

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
5. Flexible Responsive Business Systems, Processes and Practices
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 (eg. 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.

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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.