A Business Approach to Capability Development

Considerations and suggestions for applying life based learning in the workplace
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A companion document to the research report
Life Based Learning: A strength based approach to capability development in vocational and technical education

Managed by the TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning (ICVET)

http://www.icvet.edu.au

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What is this document?

This document is a starter kit designed to assist you to engage in realistic and practical ways with the findings of the research project Life Based Learning: A strength based approach to capability development in vocational and technical education. As a companion document to the research report, it will help you identify opportunities to customise the findings and apply them to your business context.

The companion document is part of a suite of resources – including the full findings of the research – which are available on the TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning website, (http://www.icvet.edu.au). In addition, a wiki1, which can be found at http://icvet.wikispaces.com/life+based+learning, provides a dynamic and collaborative workspace where you can access, share and develop ideas, case studies, resources, tips and tools.

As vocational and technical education (VTE) businesses begin to implement research findings, the wiki will become the living resource that captures, grows and disseminates the life based learning approach.

What does it contain?

This companion document is organised into four parts:

1. A summary of the research. This includes key concepts and findings, models and application strategies from the full research report. We recommend you become well acquainted with the key concepts and findings as these are the foundation on which your application and implementation strategies will be built.

2. A process for getting started. This section provides a recommended step-by-step process for engaging with the research and applying the findings to your context.

3. Case studies. Case studies provide examples of how different approaches to capability development are being implemented. In this section you’ll find five case studies which show how the life based learning model can be applied to a variety of contexts.

4. Conversation starters. The final section of the companion document provides a series of questions linked to key research findings for the purpose of dialogue and discussion.

Who is it for?

The companion document is for individuals, teams or organisations who have responsibility for the planning and oversight of capability development as well as anyone who has an interest in capability development. The process and questions can easily be adapted for different groups including decision makers, advocates and practitioners.

What is ‘a business approach to capability development’?

A business approach to capability development helps you link the key research findings with your business goals. It assists you to take stock of where you are now, build on your strengths, identify opportunities for growth and plan a course of action.

The benefits of such an approach include:

- clarifying organisational strengths and building on them
- identifying new opportunities for capability development
- creating specific strategies and action steps for pursuing business goals, and
- linking capability development to your business planning.

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1 A wiki is a web site that allows users to create and edit content collaboratively.
This section is a summary of the research project *Life Based Learning: A strength based approach to capability development in vocational and technical education* and includes key graphics from the body of the main report. It draws out key concepts, key findings and application strategies that emerged from the research.

The research was also informed by papers (‘think pieces’) commissioned by TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning (ICVET). All authors were briefed by the research team. These papers focus on emerging paradigms, workplace changes, intergenerational impacts, the ageing workforce and wisdom leadership. These papers, which form the collection *Voices: Contemporary thinking for working and learning in the Knowledge Era* can be accessed from the ICVET website (http://www.icvet.edu.au).

For a more comprehensive insight into any of the ideas discussed in this summary, we recommend you read the full research report which is also available from the ICVET site.

**Key concepts**

Four key concepts from the research emerged as highly relevant to capability development in vocational and technical education (VTE). These are:

- **Knowledge Era – the environment**
- **Learning ecologies – the metaphor**
- **Strength based philosophy – the mindset, and**
- **Business wisdom – the actions**

**Knowledge Era – the environment**

The Knowledge Era is characterised by impermanence, turbulence, multiple and competing agendas and priorities, diversity in ideologies, ambiguity, multiple roles, irritations, uncertainty, contradictions and a great amount of energy and creativity. It is also the ‘intangible era’, where instead of goods and services the growing economic commodity is knowledge itself.

Knowledge work associated with the Knowledge Era has been identified by this research as a key generic capability. This form of work is non-linear and non-routine, more intuitive, opportunistic and networked, less driven by allegiance to a pre-planned critical path or mindset and therefore more innovative. Knowledge workers in the VTE sector reflect this generic capability when they:

- balance work, learning and knowing
- undertake research
- rapidly acquire new skills
- apply existing skills and knowledge to new problems, based on high pattern-recognition skills
- problem-solve and make sense in new contexts
- maintain a balance between productivity and creativity, and
- collaborate in both face-to-face and virtual environments.
In the shift to the Knowledge Era, knowledge workers will need to accept the challenge of working and learning within contemporary environments where contradictory forces ebb and flow. Key capacities to build and sustain this environmental shift include:

- the capacity to foster sharing and nurturing
- the capacity to support groups
- the immediate applicability of professional development
- flexible and responsive leadership, and
- clear corporate goals.

**Learning ecologies – the metaphor**

The research team identified the term ‘ecology’ as an effective metaphor for providing enhanced meaning to the conceptual basis of the project. ‘Ecology’ embraces the idea of contradictory forces within a sustaining and dynamic system; ‘opposites in co-existence’ with the dawning of the Knowledge Era. The research team adapted this metaphor to that of ‘learning ecologies’; a metaphor that directly enhances understanding of what needs to be done in developing capability in VTE in the Knowledge Era.

![Learning ecologies diagram](adapted from Cooperrider, 2004)

**Learning ecologies – a metaphor for the Knowledge Era**

Learning ecologies are dynamic, adaptive and diverse. The research claims that the dimensions of this key metaphor offer capability development in VTE freedom from seeking the one way to get it right or the solution. More importantly, the learning ecologies metaphor draws our attention to a way of looking at the world that is intuitive, caring and responsible.

The learning ecologies metaphor includes the following caveats:

- This approach is not about precision or pre-determined ways of doing things. Rather than being predictive, it is anticipative.
- It is a permissive framework which means there may be tension and irritation as there are no clear answers. It is a why to rather than a how to approach.
- Some of it will be wrong and this will help to create the shifts.
- It favours successive approximations rather than exactness.
- Fuzziness is its strength. Fuzziness is a precise concept that provides a framework for understanding chaos.
- Self-organising happens in an ecology, but there may be no satisfactory explanation for where the organising pattern comes from.
**Strength based philosophy – the mindset**

The transition to the Knowledge Era is compatible with organisational change processes that move away from the more familiar deficit models which identify what is wrong before proceeding to ‘fix it’ using intervention strategies. The emerging paradigm for organisational change is based on asset or strength based philosophy for individual and organisational growth and change.

Essentially, these models focus on collaboratively identifying what’s working well and then investing in increasing it. The research identified positive psychology as the key underpinning theoretical discipline that supports a strength based orientation to capability development in VTE.

Two key ideas from positive psychology are authentic happiness and signature strengths. Authentic happiness is related to positive emotion, engagement and purpose. Signature strengths include six core virtues which are recognised in most cultures and contribute to satisfaction, motivation and engagement. The research also drew on flow theory.

**Flow theory – matching challenge and skill for optimum performance**

Flow theory is an evolutionary model based on being conscious of our intrinsic interconnectedness and being willing to devote some of our energy to the wellbeing of others. ‘Flow’ is a state of deep focus that occurs when people engage in challenging tasks that demand intense concentration and commitment. Flow occurs when a person’s skill level is perfectly matched to the challenge level of a task that has clear goals and provides immediate feedback. The concept of flow is aligned to the ‘engaged life’ as described in positive psychology, a mindset concept that is highly compatible with the connectedness embedded in the learning ecologies metaphor.
Business wisdom – the actions

Business wisdom is built on the principles and practices of organisational learning and knowledge management and is usually associated with knowledge, intelligence and experience. However, wisdom is greater than the sum of these attributes. It is about how the linking and leveraging based on knowledge, intelligence and experience sits within a business. It is about how these work together to promote learning.

The concept of wisdom, which is central to all aspects of this research project, has the following characteristics:

- Wisdom is strength based – it contributes to human wellbeing and the common good.
- Wisdom contributes to synthesis – wise thinking and actions pull components together into an integrated whole.
- Wisdom is achievement-oriented – it has a very practical orientation which serves to guide thinking and action.

From this summary of wisdom, as aligned to the other key concepts central to capability development, the research argued that wise thinking and wise actions are the glue that connects the different elements of a learning organisation into a more integrated and productive whole, strengthening what is already working.

The research team drew on the think piece on wisdom leadership and its relation to spirituality to capture an expanded perspective on wisdom and leadership. This piece described four distinct frames of reference for wisdom leadership that have emerged over the last 100 years: paternal-mechanical, humanistic, holistic and spiritual. The way a business is conducted is influenced by which of these frameworks (or combinations of them) leaders draw on for their wisdom.

A focus on business wisdom is particularly relevant to capability development in the Knowledge Era as it affirms the central role of human development, life management and striving to be the best that we can be for the benefit of others and ourselves.

Key findings

The research project produced three key findings:

1. Capability development is the new emphasis for working and learning in VTE.
2. A strength based orientation to capability development is most effective for change.
3. Life based learning is a contemporary model for capability development in VTE.

Emphasising capability development

The research identified a need to move beyond the terminology of ‘professional development’. Focus groups consulted during this research saw it as a restrictive term, suggesting that it applied to ‘professional’ groups and was associated with a range of training activities, particularly compliance training and ‘old ways of doing things’. ‘Capability development’ was accepted as being more aligned with the discourse emerging from this research. Capability development underlines the value of people and the human aspect as well as reinforcing the importance of business imperatives.
The assumptions that underpin this preference for a new terminology are that capability development:

- addresses the needs of the organisation, workforce, individuals and groups
- supports a high degree of flexibility in the organisation
- provides a wide range of learning options
- occurs in relationship and focuses on people rather than place and structure
- provides support for learning through mistakes
- responds to the shifting nature of priorities
- is available to all in the organisation
- involves a combined responsibility by both the individual and the organisation
- is recognised as occurring through many processes and everyday activities
- ranges from organisational learning to personal learning, and on and off-the-job learning
- suits the ‘organic’, open-system nature of the Knowledge Era, and
- recognises the individual process that learning is.

Creating capability is about:

- moving away from segmented activities to holistic activities that have more meaning and purpose
- positive appreciative mindsets and approaches
- creating balance and integration, with a seamless connection between work, learning and knowing
- empowering people to apply their expertise, as people – rather than procedures or information – are the best source of deep expertise, and
- reciprocal obligation between the individual and the organisation; that is, people taking responsibility for their own self-directed learning and organisations creating environments that support learning.

