Professional staff contributions to positive student outcomes

A case study

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Although professional staff comprise more than half the Australian higher education workforce, typically research has concentrated on the work of academic staff. Professional staff are increasingly researching the working lives of professional staff, adding to the understanding of the work of professional staff and the contributions they make towards the strategic goals of their institutions. This paper explores the work of professional staff in relation to student outcomes and is part of on-going doctoral research into the work of professional staff at an Australian university. Following a preliminary framing study, a case study was undertaken using semi-structured interviews with a range of professional staff. Emerging from these interviews is a conceptualisation of the work of professional staff in relation to student outcomes, from the perspectives of professional staff themselves. This paper concludes with proposals to improve the outcomes for students, and improve the working lives of both professional and academic staff.

Introduction

What I *love* is that the work you do in universities just has such profound impact for the rest of the students' lives (Participant 3).

For more than two decades, professional staff – variously known as general staff, administrative staff, non-academic staff, among other labels (Graham, 2012) – have comprised over half the workforce in Australian universities (aggregated data from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2012b), and the responsibilities undertaken by this group of staff are diverse, comprehensive and considerable. Although significant research has been undertaken by academics into the changing nature of universities, academic work and academic identities (for example: Adams, 1998; Henkel, 2000; Marginson, 2000; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Anderson, Johnson & Saha, 2002; Macfarlane, 2010), academics have written little about the work of professional staff. This lack of research by academics into the work and identities of professional staff is not surprising, since academics 'focus on the areas that concern them the most' (Pitman, 2000, p. 166). In counterbalance to this proclivity, over the past decade there has been a growing body of literature written by professional staff, and former professional staff, about the work and changing identities of professional staff in universities, both in Australia and overseas (for example: Conway, 2000; Szekeres, 2004; Dobson, 2005; Whitchurch, 2006, 2010; Small, 2008; Szekeres, 2011). Nevertheless, gaps in this research persist, and a full understanding of the work and identities of professional staff is yet to be elicited.

Given the large proportion of university staff comprised by professional staff, understanding the contribu-

tions of these staff to the strategic goals of universities is vital to the effectiveness of these institutions. Although universities have developed a broader agenda over the last decade, with increasing focus on external engagement, education (learning and teaching) and research remain as two key components of core business for universities (Shattock, 2010), and are fundamental to the strategic goals of their institutions. While the contributions of professional staff to research, through research management and administration, have been studied (Allen-Collinson, 2004, 2006, 2007; Sebalj & Holbrook, 2006, 2009), there has been little research into the contributions that professional staff make to learning and teaching. Aiming to help fill this gap, this paper arises from a case study that is investigating the work of professional staff in the context of learning and teaching (see also: Graham, 2012, 2013).

Methodology

As part of on-going doctoral research, this case study aims to investigate how professional staff contribute to student outcomes, from the perspectives of the staff themselves. This research used, as a starting point, a review of 146 international studies that derived 13 propositions for behaviours of student support that were found to enhance student outcomes in terms of 'retention, persistence and achievement' (Prebble *et al.*, 2004, p. ix). The Prebble Propositions and findings from a preliminary study (Graham, 2010) provided a framework for the case study, which aims to elicit a thick description of the work of professional staff in relation to student outcomes.

Using a single site, chosen for both logistical (Daymon & Holloway, 2002) and representative reasons (Yin, 2009), this study focuses on a single Australian university, the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). This approach is particularly apposite as this study is part of a *professional* doctorate with three main audiences – the academe, the profession and the workplace (Lee, Green & Brennan, 2000) – and as such it is appropriate to locate the research within the context of *one* workplace, thereby being an intrinsic case study (Stake, 1995). In addition, its characteristics of provenance, location, size and student diversity makes UTS representative of Australian universities. Nevertheless, it is not intended to generalise from these findings. Rather, this case study is descriptive as it identifies and describes (Yin, 2009) behaviours exhibited by professional staff that contribute to student outcomes. Being both descriptive and intrinsic, this study may provide insights into situations in other institutions.

