

Evaluating Efforts to Promote Diverse Sexuality and Gender Inclusivity at a Tertiary Institution

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Note: material in this presentation is taken from a publication presenting our findings
in the *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* (Gremillion & Powell, 2019)

Introduction

- ▶ This talk presents results from an evaluation of Unitec's ALLY Network training workshop
- ▶ The ALLY Network was established at Unitec in 2012. It is 'made up of gay, straight, cis and diverse gendered staff and students who support building an inclusive working and learning environment for all' (ALLY Network Unitec, n.d.)
- ▶ The one-day training workshop is a requirement for Unitec staff and students to become members of the Network
- ▶ Unitec is the only New Zealand tertiary provider to belong to the Australasian ALLY Network of institutions of around 40 members

Introduction

- ▶ The training workshop explores the impact of heteronormativity and gender normativity
- ▶ and helps participants identify actions (at both individual and institutional levels) that aim to reduce stigma against people with diverse sexuality and gender (DSG) identities.
- ▶ DSG identities include, but are not limited to transgender, tangata ira tane, fa'afafine, gender fluid, agender, lesbian, gay, bisexual and asexual.
- ▶ Sketch of workshop content:

Workshop Content

- ▶ Pronouns for me
- ▶ Participant round: an experience I have had that makes coming to this workshop relevant for my life (facilitators role model this part)
- ▶ Heteronormativity and power dynamics: we are all involved
- ▶ Ideas for how to challenge or interrupt heteronormativity
- ▶ Unpacking gender (sex, identity and expression)
- ▶ Unpacking gender normativity - how did you learn how to express your gendered self?
- ▶ Video: transgender people speak to their younger selves
- ▶ Being a trans ally - tools and tips
- ▶ Invitation to join the ALLY network

(Selective) Literature Background

- ▶ Although numerous studies internationally have evaluated diversity training initiatives, a limited number evaluate such training in relation to DSG identities, specifically.
- ▶ Of the latter, we located only one study (Skene, Hogan, de Vries, & Goody, 2008) that takes place in a tertiary education context.
- ▶ This study was undertaken at the U. of Western Australia - the first Australian University to introduce an ALLY Network.
- ▶ Its findings indicate that participation in UWA's ALLY workshop and Network increased awareness relating to DSG realities, and increased DSG advocacy at UWA.

Framework and Key Evaluation Questions

- ▶ For the present study, utilisation-focused evaluation (UFE) (Patton, 2008) was employed.
- ▶ UFE maximises the usefulness of findings for stakeholders through significant consultation on research design with primary users: those responsible for applying the findings and implementing any recommendations
 - in this case, the primary users were the four ALLY workshop facilitators at Unitec in 2018, and Unitec's interim Chief Executive.
- ▶ The central, agreed questions to assess workshop effectiveness are:
 1. Does the ALLY workshop raise awareness around the impact of heteronormativity and gender normativity, and
 2. Are participants more confident to act in ways that enhance DSG inclusion?

Methodology: Research Methods and Questions

- ▶ Mixed-method study: questionnaires and interviews; and statistical and thematic analyses.
- ▶ Questionnaires were completed immediately pre and post workshop. Twenty-two questionnaires were completed over two ALLY workshops in 2018.
- ▶ Four questions were posed both pre and post -event, with responses indicated along a 10-point Likert-type scale (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*):

Methodology: Research Methods and Questions

- ▶ People with diverse sexualities and genders experience discrimination at Unitec
- ▶ I am aware of how heteronormativity impacts my day-to-day interactions
- ▶ I am aware of how gender normativity impacts my day-to-day interactions
- ▶ I feel confident in my ability to promote an inclusive environment for people with diverse genders and sexualities at Unitec.

Methodology: Research Methods and Questions

- ▶ Two additional questions using Likert-type scales were posed post-workshop only, asking whether the workshop increased participants' 'knowledge about' and 'confidence to advocate for' DSG issues.

Methodology: Research Methods and Questions

- ▶ Additional questions required narrative responses. In keeping with a UFE approach, they allowed for a broad range of topic coverage and a variety of possible, emergent judgements and uses (Patton, 2008).
- ▶ Participants were asked about motivations for attending; anticipated gains; whether or not anticipated gains were achieved; workshop highlights; suggestions for improving DSG inclusivity; and which aspects of the workshop worked well and which did not.
- ▶ Finally, this study drew on findings from 10 semi-structured interviews with ALLY members about their experiences of the training workshop.

Methodology: Data Analysis

- ▶ Data analysis included testing the statistical significance of differences between participants' responses to questions posed both pre and post -workshop.
- ▶ For this analysis, the two-sample Kolomogorov-Smirnov (K-S) Test was employed (Dodge, 2008).
- ▶ For narrative responses to questionnaires and for interview data, thematic analysis was undertaken (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Key Findings

- ▶ Findings indicated strongly that the first key evaluation question is answered in the affirmative:

Does the ALLY workshop raise awareness around the impact of heteronormativity and gender normativity?

- ▶ Results were also positive for the second key question:

Are participants more confident to act in ways that enhance DSG inclusion?

-- although statistical analysis of data on this question indicated no significant change from pre to post workshop.

