

How does VET research make an impact? Paths across the rickety bridge.

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Abstract

VET researchers focus considerable energy on the formation, development and textual outputs associated with their studies. While deepening understanding in our chosen fields is a worthwhile and personally enriching experience, the primary goal of research is to *make a difference*, and improve practice. This paper first reviews and models previous studies of VET research impact. The paper then examines, through an autoethnographic approach, the impact of four recent VET research studies directed by the author with national or major organisational foci, exploring what impact was achieved, and how that impact was constituted. The paper then discusses the outcomes of these studies in terms of impact and how it was achieved or thwarted. The initial conceptual framework is then developed to produce a practical model to guide VET researchers towards maximising the impact of VET research studies.

Introduction

This paper focuses on what happens *after* a VET research study. Resources are often exhausted by the completion of research projects with little left over to make an impact in the field of practice. As researchers, we often find our energy has been expended on the trails and tribulations of managing grants, field relations, and final reports and the link to changes in practice remains a ‘rickety bridge’ (Selby-Smith and Selby-Smith 1998). This is a job half done, and the intent of this paper is to review how VET studies can make an impact, through what strategies they might make an impact, and what barriers may frustrate such intentions.

To illustrate this issue I would like to reflect on an event that has just been completed, the 34th America’s Cup. The event involved match racing between two high technology catamarans in a unique spectacle, reaching previously unseen speeds of 88km per hour. After the inevitable legal challenges onshore, the New Zealand team took a seemingly invincible lead over the Americans who then pulled off one of the greatest sporting comebacks of all time. The race was then over for another four years. But it wasn’t. Even as the crews celebrated the next campaign plans were being hatched. The capability and knowledge to sail such machines were limited, and the politicking to recruit these experienced crew-members and gain valuable sponsors started at once. Winning the next race started as soon as the last race was completed, with critical relationships established within days. So it is with our own, often less spectacular research events. After years of work, passing through the dilemmas of each phase of the research we produce the final text. Words to satisfy sponsors, grant givers, examiners or reviewers. Well before this point, like the plotters behind the America cup syndicates, we need to be planning for the next challenge of putting the findings we are so proud of to work, to effect social change. This paper is about reinforcing the need to build this principle into every research plan, and about the strategies we might employ to contribute towards social change.

Our original aim as researchers was far more than text production. It was to make VET a better system, and the experiences of participants more inclusive, more developmental and with improved outcomes. There is little to be gained by researching without generating impact. Finding the answer to a question is pointless unless it is voiced, shared and changes practice. This paper reviews what is currently known about VET research impact. The paper then explores four major studies indicating how their findings were disseminated and what impact occurred. This study has two principal aims. The first is to provide narratives that model how VET research

studies can be planned and resourced to continue past the final report to stage generate impact. Second, recognising the unique political situations each study confronts, it provides possible options for how the gatekeepers of management, policy and practice may be infiltrated, enthused, and influenced. This is a less explored area of research methodology. While researchers can be more certain about populations, samples, paradigms and instruments, it is difficult to be specific about what the study outcomes will be, and therefore what strategies might be employed, with which stakeholders, to gain the greatest impact (Denicolo 2013). There is a strong argument for ensuring that part of the analysis process includes a space to devise such strategies in light of the findings. The argument of this paper is not so much about what those strategies might be, but that researchers can plan to ensure an intent and space exists in the study timeline to devise such strategies. The importance of this for researchers is twofold. First, and pragmatically, measures of research productivity have begun to be extended towards the measurement of the impact. Second, and more importantly, a focus on the social value of the research prevents an increasing interest in the mechanics of research obscuring the original aim— making a difference.

Research Impact

Defining research impact

This section first defines and discusses research impact, then moves on to review the measurement of impact, and finally explores how researchers can plan for research impact. The Australian Research Council (2013) defines research impact as,

....the demonstrable contribution that research makes to the economy, society, culture, national security, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life, beyond contributions to academia.

However, impact is a contentious area of debate and as the previous definition indicates may include diverse outcomes that may well be valued very differently by various stakeholders (Patton 2008). The focus here is on what is being gained from the process by people other than researchers. The Emerald Publication Group (2013), extends this perspective to a broad view of impact emphasising how it encompasses far more than just contributions to existing knowledge. They indicate that research that supports teaching, encourages companies to be better managed, influences public bodies and policymakers, or benefits social, environment or economic development are all valuable outcomes in terms of impact. In each of these areas research can contribute to change either directly or indirectly, indicating a preferred practice model, or by supporting the politics of change. Such social impact may even be within research and practice communities where capability may be built (Harris and Clayton 2010). Research impact is both external upon the field of practice, and internal building knowledge and capability.

