

# **On the Road Again: Supporting VET Development in a Globalised Context**

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Paper presented at Fourth International Conference 'Vocational Education and Training Research', University of Wolverhampton, 16-18 July 2001

## **Abstract**

In many developing countries, globalisation and technological change have created urgent demands for new forms of skill development to meet economic and social needs. This has in turn required the establishment and renewal of training institutions and programs, and the professional development of VET practitioners. The authors of this paper have been involved in vocational education and training development projects in South Africa, China and India. Their work has included

- comparative research of vocational education and training systems
- development and teaching of courses, including by distance
- institutional and systemic capacity building
- establishment of mentor programs
- design of a five year program of VET reform in China.

Through facing the challenges of work in these cross-cultural and multi-lingual contexts, the authors have identified needs for the development of specific skills and capacities for international project teams to enable effective assistance for sustainable development. Within a context of changing dimensions of vocational education and training, the importance of integrating research and learning with doing has been highlighted.

This paper discusses the demands of such activities and proposes a model that suggests principles, skills and knowledge and integrating capacities for international teams.

## **Background**

### **VET reform and development**

Globalisation and competitive pressures are weakening national economic boundaries. Rapidly evolving technologies, especially in information and communication, are accelerating this fragmentation and changing both the nature of skills workers require and the longevity of these skills. The demise of 'old' industry practices, emergence of new employment sectors and the drive for environmentally sustainable development are challenging existing forms of skill development. In the 'knowledge-based' society, the importance of 'learning how to learn' has become paramount.

Hence, a new human-centred development paradigm is required: one in which environmentally sound sustainable development, a culture of peace, social cohesion and international citizenship are central (UNESCO 1999, p 61). Vocational Education and Training [VET]<sup>1</sup>, with its potential to promote lifelong learning for all is seen as a crucial tool in realising these objectives. To make such a contribution to lifelong learning, VET needs to do more than just provide a learner with knowledge and skills for specific jobs. If it is to provide benefits to individuals in economic, personal and social terms, then it needs to

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, VET is used interchangeably with Technical and Vocational Education (TVE) and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

be learner centred, inclusive, accessible, flexible, with a focus on the learner in society. Further, to foster lifelong learning VET needs to be designed and positioned so as to facilitate flexible exit, re-entry and passage to other sectors of learning.

Within this new paradigm, the roles of VET practitioners have changed. They need to accommodate different learners, facilitate transitions across programs, foster continuous and independent learning and view learners as ‘navigators shaping their (own) future’ (UNESCO 1999, p.54). VET practitioners themselves need to adopt reflective practice, not only to model this for their students but to continuously to improve their own professional practice.

To be inclusive, VET must address the learning needs of young people as well as the re-training needs of older, unemployed workers and marginalised communities. In all countries this has placed pressure on VET systems to become innovative and resourceful. In many developing countries, this has required the urgent establishment and renewal of training institutions and programs, and the professional development of VET practitioners and VET teacher trainers.

While there are clearly regional and national variations, many of the forces driving VET reform are common: globalisation; technological change; new economic and social needs; demands for new skills; requirements for new forms of skill development and the need to develop new frameworks for VET. In addition, recent comparative studies of VET systems (Gill et al 1998; Elsen-Rogers and Westphalen 2000; Keating et al 2001) have concluded that ‘demand-side pressures’ related to the labour market have been central to recent reforms. Development of VET in response to these forces is a priority for nations around the globe. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) launched UNEVOC, the International Project on Technical and Vocational Education in 1992 with the goal of strengthening ‘... the development and improvement of technical and vocational education in UNESCO Member States’ (UNESCO, 1989). A world wide network of groups committed to co-operating for the achievement of this goal was formed and countries such as Germany, Japan, Korea and France have contributed funding to support this development. One of the programs of this initiative aims to strengthen national research and development capabilities in order to improve the infrastructures of technical and vocational education, particularly in developing countries.

In launching the Second (UNESCO) International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education in Seoul, Frederico Mayor, the Director General of UNESCO emphasised the social and economic relevance of skills development. He called upon international funding agencies to ‘transform part of the developing countries’ debt into educational funding, particularly for technical and vocational education’ (UNESCO 1999, p.3).

