-development unit (ADU). The perceptions of a specific ADU team regarding several aspects of the project are also described using qualitative and quantitative survey responses. This paper has six key aims:

1. How was this change-management project enacted at the ADU level?
2. What was the perceived level of ADU leadership and management on the change-management project?
3. What was the perceived level of ADU team functionality relevant to the change-management project?
4. What were the three most highly ranked change-management requirements for ADU team members?
5. How prepared was the institution to engage with this change-management project?
6. What was the most rewarding aspect of ADU team members' role during the change-management project?

Change-management models

Several factors influence the success of change management and organisational change within a higher-education and VET context. The term "change" implies "disruption of the present conditions prevailing in the external and internal environment" (Alhazemi, Rees & Hossain 2013, p.972). The change can be strategic and have high impact across an organisation, or it can be operational with less impact. Several key aspects relevant to change management significantly affect the success or failure of an initiative: leadership, governance, management, organisational culture and the approach to learning and training relevant to the organisation (Alhazemi, Rees & Hossain 2013; Andrade 2016; Blaschke, Frost & Hattke 2014). Similarly, Eckel et al. (1999, p.8) highlights the importance of preparing staff for the change, "assessing the human dimension", "managing fear and anxiety" and clearly specifying the "function of change teams". Change initiation and management is most successful if individuals understand the rationale for change and believe in its benefit before supporting it more widely and allowing the initiative to move forward with critical mass (Andrade 2016; Eckel et al. 1999). Managing change as part of a deliberate process has its own set of challenges. It may involve directing, navigating, caretaking, coaching, interpreting and nurturing (Palmer & Dunford 2002). A formal change-management framework may be useful as a reference point for organisations preparing to undergo change, whether major or minor (Hashim 2013; Heckmann, Steger & Dowling 2016).

Business organisations seeking effective change management commonly refer to *Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change* (Table 1) (Andrade 2016; Bianchini, Maxwell & Dovey 2014; Kotter 2005; Kotter 2007; Kotter 2012; Kotter & Cohen 2002).

Table 1. **Kotter's Eight-Step Model**

Step No.	Description
Step 1	Establishing a sense of urgency
Step 2	Creating the guiding coalition
Step 3	Developing a vision and strategy
Step 4	Communicating the change vision
Step 5	Empowering broad-based actions
Step 6	Generating short-term wins
Step 7	Consolidating gains and producing more change
Step Eight	Anchoring new approaches in the culture

(Adapted from Kotter 2012, p.23)

A change-management approach can be "top down" (driven by management) or "bottom up" (reflecting emergent or participatory-driven change) (Brown 2013). A change-management approach driven by management can be useful where clear, tangible outcomes can be predetermined with confidence and there is agreement on the desired outcomes. The risk with this approach is resistance from staff who may not agree with the decisions, approaches and strategies and have sufficient independence and autonomy to influence progression (Brown 2013). In comparison, a change-management approach initiated by innovative leaders within an organisation can struggle to achieve broader updates without the support of the strategic leaders throughout an organisation. Keppel (as cited in Brown 2013), suggested an alternative approach to change management based on a distributed model, where leadership capabilities, capacities and strengths are distributed across an organisation regardless of formal leadership title. Change-management outcomes can also be influenced by a number of additional factors, including technology issues, personnel changes, perceived pressure to deliver, opposition, project creep and unofficial procedures and systems (Brown 2013).

Cameron and Green (2012) suggest that there are four different change-management approaches underpinning best practice. These approaches are based on the primary functions of an organisation. Educational organisations can potentially align with the "machine analogy", as described by Cameron and Green (2012). In this model, the senior managers define targets and time scale, and they, along with expert consultants, roll the change out from the top down. The value of training is recognised and is offered to bridge behaviours as part of the change-management process (Cameron & Green 2012, p.121). This approach assumes specific key beliefs, procedures and standards, to which all staff are expected to adhere. According to Cameron & Green (2012), key beliefs can include the following:

- Each employee should have only one line manager;
- Labour should be divided into specific roles;
- Each individual should be managed by objectives;
- Teams represent no more than the summation of individual efforts
- Management should control and there should be the employee discipline (Cameron & Green 2012, p.124).

Mechanistic organisations also espouse certain assumptions:

> The organization can be changed to an agreed end state by those in positions of authority; there will be resistance, and this needs to be managed; change can be executed well if it is well planned and well controlled (Cameron & Green 2012, p.124).

