

# Have a heart: challenges for lead vocational teachers in the changing VET landscape

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SOUTHBANK INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Participant in the NCVET Building Research Capacity  
Academic Scholarship Program 2008

NATIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION  
AND TRAINING RESEARCH AND  
EVALUATION PROGRAM  
OCCASIONAL PAPER



Australian Government

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# About the research

## *Have a heart: challenges for lead vocational teachers in the changing VET landscape*

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Building the research capacity of the vocational education and training (VET) sector is a key concern of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). To assist with this objective, NCVER supported an academic scholarship program, whereby VET practitioners were sponsored to undertake university study at honours, master's or doctorate level.

Jennifer Davids received an academic scholarship in 2008 to assist with her doctorate. Her research investigates the role of 'lead vocational teachers', a classification created by TAFE Queensland in 2005 to provide a career pathway for teachers at the top of the pay scale. Through the use of focus groups, Jennifer explores the current roles of these teachers and their personal and career development needs. This report is a snapshot of her research.

## Key messages

- Lead vocational teachers view their profession as a 'calling' and see serving their students as a priority.
- With greater emphasis being placed on financial decisions within VET workplaces and the introduction of increased reporting requirements, these teachers feel that they are operating in environments with low levels of trust. Overall, lead vocational teachers consider that their teaching practices were undervalued.

Tom Karmel  
Managing Director, NCVER

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# Introduction

In 2005 TAFE Queensland introduced a new category into their vocational education and training (VET) teachers' scales. The role of 'lead vocational teacher' was created to provide a career pathway for teachers who had reached the top of the pay scale. In return for extra pay, these teachers were to take on extra duties, commensurate with their skills and experience. The list of sample duties provided was not exhaustive and teachers were encouraged to negotiate duties they believed to be appropriate. There are currently 799 lead vocational teachers (pers. comm. Department of Training and the Arts 2011) employed in TAFE Queensland, but many questions remain about the nature of the role, its effectiveness in meeting the career development of high-level teachers and how this group can be more effectively deployed to meet the needs of TAFE Queensland.

This paper investigates the personal and career development needs of TAFE Queensland's lead vocational teachers through the conceptual framework of Spirituality at Work (SAW), which is a framework for looking at workplace relations. This research was conducted through four focus group meetings held in November 2009, each lasting approximately 90 minutes. A Queensland TAFE-wide notice attracted the lead vocational teachers who volunteered to participate in the focus group discussions. The focus groups reviewed the way in which the lead vocational teacher role is currently being deployed within various TAFE Queensland institutes (see appendix for the institutes represented and a list of the focus group questions).

The research is limited by the small number of participants. In all, while 80 people responded to the invitation to participate, only 24 were able to take part. This was due mainly to time constraints, work pressures and other commitments. The sample may not be representative of the true demographic of lead vocational teachers in TAFE Queensland. The research is also limited in that the sole method of data-gathering was through the use of focus groups.

The paper argues that the Spirituality at Work framework already exists in the teaching profession as a set of humanist values, which, while acknowledged as fluid, changeable and multiple, informs the basis of much teaching work. In particular, the role of teacher leadership in TAFE Queensland resembles a form of servant leadership (Greenleaf 1977), with a strongly affective component. This model of ethics-based behaviour is challenged by the business-based model of education and the proliferation of performance measures. It is argued that this conflict of interest creates an incongruence that is a discouraging factor in staff retention and a source of dissatisfaction among lead vocational teachers.

## Why teachers stay or go

The Productivity Commission (2010) describes the VET workforce as highly casualised, with an older than average population who intends to continue working, and observes that this population, along with the inflow of new teachers, should stabilise VET practitioner numbers in the near-to-medium future. On the other hand, another recent and equally prevailing view is that the VET workforce is one in 'crisis' (Wheelahlan 2010a, p.11) and needs drastic measures to attract and retain staff. National economic growth is threatened by issues associated with an ageing population and one approach being adopted by the Australian Government is the introduction of measures that will encourage older workers to remain in the workforce longer (Australian Government 2010), including a

\$43 million Productive Ageing Package, part of the aim of which is to encourage older workers to take up supervisory or training positions.

How TAFE (technical and further education) institutes can retain and utilise their experienced staff is an important issue in a climate marked by a number of pressing factors: the ageing teaching population; the need for training and mentoring of new teaching staff; the potential loss of knowledge (Clayton, Fisher & Hughes 2005, p.21); and, finally, the need to continue to build the skills base in order to maintain a high standard of living as the population of Australia ages (Australian Government 2010, p.12).

Wheelahan suggests that '[VET] ... will need to reduce its reliance on casual teachers and develop career structures that offer employment security, career progression, appropriate levels of pay, and supportive work environments' (2010a, p.11). Her solution for ensuring that knowledge and skills are passed on to ensuing generations of VET teachers is to create a 'master practitioner' role. These master practitioners would be skilled, knowledgeable and experienced. They would be used to mentor new VET practitioners; deliver professional development in registered training organisations; and apply their expertise to strengthening teaching and assessment practices in industry training and in the training organisation (Wheelahan 2010a, p.12).

Wheelahan's concept is not new. TAFE Queensland already has a system in place for using the knowledge and skills of their senior teachers, having created a role for lead vocational teachers, who are paid to undertake extra responsibility. Whether or not this is enough to retain experienced teachers in the VET workforce is the key research question for this study. It asks what factors influence teachers to stay or go.

Studies to date on the professional and career development requirements of TAFE teachers have tended to focus on extrinsic factors as important drivers of staff retention. These include, for example, the quality of conditions, areas of need for professional development and VET teacher capability needs (Guthrie, Nguyen & Perkins 2006; Reframing the Future 2004; Harris, Simons & Moore 2005). However, other research has highlighted the need to build an understanding of the combination of ingredients that attract and retain teaching staff (Dickie et al. 2004), such as the values and behaviours embedded in an organisation that create confidence, loyalty and trust (Reframing the Future 2004) and the shared values and beliefs in relation to education that inspire teachers to want to benefit others and from which they derive great personal and professional satisfaction (Corben & Thompson 2002, cited in Guthrie, Nguyen & Perkins 2006, p.67).

Furthermore, recent research by Simons et al. (2008) also supports the view that TAFE teachers seek internal satisfaction in their work, which includes notions of meaningfulness, fulfilment and personal development, in addition to external factors such as career advancement and movement within the system. Their research found that gender was significant in how staff viewed their careers, in that more females cited internal satisfaction factors as important. However, the concept of advancement was a term used more by general staff than teaching staff. In listing 15 factors that influenced career decision-making, the top five factors rated by teachers in the research were: job satisfaction, confidence/self-esteem, support of colleagues, qualifications and personal ambition, leading to the conclusion that personal factors rank highly. Also making it onto the list were factors such as work-life balance and family commitments. External factors such as opportunities for retraining, job rotations and project work did not have much influence in career decision-making (Simons et al. 2008) and, while job insecurity is a common cause of dissatisfaction among TAFE teachers (Lorrimar 2002),

it is not one that overly influences teachers' career decision-making, ranking only 14 out of the 15 factors (Simons et al. 2008).

