

EXHIBIT E

report on a **strategic evaluation**
of reframing the future

DECEMBER 2004

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Method

In total 32 depth interviews (with participants from 31 different organisations) were conducted in August 2004 with representatives from the VET sector. In the main participants were interviewed via telephone. Prior to the interview participants were sent an informational email inviting them to participate in the evaluation. Participants were assured that data collection, use and storage would comply with the Information Privacy Act (2000).

Across the sample, the full range of RTF sub programs were represented and participants were drawn from all states and territories of Australia. The sample was evenly divided upon gender lines with 50% of the sample being male and 50% being female. Without exception, participants were either employed in managerial roles (i.e. National Training Managers, CEOs, Directors, department managers) or were consultants working in a managerial capacity.

Overview of the Results

1. Introduction

Overall, participants from all organisational types were extremely positive about their experience with RTF and its capacity to improve the skills of staff while fostering a positive attitude towards the National Training Framework (NTF). The program was seen as well supported and resourced, accessible and flexible. Generally, participants felt that RTF provided them with an opportunity to undertake projects which addressed authentic organisational needs, in a high quality, structured and efficient manner. RTF was seen as providing professional development opportunities to those who may not have had access otherwise and it was generally seen as assisting organisations to promote the effective implementation of the NTF.

2. Strengths of Reframing the Future

Participants identified a number of strengths of RTF. These included strengths of the actual RTF structure and process and positive outcomes or accomplishments.

The role of the RTF staff was fundamental to the overall positive perceptions of the participants. RTF staff were seen as collaborative and inclusive by participants from all organisation types and with varying degrees of experience with the RTF program. Staff support was seen as a key element in ensuring both the accessibility of the program and in promoting the success of individual projects.

Among the main accomplishments attributed to RTF, participants identified their improved capacity to address NTF requirements and to implement the NTF. Participants felt that RTF had a positive impact on their project management skills and their capacity to produce successful projects with high quality outcomes. It was seen as enhancing overall VET staff development by promoting the skills and knowledge of staff, particularly in relation to equipping staff with the practical skills and the positive attitude needed to successfully implement the NTF.

The action learning approach and the structured processes associated with RTF were credited with producing projects which were of a high quality, structured, focussed and which resulted in practical outcomes.

Participants overwhelmingly felt that RTF addressed an authentic need and ensured that it was addressed in a more efficient and high quality way than would have been possible without RTF involvement. In some cases it was clear that the projects would not have been initiated without the impetus provided by the RTF funds. In other cases participants felt that their organisation may have taken on the project at some stage, but that it was of a superior quality and structure as a result of the input provided by RTF.

RTF was seen as having a positive impact on the ability of staff to explore methods to continuously improve the NTF in terms of both practice and theory. The main areas of impact were in relation to the improved capacity and willingness of staff to address the NTF requirements, in particular their skills in relation to the development, implementation and use of Training Packages. Improvement was generally attributed to the development of staff skills and knowledge as a result of their RTF project, and secondly providing staff with access to information, research and policy which promoted discussion and understanding and ultimately led to increased support for the NTF.

RTF was also attributed to having a positive impact on the development of networks and Communities of Practice, in particular formal networks and Communities of Practice which focussed on bringing together groups of stakeholders in the VET sector. These produced a range of positive outcomes including ongoing cooperation between stakeholders and improved quality of outcomes for the community in general.

In terms of the RTF impact on information and research dissemination, this was primarily achieved through the RTF website. Participants felt that the information which they accessed (including research papers, policy documents and reports on best practice), assisted them in developing the skills needed to effectively implement the NTF and fostered the development of a positive attitude towards the NTF.

Similarly the main impact of RTF on strategic management and change management reported by participants was an increased receptiveness to change and improved quality of the project.

3. Suggested Improvements

The overwhelming majority of participants were positive about their experience with RTF. However, they made a number of suggestions which they felt would improve RTF.

A number of issues related to funding were mentioned with participants contending that there is a need for increased funds for each project and funding of increased numbers of projects. Participants also wanted to see a reduction in administrative paper work and streamlining of reporting requirements throughout the duration of the project.

The need for improved timing was suggested both in regards to the application and reporting cycle which was seen as too short and consequently added to the demands upon the project manager.

Participants asserted that the use of TAFE and education-based language made the program less accessible to people involved in industry -based and other non-TAFE VET providers. It was suggested that all jargon be removed from marketing, application and other materials to ensure that the program is equally accessible to all potential applicants.

In relation to the application process specifically, suggestions included; the need for administrative requirements to be streamlined; the provision of clear guidelines (preferably on the RTF website) to assist potential applicants and new applicants in writing their proposals; and the use of plain English.

1. The Research Approach

1.1 Method

In total 32 depth interviews (with participants from 31 different organisations) were conducted in August 2004 with representatives from the VET sector. Participants were drawn from ANTA and Reframing the Future (RTF) data bases, and a small number were nominated by co-workers to stand-in for individuals who had left the organisation. In the main participants were interviewed via telephone, however a face-to-face methodology was used in a small number of cases. Prior to the interview participants were sent an informational email inviting them to participate in the evaluation. Participants were assured that data collection, use and storage would comply with the Information Privacy Act (2000).

All results were examined to determine if there were any apparent differences in responses between participants from TAFE and non-TAFE backgrounds. No systematic differences were found.

1.2 Characteristics of the Sample

Participants were generally selected from RTF databases provided by ANTA. As such participants generally tended to have had some direct experience in applying for and undertaking an RTF project. Across the sample, the full range of RTF sub programs were represented and participants were drawn from all states and territories of Australia.

The sample was evenly divided upon gender lines with 50% of the sample being male and 50% being female.

On average participants had been involved in the VET sector for 12.8 years, with a range in years of participation from 0 to 32 years.

Without exception, participants were either employed in managerial roles (i.e. National Training Managers, CEOs, Directors, department managers) or were consultants working in a managerial capacity.

Figure 1 provides a general summary of the organisation types from which depth interview participants were drawn.

