


Research Report

May 2006

# Life Based Learning



**A strength based  
approach for capability  
development in  
vocational and  
technical education**

## Members of the National Reference Group for 'Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era' Research Project

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**Australian Government**  
**Department of Education,  
Science and Training**



# Life Based Learning

**A strength based approach for  
capability development in vocational  
and technical education**

**A report on the research project 'Designing  
Professional Development for the Knowledge Era'**

**Managed by the TAFE NSW International Centre  
for VET Teaching and Learning (ICVET)**

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# Chair's Forward

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I am very pleased to release the report *Life based learning: A strength based approach for capability development in Vocational and Technical Education*, which is the outcome of the research project "Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era".

The Knowledge Era is upon us. Complexity, uncertainty, paradox, diversity and opportunity have become integral to our work environments. The research has identified a learning ecologies metaphor as the most appropriate metaphor for such environments. It recognises the need for adaptability, interrelatedness and sustainability and supports new and creative ways of planning and designing in the Knowledge Era.

Broadening our perception of professional development to that of capability development is one of the key findings of the research. It suggests capability development is a better fit for the business context of the Knowledge Era and can encompass the increasingly broader scope of professional development strategies and approaches that are needed in vocational and technical education (VTE).

Another finding of the research is the need to shift to a strength based orientation in relation to capability development. This does not displace existing practice, but rather takes the best with us and incorporates it into the new. Both new and existing strategies can be reoriented to focus on our strengths. It is an imperative in VTE that we move from deficit based models and methodologies to asset or strength based orientations.

These concepts of the Knowledge Era, learning ecologies and strength based approaches have informed the development of a new model for capability development in VTE. It is a model of life based learning and builds on the potential of work based learning. It acknowledges and recognises the importance of our life experiences. This exciting new model should be of great interest to VTE. It is underpinned by age old values and truths such as generosity, authenticity and trust.

Research is a key element in ensuring that vocational and technical education remains at the forefront of meeting business needs and providing our practitioners with the latest in theories and practice to assist them in effectively facilitating learning processes. The connection between research, capability development and change is critical to our sector. This research project has provided VTE with a model for capability development that can operate in environments where the boundaries blur, the rate of change is speeding up and learners need to increasingly take responsibility for their own learning.

I am delighted to have been associated with this research. It provides a contemporary framework for capability development that supports the development of sustainable and resilient working and learning environments.

**Institute Director**  
**TAFE NSW – Illawarra Institute**  
**April 2006**

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# Executive Summary

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This research report is the outcome of 12 months' research structured by the *Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era* research project. The research project was jointly funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training and TAFE NSW. The project involved, besides the research team, a Working Group, a National Reference Group and wider audiences for feedback on research work in progress. This wider feedback was obtained through journal articles, face-to-face forums, website publications, presentations to management groups and workshops.

The purpose of the project was to develop a business framework for professional development that assists and guides workforce planning and development practices in Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) in the Knowledge Era. The outputs of the research reported here are designed for managers as they support new directions in capability development of the VTE workforce and for individuals and groups seeking to apply new strategies and approaches to capability development in VTE.

## Background

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The *Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era* research project has progressed the research undertaken in the *Working and Learning in Vocational Education and Training in the Knowledge Era* research project (2003-04). The project is also a response to the changing context of VTE as reported in contemporary (2003-05) research reports and papers, research that has identified the need for:

- capacity building approaches rather than compliance approaches in the training package environment
- meeting the changing nature and needs of the workforce
- new pedagogical approaches to learning and teaching and innovation
- strategies that will break down many of the barriers that learners face, and
- increasing integration of working and learning.

The *Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era* research project has been a companion research project to the ongoing research of ICVET focused on pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in VTE, and complements current research and programs in VTE, including the Training and Assessment Training (TAA) Package, Unit of Competency TAAENV501A Maintain and Enhance Professional Practice, and the NCVER Consortium Research Program Supporting VET Providers in Building Capability for the Future (December 2004 – December 2006).

## Methodology

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The methodology informing this research was an eclectic one, drawing on phenomenology, hermeneutics and dialogue. The project consisted of two main phases. Phase 1 was concerned with the development of the theoretical basis for professional development in the Knowledge Era including concepts, models and strategies. The research team and the working group were the primary actors in this phase of the research. Regular working papers were provided to the national reference group for feedback on the direction that the research was taking. Phase 2 involved wider dissemination of research work in progress, seeking feedback from people in the field and discussion of the practical application of the emerging findings through a business framework.

Informing the research in its latter phase were 'think pieces' commissioned by TAFE NSW ICVET.

## The report: Life based learning: an approach for capability development in Vocational Training and Education

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This final report of the *Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era* research project is entitled *Life based learning: a strength based approach for capability development in Vocational Training and Education*. The substantive parts of the report are commentaries on vision and values, key concepts from the literature, and links between these concepts and contemporary work environments. These are followed by an exposition of the key findings from the research. The final parts of the report address the application issues associated with the key findings of the research.

## Vision and values

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The research is premised on a vision of VTE business environments as flexible, dynamic, risk-taking and self-sustaining systems. The vision for learners in VTE is that they work with teachers and trainers who passionately believe in learning and in helping others to learn and to reach their potential. This vision includes rich and diverse learning environments that incorporate continuous inquiry and development that is both adaptable to continually changing environments and sustainable and resilient in the business context of VTE.

The research identified a set of values that are emerging as fundamental to living and working in the Knowledge Era, values that need to be reclaimed in the workplace. Significant amongst these values are:

- **for the self:**
  - trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, engagement, selflessness, equanimity
- **with others:**
  - generosity, collaboration, humility, openness, tolerance
- **together as a group:**
  - taking responsibility instead of blaming others
  - planning and implementing wisely
  - being positive and looking beyond the immediate impact
  - balancing personal and work needs
  - being supported in taking risks
  - supporting community.

Values are seen as a key feature of any culture. The attributes of values that have been recognised in the research include the need for developmental values as well as values for 'end results' such as goals, and a balance between the two.

## Key concepts

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Four key concepts were identified as highly relevant to capability development in VTE. These are *Knowledge Era – the environment*, *Learning ecologies – the metaphor*, *Strength based philosophy – the mindset* and *Business wisdom – the actions*.

### Knowledge Era – the environment

The research acknowledges the complexity of the VTE sector, a sector whose environment is dynamic, diverse and characterised by constant change. The VTE environment is now experiencing the effect of a global shift, the dawn of the Knowledge Era.

Knowledge work associated with the Knowledge Era has been identified by this research as a key generic capability. This form of work is non-linear and non-routine, more intuitive, opportunistic and networked, and less driven by allegiance to a pre-planned critical path or a mindset, and therefore more innovative. Knowledge workers in the VTE sector reflect this generic capability when they:

- balance work, learning and knowing
- undertake research
- rapidly acquire new skills

- apply existing skills and knowledge to new problems, based on high pattern-recognition skills
- problem-solve and make sense in new contexts
- maintain a balance between productivity and creativity, and
- collaborate in both face-to-face and virtual environments.

In the shift to the Knowledge Era, knowledge workers will need to accept the challenge of working and learning within contemporary environments where contradictory forces ebb and flow. Key capacities to build and sustain the environmental shift underway include:

- capacity to foster sharing and nurturing
- capacity to support groups
- immediate applicability of professional development
- flexible and responsive leadership, and
- clear corporate goals.

### Learning ecologies – the metaphor

The research team identified ‘ecology’ as an effective metaphor for providing enhanced meaning to the conceptual basis of the project. ‘Ecology’ embraces the idea of contradictory forces within a sustaining and dynamic system; ‘opposites in co-existence’ with the dawning of the Knowledge Era. The research team adapted this metaphor to that of ‘learning ecologies’, a metaphor that directly enhances understanding of what needs to be done in developing capability in VTE in the Knowledge Era.

Learning ecologies are dynamic, adaptive and diverse. From an exploration of these dimensions of this key metaphor, the research claims that the learning ecologies metaphor offers capability development in VTE freedom from seeking out **the one way to get it right or the solution**. More importantly, the learning ecologies metaphor draws our attention to a way of looking at the world that is intuitive, caring and responsible.

The image developed by the research team of an approach and framework for, and the experiences to be had in, capability development in VTE that are implicit in the learning ecologies metaphor include the following caveats:

- This approach is not about precision or pre-determined ways of doing things. Rather than being predictive, it is anticipative.
- It is a permissive framework which means there may be tension and irritation as there are no clear answers. It is a *why* to rather than a *how* to approach.
- Some of it will be wrong and this will help to create the shifts.
- It favours successive approximations rather than exactness.
- Fuzziness is its strength. Fuzziness is a precise concept that provides a framework for understanding chaos.
- Self-organising happens in an ecology, but there may be no satisfactory explanation for where the organising pattern comes from.

### Strength based philosophy – the mindset

The transition to the Knowledge Era is compatible with organisational change processes that move away from familiar deficit models which identify what is wrong before proceeding to ‘fix it’ using intervention strategies. The emerging paradigm for organisational change is based on asset or strength based approaches for individual and organisational growth and change.

Essentially, these models focus on collaboratively identifying what’s right and working well and then investing in increasing that. The research identified positive psychology as the key underpinning theoretical discipline for a strength based orientation to capability development in VTE.

Two key ideas from positive psychology are authentic happiness and signature strengths. In addition, the research drew on flow theory. Flow theory is an evolutionary model based on being conscious of our inescapable interconnectedness and being willing to devote some of our energy to the wellbeing of others. The concept of flow is aligned to the ‘engaged life’ as described in positive psychology, a mindset concept that is highly compatible with the connectedness embedded in the learning ecologies metaphor.



## Business wisdom – the actions

Business wisdom is built on the principles and practices of organisational learning and knowledge management and is usually associated with knowledge, intelligence and experience (Hays 2005). However wisdom is greater than these attributes. It is about how the linking and leveraging based on knowledge, intelligence and experience sits within a business. It is about how these work together to promote learning and wisdom.

The concept of wisdom, which is central to all aspects of this research project, has the following qualities:

- Wisdom is strength based: it contributes to human wellbeing and the common good.
- Wisdom contributes to synthesis: wise thinking and actions pull components together into an integrated whole.
- Wisdom is achievement-oriented: it has a very practical orientation and serves to guide thinking and action.

From this summary of wisdom, as aligned to the other key concepts central to capability development, the research argued that wise thinking and wise actions are the glue that connects the different elements of a learning organisation into a more integrated and productive whole, strengthening what is already working.

The research team drew on the think piece produced by Miller and Miller (2006) to capture an expanded perspective on wisdom leadership. This piece described four distinct frames of reference for wisdom leadership that have emerged over the last 100 years: paternal-mechanical, humanistic, holistic and spiritual. The way a business is conducted is influenced by which of these frameworks (or combinations of them) leaders draw on for their wisdom.

This research would argue that a focus on business wisdom is particularly relevant to capability development in the Knowledge Era as it affirms the central role of human development, life management and striving to be the best that we can be for the benefit of others and ourselves.

## Linking concepts to contemporary work environments – invited contributions

This section of the report (Part 4) was informed by papers (think pieces) commissioned by TAFE NSW ICVET. All authors were briefed by the research team. These papers are:

- **Richard Slaughter** (2005) *Emerging paradigms in the Knowledge Era*
- **Richard Hall** (2006) *Workplace changes: change and continuity in the workplaces of the future*
- **Avril Henry** (2006) *The changing face of the workforce and intergenerational impacts*
- **Robert K. Critchley** (2006) *The ageing workforce – to rewire or rust*
- **William and Debra Miller** (2006) *Wisdom leadership: exploring its relation to spirituality*

These papers have been compiled into a publication called *Voices: Contemporary thinking for working and learning in the Knowledge Era* and can be accessed from the ICVET website (<http://www.icvet.edu.au>).

## Key findings

This research project has produced three key findings. These findings are:

1. Capability development is the new emphasis for working and learning in VTE.
2. A strength based orientation to capability development is most effective for change.
3. Life based learning is a contemporary framework for capability development in VTE.

These findings have been developed into a model for capability development in VTE.

## Emphasizing capability development

The research identified a need to move beyond the terminology of professional development; it was seen by participants in the project as restrictive. Capability development was accepted as being more aligned with the discourse emerging from this research. Capability development reclaims the importance of people and the human aspect as well as reinforcing the importance of business imperatives.

The assumptions that underlie this preference for a new terminology are that capability development:

- addresses the needs of the organisation, workforce, individuals and groups
- supports a high degree of flexibility in the organisation
- provides a wide range of learning options
- occurs in relationship and focuses on people rather than place and structure
- provides support for learning through mistakes
- responds to the shifting nature of priorities
- is available to all in the organisation
- involves a combined responsibility by both the individual and the organisation
- is recognised as occurring through many processes and everyday activities
- ranges from organisational learning to personal learning, and on and off-the-job learning
- suits the 'organic', open-system nature of the Knowledge Era, and
- recognises both the individual and social processes that coexist and underpin learning in the Knowledge Era.

Creating capability is about:

- moving away from segmented activities to holistic activities that have more meaning and purpose
- positive appreciative mindsets and approaches
- creating balance and integration, with a seamless connection between work, learning and knowing
- empowering people to apply their expertise as people, rather than procedures or information, as the best source of deep expertise, and
- reciprocal obligation between the individual and the organisation: that is, people taking responsibility for their own self-directed learning and organisations creating environments that support learning.

Capability development is about supporting people in being *confident, capable, connected, curious and committed learners* who interact with their environments so that they are in dynamic balance between life and work, resulting in effective and appropriate actions at work.

## Strength based orientation

A strength based orientation to capability development does not disregard or displace existing practice in the professional development field because its premise is that we take the best with us and integrate it into the new. Learners need to be able to access a wide range of diverse and personalised strategies and to take responsibility for their learning processes. Each learner is unique and needs to select from options that are available within the parameters of the business. These choices are not 'free-for-all'; they exist within the reality of the work environment and the boundaries necessary for individual, team and organisational success. This is best achieved through integrating strategies that incorporate age-old values and truths, established professional development practices, emerging strategies and openness to future options.

Many established strategies are already strength based. The idea is to build more mindfully on these strengths. Established strategies identified as strength based include conversations, action learning and coaching. Mentoring was seen as conducive to working from strength, but the research uncovered cautions and an understanding that mentoring in itself was not the strength; its potential strength came from how it was executed.

Emerging and future strategies have been specifically designed from a strength based orientation. They include, but are not limited to, critical conversations, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), talent management, disruptive technologies and positive deviance. They form part of a diverse approach to capability development in the Knowledge Era.

The critical factor and essential characteristic of these new strategies for capability development is that they are based on a thorough understanding of life based learning. Strategies used within the work based learning model may also reflect the characteristics of life based learning. The research identified the importance of appreciating the theoretical base of a life based learning model for capability development and of using selected strategies wisely and with good judgement.

## Life based learning

This project proposes that life based learning is a plausible and contemporary framework for capability development in VTE. Further, the project proposes, through the concept of life based learning, that learning **for** work is not restricted to learning **at** work. Life based learning acknowledges **multiple sources** of learning, which opens up opportunities for developing capability. Life based learning substantially shifts the discourse about professional development by moving beyond the allegiance to work based and expert-centred learning. While honouring their legacy, retaining what works and drawing out their potential, it places them into a more contemporary framework.

Life based learning has a different focus from lifelong learning in that it is more about the source of learning, acknowledging the whole person's learning contribution and recognising the different ways in which learning is significant to the individual. Life based learning allows for more of the 'whole' person to be present in learning and at work. It adds to the possibilities for learning and development in VTE and provides opportunities to build on current practices. Life based learning acknowledges that what we experience and learn outside a work environment can be as important to our work as what we experience and learn at work. What life based learning makes explicit is that individuals have knowledge, skills and capabilities that are not always visible or recognised by organisations even though they can significantly contribute to organisational life.

The ten key characteristics of life based learning identified by the research are that it:

- emphasises capability development
- promotes a strength based orientation to learning
- recognises multiple sources of learning
- balances integrity and utility
- shifts responsibility for learning to the individual
- shifts the role of organisations to that of enabler
- acknowledges that contradictions are strengths
- invests in developing the whole person
- acknowledges human dispositions as critical, and
- appreciates that change means things are qualitatively different.

The true strength of these key characteristics is in their interconnectedness. Life based learning embraces the best of expert-centred learning and work based learning, offering a broader repertoire. It expands the

potential of existing models, offering new possibilities and articulating explicitly what many VTE practitioners are intuitively engaging with already. It better serves the needs of working and learning in the dynamic VTE environment.

Life based learning creates a model for capability development specified in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities and values. The emphasis is on personal responsibility for learning through the provision of rich learning environments, with the learning benefiting both the individual and the organisation. Life based learning is adaptive, self-facilitated, based on whole-of-life perspectives and reflexive practice, and uses any strategy appropriate for the task.

There are three distinguishing features of life based learning critical to this new model:

- an emphasis on a strength based orientation rather than strategy
- explicit recognition of underpinning foundation truths and values including trust, mindfulness, consideration and tolerance, and
- acknowledgement of the learner as a whole person who accesses many sources of learning.

The research in its second phase identified benefits and outcomes of the life based learning model for capability development. The key benefits were that it:

- articulated and legitimised what was familiar and known intuitively
- proposed a way forward that was within reach
- expanded the perspective of learning, which had the potential to open up more opportunities; it was considered more productive to reduce and blur the artificial boundaries that currently compartmentalise the context of learning
- legitimised life experiences as a key source of learning; it reinforced the fact that learning is transferable, and that 'harvesting' learning from one context and sowing it in another was a very practical, achievable and productive initiative, and
- acknowledged the whole person, which in turn had potential for utilising individual talents in better and smarter ways; this could benefit both the individual and the organisation.

The types of life based learning experiences participants in the research described generally fell into three categories: 1) significant life events, 2) developing a talent, and 3) recreational interests.

Phase 2 of the research project identified anticipated outcomes of a life based learning model for VTE organisations and businesses. These are divided into various components including vision, people, work, work style, environment and resulting outcomes for business.

## Application

The research report includes a discussion of guiding principles for applying a life based learning model of capability development to businesses. Six guiding principles for action are identified. These are:

- believe relationships really matter
- work with strengths
- be reflexive, as well as reflective
- think and act wisely
- acknowledge the whole person, and
- move beyond professional development as an activity.

Further, organisational enablers are included in this application section of the report, as a guide to providing rich learning environments that promote capability development for individuals and teams through a model of life based learning. The eight organisational enablers identified by the research are:

- Valuing connections and networks.
- Developing a culture that supports job reshaping for personal growth.
- Creating space for exchange and sharing of ideas (informal learning).
- Supporting learners as designers of their own development.
- Balancing control and creativity.
- Modelling wise leadership.
- Capitalising on the benefits of an intergenerational workforce.
- Focusing on futures *in* education.

The researchers also explored application details of strength based approaches to capability development within a life based learning model. Here the focus is on emerging approaches. Application details for conversations, talent management, positive deviance, Appreciative Inquiry and disruptive technology are fleshed out.

The application section of the report concludes with a discussion of evaluation for capability development in the Knowledge Era noting that such an evaluative process will be full of paradoxes and questions. Importantly, if evaluation in general seeks to establish the value or worth of an activity or program, is it possible to evaluate capability development using traditional approaches?

The research indicates that capability development, as an innovation, demands fresh and distinctly different approaches to evaluation. Two approaches to evaluation are canvassed: Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Most Significant Change (MSC). These approaches take into account simultaneous development on multiple levels while recognising multiple stakeholders (organisation, team, the individual), each of whom will have different expectations of evaluation and will use evaluation measures in different ways.

## Concluding remarks

The researchers believe that life based learning offers a way forward at a time when many Industrial Era processes are no longer working. It opens the way to re-energising people, honouring what has worked well in the past and realigning current and emerging strategies to a strength based orientation. The potential of life based learning has been summed up by a National Action Planning Forum participant thus:

*Life based learning seems initially a utopian/fantasy notion, but we live in a complex world. The notion is an honest attempt to capture the full breadth of our humanity, and apply it to our working life. I associate the idea of life based learning with my reading of classical studies and science fiction, where writers deal with the possible and not the absurd. The possibility that humanity can set out to explore the stars.*

**Life based learning articulates what many people know and feel.** It provides a framework for application to capability development in the VTE sector. This is further explored in the companion document to this research report, *A Business Approach to Capability Development: considerations and suggestions for customising and applying life based learning in the workplace* (available on the TAFE NSW ICVET website: <http://www.icvet.edu.au>).

## 1.1 Background

It has been increasingly recognised that there is a need for a new and stronger focus on professional development in vocational and technical education (VTE),<sup>1</sup> to better meet the needs of its workforce in a constantly changing environment.

As stated in the *Enhancing the Capability of VET Professionals: Final Report* (ANTA 2004a, p. 4), this environment is characterised by:

an increasing diversity in the client base; increasing sophistication in client expectations; change in products and expansion of options for training delivery; changes in employment, work roles, team structures and places of work; increasing competition and increasing demand; and a globalisation of the training market.

As the Final Report says, in such environments long-term sustainability depends on the ability of the workforce to deliver required outcomes in new and different ways. This in turn depends on continuing investment in workforce development and capability.

There is also a need to progress the research previously undertaken in the *Working and Learning in Vocational Education and Training in the Knowledge Era Research Project* (ANTA 2004c), which examined literature relating to the Knowledge Era and processes and practices used by workers to remain current and responsive to client needs. The outcome of the research was a substantial report that highlighted the knowledge worker context, organisational and individual capabilities for knowledge work and the environments that enable workplace learning and development to take place.<sup>2</sup>

Eight key enablers were identified to promote 'knowing' and the embedding of a new style of professional development within vocational and technical education (VTE). These are:

1. **Socio-technical systems** – integrate information and communication technologies into socio-technical systems.
2. **Networks and relationships** – foster greater understanding of the organisation from within.

<sup>1</sup> Vocational and technical education (VTE) is post-compulsory education and training, excluding degree and higher level programs delivered by higher education institutions, which provides people with occupational or work-related knowledge and skills. It includes programs which provide the basis for subsequent vocational programs. Alternative terms used internationally include technical and vocational education and training (TVET), vocational and technical education and training (VTET), technical and vocational education (TVE), vocational education and training (VET) and further education and training (FET). (Adapted from DEST glossary [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training\\_skills/policy\\_issues\\_reviews/key\\_issues/nts/glo/utoz.htm#Glossary\\_-\\_V](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/nts/glo/utoz.htm#Glossary_-_V), accessed 28 March 2006.)

<sup>2</sup> A Summary Report 2004 of the research was commissioned by the TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning (ICVET), Sydney in collaboration with the Australian National Training Authority. It can be found at <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/projects/resources/pdf/futuresummary.pdf>. The complete ANTA report can be found at <http://flexiblelearning.net.au/projects/resources/PDFFutureReport.pdf>



3. **Organisational identity** – connect staff to the organisation's fundamental identity.
4. **Work outcomes and career paths** – connect to the work and career trajectories of workers.
5. **Emergent professional development** – establish structures that integrate the use of professional development resources with knowledge work.
6. **Worker as designer** – provide workers with the autonomy to design their own professional development activities.
7. **Working and learning as an iterative process** – build professional development into the iterative nature of knowledge work.
8. **Organisational environment** – create organisational contexts that value intuitive thinking and working.

Attention needs to be paid to these enablers so that environments that allow for knowledge to be shared, debated and discussed, and for new knowledge to be generated within an organisational context are created. The Final Report of the Knowledge Era research produced a comprehensive document describing the capabilities and workplace environments necessary to assist in moving to the Knowledge Era. It highlighted a need for new approaches to professional development in VTE and reaffirmed the need for sound pedagogical practices.

## 1.2 VTE context

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VTE is constantly changing in response to shifts in the industrial, economic, social, technological, political and workplace environments. There is a need to maintain and expand market share locally and globally and to meet industry, community and learner needs.

Pressure is being exerted within the VTE sector to:

- use capacity-building approaches rather than compliance approaches in the training package environment
- meet the changing nature and needs of the workforce
- use new pedagogical approaches to learning and teaching
- develop strategies that will break down many of the barriers that learners face, and
- increase the integration of working and learning.

As outlined in the *Enhancing the Capability of the VET Professional Project: Final Report* (ANTA 2004a), the current VTE workplace is characterised by increasing casualisation, intensified work environments, decreasing levels of job satisfaction, an ageing workforce and increasing requirements for a broader range of employee knowledge and skills. In the future, employers in the VTE system will be trying to attract and retain staff who are knowledge workers, industry experts (often without experience in VTE), highly flexible and mobile, from an increasingly older age group, and who will articulate higher expectations from their employers. Integrating learning with work is vital.

The national report, *Moving On: Report on the High Level Review of Training Packages* (ANTA 2004b) states that the VTE system needs a capacity-building approach that focuses on quality, creativity, professional judgement and growth rather than simply on compliance. The development of employability and generic skills needs to be supported as a matter of priority, as does increased clarity and understanding about competency-based training, curriculum, and pedagogy.

The report calls for more professional development and demands better guidance for teachers and assessors at a pedagogical level. There is a similar message in the *Doing it Well, Doing it Better* report (ANTA 2003), which states that practitioners are still coming to grips with the changes to pedagogical practice required by a training package environment. This report claims that it is strategically important to support the development of professionalism within the VTE system and to re-emphasise the importance of pedagogy.

The *Theory into Practice: TAFE NSW Teaching and Learning Project Part A Literature Review* (TAFE NSW 2004) takes this further and identifies the need for a new pedagogy in VTE. It suggests that practitioners need to work in different ways and that they need to learn to select the most appropriate approach for any particular teaching and learning situation. Practitioners also need to feel confident about innovation and about moving the boundaries from 'learner-centred approaches' to 'learner-directed approaches'. The research suggests that what is needed is the development of new knowledge (by VTE practitioners) which is informed by their context and by an awareness of teaching and learning issues and innovative practices.

Berwyn Clayton (2005), in her *Visions for RTO Capability* paper, refers to the impact of competency-based training, flexible delivery and workplace learning. Clayton also refers to research showing underinvestment in human capital in the VTE workforce and the need for an agile organisation and highly skilled professionals who can meet client expectations in the future. Clayton found that many VTE practitioners are overwhelmed by unending change and are suffering 'change fatigue'. However, she also found that many have positive perceptions and see great opportunities in these times of change.

New challenges are also emerging in our understanding of how we work and learn. As expressed by David Boud (2003) in his *Combining Work and Learning: The Disturbing challenge of Practice* paper, relationships between learning and work are not always what we assume them to be. The conventional separation between work and learning is breaking down. Learning will be more about reflexive development: this involves noticing what we are doing, what gets in the way of doing it better and how we can do it congenially with the people we interact with.

In the Australian National Training Authority's paper *Shaping our Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-2010* (DEST 2004), issues that learners face include a range of barriers such as disability, age, gender, cultural difference, language, literacy, numeracy, cost, unemployment, imprisonment or isolation. These barriers, whether they be physical, attitudinal and/or structural, inhibit learners' participation in learning, even though they may want to learn (Skills and Education Network 2004). There are also perceived barriers to the implementation of recognition of prior learning (or recognition of current competencies) due to the complexity of systems and processes as well as to lack of awareness and understanding of the possibility of this recognition by learners and providers (Bowman et al 2003).

