Abstract

Universities are fundamentally still academic communities as opposed to being corporations. The core processes that are fundamental to creating and sustaining communities according to Bryan Smith (Senge, Ross, Smith, Roberts, & Kleiner, 1994) enhance capability, commitment, contribution, continuity, collaboration and conscience. These processes underpin the principles and practice of a research skills development program at a large multi-modal, multi-campus university. With increasing emphasis on the need for staff to undertake research and student growth in post-graduate study programs it is crucial to provide staff with opportunities to enhance their skills both to undertake and supervise research. There are several tensions at tertiary education institutions currently, viz. increasing workloads and accountability, decreasing growth in some programs and increasing post-graduate registration, financial cutbacks in government subsidies, staff reductions as a result of institutional restructuring resulting in conflict and competition among staff, among others. This has resulted in increasing demands being made on staff time. They are expected to 'do more with less', that is, being responsible for teaching more students, undertaking research and engaging in professional development.

An attempt is made in this paper to describe a learning partnership model adopted to develop and enhance research expertise thereby sustaining a collegial, academic community. The staff development unit plays a dual role of acting as catalyst to initiate and sustain learning partnerships as well as furthering the aim of collegiality, viz. sharing best practice. This is
achieved by harnessing the expertise of senior experienced staff in the planning and delivery of training sessions. The training is designed to give all staff participating the opportunity to share their ideas, experience and expertise. Maintaining the balance between being 'instructive' and 'constructive' is the ultimate challenge facing the Unit, viz. of being catalyst in the learning partnership relationship.

The Research Skills Certificate, an example of a partnership initiative launched at the beginning of 2001 provides staff with the incentive and reward to engage in professional development activities despite time and other pressures. Staff members attend the training sessions for a variety of reasons that range from being personal interests to institutional requirements. Obtaining a Certificate provides staff with the incentive to attend generic research management skills training required to undertake successful research which varies from general consciousness raising in terms of policy and guidelines, writing good proposals for research and funding, being able to supervise student research, to writing for publication, among other skills. Other learning partnerships facilitated by the staff development unit include both departmental and individual consultations. Finally, in the light of under-resourced and -staffed development units generally, analysing, showcasing and documenting the practice of one university provide the opportunity for extending partnerships between and among staff development units. There would be sharing of expertise and resources across units that would avoid re-inventing the wheel each time. In conclusion, the extent to which the adoption of a learning partnership model is effective is summed up. If learning partnerships work within institutions, why shouldn't they work across institutions in higher education?
Introduction

Being an academic at a University today is a very different experience from that even of a decade ago. Academics were expected to teach, research and engage in community service activities. Recent advertisements for staff now include various other key accountability areas, tasks and responsibilities. It is not uncommon now for staff to be called upon to recruit students and contribute to what was traditionally demarcated as management functions and responsibilities. For example, strategic planning, planning budgets, quality assurance, program management, to identify a few. In addition, staff members are expected to contribute to departmental key performance indicators (KPI's) and develop personally and professionally.

Support for staff is mainly provided from central units. The brief and programs of these units vary across tertiary institutions, but largely focus on teaching and management development. The Training and Development Unit (TDU) at Massey University has recently included support for research management skills in addition to teaching and management development.

In this paper the support program for research management skills development at Massey University is described. The philosophy and model underpinning the program is one that encourages collegiality and partnerships among academic staff. Employing a learning partnership model senior staff are engaged as presenters and/or facilitators in the training sessions. The TDU thus acts as a catalyst in initiating and sustaining learning partnerships as well as furthering the aim of collegiality, viz. sharing best practice. In the paper the following are focused upon:

- The context, viz. background, challenges and management strategies
- Theoretical perspectives, viz. Senge's (1990, 1994) learning organization and community concepts, a learning partnership model
• The research management skills development program, viz. planning, content, module descriptors, implementation

• Reflections on the program

• Conclusion: Outcomes of the program and benefits for staff, the University and higher education, generally.