Organisation Description/Type	Number of Participants (n-32)
TAFE Institute	9
University TAFE Division	3
RTO (Private and Public)	8
Industry ITAB (N.B. Participants also had roles in RTOs)	4
ACE	4
Government Department/Government Agency	4

Figure 1: Organisation Types

1.3 Instruments

An interview guide was developed to ensure a degree of consistency across the interviews. In addition to a small number of closed demographic questions, participants were asked a series of open-ended questions related to RTF. Topics covered included:

- Awareness of RTF and participation in RTF projects and events
- Staff development in relation to the NTF
- Areas of impact of RTF projects
- Managerial issues related to achievement of organisational outcomes associated with RTF.

1.4 Aims

The qualitative depth interviews were exploratory in nature, and intended to provide an opportunity to scope the issues related to RTF. The depth interviews had three fundamental aims. These were to:

- Provide an opportunity to explore the range of themes and issues which emerge spontaneously from the discussion
- Explore comments and reactions to particular pre specified themes identified as being of interest
- Provide feedback into the development of subsequent quantitative stages of the research including insights on issues, terminology and language.

1.5 Understanding Qualitative Data and Coding

Qualitative data differs from quantitative data in that it is not designed or intended to be numerically based, or generalised to the broader population. Qualitative research seeks to develop insight and understanding, rather than provide absolute measures.

Given the sample size, the special recruitment methods adopted and the objectives of the study, it should be clearly understood that the work is exploratory in nature. There are no statistical degrees of confidence, and findings are not projectable to any larger population. The findings should be viewed as a frame of reference and as descriptive in nature.

The coding of the interviews was undertaken with the assistance of a software package called SPSS. Coding is an interpretive process which is designed to facilitate the exploration of themes across individual responses. In the case of the current study code frames for individual questions were developed and an overall code frame was used. The overall code frame ensured that issues which might emerge across a range of questions are captured.

All quotations appear in indented and in italics.

2. Issues in Awareness and Participation

2.1 Sources of Information

Most participants had become aware of, and continued to obtain information about RTF via several different sources. Most commonly these were via the internet and through networks.

The internet was the most common source of information identified by participants. The RTF website was the most visited website followed by the ANTA website. The internet in general was mentioned by a small number of participants.

Networks were the next most frequent source of information to be mentioned about RTF. This included industry networks, professional networks and professional development networks.

ANTA communications, emails and newsletters were frequently mentioned, while a smaller proportion of participants indicated that they had first heard about RTF through tender advertising in public media sources, such as newspapers in capital cities.

A smaller number of participants were unable to recall how they first became aware of RTF but indicated that they had been aware of the program since the days of Framing the Future (FTF), or had just known about it for a long time.

Other sources of information included word of mouth, co-workers, newsletters and conferences.

2.2 Understanding of the Aims or Goals of RTF

Most participants mentioned more than one of the goals or aims of RTF. The main themes to emerge related to professional development and the implementation of the NTF. There was very little difference between the responses provided by participants from TAFE and other organisations.

2.3 Professional Development

Professional development was identified by the majority of participants as a core goal of RTF.

While some participants offered no further information, others related professional development to a particular RTF sub program or topic (i.e. professional development related to: networks, Communities of Practice, change management; promotion of the VET sector, improving skills of teaching staff etc.).

A number of participants thought that RTF was targeted towards providing professional development opportunities which were not accessible through other programs.

"Professional development where there are gaps in the funding."

"To support and encourage P.D. in the VET sector and to provide access to professional development initiatives that (we) would not normally be able to access."

2.4 Improved Capacity to Address the National Training Framework

The next most often mentioned goal or aim was the provision of training to enable staff to address the requirements of the NTF. This appeared to be understood by participants across all organisation types, although not all used the same language. Some referred to the AOTF and Training Packages, or the National Training System. While this was not the most common theme, it revealed that a majority of participants recognised that RTF aimed to improve skills related to ANTA's national initiatives. It was also apparent that participants were generally supportive of this focus and that many felt that this focus aligned with the national focus of their own organisations.

"To enable organisations to do their business in alignment with the national guidelines."

"Furtherance of the National Training Agenda and implementation of Training Packages."

"It is a support tool for the implementation and development of training about NTS".

2.5 Other Issues in Understanding the Goals or Aims of RTF

A number of minor themes, reflecting issues raised by small proportions of participants, emerged from the data.

A small number of participants believed that RTF funding was made available to assist them to achieve the goals and aims of their own organisation.

"RTF generally supports the RTOs aims"

"To help us to achieve our direction."

Several participants felt that RTF was incongruent with local initiatives. These were not necessarily criticisms but were presented to explain why RTF was different to other initiatives. One participant commented that it was not linked to local initiatives because of its focus on national issues such as the NTF. Another participant commented that RTF could not be compared to local initiatives because of its funding structure and the types of programs funded through RTF, both of which make it unlike any other initiatives.

Other single comments from individual participants included the views that RTF aims to providing seed funding for new initiatives and that RTF changes its aims each year.

2.6 The Application Process

The vast majority of participants had been responsible for submitting a proposal for RTF funding. Just two individuals had not had this experience.

POSITIVE VIEWS OF THE PROCESS

Generally, participants were positive about the experience of applying for funding. It was seen as being straightforward, easy to manage, efficient and not overly time consuming.

"Straight forward and blissfully easy. It was not intimidating"

Experience appeared to be a factor contributing to this positive sentiment. Many of the participants explained that they had previously applied for RTF funding and were familiar with the process. There was also a view amongst those who were experienced in applying for other grants, that RTF requirements were consistent with those of other funding initiatives. Several stated that the requirements were actually less complicated than those of other initiatives (e.g. Learnscope).

Participants who cited experience submitting multiple applications tended to come from larger organisations, and often had a system in place to facilitate writing of proposals. In several other cases, private training organisations had hired consultants to assist in writing of proposals. For example in one case a consultant to an RTO had submitted six applications on behalf of the organisation and commented that the process was straightforward.

"We have submitted 13 proposals to RTF (with a good success rate)... We have found that the process is pretty much in line with the process for submitting proposals for funding. We all work together on putting together a proposal and are pretty good at it."

