Exploration of Human Resource Challenges in Academic Development Units and Impact on Service

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Exploration of human resource challenges in ADUs and impact on service
Outline

• Context
• Research Questions
• Research Design
• Overarching Research Findings
  • Participants Summary
  • Challenges (Broad and Human Resource Management)
  • Personal Attributes and Strategies for ADU Leaders
• Preliminary Conclusion
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Context

I have HRM ADU challenges!

How do you continue supporting faculties?

I have broad ADU challenges!

How do you manage them?

Am I the only one?

Is this role for me?
Research Questions

Educational and leadership experience?

What Broad and HRM challenges have ADU leaders experienced?

What is the impact of the challenges on service delivery?

What strategies can you use to manage challenges?
Research Design

- Survey (Open and closed options, n=11) (Descriptive stats)
  1. Demographics
  2. **Education** and Previous Employment
  3. Brief overall of BC & HRM challenges
  4. Importance of **Team Functionality** (*Patrick Lecioni Dysfunctions of a Team*)
  5. Importance of **Emotional Intelligence** (*EQ 2.0 Format*)

- Interviews (40min, n=9) (Thematic analysis)
  1. ADU leader context
  2. Broad Challenges & HRM Challenges
    a) What?
    b) Impact?
    c) Hindering factors?
    d) Strategies to overcome?
    e) Advice to ADU Leaders?
  3. Professional development and personal strategic needs for ADU leaders
Findings: Survey

• Demographics

• Education experience
  • 8/11 – No formal qualification in leadership
  • 7/11 – No formal qualification in management

NB: Due to small numbers, anonymity is priority
Survey – Emotional Intelligence

**ASSERTIVENESS:** Communicating feelings, beliefs; non-offensive

- High Importance
- Moderate Importance

**STRESS TOLERANCE:** Coping with stressful situations

- Moderate Importance
- High Importance

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**EXPLORE**

- Exploration of human resource challenges in ADUs an
Survey – Team Functionality

Reference: Patrick Lecioni – 5 Dysfunctions of a team
Survey – Team Functionality

23. TEAM MEMBERS COMMUNICATE UNPOPULAR OPINIONS TO THE GROUP

- Conflict

8. TEAM MEMBERS POINT OUT ONE ANOTHER'S UNPRODUCTIVE BEHAVIOURS

- Accountability

6. TEAM MEMBERS ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR WEAKNESSES TO ONE ANOTHER

- Trust
Interviews – Participant titles

- 9 interviews (40-60min each)
- A range of titles
- Direct reporting line (0-13 staff)
- Entire centre staff numbers (0-80)
- University and Higher Education Private Provider
- Multi-campus institutions
Interviews – Functions

- Academic and **professional learning/professional development** & induction (+ sessionals)
- Manage and influence **standards, benchmarking & practices** within the LMS environment
- Centre and faculty-based **scholarly research projects**
- Support **reward/recognition** through **awards and grants**
- **Resource** development, **curriculum planning**, design & delivery support
- Governance, **strategic advice**, policy, procedure, lead & influence strategic priorities
- Contribute to **digital/blended learning initiatives** & space innovations
- Engage with **quality assurance** processes
- Provide, lead and support **student enabling pathways**
Interviews – What are the Broad Challenges (BC)?

• Lack of resources
• Staff contract length and skills
• Tension with faculty expectations
• Relationship with senior executives
• Organisational culture
• Role clarity, authority, credibility
• Sector change and the impact on institution
• Research vs teaching

“Probably the lack of skilled staff and the constant restructuring that the university [positions] upon us” – Participant 6

“There’s another area of challenge is resourcing. It’s a massive one. We don’t have enough staff and resources to fulfil our basic requirements...” – Participant 7

“Our main challenges are balancing the requirements of academic staff for teaching with our developmental mode which is really more around promoting teaching excellence. Trying to accept that there are a set of things that we want to achieve but the people that we’re working with particularly have a lot of other priorities so trying to add value from our point of view to what they’re doing” – Participant 5
Interviews – Impact of Broad Challenges

• “Difference between success vs failure” – P7
• ADUs are unable to meet full potential
• Constant state of change management
• Central staff feel undervalued & exploited
• Varied credibility for the ADU
• Constant faculty relationship monitoring

“I think from the unit perspective people feel devalued because they're just a little bit unsure about what their role is....There's a lack of understanding from a senior management perspective about what happens at the lower levels but also that staff feel devalued because they're not sure what's around the corner” – Participant 6

“For me a major challenge is always trying to keep positions filled, use the budget effectively and make sure that we’re delivering according to what we have stated in our action plan so that people’s expectations are met” – Participant 5
Interviews – Strategies to overcome BC

- Building cross-team capability within the ADU team
- Strong faculty relationships; ADU – faculty integrated working groups
- Strong awareness of political agenda
- Positive contribution to governance
- Communication: Often and loud!
- Strategic influencing skills – interpersonal skills
- Productive relationship with HR department

“[C]ommunication is a massive one. Having the ability to communicate with different stakeholders internally and externally, so you need to be able to state your case and connect it to the world that people that you’re dealing with operate in” – Participant 3

“That’s investing time strategically with team leaders. We’ve just recently put in place within our team a team leader structure. I think communicating effectively within the team and beyond so managing expectations is really important” – Participant 5

“ I think the most important is a highly developed and evolving set of interpersonal skills. I will mention the need for resilience but I’ll put that aside at the moment because that's more of an enduring thing about how to make sure that while these challenges remain that you have the tool sets available to not go completely... crazy” – Participant 7
Interviews – What are the HRM challenges?

