

The impact of training packages: What might we learn about substantial system-wide change processes?

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Abstract

This account reports on a commissioned strategic evaluation undertaken for the Australian National Training Authority on the qualitative impact of the introduction of Training Packages on vocational education and training clients. The research involved collecting the views of over 200 VET practitioners, bureaucrats and administrators, industry personnel, and students from all Australian States and Territories. The data collected provides a snapshot of conflicting views about Training Packages. An activity theory approach was used to analyse the data. This resulted in the identification of key contextual issues which act against the adoption of Training Packages and their innovative use by VET practitioners. These issues are systemic in nature and provide an explanation for the polarity of views which, inevitably, result from any discussion of Training Packages. The focus of this paper is the nature of the substantial, system wide change process that the introduction of Training Packages initiated, and the views of research participants on some of the issues emanating from the lived-through experience of this change.

Training Packages represent a different form of specification of vocational education and training. Whereas for a decade previously, competency-based training (CBT) had been defined through curriculum descriptors, Training Packages define only the outcome and the criteria against which the outcome is recognised and specified. This is based on an implicit assumption of a capacity for teachers and trainers to develop the necessary curriculum through which these outcomes can be achieved for a specific

set of learners. This provides the potential for flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of learners and industry enterprises – a flexibility and responsiveness that is dependent on the expertise of the VET teaching and training workforce to undertake such learning design and implementation within an environment of finite funding and external accountability.

It is less than five years since the move to Training Packages as the national specification of vocational education and training in Australia and less than four years since the first Training Packages were endorsed. Since then, VET providers, administrators, and industry have been on a steep learning curve as they unpack the packages to determine what they mean for the end clients of the system – Australian and international workers and students undertaking vocational education and training programs.

A recent strategic evaluation was commissioned by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) into the qualitative impact of the introduction of Training Packages on vocational education and training clients (*Down in press*). The purpose of this paper is to look behind the outcomes and findings of this report to speculate on what the research revealed about the nature of the change process concomitant with the introduction of Training Packages within the vocational education and training sector.

In order to do this, the paper covers the nature of the research undertaken and, in particular, the approach taken to the data analysis and reporting. It identifies some major change issues on which a re-analysis of the research shed some light before concluding with some findings which might be heeded within subsequent change processes.

Nature of the research

The research process has attempted to collect and collate a broad-brush sweep of the views of as wide a cross-section of the participant groups (i.e., State Training Authorities (STAs), Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs), employers and students), as was possible within the time and resource constraints of this project. Participants were encouraged to tell their own stories, and to discuss with their peers, the successes, issues and challenges of Training Package implementation. As such, semi-structured focus groups supplemented by some interviews were used to collect the perceptions of participants. The participants were given a list of questions prior to the focus group (*Down in press*, pp. 118, 121, 126 & 130) but were encouraged to use the focus group session as a free-flowing discussion of their experience in the implementation of Training Packages. A summary survey instrument was used to give some degree of quantification and clarity to the recorded discussion and several participants also took advantage of the offer of a follow-up phone interview to discuss particular aspects of their experience.

The data collected in this research project are the perceptions of the participants at the time they participated within the focus groups or interviews. The method of collection was relatively unstructured with participants being encouraged to identify and talk about the issues which they felt were pertinent to the enquiry. The participants were drawn from people in all States and Territories, working within State/Territory Training Authorities, industry enterprises, Industry Training Advisory Bodies (National and State) and Registered Training Organisations, as well as trainees and students undertaking vocational education and training within educational institutions. The sample size was 216.

Such qualitative research should not be over-generalised. It is indicative, rather than conclusive. As such it provides vital information about how people see the introduction of Training Packages with respect to themselves. Situations and contexts, as well as their nature and roles, are the basic materials from which participants construct their own perceptions, understanding and realities. Whilst the content of some of the participant responses may not be factually correct, the fact that they were made is itself pertinent and cannot be dismissed. Misunderstandings and wrong impressions influence behaviour and beliefs as powerfully as do facts.

