Empowering Team Culture

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Executive Summary

The purpose of this project was to explore teams and team culture. The project team members had all worked in work teams that were functional and worked well, and in dysfunctional teams where the members did not work well together towards a common purpose or goal. The Leadership Development for Women (LDW) project group were interested in why some teams seemed to work well and were productive, and others did not. The project group saw the opportunity to support and facilitate the development of stronger team cultures, through identifying specific approaches or ways of working, which in turn would lead to positive changes in people, productivity and feeling valued within Charles Sturt University.

The LDW project group was drawn together as a result of trying to understand why some teams were productive and team members seemed generally happy, and this formed the basis of the project. Most of the team members had either experienced or seen productive and functional teams in their workplace. To understand how teams worked, initial investigations led to defining teams and understanding what behaviours assisted teams to work well, and those which did not. The rationale for exploring team culture was both personal and professional; the LDW project team members wanted to understand how teams worked better, to be the positive change in their workplaces, and to assist change to lead to positive outcomes and potentially better productivity across the university. In order to do this, the LDW project team investigated what systems or tools currently exist within Charles Sturt University to facilitate and support the development of teams and to promote positive team culture. This led us to the Charles Sturt University Capability Framework.

The Capability Framework is a tool that helps foster a common language around desired skills and behaviours used by individuals, teams and leaders. It identifies a series of above and below the line behaviours (a common team culture tool) to ensure people understand acceptable and appropriate workplace behaviour.

The methodology this project used was survey design. While this usually is considered a quantitative approach, the LDW project team used a reflexive approach where knowledge was constructed using both reflection and the Charles Sturt University Capability Framework. The survey was sent to the participants and facilitators of the 2019 LDW group.

The survey was completed by 22 participants. Key findings were that participants felt encouraged to share new ideas, celebrate successes and recognising achievements. Further responses indicated that greater consultation with team members and proactive communication would strengthen teams.

Recommendations were that an ELMO module be developed using scenario-based learning, which would help individuals reflect on self-behaviours and behaviours experienced in specific teams. This module would then be built into the team charter process the Division of Human Resources (DHR) is currently piloting across the university. The intention is that the ELMO module in conjunction with building team charters would help staff in familiarising and practising behaviours that build a stronger team culture.

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1 Exploring the Problem

The purpose of this project was to explore teams and team culture. The LDW project team members had all worked in work teams that were functional and worked well, and in dysfunctional teams where the members did not work well together towards a common purpose or goal. This group was interested in why some teams seemed to work well and were productive and others were not. The project group saw the opportunity to create stronger team cultures, which in turn would lead to positive changes in people, productivity and feeling valued. The intent, therefore, was to identify specific approaches or ways of working which build stronger team culture. The team was interested to find tools to support teams and team leaders in finding ways to work together effectively. The investigation led to the Capability Framework that Charles Sturt University had created.

The Capability Framework was developed to help foster a shared language to support teams, individuals and leaders to work together well. Within the LDW project team, the professional staff had either seen or heard of the Framework, whereas the academic staff had not heard of it. When members of the project team asked others in their work team about the Capability Framework, there was a lack of awareness of the document and its use. Further investigation led to the recently developed team charter process where teams get together and decide how they will work together. To assist teams, leaders and individual do this, team charters and action plans are being created across the university that align to the university values and Capability Framework. They also focus on development and provide individuals, teams and leaders with the opportunity to make personal commitments.

1.1   What is a team? – Discussion Document for LDW Group/ Team

1.1.1   Introduction

As part of the LDW course, the group self-selected into project groups or teams to complete the group project. The project team members had experienced poor behaviour that impacted on how teams function and saw an opportunity to help build stronger team culture across Charles Sturt University.

Discussion surrounding the difference between groups and teams that the LDW project team members had worked with over their careers took place, and the project team began to look at the tools at Charles Sturt University to support and create positive change around team culture. To have a better understanding of teams in general, some definitions were sought.

1.1.2   Definitions

The LDW project team determined that understanding what a team was would help identify where groups of people worked together and how they either did not share a common goal or meet the conditions for an effective team. These led to the definitions below.

A group "is not necessarily a team. A group can have individuals with varied interests, attitude as well as thought processes. It is not necessary that the group members have a common objective or a common goal to achieve" (Management Study Guide, 2019). A team can be defined as "A team is a group of individuals, all working together for a common purpose. The individuals comprising a team ideally should have

common goals, common objectives and more or less think on the same lines" (Management Study Guide, 2019).