- Highly regulated environment regarding staff role and position changes
- Recruitment & succession planning
- Shared expectations of internal/external staff
- Performance managing staff
- Inappropriate accusations of bullying & harassment
- Team dysfunctions

Being able to recruit appropriately, talented staff or having big pools to draw staff from. I think particular challenges around managing underperforming staff I would say that’s really challenging and takes up heaps of time if that happens....

...[t]akes a huge amount of time and that draws you away from all the other things... You’re doing a lot of management internally then so the capacity of the group slows down because it draws all of the resources away.

Then of course if you are having a HR issue with one person everyone else to some degree or another is involved in it so it takes the focus away for them from their work as well – Participant 5
Interviews – Impact of HRM Challenges

• Unable to meet the expected goals
• Personal & professional exhaustion, dissatisfaction and overwhelming sense of failure
• ADU reputational damage
• Toxic cultures

“Profound. When you have serial offenders and complainers who, in my opinion, will take HR processes and game it.. It impacts on people's moral in terms of workload. It impacts on our ability to work as a team. It impacts on managers' ability to coordinate and take accountability for certain kinds of projects and services and programs. It strikes at the very heart I think of an organisation's ability to be productive and agile” – Participant 7

“[I]t time it takes and being able to actually follow all of the correct procedures …..I think there are also reputational issues to be dealt with. So while someone’s underperforming people might form a view that your whole centre is not performing well because they’re not being serviced in the way that they anticipated. So there are some flow back issues onto the whole centre and the way that the centre is perceived in the university. It certainly limits innovation....[I]t lowers the morale of the team overall because they’re not operating in an optimal way” – Participant 4
Interviews – Strategies to overcome HRM

- Strong +ve relationships with HR, VC, Senior Exec and line manager
- Address team dysfunctions
- Recognize and Lean on internal and external support structures
- Actively seek professional development and personal support strategies

“Good, solid, sustainable supportive leadership from the vice chancellor down. I think that's the most important factor to help mitigate the problems from a culture foremost litigation and complaint. That's an important thing and that's one of those things that are so often outside of an individual's control and that's why I made the point earlier that when you recognise that something is really outside of your control then don’t take it on. You need good professional development programs. You need to have a sense of security and joy in your workplace across the board and the institution. People need to be happy, valued” – Participant 7

“[T]rying to see things from the other person’s perspective and try and be clear about what your perspective is and what you’re expecting. So that even if they’re not performing well at least they know what your expectations are around their performance” – Participant 5
Interviews – Advice for ADU Leaders

• Concentrate on your skills and attributes
• Lean on professional networks & colleagues (ie CADAD, ACODE, academic development community etc)
• Build genuine professional friendships
• Establish +ve mentoring/coaching
• Constantly measure IMPACT
• Foster strategic institutional relationships
• Provide strong leadership/direction to ADU

“Don't be sheepish when you reach the conclusion that you can't make a change for the good. There are some situations organisationally in which it's abundantly clear that you don't have the backing, you don’t have the appetite for change. Don’t be worried. Don’t take it on as a personal failure that certain things aren’t going to work out according to your own agenda and to your own sense of where the university or where the department should be heading. I can’t stress that enough” – Participant 7.

“Throw something out there, people don't like it, well you can change it. But that model seems to work a lot better than a model where you develop a concept through structured consultation because that just basically means it never gets anywhere, never gets off the ground” – Participant 3
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**Interviews – Personal Attributes, strategies and influencing factors**

**Within the sphere of influence**
- Internal/External relationships
- Strategic influencing skills
- Well-being balance
- Targeted PD
- Enhance personal EI skills
- You

**Outside the sphere of influence**
- Government political agenda
- Dynamic HE sector changes
- Resources $$$
- Appointments in senior levels
- Actions, attitudes and behaviours of others
- Alignment of values/goals
- Regulatory frameworks

**Mindset:** Actions, attitudes & behaviours

**Targeted PD**
Remain agile

**Mentoring/Coaching**

**Enhance personal EI skills**

**Strategic influencing skills**

**Well-being balance**

**Alignment of values/goals**

**Dynamic HE sector changes**

**Government political agenda**

**Resources $$$**

**Appointments in senior levels**
Where to from here: Further work….

• More exploration of the rich leader experiences (qualitative and quantitative data)

• Exploration into national and international cross-institution mentoring, coaching and shadowing opportunities for ADU leaders

• Establish complementary informal networks to CADAD/ACODE to increase support and guidance to ADU leaders
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References

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