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The OK Caral Model – From Peru’s Sandy Caral To Academe’s Stony Walls - Collaboration for Professional Development is OK!

Dr Cheryl Kerr*, Ms Sharon Saunders*, Ms Georgia Smeal#, Ms Karen Whelan#

*Academic Professional Development, Human Resources Strategic Services

#Teaching and Learning Support Services

Queensland University of Technology

Introduction

In 2001, the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Teaching and Learning Committee approved funding for a professional development program for Coordinators of Large Units (CLU) for 2002. This program is jointly facilitated by the Human Resources Department (HR) and Teaching and Learning Support Services (TALSS).

The program is unique in both its focus and the way it has harnessed the distinct development responsibilities of two departments – HR for development in management and leadership and TALSS for development in teaching and learning. The CLU program facilitation team comprises two staff members from each Department along with joint administrative support.

The focus of the CLU program is twofold:

- a) to support CLUs as a staff cohort with unique and specific needs and
- b) to acknowledge and make visible the systemic issues associated with teaching large groups of students.

The 2002 CLU program included seminars, workshops, presentations to senior management and a grant scheme that funded three faculty level projects aimed at addressing issues of significance in coordinating large units. It is proposed that the outcomes of these three projects will be disseminated University-wide through the 2003 CLU program and the University’s Teaching and Learning Development program.

This paper now proceeds to present:

- a focus on the principles underpinning the unique HR/TALSS partnership that was galvanised to deliver the CLU program
- an overview of the content of the program, and
- some preliminary results from the comprehensive evaluation of the 2002 program.

Underpinning Principles

The underpinning principles used to develop and facilitate the CLU program are based on a model of interchange within a loosely coupled and pooled interdependence, which the authors have termed the OK Caral Model.

In the nascent stages of the development and management of the CLU program, theoretical foundations were implicit and not initially expressed by the facilitation team in their discourse about operational procedures.

Nonetheless, it became apparent that below the surface details of operational issues, power and legitimacy are certainly arenas in which a model for collaboration, in provision of professional development within an academic institution, held significant explicit and implicit concerns. This is particularly the case when considering the well-being and development of academics in an industry (higher education) which is under considerable pressure regarding efficiency and productivity. Collaborative styles and leadership styles, including those found amongst the facilitation team, can have moments of conflict. Blake and Mouton's (1964) seminal conflict research found that ideal leaders are both assertive and concerned with others. The consequence they say is that such leaders deal with conflict by integrating ideas through collaborative problem solving. Kabanoff (1985) concurs and adds that "accommodation" is found equally to be an acceptable behaviour as a reaction to conflict. Given such findings and in essence such 'good news', the facilitation team considered implicitly how best to work together. Most of the CLU program planning sessions included such explorations in one form or another.

More on the underpinning theory - Is Conflict Inevitable?

The behavioural mismatches – collaboration vs. conflict, and cooperation vs. competition – are often considered endemic in educational environments. This is a particularly discernible perception when funding is tight and competitive, and survival and self-concern seem to be the key drivers within an academic organisation.

SunTzu's Art of War states that conflict is inevitable. Indeed, the Sun Tzu worldview, often applied to modern business management, notes that conflict:

- Arises when one's thinking contradicts that of another
- Is inevitable
- Is therefore a reality of organization life."

(Khoo Kheng-Hor 1992:71)

Resources, priorities, objectives, group and individual rivalries are all forces ripe for instigating conflict. Is it then assumed that all conflict is bad or that conflict leads always to war or aggression? In response to whether all conflict is bad, Sun Tzu's model suggests that for a work place to be "heavenly," people require a climate of trust, equity and a team spirit, regardless of the presence of conflict ((Khoo Kheng-Hor 1992:72).

To respond to the question posed above - whether conflict leads to aggression, the CLU program development process is explained as two models that clarify the deeper possibilities of 'reduced conflict' in collaborative professional development programs in academe. The models are the Caral, Peru, Pyramid City Model of partnerships, and the Integrated Network Model of multi-national corporations.

The OK Caral Model

In contrast to Sun Tzu's Art of War, a recent discovery in Peru suggests that the seeds of civilization and government as we know it can be based not on war and aggression, rather on interdependent and sophisticated trading partnerships (Ross 2002).