The findings of the research cited above are particularly pertinent to this present study. The integration of personal needs and values with job requirements is an essential aspect of teacher identity and authenticity, and how the organisation meets those needs in order to retain its workers merits further investigation. Harris, Clayton and Chappell (2008) contend that VET workforce capability – through the attraction and retention of high-quality staff – will only be built if the needs of VET practitioners are met. This, it is suggested, can be done through the provision of opportunities for individual development, continued learning and a high-quality work life. Their research indicates that what staff require is 'enjoyment, development and satisfaction' (Harris, Clayton & Chappell 2008, p.2). This links with a Spirituality at Work interpretation of a meaningful work life:

Pfeffer (2003, pp.29–45) defines four dimensions that people really want their work to have, and all four can be interpreted as spiritual dimensions. They want their work (1) to be interesting and meaningful, allowing them to learn, develop and have a sense of competence and mastery, and (2) to give them some sense of purpose in their lives. They also want (3) to experience a sense of connectedness and positive social relations with co-workers, and (4) to live an integrated life where their work and other roles are integrated into their identity as a human being ... They want to live an integrated life where their role as a teacher is part of their identity.

(de Klerk-Luttig 2008, pp.5–6)

The importance of recognising and supporting the inner lives of teachers in the context of change is emphasised by Kwo and Intrater (2004) and is a factor to consider in relation to staff retention:

Teaching also tests the heart, and calls upon inner strength, spirit, vocational passion and resilience. This view of education holds that sustainable and enduring change can only be achieved by providing educators with the opportunity to explore the dynamic interplay between the inner lives of spirit, self-knowledge and emotional presence and the outer lives of work in schools (p.283).

In examining the place of spirituality in liberal education, Astin (2004) asserts that changes to the higher education sector in America have focused on external factors such as funding, facilities, resources and student attendance numbers and have failed to recognise and support the internal changes required within the academic culture, thus leading to a sense of fragmentation, as features such as meaning and values are divorced from the process of change. This, Astin believes, is indicative of society in general, where the emphasis on individual achievement and success is measured through wealth, power, competitiveness and status. As a result, Astin notes a movement in academia towards a search for meaning, shared purpose and authenticity. In the context of the Australian VET sector, the unprecedented level of change to not only the way lead vocational teachers operate, but also to the philosophical purpose of education and teacher identity, raises questions over the level of alignment between contemporary institutional, economic and political objectives and the personal values and inner lives of teachers. There is no doubt that lead vocational teachers find operating in this environment severely testing, as it strikes at the heart of who they are and what they do. It generates uncertainties over the ultimate success of the change agenda and may impact on whether teachers remain in the workforce.

## Teacher identity in a changing workplace

The concept of teacher identity is integral to the role of the teacher leader. Teacher identity, like all forms of identity, is created at the meeting point between the individual and the social, and therefore must take into account contemporary political and ethical factors (Clarke 2008). Teachers' identity involves a complex mix of intellect and emotion, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, values and experience relating to politics and power, as well as expertise and a personal understanding of the purpose of teaching and even their chosen teaching subject (Beijaard 1995; Zembylas 2003). The influence of changing contexts on teacher identity is noted as a powerful factor in decisions about whether or not school-based teachers decide to stay or leave the profession (Beijard, Meijer & Verloop 2004; Maclure 1993).

In the last two decades or so the VET system has undergone considerable reforms. The identity and role of the teacher is being truly tested within the current VET climate, as new technology and learning methodologies and industry demands clamour for attention. The intensification of entrepreneurial activities in TAFE, the introduction of numerous new business practices and the shift to competency-based training have all impacted on the autonomy of the practitioner and the implementation of pedagogical practices. Furthermore, the demands for accountability and quality assurance have increased vastly the level of administrative duties to be undertaken by teachers. The contradiction between business and liberal education agendas has meant that, as Chappell (2001) notes, 'when teachers are asked to "do things differently" in their everyday teaching practices they are also being called upon to become different teachers' (p.24) and that 'despite over a decade of economic rationalism ... Teachers overwhelmingly speak of equity, fairness, social justice and public access rather than profit, competition, efficiency and entrepreneurial activity when describing their work' (p.33).

Teachers' ability to undertake teacher leadership roles is increasingly more difficult in a VET sector that has become more demanding and volatile. The teacher role is underpinned by a sense of 'moral purpose' (Fullan 1993, p.12) and a 'level of mission' (Korthagen 2004, p.5), but the impact of economic rationalism and the changing attitude towards the purpose of education are felt by some to leave little room for teachers to reconstruct their own identity and purpose within it (Chappell 2001). There are differing opinions on how well teachers are coping with the changes. Seddon (1999) introduces the notion of ethical entrepreneurialism, but notes that it 'also problematises the concept of "teacher" as the VET teacher takes on new and various roles' (p.50). Blom and Clayton (2002) uphold that teachers are able to renegotiate their roles so that their values continue to underpin their work as they juggle dual allegiances. The complexity of opinions indicates that questions remain about whether VET teachers experience a 'struggle for authenticity' or a 'values schizophrenia' (Ball 2004, p.15).

The issues that have been raised relating to identity, sense of purpose, the concept of teacher in the contemporary VET workplace, enjoyment and personal and professional development can be usefully reviewed through the Spirituality at Work paradigm.

## Spirituality at work

Spirituality at Work (SAW) is a notion that has attracted much attention over the last ten years. It is an approach that espouses the treatment of workers as whole human beings who require dignity, respect, fairness, trust, harmony, meaningfulness and a higher purpose. It is believed that this positive approach to workplace relations is likely to lead to the increased loyalty and commitment of workers and thus greater productivity and profit (Butts 1999; Quatro 2004).

This concept has also attracted increasing levels of interest from academics in management and organisational studies, as popular areas of self-discovery, self-fulfilment, self-transformation and self-development (Bell & Taylor 2003) have gained ground, with its recognition as a field of study by the highly regarded Academy of Management giving it legitimacy (Bell & Taylor 2003; Chatterjee & Singhal 2006). However, there are difficulties associated with the study of the Spirituality and Work movement, due to the historical baggage attached to the notion of the separation of church and state affairs, as well as its unwanted associations with new age movements and religion and work (Chatterjee & Singhal 2006; Korthagen 2004). In addition, Tourish and Tourish (2008, 2010) identify the threat of coerced spiritual conformity as the demarcation between work and home life disappears, thus restricting worker autonomy further. The concept is not without its problems.

