



# **Evidence-based benchmarking framework for a distributed leadership approach to capacity building in learning and teaching**

**Final Report 2014**

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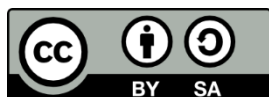
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## List of acronyms used

ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd
ASERT	Action Self Enabling Reflection Tool
CADAD	Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development
CoP	Community of Practice
DL	Distributed Leadership
HERDSA	Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia
HR	Human Resources
OLT	Office for Learning and Teaching Australian Government
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SaMnet	Science and Mathematics network of Australian university educators
WIL	Women in Leadership

## **Executive summary**

The intent of this project was to develop a systematic, evidence-based benchmarking framework for distributed leadership to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching. It built on the outcome of a previous Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded project that had identified the principles and practices for distributed leadership and synthesised these in the form of the Action Self Enabling Reflection Tool (ASERT).

Distributed leadership is an emergent form of shared leadership within the education sector. It is the collaborative action of many people operating within supportive contexts to achieve identified goals, as a means to build leadership capacity in and across institutions.

The project commenced in August 2011 and proceeded through four action research cycles before being completed in July 2013. The project methodology, based on participative action research principles, enabled the project team to model a distributed leadership approach both within the team and among a broader spectrum of participants through the project activities.

The project was successful in achieving its intended outcome of the development of distributed leadership benchmarks for use in evaluating the practice of distributed leadership. These benchmarks are now available for use by institutions that are working to achieve leadership for change in learning and teaching through distributed leadership. The project also resulted in the design of several tailored instruments that enable institutions to more fully explore the extent to which distributed leadership is being practiced within their institutions and across the sector. As a result of the project an online collaborative community of practice was established that aims to sustain discourse around distributed leadership. In addition to the identified deliverables, the project was also successful in developing links with other OLT-funded projects that utilised/are utilising a distributed leadership approach. It also resulted in the design of a new conceptual model for distributed leadership that can assist institutions to engage in the action required to implement distributed leadership.

An unexpected suggestion from senior leaders in the project reference group was that distributed leadership has the potential to build leadership in higher education institutions beyond learning and teaching. They proposed that the transferability of the benchmarks needs to be jointly explored by HR departments and learning and teaching experts to facilitate the development of programs for emerging leaders. Invitations to project members to contribute to leadership training programs being designed in several universities and to link the distributed leadership benchmarks to benchmarks for sessional staff development provide some evidence of this potential transferability. Further, invitations to the project leader to contribute to leadership training programs outside the sector suggest further opportunities for the broader transferability of the distributed leadership benchmarks.

The project team recognises that the practice of distributed leadership can be further advanced through the design of a more integrated, holistic approach that links the enabling and evaluating aspects of distributed leadership formulated in this project and its predecessor project. Accordingly, the project team has submitted an application for a grant

to design and pilot test an integrated implementation strategy for distributed leadership and develop a *Handbook for Distributed Leadership*.

The recommendations from this project are three-fold:

**Recommendation 1: Directed at senior leaders of learning and teaching in all universities**

That the benchmarks for distributed leadership developed from this project be disseminated widely across the sector to assist institutions to utilise a distributed leadership approach to achieve leadership for change in learning and teaching.

**Recommendation 2: Directed at senior academic leaders and senior leaders in Human Resources**

That the potential of distributed leadership to build leadership beyond learning and teaching be explored between senior leaders in positions of responsibility for learning and teaching and Human Resource experts.

**Recommendation 3: Directed at OLT Grants Project team**

That the OLT Grants Project team supports a further project to design and pilot test an implementation strategy that integrates the enabling and evaluative aspects and to develop a *Handbook for Distributed Leadership*.



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## 1 Introduction

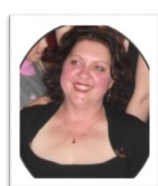
The *Evidence-based benchmarking framework for a distributed leadership approach to capacity building in learning & teaching* project (LE11-2000), (hereafter referred to as the ‘*evaluating distributed leadership project*’) was designed to develop a systematic, evidence-based benchmarking framework for distributed leadership to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching. It built on the outcomes of a previous Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded project (LE9-1222) in which the principles and practices for distributed leadership were identified and developed into the Action Self Enabling Reflection Tool (ASERT—see section 2 for details).

The project was based on three premises:

- i. That leadership in the higher education sector is different from traditional leadership, which focuses attention on the traits, skills and behaviours that characterise individual leaders (Marshall, 2008). In contrast, academic leadership exists in a highly specialised, professional environment that is not built simply upon hierarchical relationships. Distributed leadership identifies leadership as the contribution of many people engaged in a complex interplay of action. This is in accord with Ramsden’s (1998, p. 4) oft-quoted statement that leadership in universities “should be by everyone from the Vice Chancellor to the casual car parking attendant, leadership is to do with how people relate to each other”.
- ii. That the diversity of disciplinary and cultural approaches that exist within the sector suggests that a more shared, collaborative form of leadership is appropriate. As Anderson and Johnson (2006) state:  
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 (p.7).
- iii. Taken together these premises identify the need for flexible, emergent forms of distributed leadership to build leadership capacity for learning and teaching in higher education. Anderson and Johnson (2006) argue that there is need for funding to explore a middle ground between leadership as defined from a structural/positional perspective and the view that everyone is a leader.



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## 2 Background

The *evaluating distributed leadership* project built on and was seeded by the outcomes of an earlier project ([LE9-1222] hereafter referred to as the '*enabling distributed leadership project*'). Details of the initial project outcomes can be found at [www.distributedleadership.com.au](http://www.distributedleadership.com.au).

In particular, four main findings from the earlier project provided the foundations for the evaluating distributed leadership project:

- i. Distributed leadership needs to be described rather than defined.

The description developed as an outcome of the *enabling distributed leadership* project was that distributed leadership for learning and teaching is:

*...a leadership approach in which individuals who trust and respect each other's contributions collaborate together to achieve identified goals. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across an institution. It is an approach in which reflective practice is an integral part enabling action to be critiqued, challenged and developed through cycles of planning, action, reflection and assessment and re-planning. It happens most effectively when people at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise. It needs resources that support and enable collaborative environments together with a flexible approach to space, time and finance which occur as a result of diverse contextual settings in an institution. Through shared and active engagement, distributed leadership can result in the development of leadership capacity to sustain improvements in teaching and learning (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland, 2011, p. 27).*

- ii. Distributed leadership needs a more structured approach.

While it was acknowledged that distributed leadership is not a new concept and indeed has always existed as an element of academic practice in higher education, the need for a more structured approach has arisen as the issues facing the sector have become more complex. The aim of the initial *enabling distributed leadership* project was to identify a common understanding of how distributed leadership for learning and teaching is conceptualised and practiced in the Australian higher education sector. This was achieved by investigating the synergies among the experiences of four initial projects funded as institutional leadership (distributed) grants (LE6-7; LE6-12; LE6-9; LE6-8—see section 9 for details).

- iii. Distributed leadership is not an alternative to the traditional focus on senior leaders in positions of institutional responsibility.

It was recognised that distributed leadership is more about enabling people to engage in leadership in learning and teaching. It is not an attempt to replace leaders

in positions of institutional responsibility or to induce a power shift away from these 'formal' leaders. Rather, distributed leadership works in concert with traditional leadership to enable more people to participate in the process of leadership as a means to improving decision making. In so doing, it does, however, identify the need to recognise the leadership contribution of many people.

iv. Distributed leadership needs support.

For a distributed leadership approach to be effective there is need for institutional support, resources and professional development.

The outcome of the *enabling distributed leadership* project was a framework of contextual conditions and criteria required for the practice of distributed leadership. This was identified through conceptual discussion around, and practical experience of, distributed leadership in building leadership for learning and teaching (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland, 2011, pp. 16-19). This enabling framework for distributed leadership (termed the *Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool* or ASERT) is made up of two parts - an *Action Framework* and a *Self-Reflective Process*. The *Action Framework* consists of four dimensions and associated values (context of trust; culture of respect; recognition of the need for a change in approach; and recognition of the need for more collaborative relationships); and four criteria (people involvement; supportive processes; provision of professional development; and availability of resources). The intersection of these dimensions, values and criteria identifies 16 actions for distributed leadership. The second part of the ASERT (the *Self-Reflective Process*) identifies the pivotal role of reflection in the activity-based process that underpins an effective distributed leadership approach. Through a series of steps, with associated reflective prompts, the actions required by institutions to enable distributed leadership are laid out. Taken together, the *Action Framework* and the *Self-Reflective Process* provide the foundation blocks and springboard upon and from which the current *evaluating distributed leadership* project sought to develop benchmarks for distributed leadership.

The action framework is achieving impact across the sector. For example:

- The national network of science and maths higher education teachers (SaMnet) adapted the distributed leadership action framework of the ASERT to "assess evidence of the influence of various factors on development of leadership within action-learning teams" (Sharma, Rifkin, Johnson, Tzioumis and Hill - LE11-1967, unpublished report, submitted 2013, p. 35).
- two OLT-funded projects (*Griffith University (lead) LE11-2084 (2011) Leading WIL – distributed leadership appropriate to enhance work integrated learning* and *Deakin University (lead) LE10-1726 (2010) Building distributed leadership in designing and implementing a quality management framework for online learning environments*) have built their projects around the ASERT.

The *evaluating distributed leadership* project is also grounded in the literature on evidence-based practice and benchmarking for quality improvement in education, which began to

emerge at the end of the last century (see, for example, the HMSO *Dearing Report*, 1997; Massaro, 1998; McKinnon, Walker and Davis, 2000; Weeks, 2000; Stella and Woodhouse, 2007). The evidence-based benchmarking approach suggested by the literature accords with the distributed leadership ethos as it recognises the importance of leadership engagement by many people. It occurs through ongoing action-reflection cycles that incorporate evaluation and reflection on the outcomes of past and current action. This approach also recognises the importance of a collaborative learning and self-improvement focus for higher education. In these ways it is distinct from the point-in-time, comparative benchmarking processes that characterise more commercially-oriented enterprises. The evidence-based approach is in concert with the findings of the *enabling distributed leadership project*, which identified the need to:

support a complex interplay of participants across the institution, between formal managers and formal and informal leaders at all levels of the institution and between academics, professionals and administrative personnel involved in a range of functions (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland, 2011, p. 3).



*Associate Professor Geraldine Lefoe and Professor Sandra Jones, HERDSA 2011*

### 3 Approach and methodology

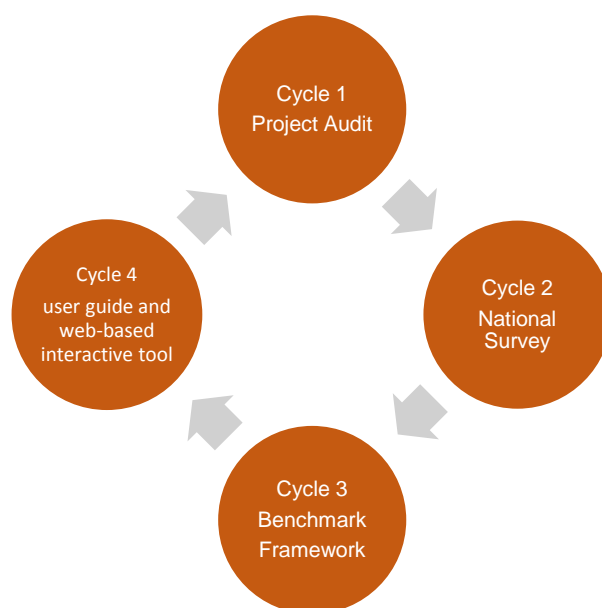
#### 3.1 Introduction

The methodological approach of the evaluating distributed leadership project was based on three assumptions. First, that the higher education sector needs to improve the leadership and management of higher education institutions in order to attract and retain its academic workforce (Bexley et al., 2011). Second, that leadership in higher education requires the involvement of a diverse range of staff. Third, that change for improved leadership requires a process that enables action to be assessed and reflected upon as part of an ongoing cycle of change. To reflect this, the project approach adopted a process of enquiry into change required to enable distributed leadership, in conjunction with a participatory action research methodology of reflexive inquiry (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) to simultaneously research the impact of such change.

#### 3.2 Action research cycles

The action research approach provided the flexibility required for working across institutions, allowed for continuous cycles of improvement over a two-year period, and enabled a cascading input of ideas from universities that have undertaken trials of distributed leadership for leadership capacity-building. Through this cyclic approach, the benchmarks for distributed leadership were designed, developed, validated and refined. The process also incorporated the collaboration and collegiality inherent in distributed leadership principles and practices. It also enabled the use of a variety of university contexts (the project membership covered three universities, while the national survey invited input from all Australian universities). This process encouraged collaborative relationships to develop between participants who have undertaken change associated with distributed leadership. The evaluating distributed leadership project proceeded through four action research cycles (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Action research cycles of the evaluating distributed leadership project**



### **3.3 Cycle 1: Desk audit of leadership projects**

In the first cycle, a desk audit was undertaken of projects identified as utilising a distributed leadership process to introduce change to learning and teaching. The audit methodology incorporated both quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to enable comparison across projects as well as confer the explanatory advantage of qualitative (in-depth and rich) detail.

A numerical coding was attached to each of the ASERT action items, ranging from -2 (an action item never occurred) to +2 (an action item always occurred). A five-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, very often, always) was used to allocate between the two extremes. If no evidence was available as to whether an action occurred or not, it was identified as 'n/a'. The scores for each action item were then averaged across the four dimensions for each criterion and against the four criteria for each dimension in order to try to identify:

- i. To what degree the project demonstrated that:
  - a. people were involved;
  - b. processes were supportive;
  - c. professional development was provided; and
  - d. resources were available.
- ii. To what degree the project demonstrated that there was:
  - a. a context of trust;
  - b. a culture of respect;
  - c. an environment of change that recognised contribution at all levels; and
  - d. an environment that valued relationships through collaboration.

An average score for the whole matrix was then calculated to present an indicator of the overall alignment of the project against the ASERT dimensions, values, criteria and action items. An average of +2 indicated that the project was perfectly aligned with the dimensions, values, criteria and action items identified as contributing to a distributed leadership approach to building leadership capacity in learning and teaching. An average of -2 indicated that the project was not at all aligned with the dimensions, values, criteria and action items identified as contributing to a distributed leadership approach to learning and teaching.

The project team discussed the findings from the desk audit, particularly the need for further explanation and development of the ASERT, at several project team meetings, and with the reference group and the evaluator as 'critical friends'.

### **3.4 Cycle 2: National survey**

The second action research cycle involved the design and administration of a national online survey of experiences of distributed leadership in higher education learning and teaching projects. The survey questions were piloted in five universities. The pilot process identified the need to increase survey clarity, for example, by asking respondents to consider their answers in relation to a specific learning and teaching change initiative. The final survey was

then designed with sections that sought to identify the existence and spread of distributed leadership related systems and frameworks currently employed to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching across Australian higher education institutions.

The final survey design (see Appendix A) incorporated:

- i. an introductory explanatory section that more succinctly described distributed leadership;
- ii. an instruction for respondents to answer survey questions in relation to a specific learning and teaching change initiative;
- iii. the option for the respondent to choose the level of the activity to which the change initiative related (whole of institution or faculty, school/department);
- iv. survey questions reworded to reflect an evaluating rather than enabling focus;
- v. questions related to outcomes; and
- vi. the opportunity for respondents to provide qualitative responses.

Survey questions were grouped into the following sections.

- i. Introduction (focused on the learning and teaching initiative upon which responses were to be based and the role of the respondent).
- ii. Participation (how participants in the initiative were selected, the degree of support from formal leaders, the decision-making process established, and the breadth of involvement of academic and professional staff).
- iii. Design and Implementation (the source of the decision to use a distributed leadership approach, the extent of involvement of both the learning and teaching unit and academics responsible for learning and teaching delivery).
- iv. Implementation of the initiative (the degree to which designers of the initiative were also implementers, a distributed leadership approach was actually implemented and responsibility for the outcome was shared).
- v. Collaboration (the degree to which collaboration was encouraged, actually occurred and was sustained).
- vi. Building expertise in leadership (the extent to which training in and mentoring for distributed leadership was provided).
- vii. Provision of resources (the extent to which participation in the activity was acknowledged in work plans and for career development purposes, and the allocation of finance to the initiative).
- viii. Outcomes (the degree to which leadership capacity was built and engagement in learning and teaching initiatives increased).

The survey was delivered online between May and August 2012. In order to attract responses from as broad a range of participants as possible (not only formal leaders of learning and teaching), potential respondents were contacted in a range of ways. These included an initial presentation made to the formal leaders of learning and teaching who make up the Council for Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD), followed



by a direct email invitation to senior leaders of learning and teaching in each Australian university with a request that the survey be cascaded to relevant people across their institutions. Past and present leaders of leadership projects funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council/Office for Learning and Teaching (ALTC/OLT) were contacted via email, and attendees of the 2012 Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) conference were invited to complete the survey.

