The Matrix: Successes in Adopting a Matrix Organisational Structure where Line Supervisors are Lynchpin Carers

Patrick Keleher, Elizabeth Taylor
Central Queensland University, Australia
p.keleher@cqu.edu.au, e.taylor@cqu.edu.au

Abstract - **The success of implementing a matrix organisational structure relies upon the 'pastoral care' role the line supervisor engages in with their staff. While a line supervisor needs to provide leadership they also need to establish an environment of dialogue, trust and care-giving to their staff in helping them perform, undertake professional development and achieve their career successes. The Heads of School role is a middle management position within a faculty. The role involves responsibility, as the line supervisor of the academic staff, in establishing and maintaining a matrix organisational structure. The success achieved is determined by the degree to which they are able to engage, equip and encourage staff to enact their individual roles and responsibilities. The multiple tensions arising from the expectations of academic and research leaders within the faculty requires the Head of School to become the broker for the individual staff member to ensure that their workload is appropriately assigned. Furthermore it is important that staff are being provided with the necessary challenges for self-development through reflective practice and the provision of new and varied experiences. Where necessary the Head of School may need to mentor staff or provide avenues for staff to engage with others to develop their knowledge and skills**

Index Terms - Head of School, Human Resource Management, Matrix Management Structure, pastoral care

INTRODUCTION

On of the major criticisms of the Matrix Management structure is that individuals are not provided with protection with regards to the multiple demands placed on them by multiple sources. As a result individuals do not always have adequate safeguards nor care taken of their personal and professional welfare in such management structures. The model adopted at the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Systems ensures that people are safeguarded by the Head of School, who acts are broker for the individual staff in order that people's workloads are negotiated equitably. Also the Head of School exercises 'pastoral care' of those staff they are directly line supervising. Avenues are provided where staff have a voice in determining structures, process and procedures and are able to engage in authentic dialogue regarding their roles and responsibilities in the Faculty. To achieve this the Head of School's portfolio has been altered so that their responsibility for overseeing a staff's professional development, personal development and workload allocation has been isolated from the added role of

overseeing the conduction of academic programs and also the allocation of staff to undertake these roles. Instead emphasis on the role of the Head of School has shifted to human resource management and the 'pastoral care' of individuals within the School. In this way staff are being provided with the opportunity to participate in processes affording the development of a person as a professional and as a whole person, supporting the balance between life and work - through negotiated equitable workload allocations. Consequently the matrix structure separates the Head of School's human resource management responsibilities from the management of the task the staff member is responsible for. A futures perspective is also used to engage staff so that more creative and lateral, as opposed to linear, thinking can occur by staff considering their individual past-present-future continuum. This is an enabling mechanism by which staff are able to explore which preferred and probable futures they may wish to pursue. As a result staff have a greater opportunity to diversify their understanding of their place in achieving their personal and professional goals and achieving the Faculty vision.

The Head of School then is the *lynchpin* which ensures that individual staff are encouraged to develop personally and professionally, managed appropriately and equitably and have avenues to actively engage and voice their perspective through open and transparent dialogue.

MATRIX MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The Matrix Management Structure (MMS) approach emerged as a result of US government requirements that a project-based system be linked directly to top management in the aerospace industry during the 1960s (Knight, 1977 as cited in [1]).

In particular [1] highlights that although interest in matrix organisational structures peaked in the 1970s and 1980s organisations continue to adopt the approach as a viable alternative management structure. In particular, owing to the increasing complexities of business the approach has gained a resurgence in a variety of industries; aerospace, automotive, chemical, communications, computer, defence, electronics, financial, energy (Davis & Lawrence, 1977; Galbraith, 2000 as cited in [1]. Great success has ensured. For instance MMS principles were adopted by Ralph Szygenda in 1997 when he restructured an inefficient Information Technology (IT) division at General Motors in the US. By setting up overlapping and intersecting responsibilities Szygenda placed an emphasis upon a balance between collaboration and competitiveness. In the process Szygenda says the MMS 'bothers a lot of

people' but it has been central in reducing the IT budget by $1 billion over the past seven years [2].