Capability development is about supporting people in being confident, capable, connected, curious and committed learners who interact with their environments so that they are in dynamic balance between life and work, resulting in effective and appropriate actions at work.

**Strength based orientation**

A strength based approach to capability development does not disregard or displace existing practice in the professional development field because its premise is that we take the best with us and integrate it into the new. Learners need to be able to access a wide range of diverse and personalised strategies and to take responsibility for their learning processes. These choices are not ‘free-for-all’; they exist within the reality of the work environment and the boundaries necessary for individual, team and organisational success. This is best achieved through integrating strategies that incorporate age-old values and truths, established professional development practices, emerging strategies and openness to future options.

Many established strategies are already strength based. The idea is to build more mindfully on these strengths. Established strategies identified as strength based include conversations, action learning and coaching. Mentoring was seen as conducive to working from strength, but the research uncovered cautions and the view that mentoring in itself was not the strength; its potential strength came from how it was executed.
Emerging strategies have been specifically designed from a strength based orientation. They include, but are not limited to, conversations, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), talent management, disruptive technologies and positive deviance. These form part of a diverse approach to capability development more suitable to the requirements of the Knowledge Era.

The critical factor and essential characteristic of these new strategies for capability development is that they are based on a thorough understanding of life based learning. Strategies used within the work based learning model may also reflect the characteristics of life based learning. The research identified the importance of appreciating the theoretical base of a life based learning model for capability development and of using selected strategies wisely and with good judgement.

**Life based learning**

This project proposes that life based learning is a plausible and contemporary framework for capability development in VTE. Further, the project proposes – through the concept of life based learning – that learning for work is not restricted to learning at work. Life based learning acknowledges *multiple sources* of learning, which opens up opportunities for developing capability.

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**Learning as separate stratas**

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**Learning as an integrated and interconnected ecology**
Life based learning substantially shifts the discourse about professional development by moving beyond the allegiance to work based and expert-centred learning. While honouring their legacy, retaining what works and drawing out their potential, it places them into a more contemporary framework.

Life based learning has a different focus from lifelong learning in that it is more about the source of learning, acknowledging the whole person’s learning contribution and recognising the different ways in which learning is significant to the individual. It adds to the possibilities for learning and development in VTE and provides opportunities to build on current practices. It acknowledges that what we experience and learn outside a work environment can be as important to our work as what we experience and learn at work. Life based learning also recognises that individuals have knowledge, skills and capabilities that are not always visible or recognised by organisations even though they can significantly contribute to organisational life.

The ten key characteristics of life based learning identified by the research are that it:

- emphasises capability development
- promotes a strength based orientation to learning
- recognises multiple sources of learning
- balances integrity and utility
- shifts responsibility for learning to the individual
- shifts the role of organisations to that of enabler
- acknowledges that contradictions are strengths
- invests in developing the whole person
- acknowledges human dispositions as critical, and
- appreciates that change means things are qualitatively different.
The true strength of these key characteristics is in their interconnectedness. Life based learning embraces the best of expert-centred learning and work based learning, offering a broader repertoire. It expands the potential of existing models, offering new possibilities and articulating explicitly what many VTE practitioners are intuitively engaging with already. It better serves the needs of working and learning in the dynamic VTE environment.
Life based learning creates a model for capability development which is articulated in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities and values. The emphasis is on personal responsibility for learning through the provision of rich learning environments, with the learning benefiting both the individual and the organisation. **Life based learning is adaptive, self-facilitated, based on whole-of-life perspectives and reflexive practice, using any strategy appropriate for the task.**

There are three distinguishing features of life based learning critical to this new model:

1. an emphasis on a strength based orientation rather than strategy
2. explicit recognition of underpinning foundation truths and values including trust, mindfulness, consideration and tolerance, and
3. acknowledgement of the learner as a whole person who accesses many sources of learning.

The second phase of research identified benefits and outcomes of the life based learning model for capability development. The key benefits were that it:

- articulated and legitimised what was familiar and known intuitively
- proposed a way forward that was within reach
- expanded the perspective of learning, which had the potential to open up more opportunities; it was considered more productive to reduce and blur the artificial boundaries that currently compartmentalise the context of learning
- legitimised life experiences as a key source of learning; it reinforced the fact that learning is transferable, and that ‘harvesting’ learning from one context and sowing it in another was a very practical, achievable and productive initiative, and
- acknowledged the whole person, which in turn had potential for utilising individual talents in better and smarter ways; this could benefit both the individual and the organisation.

The types of life based learning experiences described by research participants generally fell into three categories:

1. significant life events
2. developing a talent, and
3. recreational interests.

Phase 2 of the research project identified anticipated outcomes of a life based learning model for VTE organisations and businesses. These are divided into various components including vision, people, work, work style, environment and resulting outcomes for business.

The graphic of the Life Based Learning Model on the next page summarises the key components of life based learning. It is sure to generate some excellent conversations!
part 1: Research Summary

**Training Model**
- **Expert Centred Learning**
  - Taught
  - Discipline based
  - Educational Institution focus
  - Learning provided
  - Compliance and adoption
  - Segmented
  - Individual learning

**Professional Development Model**
- **Work Based Learning**
  - Facilitated
  - Project based
  - Workplace focus
  - Learning planned
  - Flexible and developmental
  - Integrated
  - Organisational learning

**Capability Development Model**
- **Life Based Learning**
  - Self directed
  - Context based
  - Work/life integration
  - Learner as designer
  - Adaptable and sustainable
  - Holistic
  - Business wisdom

**Hierarchy Metaphor**
- **STRATEGIES**
  - Lectures
  - Workshops
  - Train the trainer
  - Small group work
  - Guest speakers

**Network Metaphor**
- **STRATEGIES**
  - Action learning
  - Team work
  - Mentoring
  - Communities of practice
  - Expert centred strategies

**Learning Ecology Metaphor**
- **ORIENTATION**
  - Strength based
  - Multiple sources of learning
  - Adaptive to context
  - Action from wisdom
  - Blurring of boundaries

**Learner as**
- **passive receiver**
- **worker**
- **whole person**

*Life Based Learning: a model for integration, growth and potentiality.* © TAFE NSW ICVET
Application strategies

The full research report includes a discussion of guiding principles for applying a life based learning model of capability development to business.

**Six guiding principles** for action were identified. These are:

- believe relationships really matter
- work with strengths
- be reflexive as well as reflective
- think and act wisely
- acknowledge the whole person, and
- move beyond professional development as an activity.

Further, organisational enablers are included in the application section of the report as a guide to providing rich learning environments that promote capability development for individuals and teams through a model of life based learning.

**The eight organisational enablers** identified by the research are:

- valuing connections and networks
- developing a culture that supports job reshaping for personal growth
- creating space for exchange and sharing of ideas (informal learning)
- supporting learners as designers of their own development
- balancing control and creativity
- modelling wise leadership
- capitalising on the benefits of an intergenerational workforce, and
- focusing on futures in education.

The researchers also explored application details of **strength based approaches** to capability development within a life based learning model. Here the focus is on emerging approaches. Application details for conversations, talent management, positive deviance, Appreciative Inquiry and disruptive technology are fleshed out.

**Established professional development practices** such as expert centred learning and work based learning (including action learning, mentoring, coaching, communities of practice)

**Emerging strategies** such as conversations, Appreciative Inquiry, talent management, disruptive technology and positive deviance

An openness to future potential - those that are still to emerge

Building new foundations for capability development
The Application section of the full report concludes with a discussion of evaluation for capability development in the Knowledge Era noting that such an evaluative process will be full of paradoxes and questions.

The research indicates that capability development, as an innovation, demands fresh and distinctly different approaches to evaluation. Two approaches to evaluation are canvassed: Appreciative Inquiry, (discovery, dreaming, designing and delivery) and Most Significant Change, (participatory monitoring and evaluation).

These approaches take into account simultaneous development on a number of levels while recognising multiple stakeholders (organisation, team, the individual), each of whom will have different expectations of evaluation and will use evaluation measures in different ways.

**Concluding remarks**

Life based learning offers a way forward at a time when many Industrial Era processes are no longer working. It opens the way to re-energising people, honouring what has worked well in the past and realigning current and emerging strategies to a strength based orientation. The potential of life based learning has been summed up by a National Action Planning Forum participant thus:

*Life based learning seems initially a utopian/fantasy notion, but we live in a complex world. The notion is an honest attempt to capture the full breadth of our humanity, and apply it to our working life. I associate the idea of life based learning with my reading of classical studies and science fiction, where writers deal with the possible and not the absurd. The possibility that humanity can set out to explore the stars.*

*Life based learning articulates what many people know and feel.* It provides a framework for application to capability development in the VTE sector.
part 2: A process for getting started

The challenge for any research project is how to customise and apply the research findings so they have meaning and relevance in local contexts. The following concept map suggests an initial process for engaging with the findings and for identifying opportunities to incorporate some of them into your own context:

Steps for customising and applying life based learning

Each step in the figure above is outlined in more detail on next page, together with a set of focus questions.

2. Concept maps are graphical tools for organising and representing knowledge.
Step 1: Consider the benefits of investing in life based learning

Let’s face it. Any research report on capability development that lands on your desk is competing for attention in a crowded landscape. So why should you engage with this research? The answer is simple – it is good for business!

Implementing research findings offers many business benefits:

• A more productive and positive workplace.
• Getting more from your investment in capability development.
• Identifying and amplifying strengths to achieve business goals.
• Utilising human assets more effectively.
• Driving whole of organisation change efforts by including customers, partners and internal stakeholders in the change process.
• Applying current research to contemporary work environments.

Questions to consider:

• What does capability development and life based learning mean for our organisation?
• What can we do the same, better or differently in building our capability?
• How do we align this approach with our business goals?
• What are the business benefits of developing our human assets?
• What outcomes could we achieve by using this frame of reference?

