Demonstrating the Impact of a Distributed Leadership Approach in Higher Education

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Abstract

Higher education is under pressure to advance from a singular focus on assessment of outputs (measurements) to encompass the impact (influence) of initiatives across all aspects of academic endeavour (research, learning and teaching and leadership). This paper focuses on the implications of this shift for leadership in higher education. Demonstrating the impact of leadership in higher education requires taking a step beyond measuring the skills, behaviours and achievements of individual leaders to demonstrating how universities can evaluate the impact of actions taken to build leadership capacity across the institution. The authors extend the outcome of empirical research into how a distributed leadership approach can be enabled and evaluated in Australian higher education - to analyse the effectiveness of these processes for both measuring output and assessing the impact and influence of practice.

Introduction

As performance in institutional and discipline-based rankings has come into increasingly sharp focus, and government funding is linked to measured outputs, a plethora of metrics have been devised to gauge institutional and discipline outputs, quality, and productivity across various Higher Education (HE) fields of endeavour (Dawson & McWilliams, 2008; Siemens, Dawson & Lynch, 2016; West, Huijser & Bronnimann, 2016). An attendant focus on the 'professionalisation of academic work' (James, 2015; Moraru, L.; Praisler M.; Marin S A; & Cristina, B., 2013; Chalmers, D., & Cummings R., 2013) has seen the evolution of various individual performance measures. For research, this includes counting publications in high impact journals; citations; graduations of higher degree research students, and amounts of external research funds attracted (Southwell & Morgan, 2010; Bexley, James & Arkoudis, 2011; Parry, Scoufis et al., 2008; Chalmers, 2011). For learning and teaching, it involves measures of student learning, including the number of students graduating into employment, postgraduate supervisions, and student satisfaction (Fisher, Valenzueala & Whale, 2014; Gasemic et al., 2016; Probert, 2014; Coates & Goedegebuure, 2010). For leadership in HE, there is an increased focus on measuring the performance of each leader's academic unit against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) associated with the institution's research, teaching, and 'climate' metrics.

This focus on outputs has met with calls for the sector to 'value what we measure rather than measuring what we value' (James, Baik, Millar, Naylor, Bexley, Kennedy, Krause, Hughes-Warrington, Sadler, Booth, & Johnston, 2015, p.14). Recently, to recognise the value of HE beyond measureable outputs, the sector has come under pressure to provide evidence of impact, defined in terms of the collective social and economic influence and value of outcomes of research (Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC -UK] 2016; Australian Research Council [ARC] 2016).

To date, there has been little agreement on how we might most effectively demonstrate impact and influence. Measuring impact in any area of endeavour is not without challenges. Rymer (2011) argues that, in order to assess impact, it is necessary to take into account the intended aims and objectives, and that a longitudinal strategy is needed to collect, collate and analyse instrumental, conceptual, and capacity building impact. He writes,

> It is important to assess impact in terms of the impacts the research aimed to achieve, not across all impacts which are possible … Not all impacts are direct and some can be negative or result from the identification of problems that require a non-research response. The time between the performance of research and when its benefits become apparent can be significant, unpredictable and differ for different kinds of research (Rymer 2011, p.3).

In addition, it is necessary to identify the various spheres of influence in which impact may occur (OLT, 2014). Qualitative methods are required for assessing impact, as it is a less tangible outcome than publications or grant income which can be measure quantitatively. The area of academic activity in which the definition of impact is the most developed is research, with the UK describing it as 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy' (UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), 2016) and Australia describing it as 'the demonstrable contribution that research makes to the economy, society, culture, national security, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life, beyond contributions to academia ' (Australian Research Council (ARC), 2016). Three forms of research impact have been identified – *instrumental* impact, which influences the

development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation, or altering behaviour; *conceptual* impact, which contributes to the understanding of policy issues and reframing debates; and *capacity building* impact, which contributes through technical and personal skill development (ESRC, 2016).

In the field of learning and teaching, there are also signs of change occurring in relation to the qualitative evaluation of impact. For example, the UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) has developed a Professional Standards Framework (PSF) for teaching and learning, which requires the practitioner to reflect on approaches taken, their values, the impact of their activities, and iterative improvements over time (UK Higher Education Academy [HEA], 2011).

The field of leadership in HE, on the other hand, largely continues to take a leader-centric approach, and IT measures outputs (of the area that the positional leader oversees) along with metrics around professional leadership skills development. While there has been a recent expansion into measuring cognitive behaviours (Scott et al., 2008; Vilkinas, Leask & Ladyshewsky, 2009; Vilkinas & Ladyshewsky, 2011). Such measurement does not go far enough to enable the consideration of impact. The aggregation of the outputs, training, expertise and behaviours of a small number of individual leaders within an institution is only effective in ascertaining, and further developing, the capability of these leaders. The effect on overall institutional impact is hard to measure (Gronn, 2002).

Moreover, leadership capacity building – beyond that of positional leaders– is crucial in the contemporary HE climate. Universities need to build leadership capacity not only to gain momentum in achieving increasing KPIs but also to build a line of succession in a time of growth and renewal of the HE sector. To broaden and deepen the leadership capacity of universities, a Distributed Leadership (DL) approach has attractions. It refocuses the concept of leadership from a heroic (individual) leader-centric approach to a more distributed approach (Gentle & Foreman, 2014). It not only recognises the contribution that positional leaders make but also opens the concept of leadership up to include experts in practice, who guide and influence others (at the various strata of an institution). In this model, leadership becomes less about position and more about engagement and action (Gronn, 2002; Jones et al., 2014b), process (Heifetz et al., 2006) and practice (Raelin, 2011). Institutional leadership capacity is expanded through the 'concertive' action of DL, and impact is realised that is greater than the sum of individual actions (Gronn, 2002).