The results were analysed using mixed-methods that included both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The survey instrument design was subjected to internal reliability and validity testing which confirmed that the structure of the survey was appropriate and reliable (see Appendix C for details). The main statistical analyses undertaken were internal reliability tests, descriptive statistics, factor analysis and correlation analysis. The full results of the survey and survey instrument testing can be found on the evaluating distributed leadership website ([www.distributedleadership.com.au](http://www.distributedleadership.com.au)), and a summary is available in Appendix B.

A thematic analysis of the qualitative responses was undertaken independently by each of the project team members. The thematic analysis first sorted qualitative responses under the headings Participation, Design, Implementation, Opportunities for Collaboration, Contribution of Collaboration, Building Expertise, Outcomes and Resources. Each team member tagged the comments made in each of the survey questions against each of these themes. The responses from team members were compared and common descriptors identified. These descriptors then became the bases of the good practice descriptors.

This cycle concluded with the design of a conceptual model of distributed leadership (the 6E conceptual model) based upon the identification of six principal tenets of distributed leadership (Appendix E). These tenets then provided the input for the third action research cycle.

### **3.5 Cycle 3: Benchmark framework**

The third action research cycle involved the development of five benchmark domains for distributed leadership based on the six tenets identified in the 6E conceptual model. The type of benchmarking adopted was categorised as 'good practice benchmarking', based on the concept of best practice benchmarking identified by Woodhouse (2000, cited in Stella and Woodhouse, 2007). This offered the opportunity to create a framework through which institutions could self-evaluate current practices designed to enable distributed leadership against previously determined 'good practice' reference points, as identified in the responses to the national survey of distributed leadership. An action learning/action enhancement benchmarking process was also advocated in order to support sustainable action, rather than focus on action occurring at a single point in time. The draft benchmarks were prepared using templates adapted from those used by the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) to design Benchmarks for Academic Development Units (CADAD, 2011).

The relevance of the benchmarks was confirmed through consultations with a broad range of learning and teaching experts. These included senior leaders of learning and teaching in

positions of institutional responsibility (members of the CADAD) as well as senior leaders of learning and teaching from the project reference group.

The final action in this cycle was the establishment of an online community of practice through a webinar session attended by experts in learning and teaching. Issues raised in the webinar were thematically grouped to parallel the benchmarks (see Appendix D). These comments confirmed, first, the content of the draft benchmarks. Typical of feedback comments were statements such as:

- *for my organisation we would need all senior leaders to be aboard and linked to other strategies*
- *by its distributed nature it has to work without institutional support but its effectiveness will be reduced if there is no institutional support*
- *people need to be open, to feel safe, that requires an environment in which trust exists*
- *it's about facilitating people's skills*

The discussion identified the need for implementation in a variety of contexts and support for cross-institutional collaboration, as well as potential applicability outside the learning and teaching focus as important and relevant aspects requiring further elucidation. The discussion also included questions that require further discourse and exploration such as:

- How organic is distributed leadership and how organised is it?
- To what extent does distributed leadership imply distributed decision making?
- Can elements of distributed leadership be adopted in complete ignorance of total model?

### **3.6 Cycle 4: User guide and web-based interactive tool**

The fourth, and final, action research cycle engaged team members in preparing a user guide for distributed leadership (0). The existing distributed leadership website, designed as an outcome of the enabling distributed leadership project, was adapted to incorporate a web-based interactive tool. The current web-based interactive tool provides a simple mechanism to access the benchmarks but it is proposed that a more sophisticated version be developed.

The project team initially attempted to develop an integrated framework to link the resources from both the enabling and evaluating distributed leadership projects. However this revealed the need for further development. To this end the project team have included a recommendation for OLT support for a further project to design and test an integrated implementation strategy and develop a Handbook for Distributed Leadership for Learning and Teaching.

### **3.7 Supporting activities**

The project activities that supported the methodology outlined above included action by the project team as well as the engagement of a broad range of participants from across the higher education sectors in Australia and New Zealand. These are summarised in the following table.

**Table 1 Project supporting activities**

Activity	Date	Participants
Team meetings	January 2012	5
	February 2012	5
	March 22013	5
	July 2012	6
	August 2012	5
	October 2012	6
	January 2013	6
	February 2013	5
	March 2013	4
	May 2013	4
	July 2013	5
Reference group meetings	March 2012	6
	April 2013	9
Ethics approval (initially through the RMIT Ethics Approval process, subsequently ratified by partner universities)	Initial approval as Project No 040412 4 April 2012 Amendment approval as Project 1000384 11 April 2013	
Conference showcases, held at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) annual conferences	June 2012	25
	June 2013	20

## 4 Project outcomes

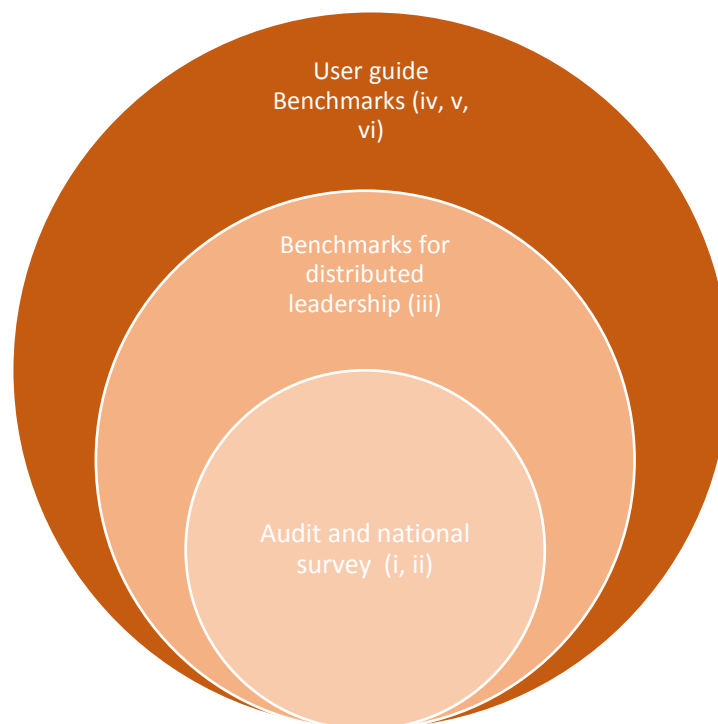
### 4.1 Introduction

This section will first outline the deliverables of the project and then go on to discuss the main features of these. The *evaluating distributed leadership* project was designed to produce a number of deliverables, each contributing to the development and dissemination of benchmarks for distributed leadership.

- i. *Desk audit data* to assist in the systematic identification and analysis of distributed leadership (DL) approaches to build leadership capacity
- ii. *national survey* data of current experience of DL for use in identifying benchmarks for distributed leadership
- iii. *evidence-based benchmarking framework* for distributed leadership
- iv. *web-based interactive* tool to facilitate benchmarking
- v. *user guide* for the benchmarking framework
- vi. *website* to disseminate findings and resources
- vii. *peer-reviewed publications*

The sequential relationship of these deliverables is illustrated in Figure 2. Scaffold process for identifying benchmarks for distributed leadership.

**Figure 2. Scaffold process for identifying benchmarks for distributed leadership**



## 4.2 Desk audit of leadership projects

The first project deliverable was desk audit data collated via a systematic analysis of distributed leadership approaches to build leadership capacity (see Action–Research Cycle 1, section 3.3). A desk audit was undertaken of projects funded by the predecessor to the OLT (the Australian Learning and Teaching Council [ALTC]) that used, or were assumed to have used, a distributed leadership approach or elements of a distributed leadership approach. The instrument developed for the desk audit was underpinned by the principles, practices and actions for distributed leadership laid out in the ASERT.

While it was recognised that the desk audit was inherently limited by the small number of projects that had completed reports available for audit, it was felt that nevertheless the desk audit would perform the important function of informing the design of questions for a national survey. This would then result in data that would enable a more in-depth analysis of the experience of distributed leadership.

Of the 62 leadership projects that had been funded by the OLT and the ALTC, 19 were identified as having used a distributed leadership approach, of which seven had published reports and were thus available for the audit. A further 18 projects (two of which had published reports) had been funded as disciplinary network projects and were assumed to have potentially used elements of distributed leadership. The projects suitable for audit (those involving distributed leadership for which written reports were available) were classified into three categories:

- i. Projects funded in the initial (2006) grant funding as institutional leadership projects adopting a distributed leadership approach, the study of which contributed to the initial design of the ASERT (four in total).
- ii. Projects funded as institutional leadership projects adopting a distributed leadership approach that were not studied prior to the initial design of the ASERT (three in total).
- iii. Projects funded as national network projects that were assumed to have used elements of a distributed leadership approach (two in total).

The findings of the desk audit were mixed (Ryland, Jones, Hadgraft, Harvey and Lefoe, 2012).

- i. As would be expected, the four projects that contributed to the initial design of the ASERT demonstrated a high degree of alignment to the ASERT, although none showed perfect alignment. The Faculty Scholar (LE6-9) and Student Feedback projects (LE6-7) showed the highest degree of alignment, while the Online Learning project (LE6-8) demonstrated the least degree of alignment.
- ii. Positive alignment with the ASERT was identified in each of the three projects that had adopted a distributed leadership approach but had not contributed to the initial design of the ASERT (LE5-18; LE6-17). The highest degree of alignment was demonstrated by a project that was an extension of the Faculty Scholar project mentioned previously (LE8-691).

- iii. Neither of the two national network projects (LE6-14 and LE6-15) demonstrated a positive alignment with the ASERT. These findings were explained largely by the fact that these projects did not have a specific distributed leadership focus.

Ultimately, while the desk audit did inform the design of questions for a national survey, this was more in terms of informing the degree of change that was required to transform the action statements in the ASERT, originally worded with an enabling focus, into evaluative statements of distributed leadership. What also became clear was the need to ensure that the national survey was utilised as an opportunity to elicit more in-depth detail than that which can be yielded through a simple quantitative measurement approach. These findings provided valuable input to the second cycle of the project.

### **4.3 National survey data of current experience of distributed leadership**

The aim of the national survey was to identify the existence and spread of distributed leadership related systems and frameworks employed across the Australian higher education sector to build leadership capacity (see Action–Research Cycle 2, Section 3.4). It attracted 110 completed responses from 47 Australian higher education institutions, although 11 of these institutions submitted only one response (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe, Hadgraft and Ryland, 2013) (see Appendix B).

Analysis of the responses to a wide range of survey items was undertaken using the dimensions and criteria of the ASERT (see Appendix B).

#### **4.3.1 ASERT criteria: Involvement of people**

A majority of respondents stated that a broad cross-section of functional and discipline experts had been involved in the learning and teaching initiative from design through to successful implementation and outcome. This included academics and professional staff responsible for learning and teaching delivery. In addition, a majority of respondents identified that staff had self-selected to participate in the initiative. This was illustrated qualitatively in comments such as:

The planning group consisted of academic staff and general staff from different departments within the university. The task had the support of senior management but was led and undertaken by staff who did not have formal responsibilities in the university, but had knowledge and experience of eportfolios.

Although there were also examples of insufficient involvement evidenced in comments such as:

The project nearly fell over during implementation because everyone assumed the project team could just get on with the job. In fact, they were operating in an innovative, creative space that needed more sustenance and sponsorship. It was identified after the group fell apart and help was provided to offer better leadership and support.

#### **4.3.2 ASERT criteria: Processes that are supportive**

A majority of respondents stated that formal leaders had supported the initiative. This was illustrated qualitatively in comments such as:

The Dean was the key sponsor of the initiative and offered visible and financial support throughout. Leaders throughout the faculty contributed throughout and attended meetings and celebratory functions.

#### **4.3.3 ASERT criteria: Provision of professional development**

A minority of respondents stated that professional development and other forms of support related to distributed leadership were offered. The following comment represents one of the few examples of good practice offered by survey respondents.

Leaders of action-learning projects have been provided with a half-day workshop on leading change (specifically on how to engage others in a change initiative) and another half of a 2-hour workshop plus support in reflecting and documenting on the leadership challenges in their projects.

#### **4.3.4 ASERT criteria: Resource availability**

While a majority of respondents stated that financial support to enact change through distributed leadership had been provided (which is partly explained by the provision of support through OLT grants), there was little evidence of support through time allocation or recognition and reward for individual contributions to initiatives. Examples of good practice were provided in comments such as:

The academic was provided with time and space to work on the initiative. Their teaching load was reduced by 50% with funding from the School.

While examples of poor practice were illustrated in comments such as:

External money was available, but most participants were not able to use it because there was no-one available to cover their teaching commitments.

#### **4.3.5 ASERT dimension: Context of trust**

The data suggests a fairly high level of acceptance of the need to take action to develop and encourage a context of trust. This is evidenced in the large number of responses that recorded the involvement of a broad range of people with expertise in learning and teaching, particularly the degree to which informal leadership by these experts was recognised. However, the low level of professional development in distributed leadership suggests that more needs to be done to encourage the involvement of more people with a broad range of expertise.

#### **4.3.6 ASERT dimension: Culture of respect**

The number of responses that identified the participation of individuals in decision making within initiatives suggests that there would be a high level of acceptance of the need to take action to develop and encourage a culture of respect for individual expertise. However, the survey was unable to identify the extent to which groups at different levels of the organisation were engaged in decision making. Furthermore, the low level of mentoring provided for distributed leadership, and the lack of recognition or reward for individual leadership contributions, suggests the need for more action to be taken to enable a culture of respect for expertise.

#### **4.3.7 ASERT dimension: Acceptance of the need for participative change**

The number of responses that identified input from academics and professionals from all levels and functions into both policy development and initiative implementation is suggestive of a broad commitment to participative change. This is further enacted by encouragement from formal leaders for broad participant engagement in projects designed to produce change.

#### **4.3.8 ASERT dimension: Collaborative relationships**

While the importance of collaboration was acknowledged in a number of responses, it was not possible to determine the extent to which the expertise of individuals contributed to collective decision making. Despite this there was recognition of the importance of allowing collaborative relationships to develop through communities of practice, formal meetings and networking opportunities.

#### **4.3.9 Identifiers of success of distributed leadership**

A cross-correlation analysis was undertaken in order to analyse whether the survey responses could be used to identify possible indicators of success for distributed leadership in learning and teaching (Appendix B). It was found that the correlation between 'building leadership capacity for learning and teaching' and 'increased engagement in learning and teaching' was the strongest, followed by the correlations between the former and 'building collaboration' and 'sustaining collaboration'. A medium-strength correlation was identified between 'building leadership capacity' and 'the provision of resources in the form of time identified in work plans, recognition for career development purposes and finance'. A medium-strength correlation was also identified between 'building leadership capacity' and the 'sharing of decisions regarding the initiative between participants and formal leaders'. Weaker correlations were found between 'building leadership capacity' and both 'self-selection of participants' and 'sharing of responsibility for the successful outcomes of the initiative'.

#### **4.3.10 Survey outcome**

In summary, while the survey responses provided examples of action taken to enable a distributed leadership approach, these were unevenly spread across the four dimensions, values and criteria identified in the ASERT. Given the range of responses on specific action items identified as enabling a distributed leadership approach, it appears that, while each



initiative utilised elements of distributed leadership, each fell short of being a fully-fledged distributed leadership initiative and thus none could be seen as an exemplar of distributed leadership upon which appropriate benchmarks could be based.

The project team concluded that there was a need to further clarify the meanings and processes of distributed leadership before benchmarks could be identified. The team came to the conclusion that distributed leadership needed to be identified as an umbrella concept that incorporates the engagement of a range of people in action to enable the dimensions and values of distributed leadership to be enacted and encouraged through a range of activities which can then be evaluated for evidence of good practice. Furthermore, the team felt that once distributed leadership had been more clearly explicated its impact could then be the subject of further discussion by a broader community of learning and teaching leaders and experts. This gave rise to the need for an initially un-identified project deliverable in the form of a conceptual model of distributed leadership.