The MMS has a variant of forms. Three common forms are the functional matrix (employees remain full members of functional departments), balanced matrix (classic model: employees are officially members of two organising dimensions), and project matrix (employees move between functional departments and projects respectively retaining membership with those units during the same period) (Burns, 1989; Galbraith, 1971, 1973; Kolodny, 1979; Larson & Gobeli, 1987 as cited in [1]). Matrix organisational structures are comprised of multiple activity dimensions and range from two dimensions to three or more dimensions depending upon the complexity of the activities of the organisation or organisational unit. Our Faculty MMS correlates to a three dimensional balanced matrix model with staff being assigned to a function group (within a structure known as a school) and a variation of a multiple project groups (academic program, research centre) with individual research commitments as part of their individual workloads.

In a traditional matrix organisation authority is shared between functional and project managers. This leads to one of the greatest criticisms of MMS, that an employee cannot serve two masters, as conflict and confusion arises over who 'controls' the individual being supervised. This manifests itself particularly through the allocation of tasks and the priority to be determined and enacted upon. In our Faculty while an individual staff member can have multiple managers (project managers: Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning, Research Centre Mangers, Program Directors, Program Co-ordinators) they only have one functional manager, the Head of School. The Head of School defines and negotiates the workload allocation and the performance indicators through a formal process that is defined by an Enterprise Bargain Agreement; the Performance Review and Professional Development (PRPD) process. As a result the Head of School is the only manager that the individual employee formally reports to with regards to their performance. The project managers, as defined, are able to provide input but the final analysis and determination of the degree to which the staff member has successfully met their performance indicators rests with the Head of School and ultimately the Dean of the Faculty.

Generally project managers have control over what has to be done (for that project), when it must be done (Faculty, University and external timeframes) and how much in terms of resources must be allocated to accomplish it. In our model the project manager has control over what has to be done (for that area) and when it must be done. While they highlight what they consider to be their resource requirements the project manager and the staff member negotiates the staff members involvement with the Head of School.

Staff working within a MMS tend to have a better understanding of the complexities of their organisation than those staff working within other management frameworks. The reason being that they gain a better understanding of the other facets of the organisation or organisational unit and how it operates as a whole. This contributes to their professional and personal growth as they are engaged more fully with the organisation and it offers them more opportunity for growth.

HEAD OF SCHOOL, STAFF AND PASTORAL CARE

In regards to examining the human side of the MMS, [1] contends there are only a few studies which have focussed upon this aspect, citing studies by Bartlett & Ghoshal, (1990, as cited in [1]) and Lawrence, et al. (1977, as cited in [1]) as exceptions. Five major issues are reported by [1] as being nominated employees operating within such a managerial framework - these being 'misaligned goals, unclear roles and responsibilities, ambiguous authority, lack of a matrix guardian, and silo-focused employees'. Also tensions and problems can be apparent as a result of long decision making periods and the need for formal committee structures to managing these issues. Our formulation of a MMS goes some way to addressing these types of aspects, although, that is not to say that these facets have not been apparent at various stages of the implementation. In our variation of the model the nomination of the one line supervisor who the employee reports to with regards to their performance helps circumvent the issues of unclear roles and responsibilities, ambiguous authority, lack of a matrix guardian and silo-focused employees. This is supported by the emergence of quality assurance processes whereby descriptions of roles, responsibilities, processes and procedures are documented. We have made inroads into this as a strategy and while not complete, the process has provided the basis for clarification and explanation of the structure and the actions required of the employees and managers.