Step 2: Read research documents

Taking time to read the research papers will give you a solid understanding of the key concepts, models and strategies emerging from the project. This will enable you to make informed decisions and to utilise the models and strategies effectively.

It is recommended you read three sets of key resources:

1. The research summary (Part 1 of this companion document) is essential reading. It provides a thorough overview of the key concepts, findings, models and strategies emerging from the research. While many of the concepts presented are not new and come from other industries and disciplines, what is new is that they have been reconfigured to focus on capability development in a vocational and technical education (VTE) context. The full research report Life Based Learning: A strength based approach to capability development is available at http://www.icvet.edu.au

2. Five ‘think pieces’ commissioned by TAFE NSW to inform the research. They provide an independent view by leading academics, consultants and theorists on themes such as emerging paradigms, the intergenerational workforce, workplace changes, the ageing workforce and wisdom leadership. The complete set of think pieces, entitled Voices: Contemporary thinking for working and learning in the Knowledge Era, is available on the TAFE NSW ICVET website at http://www.icvet.edu.au
3. **Case studies** – The five case studies included in this companion document provide practical examples of how strength based approaches to capability development have been applied within a VTE context. Case studies include:

- Two examples of strength based approaches to Institute strategic planning at TAFE SA Adelaide North in South Australia. Case study 1 shows how Appreciative Inquiry was used to develop an implementation strategy for the Institute’s strategic plan. Case study 2 demonstrates how a workplace motivation framework was used to design a professional development strategy.

- Case study 3 is from the Central Coast Community Congress in NSW, who moved from a deficit based to a strength based focus in community development work at a regional level which has begun to change both the culture and the outcomes of this work in local communities.

- A community building project in the suburb of San Remo in NSW, which used local strengths and assets to bring a number of diverse local groups together to improve community life and is shown in case study 4.

- Case study 5 is drawn from a partnership between Riverina Institute of TAFE NSW and the Wamba Wamba Indigenous Community in Deniliquin in southern NSW where the processes of learning ecologies and life based learning are linked to relationship development and community growth.

**Questions to consider:**

- How well could I explain the key concepts emerging from the research including the Knowledge Era, capability development, learning ecologies and business wisdom?
- How well do the vision and values of our organisation align with these key concepts?
- How can we introduce the key themes and concepts into our organisation?
- Which concepts have the most appeal?

**Step 3: Identify areas where life based learning can have an impact**

The life based learning model offers many options and starting points. There are opportunities for small steps or changes that can have significant impact. Options include introducing conversation tools like Conversation Cafes or Open Space Technology, using Appreciative Inquiry for strategic planning, developing a talent management strategy, mapping the learning ecology of your organisation, emphasising a strength based orientation, identifying and amplifying the ‘positive core’ of your business success, supporting a ‘learner-as-designer’ capability development program and reflecting on the role of business wisdom.

**Questions to consider:**

- What would a business approach to capability development look like in our organisation?
- What key concepts could we incorporate into our business goals so capability development is an integral part of our business?
- What strategies can we use to introduce the research within our organisation?
- How can we free the energy within our organisation to enable positive change?
- What resources can we access to assist us?
- Who can we involve?
- How can people contribute in different but meaningful ways?
Step 4: Nominate people to explore the possibilities within your organisation

VTE organisations and businesses will need to reflect on and interpret the research findings so they have relevance and meaning in local contexts. This requires people who can take the lead in exploring possibilities and drive the process. People with designated roles like learning and development managers and professional development coordinators are obvious choices. However, in any organisation there are innovators, leaders and enthusiastic volunteers who may already be implementing many of the key concepts and strategies and who would appreciate an active role.

Questions to consider:

• Who can drive the exploration and implementation process?
• What part could they play in making things happen?
• What opportunities can we provide for people to participate?
• What resources will they need?
• Who can guide and mentor them?

Step 5: Harness ideas that emerge from the process

Implementing research on capability development will have a better chance of success if it aligns with existing plans, supports business priorities and offers new opportunities. Feedback from project participants indicated that a key strength of the research was how it articulated and made explicit what many practitioners knew intuitively and were exploring already. It was also seen as being within reach as there was a starting point for everyone.

Questions to consider:

• What elements of the research capture our attention?
• What is within reach and where could we start?
• What concept or strategy aligns with our business goals?
• What themes could we target?
• What activities could we support?

Step 6: Develop proposals for capability development

Developing proposals for capability development is what grounds the research. It signals recognition of the research and its contribution to improving business processes. Proposals can be in the form of pilots, thematic approaches, case studies, strategic plans, mapping exercises and program design. They can build on existing practices or introduce new initiatives; they can be formal or informal; they can be funded or integrated into existing programs. Whatever the chosen pathway, the common goal is business improvement through capability development.
Questions to consider:

- How do we support the proposals for capability development?
- How do we communicate our intentions?
- What organisational enablers need to be in place to ensure successful outcomes?
- What guiding principles should we consider?
- What resources can we allocate?
- What examples, templates and tools can guide us?

Step 7: Take action

Actions can be several small steps or a giant leap. A key factor for success is ensuring organisational enablers are in place to support the implementation process. Progress needs to be monitored and business benefits evaluated.

Questions to consider:

- Who needs to be involved to maximise success?
- What evaluation process will we use?
- How will we know when we are making progress?
- What challenges might we face?
- What tools and resources can we use?
The following case studies provide examples of how key concepts emerging from the research are being implemented. As more case studies emerge, they will be added to the wiki.

### Case Study 1: Using Appreciative Inquiry for strategic planning – TAFESA Adelaide North

#### Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to test the effectiveness of using a modified Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process for collaboratively developing an implementation strategy for a key result area of the TAFESA Adelaide North 2005-2007 Strategic Plan. The aim was to inform and accelerate the development of a professional development framework for innovation in teaching and learning at the Institute.

#### Background

TAFESA Adelaide North is one of three TAFE Institutes in South Australia. It is the result of a recent amalgamation of Torrens Valley and Regency Institutes and the Croydon and Port Adelaide campuses of Douglas Mawson Institute. The Director of Educational Services and Programs at TAFE SA Adelaide North was a member of the National Project Reference Group and volunteered TAFESA Adelaide North as a project case study.

At that time (October 2005), TAFESA Adelaide North was finalising its Strategic Plan for 2005-2007. The Strategic Plan has five Key Result Areas:

1. Innovation in Teaching and Learning
2. Developing Business and Strategic Partnerships and Relationships
3. Focusing on Student, Customer and Stakeholder Needs
4. Our People
6. Environmental Sustainability.

Like most strategic plans, each Key Result Area had a number of objectives, each with its specific measures and actions. For this case study, the focus was on **Key Result Area 1: Innovation in Teaching and Learning**. This was the area of responsibility for the Director, Educational Services and Programs and most aligned with professional development in teaching and learning.
The Process

The process involved a series of steps:

1. A ‘presentation pack’ for the case study was developed. This included a short overview of the purpose of the case study and the Appreciative Inquiry process and an invitation to all staff to participate.

2. A series of Appreciative Inquiry questions for each action in Key Result Area 1 was developed and this became the template for the interviews.

3. The Research Project Manager was invited to give a presentation to the TAFESA Adelaide North Executive Team to brief them on the research project, on the findings to date and on the purpose of the case study. The Executive Team also received all documentation related to the case study so they were fully informed. They were also invited to participate in the process.

4. Following consultation with key people, it was decided that a three-hour workshop was the best format for the case study. To this end, the workshop would cover only two of the four Appreciative Inquiry phases so the case study was more of a ‘taster’ than a complete cycle.

5. All Institute staff received an invitation to participate in one of two workshops. Key groups, including principal lecturers and the Strategic Planning Advisory Group, received targeted invitations. The two workshops were conducted in November and December, 2005.

6. Each workshop gave an overview of the research, strength-based models of change and of the Appreciative Inquiry process. Participants then selected a topic that interested them (e.g. inclusive assessment practices), paired up and interviewed each other for 20 minutes about strategies to implement that topic. Pairs then formed small groups to discuss their findings and synthesise key suggestions. There was then a report back to the group and the process was debriefed.

7. The collated input from the workshops was distributed to all participants, Institute educational managers, and the Executive Team for comment and embellishment.

8. In February 2006, the outcomes of the case study were presented to the Institute Educational Leadership Forum, consisting of approximately 40 educational and corporate managers.

9. Current initiatives in response to the case study are now in progress.

The Results

There was initial concern from some educational managers that response to the workshop would be poor given that late November early December was peak assessment and planning time and staff would have other pressing priorities. However, 36 staff3 attended the workshops, which was very encouraging.

The mix included lecturers, educational managers and corporate staff. Two executive managers and the State Program Leader for Community Services and Health also attended. Program areas represented included Plumbing, Commercial Photography, Business Services, Aboriginal Education, Electronics, Fabrication, Mechanical Engineering, Automotive, Community Services and Health, IT Studies, Library Services, Educational Services, Youth Pathways and Partnerships, Hotel School, Learn to Earn, and Workplace Training and Development.

3 Thank you to: Tim Campbell, Pam Clampa, Graham Creed, Kevin Foster, Jenny Hondow, Jennifer Ioakimidis, Neville O’Hara, Alex Knezevic, Judy Fawcett, Margaret Thornton, Claire White, Jane Luce, Bill Calderbank, Alex Shearer, Peter Day, Peter Hayward, Julie Clifford, Adele Broster, Stephen Wold, Leanne Lord, Stephen Conway, Sandy McClure, Alan Manley, David Braun, David Jones, Jill Hadley, Cheryl Cairns, Rob Denton, Joe Garreffa, Alison McAllister, Joe Radice, Sue Rosenthal, Carol Ward, Diana Kelvin, Heather Talbot, Antoaneta Barbulescu.
This was the first opportunity many staff had to meet colleagues from other campuses and programs since the TAFESA Adelaide North amalgamation. It was also an opportunity to talk about teaching and learning. In three hours, participants generated a wealth of ideas and suggestions for implementing innovation in teaching and learning. As one participant commented:

Who would have thought that so much could have been generated in such a short time?