This approach is most successful when there is stability and compliance. However, a significant change-management process can cause unrest, and employees may demonstrate various levels of resistance. Overcoming employee resistance requires strong management action, inspirational vision and control from the top down. Within an educational context, it is vital to focus on the need for individual learning and behavioural change, which influence the success of change-management initiatives.   Cameron and Green (2012, p.27) also discuss four approaches to individual change: "behavioural, cognitive, psychodynamic and humanistic psychology". Key leaders need to be aware of these humanistic factors as they try to create change within their organisations. Hashim (2013) writes that for some staff, change management within the workplace can be likened to dealing with loss, including periods of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Hashim (2013, p.687) summarises yet another four styles of change management:

1. Collaborative: this style involves the widespread participation of employees in key decision processes that will affect them and their organisation.
2. Consultative: this style allows employees only limited involvement in the decision-making process and responsibility areas.
3. Directive: the managerial authority level makes the decisions about how change will proceed.
4. Coercive: in this style, senior management imposes change on the organisation.

Hashim (2013) suggests four key steps for effective organisation change: assessing the need for the change, initiating change, implementing or applying change and monitoring and evaluating the change. He also suggests five implementation tactics: top management support, participation, negotiation, communication and education and coercion.   These tactics might be useful when trying to create and implement a change in strategy, product, technology, structure and culture.

The culture of an organisation will heavily influence the success of any change-management approach. The "ability to influence is as important as authority to control" (Brown 2013). A positive culture demonstrates "scholarly engagement, shared governance and decision making, and rationality" (Hechanova & Cementina-Olpoc 2013, p.13).   A positive culture within an organisation normally exists where "managing tends to be by consent, decisions tend to be committee-based and generally consensual and the change agents have a high level of personal credibility and standing in a community" (Brown 2013).   The culture of an organisation during periods of change management will affect staff motivation, how staff learn and the role and effectiveness of training (Cameron & Green 2012; Sarin et al. 2010).   The culture of the workplace can also be loosely linked to Hersberg's two subcategories of motivating factors: "hygiene factors" and "motivators" (as cited in Cameron & Green 2012, p.39). Hygiene factors include the following: pay, company policy, the quality of supervision/management, working relations, working conditions, status and security. Specific motivators such as achievement, recognition, responsibility, advancement, learning and the type and nature of the work are equally powerful factors that influence staff engagement during a change-management process.

Change-management models in higher education

While *Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change* (Table 1) is commonly used in the business domain, its suitability varies within the higher-education sector. Although this approach is simplistic, Chowthi-Williams, Curzio and Leman (2016) suggest that the public sector and education domain are less likely to respond to each of the eight prescribed steps and instead would benefit from a change-model approach such as that shown in Figure 1. This approach includes a focus on "guiding teams" as key stakeholders within the change-management process; teams help employees feel empowered, provide strong leadership, capacity, and credibility and handle the human aspects associated with the change (Chowthi-Williams, Curzio & Leman 2016; Kotter & Cohen 2002).

Figure 1. ACW Change Management Model (Reproduction approved by author)
Source: Chowthi-Williams 2016.
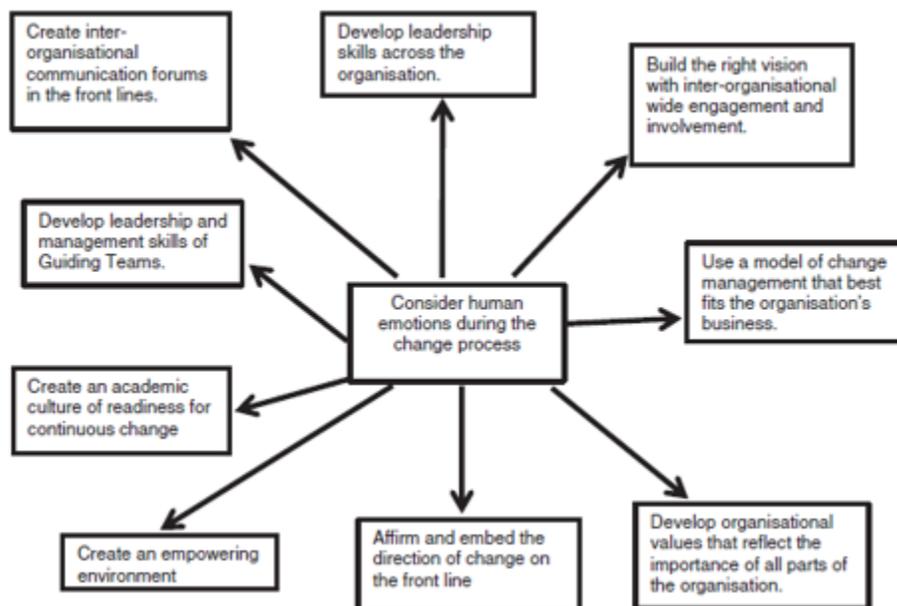
Leadership, change management and higher education