Currently, owing to transitional aspects from the previous structure, and the assignment of staff to the former School structure the Faculty has witnessed the assignment of the predominance of one discipline in each School with members being from other disciplines as minorities. For instance in one School, the School of Advanced Technological Processes, the prevalent discipline is electrical engineers with a number of physicists and some mechanical engineers as remaining members. In the other School, the School of Industrial Ecology and the Built Environment, civil engineers are in the majority and there are some physicists, one building staff member and some mechanical engineers. In this way the issue of silo-focused employees is managed within the current School structure through this mixing of staff of multiple disciplines. However this is only one facet of the management of avoiding silo-focused employees. For even though there is a dominance of a particular academic discipline in each of the Schools with the emphasis of the role of the Head of School being upon human resource management and not project management (in particular academic programs or research) then the aspect of academic disciplines becomes a non-issue. The aspects of discipline specific agendas and silo-focussed employees with an agenda to forward their discipline's needs and opportunities is played out in the project managers arena. In the area of academic programs each of the academic areas (engineering, physics and building) has a Program Committee, which includes all of the academics working in that academic program which provides for the airing of academic issues relating to the

conduction and formulation of academic programs. There are further managerial structures that oversee the strategic, operational and financial aspects of the programs. In particular the Program Director (project manager) has the multiple responsibilities of strategic direction, operational imperatives and financial control of the academic programs they are charged with overseeing. In some areas there is a further layer of management, namely the Program Co-ordinators (project manager), who report to the Program Director and who oversee the operational aspects of the conduction of the programs. Also each discipline has a discipline leader whose responsibility it is to feed into the discussion of strategic direction for the programs the emerging influences or alteration of conditions in order that the programs remain current and relevant. It is in the dynamic of dialogue of the various discipline needs and future requirements that another shift occurs to help open the debate within the Program Committee structure to reduce the focussing upon one discipline (a silo focus) as the sole or dominant aspect to be considered. It is the responsibility of the Program Director and Program Co-ordinators (where they exist) to consciously provide an avenue for equitable opportunity and to manage the debate so all disciplines are represented. Likewise the Research Centre Managers have the ability to enter the discussion on their staffing requirements and provide input into what staff they require and their strategic and operational aspects. Like the Program Directors the Research Centre Managers have strategic, operational and financial responsibility for their activities. This shift in power base of differing controls residing with different managerial structures means that the staff are protected and provides them with a champion, the Head of School, as the overseer of human resource management, to enable them to negotiate their workload with the multiplicity of callers on their expertise and time. Equity of workload for all staff in the Faculty is determined and monitored through a formal workload allocation formula. This formula was developed by the Heads of School in consultation with the Dean, the Program Directors and the employees. Such a collaborative approach has enabled ownership of the workload formula to be established as a Faculty wide approach with all of the players involved in facets of the decision making processes. This is not to say that issues do not continue to arise about the determination of the workload formula. However such issues are raised by staff individually, collectively or through the Program Directors or the Heads of School and reported to the Faculty management team, which includes the Dean, Heads of School, Associate Deans of Teaching and Research, Business Management and Facilities Management.

As a middle management position, the Heads of School, within a Faculty have the responsibility as a line supervisor of academic staff and as part of the Faculty management team to establish and maintain the matrix organisational structure by determining the degree to which they are able to engage, equip and encourage staff to enact their negotiated roles and responsibilities. The multiple tensions arising from the expectations of Program Directors and the Research Centre Managers within the faculty requires the Head of School to become the broker for the individual staff member. This means that the Head of School ensures that an individual's workload is appropriately assigned and that they are being provided with the necessary challenges for self-development through reflective practice, the provision of new and varied experiences and to monitor staff's work-life balance. Where necessary the Head of School may need to mentor staff or provide avenues for staff to engage with others to develop their knowledge and skills. Heads of School also need to provide leadership. Consistent and equitable management and leadership can be established through an environment of dialogue, trust and care-giving to their staff in helping them perform, undertake professional development and achieve their career successes.