International bodies such as UNESCO, the ILO, The World Bank and the Regional Development Banks, OECD, CEDEFOP, the European Union, the European Training Foundation (ETF) all play a part in researching, funding and supporting the reform and establishment of VET in developing countries. In addition, country specific funding agencies such as the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Agence de la Francophonie (ACCT), the British Council and GTZ provide funds for specific development projects. Funded projects initiated by these bodies in collaboration with national VET bodies range across VET system evaluation, analysis of skill development needs, development of frameworks for VET, VET teacher and teacher trainer development, institutional strengthening, technical capacity building and design for VET reform.



## International VET projects

For the purpose of this paper, *international team* is used to describe the Australian consultants, including the authors, engaged in international VET development work. The *project group* refers to the whole group of people engaged in a project, working towards common VET development goals in a particular context. This *project group* includes both the Australian *consultants* and the *participants* from the particular country.

This paper focusses on our involvement in VET development that has been funded by AusAID. This work includes six projects (two in South Africa, two in China, one in India, one with Mozambique) varying in focus, complexity and duration. The first project in South Africa focussed on VET teacher development, with the specific goal of improving distance education. Participants completed a graduate diploma program through a mixed mode delivery, customised to maximise learning relevant to their workplace tasks and challenges. A second project provided support for dissemination of learning within the two partner organisations through introduction of mentoring practice.

Our work in China included professional development for VET managers, practitioners, researchers and teacher educators, followed by the detailed design for a five year program of VET reform in the Chongqing municipality. The Chongqing community of 32 million people is centred on an industrial and business district along the Yangtze River, in the south west of China. The shift from state owned enterprises to privately owned ones, together with the influx of rural workers and the displacement occurring through the construction of the Three Gorges Dam, are creating large numbers of poorly skilled unemployed people. The professional development program was conducted through seminars and workshops in Chongqing and Beijing and through a study tour for selected participants to three Australian states. The design for VET reform entailed detailed consultations and participative processes that tested the relevance and feasibility of proposed elements and strived to enhance ownership by the Chongqing community.

The resultant design entails drawing on relevant elements of the Australian VET system to improve teacher development, instructional design, course delivery and assessment and certification in five industries: automotive; electronics; tourism and hospitality; business services and building and construction. In addition, the improvement of linkages between VET providers and industry and the enhancement of monitoring, research and evaluation functions will be targeted. Though assistance will be concentrated in Chongqing, it is intended that the experience and outcomes of these reforms will be analysed and, if successful, applied more broadly across China.

Our work in the northern Indian state of Sikkim supported the development of two polytechnics, the first to be established in this mountainous and isolated region. The participants included policy, planning and administrative staff from the Education Department and young, mainly engineering graduates, who had recently commenced work as the trainers in the new polytechnics. Activities included: seminars and workshops in Sikkim; a study tour to three states in Australia for management staff; eight weeks of training and work placement with a mentor in an Australian VET institution for the trainers and two months of in-country support to apply their new skills and knowledge in their workplaces.

Despite the variation in these six projects, there were also distinct commonalities. Each project involved a group of people drawn from usually two nationalities (one being

Australian), but often many more ethnic, language and cultural groups, working collaboratively towards common goals. In the South African context, the project participants spoke, amongst them, the eleven national languages. The trainers in Sikkim belonged to five different ethnic groups, each speaking at least three languages. In China, there were varying levels of confidence in standard Chinese and issues surrounding the uses of Mandarin and regional dialects. In each project, teaching and learning, negotiation and problem solving spanned face to face and online communication modes.

In addition to the differences arising from different nationalities, Canney Davison and Ward (1999, p.21) note that international teams also need to accomplish complex tasks that involve ‘crossing not only cultural, temporal and geographic distances, but also functional and professional boundaries’. Project groups working towards VET improvement goals need to bridge the gaps between VET systems. This involves understanding both the systems and the communities they serve.

While the ‘consultant/teacher’ and ‘participant/learner’ roles exist within the project group, the degree to which the relationships and processes facilitate participants/learners being ‘navigators’ shaping their own and their communities’ futures is critical for sustainable outcomes. As practitioners, we are perceived in particular ways because of our gender, age, colour, ethnicity, culture and language background. The perceived status of ‘technical experts’ appointed by the government of a far off, developed country also has a potentially powerful impact on the work. In the dialogue that takes place between members of the project group, there is a need to remain conscious of the challenges posed by these perceptions.

