Closing the Loop - Response to Staff Feedback on 2015 Engagement Survey Results and Links to Next SMI Activities

On 20 August 2015, the Institute Director facilitated an all-staff-and-student presentation about SMI’s staff engagement survey results. The staff engagement survey was completed in May 2015. The SMI response rate was 56% (106 responses) and identified five major areas for improvement: (1) workplace culture; (2) leadership; (3) Career planning and progression; (4) inefficiencies with policies, procedures and administration; and (5) change management.

At the all-staff-and-student session on 20 August, SMI people were invited to provide further feedback using an anonymous feedback form. The question on the form was “please describe indicators that would demonstrate to you that a positive shift has taken place” (for any or all of SMI’s five major areas of improvement). A two-week timeframe was provided for feedback.

Twenty-three responses were received. The key messages from each of the five areas for improvement are described below along with a response from the SMI Leadership and links to Next SMI activities. The SMI leadership team has committed to revisiting this feedback in March 2016 to ensure Next SMI activities have been an enabler of positive improvement.

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<th>Staff Engagement Survey – Identified Area for Improvement</th>
<th>Staff Comments – Indicators that a Positive Shift has Taken Place</th>
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<td>Workplace culture</td>
<td>Greater collegiality; reduce silos and create one SMI.</td>
<td>Developing a more collegiate and connected SMI culture is an aim of Next SMI. It is intended that the creation of integrated Programs of Work and links between Programs of Work will create more opportunities to connect people and groups across SMI.</td>
<td>Working Principle 11 for Next SMI</td>
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<td>People feeling like they are going to be part of the future and are willing to contribute/incentivized for contributing to SMI’s future;</td>
<td>The SMI Leadership Team is working hard to provide future certainty by clarifying our budget and Programs of Work. SMI’s Programs of Work and the work</td>
<td>Culture change – embedded across all Next SMI activities</td>
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<td>done to develop a growth strategy based on SMI’s content, services and platforms for delivery provides an updated vision for SMI’s future. We hope this will enable people to see how and where they can contribute.</td>
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<td>Clarifying the Programs of Work and setting the SMI budget for 2016 will provide more clarity for individuals.</td>
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<td>Respectful communication</td>
<td>This is very important and a critical part of SMI’s culture moving forward. Our leaders need to model this behaviour themselves and expect it of others. Everyone at SMI needs to be conscious that their communication with colleagues and external partners is respectful.</td>
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<td>Regular communication; close the feedback loop; explain the relevance and importance of key projects and initiatives such as ICE Chile.</td>
<td>Communication that helps everyone at SMI to feel connected and informed about what’s happening is part of the culture change for Next SMI. We will continue to work on improving communication and closing the feedback loop by increasing our use of multiple communication methods – email and intranet updates, all-staff forums, Centre pair meetings and regular communication</td>
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<td>Any tensions between work groups resolved</td>
<td>We need to respond proactively to address any tensions between people and groups as they arise. Any tensions that have existed for some time need to be identified and resolved. SMI’s Leadership Team and Program Leaders (once confirmed) have an important role to play in this. Everyone at SMI has a responsibility to contribute to a positive workplace culture, including early identification of concerns and being willing to participate in constructively resolving concerns.</td>
<td>Greater accountability and transparency of decisions and financial arrangements (objective)</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Greater transparency of decision-making including about how money is being used</td>
<td>An objective of Next SMI is to create greater transparency and accountability in relation to finance matters at all levels of leadership including Program Leaders and Project Leaders. All Programs of Work will have a clear budget, approved by the SMI Leadership Team. Those Program budgets will be based on a set of projects and the resources needed to deliver them. Program budgets will be transparently</td>
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|                                                          | Better listening and openness to ideas; less defensiveness   | It is very important that SMI leaders do take the time to listen and are open to feedback and ideas. This is something that SMI leaders at all levels will focus on over the coming 12 months and beyond. | Working Principle 11 for Next SMI  
Culture change – embedded across all Next SMI activities |
|                                                          | Greater devolution of responsibility below the leadership team level; | This is taking place by creating Program Leaders who will be responsible for defined projects, people and resources within a Program of Work | Programs of Work/Themes (task stream of Next SMI)  
