DŪCERE
GLOBAL BUSINESS SCHOOL

HIGHER EDUCATION GROUP
AUSTRALIAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Transition to Flexible Work
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FINAL REPORT TRIMESTER 2

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1. Acknowledgements

2. Executive Summary

The Higher Education Group (HEG) of the Australian Department of Education (ADE) is finding that staff are increasingly interested in accessing flexible work arrangements. There is an ADE policy structure in place for all staff to access flexible work arrangements, but, to meet the growing demand and requirements for HEG, the Dūcere Project Team (the Team) have enacted a project brief to provide a comprehensive set of recommendations regarding appropriate structures, principles and practices to further the Group's provisions of flexible and agile work practice conditions.

The overall intention of HEG is to enable workplace culture to evolve to meet the changing needs of employees and the organisation itself. Ultimately, this would mean transitioning into a more empowering 'knowledge economy', outcome-focused, project-based workflow management system that replaces the 'old economy' time-based work culture approach.

This project is designed to provide evidence of the most effective ways to introduce such change, based on empirical research and the gathering of staff appraisals.
The Team undertook a review of the literature on the areas of flexible working conditions and project-based work practices in the following areas, covering how:
- flexible working features can benefit both individuals and organisations
- to introduce enabling flexible work processes

- features of flexible modes of operation and project-based workflows can improve staff well-being, productivity and overall organisational effectiveness

The Team also conducted an online survey to gain further understanding of the nature of current flexible work arrangements across the group and to document employee perceptions around such flexible work arrangements and the project-based workflow system. The survey data was analysed to identify correlations between basic socio-demographic details, such as family responsibilities, of the respondents and organisational classifications. Follow-up interviews were also conducted to gather more in-depth information related to the survey content particularly regarding the perceptions about the current workplace culture and possibilities for change. The interview transcripts were analysed to identify attitudinal patterns in order to identify similarities and contrasts across the Group.

Although access to and use of flexible work arrangements is part of the business plan for Higher Education Group, the team found that access tended to be perceived as purely for individual needs such as family commitments, rather than amenable to all staff as an everyday right. The literature on the latter scenario indicates that access to flexible work arrangements can result in increased motivation and productivity as employees feel more empowered in relation to negotiating how, when and where they carry out their work responsibilities (Eek & Axmon, 2013; Kelliher & Anderson 2010). As a consequence, in addition to increased workforce retention statistics (due to greater employee satisfaction) organisational outcomes are enhanced as a result of the workforce becoming more engaged and highly committed. The Team found a recurring theme in the research relating to a contrast between perceptions of the negative impacts of flexible work arrangements when located within a traditional time-based work culture, and the positive reception, and operations, of flexible work processes when the workplace culture allowed more employee based decision-making practices (Putnam, Myers and Gailliard 2013; Wilson, 2010).

This evidence confirms that, to be effective for both the staff and the organisation, these change practices are dependent on transforming 'old economy' workplace cultures to reflect the more dynamic, complex conditions contemporary workplaces represent. Such outcomes enable a basis to the employment relationship where employee work outputs

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are assessed by *outcomes*, which in turn, are linked to ongoing learning effectiveness and improved efficiencies, rather than narrow instrumental time-based measurements.

The characteristics of project-based workflows were investigated in some depth as part of conceptualising what a reframed workplace culture could look like for an organisation like HEG. The literature review confirmed the findings above in that while features may vary depending on the type of organisation or industry, effective practices are characterised by relations of high trust, collaboration and teamwork which results in an empowered workforce culture (McEwan et al.,2017; Yazici, 2009). Such results were underpinned by cultural processes that prioritised increased direct communication and scope for ongoing learning, whether it was restricted to particular team learning or expanded to the sharing of knowledge between teams.

The Team found that the literature indicated that crucially, management and leadership could either play a positive or negative role regarding how individuals and the organisation itself experienced the introduction of flexible work practices and project-based workflow arrangements (Albion, 2004; Yazici, 2009). Hence, the importance of manager and leader awareness training is emphasised to ensure that they fully appreciated the benefits of reframing the workplace culture in this manner. Research by Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge (2007) demonstrates that they too can benefit from these changes as more scope for empowered team-based decision making can relieve managers/leaders from unrealistic expectations imposed on them.

The survey and interviews conducted with employees of Higher Education Group echoed these themes found in the literature review. The desire for personal flexibility was a significant factor for those who may seek future flexible work arrangements. However, some felt that they would not seek flexible work arrangements if the request was perceived in a negative way by their peers or supervisors. Hence, the need for improved communication and trust factors were identified as important to progress effective flexible workplace arrangements. Both the survey and interview responses revealed both positive and negative perceptions regarding the impacts of flexible work arrangements, with the influence of leadership behaviours presenting as a strong theme. There was also a recurring viewpoint that flexible work arrangements were a restricted entitlement reserved for those in certain roles and/or with outside commitments, thus generally considered to

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be a privilege to be earned rather than a universal right. While digital tools and platforms were strongly perceived as supportive of flexible work arrangements respondents felt that access to tools and processes needed to be further developed.

While Higher Education Group has begun to train employees in Agile workflow practices that align to project-based practices, from the survey and interview responses the Project Team identified contrasts in working practices across the group ranging from regular collaborative sharing of work in process through to segmented tasks and an absence of clear workflow management. There was also a contrast in perceptions regarding how effective this Agile approach would be in creating benefits for individuals and teams.

Therefore, the Team will be making recommendations in the following areas:

- Transforming workplace culture
- Promoting collaboration and ongoing learning
- Training and support for leaders and managers
- Engaging with workflow tools

3. Organisational Context

3.1 Higher Education Group - Organisational Design

The Higher Education Group employs approximately one hundred and sixty employees in full-time and part-time capacities. The HEG office is located in Canberra and client representatives report that in the last twelve months to June 2019 it has recruited between 25-30% of its workforce with many of the employees being in a younger age grouping. The HEG is made up of 5-6 senior executives, a leadership group of twenty-five and twenty teams.

The HEG has a stated purpose of 'maximising opportunity and prosperity through national leadership in education and training' (*Business Plan 2018-2019*, 2018). Each branch within the Group is made up of several teams;

- Research Policy and Programs
- Funding and Students

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- Governance, Quality and Access
- HELP and Provider Integrity
- Tertiary Policy

3.2 Organisational Culture

The ADE has developed a *Flexibility Framework* to assist employees in enacting flexible working arrangements within its strategic priorities:

- Culture and engagement
- Strong leadership
- Driving performance and optimising talent
- Fostering flexibility, diversity inclusion (*People Strategy 2018-2021*, 2018)

The request for service from HEG identifies that more staff are seeking to access flexible working arrangements and therefore there is a need for a framework to support this transition. Within the HEG Business Plan, an agile culture is identified as an objective to support the effective operation of such flexibility. To oversee the transformation process, two consultative bodies have been set up including the HERI Reference Group (HRG) and Group Consultative Committee (GCC) in order "to develop new strategies to support new and current staff" (*Business Plan 2018-2019*, 2018).

4. Stakeholders

According to Fontaine, Haarman and Stefan's (2006), a stakeholder is an individual or group who has a vested interest in the project, firm, organisation or business to achieve its objectives. In this case, the following major stakeholders are involved in aspects of the delivery of the project in varied ways.

- Mady Zabar, Dom English and their team as representatives of HEG
- The Dūcere Global Business School: as the overseeing body of the MBA team and the University of Canberra as the accrediting body
- The Dūcere MBA Student Team comprised of Janet Austen, Mercy Atem, Charbel El Khaissi, Jino Jacob, Candice Pendergast, Katherine Maka, Stephanie McMullen, Kenneth Seiler and Kerra Houge
- The Dūcere MBA Project Academic: Dr Ngaire Bissett

5. Project Scope

This project aims to provide a framework comprised of sets of principles and practices designed to allow the Higher Education Group to work flexibly, with staff gaining an increased sense of personal responsibility in relation to attaining a high standard of work.