## Challenges for International VET Projects

The challenges we have identified for international VET projects fall broadly under five key headings.

### 1. **Communicating and negotiating in cross-cultural and multi-lingual contexts**

- different languages necessitating working through interpreters
- different communication styles
- different experiences and ways of looking at the world
- different ways of processing information
- different conceptions of knowledge and expectations of learning and teaching
- different expectations about behavioural norms such as ‘face’, emotional display, gender roles, attitudes to time, decision making, conflict resolution and leadership
- unequal status and access to resources and
- stereotypes about each other.

Many of the differences impacting on communication and negotiation in cross-cultural and multi-lingual contexts may, of course, also exist in a group comprising members of only one nationality. However, the complexity is increased by the degree of variations amongst group members. Whatever the degree of heterogeneity, a key task facing the project team is how to acquire the insights into the cultural fabric necessary to customise the project.

In these projects, the goal has been for new VET practices to become firmly embedded in a context, so the nature of that context must be appreciated and understood as far as possible. The use of ‘cultural informants’ is a vital part of this process because they can provide information about cultural and linguistic issues likely to affect the project. Interpreters are often appropriate cultural informants because this is, in a sense, an extension of their roles as mediators of the other culture. However, in the light of likely status and social distance

issues, they need to be explicitly empowered to give feedback to the consultancy team about its cross cultural functioning. Anxieties about causing loss of face should be allayed early in the life of the project in order to elicit maximum input from the cultural informants.

Consultants themselves need to adopt an attitude of wonder and a continuous process of reflective observation, recording their questions and tentative attempts at interpretation of cultural phenomena for discussion with colleagues, other participants and cultural informants. In this way, the team collaboratively builds a picture of the values, attitudes and practices of those operating in the target context. These processes assist the team to recognise when interpretations are coloured by their own cultural expectations and perceptions and to test how specific interventions might be perceived by stakeholders.

In writing about sources of social power, or the capacity to influence change in others, French and Raven (1959) described referent influence as the perception by one person that another is like him or herself. Our experience in these projects suggests that both sides seek common ground by selecting from what is presented by the other something that they identify with. This process of setting out to uncover shared values lays the foundation for the project to bring about change. Despite many overt differences between Australian and Chinese culture, for example, the participants in that project strongly identified with what they saw as our strong work ethic. In the case of Sikkim, the mainly young project participants were strongly drawn to Western culture (perhaps through the influence of film and popular music) and this seemed to minimise barriers to acceptance of the project goals and consultants. On the other hand, this could present a barrier to sustainability if participants were less inclined to critically evaluate the applicability of Western practices to the local context.

The development projects we have conducted have all involved stages when the elements of planning, scheduling, negotiation, selection of participants or teaching were conducted at a distance, often through the use of information and communication technologies. Firstly, individuals will have different levels of ease and access to different communication technologies. Sometimes access is perceived to be available to participants, but in reality that access is inequitable. For example, in South Africa, access by email to learning support from tutors was theoretically available to all participants, both black and white. However, while some had 24 hour email access in their own home, others could only access and reply to messages, during working time, on a computer in the office of the institution’s senior manager. The lack of privacy, reluctance to be seen to be sending mail during working hours and anxiety about intruding into the senior manager’s space prevented the disadvantaged learners (who may have needed it most) from making full use of the learning assistance available.

Secondly, the shift from same time, same place, face to face mode of communication to different time, different place, technology based communication exacerbates the complexity of maintaining optimal understanding by the diminishing richness of emotional and contextual information. It also offers fewer opportunities to alter communication in progress. Table 1 shows a taxonomy of communication modes after Canney Davison and Ward (1999) and Hofstede et al (2000).

Table 1. A taxonomy of communication modes

	<i>Same time</i>	<i>Different time</i>
<i>Same place</i>	face to face	paper based messages whiteboards bulletin boards email

**Different  
place**

telephone  
desk top or video conferencing  
whiteboarding  
intergated voice and data exchange

electronic or voice mail  
fax  
WWW

Clearly the face to face mode offers the most richness in providing information about the speaker to enhance interpretation of what is being said. As location and time differences are introduced, visual and audio cues are lost and messages stripped of emotional and contextual information. The more the communicators become removed in time and place, the more complex and dense the language must become to signal what cannot be seen or heard. This places additional burden on second language speakers. In decontextualised and asynchronous modes, it becomes much more difficult to signal or pick up hesitation, reluctance, ambiguity, ambivalence and anxiety, and therefore precludes issues related to these being immediately addressed in the team.