To address the challenges, as well as the demands, of each and every student and enterprise client, John Mitchell (2005a) states that VTE practitioners need many new skills, including the ability to draw on the specialist skills and knowledge of colleagues and partners. Mitchell lists the following as key features of the new VTE practitioner (p. 11):

- Views individual students as lifelong learners on career pathways.
- Respects the business risks and pressures of enterprise clients.

- Appreciates that enterprises need skills to achieve business outcomes.
- Understands links between training, HR and workforce development.
- Functions effectively within supply chains and skill ecosystems.
- Exercises professional judgement in delivery and assessment.
- Develops and sustains long-term relationships with clients.
- Participates within a team to access colleague specialist skills.
- Taps into wider networks for information and resources.
- Understands the value of accessing and applying industry research.
- Contributes to the development of innovative products and services.
- Commits to achieving and maintaining the quality of the profession.
- Improves the tools and framework of professional practice.
- Updates [their own] technical skills and industry-specific knowledge.
- Copes with complexities and uncertainties about industry skill demands.

Acquiring these skills, attributes and knowledge will help prepare VTE practitioners for the new and challenging learning environments they face. Honouring the legacy and retaining what works, as we continue to learn and change in VTE, will give us a unique potential.

## Pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning in VTE

As referred to above, there are particular pedagogical challenges for the VTE professional. *The Theory Into Practice: TAFE NSW Teaching and Learning Project Part A Literature Review* (TAFE NSW 2004, p. 4) says, "The debate about how adults learn continues to be a major feature of the literature"; equally, methods for accommodating different learner needs continue to be debated and developed. There is a need to uncover or develop new theories of learning that can be applied to VTE and new ways for teachers to support learners in the workplace, particularly in a training package environment.

Learners come with their own unique cognitive processes, cultural inheritances and developmental requirements. However the VTE learning context has its own particular characteristics. According to research currently being undertaken by TAFE NSW through its International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning (ICVET),<sup>3</sup> pedagogy in VTE is now more about:

- educational theory in practice
- complex learners and their needs
- multiple contexts – institutional, online, workplace, community, cross-cultural, and
- the role of teacher as learning facilitator in varying sized groups and one to one.

The research is suggesting that learners require more opportunities to practise, and that teachers and trainers need to improve the quality of feedback (also ensuring that it is accurate and on time). They can also encourage the transfer of learning by making sure the training environment takes the characteristics of the operational environment into account and helps learners work out when to make a transition between the two models of knowledge: that is, implicit and explicit.

The current TAFE NSW ICVET research is also showing that partnerships with industry need to be more than a training solution. There is an increasing focus in industry on workforce development, and as Malcolm Goff (cited by John Mitchell in *Campus Review* 2005b, p11) says:

A very one dimensional view of an RTO-Industry Partnership is that the RTO offers training to the Industry. An RTO-Industry Partnership is about joint ownership, it's about sharing, it's about jointly contributing.

The same research suggests that this involves increasing the emphasis on developing relationships, improving negotiation skills for all concerned, doing less teaching, paying more attention to quality assurance, and focusing on the parallel development of both workforces – industry and VTE.

Through the ICVET research, teachers' practice is informing pedagogy. ICVET is finding that practitioners, not surprisingly, focus on learner needs more than on business needs. From current examination of 15 case studies, practitioners see that they accommodate learning styles by:

- providing a range of personalised learning experiences, over and above the curriculum
- being less concerned with which skills and competencies need to be acquired and increasingly concerned with the 'journey to vocational competence' via, for example, employability skills (Chappell cited in *Theory Into Practice: TAFE NSW Teaching and Learning Project Part A Literature Review*, TAFE NSW 2004, p. 5)
- shifting from being a content expert to being a learning expert, particularly for those involved in workplace learning
- delivering in the classroom the same way that they deliver in the workplace, and
- offering recognition up front, with gap training and a range of options.

What is emerging is that there is a distinct need for practitioners to understand what kinds of pedagogy work in a range of educational environments, such as classroom-based situations, workplace sites and online. They need to understand government funding operations and rules, and changing workplaces and cultures. Maintaining technical industry currency continues to be a priority need as well as ensuring that technology supports rather than drives learning. Practitioners also need to understand how to harness or capitalise on team, group and organisational learning.

Professional development needs to support practitioners in working and learning in such challenging business environments as well as in meeting increasingly complex pedagogical needs.

### 1.3 The research project

To address these needs, a research project was jointly funded by TAFE NSW and ANTA, and subsequently DEST. It is titled "Designing Professional Development for the Knowledge Era". It was identified in the *Training Package Workplan* (ANTA, 2005) under Outcome 10, as Action 3:

*Outcome 10:* Strategies have been developed to strengthen teaching, learning and assessment.

*Action 3:* Development of new models of professional development to support practitioners in the Knowledge Era – in partnership with NSW.

<sup>3</sup> Material in this section is based on current, but as yet unpublished research findings presented at the TAFE NSW Teaching and Learning Colloquium, 30 March 2006.

The research project complements various current research and programs in VTE, including:

- the Training and Assessment Training (TAA) Package, Unit of Competency TAAENV501A: Maintain and Enhance Professional Practice, and
- the NCVET Consortium Research Program *Supporting VET Providers in Building Capability for the Future* (December 2004-December 2006).

### 1.3.1 Purpose, target group and outputs

#### Purpose and aim

The purpose of the “Designing Professional Development in the Knowledge Era” project is to develop a business framework for professional development that assists and guides workforce planning and development practices in VTE. As stated above (Parts 1.1 and 1.2), the project is linked strongly to outcomes from recent studies that recognise the changing environment within which VTE professionals work and learn.

The aim is to improve the capacity of VTE providers to offer more flexible, risk-taking and client-focused approaches to learning and teaching. The emphasis is on the *quality* of provision through the development of capability within the VTE sector. As Moodie (2004, p. 6) says in reference to previous research, teachers and trainers “develop students’ learning best by reflecting and learning from their practice as teachers”. To enable this, organisations need to provide rich learning environments that are sustainable in changing contexts, and individuals and groups need to take increasing responsibility for designing their own learning and development, to make choices and continuously generate and share new knowledge that is context-specific.

#### Target group

The strategies and approaches outlined in the research report aim to support individuals and groups in public and private RTOs (Registered Training Organisations), enterprises and adult and community education. That is, it applies to all staff in the VTE workforce.

The outputs of the research project are designed to be used by management – to enable them to support new directions in professional development and workforce development – as well as to be directly relevant to individuals and groups. It provides them with strategies and approaches new to professional development in VTE.

In organisations where the core business is not VTE, the framework applies to all those managing, delivering, supervising and supporting learning and development. It is easily customised to many working and learning environments other than VTE.

#### Outputs

The outputs of the research focus on models for building on current practice in professional development and supporting innovative practices. Such models would emphasise:

- developing learning strategies for working and learning in an environment of uncertainty, complexity and paradox
- designing approaches to professional development which encourage learners to design their own ongoing learning within a business context, and
- presenting case studies or scenarios that embody the practical application of new business approaches to professional development.

## 1.4 Methodology

This project was intended to research the lived experience, hopes and strategic possibilities for the future in the Australian VTE sector. The research sought to further explore and build on the findings of the “Working and Learning in VET in the Knowledge Era” research project (see Part 1.1); its primary focus became an in-depth examination of new models and strategies for professional development within a business framework.

The initial focus was on a comprehensive search of the literature and on knowledge gathering. Not only texts, but journals, the web and communities such as Appreciative Inquiry Commons and Positive Psychology Centre were examined. Information was gathered and analysed in terms of emerging patterns and themes. The views of practitioners in areas such as organisational development, human resources, education and training, learning and development and planning and policy were valued and noted. In addition, the researchers had access to a multitude of ideas, theories and scholarly interpretations from members of their Working Group, their research associates and those who wrote think pieces for the project. Research of this type recorded and sought to make sense of lives lived, life experience and life as told.

A series of dialogues was organised with a broad range of participants and practitioners in the VTE sector. The dialogues were recorded as narrative texts. The texts may be thought of as a coded summary of individual and collective experiences of those engaged in and with the VTE sector.

The texts were discussed and reviewed by the research team through many iterative cycles. It was through this review process that experiential patterns were recognised and explanatory themes began to emerge.

This enquiry falls broadly within the bounds of research that has come to be described as qualitative research. Within this broad category are many theoretical and methodological paradigms. This type of research is also one where the choice of methodology influences the findings. It is, therefore, important to be clear about the reason behind the choice of particular theoretical traditions and methodological strategies. The qualitative research approach was selected because it supported a focus on the context, and on testing things out with practitioners in the field through their stories and the data they provided.

The constructed texts and their analysis were often expressed as multiple truths. The methodology used had to generate and capture the richness and variety of data and lead on to meaningful and valid interpretations. In order to meet these requirements the methodology drew from and incorporated elements from a number of qualitative enquiry traditions. The most prominent among these were: phenomenology, hermeneutics and dialogue. These formed the broad theoretical and methodological base for the enquiry. A brief characterisation/description follows:

**A phenomenological approach:** Phenomenology belongs to a group of qualitative research approaches that “examine how human beings construct and give meaning to their actions in concrete social situations” (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 204). As described by Denzin and Lincoln: “All knowledge is always local, situated in a local culture and embedded in organisational sites”. Janice Morse (in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, p. 220) suggests the aim of the phenomenological approach is to use questions that elicit the essence of experiences.

In the research over 100 individuals within the VTE sector addressed a range of questions through an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach (see Appendix 1 for the questions). Data was collected, synthesized, analysed and emerging themes were identified. The research also examined a range of case studies that exemplified the findings of the research and through which people told their own stories. In applying a phenomenological methodology the main focus was on the lived experience of individuals who described and shared their stories, understanding, hopes and dreams.

**Hermeneutics:** Hermeneutics is an interpretative paradigm (Atkinson and Hammersley in Denzin and Lincoln 1994). It is a way of interpreting and making meaning of our research with others and re-checking our own interpretation against those meanings (Robottom and Hart in Staron 1999). Throughout the research there was continual re-examination and critique of the data through continual cycles of inquiry, with the subsequent development of new levels of understanding. Through cycles of inquiry with different groups and individuals the researchers sought to discover a way forward to a new approach to professional development. Following extensive literature searches and reviews, data and findings were regularly presented for critique to the Working Group, Reference Group, national forums and workshops. With each cycle new understandings emerged, the findings expanded and explanations became more substantial. At times, think pieces were commissioned to inform the discussion and findings and became part of the iterative process of research

**Dialogue:** Dialogue was used as a way of working towards new levels of creativity and understanding throughout the research process. Dialogue can be defined as “meaning passing through or flowing between the participants” (Bohm and Edwards in Staron, 1999) and can be distinguished from discussion where the aim is for one person’s viewpoint to prevail and to ‘win’. Dialogue allows the deeper issues to emerge and to be discussed rather than staying with the surface issues. It can be viewed as “really talking” (Mary Belenky et al in Staron 1999) where people join together to arrive at some new understanding rather than focusing on didactic talk. “Really talking” requires careful listening and reaches deep into the experience of each person, drawing on the analytical abilities of each. Throughout the research, dialogue was facilitated



between different representatives of ideas and concepts in a manner that aimed at resolution. Representatives from all parts of the VTE sector were involved. The dialogue involved in-depth critique, examination from many perspectives and an iterative process through which new levels of understanding were reached and new theories were formed.

An extensive project plan was developed. It included risk analysis, factors impacting on the research, and boundaries for the research. The plan included two research phases.

## Phase 1

Phase 1 focused on development of the theoretical basis for professional development in the Knowledge Era, particularly the development of key concepts. The methodology involved a Working Group of theorists in education, chaos and complexity systems thinking, network theory and knowledge management, and drew on qualitative and collaborative research methodologies to best address the research needs. These theorists produced the core knowledge base to progress the project. (The members of the Working Group are listed at the beginning of the research report.)

The research included examination of literature, environmental scans, working groups and forums. Regular working papers were provided to the National Reference Group, and feedback and endorsement were sought for the direction that the research was taking.

## Phase 2

Phase 2 involved an activation strategy. Its aims were to disseminate the work in progress, to seek feedback from people in the field and to discuss the research's practical application through a business framework. Draft documents were disseminated as ownership within the VTE sector was sought. There were articles in journals, face-to-face forums, website publications, presentations to management groups and workshops. Some of the National Reference Group members were able to take an active part in discussing research findings with stakeholder and interest groups, and then provide the feedback to the researchers.

The intention was to gain the involvement of stakeholders and interest groups *during* the research, to ensure that there was an understanding of the project and its aims prior to release of the final document. The feedback from three National Action Planning Forums has indeed informed the final product.

## An iterative process

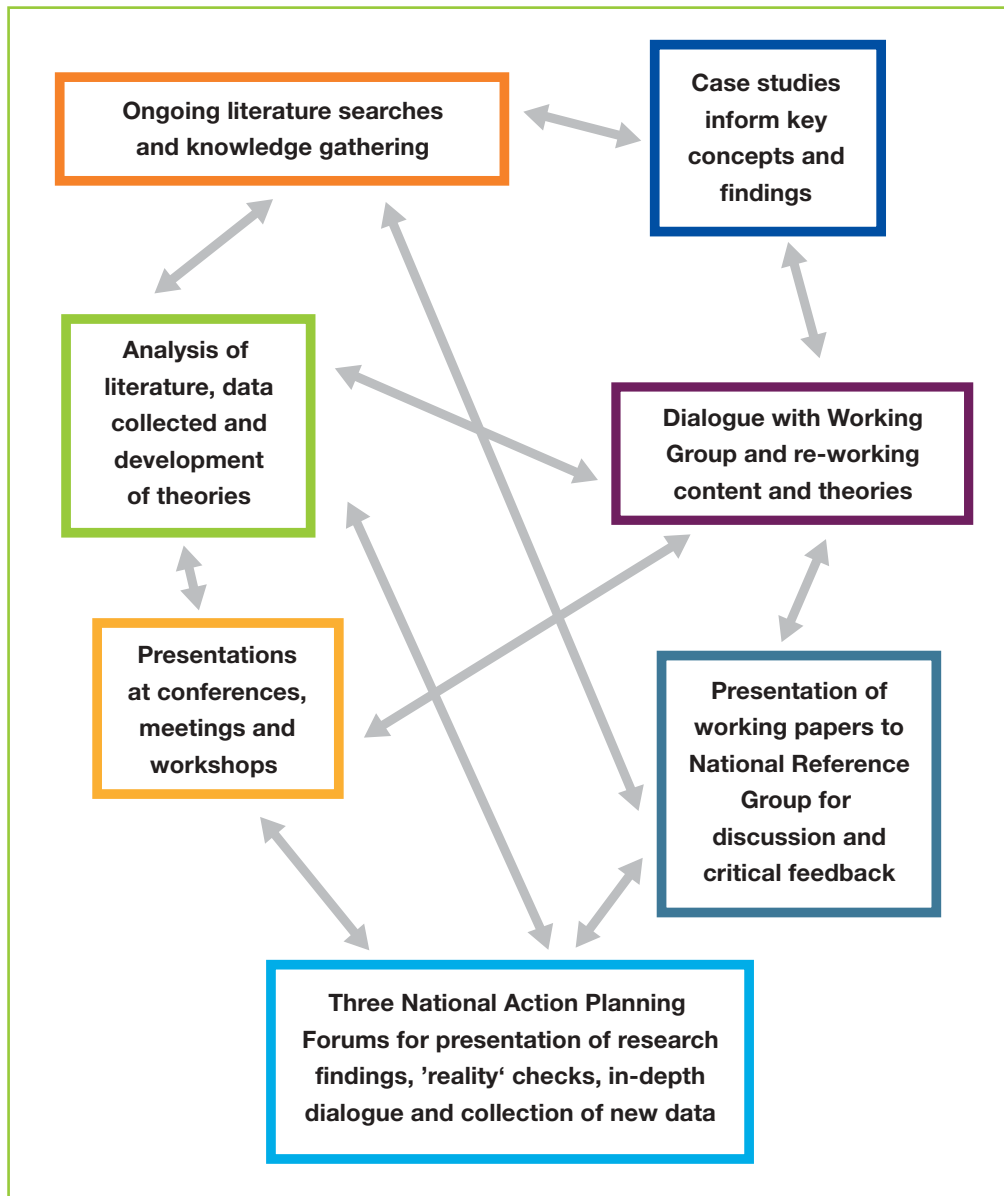
Early in the research, key concepts and findings began to emerge. These were built on through dialogue with the Working Group and feedback from the National Reference Group. An extensive theoretical basis was agreed on, and it was then discussed at meetings, workshops, conferences and the National Action Planning Forums. At each presentation, the findings were tested in the VTE context. Following each presentation, the material was re-examined and reshaped, checked out against the literature and used in the development of new theories for professional development in VTE.

The participants in the National Action Planning Forums in particular were grateful that the findings of the research were not skimmed over, that they were given extensive time through an Appreciative Inquiry process to drill down and examine the findings in depth and then to provide extensive feedback. New theories and models came out of the practical testing of the concepts and findings. The feedback heard by the researchers represented many paradigms, and the research attempted to take into account this multiplicity of approaches and world views.

The two phases of the research merged, and at times occurred simultaneously. The research processes are represented in figure 1 on page 21.

The focus is on plausibility of the research. Many research approaches are moving "further and further away from postpositivist models of validity and textual authority" (Lincoln and Denzin in Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p. 578). The researchers believe they have met many of the requirements set out by Lincoln and Denzin including grounded, theoretically based, comprehensive research that is credible in terms of member checks and logical and truthful in terms of its reflection on the phenomenon in question, ie professional development.

Altheide and Johnson (in Denzin and Lincoln 1994) state that qualitative research needs to be carried out in ways that are sensitive to the human and cultural context, remaining true to the phenomena under study. The researchers themselves were sensitive to these aspects and as employees within the VTE sector and professionals in learning and development ensured that the research was context specific to professional development in VTE. Altheide and Johnson see context as being essential for interpretation and understanding.



**Figure 1: Iterative cycles of research, analysis and feedback**

The researchers ensured information during the research process was available on the website, in publications and presentations at conferences and collaborated with a diverse range of clients, stakeholders and interest groups. Ethical research guidelines were adhered to when working with individuals and forums and the privacy of individuals was respected. The research was not conducted alone

as the Working Group contributed to the shaping of the research, the findings and the theoretical base that emerged. There were extensive feedback loops and research cycles in place.

Chronologically, the key activities undertaken during the research were:

Timeline	Summary of key research events	
April 2005	Research project endorsed by TAFE NSW and ANTA/DEST	<p><i>Throughout the research project: over 10 cycles of dialogue, analysis and 'reality' checks of interpretations, leading to new levels of understanding and development of theory in a VTE context</i></p>
	Commence literature search and analysis	
	Working Group meeting – one day workshop to examine Working Paper V1 on research aims, vision and values, results of literature search and emerging key concepts	
May 2005	Two workshops at Training Forum (Perth) – on professional development, leadership and key concepts	
June 2005	Research project team – one-day workshop to compile research findings and reflect on previous Working Group and conference feedback	
July 2005	National Reference Group – half-day workshop on Working Paper V2	
	National Reference Group – 1-hour teleconference to complete agenda of previous meeting	
	Workshop at AUSTAFE conference for managers – on key concepts (Sydney)	
	Management of project transferred from ANTA to DEST	
August 2005	Paper written for TAFE NSW ICVET website – on research progress and findings	
	Working Group meeting – one-day workshop to continue examining concepts, feedback and interpretations	
September 2005	National Reference Group meeting – 3-hour teleconference to examine Working Document V3 and provide feedback	
	Working Group meeting – one-day workshop to examine progress to date and feedback, and discuss new theories	
	Workshop at TAFE NSW Conference for teachers – to present concepts and seek feedback	
October and November 2005	Presentations at 10 TAFE NSW Institutes – to discuss research findings, 'reality checks' and feedback	
	Working Group meeting – 2-hour meeting to critically examine research progress, theoretical developments and feedback from the field	
	Commission think pieces to inform the research	
	Business Higher Education Round Table (BHERT) Skills Summit (Sydney) – paper presented on research findings	
	TAFE SA, Adelaide North Institute – presentation to executive	
November and December 2005	3 national VTE Action Planning Forums (Sydney, Perth and Melbourne) – for in-depth dialogue, 'reality checks' and feedback on learning ecologies, life based learning and development of rich learning environments	
	Paper and blog available on TAFE NSW ICVET website – updating research progress and findings	
	Presentation at senior executive board of TAFE NSW	
	Identifying and contacting people for case studies to exemplify findings	
	Conference workshop (UTS) – to international group of HR and education specialists	
February 2006	Research project team – 2-day workshop on findings, implications of think pieces and practical application	
March 2006	Working Group meeting – one-day workshop to examine draft research report and further develop theory for life based learning	
	2-hour teleconference with National Reference Group for feedback on draft research report	
April 2006	Submission of final draft of research report to DEST	
	Finalisation of companion document to research report	

**Table 1: Summary of Key Research Events**

## 2.1 Vision

Early in the research process both the researchers and the Working Group agreed that we should be clear in relation to our research and about our vision for Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) and professional development. We agreed that VTE needs to be seen as flexible, dynamic, risk taking and self-sustaining and that a way forward would be to bring together strategy, theory, people and practice to ensure that VTE remains strategically positioned in the Knowledge Era. Our focus would be on quality of provision and a major factor would be the ongoing development of the workforce and the associated research that guides and challenges practice.

As stated in *Shaping our Future: Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2004-2010* (DEST 2004), learners need career pathways and new skills and knowledge for work which will enhance their employability and help them learn throughout life. Professional development can significantly contribute to these national objectives through developing the knowledge and skills of the VTE workforce.

Learners need to participate in rich and diverse learning environments that support and encourage their passion and responsibility for learning. Both learners and facilitators of learning need to co-create varied and dynamic learning opportunities. Organisations need to actively support such environments. Passionately believing in learning and having a keen sense of responsibility to help others to learn and reach their potential is one of the key indicators of excellence in teachers and trainers identified by Corben and Thomson (2001).

Rich and diverse learning environments incorporate continuous inquiry and development that is both *adaptable* to continually changing environments and *sustainable and resilient* in the business context of VTE. Key concepts that underpin such environments need to remain dynamic and contemporary so that they are relevant and viable in the VTE system. Professional development needs to be expressed in terms of learning that is useful, relevant and enriching and to involve activities and approaches that will support the learning process and contribute to the development of learning theory.

To ensure the ongoing development of the workforce, collaborative partnerships between industry, community and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) are essential; the professional development effort needs to be sustainable for the future. Values need to underpin the directions and aims of professional development in VTE.

## 2.2 Values

Values are traits or qualities that are considered worthwhile; they represent an individual's highest priorities and most deeply held driving forces (Heathfield p. 2). Values statements within organisations aim to define how people want to behave towards others within the organisation as well as towards their suppliers, their customers, their industry and the community.

Certain values are emerging as fundamental to the way people need to work and learn together. These values are not new – many people live their lives by them – but when expressed in organisational values statements they are seen by many as mere rhetoric, rather than as what is in fact practised: the 'Do as I say and not as I do' effect. However, it is becoming an imperative that if people are to be able to work and learn effectively and efficiently in the constantly changing and often unpredictable environment in which they find themselves, certain values need to be not only expressed but also lived.

Within many organisations there is a strong sense that the *practice* of values – how we actually do our business and recognise and value the individual – is far more important than developing value statements. Value statements on their own make no difference. It's our own individual internal reflexive processes that help us get the job done, as well as the way we share our knowledge and passion about the work and integrate organisational systems, requirements and processes. The will to see this through is what counts, what demonstrates our values.

Through the research project's literature search and feedback from practitioners some values are emerging as fundamental to living and working in the Knowledge Era; these need to be reclaimed in the workplace. They are:

- **for the self:**
  - trustworthiness, honesty, integrity, engagement, selflessness, equanimity
- **with others:**
  - generosity, collaboration, humility, openness, tolerance

- **together as a group:**
  - taking responsibility instead of blaming others
  - planning and implementing wisely
  - being positive and looking beyond the immediate impact
  - balancing personal and work needs
  - being supported in taking risks
  - supporting community.

Yet when times are tough there is frequently a decrease in organisational support for learning and development. This occurs when the values actually practised are not consistent with the rhetoric; this leads to a move away from reshaping culture (or reculturing) and back to more superficial improvements and changes. Values fundamentally underpin the culture and the creation of rich and diverse learning environments. Actions within organisations are defined by and emerge from the organisational culture, which can be either supportive of positive learning environments and professional development or toxic to them (Peterson 2002, p. 1). The process of re-shaping culture is an important one and is underpinned by values.

As stated by the Minessence Group (p. 2) in their paper *Unfolding Meaning Through Values*:

The key ingredient of any culture is values. Often misunderstood, values are simply preferences and priorities, which reflect what's most important. In all organizations, values are at work everyday ...

If an organization values profit, productivity and quality it will prefer to operate in a way that prioritises action and behaviour that reflects those values. Another organization that values innovation, research and learning will prefer to operate in a way that prioritises action and behaviour that reflects those values. For either organization, if the values that are influencing daily behaviour and actions are not aligned with the strategies, then their performance and results will suffer. (p. 2)

However, in line with the diversity that is such a feature of the Knowledge Era, there is also a need for a diversity in values. Values that seem positive at first glance can actually induce dysfunctional behaviour, and at times seemingly negative values can contain positive elements. Judge (1993) questions what makes a viable set of values and applies the principles of self-organising patterns. He believes that "repeated exposure to the merits and hidden weaknesses of a valued principle refine what emerges" (1993, p. 12).



Judge does not support the focus on any particular pattern of values, but suggests that it is more relevant to “recognize the process whereby different kinds of contextual circumstances can evoke such different patterns from the value space. It is somewhat like having a cake which people will choose to cut up in different ways according to different circumstances.” (1993, p. 13).

According to Dolan et al (2000, p. 10), there are ‘final’ values that support organisations in understanding their goals as well as ‘instrumental’ values that assist in the organisation getting there. Values can also be seen as ‘control’-oriented (such as efficiency, discipline, responsibility), or ‘development’-oriented (such as trust, creativity and freedom). They suggest that a balance is needed between the two sets of values; that part of the organisation can be left to self-organise, while other parts should not be left to chaos as this may threaten the survival of the organisation.

When undergoing processes of transformation new values and beliefs may be needed to redefine the organisation’s collective identity and leadership needs to operate through values rather than objectives. This, however, does not reduce the importance of objectives.

Dolan et al (2000, p. 6) suggests there is a move away from what was known as Management by Instruction (from the 20th century) and Management by Objectives (from the middle of the 20th century) to what is becoming known in the 21st century as Management by Values.

The researchers, members of the Working Group and the National Reference Group all saw values as fundamental to this research project. The focus has been on developmental values and the importance of diversity, trust and integrity. An important value underpinning this research has been that there is no one way, no one strategy, for professional development in the Knowledge Era. This values the importance of the individual and groups designing their own learning and applying the findings of this research to their own context in their own way.

## Key concepts derived from literature

Increasingly in VTE, people are recognising the need for new strategies and practices in professional development to support them in their responses to fast-changing priorities, systems, structures, customer demands, learner needs, new technologies and innovation. A number of key concepts align with these challenges. These have been identified from searches of literature and knowledge gathering and validated through 'reality checks' with practitioners in VTE.