"We have made 20 applications... The process is reasonably straightforward"

THE ROLE OF THE REFRAMING THE FUTURE STAFF

As previously mentioned, in the main the participants were positive about their experiences with the application process. Overwhelmingly, the single most often mentioned factor contributing to this view was the support and advice provided by the RTF staff. They were seen as being critically important in supporting participants through the application process. Participants commented that the staff were easy to contact, approachable, timely in their responses, and encouraging to participants.

"staff are supportive and encouraging."

"(We) found the process to be very straight forward due to the staff at RTF. They were very helpful and accommodating to our needs."

Participants regarded the advice offered by RTF staff as constructive and helpful in assisting them to modify and refine their projects, thus increasing their likelihood of producing successful outcomes.

"We thought the Reframing staff were great. They were supportive and helped us to get our project to a manageable size."

"The RTF staff are incredibly helpful and always respond on time and are more than willing to help with suggestions and ideas around how to make a program better."

There was a sense that for many participants, the RTF staff were very much seen as partners and consultants, who not only facilitated the ease of the application process but also used their own experience as professionals to enhance the skills of applicants.

"(They) really have the project management side of things well nailed down."

"If anyone did happen to need help I am sure the Reframing staff would be happy to work with them and give them advice and the support needed to make a sound application."

The RTF staff were seen as understanding of organisational pressures, and flexible in accommodating the individual needs of applicants.

"It was a terrific experience. (The RTF staff) were very supportive. They understood the training pressure. They were flexible and coped with a late submission and allowed modifications to our proposals when the organisation changed."

OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO THE APPLICATION PROCESS

A small number of participants made negative comments about the application process. These participants generally saw it as being too bureaucratic, time consuming and confusing for inexperienced applicants. In a couple of cases these factors had prevented the organisations from applying for the current funding round. However, they were still generally favourable about the RTF program overall and expressed a desire to reapply in the future when time allowed.

"(The application process) has become more complicated in recent years. It is very helpful to be able to phone RTF."

"I found the process too bureaucratic and inflexible."

"Brief guidelines were understandable, but the timing was unclear and feedback (provided to a manager who did not make the application) was directed to the wrong place."

FACTORS PREVENTING OTHERS APPLYING

As noted in the previous section, when asked to comment on their own individual experiences, the vast majority of participants were positive about the application process. However, when asked to consider the issue from a broader perspective and identify factors which might prevent or discourage other people from applying for the RTF funding, a majority of the participants were able to identify several inhibiting factors. This may be attributable to the fact that most participants in the current study had previous experience in proposal writing and recalled obstacles which had previously confronted them, or it could be a function of thinking more broadly about the process and interaction with other organisations less familiar with proposal writing.

"The biggest discouragement would be the proposal writing process. We are used to it here, but other less experienced staff have trouble writing a good proposal. I guess it comes with experience and practice."

"It would be very difficult for first timers."

SIMPLIFYING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

The strongest theme which emerged from the comments of participants, related to the need for improved streamlining and simplification of the administrative requirements, such as the application process and the reporting requirements. The concerns related to the amount of writing and documentation required throughout the process and the need for an interim report when the project is so short. There was also a sense that the small amount of funding was not reflected in the amount of paperwork required.

"The application process requires a lot of effort."

"There is always too much paperwork with RTF and this need to be improved."

"The reporting requirements are too arduous. The interim report should be abolished and the other requirements streamlined."

Related to the issue of simplifying the administration of RTF, was the issue of time requirements, which also emerged as a strong theme. Participants mentioned the amount of time required to write the proposal, interim report and final report. Several participants felt that the time required to write the application was of particular concern when only a limited number of projects would actually be successful, weighed against the fact that the amount of funding for each project is relatively small. Several other participants also expressed concern about the amount of time required to attend forums and workshops.

"The time required for all of the application preparation, the introductory workshop and the reporting seems out of proportion to the amount of money involved."

"There is always too much time required from the application process and this has prevented us from applying for next year...although we loved the program..."

INCREASED INFORMATION

The need for more general information to be provided was mentioned by a number of participants. Several participants commented that more marketing information should be provided on the website and in the tender sections of major newspapers, as well as being targeted to specific groups to promote awareness.

Several other participants felt that more information should be provided about the administrative requirements, timing, auditing requirements, costs of auditing, and reporting requirements in writing to potential applicants. These participants felt that the information should be accessible to potential applicants in a formal, written, easily accessible form, such as via the RTF website.

"Probably a lack of information (and understanding) of how it fits with their program. ...Information needs to be targeted to specific groups."

"We need earlier advice and an indication of timing. The process needs to be streamlined. Having the information on the website should be able to fix this easily."

"The auditing requirements were extremely onerous for this level of funding... and we were not made aware of the auditing requirement until after the grant."

OTHER ISSUES IN FACTORS PREVENTING APPLICATIONS

A number of minor themes also emerged in relation to factors which might prevent other people from applying for funding. These included issues related to inexperience and funding.

A small number of participants felt that eligible applicants who had never actually written a proposal before might be deterred.

"Lack of ability to write proposals and lack of experience in writing proposals..."

Related to this, were concerns about the lack of simple English used throughout the application process and the amount of VET/TAFE jargon. This was generally a concern to participants from organisations other than TAFE. This was seen as making the process less accessible to industry-based applicants. Several participants also commented that a number of the content requirements were based on educational theory rather than workplace learning concepts and business principles.

"The language is not the language of business, especially small business."

"There is a lot of jargon and assumed underpinning knowledge and skills from TAFE that is not available in other environments".

A smaller number of participants mentioned issues related to funding, such as the limited amount of funding available for each project, the limited numbers of projects funded and thus the limited chance of being successful. Related to this was the fact that the funding was only for one year.

"Demand is now very high. Grants are harder to get. The application process requires effort. Some won't bother if the chances are low."

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Less than half of the participants made suggestions to improve the application process and to assist in overcoming the impediments preventing organisations from applying for RTF funding.

Several participants suggested that the application process needed to be streamlined and simplified. This was not surprising considering that this had been identified by participants as the most likely deterrent to people applying for funding. Suggestions included more detailed information on the website, including the provision of templates and sample reports as well as general information.

