



Ideas of leadership underpinning proposals to the Carrick Institute:

A review of proposals from the 'Leadership for Excellence in Teaching and Learning Program'

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Rationale

Evidence suggests that leadership capacity-building in higher education is uneven across the sector, and that many academic leaders rely too much on learning on the job. By contrast, the Carrick Institute position is that academic leadership is a highly specialised and professional activity. The Institute has therefore established a Program focused on Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching as one of three proposed Programs under the umbrella of the Grants Scheme. The anticipated budget for this Program over 2006-2008 is in the order of \$11 million. [Carrick Institute 2006]

The Carrick Institute commissioned the paper that follows, with this brief:

The paper will synthesize the themes and understandings about leadership for learning and teaching in higher education found in the applications for the Leadership for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Program and, where identified, the literature used to underpin these themes and understandings. It will be a scholarly paper, designed to be accessible to those not familiar with the literature and as far as possible will avoid the use of jargon.

This paper is based on an analysis of 39 of the 62 applications received under the 2006 Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program, 27 in the form of full proposals and 12 in the shorter expressions of interest. Applications came from universities in every State and Territory; some universities sent more than one application. Only those applications for which permission was received for inclusion in this analysis were included.

The paper has been prepared by consultants who have not been and will not be involved in applying for a grant under the program but have a good knowledge of higher education. All but one or two of the references used in this report were cited in the applications, but it has not been possible to examine all of the approximately 400 (including repeats) that were referred to by the applicants - in part because some were not obtainable, being conference or internal papers, or, in the case of some online sources, impenetrable.

1 Introduction

Most of the 39 proposals reviewed in this report seek to make changes at middle or department levels of the university structure: only one is pitched at the top level inhabited by VCs, DVCs, and Council members; and only two propose engaging with students as active participants. Seven have a national perspective. Most of the proposals saw the need for adaptations in response to the rapidly changing university environment; several put forward highly innovative ideas. A few did not discuss leadership at all but implied that the teaching and learning initiative being put forward was an example of leadership, or that the beneficiaries of the project would thereby become leaders.

One group of proposals aimed to improve practice with particular methods or procedures, for example in assessment, competencies, benchmarking, performance criteria, information technology and online delivery of curriculum. The majority were concerned with teaching and learning generally, either across the board or within fields, and at institution level or closer to the action. Several proposals identified a 'neglected' group of lower level managers such as chairs of curriculum committees, unit coordinators or directors of teaching committees. Persons in these positions had considerable potential to lead changes or improvements in practice but needed support, greater recognition and skilling.

Two problems reported to afflict many institutions were: the lower status attributed by academics to teaching compared with research; and poor communication and understanding between managers and academics. The literature (for example Ramsden 1998, McInnes 1996) confirms that these problems are widespread: the former is a longstanding characteristic of universities and is caused in part by the reward structure of academe. The latter is of more recent origin and follows changing work patterns and the shift of internal governance from collegial to professional managers. It is also of interest that among the proposals devoted to advancing teaching and learning in particular disciplines was the view, supported with some evidence, that science academics are the most refractory to change.

About one quarter of the references cited in the proposals are on the theory or practice of leadership; the remainder concern teaching and learning or the university context. Not many were published before 1996. Because of the limited amount of research on leadership in universities a good deal of the applied work in the higher education literature draws on studies at school level education, for example of school principals; or on management in business and productive industries, or in the political arena. Some of the applicants were aware of the need for caution in applying theories and practices to higher education that had been developed from research in institutions very different from universities, for example where structures are more hierarchical, leadership styles more authoritarian or supervisory, and those to be led more recalcitrant.

For example Burns (1978), who researched schools, and is cited in several proposals, offers a definition that is perhaps more applicable to the political domain: "leadership is exercised when persons ... mobilize ... institutional, political, psychological and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers." Another source has a view of leadership that is perhaps more appropriate to McDonalds than to a multi-purpose university: "the ability to influence,

motivate, and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness of the organization ...” (House et al 1999)

Clearly it is important to develop concepts and strategies for leadership that are useful for higher education. Perusal of the literature referred to by the applicants reveals an emerging research-based literature that includes significant contributions by Australian scholars.

2 What is Leadership in Higher Education?

Those proposers who delved into the topic would agree with the applicant who concluded that “the origin of leadership is an elusive topic”. Some get around the question of origins by stating that academic leadership is about ‘change’ - whatever will lead to the desired outcome: “developing and maintaining quality teaching”, or simply “lasting improvement”. Some used Kotter’s definition (1990): “leadership is about influencing and engaging others to effect change”. One application in particular included a useful brief review of the literature on academic leadership.