The Context

Massey University is a provider of professional and vocational education multi-modally and at various campuses. The following are some of the current challenges facing the University:

• Efficiently managing a multi-campus, multi-mode institution unified by over-arching college structures

• Achieving an institutional ethos across all campuses and departments/colleges regardless of their location

• Optimum use of resources (human and physical) to achieve growth, development and efficiency

• Ensuring the needs of staff at varying levels of development are catered for

• Responding to the changing trends relating to research and academic programs.

The introduction of this strategic initiative, viz. the research management skills development program, fulfils the following key points, among others:

• Addresses complementary market niches through multi-disciplinary synergies

• Facilitates the pursuit of excellence and the extension of knowledge through research
and scholarship in various fields

- Allows for the efficient use of human and physical resources to provide for an expanded resource base to meet challenges of an increasing international education market
- Creates more opportunities for research, professional development and career prospects of all staff.

The University has a performance review and planning program in place. There have been increasing pressures on staff to deliver in terms of departmental KPI's as part of the PIA (Planning, Implementation and Accountability) management system in place. The TDU is one of the mechanisms in place that is central to meeting the above challenges and to provide support to staff. The TDU is a relatively new unit with three main focus areas, viz. teaching development, management (includes induction), and with the recent appointment of a training consultant whose main responsibility it is, research management skills development. Other recent developments that have taken place are changes in the management of the research portfolio, the submission of college strategic plans for research and the University Research Committee (URC) strategic planning exercises.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

The management of the University may be described as fulfilling Senge's (1990) definition of being a learning organization. The three elements in the context that create meaning and perspective are vision, values and integrity; dialogue; and systems thinking. Applied to the Massey context the vision and values underpinning the operations are spelled out in the University Charter. Extensive consultation with the relevant stakeholders occurs on an ongoing
basis (dialogue). The implementation of the multi-campus management structure is in accordance with Senge’s (1994) definition of a system, viz. "a perceived whole whose elements 'hang together' because they continually affect each other over time and operate towards a common purpose".

According to Smith (In Senge, 1994), the University may be viewed as a 'community', not a 'corporation'. When one thinks of a corporation, images of authority, bureaucracy, competition, power and profit come to mind. Viewing the University as a 'community' conjures up images of living in a neighbourhood where there is cooperation and good quality life. For community building there would be mechanisms set in place to create such cooperation and interdependence. Applying this to the Massey context, one can view the University as a community. The strategy in place for managing change by the URC, for example, is one of community building. There would be cooperation and consultation among the members of the committee, thus giving them the opportunity to maintain health, vitality and productivity at the University.

Adopting the learning partnership model in implementing the research management skills program has resulted in the following beneficial outcomes (actual and/or potential) for both staff and the University. For staff participating in the program, they would gain from the senior staff who may be presenting, facilitating and/or acting as mentors. This sustains staff collegiality and community.

The training program as a 'community' initiative ensures that staff are given the opportunity to achieve this. It is hoped that the individual staff members who benefit from the program and the
ripple effect and impact on their lives as a whole would contribute to the long-term sustainability of the ‘community’. There are several core processes fundamental to creating and sustaining organizations as communities that enhance their capability, commitment, contribution, continuity, collaboration and conscience. To pick up a few of these, capability, for example, can be enhanced at the University by the encouragement of learning and improvement as a collective undertaking, viz. that individual staff have the skills, knowledge and personal qualities to develop themselves. Commitment may be evident in the University valuing its staff and therefore investing in their development by providing support, e.g. the training program. Contribution may be seen in the effort made by staff who volunteer to contribute to the training program as presenters and/or facilitators, outside of their normal duties. Providing support for junior, inexperienced staff would ensure that continuity occurs in the departments. Effective and reliable interdependence occurs as a result of the collaboration that would occur. Getting involved in the community building and support effort finally gives rise to staff participating having a positive conscience about their role in the University.