#### **4.4 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership**

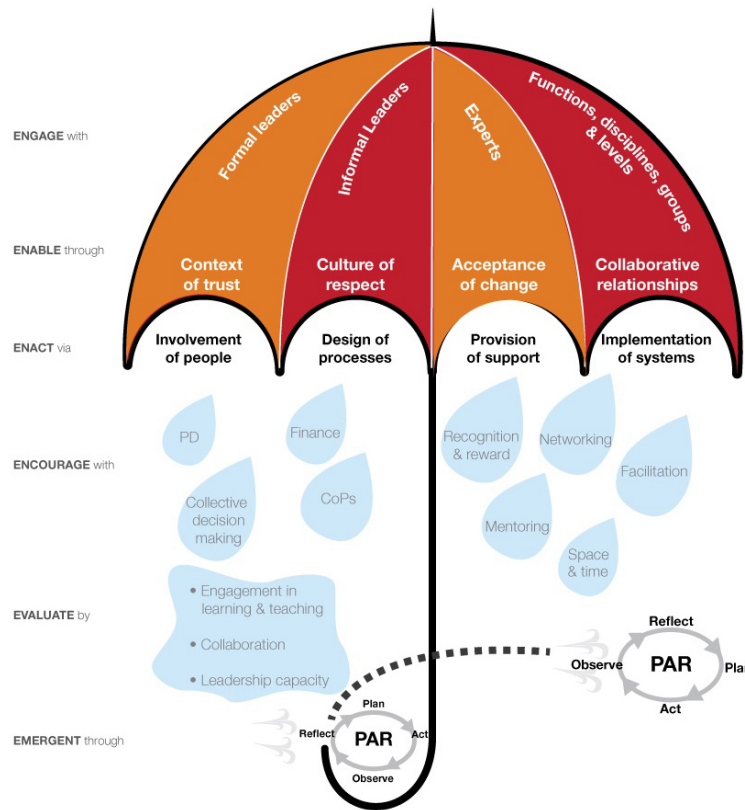
The 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe, Hadgraft and Ryland, 2013; see Section 8) consists of six underpinning tenets.

- *Tenet 1: Engage with*—distributed leadership gains carriage through an activity or series of activities that engage a broad range of leaders in positions of institutional authority (termed formal leaders), employees respected for their leadership but not in positions of institutional authority (termed informal leaders), experts in learning and teaching, and formal and informal leaders and experts from various functions, disciplines, groups and levels across the institution who contribute to learning and teaching.
- *Tenet 2: Enable through*—the contextual and cultural dimension of respect for and trust in individual contributions to effect change through the nurturing of collaborative relationships.
- *Tenet 3: Enact via*—the importance of a holistic process in which processes, support and systems are designed to encourage the involvement of people.
- *Tenet 4: Encourage with*—the plethora of activities required to raise awareness and scaffold learning about a distributed leadership approach through professional development, mentoring, facilitation of networks, communities of practice, time, space and finance for collaboration, and recognition of, and reward for, contribution.
- *Tenet 5: Evaluate by*—a suitable process needs to be designed to provide evidence of increased engagement in learning and teaching, collaboration, and growth in leadership capacity.
- *Tenet 6: Emergent through*—distributed leadership engages people in a sustainable ongoing process through cycles of action research built on a participative action research methodology.

The 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership is illustrated as an umbrella (Figure 3) to symbolise the characteristic of distributed leadership as embracing those in

positions of institutional authority (shorthanded as formal leaders), as well as informal leaders, experts, and representatives from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels.

**Figure 3. 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership**



#### 4.5 Evidence-based benchmarking framework for distributed leadership

Based on the six tenets of the conceptual model, five benchmark domains were identified (Engage, Enable, Enact, Assess and Emergent). The elements of tenet four (*Encourage through*) were recast as ‘good practice benchmark descriptors’. Tenet five (*Evaluate by*) was re-titled ‘Assess’ in order to avoid confusion given the overall evaluative purpose of the benchmarks. A scoping statement was identified for each domain based on a rewording of the description of distributed leadership and the action statement in the ASERT, taking into account the national survey responses. For example, associated with the benchmark domain ‘Engage’ is the scoping statement:

Distributed leadership engages a broad range of participants from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels. This includes formal leaders, informal leaders and experts.

Each of the benchmark domains includes a *scoping* statement, a number of *elements* (between three and four as appropriate) and a *good practice descriptor* (see Action–Research Cycle 3, Section 3.5). The good practice descriptors were sourced from the qualitative data provided by respondents to the national survey.

Within the example scoping statement given above, four elements are identified: formal leaders, informal leaders, discipline experts and functional experts. Further, each of these elements has been allocated an associated good practice descriptor. For example, the element 'formal leader' has the following good practice descriptor:

Formal leaders proactively support initiatives through attendance at meetings, publication of activities and other sponsorship activities.

Table 1, below, identifies each of the five domains, together with the scoping statement for each, the elements identified within each scoping statement, and a good practice descriptor for each element.

**Table 2. Benchmarking framework for distributed leadership**

DOMAIN	SCOPE	ELEMENTS	GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR
ENGAGE	Distributed leadership engages a broad range of participants from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels. This includes formal leaders, informal leaders and experts.	Formal leaders (academic and professional)	Formal leaders proactively support initiatives through attendance at meetings, publication of activities and other sponsorship activities.
		Informal leaders	Staff participate in learning and teaching enhancement and are recognised for their expertise through good practice.
		Discipline experts	Academics from relevant disciplines contribute their discipline expertise to initiatives either through self-nomination or peer nomination.
		Functional experts	Professional staff contribute their relevant functional expertise to initiatives either through self-nomination or peer nomination.
ENABLE	Distributed leadership is enabled through a context of trust and a culture of respect coupled with effecting change through collaborative relationships.	Context of trust	Decisions made in initiatives are based on respect for and confidence in the knowledge, skills and expertise of academics and professional staff in addition to the relevant rules and regulations.
		Culture of respect	Decisions made in initiatives are shared between all participants based on their expertise and strengths.
		Acceptance of need for change	Initiatives combine formal leadership authority, relevant rules and regulations and the expertise of staff in an integrated top-down, bottom- and middle-up approach.
		Collaborative relationships	Participants in initiatives are provided with professional development opportunities as well as experienced facilitators and mentors to encourage collaborative decision making.
ENACT	Distributed leadership is enacted by the involvement of people, the design of processes, the provision of support and the implementation of systems.	Involvement of people	Initiatives identify and encourage the participation of experts from among all relevant academic and professional staff.
		Design of participative processes	Communities of practice and other networking opportunities are encouraged and supported.
		Provision of support	Space, time and finance for collaborative initiatives are provided.
		Integration and alignment of systems	Systems are aligned to ensure that decisions arising from initiatives are integrated into formal policy and processes.
ASSESS	Distributed leadership is best evaluated drawing on multiple sources of evidence of increased engagement collaboration and	Increased engagement	Performance review processes acknowledge individual engagement in initiatives.
		Increased collaboration	Data (such as university cultural surveys; collaborative grant applications related to learning and teaching enhancement; and collaborative publications) identify evidence of increased collaborative activity between staff.

DOMAIN	SCOPE	ELEMENTS	GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR
	growth in leadership capacity.	Growth in leadership capacity	Participation in initiatives is recognised and rewarded.
EMERGENT	Distributed leadership is emergent and sustained through cycles of action research built on a participative action research methodology.	Participative action research process	An action research process that encourages participation through cycles of activity underpins the initiative.
		Reflective practice	Reflective practice is built into initiatives as a formal practice and stage of the initiative.
		Continuous improvement	Output from each stage of the initiative will be sustained.

#### **4.6 Benchmarking user guide and web-based interactive tool**

The final outcome of the evaluating distributed leadership project was a user guide (see 0) and web-based interactive tool for benchmarking distributed leadership.

The user guide explains the purpose of, and context for, the distributed leadership benchmarks, together with the background of distributed leadership in higher education.

The user guide has as its focus the provision of a benchmarking framework to assist institutions to both enable and evaluate (including reflect on) action taken to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching through distributed leadership. The benchmarking framework includes each domain and its associated elements. Users are able to benchmark the description and evidence of their own practice against the good practice descriptor and self-appraise their performance as either:

- Beginning or Developing (action required);
- Functional or Proficient (further action required); or
- Accomplished or Exemplary (continue current action).

Currently, the web-based interactive tool consists of each of the cells of the benchmarking framework being directly linked to a click-through copy of the associated benchmark template which can be printed and completed. There are also links to other parts of the website which provide further details of the concepts used in the benchmarking framework. A more sophisticated interactive tool is proposed which will be able to produce an overview of the responses made by participants and incorporate a 'traffic light' indicator of individual benchmarks and domains such that participants can easily identify areas of strength and weakness.

NOTE: An early attempt was made to integrate these elements, however, this revealed the need for greater engagement of potential enablers and adopters of the guide/tools in the design and implementation process, in order to ensure the development of a process flexible enough to accommodate the diversity within the sector.



Professor Sandra Jones and Dr Marina Harvey, HERDSA Annual Conference 2013

## 5 Impact of the evaluating distributed leadership project

The benchmarks for distributed leadership developed from this project have raised the profile of distributed leadership and awareness of its potential to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching. One example of this is that the project leader has been asked to design a module on distributed leadership for the RMIT Professional Learning Network for leaders of learning and teaching. Positive feedback on the draft benchmarks from members of the CADAD indicates that further extension would be positively received.

A further suggestion to use the benchmarks to explore the potential for distributed leadership to extend beyond the current learning and teaching focus was made by several senior learning and teaching leaders (including a dean and provost in learning and teaching) in a project reference group meeting. They proposed that this potential be explored with HR departments, as many are facilitating programs for emerging leaders. An example of the potential for the benchmarks for distributed leadership to extend beyond learning and teaching was evidenced in a paper delivered at the National Summit organised as part of another OLT-funded leadership project, the Benchmarking Leadership for Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST) project (Jones, Harvey and Lefoe, 2013).



*Associate Professor Geraldine Lefoe, Professor Sandra Jones and Dr Marina Harvey, BLASST National Summit, February 2013*



## 6 Uses and advancement of existing knowledge

The project outcomes make significant advances to existing knowledge by developing benchmarks to evaluate distributed leadership. The project drew on the extensive literature on distributed leadership identified in the enabling distributed leadership project ([www.distributedleadership.com.au](http://www.distributedleadership.com.au)). It extended this literature review by linking it to literature on the need for flexibility to accommodate disciplinary perspectives (Becher, 1994; Prosser et al., 2003) and to champion collaboration (Martin et al., 2003). It also linked the literature on distributed leadership to that of evidence-based practice for quality improvement in education (Pring and Thomas, 2003). This highlights the importance of a self-assessment focus that can allow institutions to discern both their particular strengths and areas in which improvements can be made, and lead them to develop planned improvement actions which can then be monitored for progress (Brown, 1990).

This project was based on the OLT description of academic leadership as a highly specialised and professional activity, with its effectiveness integral to excellence in learning and teaching. Leadership effectiveness, in this sector, relies upon high-quality, multi-level engagement by a diverse array of staff, rather than solely upon conventional forms of individual, formal leadership. This was described in 2011 by the then-ALTC as:

in this dynamic, sometimes uncertain and sometimes ambiguous context, the capacity of systems, institutions and individuals to respond appropriately to change and to facilitate further change requires forms of leadership that go beyond conventional models (ALTC, 2011, p. 5).

This project contributed to OLT objectives by:

- i. supporting strategic change in higher education institutions for the enhancement of learning and teaching through the provision of an evidence-based benchmarking process for distributed leadership for the OLT to promote;
- ii. raising the profile and encouraging recognition of the fundamental importance of teaching in higher education institutions through the provision of an evidence-based benchmarking process for distributed leadership in building leadership capacity in learning and teaching;
- iii. promoting the building of leadership capacity in learning and teaching in Australian higher education by developing a systematic mechanism for benchmarking good individual and institutional practice; and
- iv. facilitating national approaches to address current and emerging learning and teaching issues by identifying the contribution distributed leadership can make.

The Benchmarks for Distributed Leadership contribute to the OLT commitment to use distributed leadership to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching. They complement the outcomes of other projects funded to use a distributed leadership approach to:

- enhance work-integrated learning (LE11-2084);

- build leadership with sessional staff standards (LE11-1896);
- build local leadership for research education (LE-11-1982);
- develop a culture of peer-review of teaching through a distributed leadership approach (LE-11-1980); and
- build student leadership in curriculum development (LE13-1839).

In addition, the Benchmarks complement the work of two OLT-funded National Teaching Fellowship recipients (Associate Professor Jacquie McDonald, 2010, and Associate Professor Manjula Sharma, 2013) who have utilised a distributed leadership approach.

## **7 Critical success factors and impediments**

The critical success factors and impediments related to the evaluating distributed leadership project's action and implementation were identified as operational and strategic factors.

### **7.1 Operational**

A degree of flexibility was built into the operation of the evaluating distributed leadership project that enabled project targets to be adjusted to allow partners, reference group members and participants to participate effectively and to adjust to changes in project personnel over the life of the project.

Effective communication was essential. The project used an effective communication blend of face-to-face and technology-assisted meetings.

Establishing sustainable communities of practice proved challenging. This was due to a number of factors, including competing demands on peoples' time and the complex nature of distributed leadership which requires consideration of many issues rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. These challenges were addressed by facilitating an online webinar opportunity and then redesigning the distributed leadership website to enable ongoing discussion.

While the project team possessed a wide range of expertise, on occasions it needed to find others to provide the necessary expertise for certain tasks. This was particularly the case as multiple methods of data collection and analysis were used.

### **7.2 Strategic**

The ongoing inclusion of the external evaluator as a 'critical friend' to the project team added a layer of valuable insight to the team's deliberations and analyses.

The inclusion of experts with both an interest in and time to devote to the project as members of the reference group added a broad spectrum of ongoing evaluation and ideas from 'critical friends'.

The use of a distributed leadership approach by the project team assisted in generating shared leadership and 'ownership' of the evaluating distributed leadership project.

Dissemination activities during the life of the project provided valuable feedback on the project process.

The project website provided useful dissemination opportunities, particularly for the resources developed through project activities.

### **7.3 Further potential adoption**

The project achieved its aim of developing an evaluative framework to assist institutions in their efforts to implement a distributed leadership approach to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching. Positive feedback was received from senior learning and teaching leaders who were members of the project group to the effect that the benchmarks went

beyond the learning and teaching leadership focus of this project. However, the validity of this assertion is yet to be investigated.

The potential for wider adoption by institutions other than the participating institutions is also indicated by interest engendered at the conference workshops at which the benchmarks have been presented. For example, following a workshop at the Oceanic Conference of the International Leadership Association (2013) several participants from higher education institutions in New Zealand and Fiji joined the online community of practice established by this project. The potential to increase the reach of the online community of practice needs to be further explored.

The survey instrument designed to gather a 'snapshot' of institutional experience of distributed leadership has been internally validated and is available for use in future large- and small-scale surveys.

The benchmarking user guide and interactive tool will assist institutions to adopt a distributed leadership approach to change (0). Realising the potential of this resource to assist institutions to adopt a distributed leadership approach requires future facilitation and monitoring.



*Participants in the workshop on distributed leadership at the Oceanic Conference of the International Leadership Association, August 2013*

## 8 Dissemination

### 8.1 Material and outcomes available

Materials and resources developed from the evaluating distributed leadership project are available to the higher education sector, stakeholders and groups of stakeholders through the website established for both this project and the previous enabling distributed leadership project—[www.distributedleadership.com.au](http://www.distributedleadership.com.au). These materials and resources include:

- i. A refined description of distributed leadership
- ii. The survey instrument for distributed leadership
- iii. The 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership
- iv. Benchmarks for distributed leadership
- v. The benchmarking distributed leadership user guide and interactive tool

The website produced as a result of the *enabling distributed leadership project* has been reconfigured to include:

- i. Details of the evaluating distributed leadership project
- ii. The resources produced to benchmark distributed leadership
- iii. Links to related distributed leadership project websites
- iv. Details of the desk audit process and analysis
- v. The national survey instrument and analysis
- vi. Dissemination activities

### 8.2 Sharing of materials and outcomes

The evaluating distributed leadership process was designed such that dissemination was ongoing and cumulative throughout the project. Project outcomes have and will continue to be shared through presentations and scholarly papers and publications as follows:

#### I) Conferences

- Ryland, K., Jones, S., Hadgraft, R., Harvey, M., and Lefoe, G. (2012) *From enabling to evaluating leadership in learning and teaching in Higher Education: a Criterion based approach*, Showcase, [http://conference.hersa.org.au/2012/program\\_full.html](http://conference.hersa.org.au/2012/program_full.html)
- Jones, S., Harvey, M., Lefoe, G., Hadgraft, R., and Ryland, K. (2013) *Identifying the place of distributed leadership for learning and teaching in higher education*. Showcase, <http://bit.ly/16i2Ntj>.
- Jones, S., Harvey, M., Lefoe, G., Hadgraft, R., and Ryland, K. (2013) *Enabling distributed leadership: a conceptual model*, Workshop, International Leadership Association Oceania Conference.