5.1 In-scope

- Recommendations around types of tools to enable project-based workflows in a flexible work environment
- Insights into existing characteristics of work arrangements and culture in the department
- Recommendations for frameworks and templates enabling the introduction of flexibility and agility in team practices

5.2 Out-of-scope

- Team delivery of specific workflow enhancements and changes to existing practice

5.3 Research Methodology

- Review HEG and ADE documents relating to flexible work arrangements
- Conduct a literature review from academic and practice sources
- Design and conduct a survey on attitudes to flexible work arrangements
- Undertake follow up interviews with some survey respondents to pursue in-depth information about current workflow management and attitudes to flexible work arrangements

5.4 Project Deliverables

Required deliverables are outlined below:

- A report outlining recommendations to:
  - develop workflow management, staff movements and team priorities to promote collaboration and ongoing learning;
  - consider evidenced based recommendations on tools for team utilisation;
- A final presentation to be delivered to key stakeholders with a maximum time allowed of 60 minutes

Depending on time constraints and staff availability, deliverables may include briefing sessions for the Group.

6. The Benefits of Flexible Working Arrangements

6.1 The Basics of Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible working arrangements provide an opportunity for individuals and teams to exercise a degree of control over where, when and how they work (Chung, Heejung & van Der Lippe, 2018). This contrasts with time-based work which can be constricting and demotivating for employees. Moreover, research indicates that a work environment which prioritises flexibility and encourages workers to focus on results, as opposed to hours spent in the office, has a positive effect on the attraction and retention of staff. It also motivates employees to do their best to produce quality work outcomes (Earle, 2003). In addition, flexibility creates opportunities for staff to better manage their life and family commitments, whilst meeting business needs in an enhanced manner (Clark, 2001).

As the traditional model of work process itself is changing, the practice of working within a typical office environment is fading (Calderone, 2018) such that many workplaces support employees working remotely due to a range of conditions such as technological provisions, dispersal of geographical locations, financial expediency and employee wellbeing. Flexibility provisions have thus evolved to a point where they represent a vital foundation supporting diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace. This is important because research shows that inclusive workplaces enhance organisational effectiveness, competitive advantage, improved decision making, higher morale, more effective people management and deliver higher returns to shareholders (Cottrill, Denise Lopez, & Hoffman, 2014).

However, the application of organisational flexibility operations will be influenced by, and adapted to, the needs of individuals, including such criteria as caring for family members, contributing to the community, studying purposes, maintaining health and wellbeing and transitioning to retirement. These provisions will also be dependent on the nature of the work being undertaken to ensure the viability of organisational arrangements. According to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2018), flexible working arrangements can include:

- Flexible working hours (changes and autonomy of work start and finish times);
- Flexible working places (working from home or another location);
- Flexible working practices (part-time work, job-sharing).

Nonetheless, flexible work offerings are not a new development as organisations have been taking steps for some time now to provide employees with access to flexible working arrangements such as part-time work, flexi-time arrangements, and the option to purchase leave (Kelliher, Anderson, Kossek, Lewis, & Hammer, 2010). Indeed, currently provisions for ADE staff to request or access such leave arrangements are outlined in the *Department of Education and Training Enterprise Agreement 2016-19.* Additionally, the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) stipulates cohorts of employees can statutorily request flexible working arrangements.

6.2 The Benefits of Flexibility for Individuals, Teams and Organisations

A flexible working environment can promote a culture that motivates employees to be more accountable for their actions, whilst empowering them through the extension of increased decision-making capacity. This has further positive organisational effects with increased attraction and retention of staff including motivating employees to seek to excel in their work due to their sense of being respected (Earle 2003). Hence, organisations that have implemented flexible working arrangements report a range of benefits as outlined in sections 6.2.1 to 6.2.5.

6.2.1 Increased efficiency

Flexibility allows employers to adjust their workforce in order to meet changing demands like serving customers at times that better suit them. In Australia, 73% of businesses surveyed declared that their company is more productive as a result of having more flexible working arrangements (Government of SA, 2018). Additionally, 63% of staff reported feeling more motivated as a result of workplace flexibility (Regus, 2012).

6.2.2 Staff retention

The Government of South Australia Equal Opportunity Commission's Flexible Workplace Futures Report (2018) revealed that 26% of employees saw flexible work agreements as a driver to continue working for their current organisation. An associated survey conducted by Hays (2016) also: "found that just 44% of professionals are 'very satisfied' or 'extremely satisfied' with their current level of work-life balance". The report also found: "75% of employers offer flexible working hours or compressed working weeks, other popular flexible work practices include part-time employment (73%), flex-place, such as working from home or an alternative location (66%), flexible leave options, such as purchased leave (36%), job sharing (26%), career breaks (16%) and phased retirements (14%)" (Hays.com.au, 2016). The employees reported being happier at work and less burnt out with associated positive organisational results being less absenteeism and a reduction in staff turnover.

6.2.3 Employee satisfaction

According to Kelliher & Anderson (2010), flexible work arrangements increase employees' overall job satisfaction and increase their commitment to the organisation. Although factors, including increased stress and work intensification, were also

associated with flexible work arrangements, employees highly regarded the option of flexibility and having a sense of control over their working arrangements. Additionally, Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard, (2014) reported that employees felt a greater sense of autonomy and responsibility resulting in agile organisational practices. Furthermore, as flexibility provisions mean employees can take a break when they need it without incurring penalty for absenteeism, this also reduces employee exhaustion due to work overload (The Balance Careers, 2019).

6.2.4 Wider candidate pool/ attraction of talent

According to Thompson et al., (2015) organisations that provide flexible working arrangements to staff are seen to be more supportive of employees and therefore more attractive as an employer of choice by prospective job applicants. This links with organisations seeking to widen the talent pool by offering individual flexible working arrangements, including changes to work patterns, and where employees are able to work location-wise. Burgmann (2012) highlights that organisations with flexible working options are more likely to attract a wider and more diverse range of potential employees, including younger and older workers, and those who are highly skilled, and therefore the organisation can be more selective about potential employers.

6.2.5 Cost reductions

The Regus (2012) Flexibility Drives Productivity report states that globally 68% of businesses surveyed claim that flexible working arrangements have generated more income for their company because flexibility drives productivity. Wheatley (2017) reports that flexible working arrangements has also been associated with a combination of reduced absenteeism rates, reduced commuting times and expenses.

6.2.6 Environmental impact

Many organisations include flexible work arrangements into their environmental sustainability and conservation plans. A reduction in business related travel results in reduced emissions and energy consumption. The latest Pearson Sustainability report (2018) suggests it is possible to reduce emissions and energy use through methods of production, transmission sources and adopting new technologies to better support flexible working conditions. Flexible work agreements have also been included in the Lloyd

Bank's plan to reduce their environmental impact by 20% by 2020. Equally, Cisco and Bupa plan to reduce their emissions by 25% (Future of Work Institute, 2012).

6.3 Features of a flexible workplace culture

Culture within a workplace has a significant impact on whether an employee feels comfortable in seeking to access flexible working arrangements. Consequently, a move from traditional office work hours to a results-focused environment requires a culture that engages all employees in a new way of thinking - including management - in order to support the provision of flexible arrangements for everyone (Putnam, et al. 2013). As highlighted by Albion (2004), staff may be reluctant to access flexible working arrangements unless the workplace culture supports and promotes flexible working and is inclusive of all staff. Hence, a high-functioning flexible working environment where staff feel valued, trusted and included is crucial.