Discussions about research impact often fall into two specific perspectives. First, there is the focus pursued within this paper and captured in the previous definitions exploring what counts as impact. Second, there is the continuing internal debate about how that impact can be measured. It would appear that often debates about measurement, quantum, compliance and regulation may obscure the primary purpose of social contribution.

Measuring research impact

While the Emerald Publication Group (2013) naturally indicates citations and report usage as a primary academic measurement of impact they also include media commentary, inclusion in courseware, use in fields of practice and the development of the research outcomes for new audiences. The London School of Economics Public Policy Group handbook on gaining research impact (LSE-PPG 2011), makes a similar distinction in measuring both academic impact and

external impact on the field of practice. However, they indicate that measurement of social impact is complex because social change is usually attributable to a wide range of coalescing forces and not a single research study – an accumulative effect.

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC 2012) specifically direct their researchers towards specific goals that they require to be addressed within every grant-funded study. Their targets are contributions to economic performance, the effectiveness of public services and policy, and enhancing the quality of life, health and creative output. However, their focus is both on the impact upon society and on the impact on capacity building. They require researchers to be able to demonstrate that their studies demonstrate a contribution to understanding of method, theory or application in addition to social impact. They indicate that such impact may be instrumental, but can also be conceptual or effect capacity building.

A recent review of the Excellence in Innovation trial (Jones et al 2013), indicates that a primary need is to generate and embed a culture that ‘expects’ research impact. That is, raising the expectation that research *will have* an impact and ensuring this is a standard part of planning frameworks. They insist that there will only be more focus on this area.

Stanwick et al (2013) expresses the views of NCVET in terms of VET research impact measurement when indicating that,

Measuring impact is not straightforward and it is particularly difficult to assess when trying to attribute causality. For instance, how does one judge the impact of a given piece of research on policy, given the complex nature of the policy process and all the competing information and other factors which influence it?

The measurement of impact is problematised by the same issue that bedevils each act to quantify achievement – a focus on the easily measureable at the expense of complexity. In terms of achieving social impact researchers have to engage with the complexity of the field of practice relations. Knowing *what is required be done* leads to the complex political questions of *how such change* may be effected and the impact such changes may have on various stakeholders. Assessment of impact is inevitably problematic as the diverse outcomes of research studies are inevitably subject to significant time lapses and are also just part of a far wider series of mediating factors driving social, economic and environmental change. Determining causality is inherently complex and specifically in the social domain a significant challenge (Patten 2008).

Planning for research impact

All disciplines wrestle with the complexity and uncertainty of planning for research impact. Shergold (2011), bemoans the chasm that exists between research findings, policy and practice in the educational field. The LSE-PPG (2011) indicate that this research chasm may be generated by mismatched agendas, insufficient incentives, poor communication, cultural mismatches and weak social networks and social capital. In short, the rickety bridge between policy makers and researchers is poorly constructed and limited in most disciplines (Selby-Smith and Selby-Smith 1998).

So how can researchers plan for impact? The LSE-PPG (2011) notes that researchers will often have to share their resources across the range of short, medium and longer-term dissemination strategies, as some concepts may take decades before permeating social acceptance. They also suggest that the translation of research work into plain clearly readable discrete points is critical for wider impact, and that gaining impact is an achievement that demands substantial resources and also a commitment to building networks. The LSE hypothesises that there are a number of

factors that underpin the achievement of external research impact. Academic and external credibility, based on a prior track record and experience, needs to be allied with the capability to network and communicate with policy and practice gatekeepers. The LSE also indicates that research based organisations need to support impact goals by building wider organisational relationships, working with knowledge brokers and encouraging the free distribution of emerging knowledge.

The ESRC (2012) provides guidance to researchers in planning potential research impact through a three-stage model. First, identify stakeholders; second, identify how they may benefit; third, plan for their inclusion. Denicolo (2013) echoes this approach and arguing that research impact is an essential part of all research planning, extending the focus on outcomes, and that researchers need to acquire a range of strategies and skills to 'become impactful researchers'.