#### II) Presentations

- CADAD meetings—May 2013—design and outcome of the national survey
- Presentations of the ASERT underpinning the evaluating distributed leadership project to the Master of Leadership offered by the L.H. Martin Institute
- Leadership Group, Department of Management, University of Exeter—presentation to Professor Jonathan Gosling and Dr Richard Bolden on evaluating distributed leadership findings re: distributed leadership in Australian higher education
- University-based meetings, workshops at partner universities

## II) Journal publications

- Jones, S., Harvey, M., Lefoe, G., and Ryland, K. (forthcoming 2014), 'Synthesising theory and practice: distributed leadership in higher education', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*.
- Jones, S., Lefoe, G., Harvey, M., and Ryland, K. (2012). 'Distributed leadership: a collaborative framework for academics, executive and professionals in higher education', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 34(1): 57-68.
- Jones, S., Harvey, M., Lefoe, G., and Ryland, K. (2011). Distributed leadership: working together to ride the waves: the Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT), in Dobson, I., Conway, M., and Shrama, R. (Eds.) Tertiary Education Management Conference, 2011, Refereed Paper. ATEM Inc. & TEFMA Inc. ISBN 978-0-9808563-1-6

## 9 Linkages to other projects

### 9.1 Linkages between projects

Projects funded under the OLT Leadership for Excellence grant scheme, distributed leadership category, deal with institutional change through the use of experts and enthusiasts, building networks and communities of practice. The combined outcome of over 60 of these completed projects is the knowledge that distributed leadership, with its top-down policy and bottom-up implementation focus, can be effective in building institutional leadership capacity.

### 9.2 Leadership for excellence grants

This evaluating distributed leadership has direct links to the following projects:

- a) Jones, Ryland, Harvey, Lefoe, Schneider and Applebee (LE9-1222) Lessons learnt: identifying the synergies in distributed leadership projects (referred to in this report as the *enabling distributed leadership project*).
- b) Four initially funded (2006) distributed leadership projects, which the enabling distributed leadership project was based upon:
  - i. RMIT (LE6-7) - Multi-level leadership in the use of student feedback to enhance learning and teaching
  - ii. Macquarie University (LE6-12) - Leaders in effective assessment practice
  - iii. University of Wollongong (LE6-9) - Distributive leadership for learning and teaching: developing the faculty scholar model
  - iv. Australian Catholic University (LE6-8) - Leadership capacity for online learning and teaching
- c) Projects included in the first phase of the audit (funded in 2006) in addition to the projects identified above (b):
  - i. Australian National University (LE5-18) - Promoting teaching and learning communities: Institutional leadership project
  - ii. Flinders University (LE8-691) - Sustaining distributive leadership in learning and teaching: cascade and perpetual effectiveness of the faculty scholar model
  - iii. Flinders University (LE6-17) - Tiddas Showin' Up, Talkin' Up and Puttin' Up: Indigenous Women and Educational Leadership
  - iv. Griffith University (LE6-14) - Leading for effective partnering in clinical contexts
  - v. Queensland University of Technology (LE6-15) - Quantitative diversity: disciplinary and cross-disciplinary mathematics and statistics support in Australian universities.
- d) Related completed projects that used a distributed leadership approach:
  - i. Deakin University (lead) LE10-1726 (2010) Building distributed leadership in designing and implementing a quality management framework for online learning environments
  - ii. Swinburne University (lead) LE9-1228 (2009) Learning without borders: linking

- development of transnational leadership roles to international and cross-cultural teaching excellence
- iii. University of Tasmania (lead) LE9-1183 (2009) Demonstrating distributed leadership through cross-disciplinary peer networks: responding to climate change complexity
  - iv. University of Southern Queensland LE10-1734 (2010) Identifying and sustaining leadership capacity for communities of practice in higher education
  - v. RMIT (lead) LE9-1246 (2009) Create-Ed: strengthening leadership capability through a strategic knowledge network
  - vi. Flinders University (lead) LE8-691 (2009) Sustaining distributive leadership in learning and teaching: cascade and perpetual effectiveness of the faculty scholar model.
- e) Related current projects using a distributed leadership approach:
- i. University of Sydney (lead) LE11-1967 (2011) Fostering institutional and cultural change through the Australian Network of University Educators, Science and Mathematics Educators Network (SaMnet)
  - ii. Macquarie University (lead) LE11-1896 (2011) Building leadership with sessional staff standards
  - iii. Griffith University (lead) LE11-2084 (2011) Leading WIL – distributed leadership appropriate to enhance work integrated learning
  - iv. University of Melbourne (lead) LE12-2190 (2012) Building leadership capacity in university first year learning and teaching in the mathematical sciences
  - v. Queensland University of Technology (lead) LE11-1980 (2011) Developing a culture of peer-review of teaching through a distributive leadership approach
  - vi. University of Technology Sydney (lead) LE11-1982 (2011) Building local leadership for research education
  - vii. Queensland University of Technology (lead) LE12-2264 (2012) Building distributed leadership for effective supervision of creative practice higher education degrees
  - viii. Queensland University of Technology (lead) ID13-3001 (2013) Building institutional capacity to enhance access, participation and progression in Work Integrated Learning
  - ix. University of Western Sydney (lead) LE13-2839 (2013) Student leadership in curriculum development and reform

### **9.3 Teaching Fellowships**

The evaluating distributed leadership project has direct links to the following teaching fellowships:

- a) Associate Professor Jacquie McDonald 2010 National Teaching Fellow—Community domain, practice: facilitators catch-cry for revitalising learning and teaching through



communities of practice

- b) Associate Professor Manjula Sharma 2013 National Teaching Fellow—More active lecture approaches in science and mathematics: using expert cultural capital to drive change

#### **9.4 Linkages between disciplines**

The evaluating distributed leadership project was designed to be interdisciplinary. The project team and the reference group consisted of representatives from various disciplines, including education, engineering, management, geography and Koori education. The project activities resulted in the development of a strong link with the science/maths-based SaMnet project team members.

The survey included responses from participants in all ten broad fields of study; the disciplines represented in the greatest numbers were education, followed by health, management and commerce, and society and culture.

## 10 Evaluation

### 10.1 Evaluation processes used

The evaluation model originally developed for the ALTC by Chesterton and Cummings (2007, revised 2011) guided the evaluation process. The project team designed an appropriate evaluation process during phase 1 of the project. This included engaging an external evaluator for the project in 2012. By that stage the desk audit had already been completed. Following the evaluator's first meeting with the project team in July 2012, he thereafter fulfilled the role of 'critical friend', participating on a formative basis in team meetings, reference group meetings, and in the online collaborative session. He provided feedback and commentary throughout the project on such matters as the clarity of documents, ethics approvals, analysis of data, the theoretical framework or model being applied, research design and data gathering processes, the interpretation of data, the construction of resources, and dissemination/networking strategies. His evaluation also included an assessment of the resources and skills required to ensure project effectiveness. Finally, a review and evaluation of the overall project was undertaken.

The project team members were also configured as project evaluators, very much engaged in the iterative process of critique and commentary; the reflexive enquiry feature of action research. This also applied to participants in the various communities of practice and was true, to a lesser extent, of the reference group. Given this, much of the data feeding into the evaluation was generated through the normal processes of conducting the project. In his summative report the evaluator highlighted that, given the nature of the action research approach adopted, project leadership evaluation was inherent and ongoing throughout the project and involved a diverse array of stakeholders including the reference group and participants in the online collaborative session.

The project team and the evaluator collaboratively designed a matrix based on the ASERT—the Distributed Leadership Approach to Evaluation—which provided a framework for the evaluation of the project.

### 10.2 Evaluation outcomes

The external evaluation report commented on the overall project, its processes, deliverables and outcomes, and set out some recommendations. The principal issues and observations identified in the evaluation report were:

i. The value of a longstanding project team

The evaluating distributed leadership project team had (with the exception of one additional member) a history of prior collaboration, having worked together on the previous *enabling distributed leadership project*, and this showed in that they worked well together. The project team members acknowledged this and felt that the tacit knowledge their prior history created enabled them to produce outcomes beyond the planned deliverables for the project. The addition of a new member added opportunities for both the critique of existing knowledge within the team and the clarification of existing understanding.

ii. The value of engaging an existing community of practice

The project team were part of an existing community of practice interested in improving leadership in teaching and learning that was recruited to the project. Additional participants identified as a result of the project were also supportive, but it remains to be seen whether they will continue to participate in the group facility set up by the project team. While not crucial for the success of this project, the development of a vibrant, sustainable community of practice may impact the further proliferation of distributed leadership throughout the sector.

The project team members add that in response to the challenge of establishing a new issue-specific community of practice they took action to strengthen linkages with existing communities of practice, such as with CADAD and the learning and teaching expert members of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) who attended annual conferences.

iii. The value of recruiting participants who were also end-users

All of the participants in the project were actual or potential end-users of the project outcomes. Thus they had a sense of ownership of the issues being discussed and a clear stake in the proposed resources and materials being developed. Among other things, this helps with the dissemination strategy and also supports the validity of the outcomes.

iv. The advantages of leveraging from previous projects

This project followed on from an earlier project and it was clear that, in addition to the workings of the project team, there were advantages in following through on an already established line of enquiry.

The project team members add that the project not only built on and extended the findings of the *enabling distributed leadership project*, but also linked closely with a number of other OLT projects that were using a distributed leadership approach to achieve change. This meant that the findings were able to be clarified, tested and verified in 'real time' as they were identified.

v. The importance of open and frequent communication among the project team

The evaluator stated that during his time as an evaluator on the project he received most of the email correspondence, had access to the online project team files, and attended or read the notes of all meetings, including teleconferences and the webinar. He stated that there was constant communication among the project team and no hiatus periods where the project seemed to be in limbo.

The project team add that, in implementing the principles of distributed leadership, communication was designed to be open, constructive and mutually supportive, based on respect for, and trust in, the expertise of each of the members of the project team. This was a mainstay of the effectiveness of the team.

vi. The potential application of the benchmarks beyond teaching and learning

The evaluator identified that the reference group had indicated that the benchmarks could be used for building leadership in higher education institutions generally, not just in learning and teaching. There may be value in engaging HR in this.

The project team members add that while the project team was focussed on the contribution of distributed leadership in building leadership in learning and teaching, they are keen to take up suggestions that the distributed leadership benchmarks could underpin building leadership beyond learning and teaching.

vii. The need for management development in distributed leadership

The evaluator highlighted comments made by participants during the online collaborative session that indicated a need for institutional support and 'intentional' management, as evidenced by the comment: "DL is more effective when it has the support of a senior leader".

The project members add that findings from the national survey demonstrated little evidence of professional development for distributed leadership. This suggests, that for distributed leadership to realise its potential to build leadership capacity, there is need for a more structured approach to management development in distributed leadership.

viii. Developing a 'distributed' evaluation framework for OLT-funded projects

The evaluation identified the potential to use the action framework as an evaluation framework for OLT-funded projects. The project team members welcome this suggestion.

## 11 Conclusions

The evaluating distributed leadership project was successful in realising its intent of designing benchmarks for use in evaluating the practical experience of distributed leadership.

It has delivered several tailored instruments to enable ongoing exploration of the extent to which distributed leadership is being practiced across the sector.

It has made links between people engaged in projects that utilise a distributed leadership approach through the establishment of an online collaborative community of practice that provides the basis for sustainable discourse around distributed leadership.

The project delivered an unexpected outcome in the design of a new conceptual model for distributed leadership that can assist institutions in conceptualising/determining the action required to implement distributed leadership. The 6E conceptual framework for distributed leadership extended the ASERT, designed in the previous project, to create a more systematic approach to enabling distributed leadership.

The benchmarks for distributed leadership devised through this project provide institutions with the means to evaluate the extent to which they have been effective in implementing a distributed leadership approach that will build leadership capacity in learning and teaching.

The process used to design these benchmarks for distributed leadership resulted in the design of an internally validated survey instrument for distributed leadership that is available for further sector use.

The project confirmed that actions to enable distributed leadership and actions to evaluate distributed leadership, although related, need to be differentiated. It also confirmed the importance of both action and reflection in sustaining a distributed leadership approach. This re-emphasises the importance of a continuous action-research-reflection approach to building leadership capacity in learning and teaching.

An additional unexpected learning outcome was the suggestion by senior leaders in the reference group that the benchmarks had strong potential for building leadership in higher education institutions generally, beyond learning and teaching. These leaders suggested that there was potential for exploration of the transferability of the benchmarks for use by HR departments, as many are facilitating programs for emerging leaders.

The project team have been successful in disseminating findings throughout the project. The project team recognises that there is a need to develop an integrated, holistic approach to sustain leadership capacity building in learning and teaching. To this end, the team has submitted an application for a further grant to design and test an implementation strategy for distributed leadership that integrates the elements of enabling and evaluating to change in learning and teaching and to develop a handbook of distributed leadership.

## 12 Recommendations

The recommendations presented below identify the need for the higher education sector to keep advancing the use of a distributed leadership approach to build leadership capacity for learning and teaching.

Recommendation 1: Directed at senior leaders of learning and teaching in all universities

That the benchmarks for distributed leadership developed from this project be disseminated widely across the sector to assist institutions to utilise a distributed leadership approach to achieve leadership for change in learning and teaching.

Recommendation 2: Directed at senior academic leaders and senior human resource management leaders

That the potential of distributed leadership to build leadership beyond learning and teaching be explored between senior leaders in positions of responsibility for learning and teaching and human resource experts.

Recommendation 3: Directed at the OLT Grants Project team

That the OLT Grants Project team supports a further project to design and pilot test an implementation strategy that integrates the enabling and evaluative aspects of distributed leadership and to develop a *Handbook for Distributed Leadership*.

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# Appendix A Survey template

**The initiative**

**5. What is the name of the learning and teaching initiative that you are using as the example for this survey?**

**6. To what extent did the initiative aim to implement a university policy/strategy on learning and teaching?**

Not at All

Very Little

Somewhat

To a Great Extent

Completely

Not applicable

**7. Did the initiative originate from:**

an institute learning and teaching unit?

academics responsible for learning and teaching delivery?

professional staff with learning and teaching expertise?

an externally funded grant?

other

Other (please specify)

**8. Where did the impetus for the initiative originate?**

Central level

Faculty level

School level

Course level

Project

Individual academic

Other

Other (please specify)

## Participation in the initiative

### 9. To what extent:

	Not at All	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Completely	Not applicable
did participants in the initiative self-select?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
did formal leaders support the initiative?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
were decisions regarding the initiative shared between participants and formal leaders?	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
were professional staff with learning and teaching expertise involved with the initiative?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give an example if possible

## Design and implementation of the initiative

### 10. Design and development of the initiative

#### To what extent did the initiative:

	Not at All	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Completely	Not applicable
aim to use a distributed leadership approach?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
involve the institute learning and teaching unit?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
involve academics or professional staff responsible for learning and teaching delivery?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give an example if possible

### 11. Implementation of the initiative

#### To what extent:

	Not at All	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Completely	Not applicable
were those involved in design of the initiative responsible for implementation?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
did you use a distributed leadership approach in the initiative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
was responsibility for the successful outcome of the initiative shared?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give an example if possible

## Encouraging collaboration

### 12. Opportunities for collaboration in this initiative

#### To what extent was collaboration encouraged:

	Not at All	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Completely	Not applicable
through communities of practices?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
by holding formal meetings?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
between academics and professional staff?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
by other networking opportunities?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give an example if possible

### 13. Contribution of collaboration to the initiative

#### To what extent:

	Not at All	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Completely	Not applicable
did collaboration increase over the life of the initiative?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
was collaboration sustained?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give an example if possible

## Building expertise in leadership

### 14. To what extent

	Not at all	Very Little	Somewhat	To a great extent	Completely	Not applicable
were formal leaders provided training in distributed leadership?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
was mentoring available for participants in the initiative?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
was facilitation provided for collective activities?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give an example if possible

## Provision of resources

### 15. To what extent:

	Not at All	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Completely	Not applicable
was participation in this initiative formally acknowledged in work-plans?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
was participation in this initiative officially recognised for career development purposes?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
was finance (either internal or external) allocated to enable participation in this project?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give an example if possible

## Outcomes

### 16. To what extent:

	Not at All	Very Little	Somewhat	To a Great Extent	Completely	Not applicable
did this initiative build leadership capacity for learning and teaching?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
has participation in this initiative increased engagement in learning and teaching initiatives?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please give an example if possible

## Conclusions

**17. What changes would you make to designing and developing future learning and teaching initiatives based on your experience?**

**18. Distributed leadership has been described in this survey as including:**

- a context of trust and respect for the expertise of all staff
- a culture of collaboration
- recognition of change that occurs through ongoing cycles
- provision of professional development and resources to support collaboration
- action cycles of reflection

**Given this description, to what extent do you believe that the initiative you used to respond to this survey accords with this description:**

- Not at All
- Very Little
- Somewhat
- To a Great Extent
- Completely
- Not applicable

Comment

# Appendix B Survey analysis

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The national survey was designed as the second step in the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded distributed leadership benchmarking project. The aim of the national survey was to identify distributed leadership related systems and frameworks that are currently employed to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching across Australian higher education institutions. It was posited that the information collected from the survey could be helpful in developing an evidence-based benchmarking framework to evaluate distributed leadership approaches to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching.

