Dissonance and Engagement:
Case Study of an International VET Project

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of Australian expatriate staff engagement in their first experience of a short-term assignment on an international Vocational Education and Training (VET) project. The researcher noted instances of work-based disappointment from VET staff deployed on their first international project when away from the “home organisation” in Australia and with the “temporary organisation” in the host country.

While there were many positive aspects to deployment, negative aspects in-country included a misunderstanding of their job role, unclear goals as well as stakeholder conflicts. Often the result was either dissatisfaction with their involvement or complete removal from the project. These negative aspects are detrimental to the viability of VET international project partnerships. This research seeks ways to understand staff experiences and find ways to minimise negative aspects and improve positive staff engagement.

Research for this thesis was conducted through an interpretive qualitative case study of an educational collaboration between an Australian public VET institute and a small, emerging Middle East donor. By examining semi-structured interviews with staff, project-document analysis and participant-researcher field notes, instances of staff engagement were noted, analysed and categorised into findings for discussion.

These findings included aspects such as contextual work expectations, incongruence of goals in a multi-stakeholder environment, and their subsequent modification. Related findings included aspects of professional development through transformational learning, and the determination that VET projects be considered, and researched, as distinct from Transnational Education (TNE) programs.

Considering these findings, the discussion allows for insight into key areas on how to best manage staff in the field to help increase positive engagement, elevate work-related stakeholder positivity, and achieve stated project aims. The opportunity to introduce guided support through a *Sequential Reflexive Awareness* Program is also discussed. The aim is to first increase, and then retain, those who wish to volunteer for deployment on international VET projects. A pilot draft model of the awareness program is presented for further consideration and possible use in future research.

Declaration

"I, Ryan Gifford, declare that the Doctor of Education thesis entitled *Dissonance and Engagement: Case Study of an International VET Project* is no more than 60,000 words including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

"I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures. All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC), approval number HRE17-213."

Signature *Ryan Gifford* Date 22/03/2023

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Dedication

"They asked me, 'Where are you? It's term time.'
So I told 'em, 'I got what I wanted…why would I come back?'
Y'see, I didn't want to be a professor. I wanted to be a gardener."

Joseph 'Moses' Sparks (1907--1997)

Acknowledgements

As with all theses, this document is not the creation of any one person.

I am indebted to the bedrock of support provided by Dr. Marg Malloch. Without her assistance this document would simply not exist, helped greatly by my supervisory team that included Dr. Gabrielle Pretto and Dr. Ron Wilson.

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Finally, my deepest thanks to my family. A doctoral journey produces knowledge but takes time, and the time that was taken was from my wife and children's right to a father's presence. Here I express my gratitude for understanding and accepting this.

Abbreviations

ANTA	*Australian National Training Authority*
AQF	*Australian Qualifications Framework*
ASQA	*Australian Skills Quality Authority*
CBT/A	*Competency Based Training/Assessment*
DESE	*Department of Education Skills and Employment*
DET	*Department of Education and Training*
DJPR	*Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions*
HE	*Higher Education*
IBC	*International Branch Campus*
IST	*International Skills Training*
MNC	*Multinational Corporation*
NCB	*National Central Bank*
NCVER	*National Centre for Vocational Education Research*
NTEU	*National Tertiary Education Union*
RTO	*Registered Training Organisations*
TAFE	*Tertiary and Further Education*
ToR	*Terms of Reference*
TNE	*Transnational Education*
TVET	*Technical Vocational Education and Training*
VET	*Vocational Education and Training*

Definition of terms

Contextual dissonance

The gap that exists between what was perceived in the Australian workplace prior to departure, and the reality of the situation once in the context of the offshore workplace in-country.

Engagement: positive/negative

Specifically for offshore projects, how a staff member reacts or connects with the assignment. Positive engagement equates that the staff feel comfortable or positive about the experience. Negative posits the opposite.

Goal congruence/incongruence

Goal congruence is when organisational goals have been correctly and consistently addressed and agreement coincides amongst stakeholders. Goal incongruence is when goals are not understood equally amongst stakeholders.

Success indicators.

These assist in determining if goals are being met. Milestones are formative success indicators that allow stakeholders to ascertain that a project is moving ahead correctly. Deliverables are summative success indicators that usually determine the overall goal achievement.

Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis explores the lived experience of staff on assignment for a collaborative international Vocational Education and Training (VET) project, and how they engage with various stakeholders as they work toward delivering their goals effectively in an unfamiliar offshore environment.

During my tenure on several international VET projects, novice project-staff members would confide in me about their disappointment with the reality of the situation in-country. Upon immediate arrival on an offshore project, they would often tell me that "*It's not what I thought it would be."* My immediate reaction was to wonder what exactly they were expecting to find when they arrived. Their vocabulary was often filled with words associated with adventure and exploration – they seemed to be on an individual quest for change or growth. This resonated with Campbell's monomyth, the great all-encompassing tale of every hero's journey and the standardised path involving three specific rites of passage: *separation- initiation- return* (Campbell, 2012). VET staff deployed for the first time on international short-term assignments expressed a desire for a hero's journey, but their engagement path is unclear and difficult. Often the result of this obscured journey is a return home so negatively distanced from the illusion they first held on departure that they have no further interest in future international project work. This is a poor outcome for staff, institutes and future donors, as it results in both disaffected staff on-site for ongoing projects as well as a necessity for ongoing short-term recruitment of novel project staff for new projects.

1.1 Background

Since the 1950s, the Australian VET sector has had a strong and active presence in collaborative international project engagement (Sutherland, 1997; Brown et al., 2018). This looks to continue with the *National Strategy for International Education 2025* (Australian Government, 2016) outlining a projected expansion of Transnational Education (TNE) across all modes of delivery to 2025, including international VET collaborative projects. As well, the post Covid-19 update, *Connected, Creative, Caring: Australian Strategy for International Education 2021--2030* (Department of Education Skills and Employment [DESE], 2021) shows that both federal and state governments are set to increase the capacity of offshore projects moving forward. The earlier release of the *Vocational Education and Training International Engagement Strategy 2025* (Australian Government, 2019) and the *Vocational Education and Training in Victoria 2020* (Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

[DJPR], 2020) reported strategies to increase non-accredited foreign collaboration via capacity building (DESE, 2021) and innovative short-term project partnerships (Australian Government, 2019; DJPR, 2020). At the same time VET looks to be moving away from difficult, complicated, and often derided traditional forms of TNE that focused on export of an accredited course (Chaney, 2013; Australian Skills Quality Authority [ASQA], 2019). As well, the federal government's creation and push for the new short-term, non-accredited *International Skills Training* (IST) courses further heralds a change in the prospects of international work-roles for VET staff. It is more likely VET staff will be deployed as technical consultants on one-off international collaborative projects as opposed to the traditional experience of teaching Australian Qualification Framework (AQF) programs on longstanding foreign partner campuses (KPMG, 2018).

While the extent of Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) offshore delivery of accredited courses is publicly available and easily accessed in the public domain (National Centre for Vocational Education Research [NCVER], 2007, 2009, 2013, 2016), this is not the case for commercial offshore VET projects. Moran and Ryan's (2004) in-depth research investigating implications of globalising the *Australian Qualifications and Training Framework* (AQTF) found they *reasoned* that the majority of offshore VET was non-accredited. However, the full extent is unknown because Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE) institutes are not required to report their fee-for-service business offshore. Although they were commissioned by the federal government (DESE), Moran and Ryan (2004) found consistent opposition to requests for information about offshore VET projects, and this denial of information has been extended to doctoral researchers (Rahimi, 2009). This difficulty in obtaining full transparency from TAFEs can be related to commerce-in-confidence due to competitive business matters (Holden, 2013). It is noted that a proviso of my access to the VET project which is the basis of this case study research, is that I adhere solely to staff engagement and do not divulge or discuss project operations. Therefore, it is very difficult to find, obtain or even create research on international VET projects. Compared to the more visible and familiar accredited *programs* on partner campuses or international branch campuses (usually labelled as "offshore delivery"), offshore VET *projects* are almost invisible in the research arena.

This means there has been much discussion surrounding TNE accredited programs and associated organisational concepts of equivalency and contextualisation, suitability or sustainability, and quality or relevance (Woodley, 2008; Lim & Shah, 2017; Tran & Dempsey, 2017; King, 2019). However, relatively little has been researched into how staff experience the assignment offshore (King, 2019). Furthermore, while an international VET project may include an embedded program of accredited training within its scope of services, I have

noted that the international project staffing requirements involve a multitude of staff beyond teachers. What is available for staff engagement insight relates to teachers on branch campuses (Leask, et al., 2005; Jais, 2012; Lynch, 2013; Tran et al., 2021). As well, while there are studies involving VET staff on projects, the research literature focuses on long-term VET teacher expatriation on AusAID projects (Bailey, 2010, 2011). Most VET project research involves the project particulars only, focusing not on staff involvement but on the organisation, development and evaluation of the endeavour (Maglen & Hopkins, 2000; Rahimi, 2009). Little empirical evidence is available concerning VET staff on international project assignment for RTOs or TAFEs. With both federal and state governments set to increase the use of VET staff for project assignments that do not include an accredited course, this seems to be an oversight that this thesis seeks to address.

As mentioned above, often a negative standpoint of international project staff members is noticed on arrival in the project host-country. As a *project* is a multi-stakeholder endeavour, with a unique and complex goal that is required to be successfully completed to deadline, the predominate "work culture" is self-guided, un-regulated, autonomous and subject to executive decisions. As the work-culture in Australian VET institutes is fairly regimented, and regulated by standard enterprise bargaining agreements, TAFE staff new to project work may initially flounder with the unique work structure inherent on offshore projects.

Staff disaffection and regret were exhibited almost immediately once they commenced in-country and began working with multiple stakeholders (and the possible contradictory understandings that accompany this situation). This adverse reaction was usually in relation to a necessary reinterpretation of work context, and a personal review and re-understanding of goals, success indicators and stakeholder relations different from their pre-departure expectations.

Project work culture can be unusual for staff used to the more predictable work culture of the onshore TAFE institute, and working relations changed when the context was changed (i.e. from onshore institute to offshore project). It appeared that staff could feel helpless and powerless against certain "disorienting dilemmas" (Smith, 2014) when the project commenced in the host country. Goals were seemingly incongruent between stakeholders on arrival, as was the definition of what indicated successful staff input. These special challenges when working on offshore projects are confronting to staff, especially for their initial deployment (National Tertiary Education Union [NTEU], 2004; Seah & Edwards, 2006; King, 2019).

Prior to undertaking the research my previous attempts to understand this problem more deeply did not result in satisfactory resolution, although I did acquire a fundamental yet

undeveloped awareness of the occurrence. I have always enjoyed offshore project assignments and it was frustrating to see other colleagues as they suffered through disappointment on arrival, even regretting undertaking the work. I noticed how some staff on previous projects reacted to this disaffection. Some reduced their professional input to the minimum required while others abruptly left. Many had returned to Australia vowing not to undertake further international assignments. All these outcomes are detrimental and would be deemed a staffing failure by the institute (Harzing & Christensen, 2004). My interest, however, lies in the individual's own concept of engagement and failure.

1.2 Research aim

This thesis seeks to explore how international VET project staff members on assignment offshore engage with the work. The study sought to investigate the issues of goal-congruence and contextual engagement and /or dissonance in an international VET project. Firstly, this study elicits awareness and knowledge regarding how expatriate staff engaged with educational project goals in context, and then considers the effects of engagement and/or dissonance caused by goal congruence between and across organisational levels.

The researcher has collected, collated and examined the experiences of TAFE staff working on an international VET project assignment. The aim of the study is to then provide further understanding and awareness of their involvement with stakeholders as they sought to achieve these goals during engagement in-country. The findings and results may be relevant to VET stakeholders including international policy makers, program designers, RTO managers and VET staff. The findings and results of this research may also contribute to the Australian Government's plans for the National Strategy for International Education (DESE, 2021), and an RTO's ability to successfully undertake international partnerships.

1.3 Scope of research

The study focuses on a specific project undertaken in an educational institute in an oil-rich Middle Eastern country. A Victorian TAFE Institute successfully tendered for this National Central Bank (NCB) endeavour, which in keeping with the national vision of educational sustainability, aims to improve the access of youth to the banking and finance sector. The project involved running a secondary school for local students that offered an Australian banking and finance curriculum as an optional stream. The first school was created in October 2010 solely for boys, and in August 2015 another campus was opened for girls.

The Australian *Certificate III in Finance* was used to maintain international standards and operated on an auspice agreement with local teachers delivering 100% of the program.

Organisational support and implementation advice, along with an initial training program for teachers, came from Australian consultants. The consultants for the boys' school were selected via a recruitment process in 2010 and the boys' school commenced in September 2010. This was on an initial three-year contract which was then annually extended twice thereafter. Australian consultancy staff for the girls' school was hired August 2015, and the three-year project commenced a few months later. Both contracts were set to finish in 2018. A one-year contract extension to provide a handover period was discussed, but ultimately both schools finished with the Australian consultants in June 2018. Although the NCB funded the project, the Australian staff did not maintain offices at their headquarters, instead opting to station themselves at the respective schools.

This study was conducted on-site between March and June 2018, with follow-up in Australia in August. While the original project envisioned only a handful of Australian consultants to be embedded in the schools, over the years many Australian institute staff members were flown in on short-term assignments. While it is tempting to write a first-hand study of my experiences, other researchers in offshore VET projects proclaim that first-hand narratives dominate the field and call for more rigorous empirical studies into project staffing (Bailey 2011). Therefore, this study was conducted using qualitative ethnographic case study methods to create related data from available project documents as well as regular and natural observations and interviews with staff deployed on assignment. 8 members of staff were involved with 7 on a VET project for the first time. Data was analysed to elicit and establish knowledge in regard to various stakeholders' understanding of project goals and success indicators, and if this changed in context. Commercial in confidence arrangements with the Australian institute that granted access to the study participants, documents and location meant the country cannot be named in order to maintain discretion.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

The framework for this study is drawn from Humanistic Psychology. The humanistic psychological orientation is a modern and consolidative school of thought where authenticity and the real-self matter more than material success (Rowan & Glouberman, 2015). It builds on the belief that human beings are inherently good, and masters of their own domains through self-actualised and reflective understandings of their actions (AHP, 2006). The advent of the paradigm was a mid-twentieth century reaction to the two predominant stalwarts of psychology at the time: Freud's psychoanalysis and Skinner's behaviourism. It

was considered that these schools focused on supposed non-conscious activities inherent in the human disposition linked to sexual urges or environmental inputs and negated the concept of understanding the whole person by explaining their actions. (Evans & Hearn, 1977). Humanistic psychology was heralded as a "Third Force" which celebrated dignity, value and well-meaning conscious intentions of people and their motivations (Buhler, 1971). The first beginnings of the movement happened in Michigan by, amongst others, Maslow and Rogers in the 1950s. Here the main tenets of the paradigm were founded on individuality, intrinsic being, meaning and self-actualisation, (APA, 2013; Schneider et al., 2015). Maslow extrapolated some concepts into his "hierarchy of needs" explication of human motivation in the 1970s, which led into "Positive Psychology" of the 80s, and continues today in management concepts underpinned by humanistic rationales (Maslow, 1970; Khan & Jahan, 2012; Melé, 2016). Humanistic Psychology has long been integrated into mainstream management culture, with training models often utilising humanistic methods and thinking as corporate "personal growth" professional development coaching sessions (Rowan & Glouberman, 2015; Reintges, 2015). Therefore, as this study seeks to understand staff motivation and engagement in a dynamic and contextualised setting, humanistic psychology is a fitting paradigm to assist in furthering comprehension of the research problem.

1.5 Research questions

In accordance with the problem concerning the lack of experiential understanding of VET staff on international assignment, the overarching research question of the study is:

How do Australian VET staff engage with a multi-stakeholder international project when deployed on short-term assignment? What are the implications?

My personal and professional experience showed me that context of location and initial stakeholder encounters in-country are areas of possible disengagement. So in order to further guide the study, three sub-research questions support the study in the quest for more specific knowledge on the influence of context and stakeholder relations on staff engagement:

1. *Do all project stakeholders recognise the same goal and success indicators in context?*
2. *Are project goals and success indicators modified during in-country deployment; to what extent is there goal achievement congruence?*

3. *How do individual staff members engage with goal achievement congruence (or incongruence) and contextual agreement (or dissonance) during and after deployment?*

Specifically, these questions seek to create knowledge about stakeholder interpretation of project goals and indicators of goal success. This is especially important during the initial entry period when the context shifts from onshore (Australian understanding) to offshore (host in-country understanding). The sub-research questions also assist in providing understandings concerning what the staff member might react to during the assignment, and how individual staff members possibly engage differently with the experience thus supporting greater understanding of the main research question. All areas of concern from my extended experience of dealing with new staff on international VET projects.

1.6 Significance of the study

Many Australian educational institutions are engaged in international projects and compete for opportunities to undertake these profitable activities (Moran & Ryan, 2004; Holden, 2013). To this end, RTO's must ensure their staff are active and engaged in their work, and happy to volunteer and successfully deliver offshore project deliverables. To increase career engagement, personal health and other higher-order needs, it is necessary for employees to feel their contribution in their job role is significant and worthwhile (Bishay, 1996). This gratification does not seem to be happening with staff on international projects. As previously mentioned, there is considerable negative impact to a project's success due to staff discontinuity. This is realised via staff abruptly leaving mid-project or excessive novice staff turnover as experienced employees refuse to return. There is also the hidden failure of staff disaffection that results in sub-par performance. These failures are detrimental and do not lead to a successful international project outcome. Decreased staff engagement with international projects will negatively impact an RTO's ability to successfully bid and win further offshore partnership contracts. Conversely, improved staff engagement will mean a better outcome for stakeholders of both Australian and host country institutes.

Therefore, this thesis contributes to the academic community in two ways. Firstly, by creating awareness of the unique nature of international VET projects and resultant staffing issues, and secondly, by generating a framework for future research of staff deployed on international VET projects. Further, this research may contribute practically by showing a strategic approach to staff preparation and support, while utilising this strategic approach may enable co-ordinated policy at all organisational levels to ensure that goals are

consistent, and the effect of context is limited. Finally, a further practical contribution is possible via the creation of a functional engagement template for systematically supplying and charting ongoing staff support. This mix of academic and practical contributions will be beneficial for helping prepare and support staff and stakeholders on short-term international assignment.

1.7 Thesis outline

The thesis is organised into six chapters. The first chapter described the background, aims, scope, questions and significance of the research. It argued that international VET projects are an overlooked component of research, and not much is known about how staff engage when they are on international assignment. Through empirical study of an ongoing VET project in the Middle East the questions presented will allow awareness and insight into offshore VET projects, while also developing a practical template or model to assist all stakeholders in future project assignments.

Chapter 2 presents the literature review and subsequent gap addressed by this research. The multidisciplinary review included a global mobility evaluation with a focus on short-term assignments, as well as educational inputs. Further information was taken from development project research and articles that utilised VET programs and staff. As specific literature on offshore VET staff engagement with international projects was sparse, facets of project management and organisational management were utilised to increase awareness of what staff on an international project might encounter during an offshore assignment. The review found there is little research on VET offshore projects, especially staff engagement with stakeholders and how goals and success indicators are encountered in-country. As well, the research assembled was found to be light on empirical study, usually either done by researchers distant from the subject or by in-situ participants recounting anecdotal narratives. This chapter therefore identifies the need for empirical research by participant-observer research on an on-going offshore VET project to study the lived experience of staff undertaking an offshore project assignment.

Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter, describing the research design, and the choice and implementation of the qualitative-based, intrinsic case study methodology utilised for this study. Data collection methods and interview scheduling using the expatriate deployment cycle is presented as the main framework for collection and analysis. Further, data collection is shown to be supported by triangulated methods of semi-structured interviews, document collection and participant observer field notes. The context of the setting is

described, and a participant overview is detailed. Finally, the data analysis and interpretation procedures via thematic coding are presented, followed by validity assurance, ethical concerns and subsequent approval of the study.

Chapter 4 presents the overall findings of the main themes presented from the analysis as they align to the study's research questions. The chapter begins by presenting general findings that outline the project staffing and work challenges they faced as well as the shared project engagement cycle they experienced. This is followed by a focus on team engagement issues; presenting findings that relate to team engagement with stakeholders on arrival, and how the team engaged with the project in-country and modifications that took place during the remaining time working in-country. The chapter ends with an overview of individual staff engagement on assignment and presents the specific differentiated issues that are experienced.

Chapter 5 presents in-depth discussion of the four major issues presented in the findings and further related to the research questions. The first issue discusses general insights into staff engagement and the necessity of realising the unique nature of a VET international project with its distinct staffing and engagement support requirements. The second issue presents the problem that occur upon immediate arrival between stakeholder interpretations and working relationships once the staff member is in-country. Here the problems with goal incongruence and success indicator interpretation as related to contextual dissonance are further examined. The third issue describes how staff become isolated and create modified goals and success indicators in situ. The final, fourth, issue discusses the transformational effect this executive decision making has on staff. The need for debrief and appreciation post-deployment is also considered in greater detail.

Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the research with recommendations and implications for VET management that may operate offshore VET projects. A practical model of work-based induction and mentoring is first presented that promotes awareness of what staff may face on international project assignment is presented. Then the limitations to the study and an overview of the study's contribution to knowledge are shown, while the last section suggests further areas for subsequent researcher consideration.

1.8 Conclusion

Chapter 1 presented an introduction to the research context and the reasoning behind the study. The significance of providing improved engagement and support for staff working on an international VET project was provided in relation to an increased benefit to the Australian

Government's long-term international education plan. A statement of the problem was presented, outlining the obscured area of VET international project research. The research aim of increased understanding and awareness of the lived experience of VET staff was presented, which leads to the overarching research question about discovering insights into staff engagement when deployed on international assignment. The study was then presented, outlining how this research can provide awareness and understanding, as well as the possibility of a practical staff support guide for further consideration. The next chapter presents a review of literature relevant to this research into engagement on international assignments, specifically short-term inputs on VET projects.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This research involves staff engagement on short-term assignment for an offshore international VET project. The study explores stakeholders' perceptions prior to deployment, reactions during and considerations upon completion. Offshore assignments are a subset of employment called "Global Staffing". This term covers an array of workplaces such as multi-national and domestic companies, as well as educational employers of both higher education and VET institutes. Therefore this chapter contains an interdisciplinary review of relevant literature to inform the scope, framework, and methodology of participant-observer case study research with a focus on the themes of offshore staffing and their engagement with their offshore work. The literature review will follow conventional instrumental case study design in exemplifying the research problem whilst further highlighting deeper concerns of the problematic (Creswell, 2008). Section 2.2 utilises multinational corporation (MNC) research studies. It moves from analysis of expository overarching expatriation concerns to more relevant studies, specifically concerning the expatriation cycle and rise of short-term assignments. This leads to section 2.3 and an examination of the challenges of Higher Education academic staff as they travel on their educational short-term programs, as well as organisational issues surrounding adequate support for staff. section 2.4 then deals directly with VET TNE programs, offshore projects and staff engagement issues faced as they undertake their short-term deployment. This is followed by section 2.5 that shares the shared challenges that drive the research, as well as the rationale and purpose of the research direction.

2.2 Multinational corporations' international assignment research

2.2.1 Traditional expatriation assignment research

This study is about VET staff engagement as they travel to a foreign country for deployment on an offshore collaborative project: an *international activity*. (Kearns & Schofield, 1997). MNC literature includes several international activity models, from weekend business trips to permanent relocation in a foreign country (Jooss, et al., 2020). However, the most researched and familiar type of international assignment is predominantly "expatriation" (Brewster, 1991; Collings et al., 2009). Traditional expatriate assignments are long, involving family relocation and uprooted personal concerns (house sale, cars, gym memberships, relationships) (Petrovic, Harris, & Brewster, 2000). If an expatriate is unable

to successfully fulfill their contract, or returns early, it is deemed “expat failure” (Harzing & Christensen, 2004). While there is an obvious cost related to lost financial outlay upfront, there is an accompanying ‘hidden cost’ encompassing corporate brand damage, lost business opportunities and weakened relationships (Ashmalla, 1998; Tharenou & Harvey, 2006). This has meant that most MNC expatriate research is dedicated to proper selection and deployment, with a focus on decreasing expatriate failure.

To facilitate consistency, the majority of MNC expatriate management studies situate their research within a facet of the traditional “expatriation cycle”. This cycle has been simplified below into selection, training, adjustment and repatriation (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016). While VET projects differ in time-frame, this expatriate cycle is helpful to facilitate comprehension of VET staff engagement as they embark on their own international activity deployment.

2.2.2 Individual expatriate studies: expatriate cycle

Research originally concentrated on challenges and management of the expatriate throughout entire cycles (McKenna & Richardson, 2007; Da Silva, 2008; Singh, 2010) but has since focused on more detailed analysis of pertinent sections**.** This has led to greater understandings of each phase of the cycle (Guthrie et al., 2003). The sequential development of the cycle is an insightful format in which to collect and analyse data for research into staff engagement and development and has also been adopted by researchers studying offshore assignments of educational professionals (Debowski, 2003; Seah & Edwards, 2006; Jais, 2012; Lynch, 2013).

Selection

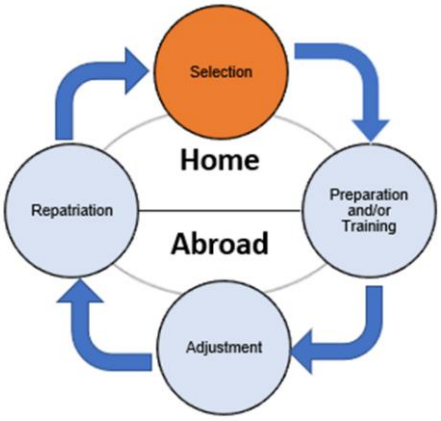

Figure 2.1. First stage of the expatriation cycle

Figure 2.1 shows that the first stage of the general expatriate employment cycle is selection of the employee to undertake the international assignment. MNC selection research is dominated by the search for the perfect expatriate employee. Studies surrounding

personality traits (Paunonen & Ashton, 2001; Han & Pistole, 2017) use these as a possible determinant for expatriate success or good selection. The main criteria for selection are often based on technical competence (Bormann, 1986); however, research suggests that a more profound selection mechanism could maximise probable expatriate success (Graf, 2004). If an employee possesses individual skills and abilities (beyond technical competence) that allow them to adapt and integrate into a foreign, novel culture, researchers propose that this will decrease expatriate failure (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985). These abilities are aligned with three facets of interpersonal skills: *self-efficacy* allows confidence to help manoeuvre successfully in a confronting situation (Bandura, 1977); *relational skills* mean better overall communication with locals which leads to a faster and smoother adjustment (Black et al., 1991); and *perceptual skills* allow an expatriate to comprehend appropriate behaviours from inappropriate ones (Black et al., 1991). It is thought that these skillsets are best accompanied by prior foreign experience (Nicholson, 1984) and the ability to speak a foreign language (Church, 1982). Overall, the belief is that the higher these attributes in personnel selected, the greater the chance of positive adaptation and expatriate failure should be significantly minimised. Once selection has been achieved, personnel are advised to then undertake preparation and/or training.

Preparation / Training

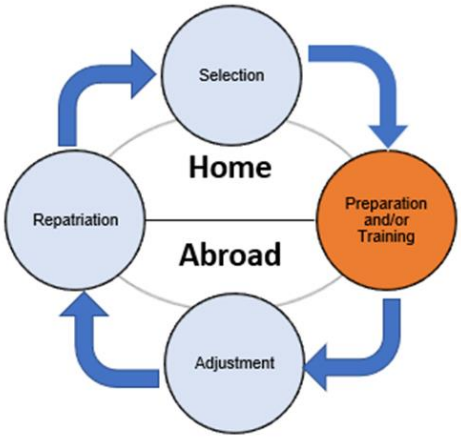

Figure 2.2. Second stage of the expatriation cycle

Figure 2.2 presents the second stage of the general expatriate employment cycle: preparation and/or training. Training literature revolved around preparatory factors attributing to potential performance issues (Minter, 2011) and how to reduce these difficulties (Robert et al., 2015). Research has shown that expatriate training is an effective tool for preparing and reducing expatriate stress and potential failure yet systematically underutilised (Enderwick & Hodgson, 1993). Poor training can lead to underperformance and a negative deployment outlook, which some researchers argue is a type of expatriate failure (Harzing, 1995). Three major types of training have been studied: *factual* methods (books and

recorded lectures), *analytical* (workshops and formal training), and *experiential* (field trips) (Black & Mendenhall, 1989). It is widely held that experiential training is the most effective method, but by far the most taxing on resources of time and money (Brislin et al., 2008). As well, timing of training is debated, with pre-deployment and in-country the most widely researched. Overall, in-country training was found to be the most effective as the expatriate can fully situate the assistance needed, and gained, in the environment (Selmer, 2001). However, research shows that, even though less effective, pre-departure training is still important for the employee in reducing anxiety and increasing confidence prior to deployment (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). Finally, caution is urged to ensure information provided pre-departure is as accurate as possible so that realistic expectations are created for impending arrival in-country (Caligiuri et al., 2001).

Adjustment

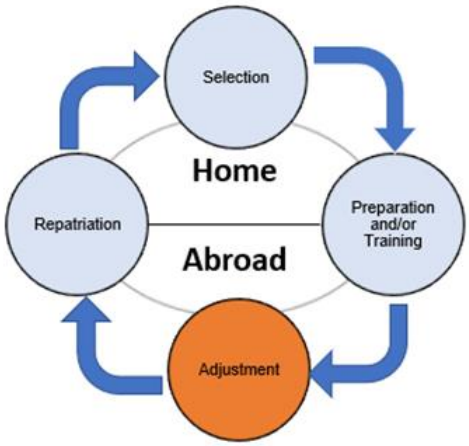

Figure 2.3. Third stage of the expatriate cycle

Figure 2.3 shows the in-country adjustment period of the traditional expatriate employment cycle. MNC literature provides insight into work-based adaption issues for employees on international assignments. Once the employee lands in the host country on assignment, adjustment was of major concern and was subject to multiple studies on managing this aspect. Most studies derive from Black et al's early theoretical model (1991) of the three main facets of adjustment. While most concepts of "culture shock" are of a linear nature (Fitzpatrick, 2017), Black and colleagues presented a model of "cross-cultural adjustment" that outlines a multi-dimensional aspect comprised of three adjustment features felt simultaneously. Expatriate staff members adjust along three basic lines related *to General environment*, *Social interaction (with locals)* and the *Work environment* (Black et al., 1991). While this cross-cultural adjustment model is not the most recent one, it is the most influential, setting the standard for future models that build on the concept of multiple facets. Parker and McEvoy's (1993) model of intercultural adjustment utilised individual factors (experience and demographical factors), organisational factors (compensation, training,

assignment length, etc.) and contextual factors (location, culture, etc.). Later, Aycan (1997) would also split the factors into two specific times: *pre-departure* and *post-arrival*.

Repatriation

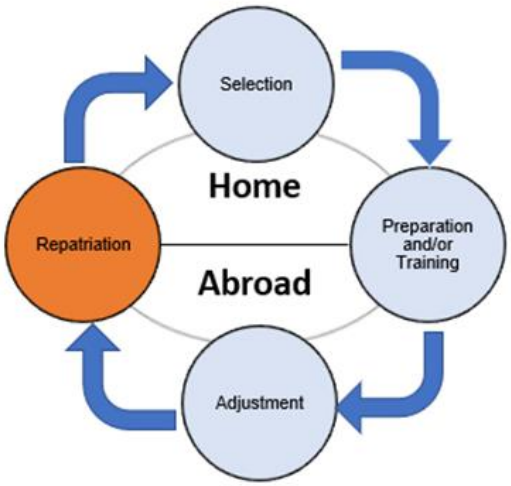

Figure 2.4. Fourth stage of the expatriation cycle

Figure 2.4 shows the fourth and final stage of the expatriate employment cycle: repatriation. While return home post-deployment is generally considered to be the least studied area of the expatriate cycle (Linehan & Mayrhofer, 2005), some researchers feel this component is of significant concern for the staff member and one of great responsibility for the MNC (Sulaymonov, 2017). Unsuccessful repatriation often leads to the employee leaving the company soon after returning, which in and of itself is a form of expatriate failure; in this case company loss is a very expensive investment of human capital (Baughn, 1995). A capable and effective return plan is equally important as the deployment schedule, as evidenced by recent events surrounding the inability to repatriate due to global travel restrictions (Berry et al., 2021).

2.2.3 MNC short-term assignments: an "alternative"

Candidate selection for expatriate assignments is a long and complicated process. These assignments are for at least three years and involve mostly position-filling in a subsidiary branch of corporate head office (Tharenou & Harvey, 2006; Salleh & Koh, 2013). Once in place the assignment requires the involved and sustained process of cultural adaptation (Salleh & Koh, 2013). Selection and deployment costs are high, with an expatriate manager costing almost three times the expense of being based onshore (Stroh et al., 1998). To combat these issues many corporations looked to short-term assignments as an alternative form of international expatriate assignment.

The attributes of short-term assignments are meant to be: lower cost, less upheaval due to reduced personal concerns (such as family involvement) and reduced bureaucratic effort (Tahvanainen et al., 2005; Tharenou & Harvey, 2006; Reiche & Harzing, 2019). This means MNCs are utilising them at a faster rate than traditional expatriate assignments (KPMG, 2018). The length of staff deployment time on assignment is dependent on organisational need and can be anywhere between a few days or a few weeks (Druckman et al., 2014; Puchmüller & Fishlmayer, 2017). Some assignments can be for a few months and may even necessitate consistent and ongoing short-term returns to a location versus traditional long-stays (Harvey et al., 2010; Rodin, 2012). Regardless of name, short-term assignments always commence with contracts less than a year (Fenwick, 2004; Collings et al., 2007; Shaffer et al., 2012; Reiche & Harzing, 2019).

Salleh and Koh's empirical pan-Asian/Australian study on the functions of short-term expatriate assignments determined four overall reasons for a company to utilise a short-term assignment. As shown in Table 2.1, the overwhelming rationale for sending staff on short-term assignment is for a staff member to *complete a specific aim or objective* in a set amount of time (Salleh & Koh, 2013; RES, 2018).

Table 2-1. Rationale for short-term assignment

Reason	Definition
Deliver specific assignment or skills	Transfer specialised knowledge of operational functions during the implementation of a specific assignment involving projects, meetings, and targeted training
Management development / knowledge transfer	Presenting international experience to relevant assignees
Problem solving	Specific actions needing to be identified in light of adverse, sudden or unexpected difficulties
Relations building / maintenance	Involving local clients and staff in personal relations to better achieve or maintain operational aims

(Adapted from Salleh and Koh, 2013)

The importance of providing international experience to company employees is noted as important, as it assists with *managerial development* and subsequent *knowledge transfer*. As well, the added functions of *problem solving* and *relations building/maintenance* require the use of diplomacy and flexibility in adverse situations, all under the added compression of a deadline that is not evident for traditional expatriates. It can be reasoned that the

particular attributes necessary for a successful expatriate assignment are somewhat different than what makes a successful short-term assignee.

On short-term assignments the personnel selection process is deemed to be extemporised (Reiche & Harzing, 2019); short-term assignees often find they are selected at the 'last minute', and this severely limits any preparatory support or training for the specific job requirements or challenges of these assignments (Mayerhofer et al., 2004). Once in-country these assignees make less-effective relationships (Reiche & Harzing, 2019) but suffer the same "culture shock" of traditional expatriates (Collings et al., 2007). At the same time, short-term assignees are expected to acculturate faster to the host country than traditional expatriates (Suutari et al., 2013). Repatriation research is almost non-existent in short-term assignment literature (Mayrhofer et al., 2012). Some studies find that repatriation is not well researched because it is "rarely a problem with short-term assignees" (Conroy et al., 2018, p. 312) and thus regarded as unproblematic (Tahvanainen et al., 2005).

Indications are that the popular use of the short-term assignment in MNCs is rising (ECA International, 2016; Santa Fe, 2017; Johnson, 2018). As well, the increased flexibility afforded by short-term assignments means MNCs are moving toward them in such large numbers that soon they will be no longer designated as *alternative* assignments (Kang et al., 2016; RES, 2018; Mercer, 2017). Therefore, this literature is helpful for this study as the length of a VET offshore project deployment is generally less than six months and can thus be described as short-term international assignments (Søderberg & Zølner, 2012).

In conclusion, research into MNC staff engagement has allowed insights into a framework using the expatriate cycle and the unique nature of short-term assignments. Just as an MNC is first and foremost a business, geared towards profit and commercial expansion, so too is transnational education (TNE) (Chen, 2015). As such there are many similarities between MNC structures and goals and those of TNE institutions (McDonnell & Boyle, 2012). Therefore, the next section will outline issues related to the "mini-expatriation" of TNE international assignments (Debowski, 2003, p. 6), as the strategy to underpin research into educational assignments with MNC research is well established in the literature (Kearns & Schofield, 1997; Jais, 2012; Lynch, 2013).

2.3 Transnational Education programs

2.3.1 TNE staff engagement

Transnational Education (TNE) is traditionally defined as “courses of study… where the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based” (UNESCO/ Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1). Australian TNE, both VET and Higher Education (HE), consists of ongoing relationships with a defined curriculum and assessments and is traditionally twinning partnerships with bricks and mortar foreign institutes. Delivery of TNE programs is complex, giving rise to extensive research in relation to teachers and teaching, preparation and workload, and student experiences (AVCC, 2005; NCVER, 2020). Topics are wide-ranging, with research available describing educational concerns such as student experiences, teacher preparation and teacher workload (Mazzoral & Hosie, 1997; Lynch, 2013; Brown et al., 2018). TNE staff can also gain further insight into organisational problems by reading about research into stakeholder issues, sector viability, and sustainability (Altbach, 2010; Dempsey, 2011a; Lim & Shah, 2017; King, 2019). These studies help to guide a conceptual understanding of the structural difficulties surrounding the tasks of teaching and assessing. As well, “Good Practice” guides and teacher-centred preparatory handbooks are available with information for staff guidance on both professional and practical matters when undertaking an international assignment (NTEU, 2004a, 2004b; Dempsey, 2011b; 2013; Foster et al., 2011).

However, while providing insight into operational means and issues, there was little if any insight into staffing engagement issues. Staff concerns were limited solely to HR matters with an NTEU report (NTEU, 2004a) finding deficient organisational support regarding benefits and remuneration for short-term HE TNE staff, as well as lack of PD provision. The information on the offshore staff ‘deployment cycle’ is limited (Seah & Edwards, 2006) and mainly concerned with HR organisational administration or employment conditions (NTEU, 2004a, 2004b).

While McBurnie and Ziguras (2007) noted an international paucity of TNE information in the global sphere. Jais (2012) found that data is extremely scarce for Australian short-term TNE academics specifically. Limited data was also noted for staff personal engagement issues such as work–life balance, motivation, and organisational support (Jais et al., 2015; NTEU, 2004a; Jais, 2012). With little quality data to base planning on, it seems staff concerns are left far behind by management in lieu of more conspicuous bureaucratic concerns. Therefore, because HE TNE research centres around matters of teaching quality and program experiences (Dunn & Wallace, 2004, 2006), short-term offshore TNE research is

sparse (Lynch, 2013) and there is "…no complete central source of data on short-term staff" (Jais, 2012, p. iiix). This makes it difficult to build academically sound research topics on educational staff and their engagement with short-term assignments offshore.

2.3.2 HE TNE: Organisational support issues

Deficient organisational support for international assignments is a long-running issue in research and practice with studies and reports finding formal procedures for offshore assignments lacking, with little dedicated support (Debowski, 2003; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). Ten years on, Lynch (2013) found organisational support still lacking, particularly in relation to recruitment and selection, as well as numerous "challenges…during all phases" (Lynch, 2013, p .vi) of the deployment cycle. Challenges to both TNE and VET projects include pre-departure preparation, short-term training and high staff turnover (Debowski, 2003; Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Mizzono et al., 2012), and these are presented below.

HE TNE support provision

Gribble and Wallace (2003) recommended an organisational triumvirate approach to staff preparation for offshore delivery. They advocate an initial general overview of normal staff issues with HE TNE provision, followed by specific national information to facilitate contextualisation of materials, ending with the creation of an informal inter-colleague support network. Debowski (2003) also recommended organisational support, advising universities to delve into the literature of MNCs and their extensive knowledge of staff support while on short-term assignment (Debowski, 2003). Beyond organisational support, pre-departure training rationale takes numerous forms in the literature, with many authors seeing it as a solution to their specific research issue. Some determined that pre-departure information should be acutely focused on the actual program and location of that teacher's specific offshore delivery program (Yang, 2012). More recent studies revert to generalised training for HE TNE academics and the need to develop a generic offshore support model that can be adapted to suit individual needs (Jais, 2012).

Industry reports further suggest that this training should be extended to administerial and managerial staff as well as academics (NTEU, 2004b). While some researchers felt that general training was necessary for increasing an academic's overall "internationalised" global outlook, others concluded that targeted professional development and inductions should be specifically linked to the offshore context (Dunn & Wallace, 2006; Seah & Edwards, 2006). This deficiency in productive pre-departure preparation has been linked to staff disaffection, causing a frequent turnover in staffing for international assignments (Tran et al., 2021). This can contribute to a perpetuated cycle of disaffection from inexperienced staff unprepared for offshore engagement.