In terms of VET research impact, the first significant comment on the impact of VET research was made by McDonald et al (1993) as Australia reconstituted the VET system based largely on the colonial importation of a UK model and mediated by vigorous local debates and a seemingly never ending confusion of acronyms and governance bodies. They characterised VET research as 'fragmented' with the links to policy makers 'weak' with limited evidence-based results to offer as a basis for change. While the development of NCVET and ANTA changed that landscape and improved the quality of VET research, nearly a decade later the impact of VET research on policy was still viewed as limited. Selby-Smith and Selby-Smith (1998) argued that researchers still had two main issues. The first was that research impact was diffuse rather than direct. The second was that while researchers focused on significant issues, the political reality of 'putting things right' was far more complex. Indeed, there was a difference between providing evidence to policy makers and changing policy and practice. The relationship between research and policy remained in the words of one of their interviewees 'a rickety bridge'. Researchers often busied themselves with broad acts of dissemination in the hope of connection, rather than focusing on direct approaches to policy makers. In addition, the reality was that researchers and policy makers worked to different agendas; one anxious to see a specific change, the other viewing each potential change in terms of disturbance to the status quo. Policy makers often just wanted justification for past actions, or improved understanding of issues, and at best incremental impact rather than immediate change.

More recently AVETRA commissioned a review of VET impact (Dymock and Billett 2010). They indicate the factors determining the impact of VET research that include the applicability, accessibility and credibility and availability of the research. Such alignment prepares findings for subsequent interaction with stakeholders, increasing the value they place upon the findings. They also indicate that timeliness of research is a critical issue that is often outside the control of the researcher. The report provides templates for appraising the impact of VET studies and address a range of stakeholder actions that are critical for VET research impact. They indicate that building capability and valuing VET research begins within the curriculum of VET teacher development programmes. VET researchers need to tailor findings to audiences, and the value of evidence based research promoted above the experiences of policy makers. Finally, they emphasise that the impact of VET research is often accumulative rather than a direct silver bullet. Studies build capacity for change rather than instigating change, supporting emerging initiatives in the field.

Finally, Peter Shergold (2011), who has the advantage of having walked down both paths as a Senior Federal advisor and as an academic and researcher, comments on research impacting on policy. In a review when leaving the Prime Minister's Office in 2011 (Shergold 2011), he stressed the need for 'closing the gap between academics and policy makers'. He indicated that changes

made to policy emanating from evidenced-based research were limited because of two specific reasons. The first is the conflict of research and policy agendas.

They have different expectations of research, different expectations of collaboration, different views on timeliness, different views on what is important in the research.

The second is the need for researchers to allocate more resources to marketing their finding. He notes the current incentives to academics favour publications rather than interactions, and academic outcomes rather than social outcomes. He suggests that there may need to be a change in what aspects of a researcher's role is valued to increase resources in the area of facilitating impact.

....spending their time not as just researchers but as knowledge brokers on the research they're doing, because in general it doesn't afford much reward.

On leaving office, Shergold indicated that one of the problems with current research was that often it was not in a form that was usable for policy makers. He said that, when offered the opportunity to indicate what changes might be made to policy, researchers were often silent. The themes of increasing resource allocation to impact, brokerage and networking, and ensuring greater accessibility by adapting to stakeholder agendas pervade the discourse of impactful research. While researchers are always hostages to serendipity when striving to achieve impact, there are several actions researchers can take to pave the way for impact. Figure 1 draws together the key points of the literature that has been reviewed into a conceptual framework.

Research Method

The project is essentially a review and reflection of four completed research studies during the last decade that the author of this paper directed and managed. It is therefore an autoethnographic account of specific life experiences and in this case, research experiences. Maréchal (2010), indicate that 'Autoethnography is a form of self-reflection and writing that explores the researcher's personal experience and connects this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. In this case the impact of these research studies is reviewed to map how the planning and serendipity of the outcomes impacted on the fields of practice. However, such accounts and reflection may be prone to considerable personal bias and the usual reconstruction of memory (Patton 2008). There are two actions that have been taken to ameliorate these potential issues (Lyons 2010). First, the reflections have been driven by a template approach to ensure that similar data have been extracted in similar ways from each of the studies. Second, as the sole researcher present across all four of the studies, I have re-read the final reports associated with each study and also engaged in conversation co-researchers from each of the studies, to ensure that the reviews and reflections are grounded.