The pyramid city of Caral, Peru, predating the ceramic age and said to be the oldest known 'new world' city, indicates that urban civilization began in the Americas 1500 years earlier than thought, and at the same time as the Egyptian pyramidal era – 2627B.C., even before the Incas. Caral, inland from the sea and in the desert, does not support the anthropological theory that civilization occurred as a means of protection from war. Indeed, there are no fortifications of any sort, nor is there any indication of ritual sacrifice. Also, Caral, as a complex society, was not based on stockpiling of foods for trade leverage, and thus power, in tough times. (Ross, 2002; Levine 2001)

What the people of Caral offered was the enabling of other ocean and jungle based communities to receive better products (such as large cotton fishing nets), allowing those communities to work more productively and effectively. The entire organisational network of communities thus combined resources with Caral in a pooled reliance on fish, Coca plants, and other items, in a richly networked trading environment.

Such an environment matches with at least two contemporary management findings. The first is that competition begets uniformity, not diversity (Tisdell 1999; Holling 1995; Maynard & Mehrtens 1993; Aoki 1959). This query regarding economic model speculation will not be explored further here other than to say that competition and 'best practice' emulation reduce diversity, especially in tertiary industries where diversity is an important driving force for adding to the growth of our stock of knowledge (Tisdell 1999).

The second management research finding is that interdependence in an integrated network structure produces a better dynamic than a centralised hub. Centralised hubs have tight, simple controls, especially of product development, procurement, and product creation. Such a system keeps primary decision-making and control at the centre, reducing collaboration and interdependence (Bartlett & Goshall, 1995, pp.474-475; Applebaum et al, 1999).

Something Different from Centralised and Decentralised Models

The Integrated Network Model, in comparison, is a climate in which assets are distributed and interdependent – for Caral, Peru that meant fish in the sea, cotton in the desert gardens, weavers near the sea wanting nets, farmers in the desert gardens who wanted the protein in fish, and a society that had extensive music-based social activities.

With both centralised and decentralised activities combined, loosely coupled systems of interdependence lead to individuals acting collaboratively on behalf of the overall organisation. Managerial and leadership competencies required for this include empathy, transformation, politics, networking and creative thinking (Limerick, 1990, 1989, 1987; Harris, 1995; Austin, 1995).

Coordination and networking needs will of course vary by business and geographic area, and will change as the operating environment changes. In other words, things are

managed by “self-regulation, ...[within] a broad culture and [a broad] set of relationships that provide an appropriate organisational context for delegated decisions – a sophisticated management process driven by socialisation” (Bartlett & Goshall, 1995:480). Looking forward, self-regulated teams, that have both an internal and external focus, and the ability to manage across competencies within networked organisational structures, seem likely to have a distinct advantage over traditional team theory (Hyde, 2002:63).

Such a model requires a “management process that can resolve the diversity of interests and perspectives and integrate the dispersed responsibilities” (Bartlett & Goshall, 1995: 479). Amongst the different tools needed in this model, the overall organisational anatomy requires micro-structural tools, such as those illustrated in Table 1: OK Caral Model and the CLU Program – all by way of informal systems and informal relationships, and by participative and self- managed systems such as those promoted by Fred Emery (Cabana, 1997).

Table 1: OK Caral Model and the CLU Program

<i>OK Caral Model</i>	<i>CLU Program</i>
Task forces	Facilitation team – internally and externally focused
Supplemental decision-making forums	Reference groups Evaluation/review process
Good communication channels	A wide range of contemporary technology including face-to-face
Shared management understanding	Joint drafts of an initial Issues paper Ability to manage across competencies
Systems that develop and reinforce appropriate kinds of people, practices and systems	HR & TALSS quarterly linkage meetings Program activities Networked organisation structures

The basis of the Caral-style relationships and the OK Caral model of collaborative partnership proposed is:

- Interdependence, rather than a need for usurpation and control
- Trade and pooling of resources
- Non-competition
- Collaboration and collaborative problem solving
- Centrally located opportunities for trade based on mutual need – such as new or improved products, and social and intellectual interaction

- Diverse levels of social groups – leaders, planners, builders, designers, product producers, traders
- Diversity of product
- Accommodation of diversity
- Improved access to resources
- Product diversity based on location and/or function
- Climate of trust, equity and team spirit.

Thus, the Caral model, of interchange, and pooled interdependence, expresses the philosophical foundation of the facilitation and development for the CLU program at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). As we have indicated, contemporary research legitimates the application of the Caral model to our collaborative endeavour.

Adopting the OK Caral for CLU Program Development

In this section the OK Caral Model will be further illustrated through discussing some of the key components of the HR/TALSS collaboration required to develop and implement the CLU program, a program that aimed to:

1. Develop the individual and organisational capabilities[#] of CLUs to improve their practice across teaching and learning and management and leadership;
2. Uncover the systemic barriers to CLU effectiveness
3. Provide a forum for CLU networking across the University community
4. Provide a program that acknowledged the value added contribution CLUs made to QUT's teaching and learning environment.