The research management skills development program

In this section the background to the planning, content and delivery of the program are focused upon:

Planning the program

Prior to the appointment of the training consultant with a research focus, the TDU facilitated research training on an ad-hoc, demand basis. There was an evident increase in the demand for more research-specific training as a result of pressure on staff to deliver in terms of departmental KPI's and other institutional decrees. For example, Academic Board and Council
rulings for mandatory support and training for staff engaged in research with human participants and staff who are new to supervising doctoral level students at Massey. The close liaison and collaboration between the URC and the TDU on the planning of the research management skills program would ensure relevance and consistency of the training across the five colleges and three regional campuses. The feedback from previous research training and the needs expressed from members of the URC, the regional research committees, and other related committees (Ethics and Doctoral Research) contributed to the initial structure of the training program.

The research management skills program is targeted to support staff new to research at Massey. The modules are designed to provide opportunity for participants to obtain policy and practice information and to engage and interact on various topics and issues. Participants will gain insights from experienced senior researchers presenting or facilitating at the workshops and seminars. Attending the training sessions that are designed to stimulate and promote a healthy collegial research culture at Massey will provide networking opportunities. As an incentive to staff to attend the training it was decided to award them with attendance certificates (Research Management Skills Certificates). To qualify for these certificates participants will need to attend a minimum of five sessions of TDU workshops/seminars or other approved sessions. Staff who attended sessions prior to the introduction of the Certificate will gain credit for their attendance.

Content of the program

The Research Management Skills Certificate program consists of the following nine modules:

Establishing a Research Career
Only two of the nine modules, viz. 'Undertaking Research with Human Participants' and 'PhD Supervision' require that staff attend. Some of the modules on the program have been offered several times and in some instances at least for three years prior to the introduction of this consolidated program. Feedback obtained from the sessions formed the basis for fine-tuning the aims, objectives, and content of the modules. Participants were requested to complete feedback forms that consisted of a quantitative rating of the session, and comments on other aspects, e.g. presentation and content, benefits as a result of attending and suggestions for improvement. The feedback from the ethics training sessions (about fifteen), collected in the last two years, e.g. formed the basis for discussion at a review meeting held with all presenters at the end of last year. Various aspects were considered, which included, among others, aims and objectives, duration, schedule of sessions in the different regions, target group, pre-course material, program content, activities and tasks for participants and new presenters.

The URC and the Chairs of the Ethics and Doctoral Research Committees approved the aims, objectives and key issues of the different research management skills modules. Maintaining these generic templates for each of the modules ensures that there is a uniformity and
consistency of the program across the University. The following are descriptors of two of the
modules offered in the program, 'Undertaking Research with Human Participants' and
'Managing Team Research Projects':

*Undertaking Research with Human Participants*

All staff conducting research with human participants are expected to attend a Human Ethics
The seminar aims to:
Raise researchers’ awareness of ethical issues in the conduct of research involving human
participants
Provide researchers with skills needed to undertake ethical analyses of proposed research
involving human participants
Outline policy and procedures for gaining approval for research involving human participants
Engage researchers in discussions of ethical issues in selected case studies.
Issues covered will be:
Background to Ethics in New Zealand
MUHEC Policy and Guidelines
Code of Ethical Conduct for Teaching and Research including Human Subjects
Inter-ethnic Research: Cross-Cultural consultation
Treaty of Waitangi Issues: Researching Maori and Maori Researching
Case Studies
Applications to MUHEC.

*Managing Team Research Projects*
This workshop is aimed at research project managers, senior research fellows, research fellows, research officers and academic staff leading team research projects, and staff who may be interested in leading or working in research teams.

The workshop aims to:

Provide participants with the opportunity to network with others in team research projects

Allow participants to share practical experiences and suggestions

Involve participants in group work around team research project management issues, viz. people and conflict management, effective teams, communication, project resourcing and delivery in terms of the research plan

Examine options for software for project management

Provide tips on the logistics of finance administration.

The following issues will be covered:

Overall project management process

Handling partners and sponsors

Managing and motivating the research team

Working with the University system

Time management and day-to-day issues

Finishing the Project: Writing the report.

Implementing the Program

With regard to the research management program in the various regions, the regional research committees were consulted. This had consequences for the timing and frequency of modules on offer. Such consultation ensured that there was consideration of staff and campus needs. Each of the modules is offered at least once in each of the regions at least once every year. The
schedule for the program was liaised and finalized in consultation with the regional committees. All staff can therefore plan their personal/professional development program for the year ahead.