References to the nature of leadership listed in the applications include: personality theories stating that leadership depends on traits that are either inherited or emerge in early life development; role theory holding that leadership is behaviour associated with a particular context or position; assumptions that the capacity for leadership can be taught; and that leadership capacities are universal so that, given the right circumstances, anyone is capable of exercising leadership. Most proposals adopt a position closer to the latter end of this list, assuming that leadership is related to context and that it can be taught. “The Carrick Institute position is that academic leadership is a highly specialised and professional activity”; the clear implication is that it can be taught.

The terms leader and manager tend to be used interchangeably in proposals, one even using the expression leader/manager. Some proposals focus on university managers seeking support for projects that will enhance their leadership capabilities. A number of proposals implicitly see the problem they are addressing as being due to poor communication or strained relations between managers and academics. The literature makes a distinction between the roles of leader and manager. A manager is a formal role position, usually at some level in an organisational hierarchy and is not necessarily a leader. On the other hand a leader may occupy a formal position and may be a manager, but neither of these is a necessary condition for leadership, and many individuals, recognised by their peers as leaders, are not distinguished by any formal position or title. Zigarni (2005) in a long description of the differences between managers and leaders says the former are likely to be more conservative and concerned with systems maintenance rather than change, are rational and data-based in decision making, are not risk takers, and, by virtue of their positions, have authority to direct resources and personnel. On the other hand leaders are change oriented; they have a variable time perspective, a vision of what needs to be, and help to create a culture of enthusiasm for change. Ramsden (1998) and Kotter (1990) are both important sources for our applicants; Ramsden applies to academe Kotter’s idea that management and leadership are complementary processes and equally necessary for the success of an organisation:

Excessive management produces compliance, passivity and order for order’s sake; it discourages risk-taking and stifles creativity and long term vision. But

excessive leadership without the compensating force of strong management produces inconsistent, delayed and off-budget results, while emphasising change for change's sake.

Change is of course always assumed to be for the better in the proposals and in most of the literature. But in passing it is worth noting that a leader can, by accident or design, effect changes that, in the opinion of the followers, make things worse. Even universities are not immune to such leadership. In the applications there are proposals for changes related to quality - doing things better, and others seeking new structures and directions - doing things differently. One proposal, in discussing these two objectives, applies the terms transformational and transactional. That however is not the common meaning and one of the authorities Bass (1990) in a book on improving organisations through transactional leadership refers to it as "indirect, bottom up and horizontal" and states that this leadership style is characterised by behaviour exhibiting individualised consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational leadership and idealised influence. In the higher education literature the terms transformational and transactional are applied to contrasting leadership styles or objectives; see for example Ramsden (1998) and Gibbs (2005). In the former leadership exhibits values, inspiration, trust and exemplary practice; there are clear goals, teachers are involved and responsibilities may be delegated. Transactional leadership, referred to in a number of proposals, is not well defined or understood by the applicants. Ramsden sees transactional leadership as involving clear goals and contingent rewards and being, in some ways, complementary to transformational. Martin et al (2003) in a study of Australian academics, found that a student-focussed approach to teaching (as distinct to a teacher-centred one) was associated with self-perceptions by teachers of their leadership as transformational. The transactional concept originates in the leadership literature of politics and management and refers to a relation between leader and follower characterised by a sort of bargain - for example "political office for electoral support" (Burns 1978). For a clear discussion of these concepts as applied to higher education see Ramsden (1998). The terms are not applied usefully in the applications.

Some proposals and supporting literature regard leadership as a characteristic of the organisation as much it is of particular individuals. Yuki (2002), who is cited several times, defines leadership as "a complex social influence process where individuals at all levels of the organisation influence the choice of objectives and strategies, the organisation of work activities, the motivation of people to achieve the objectives, the development of skills and confidence, and the maintenance of cooperative relationships both within the organisation and with people beyond the organisation."

Somewhat in contrast to this view, gravitational or spatial analogies - 'bottom up', 'top down' and 'sideways' - are used widely in the literature and in about one quarter of the applications to describe leadership within multi-level or hierarchical organisations. Three of the proposals describe leadership that is both bottom up and top down. The terms are useful in conveying where authority and the potential to initiate change lie.