## 2 SURVEY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The survey questions were developed from the dimensions, criteria, and actions required for distributed leadership identified in the Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT). This tool recognises four dimensions of distributed leadership: a context of trust and a culture of respect, together with a commitment to a change to a more participatory approach and to the development of collaborative relationships. It also recognises four criteria for distributed leadership: the involvement of people, supportive processes, the provision of professional development and the availability of resources. At the intersection of these dimensions and criteria sixteen actions to achieve distributed leadership, underpinned by reflective, action research processes, can be identified.

The survey questions were designed through an action research, iterative process that started with a desk audit of published reports of completed ALTC-funded projects that had utilised a distributed leadership approach, together with reflection by the project team and reference group members on the findings from the audit. Several key issues were identified through the audit, including instances of repetition and the need to describe distributed leadership, to more clearly clarify intent, and to provide respondents with the opportunity to present their perceptions on the extent to which they had engaged with each of the elements of the ASERT.

This process informed the development of survey questions which were piloted in five universities. The pilot process identified the need to further clarify aspects of the survey, for example, by asking respondents to evidence their answers in relation to a specific learning and teaching change initiative. The final survey was then designed with nine sections that sought to identify the:

1. leadership contribution of the respondent;
2. source of and impetus for the initiative;
3. form of participation in the initiative;
4. design and implementation;
5. extent and sustainability of collaboration;
6. extent of professional development provided to build expertise in leadership;
7. extent to which resources were provided;

8. contribution of the initiative to building leadership capacity and increasing participation in learning and teaching; and
9. respondent conclusions.

The survey was delivered online using SurveyMonkey. Given the desire to encourage responses from as broad a range of participants as possible (not only formal leaders of learning and teaching), potential participants were contacted in a range of ways. These included an initial presentation to the formal leaders of learning and teaching who make up the Council for Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD), followed by a direct email invitation to senior leaders of learning and teaching in each Australian university, with a request that the survey be cascaded to relevant people across their institution. Past and present leaders of leadership projects funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council/Office for Learning and Teaching (ALTC/OLT) were contacted via email, and attendees of the 2012 Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) conference were invited to complete the survey.

The results were subjected to internal reliability and validity tests that confirmed that the structure of the survey was appropriate. The main statistical analyses undertaken were internal reliability tests, descriptive statistics, factor analysis and correlation analysis. This report addresses the descriptive and correlations analyses only.

### 3 SURVEY LIMITATIONS

The survey design includes some underlying assumptions that bring with them inherent limitations. First, the ASERT upon which the survey questions were based is designed as an enabling framework for distributed leadership. It is built on an underlying assumption that distributed leadership is a suitable leadership approach for higher education and does not set out to question this. Second, the survey questions are based on the perceptions of the participants rather than any independent quantifiable measurement. In summary, the survey was not designed to identify the benchmarks for distributed leadership to be used in developing the framework and tools, rather it was designed partly to assess whether these dimensions and criteria were present in the learning and teaching initiatives selected and partly to refine our understanding of these dimensions. While acknowledging these limitations, the major findings are reported, interpreted and discussed as a process of criterion validation.

### 4 SURVEY POPULATION

The survey was carried out between May and August 2012, and received 175 responses of which 110 were complete in their entirety. Forty-seven Australian higher education institutions were represented, although eleven of these institutions recorded only one response. It is estimated that sixty of the 175 respondents were from leaders of ALTC/OLT-funded projects that had adopted a distributed leadership approach to build leadership in learning and teaching.

### 5 SURVEY ANALYSIS

While the small number of responses does limit the extent to which the analysis can be generalised across Australian higher education institutional experiences, the survey results do indicate that distributed leadership is being employed to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching in the Australian higher education sector.

A reliability analysis conducted on the survey results indicated that the items associated with three of the four criteria showed a reasonable level of internal consistency (design of processes, availability of support, and implementation of systems and resources). The fourth criteria

(involvement of people) showed a lesser degree of internal consistency with questions than the others but was still acceptable.

In the following discussion, the percentages refer to the proportion of respondents who recorded either 'to a greater extent' or 'completely' for the item being discussed.

## 5.1 The four criteria of distributed leadership

### 5.1.1 Involvement of people

Fifty-eight per cent of responses indicated that a broad cross-section of people had been involved in the initiative from design through to implementation and successful outcome. Eighty-two per cent of responses indicated that those involved in the design of the initiative had also been responsible for its implementation, whereas, only fifty-eight per cent of responses indicated that decision making regarding the initiative, as well as responsibility for the successful outcome, had been shared.

Seventy-four per cent of responses also indicated that participants in the initiative had included academics and professional staff responsible for learning and teaching delivery. The following quotes illustrate this involvement (please note that the quotes contained in this Appendix have been reproduced verbatim and include grammatical errors contained in the originals):

- Each project team is supposed to include a junior academic, a senior academic, the associate dean (education) for the target faculty, and an academic developer. About half of the teams include someone from the institution's learning and teaching unit. There are two academic developers and one former head of a learning and teaching unit on the 11-member steering committee of SaMnet.
- The Project Team comprises both academics and professional staff, who are experienced WIL leaders and chose to be involved. These WIL Leaders are modelling WIL leadership in their project, and encouraging and facilitating WIL leaders to try similar in their contexts, and to network with other WIL leaders in wider national CoP's.
- The planning group consisted of academic staff and general staff from different departments within the university. The task had the support of senior management but was led and undertaken by staff who did not have formal responsibilities in the university, but had knowledge and experience of eportfolios.
- This project was a problem-based initiative that involved academics, leaders and professional staff.
- The network is the hub linking academic & professional staff. The advisors also act as a distributed network to share workload & consult with each other to plan & solve problems.
- The working group included both academics from all Faculties within the university and professional staff from IT, L&T, Quality Assurance & HR. We held formal meetings of the working group, sought guidance from the advisory group which comprised mostly academic staff who were interested in the topic. We liaised with the PVC and other senior staff to ensure support for the initiative when it went through the Academic Board.
- The project I had chosen had previously been developed in different forms twice in the past and never gotten off the ground. By working collaboratively with all stakeholders from the beginning and recognising people and achievements all the



way through made this project a success. Also by looking at why the previous attempts had not worked and learning from previous issues and utilising the things that worked well the final project ran extremely well with only a few adjustments requires before final pilot.

- Associate Deans (T &L) opted in, with the Dean at each institution supporting, with little involvement, until the results were produced. Extracting cohort data student records from 8 universities involved professional staff in each institution

Participation in fifty-nine per cent of cases was reliant upon self-selection. This is illustrated by comments such as: “Faculty representatives were invited to join in organising the initiative, supported by the L&T unit. Staff decided themselves whether to attend/participate”.

#### 5.1.2 Processes that are supportive

Sixty-nine per cent of responses reported that there had been formal leader support for the initiative, although at times the support was not as timely as would have been ideal. This was illustrated in comments such as:

- The Dean was the key sponsor of the initiative and offered visible, time and financial support throughout. Leaders throughout the faculty contributed throughout and attended meetings and celebratory functions.
- The project nearly fell over during implementation because everyone assumed the project team could just get on with the job. In fact, they were operating in an innovative, creative space that needed more sustenance and sponsorship. It was identified after the group fell apart and help was provided to offer better leadership and support.

Fifty-eight per cent of responses also identified support for collaboration through communities of practice and sixty-seven per cent of respondents participated in formal meetings, while fifty-four per cent engaged in other networking opportunities. This is illustrated in comments such as:

- CoP facilitators were initially school based academics however general staff from disciplines and AOU's now fulfil some of these roles. Centre for University Teaching provides financial support to the CoPs and facilitators have access to professional development funds to attend conferences, etc. relevant to their CoP. Approximately three meetings are held every year centrally to hear from the CoP facilitators
- TATAL is a community of scholars sharing.
- CoP Meetings of CoP facilitators are undertaken approximately three times a year, the CoPs were initially established (late 2009) to be open to staff of all levels and disciplines, all but one of the CoPs has both academic and general staff members representing multiple disciplines at meeting. While collaboration has occurred, little formal encouragement occurred for them, beyond stating an expectation that they should occur at an initial meeting, that was the extent of encouragement.
- There are formal procedures were exploited (e.g. regular meetings of extant committees), but this was blended in opportunistic fashion with other networking opportunities, formal meetings.

### 5.1.3 Provision of professional development

Only twenty-seven per cent of respondents indicated that opportunities for professional development in distributed leadership had been provided. Forty per cent of the responses identified the direct involvement of the Institutional Learning and Teaching Unit, and only eight per cent of respondents identified the availability of formal training in distributed leadership. Forty per cent of responses indicated that facilitation for collective activities had been available, and twenty per cent of responses indicated that mentoring for participants had been available.

On the other hand, several quotes illustrated examples of professional development opportunities:

- Leaders of action-learning projects have been provided with a half-day workshop on leading change (specifically on how to engage others in a change initiative) and another half of a 2-hour workshop plus support in reflecting and documenting on the leadership challenges in their projects.
- Each project team also has a senior academic involved to provide mentorship as well as a critical friend, a member of SaMnet's steering committee who checks in every month or two to provide advice.

### 5.1.4 Resources are available

A similar distribution was found in responses to questions relating to the provision of resources. Fifty-nine per cent of respondents identified that financial support to enact change through distributed leadership had been provided, with illustrative quotes including:

- SaMnet's action-learning projects are not funded by SaMnet. However, some projects have gained funding from their faculty or university.
- In 2011 CoP facilitators received \$1000 each to utilise for professional development (conferences, books, etc.) and a similar amount and process is in place this year.
- Funds from ALTC and HERDSA, not a priority for the university.

While fifty-four per cent of respondents stated that regular networking opportunities had been encouraged, only twenty-nine per cent indicated that individual participation in activities was acknowledged in work plans. Examples of comments around these issues included:

- Significant time-release funding (in my opinion) was provided in 2009 and 2010 for CoP facilitators to plan, liaise, hold meetings, etc.
- The project team was given time release to develop the new initiative and extra support was later offered in the form of new people.
- External money was available, but most participants were not able to use this because there was no-one available to cover their teaching commitments.
- The academic was provided with time and space to work on the initiative. Their teaching load was reduced by 50% with funding from the school.
- Participation in the project was formally acknowledged, but little workload time has been provided for the project's activities. An academic fellowship, and funding was provided centrally but then the project involved distributed decision making.

Only twenty-six per cent of respondents indicated that participation in these initiatives had been considered for career development purposes, with illustrative quotes including:

- SaMnet provides a letter of congratulations to the Dean when a team gains SaMnet endorsement for their project, and SaMnet has been presented and lauded at an AGM of the Australian Council of Deans of Science. So, our aim is to gain career development points for project participants.
- It is unclear whether this will be acknowledged for career purposes, I believe it will but it largely depends upon individual circumstances.

In summary, while survey responses did provide examples of each of the action items identified in the ASERT this was not consistent.

## 5.2 Evidence-based benchmarking framework

In terms of the suggestion that the data collected from the survey may be helpful in developing an evidence-based benchmarking framework to evaluate distributed leadership approaches to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching, the outcome is less conclusive.

In order to commence the survey analysis into possible indicators of success for distributed leadership in learning and teaching it was necessary to clarify that, for the purposes of this project, the agreed purpose of distributed leadership is to build leadership capacity for learning and teaching. It was found that the correlation between building leadership capacity for learning and teaching and increased engagement in learning and teaching was the strongest, followed by its correlations with building collaboration and sustaining collaboration.

A medium-strength correlation was identified between building leadership capacity and the provision of resources in the form of time identified in work plans, recognition for career development purposes and finance. A medium-strength correlation was also identified between building leadership capacity and the sharing of decisions regarding the initiative between participants and formal leaders. Weaker correlations were found between building leadership capacity and both the self-selection of participants and the sharing of responsibility for the successful outcomes of the initiative.

While these quantitative results offer no conclusive outcome as to possible specific measures to evidence the effectiveness of distributed leadership, qualitative statements provided by respondents do provide examples of good practice that may inform the development of appropriate benchmarks. These qualitative comments include:

- The project has not been running for long, but there is already evidence of leadership capacity enhancement across the Project team itself, and in some of the feedback from participants in the Focus Group.
- SaMnet is mid-way through a two-year grant-funded project. We can see some impact on leadership capacity and engagement in learning and teaching initiatives, but this perception is mainly a general impression. We have conducted a survey early in the project, and we will follow up with surveys to identify self-reported levels of activity and feelings about leadership.
- It encouraged some members of the project team to seek other opportunities to participate in L&T initiatives and to take leadership roles in them.
- Several of the participants have become involved with more national projects in support of T & L.
- Many of the teaching fellows have gone onto formal leadership roles in the institution.

## 6 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

### 6.1 Distributed leadership employed in Australian higher education institutions.

The results point towards the conclusion that distributed leadership related systems and frameworks are currently being employed to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching across Australian higher education institutions. However, it is acknowledged that there is a need for caution (given the small and possibly non-representative sample) when extrapolating the survey findings to the more general Australian higher education institutional experience. The results also suggest the existence of support by the respondents for the dimensions and values identified by the project as those that appear to underpin distributed leadership.

### 6.2 Context of trust

The data suggests a fairly high level of acceptance of the need to take action to develop and encourage a context of trust. This is evidenced in the large number of responses that record the involvement of a broad range of people with expertise in learning and teaching, particularly the degree to which informal leadership by these experts was recognised and the number of projects that had finance allocated to them. However, the low level of professional development in distributed leadership suggests that more needs to be done to encourage the involvement of more people from a broad range of expertise.

### 6.3 Culture of respect

The number of responses that identified the participation of individuals in decision making within initiatives suggests that there would be a high level of acceptance of the need to take action to develop and encourage a culture of respect for individual expertise. However, the survey was unable to identify the extent to which groups at different levels of the organisation were engaged in decision making. Furthermore, the low level of mentoring provided for distributed leadership, and the lack of recognition or reward for individual leadership contributions, suggests the need for more action to be taken to enable a culture of respect for expertise.

### 6.4 Acceptance of the need for participative change

The number of responses that identified input from academics and professionals from all levels and functions into both policy development and initiative implementation is suggestive of a broad commitment to participative change. This is further enacted by encouragement from formal leaders for broad participant engagement in projects designed to produce change.

### 6.5 Collaborative relationships

While the importance of collaboration was acknowledged in a number of responses, it was not possible to determine the extent to which the expertise of individuals contributed to collective decision making. Despite this there was recognition of the importance of allowing collaborative relationships to develop through communities of practice, formal meetings and networking opportunities.

In summary, while the survey responses provided examples of action taken to enable a distributed leadership approach, these were unevenly spread across the four required dimensions.

### 6.6 Evidence-based benchmarking framework

Given the range of responses on specific action items identified as enabling a distributed leadership approach, it would appear that, while each initiative had elements of distributed leadership, each fell short of being a fully-fledged distributed leadership initiative, and thus none could be seen as an exemplar of distributed leadership upon which appropriate benchmarks could be based.

In summary, the survey analysis emphasised that the logic of the survey design was partly to assess whether the dimensions and criteria of distributed leadership were present in the learning and teaching initiatives selected and partly to refine our understanding of these dimensions, rather than to identify exemplars of distributed leadership. Before further action can be taken to identify evidence-based benchmarks there is need to further clarify the meanings and processes of distributed leadership. It would appear that distributed leadership needs to be more clearly identified as an umbrella concept that incorporates the engagement of a range of people in action to enable the dimensions and values of distributed leadership to be enacted and encouraged through a range of activities which can then be evaluated for evidence of good practice. Once more clearly explicated, the impact of distributed leadership can then be the subject of further discussion by a broader community of learning and teaching leaders and experts, with the aim of identifying possible good practice examples that may inform benchmarking.

# Appendix C Reliability and correlation analysis for national survey

## Reliability analysis

In order to assess the internal consistency of the proposed framework, a reliability analysis was conducted on the questions in the four dimensions.