The University of Washington (2019) has some conditions that make up an effective team. These include:

1. The purpose, mission, or main objective is known and understood by all team members.
2. Communication in the team is open, direct and honest.
3. Sufficient leadership is available in the team.
4. There is regular review of how well the team is performing toward achieving its purpose.
5. There is an agreed organizational structure to the team.
6. Adequate resources are available to permit the team to perform its function, including skills, tools, facilities, and budgets.
7. Synergy exists, so the team performs in a way that is greater than the sum of its parts.

A third reference puts forward a useful analogy for understanding a team: "The ten thousand runners in the New York City marathon race have a common goal or purpose. However, they are not a team. They are, in fact, in competition with each other. Teamwork requires interdependence— the working together of a group of people with a shared objective. More specifically, the only way the runners can reach their goal is by competitive efforts" (Parker, 2008, p. 51). This is quite useful to think about because interdependence is important here, and this analogy may also help us to understand why some teams are not as effective as others. The other interesting point about teams is their longevity. For example, a work unit may be formed and remain fairly static in its goals and objectives, even though some of the individual members may change, whereas teams may be brought together for short term interaction (such as this project team).

1.1.3 What about Charles Sturt University?

Charles Sturt University has some factors that make it different to a traditional university. While many universities have embraced online learning, often this is offered from a single campus where teams or groups are co-located. When thinking about both groups and teams at Charles Sturt University – there are various examples and all have different (and subjective) interpretations around these words. Some examples include:

- Academic schools – divided geographically but theoretically part of the same team, working towards common goals
- Divisions and other professional business units – could be considered more a group than a team e.g. can work within the same division/business unit but on teams with different priorities, objectives etc.
- This project team and other cross divisional/faculty project teams – from different areas across the university, different backgrounds (academic vs professional staff) and different campus locations but are working together to achieve a common goal and deliver a successful project
- Charles Sturt University employees on a particular campus – a group that works together only through proximity but could be working on various different things

1.2 Personal Reflection on Team Behaviours

The LDW project team identified some behaviours that had previously been demonstrated by teams that functioned well and some behaviours by teams that were viewed as being less functional or dysfunctional

(both in terms of team member happiness and productivity). These behaviours are listed in Table 1 below. Part of what was identified as a key aspect of a functional, productive team was the role of a team leader. It is clear that effective leaders help to facilitate team culture by displaying examples of acceptable team behaviour for their team members, leading by example and helping to ensure positive team outcomes.

Table 1 - Project Team Identification of Positive and Negative Behaviours

Aspects of Good Teams	Aspects of Bad Teams
Communicate well	Silos – do not share information
Wants everyone to succeed	Withholds information for own gain
Trust	Lack of professional trust
Open communication pathways	Fear
Shared vision (same goal and willingness to work towards it – we all want to end up at same endpoint)	No shared vision
Learning from each other in the team	Everyone has their own agenda
Openness to change	People avoiding communication with others
Feel safe to share ideas	Self-isolation
Positive achievements are celebrated no matter how small	Hostility
Role clarity	People talking about each other negatively
Support each other within team	Role uncertainty, lack of clarity - hiding behind this to not do job effectively
Encourage each other	Game playing and politics
Availability of staff to focus on work at hand - not be pulled constantly in other directions	
Work across business units – do not let politics get in the way	

1.3   Charles Sturt University Capability Framework

The Charles Sturt University Capability Framework has been mapped to university values and strategy to help build internal capabilities and foster a common language. It helps guide the behaviours of individuals, leaders and teams with real-world, easy to understand examples of how staff do and do not behave in certain situations to help enhance collaboration and understanding.

When the LDW project team started looking at research and personal experiences, the Capability Framework was suggested and decided that this resource would be beneficial to the team and the ethos of the project – leveraging opportunities to improve and build a stronger team culture across the university and empower teams to thrive.

Also discovered amongst the LDW project team was that the majority were unaware the Capability Framework existed and questioned what was being done to promote and educate staff about the resource. As such, the Capability Framework became the focus and key vehicle/resource of the project.

2 Finding a Solution

After speaking with a representative from DHR regarding the use of the Capability Framework across the university, the LDW project team were informed that team charter workshops are also planned as part of improving team culture.