"Leaders lead by persuasion, through other leaders and by building trust" (Eckel et al. 1999, p.8). There is abundant literature regarding leadership and its role in the change management and evidence-based models that align with the higher-education context (Bolden & Petrov 2009; Alhazemi, Rees & Hossain 2013; Davies 2014; Cahill et al. 2015). Davies (2014) comments that one of greatest challenges of any leader in higher education is to effect change and bring staff together to consider preferred futures and current realities. Effective leaders are likely to engage in planning, understand the nature of the change, seek to engage with the external environment and understand when to exert authority, influence and power (Bolden & Petrov 2009; Drugus & Landoy 2014). Leadership is critical in determining the results of change-management programs

(Alhazemi, Rees & Hossain 2013). During periods of change management, leaders must demonstrate skills and behaviours that deepen commitment, align strategies, focus actions, expand capabilities and clarify progress. (Alhazemi, Rees & Hossain 2013). Snowden and Boone (2007, p.7) report that effective leaders

> learn to shift their decision-making styles to match changing business environments. Simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic contexts each call for different managerial responses. By correctly identifying the governing context, staying aware of danger signals, and avoiding inappropriate reactions, managers can lead effectively in a variety of situations.

Caton and Mistriner (2016) describe six key leadership strategies: organisation strategy, resource management, communication, collaboration, advocacy and professionalism. Calma (2015) describes higher-education leaders as having many multi-faceted roles such as experts, beneficiaries, heroes, tyrants, negotiators and facilitators. Leaders working within a distributed-leadership model also require specific leadership literacies to ensure they are effective (Jones et al. 2011) and positively influencing change-management outcomes.

Jones et al. (2011, p.4) reported in an Australian Learning and Teaching Council leadership project that "capacity development for both formal and informal leadership with higher education institutions" needed to be prioritised to meet the constant challenging and complex needs of the sector". Didi, Griffioen and de Jong (2015) also highlight the importance of leaders empowering and engaging with key stakeholders (such as lecturers and teachers) during periods of organisational change. The success of the distributed-leadership model is widely acknowledged in the literature. Distributed leadership acknowledges that leadership is demonstrated from both structural and positional perspectives and asserts that everyone is a leader in their own domain. It shares the responsibility for accountability, commitment and shared vision across an organisation (Bolden, Petrov & Gosling 2009; Jones et al. 2011; Parker 2008).

Davis and Jones (2014) also highlight the importance of professional development for leaders in higher education, particularly those involved with change-management initiatives. Their meta-analysis of the leadership literature finds three key areas of leadership research and framing: exploring context, relationships and activity. In addition, Drew (2010) lists five key skills of a leader in a higher-education context: fiscal and people resources; flexibility, creativity and change capability; responding to competing tensions and remaining relevant; and maintaining academic quality and effective strategic leadership. In particular, the need to remain flexible, innovative and change-ready is an essential skill of a leader in higher education. The Action-Centred Leadership Model discussed by Middlehurst (2007) also captures key habits of successful leaders, and brings attention to the importance of relationship-building.

Case-study context: The process of enacting change management

In July 2015, "senior administrative members" of the Vice Chancellor's senior team (Deputy Vice Chancellor – Academic and Deputy Vice Chancellor – Learning and Quality), identified the urgent need to lead an institutional change-management process as the ASQA reregistration deadline (August 2016) approached. As a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), Federation University is bound by the National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011 (ASQA n.d.). Preparing for reregistration with ASQA involves providing detailed evidence of quality, business

and learning and teaching processes, relative to the expectations and standards described within the VET Quality Framework and its counterparts.

The following narrative describes the change-management process at the ADU level as aligned with Kotter's Eight-Step Change Model (Table 1). This narrative is based on weekly reflective journal writing throughout the change-management process which addresses **Aim 1** in this papers objectives.

Step 1: Establishing a sense of urgency.
The sense of urgency for this change management process had been well established by the senior administrative sponsors of the institution in July 2015. During this period, I was requested by the Deputy Vice Chancellor – Learning and Quality to develop and present a financial business plan projecting the resources and approach required for achieving the intended outcomes of the change-management process. The Strategic AQSA Steering Committee led the vision for this change-management project. The main role of the ADU was to provide targeted professional development for VET teachers that focused on the creation, redesign and development of assessment tools. Assessment tools are a substantial element of the learning and teaching resources provided to both students and staff as part of a quality curriculum experience. This documentation is linked with student expectations described in the nationally endorsed training packages. Successfully creating and completing well developed, validated and high-quality assessment tools requires both discipline content knowledge and knowledge of training and assessment targeted at the VET sector.