**2. Working across VET systems**

- differences in VET system structures and terminology
- different scope of educational pathways and
- differing degrees of VET system centralisation
- varying relationships between supply and demand.
- varying relationships between theoretical and technical skill components in VET
- variations in industry and enterprise involvement in VET
- unequal levels of relevance and currency of curriculum
- uneven levels of VET staff technical skills and experience in industry
- differing community perceptions of VET as an educational option

In assisting the identification and adaptation of aspects of the Australian VET system relevant to international contexts, consultants need to address issues arising from features and/or limitations of the VET system in question. Consultants and participants need to learn from each other and share understanding about the structure of the VET systems and the associated terminologies. Translation of terminology is not always a simple matter and fine distinctions may need to be drawn, for example, between ‘assessment’ and ‘evaluation’ to avoid confusion. In order to understand the difficulties being faced by VET in the target context, it is necessary to examine features of the system such as the relationship between theoretical and skill components, the links between VET providers, industry bodies and enterprises and the relevance and currency of curriculum. Knowledge about VET teachers’ technical skills and experience in industry needs to be established if planning for professional development activities is to be effective. Community perceptions of VET as an educational option are dependent on a range of factors including occupational status, employment options, cultural orientation towards education and family size. For example, in China, despite wide acknowledgement of the need for VET graduates to have ‘highly developed, up-to-date skills, there is a cultural bias against vocationalism and community perceptions of the value of VET are negative’ (Perry & Volkoff, 1999). The one child policy has meant that parents want their only descendent to be as highly educated as possible. The high value placed by society on higher education is reflected in a ‘... tension between the provision of opportunities for workplace relevant skills development and an emphasis on *general content*’ (Keating et al 2001, p.69). Within the Sikkim context, there was very limited awareness of the existence of VET as the polytechnics were newly established and a majority of the first intake of students came from other parts of India.

**3. Navigating dimensions of VET practitioner roles**

- functions of VET practitioners
- dimensions of VET practitioner work roles
- social distance between learners and teachers
- intersection of teachers’ and learners’ worlds

VET practitioners have been central to all of the development projects we have completed. In each case we have needed to gain an understanding of the common functions of VET practitioners and the dimensions of their roles. These clearly relate to the structure of the VET system in the country. For example, curriculum is centrally controlled in China with both content and proportions of theory and practice prescribed. Hence there is a very limited role for the teacher in developing curriculum at the local level. By contrast, in Sikkim, the trainers had access to curriculum from a linked institution in another part of India, but its implementation within the local context was not possible due to lack of teacher knowledge and skills and resourcing constraints. Consequently, they were adapting their program ‘on-the-run’, driven by what was feasible. In South Africa, the focus of the project was distance education and the roles of course developer, tutor, assessor and program co-ordinator were quite separate. Courseware development was undertaken in units separated from input from tutors, assessors and students.

Much of what is written about education in China stresses the exalted role of the teacher and the formality of discourse and patterns of behaviour between teachers and learners. While great deference is paid to teachers by students, in line with the Confucian tradition, there are a number of elements which reduce the social distance between them. One of these is the extent to which the teachers’ and learners’ worlds overlap. Most of the VET students we encountered in Chongqing reside at their vocational schools. Their teachers are also provided with accommodation in the school complex, so staff and students have the opportunity to encounter each other in a range of roles within the school and broader community. Unlike Australian VET students, the VET students in both Chongqing and Sikkim participate in social occasions, ceremonies, sporting and political events alongside their teachers. This interweaving of their lives seemed to foster amongst staff a broad sense of responsibility for the students as members of the community and the society.

This contrasts sharply with the vast gap between the distance educators and their students in South Africa. In fact, some kind of gap is almost inevitable with distance education because of the limited, or non-existent face to face contact between staff and learners. However, in South Africa it was exacerbated by the historical forces which had privileged whites within the society. While staff in the two target institutions were mostly white urban dwellers with access to the resources typical of a developed country, many of their students lived in impoverished rural areas and townships without even the benefit of electricity or reliable postal services. In some cases, students in a township or village would gather under a streetlight to complete their study requirements.