The key concepts are:

- Knowledge Era – the environment;
- Learning ecologies – the metaphor;
- Strength based philosophy – the mindset; and
- Business wisdom – the actions.

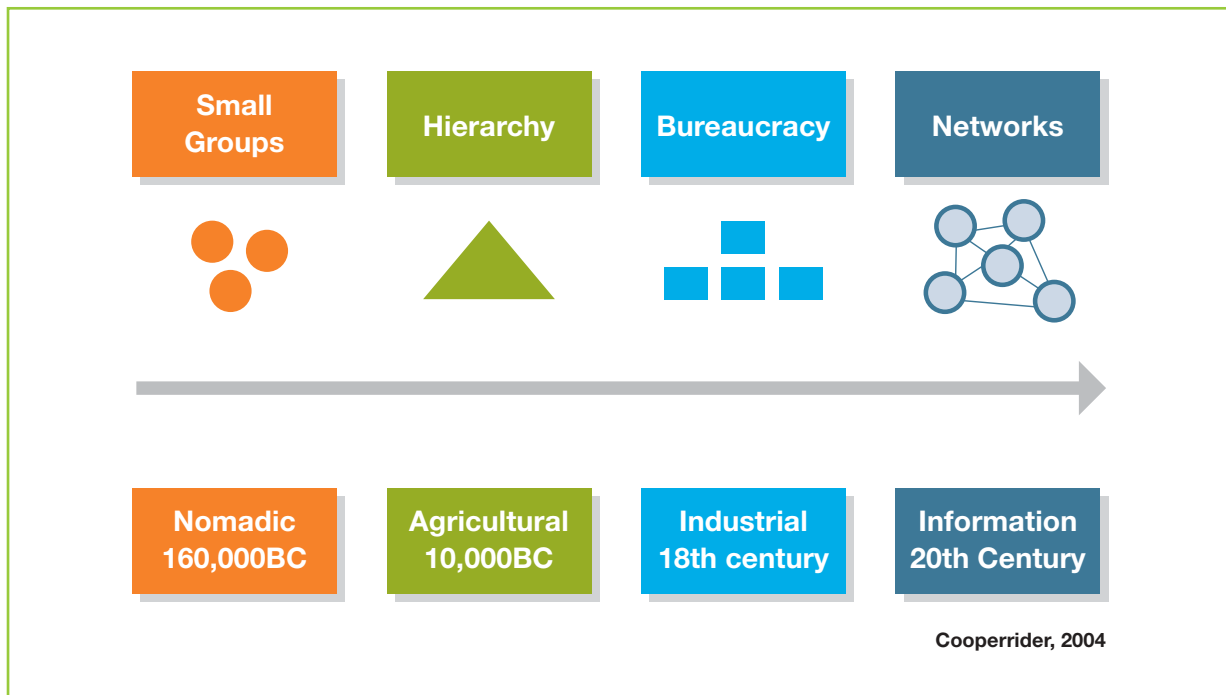
### 3.1 Knowledge Era – the environment

The VTE sector is a rich mix of industries, organisations, networks and individuals that collaborate and compete to bring vocational and technical education to Australian and international clients. VTE is a complex context in which to work and learn. There is huge diversity, complexity and variety. VTE is made up of private providers, public providers and the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector. All of these have different approaches and ways of delivering learning products and services to their clients.

The environment in which this activity is taking place is dynamic and constantly shifting. Sometimes the shift is slow and imperceptible, requiring small corrections or none at all. Sometimes they are dramatic and disruptive and result in demands for large-scale change. This shifting is occurring at different levels of scale across VTE and the impact reverberates up, down and sideways. Everyone is affected by this to some degree.

At the national, state and territory level, structures change, and there is at times instability and uncertainty. At the point of delivery everyday work practices are changing as we vie to keep current. At an individual level jobs are being redefined, restructured or lost and this requires a re-examination of who we are as professionals and how we fit in to the scheme of things.

All this is happening in the context of the largest shift of all – a global shift. We are witnessing and experiencing the dawn of a new era – the Knowledge Era.



**Figure 2: Organisational signatures of different eras (Cooperrider 2004)**

### New era, new stories, new thinking

An era is a particular period of historical time having distinctive characteristics. Every era has a signature (or preferred) style of organisation (Cooperrider 2004). The signature for organising in the Nomadic Era was small groups; for the Agricultural Era it was hierarchies; bureaucracies were the signature for the Industrial Era; and for the Information Era it was networks. These organisational signatures are outlined in Figure 2:

Each era also had its signature stories which reinforced these organisational structures and influenced the thinking and practice of the people who lived and worked in them. Futurist Robert Theobald gives a succinct outline of the stories of each of these eras (Theobald 1999). The story of the nomadic hunters and gatherers was one of survival through close observation of natural forces and keeping these forces benign through sacrifices and offerings. The human world was connected to the universe through shamans and witchdoctors. Seasons, planets and stars set the rhythm of life. You could take advantage of what existed but you could not alter it. Priorities were the family over the individual. Respect was given to elders.

The story of agricultural societies was one of domestication of crops and animals, which led to surplus. Surplus permitted a role for priests and kings.

Cities grew, and wars became a feature of life. Class structures developed and perceptual boundaries were narrow. Respect moved to those with secular or religious power.

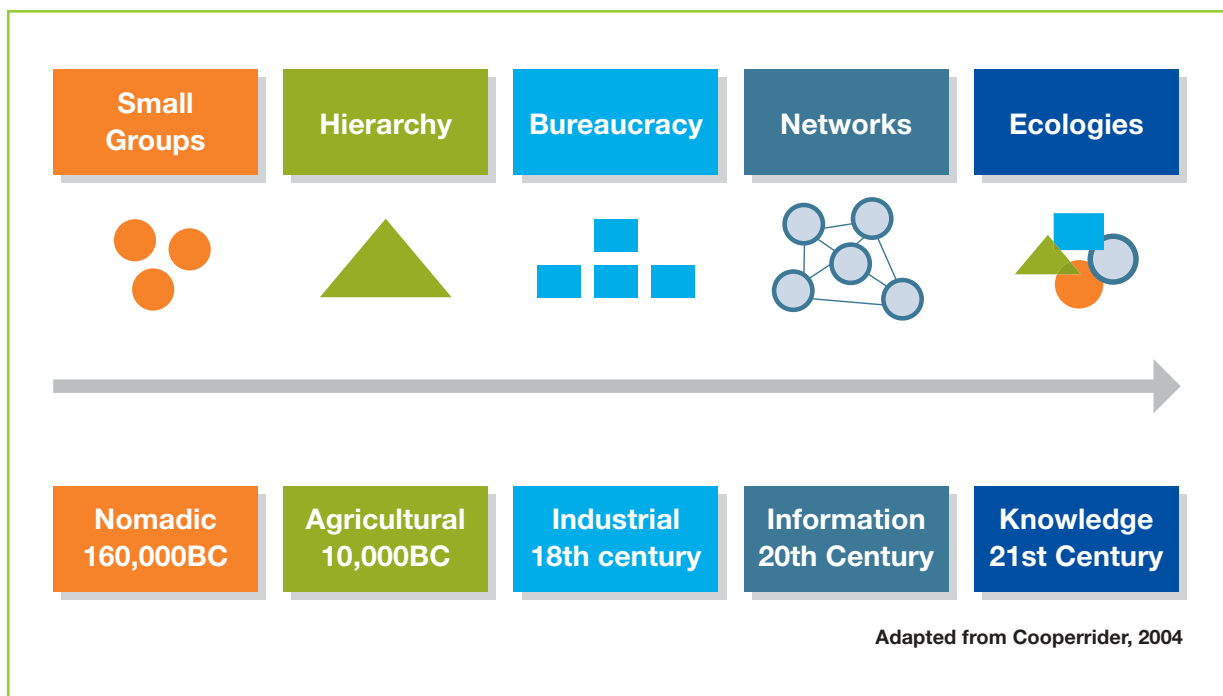
The story of the Industrial Era was one of understanding how the world worked and how this could be the basis for power. Innovators, organisers and entrepreneurs became more influential and societies were organised so as to produce wealth. People realised that they could affect their own fate.

The story of the Information Era is still being told. It is one of exponential growth in information and communication technologies which has accelerated the exchange of information and made information a valued commodity.

So what is the story of the Knowledge Era? What is its signature way of organising and how are its stories shaping our thinking and influencing our practice?

The 21st century is the era of knowledge and this research proposes that its signature is ecologies.

One of the characteristics that differentiates the Knowledge Era from others moments in time is a shortening of time span. An “era” used to last a long time. The Industrial Era lasted for over a century. The Information Era lasted decades, and many suggest that



**Figure 3: Signatures of Nomadic to Knowledge Era**

the Knowledge Era will also last at least a full decade (Rubinstein 1974). Transformations have taken place in the past from hunting and gathering to agriculture and from agriculture to industry. The scope and speed of transformation now, however, are far more intense than in the past. We live in a world with essentially unlimited productive and destructive power. There is growing knowledge of constraints imposed on ecological feedback loops. Power strategies to force changes work less and less well (Theobald 1999).

The other issue is how and by whom knowledge is generated, accessed and used. The hypothesis is that in the future everything about the way an organisation functions will be so flexible that the only unique and truly valuable asset the organisation has will be its knowledge. Its knowledge of its markets, customers, products, services and processes are what will allow it to continuously adapt and succeed (Van Ewyk 1998, p. 1).

The Knowledge Era is characterised by impermanence, turbulence, multiple and competing agendas and priorities, diversity in ideologies, ambiguity, multiple roles, irritations, uncertainty and contradictions *and* a great amount of energy and creativity. It is also the 'intangible era', where instead of goods and services the growing economic commodity is knowledge itself.

The distinguishing features of the Knowledge Era have been summarised into four key elements:

1. Knowledge: this is recognised as important to organisations and is acknowledged as critical to organisational success.
2. Time span of discretion: there is an increasingly greater need for efficiency and analytical thinking but there is also a need for greater conceptual thinking long-term by managers.
3. Relationships between employees are more complex.
4. Information and communication technology is embedded into most human interactions and business transactions (Henry 2004, p. 10).

Within organisations there is a view that the Knowledge Era is made up of a 'new vortex' of emotional intelligence, organisational learning and self-organising, the web, knowledge management, intellectual capital and core competencies (Savage 1999).

The Knowledge Era is an era of rapid movement. There is so much going on that we need new and meaningful ways to make sense of how to best work, learn and live effectively in these times. The Knowledge Era is disrupting our thinking, our relationships and our work practices, but we must adapt to it to survive.

## Knowledge work – a key generic capability

VTE is a knowledge-based industry: knowledge is its core business. It confronts a number of issues which relate to the pace of knowledge acquisition, how knowledge is accessed and exchanged and the contexts in which it is important (*Working and Learning in VET in the Knowledge Era*, ANTA 2004c, p. 2). Knowledge is no longer stable; it can quickly become dated. In the past knowledge mostly resided with experts and was confined to local or specific contexts. Today technology is increasingly enabling information to be accessed from many sources and knowledge sharing is becoming global.

Knowledge work is the new economic imperative. It is characterised by:

- being more organic than mechanistic
- balance and clarity of purpose
- having processes and outcomes that are more emergent than predictable – the skill of knowledge work is about being able to anticipate
- not just involving a collection of information – it is how the user reacts to information that matters
- *who* and *how* you know being as important as *what* you know
- the focus being on people not technology – on tacit knowledge, which can often only be shared through relationship, conversation and interaction
- working with ambiguity and opposites and paradoxes
- involving options and alternatives instead of ‘one size fits all’, and
- an emphasis on ethical considerations in regard to positional power.

Knowledge work is non-linear and non-routine, more intuitive, opportunistic and networked, and less driven by allegiance to a pre-planned critical path or mindset, and therefore more innovative. Knowledge workers in VTE need to be able to:

- balance work, learning and knowing
- undertake research
- rapidly acquire new skills
- apply existing skills and knowledge to new problems, using their high pattern recognition skills
- problem-solve and make sense in new contexts

- maintain a balance between productivity and creativity, and
- collaborate in both face-to-face and virtual environments.

Knowledge workers need to work with contradictions and have the ability to continually learn, innovate and take intuitive leaps even when the organisations in which they work may support mediocrity, step-by-step improvement processes and incremental change. Other generic contradictions of the Knowledge Era include competition and cooperation, mutation and extinction, growth and decay, replenishment and exhaustion, wholes and parts, individual and collective, order and chaos, flexibility and balance, and stability and unpredictability.

The challenge for management is to create a culture that is able to accommodate contradictions and paradox and is not risk averse. Risks do have to be properly assessed and managed but one of those risks is excessive conservatism in response to external pressures. Capability is more about options – having the freedom to identify and seek opportunities for learning than about mandating and controlling those opportunities and options.

Organisations will need the capacity to discern trends in the education and training landscape and adjust the work patterns of knowledge workers accordingly. They will need to provide leadership through forward-thinking policies and adaptable management structures. These will need to create a capability development framework that supports the matching of the skills of knowledge workers with the needs of clients. The management of knowledge work is a crucial business skill and a pivotal driver for enabling high quality capability development initiatives.

Organisations must be able to create and sustain a climate that matches staff learning with the needs of their customers, particularly their students; locates expertise, as required, from within and without the organisation; adjusts job opportunities to accommodate individual worker aspirations within the goals of the organisation; and contributes to the development and support of self-motivation.

Key capabilities required to build and sustain this environment include:

- the capacity to foster sharing and nurturing
- the capacity to support groups



- the ability to immediately apply professional development processes and opportunities
- flexible and responsive leadership, and
- clear corporate goals.

What is needed are the key capabilities to build and sustain such environments.

Certain systems, entrenched 'old' patterns of thinking, outmoded hierarchical ways of relating and inflexible ways of engaging with supply chains and clients are still with us as legacies of the Industrial Era – and will be for some time. The challenge is to not destroy the old, but to build on and transcend its strengths with models, thinking, approaches and strategies that will work more effectively in the Knowledge Era.

### 3.2 Learning ecologies – the metaphor

Metaphors are not logical, but they create an image that can challenge what is blindly accepted, allow new links to develop and generate new ways of thinking. Metaphors are a way of understanding a situation you are a part of and helped create. They give a new language, a more poetic, less scientific language, for discussion of life (Gellat 1991).

The Industrial Era's machine metaphor, with its linear and mechanical thinking, command and control management structures, fragmented analysis and bureaucracies that reinforce hierarchies, is becoming outmoded. Contemporary working environments, with their abundance of information, global connections, access to technologies, fast-paced dynamics, complex relationships and continuous learning, demand a new conceptual framework.

A learning ecology metaphor, which focuses on the relationships between living things and their environments, can provide such a framework. The word 'ecology' comes from the Greek words *oikos*, meaning 'where you live' and *logos*, meaning 'to study'. It also stems from domestic science, which means 'looking after and caring for your home'. Ecology is a study of where we live – and work!

Metaphors help to increase our power to express ourselves and our relationships and to provide meaning in our local context:

To be effective, a metaphor must come from a field of knowledge complex enough to allow us to express relationships of great subtlety, and simple enough that a large fraction of the population can feel comfortable with speaking its language (Muder).

Ecology meets the criteria for an effective metaphor. It is both complex and familiar and it aligns with and reinforces the theme of embracing 'opposites in co-existence' which characterises the Knowledge Era. These opposites include: competition and cooperation, mutation and extinction, growth and decay, replenishment and exhaustion, wholes and parts, individual and collective, order and chaos, flexibility and balance, stability and unpredictability.

The following concepts form the basis of the learning ecology metaphor and help our understanding of what needs to be done to develop capability:

**Learning ecologies are dynamic:** Ecologies focus on living systems and their dynamic relationships.

Ecologies are interconnected and interdependent and are based on relationships between agents within the ecology. These participating agents – individuals, groups and organisations – influence and are influenced by the ecology's health and fitness. So rather than emphasising parts, the emphasis is on what the parts are doing together. By perceiving our environments as ecologies, we become more aware, astute and engaged participants in these environments, and more mindful and conscious of relationships and how they impact on how we work and learn.

**Learning ecologies are adaptive:** Adaptability is a key survival capability within an ecology. Ecological models operate on a simple formula. When there is stability in the ecological environment there is equilibrium. However, when there is a disruption or disturbance (perturbation) to the equilibrium of an ecology, agents respond by adapting. The essence of this adaptability is learning from environmental experiences and continually developing strategies to remain responsive and resilient to these disturbances. Fitness and agility allow agents to be dynamic and flexible enough to adjust to disturbances in their environments. Humans have one key adaptive advantage: conscious awareness. This empowers us to be designers of change and shape our environment as much as we are shaped by it. Adaptation therefore is not just a mechanical response. It is also a conscious and responsible choice. This requires a continuous

process of learning. An ecological metaphor invites us to create the adaptive learning models that the Knowledge Era demands. Learning to adapt requires a whole suite of capabilities, including:

- collaborating
- networking
- taking on multiple roles
- building new mental models
- appreciating multiple perspectives, and
- working with contradictions.

**Learning ecologies are diverse:** An ecology is fundamentally dynamic and gains robustness through diversity. Diversity contributes to an ecology's 'fitness' – its ability to increase its levels of coordination, autonomy, interdependence, flexibility and integration. Diversity is a core requirement of knowledge work. Knowledge working demands diversity in thinking styles, relationships, interaction, learning opportunities and processes, learning choices, work practices, technology options, career paths and management structures. Honouring diversity and appreciating how it is essential for sustaining robust dynamic environments is one of the strengths of an ecological perspective. It reinforces the idea that multiple and self-determined approaches, rather than a prescribed or preferred model or methodology, are critical for designing professional development for the future. As Por (2000, p. 3) says:

In a natural ecosystem, the higher the diversity of species, the more robust the community and the more fit for longevity. The same applies to organizational ecologies.

Using this ecological metaphor makes good business sense for the Knowledge Era. It serves to fuse together a range of philosophies, domains, disciplines, concepts, principles, strategies and practices so that they make sense in the collective. It also highlights and reinforces the central role and dynamic nature of learning in shaping and maintaining a rich and healthy environment:

Ecology is the science of the relationships between ... living entities and their environments. The relationships are shared through a continuous process of learning; the entities learn to interrelate and interact so as to better adapt to the external changes and co-evolve in harmony with ... evolving nature. In this sense, ecology and learning are inseparable; an all-embracing ecological web of

nature exists and evolves because the living entities are able to constantly learn how to relate with one another and with the environment and vice versa (Dimitrov 2004, p. 1).

What an ecological metaphor offers capability development in VTE is not the way to *get it right* or the solution. That is because there is *not* one way to get it right and there is no one solution. An ecological metaphor is not about determining a path; it is a way of being, a way of raising our sensitivity to what is going on around us and giving us insight into how we can work with it. Rather than a kit, a model, or a set of procedures, ecology is an orientation. It is a way of looking at the world that is intuitive, caring and responsible.

It draws on plurality and richness of ideas and recognises that there are multiple ways to adapt to and shape the environment in which we live, work and learn. It gives coherence to the concepts that have emerged from this project and has direct implications for professional development in the Knowledge Era. It also challenges us to think beyond the familiar and to recognise, value and celebrate 'humanness' while still investing in the inclusive, holistic, diverse and complex characteristics that define a learning and working ecology.

It is also risky business, as it is an invitation and a challenge to take a brave leap and to be willing and determined to ride the tension between seemingly contradictory concepts that challenge our thinking and our practice.

Here are some of these contradictions:

- This approach is not about precision or predetermined ways of doing things. Rather than being predictive, it is anticipative.
- It is a permissive framework, which means there will be tension and irritation as there are no clear answers. It is a *why* to rather than a *how* to approach.
- Some of it will be wrong, and this will help to create the shifts.
- It favours successive approximations rather than exactness.
- Fuzziness is its strength. Fuzziness is a precise concept that provides a framework for understanding chaos.
- Self-organising happens in an ecology, but there may be no satisfactory explanation for where the organising pattern comes from.

A learning ecology metaphor offers a complex, diverse, dynamic and adaptive framework that gives us a fresh perspective on working and learning in contemporary environments. There is a good fit between the metaphor and the context:

Managing knowledge is more akin to managing a complex ecology of interdependence, unpredictable and fluid entities than it is to designing and maintaining a sophisticated machine (Woog 2004, p. 8).

### 3.3 Strength based philosophy – the mindset

Many organisations focus on deficit models that identify what's wrong and then develop intervention strategies to 'fix' it. They are mechanical and linear and characterised by activities such as gap analysis, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, benchmarking, performance indicators and process re-engineering. The language includes 'interventions' and 'diagnosis'. Deficit-based models are a legacy of the Industrial Era; they remain strong models as they have been the conventional and predominant paradigm for designing professional development.

In the transition to the Knowledge Era an alternative approach is emerging. It aligns with the holistic focus of an ecological perspective which uses asset or strength based philosophies for individual and organisational growth and change.

Strength based philosophies, models and methodologies move away from the deficit model of the Industrial Era. Strength based models are based on conversations. They are participative, integrated, flexible and organic. The focus is on collaboratively identifying what's right and working well and then investing in amplification. A flexible attitude is required to make this conceptual shift.

The focus on building on the best of what is means that strength based models do not disregard or displace existing practice; they take the best of what is and integrate it into the new. Strength based models displace nothing that has gone before – from an ecological perspective, if established practices are fit enough to adapt to the new knowledge environment, they will survive.

There are two key theories that support asset or strength based approaches; positive psychology and flow theory.

### Positive psychology

Positive psychology is the science of human strength. It seeks to understand and build the strengths and virtues that improve wellbeing and enable individuals, organisations and communities to thrive:

The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, pp. 5-14).

Positive psychology is a serious and well-researched approach to understanding and building emotional wellbeing. It focuses on amplifying strengths rather than repairing weakness, providing an alternative yet complementary approach to the deficit-based medical model that characterises much of psychological practice.

Psychologist Martin Seligman (Fox Leadership Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania and founding Director of the Positive Psychology Centre), regarded as the founder of positive psychology, focuses on the empirical study of such things as positive emotions, strengths-based character, and healthy institutions. "His research has demonstrated that it is possible to be happier – to feel more satisfied, to be more engaged with life, find more meaning, have higher hopes, and probably even laugh and smile more, regardless of one's circumstances" (Authentic Happiness website).

Two key ideas form the basis of Seligman's work. They are authentic happiness and signature strengths.

#### Authentic happiness

Seligman and his research team have identified three domains of happiness. Each domain is measurable, and contributes to a happy life and a sense of life satisfaction:

1. The pleasant life is about pleasures – having as much positive emotion as possible, a range of pleasures, and the skills to amplify the intensity and duration of those pleasures. The capacity for positive emotions has a genetic component and individuals work within their natural range.
2. The good life is about engagement – this means knowing what your signature strengths are and utilising those strengths to become more fully engaged in your work, family, friendship and leisure activities.

3. The meaningful life is about purpose – this means using your signature strengths to serve some larger end, something that is more worthwhile and important than your own pleasures and desires.

Pursuing all three leads to greater life satisfaction, with engagement and meaning leading to the greatest fulfilment.

### Signature strengths

There has been significant investment by Seligman and his colleagues in researching the classification of strengths and virtues. Working with a number of positive psychology centres worldwide and hundreds of scientists Seligman has identified six core virtues that are recognised in most cultures: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. The core virtues have been subdivided into 24 'signature strengths'. And individuals can identify their five greatest signature strengths by completing a free online survey ([www.authentic happiness.com](http://www.authentic happiness.com)). This survey has been completed by over 400,000 people worldwide; it is a way of collecting data for ongoing research.

Seligman establishes the fact that the more time we spend doing what we are good at, the more pleasure we experience in our lives. Knowing our signature strengths and using these strengths every day in the main realms of our life can bring abundant gratification and authentic happiness. If our work is aligned with our strengths we feel more satisfied, motivated and engaged.

### Flow Theory

Another pioneer of positive psychology, Dr Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, developed the concept of 'flow' – an optimal human experience (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Flow is "a deep and uniquely human motivation to excel, exceed and triumph over limitation". According to Csikszentmihalyi people are most likely experiencing flow as a state of deep focus that occurs when they engage in challenging tasks that demand intense concentration and commitment. Flow occurs when a person's skill level is perfectly matched to the challenge level of a task that has clear goals and provides immediate feedback.

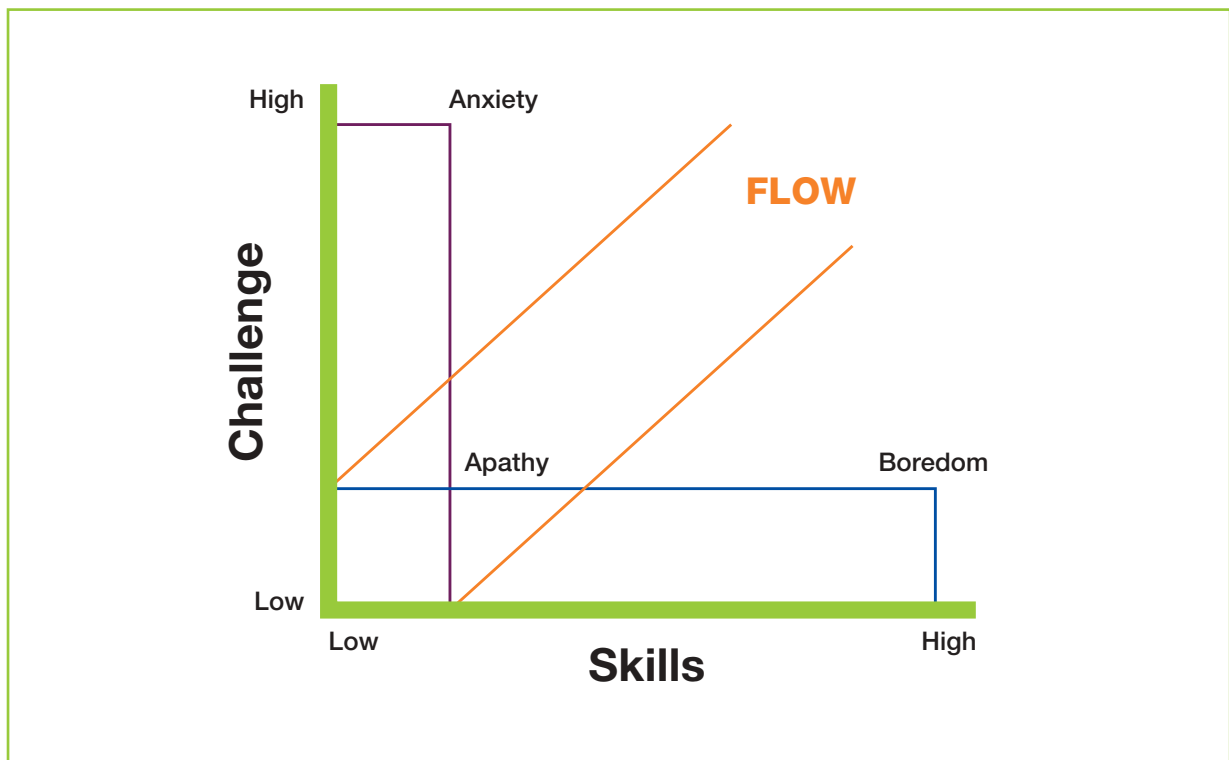


Figure 4: Flow – a perfect match between challenge and skill (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)

Almost any activity can produce flow if these elements are present, says Csikszentmihalyi, and making them a constant part of your life can enhance your work, personal relationships and leisure time.