Building on the earlier study (Graham, 2010), it was recognised that there would be value in interviewing experienced professional staff, and purposive and snowball sampling were used to identify participants who had at least three years' experience in higher education. Fourteen interviews were conducted, which is consistent with achieving theoretical saturation for a relatively homogeneous purposive sample (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The gender distribution among the participants was similar to the overall gender distribution across UTS, as was the length of service at UTS. The participants' experience in higher education ranged from 3 to 24 years, with an average of 10 years. Participants were drawn from 12 work units: nine were various central services, while three were different faculty or school units. Participants worked in positions ranging from Higher Education Worker (HEW) Level 5 to above Level 10, with the median being Level 7. The HEW levels refer to the classification structure for professional staff in Australian universities ranging from HEW 1, which is the lowest level and is rarely used, to HEW10+, which includes directors and managers. Six of the 14 participants had completed a postgraduate coursework programme, four at Master's degree level, and four staff were currently studying.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted over a seventeen-month period between April 2010 and September 2011. Analysis of the data was informed by earlier findings (Graham, 2010) and used first cycle descriptive coding as well as structural coding (Saldaña, 2009) based on the 13 Prebble Propositions for student support (Prebble *et al.*, 2004). This allowed identification of key themes, for comparison with the earlier study, and subsequent second cycle coding provided elaboration of these themes.

Key findings and discussion

Applying the Prebble Propositions framework across the case study, the contributions of professional staff to student outcomes were found to be most significant in ensuring 'behaviours, environments and processes are welcoming and efficient' (Prebble *et al.*, 2004, pp. 56-58), which was consistent with the results from the earlier study (Graham, 2010). There is a wide range of factors, with positive or negative effects on student outcomes, which are reflected in these behaviours, environments and processes (Prebble *et al.*, 2004). These factors include aspects such as enrolment and general administration processes, course selection and timetabling, and provision of advice that is timely and appropriate. In exploring this theme in the data, four key sub-themes emerged, which

elaborate the proposition: technology; knowledge (that of the participant and colleagues); helpful colleagues and supportive supervisors or managers; and the associated job satisfaction. These sub-themes are discussed below.

Technology

'Technology is here to stay – it leaves a lasting impact on each of our lives and is a core requirement in today's working world' (Wilen-Daugenti, 2009, p. 2). Wilen-Daugenti (2009) describes three aspects of the impacts of technology on higher education: the continual development of new technologies; the increased use of technology; and changes to learning environments that are facilitated by technology. This case study found indicators for all three aspects in the participants' interviews. This paper considers the first two aspects, describing changes to technology and the increased use of technology that are supported by professional staff, while the substantial and significant contributions by professional staff to learning environments found in this study was the subject of an earlier paper (Graham, 2012).

Participants in this study described changes to technology, and their use of this technology, which can be framed in two different contexts: operational activities; and support for student learning. In both contexts, participants described considerable changes in the use and functionality of technology-based systems, which have direct impacts on their working lives and on student outcomes. For example, one participant described changes in operational technology that had occurred during a period of parental leave:

> I used to have access and do things with *Curriculum And Student System,* which I can't do at the moment because I haven't been to training and been refreshed. I'm finding [the changes relate] mainly [to] technology – it's obvious it changes (Participant 5).

This participant had returned to part-time work, after two years' parental leave. As a result of changes in technology, the participant was prevented from using systems that had previously been accessible, as training for the new systems was required before access would be made available. As a part-time employee, it was particularly difficult to schedule training between other responsibilities. While the length of absence and the return to less than full-time work exacerbated the impact on this participant, this account exemplifies the experiences of other participants who also described significant changes in technology that had consequences for their work activities.