These studies shared a common approach, despite their different aims and very different research teams. Each study had multiple phases and an iterative approach, with each phase informing and moderating the subsequent phases. Each study also was strongly influenced by partners and reference groups that acted both in a governance role over the study and also as enabling bodies, opening access as gatekeepers of the field. Each study was framed to use a mixed approach with statistical analysis providing only a descriptive landscape, while the subsequent interviews, document scanning and observation phases provided a deeper investigation of the meaning behind the actions. Having determined *what* was going on, these inductive studies then pursued *how and why* it was happening and who was involved. Each study therefore was able to determine actions that might have utility and an instrumental effect upon subsequent organisational learning and performance. In terms of method what is interesting is that, while the studies were inductive

rather than deductive, exploring emerging phenomena, this reflection is *abductive* (Awbury and Awbury 1995) and was unintended, recognising the patterns within the research in hindsight, and with a focus that was never consciously on the agenda of the original studies.

Three of these studies were based in Western Australia (WA) and one was national in scope, all were based and directed from Edith Cowan University where ethical clearances were obtained. The WA studies were designed primarily to provide direct and pragmatic feedback to local organisations. Each study piloted instruments, used multiple instruments, prescribed protocols, and used multiple cases or clusters of staff, with the triangulation of findings reviewed by multiple researchers and practitioners to improve the authenticity, validity and reliability of the findings.

The stories of four VET research studies

The previous section reviewed the research approach taken in all of the four studies and this section now explores each study in detail. These narratives will begin with an overview of the partnership building and the genesis of the studies. Then the funding arrangement will be detailed with a specific focus on the research questions. This will be followed by an account of the data collection, the subsequent analysis process, and the mode of the presentation of the findings. These studies span more than a decade of VET research. The focus of the studies is upon organisational learning practices and manager learning rather than institutional skill training and initial work preparation.

The evaluation of the Frontline Management Initiative was begun as a response to an NCVER tender request. A partnership between six Universities was developed spanning interdisciplinary research capabilities of management, marketing, leadership, evaluation, and CBT pedagogy. Directed from Perth, the application to NCVER went through two stages of modification reducing the original budget by 35%. The study was charged with evaluating the Frontline Management Initiative (FMI) that had been launched two years previously. The study focused on determining the impact of the initiative at individual, organisational and business levels, a focus developed through pilot interactions and prior studies. The data collection consisted of four phases. Pilot focus groups fine-tuned the research approach. A broad random stratified survey went to 3,000 businesses and 700 probable users, as there was no central register. The leads from this phase of the study were used to gain 23 case study organisations spanning all locations, business sizes, and industry groups, where clustered interviews with managers and participants provided responses to interview questions. The survey data produced a broad descriptive picture of the FMI permeation and processes, while the case studies narratives indicated key themes key themes in NVivo. The final report was developed as two NCVER publications with significant downloading. Findings, which included those from a parallel PhD study, were presented at various academic, practitioner and government institute events.

The investigation of 'Dynamic Resourcing' and the role of HR during a period of culture change was carried out after several workshops between researchers and the HR section at the State Planning and Infrastructure Department (DPI). The study began as an ARC application and then became a collaboratively funded study by the DPI and the University. The purpose of the study was to determine what actions by the HR department would be most instrumental in developing a new culture and individual learning within the DPI, recently formed from a merger of planning and transport entities. The study investigated the current issues for staff and managers, what strategies were hindering and promoting cultural growth and what contribution the HR department could make. The data collection process was developed through the use of an embedded researcher working within the organisation. The study used a broad staff survey with

more than 2,000 returns and over 70 interviews with staff. The analysis of these phases of the study was used to focus the final phase of executive interviews confronting the issues that were emerging. The analysis of the data was carried out using NVivo over a five-month period and a final report produced that was presented to the CEO and Executive group with the HR section.

The third study was a large ARC study focusing on the relationship between individual wellbeing and organisational learning and performance. Joint discussion between representatives of the Police, Nurses and Teachers indicated that personal wellbeing was a significant determinant of organisational health, learning growth and innovation. These public bodies were experiencing a conflict between professional ethics, increasing organisational compliance, and public scrutiny. Initial focus groups indicated that any organisational development was primarily dependent on the basic work-health of the staff. The study set out to investigate the levels of wellbeing at the individual, professional, group, departmental, and organisational levels within each profession within WA. Major coordination between State Authorities, Registration bodies, Unions and School Boards developed and distributed a survey to over 20,000 employees with more than a 50% return. The survey was repeated three times over three years within the Police service. Final reports of both the whole study and the regional sections were presented at high-level media conferences with Ministers and CEOs.