People in a state of flow have feelings of great satisfaction and 'true' happiness. Happiness involves the continual challenge to go beyond oneself as part of something greater than one's own self-interest.

Csikszentmihalyi offers a new paradigm for human living based on the notion that human beings now have the unique opportunity – and obligation – to become conscious participants in evolution. Flow is an evolutionary model based on being conscious of our inescapable interconnectedness and a willingness to devote some of our energy to the wellbeing of others. Engaging in positive experiences accelerates learning of new things and helps us become better at what we are doing. Flow is experiencing a fitness peak. If you enjoy things beyond baseline survival, there is more chance to transform yourself and evolve. Flow is a universal concept and is closely aligned to the "engaged life" that Seligman so aptly describes.

### 3.4 Business wisdom – the actions

Business wisdom is built on the principles and practices of organisational learning and knowledge management and is usually associated with knowledge, intelligence and experience. However wisdom is greater than these attributes which many organisations already have in abundance. It is how they are linked and leveraged and how they work together to promote learning and wisdom that makes the difference. It involves common sense, insight and ability to discern what is true, right or lasting: "Organisational wisdom transcends organisational learning in its commitment to doing the right thing over doing things right" (Hays 2005, p. 1).

It appears to be an unavoidable consequence of our times of uncertainty and turbulence that there is an increasing focus on areas such as wisdom in organisations. As Margaret Wheatley says, "As our world grows more chaotic and unpredictable, we are forced to ask questions that have, historically, always been answered by spiritual traditions" (Wheatley 2002, p. 1). People often want the chaos to stop, to find more certainty and, at times, to be sheltered from the impact of change. As we search for answers many find that it's through thinking and acting wisely that we can find ways of moving forward together. Wisdom is a key value for the Knowledge Era.

#### 3.4.1 What is wisdom?

As mentioned, research on positive psychology has classified six virtues that enable humans to thrive. These virtues are endorsed by almost every culture across the world (Seligman and Steen 2005). One of these virtues is wisdom. The others are courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. Attached to each virtue are particular strengths of character.

The strengths of character for wisdom are:

- creativity – thinking in novel and productive ways to do things
- curiosity – taking an interest in all experience and being tolerant of ambiguity
- open-mindedness – thinking things through and examining them from all sides
- love of learning – mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, and
- perspective – being able to provide wise counsel that makes sense to self and others (Seligman and Steen 2005, p. 412).

In addition to the work done in positive psychology, which shows how wisdom clearly contributes to human wellbeing, Baltes, the founder of the field of lifespan psychology, analysed 'everyday snapshots' of common beliefs about wisdom and how it is used in everyday language (Baltes 2004). He identified seven properties from both modern and ancient literature that are "generally accepted in any definition of wisdom" (Baltes 2004, p. 17). He offers this list as a work in progress:

1. Wisdom addresses important and difficult questions and strategies about the conduct and meaning of life.
2. Wisdom includes knowledge about the limits of knowledge and the uncertainties of the world.
3. Wisdom represents a truly superior level of knowledge, judgement and advice.
4. Wisdom constitutes knowledge with extraordinary scope, depth and balance.
5. Wisdom involves a perfect synergy of mind and character: that is, an orchestration of knowledge and virtues.
6. Wisdom represents knowledge used for the good or wellbeing of oneself and others.
7. Wisdom, though difficult to achieve and specify, is easily recognized when manifested (Baltes 2004, p. 17).



Baltes also examined twentieth century philosophers' writings about the meaning and consequences of wisdom, identifying six attributes of wisdom-related knowledge and behaviour:

1. Wisdom is life-orientation and action-guiding knowledge dealing with a good life.
2. Wisdom is holistic, integrative, and balanced knowledge regarding mind and human excellence.
3. Wisdom is knowledge about limits and uncertainty.
4. Wisdom involves pluralism and tolerance of diversity.
5. Wisdom is experiential knowledge.
6. Wisdom is justified knowledge and needs to consider multiple sources of knowledge including scientific ones (Baltes 2004, pp. 132-33).

While wisdom is almost impossible to define precisely, and there are variations in interpretation, these grassroots and academic perspectives encompass a number of common themes. A key theme is that wisdom is multi-dimensional and emerges from a synergy between knowledge, understanding, judgement, reflection, creative thinking and practice. In practice, wisdom means a high level of interest in self and others, a deep understanding of self and others, and acceptance of difference, as well as continual learning, reflection, empathy, metacognition, a holistic perspective and judgement.

In light of all of this it is clear that the concept of wisdom underpins all aspects of this project. This is because:

- **Wisdom is strength based** – it contributes to human wellbeing and the common good.
- **Wisdom contributes to synthesis** – wise thinking and actions pull components together into an integrated whole.
- **Wisdom is achievement-oriented** – it has a very practical orientation and serves to guide thinking and action.

These align with a strength based orientation, learning ecologies and the 'foundation virtues and truths' that emerged as key considerations for capability development in this project.

### 3.4.2 Organisational wisdom

Wisdom plays a key role in capability development and organisational life in the Knowledge Era and is critical for achieving in a business environment. This involves a greater emphasis on wise thinking and wise actions to help businesses achieve their goals.

Wise organisations tap into their accumulated wisdom and understand their body of knowledge and capability. As wisdom is hard to define and measure it is usually ignored in organisations. To overcome this, businesses must:

anticipate and preempt problems and capitalize on potential opportunities; mobilize and engage organizational members; evolve from a reactionary organization to a proactive one; and remain viable and sustainable while serving as stewards to our communities and the environment (Hays 2005, p. 2).

Hays offers a 'tentative' model of organisational wisdom that "incorporates accepted theory" and "provides a framework for understanding learning in organizations". The model comprises 24 elements (see Figure 5). Those highlighted in bold are considered to be the core variables that "push the limits of organizational learning" (Hays 2005, p. 14).

The heart of Hays' model is that wise thinking and wise actions create a synthesis between the elements and this synthesis contributes to organisational success. Organisations need to improve processes that promote the synergy between intelligence, knowledge and experience and allow employees at all levels to exploit the synergy. Hays places learning (activated by reflection) at the heart of the model:

Wisdom is not knowledge, intelligence, values, or even, as commonly believed, experience, though it is a synergistic amalgam of them, fueled by learning. And, while curiosity or need may motivate learning, it is inspired by and activated by reflection (Hays 2005, p. 14).

Wise thinking and wise actions are the glue that connects the different elements of a learning organisation into a more integrated and productive whole, strengthening what is already working.



Figure 5: The 24 elements comprising the organisational wisdom system (Hays 2005, p. 5)

### 3.4.3 Wisdom leadership

In a challenging ‘think piece’, William and Debra Miller (2006) suggest that a new guiding ethic for business leaders is ‘wisdom leadership’:

...where wisdom is more than the sum of our knowledge, intelligence, experience, and innovative thinking. True wisdom is the ‘deep understanding, keen discernment, and sound judgement’ that draws from a level of self-insight, personal and organizational values, and cultural broad-mindedness (Miller and Miller 2006, p. 1).

This is especially important in a complex business world characterised by globalisation, evolution of knowledge-based enterprises and global and local competition.

Wisdom leadership is required to address the pressing issues that characterise contemporary business environments:

What may appear to be purely business or technology decisions are really human choices that require our highest wisdom. These decisions mirror our consciousness and values. The partnership of business and human values requires a high level of wisdom in our leadership (Miller and Miller 2006, p. 2).

They offer a balanced view of the diverse sources and contexts that inform and influence a leader’s wisdom by providing four distinct frames of reference for wisdom leadership that have emerged over the last 100 years:

- 1. Paternal-mechanical:** From this view business is ‘survival of the fittest’ and competition is a ‘win-lose’ game. Business leaders operating from this perspective adopt a command and control approach to serve the overall goals of efficiency and productivity. Employees are cogs in the wheel of a big machine and expected to perform within clearly defined parameters.
- 2. Humanistic:** From this view, the goal of business is still wealth creation, but from a ‘win-win’ perspective. Employees are resources to be managed sensitively and are encouraged to invest in their talents for personal and organisational benefit.
- 3. Holistic:** The focus here is wealth creation for the optimal benefit of all stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers, competitors, community, society and future generations. Leadership is about having a common purpose and value system. This view recognises that people are the principal assets for wealth creation, especially in knowledge-intensive learning organisations.

4. **Spiritual:** This view sees people as spiritual in nature with a particular spiritual purpose in life along with 'gifts' to fulfil that purpose. Leadership focuses on assisting people to fulfil their life's purpose while integrating that with the organisation's 'life purpose'. The purpose of spiritually based leadership is to bring forth the wisdom found in the other three contexts.

While each of these four frames is distinct, representing a progression from the paternal-mechanistic to the spiritual, "each completes and expands the other" (Miller and Miller 2006, p. 10). They all operate to some degree in every organisation; leaders may operate from any one of them, and a single leader may use all four. They are the reference points from which leaders draw on their wisdom for conducting their day-to-day business. Which reference point is used influences how that business is conducted.

Wheatley has observed that many leaders choose to exert more control as the challenges they face increase. However she says that "leadership through command and control is doomed to fail ... Instead, as leaders, we must help people to move into a relationship with uncertainty and chaos." She goes on to say that "we must enter into the domain of spiritual traditions if we are to succeed as good leaders" (Wheatley 2002, p. 3). To do this Wheatley provides what she believes are some essential principles for leaders to embed in their work. They come from spiritual thinking and traditions, and they are:

- Life is uncertain.
- Life is cyclical.
- Meaning is what motivates people.
- Service brings us joy.
- Courage comes from our hearts.
- We are interconnected to all life.
- We can rely on human goodness.
- We need peace of mind.

(Wheatley 2002, pp. 3-6)

As Wheatley emphasises, it's more important to access your own wisdom than to look for it in other people. She believes that as leaders, when we play a part in something more purposeful than anything our own egos could describe, we become "leaders who are peaceful, courageous and effective" (Wheatley 2002, p. 8).

### 3.4.4 Implications for professional development

What is the role of wisdom in professional development for the Knowledge Era? Baltes and Staudinger suggest that the concept of wisdom has a pragmatic role in directing our attention and guiding us in conducting our lives:

- [It] coordinates our knowledge and judgements about the fundamental pragmatics of life around such proprieties as: (1) strategies and goals involving conduct and meaning of life, (2) limits of knowledge and uncertainties of the world, (3) excellence of judgement and advice, (4) knowledge with extraordinary scope, depth and balance, (5) search for a perfect synergy of mind and character, and (6) balancing the good for well-being of oneself and that of others (Baltes and Staudinger 2000, p. 11).

In other words the concept of wisdom is a common sense guide that gives direction and enables a person to make educated guesses, recognise promising approaches to problems and work with incomplete information.

Wisdom is concerned with the fundamental pragmatics of life. These pragmatics include:

- knowledge and judgement about the meaning and conduct of life
- the orchestration of human development towards excellence, and
- attending to both personal and collective wellbeing (Baltes and Staudinger 2000).

Focusing on wisdom also reminds us of the importance of investing in research in professional development in the first place and why we should consider strength based models of change, explore learning ecologies and life based learning. It also affirms the central role of human development, life management and striving to be the best that we can be for the benefit of others and ourselves:

- [T]he perennial power of wisdom is its role as a reminder, a source, and a benchmark in our quest for excellence (Baltes and Staudinger 2000, p. 17).

## Linking the concepts to contemporary work environments – invited contributions

A number of think pieces were commissioned by the TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning (ICVET). The papers were commissioned specifically to inform the research project and they have been written by people recognised as leaders in their area of expertise. Some papers cover areas that traditionally are seen as outside the educational framework of VTE: spirituality, for example.

The authors were well briefed by the research project team on the project, its context, and the focus on professional development in the Knowledge Era. ICVET exerted little control over the content of the papers apart from providing feedback on drafts.

The copyright of these papers is with TAFE NSW and the papers can be found on the TAFE NSW ICVET website ([www.icvet.edu.au](http://www.icvet.edu.au)). The authors, and the titles of their papers, are:

**Richard Slaughter** (2005) *Emerging paradigms in the Knowledge Era*

**Richard Hall** (2006) *Workplace changes: change and continuity in the workplaces of the future*

**Avril Henry** (2006) *The changing face of the workforce and intergenerational impacts*

**Robert K. Critchley** (2006) *The ageing workforce – to rewire or rust*

**William and Debra Miller** (2006) *Wisdom leadership: exploring its relation to spirituality*

The sections below summarise the key features of these papers. An underlying focus is the workplace of the future. This to a large extent will determine learning environments and possibilities for the future.

### 4.1 Emergent paradigms

Richard Slaughter, in his paper *Emerging Paradigms in the Knowledge Era: New ideas and practice* (2005), identifies diversity as a central feature of the Knowledge Era and examines the range of views and paradigms that are competing for our attention and support.

The word 'paradigm' can be difficult to define. As suggested by Egon Guba, not many people provide clear statements as to its meaning. Guba prefers to define paradigms in a generic sense as "a basic set of beliefs that guides action" (Guba 1990, p. 17). In practice, the word is frequently used interchangeably with 'mindset' or 'world view'.

The range of paradigms that Slaughter describes includes:

- **Techno-economic:** a strong belief in the power of science and technology, progress that is continual and linear, the ideology of economic growth and a divergence of views about roles of women, traditional culture and nature.
- **Environmental:** critiques Western models of development and progress and provides a set of values, ideas, principles and practices that seek to redress the growing imbalance between humanity and its environment.
- **Neo-humanist/multicultural/de-colonising:** these overlapping paradigms extend the previous ideology of humanism, recognise the legitimacy and vitality of different cultures and seeks positive ways of de-colonising and proposing alternative futures. They all aim to open out new arenas of freedom, of human and society possibility beyond oppressive values and structures inherited from earlier times.
- **Spiritual:** offers the insight that there are both inner and outer worlds, each equally valid and that spiritual practices enhance human capacity and awareness across the board. It opens up a wider set of understandings about human development and the goals that can usefully be undertaken by people and organisations and establishes a direct link between spirituality and wisdom.
- **Futures:** acknowledges the realisation that to construct or achieve anything requires us to think ahead and to put in place the necessary means. In education it suggests that the most productive approach allows for futures work across multiple domains.
- **Integral:** this paradigm is still in the process of development and aims to embrace each of the above in more breadth and depth. It is based on two key principles – ‘everyone is right’ and ‘transcend and include’. An implication of the integral paradigm is that it helps us see how different types of knowledge disclose different aspects of the world.

Slaughter's view is that the techno-economic paradigm is the dominant one in western culture at the moment and that this is unlikely to change for some time. Of particular interest is the futures paradigm where he states, writing about education:

There are two key ways to interpret the interaction of futures and education. One is preoccupied with the future *of* education. The other deals with futures *in* education. Both have their uses. The former deals with forecasts, the extrapolation of various trends (demographic, technological, work functions etc) and attempts to depict educational provision a certain number of years into the future. It appeals to administrators and bureaucrats because it fits in with (ie, does not threaten) their views about ‘economic progress’, ‘human resource planning’, ‘market reform’ and other such instrumental concerns. Fundamentally, the ‘future *of*’ approach is driven by interests in administration, power and control.

Futures *in* education is a very different matter. It sees ‘futures’ as *an active principle* within education now and, as such, is driven by progressive interests in ‘futures literacy’, ‘social innovation’ and ‘alternative futures’. It draws on the body of knowledge and practice that has been generated by ‘futures educators’ over more than four decades ...

While these two approaches may productively interact, they are seldom treated equally. Futures *of* education is the usual focus of formal government-funded projects. Futures *in* education derives from the work of innovators, progressive educators, teachers who are not so much responding to future economic needs as [to] the present needs of young people. The ideal, of course, is to combine the necessary extrapolative work of the first approach with the educationally progressive and well-grounded work of the second.

The significance for the professional development project is at least two-fold. First, the futures *in* education literature contains many useful elements that could be assessed in relation to the current project. For example, what futures tools, methods, concepts and approaches have specific value and could be incorporated? Second, the futures *of* education, in distinction, helps to clarify a central issue. That is, what is the optimum balance between administrative (system-oriented) imperatives and those that support and value the human life-worlds of people? (Slaughter 2005, pp. 5-6)



This research project, whilst acknowledging the presence and dominance of the techno-economic paradigm and the need for controls, standardisation, structures and management, attempts to balance that paradigm with a focus on creativity, innovation and intuition. This involves the application of the spiritual, environmental and futures paradigms, through a focus on learning ecologies, life based learning and business wisdom.

## 4.2 Workplace change

In the paper by Richard Hall, *Workplace changes: change and continuity in the workplaces of the future* (2006), he re-evaluates the Knowledge Era thesis and examines what is happening in workplaces, the changes in labour supply and labour demand, and other critical forces driving workplace changes. He describes the trends of work intensification, labour flexibility and increasingly rigid and disciplined management of labour. These changes are, he says, having a number of results:

- Organisational structures, methods of working, forms of collaboration and the skills and attributes required continue to change.
- There is greater diversity in organisational workforce and increasing pressure for flexible work arrangements.
- Higher levels of educational attainment are leading to a more qualified labour pool but also to employees with heightened labour market expectations.
- Workers are having increasingly diverse and often discontinuous career paths.
- There is likely to be a shortage of knowledge jobs rather than of knowledge workers.
- People are working longer hours, and a greater proportion of workers are working very long hours, resulting in increased intensification of work.
- Restructuring, delayering, downsizing, and an increased emphasis on teamwork are resulting in responsibility for performance and profits being pushed down the occupational hierarchies.
- There is a strong growth in low-end, budget services as well as in high-end services catering to the affluent.

Hall makes the following interesting observation:

Recent trends in the management of labour do not seem consistent with a decisive trend toward enhanced discretion, autonomy, opportunities for creativity and genuine knowledge work that would be consistent with the Knowledge Era thesis. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the key managerial reforms (or ‘management fads’ for some) of recent times – Just-in-Time, Business Process Reengineering, lean production, high performance work systems – have typically had little to do with extending empowerment or genuine discretion and autonomy of work to workers whether professional, managerial, operational or support. Work intensification and increasing insecurity have more often been the characteristic results (Hall 2006, pp. 6-7).

Many organisations will be seeking to “exploit knowledge in new ways for competitive advantage”, he suspects, and there will be further blurring of the distinction between work and non-work (Hall 2006, p. 5).

This research project needs to take into account the issues Hall raises about the Knowledge Era and the reality of most workplaces and management styles, as well as the possibilities and hope that are an essential part of our human nature.

## 4.3 The intergenerational workforce

There is a shift occurring in how organisations need to think about attracting and retaining employees, especially those designated as belonging to Generation X and Generation Y. Avril Henry, in her paper *The changing face of the workforce and intergenerational impacts* (2006), examines the motivators of these generations and what may make them commit to certain employers. Generation X and Y are interested in learning environments where employers invest in their learning and development, they have access to coaching and mentoring, and easy access to people, networks, and technological resources. They desire workplace environments that:

- cater to a mobile population;
- redesign jobs regularly;
- enable greater flexibility;

- create more inclusive, collaborative work environments
- involve multiple and changing stakeholders, and
- give people the choice to be contractors, consultants and/or self-employed.

However, 80 per cent of the workforce growth in the next decade will come from people older than 45 years of age and by the 2020s the number of people retiring will exceed those entering the workforce according to Robert Critchley in his paper *The ageing workforce – to rewire or rust* (2005). He goes on to say that there will be only three people in work for every person over 65 compared with the current ratio of 6:1, and that in Australia, for every new young person entering the labour market today, there are seven workers over the age of 45 available. It appears that:

Older workers are the key people in ensuring the knowledge transfer to organizations and younger people is achieved effectively. Over the last decade, there have been many examples of knowledge, wisdom, and the history of an organization being let go in the flight to youth by many workers ... There are many ingrained prejudices associated with employing older workers ... and stereotypes abound (Critchley 2006, pp. 2-3).

Older workers have a lot to offer, providing a wider skills base, broader experience and wisdom with a solid work ethic and flexibility. Employers need to recognise that older workers are capable of filling most work roles into their 60s and beyond, and do learn new concepts and technologies: “The fastest growing portion of the workforce over the next 10 years will be the 45 plus worker” (Critchley 2006, p. 5).

Professional development strategies of the future will need to respond to these sorts of integrated and changing working and learning environments.

## 4.4 Wisdom leadership

Wisdom leadership is required to address the intergenerational, economic and social issues that characterise our world. These issues include globalisation of national economies, evolution to knowledge-based enterprises, the pace of technological evolution, the rigours of global and local competition, the state of ‘continuous discontinuity’, the stresses of the 21st century lifestyle and the global prosperity gap.

As William and Debra Miller outline in their paper *Wisdom Leadership: Exploring its relation to spirituality* (2006), it will take true wisdom to create new futures and to play a key role in transforming society, our quality of life and organisations: “This means tapping into a level of wisdom characterized by integrity and caring, and making business decisions in light of that higher wisdom and [those] values” (Miller and Miller 2006, p. 2).

In their ‘think piece’ Miller and Miller suggest that a new guiding ethic for business leaders is ‘wisdom leadership’:

...where wisdom is more than the sum of our knowledge, intelligence, experience, and innovative thinking. True wisdom is the ‘deep understanding, keen discernment, and sound judgement’ that draws from a level of self-insight, personal and organizational values, and cultural broad-mindedness (Miller and Miller 2006, p. 1).

Miller and Miller provide four contexts for wisdom leadership that have emerged over the last 100 years; four world views that inform and influence a leader’s perspective and reactions and provide a source of wisdom for guiding an organisation. They are:

- 1. Paternal-mechanical:** where business is ‘survival of the fittest’ and competition is a ‘win-lose’ game. Leaders adopt a command and control approach to achieve efficiency and productivity. Employees are seen as cogs in the wheel of a machine.
- 2. Humanistic:** where the goal of business is still wealth creation, but from a ‘win-win’ perspective. Employees are resources to be managed sensitively and employers are encouraged to invest in employees’ talents for personal and organisational benefit.

3. **Holistic:** with the focus on wealth creation for the optimal benefit of all stakeholders. Leadership is about having a common purpose and value system. People are recognised as the principal asset for wealth creation, especially in knowledge-intensive learning organisations.
4. **Spiritual:** where people are seen as spiritual in nature, with a particular spiritual purpose in life along with 'gifts' to fulfil that purpose. Leadership focuses on helping people fulfil their life's purpose while integrating that with the organisation's 'life purpose'. Leadership aims to bring forth the wisdom found in the other three contexts (Miller and Miller 2006, pp. 6-7).

While each of these four contexts is distinct, each "completes and expands the other" (Miller and Miller 2006, p. 10). They all operate to some degree in every organisation and leaders may operate from any one of them; a single leader may also, of course, use all four. They are the reference points from which leaders conduct their day-to-day business. Which reference point is used influences how that business is conducted.

**In this research project, spirituality is not seen as religion, but rather as something that comes from within and is a very personal journey.**

A feature of the spiritually based context for wisdom leadership is that "wealth creation is no longer the *goal* of a business; rather, it becomes the *means* for enabling and sustaining a broader purpose" (Miller and Miller 2006, p. 8). The potential of this context is to enhance the wisdom found in the other contexts. That is, it can:

1. Fulfil the potential of the *paternal-mechanistic* context by:
  - Honouring the experience and wisdom of "those who have paved the way before us".
  - Recognising life's "cause and effect" law: "As you sow, so shall you reap."
2. Fulfil the potential of the *humanistic* context by:
  - Recognising the essential goodness and work ethic of people.
  - Providing opportunities for individuals to actualise their potential, which includes self-actualisation as well as work abilities and aspirations.

3. Fulfil the potential of the *holistic* context by:
  - Recognising the interconnectivity of people, nature, and business enterprises.
  - Emphasising the universal nature of principles from which to operate harmoniously and creatively.
4. While offering its own unique wisdom:
  - Focusing first on a relationship with a transcendental source of consciousness within which a relationship with creation finds new meaning.
  - Basing motivation primarily on selfless service – intending first and foremost to give [to] and benefit the larger whole, with the skill and conscious attention to do this in a sustainable manner (Miller and Miller 2006, p. 10).

The four contexts are nested with the progression outward from paternal-mechanistic to spiritual, each completing and expanding on the other. In this way, spirituality can be a source of wisdom leadership. And leadership is critical in the turbulent and diverse times that characterise the Knowledge Era.

## 4.5 In summary

The researchers have attempted to bring together a wide range of perspectives as part of their literature search and knowledge-gathering processes. A number of varying world views have been integrated into and reflected in their findings.

A complete set of the papers titled *Voices: Contemporary thinking for working and learning in the Knowledge Era* is available on the TAFE NSW ICVET website at <http://www.icvet.edu.au>.

The challenge for this research project is to build a new direction for professional development in VTE that will be directly relevant to a wide variety of individuals, groups and contexts.

The extensive literature review, think pieces, iterative conversations with the expert Working Group, feedback from the Reference Group and influence of the National Action Planning Forums have together provided a theoretical base that has flagged the best way forward. Key concepts such as the Knowledge Era, learning ecologies and asset or strength based approaches challenge us to look beyond the familiar and explore different perspectives on how the relationship between life, learning and work might be re-conceptualised.

The Knowledge Era highlights an environment characterised by continuous change, unpredictability and irritation as well as excitement and opportunity. Learning ecologies, as a metaphor for the Knowledge Era, direct attention to the importance of relationships, interconnections, taking a holistic perspective, diversity, and the ability to both adapt to and shape our environment. An asset or strength based approach highlights the importance of human strengths and values and is an invitation to prosper and grow by investing in what is working well so that it becomes more common.

A number of powerful and interesting new theories and writings from academics, prominent workforce management writers, futurists and theorists have alerted us to the complexity of the contemporary workplace. These include new challenges such as intergenerational impacts, an ageing workforce, the growing status of business wisdom and a return to human values and valuing people. We need to be mindful of new paradigms that are already forming as we look to the future.

A synthesis of these diverse perspectives has led to three key findings:

- 1. Capability development** is the new emphasis for working and learning in VTE.
- 2. A strength based orientation** to capability development is most effective for change.
- 3. Life based learning** is the contemporary framework for capability development in VTE.

These have been developed into a model for life based learning for capability development in VTE.

## 5.1 Emphasising capability development

The research project's focus was on professional development; however, there is no universally accepted definition of that term. Current terminology describing learning in the workplace in VTE includes 'professional development', 'learning and development', 'training', 'staff development', 'workforce development' and 'capability and capacity building'. These terms have traditionally described the policies, procedures, strategies and activities that help people develop skills, attributes and knowledge to meet their professional learning needs in ways that are consistent with the strategic goals and anticipated needs of the organisation.

On the DEST website (<http://www.dest.gov.au>) a description of **professional continuing education** (also called 'professional development') refers to 'education of adults in professional fields, updating and improving occupational skills, often involving short-term, intensive, specialised courses'.