A recent report undertaken by Roderick (2018) examining various organisations that had successfully implemented workplace flexibility programs found that they all focused on outcomes, rather than simply counting hours in the office. The common features across the case studies included:
- Organisations that were genuinely committed to a flexible program and inclusive of all staff;
- Organisations taking a creative and innovative approach towards flexibility;
- Leaders and managers being provided with support and guidance to enable them to facilitate flexibility in their teams and to model companion working behaviours themselves.

Project-based workflows can help leaders and managers to facilitate this culture, and as a form of self-organising team management is required to support flexible working environments, this displaces the traditional top-down instructive management approach. In so doing, the teams need to be given the flexibility regarding how they determine, plan and manage their work projects. This allows individuals to adopt an increased sense of accountability as they feel they are part of an empowering team dedicated to meeting deadlines (Parker, et al. 2015). In addition, the adoption of agile concepts and associated frameworks into the team workflow facilitates the effectiveness of the self-organising

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teams. As a result, the flexibility created empowers and engages employees and increases a team's enabling capacity (Parker, et al. 2015) through:

- Visibility and accessibility of work in progress;
- Opening the lines of communication and creating a team environment even from remote settings;
- Opportunities for rapid learning and recognition of work completed;
- Facilitation of self-organising teams which allows them to take responsibility for their work output.

Additionally, there are many features of effective practice in a project-based environment and while some may be specific to certain industries, project methodologies and workplace cultures, the characteristics of effective project-based workflow include:

- An emphasis on interdisciplinarity which enables knowledge sharing (Danford, 2006). And as workplace culture is a contributing factor to both business and project performance, that interdisciplinarity must carry the cultural characteristics of sharing, trust, collaboration, teamwork and ultimately empowerment (Yazici, 2009; Bond-Barnard et. al. 2017; McEwan et. al, 2017). A diamond-like organisational structure typically complements this sense of sharing and team work. This is because project-based work systems are typically diverse in composition (Erhardt, 2011), and with decentralised teams operating with relatively autonomous project managers, who have minimal status differences to their peers (Sydow et. al, 2004; Wickramasinghe & Liyanage, 2013).

- A focus on "learning by doing" (Stauffacher et al., 2006: 255), as opposed to learning by watching. Ensuring there is a team learning process where a sense of purpose is fostered through the conceptualisation of an end "quality product" (Danford 2006, p. 12), as this drives project planning, production, and evaluation.

- A shared knowledge of process documentation (and its dissemination) are key characteristics for project-based workflows (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Bond-Barndard et. al, 2017; Bresnen et. al, 2005; Sydow et. al, 2004; Wickramasinghe & Liyanage, 2013). The success of knowledge transfer processes is also linked to the type of

organisational and project culture, and thus influences the success or failure of future projects (Ajmal & Koskinen 2008, p. 7).

- Workflow documentation processes. The value of workflow documentation processes is also interrelated with the integration of diverse and specialised intellectual resource systems in order to contribute to awareness of the expertise of staff members and facilitate ongoing training and development (Sydow et. al, 2004; Wickramasinghe & Liyanage, 2013). This is particularly vital for project-based workflow systems given that regular, unintended issues often arise during such procedure, which requires project members to have access to key knowledge in order to be successful at "firefighting" duties (Ayas & Zeniuk 2001, p. 64).

7. The Application of Project-based Workflows

7.1 Compatibility of Project-based Workflows and Flexible Work

An agile workflow provides an opportunity to redefine the when, where and how of workplace flexibility processes. This is because the degree to which time, location and tasks are adjustable to meet personal needs can be accommodated through teamwork arrangements. Putnam, Myers and Gailliard (2013) also argue the elements of agility allow organisations to move from a fragmented task-oriented structure of work to a more strategic integrated outcomes-oriented mode of operation. Relatedly, Ajmal and Koskinen (2008), suggest that the goal of every project should focus on a combination of the successful development of delivery and enhanced organisational learning at the same time. As it has been shown that flexible work arrangements encourage and improve the exchange and reciprocation of knowledge sharing (Chronéer and Backlund, 2015), then a project approach that improves current workflow patterns will likely enhance this objective too.

Becker (2004) notes that while contemporary organisations depict their workflows as exhibiting patterns of interdependence that involve multiple stakeholders and are therefore collective in nature; and distributive in terms of scope for decision making; along with being context driven and processual in character; some organisations tend to hold to a dated assumption that the nature of the organisational routines are mainly repetitive

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(Bresnen, Goussevskaia and Swan, 2005). In contrast, more progressive organisations that work with a project-based methodology understand that each project has its own idiosyncratic nature which demands a fluid and often modifiable workflow in order to be able to respond to unpredictable changes (Crawford, French and Lloyd-Walker, 2013). While flexible work arrangements have tended to be informally implemented throughout organisations and, often only when demanded, Perlow (2012) argues that such workplace conditions can be reorganised without disrupting project outcomes. Indeed, most organisations that use project methodologies like agile, link well with flexible work arrangements, allowing them to respond to evolving work demands.

Bessa and Tomlinson (2017) point out for instance, that flexible work arrangements empower project participants to increase their performance, feel motivated and work harder because they have some autonomy over their working times, the location of work or scheduling and that, collectively, this results in improvements in organisational performance too. However, Sydow, Lindkvist and DeFillippi (2004) show that one of the dilemmas faced by project-based organisations is the autonomy required by project participants which can be in tension with lingering embedded organisational and inter-organisational settings where the latter demand 'old economy' integrated command/control routines and/or inter-organizational coordination efforts. Understanding all of this, on the part of leaders then, is crucial to avoid mismanagement and achieve meaningful results.

7.2 Leadership for introducing project-based practices

Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski & Senge (2007) contend that leadership in today's complex organisations needs to let go of the historical norms where a leader is expected to be across all aspects of the organisation. Instead, because organisational issues today are complex and often multifaceted, leaders need to trust the individuals within the team who have a range of skillsets, and recognise that often "leadership exists throughout the organisational hierarchy" (Ancona et al., 2007, p. 94). Further to this Ancona et al (2007) argue that an environment that fosters shared and debated points of view should be encouraged and supported by facilitating team members to advance their skill sets through the individual and collective learning that takes place in teams that participate in mutually-respectful shared conversations.

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Leaders can also gain benefits from engaging in professional development and working with other leaders to overcome their own areas of leadership weakness and to take the pressure of themselves regarding the unrealistic decision-making capabilities that organisations can impose on them (Ancona et al, 2007). Hence, Ancona et al (2007,p. 95) shift the focus to team-based leadership developed through a "four capabilities" framework designed to achieve successful innovative leaderful outcomes. These include processes of *sensemaking, relating, visioning and inventing*, which can facilitate a project-based workflow approach

Utilising sensemaking, initially as an individual, for example, can help a leader to have an appreciation of their working environment and what is happening around them and why. Sensemaking can be empowered by also recognizing one's own frame of reference and how this can limit the opportunity to see potential growth areas in the workplace. There is real value to a team if a leader is able to "capture the complexities of their environment, explain them to others in simple terms" (Ancona et al., 2007, p.95) and seek confirmation from others that their understanding of current needs is that of the collective. In relation to this project therefore, a framework that seeks to appreciate the current issues or needs for flexible work practices at an individual level can be achieved through ongoing open communication by leaders of the organisation operating at all levels of employment. The evolving of a shared sensemaking facility will support the sense of a highly committed culture that in turn will embrace a transparent, accessible and shared understanding of the benefits of flexible work practices and their connection with staff needs and workplace satisfaction.