Participants in the study acknowledged that changes in operational technology had impacted on their working practices. For some, new activities were undertaken

without adequate training or support. Other participants found ways around limitations imposed by technology, while nevertheless feeling frustrated with this situation. Many of the participants articulated the fact that new technologies change the ways that work is completed and some technologies, such as email, are now ubiquitous.

> When I came, computers still had floppy disks, so that's obviously changed a lot. Everything has removable hard drives now and USB keys. Laptops, you needed a trolley to drag them around when I first came, but now they're so small and light (Participant 9).

> We help people fix wireless problems, which can take a couple of hours each time, sometimes. We're not supposed to; when the wireless network was rolled out, about three or four years ago, we weren't given any extra staff to handle that, or even much training, or really any training (Participant 4).

> In terms of tools and things, it's just the usual – we live via email now, and that's the way it works. I remember before email, but only just (Participant 3).

Perhaps even more than the changes in operational technology, changes in technology that support student learning have impacted on the work of professional staff. Changes in general learning technology, such as the introduction of or changes to learning management systems, affect the whole student population, while specialised technology, including some course-related technology, affects specific groups of students. Whether for particular groups or whole student populations, the knowledge and skills of professional staff in relation to learning technologies have become essential to effective teaching and learning within universities. This is of growing importance due to the increasing number of students and the widening diversity of the student population.

With the massification of Australian higher education over the last 25 years, have come large increases in both the numbers and diversity of students enrolled in Australian universities (Graham, 2012). This trend is likely to continue, due to the widening participation targets for a wide range of disadvantaged groups. These changes will have a direct and considerable impact on the work of professional staff. For example, the number of students with special needs has increased significantly over the last decade, more than doubling in Australia between 2000 and 2010, and increasing in proportion from three per cent of the domestic student population to 4.5 per cent (aggregated data from Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2012a). Learning outcomes for these students are supported by professional staff who use assistive and adaptive technology to facilitate the students' learning. Furthermore, while the propor-

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tion of students with special needs in Australian higher education is small, and seems under-reported compared with rates in North America (Heiman & Shemesh, 2012), assistive and adaptive technology primarily intended for students with special needs can be used as learning tools for the general student population (Ash, 2011).

> Technology changes for students [with special needs], and so we've had to do a lot of groundwork, and working with other areas of the uni, to make sure materials are accessible for students. For example, students who have a print disability . . . we get their materials put into electronic format so they can access them with technology . . . It's quite a big service and system now, rather than us just running around trying to do things in a non-systematic way. We have also had a lot of student growth over that time, so all of our services have had to develop to cater for larger numbers of students, so just setting up those kind of processes and things has been interesting (Participant 8).

Online systems have become key tools in learning, for both content distribution and to address different learning needs (Lin, 2009; Wilen-Daugenti, 2009; Petreski *et al.*, 2011). As new technologies are introduced into the learning environment of higher education, professional staff are needed to develop and maintain these systems. For example, learning management systems have become ubiquitous (Machado & Tao, 2007), yet the role of professional staff in developing and maintaining the infrastructure that underpins learning management systems appears to be overlooked in the literature. In addition, new roles, such as educational designer and curriculum support officer, have arisen, which occupy the 'third space' that spans between academic and professional staff and require skills and knowledge from both sides of this space (Whitchurch, 2008).

> I think the computer systems at UTS are pretty much absolutely integral for everybody's studies now . . . So students have to at least forward that [official UTS email], and they might have to use UTSOnline [the learning management system] to get their lectures, which is probably about 75 to 80 per cent of the time . . . And they have to use the [online] enrolment system. So there's a few [IT] systems they pretty much have to use (Participant 4).

> The curriculum mapping system, that we're using . . . it's a crucial piece of infrastructure for us because of the way we want to make sure, [and] we want to make it very apparent to all of our students, how everything they do relates to later practice [in their profession] . . . And we've promised the external stakeholders that we will be able to do that (Participant 14).