Anecdotal feedback from the National Action Planning Forum groups and interaction with VTE practitioners indicated that in response to the proposed new directions, 'professional development' was a restrictive term. Many felt that it applied to 'professional' groups and was associated with a range of training activities, particularly compliance training and 'old ways of doing things'. The following two quotes from National Action Planning Forum group participants are representative of this feedback:

*The words 'professional development' reinforce the old way. Professional development is only one aspect of life based learning. We need a more holistic term.*

*Current approaches are exhausted and this provides a fresh vision and a stimulus to change practice, particularly as it embraces theory from fresh fields which can challenge us in a positive way. This [strength based model] offers a new kind of professional development vision and strategy, which would align with new, far-reaching corporate strategy.*

It is timely that the concept of professional development is broadened. The preferred term is 'capability development' which encompasses professional development and seems to be a better fit for the business context of the Knowledge Era and the broad range of developmental approaches and strategies being proposed.

'Capability development' reclaims the importance of people and the human aspect as well as reinforcing the importance of business imperatives. The aim is to keep organisations in VTE strong and viable through capability development which brings the 'soft' and more intangible people focus together with the 'hard' and more measurable economic edge. This involves a continuous process that is holistic in approach and recognises the person as the most important asset within the organisation.

There are a number of assumptions that underlie the development of capability development. These are that capability development:

- addresses the needs of the organisation, workforce, individual and groups
- supports a high degree of flexibility in the organisation
- provides a wide range of learning options
- occurs in relationship and focuses on people rather than place and structure
- provides support for learning through mistakes
- responds to the shifting nature of priorities
- is available to all in the organisation
- involves combined responsibility of both the individual and the organisation
- is recognised as occurring through many processes and everyday activities, both inside and outside the organisation
- ranges from organisational learning, personal learning, to on and off-the-job learning
- suits the 'organic', open-system nature of the Knowledge Era, and
- recognises both the individual and social process that coexists and underpins learning in the Knowledge Era.



'Capability' is not easy to define and is easier to recognise than measure. It is more about a person's confidence in applying their skills in changing and complex situations than the mere possession of those skills (Stephenson et al 1992). The following statement by John Stephenson explores the essence of capability:

Capable people have confidence in their ability to:

- take effective and appropriate action
- explain what they are about
- live and work effectively with others
- continue to learn from their experiences as individuals and in association with others, in a diverse and changing society.

(Stephenson et al 1992, p. 2)

Creating capability is about moving away from segmented activities to holistic activities that have more meaning and purpose. This requires positive and appreciative mindsets and approaches. Balance and integration are features, along with a seamless connection between work, learning and knowing. People need to be empowered to apply their expertise. There needs to be a reciprocal obligation between the individual and the organisation: that is, people need to take responsibility for their self-directed learning and organisations need to create and maintain environments that support learning. Individuals and organisations need to take responsibility at a number of levels:

- The individual needs to take responsibility for:
  - designing their own learning
  - taking initiative, being self-directed and not waiting for others to make the difference, and
  - actively contributing to, sharing and using the body of knowledge in the organisation.
- The organisation needs to take responsibility for:
  - actively encouraging, acknowledging, supporting and promoting the learning of individuals and groups
  - harnessing and disseminating the learning for the benefit of all, and
  - building a rich learning environment.

The focus is on the capacity of individuals, groups and organisations to engage in all aspects of their business including technical and ICT aspects, relationship building, structures and systems, skills and resources,

culture, leadership and values, and redevelopment.

To do this, capability development needs to be about: **supporting people in being confident, capable, connected, curious and committed learners, who interact with their environments so that they are in dynamic balance between life and work and who take effective and appropriate actions at work.**

Capability development results in people learning to interact in dynamic balance with the various environments in which they live and work so that they can fulfil their potential, extend their work challenges, take responsibility for their choices and contribute to sustainability, relationship building and resilience within their organisations.

To effectively respond to these broader requirements for working and learning in VTE in the Knowledge Era, a fresh framework is needed. This project proposes that life based learning is a plausible and contemporary framework for capability development in VTE.

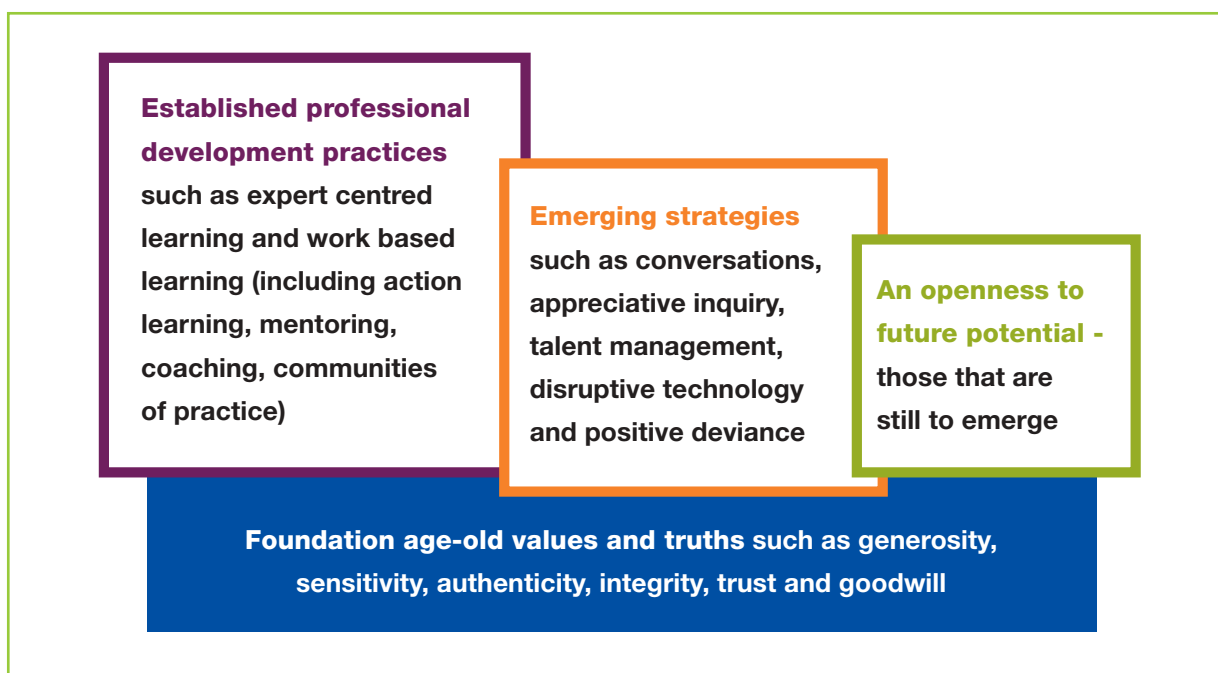
## 5.2 Strength based orientation

A strength based orientation to capability development in a life based learning context (see 5.3 below for a discussion of life based learning), does not disregard or displace existing practice because its premise is that we take the best with us and integrate it into the new. Strength based approaches displace nothing that has gone before. From an ecological perspective, if established practices are fit enough to adapt to the changing environment they will survive.

Learners need to be able to access a wide range of diverse and personalised strategies and take responsibility for their learning processes. Each learner is unique and needs to select from options that are available within the parameters of the business. These choices are not 'free-for-all'; they fit within the reality of the work environment and the boundaries necessary for individual, team and organisational success.

The choices and strategies need to match the kind of work environments that are emerging. Some people will prefer established approaches to work and learning while others will require varied and creative opportunities.

This mix is best achieved through integrating strategies that incorporate foundation age-old values with established professional development practices, emerging strategies and an openness to future options.



**Figure 6: Building new foundations for capability development**

### 5.2.1 Established strategies

Many established strategies are already strength based. The opportunity is to build more mindfully on those strengths. Depending on the baseline practice, this could be a fine adjustment or a significant shift. The advantage of building on established practices is their familiarity and immediacy. With familiar strategies, the investment is not in learning something new, but in deciding to do something new – shifting the orientation to reinforce a strength based approach.

National Action Planning Forum group members (Appendix 1) recognised this opportunity:

*“Reframing to a positive culture reinforces what is working well. It is common sense yet refreshing.”*

*“The possibilities are endless. Strengths-based models stretch the boundaries of what we label learning and its possibilities. Learning becomes more of a social and cultural exercise.”*

*“Much of what we currently do is problem-focused and therefore inevitably deficit-based. This offers a new paradigm.”*

*[Strength based learning] “...can be consistent with any approach to learning – start with interest and grow it.”*

*“Gradual building is very important for effective results.”*

The immediacy of established practices is an advantage because deciding what to do and how to do it is within the control of the individual. It is about choice and opportunity as these responses from National Action Planning Forum group members indicated:

*[A strength based approach] “...aligns with my personal intuitive belief, although my formal work is mostly about solving problems. I have a current project which I am now (after today) going to tackle from a strength based approach.”*

*“The positive theme of the workshop has enabled me to refocus on how important my work is as a change agent in that I, as a small part of the equation, can make a difference by being positive and believing in what I do. I have pride in the work that I do and wish to continue to create an environment where the people I work with are empowered to grow and engage in new ways of working.”*

*“I’ll use these principles in my role as professional development manager and with my staff starting tomorrow.”*

The message was that all it takes is the decision to have a go and that there is a starting point for everyone. It also gives people a marker for recognising excellence in existing practices and identifying factors for success:

*“Our mentoring scheme is local, personal and builds on strengths, looks for the good, isn’t in a straitjacket of rules, is a two-way benefit for participants, works well, is practical and has had real benefits in the workplace.”*

*“Doing it from a positive perspective has always got me better results than doing it from a negative perspective.”*

*“I think there are many possibilities. In TAFE we have some wonderful examples of high-value work; it will be exciting and replenishing to acknowledge and build on these.”*

*“As a philosophy/guiding principle, strength based professional development links well to other modes of learning (action learning, project-based learning). It can also help to unearth unused talents.”*

Established practices identified as strength based included action learning, communities of practice and coaching. National Action Planning Forum group members highlighted mentoring as particularly conducive to working from strength. Key descriptors of positive mentoring included mentors modelling the desired behaviour the organisation wants, trust, relationship building, personal as well as professional interest, encouragement, generosity, engagement and inspiration. However there were cautions and an understanding that mentoring per se was not the strength, as mentoring could also be ‘full of stories of failure’. How it was applied was what mattered.

More participants were alert to the importance of raising the profile of the impact of a strength based orientation and acknowledging that contribution:

*“One such project had all these positives ... however, none were listed as outcomes initially. We have learnt to include these and celebrate them along with more traditional outcomes.”*

Responses from some National Action Planning Forum group members also signalled the diverse realities of working and learning in VTE – experiences that were far from strength based:

*“How will this ever work in our abusive culture?”*

*“We need to name abusive work cultures so that those in power will see it for what it is. At the moment, it has become normalised.”*

*“We need to light the passion.”*

While participants were encouraged and enthused by the potential of strength based orientation they were also grounded in the realities of working life and therefore recommended a balanced approach as the wise path:

*“At the end of the day, we probably can’t walk away from a focus on problem analysis and intervention. There are dysfunctional situations that need to be addressed. This looks to be powerful but may not be a universal tool.”*

## 5.2.2 Emerging and future strategies

While established strategies could be ‘refreshed’ by an emphasis on strength, a range of approaches that are based on a strength based orientation have been designed and are rapidly gaining recognition. They align well with the life based learning model (see Part 5.3.5, below) and the Knowledge Era, learning ecologies and strength based orientation concepts. These strategies include, but are not limited to, conversations, Appreciative Inquiry, talent management, disruptive technologies and positive deviance. They are part of a diverse approach to capability development in the Knowledge Era.

With the exception of conversations, these other emerging strategies were not as familiar to National Action Planning Forum group participants and few could identify them as explicit practices within their own work context. Some, however, were able to identify their own practices as a specific strength based strategy:

*“It gave me a name for what I was trying to implement. Now I will be able to do further research into Appreciative Inquiry and try to create the environment and implement some of the ideas that have been suggested today.”*

Emerging strategies raised interest and their potential was recognised. For example when asked about professional development models for the future that would best support a learning ecology and life based learning responses included:

*“Focus on strength based modeling. Generally implement a talent management strategy in focusing people on their strengths and looking at how they can grow outside their job roles.”*

*“Describe the positive deviance model to build on current strengths.”*

[Use] *“...talent management as a strategy and learning opportunity.”*

[Use] *“...learning circles – informal and daily learning that suits individuals and is acknowledged and documented in duty statements.”*

The critical factor and essential characteristic of strategies for capability development in our context is that they are based on a thorough understanding of the life based learning model. Strategies used within the work based learning model (such as mentoring, coaching, workshops) will fit into the life based model if they reflect the characteristics of life based learning. It is important to appreciate the theoretical base and to use the strategies wisely and with good judgement, otherwise the integrity of the life based learning model is lost.

### 5.2.3 Foundation values and truths

Initially the fundamental role of foundation values and truths was not an explicit focus of the research. However references to the importance of trust, ethics and integrity to the realisation of the intent of this project were scattered throughout the interview data. As National Action Planning Forum groups explored their own experiences and observations of ‘inspirational work environments’ it became evident that ‘feeling valued’, ‘encouragement’, ‘faith in you to do your job’, ‘support’, ‘appreciation’, ‘respect’, ‘trust’ and ‘recognition’ were key indicators of rich learning environments. This was regardless of the strategies used. Responses such as ‘there was support, respect and acknowledgement [that] you have the skills and [will be] supported to grow into the job’ and ‘the strengths emphasised need to be based on ethical values’ demonstrated an appreciation of how these values and truths underpinned positive experiences in the work environment.

In this project foundation truths and values are presented as the new constants, the bedrock on which established and emerging strategies are built.

### 5.2.4 Business benefits of a strength based orientation

From their own experiences and from conversation about possibilities, National Action Planning Forum group participants were able to identify a number of business benefits of a strength based orientation to capability development including going beyond expectations, capturing corporate wisdom, impacting on client relationships and being a catalyst for change within the wider organisation:

*“The organisation would go beyond expectations and beyond the current borders of thinking.”*

*“It would help capture corporate wisdom. If there was an environment of trust, support and recognition, people would be more willing to share ideas and identify with the organisation and its goals.”*

*“It would translate across into client relationships and building collaboration.”*

*“Professional development can be used to support/model this approach and facilitate the spread of positive and strength based discussion throughout the organisation.”*

Another business benefit is that a strength based orientation could also provide a new sense of what quality means in VTE:

*“Currently, VET quality is a deficit-based concept, which focuses on compliance and gap-filling to reach a baseline performance. If you only fill gaps, that’s all you’ll achieve. A strength based approach is broader in scope. It is not just about compliance, but about quality products that include quality staff, quality teaching development, quality curriculum and a quality environment in which to work.”*

In other words, an orientation towards strength has the potential to influence beyond a focus on strategies. The potential of a strength based orientation as a business benefit can be summed up in the following common sense observation:

*“If you don’t pay attention to all the bits and pieces that make up an organisation, then it won’t stay healthy. You have to make sure everything, every part of the organisation, is considered.”*

### 5.3 Life based learning

Life based learning has been informed by key concepts such as learning ecologies, strength based approaches to change, the Knowledge Era, ‘think pieces’ on the contemporary workplace and feedback from VTE practitioners.

Life based learning proposes that learning **for** work is not restricted to learning **at** work. The premise is that all learning is interrelated so it is not easy to separate learning at work from the other types of learning adults do. Learning is a multi-dimensional experience, adults engage in a lot of learning other than professional development and much of this ‘extra-curricular’ learning influences our thinking and our work practices.

Life based learning acknowledges **multiple sources** of learning that open up opportunities for developing capability. The challenge is how to recognise, capture, support and utilise this more open-ended approach for the benefit of both the individual and the organisation.

#### 5.3.1 Progressing familiar models

Life based learning integrates and progresses two dominant models that have influenced the design of professional learning in VTE: the expert-centred model and the work based learning model. In the expert-centred model the ‘teacher’ is the holder and impartor of knowledge. The work based learning model is project-focused; learning is facilitated and knowledge is constructed through processes such as action learning. Both models have informed much of professional development methodologies to date.

Life based learning substantially shifts the discourse about professional development by moving beyond the allegiance to work based and expert-centred learning. However rather than abandoning these familiar models for ‘the next big thing’, life based learning honours their legacy, retains what works and places them into a more contemporary framework. This allows a pathway for growth.

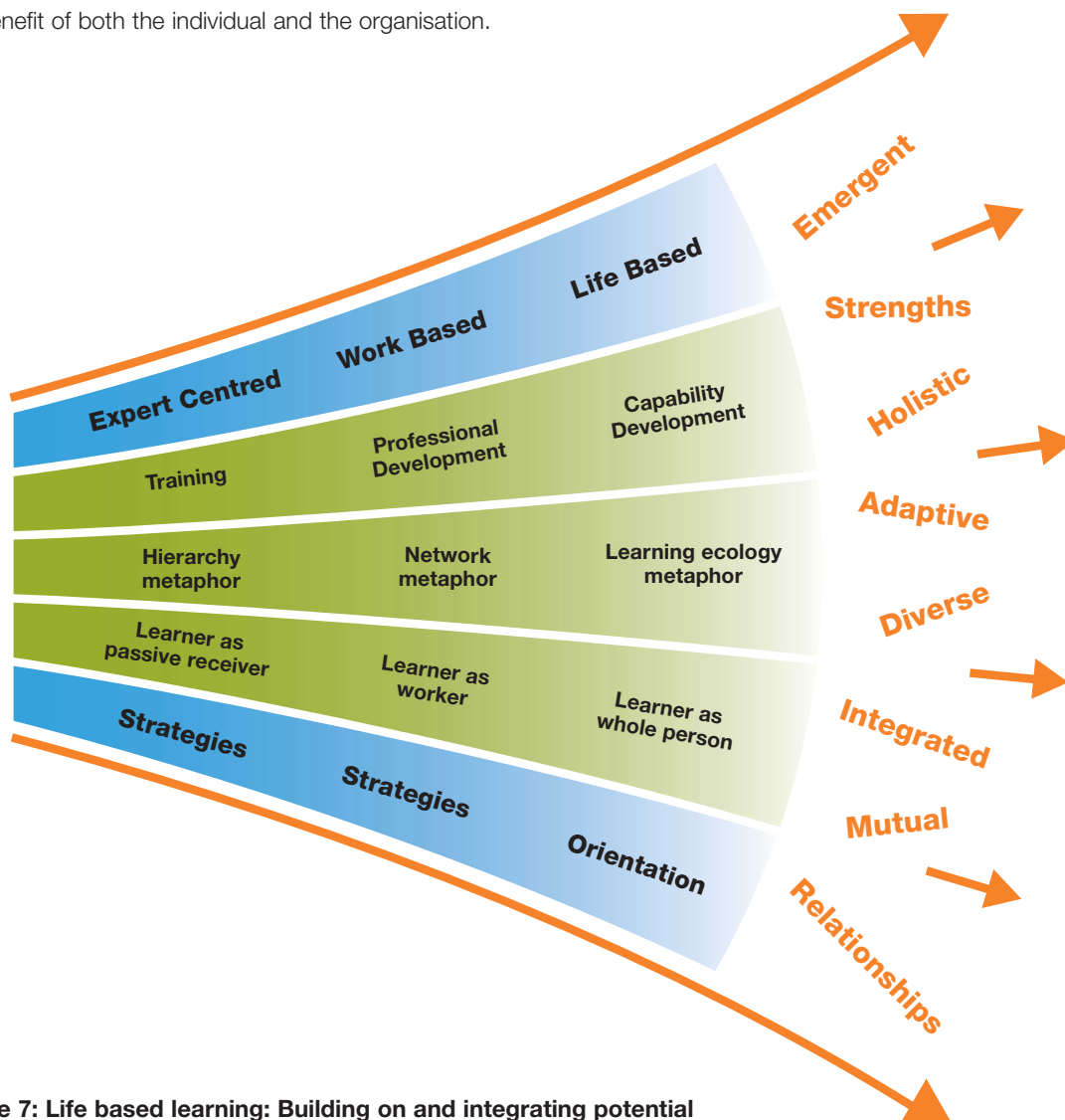


Figure 7: Life based learning: Building on and integrating potential



### 5.3.2 Life based and lifelong learning

Life based learning is different from lifelong learning, which is the 'process of acquiring knowledge or skills throughout life via education, training, work and general life experiences' (DEST Glossary). While lifelong learning is about a learning continuum and an ongoing acquisition of knowledge and skills, life based learning is more about the source of learning, acknowledging the person's entire learning contribution and recognising the different ways in which learning is significant to the individual. The uniqueness of life based learning is its specific focus on capability development in the Knowledge Era and its contribution to achieving a business outcome. In other words, lifelong learning is 'learning forever' and life based learning is 'learning from life'.

#### 5.3.3 Life based learning – integrated and holistic

An avid proponent of this more holistic approach to learning is Knud Illeris, Professor of Workplace Learning at Roskilde University in Denmark. Illeris talks about 'life projects' that extend beyond a work environment yet are inextricably connected with that environment. Life projects are relatively stable and long-term activities that link everyday interests with professional learning.

Life projects could include (but are not restricted to) family projects, work projects, service projects, self-development and leisure time projects, all of which are integral to the **identity** of the individual:

These projects are embedded in the life history, present situation and possible future perspectives of the individual and closely related to what we call 'identity' (Illeris 2003b, p. 11).

So important are these projects to our identity that according to Illeris, we develop defence mechanisms to protect them, as they are linked to who we are and who we would like to be. Our motivation to learn is based around these life projects. Life projects, like all effective adult learning, are desire-based. The formula is simple:

**Interest + meaning = motivation or desire**

No matter why, where, what, when, how, or who you learn with, the impact of that learning is not linear, separate or confined to discrete contexts such as **work** or **not work**. The challenge and goal for capability development is to identify what activates this motivation or desire to learn, then make this explicit and nudge it along. Activation of this energy will require a diverse range of strategies.

As portrayed in the figures below, the shift is from a perspective where work has traditionally been seen as separate from leisure, family and personal life (figure 8) to one where, more realistically, they merge and allow for a more integrated or more holistic and integrated approach that acknowledges the realities of adult learning (figure 9).



**Figure 8: Learning as separate stratas**



**Figure 9: Learning as an integrated and interconnected ecology**

Life based learning allows for more of the ‘whole’ person to be present in learning and at work. It adds to the possibilities for learning and development in VTE and provides the opportunity to build on current practices. Life based learning acknowledges that what we experience and learn outside a work environment can be as important to our work as what we experience and learn at work. Individuals have knowledge, skills and attributes that may not always be visible or recognised by organisations but can significantly contribute to organisational achievements and relationships. Life based learning acknowledges this as well as the importance of personal values, foundation truths and their profound effect on work and culture.

#### 5.3.4 Key characteristics of life based learning

The life based learning model has a number of key characteristics. The deliberate focus on characteristics rather than strategies recognises that individuals, groups and organisations will make their own judgements and decisions about how to proceed with embedding new ways of working, learning and knowing within their organisation. The characteristics provide a base from which these judgements and decisions can be made.

The key characteristics of life based learning are that it:

1. **Emphasises capability development.** This results in people learning to interact in dynamic balance with the various environments in which they live and work so that they can fulfil their potential, expand their work challenges, take responsibility for their choices and contribute to sustainability, relationship building and resilience within their organisations.
2. **Promotes a strength based orientation to learning.** It is the orientation that makes the difference, as much as the strategy.
3. **Recognises multiple sources of learning.** Individuals engage in a multitude of learning events and have capabilities that are not always visible or recognised as formal and significant contributions to organisational life. This needs to be acknowledged and supported.
4. **Balances integrity and utility.** For a life based learning model to prosper, mindset matters. A new strategy approached with an old mindset can undermine the integrity of the model. This is an inherent difficulty in a ‘grab and go’ environment where there is a temptation to use the strategies without studying or fully appreciating the concepts that underpin them or their intent.
5. **Shifts responsibility for learning to the individual.** Learning is a unique event and adults access learning from a range of life sources. While we may never fully comprehend the learning of others, we can respect and appreciate the process

and set up the environment and enablers to encourage its growth. Individuals need to take responsibility for designing their own learning and choosing options most appropriate to meeting their personal and professional goals.

- 6. Shifts the role of organisations to that of enabler.** The role of the organisation shifts from the provider of the learning program to the creator of the best environment to enable learning to happen. The design of safe spaces, promotion of a positive work climate, provision of opportunities for learning as an integral part of everyday work, plus flexible options and openness to new ways of learning and working all contribute to the building of rich learning environments.
- 7. Acknowledges that contradictions are strengths.** The tension created allows new understandings, new sets of practices and new relationships to emerge. Rather than having a single authoritarian voice, life based learning celebrates different voices and multiple and competing interpretations of the world. Moving through this multiplicity requires judgement and wisdom.

- 8. Invests in developing the whole person.** There is a refocus on the human factor. Life based learning is also about being – having a robust sense of self and a sense of relationship with others, with the world and with organisational life, thereby enriching the knowledge and skills required to prosper and thrive in the contemporary world.
- 9. Acknowledges human dispositions as critical.** Basic human foundation truths and human responsibility are the new constants. Life based learning shifts from what you know about the world to how you know about the world. This invites a new level of awareness, responsibility, trust and accountability.
- 10. Appreciates that change is qualitatively different.** Change is both externally and internally oriented. How individuals understand themselves, their sense of identity, sense of being in the world and their mindset are just as important as changes in models, methods and strategies. This is because dispositions and mindsets influence how models, methods and strategies are used and can have a significant bearing on outcomes.