A further dimension of VET practitioner roles is the extent to which staff identify themselves as a community. In recent years, much Professional Development practice has moved away from ‘delivered forms’ such as seminars and workshops to contextualised learning in groups in the belief that these offer a better chance of lasting change. However, this necessitates the development of a learning community in the workplace. VET practitioners working together for change need sufficient trust in each other that they can discuss what is not working in their practice and move towards finding what could work. However, this is very difficult amongst staff who do not perceive themselves as a community. In India and China, both communal societies, the tendency of staff to choose collective over individual tasks was quite clear. In the South African VET institutions, where the participants represented a number of cultural groups with painful histories affecting their perception of the others, more collegial



forms of Professional Development such as mentoring and shadowing which require a high degree of trust can become quite problematic. For historical reasons, the white staff in the project were more likely to be in a position to mentor others, while the African staff were more likely to need the opportunities that mentoring can create. Establishing cross cultural mentoring pairs necessitated the consultants mediating discussions in which both partners could air issues affecting their capacity to learn from and mentor the other. There was often the sense that these and other facilitated discussions were the first times that these VET practitioners had engaged in any sustained discourse about themselves and the outcomes were sometimes dramatic. In South African VET institutions, the task of building learning communities, like the task of building a transformed society, may well be a long and difficult process.

#### **4. Operating professionally in challenging conditions**

- technology issues
- terrain and transport difficulties
- lack of access to resources
- work across time zones
- unreliable links to 'home base'
- the need for integration and management of multiple roles
- demands of complex planning, scheduling and reporting
- reconciling diverse stakeholder goals
- negotiating equitable participation and
- ensuring effective and sustainable outcomes.

Teams working in developing countries face difficult conditions. Power and information and communications technologies may be unreliable. Access to computers, printers and photocopiers may be restricted and while portable office equipment can address many needs, it depends on safe and reliable power supplies to recharge batteries and remain operational. Travel across geographical distances is time consuming and energy sapping. A series of flights may be required and land travel may be over difficult terrain. For example, Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, where our project team was based, is more than four hours journey by four wheel drive vehicle from the nearest airport and railway station. The road is winding, narrow and rutted and progress slow. Unreliable systems and unforeseen circumstances have the potential to complicate and extend journeys. One of our return journeys from Sikkim had to be amended because the airport was suddenly shut down a day before departure requiring us to reschedule and undertake a 26 hour train trip instead.

The usual resources of an academic office are not available in the field and airline baggage weight limitations mean that extra materials which only 'might be helpful' cannot be taken. This means that responsiveness to changing needs on the ground also demands creativity on the part of the consultants. However, this requirement to be adaptable provides an opportunity to model practice relevant to the local conditions. Working across time zones makes it more difficult to restrict work to normal office hours as communication with 'home base' may need to be conducted very early in the morning or at night. Where electronic links are unreliable and/or mobile phones do not operate, contact with family, friends and colleagues is limited, diminishing the personal support normally available.

Consultants working on international development projects are required to undertake multiple roles and integration of these roles is a challenge. Roles might include that of project manager, teacher, mentor, record keeper, report writer, researcher and evaluator. When participants are in Australia for study tours, the consultant becomes also a host. In-country,

the reverse may occur and the consultant becomes a guest of the participant. Our practice of integrating research with project work means that documentation for reflective processes, continuous improvement of professional practice and project evaluation reporting purposes is intertwined with data collection for research. Movement in and out of these multiple roles raises professional and ethical issues. For example, personal information confided by a participant to a mentor may influence project processes, but may fall outside what can be used for the purposes of research.

Negotiating equitable participation can be another difficult issue for project teams because expectations about participation of various groups within a society vary so much across cultures. AusAID projects involve strong equity targets yet these are sometimes difficult to reconcile with the prevailing culture. Even societies involved in the process of transformation may have few suitably placed members of the equity target groups able to participate appropriately at this point in their histories. Where the inclusion of equity group members can be negotiated, specific strategies to maximise their contribution to projects and demonstrate their capacities to others needs to be integral to project planning.

When the work is directed to different levels of an organisation or system, there may be a tension between the diverse stakeholder goals. Ensuring that these diverse goals are reconciled and that participation and outcomes of the project are equitable requires vigilance and negotiation. If the goal of such projects is sustainable community development, then the ways in which projects are conducted must be congruent with these goals.

