Workplace Productivity Program

Disciplines Case Study

This project case study is provided as an example of how the organisation utilised the University process model to focus on a particular process and undertake improvements.
From the process reference model you will note that, **Determine Discipline Profile** is the fundamental precursor to both the core processes of Learning and Teaching and Research. Disciplines are the key academic building block. The discipline profile must be aligned with University strategy and the performance, quality and sustainability of the disciplines in that profile defines the success of a University. The discipline profile not only guides and focuses the institution towards its strengths, it establishes the link between teaching and research information.

Historically disciplines have been DEST driven and their definitions obscured their real meaning. Funding-based definitions of disciplines rendered impact analysis and planning problematic.

After the health reviews of all CSU processes, the WPP program delved deeply into this process due to its criticality. CSU needed to ensure:

- the discipline profile is aligned with the University Strategy
- the performance, quality and sustainability of the profile, hence CSU’s core processes, hence the University’s success
The Discipline Project

- Establish a CSU Discipline Profile
- Determine information required
- Attribute Disciplines to Staff & Subjects
- Modify processes to collect & maintain
- Modify systems to store and report
- Make discipline information available
- Disseminate and apply

These were the key deliverables for the discipline project. It took about 12 months all up to be completed and provide first data sets.

The profile needed to suit CSU not the government and stand test of time. It was up to each faculty as to granularity.

We had to attribute staff and subjects to a discipline and then the procedures to ensure this was maintained.

A communication and rollout plan was important.
“In this Discipline, we would like to know …”

- Student load in total, weighted and by UG, P/G, Hons and RHD level
- Teaching Load related funding (grant and non-grant)
- Quality results (eg evaluations, student feedback)
- Total staff numbers assigned including fractional and total FTE and other such as age and gender
- Numbers and Percentage of staff by academic level type
- Numbers and Percentage of staff with doctoral qualifications
- Numbers and Percentage of staff undertaking doctoral studies
- Numbers and Percentage of staff in the following categories: Teaching Only, Teaching and Research, Research Only, and Teaching & Professional
- The Academic Staff / Student Ratio
- Numbers and percentage of staff who met CSU internal funding criteria in previous year
- The costs associated with the discipline
- Publications per head
- Publication type breakdown as per standard classification
- Research funding (by type)
- Quality results
- Numbers and Percentage of staff who are members of research centres or groups

The management information required was described by the senior executive in very simple terms. Interpreting these into reality required EA and knowledge of the data. Almost all the data existed in some way or another but had never been brought together.

We ensured that we didn’t get caught up in detailed data issues as these were indicators – not exact measurements – used to trigger further investigations if required
The results of the work is now in a simple data warehouse and managed by our Planning and Audit department. This allows us to trend into the future and break it up many ways depending upon the audience. One of the most important initial views we created for enhancing buy-in to the work was the Senior Executive’s ‘Discipline Scroll’ – on one page we could see all disciplines and their data. This intentionally blurry shot provides you with an idea of the layout of the data which was grouped into the following headings (Details of the profile and the data are provided in another resource on this website.):

- General Discipline information
- Student Load – EFTSL, fund source, no subjects
- Student and Staff Calculations – indications of workload, teaching quality, efficiency
- Staff – numbers, gender, level, qualifications
- Financial – income by type, casual to permanent costs
- Teaching Quality – subject evaluation data
- CSU Performance based funding – research, teaching, professional aspects
- Research – output, quality, grants, points
- Research and Staff Calculations – indications of breadth of research across discipline

With the data on one page, a variety of questions can be asked, comparisons made across the board of disciplines and across all aspects of teaching and research. Previously this information was perhaps available but not integrated.
The project has had very successful outcomes. The discipline reports will be generated annually and have been slotted into CSU’s yearly planning and review cycle and the profile is well communicated throughout the organisation.

The discipline information will become a key academic workforce planning tool as the information will be used as a key tool to plan, develop and drive performance quality and within each Faculty. Faculty will develop and implement staffing strategies to recruit to discipline groups and ensure:-

- sufficient critical mass in each discipline.
- early career, established staff, and professorial presence in each discipline [ideally].
- leadership succession planning.

More recently disciplines have provided a key role in new initiatives around setting standards in Learning and Teaching and Research at CSU and creating an institutional scorecard. CSU disciplines have also placed us in a strong position for ERA. More and more questions can now be answered in addition to the original ones.

Important comments regarding the work have included:-

“One view of excellence, sustainability and flexibility of the organisation”

“A sense of performance at a meaningful level”