In addition to the increasing use of hardware and software in higher education, the amount and credibility of information on the web has grown. For example, there are now extensive digital collections of peer-reviewed journals available through university libraries, as well as course material that may be either open access or accessible via restricted-access learning management systems (Wilen, 2009). Yet while the current generation of students has grown up with a wide range of ever-changing technology, and have been characterised as 'digital natives' (for example, Prensky, 2001, p. 1), more recent critical reviews question the technology and information literacy abilities of these students (Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2008; Kennedy, Krause, Judd, Churchward & Gray, 2008). Indeed, in order to address the perceived gap in information literacy skills, professional staff are engaged in supporting and developing these skills in students.

> I guess at the research help desk [in the library] the technology is extremely important. A lot of the times, the students [are] coming for the resources. We have a department here called information resources and we liaise with them, saying 'the law students are looking for books in this area', or 'they need more statistics for business', and we find a database that matches with that need (Participant 10).

And finally, changes in technology have changed the way professional staff interact with students (Berg, Berquam & Christoph, 2007). Experience from the United Kingdom suggests that these changes in technology, and associated new ways of communication, have led students to expect that support will be continually available (Ramsden, 2008). These changes were recognised by the staff in this study, as illustrated below.

> [Helping students by] trying to transpose yourself into the current student environment, because we didn't have mobile phones, we didn't have email, we didn't really know much about the Internet. It's changed a lot since I was an undergraduate (Participant 3).

> Of course, the week that the assignment's actually due, I had several emails from students desperately seeking help . . . Some students came back to the desk and I helped them right there and then, and that's the most effective way because you can speak to them face-to-face. Others couldn't come in, so I used email instead . . . I also did some telephone calls when they weren't understanding what was described [in the email] (Participant 10).

Staff knowledge

Staff knowledge has been recognised as a key factor for positive relationships between staff and customers (Bitner, Booms & Tetreault, 1990; Johnston, 1995). In this study, professional staff identified the importance of staff knowledge from two key perspectives: their own knowledge and knowledge held by other professional staff.

Several of the participants discussed the importance of such knowledge in relation to being able to meet the needs of students effectively, which, in some instances, was outside the remit of their job descriptions, with staff expanding their roles in line with their interests and the needs of students.

> I need to know about the processes in place and the changes that happen, so just a lot of communication and finding out the exact processes for things. The student will often use us as their first port of call. It might be about late withdrawal or enrolment issues . . . we need to be able to have key contacts in there [the student centre]. We have key contacts in the student centre but then each faculty will have a different system for organising the same thing, so there is a lot of detailed information, and then it can change . . . That's important to be able to keep up with the changes (Participant 8).

> One of our very busy librarians here, he works in the science and technology team, and we rely heavily on him because he is our EndNote [software] expert. EndNote is . . . an extremely tricky thing because the referencing now, there are so many diverse kinds of information resources, it's not just a book or an article. They're now referencing YouTube and blogs and forums and it's not quite clear exactly how to do that. So he is fantastic . . . he can literally spend a few hours every week just trying to troubleshoot students through the different issues they may have (Participant 10).

Appropriate training for staff has been identified as necessary for high quality service (Schneider, White & Paul, 1998; Chen, 2012). This link was identified by several of the participants in this study.

> [The] Security [Unit] is responsible for the security not only of staff and students but [also] the two or three billion dollars' worth of buildings that we have. We are charged with maintaining a safe and secure working place, for all those reasons, all those pieces. Nobody notices until there is a crisis and then we just swing into action because we've practised and we know [what to do] (Participant 1).

> Sometimes students come to the counter and they say they want to withdraw from their course but when you talk to them they're having some difficulty. Really what they need is a leave of absence. So they might mix up the terminology. So it's really important to have the conversation, to make sure that you've got a handle on what they really want and I think that's an area that I'd like to focus on with training [for staff] (Participant 7).