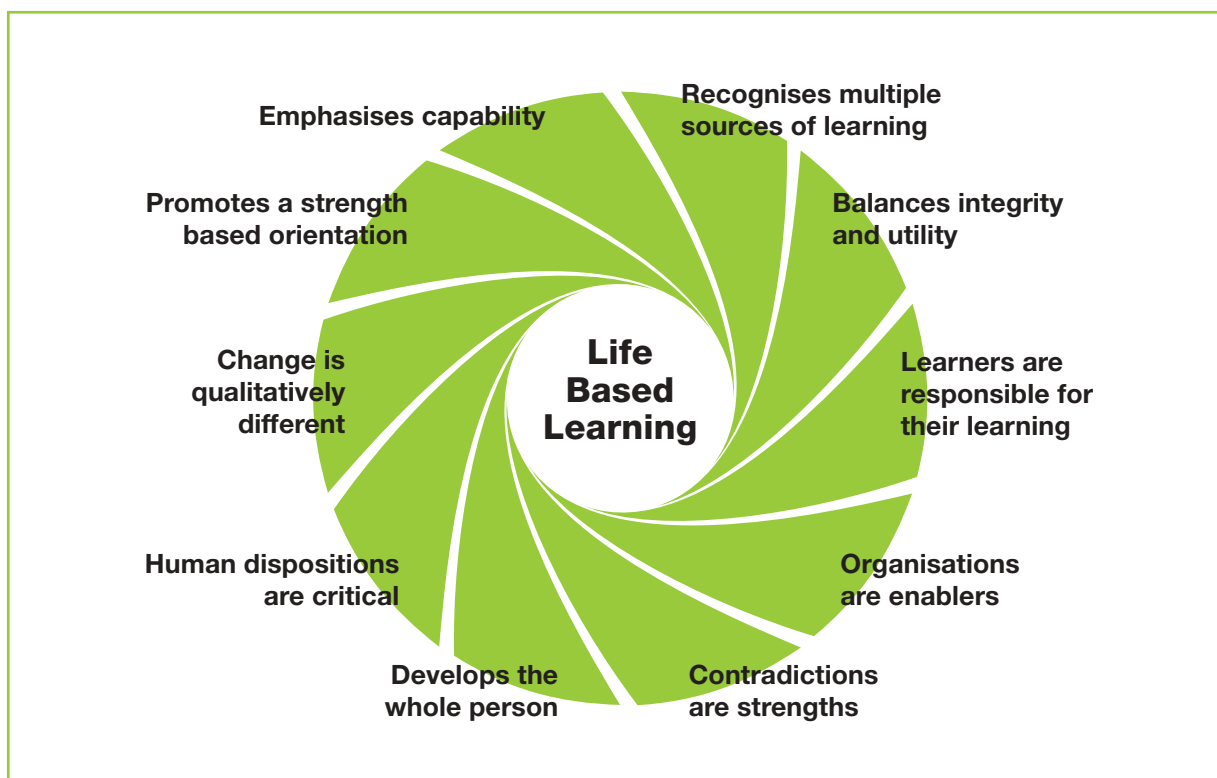
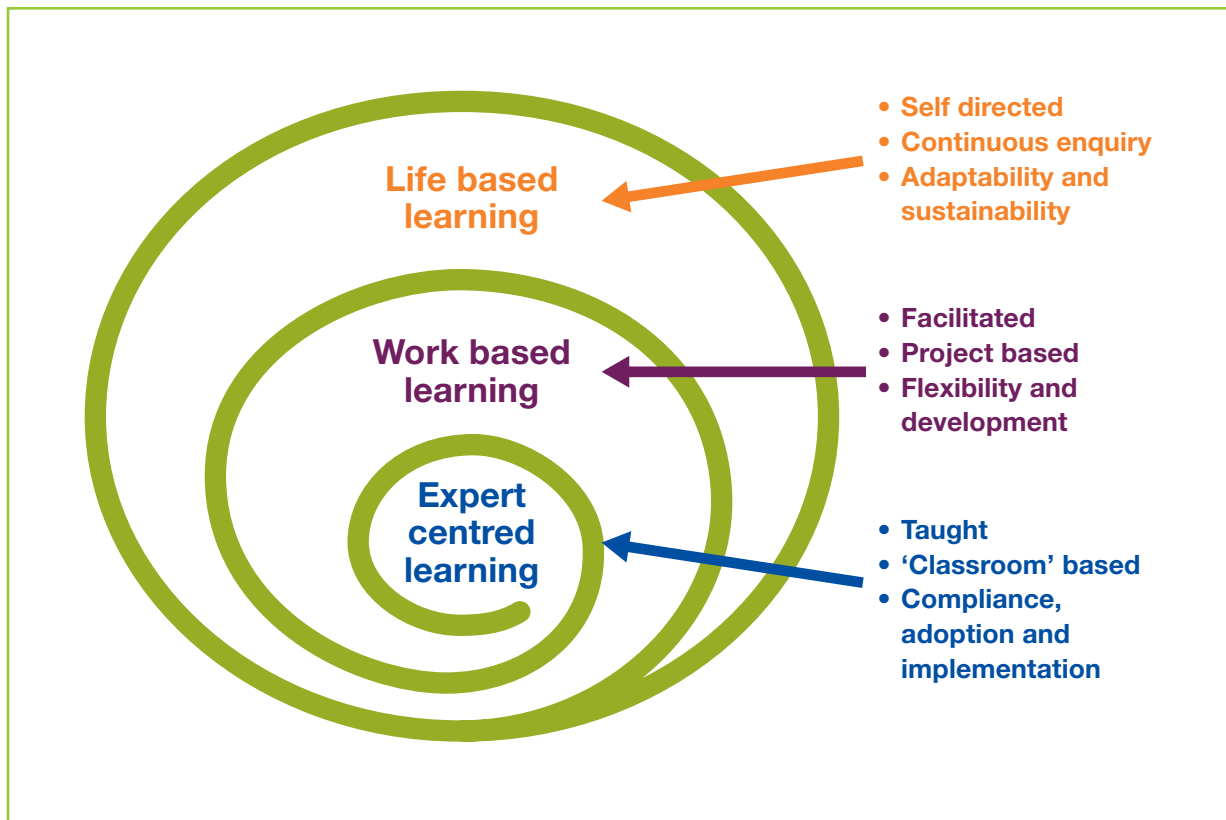


Figure 10: A holistic and interconnected perspective of the key characteristics of life based learning



**Figure 11: Life based learning: expanding the potential of work based learning and expert centred learning**

While these ten key characteristics of life based learning are described in list form to provide a clear overview of what each entails it must be emphasised that their true strength is in their relationship as an interconnected whole rather than as discrete units. Figure 10 attempts to capture this interconnectedness.

### 5.3.5 Life based learning: a model for capability development

Life based learning offers a unique perspective on learning and working in VTE. It forms the basis of the capability development model for VTE in the Knowledge Era. Life based learning embraces the expert-centred and work based learning models, aiming for a total effect that is greater than any one approach could offer, and that fosters new synergies.

A comparative table of these three models is attached for discussion and debate (see Appendix 2).

Embracing the best of expert-centred learning and work based learning, life based learning offers a broader repertoire, expands the potential of existing models, offers new possibilities and articulates explicitly what many VTE practitioners are intuitively engaging with already. In doing so, it better serves the needs of working and learning in the dynamic VTE environment.

The expert-centred model is a training model and represents the need to master the knowledge and skills required to improve job performance to required standards. The teacher or trainer is the expert who holds and imparts knowledge. This is usually delivered to groups in a classroom setting and thus involves a focus on discipline as well as learning. Training strategies include lectures, role-plays, train the trainer sessions, discussions and workshops.

Work based learning is a professional development model that was driven by the need to broaden the scope of training beyond developing skills to encouraging people to extend their horizons or gain new viewpoints, which may or may not be directly related to a job. Work based learning shifts attention to the process of learning, to the group as the source of expertise, and to the facilitation of learning for improved performance and growth. Learning on the job through projects, flexible learning, action learning, research, team learning and mentoring are core strategies.

Work based learning was first introduced into vocational education and training in 1992. It significantly challenged the expert-centred model and shaped the thinking and practice of professional development in VTE. Professional development programs such as LearnScope and Reframing the Future adopted and championed a work based learning model, spreading its influence across the VTE sector.

Over the years work based learning has been reshaped to reflect changing times, and a significant review of work based learning was undertaken by Mitchell et al (2001).

Life based learning draws on these models to create a model for capability development which may include training and development but which is articulated in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities and values. The emphasis is on personal responsibility for learning through the provision of rich learning environments with the learning benefiting both the individual and the organisation. Life based learning is a model for performance, growth and opportunity. It is adaptive, self-facilitated, based on reflexive practice and uses any strategy appropriate to the task. These strategies can be sourced from an expert-centred model, a work based learning model or through life experience.

There are three distinguishing features of life based learning:

- an emphasis on a strength based orientation rather than strategy
- explicit recognition of underpinning foundation truths and values, including trust, mindfulness, generosity, consideration and tolerance, and
- acknowledgement of the learner as a 'whole' person who accesses many sources of learning.

Life based learning builds on the potential of expert centred and work based learning and provides a strong foundation for learning in a dynamic and rapidly changing environment. Within an organisation or business the three models co-exist. Sometimes there will be a blend of all three; sometimes there will be a preference for one over the other. Like any model life based learning will change over time as people engage with it more fully and shape it to the needs of their own contexts. We look forward to how it will develop.

Figure 12 outlines the distinguishing features of the three models and shows how life based learning could build on the potential of expert-centred and work based learning to promote capability development in VTE.

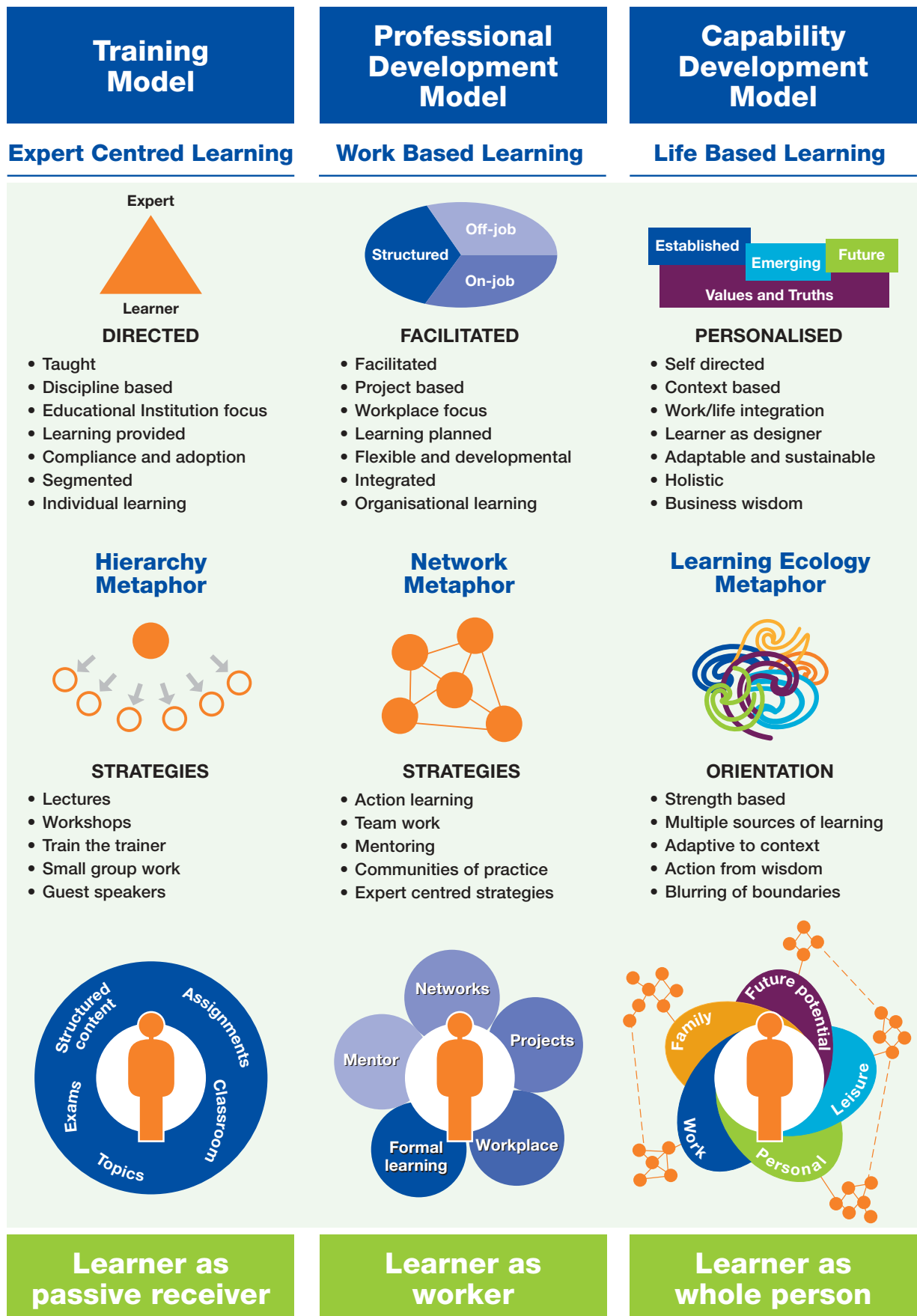
### 5.3.6 Benefits and outcomes: a perspective from the field

To test the plausibility of life based learning as a model for capability development, the key concepts and the model were presented to over 100 VTE practitioners who participated in the National Action Planning Forums. Presentations to a number of national conferences and workshops and several smaller groups of senior managers with responsibilities for professional development were also made. Strength based questions engaged participants in conversations around the key concepts and resulted in rich feedback that informed the development of the model (the questions are included in Appendix 1).

#### Benefits

The participants highlighted two key benefits of a life based learning model. The first was that it articulated and legitimised what was familiar and known intuitively. The second was that it proposed a way forward that was within reach. Participants could easily provide examples from their own life experiences of how learning from sources other than work contexts had influenced their work practices and performance.





Life Based Learning: a model for integration, growth and potentiality. © TAFE NSW ICVET

Figure 12: Summary of models

Some of the benefits of the life based learning identified by participants are represented in the following sample of quotes:

*“Embracing the concept of life based learning opens up opportunities.”*

*“It provides the framework through which to look at work through different lenses.”*

*“Life based learning applauds and supports the explorer in us all.”*

*“It is holistic – it recognises workers as whole people who need to be nurtured and supported. It utilises the person in a better way.”*

*“It raises consciousness – it makes you think about what you do outside of work as having an impact on what you do at work.”*

*“The changing vision of your own life, how you grow emotionally, physically and intellectually, is integrated into this concept. It recognises your journey in life.”*

In other words, life based learning is a model for growth that offers the potential to open up opportunities, provide a new set of lenses and recognise the whole person as a valued asset.

Three key benefits of life based learning were particularly emphasised in the National Action Planning Forums:

1. It expanded the perspective of learning, which had the potential of opening up more opportunities. It was considered to be more productive to reduce and blur the artificial boundaries that currently compartmentalise the context of learning.
2. It legitimised life experiences as a key source of learning. It reinforced that learning is transferable and ‘harvesting’ learning from one context and sowing it in another was a very practical, achievable and productive initiative.
3. It acknowledged the whole person which in turn had potential for utilising individual talents in better and smarter ways. This could benefit both the individual and the organisation.

It was clear from the comprehensive nature of National Action Planning Forum group responses that people engage in significant amounts of learning in their non-working lives. This learning took many forms including formal, informal, incidental, within groups, or through individual effort.

The types of life based learning experiences participants described generally fell into three categories:

1. **Significant life events:** These included facing a serious illness, migration, living in another culture, the death of a close relative, advocating for ageing parents, the birth of a child and/or changing one’s lifestyle or career path. These events were often unpredictable and very challenging emotionally and the learning had lasting impact.
2. **Developing a talent:** Several people highlighted their commitment to honing a specific talent, for example as a musician, artist, or elite sportsperson. These types of experiences developed the ability to set clear goals, self-discipline, focus, commitment, passion and self-confidence.
3. **Recreational interests:** These were broad, ranging from membership of a native plant society to active participation in travel, sports, hobbies and social events. The emphasis was on maintaining a work/life balance by spending time with family and friends and enjoying leisure time.

The factors that made these such powerful learning experiences clustered around common themes, including a sense of autonomy, building and maintaining good relationships, emotional and spiritual as well as intellectual development, being with inspiring people and inspiring others, teamwork, and having personal meaning.

Participants could clearly articulate what life based experiences transferred to the workplace and how they contributed to thinking and practice at work for their learners, themselves and their teams:

#### For learners:

- being more aware of providing opportunities for learners
- ensuring that students have enough resources to achieve effective outcomes
- having a greater level of empathy with students and colleagues, and
- engaging in increased self-advocacy and advocacy for others.

#### For self:

- using specific life-learned skills in a work context
- coping with pressure more effectively
- being a more confident organiser
- being gracious in both winning and losing
- having an increased awareness of one's personal repertoire through identifying skills which may not have been recognised as being valuable in a work context
- having a greater awareness of how one conducts oneself at work and the impact that has on one's work environment and relationships with colleagues, and
- having a greater awareness of the importance of relationships, and increased sensitivity to others, empathy, consideration and tolerance.

#### For teams:

- having better teamwork and project management skills
- being more passionate about consulting with colleagues and being more inclusive
- having a greater appreciation of diversity which in turn would influence management style, and
- having a greater willingness to collaborate.

#### For the workplace:

- improving motivation and engagement
- having a richer more satisfied, re-energised and happier workforce
- having a re-energised view of professional development: it expands professional development to more of a process of growth than a series of events and activities
- having an opportunity to more effectively tap into the talent pool, and
- creating a culture of possibility.

## Outcomes

Participants offered their vision of the outcomes of a life based learning model for VTE organisations and businesses. These were divided into different components including vision, people, work, work style, environment and resulting outcomes for the business.

### The vision

A clear path and a sense of purpose is articulated and understood. Everyone knows why they are doing what they are doing and how it contributes to the vision. The whole organisation actively participates in building the vision; this is a continuous process.

### The people

Leaders model the foundation truths. This has a flow-on effect. Managers are receptive, dynamic, appreciative, creative and supportive. Motivated, responsible and accountable people actively contribute to building the business.

### The work

Work is appropriately challenging and supervised. Life skills are recognised and utilised and the benefits of this can be demonstrated. Personal life skills audits are as important as evaluation of formal qualifications. Life based learning is fostered so that it becomes increasingly robust and there is strong personal support for career development. Talent management as a recruitment and retention strategy is in place.

### The work style

Job roles are dynamic and grow with the person. 'Play time' is built in as a valued process and there is time to research, reflect and have strategic conversations. Flexible work practices based on autonomy, trust and accountability are implemented.

### The environment

The work climate is safe and risk-tolerant. The work environment models 'humanity at work' and there is respect for self and others. Comfortable and informal conversation spaces are provided and actively used for knowledge exchange and transfer. Capability development has a high profile and is accepted as a mutual responsibility for the individual and the organisation. Active participation in social activities is an important and valued part of organisational life.

### The outcomes for the business

These include:

- improved productivity
- higher customer and worker loyalty
- adaptable, adept and responsive workforce
- improved work climate that attracts new staff and retains existing ones
- capable, confident, committed learners
- organisational capabilities being understood and utilised responsibly
- opportunities to innovate, grow and adapt being maximised
- self-sustaining learning practices, including learning to learn, being evident
- risk-tolerant and risk-aware environments being supported, and
- motivated and satisfied learners.

## 5.4 In conclusion

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Life based learning focuses on development rather than training, on designing and self-responsibility rather than direction and conformity, and has the potential to build on the best in VTE.

Capability development strategies, whether current or as yet emerging in the VTE sector, need to reflect the characteristics of life based learning, incorporating a strength based orientation. As one participant wrote in one of the National Action Planning Forums:

*“If the right environment is provided for people to flourish, capability development will be the outcome rather than the primary focus. In other words, build the right environment and the capability will flow from that.”*

How to apply life based learning depends on context. There is no one way forward, no one best approach. Organisations need to determine which enablers will best support rich learning environments in their context. They also need to work with their learners to ensure their growth, ongoing adaptability and resilience in these times of uncertainty, diversity, unpredictability and opportunity.

Applying a life based learning model of capability development to business is about a change of mindset towards more fully acknowledging the whole person, expanding the perspective of learning and legitimising life experiences in the work place.

A key challenge for funding bodies, decision makers, operational managers and individuals is how to recognise and acknowledge learning that occurs outside a work environment but adds value to the work experience. Life based learning is about the responsibility of learners and learning as an interaction – between ‘my work and myself’ and between ‘my life and myself’. Each person comes with different knowledge and different life experiences and only they can choose what is best for them. By not having others make that choice for them learners accept responsibility for their learning. Meeting these challenges may require a significant shift in the way we perceive learning and how it impacts on work practice.

A fresh approach to organisational planning and capability development is required. This is reflected in the following sections on guiding principles for action, organisational enablers, application of strength based strategies and evaluative approaches.

## 6.1 Guiding principles

The guiding principles are presented as a framework for thinking about, planning and undertaking capability development. They are not to be seen as a rigid or linear list but rather as a support to an organic process that will result in different applications within different contexts. Local needs, issues, resources, experiences, personal preferences, priorities and business requirements must be taken into account.

The six guiding principles for action provide a direction from which managers, planners, teams and individuals can identify, customise and apply the life based learning model. Firstly it does, however, require an understanding of the life based learning model, its characteristics, benefits and outcomes (as described in Part 5).

The guiding principles are:

- Believe relationships really matter.
- Work with strengths.
- Be reflexive as well as reflective.
- Think and act wisely.
- Acknowledge the whole person.
- Move beyond professional development as an activity.



## Believe relationships really matter

If you believe relationships really matter, capability development strategies will reflect this value. Strategies will ensure that relationships between learners, networks, communities of practice and the globally connected world will be strengthened. Age old truths and values will also be applied – such as integrity, generosity, sensitivity, authenticity and goodwill. These support the development of strong relationships and signal a greater capacity for sharing and contributing to the development of others for the benefit of the whole organisation.

## Work with strengths

As the saying goes, if you always think as you have always thought, you'll always get what you always got. To get something different will require a shift in mindset and the shift that is suggested is from deficit thinking to asset thinking. This requires a reorientation towards strengths instead of weaknesses when planning and designing capability development. Strategies need to build on what is working well and processes such as Appreciative Inquiry enable this.

## Be reflexive as well as reflective

It is timely that recognition is given to not only the importance of reflection, but also reflexivity. Being reflexive encourages us to be mindful of new or different ways to view the world. It involves having the capacity to acknowledge why we act or react in specific ways and makes us aware of our own patterns and responses and the existence of multiple realities, abilities and experiences of different people. Critical reflexivity reminds us to exercise choice and judgement in making responses to life events so that our responses are thoughtfully appropriate and not just a closed self referential cycle of actions and reactions.

## Understand your learning ecology

Viewing our work environment as a dynamic learning ecology enables us to focus on systems as interconnected and interdependent, rather than emphasising the parts of a system. Learning ecologies encourages us to focus on adaptability to continual movements between disruption and equilibrium. Having the capacity and resilience to coexist, interrelate, adapt, shape and reshape within a context of constant change and unpredictability is an essential feature of capability development in the Knowledge Era.

## Wise thinking and actions

Wise thinking and actions will result in congruence and connection between a person's internal self and the organisation's body of knowledge and experience, as well as transcending self interest. It recognises that supporting the development of others is just as important as focusing on your own development.

## Acknowledge the whole person

Understanding the significance of acknowledging the whole person adds to the possibilities for capability development in VTE. Life based learning acknowledges that the skills, knowledge and capabilities acquired outside of work are not always visible within organisations even though their contribution is significant.

## Move beyond professional development as an activity

Capability development is much more than a limited number of training programs, strategies or options for learning. It is about recognising a holistic approach with the person as the most important asset within the organisation and being open to future possibilities. It recognises the importance of individuals taking responsibility for designing and initiating learning that contributes to the knowledge within the organisation.

## 6.2 Organisational enablers

Organisational enablers support rich learning environments that promote capability development for individuals and teams. They build on those identified in the *Working and Learning in Vocational Education and Training in the Knowledge Era* research report (ANTA 2004c, pp. 36-42):

- valuing connections and networks
- developing a culture that supports job reshaping for personal growth
- creating space for exchanging and sharing ideas (informal learning)
- supporting learners as designers of their own development
- balancing control and creativity
- modelling wise leadership
- capitalising on the benefits of an intergenerational workforce, and
- focusing on futures in education.

## Valuing connections and networks

Organisations are made up of people with different sets of attributes and characteristics which are life based rather than just work based. As part of the learning ecology of an organisation, people form varying links with others and develop diverse networks.

Organisations must seek to understand the dynamics of these networks and identify those that impact positively on business and future possibilities. This strength based approach can exemplify what is working well and embrace such practices in other areas of the organisation. It magnifies those attributes that contribute to high performing groups (or individual) and organisations.

## Developing a culture that supports job reshaping for personal growth

Evidence from literature on the younger generation in the workforce suggests that individuals 'grow a job' rather than 'grow out of a job'. Growing a job requires a change in mindset from rigid, inelastic job descriptions to more "fluid" job families which outline the work that needs to be done and the skills and competencies required.

Strong organisational vision and values are a key to providing the individual with the autonomy to stretch, change or create a role that currently may not exist. Enabling this to unfold requires a mindset which links the individual's potential or talent with the direction of the business rather than finding the right person for the job. To do this effectively people need some autonomy over what it is they need to learn and how they go about learning it. The benefit to the organisation is that there is currency and relevancy which will be reflected in the organisation's competitive edge and recognition in the market place.

## Creating space for exchanging and sharing ideas (informal learning)

Current work practices indicate that there is insufficient **physical space** in the workplace for the informal conversations and chats that are important to work and allow for life experiences to be understood and brought into work. Less time is available for stopping and engaging in conversation over morning tea, lunch or to take time out for 'social' networking at work. These work (or non work) areas need to provide environments that are not guided by constraints of time and authority.

Physical space may include tea rooms, cafes, the park, balcony or places that are less formal than the work area. In the cyber world, this space may include access to online networks and communities of practice.

The **psychological space** refers to a space that is not risk averse and supports people in testing out ideas, developing knowledge and being open to critical feedback. It encourages the openness and frankness that is not always prevalent in more formal situations. It is also considered a safe environment to freely express opinions, ideas and thoughts without any feelings of ridicule or power struggles. The psychological space is generally free of structure and authority. It is a space where perceptions, ideas, thoughts, emotions, moods, passion and knowledge can be freely expressed. People relate as person to person, not position to position.

Other informal learning practices such as the reading of journals, articles, website resources and attendance at professional and industry association activities, involvement with sporting and leisure clubs and activities all provide an extension to professional and personal growth. Being in these spaces and making the connections requires time. This needs to be recognised and acknowledged as legitimate capability development time which can be encouraged by management.

## Supporting learners as designers of their own development

Learner as designer requires a mindset based on 'design' rather than problem solving. This is explained in Working and Learning in Vocational Education and Training in the Knowledge Era (ANTA 2004c, pp. 41-42) as:

Designers draw on the knowledge and expertise of cross-disciplinary teams, they keep abreast of new developments, they combine intuition and creativity with scientific knowledge, and as each design is original, they constantly innovate and contextualise their work. The linearity associated with pre-planned problem solving and the logic of enacting identified staged plans over specified timelines are re-shaped within the projects. These elements are reshaped by a greater appreciation of the contribution that intuition, improvisation, team learning and conversations can make to the resolution of critical matters in non-routine and uncertain times.

This insight has ramifications for capability development. Many current practices of planning for capability development are based on a premise of order without unpredictability. With the focus on learner as designer, order emerges through the interactive relationships amongst individuals or team members but in ways that could not be predicted from the outset. (Examples of this are seen in the outcomes of national work based learning programs such as LearnScope and Reframing the Future.) Similarly, the capability development requirements of these people will emerge as the work evolves and in ways that may not be readily predictable at the beginning of the work.

The selection of strategies, activities and processes should ideally remain with the learner. The learner as designer understands the approaches and styles in which they prefer to develop skills and knowledge (meta learning processes) and through this process generate new knowledge to apply in the context of their work situation. In other words they create their own learning journey and the learning and knowledge gained through this journey is applied within their context.

The organisation's obligation is in providing some resources, time and in supporting individual and team development. Frameworks for capability development such as work based learning and life based learning enable individuals to design learning that meets both their own and organisational needs. To support the broader understanding of learner as designer in the context of life based learning and a strength based approach, organisations can provide a range of opportunities for individuals and teams to understand the concepts and apply theory, intuition and creativity to practice.

Where creative and innovative practices are key outcomes from a learning journey, for example, in seeking new ways of learning and teaching, the learner as designer is an important process. This is not a free-for-all approach but a strategy for gathering, interpreting, generating and applying new knowledge.

On the other hand where the learning requires standards or consistencies throughout an organisation, for example, in enrolments, health and safety, a more formalized capability development program may be required to ensure all aspects are covered. However, these programs should provide a range of learning strategies to suit the differences in learning styles and provide opportunities for checking that knowledge has been gained.