In presenting the findings of this research within the research report, care was taken to ensure that participant-raised issues were identified and commented upon. Just because an issue was raised, this did not automatically indicate a problem any more than a claimed success really was one. However, it did present the issues as those which may need further investigation.

Contextual issues

As expected, it was impossible to limit the discussion and collected data to issues which were Training Package specific, just as it is impossible to separate out the effects caused by the structure and nature of Training Packages, the wider context of the Australian Quality Training Framework and the contexts into which Training Packages have been applied. The data was, therefore, analysed using an activity theory approach (Leont'ev 1981, 1978; Vygotsky 1987, 1978; and Engström 1999, 1996, 1995). This allowed the data to be evaluated in terms of its particular application and the context into which it was being introduced. This enabled an analysis of the implementation of Training Packages (as a fundamental, systemic change process) into a number of diverse communities each of which was also dealing with other associated but separate change processes.

Change is a process, not an event. This evaluation has been undertaken at a time when the change is still, relatively, in its infancy. Some Training Packages – those endorsed in 1997, 1998 and 1999 – have been implemented and reviewed. Others

were implemented for the first time in 2000, 2001 and 2002, whilst there are still more at the development stage. The shift in educational thinking and approach required by Training Packages, is a substantial one, and one which takes time to become integrated into practice. The research shows that this integration is far from complete and varies considerably from individual to individual. Whilst not unexpected, this variability means that people's understanding of Training Packages and the change in practice they represent is often incomplete and results in practices which leave a lot of room for improvement.

As a result, the analysis of the data focused on the impact of the change process associated with the implementation of Training Packages against the background of the diverse set of contexts, settings and practices that constitutes vocational education and training (VET) in Australia. The data collection process focussed on eight key measures determined by ANTA which covered the impact of the introduction of Training Packages on State Training Authorities (STAs), Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), Industry, employers and students.

Findings of the research project

The research process gathered data on a number of instances where the implementation of Training Packages has resulted in new and improved practice. These include instances where the development and implementation has resulted in:

- training and qualifications in areas where previously there was none
- ready acceptance of Training Packages by those in large and medium sized enterprises
- the use of Competency Standards by enterprises for selection, work appraisal and for setting benchmarks for enterprise workplace agreements
- increased demand by industry for recognition of current competency (RCC) and "gap" training for existing employees
- signs of more efficient and accurate reporting of activity within the VET system
- a closing of the gap between institutional and enterprise training
- increase in the provision of New Apprenticeships, especially those of less than 18 months duration
- the introduction of traineeships in industry sectors (or sub-sectors) where previously there has been no provision for formalised training for new entrants to the workforce
- a growth in workplace placements directed at specific skill development for

students undertaking institutional VET programs

- the development of teaching and learning approaches within institutionalised settings which mirror workplace experience
- greater responsiveness to industry clients and individual learners
- the necessary conditions for professional educators to exercise their expertise
- a growth in partnerships between RTOs and enterprises to collaboratively deliver training in the workplace
- greater contextualisation of programs and learning resources for specific delivery situations such as enterprise delivery
- a shift in client base with more learners already in or starting work.

These 'success stories' demonstrate that the flexibility claimed as an advantage of Training Packages does, in fact, exist. The examples show that, innovatively implemented, Training Packages have the potential to provide gains in the effectiveness of vocational education and training. The findings are compatible with those of a number of recently conducted research projects looking into different aspects of Training Package implementation and its effect on the VET community. These include the work of Victoria University (2000), VETAssess (2000), Down (2000), Figgis *et al.* (2000), Moy (2000), Mitchell and Young (2001), Quay Connection and Urbis Keys Young (2001), ALNARC (2002) and Dawe (2002).