The case study highlighted that it was a very effective and expedient process for collaboratively generating content around a core issue, in this case developing implementation strategies to activate a component of the strategic plan. A very rich picture of excellent practice and a way to move forward emerged.

However, the reality is that this case study was an experimental event. It addressed only the first two stages of the AI cycle – Discover (uncovering and appreciating moments of excellence when people experience the best of what is working well) and Dream (envisioning the organisation as the best it can be). The Design (designing an implementation strategy) and Destiny (implementing and monitoring the changes) phases are perhaps the most demanding and would take a concerted commitment to ground the ‘dreams’ into reality.

However, the way the appreciative questions are linked to specific actions lends itself to smaller and local implementation strategies. The idea of seeking input on individual actions in contexts like work group and management meetings is a possibility currently being explored. What this case study highlights is that a process such as Appreciative Inquiry is an engaging and expedient process for tapping into the expertise that exists within an Institute.

Lessons learned

Align strategically: This case study highlighted two key issues. The first is that AI has potential. The AI process can easily be linked to salient topics, is participatory, engages and connects people and can generate rich data. There is no doubt that an orientation to strengths highlighted the expertise, goodwill and good practices within the Institute. People are willing to tell their stories and share their successes. Many commented on this being a refreshing and re-energising opportunity.

The second is having processes in place to effectively utilise and amplify what has emerged. This would most likely be addressed if the complete AI cycle was implemented as the Design and Destiny phases serve to analyse and synthesise the data and convert it into an action. This, however, would need to be underpinned by a commitment to the process and the outcome so that effort put into the process advanced professional development initiatives.

Focus on the concept not the strategy: One of the key lessons learned was to emphasise the underpinning concept rather than to promote a particular strategy. This way, the strength based concept can be reinforced with a number of strategies rather than reliance on ‘a strategy’.

This lesson emerged almost by default. The raw data for this case study was prolific. It was to be presented to an educational leadership forum, which comprised over 40 Institute educational and corporate managers. The preparation advice was that “no-one would read that stuff, so make better sense of it”. As the focus of the presentation was supporting teaching and learning rather than the research itself, another strength based strategy was used.

Three questions in the AI template related specifically to effective professional development experiences. The responses to these questions translated very neatly into Ryan and Deci’s (2000) workplace motivation framework based on their Self-Determination Theory. The responses were reworked to fit into this framework, which was then presented to the forum as Designing a motivating learning environment for TAFESA Adelaide North. This is described in Case Study 2.
The workplace motivation framework received excellent feedback as it was clear, concise, practical, usable, ‘made sense’, highlighted priorities identified by staff and was directly aligned to the strategic plan.

The lesson learned is that translation of data into a suitable format is just as important as the data itself.

**Start with where the opportunity presents and invest in that:** The findings were sent out to all participants. As a result, the Principal Lecturer in the Hotel Operations and Management work team, who has a professional development responsibility, immediately saw the potential of a workplace motivation framework for planning professional development in her context. The professional development plan for her work team was reworked with a strength based emphasis using the motivation framework.

A follow-up meeting, including an advanced skills lecturer who also has responsibilities for professional development and the educational manager advanced the process and the following is planned for implementation in Semester 2, 2006:

1. The professional development program will have the theme of ‘Engagement’. This will address an identified priority of more effectively engaging “Generation Y” learners.

2. The aim is to develop a range of strategies that address each of the three components of intrinsic motivation – competence (capability and capacity), autonomy and relatedness.

3. The focus for the educational manager will be on enabling a ‘rich learning environment’ to facilitate learning. This will include building in a common half-day non-teaching time for professional development activities and developing conversation spaces to share expertise and have input from colleagues. This will initially be guided by the World Café model.

4. The Principal Lecturer from the Institute’s Innovations in Teaching and Learning Unit will spend one day a week with the team during Semester 1 to support the design of the program. This will be documented as a case study.

5. The aim is for this to be an open process where interested people from across the Institute are invited to participate and contribute so a cross-program network builds across the Institute.

6. The outcome will be the development of a transferable professional development program on the theme of ‘Engagement’ which has been informed by key findings from the research project and which can be adapted by other work teams in the Institute.

**Respond to the unexpected:** One of the unexpected outcomes was a keen interest expressed by management lecturers in obtaining the presentation on strength based models for use in their own teaching context. To this end, the Research Project Team will develop a presentation pack for ‘on use’ as a value adding service and a way to disseminate the key concepts. The lesson is to be open to opportunities however they present.

**Summary**

The case study demonstrated that a strength based orientation and strength based strategies like Appreciative Inquiry had merit. To facilitate the amplification of this approach:

- it needs to be aligned strategically
- the focus should be on emphasising the strength based concept on which a strategy is built
- start where an opportunity presents itself, and
- be prepared for the unexpected.
Case Study 2: Capability development from a work motivation framework – TAFESA Adelaide North

In the first case study, 36 TAFESA Adelaide North staff participated in one of two half-day workshops and used an Appreciative Inquiry process to generate an implementation strategy for Key Result Area 1 of the TAFESA Adelaide North Strategic Plan – Innovation in Teaching and Learning.

Case study 2 takes another tack. It uses the responses to three questions from the Appreciative Inquiry process specifically related to professional development, and places them within a work motivation framework. Specifically, it uses the research on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and work motivation by Deci and Ryan and applies the core principles of SDT to structure staff responses to the following questions:

- What are the most effective professional development opportunities you have experienced as an employee in any context? What made them effective in developing your capability?
- What has been the most challenging and exciting professional development opportunity you have experienced? What made it challenging and exciting? How did you benefit? How did your clients benefit?
- Describe one thing TAFE SA Adelaide North could do or should do more of to build good learning opportunities and strengthen the learning spirit of the whole organisation.

The rationale behind this approach is that motivation is the energy that catalyses behaviour. Therefore, if the focus for professional development shifts from the conventional approach of providing a suite of activities, to that of creating an environment that facilitates intrinsic motivation, there will be a flow-on effect that benefits the individual, the Institute and the clients they serve.

The three key components of motivation

Here is the essence of Self-Determination Theory: if a person is to feel intrinsically motivated (an internally driven desire to be engaged) three basic psychological needs must be met – the need for competence, autonomy and relatedness.

- **Competence**: is the need to perceive yourself as being successful in accomplishing a task or activity. There are two components to competence:
  - Capability – having the knowledge and skills to perform and accomplish the goal or task.
  - Capacity – having the tools, time and resources to use your capabilities effectively.
- **Autonomy**: involves acting with a sense of volition (will and determination) and having the experience of choice and control. The source of this control comes from within the personal (intrinsic) rather than any external forces. These choices are not a “free for all” but within the reality of the work environment and the boundaries necessary for team and organisational success.
- **Relatedness**: is the need for connection with others and having a sense of purpose and meaning in the work being done.

4 [http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/](http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/)
From a self-determination perspective, these three components are the essential ingredients for optimal performance. Research by Gagne and Deci (2005)\(^5\) indicates that:

Work climates that promote satisfaction of these three basic psychological needs will enhance employees’ intrinsic motivation ... and this will in turn yield the important work outcomes of: 1) persistence and maintained behaviour change; 2) effective performance, particularly on tasks requiring creativity, cognitive flexibility and conceptual understanding; 3) job satisfaction; 4) positive work-related attitudes; 5) organizational citizenship behaviours; and 6) psychological adjustment and well-being (p.337).

When the TAFESA Adelaide North staff responses to the three key questions on effective professional development experiences were placed into a **workforce motivation** framework, there were clear indications that there was a good fit between what staff regarded as effective, challenging and exciting and the three core components of intrinsic motivation. **Work motivation** may therefore be an effective framework to consider for broadening the focus of professional development by more purposefully creating and nurturing a work environment that supports the development of competence, autonomy and relatedness.

A sample of staff responses for Key Result Area 1 (Innovation in Teaching and Learning) within a work motivation framework is provided below:

**1. Motivation components: Competence**

**Capability:** Knowledge and skills to accomplish a goal

**What makes PD effective, exciting and challenging:**
- Relevant to the job which is important for personal success
- Immediate
- Challenged my knowledge
- Stimulated my thinking
- Provided new perspectives and solutions
- A fresh approach
- Immersive experience
- Broadened my mind and knowledge

**What we want in 2006:**
- More effective sharing of knowledge, skills and resources
- Increased collaboration
- Increased networking opportunities
- Using technology more effectively

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## How we could do it:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coordinate our efforts</th>
<th>Specifications to make it happen:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>so we know what is going on and can plan so we avoid duplication</strong></td>
<td><strong>Calendar of events</strong></td>
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### Showcases
- exchange ideas and resources and share others’ successes
- workshops to build knowledge and skills

### Thematic approach to PD
- to encourage cross discipline and cross role participation
- Helps spread impact with a passionate core
- Themes are generated by staff and become the focus for PD

### Use technology for meetings and networking events
- CENTRA and other virtual classroom tools
- Community of Practice – at local level then more widely

### Community of Practice
- share resources, case studies, practices, good news
- have both local and interstate membership
- Build in some common Institute times for networking
- Identify and utilise existing knowledge and skills and having a process to be able to pass those on to peers

### Practical methodologies
- reintroduce a NELMIC type program

### Shadowing
- visit other campuses and programs to find out what your colleagues do in related programs or with similar themes.
- Spend time in other programs

### Coaching
- share expertise so it can be transferred to other contexts

### Industry experience
- 3-6 month secondments
- Industry exchanges

### Action learning
- apply for national funding and work collaboratively (LearnScope, Re-Framing the Future)

### Seconmdents to national projects
- recognise the knowledge and skills and the products that result

### Self-directed learning
- individual projects

### Research and development
- Time to identify innovative practices and implement them
- Take more interest in national research and how it can inform us.