The growth of and attraction to the Spirituality and Work movement has been attributed to a number of factors: an overemphasis on materialism by business (Bell & Taylor 2003); a spiritual emptiness within organisations (Mitroff & Denton 1999); a search for meaning by employees; and a means by which individual and corporate transformation can be combined (Heelas 1991, cited in Bell & Taylor 2003, p.330) and by which the meaning of work can be elevated through the construction, or recognition, of moral virtue within the greater social and moral context. It is embodied in ideas of social responsibility, workplace ethics and the recognition of the 'whole' person (Bell & Taylor 2003). It is viewed as a way by which employers can 'reap the benefits of the full and deep engagement of their employees, their so-called most valuable resource' (Mitroff & Denton 1999, p.7). The movement has emerged at a time when the contract between employers and employees requires renegotiation and recommitment after the loss of faith by employees that followed the restructuring and redundancies of the 1980s.

Spirituality at Work is not a new movement. Its presence has been identified in literature from the writings of Mary Follett on a collective model of management, to Max Weber in the identification of the Protestant work ethic, through to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Greenleaf's model of servant leadership (Bell & Taylor 2003; Quatro 2004). The current need for this model is primarily founded on two premises – the desire by employees to have a more satisfying and meaningful work life and the requirement for employers to attract and maintain employee commitment, so enhancing productivity. The Spirituality at Work literature identifies three major factors contributing to the attractiveness of its ideas. These are: sociocultural, organisational and personal (Chatterjee & Singhal 2006). As Chatterjee & Singhal (2006) elaborate, the growth of the self-development industry; the introduction of Eastern philosophies to the West; the movement of society up the hierarchy of needs scale; the breakdown of traditional communities; and the need for organisations to encourage commitment from employees are all seen as factors leading towards an engagement with the concept.

This conceptual construction of Spirituality at Work is based largely on four studies – Ashmos and Duchon (2000), Milliman, Czaplewski and Ferguson (2003), Ashforth and Pratt (2003) and Sheep (2004) – and includes:

- inner life at work
- meaning at work
- sense of connection and community
- alignment of values
- transcendence of self
- holism and harmony

- personal growth
- self–workplace integration.

What can be taken from these studies is that the Spirituality at Work model is a formulation of various components which align neatly with teacher identity, a sense of higher purpose and community. These components include meaning at work, a sense of connection and community, alignment of values, personal growth and development of one’s inner work life and transcendence of self. Sheep (2006) argues that ‘transcendence’ relates to the growing prominence of work in people’s lives, which means that the relationship with work is one of ‘company as community’ (p.361).

# The experience of lead vocational teachers

This research was conducted through four focus group meetings held in November 2009. Eighty people responded to a request disseminated throughout TAFE Queensland and 24 were able to take part. Participants agreed to discuss the role, values, beliefs and attitudes of the lead vocational teacher in TAFE Queensland. The research sought to address issues of job satisfaction, commitment and avenues for career development, as well as personal and professional development needs.

Generally, lead vocational teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the way their role was implemented and utilised in their institutes, voicing a concern that financial considerations took precedence over sound educational practices, which resulted in a great deal of unhappiness and reduced their experience of meaningful work, sense of purpose, commitment to their workplace and sense of the workplace as a community. The disparity between what teachers value and what is given value in the workplace is seen as increasingly divisive. In addition, the growing levels of paperwork demanded for auditing requirements and the high turnover of administrative staff lead to high levels of frustration as they feel overburdened and distracted from core teaching tasks and duties.

While teachers accepted the need for business development activities and business acumen in their work, they also categorically felt that their skills and knowledge were being underutilised and that consequently their potential as workers was being overlooked and underdeveloped. It was also generally agreed that there is an urgent need for more teacher consultation if their commitment to the ongoing change agenda is to be secured, and, indeed, if lead vocational teachers are to be used to their fullest capacity to enable business growth and the achievement of true excellence in education. For this to occur, the role of the lead vocational teacher in Queensland TAFE institutes had to be recognised and more thoughtfully implemented.

A number of themes emerged through the focus group meetings, six of which merit further discussion in this paper. These are:

- unclear roles and expectations
- excessive auditing and documentation
- constraints on effective leadership roles
- a clash of values
- effective models for mentoring others
- integrated career pathways.

## Unclear roles and expectations

A number of factors influencing the nature of the lead vocational teacher role have largely arisen in response to economic imperatives. These include:

- the influx of international students, which has resulted in more course-coordination duties
- a high turnover of casual teaching staff, such as in nursing where the average length of stay is reportedly 5.5 months, which is in some part attributed to a lack of adequate mentoring

- a high turnover of administrative staff, which has led, in some situations, to devolvement of some of their tasks to the teachers.

The blurring of lines between the roles of the lead vocational teacher and educational managers or administration staff in coordinating courses and undertaking administrative processes has caused the greatest sense of unease, particularly where this blurring has occurred over time, with teachers still required to undertake a full teaching load. There is an underlying sense that the lead vocational teacher role has become nothing more than a course coordinator or administrator. Furthermore, in some institutes the role of the operations manager has been abolished, with the consequent repercussions being acutely felt.

This may be a pragmatic response to the marketisation of education, which requires a constant focus on cost efficiencies. The professional status of teaching is weakened through this shift in focus and this is a dilemma faced internationally in education and felt deeply by teachers (Hargreaves 2000). Lead vocational teachers largely identified lack of time as a key factor which interfered with opportunities to reinvigorate their passion for teaching through the development of their professional teaching practices. Focus group members related the difficulties associated with this alteration of their role:

How long have you had an admin person for ... longer than six months at a time? ... that person if they were left in that job would be able to take 90% of the administrative work.

The issue we are having at the moment is that a whole array of administrators have recently been redeployed, some 16 administrators, and many of their functions fall or double into the lead vocational teacher functions ... Time has to be given to leaders to create and energise people, to inspire them and get innovation ... and to create better resources, to do clinical supervisions on teaching and strategies, but lead vocational teachers are just put under so much pressure because they are doing the administrator's role.

I guess the thing is, you know, I really feel like I am just a nobody, because at the end of the day I'm just classed as a teacher of ... and I get called team leader occasionally and I really hate that term. I feel like I am just somebody who works at a call centre ... it's a derogatory high school type of term ... and I kind of would feel a little more valued if I could be given some sort of recognition – as being, doing more like what I do.

There is a sense of being undervalued as a teacher and of the teacher identity diminished by economic imperatives. This is perhaps the harsh reality in many workplaces, where, as Wharrf (2004), suggests: 'managers have created a paradigm in which human beings are treated as inanimate resources allocated against mission objectives in order to achieve desired outcomes and ... that the capitalist system and management development programs have created these rational managers' (p.14).

A striking example of this is where the teachers do not appear as academic staff in the structure of the institute, but are instead a budget line:

- A. It hasn't changed at our level yet, because the new institute structure doesn't go to teaching. The whole new structure is just admin and management, at no point did they list educational staff as part of the structure and my question [was answered], ah, you are part of the budget.
- B. We are not part of the staff?
- A. No, we are not staff ... part of the budget.