"The first time is always hard without a template as you are groping in the dark and don't know what the criteria mean."

Other comments related to simplifying the requirements included a desire to see the paperwork reduced and the time requirements reduced throughout the program. Several participants felt that this could be achieved by cutting back on the introductory workshops, and the interim report. There was also a suggestion that the time requirements should be more realistically related to the, sometimes small, amounts of funding being provided.

Another theme related to the report writing process. This was mentioned by participants who felt that potential applicants should be encouraged to develop a very clear idea about their project, before embarking on the writing of the application.

"The application form is complex and requires some thinking. It must be prepared in terms of having a good idea of how your proposal is going to operate."

A small number of participants employed in non-TAFE organisations felt that RTF could be made more accessible to all potential applicants. These participants wanted to see the removal of TAFE and VET jargon from the process, and have it replaced with plain English. Related to this perception of a TAFE-centric approach, there was a call for more marketing to potential applicants from private organisations. Several participants from private RTOs commented that they were unused to a level playing field when it came to accessing public funding and felt that this message needed to be clearly communicated to the private sector.

3. Staff Development

3.1 Outcomes of Reframing the Future Related to Staff Development

All of the participants were able to identify multiple positive outcomes related to staff development as a result of their organisation's participation in RTF.

IMPROVED SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The strongest theme to emerge in this context related to an improvement in the skills and knowledge of staff. These were generally quite specifically related to the goals of individual projects undertaken and the process of participation in the project. However, often these outcomes were also related to the NTF with participants commenting on improved skills related to Training Packages and assessment. Common topics mentioned were improved staff morale, knowledge, leadership and human resource management.

"(It) really made staff a lot more positive and knowledgeable about what they were doing and why."

"Leadership capacities are being developed and will be of ongoing benefit."

"It has enabled us to examine the skills and attributes of our staff and uncover talents that people have that we were unaware of"

NATIONAL TRAINING FRAMEWORK ISSUES

Another frequently mentioned outcome was more specifically related to the NTF with participants mentioning that they felt that the staff who had participated in the project now had a better understanding of the NTF, were better equipped to ensure that the NTF was successfully implemented, and had a more positive attitude towards changes introduced as a result of the NTF. Many participants commented on a shift in perception, with more focus on national concepts related to the NTF, which have developed as staff became more supportive of the changes heralded under the NTF.

"It has helped them to better understand the NTF."

"It is much easier to see how the NTF relates to us and can improve what we are doing"

"It has made us think about bigger picture issues and understand the impact of the NTF in improving local practices".

QUALITY AND NATURE OF PROJECTS

Another theme which emerged was related to an improvement in quality of the staff development opportunities being offered to staff. Participants were extremely positive in their assertions that RTF support and resources had resulted in their projects being very structured, goal and outcome oriented, targeted to address specific needs and focussed on timelines and dates for completion. Participants saw this structured approach as being useful in ensuring that projects remained on track, staff remained motivated and those overseeing projects acquired increased project managers skills.

"It improved the quality of P.D and enabled us to undertake things much faster."

Related to the issue of quality was the practical nature of the projects which were undertaken. Participants viewed this positively and saw this as a unique aspect of the professional development opportunities provided by RTF.

"The experience of handling the project...was great for staff"

"(The) workbased approach is useful (and is) a realistic extension of current activities"

"It helped us...move from concepts to applied outcomes."

OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO OUTCOMES OF RTF FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

There was also a view that RTF had a positive impact on staff development in general, with participants commenting on the increased range and number of professional development opportunities, the expansion of initiatives and the inclusion of people who might not normally have access to professional development opportunities (i.e. contract staff, casual staff, and in one case volunteers). There was recognition that RTF had enabled funding to be directed to projects which would not normally be considered organisation priority areas for professional development (such as research and assessment). This was seen as enabling staff to participate in training opportunities which they would never normally have access to and providing them with opportunities to reflect upon issues.

"Reframing allowed us to do something which would have been impossible otherwise."

The broader impact of RTF was also mentioned by participants who were mainly involved in projects related to the direct delivery of programs. They commented that the opportunities which they had been given improved the quality of what they were able to offer to students. In one case the participant was confident that their project, which involved delivery to staff employed in a community service area, had a direct benefit to the broader community.

3.2 Reframing the Future Activities

All of the participants had participated in some form of RTF activity. These included internal activities as a part of their RTF project as well as the activities conducted by the RTF staff such as forums, workshops and conferences.

INTERNAL PROJECT RELATED ACTIVITY

Many participants mentioned aspects of their own projects, such as classes, workshops, forums, network meetings. These were generally mentioned very briefly however were viewed positively and seen as producing desirable outcomes.

"Communication and information techniques which were used to develop network systems and strategy."

"We ran information sessions about the AQTF. We found that there was a strong need for information about this"

"We have now participated in seven projects across various goals and sub-programs of RTF. We have found that what we have learned has been able to be transferred to others and really helped us with the whole concept of up skilling our staff."

ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY RTF STAFF

A majority of participants mentioned that they had participated in a RTF forum, conference or workshop. These were generally well regarded and seen as motivating and informative.

"The forums were great and gave (us) a sense of empowerment and excitement about the project that we would not have had otherwise...It is a great motivator."

In several cases the Sydney forums were initially seen as inconvenient and time consuming. However, participants looking back on the experience considered them to be a valuable experience.

Some participants were unaware that attendance at forums was regarded as compulsory.

"Travelling to Sydney was hard but very important and really gave us a kick start to get on with things. We would just build that into future projects from the beginning so everyone understands it is a part of the commitment to go."

A number of participants commented on the value of the support and advice which they received at forums and conferences from RTF staff. In particular John Mitchell and Suzanne Young were singled out by a number of participants for special mention. Participants appreciated the focus on quality and the willingness of the RTF staff to be supportive, approachable and helpful to all attendees. Participants also felt that the RTF staff assisted them to refine their projects and ensure that they were achievable.

"The focus on quality was really inspiring...Because we were so small we tried to make our project look big and impressive so we could compete with the big TAFEs but we realised that the Reframing staff were more interested in us keeping things targeted and manageable and of a high quality."