Leadership is also described as formal and informal. The former is generally positional, being associated with a position such as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Dean, Head of Department or Business Manager. The positional concept underpins the view of leadership in about one third of the proposals. In some cases the role of Dean etc. is assumed to include leadership capacity, and proposals seek to harness and direct this capacity to advance teaching and learning. In others the authority of

the position is recognised but the objective is to enhance the occupant's leadership potential with information or inspiration flowing from the 'bottom up'. In the literature a leadership style termed 'authoritarian' tends to be associated with top down leadership and 'democratic' with bottom up. These terms however have a wide application and are applied, for example, to the styles of informal leaders in small groups.

Ramsden's book *Learning to Lead in Higher Education* (1998) is deservedly the most frequently cited reference in the applications under discussion. It focuses particularly on the departmental level and uses research based evidence to develop models of leadership and practical strategies. In defining leadership Ramsden eschews both traits and purposes or goals, describing academic leadership simply as "... a practical and everyday *process* of supporting, managing, developing and inspiring academic colleagues" and goes on to comment that "...leadership in universities can and should be exercised by everyone, from the vice-chancellor to the casual car parking attendant. Leadership is to do with how people relate to each other."

Ramsden is here assuming that leadership is inherent in organisations. It is rarely a matter of chance when directions change or things are done better; some body or some bodies have been influential. This view pervades most of the literature and underpins most of the proposals; but it still leaves open many questions – what gives rise to leadership; is there a knowledge-base associated with it; how should leadership for better teaching operate in the multi-purpose, federally structured organisations that are universities; and how does all of this link with students who ultimately are the sole object of all these projects?

3 Where should leadership be taught? Can it be taught?

Underlying a few proposals is the trait theory or the assumption that there are characteristics for leadership deeply embedded in the personalities of leaders and that with the aid of appropriate methods such as questionnaires and correlation analysis these can be identified and built into an instrument that will be useful for predicting, selecting, promoting and even teaching leaders. However, for the majority of applications and literature the implicit assumption is that leadership capability can be acquired through teaching or experience - perhaps by anyone who volunteers for a programme, or by candidates with some potential nominated as such by their department or institution, or by those in positions of authority.

In contrast to trait theories the idea of 'situated learning' is frequently mentioned: this involves the two notions that different strategies for learning may be needed depending on the setting; and that there will be interactions among the target group as well as between them and the leader. Sometimes linked with this view is a cautionary note about the risk of generalisation across settings and the suggestion that development of leadership capabilities and teaching skills may be more effectively conducted within disciplines rather than with multi-disciplinary groups. There are references to distinct disciplinary cultures and to different pedagogical methods as reasons for developing leadership within professional or disciplinary fields, preferably at department level.

Proposals for advancing leadership capability generally involved some sort of teaching programme or learning through experience or combinations of both. The teaching strategies included workshops, writing assignments and case-studies,

discussions and focus groups, mentoring, the creation of communities and networks (some electronic), structured programmes of teaching, and seminars and conferences. For some, learning on the job together with some guidance and reflection was the main method. The principles of action research – an iteration of planning, action, reflection, re-planning, revised action – informed the strategies in several proposals (Kemmis 1998). Some extend this idea to include an assumption that leadership is an outcome of practice; that is, by virtue of their competence, first rate teachers receive recognition and status in their departments and are actual or potential leaders. Two applications proposed identifying such individuals and providing them with assistance that would enhance their leadership capacity.

This strategy was used in the innovations programmes of the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) and the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD) (Southwell 2006). Submissions were assessed by independent panels and the winners received grants to develop and implement their proposals. The winners also received publicity within their own university and nationally; and some were invited to workshop their ideas around the country. Evaluations of the scheme showed that, through the recognition of their achievements and with esteem from their colleagues, hitherto ordinary teachers assumed leadership roles in teaching, particularly within their own departments and universities.

4 What do leaders know and need to know?

Views on what leaders need to know, or should be taught, vary among the applicants and in the literature. The applications fall roughly into three groups according to the sort of knowledge deemed to be necessary for enhancing leadership capabilities. The first assumption is that leadership behaviour can be identified and, using suitable methods, developed in potential leaders. Some proposals cite Yuki (2002) who developed a three-fold classification of leadership behaviours:

1. Task-oriented e.g. organising work activity to improve efficiency;
2. Relations-oriented e.g. providing support and encouragement;
3. Change-oriented e.g. Encourage and support innovators.

The second and most common assumption is that leaders in the area of teaching and learning need to know about teaching and learning, or to be acknowledged innovators in the area. This assumption is made somewhat less frequently among the 'Institutional Leadership' priority group of applications than 'Disciplinary and Cross-disciplinary' ones. A common approach is to identify a source of potential leaders - heads of department, course controllers, sub-deans, academics with good research records - and develop strategies for advancing their knowledge of university pedagogy. The CAUT and CUTSD leaders referred to in the previous section were well informed on the latest developments in their fields; the selection process had ensured that.