'Maintaining a stable workforce is a key element in effective talent management strategy' (Deery, 2008, p. 792), and while there is an increasing understanding of the link between institutional performance and the ability to attract and retain the right staff, the importance of retaining knowledgeable and experienced professional staff is often overlooked (Gordon & Whitchurch, 2007). Nevertheless, in this study, participants associated staff knowledge, and the ability to effectively and efficiently support student needs, with retention of experienced staff.

> But to retain staff that have been here a while, that know about the whole university, [means] we can provide a more in depth support for students. Not just fix the technical problem... Whereas, someone who's only been here six months can fix the email problem, but might not know what the ramifications are, or what to do to make things okay (Participant 4).

These quotes illustrate the need to attract and retain good professional staff, and to provide relevant professional development for these staff, so that students' learning needs may be met in the most effective and efficient manner possible. While emphasis and resources have for some time been given to attracting, retaining and developing academic staff (for example: Zuber-Skerritt, 1992; Main, 1993; Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Cumming, 2010; Edwards, 2010), the quotes above suggest that the attraction, retention and development of professional staff are also highly important for positive student outcomes. Far from being interchangeable extras from Universal Casting, highly knowledgeable professional staff are an asset to the core business of teaching and learning, and these staff provide relief to busy academics by dealing with a wide range of student learning issues.

Colleagues and supervisors

> The key resource for universities is their academic and general [professional] staff. In particular, it is the knowledge, skills, attitudes and performance of staff which directly affect the quality of academic teaching, research, consulting and community service, as well as how effectively our universities work in performing those activities (Hoare *et al.*, 1995, p. 69).

Participants associated positive relationships with their colleagues, and with their supervisors or managers, with

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being able to provide effective services to students. It was important to the participants to know who, of their colleagues, would be helpful and, in addition, that their supervisors and managers were supportive of them and their work.

> It's very much an open door, [we're] always in each other's office. I am always in my boss's office, checking or asking, and also with the other people that are doing my job – we're kind of checking in with each other – it's important that we're consistent (Participant 8).

In contrast, a lack of time to appropriately deal with student enquiries, caused by competing work priorities, was identified as a hindrance to meeting the needs of students, as shown in the quotes below. In these quotes, staff recognise that workflow structures and disparate work activities can impede the provision of service to students. This supports the contention that back office activities are inherently different from front office operations, and co-location and co-staffing of these operations needs to be considered carefully to ensure maximum organisational contributions of these activities, both individually and jointly (Chase, 1978). In addition, the compulsion to 'measure everything that moves' (Marx, 1999, p. 165) can result in a proliferation of data that is difficult to separate into the meaningful and meaningless and, as illustrated below, the collection of these data can impact negatively on doing work that meets the needs of students.

> Because we do back office stuff and student facing stuff, I want to get the back office stuff as slick as possible to enable the student facing stuff to be more streamlined and easy and people not having a focus on, 'I wish I wasn't here [in the student facing office] because I should be doing this [back office work] (Participant 7).

> We need to log every job that we get, every phone call that we get needs to be logged, every student that comes up to the counter needs to be logged. Initially . . . the system for doing it was really bulky . . . [and it] could take a minute to log each one, and there are times, especially in the first few weeks of first semester that are the busiest, where we can deal with 1000 students a day each . . . they [the managers] were saying we have to log every one of those, so that they would know how much work we're doing. I said, 'well, you're going to know how much work I'm doing because all I'm doing is logging jobs' [participant laughs ironically] (Participant 4).

Staff attitude is also a key indicator of service quality (Chase, 1978; Chen, 2012). A lack of customer focus was identified by participants as being an obstacle to meeting the needs of students.

> It's frustrating when you see people treat them as a student number and dismiss their enquiries that come through (Participant 2).

> One of the issues that I see in universities is that there's Student Admin and they're doing all this student stuff, but they can't have individual relationships with students. So I think they lose the sense of students being an individual person and often the people they have to deal with a lot are really the ones [students] who are being annoying, or trying to do something that's impossible or really demanding or whatever it is (Participant 3).