The workshops use the Capability Framework as the key resource to facilitate discussions around:

- what a team wants to be known as
- what does team success look like
- what are the focus areas and priorities
- what do individuals need to focus on to support the overarching team

From here, teams create the team charter document and action plan with timings and responsibilities to ensure these activities take place. When the LDW project team reviewed the work DHR has already implemented, it was thought that further awareness and education regarding both the team charter and Capability Framework activities would be beneficial.

2.1   Creating awareness for self-reflection

By using the Charles Sturt University Capability Framework as the basis of the proposition, the LDW project team created the model below to help show how the awareness/self-reflection tool could be used as part of the current team charter activity process.
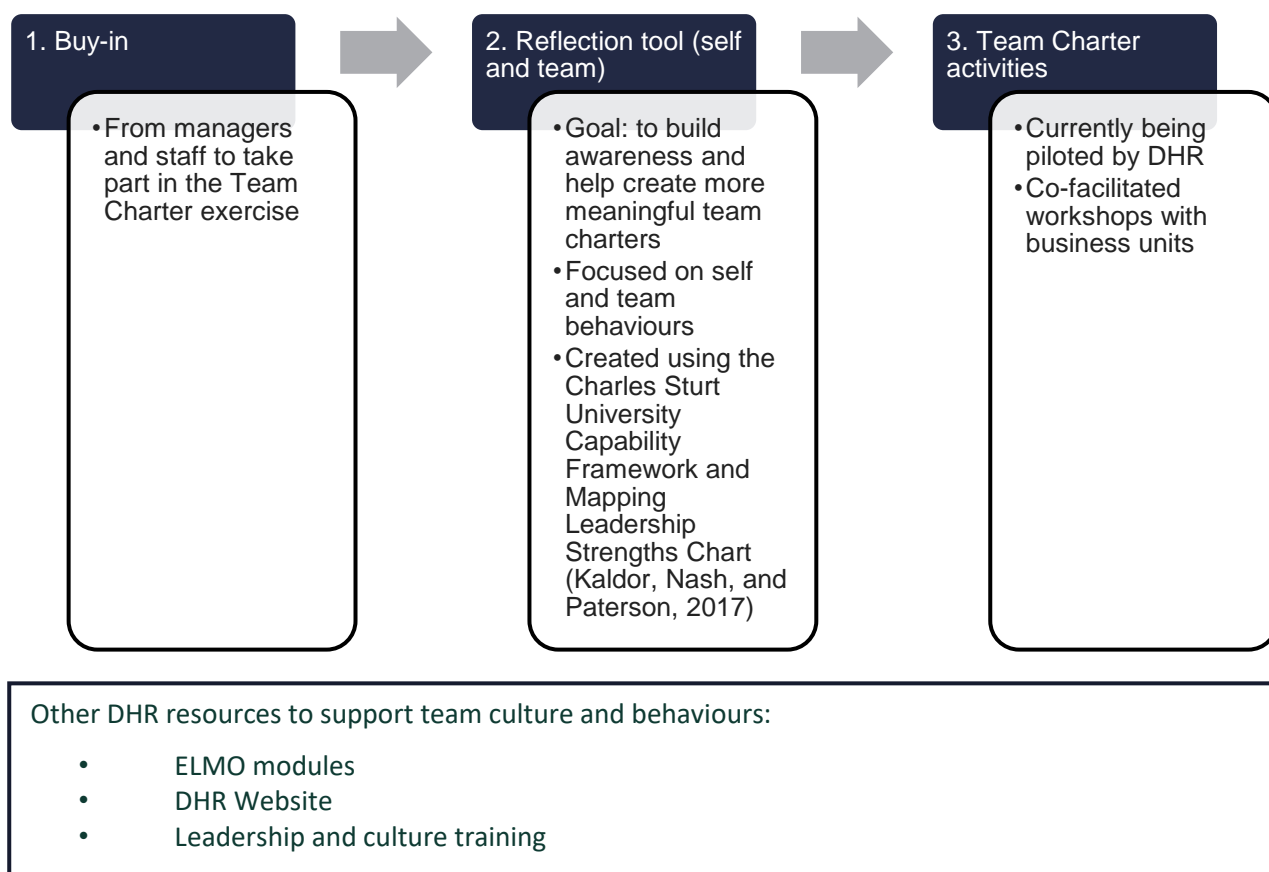
1. Buy-in	2. Reflection tool (self and team)	3. Team Charter activities
• From managers and staff to take part in the Team Charter exercise	• Goal: to build awareness and help create more meaningful team charters • Focused on self and team behaviours • Created using the Charles Sturt University Capability Framework and Mapping Leadership Strengths Chart (Kaldor, Nash, and Paterson, 2017)	• Currently being piloted by DHR • Co-facilitated workshops with business units