The idea of 'pastoral care' is generally associated with religious groups and is concerned with the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual development of an individual who is in the 'care' of another. In her piece, 'On longevity in the Youth Ministry, My Advice to a New Co-ordinator of Ministry', [3], in a broad sense emphasises the following strategies:

- Set priorities
- Learn to listen and build relationships
- Develop Hobbies and other interests (essentially learn new skills and take time away from the office to have other interests, a vacation)
- Be authentic
- Do not take yourself too seriously
- Read and study
- Don't get caught in a rut
- Be aware of the subtle and not so subtle changes
- Don't get caught in the numbers game
- Remember we are in this for the long haul

Although there is understandably a strong religious or spiritual emphasis being placed on the aspects outlined by [3], interestingly in a broad sense of the aspects being highlighted and framing them with a secular focus such matters are paramount in the 'pastoral care' of staff supervised by the Heads of School. Also there is no need to be apologetic about adopting this perspective, in a secular sense, as a management or leadership focus, as the process being explored is about acknowledging staff as human entities, compared with the functional definition as these people as being 'employees', 'workers' or 'staff'. Thus it correlates well to determining strategies and mechanisms for developing their knowledge and skills base and providing them with the opportunities for professional and personal growth. Furthermore this is not a one-way exercise as it also involves the manager, the Head of School, in this case, engaging in the process of developing as a whole person, as well as a professional as well as a manager and a leader.

As Head of School of Industrial Ecology and the Built Environment it has been important to build trust and to spend time with staff to discuss and ascertain their personal and professional goals and for the group of staff to spend time together to develop working and personal friendships. To facilitate this the members of the School have been actively engaged in two particularly important activities. This being the School's Dialogue Days and the weekly Forum meetings.

Dialogue Days are opportunities to take the members off campus for two or more days and are designed to focus upon specific issues. They are beyond an in-service day, beyond a training day as they are the mechanism by which the process of authentic dialogue (staff-staff, staff-management) is promoted and enacted. In an environment of trust, transparency and equity staff are encouraged to critique processes, mechanisms and actions by way of a 'candid but polite' approach to having them participate and formulate in and negotiate the goals of the School and their personal and professional contribution and active role in achieving it. This is achieved through a futures studies approach whereby staff discuss matters in the context of a past-present-future continuum as opposed to just trying to plan what future actions or activities are possible. It is through the dynamic of understanding that each element of this time triad (past, present, future) influences the other that staff have been able to gain better understanding of how they can more consistently achieve their goals. Indeed [4] advocates the use of futures studies as a means of connecting futures research to decision making. A better perspective of the field of futures studies is readily accessible through the work of such futurists as [5], [6] and [7]. Futures studies provides the avenue for balancing short term and long term views. So then Dialogue Days embody the promotion and enactment of a dialogue as opposed to a discussion or delivery of information or the mere provision of training sessions.

Forum meetings are informal weekly gatherings to enable people to discuss what they have been engaged in during their past week and it is the opportunity to highlight their forthcoming week activities. In this way staff are able to provide a personal account of their achievements, undertake reflective practice, demonstrate forward planning and engage other members in dialogue.

While simplistic mechanisms, Dialogue Days and weekly Forum meetings have been instrumental in establishing trust within the group and have helped to devise the strategies of engagement, enabled staff to have a voice and provided a greater sense of collegiality. This correlates well with [3]'s provision of 'pastoral care'.

A futures perspective is encouraged and supported though the adoption of active dialogue, activities and reflective practices that promote the consideration of a staff member's past-present-future continuum. In this way people are challenged to also explore their preferred and probable futures and the influences, important factors, obstacles (internal and external) and consequences required to critique, plan and implement them. One of the mechanisms adopted to cultivate a futures discourse involves a number of reflective practice exercises. Such exercises help staff consider their own perspective (contributions, self knowledge, team fluency, learning literacy) and involves them designating the influences and implications of their past-present-future continuum in light of the Faculty's vision statement. While in the performance indicator review process and the formal PRPD process, another exercise, sees staff complete a proforma, prior to completing the formal university documentation for PRPD's, which guides staff's thinking about adopting a futures perspective when considering what it is that they are able to do for the next five years in order to promote an understanding of their individual's past-present-future continuum and to formulate