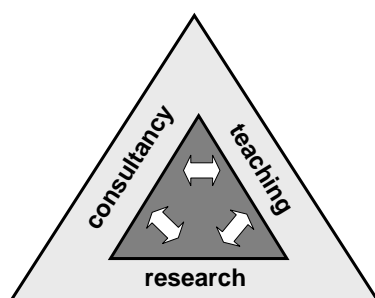
In summary, the conditions of work in these contexts are challenging and both physical and emotional resilience is required.

**5. Ongoing team development**

- maintaining current and wide ranging discipline expertise
- ongoing acquisition and improvement of skills
- making meaning from diverse experiences in the field
- applying learning to new contexts.

The fifth key challenge faced by VET teams working internationally is that of maintaining ongoing team development. The focus of the projects varies considerably requiring wide ranging and up-to-date discipline expertise. Maintaining this while spending periods out of Australia can be difficult. Conversely, engagement in overseas projects provides ongoing opportunities to build comparative knowledge of VET systems and practices. Integrating this project work with teaching and research activities in a cyclical way allows each type of activity to build on and in turn renew expertise in the others. Figure 1 shows the integrated activity model that underpins our work.

Figure 1. Integrated activity model





## Key operating principles

In summary, this international project team has formulated the following key operating principles:

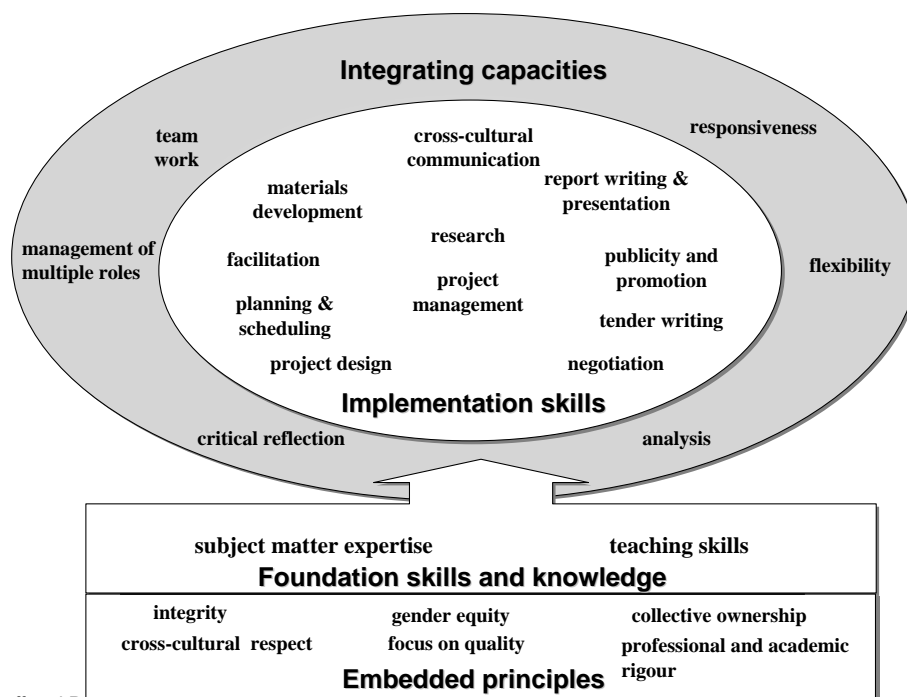
- doing with, not doing to
- recognising and strengthening interdependence of stakeholders
- building respectful relationships
- cultivating powers of observation
- checking assumptions
- paying careful attention to processes
- ensuring active participation of equity group members
- creatively managing communication and procedural complexities
- sensitively managing facilitation processes to ensure that interaction patterns do not favour dominant groups
- continuously planning for contingencies
- planning and working towards sustainability
- comprehensively documenting processes, decisions and outcomes
- progressively monitoring, evaluating and adapting.

These operating principles form the basis of decision making and reflective processes undertaken by the team.

## What capacities do international teams need?

We have drawn on our experience of conducting international VET development projects and staff development models used within the corporate sector to develop a model for building capacities for international teams. The model shown in Figure 2 has been developed and progressively refined through our reflection on the experience of the six projects we have described in this paper, together with our research and interviews with international VET practitioners.