HE TNE staff turnover issues

Offshore delivery is frequently staffed by inexperienced staff who are unfamiliar with organisational offshore delivery polices and so need preparatory programs (NTEU, 2004b). The reliance on novel staff is a consequence resulting from a combination of previous negativity by core institute staff, disinterest from experienced staff, and an aging workforce coupled with a growing TNE footprint (Debowski, 2003; NTEU, 2004b; Lynch, 2013). Studies show that experienced staff enjoyed offshored delivery at the beginning, but soon became disenchanted with the work, as the "onerous" conditions made the experience more trying than it was worth (NTEU, 2004b, p. 28). This leads to a reduction in "candidate supply" (REIS, 2018, p. 109). However, if a staff member feels positively engaged with their initial assignment, they will most likely continue (Seah & Edwards, 2006). Therefore, there is a necessity to enhance staff engagement on international assignments for first-time staff in order to "…sustain and preserve the critical human resources on which this industry is so reliant" (Debowski, 2003, p. 7).

HE short-term assignment issues

The HE TNE short-term assignment has its own research issues. The literature regularly states that TNE is delivered in "block" or "burst" mode of intensive delivery (Dunn & Wallace, 2004; Seah & Edwards, 2006; ; Woodley, 2006; Mcdonnell & Boyle, 2012). The staff member flies from the home campus to the subsidiary to deliver replicated course content in substantially compressed time (McDonnell & Boyle, 2012). Times vary from a few days, a week, or a few weeks (NTEU, 2004b). Recent research indicates this staffing model is on the decline with UK universities due to cost and staff reluctance (Wilkins, 2020) but it is still the model of choice amongst Australian universities. Some feel that the exceedingly-short interaction of "fly…teach…return" (Debowski, 2003, p. 2) does not warrant significant preparation training (Seah & Edwards, 2006), despite calls for more effective pre-departure training (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Dunn & Wallace, 2006).

However, insightful short-term offshore HE TNE research is sparse (Lynch, 2013) and research centres on matters of teaching quality and ongoing program experiences (Dunn & Wallace, 2006) or confined to onshore international-student situations (Beelen & Leask, 2010). Researchers attempting to find basic information on the offshore staff *deployment cycle* are limited, as engagement studies are mainly concerned with human-resource organisational administration or employment conditions (NTEU, 2004a, 2004b; Seah & Edwards, 2006). This is despite modern research detailing that offshore staff engagement is paramount to successful TNE provision (Croucher et al., 2020).

2.4 VET international activities

From the literature on the tertiary sector, two distinct forms of offshore activities with which staff can partake became evident: *programs* or *projects*. In TNE literature, *programs* refer to a formal course of study (AVCC, 2005; NCVER, 2020). This study is focused on VET international *projects* – an under-researched area of offshore activity. Therefore, this section will first show how the Australian Government is returning to offshore project activity, and that this activity has specific staffing requirements yet to be fully researched.

In VET literature the term project is used exclusively to refer to a situation where staff are providing off-campus technical expertise on a non-continuing basis (DJPR, 2020). While TNE programs have enjoyed consistent study and research into a great variety of topics, VET offshore projects have very little evidential information or narratives for consideration. These projects constitute an under-researched area of activity for both general VET professional development as well as offshore research delivery specifically (Guthrie, 2010; NQC, 2011). Since 2013, the term "TNE" is not generally associated with offshore VET in research or government documents and VET projects are sometimes caught-up in confusion about terminology. While a project is not a *course of study* in and of itself, the usual historical embedding of a learning program in a project means that often they are included in the literary canon of TNE (Austrade, 2013; DESE, 2021). Conversely, AusAID projects can also carry accredited programs but are not usually mentioned in relation to TNE (Maglin & Hopkins, 2000; Bailey, 2010, 2011). AusAID projects often find their own journals and conferences align more closely with governmental policy or developmental practice than educational outcomes (Wood et al., 2020). This (ongoing) misappropriation of VET projects into the TNE canon contributes to what Brown et al. (2018) considered a major problem with creating a foundation for proper VET research, due to "a lack of standard and consistent definitions and terminology relating to offshore VET" (p. 10).

2.4.1 Overview of VET staff international engagement

The Australian Government's technical education sector has long been used by government in providing practical international support. After commencement of the Colombo Plan in 1951, decades of international aid projects flourished in South-East Asia. The emphasis on from Australia was in assisting development of infrastructure and equipment while providing consultants for technical expertise via contextually designed in-country training courses (Sutherland, 1997). The 1984 Goldring and Jackson reports shifted "educational aid to educational trade" (AEI & IEAA, 2008, p. 1) and influenced newly formed TAFEs to expand

offshore ambitions into commercial operations with customised short courses. They offered international customers “twinning arrangements, distance education, and the sale of consultancy services and educational resources” (Australian Government, 1991, p. 12). However, there is little information available regarding staff input, engagement, or support during these first years of offshore activities.

The first mention of staff support for international employment was after ANTA released strategic plans and guidelines outlining commercialisation goals of their “offshore activities” (ATI, 1995, 1996a, p. 15; Kearns & Schofield, 1997). These activities were focused on “creating products and services that are responsive to the distinct needs of the client” (Kearns & Schofield, 1997, p .5). The main documents produced by Australia TAFE International and ANTA (ATI, 1995,1996a,1996b; Kearns & Schofield, 1997; Smith & Smith, 1999) feature the preferred terminology of *staff* (never teacher or trainer) and conclude that employees involved in international activities are “international program specialists” (ATI, 1996b, p. 33). These specialists were involved in a “enhanced range of activities…for a basis of international projects” (ATI, 1995, p .6). The scope of services included consultancy services, fellowship programs, creation, and sale of materials, as well as customised training programs such as *train-the-trainer* and various technical short courses (ATI, 1996a).

While there is allusion to “long-term assignment” the employment functions indicate short assignments based on technical advising or knowledge transfer (Smith & Smith, 1999). Smith and Smith (1999) also noted that differentiated developmental needs of projects require an equally large number of differentiated persons necessary for effective production of the offshore work. Staff development and training is related to holistic development and the necessity to gain experience through experiential involvement in international activities (ATI, 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Kearns & Schofield, 1997).

2.4.2 VET TNE: background and changes

VET TNE staff engagement is limited to producing equivalent delivery, and this reliance on compliance and equivalency triggered the production of an overwhelming amount of documentation on TNE offshore organisational quality. Research from 2009 to 2012 was dominated by offshore quality assurance and compliance (Rahimi, 2009; Dempsey, 2011a). These documents included various VET TNE “Good Practice” guides to compliment the 2008 “Good Practice Guide” (Dempsey, 2011b; NQC, 2011). No discernible literature was produced regarding offshore staff engagement and staffing experiences during this time were all but forgotten (Dempsey & Tao 2017; Tran & Le, 2017). While Victorian TAFE International (VTI) produced a guide encouragingly titled “Preparing Staff to Work Offshore”

(Dempsey, 2013), there is nothing specific in the guide for offshore project *staff* on offshore assignment. The author overtly situates the guide as helpful only for managers considering sending VET TNE *teachers* offshore to sister campuses in China to deliver ongoing accredited programs, and thus is of limited use for insight into project staff engagement.

Increasingly, VET TNE is seen as inappropriate, unrealistic and non-sustainable (Sanderson et al., 2010; Lim & Shah, 2017; King, 2019). In 2013 the federal government commissioned "The Chaney Report" (2013) which prioritised revitalization of international VET activities. The report recommends a preference for non-formal educational activities such as "consultancy services, curriculum development and professional development advice" (p. 54). It urged TAFEs to remove themselves from compliance-heavy risky operations burdened with an inflexible and inappropriate AQTF client product (King, 2019). This confirms Ryan and Mooney's (2004) initial prediction of TAFEs moving away from accredited courses offshore and substantiated by ASQA (2019), noting the "increasing demand for non-AQF courses" (p. 130).

An analysis (Table 2.2) of governmental educational policy documentation from 2013 to 2021 reveals the changing focus of offshore VET assignments, and therefore staff engagement. The reliance on delivering ongoing VET TNE programs of accredited qualifications to twinning partners is being replaced by skills-based capacity building projects.

Table 2-2. Governmental international education policies and reports, 2013--2021

Year	Title	Author	Offshore directions
2021	Australian Strategy for International Education 2021--2030	Australian Government	*"Provide more industry-ready type relevant education including non-AQF courses"*
2020	Vocational Education and training in Victoria	DJPR (Victorian Government)	*"One-off training projects" (p.9)*
2019	Protecting the quality of international VET and English language education	ASQA	*"Increasing the demand for non-AQF courses"*
2019	Vocational Education and training international engagement strategy 2025	Australian Government	*"Since 2013 developing and testing new training products and generate new opportunities for Australian vet stakeholders to operate offshore' (p.4)*
2018	Global Demand for Skills	KPMG	*"Increasing non-formal skills training"*
2018	TAFE for Victoria	VTA	*"Grow engagement in offshore vet projects and consultancies"*
2016	National strategy for international education 2025	Australian Government	*"Opportunities may exist in the provision of less formal training where the focus is on achieving competencies designed to address particular skills requirements, as opposed to a full qualification" (p.5)*
2016	International Education: Sector Strategy	Victorian Government	*"New innovative partnerships…"*
2015	Growth and Opportunity in Australian International Education	Austrade	*"Greater opportunities…in the delivery of Australian skills and training services (not recognised Australian qualifications) to overseas government and business partners."*
2013	Australia educating globally	Chaney Report	*"Encourage commercialisation…" (pp.6/54)*

(Compiled from DESE 2021; DJPR, 2020; ASQA, 2019; KPMG, 2018; VTA, 2018; Victorian Government, 2016; Austrade, 2014; Chaney 2013)

These documents show that there are some concessions by select agencies to continue existing TNE agreements, albeit with careful oversight (Chaney, 2013; Australian Government, 2016; ASQA, 2019). However, acknowledgements to accredited training aside, the majority of these documents focus on "non-AQF" courses (Australian Government, 2021) and non-formal skills training (KPMG, 2018). There is an emphasis on new training products (Australian Government, 2019) embedded in "one-off training projects" (DJPR, 2020) with new innovative partnerships (Victoria Government, 2016). This heralds the contemporary intention to "encourage commercialisation" (Chaney, 2013) in offshore VET by delivering capacity through "engagement in offshore VET projects and consultancies offshore" (Victorian TAFE Association [VTA], 2018, p. 31).

Ideally, this engagement is via non-accredited training that supports the uptake of relevant proficiencies which address particular skill requirements “as opposed to a full qualification” (Australian Government, 2016). This model is better capable of creating learners able to succeed in the global workforce “without the formal qualification’ (Austrade, 2015, p. 54). As well, the high financial cost (KPMG, 2018) and “time-consuming and onerous process” of accreditation (Austrade, 2015, p. 43) are also credited with a move toward delivering non-formal technical assistance and not accredited programs (Austrade, 2014, in ASQA, 2019).

Therefore, the literature shows the Governmental policy context shift toward risk-averse yet value-adding international inputs is increasing in favour of offshore projects (Victorian Government, 2016). These “high-value offshore projects” (VTA, 2018) may encompass an accredited program, but acquisition of an accredited qualification is not the main driver for collaboration (Austrade, 2013). They are referred to as “education” projects, but TAFE annual reports align these projects squarely in terms of business (Chisholm, 2020; Holmesglen, 2020; William Angliss, 2022). Regular board reports with performance measures and targets for ongoing involvement are a common feature, as well as business cases with expected outcomes and risk management plans for any upcoming considered international activities. These prosaic, internal, board reports are complimented by flashy public websites charting the achievements of these TAFES (Chisholm, 2022; Holmesglen, 2022; William Angliss, 2022). The vocabulary used is a form of online resumé for future collaborators to view past and ongoing international achievements. The listing of various international projects is an exotic menu of achievements. It seems that TAFES are open to the idea that “…prestige and status automatically attach to an institution which is actively engaged in exotic and unexplored marketplaces” (Collings, 2006, p. 27).

However, TAFEs are looking to “get the right balance” (Howland, 2011, p. 63) of international involvement. The effort by ANTA in the mid to late nineties to “integrate commercial and educational activities” (Kearns & Schofield, 1997, p. iv) has been perpetuated through the commercialised TNE phase of VET offshore continuum back to the era of post-WW2 project engagement. TAFEs are rediscovering one way to tread between commercial offshore programs and finance-draining philanthropic activities can be accomplished via “…the context of international projects” (Hill, 2011, p. 64). This will require offshore staff equally capable of getting the balance right on these projects. Unfortunately, the concept of a TAFE employee setting off on an international project leads people to assume, incorrectly, the staff member is a teacher involved in TNE delivery of a program to students.

While projects may include formal accredited instruction, the emphasis is on non-formal educational activities and capacity building. These pursuits require inclusion of all available TAFE staff and an engagement paradigm based on international project management. There are very few, if any, studies or reports that detail this involvement. As well, non-formal education activities are never captured in official offshore delivery data collections (see for example NCVER, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2016) and the full quantifiable understanding of the scope of such activities are "kept quiet by providers" (Holden, 2013, p. 63). Therefore, how VET staff members engage with a multi-stakeholder international project, as opposed to TNE, is not fully understood.

2.4.3 VET international projects

Brown et al. (2018) noted that the original "contemporary model for offshore VET projects" was the Australia-China (Chongqing) Vocational Education and Training Project (ACCVETP) that commenced in 2002. Comyn and Barnaart's (2010) study of the ACCVETP confirms that VET offshore projects may include forms of formal training, but they are substantially grander in aspirations, and technical staff requirements, than a single course of study. This aligns with ATI (1995, 1996a,1996b) and Volkoff and Perry's (2001) research that posits international activities are non-accredited and technically based, although an accredited program may be present, and use a variety of staff to successfully complete the project. And thus while a *program* is readily defined, project-based literature has struggled with the exact definition of a *project* for decades (Lester, 2014). However, a collective analysis of major works, cross-referenced with more specific research on success criteria, organising, and motivation allow the collated main factors presented in Table 2.3.

Table 2-3. Factors which define a project

Factor	Definition	Notes
Event	*An endeavour, undertaking or effort that is complex in nature*	A tangible occurrence that exists with people and resources
Time	*Temporary/transient*	A definitive start and end
Staff	*Multi-staffed*	Brought together for project only. Usually unknown to each other prior and after
Goals	*Unique (to the project)*	Monitored through milestones and deliverables
Success	*Achievement of quality goals on budget within deadlines*	Not necessarily co-dependent
Location (conceptual)	*Temporary organisation*	As compared to ongoing home/parent organisation

(Adapted from Lake, 1997; Atkinson, 1999; Grabher, 2002; Turner & Müller, 2003; Dwivedula & Bredillet, 2010; Lester, 2014; Murray-Webster & Dalcher, 2019)

A project is an event, an exclusive and complex undertaking that exists for a relatively short time and is wholly dependent on meeting its specific and unique goals (Lake, 1997; Turner & Müller, 2003). Staff members are diverse, disparate and assembled solely for the successful completion of the project goal, accomplished within strict guidelines of time and money (Murray-Webster & Dalcher, 2019). Once the goal is accomplished the project and staff requirements are finished and, by design, will not happen again (Atkinson, 1999; Grabher, 2002). Finally, a project takes place in an impermanent location, often not a physical place at all, but a *temporary organisation* that is simply a collective understanding of a space situated in the project team's consciousness (Dwivedula & Bredillet, 2010; Goodman & Goodman, 1977). In this way a project is likened to Foucault's (2001) *heretopia*. This is a space that exists in a shared consciousness of the users and has movement in and out, controlled by those on the inside and kept separated by hypo-cognition, the "unknown unknown" (Foucault, 2008). This concept of a project work environment is a non-traditional understanding of a workspace.

Therefore, it is noticeable how offshore projects differ from TNE. As mentioned above, the definition of TNE is reliant on the vocabulary of traditional education constructs: learners, awards and programs of study (UNESCO/ Council of Europe, 2001). This position of learners and awards in programs of study is opposed to the concepts of projects as one-off assignments involving unique goals related to technical assistance and development. Australian TNE consists of ongoing relationships with a defined curriculum and assessments and is traditionally twinning partnerships with bricks and mortar foreign institutes. Staff are

utilised through short, intensive formal course delivery at the start of the course and then hand over most of the teaching and assessment to local staff (Woodley, 2006; Shi & Woodley, 2008; Holden, 2013).

While quality assurance arrangements as well as moderation efforts have meant further periodic administrative visits by other Australian staff on an annual or bi-annual basis the concept of TNE is ongoing adherence to Australian set standards (Shi & Woodley, 2008; Holden, 2013). The literature reveals that success of TNE programs means *continuation* of the program, while success on an international VET project means *completion* of the project. This would seem to indicate different preparation and training would be necessary for staff undertaking either program delivery or project assignment engagement.

2.4.4 Support for VET staff on international assignments: TNE and projects

Unfortunately, there is limited information on insights into staff undertaking either TNE or project assignments offshore. Staff undertaking offshore TNE assignments understand that delivery of an accredited program follows, by design and regulation, the national structure they are trained and accustomed to. Previous research conducted and the "Good Practice" guides at least provide some perception of what a teacher will expect or encounter when delivering an accredited program. The *Good Practice Guide* does offer a chapter on TNE staff induction and training that offers 'best-practice' recruitment and selection methods. However, the majority relates to managerial concerns of staff acting correctly in terms of organisational compliance and delivering auditable equivalence. The guide echoes other literature in providing prescriptive advice on staff engagement (Schoens & Kernfeld, 1997; Smith & Smith, 1999; Woodley, 2006; Bateman, 2007). Unfortunately, despite the *Good Practice Guide* 2008 extolling the need for a "scholarly approach", and for practitioners to be informed by research "in the field" (AEI & IEAA, 2008, p. 61), there are few studies available for academic review.

Conversely, little is known, researched or published regarding what VET staff will encounter and experience on international "one-off training projects" (DJPR, 2020). The most insightful research materials are Bailey's studies on teaching practices in an AusAid-funded South-Pacific technical college (delivering AQF courses) and a discussion paper outlining TAFE trainer's identity while on employment with an AusAID-funded school (Baily, 2010, 2011). However, Volkoff and Perry's (2001) collated analysis of large AusAID development projects does offer some insight into offshore VET staff engagement. As seen in Table 2.4, they identified five collective challenges staff encountered on deployment from a cross-project analysis of six major AusAID development projects from a variety of countries. The comprehensive study is useful and interesting for organisations considering placing VET

staff on offshore VET projects. It also highlights the difference in challenges between VET offshore programs (equivalency and compliance) and VET offshore projects (job roles and stakeholders)**.**

Table 2-4. Staff challenges on international VET projects

	International VET project challenges	Overview
1	Communicating and negotiating in cross-cultural and multi-lingual contexts	*Stakeholder relations and negotiations*
2	Working across VET systems	*Structure, terminology, relevance, skills and experience vs theory*
3	Navigating dimensions of VET practitioner roles	*Identity and work role*
4	Operating professionally in challenging conditions	*Temporary office and necessity to perform successfully*
5	Ongoing team development	*Maintaining expertise and education; applying new learning*

(Adapted from Volkoff & Perry, 2001)

The first challenge *Communicating and negotiating in cross-cultural and multi-lingual contexts* relates to the project context and how stakeholder negotiations and relations are tempered through individual perspectives. These differences must be accounted for by staff on international assignments to understand new 'norms' and avoid stereotypes. The second challenge, *Working across VET systems,* related to issues faced by staff, not only about the unfamiliar structure or terminology of the system but also deeper concerns regarding cultural interpretations and bias about vocational education. The third challenge, *Navigating Dimensions of VET practitioner roles* discussed how trainers involved in different projects experienced various functions and dimensions of their job roles. This affected social distance and teacher--student interaction. Beyond the challenge of job role, Volkoff and Perry (2001) also noticed the troubles VET staff had trying to *Operate professionally in challenging conditions* as the fourth challenge. They not only discovered staff faced logistically difficult conditions, but also tensions from diverse stakeholder goals. The fifth and final challenge is trying to maintain *Ongoing team development* when working on an international project. This relates to difficulty in not only maintaining expertise and striving for improvement, but also how a staff member can make meaning of their involvement and possibly apply it to future contexts.

In an effort to overcome these challenges and "*ensure international VET team sustainability"* (Volkoff & Perry, 2001, p. 14) the researchers presented a "team approach" model for managerial consideration. This model emphasised that all projects are inherently different and should be documented to allow considerations and comparisons to be made as well as provide a basis for potential future funding. As well, organisations need to be flexible and

supportive and recognise and acknowledge how complex project work can be for VET staff. Practical components of the model include management supplying proper equipment for staff use, as well as building recognition of VET practitioners into managerial work plans and offering flexible leave arrangements.

However, the information on AusAID projects might not relate directly to the type of VET offshore project a Victorian TAFE is involved in. AusAID projects are long-running, government funded and well-staffed multinational undertakings. They have expansive goals and noble visions generally related to humanitarian strategies that include nation-building reforms, and poverty, disease and inequality reduction (AusAID, 2000; Maglan & Hopkins, 2000; Comyn & Barnaart, 2010). As evidenced below, TAFEs often have more limited goals and budgets that relate to organisational-level stakeholders.

Federal (Austrade, 2013) and state (DJPR, 2020) reports present several collections of international VET "case studies" focusing on a project's organisational involvement and partnerships. These are generally presented as "feel good" promotional narratives about project outcomes assisting in short-term vocational achievements with industry or another foreign institution. The TAFE websites give further information about successful collaboration with international stakeholders to deliver capacity building assistance (Chisholm, 2022; Holmesglen, 2022; William Angliss, 2022). Rahimi & Smith (2017) also investigated 3 case-studies of VET transnational activities, and how Australian training packages and practices fared when exported to a foreign regulatory environment.

Further analysis of these case studies and TAFE marketing materials on VET projects, as well as literature and reports outlining VET programs, allows insight into the different engagement elements inherent between programs and projects. Table 2.5 outlines the differences between VET TNE programs and VET projects regarding length of deployment, location, delivery outcome and staff employed.

Table 2-5. International work overview

	Deployment	Assignment length	Delivery	Location	Staff
VET TNE programs (including programs embedded in projects)	+6 months	Embedded	Full course delivery and related duties of moderation, validation, supervision	Twinned campus	Accredited trainer/assessor
	1-6 months	Short-term	Full or shared course delivery and related duties of moderation, validation, supervision	Twinned campus	Accredited trainer/assessor
	1-30 days	Short-term	Full or shared course delivery or -Moderation only -Validation only -Supervision only	Twinned campus or neutral training venue	Accredited trainer/assessor
VET projects*	365+ days	Embedded	Ongoing project management and extended capacity building advising	Client venue	TAFE managers and practitioners VET consultants
	179-364 days	Mid-term	Temporal project management and capacity building advising	Client venue	TAFE managers and practitioners; general TAFE staff; technical, managerial, service and administrative VET consultants
	1-179 days	Short-term assignment	Temporal project management Capacity building advising Immediate and distinct technical, service or administrative project support	Client or neutral training venue	TAFE practitioners / General TAFE staff; technical, managerial, service and administrative

*Not inclusive of accredited training program. If a project requires accredited training, VET TNE staff will be included in the project staffing directory for ToR

A project's short-term assignment aligns with capacity building or technical advising, while a program's short-term assignment revolves around delivering or assessing an accredited course. This means that staff involved in a program are accredited trainers and assessors, while project staff can include not only VET practitioners but also management, technical and administrative staff. Finally, TNE programs usually take place in either a twinned campus or a neutral training venue, whereas VET projects are more likely to take place in the client's venue. These attributes mean that a VET short-term offshore project [in blue above] aligns with traditional project management definitions of a project (as per Table 2.3):

a temporary endeavour, multi-staffed and guided by a complex, yet specific goal that is realised in an unfamiliar location (Sydow & Braun, 2017)

While a project may be labelled 'temporary', this neither constrains its size, nor determines its temporal nature (Khan et al., 2001). Projects can be large or long lasting, and often are both. Examples are evidenced by long-running AusAID developmental assistance projects (see for example Maglan & Hopkins, 2000; Volkoff & Perry, 2001; Bailey, 2010, 2011). Rahimi & Smith's (2017) case-study VET projects were also multi-year events, with collaboration possibly still ongoing. However, TAFE projects are usually comparatively short "one-off projects" (DJPR, 2020, p .4), with staff engagement falling into the MNC 'short-term' employee categorization. As mentioned earlier, training programs can be, and often are, embedded within a project. Non-training capacity building activities "can be complimented with teacher and staff training" (DJPR, 2020, p. 12) to enhance provision and broaden outcomes. This training can either be an accredited program or non-formal programs of skill development, but the delivery is a component *of*, not the reason *for,* the project (Comyn & Barnaart, 2010; Austrade, 2013; Chisholm, 2021; Holmesglen, 2021). Therefore, staff engagement on VET international projects reaches far beyond teachers and trainers, even if the core outcome is a training program (Kearns & Schofield, 1997).

However, the type of staff support required is not clearly identified, as no timely or reliable data on VET offshore projects is ever collected or available in a methodical system. While offshore projects are displayed on TAFE websites, and the annual reports communicate further particulars, the staff experience is missing (Chisholm, 2020, 2022; Holmesglen, 2020, 2022; William Angliss, 2020, 2022). This, of course, means staff engagement on projects is devoid of usable data to analyse and understand their experience. This deficiency disallows comparisons or evidence of consistencies/inconsistencies in all manner of non-formal-project conception, organisation, preparation, engagement and completion. This echoes primary concerns from ANTA, who mentioned similar concerns with inability to acquire TAFE "commercial-in-confidence information" (Kearns & Schofield, 1997, p. 54) on offshore activities completed or underway. What is available is "scattered and insufficiently developed" and there is a "deficiency in VET research…and no systemic dissemination" (Kearns & Schofield, 1997, p. 54) of offshore VET activities. Unfortunately, researchers have found outright obstinacy and conflict from institutes when trying to gain access to project data (Ryan & Mooney, 2004; Rahimi, 2009). This indicates understanding regarding staff knowledge and development on offshore activities is undeveloped and (unfairly) constrained to TNE provision.

2.5 Areas of consideration for VET projects

Throughout the literature review some prominent areas of consideration for staff engagement when undertaking their first deployment on a short-term international project assignment emerged. Firstly, is the discussion surrounding the different work environment found on a project: a “temporary organisation”. Secondly, concerns surrounding VET project selection, leading to further concerns of pre-departure preparation and any support in place for staff. Specific concerns related to the concept of context, the issues that occur when staff leave Australia and enter into the project host country, will be discussed. This leads to issues on immediate arrival, the conflict and dissonance felt when contextual differences are first noticed. Following on from these obstacles is the concept of gaining growth through management of these difficulties, labelled “transformational learning”. The final sections relate to specific areas of engagement that staff undertake including relevant informative texts and available project documents, staff understanding of their goals and success indicators, and their dealing with stakeholders. Finally, this section will end with an overview of the significance of using inexperienced staff to measure engagement.

2.5.1 Project work organisation is different from home institutes

Over the last 40 to 50 years project work has gradually yet increasingly been recognised as a “temporary organisation” (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Turner & Müller, 2003; Sydow & Braun, 2017). Goodman and Goodman (1976) first defined a temporary system as one in which “…a set of diversely skilled people are working together on a complex task over a limited time…” (p. 494.) This would not be criteria most TAFE instructors are accustomed to in the permanent Australian institute with its “more stable, functionally organised systems” (Goodman & Goodman, 1976, p. 494). The task-completion mentality of a temporary organisation also results in unclear task definition for individual staff, therefore causing stakeholders to “keep interrelating with one another in trying to arrive at viable solutions” (Goodman & Goodman, 1976, p. 494). This is compounded by the “uniqueness” of the task meaning no specific or clear procedures for dealing with it exist, and that the team itself must create its own procedures. This again might be difficult for TAFE staff accustomed to the compliance-first mentality of a heavily regulated VET sector.

For first-time staff, the differences between a permanent and temporary organisation might prove confronting and difficult to immediately comprehend. Staff engagement onshore is a holistic endeavour framed by protective structures and culturally bound and understood working conventions. However, once offshore some or all of these understandings may be elusive or disappear altogether. Research findings indicate that the challenges faced by VET

staff operating offshore are more profound than those faced by project workers in a domestic setting (Kealey et al., 2005). The transference of a domestic project to an international setting includes additional challenges such as intercultural concerns, tyranny of distance, issues relating to the foreign work environment, and finally issues with clarifying foreign stakeholders' "sometimes substantially different situation, interests and incentives' (Kealey et al., 2005, p. 292). While there are similarities with offshore campuses (Smith, 2009), these campuses are, by design, meant to be ongoing. This can be equally true of VET partnerships or "twinning" campuses where the offshore campus is branded and formatted to replicate the "Australian experience". Conversely, temporary organisations are often quickly set-up in a client or neutral venue, with branding unlikely to happen due to cost restraints and time considerations.

Research shows staff concern inherent in a temporary organisation to be lack of formal professional development (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Staff are chosen for the qualities and skills they possess at the time of project commencement and are unlikely to gain formal development. However, personal and professional growth from involvement in the unique situation is often cited as more substantial professional development. The idea of "learning by doing", or "learning on the job" (Havermans et al., 2014, p .26) might relate more to the advancement of project work capabilities rather than staff members' original vocational ability. Some research even suggests that projects should be used as a *learning experience* for staff, and their experiences can be utilised and enhanced for positive usage by the parent organisation (Packendorff, 1995). This would be accomplished by "removing people from their usual routines and setting them an unusual task to be solved in interaction with unknown individuals" (Packendorff, 1995, p. 331). This concept of professional development from confrontation and unease aligns with other educational researchers' ideals about use of offshore activities for transformative learning (Kearns & Schofield, 1997; Smith, 2014). However, this concept of work-based learning seems to contradict much earlier work on the first temporary organisations, known as temporary systems. The time-limited system means a focus on task, not on managerial problems: thus "one learns little about how to manage temporary systems from actually running them" (Goodman & Goodman, 1976, p. 494).

However, most TAFE staff members involved in a project are not interested in project management career progression, with motivation seemingly much more superficial. Onshore work motivation in a "permanent" organisation is defined by contributing work factors (e.g. pay, conditions, proximity to home) idealised via traditional and recognised methods and procedures. However, these same staff are motivated to join a project due to the "nature and structure" of the work product itself (Bredillet et al., 2009, p. 12). Most volunteers wish to work on an international project because it seems "cool" (Grabher, 2002).

Since 1985 projects have been equated with temporary organisations, and most literature reviewed aligns them almost exactly (Cleland & Kerzner, 1985; Turner & Muller, 2003). On a project, staff will find there are four major reasons for its existence; the organisation is *temporary*, it contains a *complex task*, it is operated via a *collection of diverse and multiple staff members* and has a *specific purpose* (Goodman & Goodman, 1976; Lundin & Söderholm, 1995; Turner & Müller, 2003; Sydow & Braun, 2017). Further explanation of these four aspects is presented below.

Temporary existence

A temporary organisation is created when the project commences and finishes when the project is completed (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). This provisional time limitation is the major consideration in a temporary organisation and overrides all other restricting factors. The time limit is invariably related to goal completion, and thus necessitates deadlines (Goodman & Goodman, 1976). Novice offshore VET staff might find this transitory and provisional existence daunting and unusual, as the presence of time pressure creates a work setting not usually found in the permanent organisation (Turner & Müller, 2003).

Complex task

The task is complicated (Bakker, 2010), causing issues with previous understandings and problem-solving based on experience (Goodman & Goodman, 1976). While the project task is inherently the reason for the temporary organisation to exist (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995), the multiple-stakeholder, inter-organisational structure often means task re-definement during phases of the project (Sydow & Braun, 2017). This may result in staffing changes, time extensions or budgetary refinements. While TAFE staff may be involved in complex tasks in the home institute, it is unlikely that such an array of external and determining stakeholders exist to ask for, or force, task re-definement.

Multi-staffed

A temporary organisation is staffed by teams of diverse and differentiated personnel (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995), and the concept of temporary and permanent organisations implies that staff will "be drawn for the organisation" (Turner & Müller, 2003). The literature increasingly refers to these groupings as "teams" (Turner & Müller, 2003) which infers a high level of interdependence. However, the earlier works described staff as "members" and described low levels of interdependence, often working autonomously albeit on the same system (Goodman & Goodman, 1976). The outcome is that differentiated staff means differentiated motives, understandings and preconceptions, even if they all come from the same permanent organisation (Sydow & Braun, 2017). For staff on an international TAFE project this might be the first time they will interact professionally with other departmental staff.

Specific purpose

Related to task, the concept here is that specific purpose is unique, somehow special, or otherwise important to stakeholders (Goodman & Goodman, 1976; Turner & Müller, 2003). This significant status of purpose is made obvious by the very fact that so much stakeholder time, money and effort has gone into creating a specialised organisation to implement the successful completion of the task. This relates somewhat to Lundin and Söderholm's (1995) concept of 'transition' in a temporary organisation. There is a critical change before and after the project, and this affects outcomes as well as the project team (Sydow & Braun, 2017). When TAFE staff volunteer for an offshore assignment, often their perception is of a special purpose that will affect a personal transition.

2.5.2 Selection issues

From the outset of international involvement has been the idea that "TAFE staff involved in international activities should be carefully selected" (ANTA, 1997, p. 3). Through the years this has remained embedded in the literature, however not well-established in practice. Frequently presented is the idea of a staff member who carried specific "skills…and dimensions" (Smith & Smith, 1999, p. 33), competencies (Tung, 1998a) or "essential and desirable characteristics" (AVCC, 2005, p. vi). Research alludes to the quest to find the "ideal candidate for working offshore" (Dempsey, 2013, p. 20). Careful reading shows this reasoning is influenced by MNC studies and selection rationales for expatriate assignments (Caligiuri et al., 2009).

While expatriate research studies ponder the perfect candidate, short-term MNC assignment selection literature shows that most staff volunteer (Mayerhofer et al., 2004). A policy review of tertiary employment policy indicates this is also the case with project work assignments as most academics are volunteers for offshore delivery (NTEU, 2004b). Programs and projects employ staff, yet there is no contractual obligation for TAFE teachers or administrative staff to work offshore. Although for upper management there is mention of possible specialist skill provision offshore for lower management and international representation (Fair Work Commission, 2018, 2017).

International assignments are open to anyone willing and available to travel (Jais, 2012). This willingness to travel is a main proponent to a gainful project result as "without the willingness to perform and dedication to project success…competencies are useless' (Khan & Moe, 2008, p. 74). Conversely, Harris and Brewster (1999) described the selection criteria competencies and effective offshore skills espoused by academics as reading like a "wish-list" (p. 488) that does not match the realities of selection. While case studies indicate that some large-scale companies follow formal selection procedures for long-term

expatriates (Curry & Olsen, 2010), most MNC short-term staffing decisions are done within a closed and informal “coffee machine system” (Harris & Brewster, 1999, p. 497) of intra-departmental managerial discussions.

Tertiary offshore assignment policies have grown organically from early procedures overseen by “entrepreneurial staff at departmental level” (IEAA, 2008). Recent studies show an ad hoc and haphazard process to short-term volunteer staff recruitment policies often resulting in a last-minute rush to find people (Lynch, 2013; Dempsey, 2013). The human resource department is rarely utilised beyond management of superficial practical matters and thus plays little or no part in offshore staff recruitment (Dempsey, 2013). These selection issues mean that staff members who volunteer, or are called on to volunteer, are possibly not in possession of the competencies, skills or dimensions best suited for offshore assignments. Usually, policy dictates this can be mitigated by proficient professional development or preparatory procedures prior to deployment.

2.5.3 Preparation and support

Professional development and pre-departure preparation are contradictory between policy and practice. Despite the importance of “enhancing the professionalism of VET staff in international activities” (Kearns & Schofield, 1997) the majority of staff who performed offshore activities mentioned no training or preparation ever took place (Dempsey, 2013). This personal response aligns with academic research on the inadequate, inappropriate, and absent pre-departure preparation available to staff (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). Studies show that even when preparation does exist, it is insufficient (Lynch, 2013) or inappropriate for the assignment (Seah & Edwards, 2006).

A consistent, positive theme of preparation presented was outgoing staff members’ interaction with experienced mentors (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003). Although this was not a formal organisational procedure (Smith 2009), and caution was advised. No official organisational filter was applicable and so the opportunity for good advice was also tempered with the possible propensity of “stereotypes or misinformed advice” (Dunn & Wallace, 2006, p. 31).

Formal organisational professional development procedures include an in-depth and comprehensive “structural and thematic conceptual framework” (AVCC, 2005) for academic staff. For VET staff an overarching “Staff Development Framework” plus an “Intercultural Training Unit” (Kearns & Schofield, 1997) was initially presented. This was followed by the more recent report on “Intercultural Preparation Offered by Victorian TAFE” (Dempsey, 2013, p. 3). All these previous documents advise early detection of relevant staff with appropriate qualities for offshore work, followed by formal training. For VET offshore

assignments, Dempsey (2013) advises initial training should take place “12 months before an offshore assignment” (p. 22) to be followed by “good training in the weeks before they go offshore” (p. 22). The time required for these frameworks is extensive, requiring months, sometimes years of ongoing development.

Research best practice is that “strategically planned and delivered services support the professional development” (AVCC, 2005, p .46) of staff wishing to work on offshore assignments. However, the reality in TAFE practice is that modern professional development for VET staff is “focused on compliance and regulatory requirements only” (Tran & Pasura, 2021, p. 23). Professional development (PD) is meant to be about keeping staff up to date with current and contemporary developments in their chosen field, dependent on the “aspirations and contexts within which they operate” (Guthrie, 2010, p. 12). Tran and Pasura’s (2021) study noted that internationally-minded staff found institutional PD focused on domestic “regulatory requirements and audit compliance” (p .23).

The expected rigour of information for staff uptake during these proposed PD and preparation programs varies from academic to intercultural elements (AVCC, 2005; Dempsey, 2013). TNE academic preparatory programs outlining curriculum compliance and student--teacher acculturation may not be suitable for short-term VET projects with their focus on technical task completion with unknown stakeholders. The effectiveness of inter- and cross-cultural training professional development has long been debated (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). Consensus is that this type of training is dependent on context and thus difficult to apply, meaning personalised guidance is essential (Mendenhall et al., 2004; Forster, 2000).

Dempsey (2013) concludes that these contextual factors are so varied that discrete sessions of ‘pre-departure training’ may actually be irrelevant, as it is the inherent personal attributes of the staff member that ultimately determine successful integration offshore. This means that inadequate personal PD and/or face-to-face pre-departure training in Australia can cause staff to have concerns about work purpose. This needs to be considered in regard to staff expectations about what is to be achieved in context on arrival in-country (Volkoff & Perry, 2001).

2.5.4 Context

The effect of context over expectations on arrival is a major concern, yet advice for dealing with this issue is not especially noticeable in the available studies or guides. Academic unions advise that “issues come up in the overseas context which give rise to unexpected problems” (NTEU, 2011b, p. 12), while researchers found that one of the challenges to *Good Practice in Offshore Delivery in VET* is poor staff awareness of “contextual expectations”

(Foster & Schulz, 2009, p. 5). However, little research has been conducted in this area and it is not specifically mentioned in available pre-departure sessions despite academic assertions that it is important to recognise and accommodate contextual issues (Debowski, 2003).

While Debowski (2003) found that the performance of staff operating offshore can be affected by the "impact of local conditions and expectations" (p. 6). A later study, analysing "lived experience" (Dunn & Wallace, 2006) of staff on offshore short-term assignment, dismissed contextual affect by explicitly stating that pre-deployment expectations and perceptions of in-country engagement on arrival "were not explored" (p. 266). The majority of studies used off-shore-experienced staff members (Dunn & Wallace, 2004, 2006; Soontiens & Pedigo, 2013; Smith, 2014), with the exception of Seah and Edward's (2006) study of perceived 'value differences' experienced by new staff engaged in short-term offshore activities.

Two staff members recounted that lack of effective preparation and support prior to deployment resulted in self-initiated attempts to obtain information and understanding of "offshore context" (Seah & Edwards, 2006, p. 305). The rigour and accuracy of their personal pre-departure intelligence-gathering attempts was not verified. However, even though they were deployed to separate countries on different assignments, both reported that immediately upon commencement of duty the offshore context clashed with their perceptions, causing uncomfortable "dissonance" (Seah & Edwards, 2006, p. 303). Their immediate reaction to this *contextual dissonance* was being upset, frustrated, and even angry. Both staff entered into a period of internal reflection and came to a realisation of "stereotyping" from both students and staff. The stakeholder's preconceptions were challenged, considered and resolved. One conclusion of the research was that creating pre-departure perceptions and expectations prior to deployment can result in contextual dissonance upon engagement (Seah & Edward, 2006). This contextual dissonance is a very real concept I often witnessed with staff newly arrived in-country on international projects, but exactly why it occurred was not clear.

2.5.5 Arrival: obstacles of significance

In literature discussing international exchanges and experiences, the term 'culture shock' is frequently used to describe negative reactions to unfamiliar external stimuli, which may cause 'misunderstanding of new and diverse experiences" (Adler, 1975, p. 13). There are many similar terminologies used in different research areas to describe this phenomenon such as "culture shock, personal adjustment, cultural adaptation…cross-cultural

effectiveness…personal adjustment difficulties, lack of cultural participation" (Ruben, 1989, p. 229). Ruben collated various terminologies used for this phenomenon and concluded that all were obstacles of significance and resulted in failures, setbacks or difficulties (Ruben, 1989). This aligns with a more recent study from Lyon (2002), which, after collecting, and analysing studies that combined both transformational learning research and cross-cultural adaption, concluded that all participants underwent similar disorientating dilemmas. Transformative learning literature referred to these dilemmas as "trigger events", whereas cross-cultural adaption researchers preferred "culture shock". Lyon found that, no matter what the name, unexpected events influencing individuals on arrival in a foreign land was a common thread, thus enabling her to make links between them.