"It showed us all what was possible and helped us to be flexible in narrowing down and targeting what we wanted to achieve."

One participant who submitted a proposal which was not funded because it did not address the project criteria, explained that although she was initially disappointed at the outcome the RTF staff invited her to attend a reporting workshop and use the opportunity to learn how other providers put together their proposals. The participant felt that this was very beneficial and appreciated the support of the RTF staff and the networks formed through this experience.

Not only were the RTF staff seen as approachable and supportive in the forums, participants also recognised their professional skills and expertise.

"The forums (were) so valuable in getting us off to a great start and the facilitator was top notch."

OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO RTF ACTIVITIES

Several of the more experienced participants felt that the forums could be streamlined and cut back to a half day. One participant was unable to travel to forums in Sydney and was concerned at being told by RTF staff that their organisation could be in breach of contract.

Conversely several others wanted more opportunities to network and exchange ideas.

"We presented at the National Conference which was a great experience and gave us the chance to see the range of activities nationally. We have been to regional workshops which were a great help. We would like more opportunities to network..."

Several participants commented on the networks they formed at the forums and saw these as an asset.

"The networks we built in the first forum were a great help."

4. Areas of Impact

4.1 Impact on Continuous Improvement of the NTF

Most participants identified at least one area where RTF had impacted upon the ability of staff to explore methods to continuously improve the NTF, in terms of both practice and theory. A small number of participants explained that their organisation did not yet have any structured continuous improvement programs while a similarly small number of participants were unaware of any impacts in these areas suggesting that they were already "up to speed" in these areas. The improved access of staff to theory in the form of information, research and policy was seen as promoting discussion and ultimately facilitating understanding and support for the NTF.

CAPACITY TO ADDRESS NTF REQUIREMENTS

Most commonly participants remarked that RTF had facilitated their ability to address the requirements of the NTF. Participants frequently commented that RTF had improved the skills and knowledge of staff in those areas required to deal with the NTF. In addition to identifying specific skills which had been developed as a result of RTF, a number of participants commented on the general improvement in staff skills and the flexibility of the skills from which they could now draw when addressing NTF requirements.

"Improved skills development"

There was also a strong sense that as staff developed skills and knowledge there was a positive impact upon their professional practices.

"It changed the way we deliver training and the way we assess in the workplace..."

"When you are talking about changing the way people have done things for 20 years it is great to spend time really looking at the reasons behind the changes."

Related to this, a number of participants felt that the opportunity to reflect upon theory had impacted on the way staff used their skills and knowledge in practice.

"It really helped us to marry together practice and theory, and gave us an opportunity to reflect which we would not otherwise have had...It enabled us to train staff in new methods of delivery ...(and) it also allowed us to be innovative."

WILLINGNESS TO ADDRESS NTF REQUIREMENTS

Another theme which emerged related to the view that by providing resources and support, staff who had participated in RTF projects felt better equipped, more committed and positive in their attitudes towards the NTF.

"(Staff) became empowered...and it made the process of making change accepted much easier...(It) made staff more supportive of the changes that needed to be done to bring us into line with the NTF."

"It not only improved their skills in fulfilling NTF requirements, it also helped to ensure that they were positive and supportive of the changes to their previous practices."

"It enabled us to do more than just cope with change abut accept change and produce a high quality response to it."

TRAINING PACKAGES

Related to the issue of skill development, a number of participants specifically mentioned feeling that their organisation now had an improved capacity to develop, implement and use Training Packages. For some participants there was also a view that the quality of outcomes had improved as a result of the RTF project.

"Our project was (related) to Training Package assessment...It gave us time to devote to producing quality outcomes rather than doing an ill-informed job that would have taken twice the time."

"RTF projects enabled the organisation to begin a real enjoyment with Training Packages."

A group of these participants commented that RTF had improved the capacity of Training Packages to be flexible. This increased flexibility made them more likely to promote innovation and be more relevant to industry and technological changes.

A participant with experience in the manufacturing sector, felt that while the NTF had an excellent agenda in the continual development and revision of Training Packages, it was not able to keep abreast of industry changes, changes in technology and the development of new practices. This participant felt that RTF had bridged this gap because the flexibility of projects allowed for alternative ways of doing things, and that the NTF could only be achieved if such flexibility was to become more widespread.

Similar views were expressed by several other participants from small RTOs. These participants were supportive of the NTF and felt that it could only be achieved through the flexible, innovative and creative processes encouraged by RTF. These participants also expressed the view that small RTOs had learned to be flexible and innovative out of necessity and this meant that they were able to readily align their organisations with the RTF approach to achieving the NTF. Similar views were expressed by a number of participants from TAFE.

"The RTF programs enabled our staff to go into industry and observe what they are doing...and to look at how the training our staff provides impacts on industries...We believe that this process had dramatically (improved) our teaching and moved us to the realisation that flexibility is needed in training programs."

OTHER AREAS OF IMPACT

For a small group of participants RTF was the first introduction to the NTF and assisted participants with little prior knowledge to improve their understanding about the NTF works.

"RTF has given the staff exposure to the NTS and how other organisations are doing things. It has opened doors and eyes."

4.2 Impact of RTF on Networks

Participants were asked to identify and comment on any networks or Communities of Practice established between different VET stakeholders, as a result of their RTF project. They were also asked to describe the impact of any of these networks or Communities of Practice on the achievement of NTF aims.

The majority of participants were able to identify networks which developed as a result of their RTF project. In all cases that were mentioned, participants were able to make a very clear link between the goals of the network or Community of Practice and the achievement of the NTF. However, in many cases other positive outcomes also resulted from the initiative.

Very few participants used the term Communities of Practice and were more inclined to discuss networks. This may be a reflection of their projects, or due to lack of familiarity with the terms, several participants commented that they were not sure if Communities of Practice replaced Common Interest Groups.

FORMAL NETWORKS AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Participants were most likely to describe the networks created as a result of their RTF project, as a formal network with external VET stakeholders. Most participants described clear links between the network or Community of Practice and achievement of NTF related outcomes. Most commonly these related to bringing stakeholders together to look at assessment, teaching practice or development and review of Training Packages. In a couple of cases marketing programs was also mentioned.