One of the barriers to 'old economy' approaches to culture change is where leadership restrains the opportunity for multiple opinions to be voiced and for the varied skill sets of individuals to be embraced to more fruitfully address complex problems. Ancona et al., (2007) argue therefore that there is value in embracing scope for individual viewpoints as this creates openness for ideas to be shared, and creativity to be forged, which allows trust to be developed thus strengthening the cohesiveness within teams. Communication tools and strategic processes, as outlined above, that support this approach will allow the teams to deliver successful project-based workflow outcomes. Furthermore, Ancona et al., (2007) see strength in leadership that is able to genuinely connect by relating with

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their staff in mutually respectful ways and thereby allowing staff to gain the confidence to speak to their informed viewpoints.

Margaret Heffernan's *TED talk* (*Why it's time to forget the pecking order at work" 2019),* adds to this argument by advocating that everyone in the team should have a voice, thus rejecting the 'old economy' approach where only one voice, that of the formal leader, is dominant whilst others in the team are expected to remain passive participants. Leaders that invest time to understand and know their staff needs allow for the creation of an environment of trust and helpfulness which bonds teams together, supporting team productivity and satisfaction (Heffernan, 2019); again helping to forge a strong sense of culture. Furthermore, Hill (2019) states, "Innovation comes from the collective genius" (Hill, 2019) thus leadership that relates to and connects with their staff, fostering opportunities for shared opinions, and even encouraging creative abrasion, will strengthen the collective sensemaking of the team whilst developing everyone's leadership capabilities.

Finally, it is recognized that leadership needs to be open to how both visionary and inventing capabilities can be expanded through this kind of agile networking way of working. By providing scope to review possible opportunities for these kinds of change processes, and encouraging and supporting them in practice, the organisation will become more strongly connected to the current needs of their staff, at the same time as creating a dynamic and agile workforce dedicated to delivering for the organisation.

Hence, leadership that shows a commitment to project-based practices is vital to achieve more dynamic workflow processes. An essential feature is also the ability to recognise and map in a facilitative way the characteristics of the team members to the characteristics and needs of the project. This is a key element of a framework that supports the implementation of effective project-based practices.

7.3 Features of effective project-based practice

Consequently, studies reveal the many features that define effective project-based practice include the development of a culture of trust-based relationships; collaboration and increased commitment; democratic styles of leadership; and knowledge exchange opportunities. All of these factors then enable a shared understanding of goals, activities

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and interdependencies related to the various activities (Bond-Barnard, Fletch & Steyn, 2017). Turner & Miterev (2019) name the five underpinning features of project-based organisations as: *strategy, process, behaviours, human resources and structure.* Strategy is influenced by the organisations design, yet "strategic decision" embracing project - based practice will "influence the overall strategy of the organization" (Turner & Miterey, 2019, p. 3). Thus, the culture which is supported by leadership will be the foundation for leading effective project-based practices. Further to this, the importance of "seamless communication" has been recognised as the key element that bring together all five of the underpinning features of project- based workflow (McEwan, Ruissen, Eys, Zumbo & Beauchamp, 2017, p. 2). It is particularly how the communication is supported culturally that will determine its effectiveness. Therefore, it becomes clear that a culture which is supported by this kind of leadership awareness will provide the foundation for effective project-based practices to take place.

While Sydow, Lindkvist & DeFillippi, (2004, p. 7) argue that one of the limitations of project-based practice is the tendency to create "knowledge silos" where teams only work with the one team and thus there is limited opportunity for knowledge sharing, inter-project learning along with learning across the organisation. To address this, they suggest that "project management tools" in particular can promote the "sharing of knowledge" in practice between diverse groups, with technology providing communication support through various online systems (2004, p. 9). Nonetheless, this does not replace the need for touch points and opportunities for "face to face interaction" (Sydow, et al, 2004, p.9), hence, "co-location and frequent communication" (Bond-Barnard, Fletcher & Steyn, 2017, p. 2) are key factors too. Collectively then, these features have been shown to support the sharing of knowledge, effective practice, linked to vision, goals and strengths necessary for team and organisational collaboration.

Martinez (2019) also states that project-based working methods have a defined beginning and end, with tasks assigned and completed in teams or project groups. As noted above, project-based organisations have a management structure where each team or group fits within a larger hierarchical structure but operates itself in a more collegial manner (Fink, 2013). This means, workflow regarding 'who' takes on a task, 'how' they will complete it and 'when' they are required to complete the task, is determined by the team. Martinez, (2019) argues in this regard, that having a planned workflow will assist with achieving

deliverables by the required completion date, reducing stress and confusion and enabling the team to know what task needs to be completed and by when. Workflow thus provides a level of transparency across a team and in relation to the project; it enables managers to communicate, monitor progress and adjust workflow according to business or project requirements.

In conclusion, the evidence suggests that a project-based workflow model benefits teamwork as it promotes increased communication, learning, and the sharing of knowledge within the team which invariably results in team member loyalty to the project. As the teams themselves have a level of defined authority, it allows them to be better informed regarding escalation processes and to readily obtain clarity regarding particular tasks. Richardson, (2014) contends, this structure can, therefore, reduce downtime and a lack of direction when team members reach a roadblock in a task. Consequently, because project-based organisations have an established set of processes, the adoption and adaptation of new technologies can also positively be introduced and increase the efficiency, cost, and performance of the project.

8. The Higher Education Group - the current landscape

In order to provide informed recommendations around a transition to a more flexible work environment, it was important that the Team understand the current state in terms of operations and culture that exists within the HEG.

To achieve this, we carried out research of both a quantitative and qualitative nature, using both a survey and one-on-one interviews with participants from the HEG. The findings are outlined below.

8.1 Survey

The HEG online survey aimed to increase an understanding of the current nature of flexible and/or part-time work arrangements in the department, including documenting employee attitudes to flexible and part-time work practices in general.

The survey was divided into four sections:
- Sociodemographic Classification

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- Organisational Classification
- Current Work Arrangement
- Attitudes to a Flexible Workplace

A total of 104 responses were collected, representing approximately 63% of the total number of employees in the Group. Twelve respondent's answers were excluded from data analysis as they were subject to multiple sources of incompletion or errors associated with non-response; a total number of 92 respondents were used in subsequent analysis. Because this sample is based on those who agreed to participate, no estimates of theoretical sampling errors were calculated, and the data could not be weighted to reflect the total composition of employees in HEG.

The gender breakdown of respondents was 66% female compared to 33% male. The 25-34 age group (34%) made up the largest respondent age grouping, followed by the 18-24 age bracket (30.1%). With regards to the highest degree earned among respondents" 45.6% had a bachelor's degree, followed by 34% with a postgraduate qualification. Nearly half of all respondents (46.6%) indicated they were a parent or a caretaker of a dependent person, including children. Over 80% of respondents worked full-time and have been working for the HEG for less than 5 years. In terms of the respondents' organisational distribution, nearly one third of respondents (31%) occupied an EL Level 1 position, followed by APS 6 (21%) and APS Level 4 (15%). Finally, the Help & Provider Integrity branch (25.5%) and Governance, Quality & Access branch (23.5%) made up the largest representation of respondents, followed by an average of 15% representation amongst remaining branches.

The Regional Rural and Remote Education Review branch was not represented, and each branch contained a variable representation of teams. For a detailed summary of survey representation, please refer to the (socio)demographic and organisational classification sections in Appendix A. For an overview of survey questions, please refer to Appendix B.

8.2 Interviews

Follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 survey respondents in order to further pursue in-depth information regarding current work arrangements and workflow

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management processes, as well as attitudes to flexible work arrangements. This also provided the Team with an opportunity to work more directly and personally with respondents in order to probe deeper into their opinions and impressions regarding workplace culture.