2.5.6 Transformational learning and international assignments

Many researchers' interpretations of this "disorientating dilemma" see it as a positive opportunity. Lyon (2002) even surmised that these trigger events are a necessity for transition to occur. Transformational learning theory posits that such conflicts can create internal critical reflection, resulting in enforced re-assessment of an established perspective (Mezirow, 1997). Such re-assessment creates wider understanding and greater acceptance of other internationalised life-shaping rules and standards that define social behaviours within a group: the adult's "frame of reference" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). MNC research by Kohonen (2004, 2005) found that expatriates underwent transformational experiences and identity changes as their perspectives were broader as they progressed through their (traditionally) long international deployments. TNE research by Smith studied staff experiences on short-term assignment, further utilising the concept of disorienting dilemmas where established frames of reference are challenged (Smith, 2014).

These dilemmas result from a "confrontation with a challenge against an established perspective" (Smith, 2014, p. 119). Transformational learning is possible via critical reflection on personally perceived and accepted expectations and perceptions. Hoare (2013) found that TNE teachers were willing to use the ambiguity encountered on assignment as a learning opportunity, but that management must first formally prepare staff training to capitalise on the event. Similarly, Tran et al. (2021) report the possibility of experiential learning taking place during challenging offshore delivery, but that the institute needs to design and provide it in a formal manner (Tran et al., 2021). While a form of transformational experiential learning is also evident in Seah and Edwards' (2006) study, Smith (2014) does not readily identify any instances of disorienting dilemmas or transformational learning. This could be that participants were experienced and familiar with all aspects of their deployment, having travelled to the offshore work location regularly for

short-term assignments for many years. Smith specifically chose them because they illustrated a “typical” type of staff member she was trying to generalise (Smith, 2014). The study produced a great number of interesting and usable conclusions, but the intended effect of contextual dissonance during engagement on short-term assignment staff was missing, as the staff did not seem to be challenged because they simply knew what to expect from their regular international TNE commuter program.

Fortunately, Smith continues the initial study in the following year with further research that expands on the theme of transformative learning initiated by engagement with a disorienting dilemma caused by contextual dissonance (Smith, 2014). She concludes that, beyond practical matters, overt pre-departure preparation is unnecessary because disorienting dilemmas creates positive transformation. This stance echoes Dempsey’s (2013) assertion that pre-departure training is often excessive. However, this approach is at odds with other studies advising the need for in-country support (Jais, 2012; Lynch, 2013). Nonetheless, Smith’s assertion that more provision should be allocated to post-deployment support (e.g. debriefs, follow-up interviews) matches previous sentiments in the research community (Dunn & Wallace, 2006; Lynch, 2013).

Transformational learning can be connected to *development* models of international adaptation. These include various models where the concept of *stress-development-growth* is a central theme (Guykunst & Kim, 1992). These suggest that individuals react and adapt only when their default normative settings are challenged (Kim & Ruben, 1988). One notable study is Adler’s alternative view to culture shock, a multi-stage transitional experience involving *Contact-Disintegration-Reintegration-Autonomy-Independence* (1975, 1987). This model posits that staff who are suddenly forced to undertake adaption in a foreign land move from low- to high-awareness internally and independently (Adler, 1987). This concept of being unexpectedly required to adapt quickly and effectively in a foreign country is the basis of Hoare’s (2013) TNE research article “Swimming in the deep end: transnational teaching as cultural learning?” Hoare concluded that TNE staff undergo haphazard transformational change and professional development though the necessity to abruptly deal with ambiguity and conflict on an international assignment. Hoare is insistent that this transformation should occur, but should not continue as an unplanned event. Both institute and staff need to be aware of the chance and capacity to enhance their human capital. Hoare’s recommendation is for the institute and staff to recognise that growth will occur and to allocate sufficient resources to this positive outcome (Hoare, 2013). This recommendation is echoed by MNC research requesting organisational initiatives that ensure that learning and development opportunities are captured and capitalised on (Søderberg & Zølner, 2012). More recently, Tran et al. (2021) confirm that targeted

developmental learning on TNE international assignments is still eschewed for the less effective, but common, organisational practice of providing a generic pre-departure package (Tran et al., 2021).

MNC researchers utilising developmental models also make a direct connection to the expatriate deployment cycle. Osland (1995) was one of the first to situate the plight of expatriate staff as one of transformation and not solely adjustment (Mendenhall et al., 2017). She collected expatriate experiences through their deployment, aligning the phases of the expatriate cycle with Campbell's classic all-encompassing plight of the hero, the *monomyth* (Campbell, 2012).

Campbell's (2012) hero underwent various recognised stages on the journey from home to adventure and back again, and Osland (1995) situated her study's expatriates as such heroes. They heeded the *call to adventure*, met a helpful *mentor/magical friend* and *crossed the threshold* from the familiarity of the home office to the unknowns of the offshore subsidiary. There they battled on the *road of trials* and won the *ultimate boon*, ultimately having undergone internal transformation as evidenced on *the return* to the home office (Osland, 2000; Mendenhall et al., 2017). While empirical research shows that expatriates take on international assignments for adventure and growth (Adler, 1981; Stahl et al., 2007), Osland's studies are a theoretical descriptive analysis of expatriate "war-stories" she collected. Her writings are useful as a metaphorical framework to capture staff experiences in the familiar and well-known structure of fictional story-telling. However, more recent and in-depth research provides greater insight into how expatriates undergo change and growth as they navigate the expatriate cycle on their deployment.

Armö's research into Finnish expatriates, for example, showed that, for inexperienced staff on their first deployment, the expatriate cycle is more like an "attitude adjustment cycle" (2013, p. 26). The case study outlined the findings of how a novice expatriate undergoes a process of internal professional development as they progress through the assignment, adapting expectations and attitudes about their work and relationship with the employer as the expatriate cycle moves from pre-departure to repatriation (Armö, 2013).

In the VET sector, the concept of international activities as a form of professional development was the basis for Kearns and Schofields' seminal (1997) report for ANTA on internationalisation of VET in Australia. The key theme of the report was to affect professional development through growth and development, and the authors felt that the best way for this to occur was via experiential learning (Kearns & Schofield, 1997). They presented a model of professional growth for those wanting to be involved in international activities that focused on assisting inexperienced staff to navigate the offshore world.

However, the model did not seem to gain an audience, and has not been accessed beyond the publication of the report (Dempsey, 2013). This fate is a common and ongoing one for development models. Researchers across separate disciplines work independently on studies of adaption and growth on international assignments, but rarely read each other's work. As such, multiple models are presented for consideration but never empirically utilised for further research or study (Mendenhall et al., 2017).

2.5.7 Texts

One simple method of pre-departure orientation is by supplying relevant documents (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). As well as practical concerns about travel accommodation and health, information on goals and outcomes can usually be found in text form (NTEU, 2011b). These can include position descriptions, contracts, or other important project-defining documents (Bailey, 2010). The staff member should be able to access, check and cross-reference these definitive texts with other stakeholders for clarity of purpose, goals and ultimate objectives achieved.

Most projects are guided by several overarching documents at multiple levels of stakeholder hierarchical authority. These documents can clarify the purpose and role of employees and donors in "a complex policy environment at a local, regional and international level" (Bailey, 2011, p. 172). To understand project background and context, staff should ideally access project texts. For example, the "Terms of Reference" (ToR) document is project specific and "articulates the scope of work for a taskforce and how the people identified in the ToR will work together in the pursuit of a shared goal" (Australian Public Service Commission, 2021). The 'people' identified would be key stakeholders and the shared goal would include the main and supporting objectives. ToRs also "clarify the expectations…with overall accountability for the project" (Australian Public Service Commission, 2021). Therefore ToRs (and similar project defining texts) are useful documents to help first-time staff understand their role and they can be accessed prior to deployment. As well, they are definitive across all stakeholder levels, onshore and offshore, and thus are the ultimate authority to be consulted on project scope. They are very important documents.

However, Bailey's 2011 study of a South Pacific Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) college, as part of an AusAID project, discovered that less than 2% of the total TAFE teaching staff had read the project-defining texts such as the ToR or the "White Paper" which outlined the projects necessity. The vast majority "didn't know [these texts] existed" (Bailey, 2011, p. 172) despite their inclusion in a comprehensive and extensive pre-departure briefing. Bailey opined that because the work is new and complex to them, the staff focused on the "more immediate aspects of their employment" (p. 175) once their

deployment commenced in the field. While staff may feel that such large, overarching key texts are too far removed to be absorbed into their everyday work, Kealey writes that project management should understand that conflicts and complications arise through "failure to clarify operational objectives by achieving a clear and shared understanding of work objectives, performance targets, and management responsibilities" (Kealey et al., 2006, p .41). However, the author does contend that even ToRs are subject to interpretation and that "reality often diverges from formally stated objectives, roles and responsibilities" (Kealey et al., 2005, p. 313).

In most cases, TAFE staff deployed on offshore projects would look to more relevant and familiar work-based texts. Research shows that short-term project staff members are motivated to perform and achieve success with "clear understanding of the project goals, objectives and mission, [and] clear assignment of responsibilities" (Khang & Moe, 2008, p. 74). These responsibilities would be recorded in work contracts, personal itineraries, and position descriptions. While contracts provide clarity on practical issues such as rates of pay and working conditions, they also provide guidance on job roles (NTEU, 2004b). More critically, they establish a "shared understanding of desired steps, targeted results, success indicators, and expected contributions from each party" (Kealey et al., 2006, p.44).

Onshore entities advise that staff should be provided with relevant information, including the project objective and pertinent stakeholders, as well as daily expectations of job performance (NTEU, 2011b). The institution should also provide country-specific information and news, and ensure that both onshore and offshore stakeholders understand the value and authority of the working contract (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Foster et al., 2011). The legalities of the contract should also be clarified with all parties, and legal issues of the host country presented for dissemination by staff. However, it is not clear if and how this is done due to significant lack of pre-deployment preparatory mechanisms. Gribble and Ziguras (2003) stated that relating of information to staff pre-deployment is not possible "given the absence of any formal process" (p. 214), as they found pre-departure training to be non-existent. Seah and Edwards (2006) study highlighted the ongoing concern that little or no pre-departure information is presented. For one staff member's information session "nobody bothered…she even had to take the initiative to obtain basic administration information herself" (p. 302). Generally, few or no relevant texts are presented to staff, and thus a project may be "jeopardised by failure to provide new staff…advice on their roles, responsibilities and obligations" (Pyvis, 2009, p. 310).

As well, onshore staff signing any contract for offshore project work must abide by the terms of the specific contract. While onshore work is governed by familiar bargaining agreements

between institutes and unions, offshore partnerships are agreements that can override these norms. If the staff member is not aware of conditions in the contract that require them to perform in a way that "might impact on your personal reputation or integrity" (NTEU, 2011a, p. 19), there is a question about possible ethical conflict. The suggested answer is to read the contract carefully prior to signing. The reality is that informal and opportunistic recruitment methods of short-term assignments mean contracts (or position descriptions) are usually not made (readily) available and are signed at the last minute (Tahvanainen et al., 2005; McKenna & Richardson, 2007; Mayerhofer et al., 2011). All of these issues with vague texts result in possible disorienting dilemmas, especially in terms of goal congruence/incongruence and success indicator misinterpretation or realignment.

2.5.8 Goals and success indicators: congruence issues

Goal congruence is when organisational goals have been correctly addressed and coincide amongst stakeholders, when there is "consistency or agreement of individual goals with [project] goals' (Ding et al., 2017, p. 961). Wiley (1975) originally explains that this can be caused through correct decision delegation downward through a hierarchical managerial system. Goal incongruence was incorrect delegation understanding. Schaffer (2007) further identified both goal congruence and goal incongruence as capable of having constructive and destructive factors. "Constructive" means goals have been adequately communicated top-down, and congruence means subordinate stakeholders accept/believe/understand goals as communicated. Destructive means miscommunication between managerial levels about goals, and incongruent is defined as stakeholders rejecting/misunderstanding goals.

Ding et al. (2017) are mostly concerned with downward goal alignment with management and subordinates in an organisation. However, in a project there is also the possibility of sideways goal incongruence (constructive or destructive) amongst teams or individuals (Ding et al., 2017). Sideways goal incongruence is more likely to happen with multiple stakeholders interpreting the goal differently. One stakeholder will read the goal, and independently set off on their fulfilment of what they perceive to be a successful outcome. Unfortunately, one stakeholder may read the same goal differently as another and work towards their defined successful outcome, even though the two identified goals are different and result in dissimilar outcomes. And so without combined discussion of the goal, sideways incongruence amongst stakeholders can occur. As defined earlier, projects are multi-staffed and formed from a collection of individuals working together for timely completion of a unique outcome. This supposes that the team "shares one or more common goals" (Schreuder et al., 2019, p. 1). However, due to the compressed temporal conditions of a project, team members "may focus on different aspects of this goal or even pursue their

own goals" (p. 2). As projects are a "plethora of partners with varying goals…political and social agendas…from local, national, regional, and international perspectives" (Watkins et al., 2013, p. 29) the propensity for top-down and sideways goal incongruence is great. If only individualised interpretation of project documents is available, then it is difficult to check exact specifications and discuss amongst various stakeholders; thus it is difficult to enact correct success indicators across stakeholders accordingly.

Success indicators are used to determine if goals are achieved. These are sometimes aligned with *realistic* goals in project management literature (Cimcil, 1997). McGill defines sustainable project success indicators as "a measurable value that represents progress towards a desired impact of a project" (McGill, 2015). Success indicators are usually set out in contracts and aligned with project objectives, milestones and deliverables. It is important that all stakeholders ensure and maintain equal understanding of engagement prior to commencement. Failure to do so may create a situation where success indicators are misinterpreted or not aligned amongst stakeholders.

2.5.9 Stakeholders

Project work is multi-staffed with multiple diverse levels of stakeholder goals and success indicators (Volkoff & Perry, 2001). This can lead to tension and requires constant vigilance and negotiation to ensure participation and equitable outcome of diverse goals, and "ways projects are conducted must be congruent with these goals" (Volkoff & Perry, 2001, p. 10). In regard to TNE delivery, Lynch (2013) writes that offshore stakeholder engagement is unrelenting, and staff are expected to perform many visible duties, contracted or perceived, to ensure relations. However, international offshore project stakeholders are even more nuanced, with underlying personal relationships causing "persisting tension and conflict" (Grabher, 2001). This leaves the VET staff member trying to effectively manage relations on a short-term project in an international setting among stakeholders with a variance of goals and objectives across different socio-cultural backgrounds (Aaltonen, 2010).

While sometimes complex and hard to follow, the multiple staffing and assembled layers of project stakeholders can nonetheless positively affect project outcomes by providing extended resource capacity (Bailey, 2011; Grabher, 2002). Likewise, it can also negatively bring fragmentary "multiple perceptions and loyalties of project members" (p. 208) into the frame. To ensure effective and shared realisation of project goals, researchers feel it is vitally important for project staff to initially clarify expectations and requirements of the project partnership with relevant stakeholders, even beyond visible duties (Smith & Smith, 1999). These initial stakeholder relations can result in "good working understandings on

personal, professional and organisational bases" (Smith & Smith, 1999, p. 32). Multiple stakeholder groups can have gaps and mismatches in expectations (Levin et al., 2010) and connecting with stakeholder expectations early is conducive to a mutually agreeable and positive outcome (Woodley, 2006). However, this is dependent on knowing who the relevant stakeholders are. And lack of texts available to staff is detrimental to locating this information.

2.5.10 Researching staff experiences

This thesis seeks to understand international staff's engagement with their first offshore posting. This differs from the typical strategy of utilising experienced staff for studies on offshore assignments. While King (2019) sought experienced TNE practitioners for her study (King, 2019), she found that first-time staff would need the most support for international work. It seems that researchers are looking to gain experiential knowledge of ongoing issues with staff engagement, specifically issues with TNE delivery of programs over time (Whieldon 2009; Jais 2012; Lynch 2013; King, 2019). They use veteran practitioners that allow expert and measured insights into consistent issues (Dunn & Wallace, 2004, 2006; Gribble & Zigiguras, 2003; Smith, 2009, 2014; Jais et al., 2015).

Although they differ substantially, two studies highlight the experiences of first-time staff on international assignments. Seah and Edwards (2006) explored the professional experiences of new academic "fly-in fly-out" staff, while Bailey (2011) interviewed and analysed long-term VET staff on an international aid project. While they differ on subjects and methodology, the rationale is the same: to find and discover how staff members engaging in international work perceive what they are doing offshore as differentiated from their normal work experience onshore. While alluded to, this dichotomy is never really explored in detail. The general consensus is dissonance between the reality of the offshore work and what the staff member conceived would happen (Seah & Edwards, 2006; King, 2019). This contradiction occurs in the wider educational sphere, with studies of international teachers showing that inexperienced educators feel disenchanted with their offshore deployment if, on arrival, they feel the negative situation was 'misrepresented' too positively during recruitment and selection (Odland & Ruzica, 2009, p. 27). The use of inexperienced staff is important to recognise, record, and analyse reactions from their first engagement.

2.6 Conceptual Framework: Humanistic Psychology

2.6.1 Overview

In reaction to the two major deterministic forces in psychology of the time, Freudian psychoanalysis and behaviourism, a “third-force” psychology evolved in the mid-twentieth century (Buhler, 1971). Maslow’s (1954) and Rogers’ (1951) theoretical outlooks were directly developed as a consequence to the perception that human behaviour is controlled solely by non-conscious instincts and the view of behaviourist that people are at the whim of their environment. (Evans & Hearn, 1977). This eventuated into “Humanistic Psychology”, and the importance of personal growth and individual responsibility.

A key element of this theory was honest communication with groups to stimulate and guide healthy growth and transformation, with emphasis placed on the individual enabling this growth through personal experience. (Schneider et al., 2019). The way to match this personal growth experience with groups was through the “growth centre”. This was initially a dedicated space for groups to congregate and has since manifested into contemporary “communities of practice” (Rowan & Glouberman, 2018).

2.6.2 Theory in Humanistic Psychology

For the most part, humanistic theorists such as Maslow, Rogers, and May highlighted their beliefs in the inadequacies of behaviourism and psychoanalysis in explaining human nature (Schneider et al., 2015). As shown in Table 2.1, while there is not a uniform single established theory related to humanistic psychology there are some consistent themes found throughout these various theoretical writings.

Table 2-6 Humanistic Psychology themes

Theme	Overview
Humans are good.	We are all inherently striving to be, and do, good in the world.
Whole person.	The whole person is emphasised and that we exist on five levels – body, feelings, intellect, soul and spirit.
Change and development.	Human beings are in a natural, needful process of growth into our full potential.
Motivation from abundance.	Human beings have an achievement motivation and wish to be more than they already are.
The real self.	Maslow described the self-actualized person as having discovered his or her own real self. This is an individual journey dependent on personal choice and responsibility.

(Adapted from Rowan & Glouberman, 2018)

The first recurring theme is that humans are good. Even though there are parts of a person's life that might be considered " bad", the point is to learn and abide by the deep truth that we all strive for a virtuous and noble life. The second theme relates to the concept of a "whole person". This is seen to be accomplished by ensuring five levels of existence are fulfilled as best as can be to realise complete human potential. This leads to the third theme of change and development. Proponents of humanistic psychology contend that growth is continual, and limitations are self-imposed. By accepting and developing this growth we change and develop our full human potential. Motivation for abundance is the fourth theme and contends that humans have a curiosity and desire for experiences that are varied and diverse, and that this desire does not stem from a need to restore a deficiency but accept that inherent potential has yet to be realised. The final theme is the concept of the real self. Maslow described "self-actualisation" as a discovery of a person's real-self, and humanistic psychology asserts that this state is dependent on personal responsibility for each person's voyage of non-physical development. (Buhler, 1971; Maslow, 1971; Schneider er al., 2015; Rowan & Glouberman, 2018).

2.7 Conclusion

TAFE staff undertaking an assignment on an international short-term VET project find themselves working on a specific and unique objective, under deadline pressure, and in an unfamiliar work environment dealing with cross-cultural stakeholders and colleagues

previously not known to them. The goal and success criteria are time-based, financially motivated and will initially be determined by objective and structured criteria susceptible to subjective contextual change in-country. For most VET employees this is quite different from their normal working conditions onshore. Despite this, there appears to be very little academic documentation that relates how staff engaged with these new factors (Rahimi 2009).

There is acknowledgement that research using experienced staff provides valuable insights into ongoing issues related to working conditions, and valid enduring concerns about organisational quality, compliance and equivalence. However, the available studies that researched lived experience, and provide insight into offshore VET work, are lacking in critical interpretation of the activity, including staff experiences (Bailey, 2011). Researchers also mentioned a lack of empirical studies in both academic teaching experiences and staff professional development designed for dealing with contextual engagement (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). Dempsey and Tran (2017) noted that official statistics often used by researchers for data are no replacement for studies of lived experience. They further stated that this is a "neglected research area" and call specifically for dedicated studies on offshore VET activities (Dempsey, 2017, p. 247).

Overall, there is little guidance, research or policy for staff to analytically inform positive direction in delivery and management of future offshore project endeavours (Tran & Le, 2018). What is available are disparate studies related to staff and their anecdotal experiences offshore (Yang, 2012; Soontiens & Pedigo, 2013; Smith, 2014). To counter this trend, the IEAA (2008) had called for a more "scholarly approach" (p .61) to international assignment research. They made a general call for further empirical studies by practitioners in the field, echoed by later researchers who support literature from staff "…when they are in situ living and working offshore" (Lynch, 2013, p. 280).

Overall, the literature review identified recurring issues with VET offshore project work and staff engagement. These include project work-culture challenges and challenges of inexperienced staff on projects. It also identified significant research gaps regarding the lack of scholarly and empirical research of experiential lived experiences of staff on first-time offshore project assignment. The identified challenges provided the underlying structure for data collection, analysis and presenting the findings of the study. It is therefore applicable for an academically minded vocational practitioner to undertake empirical and rigorous participant-observer research on lived experience of VET staff in order to better understand contextualised staff engagement within an international VET project.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided insight into the literature surrounding organisational and staffing issues in international work models, tertiary offshore programs, and offshore VET projects. The review showed that while there were studies providing insight into the working lives and lived experience of offshore assignments for MNCs and HE TNEs, there was a paucity of material for offshore VET assignments. To better comprehend staff engagement within an international VET project it is crucial to study their lived experience. As this research explores lack of experiential understanding of VET staff on international assignment, the overarching research question is:

How do Australian VET staff engage with a multi-stakeholder international project when deployed on short-term assignment? What are the implications?

This is followed by three sub-questions that relate to the many different stakeholders inherent in an international VET project, and their interpretation of goals and success indicators. Of principal concern is the interaction of stakeholders and perceptions of project goals *in context,* when Australian VET staff are in-country and the actual project is underway. The three sub-questions are:

- *Do all project stakeholders recognise the same goal and success indicators in context?*
- *Are project goals and success indicators modified during in-country deployment; to what extent is there goal achievement congruence?*
- *How do individual staff members engage with goal achievement congruence (or incongruence) and contextual agreement (or dissonance) during and after deployment?*

This chapter is divided into two sections and will address how the above will be accomplished by describing the methodological design of the thesis. It begins with section 3.2 and an overview of the research questions with the rationale for a qualitative approach and case study research orientation. This is followed by section 3.3, the research design. This includes the setting, the participants, and the ethical issues. As well it presents the data collection tools, collection procedure, data analysis, and finally the overall trustworthiness of the research.

3.2 Research approach

3.2.1 Qualitative orientation

This thesis investigates the interrelationships between stakeholder goal achievement congruence and contextual agreement in an international project delivered by an Australian educational institution in partnership with a foreign government. To accomplish this aim, the study sought to explore the lived experience of onshore-based VET staff as they engaged on a short-term assignment with an international project offshore. I have chosen to adopt a qualitative interpretivist approach to the research.

The selection of qualitative research is appropriate for investigating the perspectives and experiences of staff engagement (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Creswell, 2013). The differentiation in research approaches can be defined between quantitative and qualitative research strategies. The role of a quantitative researcher is differentiated from qualitative researchers. (Hatch 2002). Quantitative researchers have an objective stance which relies on numerically-based instruments, such as surveys, for data-gathering. They also are more likely to use metrics in analysis and reporting. However, quantitative research, sourcing statistical data, is not feasible as there is paucity of numerical data in this area and this is historically hard to obtain (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2007; Jais, 2012; Holden, 2013; Dabaga, 2014; Dempsey & Tran, 2017). Rahimi and Smith (2017) found that this quantitative knowledge was still emerging from a variety of industries and their affiliated research domains; therefore standardised datasets were not available. As the focus of this research is *understanding* issues of staff engagement rather than *counting* them, a qualitative research orientation is appropriate (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In this study of lived experience it is important to utilise multiple methods of data collection, and for the researcher to be able to become involved in activities as they happen. The data collection methods I proposed included multiple interviews over time, ongoing observations as well as documentary and artefact collection, which are typical components of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This allows the researcher to use these collection methods to ascertain a much richer understanding of participants' lived experience and how they create individual and socialised meanings in the workplace among stakeholders in a new environment (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). While the use of multiple-methods can add breadth, depth and rigour to the research (Flick 2002), reliance on the method as a sole means to promote rigour is cautioned (Silverman, 2010). The application of the methods must be applied in perspective and that the inherent truth of research is not accomplished by "simply aggregating data" (Silverman, 2010 p.134). This resulted in the necessity for my ongoing and dedicated adherence to reflexivity when collecting and analysing the data.

Finally, as the goal of comprehensible understanding of a complex situation is the basic distinction of qualitative research, it is therefore appropriate to follow qualitative methods of research design because this study does not ask “how much”, but instead “why” (Stake, 1995; Green & Thorogood, 2004).

3.2.2 Case-study approach

A research strategy assists in providing an ideological framework for guidance and provide a set of accepted and basic beliefs that co-ordinate principles and research values (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The research strategy for this study needed to encompass a method that created inductive qualitative data across different contexts of place, time and participants using multiple and complimentary collection techniques for a specific unified purpose.

Therefore, case study method, utilised as a “comprehensive research strategy” (Yin, 2002, p. 14) with complimentary data collection methods, was appropriate to effectively organise, plan, collect and analyse the real-life data of participants in context. This would entail the capacity to collect relevant documents, observe participants in their daily working lives, as well as allow them the opportunity for explanation and description of their experiences.

Stake (1995) refers to the defining characteristics of a case study research program as being holistic, empirical, interpretative and emphatic. This research context was linked to the phenomenon of staff engagement (*holistic*), grounded in the observations and work of a participant observer in the field (*empirical*), explicated via constructivist epistemology of intuitive researcher-subject constructed meaning (*interpretive*), and conducted from an emic perspective of the subjects (*emphatic*) (Stake, 1995).

Furthermore, the literature points out that VET staff involvement in offshore project work is a relatively contemporary model. With little known about ‘why’ and ‘how’ staff engage when situated offshore, a holistic in-depth understanding was required which followed the participants (Siggelkow, 2007). As little is known, the concept of theory adherence or prediction is minimised in favour of description or explanation of the events that unfold (Merriam, 1988). As such this engagement lends itself to case study research which “investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18).

The choice of site-setting for case study is instrumental, as the site was chosen to observe and collect data related to how staff engage with a project, and not the particulars of the project itself. Instrumental case studies take place when the actual case site is of secondary interest to the researcher (Yin 2009). As previously mentioned, my access is granted as long as I do not mention operational matters of the project; in effect I have been directed to

not undertake an *intrinsic* case study that focuses on the particularities of the commercial and operational side of the project.

The purpose of this case site is as a conduit for the study of professional behaviour of staff engagement within it. It is these ordinary internal staff activities on site that are of interest. This engagement of staff with a project is the objective of this study and not the operational procedures or outcomes of the project. How the project came to be, its operations and its success or failure are peripheral to my research of the staff deployed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In this manner they may provide details for an external and larger picture outside the specific case study site. This ability to possibly extrapolate the findings beyond the particular case site setting is indicative of an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995).

Furthermore, it is a single case study, of a holistic nature, and "revelatory" in nature. Yin explains that one of the purposes of a holistic single case study is to provide insight into a phenomenon not usually seen or researched before (Yin, 2009, p.48). As previously mentioned, information for research on TAFE international projects can be difficult to obtain (Moran & Ryan, 2004; Rahimi, 2009). I have been fortunate to be granted access and so will be able to present a revelatory single case study.

Thus by utilising a holistic, revelatory, instrumental single case study, it is possible to glimpse the phenomenon of novel staff engagement on an international project, which the literature review shows is an under researched area.

3.3 Study design

3.3.1 Setting

The positioning of the research setting in its environment is helpful in understanding the limits of the study's effectiveness (Crowe et al., 2011). With in-depth investigation afforded by the use of instrumental case study, it is necessary that the individual case study is bound from other studies via the use of setting (Creswell, 2008). The field work was undertaken between March and June 2018 in an oil-rich Middle-Eastern country. The case study site was a special banking school for secondary-age students that followed the Australian *Certificate III in Finance* to maintain international standards and operated on an auspice agreement with local teachers delivering 100% of the program. Australian consultant input was predominantly knowledge transfer and technical input, although there were some instances of accredited vocational training for local teachers in the beginning. The case study research setting for this study was convenient, as it supported an ongoing VET

international project that would require the assistance of numerous short-term staff over its duration. As a full-time employee of the institute and involved in the project early on, I had access to all short-term consultancy staff deployed over the course of the project. Given my experience I would see this as a “typical” offshore project staffing structure and is therefore useful for instrumental case study research (Stake, 1995)

3.3.2 Participants

Participant sampling techniques

A selection of sampling techniques was considered, both from the non-probability and probability sampling techniques, and each had the pros and cons weighed against them for consideration of usage in the study.

Non-probability sampling

So named as the chances of selecting any one individual are not probable (Evans). This includes the snowball or network sampling procedure where the researcher makes first contact with the initial participant, and works outward from there (Gleshe & Peshkin, 1992). This is also known as the network, chain, referral or reputational sampling (Evans & Rooney, 2008). After the researcher makes contact with someone they believe will suit the study criteria, it is then left to the participant to contact other suitable candidates, and these in turn contact others as well (Neuman, 2009). This should then result in sufficient promulgation of appropriate research participants.

Some of the better components of this method include the ability to reach stigmatized or obscure groups, and even use group trust to draw inwards to key participants not normally approached by outside researchers immediately (Evans & Rooney, 2008). However this is also a negative component of the snowball sampling technique, as all participants are somehow tied to each other thus providing possibly skewed or non-generalisable results (Neuman, 2009).

Theory-predication and hypothesis testing is usually the domain of snowball sampling and the non-representative nature caused external validity to be difficult to prove. Overall non-probability sampling was discounted for use in this study in favour a representative sampling procedure.

Probability Sampling

The sampling techniques that use probability sampling means the researcher can be sure that a population selected is representative. This also means that the study can show

proper replication outcomes if the same sampling technique is utilised (Evans & Rooney, 2008).

The most basic type of probability sampling is random sampling, a technique that mitigates bias or interference from the researcher in participant selection. (Gleshe & Peshkin, 1992).

The positive benefits of random sampling include the reduced cost and time needed, as well as the prevalent finding accuracy inherent in carefully executed probability random sampling research (Neuman, 2009). However some cons include the possibility that there is no way to formalise a list or selection of random participants in some groups, and that results cannot usually be generalised to a larger population (Yin, 2009).

Initially, participants were to be selected using purposive criteria as per the research objective of staff on short-term assignment. However, the insistence on short-term assignees was relaxed to allow an additional subset of participants, and so the sample includes three long-term staff members as well. Fifteen project participants who met the criteria were invited, which adhered to accepted sufficiency minimum for case study research (Baškarada, 2014). Unfortunately, time, distance and refusals transpired to cause less availability of participants with 8 out of 15 fully utilised. Therefore, the data was gathered from those available, meaning the participants formed a voluntary response convenience sample.

The participants were Australian vocational education employees who contributed to the banking and finance secondary school project as consultants. All participants were Australian, aged between 40 and 62, with seven on their very first international posting and one with extensive experience. A variety of external and internal staff were hired, as well as an array of faculties. This demonstrates the diverse staffing assignments required for project operations and the need to create teams using “high performance team design” (Harris, 1986; Richardson & Denton, 2003). On international VET projects most TAFE staff will be internal volunteers, but this particular VET project also hired full-time external consultants. Hiring external contractors to fill job roles on international projects is necessary when suitable institute staff are unavailable due to work commitments, there are no internal applicants, or no-one is available with the expertise required (Marsh, 2010). In a TAFE institute, the different personnel sent for inclusion on the project may come from an array of departments and organisational levels, with teaching, technical and administrative staff, and management all accounted for in the participant sample. In Table 3.1 variation in the sample can be seen with different genders as well as different levels of seniority and departments. There is also a cross-section of internal and external employees and a wide range of job roles, with the majority employed as advisors or technical consultants, although there is one

teacher-trainer in the sample. Finally, there is a number of different deployment lengths from the longest expatriate at six years, to the shortest “business traveller” being a managerial excursion of one week.

Table 3-1. Interviewed participants.

Participant	Internal or external	Dept.	Job role (home office)	Consultant role (project)	Time on project	Project experience
Michael	External			Vocational co-ordinator (Boys)	6 years	No
Donna	External			Career development advisor (Girls)	1 years	No
Eileen	External			Vocational co-ordinator (Girls)	1 years	No
Frank	Internal	ESL centre	Teacher	Education infrastructure support	12 weeks	No
Clarice	Internal	Corporate improvement	Middle Manager	Teacher-trainer	4 weeks	No
Amin	Internal	IT	Staff	Software integration/ implementation	4 weeks	No
Dave	Internal	Media services	Middle Manager	Videographer	3 weeks	No
Jonathon	Internal	International	Upper Manager	Management visit and quality assurance	1 week	Yes

3.3.3 Collection tools

The instrumental case study data was sought from multiple sources, with data collection coming from interviews, observations and document analysis (Yin, 2009). This triangulation method adds depth and breadth to the study as well as increasing rigour, with additional insight into the researcher journal (Flick et al., 2004). Using these three methods simultaneously facilitated checking for possible points of agreement or discord in the field. There can be discord between formal accounts of actions/texts and informal accounts and often “accounts of how things occur on the ground do not match authoritative, official or speculative accounts” (Bisaillon & Rankin, 2012, p. 9*).* Therefore, having access to official and semi-official documents, as well as live observations, assisted in creating a broad and profound understanding of the staff’s lived experience.

Textual analysis of documents was utilised in this research, as commitment to, and compliance with, a written document that leads and shapes a project’s working life. These documents can be material and/or symbolic and often create a “bridge between the everyday local actualities of our living and the ruling relations" (Grahame & Grahame, 2001, p. 4). While documents provided insight into the project, interviews were the major source of data.

The interview schedule included broad a priori codes positioned in the different temporal sections of the deployment cycle as influenced by the expatriate assignment cycle. Thus, concepts of goals, success indicators, stakeholders and job roles were embedded throughout the sequential deployment cycle of pre-deployment, immediately on arrival, during work and post deployment. The interview objective was to ascertain information that could not be gained by text or observation (Darke et al., 1998). These guided conversations are the most important, and often the only source of information for analysis of the problem (Yin, 2009).

Furthermore, as an ongoing employee I was able to add to the data collection via participant observation. Being an active participant in events is advantageous but also prone to bias (Yin, 2009). I adopted a case study observation protocol to reduce bias, and kept field notes of critical events, as well as more mundane features of project life. Field notes were first made in a written journal, then transcribed to an electronic medium for the database.

Finally, a reflective journal was kept which allowed for consistent recording of impressions, thoughts and critiques of the study. This reflective journal was then re-read weekly, allowing for moments of critical reflexivity in noting bias. Thus it was possible to ensure a fair, thorough and consistent study.

3.3.4 Collection procedure

Ethical issues and approval

As an employee participant observer, there were a number of ethical issues to consider in the implementation of this case study. Proximity to staff as colleagues and friends meant a constant need to be reflexively distant. Being too distant would be unethical in my duty to mentor new staff, especially through disorientating dilemmas, but it was these very moments that I wished to research. However, as the research continued, this conundrum dissipated.

Use of the site for case study research necessitated endorsement on multiple levels. The in-country project managers and the Australian project director first agreed to the project for research purposes in early 2017. Internal authorization was confirmed in October 2017 when the institute CEO approved the study during an in-country visit. As mentioned earlier, approval was on the proviso that I could not have access to, or report on, any operational aspects of the project. This was expected, as during the literature review it was found that TAFEs keep offshore commercial activities confidential (Howland, 2011). After gaining internal institute authorization, official Victoria University (VU) ethics approval was granted on November 21, 2017 (HRE17-213). However, fieldwork could not commence as the

proposal had to be approved by the TAFE's own internal ethics review panel. The project was approved in March 2018.

Immediately prior to commencement of the field work, the project manager in-country fielded a request by one of the staff members that I do not conduct research during working hours (specifically interviews), and that institute property should not be utilised for VU research purposes. The complaint was moot; however, as interviews were always scheduled outside work hours and no access to project infrastructure was needed for research purposes. Barring this one grievance from a non-participatory staff member, all remaining staff members were happy to participate and were interested in the study.

Participants were provided with a plain language statement (Appendix A) and informed consent form (Appendix B) that outlined the objectives of the study and their intended involvement. Anonymity was guaranteed via the use of pseudonyms and erasure of all identifying factors from the transcripts, reports and thesis. The ethics for data collection and observations were clearly presented and the procedures outlined. Participation was explained as voluntary, and subjects were free to withdraw at any time. Their data was made freely available to them for checking, substantiation and comments. No participants withdrew or commented on any of their data.

Practice interview

In February 2018, after receiving VU ethics approval (November 2017), but while still waiting for institute approval (March 2018), an informal practice interview was conducted in Melbourne with critical friends. This provided useful feedback leading to adapted interview protocols. A time limit of 60 minutes was adopted, and the interview technique was amended to keep the participant and researcher focused on the questions. Anchor codes were included in the researcher's question schedule as aligned to relevant questions to help guide analysis later. It was also decided to provide participants with a condensed version of the interview schedule beforehand.

3.3.5 Field work

All potential participants had been emailed two weeks ahead of the start date, with a plain language statement (Appendix A) attached. In-country participants had all been invited to attend a face-to-face briefing one week beforehand. The research project aims, and confidentiality arrangements were presented to them to allow the opportunity to proceed or not. There was only one refusal in-country, and interviews with three staff members started on March 28, 2018.

The response from Australian-based staff was not as successful. Several previous project staff members were no longer employed and not contactable. A further three participants were keen to be involved, but planned interviews were frequently abandoned due to last-minute work commitments. However, five Australian-based staff were interviewed. Interviews with these five participants commenced in August 2018.

Interviews

All interviews followed the same protocol. First an invitation email with the interview process was sent, along with a number of suitable dates, times and locations, to those who expressed interest in participation (Kvale, 2007). The participants then responded with a mutually suitable time and preferred location. This was followed by an email with the informed consent form and condensed question schedule attached (Appendices B, C). Ongoing staff members were interviewed on location between March and May 2018. As most short-term staff had finished their deployments by the time data collection commenced, they were interviewed upon my return to Melbourne in August 2018. The participants in Melbourne mentioned that this time allowed them to reflect and focus their thoughts prior to interview.

In all instances the location was a neutral venue outside working hours. Quiet, comfortable and secure environments were selected as this is conducive to positive participant response (Gillham, 2005). Interviews were semi-structured and each lasted approximately one hour. A dedicated audio-recording device was used, as well as handwritten notes. After an initial briefing on aspects of anonymity and data collection, storage and destruction, the interview moved to the rapport-building section. As well as demographic data collection, the first section of the interview asked personal questions about their career. This included what they considered an international VET project to be, and how they came to apply or volunteer. This section helped set the context for the remaining question schedule, while also easing the participant into the interview process, as subjects feel comfortable by first describing "narrative accounts of individuals' professional lives" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 392).

As shown in Figure 3.1, staff members were interviewed about four separate chronological phases during their input: i) Pre-deployment, ii) immediate arrival, iii) working in-country, and iv), post-deployment. Interviews followed the templated question schedule, although allowances were made for relevant tangential discourse.