In several cases the network or Community of Practice involved the creation of links between other initiatives. One participant described how their RTF project linked with a State Government training reform project in order to establish links across sectors (VET and secondary schools).

Reflecting upon elements which make formal networks and Communities of Practice successful, several participants commented that resources were essential to ensure viability and they need to have a clear purpose and goals. Another participant felt that the fact that RTF required documentation and dissemination of materials to the network had also contributed to their networks longevity.

"Communities of Practice need to be focussed on task based contact not whimsical contact."

In most cases where formal networks or Communities of Practice were mentioned, participants considered it quite likely that they would continue beyond the end of RTF involvement.

*"This is always the key issue, "How sustainable are the networks long-term?"
Of course we hope they will continue and we feel positive about this one as it has achieved so much this far, but only time will really tell."*

Contrary to this, one participant admitted to initially thinking that Communities of Practice would be unsustainable within their large national organisation. However, as a result of positive experiences with RTF, three years after the Communities of Practice were first established, the participant was able to report that they are still in operation.

In several cases participants saw the network or Community of Practice as fostering a more cooperative working relationship between stakeholder groups. In one case a participant described how the development of a network had brought together a group of (self-confessed) competitive TAFEs and RTOs. The network was given credit for replacing the traditional sense of competition between providers in the region with a new spirit of cooperation and resource sharing. Several other similar cases also received mention.

"It has developed links between VET providers, unions, and a range of Government Departments which are now ongoing and will continue to meet and try to develop Training Packages which meet the communities needs."

"(It has) facilitated collaboration in what had been a competitive environment"

Some participants felt that support was critical in ensuring the ongoing success of networks and Communities of Practice. One Industry ITAB was so impressed by the results achieved through their networks, which had resulted in a consortium of TAFEs and RTOs being established in their area, that they were planning to self fund it into the future. This network was considered too valuable to risk losing as they felt that it had been positive not just for the VET providers but for the entire community.

Several other participants explained that the results of their Community of Practice and networks had been so successful that third parties were expanding their involvement to ensure that the work continued.

"We put in a proposal (with some) other TAFEs to examine and improve teaching practice in line with national practice. The TAFE Development Centre (Victoria) might fund it as it was considered to be a useful and high quality idea."

"We have combined key stakeholders in projects (as specified in the AQTF). DATSLP (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy), justice and legal service group members have participated. The Department is now going to look at offering scholarships and P.D for paralegal and justice programs."

INFORMAL NETWORKS

A slightly smaller proportion of the participants described their networks as formal internal, being based within their own organisation and being formal in structure and in the way they were conducted. Informal networks (both external and internal) were less commonly mentioned. Many of these participants commented that while their project had not been specifically aimed at development of networks or Communities of Practice, this had occurred inadvertently, as a result of the project.

"This happened internally as a result of the act of getting people together and at the forums where we had set up networks of other people doing similar things around the nation."

4.3 Impact on Information and Research Dissemination

Participants were asked to discuss the impact of RTF on information and research dissemination to VET organisations. Participants were also asked to comment on how this has impacted on the implementation of the NTF.

The majority of respondents felt that RTF had a positive impact on the dissemination of research and other information to the VET sector.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The primary source of information related to research and best practice and other informational papers mentioned by participants was the RTF website. Most participants were very positive about the range and type of research available from the website, and the fact that it was linked to best practice models. The most often mentioned areas of

content were the NTF, assessment, and action learning. While the website was mentioned as a source of information by those participants with a program directly related to research and information dissemination, it was also seen as a valuable source of information by participants with projects focussed on another area. Other sources of information mentioned by the participants included networks established for their RTF project, RTF forums and the RTF support staff.

"They have released some great papers on their website...They have good information online and it is up-to-date."

"It provides good web-based access to best practice models and brings the contacts network alive."

BENEFITS OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

Participants identified a range of areas in which the research and information disseminated through RTF had a beneficial impact. The most commonly mentioned theme related to an improvement in the capacity of their organisation to achieve NTF requirements. Furthermore, participants mentioned that it had the effect of increasing staff support of the NTF and improving their attitude towards subsequent changes to their practices.

"It not only improved skills in fulfilling NTF requirements, it also helped to ensure that they (staff) were positive and supportive of the changes to their previous practices. When you are talking about changing things people have done for up to 20 years, its great to be able to spend time on really looking at the reasons behind the changes and the information and evidence available for discussion."

Participants who were undertaking projects with a research focus identified a range of positive outcomes such as increased staff support of the NTF, increased innovation in initiatives, improved quality of outcomes generated, and adoption of new ideas throughout the organisation.

"(We) have seen changes in the way staff think – a senior lecturer who attended some forums brought back changes that have been incorporated into the RTO way of doing things."

The positive impact of research and information dissemination was not just confined to those projects with this as a primary focus. Positive outcomes were noted by participants undertaking a range of projects.

"Every project had key readings from the RTF website. We are heavy users of RTF information...The FTF and RTF publications have a nice communication of theory and peoples' stories and references. At the same time they are rigorous."

"We feel that a significant outcome of our RTF program has been the dissemination of information amongst key stakeholder groups in our industry... We feel that this does align with the NTF."

4.4 Impact of RTF on Strategic Management and Change Management

Participants were asked to discuss the impact of RTF in terms of strategic management and change management. A majority of the participants were able to identify at least one area of impact. These comments, while consistently positive about the contribution of RTF, were mostly very general in nature.

RECEPTIVENESS TO CHANGE

Overwhelmingly, the strongest theme to emerge related to the positive sentiments of staff, who were seen as being more supportive of change as a result of the NTF. Many of the participants felt that this was a result of the increased skills, knowledge and ideas which had been introduced to staff as a result of their RTF project. Some participants felt that being included in the strategic management process staff felt more empowered and supportive of the resulting changes because they had participated in the change management process as opposed to having change imposed upon them. Similarly, others commented that having the opportunity to take time to reflect upon the strategic management and change management issues and feeling supported had been positive.

"Given the rapid rate of changes in TAFE, the fact that RTF provided us with time to develop the skills and knowledge to cope with change, has had enormous benefits to our organisation and to our ability to fulfil NTF requirements. The support of staff has been invaluable in facilitating change and gaining support of change."