Finally, ongoing discussion between the Construction Training Fund in WA and researchers focused on the introduction of compulsory pre-site health and safety training and certification for all industry employees. The study was devised to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative for the industry and the employees. This involved assessing levels of industry permeation by the scheme, the training curriculum, the modes of delivery and the impact on accident, incidents, individuals and workplace cultures. The study used a central focus group to fine-tune the field study and develop a relevant sample frame. The investigation began with a pilot phase in the Civil Construction area and then branched into the Housing and Commercial sectors. The accident statistics gave an indication of improving safety within the industry at a time of major expansion. The survey returns were poor, but provided a uniform picture of industry acceptance. The interview phase confirmed the prior assumptions and provided information of some significant issues to challenge the rollout of the training across the State. The analysis phase was completed using the partners and reference group as a secondary source of feedback to ensure face validity of the findings and assess the political implications of issues emerging from the study. The final report was drafted, reviewed and then presented to the reference group and then the CTF board.

Discussing and tracing the relations mediating impact

The experienced gained from each of these research projects improved the researcher's capability to plan for impact and focus on significant gatekeepers earlier in each study. However, it is apparent from this review that the latter stages of each study were emergent, iterative, and determined by the results, network relations and agendas that could not have been envisaged at the time of planning the studies. The landscape, agenda and personnel change as the study progresses, problematising the issue of planning impact.

The FMI evaluation had a number of advantages by the conclusion of the study. Not only were NCVER publishing the findings to a national audience but the success of the initiative meant that many thousands of managers were actively wrestling with developing the infrastructure associated with workplace based managerial learning, and wanted support and knowledge. The development of online technology had reached a stage where it was replacing the previous hard copy reports and as a result the FMI reports were downloaded over 15 thousand times.

Technology, social interest and publishing networks conspired to accelerate the dissemination of the report. In hindsight, *Paradise Nearly Gained*, was an excellent subtitle but a poor leading title and an important lesson for all researchers framing a title that will be instantly noted by key word searches. On reflection the evaluation provided cultural confirmation for those experimenting with in-house workplace learning, blending forms of learning and partnerships, and individual programmes that harnessed the capabilities of existing managers, that they were not alone and were generating an emerging model, displacing externalised training, and placing learning within workplace cultures. The FMI was a Trojan Horse, invading organisations at managerial level with self directed workplace based learning and changing the culture of learning and managing – from cops to coaches. The texts became the lexicon for the subsequent packages and the pedagogic language and leadership language changed many cultures. The impact of the evaluation was complementary, placing 23 narratives in text and legitimising self-directed workplace learning. The extensive nature of the research study and team and subsequent offshoot studies meant that there was significant field interaction and influence with an action-research effect as learning was carried and questioned from cluster to cluster across organisations. The final irony was that, by the time the concurrent PhD study was completed, the FMI had already been displaced and subsumed as ANTA was disbanded.

At the DPI, the partnership included an embedded researcher and continual interactions contributing to co-management of the study, and unwittingly paving the way for senior level dissemination. Reports were sent directly to all staff and all managers specifically targeted by both tone and focus. The CEO and team programmed a two-hour period for the review. The presentation focused on both a detailed overview and also a focus on key recommendations. A programme of meetings was subsequently held with the HR department to workshop the implications. Ironically, a change of government saw the department re-split into the same two entities from which it has been formed, negating the potential impact four years of work and research. Politics with a big P intervened, but did not prevent the research team from gaining an award for the study and being recognised by the State authorities.

In the third case of Wellbeing in the Police, Nurses and Teachers, politics again became a determining factor. From early on it became evident that, while the study was orientated towards exploring wellbeing, promoters of alternative agendas within the organisation were determined to use the survey as evidence for responses to recent public commissions. The fear of placing potentially damaging statistics about employee feelings into the public domain dominated management of the study outcomes. A major media conference was held with all CEOs to release the findings. The final report had to be very carefully phrased as it indicated significant dissatisfaction within all three cultures. Meanwhile the multiple collaborative grouping that had formed the study began to unravel due to unassociated internal disputes. The teaching cluster split into fractions over funding and NAPLAN introduction. The Nursing union and board battled for local control. In the Police, the union funded further surveys as they annually demonstrated a fall in Police wellbeing and morale. The hopes of using the data for internal cultural change and training disappeared with the focus changing from the primary objective of utilisation towards data suppression.

The final study for the Construction Training Fund was well managed in a collaborative fashion, using learning from all previous experiences. Regular reference group meetings maintained focus, supported field access and helped to shape the format of the findings. However, the report of positive findings for the scheme was offered to the Board, with no opportunity for the researchers to present the findings to that group. Two months later the board had acted on the one area of controversy the report had commented on – online training was reported as being brief, and

lacking the rigor of the programme's face to face delivery. The board withdrew financial support for all on-line training.