## Specifications to make it happen:

### Calendar of events
- Two teaching and learning showcases a year

### Themes:
- Flexible assessment practices
- Setting up networks for sharing and collaboration
- Innovation that made a difference
- Teaching methodologies
- Appreciative Instructional design

### Process:
- Facilitated conversations
- Coaching – for transfer to other contexts
- Skills workshops

### Training in use of technologies
- Use CENTRA for meetings and networking events as well as teaching.
- More PD in use of various media

### Establish networks
- Set up e-network for resource and ideas sharing. Plumbing school and C& J have excellent e-networking and resource sharing models

### Methodology shorts
- series of 1-2 hours practical sessions focused on ‘learn today, use tomorrow’
- Flexibitions – lunchtime demos – Taste of Technology

### Set up coaching program
- methodology champions as coaches
- use expertise within TAN
- facilitate a coaching network to support the champions

### Profile the benefits of participation in national projects
2. **Motivation components:** Competence

**Capacity:** Time, tools, resources to enable the capability

**What makes PD effective:**
- Tools available to implement back into the workplace
- Opportunity to report back on progress
- Organisation was very supportive of new ways
- We had organisational support
- There was ongoing review of the process
- Better ways of providing faster and more efficient services

**What we want in 2006:**
- More responsive support services
- Provide time to research, reflect and network
- More commitment to PD from managers

**How we could do it:**
- Better internal customer service orientation
- Time out suggestions
- Have 10% downtime built in
- Ensure non contact is just that
- Review current lecturing roles
- Allow time for quality resource development

3. **Motivation components:** Autonomy

**What makes PD effective:**
- Voluntary – it was encouraged rather than enforced
- Learning through a combination of doing, talking, reflecting, trusting.
- A sense of ownership from giving it a go rather than being told what to do
- Took risks to test ideas
- A personal commitment to learn rather than a ‘thou shalt’
- A desire to pass on skills
- Having options to how you learn

**What we want in 2006:**
- More choice in how we do things
- More independence
- Negotiate rather than dictate

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| **Design your own learning program**
- Being responsible for coming up with your own PD program that matches your style and needs and also aligns to achieving Institute goals
- recognition of informal PD
- could include personal development if can demonstrate impact on work |
| Set up a volunteer group to develop a “DIY” learning guidelines and examples. |
4. Motivation components: Relatedness

What makes PD effective:
- Based on trusting relationships
- Working in a professional group
- Fun
- Developed me as a whole person.
- Focused on developing expertise in building personal and professional relationships.
- Safe environment – felt comfortable to be honest and articulate challenges

What we want in 2006:
- Improved work climate
- Better morale
- Rewards and recognition
- Live the espoused values

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<td><strong>More opportunities to participate in decision making</strong></td>
<td><strong>Co-design a rewards and recognition system</strong></td>
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<td>Rewards and Recognition Schemes</td>
<td>• Devise reward and recognition systems that address the sharing and successful utilisation of knowledge, skills and experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Identifying existing knowledge and skills and use them more effectively</td>
<td>• Upside down reward systems (creative swiping – transfer model)</td>
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<td>• Rewarding innovators by giving them opportunities to promote their ideas and coach others.</td>
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<td>• Rewarding the quiet achievements</td>
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<td>• Profiling top class practices publicly</td>
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<td>Life-based learning portfolios</td>
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<td>• Consider life skills in job applications</td>
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<td>• Add a life-based question to performance management template</td>
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<td>• Promote life-based learning impact</td>
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<td>Social Events</td>
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<td>Wellbeing events</td>
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<td>Networking opportunities</td>
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<td>• both horizontal and vertical</td>
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<td>• external and internal</td>
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<td>Positive performance appraisals</td>
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<td>Introduce Appreciative Performance appraisals as an option</td>
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Case Study 3: The Central Coast Community Congress – using a strength based approach in regional community development

Background

This case study is about how a change in the focus of community development work at a regional level – from a needs or deficit focus to an asset or strength focus – has begun to change both the culture and the outcomes of this work in local communities.

It encompasses three major themes:

1. Celebration
2. Co-operation, and
3. Learning.

The context is the Central Coast of New South Wales, a region that has experienced rapid urban expansion and population growth over the past two decades. This is a region people move to in search of affordable housing near the beach. Then they spend most of their waking hours commuting to and from Sydney for work. Like many regions on the coast of Australia and not too far from a capital city, the Central Coast is a place that attracts people who are looking for a place to bring up young children, and people who are looking for a place to retire to. Both ends of the demographic spectrum are over-represented, and infrastructure and services have struggled to meet demand.

The Central Coast is also a place where community-building work has been done for most of that time, and where a shift has occurred over the past 5 years in the way community builders, both professional community development workers and local community members, are doing that work.

Notions of community and community development have played an important part in social planning and policy in the region. Questions such as “How do new residents in an area develop and experience a sense of belonging?”, “What happens to older, smaller communities in the face of rapid expansion?”, “How does community infrastructure (such as neighbourhood centres) contribute to community identity and local networks?”, have been common themes in local and regional planning processes (see Gosford City Community Plan 2002, Wyong Shire Community Plan 2002, Shaping the Central Coast 1999).

The shift to a strengths based approach

If you had listened to the conversations that were taking place amongst community workers and community builders on the Central Coast of New South Wales five years ago, and then were to listen again now, you would hear some very different ideas about how to build strong communities, who should be involved, and what a strong and healthy community looks like.

Five years ago much of the conversation followed the themes of many rapidly growing urban fringe and regional areas in Australia. An alarming array of statistical and anecdotal information was discussed regularly: it described high child notification rates, high unemployment, record youth suicide, economically disadvantaged communities, low levels of education, social isolation, family and community breakdown.

The objectives of these discussions were, first, to convince government at all levels to allocate more resources to the Central Coast because the need was so high, and second, following on from this, to develop more services to address the needs that had been so clearly articulated.
People on the Central Coast were experts in telling and retelling the story of crisis, of unmet need, of social and economic deficit. It is a story that has a substantial body of evidence to justify its telling. Whether it was an interview with the Mayor on a local radio station, a community meeting, a newspaper article, a local or state government strategic planning process, or a chat over a beer down at the club, the themes were the same. The Coast is in trouble. Why won’t anyone listen?

About five years ago, a group of people who both lived and worked on the Central Coast began a conversation about this story.

This was a group of people who worked in human services, either for government agencies or in the community sector. As a result, they were often viewed as important advocates and problem-solvers for the Central Coast. The discussion took place at an interagency meeting and was in many ways accidental. Its content and results were pivotal.

This group of people had become increasingly frustrated about what they felt was the ineffectiveness of their work, and of the work of the human services sector on the Central Coast in general. They had noticed a number of things that concerned them deeply:

1. In spite of the increasingly clear and evidence-based articulation of the problems and disadvantage experienced by communities on the Central Coast, the level of resources coming to the region had not increased in any significant way.

2. The retelling of the story of social need on the Central Coast had had some unintended consequences for both local service providers and the communities they served. A culture of secrecy and competition had developed between local human service providers on the Central Coast. As funding was limited, often piecemeal and/or short term, organisations had become desperate to gain their share of the small pie. In this environment, co-operation between organisations was almost unheard of. Just as advocates for the Central Coast were competing fiercely to gain ‘most disadvantaged in the State’ status for the region, local service providers were competing to establish their particular locality or target group as the ‘most needy’. In the communities where these service providers worked, individuals, families and groups were becoming increasingly narrowly defined as targeted client groups dependent on the service system to get by.

3. The sustained and exclusive focus in their work on problems, crises and deficits had not assisted them or the people they were working with to solve those problems/crises/deficits in any substantial or self-sustaining way.

4. The way people were working and living on the Central Coast, waiting for the magic pudding of funding to arrive from Sydney or Canberra before they could act, had resulted in both workers and communities giving away their power to improve life on the Central Coast.

Overall, there was agreement amongst the group that what they had been doing so far wasn’t really working and that they wanted to try something new. They were an ambitious group and agreed that they also wanted to work towards a culture change on the Central Coast, a culture change that could be felt from grassroots voluntary community groups through to State and Federal government departments.

The conversation took a turn to action. The group decided to concentrate on four themes and to model a new way of working themselves as the starting point. The group wanted to have an impact both with local communities and at a regional level.

The themes were co-operation, learning from each other, celebrating good community building stories on the Central Coast and encouraging local communities to work with all of their members in order to get stronger. The group called their project The Central Coast Community Congress.
This conversation has resulted in a quiet revolution getting underway. The aim now is to change the social policy and practice framework in that region from the ground up.

The Congress Working Party developed two major areas of activity:

1. A conference that takes place every two years as a catalyst for learning, celebration and reflection on the strengths based community development work taking place in the region and further afield. This conference is designed to be affordable for everyone and combines the input of keynote speakers with workshops and presentations from local community builders and projects.

2. The development of resources and training to help groups who want to put this approach to the test in their own communities. The Congress Working Party has developed a Tool Kit for local communities that takes them through the steps that will let them identify and mobilise local assets and strengths to improve community life. There has also been training for service providers and community members on strengths based community development, and a website is being developed as a further resource for those interested in this work.

The first Congress conference, held in 2002, attracted over 200 people; the second saw the numbers swell to over 300. Congress 2006 continues this work, and hopes to again bring people together to learn and to take that learning back to their communities.

The Tool Kit will be reviewed in 2006 and new resources developed.

**What a strengths based approach means in this context**

In this context, a strengths based approach means paying attention to what is working in local communities and creating opportunities for community members and community development workers to identify and mobilise local strengths and assets to work on the things that are priorities for that community.

Through the Central Coast Community Congresses, community groups have had an opportunity to come together, showcase the way local strengths were being used for improving community life, and learn about using a strengths based approach in a range of different contexts.

**Benefits and challenges**

**Benefits**

The benefits of this project have been:

- Increased co-operation amongst people (paid and unpaid) doing community development work on the Central Coast.
- Creating a culture of learning for everyone interested in community development in the region.
- Having an opportunity to develop leadership in communities as community members drive local projects and present those projects at the Congresses.
- Discovering untapped assets on the Central Coast, both regional and local, and the mobilisation of these assets to attract more resources to community projects. These included everything from local people renovating and re-energising a neglected hall to an Aboriginal group developing a community garden in partnership with the local school, to the development of a festival that has expanded economic, social and cultural activities in a suburban community.
- Developing practical ways in which local people can work towards a community where all members are valued.
Challenges

The major challenges have been:

- Developing a sustainable resource base for the Congress to continue its work. This has been established to some degree, with both Gosford and Wyong Councils committing ongoing funds, but further work needs to be done.
- Developing a broad-based structure for the management of the Congress into the future. As the process is still evolving, this remains in development. The Congress currently has no formal structure, only a working party that co-ordinates the project. This has been a strength to date, but it needs to be re-examined over time.
- Shifting the mindset from needs to strengths: it has been, and continues to be, a slow process. Misunderstandings about the strengths based approach (primarily that it pretends disadvantage does not occur or that problems don’t exist) remain, and discussions about tackling problems in a different way, not ignoring them, will continue.