Another participant commented that as a result of the training, staff now perceived themselves as change agents, while another TAFE based participant commented that RTF had been valuable in breaking down the resistance of staff to change and that *"It has taken down the fear factor"*.

One participant contended that staff of all levels felt included in the project because of the RTF emphasis on action learning which prompted a democratic and inclusive approach.

IMPROVED QUALITY OF OUTCOMES


A number of participants who had been involved in projects with a strategic or change management focus felt that RTF had resulted in a higher quality of outcomes. RTF was also seen as increasing the focus and structure of projects with participants explaining that while their organisation would have undertaken this process eventually, RTF had enabled them to do it in a more focussed and professional way, with clearer goals and timelines. These participants indicated that as a result of the support and guidance they had received through RTF, they were producing higher quality results and approaching strategic management and change management in a more innovative and informed way.

"It transformed practice because (we) would not have thought of the different ways of doing things otherwise."

Several participants commented that as a result of the RTF project the focus of their PD program and their organisation's strategic direction had shifted focus in order to accommodate their new perspective on teaching and learning outcomes. Another participant commented that RTF had been the one initiative to impact on improving the skills of practitioners, while another participant felt that the overall quality of leadership at TAFE had been improved as a result of RTF.

OTHER ISSUES ON THE IMPACT OF RTF ON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A small proportion of participants mentioned the support received through RTF in relation to their individual RTF strategic management and change management projects.



Several participants commented that they had been advised by RTF staff to refine the parameters of their intended projects and undertake them on a smaller scale. This was seen as a positive move contributing to the success of the projects. In each case participants commented that by using the support, and following the advice of the RTF staff, they were not only able to have a successful project, but were also able to develop their own skills related to strategic management, change management and project management. In each of the cases cited, the success of the smaller RTF project subsequently led to the organisation picking up the concept and expanding it throughout the organisation.

Another minor theme emerged with several participants commenting on the need for some impetus to facilitate change to move throughout the organisation. There was a view that change management had been within departments and not across the organisation.

Several participants who did not have strategic management as the primary focus of their RTF project, but rather were engaged in the creating of networks or a Community of Practice, felt that they had also improved their strategic planning capacities as a result of the knowledge learned, and participation in the network or Community of Practice.

"By forming this Community of Practice we had significant input into the strategic direction of our (organisation)."

5. Accomplishments of Reframing the Future

Participants were asked to identify the main benefits or successes of Reframing the Future. The overwhelming majority of participants were able to identify more than one accomplishment. Two major themes emerged. The first related to the capacity to implement the NTF. The second theme, which was mentioned almost as frequently as the first, related to the improved capacity of staff in the area of project management as a direct result of the RTF resources and support.

5.1 Improved Capacity to Address Requirements of the National Training Framework

The first major theme related to the participants' view that involvement with the RTF program had improved their capacity to address the NTF requirements by enhancing their skills and knowledge.

"RTF provided us with the skills and knowledge to cope with change. This has had enormous benefits to our organisation and to our ability to fulfil NTF requirements with the support of staff..."

Participants also remarked that RTF had brought their practice into line with the NTF; improved understanding of the NTF and allowed staff the time to reflect upon issues; and prompted a positive attitude towards change.

"It gave us an opportunity to involve (staff) and ensure we have their support and meet their needs and don't just impose changes on them in a threatening way... They are now excited and feel confident to handle the changes."

Also in relation to the NTF several participants commented that RTF had enabled the national principles and concepts to be understood and applied locally.

"The main benefit is that Training Packages and national concepts are used at ground level and become a part of local practice."

"(The benefits have been) it's flexibility, its staff and it's capacity to demonstrate the NTF initiatives in practice."

5.2 Project Management Issues

The second main theme mentioned by participants related to project management issues. Participants often expressed the view that RTF resources and support were pivotal in enabling their initiative to proceed.

"Without the funds we may have taken years to do this."

"RTF has had an enormous impact and has allowed (us) to deal with a problem that is two years old."

Related to the issue of project management, the support and advice provided by RTF staff was seen as a major element in improving and supporting the project management skills of participants. It was very clear that the RTF staff were seen as a valued professional resource and that participants regarded them as being of paramount importance in contributing to the success of their projects. In several cases participants indicated that the role of the staff was what made the RTF unique and not just a source of funding.

"RTF people are positive and knowledgeable, open to new ideas and keen to understand industry."

"RTF staff are the best I have experienced – they are all excellent."

"RTF don't pretend that they are the centre of excellence, but they get professionals together for interaction... They are accessible by email or phone. They have good networks and are very generous with access to those networks."

The result of the enhanced approach to project management, facilitated by RTF, was reflected in the way projects were carried out, and in the quality of the outcomes. Participants expressed the view that as a result of the input from the RTF program (in terms of structure, guidelines, information) and the support of the RTF staff, they produced projects that were more focussed, outcome oriented and structured around clear timelines. This was seen as having a positive impact on the quality of outcomes.

"It has made staff development be more focused and outcome oriented and provided us with a timeline...It also has a real focus on quality and producing outcomes in practice."

"It enabled us to do a project in a definite timeframe and to a high standard."

5.3 Professional Development Issues

Although mentioned less frequently than the two previously mentioned major themes, professional development was a strong recurring theme.

A number of participants expressed the view that RTF had raised the quality and profile of professional development within their organisation.

"Unexpected benefits have been the considerable awareness raising re the value of P.D."

Related to this, the nature of the RTF funding arrangements were seen as increasing the number of professional development opportunities and contributing to organisations' interest in providing professional development. In relation to smaller organisations, several participants commented that RTF funding had enabled projects to be implemented and seen through to their conclusion.

"For organisations surviving on a shoestring we often find it hard to continue with programs."

Several participants also commented that RTF had provided staff with opportunities to participate in professional development that would otherwise have been unavailable to them due to the nature of their position (examples included: employees on contracts, sessional teachers, administrative staff, part time employees, volunteers and staff from small RTOs). This was seen as not only improving their skills, but also improving their professional esteem and confidence.