Again, these quotes show the importance of recruiting and retaining helpful and skilled professional staff – staff and managers who understand the needs of students, and who support those needs through their own direct interactions with students and through the interactions with other staff. This requires recruiting for the right attitude, so that both students and other staff (academic and professional) are viewed as customers requiring service at a level that satisfies the required outcomes rather than at a level that just answers the presenting problem. This study also highlights the importance of having effective and efficient work structures and processes so that staff are empowered to provide the service that students need. Once such staff are recruited, it becomes crucial to retain those staff, developing their skills and knowledge, so that they can provide a resource to other staff, as well as directly to students.

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction may be defined as a generally favourable job attitude (Grant, 2008) that is a global attitude relating to a work role (Harrison, Newman & Roth, 2006). Importantly, job satisfaction has been strongly linked with customer satisfaction (Nebeker *et al.*, 2001). As described above, having technology and systems that work well, being knowledgeable and having knowledgeable colleagues, and having supportive colleagues and supervisors, all contribute to the job satisfaction for these staff. In addition, the intrinsic motivation of being able to assist students effectively, supporting their learning outcomes from admission through to graduation, provides a high level of job satisfaction for the participants in this study.

Intrinsic motivators have been related to job satisfaction in a number of studies (for example, Herzberg 1987; Coster 1992). The Self-Determination Theory of motivation proposes three basic needs that, when satisfied, give enhanced self-motivation and positive mental health: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan & Deci 2000b). Autonomy refers to the freedom to make choices

and to have self-regulation in the pursuit of self-selected goals; competence is the need to feel effective in interactions with the social and physical environment; and relatedness refers to the need to feel a sense of belonging with others (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Skinner & Edge, 2009). These three needs are innate psychological needs and satisfaction of these needs is conducive to the development of intrinsic motivation (Petri & Govern, 2012). In addition, it is recognised that satisfaction is also associated with engaging in intrinsically interesting activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Several participants expressed the need for competence and autonomy, through being able to use their own judgement to make decisions and solving problems for students, which resulted in job satisfaction.

I guess it's challenging. Mostly my role, currently and probably for the last several years, has been with admissions. So I actually process and assess . . . applications. I find that satisfying because . . . there is an element of my own judgement and I enjoy that. Obviously you get a wide variety of applications from varying students and I find that interesting as well (Participant 6).

The last quote demonstrates intrinsic motivation in doing a job well. Extrinsic motivators include receiving thanks from students (client satisfaction), and having supervisors and managers who support their staff and create a positive culture, as illustrated by the quotes below:

I love how the library administrators [managers] here are very open to trying new ideas and also trying to encourage fun. We still do our jobs, we do them well, but we do it also in a way that's fun . . . Yesterday we had an edible book competition, so staff made little cakes based on a book theme . . . So [the managers are] trying to inject a bit of fun and creativity into what we do, to keep staff motivated and interested as well. I love that about UTS library, it's quite different from where I have worked before (Participant 10).

Eventually he [the supervisor] did go to the people who were responsible for the system, asking for it to be automated, and put the project to them. They said, 'sorry, that's not important enough. We're not doing it'. He told me and I said, 'look at least you tried. I mean, that means you're on our side. You've done everything you can, so we're happy' (Participant 4).

The second quote indicates that staff do not expect their supervisors to always be able to implement changes if it is not within their power to do so. The fact that a supervisor makes a genuine attempt to implement a change suggested by a staff member is sufficient for the staff to feel supported and thereby motivated.

In contrast, supervisors and managers who are more concerned with process and control than outcomes can dampen staff motivation, as shown below:

I think back to the management side of things for the way that people operate, the staff operate . . . [it's important] to give them the autonomy to do their own thing, to assist the students and to think 'okay what needs to be done for this particular student? how can we work around it?', and not have management saying 'no you can't do this, you can't do that, you've got to follow this strict rule' (Participant 2).