In an effort to plan projected resources and a suitable approach, I calculated the appropriate volume of work that was expected to be revised (for example, how many units of competency, multiplied by the approximate volume of assessment tools per unit of competency, multiplied by the hours required to complete each type of assessment tool). This focus on work output was then combined with the physical number of key people who had the skills to meet this allocated task. For example, VET senior educators would be required to mentor, coach and upskill large numbers of VET teachers. Due to internal and external institutional factors beyond the scope and control of the ADU, the provision of internally offered VET professional development had substantially fallen over the preceding three years. The proposed distributed leadership model was based on four senior educators (HEW 7 classification, full-time) and four administrative staff (HEW 4 classification, full-time) to support VET teachers and develop assessment-tool creation, storage, monitoring and reporting. The proposed model was granted $500,000 over a 12-month period centrally from the institution. The funding was linked with specific targets and projected outcomes, which were monitored closely by the Strategic AQSA Steering Committee and Faculty ASQA Implementation Committee.

Step 2: Forming a powerful guiding coalition
Once the financial resources were approved, I was keen to commence recruiting. It was imperative to recruit the correct number of staff with appropriate skills sets within an efficient timeframe. I found it challenging to recruit to a regional

institution senior educators who were available and willing to work within this change-management structure. In particular many Victorian RTOs were also preparing for their own ASQA reaccreditation; hence these staff members were largely unavailable. Recruiting administrative support staff was less problematic. During the life of the change-management process, six senior educators and nine administrative assistants participated. The recruitment process was completed in the first three months. Some staff were only available for certain periods of time throughout the process; therefore the team needed to have clear processes regarding knowledge management, and to remain flexible during this highly intense period of change.

Once recruitment was finalised, it was essential that our ADU ASQA VET professional-development team established boundaries for a positive working relationship. This process included establishing agreed team functions such as the important of trust, having the confidence to disagree, accountability, commitment and a focus on team results. I established a three-tiered governance structure within the ADU team to successfully support, monitor and report progress against the intended change-management outcomes throughout the 16-month process (August 2014-December 2016). I actively led and facilitated discussions relative to ADU ASQA Implementation Meetings. I used these one-hour weekly meetings to disseminate all the information I had received from the Strategic AQSA Steering Committee and Faculty ASQA Implementation Committee to the broader ADU team. I also used this meeting structure to hear ADU member comments, concerns, questions and ideas, and actively sought to represent these at higher governance level meetings. As the leader of the team, I also performed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis to help identify when additional resources and conversations were required with other key stakeholders (for examples, conversations regarding an electronic management system and template revisions). I was mindful that the majority of the team were completely new recruits to our institution, and thus lacked historical knowledge relevant to processes and outcomes associated with previous change-management processes within the VET domain. Members of the ADU AQSA Implementation Team also began having their own weekly sub-team meetings (one for the senior educators and one for the administrative assistants).

Step 3: Develop a vision and strategy

From the onset of the project it was imperative to align the ADU vision and enacting strategies with the existing institutionally endorsed vision. The vision for the ADU team was on the provision and rollout of targeted VET professional development to VET teachers, which enabled and empowered teachers to create, redesign and develop high-quality VET assessment tools relative to each unit of competency. This vision was situated within the full suite of VET quality learning and teaching documents, which also included the Training and Assessment Strategy and the Trainer Skills Matrix documents. The team collectively decided on key professional-development approaches, including one-to-one mentoring and coaching and mechanisms for small-group facilitation support. The team collectively developed strategies to meet the overarching vision and reported against milestones for assessment-tool redesign and development stretch targets. The deliverable outcomes for professional development varied in format and were

adapted to the qualification type, number of units of competencies and VET teacher capacity, capability and attitudes. The vision and associated strategies were developed based on common change-management principles, despite a lack of knowledge regarding the current VET culture. Although members of the ADU team were fairly clear about their roles and expectations, resistance began to surface as the vision was communicated to the VET teachers themselves. It became imperative to manage this resistance and offer additional support services to staff as part of the change-management process.

Step 4: Communicating the change vision

From my perspective, communicating the vision from the top down was well executed. Communicating the vision within the ADU was also well planned. I led and facilitated weekly one-hour meetings with the entire ADU ASQA professional-development team. In addition, I encouraged the senior educators and the administrative staff to have sub-meetings on a regular basis to discuss their progress, offer solutions, problem-solve and build support and collegiality. Where appropriate, senior educators and/or administrative staff also met with faculty (or equivalent) staff to discuss, plan and implement progress towards assessment-tool completion.