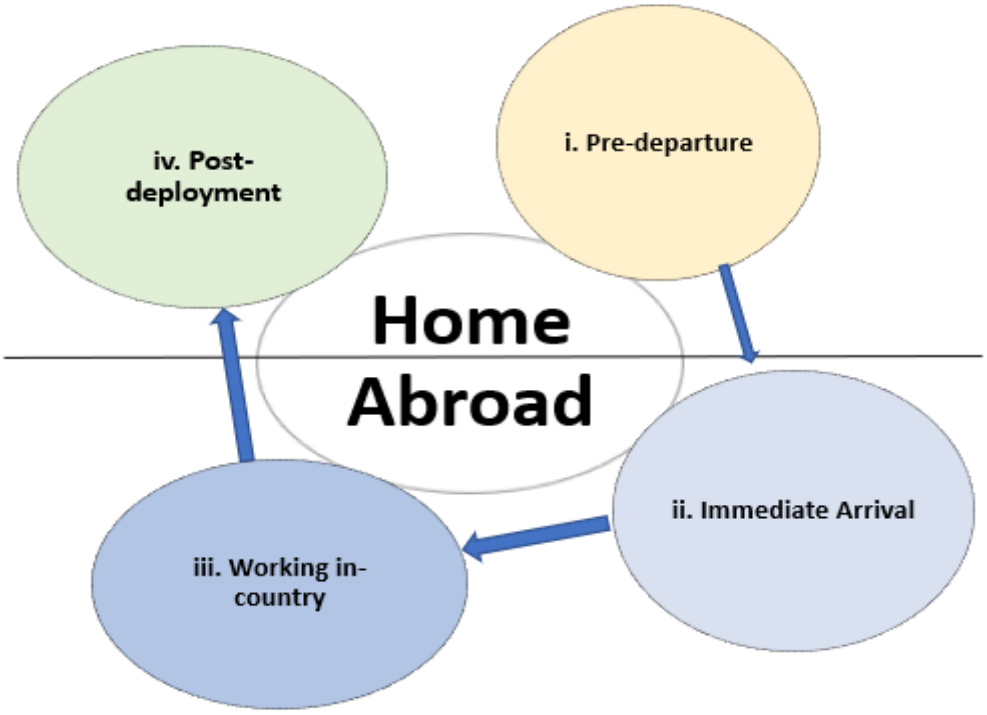

Figure 3.1. Chronological interview phases

To begin with, a priori (anchor) codes (from readings and prior impromptu participant observer research) were utilised for overarching focus questions to lead interviews in an iterative process (Braun & Clark, 2006). While the questions centred on research concepts of goals, success indicators, stakeholders and job roles, often there was acceptable and relevant transgression into other areas. In all instances, participants were open, responsive and readily shared their experiences. Quite simply, the participants liked to talk about the project and their involvement. Most participants mentioned that this was the only instance in which they had ever discussed their involvement with anyone outside the direct employ of the project.

Each interview closed with a debriefing and a final review of notes with the staff member. The participant was able to ask further questions and clarify responses, and then approve the information. After each interview, I took 10-15 minutes to reflect and noted the context of what had been learned to assist later in transcription analysis (Kvale, 2007). All hand-written notes were transferred to an electronic version and saved to a secure database as well as a separate secure archive. The audio recording was checked and saved to both database and archive. Signed informed consent forms were scanned and added to both secure locations. Hard copies of notes and forms were filed appropriately and then locked in a portable secure document storage facility.

All participants were assigned pseudonyms and all organisational or location identifiers were replaced with non-distinct markers. Parker (2005) supported discussing the use of non-anonymity with participants as it may empower subjects. However, all participants were content to remain anonymous. While privacy was assured in the informed consent form that was emailed prior to interview, participants exhibited visible relief when the depth and extent of the anonymity was clarified in person. Interview audio was professionally transcribed through a dedicated confidential service. Each transcription was checked, and all identifiers removed, as well as clarification of certain times when the audio was unclear. The transcripts were made available to participants for checking, but there was no response to this offer.

Observation

As a participant observer, I was able to gather observation data and gain access to project documentation (Fox, 1998; Kawulich, 2005). The organisation and its operations were observed and noted through linking an analysis of the details of ordinary organisational existence with both a targeted analysis of language and a more general "social analysis" (Everett, 2002, p. 57). This study aimed to observe instances of how Australian staff engaged with an international VET project that used certain key textual documents to determine project goals and indicators of successful fulfilment of these goals. For those instances, staff members' experience was paramount. Observing and noting these experiences was the approach used for data gathering.

Observations were useful for recording the informant's behaviours and reactions in the authentic work environment (DeMunck & Sobo, 1998). The approach used was "participant observer"; however, Patton's (2015) continuum displays several types of participant observer. As a colleague I was participating in scheduled events such as staff meetings and social gatherings, but I was not directly participating in their individual working lives and so at times the observation of unscheduled events was "naturalist observation" (Salkind, 2010). This follows normal observational instances when the researcher's involvement can shift from total-participant to total-observer (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989).

The primary process for observation was guided by the research questions and would be closely linked to selective observation (Angrosino & DePerez, 2000). I was prepared and organised for times when a participant was dealing with issues of goals, success indicators, stakeholder relations and job role. When there was discussion about contextual dissonance or goal congruence I switched from participant to observer. The observation focus was the action and reaction to the specific research items as above. This is in-line with Merriam's advice to commence observations on the purpose of the study, but also accepts that where,

how, and when to stop observing is impossible to know prior to commencement (Merriam, 1998). Unscheduled events related to the research purpose happened all the time. As per the plain-language statement, the system of observation for unscheduled events was to simply note what was occurring in everyday project life. Notes were taken in one of two ways dependent on location. Outside the office environment a small notebook was used, and in the office my notes were typed directly and tactfully onto my computer. The small notebook was unobtrusive and there was little disruption when switching to observational note-taking within the office.

The majority of observational data was not directly or explicitly written down immediately but maintained as a mental record until such time as it could be recorded. In this way I was able to systematically observe and add critical events not foreseen or expected (O'Leary, 2004). Observation of scheduled events, including meetings, presentations and other work-related functions, followed a set format. Notes included time, place, persons present and activity. These events were recorded quickly and discreetly. After the scheduled event my reflection was added, transcribed to electronic form, and the electronic document saved in a secure database and separate secure archive. Hard copies were filed and locked in a portable document locker. Archival notes were used for observational instances of participatory staff that had finished and left prior to official research study commencement. My observations and notes of staff members who ultimately failed to respond to inclusion requests, and by extension refused participation in the study, have not been used.

Document collection

Document collection centred on official, mostly unpublished, texts that assisted to locate the project in a place and situation experienced by all relevant stakeholders. This meant that three hierarchical levels of documents were collected, keeping in mind the emphasis on staff engagement and not project operations. Table 3.2 shows that macro, meso and micro level documents were collected. As per Bailey's (2010) study, large macro-level government documents were used in the interview to try and situate the project in a global setting. The meso documents are important for analysis of findings against interview and observational data and it is these texts that are the most concern for this study. While the document content can be replicated across time and organisational levels, the text can be interpreted differently according to the context in which it is read.

For example, project reports and project contracts are created and produced at stakeholder level with the inherent intention of creating uniformity. These texts are the "essential coordinators of institutional [project] process" (Watt, 2016, p. 6). However, it is via these texts that incongruencies can occur. This replication of texts can create stakeholder conflict

when divergent contextual readings arise between definitions and purposed meanings (Carrier & Prodinger, 2014). This can occur when different stakeholders interpret the same text (or their idea of a text) in different locations and at different times with different understandings (Rudrum, 2016). Therefore, it was important to collect, collate, interpret and analyse key texts and definitive documents as objectively as possible. If stakeholder conflicts occur, it is good practice to go back to the replicated document to try and ascertain where this conflict occurred, and the resultant effect on staff engagement.

Table 3-2. Document collection and rationale

Level	Document	Contribution to Investigation
Macro	Government white papers	*Helped to create an overall picture and the purpose of project situated in a global, far-reaching context*
	"National Vision"	
Meso	Project reports	*Overarching documents available to all stakeholders in direct relevance to the project goals, success indicators and stakeholders*
	Project contracts	
	Newspaper articles (project)	*Helped place the project in the public sphere*
Micro	Position description	*A clearer picture of job role and stakeholder relations was able to be determined from these individual texts* *Defining documents*
	Contract	
	Meeting minutes	*These provided secondary evidence and collaborative evidence to ascertain a situation as distinct from, but related to, something observed or told in an interview (often both)*
	Emails	
	Newspaper/Newsletter (staff or team)	*Helped place the project staff or team in the public sphere*

The micro documents included "defining documents" in blue. These provided recognised, objective definitions of the staff member's job role, goals and success indicators. These are useful for cross-checking responsibilities and expectations, as well as any confusion that may arise between differentiated understandings. These texts are not able to be accessed by all stakeholders, and so can be subject to individualised interpretations via stakeholder conjecture. Finally, meeting minutes and emails are advantageous for providing extended information, clarity, and details of staff engagement with the project.

3.3.6 Data analysis

Data analysis was an iterative process that commenced during data collection and helped form and guide ongoing research. Data coding and the analytical process has been adapted

from previous studies; this combination of techniques is the basis for “good data analysis” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 3). While Saldaña (2016) encourages researchers to develop their own methods and processes as necessary, the analytical process in this research adheres to familiar and common systematic thematic coding protocols using blended approaches (Graebner et al., 2012). This section outlines how extensive and disparate participant data was categorically aggregated into a thematic and literal tool for interpreting findings.

Document Analysis

Initial desktop analysis was conducted using institutional documents as listed in Table 3.2. Document analysis is an effective way of gathering initial and trustworthy data as documents are conventional and routine, making them an accessible source of reliable data (Bowen, 2009). The texts that were collected were an important means to contribute to, corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 2009). In this study those documents were used to support and substantiate findings identified in the interview and field note transcripts.

Document data was collected from multiple organisational levels of the project. Macro key documents included “National Vision 2030” and governmental white papers on education reform. Institute-based documents collected were contracts with financing stakeholders, project “milestones” of the group, and large, overarching annual reports. Staffing items included position descriptions or work schedules and individual staff “deliverables” attributed to them, as well as non-private emails and meeting minutes. Researcher bias is therefore mitigated by the fact that documents are stable data sources which can be reviewed numerous times yet remain unchanged by researcher bias or research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Once the document collection resulted in an appropriate number of texts, the analysis commenced. A two-stage process of thematic analysis was considered ideal in this study as the analysis method was not underpinned by any ontological epistemological or theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This versatility resulted in an approach closely matched to the necessary outcome required in this particular case study. (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

First pass: Familiarization and coding

The documents were first put through a first pass that sought to identify words or concepts that occurred and re-occurred within the text, texts or group of texts. This pre-interview quantification of particular words and phrases is the essence of first-pass analysis (O’Leary, 2004). This is a very useful process as a large variety of text types was utilized, and this first pass provided identification of key passages and key documents (Bowen, 2009).

Supplementary passes: Thematic analysis

A second pass of the texts was conducted after the transcripts were coded. The codes and patterns noted from transcript analysis was complimentary to the pattern recognition emerging from further passes of the documents. (Bowen, 2009). These emergent themes aligned with categories prevalent in other mixed-methods analysis. The previous analysis had produced the pre-defined codes which now fuelled the supplementary passes, which is in line with appropriate category construction and applicable phenomenon themes (Armstrong, 2021). These transcript-inspired codes proved useful during application of document re-coding by integrating and confirming (or refuting) the auxiliary research methods (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Further passes- corroboration, connection and usefulness for other data.

Further passes contributed to further understanding and contextualisation of the case study, rationale and reasoning behind some otherwise unknown decision-making, as well as establishing deeper perspectives of stakeholder relations. Therefore the use of document analysis was useful for corroboration and deepening of understanding the other methods of data collection (Braun et al., 2019). By triangulating data collection methods, findings were confirmed across data sets which minimized bias (Bowen, 2009). Often analysis of these various texts bridged a link with an observance and/or an interview conversation, allowing for an expanded understanding of an incident.

Transcript analysis

While the documents provided support for thematic analysis, the main focus of data analysis was the interview transcripts. King's (2004) template analysis procedure was the key technique for thematically organising and analysing codes. The process began with familiarization, with the transcript first read to discern relevant sections and clear-up any transcription errors. A first coding pass was conducted on each transcript to label sections of *in vivo* codes which produced a loose collection of emergent codes. A table was created for each transcript aligning codes to the anchor codes from the interview schedule along with support data and my interpretation in a coding frame (Miles et al., 2013). For a more intensive second pass, one transcript was chosen as a model transcript and split into interesting *in vivo* sections. *In vivo* coding allowed the 'voice' of participants to remain (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). This was then re-assigned inductive codes and aligned with previous emergent codes. Patterns of responses were grouped as they related to emergent themes (Creswell, 2013). This constant comparative method of re-iterative coding is a common and accepted method of identifying relevant information, with recurring and grouping of themes then labelled into categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, 2008). A third

pass was given on the model transcript, with an emphasis on initial analysis and alignment of categories. The remaining transcripts were then re-read, coded, themed and categorised accordingly, as informed by the model transcript (Saldaña, 2016). The categories were individually re-analysed and cross-referenced against the remaining transcript results. This entailed data reduction in deciding what was now determined to be essential and non-essential text (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

These categories came, went and shifted as more data arrived. I kept an analysis log and created frequent memos to track changes and adaptions. An ever-growing and ever-changing code book was utilised for clarity and uniformity of codes, categories and themes (Strauss & Corbin, 2008; Saldaña, 2016). Eventually categories and sub-categories began to solidify into usable chunks related to the research purpose and research questions, all revolving around the four standard times of the deployment cycle: pre-deployment, immediate arrival, working in-country, and post-deployment. These categories and sub-categories were organised into a thematic analysis matrix. The data was again re-read and combined with a contextual analysis of relevant text and observations from the indirect data collection which created an analysis matrix. The overarching results created access to the aggregated data in an organised and usable manner, and this rigorous comprehension of the datasets allowed for findings of staff engagement on a VET research project to emerge as a story began to be identified (Gray, 2014).

3.3.7 Trustworthiness and Methodological Limitations

This study was bound within specific narrow confines of it's specific scope. Location, participants, time and scale; the nature of these boundaries imposed limitations on outcomes of the study (Punch, 2000). The concept of trustworthiness is a systematic way to both mitigate limitations and also establish the rigour of a qualitative research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Three key parameters which contained the study; absence of generalizability, possible researcher bias and reliance on interview data. Trustworthiness can assist in decreasing these limiting factors. Data collection triangulation methods and attempts at member checking are indicative examples of inherent trustworthiness. However, this study seeks further verification through the criteria proposed by Lincoln & Guba (1985): *transferability, dependability, confirmability* and *credibility*.

Transferability

The inherent nature of a single case in case study research effectively binds it to an event at a specific time and place (Miles et al., 2014). This reduces the traditional concept of generalizability, which seeks to apply results to other contexts (Gay et al., 2012). However, some feel that case studies can prove rigour via transferability, as resultant concepts might

be valuable to other applicable contexts (Schoch, 2020). This research used multi-disciplinary literature to inform the study, as well as utilising various professional research studies in underpinning my study design.

The diverse research I used ranged from MNCs to TNE as well as cost accounting and project management. Researchers point out that readers of the study decide on transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Polit & Beck, 2010; Schoch, 2020). This means that the same disciplines I used to inform my research might find the results of the study useful in supporting further research in their fields. For example, MNCs and TNE providers as well as project managers and cost accountants might find the results transferable and decide on replication of whole or parts of the research study. As the study provides full and detailed descriptions of the methods and participants, as well as data collection and analysis procedures, this lends credence to the transferability of the study.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research is a component of reliability, in that the findings are stable and able to be made by a similarly placed researcher/observer (Gray, 2014). The most efficient way this can be accomplished is by leaving adequate audit trails throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These trails are manifestations of good researcher practice techniques. Techniques used in this research included keeping ongoing records and accounts of all phases of the research study to maintain reflexive objectivity. By using proven differentiated research methods and maintaining accurate and accessible records the dependability of the research is assured.

Confirmability

Maintaining reflexive objectivity is also a concern with the concept of confirmability. This involves neutrality and concerns assurance that the findings come from the actual data and not the researcher (Given, 2016). The audit trail mentioned in 'dependability' above also confirms that all manners/matters of the research are fully available and accessible for cross-checking and confirmation of objective use. Triangulated collection methods meant rival and sometimes contradictory situations, which were fully embraced and considered thus reducing bias further. Data analysis was via an overwhelmingly inductive approach that allowed the participant voice to lead the emergent theming. Lastly, the use of the researcher journal meant ongoing reflexivity and adherence to minimizing bias (Nadin & Cassell, 2006).

Credibility

A credible study produces results which a reader can be confident are true (Ulin et al., 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this truth value as a way to validate the legitimacy of outcomes. This research ensured credibility in both methods and practice. Multiple

collection methods meant continuous sequential credibility assurance. The feasibility of interviews was cross-checked with unobtrusive observations that were then verified with texts that afforded minimal bias interference (Gray, 2014). In practice I ensured case study collection methods and analytical procedures used were proven in the field, as well as participant-observer protocols. As a participant-observer I was able to employ prolonged engagement with the case as well as persistent observation of the subjects. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described these techniques as conducive to ensuring credible research results. Lastly, 'thick description' of process and context helps the reader situate themselves within the case study, thus creating 'thick meaning', enhancing plausibility via familiarity and transparency (Geertz, 1973; Ponterotto, 2006).

By adhering to the principles of research trustworthiness in the study, it was possible to assuage the limitations discussed and allow the benefits of the inductive approach to real-world situations to be considered.

Further limitations

Some more specific limitations to the study to be considered include aspects such as a limited scope, minor scale and modest number of participants. The data collection is reliant on a constrained number of participants commenting on a single case-study that is unique in its implementation. However, while the framework constructed for this study only represents the concentrated essence of extensive data from one site, the usefulness of the output could provide a scaffold for future research (George & Bennet, 2005).

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the methodological design and justified the qualitative instrumental case study research approach to explore the lived experience of VET staff on short-term assignment for an international project. This included a discussion of the research design, including data collection tools, situating of the case study in the school, and participants. The influence of the expatriate deployment cycle on study methods was explicated for inclusion, as this cyclical framework and timing will be utilised for data collection. Finally, the data analysis and interpretation procedures were presented followed by validity assurance for the research.

The next chapter presents findings from thematic coding, analysis and interpretation of the research data. Subsequent chapters determine the significance of these findings while building on the previous literature review. These chapters present significant moments of engagement for staff working on an international VET project.

Chapter 4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This thesis investigates the motivations, perspectives and experiences of staff members from an Australian TAFE in the delivery of an overseas international VET project in the Middle East. The selected methodology of case study was supported by triangulated collection methods of semi-structured interviews, document collection and participant observer field notes. Analysis was conducted through the concurrent iterative process of thematic coding. This method sought to create, interpret and evaluate categories by weaving together the primary interview transcripts with supplementary observational data, further complimented by textual analysis of relevant project documents.

This chapter presents the findings from the thematic analysis of this collected data as they align with the study's research questions.

Section 4.2 addresses the overall research question: *How do Australian VET staff engage with a multi-stakeholder international project when deployed on short-term assignment? What are the implications?* It examines the project staffing and work challenges faced, as well as the shared project engagement cycle experienced.

Section 4.3 presents findings related to team engagement and conflict with stakeholders, and this is connected to the first sub-research question: *Do all project stakeholders recognise the same goal and success indicators in context?*

Section 4.4 examines how the team engaged with the project in-country and modifications that took place, and this is associated with the second sub-research question: *Are project goals and success indicators modified during in-country deployment: to what extent is there goal achievement congruence?*

Section 4.5 is the final section and presents a synopsis of individualised staff experiences of the project cycle engagement, and this is associated with the third sub-research question: *How do individual staff members engage with goal achievement congruence (or incongruence) and contextual agreement (or dissonance) during and after deployment?*

4.2 Project staffing

Of the interviewed staff, three out of eight participants were external contractors, three were female, five were male and the median age was 55. Table 4.1 shows that the participants' job roles consisted of consultants, co-ordinators, a managerial representative and one teacher. During interviews it was determined that none of the staff had worked together prior to deployment, and subsequent information collected (via emails, text messaging, phone calls) found that (as of 04/2022) none have worked together since and 75% no longer work for the institute.

Table 4-1. Interviewed participants' job role, age, gender, time deployed and experience

Staff		Age	Job role in-country	Time on project	VET project experience	Employment method
Michael	M	59	Vocational co-ordinator (boys)	8 years	No	Selection
Donna	F	59	Career development advisor (girls)	3 years	No	Selection
Eileen	F	59	Vocational co-ordinator (girls)	3 years	No	Selection
Frank	M	57	Education infrastructure support	12 weeks	No	Volunteer
Clarice	F	52	Teacher trainer	4 weeks	No	Job role
Amin	M	40	IT support	4 weeks	No	Volunteer
Dave	M	58	Media services	3 weeks	No	Volunteer
Jonathon	M	55	Management	1 week	Yes	Job role

The case study project employed 22 staff over a period of eight years in a range of roles required to conduct the project. The project aimed to present education activities benchmarked off an Australian *Certificate III in Finance* to students in a purpose-built secondary education institution. Table 4.2 shows that the study participants represent a cross-section of the total project staff, with a diverse range of job roles spread across an equal split of genders.

Table 4-2. Job roles of all staff deployed on the project, 2010--2018

		Staff in-country	Deployment length	Prior VET project experience	Employment method
1	M	Vocational co-ordinator (boys)	8 years	No	Selection
2	F	Vocational co-ordinator (girls)	3 years	No	Selection (friend)
3	F	Career development advisor	3 years	No	Selection (wife)
4	M	Education infrastructure support	12 weeks	No	Volunteer
5	M	IT support	4 weeks	No	Volunteer
6	M	Media services	3 weeks	No	Volunteer
7	M	Teacher trainer/co-ordinator	5 years	Yes	Selection
8	F	Teacher trainer/ team leader [Left project early]	2 years	Yes	Volunteer
9	F	Teacher trainer /Management [Replacement staff for above]	3 weeks	No	Job role
10	M	Education consultant: Careers	3 months	No	Volunteer
11	M	Education consultant: Resources	4 weeks	Yes	Volunteer
12	F	Education consultant: ESL	3 years	No	Selection
13	F	Support staff	8 years	No	Volunteer
14	F	Administration	1 year	No	Volunteer
15	M	Project manager	7 years	Yes	Job role
16	M	Auditor	2 weeks	No	Volunteer
17	M	Executive consultant: Capacity	4 days	Yes	Job role
18	F	Executive consultant: Support	4 days	Yes	Job role
19	F	Management support	1 week	Yes	Job role
20	M	Management consultant	1 week	No	Job role
21	F	English team co-ordinator	3 years	No	Volunteer
22	M	Workplace learning co-ordinator	5 years	Yes	Volunteer

Due to the project focus of teaching a specific program across the girls' and boys' schools, there were two vocational co-ordinators, one for each school. The teacher training position descriptions also showed that teaching was only part of their contracted job role in-country, with the larger portion of their time being dedicated to non-teaching consultancy roles.

4.2.1 Work challenges of participant staff

As presented in Table 4.3, data analysis showed that Australian staff on international VET projects faced engagement challenges centred around three major areas: where they were going to work (work environment); the people they were going to work with (stakeholders); and documents outlining what they were going to do and why (project texts).

Table 4-3. Reported areas of work challenges

Areas of work challenges	
Work environment	Situation where participants conducted the project work
Stakeholder relations	Who they worked with and hierarchy of the work relationships both onshore and offshore
Texts • ***Project goal*** • ***Job role*** • ***Success indicators***	Documents that outlined what they did, how it would be accomplished, what signified successful accomplishment Project goal would come from terms of reference or project brief Job role and success indicators were either in the contract or position description, although a generic description could be found in the project brief

Staff experienced challenges within these three main areas throughout the entire engagement with the project, as outlined in the project engagement cycle below.

4.2.2 Project engagement cycle

Despite the variety of participants in the study, analysis revealed that all staff encountered the same distinct experiences during their time on the project. These experiences aligned with certain times in relation to their involvement in the project. The phases of project deployment were: i) pre-deployment, ii) immediate arrival, iii) working in situ, and iv) post-deployment. Interviewed at each phase of deployment, staff members' experiences and perspectives were codified into themes which formed a cycle of engagement, as presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4-4. Staff exhibited similar themes through project engagement phases

Project phase	Response to interview questions	Meaning	Theme
Pre-deployment *Pre-selection* *Post-selection*	Participants recounted feelings about wanting to be involved in offshore VET projects	Participants had preconceived notions about what it might be like to work internationally	***Motivation***
	Participants recounted feelings after selection/being hired	Participants felt there were things they knew, did not fully understand , or presumed to know	***Unknowns***
Immediate Arrival Starting	Participants recounted feelings they felt within the first week of arrival on the project	Participants felt a lack or loss of control and were unable to work "normally"	***Control issues***
Working in-country Working Finishing	Participants recounted feelings about working on the project after a short period of time had passed	Participants felt or noted exclusion or isolation from the home office	***Distancing***
	Participants recounted feelings about working on the project as their input neared completion	The participants uses actions or words to adjust their work environment	***Shifting of priorities***
Post-deployment	Participants gave advice to others considering offshore VET projects	Participants experienced to make further judgements on other projects	***Closing the loop***

This shared cycle of engagement is helpful for understanding and situating staff engagement, and the relevant experiences and implications that were produced as they progressed on the project.

Pre-deployment: motivation, preparation, unknowns, presumptions and expectations

Pre-deployment consists of two different periods for staff: pre-selection and post-selection. Pre-selection is a time of consideration, when the job posting, or "expression of interest", was first noticed and considered by the staff member. This involves *motivation***,** the reasons given for contemplating what it might be like to be employed on such a project and included internal as well as external motivation. Internal motivation is items flagged by staff as being of mutual benefit to the institute and the participant via ongoing project involvement. This can

be a work-challenge or for professional development, as well as extended benefit for the institute through successful project completion. External motivation is related to participants' personal goals and career aspirations. This might mean motivating factors for project involvement include being able to visit a friend in the region, or a good remuneration package.

Post-selection was when they had been hired or selected for inclusion. This period is a time of preparation, both from the participant and the hiring institute. The individual prepares themselves in terms of impending personal changes and the institute prepares them for time working abroad. However, formal induction and pre-deployment support seems minimal at best, with all staff instead turning to self-guided informal work preparation assistance. This included independent research and seeking experienced friends or individuals for advice. Lack of information regarding the project resulted in staff mentioning they had many *unknowns* about their work on the upcoming project.

Participants did their best to fill gaps for these unknowns themselves by creating individualised assumptions and presumptions based solely on previous uneducated perceptions about what they thought might occur in-country. As in-country deployment time drew near, these presumptions of offshore work shifted to expectations of offshore work; what they *thought* might happen to an expectation that it *will* happen. Participants therefore made the transition from onshore Australian context to offshore host-country context with self-created expectations about the project work environment, impending stakeholder relations, and any information that might relate to specific job role, project goals or success indicators.

Immediate arrival: control issues

On arrival in the host country, staff immediately became aware of their misconceptions of expected 'knowns'. The new context of the host country quickly created instances of dissonance between their preconceived pre-deployment expectations and the reality of the project in-country. This contextual dissonance resulted in feeling a lack of control on arrival.

The staff first mentioned these "*control issues"* as related to the unanticipated difference in the work environment in-country. Next, they described a lack of control regarding texts and described job roles. Finally, the control issues they described related to stakeholder relations and differing interpretations of goals and success indicators. During this period, the participant is unable to work "normally" (as per the familiar Australian context) in the unfamiliar context of the offshore environment and reaches out for assistance from the home office onshore.

Working in-country: distancing leads to priority shifting

When staff reach out for help from the home office they find they receive little or no assistance, which leads to feelings of isolation and "*distancing*". Due to a lack of co-ordinated pre-arrival text analysis between stakeholders, there are many instances of incongruence noted during in-country working. Various stakeholders offered differing subjective interpretations of goals and success indicators in context. Once work was well underway there was a stage of adaptation from the participants on the project over time.

As participants' input moves toward completion and related deadline pressure, unsure how they can complete their work, staff members experienced a period of *"priority shifting".* This is when the participant realises things are accomplished differently in the temporary office and begins to understand the work environment better. The participants spoke about a change in their mindset regarding work to be done. No longer feeling helpless from the shock of the initial grounding, they were now aware and accepting of distancing from the Australian office. Priority was shifting from trying to make the home office understand the situation to embracing the project office and managing goal completion on their own terms. The offshore participant feels there is no choice now but to establish independent, locally based decisions due to feelings of isolation from the Australian office.

With this increased contextual understanding of the project office and stakeholder inputs, staff exhibited a shift away from organisational objectives toward self-satisfying objectives called *'self-governing behaviours'.* Staff members modify project goals and success indicators to what they consider to be the best outcome. This allowed them to complete their input as successfully as they could.

Post-deployment: reconsiderations and advising

During the post-deployment phase, participants were able to discuss their feelings of involvement and reconsider their involvement in future projects. They also wished to offer advice for other first-time staff considering offshore projects. The staff felt experienced and reviewed their considerations that started the process in the first place, as well as refined their motivations for project deployment. The next section uses this project engagement cycle to present the challenges of contextual dissonance the team faced during the initial part of the engagement cycle.

4.3 Team engagement challenges: stakeholder conflict

This section on stakeholder conflict presents findings regarding how different stakeholders recognise goals and success indicators differently in context. The main areas of work challenges are related to engagement confusion in the work environment, stakeholder relations and related project documents. As shown in Table 4.5 participants reported that inadequate preparation left them to presume, and then expect, knowledge about the project and their involvement. On arrival in-country this context changed, and expectations were not met in context. This caused dissonance and issues of staff feeling lack or loss of control, particularly in relation to the environment and stakeholder relations.

Table 4-5. Staff engagement: from pre-deployment to immediate arrival

Pre-deployment				**On arrival**
Unknowns and presumed knowns →				**Control issues**
Information sessions →	**Unknowns** →	**Presumptions** →	**Expectations pre-arrival** →	**Dissonance in-country**
-Work environment *-Stakeholders* *-Texts* *No information available to staff*	*What they felt they did not know*	*What staff presumed without information*	*What staff expected would happen in-country*	***Contextual conflict and loss of control on arrival in-country***

The relevant findings for the data collected from disconnect between pre-deployment perceptions and deployment realities are presented below. A brief overview of pre-deployment preparation is presented, followed by the dissonance related to the work environment and stakeholder conflicts on arrival. Findings related to texts and the different recognition of job roles, goals and success indicators by stakeholders in context are also shown.

4.3.1 Preparation overview

The findings show that pre-deployment staff preparation was limited. No relevant formal preparations were indicated by any staff members. Frank was advised to attend an induction for institute staff travelling to teach in China, and Clarice mentioned a '*code of conduct stuff*' preparatory meeting. The other participants noted there was no preparation offered or even mentioned. All participants then turned to informal methods of pre-departure preparation. This included self-guided research on the country and culture, as well as seeking out friends or colleagues who had previously worked internationally. The value of

this self-research is not known, but all staff mentioned the benefit of discussing the work venture with an experienced person.

There was no directly relevant preparation regarding the new offshore work environment, who they would be working for, or even working with. There was limited or no access to project texts to enable any profound understanding of their job role, project goals or success indicators. For each of these missing elements, staff members were forced to create presumptions and expectations pre-arrival. This resulted in contextual dissonance on arrival, as presented next.

4.3.2 Work environment dissonance

The findings indicated that during pre-deployment preparation there was no direct information offered about the work environment of the offshore project office; therefore, they had little perception about what it would be like. Table 4.6 shows that the expectations staff had built-up prior to arrival was not coherent with the actual work environment in-country. There was mention of the home office being somewhat dismissive of the work performed in the temporary office. Amin noted that the home office "*think you're on some sort of holiday or something*." Participants presumed the project office would be similar to Australian standards and that the project team in the host country would be well prepared and ready to receive them.

Table 4-6. Work environment dissonance in context

Pre-deployment				**On arrival**
	Unknowns ⇨	**Presumptions** ⇨	**Expectations pre-arrival** ⇨	**Dissonance in-country**
Work environment	No knowledge of the set-up or structure of the offshore work environment	Offshore office is an institute subsidiary	Office and managerial set-up equal to Australian office	***Contextual differences in offices***
			Offshore office lax	***Onshore office misconception of offshore office***
			Their arrival would be anticipated and welcomed	***Offshore office and local stakeholders unprepared for their arrival***

On arrival participants noted differences in the offshore work environment to what was expected pre-deployment. Overall, there was a deep contextual misunderstanding from the Australian office about how the project office operated. Participants felt that *"…no matter how many times people back home tell you that's what we will be doing, it's when you are in*

the [project] office and you see what's happening, that you get the real vibe" (Amin). Participants felt that only by being in-country was it possible to consider the work to be conducted. Dave believed that the home office's derisive attitude to the work ethic of the project office was unfounded and that *"…what [home office] don't understand is, you're going to the offshore office and you're expected to perform from the minute you arrive."* The participants pointed out that, contrary to onshore Australian assumptions, the amount of work required offshore is constant, substantial and demanding for the entire input time.

As well, contradicting their expectations of a warm welcome, the participants noted that on arrival in the host office there was a feeling of unpreparedness. Nothing was ready, and in some cases local stakeholders did not even know of their arrival or what their intended input should be. Participants mentioned that this disadvantaged them immediately. Clarice felt her student stakeholders were negatively inclined from the start because *"no-one told them I was coming or why I was there*" (Clarice). Overall, the participants felt that everything happened on their arrival, that *"…the organizational part of it happened from the day I arrived" (*Dave). This seemed to destabilise the participants as *"…after I got there my understanding changed. The [local] organisation was happening ad hoc, as opposed to before I got there*" (Frank).

4.3.3 Stakeholder relational dissonance

During the interviews, it became clear that participants did not receive a briefing about the project stakeholders pre-deployment. Participants had little or no information regarding who was going to manage them either onshore or offshore, or who they would be working alongside. The team members' understanding of line management and responsibility prior to deployment was vague at best. Institute staff members were confused by secondment procedures and the multiple assumed layers of responsibility, while contractors' understanding of onshore managerial hierarchy was essentially nil. Table 4.7 details the dissonance this caused.

Table 4-7. Project stakeholder relational issues on arrival

Pre-deployment				On arrival
	Unknowns ⇨	**Presumptions** ⇨	**Expectations pre-arrival** ⇨	**Dissonance in-country**
Stakeholder relations	Project line management onshore	Continue with individual department managerial set-up as onshore	No change in working or management environment	**Managerial conflict/ confusion in-country**
	Organisational responsibility offshore			
	Local staff working relationship	Local staff interested and competent	Locals happy to receive Australian staff	**Local stakeholder indifference/ interference**

When asked who the institute staff should have reported to in Australia prior to deployment, the responses were vague and often (incorrectly) nominated the person who gave the code of conduct briefing: "*Because she briefed us, so I guess it would be her" (*Frank). This vagueness was exacerbated by the secondment to an unfamiliar department. *"I needed to know who to meet with on this and let them know what's happening"* (Amin). When asked about who was ultimately responsible for managing the project, participants named different people on separate occasions. Dave responded that this information was unclear because "*We were seconded*".

Offshore relations and stakeholder's operational responsibility were equally as vague but further impaired by the addition of unknown collegial relations with local staff. Participants were indefinite about line management overseeing day-to-day operations. While Frank presumed that the offshore manager would be guiding him, there was no mention of professional connections with, or responsibility for, any member of the offshore project institute team. Participants' understanding pre-deployment was that central project management was going to be situated in Australia.

The ability and interest of local stakeholders was unknown and subject to assumption and expectations. Some mentioned an expected high technical ability from the local staff because they *"…assumed they would have some capable vocational teachers"* (Eileen). Similarly, the Australian staff felt that the interest of the local staff must be high and "*assumed that the teachers would be enthusiastic for it"* (Frank). There was no documentation or reason given for these assumptions about local stakeholder ability and interest.

Unfortunately, once situated in the host country, staff immediately felt a lack of control due to a realisation of relational conflict, both in terms of internal managerial confusion and local

stakeholder indifference. Clarice felt she had *"two managers…three bosses*" and Amin suffered internal strife through displaced obligation to his Australian line manager. He was confused about who he should be reporting to. He felt loss of control because *"I needed to forget where I am from for those four weeks"* (Amin).

While managerial conflict was a source of control issues for some members of staff, by far the largest indicator of stakeholder control issues was related to local staff indifference with Australian project staff. Frank found the local staff were under intense pressure from the Ministry of Education *"…to get the students through exams, so they had no time for fripperies"* (Frank). Clarice's students were immediately dismayed to learn that their training was not an upgrade, but in fact an entire repetition of the qualification. This meant that *"…by the end of the first day. Everything was thrown out the window"* (Clarice). Other Australian project staff echoed this concern: that the local staff simply had no idea who they were and how they would be working together.

What the participants had previously perceived and expected about stakeholder relations did not happen on arrival and unfortunately (as shown in section 4.2) for some this stakeholder indifference turned into stakeholder interference.

4.3.4 Texts: issues of contextual dissonance on arrival

The findings showed three major areas of stakeholder concern once staff were situated in-country. There were issues on immediate arrival with *institute documents, project goals, staff job role goals* and their aligned *success indicators*.

Issues with institute documents/goals

Participants first mentioned problems with access to project related institute documents during pre-deployment. The institute was noted as primarily focused on supplying documents related to institute compliance matters instead of timely and relevant project work information. Table 4.8 outlines the process of how lack of available documents pre-deployment leads to dissonance about their supply on arrival in-country.

Table 4-8. Contextual dissonance with institute document understandings

Pre-deployment				**On arrival**
Text: *institute documents (ToR, project briefs)*	**Unknowns** ➡	**Presumptions** ➡	**Expectations pre-arrival** ➡	**Dissonance in-country**
	Existence or location of these documents unknown	These documents were somewhere inaccessible	Relevant information would be passed verbally, as needed from home office	**No further information available from home office on arrival**

The external contractors were given no usable or relevant pre-departure work-based documents to orient themselves as VET practitioners on an offshore project or in fact working offshore at all. The institute staff were passively given *"…a pack of things to sign*". All staff were asked to come to the international office to collect the pack of travel documents and sign 'Code of Conduct' statements. Some felt it was strange to sign documents that "*you don't even know what they are*" and that "*instead of giving you a travel diary to fill in, maybe they should give you the [relevant work related] information before you get there*". Many felt that it would have been more effective to receive pre-departure documents that were "*… more work specific to what I was going to find there, you know. It didn't happen, though*" (Clarice).

The respondents described their understanding of project goals and outcomes via verbal means. While there was a "*paper trail of my costs*" (Dave) between departments, no specific single piece of text was ever used to describe and align the work or understanding of the project. Dave did note there were documents at meetings about his involvement; however, they were separate documents from different departments. These were not helpful and somewhat contradictory. *"Yeah, no they don't match…no they are totally different"* (Dave). All presumed knowns about project documentation were via word of mouth, "*There was a lot of talk about it*" (Amin) but no physical texts, so "*…it was only through briefings*" (Dave).

Informal verbal communication and non-formal written documents were the main source for participants' knowledge. Dave and Amin mentioned a "*series of meetings about structure around [the job role]*" (Dave) and also some informal "*planning of what you wanted to do*" (Amin). Participants felt there were inconsistencies in how helpful these verbal meetings and informal planning would be due to contextual reinterpretation. *"You had a plan, but until you got there you couldn't say whether you could do it or not"* (Amin). The majority of participants felt that this verbal communication in relation to job role, goals and success indicators would continue in-country, so there was no need for texts.

It became clear on arrival that local stakeholders were also operating according to their own verbally communicated interpretations. There was no further assistance from the Australian institute on determining what or who was correct. This dissonance meant some inconsistent understandings of distant project documents, and that local stakeholders modified interpretations to suit their own. *"The reality is, they [offshore stakeholders] just chopped and changed everything…just around whatever*" (Dave). This interpretive dissonance seemed to extend to written texts, as one participant mentioned a guiding document she received on arrival that was changed immediately by local management. The participant suspected that the local stakeholders actually controlled the document, and she did not

know how to proceed. Another participant mentioned lack of consistent stakeholder understanding of her Australian job contract. On arrival, interpretation and understanding of the contract text was again decoded differently across stakeholders.

Issues with project goals

Stakeholder dissonance with project goals started with a distinct lack of understanding from the Australian staff about why and how the project originated and continued. Overarching macro-level governmental documents and policies that guided the creation and subsequent direction of the project were unknown by project staff (Table 4.9), while it appeared local staff were more aware of these directive texts. Participants felt that important emphasis was placed on these documents by local stakeholders and Australian staff felt they should have known and understood the significance of these macro-level texts to better understand project foundations and build camaraderie with local stakeholders.

Table 4-9. Contextual dissonance with project document understandings

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Pre-deployment</th><th>On arrival</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Text:
project documents (project goals)</td><td>Unknowns</td><td>Presumptions</td><td>Expectations pre-arrival</td><td>Dissonance in-country</td></tr>
<tr><td>No understanding of macro texts that were used to justify project</td><td colspan="2">No presumptions or expectations were made by staff due to complete ignorance of the existence of these texts</td><td>Macro texts are unknown by the Australian team</td></tr>
<tr><td>Specific path of goal achievement</td><td>Banking and finance career</td><td>Clients would enter workplace directly</td><td>Goal path unclear or ambiguous</td></tr>
</table>

This confused textual understanding was comprehensive and included any texts that outlined expected project outcomes. The project staff admitted there was a lack of awareness about their content. When asked about project goals, the response was direct: "*No idea. I don't have a clue"* (Dave). The findings also show a lack of knowledge in regard to contents, location or even existence of meso-level project documents such as the terms of reference or business plan. When asked if there were any of these project texts related to institute goals, the participants admitted their existence was unknown, "*I'm not aware of any of those documents. They may exist"* (Jonathon).