There is a pervasive sense of dislocation within the institutes, such that teachers question their professional identity and place within the overall structure and the direction of the educational

establishment. This has led to alienation, where there was once a feeling of centrality, belonging and community.

## Excessive auditing and documentation

One of the components of the job that demands increasing amounts of time is administration. The emphasis on the paper trail to cover auditing requirements is seen as irrelevant to high-quality teaching by many lead vocational teachers. Named by Black and Reich (2010) as the ‘elephant in the room’, it is time-consuming and viewed generally by the VET teaching profession as a stressful and sorry misdirection of valuable teacher energy, to the extent that participating teachers stated that they find it ‘stupid’ and feel pushed towards retirement. The ‘audit culture’, which results in ‘excessive time spent on “paperwork” related to compliance’ (Black & Reich 2010, p.1), is seen as a way to encourage trust in an accountable, transparent public system, using performance measures taken from the fields of accounting and auditing. However, the doubling-up of systems and multiple copies in electronic and hard copy are seen as a waste of time, energy and resources. This focus reflected a devaluation of teaching and education, as the professional judgment of the teacher is no longer trusted and is superseded by the quality performance measures of auditing. The pressures of performance are identified as a factor undermining the confidence of teachers and even their ability to prioritise their teaching activities as they seek to meet the diverse external demands for increasing the numbers of students and the completion of paperwork (Ball 2003).

In stating the need for a further overhaul of quality assurance – by moving to an outcomes-based model, where funding is focused on completion rates – Skills Australia couches the discussion in the language of increasing trust. Yet, Skills Australia (2010) goes on to ask the crucial question: ‘Do we currently have a quality system in VET that is the worst of all worlds – bureaucratic but ineffective?’ (p.12).

Many of the lead vocational teachers participating in the focus groups would agree – they are overwhelmed by paperwork, which does not reflect the quality of their teaching, the integrity of their work or the qualitative outcomes of their work with the students. However, the source of the issue remains unchallenged as Skills Australia (2010) also flags the need for additional capturing of auditable information:

improving the quality of services delivered and indeed, having the means to measure the full range of benefits the sector generates for individuals and enterprises (p.7).

Do we need to switch to more outcome- and output-focused indicators ... Additionally, there are gaps in the visibility of outcomes achieved from VET providers’ community engagement activities. With the anticipated growth of services in workforce development, how might we capture the outcomes achieved by providers working collaboratively with employers in this domain? What adjustments would be required to our data and management systems to enable them to cope with these changes? (p.13)

Palmer (2003) makes the point that ‘relational’ trust within a school environment is an essential ingredient for success and that what really happens in the relationship between the student and teacher is immeasurable. This is applicable to any learning environment. He goes further, stating that money, external measuring processes, and new curricula will not work without trust (p.384).

In addition, Boyle (2001, cited in Ball 2003) observes that, despite the frenzy of data collection, effective solutions are still as elusive as ever:

We take our collective pulse 24 hours a day with the use of statistics. We understand life that way, though somehow the more figures we use, the more the great truths seem to slip through our fingers. Despite all that numerical control, we feel as ignorant of the answers to the big questions as ever (p.215).

It is therefore not surprising that, in a climate calling for more performance measures, many lead vocational teachers remain unconvinced by the bureaucratic demands of performance documentation, while ironically being frustrated from channelling their energies into the very activities they believe would achieve the desired outcomes. The Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP) offers an extreme example of meeting the needs of the auditing requirements demanded by independent verifiers. The time estimated to set up, deliver, mark and report on assessment required by this program is approximately eight to ten hours per week. The average TAFE teacher week is 32 hours. A senior teacher in this program spoke vehemently about the lack of value in this type of auditing, stating that there is:

nothing educationally sound in this. Imagine being a student in this? Every time they turn around they have another assessment thrown at them. This is complete negative backwash. It is stress for the student – not a great learning environment ... we have some excellent teachers here, but this is just a waste of their time.

The verifiers come in once a year and if the assessment and reporting requirements are not deemed up to their standards the program is deemed 'at risk' and teachers will be audited again soon after. As observed by a lead vocational teacher about this issue, it is the quality of the reports that is being assessed, since independent verifiers are unable to attend the interviews with the clients of the program and, for the purposes of auditing, witness the process first hand.

I am convinced we will never get it right. If we do they will be out of a job ... now you've got me on my soap box!

Other members of the focus group expressed their frustration at the multiple recording methods used for meeting different reporting demands, which again pay scant attention to the quality of education, but is essentially a data-gathering exercise:

- A. Not the job necessarily. I like the outcomes of the job ... The job pisses me off. A lot of aspects of the job really piss me off ... For example, this morning I had to print out off the blackboard [Learning Management System] my study and assessment guide, my matrix, my blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Big push, let's go electronic ... but for that administrative nastiness that is a roll book, we now have to take everything off the blackboard, print it on nice paper ... kill a few trees ... it's stupid. But we have to print it all out and put it in the roll book. It's accessible, there it is ... But they develop a system and we have to change what we do ... It's the administrative part of a lead vocational teacher, having to deal with systems ...
- B. Has got me to the point where I seriously, I'm thinking of retiring, even though I can't afford to and coming back as a casual teacher, 'cos I don't want to stop teaching.
- A. It's the tail wagging the dog.
- B. Yes.

- A. They develop a system and then we have to change what we do to fit the system and, as an IT professional, that is anathema. That's exactly the opposite to what IT systems should be. IT systems should reflect what you do, not the other way around.
- B. Yes.
- C. Yes, absolutely.
- B. I certainly don't feel that my teaching skills are valued by management.

Researcher: You don't feel that your teaching skills are valued by management?

- B. No, I think they are valued by the people around me, who I work with ... certainly the students. But, I really feel like, from the management side, if it's not causing them any grief or any problems, that's good but ... like I have never seen any audit in twenty years, anything at all that has ever looked at my teaching quality. No. It's about my administration, quality of doing assessments and marking rolls, all those other things that I do, but I have never had anybody put comments from management say anything about my teaching.

This aspect of their role remains a source of genuine dissatisfaction to lead vocational teachers, who, by contrast, expressed a dedication to and enjoyment of leading students through a transformative learning process and participating in the teaching community. These components of the job were a source of great satisfaction to them. Even so, within a multifaceted job such as the VET teacher, the participants believe there is room for improvement so that their skills and knowledge are fully utilised.

## Constraints on effective leadership

It is clear from the comments of those participating in the focus groups that the main attraction of their work and their most meaningful activity was supporting students through the learning process and feeling that they had helped to transform their lives in a positive way. It is a journey that teachers are passionate about and gives meaning to their professional lives. The following are some typical examples of comments on this issue:

Lead vocational teachers take genuine ownership of the outcomes for the students, having them at heart and doing things that are good for the students, not for [the institute], in that sense. Take a lot of pride in what you produce, take a lot of pride in what you see at graduation, take a lot of pride when employers ring and when you see students some years later and they tell you what a great job they've got ... I think that's what drives a lot of the lead vocational teachers that I work with.