It is, however, too soon to celebrate, as the research presents a picture of a system struggling against real impediments to implement a change which is only partially understood by probably most of its practitioners. Whilst this is not unusual for a change of the magnitude represented by Training Packages, it does present real challenges which need to be overcome if Training Packages are to realise their potential as an organising framework for VET provision and assessment. Many of the impediments have less to do with the actual nature of Training Packages than the contexts into which they are being introduced. Past practice, strong and long-held beliefs about how training should be specified and delivered, resistance to change, funding and resourcing issues, collateral change processes and conflicting priorities, and a lack of appropriate educational leadership have all had a negative impact on the implementation of Training Packages.

Unless policy directives and compliance measures are reinforced by strong leadership aimed at converting the hearts and minds of practitioners and giving them ownership and confidence in the change, superficial compliance rather than the desired change will result. Much of the data collected and analysed reflects a VET system struggling to give the appearance of compliance rather than embracing a whole-hearted acceptance of the change. Areas that were identified as needing careful consideration

if the introduction of Training Packages is to attain its potential to deliver flexible, quality, training and assessment provision included:

- perceptions (especially by RTO practitioners) of an enduring focus on the content of Training Packages to the exclusion of their function and the anticipated shift in vocational education and training practice
- continuing confusion and misunderstandings of the difference between the specification of VET and the curriculum of its delivery
- deficits in both the National Training Information Service database and website which cause confusion, additional work and poor practice
- need for effective professional development of VET staff (including those employed on a sessional basis) to ensure that VET teachers and trainers have the necessary competence to deliver Training Packages effectively
- perceptions by RTO and some industry participants of a lean, mean training environment in which the funding for program delivery, teacher support and innovative practice is insufficient
- quality assurance and accountability mechanisms which are paper rather than practice based and which create an environment in which innovation is often punished and compliance at the expense of learners' needs rewarded
- the increased ownership by industry of Training Packages and the National Training Framework (NTF) at the expense of educational institutions and practitioners
- a belief by RTO participants that there has been a shift in the emphasis of training provision to existing employees (including those undertaking traineeships) at the expense of pre-vocational learners, especially those straight from school
- assessment based on the performance of routine tasks under ideal conditions rather than an assessment of the learner's ability to deal with contingency issues with a consequent failure to assess underpinning knowledge
- access and equity issues which result from shifts in training provision
- concerns about the specificity of performance outcomes, range statements and evidence guides within Training Packages
- concerns about the qualification level required for VET practitioners and the level of competence required to implement Training Packages well
- the time lag between the implementation of Training Packages at the State/Territory level and the provision of professional development to practitioners on how to unpack, repack and use Training Packages in the manner intended.

Training Packages as a vehicle for change

The first report to ANTA, on the data collected and analysed, focused on the successes and issues relating to the impact of the introduction of Training Packages. In this re-examination of that data, the focus is on what the process has told us about the nature of large-scale systemic change. This has been done in order to identify some of the issues which might also occur in other similar change situations.

Most participants agreed that the change process initiated by the introduction of Training Packages was a much more fundamental and wide-reaching change than they had initially understood.

... because the vision wasn't communicated and built on initially, it has always been in retrospect - like shutting the stable door after the horse has bolted.

(ITAB participant)

Superficially, the change was centred on a new form of training specification in order to enable more flexible and responsive vocational education and training activity. This provoked a set of predictable responses from teachers and trainers including:

- a resigned, wait-and-see approach from those who had experienced other changes in training specification which had had minimal effect on their practice;

When I started teaching in TAFE, the Kangan Report was shaping curriculum. Next we went to the Systems Model Approach and then CBT. This was just another step. I had coped with the other changes - I would wait to see what I needed to do.

(RTO participant)

- a bureaucratic, prescriptive, top-down approach which took the line that we need to develop appropriate processes and procedures (the non-endorsed components?) and then teachers and trainers will know what to do (and, possibly even do it);
- resistance on the basis of having endured enough changes already and why couldn't the powers-that-be just leave them alone to get on with the job;

Whenever there is a new political party in power, or a new manager, at whatever level, they want to make changes to make people notice them. It's change for change's sake and not necessarily in the interests of the students.