I used the meetings as an open two-way communication channel. I disseminated relevant information that I had heard from meetings at higher levels, and listened and responded to comments, suggestions and questions regarding the current practice. During these meetings, it became apparent that many VET staff (program coordinators, discipline leaders, teachers, managers and administrators) were less prepared, willing or able to engage with the change-management process in a timely manner than I had first thought. From my perspective, VET staff buy-in was not particularly well led or managed, which resulted in some difficult situations for the ADU staff. Although the ADU team constantly communicated the ADU vision to VET stakeholders, their level of demonstrated commitment and accountability towards reaching the intended goals varied. Three of the ADU AQSA implementation team had prior experience with the staff at this institution. While these three had suspected that resistance would follow, we collectively underestimated the existing culture, and comprehension of how performance management was enacted within it.

The senior educators and administrative staff, who formed a centralised model of leadership, were chiefly responsible for motivating and facilitating assessment-tool development in a scaffolded, supportive manner. These staff had no positional influence, and could only report on progress based on their personal experience. It became obvious at the weekly ADU ASQA implementation meetings that all team members had expressed to VET staff feelings of disempowerment, confusion, disappointment and resistance. Members of the ADU ASQA implementation meeting were often confronted by anxious VET teachers who refused to meet, communicate about or work on their assessment-tool materials. This may have occurred because of a lack of capacity, capability or attitude. ADU ASQA team members often tried to renegotiate goals with the teacher and aim for more-achievable milestones. Several VET teachers also experienced feelings that could be characterised as "change fatigue" and "compassion fatigue". This was particularly noticeable when VET teachers realised that template revision meant more workload with little

explanation. The VET teaching culture, in combination with the existing level of autonomy and self-directed accountability, became a constant source of questions during our meetings. On occasion, some team members reported feeling helpless when they wanted to support VET staff, but not all were ready to receive that support. Some team members felt personally responsible for not being able to shift staff motivation and tangible progression based on the stretch targets (for example the number of assessment tools completed by a nominated date per qualification). During these sensitive times, the value of understanding staff motivation, strong leadership, varied human-resource skills and a surrounding collegial team provided each staff member with the support to refocus and continue with the change-management process.

Although many challenges arose regarding assessment-tool redesign and creation, VET staff also reported feeling grateful for the targeted professional-development support, additional workshops, mentoring and personalised coaching opportunities. Some VET staff also commented positively on additional assurance that "the university" had acknowledged that more could and should be done to improve the quality of learning and teaching for VET students. Many VET staff welcomed the support, collegiality and opportunity for open dialogue regarding best practices and innovation in their field.

Step 5: Empowering broad-based actions
Each ADU ASQA team member was extremely hardworking and knowledgeable and had high levels of interpersonal skills. Twelve out of the 14 team members were completely new to the institution, and therefore lacked historical knowledge, including understanding how internal and external institutional, political and sector changes had influenced staff attitudes and perceived trust. Although the ADU members were skilled in the areas relative to their priorities, they were not line managers or staff in positions of power. Instead, they were empowered to assist staff and encouraged to adapt their professional-development style to reach the desired outcome. They recognised that the VET teachers had varying levels of motivation, capacity and capability. During the 16-month change-management process, the senior educators provided a variety of professional-development opportunities, including planning and preparing quality assessment; validation workshops; individual and small-team coaching; developing and refining assessment-tool templates; and developing and completing student and teaching assessment tools. Similarly, the administrative assistants were integral in documenting version control, storing files, pre-populating templates, organising meetings, workshops and training and following up on progress with assessment tools and related documents. On many occasions, when an ADU ASQA team member raised a concern specifically related to a lack of progress in their area, I observed the sub-teams providing remarkable support to each other. Both the senior educators and administrative assistants worked collegially toward solution-focused outcomes. At times this required the assistance of a line manager; however, more often than not, it involved the co-teaming of senior educators and administrative assistants to help the staff member in need.

Step 6: Generating short-term wins
During the 16-month change-management process, the ADU ASQA team created many opportunities to celebrate meeting smaller milestones with VET staff. They

created workshop certificates, arranged workshops with catering and encouraged VET teachers to apply for teaching buy-out in an effort to attend professional-development opportunities. The wins were celebrated with the staff and reported at higher-level meetings to line managers and other key institutional team members. The ADU ASQA staff also created drop-in-sessions and focused on one-to-one individual coaching specific to a unit of competency. Senior educators would also help staff further understand delivery strategies in context with their assessment tasks and their alignment with the training packages.