### Cronbach's alpha Internal consistency

$\alpha \geq 0.9$	Excellent
$0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.9$	Good
$0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.8$	Acceptable
$0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$	Questionable
$0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$	Poor
$\alpha < 0.5$	Unacceptable

### 1. PEOPLE ARE INVOLVED (in the initiative)

#### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.619	6

#### Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
did participants in the initiative self-select?	19.09	13.070	.296	.599
were decisions regarding the initiative shared between participants and formal leaders?	19.16	11.886	.544	.496
were professional staff with learning and teaching expertise involved with the initiative?	19.02	13.844	.194	.642
involve academics or professional staff responsible for learning and teaching delivery?	18.76	14.243	.283	.599
were those involved in design of the initiative responsible for implementation?	18.60	13.408	.361	.571
was responsibility for the successful outcome of the initiative shared?	18.88	12.084	.469	.524

Cronbach's alpha of 0.619 with 6 items (9.1: Did participants in the initiative self-select?, 9.3: Were decisions regarding the initiative shared between participants and formal leaders?, 9.4: Were

professional staff with L&T expertise involved with the initiative?, 10.3: Involve academics or prof. staff responsible for L&T delivery, 11.1 Were all those involved in the design of the initiative responsible for implementation? and 11.3: Was responsibility for successful outcome shared?)

**2. PROCESSES ARE SUPPORTIVE (of the initiative)**

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.747	6

**Item-Total Statistics**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
did formal leaders support the initiative?	17.15	17.340	.400	.732
involve the institute learning and teaching unit?	17.99	16.010	.398	.738
through communities of practices?	17.52	15.461	.522	.700
by holding formal meetings?	17.37	16.798	.513	.707
between academics and professional staff?	17.73	14.407	.570	.685
by other networking opportunities?	17.60	15.493	.529	.698

Cronbach's alpha of 0.747 with 6 items (9.2: Did formal leaders support the initiative?, 10.2: Involve the institute learning and teaching unit?, 12.1: Through communities of practices?, 12.2: By holding formal meetings?, 12.3: Between academics and professional staff? and 12.4: By other networking opportunities?)

**3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS PROVIDED (to support the initiative)**

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.758	3

**Item-Total Statistics**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
were formal leaders provided training in distributed leadership?	5.78	6.230	.466	.839
was mentoring available for participants in the initiative?	5.43	5.970	.731	.521
was facilitation provided for collective activities?	4.90	6.644	.603	.664

Cronbach's alpha of 0.758 with 3 items (14.1: Were formal leaders provided training in distributed leadership?, 14.2: Was mentoring available for participants in the initiative? and 14.3: Was facilitation provided for collective activities?). Removing question 14.1 would increase Cronbach's alpha to 0.839, however since there are only 3 items in this dimension no further analysis was done.

**4. RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE (for the initiative)**

**Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.730	3

**Item-Total Statistics**

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
was participation in this initiative formally acknowledged in work-plans?	6.59	4.959	.651	.521
was participation in this initiative officially recognised for career development purposes?	6.52	5.436	.611	.578
was finance (either internal or external) allocated to enable participation in this project?	5.77	5.792	.416	.809

Cronbach's alpha of 0.730 with 3 items (15.1: Was participation in this initiative formally acknowledged in work-plans?, 15.2: Was participation in this initiative officially recognised for career development purposes? and 15.3: Was finance (either internal or external) allocated to enable participation in this project?). Removing question 15.3 would increase Cronbach's alpha to 0.809, however since there are only 3 items in this dimension no further analysis was done.



# Spearman's Correlation Matrix

		Correlations																										
		6	9.1	9.2	9.3	9.4	10.1	10.2	10.3	11.1	11.2	11.3	12.1	12.2	12.3	12.4	13.1	13.2	14.1	14.2	14.3	15.1	15.2	15.3	16.1	16.2		
Spearman's rho	6	1.000																										
	Correlation Coefficient		-0.09																									
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.323																									
9.1	9.1		1.000																									
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
9.2	9.2			1.000																								
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
9.3	9.3				1.000																							
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
9.4	9.4					1.000																						
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
10.1	10.1						1.000																					
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
10.2	10.2							1.000																				
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
10.3	10.3								1.000																			
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
11.1	11.1									1.000																		
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
11.2	11.2										1.000																	
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
11.3	11.3											1.000																
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
12.1	12.1												1.000															
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
12.2	12.2													1.000														
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
12.3	12.3														1.000													
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
12.4	12.4															1.000												
	Correlation Coefficient																											
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	Correlation Coefficient																											
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14.1	14.1																		1.000									
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14.3	14.3																				1.000							
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15.2	15.2																						1.000					
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
15.3	15.3																							1.000				
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
16.1	16.1																								1.000			
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											
16.2	16.2																										1.000	
	Correlation Coefficient																											
	Sig. (2-tailed)																											

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).  
 \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Questions:**

- 6: Did the initiative aim to implement a university policy/strategy on L&T?
- 7: Did the initiative originate from: an institute L&T unit, academics, professional staff, an external grant?
- 8: Where did the impetus for the initiative originate?
- 9.1: Did participants in the initiative self-select?
- 9.2: Did formal leaders support the initiative?
- 9.3: Were decisions regarding the initiative shared between participants and formal leaders?
- 9.4: Were professional staff with learning and teaching expertise involved with the initiative?
- 10.1: Aim to use a DL approach?
- 10.2: Involve the institute learning and teaching unit?
- 10.3: Involve academics or professional staff responsible for learning and teaching delivery?
- 11.1: Were those involved in design of the initiative responsible for implementation?
- 11.2: Did you use a DL approach?
- 11.3: Was responsibility for the successful outcome of the initiative shared?
- 12.1: Through communities of practice?
- 12.2: By holding formal meetings?
- 12.3: Between academics and professional staff?
- 12.4: By other networking opportunities?
- 13.1: Did collaboration increase over the life of the initiative?
- 13.2: Was collaboration sustained?
- 14.1: Were formal leaders provided training in distributed leadership?
- 14.2: Was mentoring available for participants in the initiative?
- 14.3: Was facilitation provided for collective activities?
- 15.1: Was participation in this initiative formally acknowledged in work-plans?
- 15.2: Was participation in this initiative officially recognised for career development purposes?
- 15.3: Was finance (either internal or external) allocated to enable participation in this project?
- 16.1: Did this initiative build leadership capacity for learning and teaching?
- 16.2: Has participation in this initiative increased engagement in learning and teaching initiatives?
- 17: What changes would you make to designing and developing future L&T initiatives based on your experience?

## Significant correlations

- 16.1: Did this initiative build leadership capacity for learning and teaching? and 16.2: Has participation in this initiative increase engagement in learning and teaching initiatives? = 0.807
- 14.2: Was mentoring available for participants in the initiative? and 14.3: Was facilitation provided for collective activities? = 0.711
- 13.1: Did collaboration increase over the life of the initiative? and 13.2: Was collaboration sustained? = 0.679
- 13.2: Was collaboration sustained? and 16.2: Has participation in this initiative increased engagement in learning and teaching initiatives? = 0.631
- 15.1: Was participation in this initiative formally acknowledged in work-plans? and 15.2: Was participation in this initiative officially recognised for career development purposes? = 0.628
- 13.1: Did collaboration increase over the life of the initiative? and 16.2: Has participation in this initiative increase engagement in learning and teaching initiatives? = 0.623
- 11.2: Did you use a DL approach? and 11.3: Was responsibility for the successful outcome of the initiative shared? = 0.617
- 12.1: Through communities of practices? and 12.4: By other networking opportunities? = 0.614
- 10.1: Aim to use a DL approach? and 11.2: Did you use a DL approach? = 0.612
- 13.1: Did collaboration increase over the life of the initiative? and 16.1: Did this initiative build leadership capacity for learning and teaching? = 0.587
- 12.1: Through communities of practice? and 16.2: Has participation in this initiative increased engagement in learning and teaching initiatives? = 0.558
- 11.2 Did you use a DL approach? and 12.4: By other networking opportunities? = 0.539
- 12.4: By other networking opportunities? and 14.2: Was mentoring available for participants in the initiative? = 0.536
- 11.3: Was responsibility for the successful outcome of the initiative shared? and 12.1: Through communities of practice? 0500

11.2: "Did you use a DL approach?" was significantly correlated with:

- 9.3: Were decisions regarding the initiative shared between participants and formal leaders? (0.233)
- 10.1: Aim to use a DL approach? (0.612)

- 10.3: Involve academics or professional staff responsible for learning and teaching delivery? (0.225)
- 11.1: Were those involved in design of the initiative responsible for implementation? (0.379)
- 11.3: Was responsibility for the successful outcome of the initiative shared? (0.617)
- 12.1: Through communities of practice? (0.482)
- 12.2: By holding formal meetings? (0.216)
- 12.3: Between academics and professional staff? (0.325)
- 12.4: By other networking opportunities? (0.539)
- 13.1: Did collaboration increase over the life of the initiative? (0.343)
- 14.1: Were formal leaders provided training in distributed leadership? (0.405)
- 14.2: Was mentoring available for participants in the initiative? (0.299)
- 14.3: Was facilitation provided for collective activities? (0.373)
- 15.1: Was participation in this initiative formally acknowledged in work-plans? (0.358)
- 15.2: Was participation in this initiative officially recognised for career development purposes? (0.271)
- 15.3: Was finance (either internal or external) allocated to enable participation in this project? (0.231)
- 16.1: Did this initiative build leadership capacity for learning and teaching? (0.382)
- 16.2: Has participation in this initiative increase engagement in learning and teaching initiatives? (0.374)

16.1: Did this initiative build leadership capacity for learning and teaching?

- 13.1 Did collaboration increase over the life of the initiative? (0.587)
- 13.2: Was collaboration sustained? (0.617)

16.2: Has participation in this initiative increase engagement in learning and teaching initiatives?

- 12.1: Through communities of practice? (0.558)
- 13.1 Did collaboration increase over the life of the initiative? (0.623)
- 13.2: Was collaboration sustained? (0.631)

## Appendix D Online collaborative report

The table below is arranged to show the questions asked by participants in the webinar arranged by the main themes of the project. The responses shown are given by the project team either at the time of the webinar or on subsequent reflection.

THEME	QUESTION	RESPONSE
<b>ENGAGE</b>  For formal leader pro-active support	Would senior management be an inhibitor to DL?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our experience is that DL is more effective when it has the support of senior leader, eg for the provision of for resources-e.g. for a COP</li> <li>• From our experience at CQU I agree</li> <li>• If DL needs support from traditional leaders, but they think their 'power' is threatened, it could be hard to get the process started</li> <li>• It is extremely important for formal leaders to support-hence Tenet 1 Engage Benchmarking</li> <li>• this had led Gronn to re-term DL as hybrid leadership</li> <li>• there is need to introduce the hybrid concept to those who are functioning in hierarchical roles</li> <li>• it is important to emphasise that DL is not a replacement for formal leadership</li> <li>• A key from research studies highlights the importance of formal leaders knowing when to step in and when to stand back to create space for leading from others to emerge</li> <li>• It is most effective when it has formal leadership support</li> <li>• For my organisation we would need all senior leaders to be aboard and linked to other strategies.</li> <li>• Some staff may react against this as they may not see that they have the capacity to do more as implied through a greater distribution of leadership work</li> <li>• It is a catch 22, you need a leader to lead the DL process + senior leader to champion process.</li> <li>• What we found is that the leadership role in the CoPs is important. There is need for people to push a good idea for change but also need for senior leadership support for the idea</li> <li>• This suggests the need to include a benchmark to identify the need for lead of a project</li> </ul>
<b>ENABLE</b>  An institutional context of trust and culture of respect	Would not DL be a reflection of institutional climate in relation to what academics and staff are able to pursue in terms of decisions or recommendations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By its distributed nature it has to work without institutional support but its effectiveness will be reduced if there is no institutional support</li> <li>• It is both - it already exists (i.e. the potential for leadership) and it needs some intentional management.</li> <li>• Research from schools shows both are evident.</li> <li>• Leithwood argues for the need of intentionality. The structure of projects can provide this intentionality</li> <li>• yes I have always been interested in how you manage for distributed leadership</li> <li>• I am thinking in terms of what Cohen, March, &amp; Olsen (1972) and Birnbuam (1988) called organizational garbage can or anarchic organizations both talk about fluid participation based on self-vested interest. Participation at the formal and the informal level thus have an interest challenge to trust and rationale for collegiality</li> <li>• People need to be open, to feel safe, that requires an environment in which trust exists</li> </ul>

THEME	QUESTION	RESPONSE
PD to explain DL	How organic is distributed leadership and how 'organised' is it? e.g., providing PD for staff etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One assumption I have found in my research of DL is that we can't assume people understand what DL is</li> <li>• For CoPs we talk about organic, nurtured &amp; intentional as different emergent/start-up approach</li> <li>• I agree, it takes a while for the message about DL to get through – it is about facilitating peoples' leadership skills</li> <li>• You will note that the ASERT identifies the important role for PD.</li> <li>• Because DL is a very different concept from individual (heroic) leaders this needs PD</li> <li>• Our focus is on how DL can be enabled, so while DL can be organic, our focus has been on the factors that can enable, evaluate it.</li> <li>• We have found that DL needs facilitation</li> <li>• DL is applicable in HE because we can pinpoint organic examples – our emphasis is on how to assist and enable</li> <li>• Is a possible way to start is to focus on sub-units within a University where there is anecdotal evidence to suggest a distribution of sources of productive influence? The reason I raise is this due to the importance of culture, which in large orgs needs to be understood through its sub-cultures</li> <li>• I agree with Howard's suggestion. This is a good constructivist approach to introducing DL</li> <li>• It is how the Academy used to work collegially before it became more corporate and hierarchical</li> </ul>
Participation by staff contributing their expertise to decision making	To what extent does distributed leadership imply distributed decision making?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have studied this in the context of L&amp;T projects - where participants are often "free" to make decisions</li> <li>• The ASERT refers to different approaches to decision making – decision making, participating in decision making, contributing to decision making, engaging in decision-making – it will depend on what suits the institution</li> <li>• We have not been categorical because of the need to ensure that formal leaders don't reject DL</li> <li>• This needs more work</li> <li>• This comes back to Institutional readiness</li> <li>• Not necessarily. A person/ individual could take the lead on making a decision</li> <li>• It can be either - it may depend on the methodology you adopt, but certainly with PAR is organic</li> <li>• Managing up is always important</li> <li>• Need people working at multiple levels to engage in change</li> </ul>
	Is institutional support required to enable DL to work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DL is appropriate for the HE sector because it employs people on the basis of their knowledge and thus has traditionally been structured to enable participation. This is different from the current more managerialist approach</li> <li>• DL is an excellent idea, but it is bounded by the formal university governance structure and the climate fostering participation vis a vis capacity to impact decision making. Possibly, this may be my USA experience coming to the fore, but DL, in my experience, has been used to augment decision capacity or subverted to meet other less, positive needs.</li> <li>• The ASERT identifies 16 elements, presented as a matrix to try to identify that all the elements need to be focused on when looking at benchmarks we identify all of the factors.</li> <li>• The benchmarks have been designed so that an Institution can identify what they have and what they are not so effective in.</li> </ul>

THEME	QUESTION	RESPONSE
<p><b>ENACT</b></p> <p>The design of participative processes to encourage and support engagement</p>	<p>Organisations decide to adopt element - therefore the question is can we introduce elements almost in complete ignorance of total model?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have not articulated CoPs as a DL practice, they operate on DL principles but we have not articulated this -we have concentrated on CoPs to share good practice</li> <li>• I've never thought to promote discussion of DL with Senior Leaders</li> <li>• Communities of Practice operate on DL principles - is a given - but do not articulate this</li> <li>• The ASERT identifies CoPs as an enabling action for DL</li> </ul>
<p><b>EMERGENT</b></p> <p>The action research, reflective, cycles of development</p>	<p>Are CoPs a model of DL?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DL can be useful as a strategy for a national OLT project.</li> <li>• The 'distributed' nature driving change in one uni can draw support &amp; insight from colleagues in another uni.</li> <li>• Agreed, being successful in similar context gives ideas re process to implement in another context</li> <li>• The project has been focussed on individual institutions in DL but it is an interesting question to see how DL can assist project that working across institutions.</li> <li>• This goes to the question of how the DL enabling and evaluating frameworks could be useful outside the L&amp;T focus</li> <li>• Yes, the model is useful in a range of situations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>EVALUATE</b></p> <p>Need to articulate purpose of DL and use multiple sources of evidence to evaluate, including reward and recognition of individual input</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think the introduction could include a section on how the benchmark could be used especially with comments on its flexible adaptation to different contexts</li> <li>• Re the benchmark related to participation in L&amp;T being recognised and rewarded, perhaps it needs to be clearer that the staff themselves recognise how they have benefitted from the leadership opportunities?</li> <li>• I wonder if there is an appreciative approach to employing this sort of benchmarking process. Instead of asking, "Have you done X?" or how well have you done it? How about "when have you done X?"</li> <li>• Good point, as the potential for leadership and unseen leadership practice may go under the official radar</li> </ul>

# User guide to benchmarking distributed leadership

**A user guide**

**for benchmarking**

**distributed leadership**

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## **Abbreviations**

ALTC	Australian Learning and teaching Council
ASERT	Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool
DL	Distributed Leadership
HE	Higher Education
OLT	Office for Learning and teaching
PAR	Participative Action Research

## **Purpose**

This user guide for benchmarking distributed leadership is the outcome of a project funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching to support institutions in their use of distributed leadership to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching.