The program incorporated:

1. Seminars and workshops delivered by experts from both within the QUT community and beyond (sessions included a catered lunch, to facilitate networking amongst CLUs)
2. A reference group of CLU representatives drawn from across QUT Faculties, which met to determine overall directions of the program. This group had the dual role of consultants to program directions and for providing communication links to CLUs within each Faculty. In many cases Reference Group members were representatives on Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees or equivalent
3. A CLU grant scheme that funded three faculty based research and product outcome projects. Each project was awarded on a competitive basis through an application process
4. A presentation to a Heads of School forum featuring an introduction to CLU issues and strategies to address some of these issues. The presentation was made by a Dean

[#] An example of an individual capability is the ability to lead a team (such as the tutoring team in a large unit). An example of an organisational capability is the ability to negotiate the QUT systems for appointment of casual academic staff.

of Faculty and Director of TALSS and Heads Of School were encouraged to contribute to their points of view for inclusion in a CLU issues paper

5. The development of a CLU website
6. Updates to University Teaching and Learning Committee.

The HR/TALSS collaboration presented the following key features:

- Of the four members of the facilitation team, three were new to their roles and two were new to the University. Thus there was an acknowledgement of interdependence in transitioning to these new roles and the need for exploration of ways to develop effective relationships without the constraints of existing political and social impediments. After an initial period of getting to know each other there was an explicit commitment to trusting and sharing broader perspectives in working as a cross-Departmental team
- The nature of the organisational environment meant that each member of the facilitation team had different but not distinct development foci. Thus it was clear from the beginning that staff from HR would bring a focus on leadership and management and those from TALSS on teaching and learning. Those in the CLU program however did not make such clear distinctions. In grappling with their daily issues CLUs found that their management of human resources for example, directly impacted on their ability to support quality student learning outcomes. Thus the facilitation team relied on the particular skills and focus of each member to collaboratively develop activities and programs that met the needs of academic staff.
- As the desired outcomes of the program illustrate, there was an explicit acknowledgment of the broader contexts of the target group for the CLU program. As a consequence a range of development opportunities were offered (see above).
- To develop effective working relationships, members of the HR/TALSS facilitation team committed to face-to-face meetings. A reference group of CLU representatives met regularly and provided opportunities for diverse issues to be raised.
- The program included a range of offerings (a diversity of product), which reflects not only the diverse needs of CLUs but also the range of HR/TALSS perspectives that informed the program. For each of the offerings, one facilitation team member took a lead role in developing the activity and the others supported through whichever means were most appropriate – sometimes attendance as a facilitator, sometimes the development of case studies for discussion. In a similar fashion the administrative support for the program shifted between the two departments as workloads shifted.
- Through this collaborative work a climate of trust, equity and team spirit between members of the facilitation team and with the CLUs was built.

Thus in the modes of operation, the micro-structural tools used, and relationship interactions engaged in, there was a clear move towards an OK Caral system of operation, one characterised by interdependency, trust, collaboration and team.

The CLU Program Offerings and the Evaluation Process - What they tell us about our Collaborative Effort

The success and benefits of the OK Caral system of operation can be verified through the findings of the CLU program evaluation process. The preliminary findings of the evaluation showed support and agreement for the micro-structural tools, which emerged from the collaborative partnership that was forged to deliver the program

A plan for evaluating the CLU Program for 2002 was developed using the Flashlight Methodology*. It is interesting to note that this methodology was discovered and shared by one member of the development team, and its applicability to the CLU program was explored, and then adopted, by the rest of the interdependent team.

In brief the Flashlight framework is built around an issue of interest from which a problem is highlighted. This problem is explored through a triad of three key areas:

- the desired outcomes;
- the activities (learning activities) that have been used to support the desired outcomes;
- the technology or strategy that has been used to support the activities.