Step 7: Consolidating gains and producing more change
At many stages throughout the change-management process, improvements were made and progress was on track. In these situations, both VET teachers and ADU ASQA staff equally felt highly motivated/positive, energetic and empowered, and that they were moving towards the target in an ethical, responsible manner. Discussions, demonstrations and general support for the teachers' continuous improvement were essential in building trust with the people closest to the unit of competency and to influencing the student experience. The ADU ASQA team members collaborated with the VET teachers in creating and designing assessment tools using an underpinning framework of continuous improvement (plan; implement; monitor and evaluate; improve). Ongoing issues regarding version control and storage were raised, and additional support was provided to the ADU ASQA team to address them. Although at times the solutions provided to the team were less than optimal, the team influenced what they could to make the best of the situation. The ADU ASQA team also raised issues of workloads for VET teachers, and at times went over and above their scope to help their colleagues reach the institutional intended outcomes.

Step 8: Anchoring new approaches in the culture
After the change management process had continued for 12 months, the work of the ADU ASQA team was extended until end of the calendar year (2016). Some of the team members chose to continue on a casual contract and remained with the ADU until the end, while others moved into other positions at the institution given that their original contracts has expired. This team had met its target key performance indicators and played a significant role in upskilling VET teachers regarding assessment tools. There was a great sense of achievement and a sigh of relief at the conclusion, when the university was successful in achieving reaccreditation. Starting in 2016, a new entity was created to continue some of the work of the ADU ASQA team. This new VET entity was smaller and more targeted, and set goals to continue building on the momentum created by the change-management process to achieve continuous improvement. The ADU ASQA team demonstrated how a centralised approach in a strategic and operational change-management process successfully provided upskilling for staff and consistency in the quality of assessment tools in a time-efficient manner. The ADU ASQA team also demonstrated the enactment of a distributed leadership model within a complex and dynamic learning and teaching environment.

Discussion

This narrative demonstrates that although some processes were well established early on, many were not. Many early adopting practices could have been better supported from the onset, including a recognition of the existing VET culture and how ready the staff were for this change. Although the ADU ASQA team was hard-working and dedicated, this was not always enough, as other steps in the change-management preparation had not been fully completed.   Occasionally, those who had to deal with the VET teachers did not become enthusiastic about the project early enough; thus at times the staff felt like they were "pushing" an agenda that they did not fully agree with. These errors are consistent with those described by Kotter (2012), who describes pockets of complacency, a lack of vision and at times, "neglecting to confirm changes in the corporate culture" (Kotter 2012, p.12). Insufficient effort was given to exploring the VET staff members' motivation and building the guiding teams from the ground up, rather than imposing change from the top down (Beaudoin 2013; Shattuck 2013). At times, it also became evident that there were obstacles within the faculty environment, and I was unable to help them overcome these issues. This also affected the project team's ability to achieve the end goals.

Perceptions of the ADU team: Findings and Discussion

<u>**Aim 2:**</u> **What was the perceived level of leadership and management of the ADU director as assessed by the ASQA team throughout the change-management project?**

At the conclusion of the 16-month change-management process, a brief survey was emailed to the remaining ADU ASQA team members (n=15) by a neutral third party. This research received human research ethics approval in November 2015. This survey comprised a number of open and closed survey items, including an evaluation of the leadership and management role as demonstrated by the ADU director. Feedback from the ADU ASQA team-member respondents (n=8) revealed that 57% rated the ADU director's leadership at *'5 - high-level'*, and 42% at '*4 - medium-level*'. The likert scale provided to the participants ranged from 1 (no level of demonstrated behaviour) to 5 (high level of demonstrated behaviour). Qualitative comments from those who gave the director a *'high level'* rating included:

> ***Respondent 2:*** *While top-level management leadership was outstanding, there were times when other levels of management were less forthcoming in providing assistance/information, and some did not take full advantage of the administrative assistance being provided.*

> ***Respondent 9:*** *When giving the above answer my thoughts were around the leadership shown by the ADU director as my direct line manager. The ADU director was supportive, clear and concise in her communication and followed up on any question or issue.*

Respondent 10: The team was well led by a capable, thoughtful, responsive and interested leader who motivated and empowered members on the team. The team leader kept in regular contact with the team through structured meetings, but was also available to address individual concerns in a timely and non-judgemental way. The team leader had a clear vision of what was to be achieved and the role of staff, and enabled staff to do that – in the first instance, staff were treated with respect at a personal and professional level, [and were] encouraged to share ideas and problems, and contribute to the project at all stages. The team leader had a good understanding of the processes and procedures governing most aspects of the project and could keep all staff on track and properly informed. All issues were followed up/acted upon in a timely way. The communication style was open, clear, honest and collegiate. The team leader was astute, insightful and perceptive, consistent and inclusive. If there was a problem, it was addressed immediately as a team or individually where required. All team members were encouraged to participate, and their contribution and work acknowledged, which was motivating and empowering. There was genuine respect by the team leader for the qualities and attributes of the team members. Above all, the team leader had a clear vision and understood the project [and] what was required, and was prepared to listen and act on information coming from the team members. The team leaders brought energy and commitment to the project and people working on the project. The positive team culture was evident from the very beginning. There was never inconsistent behaviour or advice so it was very easy to trust and respect the team leader.