The benchmarks for distributed leadership complement the Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT) developed as an outcome of a previous OLT-funded project to enable institutions to use distributed leadership to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching.

The benchmarks for distributed leadership address the key issue of how do institutions evaluate the effectiveness of the actions they have taken to enact distributed leadership?

This user guide is designed to assist leaders with institutional responsibility, as well as academics, professional staff and experts with functional responsibility for learning and teaching, to utilise the strategic potential of distributed leadership in building leadership capacity in their area.

Employed in conjunction with the ASERT, the benchmarks for distributed leadership will help to identify the action required to enable distributed leadership to be implemented and evaluated.

## **Context**

Current development and preparation of academic leaders in learning and teaching has been described as:

at best ad hoc or absent altogether in any systematic sense from formal professional development programs, [and] where they are provided, often focus on either learning and teaching practice, or leadership and management development more generally, with the latter targeting staff already in formal positions of management responsibility (Bosanquet et al., 2008, p. 3).

It is acknowledged that, given the diversity of the higher education sector together with its uncertain and sometimes ambiguous context, there is need for leadership in higher education that goes beyond conventional models (ALTC, 2011).

Academic leadership for learning and teaching has long demonstrated the importance of engaging a broad range of participants at all levels of the institution, from whole-of-institution to individual delivery levels. While this has existed as a tacit, often ad hoc, process, there is need in the current context to develop a more systematic approach to distributed leadership. By describing and identifying the actions needed to enable and evaluate distributed leadership, this user guide provides such a systematic approach.

## **Description**

Distributed leadership is an emergent form of shared leadership within the educational sector. It is the collaborative action of many people operating within supportive contexts to achieve identified goals, as a means to build leadership capacity in and across institutions.

Distributed leadership can be described as:

a form of shared leadership that is underpinned by a more collective and inclusive philosophy than traditional leadership theory that focuses on skills, traits and behaviours of individual leaders (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe and Ryland, 2011).

Distributed leadership recognises collaborative relationships as the source of, and support for, flexibility for change, particularly in learning and teaching.

Despite recognition of the potential of distributed leadership to build leadership in learning and teaching, it has proved difficult to promulgate in a systemic manner. This is because it is a more elusive concept than the traditional focus on skills, traits and behaviours of individual leaders. This lack of definitional precision and instrumental implementation, coupled with the perception by some that it is a decision-making process that seeks to compete with positional leaders or that it is merely a way to increase the workload of already stretched academics, has led to its potential to build leadership capacity being less than universally recognised.

## **Background**

The need for benchmarks for distributed leadership lies in recognition of the need for higher education institutions to develop a systematic, multi-faceted approach to building leadership capacity for learning and teaching (Marshall, 2006; Bryman, 2009). While approaches to building leadership capacity outside the sector are prolific, it is argued that academic leadership is different. Academic leadership exists in a highly specialised, professional environment built not simply upon hierarchical relationships. This led Ramsden (1998) to describe leadership in universities as:

a practical and everyday process of supporting, managing, developing and inspiring academic colleagues....leadership in universities should be by everyone from the Vice Chancellor to the casual car parking attendant, leadership is to do with how people relate to each other (p. 4).

Exploration of what constitutes an appropriate approach to building effective leadership for higher education has revealed a spectrum of possibilities. In seeking to summarise the various discourses on leadership in higher education, Marshall (2006, p. 5) concluded that:

while there is growing literature on “leadership” in higher education, relatively little of this literature focuses on the specific issue of developing leadership capability ... and even less on the development of leadership capability in learning and teaching.

This has led to claims that high-quality, multi-level leadership is fundamental to the promotion and enhancement of learning and teaching in higher education. The Australian Learning and Teaching Council has emphasised this in its statement:

in this dynamic, sometimes uncertain and sometimes ambiguous context, the capacity of systems, institutions and individuals to respond appropriately to change and to facilitate further change requires forms of leadership that go beyond conventional models (ALTC, 2011, p. 5)

## Benchmarks for distributed leadership

The benchmarks for distributed leadership have been developed from a project funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching. The benchmarks build on a national survey that investigated the existence and spread of distributed leadership related systems and frameworks currently employed across the Australian higher education sector. This survey revealed a high level of acceptance of the need to take action as identified in the Action Self Enabling Reflection Tool (ASERT), that is: to develop and encourage a context of trust, a culture of respect for individual expertise and a commitment to change, and to develop collaborative relationships.

The benchmarks for distributed leadership were designed in accordance with the six tenets of distributed leadership identified in the 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership—Engage, Enable, Enact, Encourage, Evaluate and Emergent.

The benchmarks for distributed leadership consist of five **domains**: Engage, Enable, Enact, Assess and Emergent. Each of the domains includes a **scoping statement**. Within these scoping statements there are several **elements**. Each of the elements has an associated **good practice** descriptor.

The benchmarks for distributed leadership are designed to enable institutions to identify and evaluate their own practice.

### Benchmark Domains

#### Engage

The domain of *engage* covers aspects of distributed leadership related to the degree and breadth of involvement of individuals. This benchmark includes measurement of the extent of engagement of leaders with institutional responsibility, informal leaders, and discipline and functional experts.

#### Enable

The domain of *enable* covers the aspects of distributed leadership that address the need for a context of trust and a culture of respect that acknowledges the expertise individuals can contribute. This benchmark includes the extent to which there is acceptance of the need for change from the traditional reliance upon positional managerial hierarchies to more collaborative approaches to developing relationships.

#### Enact

The domain of *enact* covers the aspects of distributed leadership that require a more holistic process. This benchmark includes the extent to which people are encouraged—and processes, support and systems are implemented to encourage—a distributed leadership approach

#### Assess

The domain of *assess* covers the area of distributed leadership concerned with identifying evidence of the contribution of distributed leadership to leadership capacity building. This benchmark includes evaluating cross-correlations between distributed leadership and increased engagement in learning and teaching, collaboration and growth in leadership capacity.

## **Emergent**

The domain of *emergent* covers the area of distributed leadership concerned with sustaining distributed leadership over time through action research cycles. This benchmark includes evidence of a participative action research process, reflective practice and continuous improvement.

The Benchmarking framework for distributed leadership is provided in the table below.

## Benchmarking framework for distributed leadership

DOMAIN	SCOPE	ELEMENTS	GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR
ENGAGE	Distributed leadership engages a broad range of participants from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels. This includes formal leaders, informal leaders and experts.	Formal leaders (academic and professional)	Formal leaders proactively support initiatives through attendance at meetings, publication of activities and other sponsorship activities.
		Informal leaders	Staff participate in learning and teaching enhancement and are recognised for their expertise through good practice.
		Discipline experts	Academics from relevant disciplines contribute their discipline expertise to initiatives either through self-nomination or peer nomination.
		Functional experts	Professional staff contribute their relevant functional expertise to initiatives either through self-nomination or peer nomination.
ENABLE	Distributed leadership is enabled through a context of trust and a culture of respect coupled with effecting change through collaborative relationships.	Context of trust.	Decisions made in initiatives are based on respect for and confidence in the knowledge, skills and expertise of academics and professional staff in addition to the relevant rules and regulations.
		Culture of respect	Decisions made in initiatives are shared between all participants based on their expertise and strengths.
		Acceptance of need for change	Initiatives combine formal leadership authority, relevant rules and regulations and the expertise of staff in an integrated top-down, bottom- and middle-up approach.
		Collaborative relationships	Participants in initiatives are provided with professional development opportunities as well as experienced facilitators and mentors to encourage collaborative decision making.
ENACT	Distributed leadership is enacted by involvement of people, the design of processes, the provision of support and the implementation of systems.	Involvement of people	Initiatives identify and encourage the participation of experts from among all relevant academic and professional staff.
		Design of participative processes	Communities of practice and other networking opportunities are encouraged and supported.
		Provision of support	Space, time and finance for collaborative initiatives are provided.
		Integration and alignment of systems	Systems are aligned to ensure that decisions arising from initiatives are integrated into formal policy and processes.
ASSESS	Distributed leadership is best evaluated drawing on multiple sources of evidence of increased engagement collaboration and growth in leadership capacity.	Increased engagement	Performance review processes acknowledge individual engagement in initiatives.
		Increased collaboration	Data (such as university cultural surveys; collaborative grant applications related to learning and teaching enhancement; and collaborative publications) identify evidence of increased collaborative activity between staff.
		Growth in leadership capacity	Participation in initiatives is recognised and rewarded.
EMERGENT	Distributed leadership is emergent and sustained through cycles of action research built on a participative action research methodology.	Participative action research process	An action research process that encourages participation through cycles of activity underpins the initiative.
		Reflective practice	Reflective practice is built into initiatives as a formal practice and stage of the initiative.
		Continuous improvement	Output from each stage of the initiative will be sustained.

## **Benchmarks**

The Benchmarking Distributed Leadership Instrument has been designed to provide users and potential adopters of distributed leadership in learning and teaching with assistance in self-assessing their performance against good practice descriptors for each of the five benchmarks domains and their associated scope and elements.

The Benchmarking Distributed Leadership Instrument provides a template for each domain and element that includes a good practice descriptor of the action required. Users can download the templates to benchmark the description and evidence of their own practice against the good practice descriptor and self-appraise their performance.

Self-assessment of performance is rated as either:

- Beginning or Developing (action required);
- Functional or Proficient (further action required); or
- Accomplished or Exemplary (continue current action).



<b>Domain: 1. ENGAGE</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership engages a broad range of participants from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels. This includes formal leaders, informal leaders and experts.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Formal leaders (academic and professional)
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Formal leaders proactively support initiatives through attendance at meetings, publication of activities and other sponsorship activities.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 1. ENGAGE</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership engages a broad range of participants from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels. This includes formal leaders, informal leaders and experts
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Informal leaders
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Staff participate in learning and teaching enhancement and are recognised for their expertise through good practice.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 1. ENGAGE</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership engages a broad range of participants from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels. This includes formal leaders, informal leaders and experts.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Discipline experts
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Academics from relevant disciplines contribute their discipline expertise to initiatives either through self-nomination or peer nomination.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 1. ENGAGE</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership engages a broad range of participants from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels. This includes formal leaders, informal leaders and experts.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Functional experts
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Professional staff contribute their relevant functional expertise to initiatives either through self-nomination or peer nomination.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 1. ENGAGE</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is enabled through a context of trust and a culture of respect coupled with effecting change through collaborative relationships.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Context of trust
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Decisions made in initiatives are based on respect for and confidence in the knowledge, skills and expertise of academics and professional staff in addition to the relevant rules and regulations.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 2. ENABLE</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is enabled through a context of trust and a culture of respect coupled with effecting change through collaborative relationships.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Culture of respect
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Decisions made in initiatives are shared between all participants based on their expertise and strengths.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 2. ENABLE</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is enabled through a context of trust and a culture of respect coupled with effecting change through collaborative relationships.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Acceptance of need for change
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Initiatives combine formal leadership authority, relevant rules and regulations and the expertise of staff in an integrated top-down, bottom- and middle-up approach.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 2. ENABLE</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is enabled through a context of trust and a culture of respect coupled with effecting change through collaborative relationships.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Collaborative relationships
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Participants in initiatives are provided with professional development opportunities as well as experienced facilitators and mentors to encourage collaborative decision making.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 3. ENACT</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is enacted by involvement of people, the design of processes, the provision of support and the implementation of systems.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Involvement of people
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Initiatives identify and encourage the participation of experts from among all relevant academic and professional staff.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 3. ENACT</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is enacted by involvement of people, the design of processes, the provision of support and the implementation of systems.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Design of participative processes
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Communities of practice and other networking opportunities are encouraged and supported.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 3. ENACT</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is enacted by involvement of people, the design of processes, the provision of support and the implementation of systems.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Provision of support
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Space, time and finance for collaborative initiatives are provided.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 3. ENACT</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is enacted by involvement of people, the design of processes, the provision of support and the implementation of systems.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Integration and alignment of systems
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Systems are aligned to ensure that decisions arising from initiatives are integrated into formal policy and processes.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 4. ASSESS</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is best evaluated drawing on multiple sources of evidence of increased engagement collaboration and growth in leadership capacity.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Increased engagement
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Performance review processes acknowledge individual engagement in initiatives.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 4. ASSESS</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is best evaluated drawing on multiple sources of evidence of increased engagement collaboration and growth in leadership capacity.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Increased collaboration
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Data (such as university cultural surveys; collaborative grant applications related to learning and teaching enhancement; and collaborative publications) identify evidence of increased collaborative activity between staff.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 4. ASSESS</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is best evaluated drawing on multiple sources of evidence of increased engagement collaboration and growth in leadership capacity.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Growth in leadership capacity
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Participation in initiatives is recognised and rewarded.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 5. EMERGENT</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is emergent and sustained through cycles of action research built on a participative action research methodology.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Participative action research process
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> An action research process that encourages participation through cycles of activity underpins the initiative.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 5. EMERGENT</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is emergent and sustained through cycles of action research built on a participative action research methodology.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Reflective practice
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Reflective practice is built into initiatives as a formal practice and stage of the initiative.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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<b>Domain: 5. EMERGENT</b>
<b>SCOPE:</b> Distributed leadership is emergent and sustained through cycles of action research built on a participative action research methodology.
<b>ELEMENT:</b> Continuous improvement
<b>GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTOR:</b> Output from each stage of the initiative will be sustained.

Description of current practice
Evidence of performance in this element

	1	2	3	4	5
	Beginning-Developing		Functional-Proficient		Accomplished-Exemplary
Appraisal of performance in this element					

Actions
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# Evaluation Report

## Evidence-based benchmarking framework for a distributed leadership approach to capacity building in learning and teaching

<b>Year Funded:</b>	2011
<b>Project Reference:</b>	LE11-2000
<b>Program:</b>	Leadership for Excellence
<b>Project Discipline:</b>	Not disciplinary based
<b>Project Keywords:</b>	Benchmark, Disciplinary and cross-disciplinary, Distributed leadership, Evidence-based practice

### Lead Institution

RMIT University

### Partner Institutions

Macquarie University, University of Wollongong

### Project Team

Professor Sandra Jones (Project Leader), Associate Professor Geraldine Lefoe, Dr Marina Harvey, Professor Roger Hadgraft.

### Evaluator

Emeritus Professor Mark Tennant<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Tennant is an Emeritus Professor in Education at the University of Technology, Sydney. He was Dean, University Graduate School for 10 years to 2010 and prior to that he was Dean of the Faculty of Education on two occasions. He was an AUQA auditor for 10 years and is currently on the TEQSA Register. He has published widely on higher education and post-school teaching and learning.

## Introduction

This project was funded by the OLT<sup>2</sup> under the Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program, which is a competitive grants scheme. A key focus of this program is leadership capacity building through promoting systematic, structured support for academic leadership. The stated aim of the current project is to *undertake research to develop a systematic, evidence-based benchmarking framework for Distributed Leadership to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching.*

## Context for the project

The project context is detailed in the Introduction to the Final Report but also in the original project application. The project takes as its starting point the desirability of fostering distributed leadership in the higher education sector (with an emphasis on leadership for teaching and learning). The project team see distributed leadership as

*a form of shared leadership that is underpinned by a more collective and inclusive philosophy than traditional leadership theory that focuses on skills, traits and behaviours of individual leaders” (Jones et al 2011). In so doing it recognises relationships as the source of, and support for, flexibility for change.*

Distributed leadership is thus located within what the team members refer to as ‘collective’ theories of leadership. There is an implicit critique here of individualistic approaches to leadership which aim to only develop individual skills and attributes. There is ample evidence to support the need to investigate distributed leadership: the team members refer to UK and USA research and the plethora of distributed leadership projects supported by the ALTC/OLT, including their own prior project *Enabling distributed leadership*. The current project follows directly from the *Enabling distributed leadership* project which identified a set of actions to enable distributed leadership from a matrix of dimensions, values and criteria applicable to distributed leadership - the Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT) (LE9-1222). The current project represents the next logical step in investigating distributed leadership: how it can best be evaluated – hence the intent to develop an *evidenced based benchmarking framework*.