As staff were not aware of any project documents related to project goals, it followed they were not at all clear about overall project goals. Staff were not sure of specific goals or even who judged whether any goal was achieved. Prior to deployment, participant interviews yielded differing understandings of the overall project goal. While the overall sector of

finance was understood, specifics about the actual project goal were disparate and vague. The participants' approximated idea of the project goal was not collectively precise. The sector was identified as *"…related to business and finance*" (Michael) and the respondents' expectations were that the project goal was career acquisition in banking and finance for the local youth. Their understanding was *"…we were preparing the students to pursue careers in the banking industry*" (Michael) with some participants presuming the project goal was *"helping this school send students to pass accountancy degrees'* (Frank). Other participants believed the project goal to be that students are placed in a bank for work experience and then take on an entry-level position because "*…that's what the VET sector is all about"* (Clarice).

However, participants admitted these were all educated guesses as no research into the technical aspects of the project was undertaken by any members of the group. It was noted that prior to arrival participants *"…really didn't do any due diligence*" (Michael) and *"…didn't know very much about the project goal*" (Jonathon). This unknown was followed by the presumption that an Australian team was going to assist the local contingent in creating a vocational school, and the expectation was that all stakeholders knew, understood and welcomed this assistance. This caused contextual dissonance once in-country, as it became obvious that different stakeholders recognised project goals differently.

On arrival, ideas about project goals changed almost immediately and participants identified they were feeling powerless, as the goals were unclear and ambiguous. "*I don't know that [the goals] are, for us, I don't know that we really came up with any...*" (Michael). This caused some participants to feel control issues related to goals as there was "*… a lack of understanding and why we are really doing it"* (Eileen). And some participants felt their superficial understanding was now inadequate: *"I came in and found out that some of the underlying principles in the project I didn't quite get"* (Donna).

The conflict with stakeholders manifested when participants emphatically recounted feelings of lack of control in determining goals in situ from relational conflict. The largest indicator of control issues related to loss of control over goals immediately on arrival was local stakeholder interference with Australian staff goals, as presented in Table 4.10.

Table 4-10. Local stakeholder interference caused by different goal recognition

Interference	Example	Quote
Direct	Local staff member working against Australian staff goals	*"I had to find a way to work around him"* (Frank)
Indirect	Local staff member asking for help outside project goals for personal gain	*"The manager told me 'You're not here to help him, you're here to work on [project goals]'" (*Amin)
Dichotomy of Australian staff role	Local (superior) staff member confused about Australian staff job role goals	*"I felt like when I was finally offshore, working within the project, that the urgency of me being there, for the [local stakeholders] was to meet requirements for them that weren't within the project. It was these personal requirements that were important to them, not the project's."* (Dave)

Direct interference was demonstrated by Frank's conflict with his local counterpart. Frank mentioned that it was *"frustrating*" working with his local counterpart, and he felt local staff tried to *"sabotage*" his project goals because his local counterpart had very different ideas of Frank's goals. Clarice also felt that her training was being sabotaged by *"frustrated*" locals when they realised the full extent of the training required of them, and they "*realised everything would have to be redone"* (Clarice).

An example of indirect interference and resultant confusion over shared goal recognition is seen in the stakeholder conflicts of technical staff. They mentioned control issues when dealing with local staff immediately on arrival, and that goal objectives were seen to be interpreted differently between Australian staff and local staff. Amin felt that he was trapped in a difficult situation when a local staff member repeatedly asked for personal assistance. Dave also felt this conflict of local and localised immediate goals taking precedence over more obscure and ethereal Australian staff goals. Immediately on arrival there was a lack of control in realising these Australian staffing goals due to hierarchical localised ruling relations causing conflict with Australian goal achievement direction.

Prior to arrival they both thought the local staff/students were onside and aware of their shared project goals. *"I thought that people would be working together, having a common goal"* (Frank). Frank's goal clashed directly with his staff counterpart's understanding of the project outcome, as he had *"…assumed that the teachers would be enthusiastic for it, but I found that the teachers were hostile"* (Frank). The realisation came that some local stakeholders were not at all enthused by the project, and there was animosity created by unclear and ambiguous project goals. This caused feelings of powerlessness in the Australian staff. "*Everything went out the door by the end of that first lesson because they refused to do what I asked them to do"* (Clarice).

Other staff felt that after arriving the time allowance was insufficient to goal achievement, and that arbitrary local stakeholder goals were taking precedence over project goals. Misinterpretation of the goals by local staff caused both technicians to feel overwhelmed by the apparent need to appease local stakeholders over their project goals. These feelings of powerlessness were intensified by their dual need to show Australian management stakeholders (not project stakeholders) that a timeline of goal completion was being followed. Management noted that immediately after arrival there was a distinct difference in what they envisioned staff goals to be, and the reality. The conceptual goal of "staff working together" was not evidenced by the manager. *"They didn't appear to be working together as much as I might have imagined, but it was made clear to me that that was not the case"* (Jonathon). This differentiated goal interpretation between local staff and Australian staff caused feelings of lost opportunity.

Issues with staff job role goals

Table 4.11 outlines how inconsistencies, confusion and conflict occurred on arrival in-country due to dissonance with expectations and presumptions from unknowns encountered by staff regarding job role texts.

Table 4-11. Contextual dissonance with job role document understandings

Pre-deployment				**On arrival**
Text: *Job role (staff goals)*	**Unknowns** ⇨	**Presumptions** ⇨	**Expectations pre-arrival** ⇨	**Dissonance in-country**
	Specific position/role/plan	Offshore job role linked to previous job roles	Australian staff to assist local staff	**Inconsistent interpretations**
	Position descriptions	Position descriptions non-existent		**Outcomes Confusion Role conflict**

Participants were asked what they considered their job role to be prior to project commencement. Most stated the exact job role was unclear pre-deployment. To gain clarification, some participants presumed the job role was linked to their previous TAFE job roles onshore. "*So, I assumed it's just the same as that*" (Michael). Other institute staff thought the job role was known by other stakeholders: "*I assumed, or was told, that they were looking for a professional videographe*r" (Dave). Some staff presumed local stakeholders knew their job role even if this information was unclear to them. "*My understanding of the job role was that I'm going to be a technical consultant"* (Amin).

The lack of specific job role text meant there were instances where participants were unclear how the job role would be executed when in the host country. There was an expectation that

they would be assisting local staff, but there was uncertainty in exactly how this would be carried out once the project commenced. There was mention of a plan, but also its shortcomings. "*You had a plan of what you want to do, but whether you're going to be able to do it or not, there was a lot of questions that couldn't be answered until you got there and you checked it for yourself*" (Amin). There was also mention of shortcomings of "understandings" out of context. "*I had a pretty good understanding of what was needed to be captured. What I didn't have was an understanding of the place I was going to*" (Dave).

Table 4.12 shows there was contextual stakeholder job role dissonance on arrival. These included a misunderstanding of the Australian job role, conflict with local staff about the expected role, and confusion about what project staff can achieve.

Table 4-12. Stakeholder job role goal issues on immediate arrival

Issues	Example	Quote
Misunderstanding of job roles between stakeholders	Local stakeholders unclear on what Australian staff are paid to do on a day-to-day basis	*"That's not my job to make sure that she's going to be able to control the kids in the classroom, but they think it is"* (Eileen).
Role conflict	Local stakeholders felt that Australian staff were not doing the expected role	*"My job role was consultant yet what they wanted me to do was transcribe these YouTube videos"* (Frank).
Outcomes confusion	Local stakeholders carry different views of what Australian staff will achieve	*"Nobody told* [the local staff] *that I was there and then they realised it wasn't gap training, it was actually starting again"* (Clarice*).*

Stakeholder misunderstandings about job roles and shared goals stemmed from imprecise interpretations. Australian staff understanding of their job role goal was *"We are here to assist*" (Eileen), while local staff seemingly felt "assist" meant Australian staff was there to teach, or at least aid teaching practically. This led to conflict as Australian staff felt *"They don't understand what we're here for. They don't understand why they need to do certain things"* (Donna). The job role perceived by the participants pre-entry was seemingly adapted by local stakeholders on arrival. Few Australian participants had ever seen their position description, and it is assumed that local staff also had no access to Australian staff expected requirements.

Not one participant had ever discussed with other stakeholders what their job role meant once in-country, leaving the job role open to diverse interpretation. This caused some job role conflicts on arrival between Australian and local staff and led to an immediate misunderstanding of acceptable job role outcomes. In one instance the actual work the

participant was expected to achieve was changed on arrival by the major stakeholder. Michael was aggrieved to find that *"…initially the role was working with the teachers in the classroom, developing resources, developing assessments. But the goal posts changed [on arrival] and we were told that that's what [the major stakeholder] wants"* (Michael).

This lack of a shared, common understanding of what participants were meant to do in their job role meant they felt a loss of control in asserting their professional responsibility once on the ground. This was aggravated by the apparent lack of accepted texts, as well as poor text understanding, or even ignorance, in outlining such items.

Issues with project success indicators

Success indicators are the guides by which a project stakeholder can first situate their job role, plan their work goal, and then be judged to have accomplished the goal sufficiently or not. On this VET project, the official term was "milestone", although "deliverable" is used interchangeably. While the official milestones were seemingly evident in the documentation I read, the participants were mostly unclear about both project milestones and job role milestones. While one group of institute staff did understand the concept of deliverables, the participants were mostly making assumptions about what indicated successful completion of the project and their own work goals. As well, the findings show a differentiation in judgement of success as related to location of the stakeholder (onshore or offshore). Table 4.13 outlines the two main unknowns that caused dissonance in-country: lack of understanding about what milestones were and who was judging participants on their success.

Table 4-13. Contextual dissonance with success indicator document understandings

	Pre-deployment			On arrival
	Unknowns ⇨	**Presumptions** ⇨	**Expectations pre-arrival** ⇨	**Dissonance in-country**
Text: *Success indicators*	What specific milestones were	Indicators understood equally by all parties	All staff working toward placing students in the finance sector	**Advent of financial deliverables**
	Who judged success	Home office had a plan for success	Home office to oversee results	**Success determined in-country by ambiguous definition**

As previously mentioned, the induction or information sessions lacked any specific documents that would outline success indicators. This lack of relevant and specific pre-departure knowledge was noted as problematic regarding justifying success. "*For me my biggest concern was…what am I going to do when I get there…what do I have to achieve?"*

(Donna). Prior to deployment all participants mentioned they presumed the overall success indicator for successful completion of the project to be that clients found employment in a bank or financial institution immediately upon graduation. For the boys' school the assumption was they would "*go off and get a job at the end of Year 12*" (Michael). The girls' school staff felt that "*…more students will perhaps join the workforce rather than just be married off*" (Eileen). A direct presumption was that the major stakeholder outlined this specifically and "*We were told that's what the central bank wants" (*Donna). No indication was given on how the participants thought this success would be measured by the primary stakeholder (the National Central Bank).

As well as ambiguity around project goal success, most participants were unclear about milestones and deliverables and how their job role would be judged as a success. However, some institute staff presumed to understand quite clearly what the technical success indicators were. During the interviews both Dave and Amin were able to speak knowingly about milestones and deliverables and professed that this is similar to how they work in Australia. This group spoke of success indicators in regard to chunks of content and also technical expertise. "*I had a pretty good understanding of what was needed to be captured"* (Dave). They also mentioned that judgement of their success indicators was different to the other participants. They felt that their completion efforts would be judged by "*the management back home [Australia]*" (Amin), while the other participants were judged on their success *"…in the offshore environment"* (Dave).

The findings show that success indicators for non-technical goals were also differentiated based on who was making the subjective judgement of success. Frank felt that his project goal would be based on use of the product in the host country, whereas Clarice felt her success was determined by the onshore team in Australia, not by the offshore team in the host country. She felt her success indicators were different than the others because "*for me to be successful, it meant that I would be bringing stuff back [to Australia]"* (Clarice).

Some participants were surprised by the pragmatism of measuring project-staff success via deliverables and milestones. Michael felt surprised and was caught off-guard when his expected ideas of holistically working with teachers were usurped by cold practicality: "*No, I did not think that my role would be having to make deliverables. Definitely not"* (Michael). Donna felt a lack of control due to the realisation that "milestones" were fundamentally related to the financially motivated factor of invoicing. These monetary achievements were not the indicators of goal achievement she envisioned prior to arrival. In Australia there was a more rounded vision of student development as goal achievement, but in-country it became obvious that *"…milestones [are needed] so they could pay us*" (Donna).

4.4 Team engagement challenges: in-country modifications

4.4.1 Working in-country

As noted in the previous section, participants encountered control issues and contextual dissonance immediately on arrival. In that initial stage it was apparent that, in context, different levels of stakeholders recognised goals and success indicators differently.

Table 4-14. In-country working challenges and results after self-governing

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Working in-country</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Work challenge</th><th>Distancing</th><th>Priority shifting</th><th>Result</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Staff encounters work challenges on arrival and attempts to overcome them</td><td rowspan="5">Participant reached out for assistance but feels isolated from Australian office</td><td rowspan="5">Participant began to use self-governing behaviours and worked autonomously</td><td rowspan="5">Goals and success indicators modified to suit new priorities</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">A. Work environment</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">B. Stakeholder relations</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">C. Texts</td><td>Goals</td></tr>
<tr><td>Success indicators</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Job role</td></tr>
</table>

As seen in Table 4.14, after working in-country staff members experienced work challenges aligned with their new *work environment*, the *stakeholders* in-country and *text* confusion. Participants then reported reaching out for guidance from the home office but received little, if any, assistance. This led to a shifting of participant priorities where they utilised self-governing behaviours and autonomous work practices to modify goals and success indicators.

4.4.2 Temporary office: modified work environment

An overarching theme was the realisation that the temporary office was very much a different work environment than the Australian office. Table 4.15 shows the two main areas of concern being non-responsiveness from Australia, and their apparent ignorance of the situation in-country for participants.

Table 4-15. Work environment challenges in-country

Work challenge →	Distancing →	Priority shifting →	Result
A. Work environment Temporary office is different in working style/conditions Home office still has home style expectation	Home office not responsive	Stop trying to contact them Focus on T/O	Easier and more accessible management
	Home office not aware of context of relations in situ	Dismiss home office relevance Align with offshore management	Outcomes subjectively assessed by staff member in-country

At first participants expressed concern that the home office did not understand or appreciate the work environment of the offshore office. Staff were hampered in their efforts to create "Australian" standards, but because "*you're doing the work offshore, the overseer of [Australian] content standard doesn't exist*" (Dave). The feeling was that without the proper context of working in the temporary office, the team in Australia would still expect staff to deliver goals as determined pre-deployment.

Other participants felt this distancing from the home office meant isolation as "*there was no real network for me to connect with and I had to rely on the offshore [temporary office] staff to do pretty much anything*" (Amin). This reliance on an independent, but removed, temporary office also meant feelings about a lack of contact or input from the Australian institute. Some participants were surprised by this burden of responsibility on participant staff, as they *"…would have expected, from a quality assurance point of view, that someone back in Australia would have monitored our work*" (Michael). It doesn't seem that the Australian office was fully cognizant of the working situation of the temporary office, and the participants mentioned that their Australian bosses often acted like the project staff *"…are on some sort of holiday or something*" (Amin).

The longer the staff spent in the temporary office, the less they concerned themselves with what the home office thought of their output, and that Australian-based managers *"…don't understand what it's like here. You're here and you're expected to perform from the minute you start working*" (Dave). As well, project staff themselves became increasingly understanding and accepting of the temporary office, and that *"…to be effective in our job roles, we have to adapt to the same work environment of the people who we're working with*" (Frank).

This time spent "Working in-country" resulted in a conversion by the project staff. Previous allegiance to Australian-based managers was replaced by an embracing of the temporary office work environment. Now, in context, the original home office goals were seen as

distanced and irrelevant. The staff felt that nothing contextually applicable would be accomplished by continuing to follow a distant, removed, and unaware Australian office. The staff re-aligned themselves with the temporary office work environment and managerial structure and understood that short-term work on an international VET project meant that "*you go there, you have a task to do in those four weeks, you come home*" (Amin).

4.4.3 Stakeholders: modified relations

As well as a new understanding of the work environment, the project staff also described a shift in stakeholder relations and loyalty, moving from making home office stakeholders happy to focusing on the needs of local project stakeholders. Table 4.16 outlines the main issues being confusion in management hierarchy, and the problem of forming good relationships with counterparts.

Table 4-16. Stakeholder challenges in-country

Work challenge →	Distancing →	Priority shifting →	Result
B. Stakeholder relations	**Line management confusion**	Re-adjust and look inward for direction	Autonomous work actions
	Working relationships hard to form	Re-prioritise goals and try to understand locals context	Better understanding of locals and improved working relationship

During the in-country period of project work the Australian staff generally felt there was some confusion about line management and Australian staff being left to manage stakeholder relations independently. There was little or no feedback on performance from any stakeholder. Some staff mentioned they have *"no clue what or whether the stakeholders in [the host country] thought I achieved"* (Dave). This lack of feedback on goal achievement was also extended to the home office, as *"I don't even know from the department we worked for, whether what we did was good, bad or indifferent*' (Amin) and there "*was never any feedback given"* (Amin).

There was further reference to home office distancing themselves from specific issues, as *"[the Australian office] had an overall objective but they didn't understand the intricacies of the project"* (Dave). Participants felt that the institute was only involved in aspects revolving around *"…the financial aspects of the project…that was very important to them*" (Dave). This distancing from the home office meant that temporary office staff were left to deal with developing local stakeholder relations when working in-country. The longer the Australian

staff spent in- country, the more they mentioned the lack of contextual understanding from the home office.

Most misunderstandings were related to distancing and isolation. There was mention of the temporary office *"operating solo, without any support from Australia"* (Amin). Others mentioned that the home office "*don't understand the pressure that the Australian team is under…"* (Eileen). A connecting theme here was the lack of home office's contextualised understanding of what goals the temporary office was trying to achieve, and how these goals changed as the project moved forward. *"It doesn't matter how well, or badly, the communication is coming from Australia. I don't think they will have a clue unless they come here*" (Amin).

At first, relations with local stakeholders were distanced and difficult to initiate and maintain. Some participants were kept separated from local meso-level stakeholders (the school Principals) and unable to create any relationships. However, while at the beginning the Australian staff felt isolated and excluded from the Australian office, they also started to realise that *"…in this situation, you are left on your own to just save yourself"* (Dave). Stakeholder relations shifted priority as the project unfolded over time. Project staff mentioned newfound understandings and respect for local staff as differentiations in the project involvement took shape.

Australian project staff described how a re-prioritising of goals meant the possibility of closer working relations with local staff. Previous staffing conflicts between Australian and local staff were also reconsidered in light of the realisation of differing personal goals. Local staff were initially seen as not fully understanding the project, and "*hadn't taken on board"* (Frank) the goals, deliverable, or milestones necessary to drive the project forward. However, with time the project staff seemed to realise that the priority of deliverables and milestones were outcomes defined by a person's time in-country.

The long-term local staff had a comprehensive view of the project and saw the project school as an ongoing career situation; thus their goals and success indicators were long-term outlooks. In contrast, the Australian staff saw the project institute as a transient entity. They viewed it as a short-term project and were very immediate in their standpoint. Even though there was initial disagreement from Australian staff about local stakeholder grievances with goals and expected achievements, with time the Australian staff came to realise that "…*to be honest, some of the stuff was right…the arguments were basically right. It was incredibly valid"* (Clarice).

4.4.4 Texts: modified job roles, goals, and success indicators

Words and phrases associated with exclusion or isolation were connected to operational texts by Australian project staff during their time working on the project in the host country. Table 4.17 shows that these included documents that outline project goals, success indicators and job roles.

Table 4-17. Text challenges in-country

Work challenge		Distancing	Priority shifting	Result
C. Texts Work-related documents not readily available Documents retroactively recreated or changed to suit local stakeholder	Goals	*Unclear and arbitrary*	The changed context means job roles on a project are flexible and therefore goals and success indicators are also adjustable	Staff worked with local counterparts for solutions instead of adherence to a set text
		Home office goal conflicts with project goals		
	Success indicators	*Unknown, distant or hidden*		
		Inconsistent with pre-deployment perceptions		
	Job role	*Malleable in context, local stakeholders' interpretation favoured*		
		Home office not able to understand context of changed job role; no formal clarity or support		

Overall, there was a feeling that texts were not readily available, they were of little use once the project was underway, and local stakeholders were able to influence preferential changes in the texts. Frank felt that probably operational texts (i.e. positions descriptions or KPIs) did not exist. When it was revealed that they did exist, but were not made readily available, he questioned *"…why were they kept secret? That makes no sense*" (Frank).

In regard to job role texts, participants first noted that after commencing work in the local environment, there were expressions that the job role was either unknown or unclear; no position descriptions were available, and any description of job role changed in context. Staff were left to fend for themselves in the face of unclear job roles and any subsequent conflict with students. This was seen as isolating and distancing, increasing panic levels in trying to reconfigure perceived job role understandings to suit their application in a new context. Generally, the staff mentioned that job role clarification "*won't be coming from anyone at [the institute*]" (Eileen). Job roles became obfuscated over time, while work on the project became more complex and more involved.

This disconnect between operational texts and use was further eroded by the revelation from management that often these documents are retroactively recreated to "*solve a cultural norm or law or whatever situation it might be*" (Jonathon). The changes were made by home office in Australia to appease local stakeholders, yet it seems these changes were not passed onto staff. This intensified the feeling of distance and exclusion by creating a situation where project texts are obscured from Australian project staff yet are arbitrarily and disproportionately adjusted in situ to local stakeholder needs.

However, during the working life of the project, participants came to understand that, in a temporary organisation, items such as job roles, goals and success indicators were more likely to be verbally explained and validated. This meant they were then flexible in their execution during the allotted project time. There was consensus that there was no centrally understood document for equal consumption and recognition by all stakeholders, that *"there wasn't one and there was never going to be"* (Clarice). However, as the participants worked in their job role for some time, the previous issues of lack of control and home office distancing gave way to individualised accomplishments. Some staff adapted to in situ project goal adjustment by having to "*pull yourself back and say 'Look I'm here to do it, I'm going to just do it the best I can'"* (Amin).

While staff felt it would have been helpful to have access to these documents and that "*it would have been a very different matter*" (Dave) in regard to work roles. Priority shifting meant that as there was no discernible text outlining these items, many staff created or modified their interpretations of job roles to prioritise their own input.

The resultant separation of an 'expected' job role and the 'reality' of job role was mentioned by some participants in that "*you put on a show for the powers that be, and then what you actually do is what you can*" (Frank). Other participants simply stated that their job role was now defined by what they felt was the most immediate need. *"I'm working with different [local] teacher's now, and that's not in my job role*" (Donna). This new understanding and controlling of change in the project over time was determined as *"quite challenging, to put yourself outside your comfort zone and see whether you can actually do something that is successful"* (Dave). The distance of home office assistance and isolation were accepted at this time, as participants felt this understanding of the necessity of change, and the determination to make it happen, was independently done, as "*you're basically relying on your own resources to actually do it*" (Dave).

4.4.5 Goals and success indicators modified to suit new idea of congruence

Due to limited exposure to project contracts, work contracts and position descriptions participants initially felt removed from any connection to project goals or success indicators. After arrival staff had felt project goals were different from their original pre-deployment perceptions, local stakeholders were interpreting goals arbitrarily and unilaterally, and the home office in Australia distanced itself from this aspect of project work. As well, at first, success indicators were deemed to be either removed and distant, obscured or just non-existent. Australian staff felt that the responsibility to ensure shared project goal outcomes was the domain of the Australian home office. "*The institute should have more responsibility in making sure [objectives are jointly known and accepted] and moderating what's happening*" (Amin).

Once work commenced staff made early attempts to align local stakeholder interpretations of the exact goals of the project, but Australian project workers and meso-level local staff *"…never met. I never once spoke to them*" (Frank). Micro-level local affiliates to the Australian project staff also distanced themselves from Australian staff interpretations of project goals. Local staff were under intense pressure from the Ministry of Education *"…to get the students through exams, that they had no time for fripperies*" (Frank).

Like project goals, participants felt that success indicators were either hidden or non-existent. When questioned about how local stakeholders describe project success for his input, Frank could only assume that there must be a form of performance indicators. "*They would have to have KPIs, would they not? I wasn't aware of them but there would be, you'd expect"* (Frank). The concept of sharing a mutual understanding of what determines successful goal completion was unknown because Australian staff felt local stakeholders "*kept it secret*" (Frank).

However, after working on the project in-country for an extended period of time and nearing completion (or time to return), staff mention a priority shift in goal execution. There was a questioning of goal statements that were noticed by staff. Application of goals in practice was also questioned and opposed, "*I don't think they should be doing two different courses"* (Michael). Some participants opposed formal goals and success indicators once they fully grasped them: *"I think it's ridiculous*" (Donna).

While project staff felt free to propose their interpretation of project goals, they also denounced local stakeholder's interpretation. *"[Local stakeholders] says it's one thing, but it's probably another"* (Donna). Some project staff felt that goals should evolve over time, and *"there's nothing wrong with that, the evolution of the project"* (Eileen). It seemed that

goals evolved to match what project staff felt was the necessary component of the project for now. After working in-country and better understanding the contextualised local situation, project staff made various modifications to both success indicators and goals to ensure clearer goal conference.

They mentioned that these goal shifts were "*bette*r" (Frank). Goals were reviewed over time and re-configured to gain some measure of accountable achievement. Frank made an executive decision to remove any dealings with his local counterpart and focused on working with Australian colleagues to achieve a reworked project goal. There is no mention of 'sustainable-staffing' as a project goal, but project staff decided to pursue it. "*It [project goal] doesn't say that I need to train someone to take over for me, but I'm actually doing that*" (Donna). Other participants mention spending more time in the classroom with the teachers even though it was not stated as such in the project contract. The idea was that a goal that was contextualised and successful was better than a failed original goal. "*So we just gave up trying [the original goal]. We just took the materials I created, and … we used them [for a new self-allocated goal*]" (Frank). At this stage of project involvement, the staff member decided to ignore the original prescribed goal of stakeholder relation and concentrate on a goal he could accomplish.

The desire to modify goals was also time driven. Getting a project goal accomplished was difficult because "*a lot of the time you were fighting the clock*" (Dave). Staff found that resources and staff needed to complete the project goal as well as location and materials were *"…only available for a certain amount of time*" (Dave). In these instances the goal wasn't shifted entirely but modified to *"sort of get the best [outcome] you could*" (Amin). Clarice's shift in prioritising goals near the end of her project input was time related, as *"...I had a very short timeline to get a lot of work off of them"* (Clarice). Time limits meant the expected project goal was compromised, but "*if you didn't do it then, it wouldn't happen*" (Dave).

As goals followed a pattern of shifting priority away from formal project goals toward new and informal staff goals, so too did success indicators. After working on the project for some time, overcoming initial control issues and then isolation from the Australian office, project staff determined that "networking" was the overall goal, and that networking success was determined by a "good reputation". Individual staff re-configured success indicators to ensure increased regional networking capacity. This was deemed a successful outcome as the institute would not "*get a bad reputation, instead of a good reputation" (*Frank).

Overall, project staff felt that a modified and completed project goal is better than an original but unfinished one. This justification of goal differentiation at the end of the working project

cycle is that "*the project can only be successful by people completing what they are here to do' (*Frank). Overall, Australian project management was not surprised by the localised adaptation of goals and success indicators. Jonathon mentions that on large international multi-stakeholder projects there is a need for staff independence and that any new idealism about goals prior to project commencement in-country should be adaptable and become "*self-managing*" (Jonathon).

4.5 Individual project engagement challenges

This final section presents findings that inform how the different inexperienced members of the team managed their first posting to an international VET project. This will provide an overview of how individual staff react and connect differently with the project engagement cycle.

4.5.1 Motivation and transformation: learning and change

All inexperienced volunteer staff underwent a type of growth, transformation or change. Jonathon, the only experienced participant as well as the only non-volunteer, did not explicitly state his motivations or mention any change or growth. Table 4.18 outlines various forms of change different staff members underwent over the course of their engagement and encapsulates their views of their learning. During analysis it was possible to align their pre-deployment motivations with post-deployment musings. This demonstrates that although they all expressed different views, the underlying motivation for project involvement was a quest for change. As can be seen in the table below, change was achieved, even if it was not directly related to pre-deployment motivation.

Table 4-18. Transformational learning

Staff	Pre-deployment motivation	Expressed change post-deployment
Michael	*It was the opportunity to work overseas. No, it wasn't a desire to leave TAFE. It wasn't for any sort of career enhancement or promotion or anything like that.*	*I think some of the autonomy and working over here meant that I was exposed to a whole range of experiences that I would not have been exposed to back in Australia you know, having been over here I just wouldn't want to go back into doing something like I was doing before I came over here.*
Eileen	*I had never even thought of working offshore. I was comfortable doing what I was doing [in Australia]. I don't know. We saw an opportunity…let's do something different.*	*I got a whole new outlook on life. Get out, do what you can, have fun. Travel, go overseas.*
Donna	*I guess to experience something different.*	*You start changing the way you deal with issues and your ideas of how you can still address this but by doing something different. So you have to change your parameters of the way you think rather than change the role.*
Clarice	*I wondered what's the aspect to working over there. I wanted to find out as much as possible about the whys, the hows. International projects, for a lot of people they don't have that good a reputation.*	*Yeah, you're running, you're on the fly and you've got to be a decision-making kind of person. Like I said, you need to be that type of person because I can tell you now, no matter what, there's gonna be issues.*
Frank	*I was in a rut. It was a change. It [deployment] wasn't too long.*	*Yeah, it was a good change, and I came back with a renewed appreciation of how lucky I was to work at the [home office].*
Dave	*It was the experience, to challenge myself to work in a different environment, to work in another country.*	*It was very, you know, quite challenging, to actually have to put yourself really outside your comfort zone, and see whether you can actually do something that is successful, basically relying on your own resources to do it.*
Amin	*I thought it's a project, we won the project; we worked so hard to get this project approved. I'll be happy to do it.*	*The first trip, yes you felt the sense of responsibility and your failure was going to affect everyone else. You had to come up with something quick to make it work.*

Generally, the expatriates were looking for a change in career environment, with Michael and Eileen specifically mentioning working offshore. During the interviews Donna mentioned the personal struggles she had with leaving her career in Australia to start again offshore. This "*career destroying*" (Donna) move was tempered by her assurance that it would be a "*life-changing experience*" that would only happen once in her lifetime. However, the change/growth reported did not exactly align with practical career motivations, with transformation occurring on a more emotional plane. Michael reported a change in personal

autonomy, Eileen felt that her mindset about life's priorities shifted, and Donna discovered a way of dealing with issues and people that was more altruistic.

The short-term institute staff members were much more prosaic regarding their motivations, with all connected primarily to a type of institute loyalty or work improvement, with elements of personal gain coming second. For these staff members, reported changes were more related to their work, which aligns closely with pre-deployment motivations. While Frank was looking for a personal change of scene, Clarice wanted to know more about offshore projects as she felt *"they have a bad reputation"* (Clarice). Both Clarice and Frank came back with renewed understanding and appreciation for the issues faced by offshore project staff. Clarice even describes a personality type that would best suit the specific issues of offshore assignments. Technical consultants reported growth in their work habits from their offshore assignments, with an improved ability to work independently.

4.5.2 Post-deployment issues

Participants reported there was no debrief or other follow-ups once their assignment finished. They also expressed animosity towards the departments that hired or seconded them, with feelings of being unappreciated or ignored on return. "*There was no feedback from the International Centre whatsoever. They were very interested in the financial aspects of the trip that were very important to them, but no nothing in terms of feedback*" (Dave). The participants offered advice to me, but often professed they would prefer to make the same information available to others contemplating offshore assignments, as their experiences could be passed on in a type of learning cycle.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings that revealed an international VET project team is made up of diverse staff working in a variety of job roles. Yet, while divergent in job roles, they experienced similar issues and phases of project engagement. It also showed how poor preparation pre-deployment can lead to stakeholder conflicts in-country and that the Australian team can suffer contextual dissonance on arrival and goal congruence issues when working in-country. It was further found that staff can overcome these challenges by working autonomously to achieve modified goals in context. Additionally, it was revealed that while the team experiences the same challenges and phases, different groups of participants may encounter and resolve slightly deviated challenges which can lead to transformational learning or change. Finally, participants expressed a desire for a debrief and to be able to pass on their experiences to others. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of these findings in relation to staff engagement with a multi-stakeholder international project.

Chapter 5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented findings from interviews, observations and document analysis collected from an international short-term VET project. Three major issues will be explored in this chapter to create deeper understanding of first-time offshore VET staff engagement when deployed on an international project.

Section 5.2 discusses general insights into staff engagement in this study. Discussion here will provide further insights into addressing the main research question: *How do Australian VET staff engage with a multi-stakeholder international project when deployed on short-term assignment? What are the implications?*

Section 5.3 focuses on team engagement pre-deployment and immediately on arrival. Discussion in this section supports further comprehension of the first sub-research question: *Do all project stakeholders recognise the same goal and success indicators in context?*

Section 5.4 presents a discussion that revolves around team engagement in-country. This discussion enables deeper understanding of the second sub-research question: *Are project goals and success indicators modified during in-country deployment? To what extent is there goal achievement congruence?*

Section 5.5 presents a discussion on post-deployment and individual experiences. This discussion enables deeper understanding of the third sub-research question: *How do individual staff members engage with goal achievement congruence (or incongruence) and contextual agreement (or dissonance) during and after deployment?*

5.2 Insights into VET staff international project engagement

This section presents an overview and discussion of general findings from the study. The information in sub-sections that follow (5.2.1 to 5.2.5) will provide insights regarding how Australian VET staff engage with an international project when deployed on an offshore assignment. Sub-section 5.2.6 also provides implications for various stakeholders interested in staffing these projects. The findings showed that “VET staff” encompass a wide contingent of personnel. In terms of “project engagement”, all staff reported differing motivations and perceptions about offshore projects yet experienced the same cycle of engagement from pre-deployment to post-deployment.

In this study it appears that recruitment was ad hoc and institute support for staff was extremely limited. The following subsection discusses the importance of better understanding about what type of staff are deployed and how they are recruited. Further, realising how they engaged with the project over time and the importance of providing correct preparation and support over time is also discussed.

5.2.1 Importance of realising diversity of project staff

Many people suppose VET projects to be predominantly staffed by teachers, and research tends to focus on any inherent program of teaching that can occur on a project (Rahimi & Smith, 2017). However, as evidenced by the findings in this study, the project team consisted of very few teachers. The team was comprised of a variety of people with differing roles and expertise, brought together for a specific and temporary purpose. Table 4.1 and 4.2 (see Chapter 4) indicated a wide contingent of VET staff were deployed on the project, and most were internally seconded voluntary staff on their first project. The majority of internal staff was on short-term deployment, although this project also employed long-term external consultants. This means that when discussing “Australian staff” on projects, the entire continuum of possible workers at a TAFE needs to be considered. Further, the project team was a collection of staff that had previously not worked together and on completion would never work together again. This finding aligns with project management literature that states a project is a temporary endeavour with a specific goal, formed by staff who had never worked together before and most likely would not work together again (Eskerod & Blichfeldt, 2005). This finding further supports previous research affirming VET project teams being a collection of different and diverse staff (Volkoff & Perry, 2001; Rahimi, 2009; Comyn & Barnaart, 2010).

Of this diverse project staff, only 10% had any teaching responsibilities that involved students or a connection to accredited Australian qualifications. Furthermore, teaching was only a small part of their job role in-country, with other duties related to technical assistance outweighing their pedagogical student contact. This finding seems to be at odds with the amount of research, literature, and support available to offshore staff, as teachers and teaching-related issues are the predominant topic of offshore education literature and research.

While previous education literature does mention the necessity of providing preparation and support for “all project staff” involved in an international assignment, this training is directed to the domestic side of the assignments (Kearns & Schofield, 1997). Advice was to extend offshore support to onshore administration and managers who are back in the home office of

the institute (NTEU, 2004b). Unfortunately, despite international project staff being a collection of diverse education professionals, there is little mention about preparation or engagement support for offshore staff other than for teachers. This has implications for engagement with further projects and reinforces the need for support and preparation for all categories of VET staff.

5.2.2 Importance of recognition of project staff recruitment methods

Another noticeable aspect of total staff deployment are recruitment methods. Recruitment can be via formal selection (external contractors), volunteering for the position (institute staff), or when staff are required to go as part of their contracted job role (institute managers). On this project roughly 25% of staff were 'selected' via formal recruitment procedures, with the remaining 75% being volunteers. This aligns with previous literature showing that most short-term assignments are voluntary (NTEU, 2004b; Mayrhofer et al., 2012). However, this also contradicts TNE researcher advice on creating the most effective project team for an international assignment. Kearns and Schofield (1997) were adamant that international project staff need to be selected carefully, while the AVCC (2005) and Dempsey (2013) argue that institute HR needs to evaluate and allocate staff with the most desirable characteristics for working offshore.

As shown in the literature review, this type of thinking is heavily influenced by studies and processes from the MNC field of expatriation (Caligiuri et al., 2009). Multinational corporations have quite different global employment structures, international staffing policies and offshore work environments compared to TAFEs; therefore it is not advantageous to continue to adopt MNC offshore assignment selection policies. The findings show that all non-managerial offshore project staff are volunteers, and this should be considered when developing TAFE staff deployment practices, policies and processes for short-term international VET project assignments.

5.2.3 Importance of understanding new staff deployment

A further finding is that all staff except Jonathon experienced negative engagement. The findings suggest this is because he was the only experienced member deployed. While other staff felt dissonance on arrival, Jonathon considered this quite normal. As well, when staff expressed isolation and distancing, he also deemed this a natural part of the process. Finally, while other staff described stakeholder conflict, Jonathon commented that this was to be expected on these projects. Overall, this suggests that having previous experience with offshore project work decreases the anxiety of engagement and allows smoother transition throughout the engagement cycle. This aligns with research literature which shows that first-time staff ("newcomers" and "neophytes") experience negative engagement during their

initial postings/deployment but utilise the information to better adjust on later assignments (Louis 1980; Dawis & Lofquist 1984; Tung 1998b; Briscoe & Kellog, 2011). While Dunbar (1992) found that previous experience enhances intercultural ability, Black (1988) observed a direct link between previous experience and increased work adjustment. However, Kocak (2014) argues that while differences vary within the research community about meta-issues, it can generally be posited that previous experience positively affects subsequent in-country adjustment and is beneficial to reducing engagement anxiety and better cross-cultural adaptation.

In terms of Humanistic Psychology, engagement anxiety can be linked to a person's innate desire to do good and feel they have contributed positively to the betterment of the world around them (Schneider et al., 2015). Prior to deployment the participant can only imagine this contribution, and upon arrival this idealised input may be disrupted and displayed in a contrarian and negative fashion. It may take some time before the staff member understands their true worth in the project, and this ability to do good reveals itself. Therefore HR/management need to be acutely aware of when first-time staff are deployed to offshore projects so targeted support can be provided to them.

5.2.4 Importance of structure for understanding staff engagement

The project engagement cycle (Chapter 4, Table 4.4) shows that staff experience similar types of engagement and transition shock at standard times of deployment, enabling collective comparisons to be made. As well, the cycle gave structure to this study while providing possible organisational scaffolding for future studies of VET international project engagement. This is similar to Lysgaard's "U-curve" (1955) and Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) adapted "W-shape" based on Olberg's (1954) article outlining the shock travellers feel on encountering a new culture. While there is criticism of culture shock models being simplistic and outdated (Ward et al., 1998; 2001), there is no doubt that the creation of a model based on empirical studies paved the way for future research and an ability to clearly see, discuss and work with issues inherent in a foreign culture.

As Oberg (1954) said in his definitive speech on "Culture Shock" at the Women's Club of Rio de Janeiro in 1954, "*There is a great difference in knowing what the cause of your disturbance is and not knowing*" (p. 9). To this end, it is hoped that the staff engagement cycle will also provide awareness to VET staff on international deployment to assist in better understanding what causes such disturbance. The implication is that this engagement framework can help management organise necessary support where and when needed, most effectively during staff engagement on an offshore project. Moreover, the use of a

framework also implies new possibilities for research and discussion through clarified understandings and standardised interpretations of engagement phases and issues that arise.

5.2.5 Importance of effective staff preparation for offshore engagement with stakeholders

The engagement cycle provides a framework to analyse research findings and confirm the most effective preparation for short-term project staff. The cycle shows that on initial entry in-country staff encounter difference and suffer confusion, endure mood swings and then utilise coping strategies which facilitate positive adjustment. This sequence is usually called "culture shock" and frequently considered in terms of adverse reaction to the national-culture of a foreign country. As shown in the literature review, frequently culture refers to "appropriate norms and behaviours of the host-country" (Puck et al., 2008, p. 2182) and pre-departure training is usually reduced to providing superficial awareness of these aspects (Tran et al., 2021). While more recent research advocates replacing *culture* shock with *context* shock (Fitzpatrick, 2017), longstanding researcher observation is that culture is a perceived and accepted pattern of a group that is subsequently expected of them (Singer, 1971). Therefore, culture "shock" can be experienced in any new situation that confronts the understood status quo, and that cross-cultural experiences can even be found domestically (Adler, 1975). In regard to international work situations where a staff member commences work in a foreign country, culture shock has alternatively been described as "obstacles of significance" (Ruben, 1989) and "disorientating dilemmas" (Smith, 2014). However, inherent in the research findings is that the shock the participants experienced is not from *national culture*, but instead from the *situational work culture*.

