Scoping document Distributed Leadership

A. Background

Universities engaged and Distributed Leadership Projects completed
Lead university:

RMIT *Developing Multi-level Leadership in the Use of Student Feedback to Enhance Student Learning and Teaching Practice*
Partner Universities:

Australian Catholic University - *Development of Distributed Institutional Leadership Capacity in Online Learning and Teaching*

Macquarie University- *Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus*

Wollongong University - *Distributive Leadership for Learning and Teaching: Developing the Faculty Scholar Model*

Aim -to:
- *identify the synergies between the outcomes of four ALTC Projects funded as Institutional Leadership (Distributed) Grants*
- *develop an Institutional Leadership - Distributed Leadership Matrix (DLM) - of contextual conditions and leadership skills needed to achieve an effective distributed leadership process.*
- *develop a flexible self-evaluative tool (SET) to encourage and support a distributed leadership approach to learning and teaching improvements.*

Distributed Leadership Defined:
> *a distribution of power through the collegial sharing of knowledge, practice and reflection within the social context of the university* (Wollongong LP).

Distributed Leadership Elements
- create *an environment or context for academics and others to fulfil their potential and interest in their work* Bryman (2009, p.66).
- *wider context in which leadership and leadership development takes place, as opposed to focusing solely on the traits and capabilities of individual leaders* (Bolden, Petrov & Gosling 2008, p.1).
- *the idea that leadership is a property of groups of people, not of an individual* (Woods et al 2004, p.449).

Distributed leadership Variables (Woods et al 2004, p.448). :
- Context (internal and external)
- Culture (of academic autonomy)
- Change and development from many sources (top-down and bottom-up)
- Activity that is collaborative, multiple and complementary by teams of people sharing responsibility for a successful outcome
- Conflict resolution processes that are effective (to assist the multiple people contributing across a broad arena of activity).

Distributed Leadership Characteristics - Analytical dualism' (Gronn 2000)
Structure:
- institutional, cultural and social elements (including the duties and role of, and the distribution of power between, the participants)
- systems and patterns of knowledge ideas and values in the institution
- patterns of relationships and interactions between the parties.

Agency -action of people including self-consciousness that enables people to:
- evaluate their social context
- envisage alternatives creatively
- collaborate with others to bring about change.

B. Stage One: Scoping Distributed Leadership
Context
The common element identified was the need for change driven by contextual factors related to both external and internal pressures. In all cases the projects were designed to respond to external (government) emphasis on the need for the higher education sector to improve the quality of learning and teaching. This was combined with internal (university) concerns related to the need to build existing leadership capacity in learning and teaching at the same time to encourage research output. These dual demands led universities to review existing hierarchical leadership approaches through the establishment of more inclusive (distributed leadership) approaches designed to produce more standard policy.

Culture
The importance of adopting a new leadership approach that supports the existing and deeply embedded culture of academic autonomy was evident across projects. In each project academics were invited, based on their interest in leading improvements to the issue under discussion, to self select. This resulted in the participation of academics at various stages in their careers in the informal leadership roles they adopted as well as academics who held formal leadership roles. In each case it was acknowledged that support from colleagues in formal management and leadership positions was essential for the success of the project.

Change and Development
In each project the need for change that incorporated a new, more integrated approach between the formal senior leaders making policy at the top of the organisation and the informal leaders implementing policy (academics-as-teachers) was recognised. The change under discussion had Institute-wide impact designed to produce a mix of new top-down policy with bottom-up implementation strategies. In each case, the important role played by the Deputy (Pro) Vice Chancellor in positively and overtly encouraging, endorsing, supporting and recognising the contribution being made by the informal leaders and in providing mentoring and coaching support was identified.

Activity

In each project teams of people, academics and professional staff with expertise in a broad range of relevant knowledge, ideas and value were involved in a collaborative process of change. In three cases the process involved cycles of change using an Action Research approach that relied upon reflection on and in action by the participants, while in the fourth case a monthly report on progress was made to Faculty Committees and participants were encouraged to use reflection as a key activity documented in journals. In each case the participants were assisted by professionals in the Learning and Teaching Units who adopted a facilitative role using regular sharing of individual reflections on activities and change such as through the embedding of Appreciative Inquiry in team activities.

