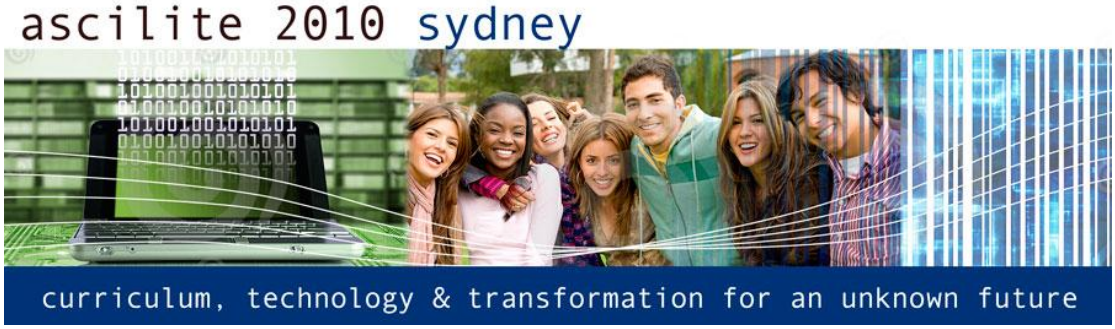

Strategic leadership capacity development for ICT: Moving beyond learning on the job

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Leadership for change is a key component for universities striving to find new ways to meet the needs of their future students. This paper discusses an innovative framework for leadership capacity development which has been implemented in a number of Australian universities. The framework, underpinned by a distributive approach to leadership, prepares a new generation of leaders for formal positions of leadership in all aspects of teaching and learning. Through the Faculty Scholars Program a number of teaching and learning innovations were implemented, including a number using innovative technologies, to establish strategic change within their faculties. The Scholars shared their outcomes annually through national forums focussed on improving assessment practice.

The paper provides a brief overview of the program, the methodology used and the Leadership Capacity Development Framework which was developed. Critical factors for success are identified including the implementation of strategic faculty-based projects; formal leadership training and activities; reflective practice; opportunities for dialogue about leadership practice and experiences; and activities that expanded current professional networks. The model can be adapted to have a specific focus on leadership for eLearning.

Keywords: leadership, framework, higher education, distributive leadership, leadership capacity development

Introduction

A cross-institutional program for leadership capacity building was implemented in 2006 -2008 funded through the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) with additional funding provided by participating universities (Lefoe & Parrish, 2008, 2009). The Faculty Scholars Program addressed both a concern for a looming leadership succession crisis and an identified gap for system wide development of leadership capacity for teaching and learning that moved beyond management and administration. The Program involved the development and trial of a Leadership Capacity Development Framework (LCDF) across four universities. It was not specifically aimed at leadership for eLearning but encompassed all aspects of learning and teaching. However, it is a particularly useful framework for those implementing eLearning initiatives as it targets participants in non-formal leadership positions who are implementing change or driving innovations within a higher education context. This paper provides a brief overview of the program, and explains the methodology for the research and the resultant framework. Critical factors for successful implementation are identified and discussed with pointers to future research.

The Faculty Scholars Program

Initially a partnership was established between faculty-based academics and a facilitator in the central academic development units of two universities and a framework to develop leadership in learning and teaching through an action learning process was trialed. The Scholars assumed complex leadership roles within their faculties and led initiatives designed to improve assessment practices. They engaged in collaborative and reflective activities throughout the program and reported on the outcomes of the assessment initiatives to their peers at a National Roundtable which they planned, coordinated and facilitated. The following year the LCDF was implemented in two further universities.