Lückmann and Färber's (2016) more recent comprehensive review of case studies involving international project stakeholder cultural engagement informed the reader that "Culture, in this context shall be conceived as national culture. *Organizational and professional cultures will not be considered" (*Lückmann & Färber, 2016, p. 86*, italics mine*). This case study finds the opposite and shows that it is organisational and professional culture that needs to be considered when trying to understand staff-engagement on international VET projects. The findings do not show any shock related to ethnographic acculturation, as no major issues with national culture are ever mentioned in any interview or evidenced in any document. The findings do, however, show that the engagement cycle has moments of dissonance caused by changed context on arrival in the host country. This contextual dissonance creates disorientation and feelings of isolation in-country, described in the findings as *control issues*. However, these control issues are related to work-induced issues and a disconnect

with “organizational culture” (Schein, 2010), and not national cultural misunderstandings. The expected work context does not match the reality, and this is what causes the shock, obstacle or dilemma.

Humanistic Psychologists believe in a person’s desire for continual growth, and barriers to this growth are auto-constructed (Rowan & Glouberman, 2018). Although there are aspects of a new culture which cause discomfort and shock, by not allowing these to become self-imposed limitations but to accept this change then staff can grow and develop their full human potential.

5.2.6 Implications of insights into VET staff international project engagement

The previous sections have provided a discussion that showed VET staff deployed on international projects are a diverse group. A project team may include managerial or administrative staff, technical or education consultants, as well as teachers/trainers. This is important, as the bulk of extant research and literature about international assignments is connected only to offshore teachers. The implication is that management (and researchers) need to be aware of the diversity of staff deployed on offshore projects. As well, the discussion showed that staff deployed engaged with the project, and inherent stakeholders, through a sequential and structured cycle of engagement. The implications here being that having this framework can improve consistency in understanding staff experience.

Finally, the discussion in this section showed that staff deployed offshore suffered “*work-place* culture shock” during their engagement. The implication being that a work-based preparation and mentoring program is needed to address negative adjustment. This will assist in positively guiding autonomous work choices made by first-time staff as they undergo the engagement cycle and navigate the temporary organisation in a foreign country with local stakeholders. This echoes previous literature from studies showing concerns for the institute to realise the opportunity to grow their human capital (Søderberg & Zølner, 2012; Hoare 2013), as well as more modern assertions that VET institutes need to focus on targeted and sequential developmental staff learning and growth throughout the entire deployment cycle (Tran et al., 2021).

5.3 Early engagement: dissonance and incongruence on arrival

5.3.1 Introduction

This section focuses on staff moving from their Australian-based pre-departure period and into their immediate arrival in the host-country context, issues with stakeholders, and understandings about project goals and related success indicators. The findings show that access to relevant work-related documentation, and provision of work-based deployment preparation was insufficient and/or missing. Thus, staff were left with many unknowns about what they were going to face and therefore fabricated expectations to help alleviate such mystery. On arrival participant's individual pre-departure motivations and expectations were not met and there were instances of contextual dissonance. There followed instances of goal incongruence amongst stakeholders after arrival in-country that manifested in stakeholder conflict and confused success indicators. It is therefore apparent that different project stakeholders had difficulty in recognising the same goals and success indicators in context.

5.3.2 Pre-departure unknowns

Texts: missing or not understood

Texts which outline and assist staff to undertake the assignment effectively are important to provide prior to their assignment (NTEU, 2011b; Dempsey, 2013; Wilkins & Neri, 2019); however, they do need to be accessed, read and understood correctly to be effective (Khang & Moe, 2008). Participants in this study said most guiding texts were not readily available, yet evidence from analysis of interviews suggests that staff were unaware of their importance and simply did not access, or read, them. This was unexpected as all levels of texts were readily available, comprehensible and applicable, but participants struggled with all three levels of text available: macro, meso and micro.

Participants had almost no idea about macro-level documents that would have caused project creation and guidance, even though they were freely available on the internet. This aligns with similar results from Bailey's (2011) study of VET practitioner identity on large international developmental projects. He found that staff focused on smaller, more relevant documents to assist them in their daily work. In terms of more relevant meso- and micro-level documents, I also found inconsistencies with what was said by participants, and what I observed and found in document analysis. Analysis of archival documents uncovered that the project manager had, often quite soon after staff arrival, sent them via email a "Scope-of-services" document with particular operational information concealed (mostly financial concerns). I had also received this document as a group email which copied in other

participants, yet only Michael makes mention of this in the findings and confirms that he did not understand the significance in context. This is possibly due to me not explicitly asking them, during interviews, if they had received relevant documents post- arrival. However, further evidence shows that even when information was passed onto them pre-departure and post-arrival, it was not accessed.

> *"I had just a very very vague understanding of what [scope of services] was. I certainly didn't fully understand the specifics of it and I didn't see them or anything like that... well no, that's not true. [The project manager] did share those with us at meeting once. It didn't mean anything to me at the time…just meant keep doing what we are doing, yeah." (Michael)*

All participants mentioned a lack of micro-level documents, such as position descriptions, job role outlines, or objectives that indicate success indicators. This finding supports previous research that shows staff regularly leave for offshore educational assignments with no defining micro-level work documents (Lynch, 2013; Whieldon, 2019; Tran et al., 2021). It was obvious during my research observations and interviews that staff operated without clear understanding of the information that might be contained in these documents. On critical reflection, I am not sure if staff never received them (as claimed), or they just never read them.

For example, despite Frank's insistence that he never saw them, micro-level texts were likely made available to him regarding his job role and logistical matters because Frank, myself, and a third staff member (unfortunately unable to take part in this study) received this information prior to our deployment. This email, copied to all three personnel, included a position description as well as advice on how to claim a one-off hardship payment. During the assignment, when Frank was trying to work out his actual job role, he was advised to check his position description. He replied he had never seen it. I then dutifully re-sent the original email from the international office. I was therefore quite surprised when Frank claimed during the research interviews that his position description was "*kept secret*" from him. A check of my archival notes mentions Frank discussing hardship payment documentation in the project office (indicating to me he had received the email and information). By checking read receipts on my email, I could also see that my email and the information contained within was opened not long after sending. Therefore, it appears he received them once, if not twice, yet he professed he had never seen the document.

"Oh, if he had [a position description], why would he keep it secret? That makes no sense." (Frank)

A possible explanation relates to perception of the immediate relevance of an emailed document. Studies show that staff receive an outstanding number of emails during a workday (Radicati, 2019), which can consume almost 30% of their work time (Chui et al., 2012). This overwhelming amount of information means staff prioritise emails directly related to their immediate work-at-hand and tend to dismiss those that require increased levels of comprehension (Lees, 2018). Institute participants were seconded volunteers working for other departments. They may have dismissively de-prioritised emails about the project in favour of more immediate work goals. During interview, research participants complained about travelling to the international office to physically front-up to collect and sign documents that could have easily been emailed. Primary evidence from Frank, and secondary research evidence, may illuminate why the international office would force the staff member to show proof of collection (if not comprehension) as obviously reading and responding to emails is lacking in effectiveness. Finally, participant derision of the activity as "*collecting a bunch of papers*" and "*signing off on a bunch of things*" is further verification of probable non-uptake of information.

However, it is not known if participants' independent reading of these documents allows for acceptable understanding without adequate assistance in deciphering content. ToRs and scope of service documents would be a new type of literature for most VET staff (Bailey, 2011). The international project manager, Jonathon, mentioned not knowing the texts existed either, but it didn't seem to cause him negative engagement. He has extensive offshore project experience, and cross-cultural adjustment researchers have connected having previous experience with an increased positive adjustment in a foreign culture (Church, 1982; Windiarti et al., 2014). Jonathon may be accustomed to operating without detailed documented macro-level knowledge, and studies show that this experience will allow smoother adjustment once in-country (Black, 1988).

Unlike the participants (who are my collegial peers), I was able to access, read and understand all levels of documentation related to the project and my position. However, I am an experienced offshore VET project consultant who has volunteered for many seconded short-term assignments. Social cognition research has shown that continual and diverse international experience can create cognitive frameworks that allow quicker and more profound adjustment in this situation (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

Through prior VET project involvement, I have become aware of what constitutes a crucial document, and where and how to access it. As well, I have been repeatedly exposed to the jargon and terminology used in VET offshore projects for many years, so I am able to decipher and comprehend what is written (as well as what is not written). Empirical research on project staff collaboration shows that this experience may situate me with more hierarchical project power compared with staff who are new to the work culture of international projects and unable to locate or understand these documents (Ekinsmyth, 2002; Grabher, 2002).

The implication here being, as supported by the latest offshore assignment research (Tran et al., 2021), that it is not enough for the institute to have a "good practice" policy of simply providing staff with work-related documents to solve the problem of staff feeling uninformed. Relevant offshore project documents must also be understood by staff and this comprehension should be substantiated. Finally, this appears to be more important for staff on first-time deployment, as they lack the appreciation of the document's importance.

"I did get stuff from international ... I got a pack. Basically there were a few things. That code of conduct, certain things I had to agree to. About overseas conduct I think it was…it wasn't about [the project]. And so [pause] there was a whole other documentation that was given on top of that…[pause]…I was given a general…uh.. [pause]…about overseas…[pause]. You're expecting me to have read them, aren't you?" (Clarice)

Pre-departure preparation

As seen in the findings, pre-departure preparation was either missing or inappropriate. Of the eight participants, only Frank had ever been directed to a form of pre-departure preparation program. Unfortunately, it was a room full of teachers learning about cultural sensitivity as they prepared to deliver Diploma-level programs at a sister campus in China, led by a co-ordinator who had never been to the Middle East. This was inappropriate for the project, as it is neither specifically relevant, nor led by someone with specific knowledge (Leask et al., 2005; Lynch, 2013). Therefore, this type of preparation will not result in effective transition (Eskerod & Blichfeldt, 2005). Unfortunately, this was not a novel occurrence, and these findings align with literature from TNE and VET projects that also show a lack of appropriate pre-departure preparation programs.

For example, while HE TNE guides also call for extensive preparation (AVCC, 2005), this does not materialise in practice (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Lynch, 2013; Whieldon, 2019). There is a mismatch between advice on good practice or lack thereof. In reality this is also

evident in VET TNE academic documents (Kearns & Schofield, 1997; Dempsey, 2013; Tran et al., 2021). Conversely, while early studies of pre-departure programs for VET offshore projects showed that a more professional approach was needed (Knowles, 1998), Bailey's AusAID project study mentions a comprehensive pre-departure program that was "88% effective" (Bailey, 2010). This was an expected finding, and this research adds to the pre-departure literature on offshore VET projects by showing that preparation programs were missing or inappropriate for staff on this study.

Informal preparation: self-directed research and use of a knowledgeable friend

While it appears that formal institute-led preparation was missing or of little assistance, participants did mention self-directed preparation and an informal meeting with a knowledgeable friend prior to departure. This meeting can be likened to Campbell's "Meeting of the mentor" stage of the monomyth and is usually a person who supplies knowledge and confidence to overcome fears and misgivings (Campbell, 2012; Vogel, 2007). The use of self-directed research and mentors is evident in practice and advice as a way for staff to prepare for an upcoming international assignment (Jassawalla et al., 2004; Dempsey, 2013). The research shows that the use of a mentor is usually informal and self-directed. This meant that advice was produced from a knowledgeable friend with experience deemed relevant by the staff member, and not formally directed by management. What is surprising here is that, despite historical and consistent recommendation for institutes to implement mentoring as a more formal part of the preparation process, few actually do (Soontiens & Pedigo, 2013). MNC research studies advise that the use of a mentor alleviates many disappointments and disaffection with international assignments (Linehan & Scullion, 2002; Allen, 2003) and is deemed good practice for ensuring a smooth transition (Poe, 2000). TNE good practice guides and empirical studies equally extol the benefits of this informal exchange of information (Dunn & Wallace, 2006; NTEUb, 2011; Dempsey, 2013). International VET project literature alludes to the positive aspects of staff on projects utilising support by experienced team members in-country (Volkoff & Perry, 2001; Bailey, 2010). The literature review also showed that Osland's study of expatriates invariably utilised a mentor. Osland (2000) contends that like Campbell's "Hero", the wise figure is only able to provide the outbound expatriate pre-departure assistance and guidance in preparation for the adventure but is unable to accompany them.

In this research study, inexperienced staff mentioned such mentors as an informal community of practice in which experienced members of the project team were willing to pass project information to them. This was not an official method of support extended to participants, and studies on mentoring provide cautionary advice on making sure the person giving pre-departure advice is experienced, knowledgeable, and approved to do so. Without

formal approval it is easy for incorrect information to be passed on to new staff with no real understanding of the project, or country, context (Seah & Edwards, 2006). An example of the danger of incorrect informal advice is evident in the contrasting examples of Eileen and Clarice. Eileen was briefed by Michael prior to her arrival. Michael is a longstanding member of the project team and knowledgeable on most aspects of the project. This seemed to help Eileen to experience a positive initial general adjustment due to realistic expectations of the situation.

"Thank God I had Michael. I would've been coming into the unknown. Half of my job contract was fictional; I had no idea what was here, what it was about. Any of that sort of stuff." (Eileen)

This supports previous research that advises that mentoring should come from someone with specific knowledgeable of the project or specific destination (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). Conversely, Clarice's original pre-deployment advice was derived from other members of staff (who had ever been to the host country before) and was negative and stereotypical. Initially this caused her much angst and influenced her preparation.

"There was a lot of bias, prejudice, and secrecy. No one knew a lot of things. I was trying to work out what was actual, what wasn't I guess. But it was just ... rumours. So, then I spoke to Amin ... I spoke to the people who I knew could give me facts." (Clarice)

Clarice mentions that after contacting Amin, who had returned from deployment on the project, she realised everything first advised to her was false and contrary. "*I told her a few things, obviously nothing about her work or the project, but just about her stay there and what to expect in the office"* (Amin). Although Amin was only able to advise on the general environment, not the specifics of her job, this second meeting allowed for a less stressful and more productive pre-departure period. This finding again reinforces previous research that a capable and experienced mentor is an excellent pre-departure method, especially for first-time staff (Jassawalla et al., 2004).

More conventional use of experienced staff should be formally and officially sanctioned by the institute (Dunn & Wallace, 2006). Here, the implication being that access to relevant and genuine information from an experienced community of practice will help staff to alleviate some pre-departure stress while assisting in correct preparation by providing realistic expectations and avoiding negative stereotypes or incorrect information (King, 2019; Tran et al., 2021).

For offshore VET assignments, Smith and Smith (1999) first advocated that, to ensure positive engagement, VET staff be prepared in advance. This preparation should provide not only the project details, but also organisational context and the work environment. Further research indicates that, as the project work environment is completely different to the normal home-based institute environment, a realistic preparation and job role preview is necessary for most effective performance in-country (Tung 1998b). However, this study reveals that this advice was not followed, with little to no details of the project, work environment or organisational context provided. This aligns with research findings from recent studies noting that staff entered into a new workplace with little idea of the different work environment they would encounter in-country (Whieldon, 2019; Tran et al., 2021).

Therefore, despite empirical research and professional guides advocating the formal responsibility of the institute to provide work-related information and preparation regarding the work environment, project goals, job roles, stakeholders and context, nothing official or substantial was relayed to the staff member pre-departure (NTEU, 2004b; Eskerod & Blichfeldt, 2005; Baily, 2010). As reported in the findings, even after meeting their mentors, participants felt they faced a great number of **unknowns** as they crossed the threshold and headed to a foreign country to start their first offshore VET project.

"All I knew, I'd been directed towards a newspaper article with photographs of the students in their [local dress]…. the understanding and the belief that I had, before I came over, was just based on this photograph and an article in the newspaper." (Michael)

5.3.3 Arrival in country: contextual dissonance and control issues

This section deals with the “immediate arrival” of participants and the engagement cycle as they encounter contextual dissonance and goal incongruence in-country. A staff member’s arrival in-country requires an immediate, and sometimes overwhelming, adjustment. As shown in Figure 5.1, Black et al’s (1991) adjustment model makes a definitive line between pre-departure (anticipatory) adjustment and in-country adjustment. The best anticipatory adjustment begins with good staff selection criteria by the institute followed by an effective and relevant training program. The staff member then aligns this incoming information with their previous relevant experience to create realistic work-based expectations of what will happen when they arrive in-country. This results in the best positive commencement of in-country adjustment.

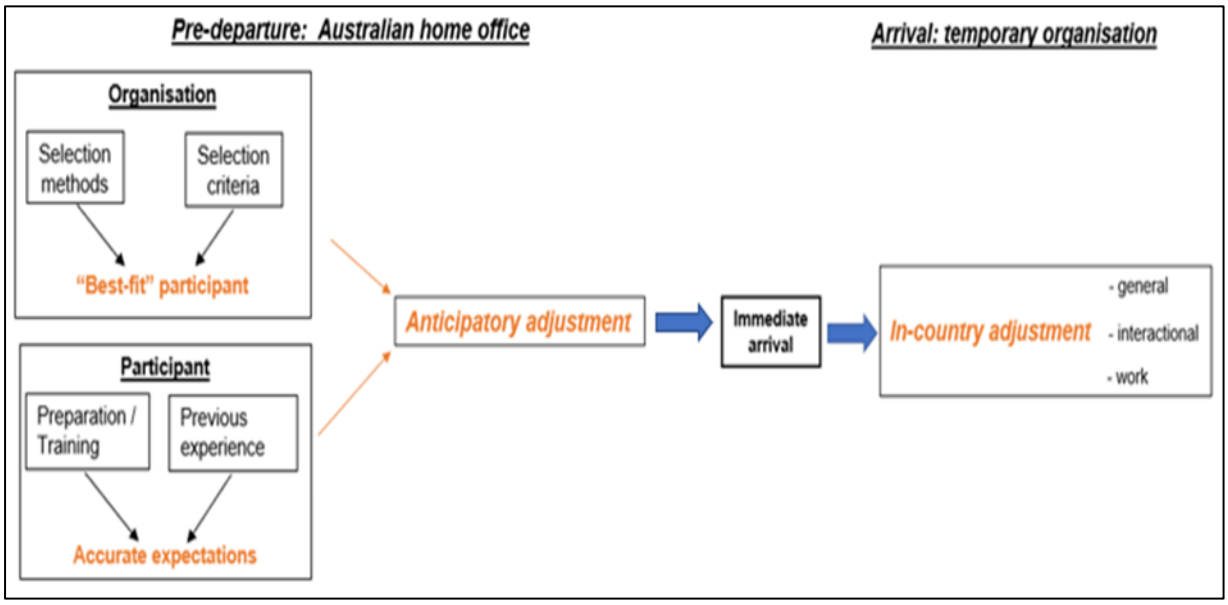

Figure 5.1. Black et al's best-practice adjustment model
(Adapted from Black et al.,1991)

As the Australian institute did not follow any component of the Black et al’s pre-departure model, participants were destined to undergo contextual conflict on arrival. The findings showed that participants in this study were volunteers, which aligns with previous literature that outlined offshore staff undertaking work freely, outside their employment conditions (NTEU, 2004b; Jais, 2012; Jais & Hoare, 2015). Therefore, these volunteer participants are removed from any formal selection procedure to locate and employ someone with appropriate skills and attributes necessary for effective adjustment (Dempsey, 2013). As well, with all staff, except the international project manager, on their first offshore VET project, they have no relevant and/or useable experience (Nicholson, 1984). Finally, it was determined in this study that pre-departure training or preparation was effectively nil, causing

potential confusion, which also supports previous literature (King, 2019; Tran et al., 2021). This would suggest that participants have nothing official or relevant on which to create accurate expectations for arrival in-country, and thus anticipatory adjustment would be stressful and cause confusion. However, as the findings showed, they produced their own expectations to create some sense of what they needed to do, which is also in line with previous studies (Seah & Edwards, 2006).

Chapter 4 outlined participants' expectations of their work environment and stakeholder relations. Without texts to adequately define them, they also created expectations of project goals, job roles (and goals) as well as success indicators. Unfortunately, these expectations were not met on arrival.

"Before we left, you didn't know what to expect, you couldn't get ready for it. So, you tried to think what might happen. Well, when I got there it changed." (Dave)

Contextual dissonance on arrival

On arrival, staff described a disconnection between what they had anticipated and the actuality of in-country entry. This was expected, as VET offshore assignment good practice guides had previously written that unexpected problems will arise only when in-country, and that staff are historically not aware of this issue (Foster & Schulz, 2009; NTEU, 2011b). The advice from guides was to accommodate dissonance via preparation programs that ensure realistic pre-departure expectations (Debowski, 2003). This case study finding of staff feelings of disconnect also aligns with previous studies across several disciplines.

King's (2019) study revealed that VET TNE staff's offshore assignment experience was "one of dissonance between their expectations [of the assignment] and the reality of the situation" (King, 2019, p. 128), while Seah and Edwards (2006) study of short-term TNE academics outlined the dissonance felt in teacher–student relationships and expectations. As well as TNE, the dichotomy between expectation and reality is a constant topic of research for both MNC expatriation and short-term MNC projects (Phillips, 1998; McKenna et al., 2009; Bashir & Bashir, 2016). Finally, there are studies showing that a high level of turnover in international schools is created by unmet expectations on arrival (Odland & Ruzicka, 2009). While the industries are disparate, the source of contextual dissonance is similar, as all these abovementioned studies indicate poor and inaccurate *pre-departure preparation* as causing the creation of unrealistic expectations in context.

The theoretical model, the *theory of met expectations* (particularly as applied to international assignments), is relevant here to assist in furthering understanding of this negative reaction. Generally, the theory states that an individual creates job expectations prior to commencement of a new position, and then compares this to the actual work experience once it commences (Littrell et al., 2006). Researchers propose that realities congruent with expectations equate to greater fulfilment and adjustment in the new situation (Wanous et al., 1992). Caligiuri et al. (2001) applied this theory to international assignments and found that effective work adjustment in-country is impeded by the presence of unrealistic expectations. The practical application of theory in relation to international assignments posits that proper pre-departure training will include elements designed to properly inform staff of realistic experiences they will likely encounter (Littrell et al., 2006). This will not only mean enhanced in-country adjustment, but also less stress during the pre-departure phase (Bennet et al., 2000).

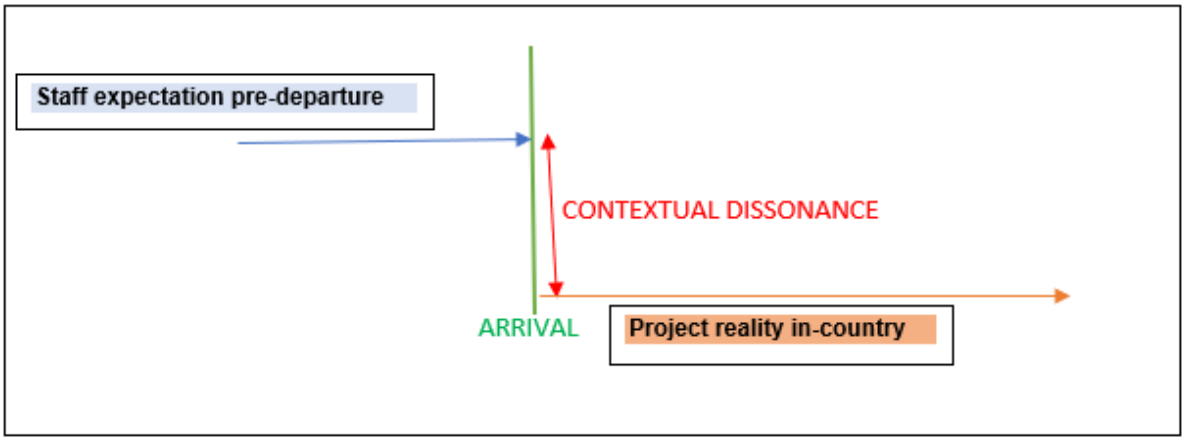

Figure 5.2. Contextual dissonance: staff expectations unmet with reality

Figure 5.2 shows the difference that occurs between heightened expectations and in-country realities encountered by staff once deployed on the project. The greater the distance between expectation and reality, the more pronounced the contextual dissonance and therefore the more adjustment needs to be made in-country.

While findings showed that all staff experienced a disparity between expectations and reality on arrival, the timing of this varied in relation to the length of their assignment. The long-term contractor's dissonance seemed to happen gradually within a few weeks of their arrival, following the traditional "honeymoon period" of the culture-shock curve where staff initially experience wonder and euphoria in-country during expatriate assignments. However, in this study, there was no "honeymoon period" for any of the short-term participants on arrival and they experienced contextual dissonance almost immediately.

The participants on short-term assignments reported they left work on Friday afternoon to board a flight on Friday night. This flight would take them across seven time zones on a 14-hour journey that arrived in-country Saturday morning. They would have less than 24 hours to settle-in and prepare for work commencing the next day at 7 a.m. The findings showed they all encountered dissonance on the first day of entry into the project school, with Clarice battling stakeholder conflict within minutes of her assignment commencement. This situation aligns less with a honeymoon period and more with the analysis of short-term international assignments as "nasty, brutish and short" (*The Economist*, 2000). However, this was expected and outlined in the methodology, as per my previous experience of offshore international projects. I observed that new project staff reacted to negative contextual dissonance almost immediately on arrival. This resulted in the creation of a research interview scheduled for "Immediate Arrival" to capture this data.

Dissonance creates control issues which affect staff engagement

As indicated in the findings, staff expressed dissonance with three major areas upon immediate arrival in-country: the *work environment*, *stakeholders*, *and lack of direction from (missing) texts*.

Work environment

Table 5.1 outlines the resulting staff engagement once in-country from dissonant pre-departure work environment expectations. Prior to arrival, participants were unsure of the nature of the work environment. As it was a subsidiary of the home office, the expectation was that it would be structured similarly to what they were familiar with in Australia. The limited pre-departure information available to them also meant they expected it to be a laid-back work ethic, and that those already working on the project in-country would be excited and ready to assist the incoming staff immediately.

Table 5-1. Effect of dissonance on staff engagement with work environment

Work environment		
Pre-dep expectations →	**In-country dissonance/control issue** →	**Engagement result**
Office life abroad will be similar to home office	Workplace organisation different	***Reinterpret work environment***
Laid back	Hardworking	
Arrival anticipated and welcomed	Unprepared for arrival: ad hoc start	

However, on arrival the findings showed an immediate variance with what they had expected to find and what was actually presented on arrival. Participants first noted that the project office was dissimilar to what they had thought, with a much more open ambience. The work ethic of the project staff in-country was quite demanding, and participants were dismayed to

find that their arrival didn't seem to be as eagerly anticipated or as organised as they had thought. This resulted in a situation where incoming project staff had to reinterpret the work environment before they could even begin to work out stakeholders or job roles, goals or success indicators.

This dissonance of the work environment on arrival can be explained by research presented in the literature review (Section 2.5.2) that configures a project as a temporary organisation. A temporary organisation is, by design, a dynamic and fluid system that employs a range of staff on a limited time basis to accomplish a complex task (Goodman & Goodman 1976; Turner & Muller, 2003; Sydow & Braun, 2017). This structure of organisational operations distinguishes the project work environment from the more familiar permanent environment, and this can create issues with initial understanding of the prevailing collective work culture (Chipulu et al., 2014). Project staff work on ever-changing and immediate tasks at hand using heuristic and autonomous processes (Bakker et al., 2012; Chipulu et al., 2014). This can result in a cycle of concentrated work followed by periods of unproductive waiting (Goodman & Goodman, 1976).

A project is multi-staffed with constant transition, in and out, of different personnel. This staff transition is dictated by external forces at the home office, and not by the project manager in-country. Further, the incoming staff member is unknown to the project team, as they have volunteered and therefore bypassed any selection criteria or recruitment method. This combines to create an intensely busy organisation of autonomous workers that simply cannot predict exactly who or when a new staff member will eventuate at the airport.

As can be seen from the findings, the incoming staff member is unaware of the real situation in-country and can only extrapolate that it will be similar to the Australian home office, a problematic situation that Smith (2009) similarly found in her study on IBC deployments where incoming Australian staff were not prepared for the effect the local educational and political context would have on the office environment, causing distress on arrival from an inability to contextually adapt (Smith, 2009). This deficiency in providing realistic work environment grounding has been criticised as missing from pre-departure training (Kealey et al., 2005). Accordingly, this study confirms that lack of pre-deployment information also caused project work environment dissonance in context.

"…once you're situated offshore, there are so many other variables that happen, which are completely different from the way that you operate in Australia." (Dave)

Stakeholder relations: not as clear as first thought

The second major issue causing dissonance in context is stakeholder relations. This occurred in both inter-organisational hierarchical management relations and external stakeholder conflict. Table 5.2 shows how staff were left to manage conflict with local stakeholders from the dissonance on arrival that occurred due to unmet pre-deployment expectations about stakeholder relations.

Table 5-2. Effect of dissonance on staff engagement from unclear stakeholder relations

Stakeholder relations		
Pre-dep expectations →	**In-country dissonance/control issue** →	**Engagement result**
Line management from Australia	Project manager line management	***Stakeholder conflict to resolve***
Locals happy to receive staff	Local stakeholder indifference/interference	

The findings showed that staff members were generally unsure of who would be managing them and expected they would continue to be line managed via their normal departmental channels as per the home office. However, on arrival they came to understand they would be managed in situ by the in-country project manager. All incoming project staff reported pre-departure they felt their local counterparts and stakeholders would be happy and welcoming. They were dismayed when local stakeholders proved to be unwelcoming and sometimes confronting. This finding relates to previous studies outlining how stakeholder conflict can be avoided by ensuring relevant stakeholders have a clear idea of their counterparts and a consistent understanding of any shared project goals (Volkoff & Perry, 2001).

The complex assemblage of stakeholders and diverse goals needs to be clarified early and collaboratively to ensure positive working relationships in-country (Smith & Smith, 1999). This early connection would help alleviate expectation gaps and mismatches on arrival (Woodley, 2006; Levin et al., 2010). As evidenced in the findings, there was no stakeholder collaboration prior to arrival resulting in indifference and interference, which was dissonant with incoming staff members' expectations. This resulted in the incoming project member initially dealing with stakeholder conflict, and not stakeholder collaboration, in pursuit of their task.

> *"I thought that people would be working together, have a common goal. I assumed that the [local staff] would be enthusiastic for it, but I found that they were hostile." (Frank)*

Lack of texts can lead to goal incongruence

Staff were not provided with, or did not access, various project documents that outlined the project and their specific roles. This resulted in expectations regarding their job role and goals, as well as what and who would determine that they achieved these goals successfully. Table 5.3 shows the effect on staff engagement that occurs when pre-departure expectations of staff use of documents are not met on arrival.

Table 5-3. Effect on staff engagement from dissonance without official texts available

Texts				
Text level		**Pre-departure expectations** →	**In-country dissonance/ control issue** →	**Engagement result**
Macro (project goals)		Specific project goal understood	No consensus on project goal	***Limited / no understanding of overall project rationale***
		No knowledge of large definitive project texts		
Meso (institute goals)		Missing documents would be made available from home office	No further information supplied by home office	***Limited access to make officially sanctioned decisions***
Micro (staff goals)	**Job role**	Australian staff to support local staff	Local stakeholder confusion, conflict and inconsistent interpretations	***Stakeholder tensions from goal incongruence mean difficult and stressful work environment***
	Success indicators	Success determined by successful student work placement *(summative and complimentary with local stakeholders)*	Success determined by milestones and deliverables *(formative and potentially conflicting with local stakeholders)*	***Stress and confusion about how (and by whom) the goal will actually be seen to be achieved successfully***
		Home office to judge success	Success judged in-country by project office	

There was little consideration by staff given to **macro** or **meso** goals. Therefore, there was little to no contextual dissonance as a result. This was due simply to the fact that they never read, or even knew about, documents that outlined the project rationale, and this ignorance never explicitly caused any conflict during their assignment. However, there was contextual dissonance from missing information regarding micro-texts such as position descriptions or contracts. As staff felt these texts were not sufficiently presented to them to make formal understandings of their job role objective or outcomes, they presumed as best they could.

Most staff expected their job was to support local staff, but on arrival there were different understandings from local staff about the rigour, intensity and definition of what this meant in context. Participants also felt that their input would be judged successful by management at home office on completion of their assignment, and that this objective would complement the local stakeholders' objectives. However, on arrival participants noted, contrary to these expectations, that their success was judged in-country by the project manager. They further discovered that sometimes the formative method of milestones and deliverable achievements was contrary to what local stakeholders considered success.

Although many guides and studies promote and support the provision of micro-level documents for short-term TNE assignments (Gribble & Ziguras, 2003; Foster et al., 2011), research shows that this provision is not always supplied (King, 2019; Seah & Edwards, 2006). This results in staff being placed in unnecessary jeopardy without clear ideas of their responsibilities (Pyvis, 2009). However, some research advises job roles and position descriptions be made available prior to deployment only for confirmation of allegiance to labour laws (NTEU, 2004b). Further, TNE work means delivery of an accredited program, the delivery of which would be fairly consistent in terms of job role (i.e. teach and assess) and success indictors (pass/fail).

VET project literature also advocates the necessity of providing clear and sufficient documentation for staff prior to arrival (Khang & Moe, 2008); but studies show that staff tend to only comprehend it once in situ (Bailey, 2011) and that what is written down can change dramatically once the project assignment commences in-country (Kealey et al., 2005). Therefore, the practicality of having a set formal text for stakeholder collaboration seems limited in a project work environment. While position descriptions and contracts did exist, they were possibly created to justify more meso- or macro-level considerations such as staff workload, validation of consultancy costs, or deliverable schedules aligned with staffing input. Therefore, while it is advisable to provide clear texts and direction on job roles and success indicators to reduce stress pre-deployment and assist adjustment in-country, this study shows that in and of itself, a formal text is not that useful for consideration without a collaborative stakeholder interpretation of content.

Conclusion of contextual dissonance and control issues

Generally, contextual dissonance causes uncertainties and feelings of loss or lack of control, resulting in project stakeholders not recognising the same goals or success indicators in the context of the in-country project. This dissonance impacts negatively on the work situation, engagement and adjustment (Black et al., 1991). Conflict and ambiguity between reality and expectations need to be minimised, although it is probably impossible to eradicate.

However, contextual dissonance only takes place on immediate arrival, and after a few days the new reality is apparent. This means the staff member is working in the, now real, contextualised understanding of work environment, stakeholders, and job roles/goals and success indicators. Therefore, the implications are that all stakeholders need to be clear on the reality of the goals and success indicators in context, or there could be further and longer lasting incongruence.

> *"You had a plan in your head of what you want to do, but whether you're going to be able to do it or not, there was a lot of questions that couldn't be answered until you got there and you checked it for yourself." (Amin)*

5.3.4 Goal incongruence and success: indicator misinterpretation

Contextual dissonance is the personal internal conflict of an individual trying to comprehend the divergence of their auto-created pre-deployment expectations from in-country reality. However, the attempted reconciliation of this divergence may be contradictory amongst stakeholders. This can result in conflict and goal incongruence, thereby creating a situation where success is unlikely to occur (Meyskens et al., 2009). Local stakeholders also produce expectations prior to commencement, and these may also be contextually dissonant with reality (Black, 1988). Therefore, when a staff member arrives from Australia for a short-term assignment, they have expectations of a goal that may differ from the project text. The local stakeholder may also have a similar expectation that differs, accordingly both stakeholders may differ.

As first mentioned in the literature review (section 2.5.8), when a personal goal deviates from the project goal, this is called "top-down" goal incongruence, and when personal goals of different stakeholders differ, this is called "sideways" goal incongruence (Schaffer, 2007). In Humanistic Psychology, this mismatch between perceived goal desire and actual goal acquisition can lead to a state of decreased well-being (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). By assisting people to experience and behave consistently in practice (self-image) with what was projected prior to meeting in-country (the ideal-self) then congruence of goals is maximised, thus leading to staff self-actualization (Rogers, 1959).

This study supports research that found that multi-staffed projects, despite sharing a common goal, are beset by problems when members intercept and pursue their version of the goal independently (Schreuder et al., 2019). Bradley et al. (2006) found that this goal incongruence causes a negative impact on performance. To diminish this impact requires stakeholders to arrive at a consistent and accepted conflation or adoption of goals, resulting

in goal congruence (Ding et al., 2017). The key to creating goal congruence is by advocating awareness and training, as well as being transparent with documented expectations and success indicators (Bradley et al., 2006).

In this study, both sets of stakeholder interpretations differ because no consensus could be made pre-deployment, as management did not supply text to facilitate stakeholder goal congruency confirmation. And even if there is text, there can be misinterpretations. Grace's (2005) study of short-term VET TNE staff found that the same formal text was interpreted differently, and they were therefore undertaking their tasks differently, even though they effectively had the same job role (Grace, 2005). The text-reader actions the text according to their interpretation and context, and then reacts to the text by performing their understanding of what the text says is required.

In this research there were no discernible documents accessed by staff and no formal micro-level texts were made available for discussion amongst home office or local stakeholders. All discussions in Australia revolved around verbal understandings of job role, goals and success indicators, and there were no discussions at all with local stakeholders. It would be prudent to consider the same was happening with local stakeholders prior to staff arrival in-country, and that local stakeholders also created their own expectations of incoming participants' input on arrival. However, without inter-stakeholder discussion pre-departure, it is probable that different understandings would arise even if a document was made available. These goals were therefore susceptible to subjective stakeholder interpretations and goal incongruence in context. However, while goal incongruence proved true for micro goals and success indicators, it was not evident for meso- or macro-level documents.

There was no goal incongruence for macro or meso-level project goals, which was an unexpected result. The findings show multiple interpretations of the project goal, which would indicate sideways goal incongruence between stakeholders. As well, multiple interpretations would mean there would be some form of top-down goal incongruence where interpretations differ from the reality of the project goal as would be outlined in official project documentation. I could find no definitive overarching project goal in the documentation, although in this type of project it is not unusual to operate without a definite, and/or measurable practical goal. Project goals are themselves created to undergo change, as it is accepted that specific tasks required to achieve the project cannot be completely known at the time of creating the project brief (Goodman & Goodman, 1977; Chipulu et al., 2014).

However, Kealey et al. (2006) adamantly advises the use of clear operational goals and performance targets, including management responsibilities and expected contributions of each stakeholder. This is important, as conflict over these items is the most serious problem

that causes project completion issues (Kealey et al., 2005). However, there is seemingly contradictory advice later in the article, where the authors suggest that employees are aware of the need to operate effectively when diverging from formal goal statements (2005). Conversely, Khang and Moe (2008) advised that projects with social objectives have fewer tangible objectives than more practical or technically based projects, with the conceptual objective of "sustainability" being the softest goal (Khang & Moe, 2008).

It seems that Kealey et al. (2005, 2006) are referring to what is called "scope creep", the "slipping away from the stated objectives and goals" (Kealey et al., 2005, p. 299) that threatens to put an entire project off course and not just individual employees. Therefore, it is possible any findings analysis or discussion on macro project goals is outside the scope of this study. Participants were either unaware of macro-level documents or considered them outside the realm of their involvement, so they did not actively access them.

While there was no discernible top-down goal incongruence, there was sideways goal incongruence with stakeholders in items such as job role goals and success indicators. Figure 5.3 shows an example of sideways goal incongruence using Eileen's job role position description wording in the project "Scope of services".

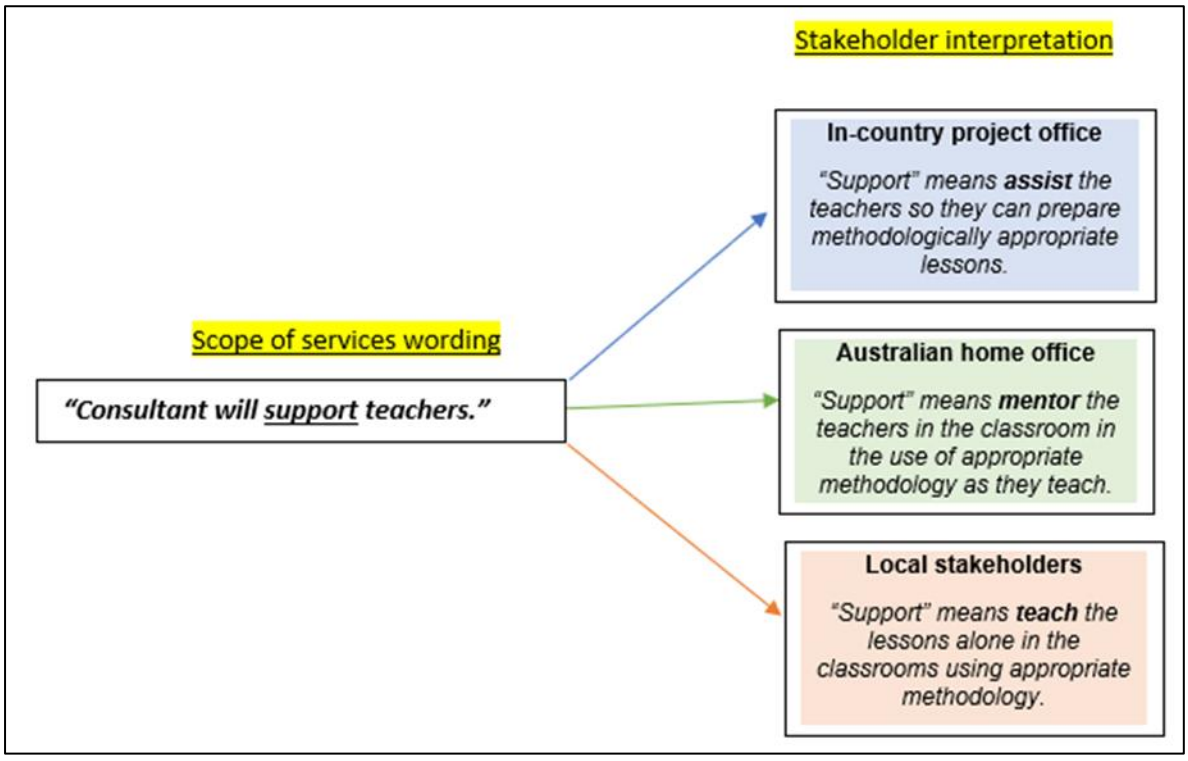

Figure 5.3. Manifestation of multi-stakeholder goal incongruence: job role

Local staff were not familiar with competency-based training and assessment (CBT/A) and so required assistance to implement their CBT/A training in a practical manner. This is part

of Eileen's job role, and the goal is "*The Australian consultant will support local teachers in the implementation of CBT…*". To Eileen, and project management, this is recognised as "*assist*", meaning she will provide experienced aid to the local teachers in preparing lessons, and lesson plans, in accordance with CBT/CBA constructs while also taking the relevant training package into account. To the Australian-based management, Eileen's job role was the goal of "*mentor*", meaning that home office thinks she is in the classroom, possibly delivering some model lessons or actively participating with the students. Finally, the local stakeholders recognised the job role goal as "*teach*". The local principal was under the impression that Eileen was hired to deliver and assess the lessons and had timetabled weekly lessons.