their preferred and probable futures and how these may be enacted. In this way staff are not passive in defining their future, they better appreciate the interconnectedness between 'what they have achieved', (past), 'where they are' (present), 'where they wish to be' (future) and which is most probably achievable (comparing and contrasting their preferred and probable futures) and what strategies would enable it to happen. Consequently this process enables a dialogue to occur between the Head of School and themselves regarding their needs for personal and professional education opportunities and revision of their workload allocation in order to accommodate these multiplicities. An integral part of this process is the Head of School's role of discussing and ensuring in the negotiation phase of the workload allocation process with the project managers (Program Directors, Research Centre Managers) that these aspects of the individual staff member is taken into account and an appropriate work-life balance occurs.

As a Head of School another avenue that has been explored successfully is the deliberate move from the emphasis upon staff training to staff learning. Vallely as cited in [8] believes that this is a significant mind shift which needs to be achieved and arises from the perception of staff that "training is something you have done to you. Learning is something which you do for yourself". Consequently the strategy has been to emphasise this to staff and to support their engagement in self-learning, reflective practice and the provision for temporal and financial support to help them develop as a person and as a professional.

CONCLUSION

The principle role of a Head of School is to provide the best opportunities for staff to operate efficiently, professionally and in a timely manner in order to achieve the strategic and operational imperatives of the Faculty as an organisational unit of the university. However their primary responsibility is to oversee the well-being of their staff so that staff can operate in an open, transparent and equitable environment with fair and realistic workload allocations. All the while the Head of School exercises 'pastoral care' so that their staff are safeguarded from unrealistic work-life balances, provided with opportunities for personal and professional growth. In adopting a futures perspective mechanisms have been instigated that allow staff to be more creative in the manner in which they conceive their contribution and their development to achieve these goals. In this way staff have a more engaging process whereby they may consider preferred and probable futures and how such futures can be aligned to accomplish personal, professional goals and development.

REFERENCES

[1] Thomas, S., D'Annunzio, L.S., Challenges and Strategies of Matrix Organizations: Top-level and Mid-level Managers' Perspectives, Human Resource Planning, March 2005.
URL: http://www.allbusiness.com/periodicals/article/394122-1.html
Accessed 19th March 2006.

[2] Prewitt, E., GM's Matrix Reloads, CIO article, 2003
URL: http://www.cio.com/archive/090103/hs_reload.html
Accessed 19th March 2006.

[3] Author unknown, Pastoral Care, CDA Youth Ministry Resource
     Manual, August 2004,
     URL: http://www.arlingtoncatholicyouth.org/downloads/
          Resource%20Manual/Complete%20Pastoral%
          20Care%208-04.pdf
     Accessed 17th March 2006.

[4] R.P. Sanal R. P. "An Introduction to Futures Studies" Science India,
     Vol 6, No. 2, Feb, 2003, pp25-31
     URL: http://www.sanalnair.org/articles/what.htm,
     Accessed 17th March 2006.

[5]   Dator, J., (Ed.), Advancing Futures: Futures Studies in Higher
      Education, Praeger, Westport, 2002.

[6] Polak, F.L., The Image of the Future, Volume I and Volume II,
     Trans. E. Boulding, Oceana, New York, 1951.

[7] Slaughter, R. A., Futures: Concepts and Powerful Ideas,
     Futures Study Centre and DDM Media Group, Melbourne, 1996.

[8]   McHugh, K.Groves, and A. Alker, Managing Learning: What Do
      We Learn from a Learning Organisation ?" **The Learning
      Organisation**, Volume 5 Number. 5, 1998.
      Accessed via Emerald database, Central Queensland University
      Library on 14 March 2006.