Figure 2: Building capacities of international VET teams model



The foundation on which we propose that international VET team capacities are built is a small number of key *Embedded principles* and *Foundation skills and knowledge*. In reality, these principles may be no different from the principles underpinning ethical cross-cultural practice in VET within national boundaries. They include: integrity; professional and academic rigour; cross-cultural respect; a commitment to gender equity, a working style which facilitates collective ownership, both within the consultancy team and the wider project group and a focus on quality. If the embedded principles are not understood and shared by all members of the international team, then tension, dissatisfaction and conflict are likely to arise. Discussion of the team's position in relation to these principles is an important part of building a new team prior to commencing work in an international context. As challenges arise in the field, reflection, ongoing discussion and reference to these principles assist team members to deal with challenges in ways that are complementary and consistent with their principles. Appropriate levels of foundation skills and knowledge in all team members are essential not only for project outcomes but also for mutual respect between team members to be assured. Clearly not all team members require all skills and knowledge necessary for completion of the project. However, all skills appropriate for the specific role being undertaken by the team member on a particular project need to be present.

The foundation skills and knowledge these projects require are subject matter expertise and effective teaching skills. As Barham and Oates (1999, p.70) deduced from their Ashbridge study of the skills that international managers require, '... the bedrock on which other skills are founded must be *professional and technical expertise*'.

Core to this are *Implementation skills*. These are skills we have found to be vital to international VET development work. Central (as shown in the model) are effective cross-cultural communication, research and project management skills. High level communication, negotiation and facilitation skills are necessary to navigate the complexities of designing, planning, teaching, negotiating and problem solving in cross-cultural and multi-lingual contexts at all levels with students, teachers, community leaders, enterprise managers and senior government officials. Research skills are required at all stages from developing an informed response to an advertised tender for work in a particular context, through gaining, documenting and analysing supporting information during implementation to integrating more formal research activities with the project to facilitate multiple outcomes for the consultancy team.

Project management skills are central to the effective implementation of the project. The approach to be taken, plans and schedules developed for the tender will need to be adhered to in implementation, so project management begins before the project is won. While high level communication and research skills are more common for academic staff, and provide a strong base from which to extend them into international contexts, project management skills are often not required for the work undertaken by most academics within their home contexts. Thus tender writing, planning, scheduling, budgeting and team management are skills which may need to be acquired.

The skills required to provide seminars, workshops and learning support are inherent to teachers' work, but the development of learning materials and delivery through information and telecommunications technologies may be new to team members.

Beyond the *Embedded principles, Foundation skills and knowledge* and *Implementation skills* necessary for undertaking international VET development work, we propose that there are *Integrating capacities*, which enable the team to deliver optimum outcomes for all stakeholders in the project, including themselves. Openness and responsiveness are key to undertaking work within an international contexts. As Barham and Oates suggest, ‘...chief among the qualities that predispose a person to a global outlook is curiosity, followed by openness’ (1991, p.71). High levels of responsiveness and flexibility allow the project processes to be adapted to address changing stakeholder needs and directions. There are times when the project design is completed some considerable time prior to implementation. Policy directions may change and new development needs emerge. In other cases, critical reflection processes can lead to identification of amendments to facilitate successful project outcomes. The team undertaking implementation must have the capacities of responsiveness, critical reflection and analysis to identify what amendments may be required.

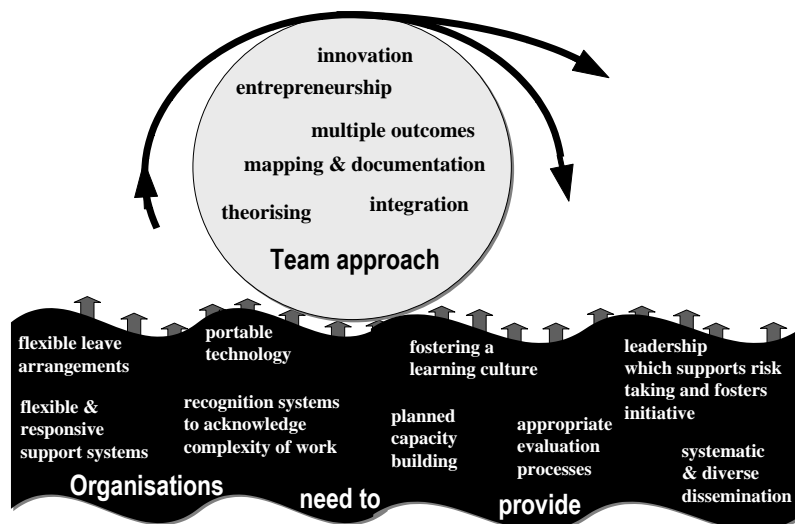
We have identified team work and the management of multiple roles as key capacities required by members of international teams. Effective team work is essential to establish a spirit of collective ownership and for sustainable outcomes to be supported. It also provides opportunities to model gender and cross culturally inclusive processes.