Overall, there was a minimum of 10 interview questions, with each interview session going for approximately 40 minutes and facilitated via either teleconferencing, in person or by phone. To ensure an equal representation of HEG branches, a preselected list of 15 HEG employee members from across 6 different branches was provided by HEG and further narrowed by the Team list to 10 employees based on their completion status of the survey, as well as general time constraints and availability. At least one out of the six branches were represented among the final 10 selected HEG interviewee members. Interviewees were contacted to arrange an interview time and encouraged to complete the survey if they hadn't already, so that survey results analysis could take place prior to the interviews. This allowed the Team to familiarise themselves with the participant's circumstances in order to dedicate a portion of the interview time to pose additional questions.

While the interviewer introduced the purpose of the interview as relating to the context of flexible work arrangements and agile project work flows located within the wider economy, detailed representations of the concepts were not explicitly defined in order to allow the subject to express their interpretations within the context of their own work experiences. Interviewees were then asked general questions relating to their role and responsibilities in HEG, such as the projects they were working on, activities performed on a day-to-day basis, a description of deliverables, as well as the tools and software used during project workflow situations. The middle of the interview comprised a more standardised set of questions relating to their opinions and attitudes to HEG's planned changes, their innovative potential, the collaborative capacity of HEG, aspects of their workplace culture, perspectives on agile project methodology and finally, the interviewee's personal work-life balance and general wellbeing sentiments. At the end of the interview, subjects were given the opportunity to add any comments or suggestions. For an overview of interview procedure and questions, see Appendix C.

8.3 Methodology

8.3.1 Survey

A multivariate analysis of the results was conducted in order to identify existing correlations between the sociodemographic and organisational classification of survey responses, and their attitudes regarding flexible work arrangements. This analysis was completed using the open-source statistical software, R-Studio (R Core Team, 2016). Conditional inference trees, a type of recursive partitioning, were regarded as the most suitable statistical model for a multivariate analysis given that high multicollinearity was expected and that such models deal well with datasets containing a high number of predictors and a small sample size.

All survey questions relating to 'Current Work Arrangement' and 'Attitudes to a Flexible Workplace' were separately treated as dependent variables against a 12-way interaction with all (socio)demographic factors and organisational classification variables. The final results are detailed in sections 8.4.2 and 8.4.3.

8.3.2 Interviews

Subsequent to the interviews, recordings were listened to by the Team so that key comments and insights could be extracted and annotated. An intra-speaker thematic analysis was conducted in order to examine patterns of meaning and attitudes relating to single interviewee responses, followed by an inter-speaker thematic analysis to determine underlying similarities or contrasts between interviewees. Results were synthesised into an affinity map to allow for a clearer representation of a large number of interrelated ideas between various groups and individuals (see 8.5).

8.4 Findings from Survey

8.4.1 Summary

Nearly 62% of all respondents had requested or expressed interest in a flexible work arrangement with HEG that was subsequently approved. No respondents indicated a circumstance whereby a request for a flexible work arrangement was not approved.

Regarding the portion of respondents who are currently experiencing a flexible working arrangement in their branch, 63.2% of them negotiated the terms of their flexible work

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arrangement after they occupied their role. Part-time work arrangements (or reduced working hours) was by far the most common form of flexible work arrangement among respondents (42.1%), followed by flexible hours of work with varying start and finish times (28.9%). Further, family responsibilities - including caring for children, elders or other relatives - was cited as the most common reason influencing respondents' decision to take up a flexible work arrangement (65.8%), followed by a desire for personal flexibility and seeking work-life balance (23.7%). In light of the recent younger age cohort HEG appointments, the latter figure may rise in the future.

In terms of respondents not currently engaged in a flexible work arrangement, 75% of them indicated they would be interested in requesting a flexible work arrangement sometime in the future, with working places (83.7%) and working hours (73.1%) comprising the arrangement types the respondents would be most interested in. The desire for personal flexibility and an improved work-life balance proved to be the most significant factor influencing the respondents' desire to request a flexible work arrangement in the future (88.4%).

On average, respondents perceived flexible work arrangements to slightly negatively impact prospects for future career opportunities (38; 1=Neg.-100=Pos.). Among various cultural values presented to respondents, communication (90.2%) and trust (87.0%) were on the whole identified as the most important underpinning to a flexible work arrangement. Working hours (84.8%) and working places (78.3%) were identified to best support positive and productive employee engagement. Flexible work arrangements are perceived to positively impact productivity (31.9%), quality (28.3%) and task delegation (24.7%), while negatively impacting workflows in terms of communication and teamwork (25%) and timelines and schedules (21.7%). Finally, existing tools technologies, (82.6%) including digital platforms and applications, used by respondents, are believed to support flexible work practices. For a more detailed summary of all survey responses to respondents' current work arrangements and their attitudes to flexible work practice, see Appendix A.

8.4.2 Current Working Arrangements

Results obtained from the survey revealed the following.

Flexible work employees

A figure of 69.5% of respondents who requested or expressed interest in a flexible work arrangement were a parent/caretaker. This explains why family responsibilities was cited as the most significant factor (63.8%) influencing a respondent's decision to be engaged in their current flexible work arrangement; this was followed by a desire for personal flexibility and work-life balance (25.0%).

Non-Flexible Work Employees

The survey showed that;

- 76.7% percent of respondents who have not requested a flexible work arrangement would be interested in requesting one in the future
- 64.3% would be interested in flexible working places
- 60.7% would be interested in flexible working hours
- 10.7% would be interested in agile working practices

Influencing factors

The various factors influencing their decision to request a flexible work arrangement in the future include:

- Personal flexibility (67.8%)
- Education/training (32.1%)
- Commute (25.0%)
- Family responsibilities (23.2%)
- Volunteering (7.1%)

The Research Policy and Programs branch accounts for 54.5% of all full-time respondents engaged in a flexible working arrangement involving flexible hours of work. The Funding and Students branch contains the most diverse range of flexible working arrangement types, including part-time staff, staff on compressed working weeks, employees with flexible hours of work, and staff working with mobility/remotely.

8.4.3 Attitudes to a Flexible Workplace

Results obtained from the survey revealed the following:

Productivity

- 100% of respondents who have a disability and 63.6% of respondents who are a parent/caretaker perceive a positive impact to productivity
- 13.6% of respondents who do not have a disability or are a parent/caretaker perceive a negative impact to productivity
- 22.8% of all respondents perceive neither a positive nor negative impact

Quality

- 56.8% of respondents who have a disability and 61.4% of respondents who are a parent/caretaker perceive a positive impact to quality
- 40% of all respondents perceive neither a positive nor negative impact to quality

Communication and teamwork

- 56.1% of respondents who are a parent/caretaker perceive a positive impact to communication and teamwork
- 43.2% of respondents who do not have a disability or are a parent/caretaker perceive a negative impact on communication and teamwork
- 25% of all respondents perceive neither a positive nor negative impact to quality

Task delegation

- 71.4% of respondents who have a disability and 45.4% of parents/caretakers perceive a positive impact to task delegation
- 25% of respondents who do not have a disability or are a parent/caretaker perceive a negative impact to task delegation
- 33.7% of all respondents perceive neither a positive nor negative impact to quality

Reporting and monitoring

- 57.1% of respondents who have a disability and 45.4% of parents/caretakers perceive a positive impact to task delegation
- 25% of respondents who do not have a disability or are a parent/caretaker perceive a negative impact to task delegation
- 41.3% of all respondents perceive neither a positive nor negative impact to quality

Timeline and schedule

- 42.8% of respondents who have a disability and 38.6% of parents/caretakers perceive a positive impact to task delegation
- 20.4% of respondents who do not have a disability or are a parent/caretaker perceive a negative impact to task delegation
- 41.3% of all respondents perceive neither a positive nor negative impact to quality

Tools

With regards to tools that could be used to support flexible work arrangements, 68.2% of all parents/caretakers selected **project methodologies** as a valuable tool to support flexible work arrangements. The consensus in favour of project methodologies was more equally split among non-parents/caretakers, with 47.9% in favour and 52.1% not selecting it at all. With regards to using communication protocols to support flexible work arrangements, this was selected by 85.7% of all respondents with a disability, compared to 40% of respondents without a disability.