Background

The full potential of educational technologies is yet to be realised in the higher education sector while it is used as an add-on to traditional teaching and learning. Throughout the educational technology literature a number of reasons for this failure have been proposed but perhaps the most important one was identified by Gayeski who stated that people do not resist "technical change", they resist the "social aspects of change" and the resultant change in their relationships (Gayeski, 1989, p7). Some twenty years later this potential is still to be realised in a significant way. One reason Gayeski failed to identify was the ad hoc leadership development in higher education. Many of the staff members in positions to lead this very significant change were simply not provided with opportunity to develop the skills needed to implement such a radical change to the status quo (Knight & Trowler, 2001). Whilst isolated pockets of very effective practice occurred in some university subjects, departments and indeed in some universities, for the majority of institutions the change process has been very slow indeed. How the university supports this changing context requires informed leadership at all levels in the institution. This notion is acknowledged in the 2009 Horizon Report (Johnson, Levine, & Smith, 2009). In order to implement emerging technologies there is the "need for innovation and leadership at all levels of the academy" (p.6). System wide development is required to ensure that leadership capacity development is no longer an 'on the job' experience but that significant and adequate preparation for such positions occurs to ensure that institutions are able to think differently about how they engage with technology in teaching and learning (McKenzie et al., 2005).

Distributive leadership provides a conceptual framework for discussing leadership capacity development in academia and is not a leadership model but a tool for analysis and draws evidence from research on distributed leadership in the school sector (Harris, 2009; Diamond & Spillane, 2007). For the purpose of the Faculty Scholars Program, it is defined as a distribution of power through the collegial sharing of knowledge, of practice, and reflection within the sociocultural context of the university (Bennett, et al., 2003; Dinham, Aubusson, & Brady, 2006; Knight & Trowler, 2001).

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used within an action learning framework. This framework also provided a model for implementation for the participants in the Program through the key areas of plan, act, observe, and reflect (Zuber-Skerritt, 1993).

Data was collected through interview, reflective journal, and anonymous surveys following ethics approval from the lead institution. Additional information was collected through evaluation of key activities such as the Roundtable, leadership retreat and planning workshop. Qualitative analysis methods, using appropriate software to identify key themes, were used to identify successful methods and challenges faced by participants engaged with the activities. This informed the development of the LCDF and associated resources.

Twenty-four participants (Scholars) engaged in the Program in this time period. They were at various stages of their career, ranging from associate lecturer to professor, and assumed a range of leadership roles and responsibilities in their faculty, the institution and the national arena. In addition there were a number of other participants engaged across the institutions, including a member of the senior executive, a project manager, a facilitator from the central academic development unit, steering committees who provided individual mentoring, and key administrative support personnel. The Scholars also engaged various peers to collaborate on their faculty-based projects and the National Roundtable.

Discussion

The LCDF built on a Faculty Learning and Teaching Scholars program to achieve strategic change initiatives related to learning and teaching both within faculties and across the institution. The LCDF developed capacity via explicit professional development activities and cross institutional consultation and collaboration. The Scholars had the broad responsibility of promoting good practice in assessment within their faculty and the broader community. The use of faculty-based projects provided a vehicle for strategic change and the opportunity for Scholars to provide leadership for their action learning project from an informal position.

All projects were related generally to improving student outcomes (Table 1). Those related to eLearning improvements included a systems level enhancement for a web-based e-portfolio system (Item 1, Table 1); the use of a content management system to map assessment practice across the curriculum (Item 2, Table 1); a school level initiative to use blogs for reflection, building to a Philosophy of Journalism for final year students (Item 3, Table 1); and an online toolbox to support international students with their learning (Item 4, Table 1).

Table 1: Examples of faculty-based projects related to eLearning

Target	Project & faculty	Context
1. System level change	Implementing a web-based e-portfolio support system for teacher education students. Faculty of Education	Based on the New South Wales Institute of Teachers' Professional Teaching Standards. This project included: (1) support strategies for students; (2) support strategies for university staff to identify opportunities for integration; and (3) support for teachers supervising practicum . (Bennett, 2007; Bennett, & Lockyer, 2007).
2. System level initiative	Faculty of Informatics: The development of a database of assessments associated guidelines which link information technology skills with graduate qualities.	Key was the implementation of a content management system for the design of an integrated curriculum. Key ideas included; online resource sharing, reusable content chunks, meta-tagging, and customised workflows to assist coordination of tasks to integrated curriculum. Intention also to foster a positive culture of sharing and learning in academic staff (Michael, 2007).
3. Degree level initiative	Reflective Learning & Professional Practice: towards an integrated model for journalism education Faculty of Creative Arts	The project developed resources and processes to link the assessment tasks and associated reflective practices in all first year Bachelor of Journalism subjects. Development and support of student blogs and Philosophy of Journalism Statements as tools for global assessment and reflective learning which assisted students and academics to build skills and graduate qualities through the recognition of links across subject boundaries. (O'Donnell, 2008).
4. Subject level initiative with international focus	Pandora: Student Teaching and Learning (Resources) Toolbox, Faculty of Law	Challenges faced by post-graduate domestic and international students with academic expectations of critical analytical thinking, reading and writing skills, academic language, referencing and expectations surrounding plagiarism and assessment led to the development of this online resource. The cross-institutional team aimed to promote student skills development in these areas and facilitate delivery of support services to students, particularly those studying overseas (Loves, 2008, 2009).