Key Findings

- ▶ Out of 22 questionnaire respondents, 17 expressed a desire pre-workshop to gain both new knowledge and skills in relation to ALLY work.
- ▶ The remaining five respondents expressed a desire either to increase understanding or openness, or to gain confidence speaking up in support of DSG inclusivity.
- ▶ Post-workshop, all but one respondent (who did not answer the question) reported that their hopes for the workshop had been realised or exceeded.

Key Findings

- ▶ Results from K-S testing showed that differences pre and post-workshop related to awareness of discrimination, and of the effects of heteronormativity, were significant at the level of $p < .05$.
- ▶ Differences related to awareness of the effects of gender normativity were more strongly significant: at the level of $p < 0.01$.
- ▶ Statistical findings showed no significant change in relation to confidence to promote DSG inclusivity. The 'post' scores were higher than the 'pre' scores, but the change was not large -- because participant confidence in this area was already quite high pre-workshop.

Key Findings

- ▶ However, in response to a question posed post-workshop only, 20 out of 22 respondents reported that their confidence to advocate for DSG inclusion had increased due to workshop participation (two were neutral, none disagreed, and notably, seven participants selected a score of 10).
- ▶ The fact that, pre-workshop, participant confidence to promote DSG inclusivity was quite high speaks to the self-selected nature of workshop participation. A key finding from the narrative data analysis was that most participants were already committed to supporting DSG inclusion at the start of the workshop.

Key Findings

- ▶ Thematic responses of qualitative data on increased awareness confirmed the statistical results. Indicative participant remarks include:
 - ▶ ‘The discussions, activities and material have raised my awareness of discrimination’
 - ▶ ‘[Before the workshop] I wasn’t clear on the difference between orientation and gender... I would go around and make huge assumptions on people’s orientation purely based on their gender presentation’.
 - ▶ (Regarding the need to know locations of unisex bathrooms on campus): ‘It hit home how real and important that stuff is. It’s not theoretical’.
 - ▶ ‘I’ll be more conscious of the language I use and how I respond to discrimination when I see it’

Key Findings

- ▶ Narrative data also indicated increased confidence to promote DSG inclusivity.
- ▶ All but one interviewee spoke about learning new ways to advocate for DSG inclusion during the workshop. Eight of the 10 interviewees spoke about feeling more empowered to speak out against discrimination due to workshop participation.
- ▶ The majority of questionnaire respondents referred to confidence about a range of new actions to support DSG inclusion (e.g., being ‘more open with sharing my personal story with people with no inhibitions’).

Additional Findings

- ▶ A central feature of the ALLY workshop at Unitec involves both facilitators and participants sharing personal stories and experiences related to DSG issues.
- ▶ Commenting on workshop highlights, just under 50 per cent of questionnaire respondents reported on this aspect of the workshop. Comments include:
 - ▶ ‘personal stories [were the most valuable]... knowing the struggle and pain people go through opened my heart to help and support’
 - ▶ ‘personal stories always have more impact on me’
 - ▶ ‘people have been generous... and courageous... to share their very personal stories. They are not going to go away either. They will remain in someone’s emotive experience’.

Additional Findings

- ▶ This finding aligns with existing research indicating that storytelling can be an important tool for promoting diversity in organisations.
- ▶ Stories are ‘memorable, easy to understand, and establish a common ground with others that creates credibility’ (Barker & Gower, 2010, p. 299). They also develop trust and communicate values, thus providing an effective and quick way to process beliefs and behaviours.

Additional Findings

- ▶ Another finding is the need for and appreciation of skilled facilitation.
 - ▶ ‘Great presenters/facilitators. Openness/sharing safely’.
 - ▶ ‘I really appreciated how the facilitators [held] difficult conversations in an open and non-aggressive way so that the people that needed to hear the answers most were involved and included’
- ▶ A 2018 study (Froncek, Mazziotta, Piper, and Rohmann) affirms that successful workshop facilitation for diversity education rests on facilitators’ ability to draw on a range of competencies, both knowledge and skill-based.

Concluding remarks

- ▶ Notably, when asked what Unitec might do to improve DSG inclusion, eight participants suggested either additional ALLY workshops or an institutional requirement for staff to attend the existing workshop.
- ▶ The need for skilled facilitators would be all the more salient if Unitec were to decide to require or promote the workshop among those who might not be drawn to it on their own initiative.
- ▶ It should be kept in mind that the offering as it stands is valuable: empowering and further educating a self-selected group is a worthwhile activity (AtKisson, 2011), because those who are predisposed to initiate change can, when supported to do so, motivate others by example.

Concluding remarks

- ▶ At the same time, there is potential value in offering a wider range of ALLY workshops to a wider range of Unitec staff.
- ▶ If Unitec were to do so, it would likely be important to redesign some offerings to provide more time to support those who, knowingly, have had limited interaction with DSG community members, or who evidence some reluctance to engage.
- ▶ A number of participants in this study (eight) specifically cited the importance of having time in the workshop to reflect and discuss ideas.
- ▶ Careful consideration of this kind would be in order regarding the structure and leadership of expanded offerings.

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