(RTO participant)

- enthusiastic acceptance and exploration of the change where it offered a greater sense of professional freedom, a change for the better, or simply a new challenge.

Training Packages do not build a course for you, thank goodness. They give us room to look at how people can do these things but if you are student-centred, teaching without a curriculum is exciting, thrilling.

(Figgis et al. 2000, p. 34)

It soon became obvious that a superficial reading of the nature of the change process was inadequate. Just as ripples spread from the point of impact of a stone thrown into a still pond, the change was seen through increasing and different dimensions, faces and foci. These included:

- industry ownership and development of Training Packages and the resultant shift in power relationships between ANTA, industry and educators
- confusion as to where curriculum and centrally developed resources fitted within the National Training Framework

You read the information about packages. The term 'curricula' has disappeared. What I mean by that is, it has an effect on the ability of RTOs to deliver... That was what created the angst, when the educators looked at that course. How am I going to deliver this, within X amount of hours, with my resources?

(ITAB participant)

- an unacknowledged decentralisation of the responsibility and resourcing of curriculum and resource development

The introduction of Training Packages represents a revolution of momentous importance as it has involved the transfer of responsibility to different sectors of the VET community - without making the transfer explicit and transparent.

(ITAB participant)

- issues relating to the division of responsibility for vocational education and training between the Federal and State governments

The concept of Training Packages is brilliant but its implementation has been based on two major, interdependent assumptions. That is, that the States and Territories will be able to implement them in ways which fit their political, organisational and educational contexts; whilst at the same time Training Packages will retain a strong national flavour with respect to the consistency and quality of outcomes.

(ITAB participant)

In particular a number of respondents commented on the lack of professional development which provided teachers and trainers with the necessary skills and knowledge to drive the change

Given the 'cost-neutral' agreement between the States and ANTA, the States felt themselves absolved from having to provide professional development (their responsibility) while ANTA apparently saw its role and responsibility as marketing the change. So teachers and trainers were left to work out what to do.

(RTO participant)

- a number of concomitant and related change processes such as User Choice and the introduction of New Apprenticeships which coloured people's reactions to the introduction of Training Packages

It is hard to tell whether the angst about Training Packages is really about Training Packages or about other things that are happening like User Choice, shifts in funding towards New Apprentices, the whole funding scene which seems to keep demanding more and more from fewer and fewer trained teachers, going to the students instead of them coming to you, flexible delivery ... the list goes on.

(STA participant)

- confusion as to what was the role expected of teachers and trainers within a training package framework of VET provision

If I don't really understand what is required of me, then no amount of paperwork or auditing is going to improve my practice.

(RTO participant)

- cascading, collateral and subsequent change resulting from the introduction of Training Packages.

The National Training Framework is still being worked out in actuality. Originally, it appears that neither the complexity, the workload, nor the decision making processes involved in the implementation process were fully appreciated. Perhaps it was assumed that the States and Territories would be able to do this on their own. I'm not sure.

(ITAB participant)

Change is an organic and chaotic process. Whilst some outcomes of change are predictable, many are not and a solution to one set of problems will have far-reaching implications to other systems and produce a further set of issues which need to be resolved. Change management is, perhaps, an oxymoron or an unachievable goal, especially in systemic and wide-ranging change. To rein in, or attempt to ignore, the consequences of planned change, both predicted and unexpected, will neutralise or lessen the uptake of the new behaviours, understandings and practices which accompany it. The planning of change processes, such as the introduction of Training Packages, requires a balance between risk minimisation strategies and the flexibility and willingness to recognise and capitalise on beneficial, although unforeseen, consequences of the change.