With a greater emphasis in the Knowledge Era on being able to acquire skills and knowledge when they are needed and with a focus on life based learning, learner as designer is a significant shift in individuals knowing who to make connections with and how to gain this knowledge and skill.

### Balancing control and creativity

Control of some processes and freedom in others is required to maximise business opportunity, growth and innovation in the Knowledge Era. There is a need for *standardisation and consistency* within business. This is because our body of knowledge and experience about organisations tells us there is a best way of doing things in some instances such as administrative tasks or budget management, for example.

In other areas it is best left to the worker's professional judgement; *innovation and creativity* rely on this. Some aspects of business need open, organic processes and individualised or personalised learning strategies. Few or no controls should be in place, with a trust in the benefits of self-organising systems. These are usually processes that are 'below the waterline': these include learning strategies for varied generations, seeking new business opportunities, designing your own learning, contextualising teaching and learning materials for a particular group. These need to be acknowledged and supported, not constrained.

Impacting on both the need for standardisation and innovation within the VTE system, are the externals such as AQTF, Training Packages, legislative requirement and certain customer requirements. Often external standards and consistencies need to be applied and sometimes, practitioners struggle to apply their own innovative and creative professional judgement to practice and delivery of flexible learning programs.

Robust processes are required for refreshing the capability development that supports standardisation and consistency and innovation and creativity, within an environment of external givens. One of the challenges as well as opportunities is to retain and value applicable knowledge, refresh what is out of date and also look to new models and strategies that support both control and creativity. There is no one solution to this. The theories, models and strategies can only provide a backdrop to one's journey in an organisation. Individuals, groups and organisations will make their own decisions about how to proceed with embedding new ways of working, learning and knowing within their

organisation. This will depend on size of business, nature of vocational education and training, location, culture, resources, needs, expertise, relationships and networks.

### Modelling wise leadership

Leadership practices and management styles matter in advancing organisations to adapt and be resilient in a global market. Modelling the age-old values and truths such as generosity, respect, sensitivity, authenticity, integrity, trust and goodwill are recognised as important aspects of leadership.

Being cognisant of business wisdom, making connections and links, identifying synergies between knowing how to work with a range of variables and having the capacity to apply good timing and judgement are all important when it comes to leadership. Wise actions are becoming increasingly necessary as change and competition accelerate, boundaries blur and there is less certainty in decision making processes.

Embodied in wisdom is the capacity to continually improve and innovate, increase adaptability, learn how to learn, maximise the benefits of teams and collaborative work and sharing and embrace the lessons of experience across the organisation.

### Capitalising on the benefits of an intergenerational workforce

Organisations planning for the workforce of the future need to understand what the key motivators are of each generation. With Boomers moving closer to retirement or extended employment beyond 60 it is increasingly important to understand how the different generations are motivated and how they can learn from one another. Organisations are facing significant skills shortages in the future which is largely driven by an ageing population and declining workforce.

Motivators of the younger generations often differ to those of the older generation. Recognising that older workers are key people in ensuring the knowledge transfer to organisations and younger people is achieved is an important factor. Gaining the skills of coaching, mentoring and talent management are some examples of how this can be achieved. If ever there was a time when development of employees was important that time is now, and this will not change in the future (Henry 2005).

### Focusing on futures in education

This relates to teachers, managers, leaders having a healthy understanding and balance between what Slaughter (2005) suggests as futures in education and futures of education. Currently the main focus is on the future of education, ie the forecasts, trends and depiction of educational provision into the future which fits well with administrators and bureaucrats. Futures in education is derived from progressive educators, teachers and innovators who focus on the needs of the learners and not the economic needs. Currently there is little focus on the future in education that supports the human value of stakeholders and client groups. Strengthening capabilities in the futures in education will result in more proactive and responsive approaches for evaluating the relevance of education for the good of the learners.

## 6.3 Strength based strategies

Strength based strategies for life based learning need to be based on a thorough understanding of the life based learning model. It is important to appreciate the theoretical base and to use the strategies wisely otherwise the integrity of the model is lost.

This section honours what already exists, identifies emerging strategies and leaves open the potential for new strategies.

### Established practices

The most well known strategies within the VTE sector come from the expert centred or work based learning models (described in sections 5.2.1, 5.3.1 and 5.3.5 above). They include mentoring, workshops, coaching, communities of practice and work based learning projects. These strategies can comfortably fit within the life based learning model if they reflect the characteristics of life based learning.

It is not the brief of this research to describe these strategies in detail as they are well documented elsewhere in literature and practice. Suffice to say that the important difference in using these strategies within a life based model is that they are reorientated toward attributes which emphasise capability development, promote a strength based orientation to learning, invest in developing the whole person and reclaim basic human foundation truths.

This research acknowledges the significance and ongoing importance of these established strategies to the VTE sector.

## Emerging strategies

These emerging strategies are not a formulae but instead are approaches to capability development that have been developed around a strength based framework:

- Conversations
- Talent management
- Positive deviance
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Disruptive technology

Though these strategies are practiced widely in many sectors they are 'new' to capability developed in VTE. To be effective they need as their basis the foundation human values and truths previously described in this research (Part 2.2).

It is not proposed that the emerging strategies replace expert centred learning or work based learning, or that by simply applying emerging strategies in the workplace people automatically become involved in life based learning for capability development. What is required is a mix and match of strategies and options, application of the guiding principles (Part 6.1) and organisational support through enablers, such as those described in Part 6.2.

The descriptors that follow provide an introduction to emerging strategies, with more detailed information available on the web or in referenced books.

### Conversations

Effective communication and strong relationships are keys to a healthy learning ecology:

Communication transforms a collection of individuals into a strong, mutually supportive team. Communication builds the important ties that bind people together-inside the organisation as well as outside (Webber 1993, p. 7).

A key process to facilitate communication and to build relationships is the art of conversation. Conversations involve the exchange of ideas, views and information between two or more people in a way that is non-confronting, egalitarian and open (Stewart, 2001). They are a vehicle for generating, sharing and processing knowledge. Conversation is therefore a core business activity for knowledge work:

Through conversation, knowledge workers create the relationships that define the organisation.

Conversations – not rank, title, or trappings of power – determine who is literally and figuratively 'in the loop' and who is not (Webber 1993, p.7).

Conversations are integral to daily organisational activity and a source of rich learning. Taking time for "a coffee and a chat" is a familiar way to share intelligence, debrief or solve issues. While this familiarity is a strength it can also be a challenge. The full potential of conversation can be underestimated and undervalued because conversations often occur 'below the waterline' – they can be invisible, spontaneous, selective, informal and have unclear outcomes.

"Stop talking and get to work!" can be a response to corridor conversations and represents an Industrial Era mindset, which considers conversations a waste of time and not 'serious' work. Mindsets are changing and so is the message. In contemporary workplaces where building networks, sharing knowledge, tapping expertise and developing relationships is valued as integral to knowledge work and capability development, a more likely invitation is "Let's get to work and have a conversation"!

Companies that practice the art of conversation are more apt to discern subtle changes in consumer taste before competitors recognise them; more likely to spread that new awareness rapidly through the organisation; and by their fast responses be better positioned to shape the new environment to which slower competitors must then respond (Webber 1993, p. 7).

Conversation has always been central to how we interact and learn as human beings. However as the potential of conversations for learning and knowledge generation in the workplace becomes more explicit, theories and models of conversation-based learning provide conceptual frameworks and offer guidance on how to harness this potential. Such theories include the seminal work of Gordon Pask (1975) on the theory of conversation, the art and history of conversation by Theodore Zeldin (2000), Diana Laurillard's (2002) conversational model for learning online and Baker, Jensen and Kolb's (2002) conversational learning as an experiential approach to knowledge creation.



Zeldin, an Oxford University historian, philosopher and management consultant, suggested we are in the era of “new conversations”:

A new kind of conversation is necessary to give expression to a broader range of our hopes. It becomes possible when we believe we are incomplete and need to share in the experience of others in order to become more fully human. In such a conversation there are no winners or losers; the aim is for each to get into the skin of the other, to feel what they feel and to emerge with an understanding and emotions which neither had before (1999, p. 1633).

The work of DEST Research Fellow Phillip Candy (2004) on self-directed learning in the digital age, proposes that conversation can occur in three different ways:

- Conversation with colleagues, which can be either ‘live’ (face-to-face, at a distance or online), or notional (with someone else’s thoughts and ideas as represented in their writing, artwork, music or some other creative output).
- Conversation with a person who knows more, which primarily involves asking questions.
- Internal conversation, which involves introspection and reflecting on personal understandings and internal worldviews (p. 224).

Candy suggests that technology has a particular role in facilitating conversation, with internal conversations having the greatest degree of unexplored potential. Technology expands the scope and choice about where, when, how and with whom conversations take place. The increasing availability and use of social software like wikis, blogs, voice over the Internet (VoIP), text messaging and virtual classrooms, confirm that the second generation of learning technologies is more about connection, communication and conversation than content and control.

In the new economy, conversations are the most important form of work. Conversations are the way knowledge workers discover what they know, share it with their colleagues, and in the process create new knowledge for the organisation. The panoply of modern information and communication technologies – for example computers, faxes, e-mail – can help knowledge workers in this process. But it all depends on the quality of the conversations that such technologies support (Webber 1993, p. 8).

Designing conversation-based learning opportunities for capability development is becoming more deliberate. Different approaches including Social Networking (Cross 2004), Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney 2002), Cooperative Inquiry (Heron 2000) and Communities of Practice (Wenger 2002) capitalise on conversations as a powerful collaborative and social learning process.

Conversation based learning is gaining impetus as a professional learning and knowledge generation strategy in VTE. For example, the provision of professional ‘conversation spaces’ as an engaging and non-threatening way to keep practitioners up-to-date with the expectations of industry clients, was one of 15 good practice in VET case studies showcased by Mitchell et al., (2005). This case study on the development of structured conversation spaces at North Sydney Institute in NSW, highlighted how creating these spaces enabled practitioners to “collaborate, reflect and clarify; analyse challenges and identify solutions; share successes and examine lessons learnt; create the conditions for change; and transform practice” (p. 52).

While conversation based learning is often one strategy in a broader capability development repertoire, it can also be the primary strategy for knowledge generation and relationship building. A case study by Sarah and Haslett (2004) of Monyx Services, a student service organisation at Monash University in Victoria, provides a comprehensive overview of how conversation based learning contributed to building capability within Monyx. The case study highlights factors that enable conversation based learning to have an impact on knowledge accumulation and knowledge management capability. A key enabler was a particular type of organisational culture, “one typified by reflecting, asking deep questions to inquire, seeking understanding, learning and a focus on delivering outstanding service to all stakeholders to achieve results” (p. 633). Other factors include having a dedicated physical space conducive to knowledge generation and sharing, allocated time for conversations to take place and for evaluation and reflection to occur, and multiple strategies for capturing and recording knowledge emerging from the conversations. Such strategies included journal keeping, diarising and capturing key ideas through strategic images, graphics, pictures, cartoons and digital technologies (p. 636).

Without such complementary tools and methods, conversation based learning may be likely to become subject to the human deficiencies of heuristic bias...that can lead to incomplete recall and inaccurate learning (Sarah and Haslett 2004, p. 637).

To facilitate conversation based learning within organisations, several models are available which provide processes and tools to guide conversations to productive outcomes. Two popular and well-documented models are The World Café and Open Space Technology.

**The World Café** is a set of methods and tools for fostering:

... an intentional way to create a living network of conversations around questions that matter. A Café conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action in groups of all sizes" (Whole System Associates 2002).

Guidelines for designing and facilitating effective sessions, crafting powerful questions, etiquette and making collective knowledge visible are freely available as a practical start-up kit for fostering "courageous conversations and collective intelligence".

The World Café is particularly useful for:

- Generating input, sharing knowledge, stimulating innovative thinking, and exploring action possibilities around real life issues and questions.
- Engaging people in authentic conversation whether they are meeting for the first time, or are in established relationships.
- Conducting in-depth exploration of key strategic challenges or opportunities.
- Deepening relationships and mutual ownership of outcomes in an existing group.
- Creating meaningful interaction between a speaker and the audience.
- Engaging groups large groups in an authentic dialogue process.

The belief in human capability and goodwill to 'produce the goods' underpins The World Café:

The Café is built on the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges. Given the appropriate context and focus, it is possible to access and use this deeper knowledge about what is important (Whole System Associates 2002).

An excellent local case study<sup>4</sup> that demonstrates the effectiveness of The World Café process, is where the community participated in the design of the Marion Cultural Centre in South Australia. The result was an innovative design that reflected the diversity of those it was designed to serve – the community of Marion.

Another conversation-based approach is **Open Space Technology**. Open Space Technology is a large group process designed to promote conversations for solving real business problems. It is an excellent example of a self-organised and emergent process, which aligns with a learning ecology metaphor and a strength based orientation.

The group is presented with a real and pressing business issue. Participants raise topics or questions they believe are at the core of the issue and these become the agenda. Participants then self select into small groups and have conversations around seeking solutions to the topic of their choice. Conveners provide a report on the discussions and recommended actions. These are added to a book of proceedings which become the basis for decision making.

Open Space Technology meetings operate on four principles and one law.

The principles are:

- Whoever comes are the right people
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened
- When it starts is the right time
- When it's over it's over

The law is 'The Law of Two Feet'. If people find themselves in a situation where they are neither learning nor contributing, they are invited to go to a place that would be more productive for them.

Open Source Technology works best in situations where the issues are complex, the outcome is unknown, a diversity of people can be brought together and there is urgency to make a decision.

Open Space Technology creates the conditions for respectful conversation. People are genuinely empowered – all have an equal voice, their presence is voluntary, the process is self-managed, they are responsible for raising the issues they care about, setting the agenda, organising the discussions, taking responsibility for finding solutions and making recommendations for actions.

<sup>4</sup> Find the case study at <http://www.theworldcafe.com/storyconversing.html>

This organic, emergent process is an intentional combination of order and chaos and is underpinned by two fundamentals: passion and responsibility. Passion engages people in the room and responsibility ensures things get done.

In both approaches, choice is emphasised and participants are invited to: *Do it again, do it better, or go back to a prior mode of behaviour.*

Both The World Café and Open Space Technology have supporting websites full of resources, case studies and comprehensive implementation guides. Both approaches emphasise that conversation-based learning builds a culture of trust and encourages organisations to create the environments that promote that trust.

In the age of knowledge work intangible assets such as intelligence, knowledge and other human qualities are the new essential value chain. Conversations are a key link in that chain.

### Talent management

It is a mindset that goes beyond the rhetoric towards a holistic and integrated approach to leveraging the greatest competitive advantage from people. Talent management is about those thoughts and actions that, consistently, over time, become organisational culture. Talent management is more than something to do, it is something to be, a way of working and achieving both short and long term success. It is a belief that talent differentiates organisation culture and breeds competitive advantage, with benefits for both the individual and the organisation (Dutttagupta 2005).

Businesses rise and fall on the strength of their people. Harnessing these strengths for the benefit of both the individual and the business is the goal of talent management. Talent management is about delivering business success by appropriately identifying, valuing, guiding and nurturing the natural talents and aspirations of employees. While some talent management efforts target 'high flyers', there is a wealth of untapped talent at every level in an organisation. Developing talent that is exceptional, underutilised or latent is important to business outcomes – untapped talent is a wasted asset.

Lack of attention to talent management can leave organisations vulnerable as the workforce landscape is rapidly changing. As Baby Boomers retire they are being replaced by a new generation of workers who

expect to be talent managed. If an employer does not provide this option, they are quite capable of managing it themselves. Avril Henry (2005) highlights this in her 'think piece' on the intergenerational workforce. By the end of 2004, for example, 50,000 small businesses in Australia were run by people under the age of twenty-five – Generation Y.

To these savvy young workers qualitative factors such as values, management style, flexible work practices and the work climate are just as important as financial rewards. If they are unhappy in their present circumstances, they have no qualms in seeking alternative work arrangements:

They believe that the only job security is to be employable, that training is an entitlement and the loyalty is to themselves (Henry 2005).

To attract and retain the talent of young workers Henry suggests that it is in the best interests of organisations to set up a range of systems and opportunities including:

- Develop learning organisations – invest in developing a learning culture where learning is visible at all levels of the organisation and learning programs are personally designed.
- Cater to a mobile population – support working in different locations and time zones.
- Redesign jobs – move from rigid job descriptions to fluid 'job families', recognising that working and learning in the Knowledge Era is more about behavioural competencies than achieving tasks.
- Provide coaching and mentoring – especially in relation to people management and leadership skills.
- Invest in leadership and management training – tackle 'softer skills' such as conflict resolution, influencing and persuasion.
- Enable greater flexibility – design environments that accommodate work styles with a focus on getting the job done rather than hours of work.
- Create more inclusive, collaborative work environments – move from a 'command and control' leadership model to one of 'inclusion and collaboration' (Henry 2005).

While there is a huge amount of interest in the implications of the X and Y generations entering the workforce, the significance of the ageing workforce should demand equal attention. This is the message

from Robert Critchley, whose 'think piece' on the ageing workforce counterbalances the emphasis on young workers with a statistical reality check:

- 80 per cent of workforce growth in the next decade will come from people older than 45 years of age.
- The annual employment growth rate in Australia will fall by .04 per cent per annum. This will cause a shortfall of 195,000 workers over the next five years.
- In Australia, for every new young person entering the labour market today there are seven workers over the age of 45 available.
- We are retiring earlier yet living longer, with those choosing to retire at 55 potentially having 25 post-retirement years.
- More people will leave employment in the next five years than enter it, leaving a workforce shortage (Critchley 2005).

Critchley's challenge for capability development and managing the talent of older workers is that:

If the full potential of the older worker is to be maximised, then employers must develop an open and positive attitude, as well as implementing appropriate human resource policies and practices that encourage, appreciate and support diversity and continuous learning and development (Critchley 2005).

The signs that talent is being managed well in an organisation include:

- success in meeting business targets and objectives
- having a talent strategy as a high business priority
- high employee satisfaction and morale
- little problem recruiting staff
- employees want to stay, and
- excellent branding – the business is known as a great place to work

While talent management was not a structured topic for the National Action Planning Forums, it nevertheless generated much interest. It was apparent that talent is not well managed in VTE contexts and tended to look after itself rather than being an integral part of a capability development strategy. The development of talent was most often self-initiated, relying on goodwill and champions rather than any clear strategy.

One Forum participant commented:

It is vitally important that individual aspirations and organisational goals are delivered together. Too often, these seem to be unequal partners. However, organisations that genuinely focus on each person's own natural talents tend to achieve corporate success.

From their own experiences or observations on how talent was managed within their own VTE contexts, participants identified three approaches to the talent issue:

- Leveraging – talented people had champions who ensured that they grew their jobs or had extension opportunities. Mentoring was mentioned as the key to leveraging talent.
- Languishing – talented people were left to own their devices and relied on goodwill and advocates for growth opportunities. This often resulted in motivation problems, low morale and disengagement as people felt vulnerable.
- Leaving – several incidents were mentioned of people who actively sought alternative employment when growth opportunities were not forthcoming.

The following ideas emerged from National Action Planning Forum discussion regarding more effective management of people with talent:

- Identify development opportunities to deepen knowledge.
- Listen to the voices – the viewpoint of the employee needs to be heard.
- Focus on strengths.
- Undertake new challenges to keep a fresh perspective.
- Design your own development plan.
- Offer appropriate incentives.
- Mentoring – helping build skills to become more savvy.
- Build a culture that provides a sense of purpose, accomplishment and fun.

Talent management strategies are required to understand not only what talent is needed to achieve business goals, but how to recruit, retain and develop that talent.

Four major principles for talent management have been identified by Duttagupta:

- Build a winning environment that people want to belong to – create opportunities to excel by using strengths, personal and professional challenges, constant new projects to work on, teams and leaders who provide a rich mix of strengths and lifestyle considerations.
- Establish a talent management mindset, which enables ownership and accountability for optimising talent and potential – coaching, mentoring, empowerment and sponsorship.
- Create tangible means to identify, select and deploy people of outstanding talent – identify the talent needed and how to source it and use it for optimal effect.
- Fully engage talent, use it and manage it intelligently – use talent wisely to achieve both personal and business goals (Duttagupta 2005).

Talent management makes good business sense for a number of reasons:

- It leads to effective business processes as well as motivated and effective people.
- It means having the right people to fill an opportunity when one appears.
- Losing talented employees is very expensive: recruiting, inducting, training and developing new staff is a major investment.
- Talented people help generate innovative ideas and fresh perspectives that are critical to competitive advantage and business success.
- The key measure of an effective management system is having the talent it needs to execute its business strategy.

Talent is a strategic resource for achieving business success and requires a refocus on the people agenda. Talent should be harnessed, not taken for granted, and the talent within the organisation should never be ignored.

### Positive deviance

In any organisation or community there are exceptional individuals or groups who, with the same set of constraints and resources as everyone else, function better and accomplish more. These are 'positive deviants'. These local 'deviants' achieve success by defying conventional wisdom. In other words their lack of conformity to conventional rules, processes and systems is a key ingredient of their success. If efforts focus on discovering how these 'positive deviants' achieve these results, and how they can be supported to model their success and mentor others, change can happen faster.

The positive deviance change strategy originated in the health care industry. Jerry and Monique Sternin were working as field directors for Save the Children (a US-based non-profit organisation) addressing childhood malnutrition in Vietnamese villages. Having limited time and even more limited resources, the Sternins focused their attention on the few families in a village whose children were well nourished. They discovered what these 'positive deviants' were doing differently and then trained them as local change agents to support the community to adopt their successful behaviours and strategies. The approach was so successful that it is now the model for many community development initiatives worldwide. The Positive Deviance Initiative website (<http://www.positivedeviance.org/>) provides a comprehensive overview of the range of development projects and initiatives that have successfully used this approach.

Table 2 summarises the key differences between a traditional and a positive deviance approach to problem-solving.

Source: <http://www.positivedeviance.org>

Traditional	Positive Deviance
Externally fuelled (by 'experts' or internal authority)	Internally fuelled (by 'people like us', same culture and resources)
Top-down, outside-in	Down-up, inside-out
Deficit-based: 'What's wrong here?'	Asset-based: 'What's right here?'
Begins with analysis of underlying case of <b>problem</b>	Begins with analysis of demonstrably successful <b>solutions</b>
Solution space limited by perceived problem parameters	Solution space enlarged through discovery of actual parameters
Triggers immune system 'defense response'	Bypasses immune system (solution shares same 'DNA' as host)

**Table 2: Traditional v positive deviance problem-solving approach (Positive Deviance Initiative)**



The principles of positive deviance have been adopted by other disciplines, including business environments. The premise is that 'positive deviants' and their 'living case studies' are everywhere, in every strata of an organisation. If there is investment in searching out what they are doing, finding out how they are doing it and supporting them to share their secrets of success with their peers, the deviant behaviour will become common practice within the local culture.

The idea is that local change efforts are culturally appropriate, easier to transplant into nearby work units and invite active participation. This shared ownership leads in turn to sustainable results.

Crom and Bertels, in their paper on the virtues of positive deviance in organisational change leadership, outline the basic logic of the positive deviance concept:

- Under equal conditions and within the same culture, some members of the community do a lot better than others
- Identifying these people and the principles they apply provides the background to distil the principles of success within this culture
- Each community has its own success model. Focusing on a single model is not sufficient
- Using individuals and their own cases to educate other community members is much more successful than using external experts
- Leveraging the experience of the participants' application of this training can fuel the next round of training and helps develop community members into change leaders. However, it is important to replicate the process of discovering successful behaviours, not simply best practices (Crom and Bertels 1999).

### Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is based on the premise that 'organisations change in the direction in which they inquire'. So an organisation which inquires into problems will keep finding problems but an organisation which attempts to appreciate what is best in itself will discover more and more that is good. It can then amplify these discoveries to build a future where the best becomes more common (Cooperrider, 2002).

AI neither negates nor ignores problems. Rather, it shifts the frame of reference that is used to define what is happening. Instead of looking for what's wrong or needs fixing (a deficit-based approach), the organisation focuses on what's right and what's

working and seeks to do more of it (a strength based approach). In short, AI suggests that you can create change by paying attention to what you want rather than to problems.

AI is based on the following assumptions:

- In every society, organisation, or group, something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality.
- Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
- The act of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.
- The language we use creates our reality (Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003).

### The Appreciative Inquiry process

The process of AI focuses on structured conversations and whole-of-organisation participation in the change process. AI searches for success stories which are shared throughout the organisation. Individuals are recognised and affirmed as contributing and successful members of the organisation. Confidence and commitment to more success begin to permeate the individual and organisational belief systems.

AI involves five phases:

1. **Choosing an affirmative topic** as the focus of the inquiry. As a premise of AI is that we move towards whatever we study, the selection of a topic is the foundation of the entire process. The topics should be bold enough to stretch the organisation to focus on something it really wants to see happen and that has the potential to energise people, mobilise forces, and be strategic.
2. **Discovering** what gives life to an organisation and acknowledging the best of what is now. The discovery phase involves a data collection and narrative exploration. It begins the process of revealing the positive and successful experiences of the individual and the collective. Through carefully developed interview questions based on the affirmative topic, the focus is to explore and enliven the stories that are shared through interviewing the defined group within the organisation.

3. **Dreaming** of what might be to create a clear results-oriented vision for the future. Participating groups discuss their individual visions of the ideal organisation and describe what would be happening some years into the future. From this discussion, the group's collective vision is developed. The strategic focus becomes articulated as a vision of a better organisational world and a compelling statement of strategic intent.
4. **Designing** what should be by collaboratively co-creating action plans. Provocative propositions are developed as bold statements of the organisation of the future as if it has already happened. Implementation plans are then developed by small working parties. To ensure comprehensiveness, the design phase can focus on specifics like leadership, strategy, culture, business practices, capabilities, professional development and systems.
5. **Delivering** the results through implementation and review. At an organisational level, if the AI process of positive transformation is supported through empowering employees to connect, co-operate and co-create, the results will continue to surface in new, innovate, and bold ways (Cooperrider 2002).

The AI process can be adapted to almost any situation including strategic planning, diversity management, or any other critical issue related to the functioning of the organisation. AI is a whole-of-organisation process and a range of stakeholders participate in the process which can last from a few days to several months.

As a strength based approach to change, AI aligns well with an ecological perspective. It is an emergent, self-organising, interconnected process which reinforces a consultative, collaborative, participatory approach to organisational change and growth which involves all stakeholders in taking responsibility for personal and organisational change.

### Disruptive technology

Disruptive technologies challenge orthodox way of doing things. The term, coined by Clayton Christensen in his book *The Innovator's Dilemma* (1997), refers to a new technology innovation, product, process or service that eventually overturns the existing dominant technology in the business or marketplace despite the fact that the disruptive technology is both radically different from the leading technology and often initially performs worse than the leading technology according to existing measures of performance.



**Figure 13: Phases of Appreciative Inquiry (adapted from The Power of Appreciative Inquiry, Whitney and Trosten-Bloom 2003)**

A disruptive technology will eventually dominate the business because it fills a role that previous processes, technologies, products or services could not fill or gains acceptance through performance improvement until it finally replaces the existing product, process or service. Examples of this can be seen in digital cameras replacing photographic film, USB and CDs replacing floppy disks, work based learning replacing training the trainer, electronic banking replacing the service with the teller.