The content, design and delivery of the modules in the different regions would be different, but in keeping with the generic templates. This would be decided in consultation with senior researchers who may be invited to present or facilitate at the sessions. Including staff in the training sessions ensures a relevant, local, yet collegial experience for the participants. The training sessions are so designed that there is balance between presentation, group interaction, engagement of participants in set tasks and activities, and individual self-reflection. The design and delivery of the modules thus differs. Prior to each of the training sessions, participants receive letters outlining the aims and objectives, key issues focused on in the session, a copy of the program, and guidelines for pre-course preparation which may range from, e.g. readings, completing a questionnaire, gathering relevant data, and/or information.

**Reflections on the program**

The research management skills program is being offered as a coherent package for the first time this year. Seven of the nine modules were run before. Only two modules, viz. 'Technology Transfer' and 'Papers, Posters and Publications' are being offered for the first time this year. Based on the feedback received, it would appear that the program is meeting the aims and objectives as specified for each of the modules.

The way the program is planned and delivered contributes to staff acceptance and participation in the program. The positive feedback indicates that staff feel that by attending the sessions they
improve their research management skills, ability to network, and gain enormously from the collegial experience of sharing best practice and expertise. In the learning partnership there is collegial sharing, viz. presenters' experience and expertise, and participants' interactions. The programs for each of the modules are designed with careful consideration of a balance between being instructive (presentations and sharing of experience) and constructive (own experience of participants and interaction with issues, e.g. small group discussion using case studies).

As a result of the way the modules have been planned, structured and delivered, staff participating in the program do not feel 'done to' by the TDU. The involvement of senior staff as presenters and facilitators on the program provides these staff with the opportunity to be members of the 'community', to share their expertise and experience (be collegial) and act as mentors. The philosophy underpinning the program and the way it is implemented lessens staff resistance to participate. Staff are in control of their learning experience. There are opportunities created for staff to share their expertise and experiences, individual, departmental or college, related to the focused topic or module. Presenting staff with certificates of attendance provides an added incentive to encourage staff to register.

**Conclusion**

The TDU performs a critical networking function of facilitating partnerships between the TDU and senior research staff (presenters and facilitators), the TDU and staff (participants), the TDU and individual staff and departments. The learning partnership initiative is an example of current practice that demonstrates that training programs can be used as an effective strategy to attain positive outcomes for both staff and the institution. Although the program is relatively new and there may be issues that will arise, the following are some of the actual and/or potential
outcomes of the programs for staff, the University and higher education, generally. For staff, especially those new to research, research is demystified. They gain basic research management skills, are aware of research policy and practice, learn from experienced researchers, network with other researchers, improve their skills in writing grant applications thereby increasing their chances of obtaining funds (internal or external), and participate in specific or inter-disciplinary team research projects.

For the University there are several benefits, e.g. the initiative is a strategy for general quality improvement of research. Staff qualifying for the 'Research Management Skills Certificate' provides the University with an additional performance indicator to demonstrate that there are strategies in place to address support for quality improvement. Also, it is hoped that there would be increased research funding as a result of improved grant applications. As a result there would be an increase in research outputs and growth in post-graduate research programs. Technology transfer and the commercialisation of research could result in entrepreneurial opportunities, thereby increased income to conduct research at the University. Finally, the initiative would contribute to an enhanced collegial research climate and improved staff morale overall.

For higher education institutions generally, there may be opportunities for inter-institutional sharing of best practice. Showcasing and documenting practice at Massey provides the opportunity to extend the partnership to other staff development units. This would result in sharing of expertise and resources and avoid duplication and re-invention of the wheel. There is no reason as to why inter-institutional learning partnerships would not work.

A good start has been made to enhance research management skills at Massey. The research
management skills program supports the development of generic skills and succeeds in promoting a positive research culture. Adopting a learning partnership model to achieve this has produced positive outcomes. In order that the initiative is sustained there needs to be follow-up on feedback received, a review of the program in order that staff needs continue to be met, and further relevant support is provided centrally, as well as in departments and colleges.

References
