Supporting Higher Degree Research collaboration: A reflection

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This paper demonstrates the application of a collaborative research framework (Gasson & Bruce, 2017) to the Higher Degree Research (HDR) journey. We propose that by positioning this as a collaborative research culture framework it will enable discussion about developing (building, sustaining and maintaining) healthy and productive collaborative research cultures.

Both authors were invited to discuss research collaboration in different spaces. We established a way forward by discussing the critical elements of such collaboration. Out of this we built a framework (Gasson & Bruce, 2017). In the course of sharing this framework with colleagues it became clear that the productive discussion and issues lay around building and managing a sustainable collaborative research culture. We realized that evaluating the collaboration is easier (based on performance metrics), evaluating the culture is more difficult but also important. Further we noted that evaluation work to date has focussed on measurable outcomes associated with visible research activity and their outputs. This framework suggests that focus on the culture would be informing, enabling productive cultures to be established.

This paper will provide a background as to why this is important and relevant to the current climate (Australian Government, 2015; Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute, 2017; Department of Education and Training, 2017; McGagh et al, 2016); Productivity Commission, 2017; Watt, 2015) and describe the proposed culture framework. We then move on to a narrative reflection on the application of the initial collaborative research framework in two contexts and the ensuing discussions and issues that arose. This has led to our view that there is a need for a deliberate focus on the development of a collaborative research culture as an enabler of research productivity; this leads to consideration of the application of the collaborative research culture framework in the HDR context.

We conclude the paper by raising key questions such as:

• What are the characteristics of a productive collaborative research culture?

• What puts a productive collaborative research culture in place?

• What puts a productive collaborative research culture at risk?

• How is a productive collaborative research culture measured and maintained?

• What is the role of research leaders in building, maintaining and sustaining productive collaborative research cultures?

In moving the discussion into the HDR context our intention is to consider how to support students and their supervisory teams to respond optimally to the call for increased collaboration/end-user engagement. The proposed application of the culture framework moves discussion from evaluation, measurement and reporting on the impact of these engagements to the underpinning culture required to enable development of research collaborations.

Development work involves a three stage approach starting with building, moving to maintaining and then sustaining based on a justification of the research collaboration's productive measureable outcomes. Our view is that this development work sits with research leaders. To date these leaders have relied on intuition and modelling from past experience to inform their activity. However, with the increasing focus on collaborative research and its measurement a more systematic approach may be needed. This approach provides leaders with a cultural focused perspective. An example of the application of the framework is provided to demonstrate this. .