Further information about all projects is provided in recent publications (Brown, 2008; Lefoe & Parrish, 2008; 2009; O'Brien & Littrich, 2008).

Organisation of the Roundtable provided opportunity for Scholars to lead at a national level. They also engaged in mentoring and coaching by strategic leadership coaches from the senior executive in each institution and an institutional facilitator. A cross-institution network of Scholars was facilitated by the cascading the model with the Stage 1 participants mentoring the Stage 2 participants.

Five critical factors for success of the program were identified:

- implementation of Faculty-based action learning projects;
- formal leadership training and related activities;
- engaging in dialogue related to leadership;
- reflection on action; and
- expansion of current professional networks.

There were eight overarching activities in which the Scholars engaged and their relationship to five key domains of the LCDF are explained in Table 2.

Table 2: Domain and activity relationships

Domains	Activity
Growing	1: Three day Leadership Retreat
	2: Two day Leadership Workshop
Reflecting	5: Mentoring and Coaching
	6. Reflective practice
	8: Cascading to partner institutions
Enabling	3: Extended Authentic Action Learning Faculty-Based Projects over 6-12 months
	4: National Roundtable: Organisation, Facilitation, and Presentation.
Engaging	3: Extended Authentic Action Learning Faculty-Based Projects over 6-12 months
	4: National Roundtable: Organisation, Facilitation, and Presentation
	7: Cross-Faculty, Institutional and Cross-Institutional Communication and collaboration
Networking	4: National Roundtable: Organisation, Facilitation, and Presentation.
	8: Cascading to partner institutions.

Each key activity served to enhance one or more aspects of the domains identified in the LCDF, but key to leadership capacity development was the way the Scholars engaged with their own action learning Faculty-Based Project. By learning about leadership within the context of their own initiatives, the Scholars developed great insight into change management processes, as well as their own abilities and preferences for leadership.

The LCDF provides a significant opportunity to prepare academics for positional leadership in higher educational institutions. With four universities already successfully implementing the program they are moving in the right direction to addressing the looming leadership succession crisis. There is a new group of people ready, willing and capable of taking leadership roles in higher education for teaching and learning. Indeed many who have undertaken the program have moved into strategic positions and bring new insights to these positions because of their engagement in the program. The final section provides some suggestions for future research.

Future directions

Future research is required to track the longer term influence the framework had on the Scholars both as leaders within and outside of their institution. Additional funding by the cascade partners has been received to continue the program in two new universities in 2009 (Smigiel, 2008). We are already seeing the effect of the program with a number of Scholars achieving publication, promotion, externally funded grants and an ALTC fellowship building on the success of one faculty project. One

Scholar, who has since taken a formal position of leadership in her faculty, encapsulates the impact of the Program:

> I have a better sense of myself as a leader [now]. I really wasn't sure I could be a leader …. [it] is not necessarily about the position you hold, or your personal achievements. Leadership is about finding ways of bringing about sustainable, enduring change to make teaching, learning and student assessment more effective. (2007 Scholar)

Frameworks for leadership capacity development, such as the LCDF, provide a scaffold for preparing potential leaders for formal leadership positions. The feedback and evaluations of participants in the Program suggest that the LCDF is a sound model for developing leadership capacity. However, the successful implementation of the LCDF relies on an investment and commitment in the implementation of the program from universities, institutional policy makers and senior leaders. Their support is fundamental to success.

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