By considering the effectiveness of each of these three areas and the relationship between them, questions are posed as a means to explore the issue of interest. In the case represented here, the evaluation of the 2002 CLU program was the focus of the evaluation to:

- determine the effectiveness of program activities of 2002 in achieving the desired outcomes, where effectiveness is defined across a spectrum from positive reactions from participants through to changing practice within the organisation;
- develop a proposal outlining the content and delivery of a CLU program in 2003 in order to secure support and future funding from the University's Teaching and Learning Committee;
- determine the micro-structural tools and model of interchange to be developed for the 2003 program;

A number of questions were posed and data was collected from a variety of stakeholders who were involved in the CLU program:

1. Immediate feedback from participants who attended each of the seminar presentations;
2. Semi-structured interviews with CLUs; who:
 - participated in the program activities and
 - did not participate in the program activities, ensuring representation from all Faculties;

* For a description and examples of the use of Flashlight see The Teaching, Learning and Technology Group Flashlight page: <http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/flashlight.html>

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3. A feedback meeting with CLU Reference Group members;
4. Discussion and comments made at the Heads of School Forum;
5. A reflective meeting of the Facilitation/Development team (HR and TALSS).

The preliminary results of the evaluation are summarised as follows:

- In the interviews with CLUs, participants in the evaluation process agreed that the program was beneficial in focusing attention on CLU issues and that the money available for the 2002 CLU program was well spent for the activities provided;
- Participants in the evaluation process strongly agreed that the 2002 CLU program allowed for significant networking and sharing of ideas amongst the CLU community. As a result a number of examples of best practice in innovative teaching practices and management solutions were uncovered from across the University, at an individual CLU level or at a school or faculty level;
- Participants agreed with the importance of the original program areas and that development opportunities are still needed to enhance CLU capabilities in the areas of management, leadership, teaching and learning in order to improve student learning outcomes in large units;
- The CLU Reference Group played an important communication and advocacy role, ensuring that CLUs were aware of the program and guiding and linking the activities of the 2002 program to the teaching and learning priorities of the faculties;
- Barriers to CLU effectiveness were identified. Two interrelated themes emerged as barriers: (a) the perceived support from Heads of School, adequate resources and a sufficient level of administration support and (b) whether there was an effective match between CLU requirements and University systems, policies and procedures.

Reflection upon the results of the evaluation further demonstrates the effectiveness of the OK Caral Model as a system of operation. This approach to development will continue to be applied and refined in 2003. In effect, the characteristics and underpinning principles of the OK Caral model could also be adopted by CLUs themselves in order to develop a curriculum, which meets students' expectations, whilst creating a climate of trust, equity and team spirit (amongst their own teaching team as well as themselves as a defined network of academics). CLUs are responsible for large numbers of students (diverse levels of social groups), a large teaching team (interdependence is paramount) and are required to produce a relevant curriculum underpinned by sound pedagogical foundations (diversity of product).

The development and provision of micro-structural tools in order to facilitate collaborative problem solving and improved access to resources for CLUs, continues to be a challenge for the development staff from HR and TALSS. Current suggestions in terms of potential future micro-structural tools include:

- The formation of a **working party** to develop a long-term plan to explore perceived barriers to CLU effectiveness and to work collaboratively with key stakeholders to improve University systems, policies and processes;
- A **reference group** with defined terms of reference focused on collaboration to develop Faculty-based communities of practice and consultation about program directions;
- A **one day conference** for CLUs to encourage collaboration, sharing of knowledge, networking and discussion;
- The further development of the CLU **web site**, competitive **grant scheme** and seminar **program**.

In addition, the successful development of CLU capabilities in the areas of teaching learning, management and leadership needs to be continually addressed by the program developers in the future. Furthermore, if the CLU program is also focused upon developing individual CLU capabilities in the areas of empathy, transformation, politics, networking and creative thinking (Limerick, 1990, 1989, 1987; Harris, 1995; Austin, 1995), then the OK Caral model can also flourish within and benefit the CLU community.

Conclusions

The OK Caral Model that underpinned the delivery of the 2002 CLU program evolved and was shaped over a 12 month period. The facilitation team recognises that the Model provides a firm foundation for the effective delivery of the program in 2003 but at the same time acknowledges that it is not static and will continue to be refined and improved.

The critical benefits of the Model have been reflected in evaluation findings but most importantly in its capacity to successfully channel the expertise of two quite distinct Departments for the benefit of the overall organisation. The potential impact of the Model as played out in the delivery of the CLU program has wide reaching impact when taken from the perspective that CLUs influence the learning experience of thousands of students and in some instances coordinate the activities of more staff than some Heads of School.

The OK Caral Model process of interchange and pooled interdependence has permeated the philosophical foundation of the CLU program – a program which has seen University “silos” being eroded, communities of learning established, practice shared and new partnerships across faculties and HR/TALSS established.

The CLU program is a strategic, targeted and successful approach to development. The leverage for the future delivery of the CLU program rests not only in past success nor the potential benefit for significant numbers of students and staff but most importantly on the bringing together of two influential Departments in the OK Caral.

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