Outcomes

The concrete outcomes for the project have been:

- The establishment of a unique biennial event that attracts hundreds of people to learn about and celebrate community-building activities.
- The development of tools and resources for communities wanting to do some of this work for themselves.
- A groundswell of activity in a number of Central Coast communities who have put these ideas into action at a local level. Strengths based community development projects are currently taking place in at least nine different communities across Gosford and Wyong. These projects are driven by partnerships between local people, service providers and businesses, with the aim of building communities from the inside out.
- A change in the language and approach of many human service providers, from seeing communities as filled with need to seeing them as filled with assets.
- Reports from a range of communities about increased participation in local activities by a more diverse group of people (many of whom had previously not participated in any community activity), the development of skills and enterprises by community members, and stronger relationships between community members and other stakeholders in the community (businesses and service providers).

The future

The Central Coast Community Congress is now seven years old, with three large events, resources and training under its belt. The future for this project is to develop a broader membership for the Working Party, expand the training work further, and look at creating more opportunities for communities to share ideas and work together from a strengths-based approach.

The development of the Congress website, www.communitycongress.org, as a place for discussion, information and showcasing projects is one arm that will develop further. Another is support for a range of local projects that have developed between Congresses.

For more information visit www.communitycongress.org
Case Study 4: Deniliquin – learning ecology in action

Introduction

This case study draws on the experience and knowledge through a partnership between Riverina Institute of TAFE NSW and the Wamba Wamba Indigenous Community in Deniliquin in southern NSW. The process of relationship development and community growth links to the concepts of learning ecologies and life based learning in the research project Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era. In preparing this case study it is important to acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional lands of the Wamba Wamba and Perrapa Perrapa nations and that we give respect and acknowledgement to elders of those communities, both past and present.

When considering learning in the Knowledge Era and the concept of learning ecologies we can begin to see a connection to traditional community learning. While we can appreciate the individual, their experience and connections, this case study indicates that we need to also appreciate the community in which they belong. Increasingly we have identified the effectiveness of shared stories and experiences that are constantly reinforced within the community. The need to retell these stories is a primary method of maintaining connection and, in this case, a continuation of thousands of years of oral tradition.

Working with Indigenous learners and following the pathway taken in this case study reveal that these oral traditions, their connection to country and stories, have been a constant part of the process.

During the course of this project three main principles have been identified:

• **Community Control** – this relates to the process of negotiating course content and delivery with the community involved in the project. It is more than consultation and needs to remain flexible in response to changing conditions. Community control also relates to the selection of appropriate teachers and facilitators who must also meet TAFE requirements, i.e. AQTF, curriculum and teacher qualification requirements.

• **Communal learning** – where the learning environment encourages group learning and supports and welcomes the involvement of all members of the Indigenous community.

• **Cultural responsibility** – working with the Indigenous community requires the learning environment to complement and accommodate cultural responsibilities.

Context

This Project commenced in late 2001 and has developed through a number of stages. Key events are presented in a table at the end of this case study. The major partners in this project are:

• the local Indigenous community who as well as participating in the project also provide guidance and advice on the direction and purpose of the work

• the NSW Department of Natural Resources through the Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer who saw the need to increase the capacity of the community to be engaged in natural resource management

• TAFE NSW Riverina Institute, which provided the learning environment as well as committed to becoming involved in the outcomes, and

• Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre and Deniliquin Local Aboriginal Land Council which provided a forum for community issues and endorsement for the project.
There are a number of important points that are worth highlighting:

1. The local Indigenous community initiated this project.
2. The learning institution provided the means to explore new learning and teaching strategies.
3. Continuation of the project relied on the level of trust and respect between the community and the learning institution.
4. Recognition of the project, and the individuals involved, provided important encouragement.

Recognising the role individuals have played in this project, it is also important to recognise that the development of this project occurred within the context of a specific community. While these principles are transferable it is important to consider the following if planning something similar:

- Identify key individuals within a community to develop the outcomes – these may be people not currently engaged in the education sector or in community development but who do have fundamental connections to the relevant community.
- Identify key personnel within the learning institution that can commit the time necessary to build the required trust and respect needed to sustain the process.
- Accept that the process may take considerable time and investment.
- Consider the starting point – different communities have different learning requirements however to develop a culturally appropriate learning process the learning institution must enter into negotiations with the relevant community.

Our Process of Learning – A learning ecology in action

This Case Study provides an opportunity to reflect on how the process developed and the impact this has had on both the learning environment and the community. From a perceived need to a continuing momentum of cultural learning we have embarked on a learning journey that has an important role to play in the years to come.

When reflecting on the process we are able to identify some basic principles. While they are not new concepts they are rarely identified in the development period. One of these is cultural control. This concept has been explored by Kral and Falk in their study of literacy in Indigenous communities. They state that:

...most training does not fit into the meaning and purpose of community life. The connection between education, vocational education and training and employment pathways is not linked to any future planning process that takes account of community aims and aspirations...the community believes that for education to be successful and to lead to sustainable outcomes, it must be integrated into the social and cultural framework of the community, and must include community goals and aspirations...relationships through the kinship system are a crucial, cohesive element in an unchanging authority structure determined by Aboriginal law...\(^6\)

This also acknowledges that the learning is taking place within the whole community — the information gathering in the institution is then brought to the families of the students. When this happens we can be assured that what is occurring is both purposeful and meaningful and connected to community aspirations.

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6 Ingle Kral and Ian Falk – What is all that learning for? Indigenous adult English literacy practices, training, community capacity and health, NCVER June 2004
Clear examples of this include the initial work around language, which has resulted in an increase in the use of Wamba Wamba words by the children in the community and the request to develop local curriculum material for the schools in the area.

The second major principle is of communal learning – where the learning environment encourages group learning and support and welcomes the involvement of members of the Indigenous community. This requires the development of flexible teaching strategies that can satisfy the increasingly regulated assessment process while accepting the need for members of the community to be involved in the courses at different levels and at different times. This becomes increasingly difficult when involving teaching staff from other sections who have timetable constraints. It remains crucial that there be a linking of subject areas. This also results in some units taking longer than their nominal hours to work through. By utilising the role of facilitator to coordinate and track across units, continuity can be maintained throughout the project.

A further consideration is the implications of the relationships between students. Generally this project has involved members of the same family group. This results in learning continuing over breaks and outside class times as well as reaching other members of the families. The teacher then needs to accommodate the unpredictable nature of these events, work within the circumstances that develop and be able to interact with the extended families of the enrolled students.

The third major principle is cultural responsibility. Working with the Indigenous community requires the learning environment to complement and accommodate cultural responsibilities. This includes assisting in dealing with sorry business (associated with a death in the community), attending and being involved in community meetings, providing a venue for cultural activities (meetings, visits etc) and realising that the need to deal with cultural business takes precedence over evidence collection to satisfy unit assessment. An important cultural event concerned with the return of stolen human remains occurred during 2005. It was accepted without question that this event would take precedence over all other business.
Drawing on the experiences of a range of people associated with this project we believe that these three principles are generally applicable to community development programs involving Indigenous communities. It must be stressed that individual members of the community have, and do, work within the existing learning structures very successfully, although they will, from time to time, feel the conflict between community business and the learning environment.

Accommodating these aspects into the learning environment requires a high degree of flexibility and acknowledgement of how interconnected the learning is to the reality of life. There has been a need to incorporate a range of subjects within the course structures to allow an holistic and responsive approach that cannot be predetermined. There have been a number of occasions where classes have taken a completely different direction than that prescribed in a lesson plan. The choice is whether to stop this natural momentum or follow it through while also connecting the activity to learning outcomes.

Not all teachers can work in this unpredictable environment. This is particularly the case when so many teachers are part-time and have very little flexibility. It has worked for our project due to the role of the course facilitator who can track the progress of every student and develop adaptive techniques to achieve required results. As well as complying with TAFE requirements, the selection of the facilitator should also be undertaken in line with local cultural protocols.

We need to be able to react not only to community responsibilities but also to emerging issues in government policy and programs. There have been many occasions where we have attended meetings as a group and there have been equally as many times when issues have been brought to us for consideration. In addition we must be aware of the individual’s requirements for support and encouragement as they deal with family and community responsibilities and educational challenges.
### Key components of the project

1. Incorporate cultural control, community learning and cultural business into the learning and teaching environment.

2. Develop appropriate teaching styles to reflect local conditions – required acceptance of (and trust in) the community’s role in selecting facilitators.

3. Integrate applications into the learning environment – the establishment of Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre as a result of the learning process indicates a high correlation between theory and application.

4. Establish and maintain appropriate organisational support. The process requires large time and resource commitments from a range of agencies. It is vital that these same agencies then integrate the outcomes into their business.

5. Provide multiple pathways, entry and exit points – teaching in a life based learning process requires acceptance of members of the community joining the learning process at different times. It is important to develop strategies to enhance the learning environment for all participants.

6. Increasing engagement of teaching staff through professional development and then utilising those skills in the learning environment. In the Nyaka Aboriginal Cultural Education package that was delivered to 16 members of TAFE NSW, Riverina Institute indicates the development of the relationship and the merging of the teacher/learner roles.

7. Trust and support local communities to identify and develop local strategies and pathways – each community has a different history and different responses. In the early stages of the program the process of learning was through skill development and facilitated through relevant cultural activities. This could not have worked without the involvement of the students and the community in the design of the program.

8. The process of learning can be repetitive. So can some of the content, however it is important to repeat the process of working within the cultural and historical context of the community. In addition mechanisms for learning between professionals and communities need to be further developed to ensure that the process is both active and alive.