I think that's why so many lead vocational teachers are doing so much more ... it's because they are in a position where they have an impact on the outcomes of the students.

I'm passionate about the teaching ... I'm very passionate about enrolled nurses, having worked with them, I think they get a really bad deal and the only way you're gonna make things better for them in industry is to go back to grass roots level.

In this context, perhaps the best and most suitable model of leadership for the teaching profession is that of servant leadership, developed and espoused by Robert Greenleaf. Greenleaf (1977) describes his inspiration for this model as thus:

The idea of The Servant as Leader came out of reading Hermann Hesse's *Journey to the East*. In this story we see a band of men on a mythical journey, probably also Hesse's own journey. The central figure of the story is Leo who accompanies the party as the servant who does their menial chores, but who also sustains them with his spirit and his song (p.79).

When Leo leaves the group, it disbands.

Note that the inspiration is based on a spiritual journey and that, in this model of leadership, a leader is a servant first and foremost and is viewed as 'inspirational and moral' (Graham 1991, p.105). In addition, the attention of the servant leader is focused on the people and not the organisation. In this it differs from transformational leadership, which can be hierarchical and meets the needs of the organisation. Greenleaf (1977) also promoted a divergent business ethic:

the work exists for the person as much as the person exists for the work. Put another way, the business exists as much to provide meaningful work to the person as it exists to provide a product or service to the customer (p.142).

Teaching is still seen by some as a calling, rather than a career. As one focus group member stated, 'Teachers ... are in a position where they have a lot of power in terms of outcomes and so teaching is more like a calling than a career. We could earn loads more money in industry, I've been offered more. We do it because we love the outcomes.'

This link between servant leadership, the nature of teaching as a vocation and the Spirituality at Work concept is best expressed by de Klerk-Luttig (2008, p.3):

Spirituality also includes a sense of transcendence, a sense of calling or being called and therefore also one of meaning. Calling refers to the experience of making a difference to others through service and, in doing so, finding meaning and purpose in life ... Where the spiritual plays an important role there is a shift from earning a living towards living a meaningful life, because spirituality is not primarily about success, but about significance and meaning. Meaning has to do with turning one's job into a vocation, thereby achieving a sense of personal wholeness, purpose and direction.

The ten characteristics of servant leadership are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and community building (Spears 1995, cited in Barbuto & Wheeler 2006).

The teachers participating in the focus groups strongly asserted that there was need for teacher leadership in TAFE Queensland. Indeed, the VET sector generally has been recently identified as one in which 'there is evidence of capability gaps among VET managers and leaders' (Productivity Commission 2010, p.LV). Lead vocational teachers cited a number of leadership areas where they felt they could be particularly effective. These included:

- induction
- mentoring and coaching of new staff
- business development
- course coordination
- management and development
- acting as a conduit between management and teaching teams
- management of Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and Australian Vocational Education and Training Management Information Statistical Standard (AVETMISS) compliance.

However, teacher leadership in TAFE Queensland suffers a number of limitations, largely because the leadership roles remain unofficial. As stated by Jameson and McNay (2007), there is a lack of

substantive power associated with teacher leadership, which can sometimes lead to a lack of trust. One participant observed:

Unless it is defined, it is not supported. You are allowed to go ahead with it, but it is unofficial you feel a little in limbo as to how far you can go. Like you are being watched and as long as it goes alright, it isn't a problem, but if it goes wrong.

The implementation of a shared and vertical leadership model (Pearce 2004) is essential in Queensland TAFE institutes because of the diversity of their programs and a growing tendency to employ managers whose job it is to manage and who do not necessarily possess knowledge of and a background in education. However, perhaps the biggest inhibitor of the teacher leadership role is a lack of recognition that knowledge of education must be acknowledged and valued and can be used to develop business. Teachers felt they could demonstrate significant teacher leadership in business development but were not being given the opportunity. The prevailing wisdom appeared to prefer teachers in the classroom, while marketing staff with little or no knowledge of the industry were sent out to business meetings. This, it was felt, was a substantial loss to TAFE Queensland, as time was not being allocated to nurture business relationships by those with specialist knowledge and understanding and personal links. A number of participants reported that relationships developed with industry were not being supported or exploited for the benefit of the institutes.

It is an important role that the organisation relies on and it should be recognised.

Teachers are the best ambassadors. They know the business and can develop the market. They could provide information and management could make up the plans and put it forward with the help of the teacher.

As lead vocational teachers we are aware of the overall picture. We can see where the market is saturated and where the need is. Maintain links with business.

I used to go out to the schools, give presentations on what we taught on our course, we don't get to do that any more. Marketing people go out, but they have no idea of what happens in education and they cannot sell it. No one has the time to do it.

There is an erosion of knowledge that would help sell the business. Any lead vocational teacher is a better seller of the course because of their knowledge than a person with a degree in marketing. We were employed with industry knowledge and industry links, but those links have faded because we are not given time to maintain them.

An example of the lack of trust placed in teachers is illustrated by the following anecdote. Teachers from a particular program who wished to impart a sense of belonging as well as provide a business-focused outcome displayed the work of the students on a website and organised the production of a tee shirt that identified the program the students belonged to:

What you are talking about is an erosion of duties that used to help the business and your knowledge as a teacher that would help to sell the business.

We wanted our own website and we wanted tee shirts, we were told, 'no, under no circumstances', so we just did it ourselves. Now they've seen it and they've gone, 'that's fantastic'.

Being a large and diverse sector means that it is individual institutes and their management that have the strongest influence on the implementation of the TAFE Queensland agenda so in some instances there are good outcomes. As one participant stated, unlike the situation in the majority of institutes, the role of teacher leadership is recognised in their institute and 'in most cases they are given a

reduced workload. We realise the need for teacher leadership.’ In addition, where the needs of the business vary across institutes, there also exists the experience that ‘I wouldn’t have a job if I didn’t develop my own business. I accept it as a part of my role. I have to go and get the business myself.’

These kinds of exceptions clearly indicate that it is the approach of the individual head of school or institute that is the predominant factor in deciding how lead vocational teachers are used. However, in the area of business development, marketing and business relationships, the overwhelming conclusion was that teachers were underutilised, and that TAFE Queensland was not benefitting from the wealth of experience and knowledge residing in its teachers. This is deeply paradoxical: on the one hand, lead vocational teachers are expected to lead, take responsibility for new staff and implement innovative educational and business practices; and, on the other, a ‘low trust’ model of management was being experienced, wherein the judgment, knowledge, skill and initiative of teaching staff were not being trusted and utilised.