We used to have a policy where we weren't allowed to cover for each other if you had to take a break, such as to go to the toilet . . . because they [management] figured if you're taking a break . . . you're bludging (Participant 4).

Some of the participants expressed pro-social motivation – the desire to benefit other people – in addition to intrinsic motivation. The combination of pro-social and intrinsic motivation is a good predictor of higher levels of persistence, performance and productivity (Grant 2008), which benefits both the individual and the organisation. As well as expressing satisfaction from helping students and contributing to the wider community, a number of participants explicitly recognised the workload issues for academics, and were motivated by being able to support students and thereby providing some time relief to academics.

She [a student] came in tears and went away very happy, feeling confident that she could handle it [the assignment], and find the things she needed to answer those questions. That for me is a real win, where she had no-one else to go to – the lecturers and tutors are all really busy, they [the students] don't feel they can go to them [the academics] for help or to just ask every little question they have. I feel that for a lot of students we are one of the only places they can go to just ask little questions or just clarify things (Participant 11).

I really am very passionate about people getting home safely at the end of the day, it really drives me, and that's how I think I get it [the OH&S work] done (Participant 13).

The University in my opinion, apart from the invaluable facilities that are available to educate youngsters, or not so young people, I believe offers a far more extensive service to the greater community and I believe that should be supported (Participant 12).

Concluding comments

While there is a growing body of broad literature written by professional staff about professional staff (for example: Dobson & Conway, 2003; Szekeres, 2004; Small, 2008; Graham, 2009; Sebalj & Holbrook, 2009; Szekeres, 2011), this study fills a gap in identifying and describ-

ing the contributions that professional staff make to student outcomes from the perspective of professional staff themselves (Graham, 2012; 2013). The domain focused on in this paper – relating to 'behaviours, environments and processes are welcoming and efficient'– was found in the case study to be most significant for the participants in this study, which was consistent with findings from the earlier study (Graham, 2010). Participants in the case study recognised their role in supporting the core business of universities through providing direct services to students and by supporting other professional staff. Consistent with other research (Sharafizad, Paull & Omari, 2011), participants in this study recognised that workload is an issue for academics. In addition, they identified activities that could be performed well and with satisfaction by professional staff, thereby relieving academic staff of some workload. Participants in this study demonstrated that they are cognisant of the importance of their work in relation to student outcomes, which provided these staff with pro-social and intrinsic motivation, leading to significant job satisfaction for these staff.

There are several implications that may be of significance beyond the context of this case. First, participants in this study were intrinsically motivated, suggesting that university management, managers and supervisors should foster intrinsic motivators of professional staff in order to retain experienced staff, and to keep them engaged with their work and the strategic goals of their institutions. This involves providing staff with opportunities to develop competence to succeed at relevant and challenging tasks; providing autonomy for choice and initiation of such activities; and for supporting the development of mutual respect and reliance with colleagues, both professional and academic. Second, this study indicates a need for university management to recognise the contributions of professional staff to the core business of learning and teaching, and to explicitly value these contributions. This would allow both individuals and the institution to benefit from the capacity of these staff, and would recognise that universities are run by partnerships of academic and professional staff (Dobson & Conway, 2003). And finally, the blurring of roles and work between traditional academic and professional staff found by this and other studies (Sharafizad, Paull & Omari, 2011; Whitchurch, 2011) signals that higher education should re-examine the structural binary divide between professional and academic staff, allowing a more flexible approach to workload distribution and career progression, to the benefit of staff and students. This study indicates that the work of all staff is essential to students achieving their learning outcomes,

and that all staff need to work together, supportively, and valuing the work of their colleagues, 'to serve The University and its students' (Sharafizad, Paull & Omari, 2011, p. 47). This is contingent on recruiting and retaining the right staff, be they professional or academic.

Acknowledgements

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