While this is a convenience sample of one series of peripheral VET focus studies directed by the same researcher, it does cover more than a decade of research and the total experience of one researcher, and a very significant number of researchers and participants nationwide. What do these studies indicate about gaining impact?

The first issue is that each experience develops *researcher capability* - capability to envisage what impact might be, and what impact might look like in the end. This echoes the voice of several previous reports on impact (Harris and Clayton 2008). Obsessed with the relations necessary to start and continue a study at first, it is later that researchers develop the capacity and the network to take their work forward to a wider network – ambitions move from completion to impact. Allocating the intent, the resources and the space to operationalise impact is critical. Second, all research benefits from external relations shaping and monitoring a study, and then finally being the conduit for impact. Research partners develop a vested interest in being a pilot for impact, and a champion for impact as suggested by the LSE (2011). Network building and the accumulation of allies can be a simultaneous practice with research development as students of actor-network theory already will know (Law & Hassard 2006). Networks built during researching are the networks for dissemination and impact, warm targets, already convinced by association. In addition, linking your research with the work of others may increase and not dilute the final impact. Third, politics plays a role in all research dissemination. Significant political acts radically change the field of practice disturbing the original premise of the research. Smaller political agendas can hijack and use findings for alternative purposes. Researchers need to be aware of the political imperatives of their partners (ESRC 2012). The length of research projects and the vagaries of politics mean that researchers cannot know what the agendas will be later on and even who will be wielding power. The message to researchers is when confronted with an impassable wall, a changed agenda, regroup and consider alternative impact courses.

Gavin Moodie (2013) indicated that the relationship between research and policy was more complex than a bilateral arrangement and that it increasingly involved media and social influence groups. This reality was confirmed by policy makers in attendance at AVETRA 2013, and indicates that perhaps researchers might try to include special interest groups as stakeholders, to promote specific research outcome agendas – who do the outcomes matter to? Perhaps they may have the energy, contact and resources to take on our reform agendas and may be better connected? These key issues of allocating space, gaining networks and keeping abreast of the reality of political agendas echo the findings of the previous studies in VET (Selby Smith and Selby-Smith 1998; Dymock and Billett 2010). However, they also reinforce recent advice to researchers from Reed (2013), who advocates starting with clear impact goals, linking with key figures and champions, building in flexibility and resources to adapt the study and engage with the field of practice in equal dialogue. Reed also makes pragmatic suggestions about harnessing knowledge brokers and setting up opportunities for exchange by using professional facilitators as intermediaries.

Figure 2 links the key themes emerging from the literature review (Figure 1) with those emerging from the research experiences within this paper into a practical model for VET researchers. While Figure 1 draws together the conceptual modeling of the field, Figure 2 develops this model by adding from recent VET research experience in the field and translating the learning into a pragmatic plan for VET researchers. The model draws from diverse literature within and outside the VET community and incorporates lessons learned from a more than a decade of VET research

to produce graphic guidelines of the stages VET research planning necessary to increase the possibility of impact. The uniqueness of each situation precludes a prescriptive model. The model provides a series of issues for consideration, adaptation and contextualisation to form an *impact plan* for each VET research study. The planning phase secures the intent and resources. Building partnerships secures the study and begins the stakeholder engagement. Simultaneously the researcher seeks liaisons with the profession to gain support and champions. Listening to agendas is followed by retuning the findings for audiences with the right voice and generating dialogue spaces, with professional support. Finally Building our own capability is an iterative activity flowing from study to study and marketing the value of research to others.

Conclusion

This study had two principal aims - to provide narratives that model how VET research studies can be planned and resourced to ensure they have an intent to make an impact and to increase recognition that every study confronts the same complex issues of engaging with the gatekeepers of management, policy and practice. The paper highlights the utility of strategies that focus on allocating resources towards gaining social impact, building network relations and keeping in touch with the associated agendas, and supplies a model to guide practice. The paper also has indicated how political changes can frustrate the intention of a study as time shifts organisational intentions and relations. Managing the impact of a VET study may involve as much planning, thought and resources as did the core study. The construction of a less rickety bridge begins at the start of the research study planning process. Similarly, moments after the win by team USA Oracle, Bob Oatley, of Wild Oats and Hamilton Island fame, confirmed his challenge for the 35th Americas Cup and the start of several years of planning.

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