Employee engagement

There appears to be a strong effect between salary classification levels and age, and the perception of which flexible work type best supports positive and productive employee engagement. For instance, over 83.3% of respondents between the APS3-5 level do not perceive working practices as supporting employee engagement. This closely correlates with 89.5% of all respondents aged 18-34 who also did not select working practices as flexible work arrangements that could support employee engagement.

This attitude changes as the classification level and age level increases For instance, 40% of all APS6-SES Band 1 workers perceive working practices as a strategy to support employee engagement in a flexible work arrangement, and this attitude is more prevalent among full-time staff than part-time staff, and among employees in higher age brackets.

8.5 Findings from interviews

8.5.1 Operational factors – the nature of daily work

While participants reported being able to plan their tasks for a specific day, work tends to be evenly split between planned work and ad-hoc, unplanned work. Senior participants reported having many stakeholders at any given time which required consultation to

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enable completion of allocated tasks or pieces of work. Team collaboration and planning often occurs in team stand-ups or work-in-progress meetings at various intervals. Each team contains a mixture of seniority levels, with lower level team members heavily dependent on "supervisors" for task allocation, prioritisation and approval of work.

Everyday activities and communication are usually carried out through email and/or phone calls and face-to-face conversations. A small number of participants identified Skype as a tool utilised for work chat functions, and limited use of teleconferencing for meetings. Most of the work is completed through an internal system called "The Hub", facilitating senior approvals and workflow, including provision for participants to access HR functions and forms. Some participants reported using OneNote for collaboration on certain files and documents, and cited limited standards or templates relating to commonly produced documents, using previously created documents as precedents and examples of format.

8.5.2 Definition of "flexible work"

The research found the concept of flexible work within this Higher Education Group is limited; "flexible work arrangements" are primarily associated with reduced work hours, namely part-time working arrangements. Flexibility in starting and finishing hours are common, however this was reported only possible within 7am - 7pm. There appeared to be limited formal agreements around flexible working conditions for work outside the office. Although participants reported being able to complete limited work outside of the office the general sentiment was work, even for those on flexible work agreements, was expected to be completed in the office.

8.5.3 Attitudes towards flexible work

General attitude - Attitudes towards flexible work within HEG are generally positive, with 39% of survey respondents indicating requesting flexible work arrangements that had been approved. Of these respondents 63% had their arrangement approved after the participant had occupied the role. This indicates not only a willingness of management to provide these working conditions but also an environment where employees are not apprehensive to approach management to request more flexible working conditions.

Variability of attitudes - branches and roles

Participants indicated access and orientations towards flexible work depended on which branch you worked in and the attitudes of management; while some were fully supportive and proactive regarding flexible work, others were just "towing the line" in relation to flexible work requests. Further analysis of attitudes within individual branches and roles demonstrated inconsistencies in attitudes towards flexible work dependent on the branch and team participants and their level of seniority. While positive attitudes indicated an environment of possibility, negative sentiments were generally related to the attitudes of senior management.

"The concern that I'm not seen as sufficiently 'dedicated' given I am an EL2"

"If I think my managers would consider the request an imposition"

"In order to retain high performing people, the group needs to become more supportive and accepting of flexible working arrangements, particularly at EL levels."

8.5.4 Characteristics of those on Flexible Work Arrangements

The research uncovered a prevalent attitude around types of people who should be and were awarded flexible work arrangements; those with outside commitments, and those who had "earned the right" through loyalty, hard work and earning the trust of their supervisors. Equally, there appears to be a universal perception that flexible working conditions are only reserved for those with outside responsibilities - namely parents, students or those with a disability or illness. Participants who did not have external "important" commitments did not feel they had a good enough reason to request a flexible work arrangement. The research showed factors within external commitment also came into play such as the age of the children and if they are in school impacted the engagement of participants in requesting flexible work arrangements, and if they would be granted.

"I don't have a need for it in the foreseeable future - I don't have carer's responsibilities or any other responsibilities that would make it necessary - though if my circumstances change, I would reconsider."

"Depends on school for the kids and other family commitments. Youngest hasn't started school yet."

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"That it would not be approved as I don't have kids or a 'valid reason' to request working from home"

One of the strongest themes in the research findings was the concept of a flexible work arrangement as a reward, not a right. The second strongest is communication with 87% of participants indicating trust was the most important feature in a flexible work arrangement. Both research results are supported by a larger number of flexible work arrangements being approved after the participant had occupied the role for some time.

"I need to demonstrate my bona fides as an effective and reliable worker before I can make a case."

"Flexible work arrangements are definitely a privilege, not a right and should only be granted when communication, trust and most of all accountability are evident."

"Flexible work arrangements are acceptable if you're a good worker"

8.3.5 Barriers to introducing universal flexible work arrangements

Technology barriers

The research indicated an affinity between the issuing of equipment and the possibility of flexible work;

"As long as they give us laptops that can connect anywhere, anytime, that would help"

"…as long as the employee has the necessary IT equipment that would allow them to have flexible work arrangements, I think it is do-able."

However, it was reported that there is a lack of technology and technical systems, which hinders the ability to adopt flexible work practices. Currently communication, progress updates and knowledge sharing are said to take place primarily over email, phone and face-to-face meetings. Participants indicated that this could be made a lot easier through the introduction of systems and tools to enable these activities to take place remotely.

"It is less a matter of IT and infrastructure and more of working out how to keep individuals included on work discussions and involved with their teammates"

"I believe most positions require interaction with other team members. The ability to effectively communicate with team members can be impacted by flexible work arrangements. The impact would of course vary by position and the type of arrangements."

Workflow barriers

In keeping with the lack of tools and technology enabling flexible work, the lack of formal documented workflow processes limits the options for flexible work. This is enhanced by a heavy reliance on management and senior staff to assign, oversee and approve activities and tasks.

"How do you ensure individuals are just as effective when working away from a work setting and how do you support management when they are not working productively… maybe it comes down to tools and training to ensure that communication lines are strong"

This reliance on management was also shown to impact attitudes around the accessibility of flexible work for certain positions – particularly management. This can be seen where workflow requires input and approval from others within the team.

"Critical functions have to be fulfilled - as a Director, I have to be here to 'clear' material or have an arrangement with my BM for a 'trusted' EL1 to undertake that role so we meet increasing short timeframes for more info requests requiring higher and higher levels of clearance."

"Key team members need to be available for advice/decisions as otherwise the team may not be able to progress tasks. If the key team member is contactable (email/ phone) then there should be no issues. Phone access is important for faster clarification of issues"

"The ability to ensure all the work is done even when I'm not there. At the moment there isn't a lot of strong workflow management used in the teams to facilitate flexible work arrangements, and the nature of the APS means you're often waiting on/relying on decisions or responses from higher staff members which influence your use of time and ability to work flexibly."

Cultural barriers

The current collective definition of what constitutes flexible work and an ingrained "culture of presenteeism" is seen to limit the extent to which flexibility might be expanded to additional employees. There is a perception that the most productive work is done within the office, and a general expectation – particularly when it comes to meetings – that activities will take place in the office.

"For example, where I have worked previously, meeting requests would contain dial-in details. That isn't the case here and there is an expectation that you will be there in person."

"…there isn't much support for the idea of working from another location (i.e. home) as a permanent rather than ad-hoc arrangement. I think this is due to an unspoken perception of needing to be seen in the office."

"The idea that you always have to be seen sitting at your desk to be doing 'work'."