Respondent 16: Weekly and then fortnightly meetings with the ADU director were organised to report on our progress and any issues. The ADU director also made it clear she was available for any contact during the week.

In comparison, feedback from the ADU ASQA team-member respondents (n=7) regarding demonstrated management from the ADU director was rated at 57% *'5 - high level'* performance and 42% *'3 - some level'* performance. Qualitative comments from those respondents included:

Respondent 2: It was very stressful, management were always in a panic and it stopped a lot of progress to keep going over why were weren't getting tasks done. The senior educators were a godsend in audit, and without their management we would not have made it through. The ADU director was excellent as a manager: she listened to our problems and helped us identify appropriate solutions. I wouldn't have made it through the audit.

Respondent Eight: Coordination was of a high level, with the roles of staff at different levels clearly defined, and most consulted well with appropriate education managers and administration staff.

Respondent 9: When I first started I was quite lost in what I was supposed to be doing [or] achieving. I found my own way and was lucky as I started at the same time as three other people in the same role – so we had each other to bounce ideas off. We had been separated into four areas throughout the Uni, all looking after different departments.

Respondent 10: Schedules were set and monitored, resources were made available, communication was clear and timely and all matters (large or small) were dealt with immediately. Institutional processes and procedures were followed and/or clarified so that staff had clear direction. Task allocation was discussed and agreed, and shared as fairly as possible appropriate to staff skill levels/experience.

>   ***Respondent 16:*** *The ADU director would report to other committee/s on our progress/issues.*

Discussion:

These findings demonstrate that the ADU director had many of the desired qualities of a leader and manager, which positively contributed to the ADU ASQA implementation team meeting their desired goals. However, at times greater management skills were needed to assist the team and reduce obstacles as part of the change-management goals. The ADU director's leadership qualities align with those described in the literature, particularly by Snowden and Boone (2007) and Drew (2010). These findings also demonstrate the importance of vision, support and the use of "hard" and "soft" human-resources skills within this type of leadership capacity.

Aim 3: What level of ADU team functionality did the ADU staff perceive during the change management project?

One section of the survey also asked each study participant to self-reflect on the ADU team's functionality. Study participants were ask to rate five questions using a likert scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) regarding team functionality at the ADU level. The findings are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Self-reflection on the ADU team's functionality

	Question	N	Strongly agree/agree
	The ADU ASQA team built a stable trust relationship within it over the length of the project.	7	75%
	The ADU ASQA team built a culture with no fear of conflict within it over the length of the project.	7	62.5%
	The ADU ASQA team built a culture of commitment within it over the length of the project.	7	75%
	The ADU ASQA team built a culture of accountability within it over the length of the project.	7	62.5%
	The ADU ASQA team was not focused on ego and status over the length of the project.	7	75%

Discussion

The ADU team perceived *'high levels'* of team functionality during the change-management process. This was a positive outcome for the team, its functions and all team members' experiences. This outcome is linked with the leadership model within the ADU team and aligns with positive boundary-setting as a key leadership skill. It also demonstrates the importance and effect that guiding teams within a change-management process can contribute to change at the ADU and institutional levels (Kotter & Cohen 2002; Chowthi-Williams, Curzio & Leman 2016). The notion of guiding teams is a key change-management principle within the higher-education context. In this case study, the team functioned well and demonstrated positive team attributes that kept it sustained, focused and high-performing.

Aim 4: How well prepared was the university for this change-management project?

One section of the survey also asked each study participant to rate the ADU team functionality. Study participants were ask to rank the statements in Table 3 in order of most important to least important. These included the following:

Table 3. Perceptions of the ADU ASQA team's success

	Statement	N	Strongly agree/agree
	There was a clear promotion of the change required across the institution.	7	75%
	The change that would take place was clearly defined.	7	50%
	A communication plan was clearly adhered to during the life of the project.	7	25%
	There was a high level of communication across the project team.	7	50%
	A training plan was clearly adhered to during the life of the project.	7	25%
	All key stakeholders were clearly informed and on board with the proposed changes.	**7**	**37.5%**
	A recognised project-management methodology was used during the life of the project.	**7**	**25%**
	Celebrations of milestones along the way were made explicit to the project team.	**7**	**25%**

Discussion

The ADU team responses demonstrate that although there was a clear promotion of the change required across the institution, many change-management indicators were not made explicit to the team during the 16-month process. The ADU members felt that VET teacher buy-in varied, which was problematic as they tried achieve their goals. Meeting methodology and the celebration of milestones were unclear; this added ambiguity to their role. The team members' responses align with their previous qualitative evidence suggesting anxiety and confusion when trying to complete a task. The ADU team required additional guidance from their ADU leader and above. Clarity, vision, purpose and communication are all key aspects of both Kotter's Eight-Step Model of Change and the model presented by Chowthi-Williams, Curzio and Leman (2016).