The hypothesis that expertise in a subject can give rise to leadership is to be tested in one of the proposals. The applicants noted an unexpected result when reviewing some cross-disciplinary study groups that had worked on a variety of pedagogical projects: as well as developing expertise in the particular content area, many of the participants exhibited leadership skills in facilitating initiatives back in their departments.

The third assumption is that leaders need to be acknowledged experts in their own field of study. As asked above, is it necessary or helpful that a leader is up to speed on, or at least aware of, the latest technical developments in the field where leadership is called for? Obviously this could not be expected of leadership at higher levels in the organisation but what about in departments? This idea lies behind the two proposals that see academics with good research records as potential leaders for the advancement of teaching. We found no evidence for or against this idea in the literature cited in the proposals. There is however a recent pioneering study of school principals in Australia and USA which examined the knowledge-base from which the principals operated. Irrespective of country and of whether the schools were public or private, the effective leaders were knowledgeable of recent research in educational pedagogy. (Biddle and Saha 2002)

5 Distributed Leadership and multi-layered institutions

A number of applicants make a point of describing the university context, commenting on the issue of central versus dispersed loci for teaching initiatives. This is particularly important because so much of the theory and practice of leadership has been developed for productive organisations with hierarchies of authority and management, or for schools and education departments where there are clear structures of authority. Despite the recent managerial revolution within universities and the demise of collegial decision making, universities remain diverse institutions of schools and faculties each having distinct cultures and a major allegiance to a disciplinary or professional authority outside the university. Curriculum is influenced by, 'dictated by' in some professional faculties, these agencies. The knowledge and skills imparted to students derive from the methods and traditions of the academic disciplines or the services provided by the professions. The idea of a common pedagogy for higher education tends to be assumed by some university management and teaching agencies. But the professions and disciplines, backed by some research, are liable to argue that pedagogy should arise from the nature and vocabulary of the subject matter. The establishment of education units within medical schools is an example of this viewpoint. (Two of these are mentioned in the applications).

Another issue is size and organisation. The larger, older, 'research' universities (the three characteristics go together) comprise powerful and loosely federated faculties in institutions with highly devolved organisational structures. Faculties are autonomous in some important respects including curriculum. Quite apart from the point about disciplinary culture and pedagogy there are likely to be in these institutions no clear ways for communicating about teaching methods and the dissemination of innovations from outside the faculty. This is reflected in the applications, where most of those assuming a 'centre out' model for dissemination are smaller institutions.

Several applicants make reference to the keynote address delivered at a conference of the Higher Education and Development Society of Australia (Gibbs 2005), reporting evidence from a study of thirteen 'research intensive' universities in ten countries in favour of initiatives at the coal-face: "...what teaching development could be seen was the result of initiatives within departments, often wholly independent of the centre. Furthermore institution-wide initiatives tended to emerge from successful initiatives from within an individual department, rather than the other way round." Gibbs concludes that in such institutions departments and programmes are the key

organisational units when it comes to understanding change and that is where leadership of teaching should be studied.

This is a controversial area we need not go into any further except where the concepts and strategies for leadership are insensitive to the diversity within universities. By and large the proposals were not. The concept of distributed leadership is seen by most as appropriate for universities which, irrespective of size, are institutions unlike any other, having multiple layers and multiple professional and disciplinary cultures. Only a few made the easy assumption of 'one size fits all' in developing their ideas for enhancing leadership capacity. Academics have always been reasonably comfortable about the idea that there are common intellectual standards which can be applied across fields when awarding scholarships and honours for degrees. Recently academics have more or less come to accept the Australian Universities Quality Agency's assumption that there are common measures of quality which can be applied to university teaching across the board. And, as the services of academic development units are becoming known, there is a growing acceptance that there are some useful pedagogical principles and practices that apply to teaching and learning generally. Distributed leadership may be appropriate in these circumstances but, as Ramsden (1998) points out, if leadership is to be effective universities "... need to sidestep a series of errors associated with single models of academic excellence, teaching and research, human resource management, and structure and process."

6 Connecting with students

How will the universities or the Carrick Institute, which expects "a demonstrable enhancement of learning and teaching ...", know whether students' learning is advanced as the result of a particular project? Most of the proposals say how their project will be evaluated; some would ask for student feedback. Understandably those proposals concerned with advancing leadership capabilities at institutional level are less likely than those in the disciplinary priority area to ask students about effectiveness, although it wouldn't be a bad idea for the project leaders to ask themselves "will the students notice?"