We cannot manage change for other people or groups of people. Each individual, group, and enterprise needs to experience, understand and integrate the change themselves:

No-one can resolve the crisis of reintegration on behalf of another. Every attempt to pre-empt conflict, argument, protest by rational planning, can only be abortive: however rational the planned changes, the process of implementing them must still allow the impulse of rejection to play itself out.

When those who have the power to manipulate changes act as if they only have to explain, and when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own. For the reformers have already assimilated these changes to their purposes and worked out a reformulation which makes sense to them, perhaps through months or years of analysis and debate. If they deny others the chance to do the same, they treat them as puppets dangling by the threads of their own conceptions.

(Marris 1975, p166).

Activity theory and data analysis

The outcomes of any research are largely dependent on the research methodology which has been applied and the methods by which the data thus collected have been analysed and reconstructed into an integrated account. The feedback from the focus groups and interviews, which were the major data collection processes of the strategic evaluation process, clearly indicated that people's perceptions of the impact of Training Packages was dependent on the context in which they were working and the understanding of vocational learning which they brought to the implementation of Training Packages. It was, therefore, necessary to analyse the data in a way which preserved the link between context, work role and perception.

Consequently, the analysis drew on the work of Leont'ev (1981; 1978), Vygotsky (1987; 1978) and Engström (1999; 1996; 1995). In particular, it modelled Engström's (1999) use of activity theory to preserve the nexus of how people think and act with the context in which they do such thinking and action. The outcome of the analysis was a number of matrices in which participants' comments around an issue were analysed against the five characteristics of an activity system; that is, the nature of the activity system, its historicity, multi-voicedness, multiplicity and contradictions, and the expansive learning which occurred (Engström 1999), and against the four basic questions about change, that is:

- what has changed?
- why has it changed?
- who is involved in the change?
- how has it changed?

Using this approach, it was possible to recognise and differentiate between where the issue being discussed arose predominantly from the effect of the mediating artefact (in this case the introduction of Training Packages and their nature), and where it was based on the nature of the rules, community and the division of labour which frames it.

These matrices demonstrated the inter-relatedness of context and perception in relation to the introduction of Training Packages, and enabled the identification of contextual factors which shape the perceptions of vocational education and training clients. A re-examination of these matrices provides some clear findings about change – both the specific change issues encountered as a result of the introduction of Training Packages and generalisations which may apply to other change processes.

Historicity

Training Packages should have proved the best thing since sliced bread as they were based on a wider industry consultation than we had ever had for accredited courses and they give teachers the freedom to make appropriate educational decisions for their learners. However, the prior domination of the cargo cult of resource packages, and other factors, has meant that they fell on stony ground.

(STA participant)

People bring the baggage of past experience, beliefs, attitudes, social and cultural myths and their professional identity to any change process. How the change will be understood, accepted and acted upon will rely on either the compatibility of such baggage with the change process or the effectiveness of the marketing of the change process. The introduction of Training Packages was characterised by resistance, especially by vocational education and training teachers and their managers because of a failure to recognise the strength and potential impact of the intended change on educational beliefs and practices. This was exacerbated by such things as:

- a concentration of rhetoric at the initial implementation phase on what Training Packages would look like rather than how they would affect practice:

At the beginning, we wanted to know what they [Training Packages] would look like. I remember reading something you wrote about that being the wrong question.

(RTO participant)

Surely, as VET practitioners, our main concern should be about the purpose and function of Training Packages, rather than on their contents and appearance. The key questions which need to be answered are:

- what is the purpose of Training Packages?
- how do they impact on our work as VET practitioners?
- how will they change our responsibilities and practice?
- how will they improve vocational education and training?

(Down 1998, p.5)

- the unfortunate use of the phrase 'curriculum is dead' in marketing presentations:

I am very, very angry about the process ... we are told that curriculum is dead – yet, in the end, they expect us to fix up the short-comings of the system so that the needs of our students are met.