9. Selection of appropriate staff – selection of teachers and facilitators is a crucial part of the process and must take into consideration the connection with the relevant community.

10. Recognition through the learning institution, the community and through the professional network. The Deniliquin program has resulted in recognition on a number of levels.

   (i) One student named Campus Student of the Year 2005
   (ii) Program teacher awarded an Excellence in Teaching Award 2005
   (iii) Current project receiving a Bronze Award in the 2005 NSW Premier’s Public Sector Awards
   (iv) NSW Department of Natural Resources staff recognition certificate

### Personal and Professional growth

The development during the past four years has opened up many opportunities for individual members of the community and the community as a whole. These include:

- **Greater interaction with government agencies** demonstrated by the development of the Werkitya Kapal Deniliquin Council Indigenous Advisory Committee, membership of the Murray and Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations group, membership of Deniliquin Council Tourism Advisory Committee, membership of NSW Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre and involvement in Reconciliation activities.
• **Relationships with the learning and education sector** – developed through the provision of a cultural education package to local TAFE NSW – Riverina Institute staff (Nyaka) and participation in *Werkityap Kuli* – LearnScope, part of the Australian Flexible Learning Framework. The LearnScope process began with the emphasis on teaching in rural and remote communities. With the increasing number of teachers being involved in working with Indigenous learners it quickly became apparent that there was great interest in learning more about the local Indigenous culture. As the need for more teachers to become involved in the process grew, so too did the need to provide some form of cultural awareness. This need was reflected when the TAFE NSW Riverina Institute placed Aboriginal education as number 1 on their business plan and funded the development and implementation of a local cultural education package.

• **Development of local cultural education program** – developed and delivered by members of the local Wamba Wamba community including the students enrolled at the Deniliquin TAFE Campus. The result was a powerful experience for the participants and the community that has allowed the development of relationships outside of the educational institution. It should also be acknowledged that some of the material presented also was highly emotional and at times confronting. As a result there has been a greater understanding between the Indigenous students, community and TAFE staff.

• **Willingness of professional staff to be involved** – the staff who benefited most from the professional development were those that could see how they could incorporate flexible and open learning into their professional environment. Those who did not see this connection found it more challenging to adapt their own teaching styles to the program.

There has also been an increase in the involvement of TAFE staff at the local Wamba Wamba Cultural Week held each year, the Nyerna Reconciliation Group and in the Werkitya Kalpal Deniliquin Council Indigenous Advisory Committee. It will be important that this involvement continues to occur so that the Institute can continue to assist the community to achieve their aspirations from generation to generation.

• **Traditional form of education** – the realisation that this was not about doing one course or another but that what we are really involved in is **preparing the coming generation to take their place in fulfilling cultural responsibilities**. Although there have been many changes in technology, lifestyles and landscapes there remains a fundamental connection to cultural identity. This is maintained through kinship, stories, and cultural practices that do not belong to an individual but rather to the whole community.

**Relationship between the community and the learning environment**

Three principles were identified in the Case Study – **cultural control, communal learning** and **cultural business**. For this program to succeed, it was vital that the learning environment acknowledged these principles. During the initial stages of this project the principles were largely unidentified. While there was a continual desire for the Institute to offer courses for what the community wanted there was little conception of what this meant. Ultimately the Institute was required to trust that what was being said was what was meant and that the method for achieving this was identified.

It was also important to realise that TAFE was the vehicle to work with, not the controller of the program. In the early stages this literally meant pulling a range of modules together and allowing the community to work through the identity strands. The Institute also had to trust the selection of the facilitator. This was a key component of the project. The facilitator was required to match the learning to the TAFE system, co-ordinate the learning activities and link with supporting agencies and the Aboriginal community. At almost the same time the qualifications needed to work in NSW TAFE were changed requiring a Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment. This effectively precluded members of the local
Aboriginal community from being employed by TAFE. The facilitator or course coordinator was nominated by the Indigenous community and was appointed in late 2001. They later obtained the Certificate IV in Workplace Training and Assessment and later (in 2004) applied for and won the position through the TAFE recruitment process.

The selection of appropriate teachers for a project of this nature requires a consideration of additional qualities including connection to the local community, commitment and capacity to facilitate the program and endorsements by the local Indigenous community.

**Role of facilitator**

One of the major components of this project is the role of the facilitator to ensure that the requirements of communal learning and cultural responsibility are maintained. This role cannot be undertaken by the program staff but must be filled by qualified and approved members of the community. The selection of the facilitator must take into consideration their connection to the relevant community, their ability and their commitment to be fully involved in a particular project.

**Recognition**

Ongoing recognition of achievements allows also for the raising of confidence in members of the community engaged in study. This has resulted in opportunities for employment in a range of areas (particularly education). Prior to this project there was little expectation that employment was possible. Recently there is a growing optimism that new employment options will be available.

Increasingly the learning setting has become part of cultural business and therefore involvement in community issues. A long-term presence of the Indigenous class on the local campus created the need for a semi-permanent classroom. To develop this relationship further a more permanent Indigenous learning centre will be required to ensure continued and progressive interaction with the Indigenous community.

**Challenges**

**Requirement for local investment in job creation**

Many of the participants combine their study with the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP).

This combination of study and CDEP has varying impacts. Some participants expect no more than these combinations but rely on the provision of courses to continue. Others view the combination as a necessary part of the process. Indeed students that have moved from study to employment often continue to combine paid employment with CDEP. This has the result of dependency on government programs and needs to be moved into full paid employment as quickly as possible.

While economics play a large part in sustaining community activities, simply creating more employment opportunities in existing businesses does not recognise the impact of historical events, particularly in rural areas.
**Need for independent funding for employment in cultural business**

This case study recognises the role of cultural business as one of the three main components. While this can be accommodated during in the learning environment, and in fact enhances the learning process, there are few resources available to generate sufficient income to support this involvement outside the learning area.

It will be a challenge for the wider community to recognise that cultural business plays a critical role in society and must be accommodated by economic systems.

**Exploring new opportunities and learning pathways**

If the learning environment becomes part of the cultural landscape, and therefore part of the lives of the community, many more opportunities could by explored. During 2005 this has included Digital Storytelling and cultural education programs.

There is however an immediate challenge ahead as we broaden the application of the project model to explore new pathways. While it is important to allow more members of the community to be involved in these processes, we must also ensure that existing students have an opportunity to follow new pathways. Currently members of the existing group are considering areas in child welfare, business studies and tourism. It will be up to the learning institutions to support these new directions while also providing an appropriate learning environment.

**Context**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>What took place</th>
<th>Connection to the learning ecology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Appointment of Aboriginal Natural Resource Officer within the Department of Conservation and Land Management employed to increase the engagement of Aboriginal community in natural resource management.</td>
<td>Identified the need to build Indigenous community involvement in environmental issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Members of the Deniliquin Aboriginal Community were enrolled in Certificates in Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Practices</td>
<td>While providing many opportunities for the community, this course was near completion and new pathways were required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher teaching qualifications were required by TAFE.</td>
<td>Restriction of using community as teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Family Kinship and Identity and Aboriginal Cultural Values.</td>
<td>These modules were also part of mainstream learning and were often challenging when put into a local context. The response to these units from the students and their families was immediate. <em>They wanted to do more but wanted it to be controlled by the local community.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Agreement with the TAFE NSW Riverina Institute Deniliquin Head of Campus.</td>
<td>Course commenced that became a challenge to both the Institution and the community as a whole. The nature of the material being researched had the potential to cause some anxiety and also reveal more about the local history of the area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge from the local council to mount an historic photo exhibition to coincide with Reconciliation Week. At the same time opportunities for obtaining resources from sources in Canberra and Sydney would result in several field trips that required the involvement of the campus administration.</td>
<td>All students enrolled in the course participated in this exhibition bringing in family photos that had remained unseen for decades. This was the beginning of a partnership between the Aboriginal community, TAFE NSW, Riverina Institute and Government agencies that would soon become a characteristic of the courses offered in Deniliquin.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Context (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>What took place</th>
<th>Connection to the learning ecology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Aboriginal Coordinator position filled. Additional units were offered in basic computing and horticulture. Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre Aboriginal Corporation awarded a major contract to increase the capacity of Aboriginal people in environmental, heritage and natural resource management project, from the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs</td>
<td>Identification of the Site Conservation course Involvement of other TAFE teachers. This organisation has a major role in managing the collected resources, guiding the training process and developing new projects. This began the process of combining different cultural elements – having strengthened the knowledge of local identity we began to explore the range of cultural characteristics including local site types, bush food and medicine plants and their connection to today’s society. Local language incorporated into learning strategy and resulted in increased usage in the community and increased recognition of local culture. Combined in partnership with Forests NSW and NSW Department of Natural Resources in an Environmental Trust funded project in the North Deniliquin State Forest. This partnership was recently recognised with a Bronze Award at the 2005 NSW Premier’s Public Sector Awards. This project will focus on the Wamba Wamba community in Deniliquin and the Mutti Mutti community in Balranald using the Asset Based Community Development Model.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003/04</td>
<td>Certificate II and III in Aboriginal Site Conservation to develop skills in site identification and management Role of language and its position in cultural knowledge</td>
<td>As part of this process we were involved in a cultural heritage assessment of a local burial site which included at least two small children. This was a tremendously emotional experience that brought the connection between the past and the present into perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005/6</td>
<td>Certificate III and IV Conservation and Land Management (Indigenous Land Management)</td>
<td>Combined in partnership with Forests NSW and NSW Department of Natural Resources in an Environmental Trust funded project in the North Deniliquin State Forest. This partnership was recently recognised with a Bronze Award at the 2005 NSW Premier’s Public Sector Awards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Yarkuwa Indigenous Knowledge Centre awarded a major contract to increase the capacity of Aboriginal people in environmental, heritage and natural resource management project, from the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs</td>
<td>This project will focus on the Wamba Wamba community in Deniliquin and the Mutti Mutti community in Balranald using the Asset Based Community Development Model.</td>
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Case study 5: Community Building in San Remo – a local strength based project

Background

San Remo is a suburb of Wyong, located at the northern end of Wyong Shire. Its borders are marked by Tuggerah Lakes on one side and the Pacific Highway on the other. In terms of development, it is an older suburb than its neighbour, Blue Haven.