Applications in the disciplinary priority area were generally closer to the coal-face. Two of these proposed investigating student feedback on teaching and others intended to seek students' opinions when evaluating the project's success. This however is as far as it goes - student feedback is several degrees removed from the sort of evidence needed to answer the question - and our conclusion is consistent with that reached by Gibbs et al (2006) after an international survey of leadership for teaching quality that "the vast majority of the literature on departmental leadership contains no evidence that the methods or principles they espouse have any consequences for the quality of teaching let alone the quality of student learning ..."

In our view hard evidence of the impact of leadership or any other innovation on students' learning should be akin to the sort universities use when deciding whether a student will pass or fail, get a pass or honours, graduate or not. This would require some sort of experimental design comparing test results; examination grades of students who had and had not experienced the new method; or results before and after. The one project that got close to this question proposed a national benchmarking exercise (in archaeology) that would provide a framework for

departments and universities wishing to know about the intellectual standards of their courses.

Should we have expected students to be given an active role in the proposals for leadership exercises intended to improve teaching? One project included students in small groups of staff and managers set up to improve communications across levels and disciplines as new courses were introduced. And another observed that students are a highly underused resource for better teaching and learning; and that they could be active educational theorists.

The number of staff per student has steadily declined since the 1980s, with a consequent decline in small group teaching. One leadership proposal addressed the problem of teaching increasingly large classes. Tutorials of up to a dozen students have all but disappeared as a regular teaching arrangement, yet the role of students as leaders in learning innovations, for example in student initiated study groups, is not among the questions asked by applicants. Perhaps this is because so much of the leadership theory originated in studies of productive and bureaucratic organisations. Yet one important leadership tradition of relevance to students concerns small groups which are described by Burns (1979) as “one of the most solid, enduring durable, and highly structured entities in human society.” (P. 292).

7 Conclusions

The literature on Leadership makes clear that there are many forms of Leadership, and many contexts. It is important to be aware of the various forms and to develop the form that suits the context/issue. The applications display a fairly narrow range of concepts of leadership, with two views predominating.

One is that described above as “Positional Leadership”, where certain people are expected to be leaders by virtue of “formal status or position in an organisation: department head, director, chairman, president, admiral, headmaster, bishop, minister, professor and so on”. In these applications, the task is seen as developing the qualities of real leadership in these officers. That is a worthwhile task, but it is perhaps not too unkind to describe it as remedial. We suspect that what the Carrick Institute had in mind in offering this program is more proactive: the development of people who will come into these positions of authority by virtue of their already developed leadership.

The second predominant concept is that competence in one’s field equates to leadership. It does not; while competence may be regarded as an important, even a necessary component of leadership, it is not sufficient in itself. To take an analogy from cricket: Shane Warne is by any reckoning a leading bowler; but teaching him an extra trick with the ball may make him a better bowler, it does not make him a better leader. Improving people’s performance in teaching and learning is an important endeavour, but more is required to develop their skills of leadership. Nevertheless, while competence or even eminence in a discipline or field is not a sufficient condition for leadership, it helps: consider the contributions beyond their fields of expertise made by Ernest Rutherford, Ian Clunies Ross, Sister Kenny, Macfarlane Burnet, Zelman Cowan, Fiona Stanley, or Peter Doherty. The eminence does not have to be as great as in those cases and, as some of our proposals hypothesised, high standing as a researcher in a department may be a good base from which to select and train leaders in pedagogy.

In summing up the section on the knowledge base of leadership the assumption is widely accepted, in the proposals and in the literature, that leadership skills can be acquired through training or experience. The potential leaders may already be in positions of authority or front line teachers. What we did not find in the literature is much research evidence for or against the proposition. Rigorous evaluations of some of the projects could make a useful contribution to the field.

Nor did we find much in the way of active roles for students as leaders in teaching and learning. A couple of proposals included them in discussion groups on policy matters, and several were interested in the uses of student feedback as a way of improving staff teaching. But there were no ideas for students as teachers, or as leaders in tasks and settings established by their teachers, or in student initiated study groups.

A few of the applications showed a clear understanding of the complex elements of leadership and the ways to develop them. At the other end of the spectrum a number of applications gave the readers the impression that the applicants sought funding simply for staff development projects which the university intended to do anyway. If universities are to develop programs deliberately to foster their rising leaders, it would appear that they would benefit from a wider and deeper understanding of the range of types of leadership and the elements in its practice.

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