(RTO participant)

- the failure to explain the shifts in responsibility hidden behind the introduction of Training Packages as a change in outcome specification:

Training Packages allow industry to define the outcomes it needs whilst at the same time recognising the professional expertise of teachers in identifying the learning pathways and assessment strategies by which this might best be achieved. Why was this left unsaid when Training Packages were first introduced?

(ITAB participant)

- the use of the term 'Training Package' which cut across a different understanding of 'packages' within the VET teaching and training community:

The language of Training Packages picked up on existing VET terminology but turned it into something different. For most VET practitioners 'Packages' meant resource packages of the kind they were used to. So they passively waited for what they believed they needed. ... They also saw the mapping exercises, done to assign student contact hours for funding purposes, as permission to minimise the change and to continue delivering as before.

(STA participant)

- the unpreparedness of many of the VET teaching and training community to take a more strategic and "big picture" approach to VET provision and responsiveness:

... the increased flexibility that Training Packages afford the system has meant that people need to be more strategic in how they put programs together and need to have a clear understanding of what their different client groups need. we can't be sure they know how to do this

(RTO participant)

- the perception of RTO personnel that they had been ignored in the original development of Training Packages and left to teach from educationally flawed documents:

Many teachers believe that the change cuts them out of the equation and this belief has been reinforced by much of the rhetoric concerned with TP implementation ...

(RTO participant)

- the excessive reliance by teachers and industry trainers on centrally-developed, 'one-size-fits-all' resource packages over the past decade:

Over time, the centrally produced learning resources became a pseudo-curriculum and, instead of ensuring quality and consistency as intended, added a dimension of rigidity and non-responsiveness to the system. Employers and industry could have any training they wanted as long as it was what the resource packages prescribed.

(Down in press, p. 81)

- the initial minimisation during the marketing and introduction periods of the complexity of the change being introduced:

The initial message was that this was just a logical step on from the introduction of CBT. Yet the upset and discomfort of CBT was microscopic compared to the change our teachers are experiencing with Training Packages

(RTO manager participant)

Multi-voicedness

Like any wide-ranging community of practice, vocational education and training practitioners have a diversity of roles, practices, beliefs and identities, and use specific language constructions when talking about their practice. On any issue there will be multiple viewpoints which find expression in different ways. This leads to a multi-voicedness within the discourse of vocational education and training discourse especially at the points of intersection and overlap of two or more sub-communities of practice.

For example educational administrators understand the phrase 'there is no curriculum anymore' as clearly meaning that the training specification is no longer in the form of curriculum documents. On the other hand, teachers understand and value curriculum

as being what they do; it defines or provides a framework for their practice. To them the denial of curriculum is a denial of their identity and their worth.

Failure to ensure that the rhetoric of the introduction of Training Packages was clearly understood and disseminated across the sector has been a contributing factor to some of the misunderstanding and resistance encountered on the journey thus far. So, too, has been the failure to recognise that each and every participant in the change process must undertake the learning journey in a unique way. This means that, at any point in time, there is a diversity of understandings about the change process depending on the stage each participant is currently at and the particular contextual route taken. This was particularly noticeable in the analysis of participant transcripts of the focus groups where disagreements could be understood as a difference in the stage, direction or context of the learning journey rather than a fundamental difference of approach. An example of how this was played out within focus groups concerned the consequential change in the role of VET teachers from deliverers of pre-packaged training to facilitators of learning:

Management still takes a Tayloristic attitude to teaching, seeing the students as identical widgets and teachers as deliverers of training rather than facilitators of learning.

(RTO participant)

Multiple rationales, implications, issues and attitudes constitute the discourse of the introduction of Training Packages. For example, the ongoing discourse of Training Packages is rich in suggesting multiple reasons for the change including:

- political expediency
- cost-cutting
- increasing the ownership and involvement of industry
- shifting responsibility and funding
- marginalising the involvement of Unions
- decreasing the power and influence of educational institutions.