"This is the first time many of these people have ever had access to professional development and at first they were very nervous about being included. As a result of the success many have been encouraged to under take further study on their own. It has shown them that they are important to the system and this has really improved their professional self image."

"Because it is so flexible it also enables small RTOs like us to get involved and have a chance to learn at the forums from the huge TAFEs."

"It has boosted staff morale by allowing professional development they would not otherwise get."

Individual comments related to professional development included the view that RTF had encouraged a focus on professional development topics often not addressed in professional development programs and that it had encouraged innovative professional development projects. Another individual commented that participation in RTF had improved the quality of services delivered to students.

"It has had a huge impact on the ultimate consumers...by giving staff access to professional development."

5.4 Other Issues Related to the Accomplishments of RTF

Several minor themes, specifically related to the outcomes of RTF projects were mentioned. Most commonly participants commented on the positive outcomes achieved by the development of networks and Communities of Practice and generally felt that these linkages would be ongoing. In several cases organisations had decided to fund the continuation of the network because it was felt that they were so beneficial. Several participants noted other positive outcomes related to information and research dissemination and strategic management and change management issues.

"By building networks it has generated ongoing links."

"This program has had a significant impact on the strategic direction of our company...By forming this Community of Practice we had significant input into the strategic direction of our company."

A minor theme related to organisational issues was identified. Participants mentioning organisational issues were generally positive about the fact that their RTF project had enabled them to address their own organisational issues while moving towards compliance with the NTF. Some participants also commented on the beneficial "flow on" effect which occurred when successful projects were adopted throughout the organisation. A number of these participants also expressed the view that the flexible nature of the RTF guidelines meant that a diverse range of organisations were able to accommodate and address their own needs. One participant explained that this was essential in ensuring the long-term sustainability of projects which will only continue to attract organisational support if they achieved organisational benefits.

"(RTF) has had enormous benefits for our organisation..."

"We have developed some great systems and the infrastructure we need to support the programs."

"We conducted an internal evaluation, which was helpful to the organisation."

A number of "other" comments were made in relation to the accomplishments of RTF. These were generally individual comments. These included the views that; RTF encourages people to focus on the big picture; it is cost effective; the dollar for dollar funding is good; and that it is different from most ANTA initiatives because it puts the emphasis back on quality rather than auditing and ticking boxes.

"Too much of what comes out of ANTA has been focussed on audits. You get rewarded for ticking all the boxes and not for producing quality. In this way Reframing is different...It is an organic program which goes beyond a bureaucratic approach and puts the emphasis back on quality rather than on auditing."

6. Areas for Improvement

The majority of participants identified at least one limitation to the current RTF program.

6.1 Funding Issues

The most frequently mentioned limitation related to the funding of the program. Participants were equally concerned about each of three funding related issues. These were; the lack of funding available for each individual project; insufficient numbers of projects being funded; and the lack of opportunity to apply for funding of a second year of the project.

"Only one in three funding applications gets up. (RTF) needs more money, more projects funded."

"(There is a) need for an opportunity to have access to a phase two of funding to take the project to the next level quickly and keep the impetus moving."

Other funding related issues mentioned by individual participants included; a desire to have access to more funding to allow multiple projects to be conducted simultaneously; the cost of travelling to forums; the unexpected costs of auditing; and the need for the funding provided to cover what was proposed in the application budget.

6.2 Administrative Issues

The next most frequently mentioned limitation related to the amount of administrative paperwork required in the application process and in the reporting requirements. Participants generally felt that this needed to be streamlined and simplified.

"(There is a) need to reduce the paperwork and reporting requirements. This has always been a drawback of Reframing."

Several participants also felt that the reporting process was too bureaucratic and too inflexible.

"The reporting process could be a little less rigid."

6.3 Time Related Issues

Related to the preceding theme, and receiving a similar proportion of comments, were time related issues. Participants' comments generally pertained to the amount of time required to complete administrative requirements in both the application and reporting phases of the project. Participants also felt that the timing of the reporting cycle, coupled with the requirement to provide an interim report on such a short project and for a relatively small amount of funds was too demanding on their time.

"The timing for report writing is too tight and the programs are often not completed until after the final report is due which is ridiculous".

"The time frame is a limitation. The effective funding cycle is limited to six months. January funding approval, March/April receive the go ahead and September/October the final reports are due."

Other time related comments included concern that the time between application and acceptance did not allow applicants sufficient time to make alternative arrangements to enable projects to proceed. While another participant expressed an interest in monitoring of the project outcomes, at the 3 and 5 year marks, to see the long-term impacts.

6.4 Use of Language

The language used in communications throughout the program was also seen as a limitation by some participants. Communications were seen as containing too much TAFE, VET and educational jargon rendering it less accessible to people from a workplace training/workplace learning background. Related to this issue another participant commented that the nature of the reporting requirements was very academic or "schoolsy" with the need for a theoretical framework. It was thought that this may be alienating to private organisations and should be more business-like.

"..don't presume we are all TAFEs..."

"(RTF) is very teaching oriented- need to move from an education focus to a workplace learning focus with respect to terminology in order to be more relevant to a wider range of providers."

6.5 Other Areas for Improvement

A number of other minor themes were raised by a small proportion of the participants. Several expressed a desire for a broader and more flexible range of project topics.

"It needs to be a bit more flexible and the breadth of vision could be extended to other areas of focus eg. Consultancy, creation of learning environments."

Improved clarity of the links between RTF and other initiatives was raised by several participants.

"The connections at national and state levels are unclear. Collaboration is fragmented...ANTA should have a stronger leadership role."

One participant said there was a need for greater involvement of indigenous people and organisations supporting indigenous people in RTF. Specific suggestions made by this participant included: the need for ANTA to develop "indigenous packages" to promote indigenous cultural activities; the need for all communications to be presented in plain English not "VET speak"; and the need to remove the assumption that all potentially eligible groups share the same knowledge of the VET system.

Other issues mentioned included condensation of the full day workshops, provision of more information, a reduction in the number of forums, greater recognition of the diversity of the sizes and resources of eligible organisations, increased industry skills among RTF staff and provision good local facilitation.

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