## Context for the evaluation

This project has already been subjected to an assessment process against a set of criteria in the Guidelines for the program. In addition to being assessed against the criteria, all proposals for grants for projects have been assessed for their contribution to the mission and objectives of the OLT and for their synergy with OLT’s values and principles for action. The OLT requires an independent evaluation, with a focus on the quality of the project and the extent to which it meets its stated aims, outcomes/outputs and deliverables. This is a ‘fit for purpose’ evaluation, but the evaluation also needs to comment on the extent to which the project reflects the mission, objectives, values and principles of the OLT.

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<sup>2</sup> The OLT is the new location for the functions of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC), which has now been disbanded. The OLT sits within the Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education. The project was originally funded by the ALTC.

The OLT has also expressed a particular view about the evaluation process and the role of the evaluator. That is, the evaluation is both formative and summative. In its formative aspect the evaluator is positioned as a critical friend providing feedback and commentary during the project on such matters as the clarity of documents, ethics approvals, the analysis of data, the theoretical framework or model being applied, the research design and data gathering process, the interpretation of data, the construction of resources, and dissemination/networking strategies. The summative aspect comprises a report at the conclusion of the project. The summative report has three principal functions: firstly, it has a quality assurance and auditing function for the funding agency (OLT); secondly, it recommends procedural and policy implications to the funding agency; and finally it provides feedback to the project team and others who have a stake in the research.

It is worth noting that the project team members are also configured as evaluators in this project, very much engaged in the iterative process of critique and commentary - the reflexive enquiry feature of action research. This also applies to the participants in the communities of practice, and it is also true to a lesser degree of the Reference Committee depending on its engagement with the project. Given this scenario much of the data feeding into the evaluation can be generated through the normal processes of conducting the project. As the evaluator of this project I have drawn on the following sources of information:

- Participation in project meetings
- Documents and documented processes
- Reference group feedback
- Participation in a community of practice webinar
- Team members' critical reflection on the project.

I was engaged in the project from June 2012 and attended my first meeting in July 2012. At this stage the desk audit was completed, but I was able to fulfil a 'critical friend' role on remaining tasks, namely: how the communities of practice will be formed, the analysis of the national survey, and the conceptual development and validation of the benchmarking tool. My engagement involved attending two day long meetings, teleconferencing sessions, responding to circulated documents, participating in a 'community of practice' Blackboard Collaborate session, and facilitating a reflective evaluation among the team members.

While being mindful of the range and scope of questions that can be asked in any evaluation (see the OLT grants scheme evaluation plan) I am also conscious of the need to focus on the key evaluative questions relevant to this project. To this end I have organized the report around four key questions. These are set out below with accompanying commentary.

**Did the approach taken reflect the key features of distributed leadership and the principles of action research, and did it give effect to the values and principles of the OLT? (eg the values of inclusiveness, networking, collaboration, diversity, systemic change and capacity building, future looking, and high impact).**

## Commentary

In its conception and execution this project is well aligned with OLT values. The very notions of distributed leadership itself reflects a set of values such as collaboration, networking, communities of practice, reflection, relationships and inclusiveness. Arguably, effective leadership in the higher education sector is central to maintaining and improving the international standing of Australian higher education teaching, learning and research. This project can be seen as part of an ongoing dialogue concerning how best to conceive and foster leadership more broadly, and distributed leadership in particular. Importantly, leadership is not seen solely as an individual attribute, but as an attribute of an academic unit or group. At the outset then I was mindful of applying the stated dimensions, values and criteria for distributed leadership to the workings of the project team and how they related to the broader community of practice (i.e. one of the outcomes of project LE9-1222). As far as the team is concerned they too were self-reflectively aware of their need to model a distributed leadership approach in their own practices both within the team and in their respective institutions. In my observations over the course of the project I certainly saw a coherent, well functioning team that exemplified the values of trust, respect, recognition and collaboration; which are so central to effective distributed leadership. I should add that I also experienced a sense of inclusion within the team as an evaluator, as did the Project Manager. Outside formal meetings and teleconferences, there was a great deal of email exchange and a Dropbox was set up to share and comment on the development of framework and resources.

Engagement with the broader community of practice provided feedback for each stage of the Action Research Cycle (see Fig 5 in the Final Report). For example the Survey results fed into the Conceptual Model and the webinar fed into the benchmarking tool and framework. While a National Survey, in itself, is a traditional research tool, it is worth noting that participants were completing the survey with a particular teaching and learning initiative in mind. Other strategies that engaged the broader community include the CADAD presentation, the ILA Conference presentation, and the Reference Group discussion.

On the issue of impact, the Final Report sets out the dissemination strategies already undertaken, including conference presentations, presentations to interested groups, and journal publications (see Section 7.2). The materials and resources developed through the project are available for use and provide scope for future ongoing impact. As a result of the project I positioned myself as an end-user to experiment with the idea that the dimensions, values and criteria for distributed leadership could be applied to the process of evaluation. The result is a modified ASERT matrix (see Exhibit 1). I have also mapped the project against an adapted framework for social science research utilization. I did this as a means to gauge the existing and potential utilization of the research by end-users, even though the concept of an 'end-user' is a bit of a misnomer in the context of this project (see Exhibit 2). To provide a better fit with the current project, I adapted the framework to include some to the features of The D-Cubed Guide: Planning for Effective Dissemination available at <http://www.olt.gov.au/project-review-dissemination-strategies-ug-2009>



**What were the project's questions? (implicit and explicit) Did the project design effectively address these questions?**

### **Commentary**

The project was focused on the production of a framework with supporting tools and resources. The project was conceived as comprising a number of action research cycles, each of which contained an implicit question, and each of which was addressed using a distinct method. It should be noted that team reflective enquiry was an element present in all cycles. The implicit questions for each cycle were:

Cycle 1 What are the indicators of success for distributed leadership in building academic leadership capacity in learning and teaching? What needs to be done to move from an enabling to an evaluative framework? Method: Audit of prior projects

Cycle 2 To what extent are distributed leadership related systems and frameworks currently employed across the Australian higher education sector to build leadership capacity? Method: National Survey/Reference Group

Cycle 3 What are the underpinning tenets of DL and can they be captured in a model? Method: Team reflective enquiry on Cycles 1 and 2.

Cycle 4 What are the appropriate indicators of DL for benchmarking purposes?. Method: Feedback from communities of practice e.g. Reference Group, CADAD, webinar participants.

Cycle 5 How can the benchmark tool be used to focus on ongoing self-reflection and improvement? Method: Team reflective enquiry

Cycle 6 How can a framework be developed that integrates both the enabling and evaluative elements of distributed leadership? Method: Team reflective enquiry.

The above questions largely emerged through the life of the project as each stage of the Action Research Cycle was completed. On first reading of the project proposal I did imagine a single Community of Practice undertaking a specific and agreed upon initiative with successive cycles of Plan, Act, Observe, Reflect. This was not the case. However there was a great deal of reflection on actions taken but these actions were distributed across different communities so to speak (eg participating universities, webinar participants, survey participants). In this sense it is better to say that different communities of practice were engaged in the project in different ways.

**How does this project add value to the prior project Action Self Enabling Reflection Tool for DL (developed from project LE9-1222) and other projects on DL?**

This project would not have been possible without the prior project on which it was built. That project developed a matrix of dimensions, values and criteria for distributed leadership that identified sixteen actions that would enable distributed leadership in a higher education context. It also developed a self-enabling reflective process designed to assist institutions to engage in cycles of reflection in relation to each of the enabling actions. The current project shifts from 'enabling' to 'evaluating', hence the development of a Benchmarking tool. In so doing a new overarching framework has been proposed which links the old and new project – the Self-Enabling and Evaluating Reflection \_Distributed Leadership (SEER\_DL) Framework. In the process of developing this framework there has been an updated description of distributed learning, a

survey instrument, a new conceptual model, a user guide (which commences with the earlier ASERT as Step 1) and a new reflection tool. All the resources will be uploaded to the website at <http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/distributedleadership/>

The current project has added significantly to the earlier project and more generally it has continued to add to the global discourse on distributed leadership.

**What outcomes were achieved?**

The project outcomes are summarised in the Final Report (see Fig 1). Specifically the outcomes were:

- An updated description of Distributed Leadership
- A survey instrument that has potential as a resource for others
- A conceptual model for Distributed Leadership (the 6E Model)
- A Distributed Leadership Benchmarking tool
- A Distributed Leadership Reflection Tool
- A User Guide for Distributed Leadership.
- A framework integrating both the enabling and evaluative aspects of DL

The Table below maps these outcomes against the deliverables in the proposal. It should be noted that the outcomes go beyond the approved project deliverables.

Deliverables/Outcomes	Comment
Systematic identification and analysis of DL approaches to build leadership capacity	This was achieved through the audit of prior projects that had a distributed learning intent. The results were used to inform the construction of the National Survey.
National survey data of current experience of DL for use in identifying benchmarks for DL	The national survey was undertaken for 2 reasons – first to try to obtain a national picture of distributed leadership; second to seek information from those who had implemented a distributed leadership process to inform the proposed benchmarks. The survey instrument itself was initially conceived as a data gathering tool but it can also be used as an instrument for others to adopt.
Web-based benchmarking tool	A benchmarking tool has been produced which is modelled on the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) document Benchmarking Performance of Academic Development Units. The Benchmarking Tool has Good Practice Descriptors that are dependent upon interpretation rather than neutral observation. As such it is best used as a reflective tool rather than as a measurement tool.

Evidence-based benchmarking framework for DL	The above benchmarking tool is positioned within a framework that integrates the resources that have been developed over the two linked projects on distributed leadership. The framework is now described as the Self Enabling and Evaluating Reflection Distributed Leadership Framework (see Section 2 of Final Report). It is now seen as supporting and action-reflection process to both enable and evaluate distributed leadership.
User's guide for the benchmarking framework.	The User Guide has been developed. It comprises four steps, scaffolding of enabling actions using the ASERT; identifying examples of the tenets in the 6E conceptual model; using a collaborative process to self-assess the actions undertaken against the good practice descriptors for each of the elements in the benchmarking tool; and to reflect on the outcomes using the DL self-reflection tool. (see Fig 3 of Final Report). The project also developed a Reflective tool which was refined from the earlier ASERT.
Website to disseminate findings and resources	The website is currently being populated with the resources and can be found at <a href="http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/distributedleadership/">http://emedia.rmit.edu.au/distributedleadership/</a>  (See 7.1 of Final Report for enhancements)
Peer reviewed publications.	The project has produced 3 journal publications, 3 conference presentations, and 5 presentations to interested groups in higher education

### Issues, observations and recommendations

#### 1. The value of a longstanding project team

The project team had a history of prior collaboration and this showed in that they worked well together.

**Recommendation 1:** that OLT consider prior productive collaboration in its assessment of project proposals.

#### 2. The value of engaging an existing community of practice

The project team were a part of an existing community of practice that was recruited to the project. However the community of practice did not define itself by the project. Rather it is a community of practice interested in improving leadership in teaching and learning. The participants were supportive of the project but it remains to be seen whether they will continue to participate in the Google group facility that is provided on the Distributed Learning website. This is not crucial for the success of this project but it may be for others that are relying on sustaining a C of P.

**Recommendation 2:** that OLT consider the risks of using a C of P in projects that rely on its ongoing sustainability for the success of the project.

3. The value of recruiting participants who were also end-users.

All the participants in the project were actual or potential end-users. Thus they had a sense of ownership of the issues being discussed and a clear stake in the proposed resources and materials being developed. Among other things this helps with the dissemination strategy but it also adds to the validity of the outcomes.

4. The advantage of leveraging from previous projects.

This project followed on from an earlier project and it was clear that, in addition to the workings of the project team, there were advantages in following through on an already established line of enquiry.

5. The importance of open and frequent communication among the project team

During my time as an evaluator on the project I received most of the email correspondence, I had access to the Dropbox, and I attended or read the notes of all meetings, including teleconference and webinars. There was constant communication among the project team and there were no hiatus periods where the project seemed to be in limbo.

**Recommendation 3:** that project proposal guidelines ask applicants to address the frequency, types and responsibilities relating to project team members' communication.

6. The potential application of the Benchmark beyond teaching and learning.

The Reference group mentioned that the benchmarks could be used for building leadership in higher education institutions generally, not just in learning and teaching. There may be value in engaging HR in this.

7. The need for management development in distributed leadership (both academic and professional staff).

The webinar participants indicated there was a need for institutional support and 'intentional' management, as evidenced by the comment: "DL is more effective when it has the support of senior leader".

**Recommendation 4:** that OLT consider funding a project that focuses on the professional development of senior managers with an emphasis on managing for distributed leadership.

8. Developing a 'distributed' evaluation framework for OLT funded projects.

**Recommendation 5:** that OLT consider adopting and/or adapting the matrix in Exhibit 1 as a framework for its own approach to evaluation.

### Exhibit 1 Project Evaluation using a Distributed Leadership approach.

	Dimensions and values			
Criteria for distributed leadership	Context Trust	Culture Respect	Change Recognition	Relationships Collaborative
People are involved	Project team designs initial evaluation brief	Project team calls for EOIs based on evaluation brief and appoints evaluator	OLT assesses application evaluation.  Team develops evaluator brief.  Chosen evaluator proposes strategy	Evaluator meets with project team and negotiates/ agrees on evaluation process  Project team are also evaluators
Processes are supportive	Project Director at OLT available for discussions.	Decisions on evaluation made by all members of project team and other relevant project participants/ stakeholders (eg Reference Group)	OLT provides a schedule and template format for project evaluation report(s)	Project team and project participants are involved in the evaluation (formative or summative).
Professional development is provided	OLT provides information guidelines and resources (e.g. framework) for project evaluation  OLT provides evaluation workshops.	Mentoring and /or exchange of issues structured into OLT operations.  Evaluators are provided with ongoing mentoring opportunities from OLT	Key stakeholders actively encourage a distributed evaluation model.	Collaboration is facilitated among key stakeholders e.g. project managers, teams, evaluators.
Resources are available	OLT requires projects to identify evaluation process in the initial application and provides funding targeted for	Evaluation is recognised as an important part of the grant application process  OLT establishes a database/list of	There is flexibility in the way evaluations are designed and implemented to enable a diversity of approaches	Networking among evaluators is encouraged and facilitated by the OLT

	evaluation	experienced evaluators on the website		
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## Exhibit 2 Project mapped against the Stages of Research Utilization<sup>3</sup>

Variable	Commentary
Transmission -results are transmitted to end users	The project has been disseminated via normal academic routes such as conference papers, seminars, and publications. The process of the research also entailed engagement with end-users (see last row of this table)
Awareness - research reports have been read and understood by end-users	Participants in the online collaborative session emphasised the need for professional development of formal managers so that they understand and can plan for a distributed leadership approach in their academic units. This was supported by positive feedback to the proposed benchmarks by members of the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development.
Reference - citations in reports and strategies by end-users	Participants in the online collaborative session proposed that action be taken to broaden and sustain the impact of the project. In response to the question <i>"Can distributed leadership be used in various contexts"</i> , participants responded with comments such as <i>"the distributed nature driving change on one university can draw support and insights from colleagues in another university"</i> . It is too early to document the citations from various publications arising from the project.
Effort -efforts were made to adopt the results or the research by end-users	<p>The Evaluator for this project has suggested that the ASERT Framework has the potential to be developed into a 'Distributed Evaluation Framework' that could be applied to the way the OLT structures and manages project evaluations (see Evaluator report for further details).</p> <p>Participants in the online collaborative session proposed that the resources developed from this project be used to underpin national OLT projects.</p> <p>Following presentations to several OLT funded projects (Griffith University, LE11-2084 (2011) Deakin University, LE10-1726, project teams have used the</p>

	action matrix as scaffolding to design their projects
Influence -research results have influenced the choices and decisions of end-users	Potential future broader impact of the project on leadership in higher education beyond the learning and teaching focus has also been proposed. At the April 2013 meeting of the project reference group, several senior learning and teaching leaders (Dean and Provost in learning and teaching) stated <i>that the benchmarks could be used for building leadership in higher education institutions generally, not just in learning and teaching</i> . It was proposed that this potential could be explored with HR departments as well as the learning and teaching experts as many are undertaking programs for emerging leaders.
Application - research has been applied by end-users	The ASERT Framework from the 'enabling distributed leadership' project (re-termed the Action Matrix as a result of this project) has been applied by end-users. For example the national networks of science and maths higher education teachers (Science and Mathematics network of Australian university educators (SaMnet) to help design and assess actions to use a distributed leadership approach for their network (see 3.1).
Engagement - research engages end-users as informants, critical evaluators, and change agents	The project has engaged a broad range of current and potential end-users, through the national survey, the online collaborative session as well as members of the reference group and the project evaluator. These participants have all provided positive feedback on the project findings and resources produced from the findings and are valuable change agents.

<sup>3</sup>Adapted from the project 'Utilization of Social Science Research' conducted by the Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland <http://www.issr.uq.edu.au/content/utilisation-of-social-science-research>.