Other DHR resources to support team culture and behaviours:

- ELMO modules
- DHR Website
- Leadership and culture training

Figure 1 - Awareness/ Self-Reflection Model

2.2   Reflection Tool

Using the Charles Sturt University Capability Framework and Mapping Leadership Strengths Chart (Kaldor, Nash and Paterson, 2017), a self –reflection tool (in the form of a survey) called the Behaviours in Self and Team – Awareness Activity was developed. This survey was sent out to the 2019 LDW Programme participants asking them to focus on their everyday work teams rather than their LDW project teams to help ensure anonymity. By completing this exercise, participants could reflect upon their results, and a thematic analysis would help people see the major collated themes. Themes could then be explored further as part of the team charter and action plan development.

Advice was sought from the Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee before circulating the survey with the fellow LDW Programme participants. Advice from the Chair and Deputy Chair of Charles Sturt University Human Research Ethics Committee suggested that ethical approval was not needed.

3   Key Survey Responses

Survey responses were received from 22 participants from the LDW group. Selected responses are listed below.

We didn't feel overly confident in:
- **knowing our place** in the bigger picture
- our team **collaborating** when faced with challenges
- **raising concerns** or calling out bad behaviour

We:
- feel **encouraged** to share new ideas, approaches and insights
- celebrate success and **recognise** achievements
- feel **respected** and valued

We felt the following would help our teams:
- **Greater consultation** with team members
- **Proactive communication**
- Strengthened **collaboration**
- Being **empowered** to make decisions

Figure 2 – Key Survey Responses

Further reflection and evaluation of the questions within the reflection tool may be required, as there were no negative "self" responses. This may be due to the wording of some of the questions surrounding the identification of "self-behaviours" and also that there was no option to indicate a no action response allowing someone to realise that they were comfortable with their position / view / behaviour as it currently stands. The inclusion of questions which may allow a no action style of response could in fact boost confidence in asking the question "why?" thus allowing greater reflective thinking on someone's own individual behaviours.

4   Recommendations

Reflection and evaluation of the pilot responses in the self and team behaviour reflection tool led to the following vision for the future inclusion of a tool to facilitate and empower the development of appropriate self and team behaviours across Charles Sturt University.

Figure 3 – Recommendations

The end goal of this project would be that all staff are practising appropriate behaviours to improve team culture, which, in turn, would improve productivity and lead to more positive outcomes for people and the university.

To help Charles Sturt University achieve this goal, the LDW project team recommends that an ELMO module be developed. This would support team charter activities and guide the use of the values in action document (a companion document to the Capability Framework). An ELMO module that uses scenarios staff can understand and relate to will assist individuals to reflect upon their behaviour. It also has the added advantage of being more interactive and engaging than a survey. Compliance can also be monitored, and an assessment included to test staff on content they have just viewed. It is recommended that the Culture, Capability and Wellbeing team in DHR be responsible for creating a new ELMO module focussed on appropriate self and team behaviours and embedding this into the team charter activity process over the coming six months.

As part of the ELMO module, it is recommended that the capacity to undertake a self-reflection about self and team behaviours is included to assist the module to be more authentic in its application.