This finding was expected and supports my experience and the previous literature on goal conflict and incongruence caused by inconsistent goal recognition amongst stakeholders. Bradley et al. (2006) found that goal congruence positively affected project performance, and Dempsey (2013) found that TNE partnership success is marred by inconsistent goals of its participants. Goal incongruence occurred not only from each individual participant (sideways incongruence), but from the institute itself (top-down incongruence). Watkins et al. (2013) found that projects consist of a collective of multi-sector partners who have diverse goals, and that this impedes performance due to constant stakeholder scrutiny and review. Volkoff and Perry (2001) further found that reconciliation of these goals amongst various stakeholders is one of the major challenges in project staffing. They posit that the more removed the communication regarding specific goals, the less detail can be discerned and therefore goals become subjectively (re)created amongst various stakeholders.

No project texts were made available to Eileen, and she had no communication with the Australian office or local stakeholders prior to her commencement. As such, this resulted in these stakeholders creating a "decontextualised and asynchronous" (Volkoff & Perry, 2001, p. 7) individualised recognition of her specific job role goal. This, according to Kealey et al. (2005), is "the most serious and project-threatening of problems" (p. 299).

Engagement problems with goal incongruence: level of involvement

While the potential damage to the project overall is clear, the negative effect on staff engagement is less so. The issue with goal incongruence causing negative staff engagement is a matter of incongruent levels of *involvement.* Involvement is the amount of time, energy, and responsibility that a staff member will utilise in the successful application of their work on the project. Bradley et al's (2006) research into how goal incongruence impacts project performance discovered that team members commence assigned tasks with a preconceived intention of "how hard they are willing to work to succeed in the performance

of this task" (Bradley et al., 2006 p.219). This demonstrates the *involvement* they have presupposed for effective realisation of the job role goal.

As can be seen in Figure 5.4, the level of involvement varies significantly amongst stakeholders. Eileen's goal requires a certain amount of time, energy and responsibility: an involvement which she would have configured in her mind prior to arrival. As well, this involvement would equally be set out in large project documents that justify her inclusion and salary.

> *"It's not my job to make sure that she's going to be able to control the kids in the classroom, but they think it is." Eileen*

The low level of involvement for this particular job role goal is because she has many other job role goals that require her time, energy and responsibilities. Thus, if Eileen were to follow the local stakeholder's interpretation ('teach'), the amount of involvement required is as much as a local teacher's. She would either have no time or energy to accomplish her other goals, or would become stressed, angry or simply overworked, leading to possible expatriate failure (Harzing & Christensen, 2004). As well, if Eileen were to take responsibility for teaching, then the local teachers would not be able to fully utilise their teacher training and would suffer if or when Eileen left the project. This is a situation Bradley et al. (2006) reports is common in projects, and can eventually result in the large overarching project objective (sustainability) not being met.

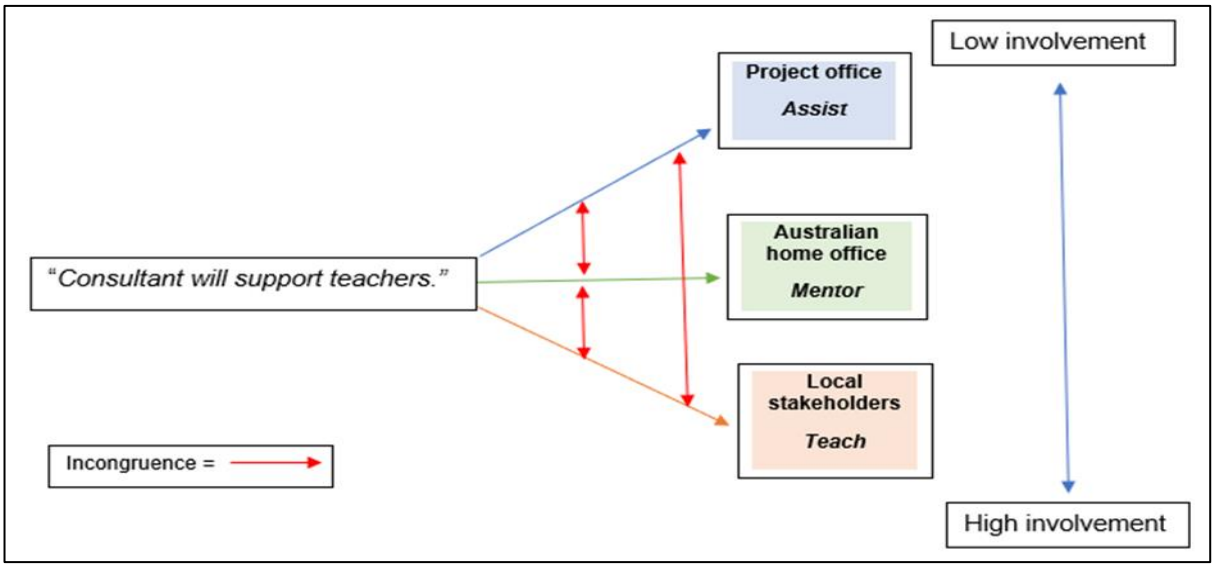

Figure 5.4. Example of goal incongruence cost due to mismatched levels of involvement.

Disparity between expectations of amount of involvement

Figure 5.4 also shows the *amount* of sideways goal incongruence between stakeholders. Red lines indicate disparity between amount of time, energy and responsibility (involvement) required for this one job role. The VET staff recognition of job role as low involvement means staff members are independently able to monitor their time and energy and maintain sovereignty from local educational policies. This involvement increases across stakeholder interpretations, with the most involvement coming from local stakeholders' understanding of Eileen's job role as teaching. This incongruence is *low-to-high*, as the understood job role requires low involvement, but others interpret the role as high involvement. This can cause conflict and burnout, both negatively impacting the project.

However, the incongruence of involvement into job role not only affects low-to-high, but *high-to-low* incongruence as well. Frank was under the impression that he was a technical consultant employed to construct and oversee the use of an "*Independent Learning Resource Centre*". This is a large, intensive endeavour that requires a lot of involvement from Frank. However, the local staff only wanted him to transcribe or translate YouTube videos, requiring low involvement from Frank (and also low involvement from the local staff). This is an example of high-to-low involvement incongruence and represents bad value for the client. This may also result in questions being raised about the effectiveness of the staff member to deliver their objectives successfully.

Involvement incongruence can also occur when staff can be expected to invest in tangential goals unrelated to project deliverables. Dave and Amin both mention that local stakeholders frequently asked them to do technical favours outside project goals. This would require time, energy and responsibility from Dave and Amin that negated involvement toward their project goals. Further, incongruence is not limited to Australian staff members' involvement, as local stakeholders are equally invested and will be affected by their goal incongruence.

Clarice also experienced high-to-low involvement incongruence, as her job role goal was to re-deliver the CBT/A training, but local stakeholders thought she was only going to do some minor "catch-up" workshops and then hand out the qualifications. Clarice was upset as this resulted in major conflict and ultimately disrupted successful delivery of her goal. Conversely, the local stakeholder's frustration is equally valid as they experienced low-to-high involvement incongruence. Their understanding was low level of involvement and they had therefore planned this amount of commitment in their minds, their work plans and ultimately their lives. Realising that they would have to change everything, and outlay more time, energy and responsibility than they had previously agreed to, caused conflict.

Lastly, the findings show that a stakeholder might willingly take on more involvement than required. Michael was tasked with providing support to teachers (*low* involvement), but he preferred to be with them in the classroom (*high* involvement). He understood that the priority was to first deliver the success indicators for the allocated low involvement job role, which then left him free to further pursue his own highly invested goals. This aligns with previous studies that found staff on offshore assignments often first fulfilled their contractually required goals before pursuing more personally interesting objectives (Grace, 2005; Smith, 2014).

Unclear success indicators

Goal incongruence can continue for some time unabated and only be realised when the success of the goal has to be measured. Then it may suddenly become apparent that stakeholders with differing inputs have produced disparate results (Boyd, 2013). This means it is necessary to maintain clear goals to produce appropriate success, as it would follow that the success indicator attributed to the job role would also be incongruent. Thus, it is important to consider different perceptions in order to identify and assess success indicators, and ensure they are also congruent amongst stakeholders (Chipulu et al., 2014).

Using Eileen as an example, if her goal is to *assist,* then the relevant success indicator would need to align, and Eileen would be judged on the level of *assistance* that could be evidenced. This evidence could be the number of hours allocated to Eileen and the relevant local staff member to work on the documents. It would be assumed that the number of hours of workshops delivered would indicate that Eileen had successfully fulfilled her goal of support. In this instance, Eileen is responsible for her own achievement of success. However, if Eileen were to *mentor* the teacher, success would be judged by how well that local teacher was able to deliver lessons, possibly evidenced by local in-house performance reports. In this instance, Eileen's success is judged by the teacher's ability. Finally, if Eileen were to *teach* the lessons her success would be judged directly by the students pass/fail rate. When this success indicator incongruence is extrapolated to the other staff members, the project would eventually fail, although each individual staff member had fulfilled their own interpreted goal successfully.

5.3.5 Review of early engagement: dissonance and incongruence on arrival

This section showed that staff experienced contextual dissonance and goal incongruence upon immediate arrival into the host country. Negative staff engagement was encountered immediately after arrival due to unequal multi-stakeholder recognition of goals and success indicators in context. This resulted in **control issues** that caused the staff to feel powerless and unsure of how, or if, to proceed. The implication is that if staff have no control and no

texts to conform to, they can quickly become overworked and/or off-task due to goal incongruence. Without the proper direction of an accepted success indicator, what staff successfully do might not align with what was actually required of them to do. The temporal nature of a project and limited time available for short-term assignees meant this issue needed to be resolved immediately.

5.4 Working in-country engagement issues: modifications

5.4.1 Introduction: isolation creates autonomous work choices

This section relates to staff engagement after they have been working in-country, and provides insight into further understanding if goals and success indicators are modified in context. The findings showed that after extended time working within the project office in-country, detached project staff utilised autonomous work practices. They adapted job role goals to align with autonomously reconfigured success indicators. Perceived employer loyalty and support defined how often these independent work practices and reconfigured success indicators favoured the institute.

5.4.2 Distancing/isolation

The findings showed that communication and responsiveness from Australia was lacking, causing staff to feel isolated and distanced from the home office. This supports previous studies on how staff isolation from the home office can result in alienation, anxiety and a disconnect that negatively affects commitment and work motivation while also distracting the employee from task focus in-country (Debowski, 2003; Jassawalla et al., 2004). Advice from guides and previous research indicates that keeping informal and formal lines of communication constant and clear are essential for moral and psychological support, as well as positively affecting performance (Ashamalla, 1998; Foster et al., 2011).

Despite this finding, other studies show that short-term staff across MNC, HE/VET TNE, as well as VET international projects all report lack of communication, distancing and isolation that occurs when deployed in-country (Smith & Smith 1999; Debowski, 2003; McKenna et al., 2009; Dempsey 2011a). These results resonate with the findings from this study, where participants described non-communication or isolating behaviours from the Australian institute on entry in-country. This was especially noticeable at immediate entry, when their pre-departure expectations did not match the reality of the situation on arrival, resulting in “disorienting dilemmas” (King, 2019). This was when most dissonance was felt in context and why Volkoff and Perry (2001) advise that support needs to be offered for staff on international VET projects. Soontiens and Pedigo (2013) found that isolation caused

inconsistent interpretations of policies and processes, and issues surrounding perceptions on how they should be implemented. This is supported by the findings of this study where participants also reported that home office distancing contributed to incongruent perception of goals and processes.

Soontiens and Pedigo (2013) further found that a program that linked experienced staff with incoming staff resulted in a positive reaction of better understanding and perception, which increased the sense of belonging and allegiance to the institute. These findings are not synonymous with my research, as participant loyalty was severely tested by the non-communicative nature of the home office even though participants had informally accessed a knowledgeable friend (mentor) prior to arrival. This indicates that a more formal approach to mentoring, such as in Soontiens and Pedigo's (2013) study, might result in more positive adjustment. A formal mentoring agreement is a form of organisational support, which has been shown to improve staff loyalty and allegiance (Allen, 2003).

While the findings show staff felt a sense of isolation, it is unclear as to what help could be offered to them and by whom. Research shows that sometimes it is not important who communicates with the staff member, or even the content or frequency of the communication, but that the home institute creates a channel for exchange (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Institute support in any form boosts morale and increases allegiance (Smith & Smith, 1999). Communication on the whole helps create a sense of purpose and enforces feelings of validity, thus leading to better motivation and performance (Jassawalla et al., 2004). Research shows that communication also leads to feelings of perceived organisational support (Wang et al., 2009).

Perceived organisational support relates to a staff member's expected level of care and assistance from their employer (Eisenberger et al., 1986), and expatriate studies of this phenomenon show increased worker commitment when the home institute provides the level of care expected by the employee on assignment (Takeuchi et al., 2009). The connection between support and commitment is via the concept of a "psychological contract"; an employee's internalised expectation about the nature of the work agreement with their employer (Aycan, 1997). While support from the home office can increase motivation, lack of support can be considered a contravention of the agreed psychological contract and therefore result in the expatriate feeling dissatisfied or even leaving the assignment altogether (Guzzo et al., 1994).

My research interview data, observations, and minutes from staff meetings clearly indicate that my participants had an exceedingly low perception of organisational support. As the findings show, staff felt that *"…in this situation you are just left on your own"* (Dave), it can be

surmised that they felt the psychological contract had potentially been compromised, possibly leading to dissatisfaction with their engagement at that point.

However, adjustment-development theories posit that isolation and feelings of distancing are a normal part of transition to a new environment. Adler's work on transition suggests that upon entry into a new environment there is a time of "*contact*" where the individual is still operating according to their ethnocentrism, as they have no ability to deal with the overwhelming number of novel foreign inputs; they select the good and deselect the bad resulting in a self-created world of enchantment (Adler, 1975). However, the next transition stage is one of "*disintegration*" where differences become noticeable, resulting in confusion, disorientation, frustration and inevitably, isolation (Adler, 1975). Research further shows that individuals may seek support at this point as a coping mechanism (Aycan, 1997).

Therefore, it is possible that the participants in my study were suffering the isolating effects of the disintegration stage, and looked to the home office for support as a coping mechanism. Additionally, as they were getting on with their work, they came to realise the contextual importance of the in-country project office over the relative impotence of the distanced home office. They made comments during this stage that they were now *"…operating solo, without any support from Australia"* (Amin) and that the home office was not aware of the context of the project in-country, so any assistance was mediated. This indicates an alteration of allegiance from the home office to the temporary office, as staff came to better understand the work culture of a temporary organisation like the project office.

"We never, ever got any feedback on anything and then [home office] just basically said, "My departments too busy, I don't want any offshore stuff on my table." We're in limbo without anyone answering our questions. That has been my biggest disappointment. I really didn't expect that lack of support." (Eileen)

Temporary organisation integration

Generally, as expected (and mentioned in the literature review), staff found the organisational work practices inherent in an offshore project difficult at first. However they were able to adapt and adjust quickly. While a project is a temporary organisation, it is important to remember that "organisation" does not specifically mean a dedicated space or location (Packendorff, 1995). The original consideration was a "temporary system" (Goodman & Goodman, 1977) and denoted a system of working that was organised to produce a unique and complex task with multiple stakeholders in a limited time (Lundin &

Söderholm, 1994). This case study took place in a temporary organisation quite removed from the permanent organisation, which caused distancing and increased the stress of isolation.

Findings showed that initially the staff struggled with the new work culture. This was expected, as research shows that offshore projects are much more complicated than domestic activities (Kearns & Schofield, 1997; Kealey et al., 2005). This can cause initial uncertainties in both job role and adjustment to the novel organisational culture (Mendehall & Oddou, 1985; Black et al., 1991). Incoming staff face these uncertainties immediately on arrival, when the memory of the stable home office work culture is still prominent in their minds as the acceptable institute work system (Turner & Muller, 2003). Volkoff and Perry (2001) indicate that this is a challenge for VET developmental projects, and request that pre-departure staff be made aware of the reality of the in-country workspace to reduce the inevitable adjustment period that occurs when situated in-country. Cai and Hall (2016) also indicated that HE TNE staff are unprepared for the different work environment offshore, with staff surprised and upset when the norms of the Australian campus were not replicated at the branch campus, even making unfavourable comparisons of the new offshore environment to the (better perceived) home campus.

While the participants did make comparisons, they were not unfavourable and simply pointed out that the work environment is novel. This is a positive finding, as a potentially destructive work feature of short-term assignees is a determination to maintain an idealised work culture of the home office when in-country operations are found to operate differently (Kealey et al., 2006). Research indicates that ignoring localised organisational work culture practices causes serious conflicts and should not be supported by the home office (Tahvanainen et al., 2005). Accordingly, participants adjusted their work habits to align with the construct of the project. This may be due to the overtly autonomous nature of the project organisation, and the prevailing work culture inherent therein.

> *"To be effective in our roles you've had to adapt to the same way that the people who you're working with. So not knowing that, as an individual, and from my point of view, when I get there, you then have to adapt to that. That takes a while, to actually get your head around that sort of space." (Dave)*

Temporary organisations are connected to the permanent organisation on a continuum of autonomy, with this particular project being determined by Australian management as independent and therefore "decoupled" from the home office (Burke & Morley, 2016). Some

research even advocates for the isolation of the project organisation to be built into planning to achieve freedom from inevitable interference into operations from the home office (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Staff on decoupled projects are more likely to work productively, with freedom to take certain work-related risks (i.e. goal modification) while also enjoying reduced role conflict with their positions back home (Burke & Morley, 2016).

"Here, you're normally in an environment where you can guarantee within 95% that what I do on Monday is set out. The problem with international projects is you don't have that over there. There are too many variables, so you need to be able to adapt with those variables…" (Clarice)

As the findings show, most participants were eventually able to operate independently from the home office, thereby allowing total focus on their project task. This shift from onshore to offshore work culture was mostly facilitated by the distancing and isolation home office provided to project staff, with staff realising that it was up to them to accomplish their task as they saw fit. This aligns with Bailey's study of VET practitioner's identity adaption to more complex environmental and employment circumstances, encountered with an international project (Bailey, 2011). His participants' successful ability to adopt the "unusual" in-country work arrangements inherent in offshore project work meant increased perception of identity and resulted in positive adjustment and work commitment (Bailey, 2011). This research supports this finding and further provides evidence that distancing and isolation from the home office can accelerate the process, which is necessary in a short-term assignment.

Now fully integrated into the temporary organisation, staff release the frustration of isolation from home office that was impeding their progress. They transition through the disintegration phase, where they do not understand the "scheme of things" and move toward making further sense of their situation without home office support. The next phase of the engagement cycle shows that, over time and isolated from home office support, staff turned to autonomous work functions.

"It means you have to be very adaptive. You have to think about how you're going to operate in a different space. You haven't got any of the safeguards of working within your normal day-to-day office environment, so you have to be really prepared for change. You have to think of contingencies, or the things that may happen." (Amin)

5.4.3 Autonomous work choices

As their time in-country progressed, the findings show that participants were affected by the mounting deadline for their input and felt pressured by the inability to clarify what they were meant to be doing. This is an expected outcome, as previous research shows that short-term assignees suffer the unique problem of "rapid adjustment" to the work environment (Conroy et al., 2018). They are expected to swiftly acculturate to the new work context and deliver their objectives quickly. Studies show staff react by increasing their work rate and making expediated decisions to create a window of opportunity for success (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gersick, 1994; van Berkel et al., 2016). This is evident in my study, where the participants all felt pressured to make decisions quickly to move forward with goal achievement and successful delivery of objectives. The pressure of time is a common theme in short-term assignments, with MNC literature finding that short-term staff experience the same culture shock cycle/acculturation issues as traditional expatriates, but in "fast-forward" (Collings et al., 2007; Meyskens et al., 2009).

"A lot of the time you were fighting the clock…but if you didn't do it then, then it wouldn't happen." (Dave)

After the "disintegration" phase of feeling isolated, frustrated and lost in the demands of a new foreign situation, the expatriate employee begins to "re-integrate" (Adler 1975). While this phase is initially a fierce rejection of the situation, negative feelings cause an individual to reflect and create an internalised "existential choice" (Adler, 1975, p. 17). This choice may end in the expatriate leaving the situation, or as is the case with my participants, finding new resilience and reinterpretation of themselves and the situation. This is also seen in educational studies of short-term assignees (Seah & Edwards, 2006), although this type of engagement research is lacking. Participants felt a sense of empowerment, which signified their transition to Adler's next phase of "autonomy", where the staff member feels a new appreciation for and understanding of the situation, and an increase in personal flexibility and appropriate skills for coping (Adler, 1975).

"We have to think differently. Work with what we've got." (Eileen)

As shown previously, participants embraced the temporary organisation and better realised their importance in the project. Finally, they experienced the final transition of Adler's model into "independence". They have now become fully functioning members of the offshore

project organisation, and that status allows them to capably exercise valid executive decisions. The staff member not only creates new meanings about their role, goals and success indicators, but accepts responsibility for the outcomes of these decisions as well.

> *"I had to pull myself back and say, look I'm here to do it, I'm just going to do the best I could. Then that's how I put myself back in and I'm like okay, let's figure out how I'm going to do it. I spent a lot of hours after work in the apartment just trying to figure out the best strategy to move forward. I think I did it well, and that's what pulled me through in the end." (Amin)*

5.4.4 Staff modification of goals and success indicators

Participants reported they felt they could now modify the goals and success indicators to better conform to the contextualised objectives of their assignment. This is a common occurrence on projects, with staff making modifications as an almost required component of temporary organisational management. Early studies concluded that goal incongruence on projects is inevitable once they commence, and therefore each project "has the goals modified by the processes within it" (Selznick, 1943, p. 47). As each project is unique, the precedence of previous project success or goals is constricted when scoping new projects (Baum, 1949). Further studies confirm that projects are frequently modified once underway by the inevitable stakeholder led "change requests" as task complexity is revealed in context (Sydow & Braun, 2017). There is some evidence of project modification in my research by looking at the number of increased staff required to execute the project. This increase in staffing requirements is directly related to changes in project outcomes and necessitated the need for additional specialised technical consultants.

Initial project start-up documents showed that only five members of institute staff were required for a projected project length of three years. However, by the time the project finished eight years later a total of 22 people had participated. This is further indication that project goals are open to interpretation and frequently diverge amongst stakeholders and therefore meant to be flexible (Kealey et al., 2006; Chipulu et al., 2014). This flexibility allows the inevitable goal incongruence to be mediated in situ (Fowler & Walsh, 1999; Kealey et al., 2005). Shared goals mean shared input, and so as many stakeholders as possible must be involved in the shared reconciliation of goals (Volkoff & Perry, 2001).

Unfortunately, stakeholders' consultations can drag-on, especially if one member does not fully understand what needs to be modified, or how. As projects will eventually self-terminate there needs to be an in situ reinterpretation produced quickly and confidently (Lundin & Söderholm, 1995). Grabher (2002) found that deadline pressure, and resultant

autonomous staffing decisions to modify objectives, kept projects from being stuck in an endless loop of stakeholder reconciliation, which he termed “collaborative paralysis” (p. 208). Deadline pressure was viewed as “carte blanche”, allowing legitimate changes to be executed without interference from external forces (Grabher, 2002), which often results in individualised heuristic information processing on projects (Bakker et al., 2012). This is supported in this study, as staff began using self-governing behaviours to make autonomous work choices legitimised by citing deadline pressure.

“I thought, ok now what is it I'm going to do? And while I'm trying to work out what I'm going to do, first of all the role, what is it I'm going to do, what's it going to be like, how am I going to do it? And then within that what is it that I'm about to achieve? Because obviously, if I'm coming here to do a role; I have to have some end goal, [which] has to be some achievement.” (Donna)

Kealey et al. (2005) found that management cultivates this autonomy and often expects staff and stakeholders to arrive at “*understandings*” about what direction the project will take once it has commenced. The reality of the temporary organisation/project in action reveals that complimentary modifications are necessary to clarify goals in the foundation texts (Kealey et al., 2005). Accordingly, management urge staff to make these necessary in-country modifications quickly, as failure to do so can result in failure of the entire project (McKenna et al., 2009).

Therefore, as goal incongruence is inevitable, it is understood that not only are staff deployed offshore on international VET projects modifying the goals and success indicators in context, but they *must* modify them as it is expected by management that this will happen to ensure project success. What is not understood is why this modification expectation was not formally relayed to participants pre-deployment.

“[Australian onshore management] have a view about what might be able to be achieved, how quickly it may be able to be accomplished, and then, generally, the offshore staff would largely be given a little bit of free reign to achieve outcomes that we’re after.” (Jonathon)

Interestingly, TNE studies do not describe offshore staff modifying goals and success indicators. TNE staff engagement research also describes feelings of isolation and distancing offshore, both from the home office and local stakeholders (Debowski, 2003; Leask & Beelen, 2009; Smith, 2009; Cai & Hall, 2016). There is also support for evidence of

autonomy and independence. Studies of short-term offshore academics found them left to make their own modification decisions as the home institute did not provide any pre-departure or in-country advice or support (Lynch, 2013; Tran et al., 2021). However, the staff never made any modifications with the material.

This is likely because the original goals and success indicators are unequivocally products the stakeholder wants. The Australian TAFE's main clients are the student and partner institute in-country. Both these stakeholders wish to have the exact qualification as specified in the prospectus: the student for educational purposes and the institute for commercial enrichment. To change this product with an in situ "understanding" could result in accusations of misrepresentation and have negative consequences for further collaborative relationships.

Equally, VET TNE involves the delivery of an accredited program that follows a prescriptive structure of assessment as set by the Australian Government and enforced by strict regulators (Black & Reich, 2010). It follows that most offshore staff would also be following a set training schedule configured to maintain equivalence across many different possible trainers. The goal would be the equivalent quality training and assessment delivered offshore as found onshore. This cannot be modified externally, beyond superficial contextualised content or adopting different delivery practices or teaching styles in collaboration with the students and partner institute once the program is underway (Dempsey, 2010; Foster et al., 2011; Yang, 2012; King, 2019). The success indicator would be the achievement of the qualification, anything else would constitute total failure. Thus, TNE teachers can only adapt the *process*, not the *product*.

As discussed in the literature review, content modification in both HE and VET TNE are ongoing issues for research. HE TNE research centres on course delivery equivalence and quality assurance (Anderson et al., 2000; Coleman, 2003; Sanderson et al., 2010). While VET TNE research has focused on fidelity issues such as quality assurance offshore, compliant supervision and moderation as well as the question of overall suitability (Foster & Schulz, 2009; Dempsey, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Foster et al., 2011). These diverse studies rely on one unifying concept: the main goal and success indicator of international TNE cannot be modified. Instead of changing content, TNE staff spoke about personal, internal changes that occurred (Seah & Edwards, 2006; King, 2014).

This finding is compatible with work role transitional studies that find work adjustment can be accomplished *actively* by changing the work environment, or *reactively* by changing themselves (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Black et al., 1991). In this study, research participants adjusted to the international work environment both actively and reactively. The staff

adapted their thinking in relation to the project work environment, and also modified their goals and success indictors. However, all modifications adhered to the over-riding objective of their assignment. This is in line with Kealey et al's (2005) assertion that "understandings" can be made to facilitate changes in staff goals, but these changes must not interfere or complicate the ultimate project objective (Kealey et al., 2005).

In this study, changes made by short-term project staff were mostly subjective personal concepts of compromised quality; they thought they could do better but were forced to work with what they had before time ran out. Although expatriate contractors did undertake some objectives seemingly removed from the project goal (e.g. Donna's sustainability training or Michael's classroom mentoring), it appears this was done after meeting their allocated project goals and were simply additional goals provided to stakeholders.

All participants reported success in achieving their goals, except for Clarice. Findings show that she ultimately failed to deliver the product due to stakeholder refusal to undertake the training, as they deemed it unsuitable. While she tried to contextualise her CBT/A program as best she could, she was ultimately contracted to deliver accredited training as strictly monitored by the regulator. This supports the assertion that if a project goal *cannot* be contextually modified after in-country commencement, it could be doomed to fail.

"I had really limited time over there in the span of things…there was no way I was ever going to complete it all there now. I didn't even get .5% done of one assessment task, because technically I'd run out of time." (Clarice)

5.5 Return home and individual responses to deployment

5.5.1 Individual responses and transformational learning

This last section provides insight into how individual staff on projects may engage differently with the project; specifically any contextual dissonance or agreement, and any goal congruence or incongruence they may encounter.

The findings show that staff underwent transformative learning as they moved through the engagement cycle working on the project. As detailed in the literature review, Mezirow (1997) states that the process of transformative learning is the shifting of an individual's pre-defined "frame of reference". In novel situations, people's perceptions of a correct frame of reference are challenged, resulting in critical reflection and change. The goal of transformative learning is to become responsible, flexible and autonomous thinkers. As shown in the findings, the participants encountered a similar transition through their deployment, with a positive increase in autonomy and independence.

When the participant was deliberately and purposefully questioned (in the research interviews) about how they felt regarding these events, they concluded that a change had occurred within themselves. Similar results were found through Lyon's (2002) analysis of cross-cultural adaption studies. Even though cross-cultural studies were a disparate mix of purpose, methodology, participants and length, Lyon found that all participants experienced a similar transformation triggered by unexpected events in-country. These findings align with Osland's (1995) study of expatriates who also reported change during assignment. More recent research by Smith (2013, 2014) posits TNE assignments are also a trigger for transformational learning. Therefore, the findings from this international VET project study can add to further research of transformative learning in the canon of global mobility.

The trigger for transformational learning in these studies was the realisation on in-country entry that what was expected to happen was not happening. An inference made by Smith (2013, 2014) is that this transformation can be described as auto-directed and self-guided professional development. Further, this development was profound, personal and happened without intervention or support from their employing institute. Smith (2014) further theorises that non-intervention is what led to disorienting dilemmas, and that this trigger for transformational learning, as professional development, would therefore be lost if a more effective pre-departure program enabled realistic expectations on arrival. It is surmised to redirect support from pre-departure to post-arrival, and to include awareness of the impending possibility of professional development in-country via transformational learning opportunities.

The concept of professional development occurring on a project reinforces the assertion in the literature review that while typical development of vocational capabilities is hindered on a project (due to its temporal and unique nature), more substantial personal growth can occur (Havermans et al., 2014). Furthermore, staff had differing motives for involvement on the project and experienced fairly individualised types of transformational change and growth.

The findings show that while Michael, Clarice and Dave directly mentioned new habits of independent work practices as a positive learned change, the others also mention transformation using various constructs around the concept of increased self-awareness. Eileen described a new outlook on life, while Donna's transformation was related to internalised coping and conflict management transformation. Frank, having learned that a "rut" can also be viewed as "comfortable consistency", opines that "*Home is best*" (Frank).

Amin described his transformation as increased awareness of his workplace and what is achievable. Although initially against the idea, Amin is the only participant who actually engaged with further offshore work for the institute. He describes subsequent trips as less problematic, signifying the value of the transformational learning experience in enhancing engagement by being more aware of the engagement cycle.

> *"Well, after you go the first time, the problems start getting less and less because you've been offshore, you know what to expect." (Amin)*

The implication here being that while offshore staff may follow the same cycle of engagement on deployment, how they are transformed is different. The personal issues attached to individually different disorienting dilemmas caused by contextual dissonance and goal incongruence resulted in individually different personal transformation. In this instance, a debrief would be advised to allow consolidation of this learning, as transformational learning is not complete until it can be critically analysed (Mezirow, 1997). This is evident in this study, as the participants would not have been able to make the critical realisation of their transformation without my research interview, which is consistent with Lyon's study of female expatriate teachers. Mezirow (1997) contends that assisted discourse is necessary to enhance effective interpretation of a person's transformed frame of reference, and Smith (2014) advises that a structured debrief is a good place for this to occur. For my participants, there was no organisational debrief (critical or otherwise) on return to allow this learned reflexivity to be shared, critically reflected and therefore validated.

5.5.2 Lack of debrief and appreciation

The findings showed that upon cessation of deployment the participants had no operational debrief on return, and that volunteer staff felt there was a perceived lack of appreciation for their duties offshore. This was an expected response, as my experience has been the same. However, the relevant literature is vague about post-deployment support and there is no clear understanding of the pertinent issues, or the way in which post-deployment support should be implemented. MNC's expatriate post-deployment literature covers a wide range of studies and reports for returning staff aimed at very complex and profound concerns. Re-patriating someone that has been living and working offshore for two to five years includes approaches to meeting family needs (Jassawalla et al., 2004) and adequate re-employment placement in a changed home office work environment (Ashmalla, 1999). The expatriate often has career advancement issues (Baughn, 1995) and is subject to high dissatisfaction with their return to work onshore (Stroh et al., 1998). Studies show that returning from a long-term assignment is often more difficult than deployment (Osland, 2000). Expatriates frequently suffer expectation/reality conflict post-assignment, as they have fabricated a situation in their minds due to lack of knowledge regarding their return to the home office (Caligiuri et al., 1999). Reports acknowledge a deficiency of studies in this area (Reiche & Harzing, 2019) despite the ongoing issue of dissatisfaction with post-assignment support leading to expatriate turnover (Tung, 1998b).

Interestingly, the long-term contractors in my study did not express any ill-will or excessive dissatisfaction with their employer despite there being no follow-up support (beyond a letter expressing thanks). However, research on self-initiated expatriates (which would include long-term staff contracted for this project) notes that they do not commence the work with any preconceived ideas about repatriation or post-deployment support (Reiche & Harzing, 2019), and thus are not disappointed when it does not eventuate. This finding for long-term contractors aligns with my research, however, this is not the same for the short-term volunteer staff.

For short-term assignees, MNC literature notes that literature on returning staff is also bereft of empirical studies. Tahvanainen et al. (2005) suggest that lack of research is because post-deployment issues are minimal, as the short-term assignee usually commences another assignment immediately or returns directly to their ongoing onshore job role. Therefore, post-deployment research is often overlooked as it is "not an issue for this group" (Tahvanainen et al., 2005, p. 671). This finding conflicts with my research, as short-term assignees definitely considered the lack of debrief and post-deployment support to be an

issue. However, the literature surrounding short-term TNE post-deployment activities is equally unhelpful in buoying meaningful support for returning staff.

Generally the early guides for supporting offshore VET TNE staff are completely void of post-deployment support methods (Smith & Smith, 1999). While later reports note that a debrief is a necessary component of an offshore staffing assignment, emphasis is placed on the final report that is produced from the activity in order to facilitate enhancement of the program (Dempsey, 2013). Thus the focus is on assisting management, and not the participant. Equally, HE TNE literature is either focused solely on pre-departure preparation or views post-deployment period as a way to enhance the institute's pre-deployment program (via a community of practice). Reports from the NTEU (2004a, 2004b) show they consider that support requirements begin and end at the pre-departure stage, as the industry regulator's evaluation criteria is mainly concerned with processes at the front end.

This study found that participants felt ignored on return by the organisation's stakeholders that had seconded and sent them on assignment. Participants did not want an in-depth evaluation for organisational process improvement purposes, but simply wanted feedback on their performance for personal validation of significance.

> *"Look, I have no idea whether the stakeholders thought I achieved. I have no idea whatsoever whether what I did was good, bad, or indifferent. I was never given any feedback from them." (Dave)*

Some researchers feel returning short-term staff should certainly be listened to, as they have a unique story to tell, and to not capture this is a disservice to both staff and institute (Smith, 2014; Whieldon, 2019). In Lynch's (2013) study of "fly-in-fly-out" academics, experienced staff felt debriefing was unnecessary and an extra burden, whereas new staff saw debriefing as necessary for support. This distinction might be because staff sometimes have years of experience flying in and out of the same international situation with the same work routine and basically the same stakeholders, and therefore little use of a debrief beyond the initial foray (Debowski, 2003; King, 2015). Conversely, studies which have inexperienced staff describe more instances of unexpected events or situations that require assisted discourse on return (Seah & Edwards, 2006; Bailey, 2011).

The short-term institute participants in my study simply wanted recognition from the international department in the form of a simple debrief: an opportunity to validate their input. This finding aligns with Whieldon's (2019) study of TNE academics who felt that no-one really cared about their input, and that the opportunity for reflection was lost.

"…when I went to put my diary in, it was like a brief conversation, it wasn't like a meeting. I mentioned a few things, but it was like in one ear out the other. I first said I'm not going to go again because after that experience…you're not briefed at the beginning and at the end you're not debriefed. You're not getting to say what happened and how things happened." (Amin)

Studies are continuing to exclusively focus on the post-deployment debrief, solely in terms of operational improvement and not personal or professional growth of the individual (Tran et al., 2021). This lack of debrief further alienates staff and may result in de-motivation to undertake future offshore assignments (Whieldon, 2019). This is compatible with my research, as staff felt very disappointed in the lack of debrief and opined that this might deter staff from further involvement. Smith (2013) also found that participants in her study valued interest in, and discussion of, their experiences. Accordingly, my study participants also enjoyed the chance to enter into deep discourse (as opposed to superficial chats) regarding their time spent on the project.

The implication is that first-time project staff will encounter transformational learning experiences. These need to be captured formally to help consolidate and support the staff member's involvement, as well as provide valuable insight for operations, and this research shows that even a short debrief is adequate to assist staff to maintain engagement post-deployment.

"If you didn't feel comfortable within your own self in saying that you've succeeded in doing something, that you require other people to actually give you that feedback, then I think that could be quite demoralizing. They think 'I'll never do that again, because no one cares about me, or nothing's happened.' Those individuals might be really, really good at what they do… they might be great delivers of a product, of the tasks that have been asked of them. But when they get back, and they don't get that feedback, then they will never be able to provide that service again, because they won't want to do it." (Dave)

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed how participants experienced the project through the engagement cycle. Despite arriving with expectations generated from the unknown, after working for some time in situ the Australian staff rebounded from their initial shock of arrival and the control issues they felt. The longer they worked on the project the more they embraced the

temporary office work environment. This made them more comfortable in making executive decisions and realised that their dealings with stakeholders was something that needed to be accomplished in their own way. During this phase of the interviews, participants regained their sense of control and felt capable of making individual decisions about their project involvement. This included modifying goals and success indicators to better fit within their new contextual understanding of the project. For them, working on an international project no longer meant loss of control, but feelings of empowerment

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I think I achieved more than what I expected I was going to do, which I was sort of surprised, not surprised, but it sort of ... I was glad that happened. I think we could have achieved a lot more, if there had been more of a preparatory program put in place onshore, before I arrived." (Dave)

5.7 Epilogue

The project contract was not renewed post 2018, with regional political instability cited as the contributing factor to cut ties with foreign projects. The local staff carried on and I have since received a message with a link that showed the boys' school winning "National School of the Year" for 2019. Just before the project finished, the Australian institute made a major change to its offshore management structure. The international department was split into two areas: one for offshore TNE and the other created and devoted solely for management of offshore projects. Jonathon was the manager hired to look over the new offshore project department, and during the latter interviews with staff it was apparent this was well-regarded as a positive move toward lessening distance between onshore and offshore employees. As well, in my last conversation with Jonathon I was informed that he was commencing with plans to provide support to project staff on international assignment, especially those volunteers new to the prospect.

"I do debriefs for people that have been over there …Yeah. First timers particularly when they come back. So I sit down and talk to them and say, 'Okay, well how did that go?' What we're interested in then, is seeing what happens when they give us some feedback, so we can learn from it, so we can send them back." (Jonathon)

Chapter 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

In this thesis I set out to explore the lived experience of staff on assignment for a collaborative international VET project, and how they engage with various stakeholders as they work toward delivering their goals effectively in an unfamiliar offshore environment. Three sub-research questions were addressed. First, I asked if all stakeholders recognised the same objectives and outcomes when they commenced working together in-country. Second, I asked if stakeholders modified these objectives or outcomes after commencement of working together in-country, why and how much. Thirdly, I wanted to know how staff members managed these types of connections and modifications individually.