Finally, the inconsistency of support and positive attitudes from senior management inhibits creativity and innovation from employees when it comes to flexible work processes and discourages employees from approaching their supervisor or manager to request a flexible working arrangement.

"I enjoy working the hours I do. my boss is extremely flexible as it is."

"If I think my managers would consider the request an imposition"

9. Enabling Flexible Work and Project-Based Workflows
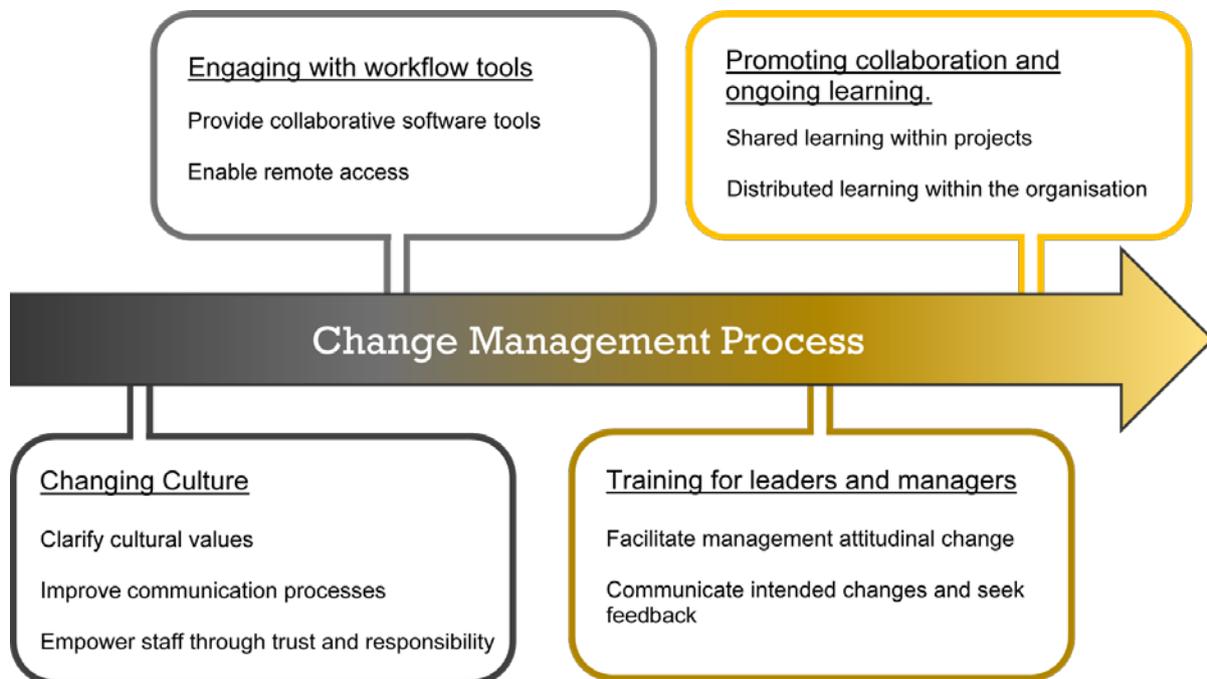
The following outlines the areas in which the Team will be making recommendations. Some existing structures and processes of HEG will be identified to support the implementation of recommendations. The "four capabilities" framework of sensemaking, relating, visioning and inventing (Ancona et al., 2007, p.95) will be used to identify how recommendations will support the transition to flexible work being a standard business practice of HEG.

9.1 Transforming workplace culture

The Team believes that a transformation of workplace culture is needed to evolve a new employment relationship where flexible work arrangements are a defining characteristic of an empowered workforce able to engage agile workflows.

In this regard, the findings from our research suggests there are currently existing cultural barriers likely to thwart such potential in relation to negative attitudes from some senior managers regarding flexible working possibilities and general perceptions about what

constitutes productive work. Hence, in order for the change process to be effective these beliefs will need to be addressed.

In doing so we recommend the following processes be put in place focusing on encouraging middle/senior managers to feel both comfortable with the introduction of flexible work arrangements, at the same time as being confident that they will continue to be able to deliver on their KPIs as a senior leader within the higher education grouping. Key to this change process is that the training that is undertaken at the management level should have a focus on the benefits of project-based workflows, particularly in the area of self-organising teams and the creation of an empowered workforce. To facilitate this, our research has indicated that it is vital to foster and encourage the development of an environment of trust and collaboration, where team members are supported to share their opinions in a collaborative and collegial working environment.

Some specific examples of how this can be achieved include:
- Sharing agendas well ahead of meetings in order to allow attendees to have the opportunity to plan their input prior to the meeting taking place.
- Holding knowledge exchange sessions where team members are encouraged to present on a topic of their interest in relation to the work processes they are involved in or would like to contribute to.
- Regular stand-ups and WIP meetings that provide visibility for team members in relation to each other's work, along with the opportunity to collaborate and help remove road-blocks.
- Set up specific touchpoints and systems for knowledge sharing to avoid knowledge silos and encourage collaboration.
- Introduce systems and software such as Microsoft Teams (see software matrix) to facilitate the sharing of ideas, knowledge and allow for ongoing collaboration.

Monitor and measure success of flexible work initiatives through:
- Regular "health checks" of organisational culture by way of surveys and spot interviews measured against set KPIs
- Set and measure KPIs around meeting flexible work requests and the number of flexible work arrangements

9.2 Training and support for leaders and managers

The research findings identify focus areas for leaders and managers to understand and address barriers to implementing flexible work arrangements in project-based workflow. Managers and leaders need to first understand the integral role they play in leading cultural transformation, and in enabling and encouraging flexible work arrangements. It is recommended that training and support be provided to leaders and managers to:

- provide consistent and intentional messaging to staff regarding flexible work arrangements in relation to requirements around KPI's, and communicating role expectations;
- enable them to communicate a climate of openness regarding negotiating flexible work arrangements and to understand how best to assess and monitor a flexible work proposal;

  o manage any potential risks associated with the arrangements;

  o understand how to ensure the flexible working arrangements operate well for both the individual and the team;

  o develop an ability to continuously monitor and evaluate flexible working arrangements;

- develop and utilise strategies to effectively manage staff working remotely when there are emergent issues (e.g., have contact protocols in place and guidelines that support autonomous work practices that not only meet individual needs but support the project team to meet project demands.);
- further develop skills in negotiation and communication capabilities; ensuring the ability to establish clear performance expectations for agile teams, and coach team members to manage their own time and collaborate effectively with colleagues too;
- encourage leaders to share strategies across branches and groups covering successful strategies that build a sense of team culture based on high performance, trusting relationships and productive outcomes;
- support the collective sensemaking among managers of the benefits of flexible work practices by visiting a workplace where flexible work arrangements have been successfully implemented; and
- identify flexible working champions across the Group to support managers and employees in their negotiations with flexible work arrangements; liaise with HR;

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and be a contact for staff to approach if they are not comfortable speaking with their immediate manager or team in the first instance.

9.3 Promoting collaboration and ongoing learning

Our interview findings indicate that a culture of strong collaboration already exists in some teams within the HEG, such as the National Research Infrastructure Policy and Engagement team. There is also evidence of an increasing capacity regarding training in relation to agile workflows, such as in the Strategy Unit team. These practices of supporting training in agile workflows should be supported across all levels of staffing, with KPIs to monitor the participation in such training and development initiatives. Purposeful sharing of the teachings from agile workflow training should be embraced and supported to further build a culture that collectively embraced such practices.

However, interview evidence demonstrated a lack of uniformity among staff members in terms of access to agile workflow training and shared knowledge of fundamental agile workflow concepts.