Finally international project work places enormous demands on team members to perform and manage multiple roles. These might include project designer, manager, teacher, researcher, mentor, instructional designer, materials developer, guest, host, assessor, evaluator, writer and colleague. At times, multiple roles may overload the individual. At other times they may conflict with each other, requiring careful ethical consideration. Long projects focussing on common goals draw together team members across nations and cultures and friendships develop. While welcome and rewarding, these friendships also have the potential to bring added complexity to the management of these multiple roles.

## **What can organisations do to ensure international VET team sustainability?**

Building on our understanding of the capacities that international VET teams require to be effective, we have developed a model which illustrates what organisations need to provide in order to ensure international VET team sustainability.

Figure 3. Ensuring international VET team sustainability



Our *team approach* for maintaining ongoing development and sustainability as the rolling ‘ball’ shows involves emphases on innovation, entrepreneurship, multiple outcomes, mapping and documentation, integration and theorising. Each project is different and an innovative approach allows for customisation of existing models, or development of a new model to match specific needs. Within the Australian context, all nationally funded aid projects are competitively tendered so an entrepreneurial approach is essential to maintain a constant stream of activity. We seek to gain multiple outcomes from each activity, documenting case studies for use in teaching and building parallel research goals into each activity. These linked research outcomes support the project itself, initiate work on publications, and provide a useful based for funded research projects. For example, our work in China provided valuable research data for use in our nationally funded publication ‘International Comparisons of VET systems’, which included China as one of the nine countries studied. Comprehensive mapping and documentation at all stages of the project, facilitated by teamwork, provide access to thick data for analysis. Integration of teaching, research and consultancy work support theorising which in turn provides valuable insights into the activities themselves.

While teams themselves can ensure that they maximise their own learning and support from within the team, they are also dependent on organisational support to ensure their well-being and longevity.

On a practical level, organisations need to equip teams with portable technologies to support their effectiveness in the field. Laptop computers, portable printers, reliable mobile phones together with flexible and responsive support systems assist the teams to deal with difficult conditions and contingencies. These support systems need to be reliable and accessible beyond normal office hours in the home country.

Flexible leave arrangements recognise the working conditions for international VET teams and provide them with opportunities to recuperate. While off-shore, teams may work long days with no weekend breaks and then return home after flying for many hours, perhaps through the night. Too often, organisations fail to understand the extent of the workload and expect the individual to return to work immediately. The impact of long absences on family relationships and household responsibilities is also often underestimated by organisations.

An issue likely to be faced by a small team is burnout due to the challenging nature of the work. To ensure that the team remains viable, the organisation needs to plan for the building

of capacity. It can do this by supporting a learning culture and dissemination processes to ensure that *learning* by team members is captured and shared beyond the team. Colleagues who show an interest and have the required base skills and knowledge can then be gradually introduced to international work through small roles. As their responsibilities increase they can be supported by experienced team members.

Within universities, international development work may fall outside the *normal* academic workplan roles and therefore be difficult to evaluate against the prevailing performance criteria. However, international projects are routinely evaluated at all stages and comprehensive reports are prepared for funding bodies. Organisations need to recognise, within the academic workplans, the work and expertise which are required to conduct the evaluations and prepare the reports.

Finally, the very nature of international VET development work entails risk in:

- tendering for competitively funded projects
- collaborating within multi-cultural and multi-lingual contexts
- comprehending different VET systems
- navigating towards successful project outcomes through unfamiliar territory
- working in challenging conditions
- travelling, often through difficult terrain by often less than reliable transport.

Most of these risks and challenges are borne solely by the individuals carrying out the work. Organisations need to acknowledge this, recognise and value the initiative demonstrated by these individuals and teams and show leadership in supporting these activities at the time of their initiation. It is easy for an organisation to throw support behind a successful and high profile international project. It is more important for international VET development teams that the support be made available during initiation and implementation of the project, that is, when the team is engaged in risk taking.

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