A review of the literature revealed issues and challenges related to global mobility and implications for short-term international VET project assignments. This research delves into the lived experience of VET staff undertaking a short-term assignment on an offshore project. By following them through pre-deployment to post-deployment, this thesis adds to the body of research on VET projects and global mobility. The research aim was to provide further understanding and awareness of staff engagement and involvement with multiple stakeholders as they sought to achieve their goals during engagement in-country.

Data collection was via observation, document review, and interview. The interview schedule aligned with four definitive times during the staff deployment cycle: pre-deployment, immediately on arrival in-country, near their completion date, and post-deployment. Document analysis was performed with relevant texts that related to staff employment on the project, and observations of informal interactions and formal meetings were conducted in situ and ad hoc as a participant observer. The research study was designed to capture experiences as they happened in the field by an academic researcher.

The findings showed that, once in-country, there were incongruent understandings amongst local stakeholders regarding Australian staff members' objectives and outcomes. This resulted in modifications to their goals and reconsideration about what constituted a successful outcome. This was a necessary and expected component required for the successful execution of an international project with multiple stakeholders. While it was observed to be a stressful and eventful assignment, all staff reported individualised professional change or growth. These findings intrigued me, as it was expected that there would be incongruence and modifications, but it was unexpected that this was an actual

planned element of project design, and that staff would derive professional development from the experience. Analysis of the data revealed additional unexpected aspects.

This chapter integrates major findings to present four areas of conclusion arising from the data and linked to the research questions. It commences with key conclusions regarding staff engagement, contextual dissonance, goal incongruence and transformational learning as a form of professional development. This is followed by supporting conclusions and implications encapsulated in a recommended two-tiered awareness program for inexperienced staff. This leads to the final sections which include researcher reflections and suggested further research.

Enhancement of these recommendations is possible by locating them via the theoretical lenses of Humanistic Psychology and is a useful tool for validating the awareness program described in the chapter.

6.2 International VET projects: staff engagement

This section discussed responses to the overarching research question: *How do Australian VET staff engage with a multi-stakeholder international project when deployed on short-term assignment? What are the implications?* There is a need to first clarify the vocabulary of the question, specifically “project” and “staff” in order to respond to the question of engagement.

Quite often the concept of an international VET project is positioned along with TNE programs, or “offshore delivery”, and yet is a completely different aspect of international employment. This is possibly due to most projects revolving around an accredited program. Accordingly, support for offshore staff usually centres on teachers, and the acculturation of dealing with students and an accredited curriculum. However, the accredited program in a project is only one component of a larger construct of non-accredited work roles. A project is a very different assignment involving a multitude of staff beyond teachers and needs to be treated as such.

Further, project staff are either inexperienced volunteers or under contractual obligation. Thus, when staffing offshore projects, it is not realistic or valid to consider utilising recruitment or selection techniques that propose employees may possess certain “traits” of an ideal international employee. The emphasis needs to concentrate on support for the inexperienced volunteer in their novel job role.

As this study shows that staff experience the same cycle of engagement during deployment, it is credible to align support with this engagement cycle for maximum effectiveness. Usually, traditional support includes a pre-departure acculturation program designed to

minimise national culture conflicts or smoother adaptation to the country. Staff on short-term assignments experience much more conflict with the work culture of the project than with national culture of the country. On arrival, project staff members meet unfamiliar stakeholders and a new way of working, but onshore-based staff are not accustomed to the temporary organisation of a project. Project staff must adhere to the needs of multiple stakeholders and complex deliverables necessary to solve a unique issue within a deadline. However, VET staff members on offshore projects are effectively left to their own devices to make sense of a situation that is contextually dissonant from what was expected pre-departure. Finally, a debrief was missing upon return, causing staff dissatisfaction and creating negative thoughts about further involvement in future offshore projects. A combination of these occurrences can result in experienced staff not continuing to volunteer for offshore projects, causing a recurring pattern of inexperienced staff being employed on international projects.

A recommendation from the research is for any VET organisation involved in the delivery of international projects is that the most efficient model of staffing assistance is a form of sequential and ongoing support during these key stages. This "sequential reflexive awareness program" is a program of work culture awareness for all types of inexperienced staff going through the engagement cycle and the issues of negative engagement found in the study. Institute adherence to this program will positively assist with their engagement. This will in turn create more VET staff willing to take on further offshore projects, adding to the pool of available technical consultants for future tender bids. The following sections provide more information regarding what assistance should be provided during key stages of engagement during the cycle.

6.3 Contextual dissonance and goal incongruence on initial entry

This section answers the first sub-research question: *Do all project stakeholders recognise the same goal and success indicators in context?* This study found that not all stakeholders recognised the same goals and success indicators in context.

Prior to data collection, I considered contextual dissonance and goal incongruence to be negative factors on an international project and sought ways to eradicate these issues. However, upon analysis and reflection I find that these are expected and necessary components of the engagement cycle. Raising awareness of the inevitable disorientating dilemmas is a much better way to create or increase positive staff engagement.

Participants complained that they did not know what to expect on arrival. But who can really say directly and unequivocally what they will find once in-country on an international project assignment? Teachers on accredited programs have set goals and outcomes that must be adhered to, and schedules, timetables and course outlines that must be followed in a suitably agreed work environment. These items are known and agreed to prior to arrival by all stakeholders and any deviation from this is negatively regarded as “un-equivalent” or “non-compliant”. None of this assuredness applies to an offshore project assignment with its unique and complex goal staffed by a disparate group of unfamiliar stakeholders working within a temporary organisation.

This study found formal support was missing, or at best ad hoc. The nature of international VET projects is, however, ad hoc. Contracts are regularly signed at the last minute, thus leading to a rush for staff. This study posits that detailed pre-departure preparation or training for staff is not possible or even warranted, and that in-country support is better suited to specific assistance. Staff complained mostly about the stress of the *unknowns* which led them to create expectations to placate themselves prior to their first international assignment. The implication is that support is best focused on creating awareness about dissonance and incongruence while also minimising the effect of these *unknowns* on immediate arrival.

Pre-departure support is important for administrative items, and review of the general objectives. Inclusion of someone knowledgeable for immediate cultural concerns was noted by all staff as important, but this informal method needs to be formally recognised to ensure consistent advice. This shows that short-term staff would benefit from pre-departure awareness programs that targeted increased understanding of the foreign work environment, with additional support for underlying cultural aspects of life in a foreign country. This program would need to include contextual awareness of the work environment, job tasks as well as job role, and how the job role is judged to be successful on completion. As well, the most effective “work culture” based pre-departure awareness program would include promoting an understanding of local stakeholders. Most importantly, staff need to be fully aware that the project environment is a flexible space, and to expect dissonance on arrival: that this is normal and acceptable. To help staff deal with any cultural adaptation it would be advantageous for an approved mentor to provide direct support regarding relevant national cultural issues or important facets of living in the country as they relate to project work. Ideally, the mentor will be a staff member with experience working in the host country, so the advice will be relevant and specific.

The most effective in-country support on arrival can be determined using the findings from staff discussion of adjustment issues. Short-term staff never mentioned any interactional adjustment issues with locals, as contact was minimal. Likewise, staff did not mention general adjustment issues, but all members of staff did experience dissonance in adjusting to the working culture of the offshore temporary organisation. They described overarching "work challenges" as being the *work environment*, relations with *stakeholders*, and the challenges of *unclear job roles, success indicators and project goals*. The participant's lack of major issues with non-work factors indicated that whatever pre-departure 'non-work' preparation was done was sufficient. Once staff are in-country the recognition of dissonance between the work environment, stakeholders, and job roles, goals and success indicators becomes clearer. This time of clarification, when the reality of the situation collides with pre-deployment expectations, is very stressful.

Therefore, it is recommended that post-arrival support needs to be implemented immediately on arrival, or soon after, to provide support for this most stressful time. On immediate arrival to the host-country is the time for guided assistance in understanding inevitable dissonance and incongruence. This will ease stress and increase positive engagement along with raising the organisational support necessary for successful completion of their assignment.

6.4 Modified goals and success indicators working in-country

This section answers the third research sub-research question: *Are project goals and success indicators modified during in-country deployment* and *to what extent is there goal achievement congruence?* The study found that, due to the nature of a VET international project, and the short-term assignments that come with them, inevitably there will be modification to goals and success indicators in-country.

Once incongruencies were discovered on immediate arrival, staff modified their goals and success indicators with a newly reconciled understanding of their ultimate assignment. This involved a period of reflection and ultimately autonomous work practices and executive decision making, an existential shift from working for the permanent organisation toward working for the temporary organisation. Therefore, it can be concluded that this is a normal, if not mandatory, requirement for successful completion of a short-term assignment on a VET offshore project. Through ongoing reflective and contemplative discussion with stakeholders in situ, onshore goals are adapted to suit a more clearly realised *understanding* of project requirements once offshore.

This conclusion implies that provision of in-country assistance would guide staff members and the reflexive considerations that facilitate their existential shift. Support from experienced personnel would also assist the inexperienced staff member in modifying goals and success indicators in accordance with the spirit of the project and thus avoid tangential goals. Accordingly, staff would also need to understand the inevitability of home office distancing and the impact of deadlines on decision making in situ. Finally, project management needs to advise inexperienced employees that they are fully expected to use their best individual professional judgement in situ. In this way, the staff member feels free to work with stakeholders on creating goals that truly reflect the situation at hand.

6.5 Individualised development via transformational learning

The final section provides answers to the final research sub-research question: *How do individual staff members engage with goal achievement congruence (or incongruence) and contextual agreement (or dissonance) during and after deployment?* Staff deployed to a VET international project undergo internalised and personal change from the impact of their short-term assignment.

The study showed that staff were forced to change and grow as they worked through the entire project engagement cycle. This is a form of transformational learning, and this research found that this was triggered due to lack of effective formal pre-departure support. The unique and temporal nature of the project means there are far fewer prior understandings from which to build a frame of reference for pre-deployment information sharing. As well, management based in Australia simply do not know what the staff member is going to face “over there” on a unique VET project. This causes a situation where the staff member was not fully aware of the reality in-country, and this created expectations. These were not realised on arrival, causing disorientating dilemmas which triggered transformative learning. Therefore, this thesis concludes that pre-deployment selection and training are of little use and management needs to focus on preparing staff for a transformative learning experience, preferably by increasing awareness about changes they will experience.

It is recommended that replacing pre-departure training with the sequential awareness schedule of guidance will assist and allow for transformational learning to take place during engagement. Additionally, for transformational learning to be fully internalised there needs to be critical reflection on cessation of the change event, and this needs to be included in the awareness schedule as the final debrief. A debrief on return is helpful in fulfilling staff transformation, and staff producing a debrief report would provide further information for

research. Hopefully, the staff member may now feel that they want to engage in a community of practice by mentoring others.

This increase in institutional support would enhance staff perception of organisational support, resulting in improved engagement and performance. This would ultimately benefit the institution through better outcomes, and staff would be more willing to take on further offshore assignments, thus decreasing the administrative burden while increasing the talent pool available for tender selection on future bids.

6.6 Further recommendations/implications

The following recommendation is made to address the issues revealed in the thesis, calling for utilisation of a two-tiered awareness program for staff support and professional development. The program commences with a pre-deployment group session that provides overarching information designed to help all staff members, experienced or new, to situate their assignment within the project. The second tier is a comprehensive and on-going *sequential reflexive awareness program* for inexperienced staff. This is for support, as they encounter and manage the engagement cycle. The focus of this awareness program is on appreciating what might happen and to prepare themselves, utilising the experience as a chance for professional development via transformative learning.

6.6.1 Group-based work-related guidance from knowledgeable personnel

Group-based guidance is best led by someone who has worked in the region before – a difficult ask for novel projects. However, knowledgeable personnel can assist all members to understand project particulars more clearly through expert analysis of overarching documents. This group meeting is a chance for all Australian stakeholders to hear, discuss and digest the goals collaboratively, thus lessening downward goal incongruence. Importantly, any advice tendered on national culture should be relevant only to the project and must focus on aspects that impact only on logistical and pragmatic concerns of project delivery. Accordingly, any advice given to staff must first be cleared by Australian management as being correct and relevant. This ensures topical and useable cultural information is available for participants while minimising incorrect or extraneous information.

6.6.2 Sequential reflexive awareness program for inexperienced staff

For inexperienced individuals a sequential program of reflexive consideration would help to guide the new participant on their journey. The engagement cycle is inevitable, and the best outcome is to ensure that contextual dissonance and goal incongruence are managed in an

ethically sound and acceptable manner for the participant (Louis 1980). This program is best enacted individually via an experienced mentor and should maintain an informal and conversational approach. The program would include assistance scheduled pre-deployment and on immediate arrival to help facilitate disorienting dilemmas of contextual dissonance and goal incongruence. The remaining schedule would be after the participant has been working in-country for an extended (relative to their overall deployment length) period of time, and then upon return to Australia. This allows reflexive discussion on how they managed to adapt and the ultimate effect this had on their motivation to return for another deployment.

This sequential reflexive awareness program is *work-based* and so will include reviewing project documents, and participants' understanding of items such as motivation, job role, job text, ruling relations, context and goals. The mentor needs to be experienced in understanding documents, as the research shows documents are sometimes not available, hidden, or do not exist. An experienced mentor can advise what to look for, where to locate them and what they might mean. It is important to remember that the mentor is not capable of providing specific project information to the participant, as the mentor is not someone involved with the same project as the staff member being interviewed. The role of the experienced mentor and these sessions is to create awareness to facilitate project success and personal growth.

Interview topics

The same themes are returned to during the four phases of the engagement cycle to help clarify change or transformation: context, application and outcomes. The connection to the project, texts used to define them, as well as practical guidance for the discussion session and overall purpose are presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6-1 Sequential Reflexive Awareness Program themes

Theme	Project connection	Text	Practical guidance	Purpose of discussion
Context (What)	*Context*	Scope of services Project plan	Purpose of project. Background and rationale	**Minimise contextual dissonance**
Application (Where When Who How)	*Goal*	Position descriptions Contracts Terms of reference	For Project For staff member	**Minimise goal incongruence**
	Job		What is the role: what the staff member will be doing	**Minimise job role confusion**
	Relations		Who is your line manager onshore and in situ? Who will you be working with: colleagues onshore and in situ?	**Minimise stakeholder conflict**
Outcomes (Why)	*Success indicators*		Deliverables, milestones, objectives	**Minimise "failure"**
	Motivations/language	Personal diary	Discussion of why the staff member wants to partake Language used	**Minimise disaffection with further offshore project work**

Context is an awareness of the purpose of the project, and participants' understanding of the rationale for its existence. By providing awareness of the different context to be found, in-country contextual dissonance will be lessened on immediate arrival. This awareness comes from reviewing overarching project documents as well as position descriptions or contracts, and by entering into critical discussion about the contents.

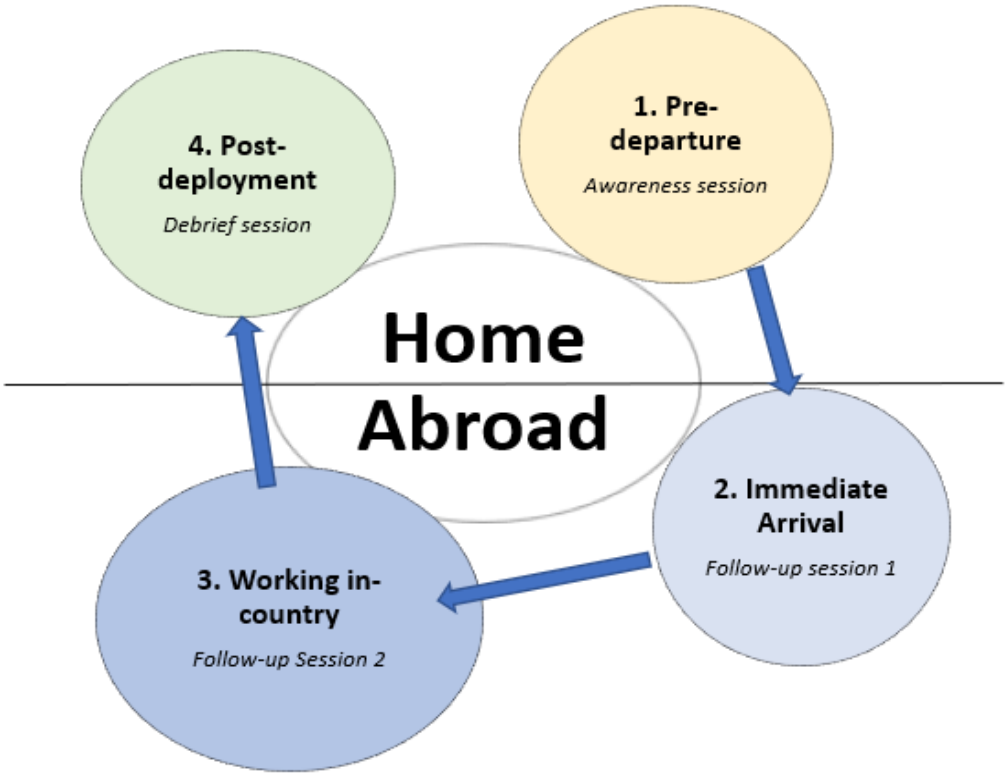
Application refers to how that contextual understanding of project and/or assignment will be enacted once in-country. This relates to the areas of most confusion with staff and centres on documents or understandings of a participant's project goal, job role and stakeholders they might work with. The mentor works with the staff member to increase awareness of the need to know what the goal is, what is their job role, and who they might be working with (and for) once in-country. This will help minimise goal incongruence, job role confusion and stakeholder conflict seen on immediate arrival in my research.

Outcomes are defined by the success indicators found in the documentation, as well as personal motivations of the staff member. Awareness of what constitutes success and failure is important to clarify what will be considered a successful assignment or an

unsuccessful assignment. By raising awareness of personal motivation, the chance of abject disaffection with further offshore work is minimised, as the staff member understands internal rationales for undertaking the assignment and possible transformational learning or professional changes that occurred.

Interview scheduling

The program takes place over four sessions (Figure 6.1) and each interview session revisits the same themes, thus documenting and charting any changes. These times are chosen as the research shows these being the most conducive to change events.



	Interview schedule	Purpose	Content
1	Pre-departure	Awareness	Introduces the themes and discuss expectations
2	Immediate Arrival	Follow-up 1	Review themes and discuss reality of assignment
3	Working in-country	Follow-up 2	Review themes and discuss any modifications
4	Post-deployment	Debrief	Recount themes and discuss total engagement

Figure 6.1 Sequential Reflexive Awareness Program interview schedule

Pre-departure is the time of unknowns and initial awareness, and minimisation of unmet expectations will occur here. In this meeting the mentor introduces the themes and conducts the initial interview, with the emphasis on guiding the participant to discover what they know and do not know about each theme. The mentor is allocated an information guide for consistency [Appendix E]. Participants are contacted and asked to bring as many relevant documents as possible to the pre-departure interview. During the interview each item is

discussed in detail with the participant writing down their interpretations and thoughts on what they consider to be the best response. Mentors would not be able to assist or intervene as they should have no connection to the project and are simply there to guide the staff member through the pre-departure awareness program. The mentor can advise the staff member to follow-up with relevant personnel any points covered that cause them stress or confusion. As well, the staff member is advised to keep a journal of events during the engagement cycle. This is followed by subsequent follow-up interviews and a summative debrief [Appendix F].

The *Immediate Arrival* interview is conducted after immediate arrival, once contextual dissonance and goal incongruence are evident, but not before the staff member begins their period of deep reflection. The program is designed to guide this reflection and assist with subsequent goal modification. Again, the mentor should provide little information to the staff member, and only assist by guiding them through the set interview questions that facilitate awareness of the situation. The *Working in-country* interview further engages with the staff member after they have modified their goals and success indicators. This component designed to expediate any cognizance of personal growth, change or transformational learning. The final *post-deployment* debrief further consolidates staff appreciation of these changes or growth.

Once the engagement cycle is complete and the awareness program finishes, the staff member can be considered “experienced” and possesses the internalised ability of self-awareness for further offshore work. This newly initiated staff member can then take their turn as a mentor for other staff going on deployment for the first time, helping create a community of practice.

6.7 Limitations of the study

6.7.1 Methodology / Research approach

One identifiable limitation with the research is the scope of the case study, with a limited sample size and adherence to a single location. The sample size encompassed all participants that were available during the field work period. Moreover, document analysis during field work revealed that a further 14 staff members participated in the project, thereby opening up the scope for additional participant data to be collected for further analysis, integration or comparison with this study. The location can also be identified as a potential limiting factor in the study results, with the possibility that the Middle East could influence the findings. There was, however, little influence of national culture on the participants. The

situation and reactions are typical of what I have witnessed (and felt) on other projects in vastly different locations. The location of the study did not skew the participants' engagement with the project, which was the basis of the research study. While triangulation of data collection assisted in research rigour, an expanded utilisation of formal observations and text analysis might provide more profound themes.

6.7.2 Study design

The propensity for observer bias is possible during qualitative case studies. The analysis and interpretation of the data is dependent on the researcher, who may have a vested interest in a particular outcome. Even with constant reflexivity it is acknowledged that findings can be subjectively personalised through selectivity and bias. (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Perspective specificity is also conceivable as the participants were all from the same institute, with its own, specific, perspective on offshore projects and staffing (Chan, 2006). It is quite possible that other staff from other TAFEs or RTOs have different opinions and viewpoints, which could result in divergent or even contradictory findings.

From the methodological standpoint of a qualitative study, reduction of researcher bias and increased analysis integrity can be mediated through non-partisan analysis by team members. As well, increased legitimacy via extended triangulation is possible with larger sample sizes and participants from different RTOs/TAFES. Finally, the use of a mixed methods approach could be increased by including quantitative techniques, such as surveys, to examine the possible further generalisability of findings (McLeod, 2019).

6.7.3 Theoretical integration

While the use of Humanistic Psychology was used for peripheral locating of certain participant characteristics, this study did not utilise an a priori theoretical framework. The data analysis has shown some superficial links to extant theories [Theory of Met Expectations and Humanistic Psychology], these emerged via the analysis phase; a common occurrence when conducting qualitative research (Grant& Sanloo, 2014). It can be considered that the use of a deeper theoretical framework from inception may assist in locating key concepts and recommendations in a broader theoretical, or conceptual, framework. This may result in enhanced research outcomes.

This study sought to explore and add to theory creation, utilising the case-study as an exploration of ideas for to be used for possible theory building (George & Bennet, 2005). Further studies may based upon a theoretical framework from the outset, but interpreting the data via a retro-actively applied theoretical lens calls into question issues of legitimacy and

authenticity. Any adventitious theories that arise during analysis should be considered, but not be retrospectively "forced to fit" (Crowe et al. 2011).

6.7.4 Critical reflection on research question and sub-questions

During analysis it became apparent that while the first sub-research questions focussed on “all stakeholders” inherent in the project, it was only the TAFE staff who were used for data collection. There were no responses, interviews or observations gathered for data analysis from the local stakeholders, and only high-level documentation utilised for text analysis. Unfortunately local stakeholder data collection was not feasible at this time, and the under-representation of the local stakeholders means that the research questions could possibly be answered more fully.

Overall the relation of all sub-questions to the main research question is tied to chronologically-based events before, immediately after arrival, working in-situ and upon return to Australia. While the document collection and observations were able to be conducted according to the original schedule, the interviews were not. The interviews were originally planned to coincide with a first-time staff members on-going experience with an offshore project at the key stages determined by the engagement cycle. However data collection of all these phases took place en-masse during one final interview after the project had ended. Subsequent similar research may find better, different, or contradictory data if the originally planned data collection schedule is followed.

6.8 Contribution of the research

This research promotes several contributions to the canon of global mobility and TNE, as well as project management and organisational behaviour sectors. Firstly, this study clearly defines that VET international projects are a distinct entity from TNE programs, and an area of research that should be considered quite separately in research and application of support. This research provides clarity on the distinction of an international VET project as being a temporary and multi-staffed endeavour in pursuit of a unique and complex goal. This stands it well apart from the traditional confines of the international branch campus or even short-term teacher-led TNE delivery. There has not been extensive research into VET international projects, mostly due to commercial-in-confidence agreements that restrict information flow (Holden, 2013) and deny researchers access (Rahimi, 2009). This study did not delve into operational matters but focused on staff engagement. It is hoped that this study can provide information for further research into the unique nature of international VET projects by indicating there can be research into staffing without operational disclosure.

Secondly, this study added further insights into existing concepts of engagement and transformation by illustrating the engagement cycle that staff on assignment experience. Further exploration of VET project staff is possible by linking their unique experiences to previous research into cross-cultural training (Black & Mendenhall, 1990, 1991), transition (Nicholson, 1984; Bennett, 1977), adjustment (Black et al., 1991; Aycan, 1997), development (Adler, 1975, 1987), and transformation (Osland, 1995, 2000; Smith, 2014). Connecting the engagement experience of VET staff offshore to established concepts of transition, change and transformation allows for more wide-ranging and profound research agendas to be followed.

Thirdly, this research presents a program of awareness for VET staff on international assignment, with special emphasis on inexperienced staff. There have been many previous models presented for managerial consideration regarding staff training and support, but this study focuses on the missing aspect of *awareness* for the inexperienced staff member. This is distinct from the prescriptive ongoing TNE models that outline, with great precision, what management should do to assist and support teachers heading off to deliver an accredited course to an approved and known stakeholder. The awareness program recommended in this study is not prescriptive, but instead describes a way to allow the participant to engage in critical thought about what they are going to do, or have done, during their unique assignment. Once the participant completes the program, there is no further need for management support beyond supplying and collecting project information.

The fourth contribution relates to the transferability of the awareness model to any organisation where “sensemaking” (Louis, 1980) is required by an incoming inexperienced member. The awareness model asks the staff member to consider the upcoming and unfamiliar work environment, job role, stakeholders and potential success indicators. The program exists to reduce opaqueness and illuminate blind spots for incoming staff. As previously described [2.4.3], a project is a heretopia which has movement in and out (Foucault 2001, 2008). This transience is controlled by those on the inside and kept separated from the outside by hypo-cognition: the *unknown unknown*. Heretopias exist anywhere that an organisation/society is required to regulate behaviour, thus by changing “unknown unknowns” to “known unknowns” the incoming worker is more aware of what contextual dissonance they may encounter on immediate arrival, and that goals and success indicators can, and should be, modified in situ (Massie & Morris, 2011; Razzetti, 2019).

Finally, the idea that the transformational experience of engagement on an international VET project can be utilised for professional development opens new areas of consideration for TAFE management in how to manage the use and employment of staff on these

assignments. International departments usually rely on experienced staff to ensure that the short-term gain of a successful completion of a project is achieved. However, they neglect the long-term benefits of an increased pool of willing offshore project staff. By utilising the sequential reflexive awareness program to assist in professional development, it is likely that inexperienced staff will better understand their achievements and wish to be re-deployed on further short-term assignments.

6.9 Further research

Suggestions for further research come from the findings that show different and various staff member reactions to the engagement cycle and their distinctive approach to transformational learning. A formal comparison between groups shown in the study would further enhance the literature available regarding VET project staff engagement during short-term assignments. The main comparable groups were experienced staff/inexperienced staff, external consultants/institute staff, VET technicians/VET practitioners, management/staff as well as technical assistance/teacher. A final suggestion mirrors Mendenhall et al. (2019) in requesting that further empirical studies utilising the engagement cycle or awareness model, as presented in this study, would be helpful in progressing extant research without reproducing similar or parallel studies.

6.10 Concluding comments

This thesis provides insights into the lived experience of various VET staff as they engaged with an international project assignment. These insights provided deeper understanding of the trials and tribulations encountered throughout the deployment cycle, which contributed to the creation of an awareness program for inexperienced staff contemplating their own offshore engagement. This program also allows for transformational learning to be guided and charted, resulting in beneficial professional development for both the staff member and the institute. The staff member receives enhanced personal development through deep guided change, and the institute retains positively minded staff and an increased pool of international talent.

The complexities of an offshore VET project are marked by the necessity to delve into literature from multinational companies, transnational education, project management, organisational culture, transitional development and transformational learning. An international VET project, and its staffing requirements, have components that distinctly

situates this specific educational assignment. Increased understanding of this situation will benefit from management, staff, and researchers agreeing that a VET project is a unique and complex task staffed by a multitude of people, with a pressing deadline and malleable objectives. Assistance for inexperienced staff to navigate this situation is paramount to ongoing institute success in completion of projects now, and successful tenders in future. The *Sequential Reflexive Awareness Program* presented in this study can provide this assistance and generate and guide transformational learning in the process.

This study's findings extricate VET project research from TNE research, explicate the issues of staff on short-term assignment, provide implications for management in the form of a *sequential reflexive awareness program,* and offer the promise to staff of guided transformational growth. As such, it is hoped this thesis will influence and pilot further studies dedicated to the research of VET staff engagement with international projects.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Plain language statement

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project:

Offshore Staffing: a study of international-based Australian VET Projects

This project is being conducted by a student researcher, Ryan Gifford, as part of a research doctorate in the College of Arts and Education at Victoria University. This study is under the supervision of Dr. Marg Malloch, from the College of Education and Dr Gabriella Pretto, from the College of Engineering and Science, at Victoria University.

Project explanation

The Australian VET sector is increasing its offshore project potential and your international project participation is a very unique part of this expansion. I am gathering information about this project to contribute to the creation of an overarching picture of the influence and contribution of staff in VET international projects. This investigation will use various methods to gather data such as observations, interviews and textual analysis of key documents.

What will I be asked to do?

You are being invited to reflect upon your experiences of working on this VET project while living and experiencing a foreign land and culture. You will be asked to contribute to the research via different data gathering forms: informal observations, interviews and textual analysis of relevant documents. You may choose to participate in one, two or all of them.

What kind of questions will I be asked?

Participants will be asked semi-structured interview questions with opportunities to build on/follow up on responses:
Generally, the questions you will be asked are in relation to your understanding of the project, your job/role, your reflections and the type of tasks you perform in a typical day/week/month.
You will not be asked questions about any religious, political, educational, ethnic or economic situation in the host country; current or otherwise. Likewise you will not be asked to comment specifically on any Institutional issues that are not directly related to your input as an educational advisor.

What will I gain from participating?

Your participation will provide valuable insights on staffing of international VET projects. These reflections can help influence future directions by making recommendations on management, direction, expectations and protection, for example.

How will the information I give be used?

The information will contribute to a research thesis for a Doctor in Education at Victoria University. You may provide as much or as little information as you wish; you will not be asked for comment on any political, religious or personal work relations, and, you may withdraw from the research at any time.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

There are minimal risks involved in participation. Any information provided will be confidential and your anonymity is maintained with the use of pseudonyms for each participant and workplace.

How will this project be conducted?

Informal observations may take place through the normal operation of work. Certain key documents may be reviewed and analysed prior to a set of informal interviews, where you will be asked about your perceptions and experiences and notes may be taken. If necessary, a possible second round of observations and document analysis will take place before any further informal interview/s, where you may be asked to provide further insights and reflection on the project. If necessary, final interviews will focus on any perceived changes that might have occurred during these times.

Who is conducting the study?

This study is being conducted by:

Student Researcher	Ryan Gifford Phone: +97466650289	Email: Ryan.gifford@vu.edu.au
Research Supervisors:	Dr. Marg Malloch, Honorary Professor, College of Arts and Education, Victoria University. Footscray. VIC. 3011 Australia. Phone: +61 (3) 9919 4175	Email: marg.malloch@vu.edu.au
	Dr Gabriella Pretto, Blended Learning Co-ordinator, College of Engineering and Science, Victoria University. Footscray. VIC. 3011 Australia. Phone: +61 0(3) 9919 5549	Email: gabriella.pretto@vu.edu.au

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above. If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.auor phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix B. Informed consent form

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:
We would like to invite you to be a part of a study:

Offshore Staffing: a case study of an international-based Australian VET Project.

The Australian VET sector is increasing its offshore project potential and the QCED project is a very unique part of this expansion. I am gathering information about this project using various methods; observations, interviews and textual analysis of key document. Through these means of data collection will emerge an overarching picture of this projects influence and contribution to into staffing of VET international projects.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT
I, (insert name)
of (address)
do certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:
'**Offshore Staffing: a case study of an international-based Australian VET Project**'
that is being conducted for Victoria University by: Mr Ryan Gifford.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by: Mr. Ryan Gifford and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Informal interviews
- Informal observations
- Document analysis

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to:

Student Researcher: Ryan Gifford
Phone: +97466650289 Email: Ryan.gifford@vu.edu.au

Research Supervisors: Dr. Marg Malloch, Honorary Professor,
College of Arts and Education,
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Phone: +61 0(3) 9919 5549 Email: gabriella.pretto@vu.edu.au

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix C. Participant question schedule

Schedule of questions: Participant information

You will be asked to volunteer some background demographic information.

You will be asked about your history of VET projects.

You will be asked about the VET project you are working on now.

You will be asked about your job role now and in the future.

You will be asked about any points of agreement and any points of disagreement (*points being areas where you had envisaged an expected outcome) on the project and/or in your job role.

You will be asked about how you would/will deal with these points in the future.

You will be given the opportunity to ask questions and/or clarify your responses.

Appendix D. Researcher question schedule

Schedule of Questions

"How do Australian VET staff engage with a multi-stakeholder international project when deployed on short-term assignment? What are the implications?"

1. Have you worked on other international vet projects before? If not, please provide details (move to a). If yes, please list a few other VET projects you have worked on (ask b.)

    a. If not, please describe your previous understanding of what a VET offshore project might entail.

    b. Please describe the VET offshore projects you have worked on before

2. What is your motivation for working on this project?

3. Can you describe your understanding of your job role this VET project prior to commencement?

    a. Has this understanding changed?

    What is the goal of this project?
    Can you tell me some possible other stakeholders involved in the project?
    What is your position on this project?

    Who would you consider to be your line-manager on this project?
    Who would you consider to be your line-manage offshore on this project?

    What does onshore management believe is the goal of the project?
    What does onshore management believe your position to be?

    What does offshore management believe is the goal of the project?
    What does offshore management believe your position to be?

    What do other stakeholders believe is the goal of the project?
    What do other stakeholders believe your position to be?

    Is there a noticeable congruence/disconnect between these?

4. Is there any text-based document outlining your job role?
    Did your job role follow this document?
    Did your manager(s) expect you to follow this document?

    Overall, what are some key documents you think drive/steer this project?
    Does onshore follow the same documents?
    Do other stakeholders follow these documents?

    Do you believe there is congruence/disconnect between interpretations of these documents?

5. After commencement, what was your experience once in-situ?

    a. What did you find went "as expected" during your time on VET off-shore project?

    b. What did you find went "unexpected"?

Do you feel that your goals, procedures and outcomes became modified in context?

- How do stakeholders react to goals, procedures and outcomes in context?

6. Now that the time is over, how would you describe your job role?

    a. How is this different (if at all) to your description prior to commencement?\

    How would you describe "success" on this project?
    What would be a tangible indicator of success to you?

    How would management (onshore) describe success?
    What do you think management (onshore) feels are viable "success indicators"?

    How would management (offshore) describe success?
    What do you think management (offshore) feels are viable "success indicators"?

    How would other stakeholders describe success?
    What do you feel <u>they believe</u> are success indicators?

    Is there a noticeable congruence/disconnect between these?

7. How would you identity your job role if asked to go back?

8. What would you do the same? What would you do differently?

    Do you feel that you were personally successful?
    Do you feel that you accomplished (or tried to accomplish) what you were sent to do?

    Do you feel your motivations (Question #2) were realised?

9. Advice for someone going offshore?

10. Would you consider another offshore assignment?

Appendix E. Information for the mentor/interviewer
Model overview

The selected participant will be involved in 4 interview sessions and asked to write an engagement debrief. The session timings are; 1. Pre-departure induction, 2. Immediately after arrival, 3. Working in-country, and 4. Post-deployment

This is run in conjunction with a meeting between first-time staff and an experienced staff member who has already been deployed. This meeting with an experienced staff member would be where issues of culture would be dealt with. Cultural issues noted will be relevant and necessary to work and compliment the "Code of Conduct" cultural induction given by the International department.

Process

1. Contact staff to set a date for pre-deployment interview and ensure they can collect and bring relevant texts [P.D., ToR, Contracts etc). 2 weeks prior is minimal.

2. During the interview, discuss each item in detail. Request that the participant write down WHAT THEY THINK on the response sheets. There is little need to intervene, indeed most likely you will not be able to assist as the participant and project will be outside your area of expertise or understanding.

3. Urge the participant to

    - Follow-up with the relevant personnel any points covered that cause them stress or confusion
    - Keep a personal journal during deployment
    - Follow-up during the engagement phases; skype or phone calls etc.

4. When doing the follow-up interviews, follow the same advice as #2. Do not interpret. Guide the participant to contact relevant personnel if they need clarification or support.

5. This is not a cultural induction, nor is it meant to provide guidance on content. This is about engagement *in-situ*. If the participant requests further training for culture or content they now have 2 weeks to contact the correct personnel.

6. Participants will be requested to write an engagement debrief at the end. This is not the same as a normal project debrief. The project debrief is for institute/departmental outcomes. The engagement debrief is related to researching engagement for future project deployments.

Interview procedure

Ask the following questions and make your own notes. The participant is invited to write his answers on his sheet. There are no right or wrong answers, and the participant is free to extrapolate or pass on any question.

[Schedule 1; interview questions]

1. Why do you want to partake in this project?

2. Read through the texts and describe them. How can they be used?

3. What do you think your job role is for this project?

4. Can you list/name the people who might benefit from this project?

5. Who do you think you will be working with on this project?

    Who is your (project) manager onshore? Who do you manage?

    Who will you be working with offshore?

    Have you met them?

    What do you consider the chain of command to be?

6. What might be the goals of this project;

    For the institute?

    For you?

7. How are you going to show success;

    To the institute for your involvement on this project?

    To yourself?

8. (Revisit #1) What are your motivations for project involvement?

Participant guided response sheet: interviewer example

*Complete overview **[example for interviewer]***

	Theme	Terms	Pre-deployment	Immediate Arrival	Working in-country	Post-deployment
1	*Motivation*	Work				
		Personal				
2	*Text*	Position Description				
		ToR				
		Contract				
3	*Role*					
4	*Stakeholder*					
5	*Relations*	Onshore				
		Offshore				
6	*Goals*	Project				
		Personal				
7	*Success indicators*	Project				
		Personal				
8	*Motivations*					

Appendix F. Participant guided response sheets

	Pre-deployment: *Please do your best to answer these questions as you see fit.* *There are no wrong or right answers and all responses are kept by you for reference later.*		
1	**Motivation** Why do you want to partake in this project?		
2	**Text** What documents are available to you to help you understand the project and your involvement? How can you/ do you use them?		
3	**Role** What do you consider your job role to be for this project?		
4	**Stakeholder** Can you list or name the people who might benefit from this project?		
5	**Relations** Who do you think you will be working with on this project here in Australia? Who do you think you will be working with in the host country?	Onshore	
		Offshore	
6	**Goals** What do you think are the goals of this project: -for the institute? -for yourself?	Institute	
		Personal	
7	**Success indicators** How do you think you are going to show a successful outcome for your deployment; -to the institute? -to yourself?	Institute	
		Personal	
8	**Readiness** Do you feel, generally, ready to partake in the project?		

	Immediate Arrival: *Please do your best to answer these questions as you see fit.* *There are no wrong or right answers and all responses are kept by you for reference later.*		
1	**Motivation** Have your motivations shifted?		
2	**Text** Do you feel these documents are helpful? What documents might you think are missing or necessary?		
3	**Role** Has your job-role changed?		
4	**Stakeholder** Has your idea of stakeholder changed?		
5	**Relations** Has your ideas of who you will be working with changed?	Onshore	
		Offshore	
6	**Goals** Are the goals still the same as you previously considered?	Institute	
		Personal	
7	**Success indicators** Have the success indicators changed?	Institute	
		Personal	
8	**Readiness** Do you feel, generally, ready to continue with the project?		

	Working in-country *Please do your best to answer these questions as you see fit.* *There are no wrong or right answers and all responses are kept by you for reference later.*		
1	**Motivation** What are your motivations now?		
2	**Text** Do you feel these documents are helpful? What documents might you think are missing or necessary?		
3	**Role** Has your job-role changed?		
4	**Stakeholder** Has your idea of stakeholder changed?		
5	**Relations** Has your ideas of who you will be working with changed?	Onshore	
		Offshore	
6	**Goals** Are the goals still the same as you previously considered?	Institute	
		Personal	
7	**Success indicators** Have the success indicators changed?	Institute	
		Personal	
8	**Readiness** Do you feel, generally, ready to finish the project?		

	Post-*deployment:* *Please do your best to answer these questions as you see fit.* *There are no wrong or right answers and all responses are kept by you for reference later.*		
1	**Motivation** Were your motivations changed by the experience? Would you return?		
2	**Text** Do you feel these documents were helpful? What documents might you think were missing or necessary?		
3	**Role** Is the job-role you first considered pre-deployment the actual job-role you maintained?		
4	**Stakeholder** Did your understanding of stakeholders change?		
5	**Relations** Did you have and maintain the working relations with the people you considered pre-deployment?	Onshore	
		Offshore	
6	**Goals** Are the goals still the same as you previously considered?	Institute	
		Personal	
7	**Success indicators** Did the success indicators change from your first understanding pre-deployment? Do you feel you were successful?	Institute	
		Personal	
8	**Readiness** Do you feel, generally, that you were ready for the project?		