(Down in press, p. 154)

Multi-voicedness can also be understood as multi-comprehension. Those working with Training Packages must reconcile and find an understanding within these often competing voices. This means that what is benign to some is interpreted by others as having a more sinister outcome: For example, the introduction and growth of traineeships, based on Training Packages, has established an effective pathway for school-leavers to access work and to obtain accredited learning on-the-job. Traineeships are also being undertaken by unemployed adults – a change made possible by the incentives offered as part of current New Apprenticeship arrangements, which enable adults to be taken on at competitive costs as school-leavers in many industries.

Given the greater maturity and, in general, greater work experience of adults returning to the workforce, this was perceived, by many participants, as making it more difficult for school-leavers, especially early school-leavers, to obtain traineeships.

Employers like mature age apprentices. They understand what work is and don't require the same amount of supervision or fool around as much as young people in their first job. So it is much harder for school leavers (especially early school leavers) to get apprenticeships.

(RTO participant)

The multi-voicedness of change processes needs to be understood by those implementing change and accompanied by responses to the resulting confusion and misunderstanding which support rather than alienate those affected by the change.

Contradictions and multiplicities

Perhaps most significantly, the analysis of the collected data shows the range of multiplicities and contradictions which characterise the work of VET practitioners working within the framework of specific Training Packages. On a daily basis, training practitioners must find their way within a framework where the same specification of outcomes must be translated into educational action using a number of different modes and sites of delivery such as:

- recognition of current competence (RCC)
- learning through work
- workplace learning
- apprenticeships
- traineeships
- pre-vocational programs
- full-time institutional delivery (usually to learners preparing for work)
- part-time institutional delivery (often to those already in work)
- post-vocational programs.

Similarly, VET practitioners need to learn to use the same specification of outcomes provided by a Training Package as the criteria against which assessment for a multiplicity of purposes occurs. These purposes include:

- recognition of competence for a variety of workplace purposes, including:
 - credentialling
 - progression against workplace agreement criteria
 - selection of staff
 - work appraisal schemes
 - development of workforce capability

- assessment of Training Package outcomes
 - for qualification/credentialing purposes
 - to meet specific needs
 - readiness for the workplace
 - career planning and development
 - career change preparation
 - licensing and professional recognition purposes
 - RCC for fast tracking.

Dealing with such multiplicities is complex enough but these are set against a number of contradictions which VET practitioners must reconcile. Such contradictions are implicit in a system which has tiered levels of management and which must of necessity reflect national, state and local political directions and priorities. Thus VET practice at all levels must find an acceptable and balanced pathway between opposing ideologies, policies, practices and priorities such as:

- funding mechanisms based on student contact hours where:
- the design and rhetoric of Training Packages, which suggests flexible and multi-faceted training and/or assessment, whilst accountability is predominantly assessed by paper-based audit systems which are most easily met using classroom-based training and assessment
- the need for professional development of VET practitioners to enable them to use Training Packages effectively and the demands made on them which limit their access to formal professional development activities
- the continued use of dedicated experts to design pathways and learning resources which limits or denies teacher practitioner growth in educational planning and development
- Training Packages specify assessment based on evidence whilst event-based assessment is still an integral part of our learners' and clients' expectations and of many auditing processes.

The need for the reconciliation of these contradictions and paradoxes highlights the desperate need for visible, vocal and effective educational leaders at all levels of Training Package implementation and for the provision of timely professional development activities for those involved. Vocational education and training is largely an oral culture and it is only by facilitating healthy discussion, reflection and learning about the possibilities of Training Packages that their potential to provide a framework for quality, flexible training and assessment will be realised.

New learning

Change is simultaneously a cause, vehicle and outcome of learning. Such learning is previously unknown by the learner and unbounded; it is constructed by participants as a consequence of their involvement in the change process. Such construction of new knowledge is contextually based and is mediated by contestation and discussion; the evolving discourse which accompanies the change; and by the progressive learning of individuals, groups and the whole community as the change process continues to run its course. Such learning oils the wheels of change, and time and space must be available for participants to reflect on and understand their experience if the learning is to be maximised. If the 'expansive learning' (Engström 1999) of change is not valued and promoted by the design and facilitation of the change process, the learning of individuals and specific groups is unlikely to be mediated, formalised and enriched, resulting in frustration and misunderstanding.