Perhaps most significantly, teachers felt that their role as a professional who contributed to the life and direction of business initiatives and the TAFE community went unacknowledged. So while the desire existed among teachers to offer their specialist skills and knowledge to the growth and business development of the institute, the majority felt largely inhibited from doing so, which stifled their potential as an individual and contributing member of the workplace.

These issues raise the question: are teachers not being fully utilised or trusted because their sense of purpose, their personal and professional identity and accompanying value system have not yet been fully integrated into the changing VET environment?

## A clash of values

The specific issue of values was raised separately to open a discussion that would explore whether the values of teaching staff and the institute were aligned and whether a shared vision that underpinned teacher leadership duties and roles existed. When questioned about the nature of the lead vocational teacher core values, many of the participants expressed a genuine commitment to the outcomes for students, indicating their sense of responsibility for these students and reflecting the vocational nature of teaching. That was also cited as part of the reason why lead vocational teachers take on additional unremunerated jobs and tasks.

However, countering this vocational devotion to their job is a conflict of interest that has grown more marked with the increase in the economic and administrative demands of the business of education. Lead vocational teachers reported a sense that management and teachers did not share the same vision. Yet the critical importance of establishing a vision and mission based on shared values is emphasised in most leadership models:

Shared values give everyone an internal compass that enables them to act independently and interdependently, responsibly and publicly. (Kouzes & Posner 1993, p.53)

Teachers assert that there is a lack of genuine understanding of education as well as an undervaluing of the role, job and aim of educators and education. They view the focus on the ‘mighty dollar’ as the prevailing factor in the decision process. In fact, the focus has so shifted towards financial and administrative imperatives that teachers often feel that teaching excellence is irrelevant. This is not only being questioned by current lead vocational teachers in TAFE Queensland but internationally as well. In a recent speech on 15 January 2011, the Leader of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, Ed Miliband, opened a discussion on values and the merits of managerialism and a market-driven

society, while referring to public institutions such as health and education. Miliband questioned the wisdom of an approach that has ‘a vision of the market that seemed to place too little importance on the values, institutions and relationships that people cherish the most’, and attributed the Party’s failure in the last election to putting ‘markets and commerce before the common good ... We became too technocratic and managerial’. He further added: ‘But people don’t just care about the bottom line; there is so much more to life’.

In an examination of values in servant leadership, Russell (2001, p.77) points to the existence of two value cultures:

Lloyd (1998) and Oster (1991) argue there are two dominant value cultures. One has a short-term perspective motivated by material and monetary gain. The other is spiritually and morally driven, and is more concerned with long-term issues.

The problems of housing two disparate value systems under one roof were identified repeatedly as a source of real concern by members of the focus group. It is an issue identified in the Spirituality at Work paradigm, with alignment of values seen as essential for acting with integrity at work and therefore achieving a sense of wholeness:

‘Spirituality links with integrity and wholeness’ (Louw 2005, p.133). The word integrity comes from the noun ‘integer’, which means wholeness or completion ... Spirituality, as an expression of wholeness, is therefore directly linked to the ability to act with integrity ... how a person relates his or her actions towards the Absolute and towards others and to their own being, core values and practices. (de Klerk-Luttig 2008, p.3)

The underlying issue expressed by the participants in the focus groups was they were not making decisions based on real outcomes for the students but on the economic demands made by management to improve the bottom line. It was understood that all employees were experiencing the difficulties of the economic imperatives, but that teachers at the ‘coalface’ were particularly able to see the effects on students. In fact, teachers were concerned that, by encouraging students to engage in particular activities, they were dooming them to failure. The short-term gains, it was believed, did little to serve the long-term aims of TAFE and, in fact, some feared it would affect their industry credibility. The shift in focus to financial outcomes emphasised what was felt to be a widening gap between teaching staff and management. The financial constraints also limited the teachers’ ability to be innovative, with teachers stating that they simply did not have the time. These dilemmas consequently affect teacher understanding of the role of the lead vocational teacher and teacher leadership:

Sometimes, I look at my teaching and I look at the institute and the institute seems to be more worried about figures, where I am more worried about the outcome of the student, in particular if I have a difficult one, I’m looking at where will they go unless I do the extra mile with them, so I think sometimes our teacher instinct comes in ... whereas management in the institute is looking at meeting their targets, their budgets ... I really feel that they are two different focuses.

I don’t think the management understands education at all ... For example, what can we do to ensure that we get the full amount of money? Bring all the assessment to the start of the course; it is not educationally sound ... It is that sort of comment that makes me believe that they are really there and we are here [and] they really don’t understand education.

In the three years I have worked here, I have seen the focus shift from the student to the dollar.

It is so different to when I first came here. They used to interview every student and so the success rate was so much higher, now we take everyone and we know there is going to be a high drop-out rate.

If we continue pushing people through like a sausage machine, we're going to lose our industry credibility.

Everyone's thinking dollars ... but when they think about tightening budgets they think about cutting down on teaching time and resources and things, not on say administrative processes; we seem to be the first port of call that they'll compromise and it's really frustrating.

The emphasis on short-term goals caused professional anxiety and presented the teachers concerned with an ethical dilemma, identified as 'ethical retooling' by Ball (2003, p.226):

This is part of a larger process of 'ethical retooling' in the public sector which is replacing client 'need' and professional judgement with commercial decision-making. The space for the operation of autonomous ethical codes based in a shared moral language is colonized or closed down ... The policy technologies of market, management and performativity leave no space for an autonomous or collective ethical self.

It was repeatedly asserted that the quality of courses was being compromised and that teachers feared for the outcomes of their students:

The shrinking bucket for the lower level qualifications ... is making it very difficult for us to deliver to our client base ... We have a very low socio-economic population here. We have a high demand for level 2 and 3 qualifications ... we are getting pushed to deliver level 4 and diploma but our clients aren't ready ... and that's very much an ethical dilemma.

Pushing people around me to pick level 4 and diploma, it is making it difficult for those people. It is a money thing all the way through and a lot of students, as people have said before, cannot go straight into a diploma ... Setting students up to fail ... and I don't believe in setting students up to fail.

Pushed to deliver higher-level diplomas that clients are not ready to take on that level in an interest to get work outcomes that clients are not ready for.

Other teachers were more pragmatic:

It can be a bit of a clash, a bit of an ethical dilemma if you like, but I am paid to do a job, I do the job to the best of my ability. I don't always agree with what they are doing and I get very frustrated, but I have to realise that at the end of the day, that's it and there is often very little you can actually do.

As Bernstein (1996, p.169) puts it, 'contract replaces covenant', or expressing it another way, value replaces values, and 'commitment and service are of dubious worth within the new policy regime' (Ball 2003, p.218).