The importance of the Institutions adopting an approach to resources provision that recognised the importance of providing time for networking and communicating opportunities, training in leadership and professional development was acknowledged. A common finding was also that on-line communications were not regarded as effective as face-to-face.

Conflict Resolution

In none of the projects were discrete conflict resolution mechanisms identified. Several challenges did occur that had the potential to lead to conflict. Each project suffered from turnover of participants that made communication more difficult. As informal leaders gained expertise and began to exercise leadership skills this created some tension for the formal leaders used to being the sole expert and/or decision-maker. The cycles of change that characterise Action Research caused some concerns for formal leaders used to focusing on short-term, explicit outcomes.

Despite lack of formal conflict resolution procedures, project methodologies enabled indirectly processes to address conflicts. The Action Research process enabled any conflicts to be identified in a timely manner and adjustments to be made. Each project had a two-year timeline that enabled time for change without undue pressure. Each project had a Reference Group of external and internal experts who were available to discussion and advice.

C. Validating The Scoping Document

Activity:

1. Using the above definition, can you identify any examples of Distributed Leadership occurring within your own University? How is this supported?

2. If you have identified Distributed Leadership as an appropriate approach, who have you identified as the most influential thinkers in the field?

3. With these examples identified in your response to (1) in mind, can you identify examples of the five variables identified above?

4. In each case, can you identify examples of additional variables not included in the above?

5. Is there evidence that distributed leadership is being effective in achieving the aims for which it has been designed? If so, can you identify what your university is using to identify demonstrable or measurable improvements?

6. As a table, please discuss your response to the following conclusion that emerged from an ALTC discussion in 2006:
   *A Distributed model of leadership is needed in Higher Education*

Focus Group Questions:

1). Using the definition of distributed leadership provided below, can you identify any examples of Distributed Leadership occurring within your own University?
a distribution of power through the collegial sharing of knowledge, practice and reflection within the social context of the university (Wollongong University)

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2. If you have identified Distributed Leadership as an appropriate approach, who have you identified as the most influential thinkers in the field, both nationally and internationally

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3). If you have identified examples of distributed leadership, can you identify examples, and rate the importance, of the following five variables, to the achievement of an effective distributed leadership approach? Please circle your response:

i) Context (internal and external)
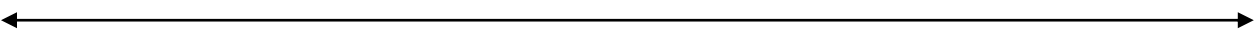
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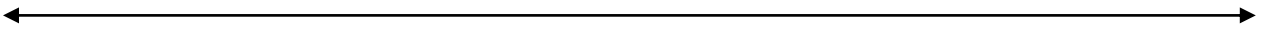Not important   Extremely Important

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Comments:

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ii) Culture (of academic autonomy)

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Not important   Extremely Important

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Comments:

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iii)   Change & development from many sources (top-down & bottom-up)

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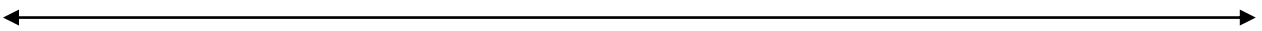
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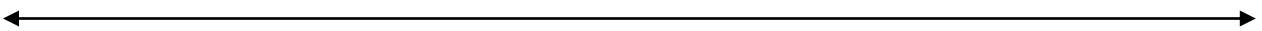**1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10**

Comments:

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**iv)   Activity that is collaborative, multiple and complementary by teams
of people sharing responsibility for a successful outcome**

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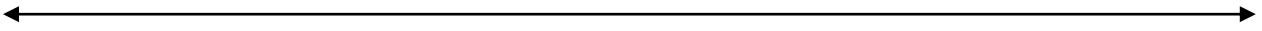
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v) Conflict resolution processes that are effective (to assist the multiple people contributing across a broad arena of activity)

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1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Comments:

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4. Can you identify examples of additional variables not included in the above?

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5. Is there evidence that distributed leadership is being effective in achieving the aims for which it has been designed? If so, can you identify what your university is using to identify demonstrable or measurable improvements?

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6. As a Group, please discuss your response and record a group response to the following conclusion that emerged from an ALTC discussion in 2006:
    A Distributed model of leadership is needed in Higher Education

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