5 Leadership Journey & Reflection

Throughout the LDW program, all the participants have actively reflected on their leadership journey. For the LDW project team, this journey has been summarised in an infographic included below (Figure 4).
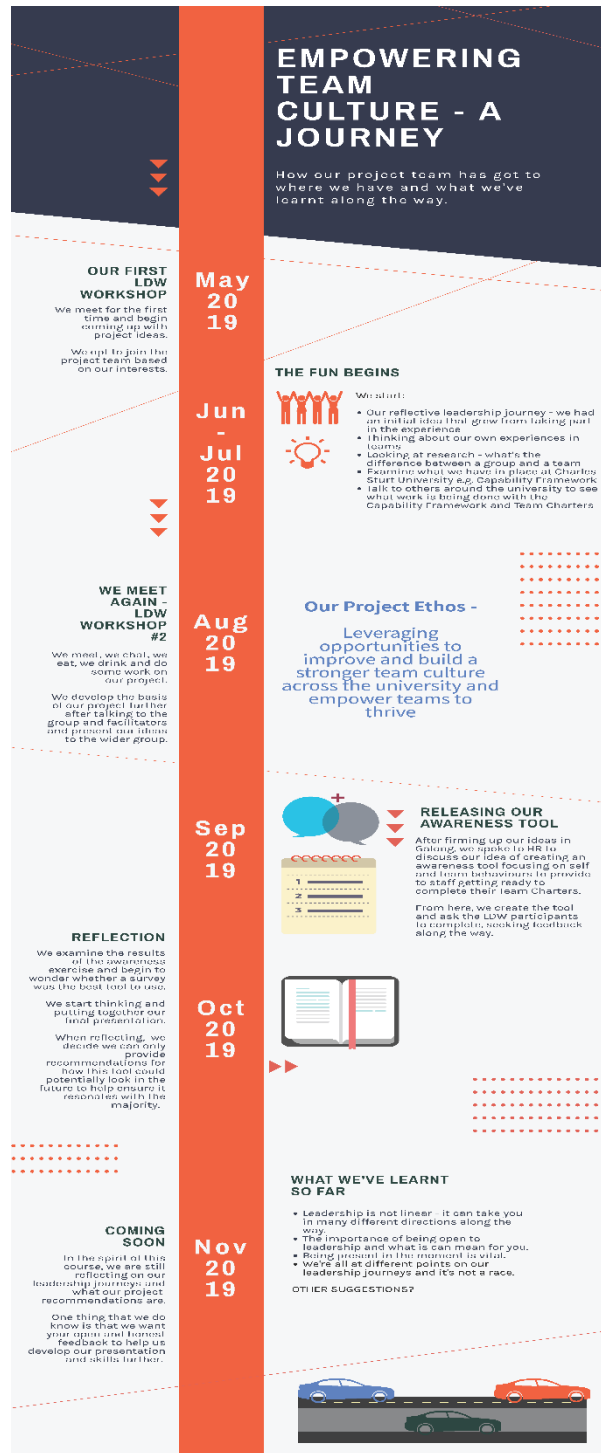

Figure 4 – Team Journey

Furthermore, as part of the LDW project team's reflective processes, each member identified one of the Charles Sturt University values, to align with their leadership journey reflection. Figure 5 below summarises the project team living the Charles Sturt University values.

Figure 5. Living the Charles Sturt University Values

6 References

Management Study Guide. (2019). *Understanding Team - What is a Team?* Retrieved May 28, 2019, from
https://www.managementstudyguide.com/understanding-team.htm

Parker, G. M. (2008). *Team Players and Teamwork: New Strategies for Developing Successful Collaboration.*
San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.

University of Washington. (2019). *Team - Definition*. Retrieved May 28, 2019, from
http://courses.washington.edu/ie337/team.pdf

Appendix 1. Initial LDW Team Plan

Introductory Workshop in Bathurst.

"Empowering team culture"

1. Situation ▷ Different personalities, perspectives + agendas; silo vs team approach
   Problem ▷ People w/in groups aren't working as effectively
   Opportunity ▷ To create stronger team culture
   Why? → Stronger team culture will lead to +ve changes in personnel, productivity + feeling valued. (ultimately better outcomes for students + staff) → CSU

2. Intention ▷ Identify successful team/team approaches, incl. characteristics of people/teams. (internal + external)

3. Edge ▷ Our own preconceived ideas/assumptions of teams/groups at CSU.

4. Help ▷ Talk to Deans/Executives of Divisions + HOS to I.D. teams (top down)
   + (bottom up) → Survey academic/general + professional, past participants
   ▷ interviews

5. Solutions/Actions ▷
   · Solution will be different depending on area. (appreciating differences/context)
   · Outcome - ID behaviours/characteristics + dynamics
     ↳ return to managers about implementation.

   - Current activities/training etc. being done
   - leaders in teams
   - looking @ teams overall to defn success
   - tools to collect data
     your voice/Fiona
   - RED award - team award success criteria & tell story

Appendix 2. Key Resources

2.1 Charles Sturt University Capability Framework

https://www.csu.edu.au/division/hr/current-staff/my-employment/professional-development/capability-framework

2.2 Reflection Tool

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Self-and-Team-Behaviours

2.3 Final Presentation

Wagga Wagga, 21 November, 2019: https://prezi.com/view/9vcP1L4ncaaFmLk3qPFf/