The financial effects were also being experienced in the form of teaching staff cutbacks, based on a push to deliver online courses. This in turn reflected a lack of understanding of online courses, which it was asserted, are just as expensive as face-to-face classroom delivery. This left the teachers feeling under siege and at odds with management directives. In addition, teachers stated that, while resources such as libraries, toilets and computers were also being cut back, money was being found to finance management consultants. Less clear is whether the decisions affecting teachers at the coalface and their basis were being effectively communicated and, if they were, as was the case in one institute, whether this would lead to less dissatisfaction and more understanding. One staff

member described how the lead vocational teacher was being used in her department to liaise between management and teaching staff and this was, in fact, proving to be very successful, because teacher frustration was based on a lack of understanding as a result of poor communication. Once meetings had been set up and decisions explained, the teachers were satisfied. This was a solution initiated by the lead vocational teachers themselves.

We've had a significant number of staff cuts in the last twelve months, across admin and teaching areas, so that was one contentious issue that was causing concern. We asked for that to be a focus point at one of the forums and that was based on an identified need from other staff; other staff now looked to the lead vocational teachers as a point of contact, so that was really good. The director came and spoke and ... they are not always happy with the outcomes, but they understood why ... one of the problems we had here was that there wasn't enough consistent communication between management ... so things would just happen ... you'd come back and someone's contract was not renewed and they were no longer here. That was a move from the lead vocational teachers to get together ourselves and walk down the corridor and knock on the door.

This proactive approach was discussed enthusiastically by the staff member who had implemented it. She stated that it was a role that the lead vocational teachers had identified and it met the needs of the team. It played a significant part in reducing tensions among staff and decreasing feelings of alienation and powerlessness.

Finally, participants noted that the business of education itself had not undergone any real form of debate. Due to the diversity of programs and the competitive nature of inter-institute relations, lead vocational teachers felt that they lacked a unified voice – the teachers felt silenced. Yet it was deemed paramount that education should regain its voice to reassert its aim to provide high-quality outcomes that would improve the long-term business viability of TAFE Queensland.

If we had all lead vocational teachers ... saying, for instance, we need to increase the value given to the educational experience that is going to, long term, get you better marketing. Its benefits ... if you look after the educational experience and the people delivering it ... your long-term goal of financial viability is much better served ... as a body, let's say something, let's keep, every time we get a chance, keep saying it, keep reminding them, but there is no such thing as a lead vocational teacher body, no unified voice from any of the staff.

## Effective models for mentoring others

'The business side of things' has also affected the time given by teachers to mentor their peers. The economic demands of the business has limited the access of teachers to desired levels of professional and personal development, conflicting with ideas of professional mastery and an innately felt desire to mentor new staff in the way these teachers had experienced in their earlier formative teaching years. Some described their early relationship with their mentors. One explained that, many years later when his mentor had retired, the relationship had continued, thus supporting the idea of a teaching community and sense of connectedness.

- A When I started here I was allocated a teacher to be like my mentor and I was actually given some time at the start to sit and watch him teach and I learned so much from watching someone doing it who was very good at it.
- B You feel like you had significant mentoring when you started?
- A Oh, absolutely. [Now] it's ad hoc, you do it because you are a professional, not because you have been allocated that task ... it's just what you do.

- C Can I just add that every teacher, nursing teacher, leaves and that's the first thing they cite. It's not the workload or the money ... both figure heavily. It's the fact that they haven't been mentored. They started the day, like I started the day. I was given a class and was told 'go to it' and you hit the ground running. You either sink or swim and some people just can't make the grade and they have all said: 'you are not led into it, you are not helped, you are not facilitated. You are just plonked in there, thrown a whole lot of notes and this is your class. Here is your roll.' So if they had somebody dedicated to that role who could just look after new teachers, I think you'd have more longevity within the team.

Virtually across all institutes there was a sense that a formal mentoring program would be beneficial, not only to promote the passing on of knowledge and skills in an industry threatened with 'knowledge loss' (Blom & Clayton 2002), but also to prevent the waste and stress associated with high staff turnover. This is a view supported by the findings of a recent report into the quality of teaching in VET.

A particularly strong finding to emerge was the emphasis of participants in all categories on the need for effective institutionalised support and mentoring of new VET teachers. Support for new teachers needs to be embedded into institutional structures, funding and workloads and included as a line item in institutional budgets. Many argued that VET teachers should be required to do some sort of induction prior to commencing teaching if they do not already have an appropriate qualification, and then embark on a VET teaching qualification. (Wheelahan 2010b, p.6)

It was suggested by members of the focus groups that, to complement these needs, lead vocational teachers should undergo leadership training. Due to the financial costs incurred by release from the classroom, very few teachers are given the opportunity to attend training, but it was felt that both lead vocational teachers and their institutes would benefit from leadership training. Again, this desire to lead and mentor coincides with the notion of servant leadership, where the primary function of the leader is to facilitate individuals on a journey of growth and development. This desire in teachers is very pronounced, as Palmer states: 'It was my turn to become a mentor to someone else. I needed to turn around and look for the new life emerging behind me, to offer people the gift that had been given to me when I was young. As I did, my identity and integrity had new chances to evolve in each new encounter' (Palmer & Scribner 2007, p.25).

This idea is supported by statements from the lead vocational teachers themselves:

- A. I would find the mentoring thing interesting. Like a proper mentoring ... see, I think from a teaching perspective you enjoy ... If you have stayed in it ... it's because you enjoy taking people from somewhere to somewhere else and if that person happens to be another teacher, then I would find that very rewarding, to be able to take someone and give them the confidence or the skills or whatever to make them a better teacher.
- A. And that's not a money thing ... well, it is a money thing, because you'd have to take me off hours for that week ... but the long-term benefits ... you'd have teachers not leaving in five months.
- B. It's not just in the classrooms that you are giving that mentoring, there's a lot of other things, you know. People say [person's name] knows that, [person's name] knows that ... I'm not gonna be here forever, so I need to be able to pass that knowledge on and that responsibility on to other teachers as well.

- A. It is interesting, that when I started here in '89, the guy who was my mentor became one of my best friends and we still are in contact now ... I was very impressed with what he did; he was the guy I went to from then on if I had any issue with someone.

The relationships developed by teachers within their own professional community are valued highly. Palmer and Scribner (2007) state that 'good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves' (p.25). Furthermore, the mentoring tradition should be viewed as one that requires a serious focus and adequate funding if the knowledge base of older teachers is to pass to the younger generation of teachers coming through the ranks and also to stem the current levels of high staff turnover in some VET areas of learning. It should be noted that since these focus groups were held one major institute has introduced a significant mentoring program in an attempt to deal with some of these issues.

## Integrated career pathways

Teachers need reinvigorating. It's [the situation is] like a car, you just can't drive it for 100 000 km and never, ever service it. (Focus group member, November 2009)

The role of lead vocational teacher was introduced partially to provide a career development ladder for teachers. The teachers involved in the focus groups were asked if it had fulfilled this aim and were further questioned about the types of activities they believed would be professionally engaging for this level of teacher and which would offer them a genuine career development pathway. In this context two questions require further investigation:

- Is the introduction of the lead vocational teacher position enough to retain skilled teachers in the VET sector?
- What are the incentives that might encourage senior teachers to stay and remain committed and engaged with their work?