Operating Model (task stream of Next SMI)  
Financial Model (task stream of Next SMI)  
Culture change – embedded across all Next SMI activities |
<p>|                                                          | Clearer picture of SMI’s future and strategic direction.       | This is something that UQ more broadly is working on in response to the staff engagement survey feedback and SMI will do the same. Revisiting our strategic direction and vision is taking place as part of our Next SMI activities. It is important for our people to feel connected to SMI’s vision and future direction. | Vision and strategic plan (task stream of Next SMI) |</p>
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<td>Career planning and progression</td>
<td>Provide longer contracts where possible, help and incentivize people to see a future beyond their current contract (encourage commitment to and investment in SMI by offering longer contracts/more certainty),</td>
<td>The SMI Leadership team appreciates that this is a critical issue for SMI people. It is difficult because the nature of SMI as a predominantly externally funded institute, means there is uncertainty in the level of resources available to fund positions from year to year. How to find the most appropriate balance between certainty/incentives for staff and the management of financial risk is an ongoing discussion between SMI Leadership and the University Executive. It is important to note that the University has provided SMI with considerable financial support through 2014 and 2015 as our external revenue has declined. The Next SMI process and our future growth strategy form the basis for discussions around the University’s investment in SMI.</td>
<td>Operating Model (task stream of Next SMI) Financial Model (task stream of Next SMI)</td>
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<td>Pay more attention to having regular performance and development discussions,</td>
<td>Regular performance and development discussions between staff members and their supervisors are a UQ expectation. The feedback that more effort is required to ensure this happens is valuable. The formation of Programs of Work provide</td>
<td>Operating Model – task stream of Next SMI Culture change – embedded across all Next SMI activities</td>
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<td>the opportunity to clarify reporting arrangements and reinforce the responsibilities of all people supervising staff.</td>
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<td>Promote training opportunities offered by UQ</td>
<td>UQ offers a range of staff development courses and they are advertised at: <a href="http://www.uq.edu.au/staffdevelopment/">http://www.uq.edu.au/staffdevelopment/</a> Through the implementation of Next SMI, opportunities will also be provided to build staff capability in project management and in financial management in a UQ context.</td>
<td>Operating Model (task stream of Next SMI)</td>
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<td>Ensure equitable access to training opportunities; remember to provide support for research support staff as well as for administrative staff.</td>
<td>Ensuring equitable access to training will be a responsibility of leaders at all levels (SMI Leadership Team, Program Leaders and supervisors). The Next SMI financial model should enable better coordination of decision making in this area.</td>
<td>Operating Model (task stream of Next SMI)</td>
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<td>Inefficiencies with policies, procedures and administration</td>
<td>• Achieve greater consistency • Have procedures that are accessible eg on a database; • Have a system that generates real-time financial information eg how much budget is left in Project X Reduce the need to follow up and check status/progress; People indicated they are confident that Improvements including those suggested are progressing as part of Next SMI. Changes will be rolled out over 2016. A key change is the implementation of a consistent approach to project management, including consistent management information reports linking project finances and technical progress. Process improvements are also in</td>
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<td>RPM Process improvements (task stream of Next SMI)</td>
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<td><strong>the review of professional services will lead to positive improvements.</strong></td>
<td>development in a range of finance and travel-related processes.</td>
<td>Project Lifecycle (task stream of Next SMI)</td>
<td>Next SMI activities are being supported by change management principles and advice from an external consultant.</td>
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| Change management | • Help people to feel more a part of the change  
• Keep up the communication and communicate about the practical things that people are concerned about as well as the big picture things;  
• Move at a faster pace;  
• Mixed views about “communicate as you go” vs “communicate once a decision is final”;  
• Work towards a more stable environment. | We have actively sought to improve in these areas. Things are moving much more quickly and efforts have been made to communicate regularly and involve people as much as possible. Even though we are trying, the current fast pace of change and the high degree of uncertainty at the moment means that our communication and efforts to involve people may feel insufficient for some people. We will continue to do as much as we can to keep SMI people informed and involved. | |