<u>Aim 5</u>: How would you rank the requirements for change management in order of their importance to you (from most important to least important)

Change-management requirement	Rank (most important to least important) % frequency

Understanding why change is happening and why it is necessary	1
Appreciation of how the change will take place and be effectively communicated	2
Feeling that everyone is focused on the same goals and objectives	3
Knowing the project recognises organisation-wide dependencies and considers people, process and infrastructure	4
Having assistance from the project sponsors, project infrastructure and training specialist to create a supportive environment	5
Awareness of who is ultimately responsible for the project	6
Consciousness that key individuals are involved in the project	7
Being able to take ownership and influence details of the change	8
Recognising that the project is being implemented by people with the necessary core skills in a clearly defined and tracked manner	9

Discussion

The team members' rankings of requirements for change management closely align with the key elements presented in the change-management literature. The ADU team clearly identified that "understanding why the change was happening and why it was necessary" was of great importance (Kotter 1995; Kotter 2006; Chowthi-Williams, Curzio & Leman 2016). As discussed in the case-study narratives, the ADU team dealt with the key VET teachers directly, and felt that they needed to be well informed when supporting the staff. The ADU team also felt it was important to appreciate how the change would take place and how would it be communicated effectively. These tactics are essential in change management, and the ADU team members considered ranked this requirement second. The third key item relates to alignment and references regarding individual and organisation learning as discussed by Cameron and Green (2012).

Aim 6: What was the most rewarding aspect of ADU members' role during the change-management project? (Question 6)

> **Respondent 2:** *Some of the wonderful and hard-working team members that I worked with. Without them I would not have been able to get through the audit and out the other side.*
> **Respondent Eight:** *Successfully completing stages of work within the project and being able to forward this to the appropriate staff to continue working on. Also the fact of passing the audit, which was a confirmation that the project was working well.*
> **Respondent 9:** *Assisting [with] qualifications [to] get [teachers] into the position of being confident to pass audit and recognising that they now had a quality set of assessment tools to teach with.*
> **Respondent 10:** *Working with highly dedicated teachers to develop effective assessment instruments in their specific disciplines, and working with fellow senior educators in the broader context to develop robust assessments across the FedUni TAFE/College.*
> **Respondent 14:** *Opportunity to be part of the ASQA CLIPP team.*
> **Respondent 16:** *Being able to work with teachers to create assessments that are interesting and relevant for the students. Working with teachers in a positive way – seeing them change from [being] disengaged to motivated. Helping to change the*

culture within a department. Helping teachers understand what a good assessment can look like, and showing them how little changes can make a big difference.

Discussion

The ADU team comments demonstrate key skills of distributed leadership as aligned in the literature (Caton & Mistriner 2016; Calma 2015; Jones 2011). The team focused on support, empowerment, communication, achievement and meeting the desired change-management outcomes. The ADU team demonstrated high levels of accountability, commitment, trust, respect and collegiality for the VET teachers they were assisting. The ADU team was also focused on tangible outcomes – the creation and development of high-quality assessment tools for VET students – which was an important deliverable to their level of engagement with the process. In addition, the collegiality formed within the team during the process of change management was an unexpected but positive finding.

Conclusion and Future Directions

An ADU can successfully play a key role in an institutional change-management process. It is essential to ensure that a suitable change-management framework is adhered to during the process to ensure success. The mechanistic model that had been a key driver for change management in past initiatives was not the best fit for this type of learning and teaching change initiative. Target areas of improvement for the approach this project did use include assessing the indicators for change, assessing the staff culture, increasing communication, building groundswell, empowering guiding teams to work directly with teachers and improving management when obstacles occurred. An ADU can assist effectively if positioned appropriately with key stakeholders within a change-management framework. Several lessons can also be learnt about the personal leadership of the ADU director, including a focus on management skills when the team most needed the support. Future research can also assess the perceptions of the ADU team against the performance of the key stakeholders external to the ADU. Assessing the perspectives of a number of key groups involved with the change-management project will provide a more holistic view of the success and challenges of the project.

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