Disruptive technologies offer alternatives to established technologies and are initially perceived as more agile, responsive and empowering for some user. They generally attract the fringe clients of established products and new client markets who are prepared to 'try it out' and see the benefits before the potential of the different technology is fully realised.

To identify disruptive technology within this range of strength based strategies is to appreciate the diversity of the various processes, products, services and technologies that are unfolding within the workplace and which some people are trialling and working with to create richer learning options to benefit their learners.

## 6.4 Evaluation

The more complex the organisation, the more difficult becomes meaningful evaluation; the more pressure for change, the less time for reflection. Yet it is precisely in these circumstances that mature reflection has become crucial to progress, for change is unlikely to be simple to achieve, and the way forward unlikely to be obvious to everyone concerned (Rose and Haynes 1999).

Finding an evaluative process that is appropriate for capability development in the Knowledge Era is likely to be a difficult task. Is it possible to evaluate dynamic, complex, unpredictable, multifaceted, emergent processes where there is a shift from highly structured and linear professional learning and development to embedding enablers that support confident, capable, connected, curious and committed learners? If evaluation, in general, seeks to establish the value or worth of an activity or program, is it possible to evaluate capability development using traditional approaches?

Many of the traditional approaches to evaluating professional development:

- are deficit-based rather than strength based
- are trainer directed rather than self-directed

- are event-focused, with clear boundaries between learning and doing, and
- require evidence of return on Investment.

Many publications, including Misko (2001), are devoted to return on investment (ROI) models in relation to training programs and activities. However, an ROI model alone may not fit the premise of working and learning in the Knowledge Era. Andrews (2005) cites Tobin (1998) and Conner (2002), who articulate issues with ROI measures of learning. They suggest that as a traditional financial measure based on historic data ROI in education has been used primarily for self-justification rather than improvement. Factors limiting the contribution of ROI assessments include the interaction between training and other variables and the difficulty defining and measuring intangibles. Tobin notes that by the time an educator is asked for an ROI study to demonstrate the value added it is too late – the decision has already been made to continue, downgrade or eliminate, and the ROI is merely a justification for the foregone conclusion.

Andrews (2005) suggests that while Kirkpatrick's four-level model of training evaluation remains highly influential and popular, there is an obvious delineation between learning and working inherent in the four evaluation levels. These are:

- **Reaction-level evaluation** – measures trainees' reaction to the training and development input.
- **Learning-level evaluation** – measures whether the specified learning has occurred.
- **Behaviour-level evaluation** – measures on the job performance.
- **Results-level evaluation** – focuses on the outcomes of training and development – for example on productivity and profit ability.

Larri (2001) describes a range of evaluative processes for professional development in addition to Kirkpatrick's Four Level Evaluation. These include Stages in Training Program Design, Delivery and Evaluation (Armstrong), Strategic Training Evaluation Model (Unger and Rutter) and Program Logic. These processes (and others) are still relevant in determining results for various areas of professional development. However, we still need to identify evaluative processes that take into account capability development which impacts on multiple stakeholders that also work well in an environment characterised by uncertainty, with high levels of innovation, creativity and knowledge sharing.

Rich learning environments are holistic and inclusive, adaptive and shaping, and diverse and complex. Outcomes are distinctively different from efforts best measured by increments in individual productivity. Changes are desired at individual, team and organisational level to create sustainability and resilience.

Where organisational goals are multiple, contradictory, dynamic and political, evaluation difficulties are exacerbated. Andrews (2005) cites a number of authors including Michalski and Cousins (2002), Rose and Haynes (1999), Brown and Duguid (1991), and Brown and Reid (2002), who highlight issues around attributing causality, the difficulties of evaluation in complex organisations where knowledge workers learn in many ways, and evaluating for multiple stakeholder views in capability development programs/models.

Authors such as Brown and Reed (cited in Andrews) note the complexity of comprehensive change strategies and the inappropriateness of evaluation measures centred on individual change. These authors argue that when capability development aims to achieve organisational as well as individual outcomes, we must recognise the unfolding nature of developmental stages. Secondly, evaluation must heed the criticality of organisation permissions and supportive social structures in addition to individuals' skills attainment. These researchers argue that a focus on capacity building connotes simultaneous development on multiple levels. There is a clear conceptual linkage between these ideas and the learning ecology metaphor.

Further insights are provided by Bassi (cited in Andrews 2006), who also argues that accounting and reporting systems designed to measure Industrial Era wealth are inappropriate for Knowledge Era activities. Specifically, Bassi suggests that because human capital is the only asset that cannot be owned by an organisation, management faces a paradox. How can efficiency measures be mandated when the contributions of Knowledge Era workers are essentially discretionary? The challenge is to focus on efficiency and productivity (Industrial Era concepts) whilst simultaneously engaging the passion, creativity, loyalty and best efforts of the people on whom an organisation relies.

In reality the knowledge workers themselves control both inputs and outputs. Andrews cites Drucker, who echoes Bassi's observations and concludes that in the Knowledge Era people must be led and managed differently, with businesses conceptualising themselves in an entirely new way; employees are assets to be valued, rather than costs.

## A fresh approach to evaluation and improvement

A fresh and distinctively different approach to capability development demands a fresh approach to evaluation. The following two approaches, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Most Significant Change (MSC), take into account simultaneous development on multiple levels. They recognise multiple stakeholders (organisation, team or unit, and the individual), all of whom will have different expectations of evaluation and use evaluation measures in different ways.

It is important to remember the words of Patton (cited by Andrews 2005), that 'The world of evaluation is vast and rich, and is becoming more vast and richer each year. The evaluation universe, like the physical one, is still expanding'.

As in the strategies (see Part 6.3) it is important that the evaluation and monitoring processes are embedded within the theoretical understanding of life based learning.

### Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

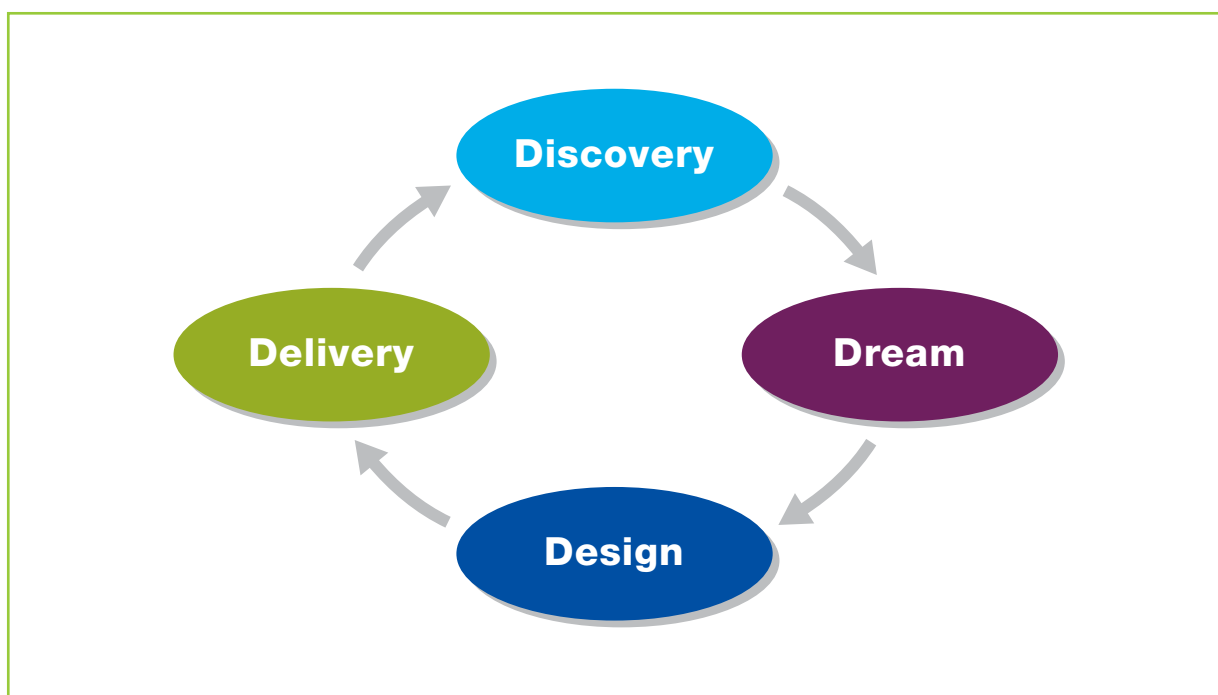
AI has been used to embed self-evaluation by discovering an organisation's own best practice and allowing all practitioners to assess their own performance against that benchmark (Elliott in Andrews 2005). Preskill and Coghlan (2004) recommend that using an AI approach to evaluation is particularly useful to accelerate change, build communities and overcome scepticism. In contrast with ROI measures, evaluation based on AI is unfolding, engages capability development participants, and focuses on improving and accelerating outcomes.

An AI approach to evaluation comprises four phases, as shown in Figure 14.

The phases and illustrative focus questions, adapted from Preskill and Coghlan (2004) are summarised as follows:

**Discovery:** identifying the successes and strengths:

- What has been my/our most powerful development experience during the last period?
- What were the nurturing conditions/enablers that produced these outstanding outcomes?
- Where and what are the wellsprings of PD in this environment?
- If I/we had three wishes for my/our PD going forward, what would they be?



**Figure 14: The 4D Model of Appreciative Inquiry Evaluation (Preskill & Coghlan 2004)**

**Dreaming:** visualising the opportunities:

- What can I/we do to replicate the outstanding experiences described?
- How can I/we better use the rich variety of enablers/resources to support the outcomes I/we wish for?

**Designing:** developing the architecture:

- What will I/we do to create the rich development experiences sought?
- What enablers will support me/us?

**Delivery:** implementing and experimenting.

The appropriate measure for rich, complex and emergent capability development processes should itself be rich, complex and emergent. AI-based evaluation fulfils this criterion and is both congruent with and applicable to working and learning in the Knowledge Era.

### Most Significant Change (MSC)

In a comprehensive guide to its use, The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique (Davies and Dart 2005), is explained as a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is participatory because many project stakeholders are involved in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data. It is a form of monitoring because it occurs throughout the program cycle and provides information to help people manage the program. It contributes to evaluation because it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the program as a whole.

Davies and Dart describe the process as involving the collection of significant change (SC) stories emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved by 'searching' for project impact. Once changes have been captured, various people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about



the value of these reported changes. When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on program impact.

This technique was initially developed for organisational learning in non-government aid organisations by Rick Davies (1996); since then it has been used with other theoretical perspectives, including AI. MSC is a strength based approach that looks at what works and determines how to do more of what works.

MSC is an emerging technique and can be adapted for different situations. Its ten steps are:

1. How to start and raise interest;
2. Defining the domains of change;
3. Defining the reporting period;
4. Collecting SC stories;
5. Selecting the most significant of the stories;
6. Feeding back the results of the selection process;
7. Verification of stories;
8. Quantification;
9. Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring; and
10. Revising the system.

Why use the MSC technique?

Davies and Dart list a wide range of reasons why organisations have found the MSC technique useful. These include:

1. It is a good means of identifying unexpected changes.
2. It is a good way to clearly identify the values that prevail in an organisation and to have a practical discussion about which of those values are the most important. This happens when people think through and discuss which of the significant changes is the most significant. This can happen at all levels of the organisation.
3. It is a participatory form of monitoring that requires no special professional skills. Compared to other monitoring approaches, it is easy to communicate across cultures. There is no need to explain what an indicator is. Everyone can tell stories about events they think were important.

4. It encourages analysis as well as data collection because people have to explain why they believe one change is more important than another.
5. It can build staff capacity in analyzing data and conceptualizing impact.
6. It can deliver a rich picture of what is happening, rather than an overly simplified picture where organisational, social and economic developments are reduced to a single number.
7. It can be used to monitor and evaluate bottom-up initiatives that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate (Davies & Dart 2005, p. 12).

MSC is more suited to monitoring which focuses on learning rather than just accountability.

The above approaches provide a guide to the evaluation for capability development that is based on life based learning. They are suggested strategies only and need to be applied by people who have with a thorough understanding and knowledge of the life based learning model.

## 6.5 A business approach to capability development

A companion document to this Research Report has been developed. It focuses on practical questions in relation to 'getting started' in life based learning for capability development and is titled:

### ***A Business Approach to Capability Development: considerations and suggestions for customising and applying life based learning in the workplace***

The companion document is available on both the TAFE NSW ICVET and DEST websites<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> The websites can be found at <http://www.icvet.edu.au> and <http://www.dest.gov.au>

This research is really only a beginning and as such it is difficult to write a conclusion. There are, however, some comments that can be made in these concluding remarks.

Life based learning aims to support adaptable, resilient and sustainable business environments in the Knowledge Era. It builds on the potential of work based learning and creates new possibilities for the future. Business leaders need to heed the message and consider how enablers for capability development will be embedded within their organisations.

Life based learning is underpinned by age-old values and truths and due recognition needs to be given to this. Life based learning is holistic in nature and will not work as an 'add-on' or as a piecemeal approach.

It is hoped that this research raises many questions and supports strong debate and dialogue in VTE. There is no one way to 'do' life based learning. It requires context-specific, wise thinking and planning, and an openness to intuition and serendipity. Trust is a key ingredient; this was raised by many participants during the National Action Planning Forums.

Life based learning offers a way forward at a time when many Industrial Era processes are no longer working. It opens the way to re-energising people, honouring what has worked well in the past and realigning current and emerging strategies to a strength based orientation. The potential of life based learning has been summed up by a National Action Planning Forum participant thus:

*Life based learning seems initially a utopian/fantasy notion, but we live in a complex world. The notion is an honest attempt to capture the full breadth of our humanity, and apply it to our working life. I associate the idea of life based learning with my reading of classical studies and science fiction, where writers deal with the possible and not the absurd. The possibility that humanity can set out to explore the stars.*

Life based learning articulates what many people know and feel. It provides a framework for capability development in the VTE sector.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### National Action Planning Forums and Themes

#### A: National Action Planning Forums

Three national action planning forums were held in Sydney, Perth and Melbourne during November and December 2006. The purpose of the forums were to:

- inform participants of the project
- engage in conversation about the key concepts
- collaboratively develop practical strategies based on key concepts.

The forums aimed to assist individuals and organisations to understand and implement new models of learning, enabling them to more readily adapt to the rapidly changing working and learning environment. Participants were from TAFE, private RTO, enterprise, and community education and targeted individuals who work in the role of professional development, learning and development, organisational development, teaching and learning practitioners, educational managers, administrative managers and key drivers of change.

Over 60 people attended the forums.  
List of participants follows:

#### SYDNEY – 25 November 2005

**Liz Agars**, TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute  
**Colin Alcock**, TAFE NSW Riverina Institute  
**Verna Aslin**, TAFE NSW North Coast Institute  
**Alison Culter**, TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute  
**Margaret Dix**, TAFE NSW Northern Sydney Institute  
**Ruth Djordjevic**, Business, Arts & Information Technology Curriculum Centre  
**Heather Ferguson**, ICVET TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning  
**Lee Harman**, TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute  
**Janet Hewson**, TAFE NSW Sydney  
**Robyn Jay**, ICVET TAFE NSW International Centre for VET Teaching and Learning  
**Jade Kavanagh**, TAFE NSW South Western Sydney Institute  
**Diana Khabbaz**, TAFE NSW Sydney Institute  
**Branko Kulevski**, Business, Arts & Information Technology Curriculum Centre  
**Graham Loveday**, TAFE NSW Hunter Institute

**Marilyn McKinlay**, Australian College of Natural Medicine, QLD  
**Roderick McLeod**, TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute  
**Sam Meredith**, TAFE NSW New England Institute  
**Craig Weston**, MECAT Curriculum Centre  
**Barbara Sakai**, TAFE NSW Western Sydney Institute

#### Perth, 28 November 2005

**Anzara Clark**, West Coast TAFE WA  
**Therese De Luce**, Brightwater Cage Group (Inc)  
**Di Dunsall**, Enterprise RTO  
**Margaret Gannaway**, Challenger TAFE  
**Annette Geikie**, Swan TAFE  
**Sally Lumsden**, DET  
**Kylie Kennington**, Swan TAFE  
**Becky Saunders**, DET  
**Jennie Timms**, West Coast TAFE WA

#### Melbourne, 2 December 2005

**Maryanne Barclay**, Chisolm Institute of TAFE  
**Denise Bell**, Gordon Institute of TAFE  
**Leonie Benson**, University of Ballarat  
**John Capper**, ACPET  
**Penny Diressen**, ACPET  
**Marsha Ellis**, Australian College of Natural Medicine  
**Loiusa Ellum**, ACPET  
**Shirley Evans**, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE  
**Frances Hales**, TAFE Development Centre  
**Mary Hoffmann**, Swinburne University of Technology  
**Chris Horton**, Wodonga Institute of TAFE  
**Evelyn Ibrahim**, Victoria University  
**Malcom Jolly**, Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE  
**John Katsourakis**, Air Services Australia  
**Carolyn King**, ACPET  
**Graeme Kirkwood**, TAFE Tasmania  
**Trish McCullough**, DET Tasmania  
**Belinda McLennan**, Victoria University  
**Chris McMillan**, ACPET  
**Sherridan Maxwell**, RMIT  
**Alma Ryrie-Jones**, TAFE Development Centre  
**Chris Satzke**, South West Institute of TAFE  
**Eileen Springer**, ACPET  
**Linda Thompson**, Wodonga Institute of TAFE  
**Robin Tunbridge**, Box Hill Institute of TAFE  
**Greg Waddell**, Kangan Batman Institute of TAFE  
**Anne Younger**, TAFE Development Centre  
**Louise Palmer**, Swinburne University of Technology

## B: National Action Planning Forums – Themes

### Life based learning

In today's rapidly changing business environment, the success of a business increasingly depends on the learning capacity of its members. Dynamic interactive and ever-changing systems require a range of learning approaches. Some of them are familiar, others will challenge us to explore beyond what we know.

Adults engage in a lot of learning other than professional learning and much of this 'life based' learning influences our thinking and our work practices. A key challenge is how to recognise, value and support learning that extends beyond the work environment yet is inextricably connected to and influences that environment.

The Knowledge Era with its ecological leanings challenges us to think about how we conceptualise learning and the relationship between life and work. An ecological perspective makes clear that there is no one way or no best model. Professional development in the Knowledge Era is characterised by variety, inclusiveness, interrelatedness, acknowledging the importance of relationships and the capability to adapt.

1. What appeals to you most about the concept of life based learning?
2. Describe a life based learning experience that inspired you to learn and which made a positive difference in your work environment.
  - What factors made this such a powerful learning experience?
  - How did this experience contribute to your thinking and/practice at work?
3. What **existing** models and practices for professional development have you experienced or are aware of, that enable the concept of life based learning to be realised? What are the characteristics of these models and/or strategies?
4. What **new possibilities** could emerge if the scope for professional development broadened to more fully acknowledge, recognise and support life based learning?
5. What would enable life based learning to flourish within a business environment and why would this be **good for business**?

### Learning ecologies

Fit and resilient organisations/businesses work more like ecologies than well-oiled machines. They value and promote meaningful interactions within and across their entire systems. Their structures are flexible and they encourage individuals and

departments to have a voice, participate in decision-making and to work across lines and positions. This enables them to adapt and respond to changing customer requirements, technologies and regulations. They support people in identifying and seizing unexpected and unplanned strategic opportunities and they create a 'container' in which people can work together effectively through good times and bad.

1. Describe an organisation/business you've seen, heard of, or worked in whose structures were both flexible and resilient and supported you in implementing its core purpose, vision and values. What metaphor would you use to describe this structure? What effect did this have on your capacity to learn and to deliver quality products and services?
2. What professional development models and strategies would best support the development of an organisation/business as a learning ecology? How could these heighten the health and vitality of a business and make it more resilient?
3. What useful design guidelines you would suggest for a business/organisation wanting to embrace a learning ecologies framework for professional development?
4. What would be a good business case for supporting a learning ecologies frame of reference?

### Rich learning environments

The culture of every business is unique and special in some way. Every business has its patterns and stories – "the way we do things around here" – and these patterns and stories characterise how the business operates.

Some businesses/organisations consciously create cultures that enable and support people in doing their jobs both effectively and enjoyably. With this approach, an organisation's culture becomes a strategic advantage. It creates a work environment that helps attract and retain empowered, skilled employees who contribute to the excellence product and service provision.

1. Reflect on the different contexts you have worked in. What type of work environment has most inspired you to want to learn? What made this such a favourable place for learning? How did you and others grow and change as a result of being in this environment? How did the business benefit from providing such an environment?
2. If you were to describe the **key enablers** of a rich learning environment, what would they be?
3. What **three improvements** would you make to your business/organisation so it more effectively enables you to learn and develop as a life based learner?
4. Why would these improvements be a good business investment for both you and for your organisation?

## Appendix 2

### Comparison of expert centred, work based and life based learning

Characteristics	Expert Centred learning	Work Based learning	Life Based learning
<b>Relationships between learners</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dependence and independence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation and collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdependence, agency and imagining something different</li> </ul>
<b>Relationship between knowledge systems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gaining knowledge</li> <li>• knowledge is received</li> <li>• knowledge is disembodied</li> <li>• knowledge is a fixed reality</li> <li>• emphasis is on knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organizing knowledge</li> <li>• knowledge is selected and applied</li> <li>• knowledge has the potential to be embodied within the learner, tied to the job or work</li> <li>• knowledge can be constructed out of application</li> <li>• emphasis is on application of appropriate knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engaging with knowledge</li> <li>• knowledge is exchanged and generated</li> <li>• knowledge is embodied and within the knower, with a strong stronger link between theory and practice</li> <li>• recognition of the whole knowledge repertoire that a person brings to the organization and the mindful and prudent selection for their context</li> <li>• emphasis is on the knower, across the full landscape of their experiences</li> </ul>
<b>Metaphors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• empty vessel</li> <li>• knowledge is power</li> <li>• recitation</li> <li>• sage on the stage</li> <li>• apprentice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• team as the advance guard in the organization</li> <li>• guide on the side</li> <li>• craftsman</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning ecologies</li> <li>• vision quest</li> <li>• designer or the architect</li> </ul>
<b>Goals and objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teacher prescribes learning goals and objectives based on prior experiences, past practices and state and/or locally mandated standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students work with teachers to select learning goals and objectives based on authentic problems and students' prior knowledge, interests and experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning/worker is self-motivated, self-directed and sees learning as part of everyday working where the work required new learning which then informs the work. A total interactive process</li> <li>• all teachers are learners</li> </ul>
<b>Processes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• event driven</li> <li>• Teacher/trainer</li> <li>• Knowledge is imposed</li> <li>• Adopt &amp; implement</li> <li>• Focus on formal learning</li> <li>• discovered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• project driven</li> <li>• Facilitator</li> <li>• Knowledge is constructed</li> <li>• Customise &amp; develop</li> <li>• Focus on formal and informal learning</li> <li>• heuristic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• seamless and unbounded</li> <li>• Self facilitated &amp; personal responsibility</li> <li>• Knowledge is engaged</li> <li>• Adaptable &amp; sustainable</li> <li>• Boundaries blur between work, formal and informal learning</li> <li>• hermeneutic</li> </ul>
<b>Operational basis – purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just in case</li> <li>• Theory and case study based</li> <li>• Individual based</li> <li>• prescribed, curriculum</li> <li>• passive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just in time</li> <li>• Project based</li> <li>• Team based</li> <li>• Networks</li> <li>• Contextual</li> <li>• application and task driven</li> <li>• responsive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Just ahead</li> <li>• Continuous enquiry</li> <li>• Become the change you wish to achieve</li> <li>• Community based</li> <li>• reflective</li> <li>• agency</li> <li>• initiated</li> </ul>
<b>Foundation values – a changing emphasis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• objectivism</li> <li>• empiricism</li> <li>• social control</li> <li>• knowledge as fact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• utility judged in terms of its usefulness</li> <li>• practicality</li> <li>• Ethical</li> <li>• Risk taking</li> <li>• Sharing information</li> <li>• Reflection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aesthetic common sense</li> <li>• communitarian aspect</li> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Generosity</li> <li>• Risk recovery</li> <li>• Sharing knowledge</li> <li>• Inclusive</li> </ul>

Characteristics	Expert Centred learning	Work Based learning	Life Based learning
<b>Business enablers – a changing emphasis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>time off task</li> <li>Formal learning opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>capacity to put together work based teams</li> <li>ICT</li> <li>Formal and informal learning opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designing your own learning</li> <li>Integrate ICT into 'social' work systems</li> <li>Worker as designer and design own learning</li> <li>Value intuitive ways of working and thinking</li> <li>Integrate formal and informal learning opportunities</li> <li>reflection</li> <li>rich learning environments</li> </ul>
<b>What does this mean for capability development?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>limited</li> <li>difficulty is interpreting the received knowledge into new practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>some capacity for interpreting knowledge into new practice, but limited by project scope and timing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>hope is that openness and transferability to new contexts as these arise</li> <li>designing your own learning</li> <li>openness</li> <li>hopefully seeing the emergence and being open to it</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Train the trainer</li> <li>Lectures</li> <li>Short courses</li> <li>Workshops</li> <li>conferences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action learning</li> <li>Action research</li> <li>Teams</li> <li>Flexible learning</li> <li>Problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critical conversations</li> <li>Appreciative Inquiry</li> <li>talent management</li> <li>disruptive technology</li> <li>positive deviance</li> </ul>
<b>Learning outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discipline specific verbal information</li> <li>lower order thinking skills eg recall, identify, define</li> <li>memorisation of abstract and isolated facts, figures and formulas</li> <li>problem solving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>interdisciplinary information and knowledge</li> <li>higher order thinking skills eg problem solving</li> <li>information processing skills eg access, organise, interpret, communication information</li> <li>problem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>who and how you know is as important as what you know eg networks, use of technology</li> <li>higher order thinking skills eg analysing, creativity</li> <li>generating new knowledge for a specific context</li> <li>design</li> </ul>
<b>Instructional strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instructional strategy prescribed by teacher</li> <li>Group-paced, designed for 'average' student</li> <li>Information organised and presented primarily by teacher, eg lecturers, with some supplemental reading assignments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>learner work with facilitator to select goals and objectives based on authentic problems and work issues, learners prior knowledge, interests and experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>learner/worker understands how best to access information and follows through with interactivity through various forms of dialogue which helps to clarify and generate new knowledge</li> <li>an iterative process of reflection, checking assumptions, applying new knowledge in the workplace</li> <li>learner accesses information through multiple sources including networks, communities, interest groups as well as books online. Technology plays an important part</li> </ul>
<b>Theories underpinning the model</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>critical systems theory</li> <li>instructivism</li> <li>behaviourism</li> <li>pedagogy</li> <li>expert systems</li> <li>the recitation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adult learning</li> <li>action research and action learning</li> <li>learning organisation</li> <li>communities of practice theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>heutogogy</li> <li>flow theory</li> <li>learning network theory</li> <li>knowledge management</li> <li>connectivism</li> <li>complexity theory</li> </ul>