The teachers asserted that, as with any incremental process, once an employee reached the top of the scale, there was nowhere to go:

The top of the range ... that's as far as you can go.

I don't feel like there's any pathway for me, I just gotta hope, look out and see if you can find something.

Despite the general agreement that they had little by way of a career pathway, teachers provided a number of avenues they would like to explore – balanced with a teaching load – that they felt would enhance the educational and business value of TAFE Queensland. Lead vocational teachers recognised the dangers of knowledge loss and expressed a desire for combined roles that would ensure the passing on of knowledge and skills and also reduce the high staff turnover currently being experienced in TAFE Queensland. Combined roles would ensure that teachers, who enjoyed teaching and saw it as a strength, could still continue to practise teaching while acting in other challenging roles. Virtually all of the suggested alternative roles were suitable for combining with teaching and include the mentoring of teachers willing and able to take on managerial roles in the future. Teachers, while acutely aware of the current economic limitations, offered the following list of suggestions for career development pathways:

- identifying, coaching and mentoring teachers suitable for future management roles

- research
- business development
- human resources
- project management
- educational leadership roles
- resource and curriculum development
- further study.

It was repeatedly asserted that both teachers and their institutes would benefit from the reinvigoration experienced by teachers through professional development opportunities: the institute would realise financial and educational outcomes, while the knowledge, skills and status of teachers would be improved – and ultimately the reputation and quality of TAFE Queensland institutes would be enhanced. Educational leadership shown through the provision of staff development programs and formal induction and mentoring programs would ensure that knowledge was passed on, while encouraging staff to undertake further study and research would support the academic standards that institutes require to deliver high-level qualifications. Moreover, releasing teachers to develop curriculum and resources and design innovative tailored courses for industry would satisfy industry needs and rebuild partnerships that would be financially beneficial. It was further suggested that, as a part of the lead vocational teacher program, teachers should be given leadership training, career counselling and mentoring.

# Conclusion

The Spirituality in Work approach strives for a workplace where the individual is a part of a community, participating in meaningful work, appreciated for their skills and knowledge, and undergoing appropriate professional and personal development. It depicts a workplace where employees seeking more than just financial reward can work with integrity in an atmosphere of trust and experience a sense of wholeness. The leadership model most commonly associated with this approach is Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership, which combines both a moral and transformational dimension, and places emphasis on serving individuals as a first priority (Biberman & Whitty 1997; Fairholm 1996; Barbuto & Wheeler 2006). The Spirituality at Work paradigm connects on many levels with the role and identity of the lead vocational teachers in this study.

This study found that lead vocational teachers find it fulfilling to lead the learning journey of their students and their peers. Because it represents more than simply monetary reward, the teachers value the process of helping people to become professionally proficient and they derive satisfaction from the achievements and outcomes of their students. They have a commitment to the teaching and learning community, with some describing it as a 'calling', and they discuss the importance of passion in their work. The teachers profess an awareness of the necessity for passing on their knowledge and skills to the ensuing generation of teachers. They would like ongoing opportunities for professional and personal development to invigorate their teaching lives – opportunities to work in various fields, such as management, research and mentoring within education, but combined with a teaching role.

It is clear that lead vocational teachers understand the economic imperatives of the current VET system and want to contribute to the development of the business and to the betterment of the TAFE learning community; that is, to feel that their specialist skills are being fully utilised and their professional potential recognised and developed. They want their professional judgment to be trusted and drawn upon and their professional integrity to be respected. They are dismayed and disheartened when their teaching practices are undervalued.

However, there is evidence of a growing lack of congruence between the values embedded in the individual institutes and those held by the teachers. This is causing professional anxiety and stress – particularly in regard to the decisions being made on financial grounds, the prominence given to compliance requirements and the misdirection of teacher energy and talent into administration. Teachers expressed frustration that lead vocational teacher energy is not being channelled into what is perceived as more worthwhile professionally based duties and functions, such as formal mentoring and coaching, curriculum and resource development, networking and business development, and targeted use of specialist skills and knowledge. They emphasised the commitment they had to the long-term goals of education, business and the TAFE community, as opposed to the short-term financial outcomes pursued by the management in their institutes, and they experienced an ethical dilemma when one took precedence over the other. In addition, they felt that they largely operated in an atmosphere of low trust, where their views are marginalised and their teaching skills seen as of secondary importance to the growing demand of excessive compliance. These concerns are deeply felt by the teachers, to the extent that a number indicated that they had considered leaving the job and returning as casual teachers, thereby reaping the rewards of more heart-based teaching practice without the burden of reporting.

The key to retaining experienced and highly skilled lead vocational teachers in Queensland TAFE institutes is to keep staff engaged with their work and to encourage a sense of wellbeing through the

targeted use of their skills, knowledge and experience in an atmosphere of trust and to view them as a professional body whose judgment and sense of moral purpose are fully integrated into a new work paradigm. In this we agree with Gorgievski and Bakker (2010, p.265) when they say:

Engaged employees ... have a sense of energetic and effective connection with work activities. They work hard (vigor), are involved with a feeling of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge (are dedicated), and feel happily engrossed (absorbed) in their work. Engaged employees exercise influence over events that affect their lives – they are self-efficacious.

Engaged employees perform better, are innovative, are better able to take advantage of business opportunities and develop important connections and networks, and are generally healthier and happier at work. We have found that the key to retaining experienced lead vocational teachers is to provide engaging work and good conditions in an atmosphere of trust that acknowledges, understands and focuses primarily on the educational journey and outcomes of the students.

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# Appendix: Focus group questions

Representatives from the following institutes participated: Gold Coast, Southbank, Southern Queensland, Sunshine Coast, Tropical North, Brisbane North, Wide Bay, Barrier Reef and Skills Tech Acacia Ridge. Questions included:

- Job roles and functions
  - Lead vocational teachers to introduce themselves, their current job roles and functions
  - Do you think you are being used as a lead vocational teacher in the best possible way?
  - What possible roles/functions do you think the lead vocational teacher could fulfil?
- Teacher leadership
  - Do teachers perform leadership roles? If yes, give examples. If no, why not?
  - Is there a need for teacher leadership in VET? If yes, what is that need?
  - Are teacher leadership roles supported where you work? If yes, how? If not, why do you think that is the case?
- Values, behaviours/attributes
  - Are lead vocational teachers a distinct group?
  - What core values do you think they possess?
  - How do they model their behaviours?
  - What attributes do you need to possess to be an lead vocational teacher?
  - Are these values, behaviours/attributes supported/ encouraged/developed by the organisation?
- Career needs: The role was introduced to meet the career development needs of Step 9 teachers.
  - Does it succeed?
  - What avenues for career development do you think are there currently?



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