The suburb is made up largely of separate houses and in 2001 there were just under 4,000 local residents. It is a suburb that had been perceived negatively by the broader community in the past. The locals wanted to build community pride and counter the images that some people had of their suburb.

This case study is about a project that used local strengths and assets to:
• bring a number of diverse local groups together to improve community life in San Remo
• turn a potentially negative focus on drug and alcohol issues into a local project that promotes health in practical ways
• create opportunities to include people who had previously been very marginalised in community activities, and
• build local pride and the sense of belonging.

The shift to a strengths based approach

Over the past 2 years there have been a number of community-building initiatives in San Remo that have focused on:
• bringing together community members and groups interested (and sometimes already taking action individually) in making San Remo a safer, better looking and more vibrant locality, and
• building connections between individuals and groups within the community to encourage mutual learning, friendship and participation in community life.

Specific activities and projects have included:
• **The San Remo Beautification Project**: which has brought all ages together to improve the environment of a local park: it started with an event called the ‘Walk and Talk’ to find out what people wanted to do at the park, then moved to planting trees and designing and painting a mural at the park that reflects the diversity of the community.
• **The San Remo Community Garden**: this project has an active committee of 19 local people who are planning, advocating, developing skills and building relationships by establishing a community garden on a vacant block of land in the area.
• **The International Interaction**: 160 community members from an array of cultures joined in a day of celebration and hospitality in the local park where the beautification project had been working. This was followed up by a regular gathering at the neighbourhood centre where people can share their food and friendship as well as building on the strength of cultural diversity in San Remo.
• **The Milpara Aboriginal Group**: members of the local indigenous community have been working with the San Remo Neighbourhood Centre and the local schools to build connections and participation both within the Indigenous community and within the broader community of San Remo. The role played in this process by a community worker from The Benevolent Society, who brought people together to create an opportunity for these groups and the broader community to build connections and work together, was seen as crucial.
Through both the Beautification Project and the Community Garden, the local Community Drug Action Team, working closely with the San Remo Neighbourhood Centre, has played a pivotal role.

All these projects have built connections with longer term community groups and activities in San Remo, ranging from the Tidy Towns group and the Precinct Committee to the GOATS (Going Off At The Swamp) festival that began as a youth festival and has now become an annual event for the whole community.

The development of these activities began when the local community groups, such as the Community Drug Action Team, and community service providers, such as the San Remo Neighbourhood Centre and The Benevolent Society, deliberately moved away from a needs-based framework and began to listen for the strengths and assets that were present in San Remo.

The process began with the ‘Walk and Talk’ in the local park, where people came to a picnic and tree planting, and where the community-building groups listed above spent time listening to and talking about the dreams and hopes that community members had for San Remo.

Other opportunities for getting together and listening/talking were set up and taken up, and work began to mobilise and utilise the ideas, talents, skills and strengths of community members.

This process slowly developed into the range of activities that are currently taking place in the area. It has gained momentum over time and is continuing to bring new people into local community-building activities of all sorts.

**What a strength-based approach means in this context**

A strengths based approach in San Remo has meant starting from the premise that everyone in the local community is needed, and that all of those working in a local area (community groups, organisations and services, and local businesses) can provide crucial support and resourcing for community-building work by supporting the strengths and assets that are on the ground.

Overall, the key ingredients that are the foundation of community-building work in San Remo are:

- Reflecting on what was and wasn’t working and changing the approach to do more of what was working.
- Willingness to spend time just listening to community members and the things they wanted for their suburb.
- Taking time to build relationships and partnerships between community groups who had tended to work on their own in the past.
- Services and organisations such as the San Remo Neighbourhood Centre, the NSW Premier’s Department and The Benevolent Society working in co-operation with community members and seeing themselves as resources for the community rather than driving the agenda.
- Practising the knowledge that issues of concern can be effectively addressed in indirect ways in community life. For example, the Community Garden has addressed a range of health issues for participants, including mental health and drug and alcohol issues, in a way that direct education programs or support groups could not. It does this by promoting a sense of belonging and providing an opportunity for all community members to be valued and to develop connections with each other.
Benefits and challenges

Benefits

The benefits of this project have been:

• Discovering and mobilising a range of skills, talents and strengths of San Remo community members – this discovery has been as important for community members for organisations and service providers.

• Developing new community groups such as the Milpara Aboriginal Group, the International Interaction group and the Community Garden committee.

• Greater co-operation amongst local community groups and service providers to work for the improvement of San Remo.

• Creating opportunities for a more diverse range of local people to have a role in community life and in local leadership.

Challenges

The major challenges have been:

• Keeping the momentum going when things were moving slowly.

• Managing and negotiating conflicts or misunderstandings amongst groups (going through this process has also been a benefit).

• Remembering to continually reflect and take time in the process – not to rush things. This is often an issue for services who look for immediate outcomes, and for community groups who like to see a result quickly.

The outcomes

Significant outcomes of the community-building work in San Remo are:

• Council approval for the development of the Community Garden on a block of land behind the shops.

• Increased community participation in local decision-making and community-building projects.

• A greater sense of belonging and co-operation across the community.

• Improved relationships between groups, services and businesses in the local area.

• Better utilisation of local resources and an increase in the flow of additional resources (monetary and other) into the San Remo community.

• Increased skills for local people through the TAFE Outreach course on landscaping and gardening, organisation of local events, and participation in groups.

The future

Future plans for the area include the establishment of the Community Garden after 2 years of developing the concept; further development of the newly established community groups and continued efforts to include more local people in the process and to mobilise the strengths they bring with them for new and existing projects.
In this section, we have linked some key questions to the Key Concepts and Key Findings that were introduced in the Research Summary section of this document. This section is designed to provide a set of conversation starters which you can use in various contexts like workshops, team meetings and planning sessions. They allow you to tap into the knowledge and expertise within your organisation, to focus your efforts and to identify strengths and opportunities for growth. Please modify them to suit your needs. We also encourage you to add your own conversation starters to the dynamic life based learning wiki which can be found at http://icvet.wikispaces.com/life+based+learning

Key Concept 1: Knowledge Era – the environment

In the shift to the Knowledge Era, knowledge workers will need to accept the challenges of working and learning within contemporary environments where contradictory forces ebb and flow. The research suggests that key capacities to build and sustain this shift to the Knowledge Era include capacity to foster sharing and nurturing, capacity to support groups, immediate applicability of professional development, flexible and responsive leadership and clear corporate goals.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What could your organisation/business do better and/or differently to more effectively work and learn in the Knowledge Era? (Choose from the capacities mentioned above to focus your conversation).
- What are some of the contradictions you are currently facing?
- What is one small step you could take to enable individuals, teams and/or the organisation to be more resilient in working with the ebb and flow of the contradictions of the Knowledge Era?

Key Concept 2: Learning ecologies – the metaphor

The research identified learning ecologies as the metaphor for the Knowledge Era. Learning ecologies are dynamic, adaptive and diverse and offer capability development in VTE the freedom from seeking out one way to get it right or the solution. It favours successive approximations rather than exactness, self-organising patterns as well as contradictions and tensions!
Key Concept 3:  
Strength based philosophy – the mindset

A strength based orientation focuses on collaboratively identifying what is working well for an individual, a team and/or the organisation/business, and then investing in amplifying those strengths so they become more common.

Key Concept 4:  
Business wisdom – the actions

Business wisdom is about linking and leveraging knowledge, intelligence and experiences within an organisation so they work together in a more holistic and mindful way. Wise thinking and actions are the glue that connect the different elements of a learning organisation into a more integrated and productive whole, strengthening what is already working.
Key Finding 1:
Emphasising capability development

The research suggested that capability development is a more holistic, inclusive and expansive term than professional development. It is considered to have a greater focus on the person, is more open to a wider range of learning options, involves mutual responsibility for learning and growth, empowers people to apply their expertise in different contexts and is suited to the organic open-system nature of the Knowledge Era. It is about supporting people to be confident, capable, connected, curious and committed learners who interact with their environment so they are in dynamic balance between life and work, resulting in effective and appropriate actions.

Key Finding 2:
Strength based orientation

A strength based approach to capability development does not disregard or displace existing practice in capability development because its premise is that we take the best with us and integrate it into the new. Learners need to be able to access a wide range of diverse and personalised strategies and take responsibility for their learning processes. This is best achieved through integrating strategies that incorporate age-old truths, established practices, emerging strategies and openness to future possibilities. Some emerging strategies include Appreciative Inquiry, talent management, positive deviance and disruptive technologies.
Key Finding 3: Life based learning

The model of life based learning proposes that learning for work is not restricted to learning at work. Life based learning acknowledges multiple sources of learning which opens up opportunities for developing capability. The research highlighted that learning from significant life experiences, from developing a talent and from recreational activities could significantly contribute to our work experiences. The emphasis is on personal responsibility for learning through the provision of rich learning environments, with the learning benefiting both the individual and the organisation.

Life based learning is adaptive, self-facilitated, based on whole-of-life perspectives and reflexive practice, and uses any strategy appropriate for the task.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What emerging strategies are you keen to explore in more detail? Why?
- What would be some challenges of a greater emphasis on strength based strategies?
- How could we map individual, team and organisational strengths?
- What age-old truths and values are important to our organisation? How do they manifest in practice?

CONVERSATION STARTERS

- What appeals to you most about the model of life based learning?
- If you were to ‘design-your-own’ personalised learning program that would benefit you and your organisation, what content, strategies and sources of learning would you include in such a program and why? Why would this program be good for business?
- What existing models and practices for capability development have you experienced or are aware of, that enable the concept of life based learning to be realised? What are the characteristics of these models and/or strategies?
- What new possibilities could emerge if the scope for capability development broadened to more fully acknowledge, recognise and support life based learning?
- What would enable life based learning to flourish within a business environment and why would this be good for business?