The introduction of Training Packages has resulted in a myriad of new understandings about vocational education and practice.

It has been a learning process for RTOs, for individual teachers, for employers, for work supervisors and for the students. There have been some hiccoughs in the system but that was to be expected in a period of innovation. You have to take risks, to try things, to find out what is and is not possible within a work situation.

(RTO participant)

These are still largely part of the oral culture of VET practice, but a succession of analyses of Training Packages (such as the strategic evaluations and other research into different aspects of Training Packages commissioned by ANTA between 2000-2002 (Victoria University 2000; VETAssess 2000; Down 2000, 2002; Figgis et al. 2000; Quay Connection and Urbis Keys Young 2001)) has enabled these to be documented. Dissemination is still problematic as most of this material is not published. Access to this material is on request and reports of this material are published in newsletters and journals produced by ANTA and State and Territory Training Authorities. The new understandings articulated by the participants in the strategic evaluation of the qualitative impact of Training Packages included:

- the nature of workplace and vocational learning
- simulated learning strategies as part of the need to achieve equity, in the eyes of the various stakeholders, between workplace learning undertaken on- and off-the-job
- the nature of educational-enterprise partnerships and their negotiation, formalisation, maintenance and evolution over time
- contextually-appropriate strategies for flexible and responsive learning
- effective (and not so effective) communication between different sections of

the VET community

- the changing roles (and consequential organisation) of training institutions demanded by the National Training Framework consequent on the introduction of Training Packages
- reconciliation of educational objectives within the culture, mores and values of a business environment
- implications of shifts in understanding of education as a responsive service rather than a product
- assessment based on the weighing of multiple evidence rather than a single event
- shifts in the dominant metaphors through which meaning is conveyed within vocational education and training.

Conclusions

The strategic evaluation of the qualitative impact of the introduction of Training Packages on the clients of vocational education and training (*Down in press*) presented a snapshot of perceptions from State and Territory training authorities, personnel from industry peak organisations and training advisory bodies, industry enterprise personnel, managers, administrators and teachers from public and private registered training organisations, industry trainers, and industry and institutional students. It provided indicative data of positives and negatives of the change process initiated by the introduction of Training Packages, and supported and enhanced other research into the effect of Training Packages on the vocational education and training landscape, and the material it contains has provided the data for an interrogation and critical analysis of its nature.

The re-analysis of the research data on which this account is based reinforces the original findings whilst highlighting some of the embedded change strategies and their effects. Listening again to the voices of the participants has enabled a focus on the change issues which underpinned the introduction of Training Packages. These voices demonstrate all too clearly that the collective wisdom of the vocational educational and training sector does not disproportionately lie with the policy makers and managers but equally with those involved in the day-to-day enactment of this policy. To disregard or fail to listen to the perceptions of the practitioners who implement the change and make sense of it, is a recipe for chaos.

The data shows that the participants in the research process, and, presumably, most other VET practitioners, have considerable knowledge of and insight into how the introduction of Training Packages has impacted on their work practice and that of their colleagues. If change is to be successfully facilitated, then there must be reciprocal communication processes to ensure that what has been learnt is shared

and that management strategies are directed at resolving the root issues rather than camouflaging their symptoms.

Systemic change is a many headed entity which affects all within its sphere of influence. Like the mythological hydra, once initiated it is virtually impossible to kill as attempts to resist, negate, re-direct or reconstitute are at best only temporary. Its organic nature means that for every problem "resolved", others spring into being. Change takes us out of our zones of professional and challenges all in its path to find new solutions and practices. As an example of a change process, the introduction of Training Packages provides us with the opportunity to reflect on its evolution and to learn from our experience.

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