Therefore, in order to strengthen the collaborative capacity of HEG as a whole it is recommended that:
- more broad-based access to agile workflow training be provided.
- The application of agile teamwork processes be managed through the leadership group. This will require separate training for leaders and managers (see section 9.2) in order to ensure that the appropriate teamwork and collaborative practices are being facilitated correctly among team members.
- Create communication protocols to inform different workflows:
    - Always provide dial-in details to meeting invites
    - Collaboratively plan team schedules once flexible work arrangements are negotiated (e.g., everyone in office between 10am and 2pm on a Tuesday).
    - Share team calendars, and use consistent calendar management, so that all team members are able to see when a team member can be contacted.
    - Communication protocols are collaboratively reviewed/updated every 3 to 6 months as part of professional learning

This form of synchronized interaction is a type of work practice that allows group members to specify when interaction, contributions and member presence should occur,

thus reducing disruptive interruptions outside such times and giving professionals more time to concentrate individually on their 'real work' (Perlow, 1999).

- Escalated workflow - consult on agreement for remote collaboration when required for emergent tasks, e.g., remote log in, phone availability. (See Appendix E for individual planning considerations that could be considered in forming team communication protocols).
- Build scope for professional learning and reflection into branch and team meeting schedules, e.g. allow space for teams to share how they have applied agile workflow strategies.
- Engage relevant teams to present findings on pilot use of agile tools and methodologies, e.g., feedback on collaborative IT tools (e.g. Microsoft Teams).
- Leadership group to collect feedback on implementation of Agile team workflow methodologies (e.g. through Group Consultative Committee or the leadership group sharing KPI achievements to foster and celebrate these workflow practice)
- Build and maintain capacity for team-centred coordination: encourage cross-training between team members to increase their generalist abilities, promote group problem-solving and create sustainable teams where each member is encouraged to also be a leader in relation to their respective area/skillset. This communication building scope also enhances shared awareness of roles and responsibilities and can allow professionals to not necessarily be present all at the same time (Dyke et al., 2007), e.g., each member can chair/contribute to team meetings on a weekly or monthly cycle.

9.4 Engaging Work-Flow Tools

Technology & Workflow barriers:

Currently HEG methods for collaboration, tracking workflow, file sharing and communicating varies between different teams in the department, which means there is inconsistency in the usage of various forms of communication and scheduling tools such as Outlook.

It is therefore recommended that HEG:

- Have a clear purpose outlined for choosing a collaborative platform to increase workflow visibility for all users in the team

- Provide training and support to increase understanding the platform and reduce complexity in use and uptake by the user

- Have a management strategy for reduction and phasing out of other platforms

How to reduce the gaps:

Develop a collective learning structure, like a communities-of-practice approach, and systematically provide scope for reflective practice based on a common platform; a commonly used collaboration tool, coupled with agreed usage patterns. This will enable:

- Increased knowledge flows
- Accelerated learning amongst/between teams
- Measurement of progress in a concise format even for complex processes
- Dynamic changes and flexibility to aid team member visibility

Tool selection:

Our research findings on various platforms are defined in Appendix F and are focused on the following:

- Low value implementation
- Leverage of existing infrastructure
- Security and containment of data within a trusted platform already utilised by HEG
- Existing training and online tools for e-learning

It is recommended that Microsoft Teams is the selected collaborative platform, which is capable of being integrated into HEG's existing Microsoft suite of products. We understand implementation cannot be conducted without discussion, review, agreement and funding.

9.5 Summary of Recommendations

Below is a summary of recommendations with possible timelines.

	Now	Next	Later
9.1 Transforming workplace culture			
Foster and encourage an environment of trust and collaboration, where team members feel like their voice is heard:	■	■	
o Sharing agendas well ahead of meetings and allow attendees to share their input prior to the meeting taking place	■		
o Regular standups and WIP meetings giving team members visibility into each other's work and the opportunity to collaborate and help remove road blocks	■		
o Knowledge exchange sessions where team members are encouraged to present on a topic of their interest		■	
o Set up specific touchpoints and systems for knowledge sharing to avoid knowledge silos and encourage collaboration.		■	
o Introduce systems and software that facilitate the sharing of ideas, knowledge and ongoing collaboration such as Microsoft Teams (see software matrix)			■
Monitor and measure success of flexible work initiatives	■	■	
o Set and measure KPIs around meeting flexible work requests and the number of flexible work arrangements	■		
o Regular "health check" of organisational culture by way of surveys and spot interviews measured against set KPIs		■	

	Now	Next	Later
9.2 Training and support for leaders and managers			
provide consistent and intentional messaging to staff about flexible work arrangements, requirements around KPI's, communicating roles and expectations.	■		
enable them to communicate openness to negotiate flexible work arrangements and understand how to best assess and monitor a flexible work proposal		■	
Develop and utilise strategies to effectively manage staff working remotely when there are emergent issues (e.g. escalated contact protocols)		■	
Further develop skills in negotiation and communication; ability to establish clear performance expectations for agile teams, and coach their team members to manage their own time and collaborate effectively with colleagues.		■	
Encourage leaders to share strategies across branches and group on successful strategies that build team culture based on high performance, trust and outcomes	■		
Identify Flexible Working Champions across the Group to support managers and employees to negotiate flexible work arrangements; liaise with HR; and be a contact for staff to approach if they are not if comfortable speaking with their manager or team in the first instance.		■	

	Now	Next	Later
9.3 Promoting collaboration and ongoing learning			
Provide more broad-based access to agile workflow training. Interview evidence demonstrated a lack of uniformity among staff members in terms of access to agile workflow training and shared knowledge of fundamental agile workflow concepts	▓		
Create communication protocols to inform different workflows: Everyday workflow o Always provide dial-in details to meeting invites o Collaboratively planned team schedules once flexible work arrangements are negotiated o Sharing team calendars, and using consistent calendar management o Communication protocols are collaboratively reviewed/updated every 3 to 6 months as part of professional learning	▓		
Escalated workflow - consult on agreement for remote collaboration when required by emergent tasks. E.g. – remote log in, phone availability		▓	
Build professional learning and reflection into branch and team meeting schedule e.g. teams share how they have applied agile workflow strategies.	▓		
engage relevant teams to present findings on pilot use of agile tools and methodologies ego feedback on collaborative IT tools (e.g. Microsoft Teams).	▓		
Leadership group to collect feedback on implementation of Agile methodologies of team workflow	▓		
Build and maintain capacity for team-centred coordination: encourage cross-training between team members to increase			▓

their generalist abilities, promote group problem-solving and create a sustainable team where each member is encouraged to also be a leader.

	Now	Next	Later
9.4 Engaging with workflow tools			
Have a clear purpose for choosing a collaborative platform to increase workflow visibility for all users in the team			
Provide training and support to reduce complexity in use and uptake of user in understanding the platform			
Have a management strategy for reduction and phasing out of other platforms			
Develop a collective learning structure, communities of practice and concise systematic collection of reflective practice based on a common platform; a commonly used collaboration tool or tool coupled with agreed usage patterns. This will enable: ● Increased knowledge flow ● Accelerated learning between teams ● Measurement of progress in a concise format even for complex process ● Dynamic changes and flexibility to add and remove team member visibility			
It is recommended that Microsoft Teams is the selected collaborative platform integrating into HEG's existing Microsoft suite of products.			

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10. Appendix

10.1 Appendix A

A full summary of responses to the survey questions may be accessed [here](#).

10.2 Appendix B

A copy of the department survey may be downloaded [here](#).

10.3 Appendix C

An overview of interview procedure and questions may be viewed [here](#).

10.4 Appendix D

Tips for Managers may be viewed [here](#).

10.5 Appendix E

Considerations when putting together a communication plan may be viewed [here](#).

10.6 Appendix F

A tools comparison chart may be viewed [here](#).

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