In recognising this broadened concept of leadership, the intent of this paper is not to re-visit debate on whether a DL approach is the most appropriate for HE. That issue is effectively discussed elsewhere (see, for example, Gronn, 2000, 2002, 2009, 2011; Bolden et al., 2006; Bolden et al., 2008; Bolden et al., 2012; Hartley, 2007; Jones et al., 2014a; Jones, 2014; Lumby, 2013). Rather, the intent of this paper is to illustrate how a DL approach can provide a suitable means to create impact, such as building in leadership capacity and engaging people in collaborative practices. The paper considers how the impact of a DL approach can be measured. This is illustrated using case exemplars.

Aligning benchmarking and impact of DL

It is important to first consider recent research findings on enabling and evaluating a DL approach to build leadership capacity in HE in order to understand the inputs to (against which to identify impact) of, a DL approach. It has been established that four main variables or

dimensions characterise DL – a *context* of trust; a *culture* of respect; recognition of the need to *change* from a single hierarchical decision making process to an approach combining top-down, middle-out, bottom-up methods; and *collaborative relationships* (Woods et al., 2004; Jones et al., 2014a). Complementing these dimensions of DL are four identified criteria – the *involvement* of people, the establishment of supportive *processes*, the provision of *professional development* and networking opportunities, and the availability of *resource*s (Jones et al., 2014a). Taken together these dimensions and criteria were cross matched to identify 16 actions required to enable a DL approach. These were identified in an Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT) for DL (Jones et al 2012a)

In Australia, several teaching and learning leadership grants funded by the federal government have resulted in the production of resources for the theorisation, reflection upon, benchmarking and evaluation of DL initiatives and practices. Of particular importance to this paper is the emergence from these projects of a systematic, evidence-based benchmarking framework for DL. Developed by Jones et al in 2014c. It identifies five benchmarks for DL *Engage, Enable, Enact, Assess, Emergent -*. These benchmarks are associated with six DL tenets of DL (with the tenet of *Evaluate* being reworded to *Asses*s to reduce the confusion of having a benchmark as an evaluative process that itself included the benchmark of evaluate,. In addition the tenet *Encourage* has been incorporated into the identification of examples of good practice) (Jones et al 2014c). (For a fuller explanation of these tenets see Jones et al., 2012 and Jones et al., 2014, http://www.distributedleadership.com.au.) The DL benchmarks can be aligned with similar benchmarking frameworks that have been identified for quality assessment purposes in Australia (Woodhouse, 2000, cited in Stella and Woodhouse, 2007).

Together with the provision of good practice examples for each criterion, the five benchmarks for DL provide a framework through which institutions can self-evaluate actions they have taken to foster and enable a DL approach. They present a mechanism to both measure output (of action to engage and enact DL) and demonstrate impact (through actions to enable, assess and support emergent DL) (as demonstrated below in Table 1). Output here is identified as what was produced by the actions, for example, an increased number of experts in the identified project aim engaged in leadership activity or an increase in the number and range of resources and systems (such as finance, opportunities for networking) that have been created to enact the leadership contributions of many experts. Impact, on the other hand, is identified through the influence of a DL approach on context and culture. For example, has DL fostered positive change, collaborative relationships, or growth in leadership capacity as a result of ongoing cycles of activity? Table 1 presents a summary of the five DL benchmarks in relation to their scope, along with their (quantitatively measured) outputs and (qualitatively measured) impacts.

Table 1: Aligning Benchmarks for DL with Output and Impact

BENCHMARK	SCOPE	ASPECT
Engage	*broad range of participants from all relevant functions, disciplines, groups and levels, including formal and informal leaders and experts*	*Output*
Enable	*a context of trust, a culture of respect coupled with effecting change through collaborative relationships*	*Impact*
Enact	*involvement of people, design of processes, provision of support and implementation of systems*	*Output*

Assess	*drawing on multiple sources of evidence of increased engagement collaboration; and growth in leadership capacity*	*Impact*
Emergent	*through a cycle of action research built on Participative Action research methodology*	*Impact*

Testing DL benchmark alignment with outputs and impact aspects at a national summit

To test this benchmarking approach, a National Summit on Distributed Leadership was convened in Melbourne Australia in 2014, funded as a dissemination opportunity by the OLT. It was attended by 50 participants from eleven universities, representing six Australian states and Papua New Guinea. The summit provided an ideal opportunity to explore and experiment with the possibility of the benchmarks to identify both outputs and impact of DL across the HE sector.

The national summit was itself designed to enable a DL approach. Indeed, one of the aims of the summit was to achieve praxis (Kemmis & Smith, 2008) by applying and practicing the theory of DL. Open invitations to attend and to present at the summit were extended to Australasian universities to elicit submissions of cases of DL. All activities associated with the summit were categorised into the 16 enabling actions identified in the ASERT for DL (Table 2).

Table 2: DL National Summit activities formed to enact a DL approach

CRITERIA FOR DL	DIMENSIONS AND VALUES OF DL			
	CONTEXT Trust	**CULTURE** Respect	**CHANGE** Recognition	**RELATION-SHIPS** Collaboration
People are involved	*Invitation to present case studies of the use of DL*	*Invitation to pilot benchmark online interactive tool*	*Experts invited to pilot the online interactive tool*	*Small & large group activities & feedback at Summit*
Process are supportive	*Design of open-ended template for presentation of case that enabled individual interpretation*	*Technology used to link with non-attendees (twitter, emails, online tools available on website)*	*Inviting feedback to inform future Summit design*	*Open-invitation for interested persons to attend the Summit*
Professional Development is provided	*Summit combined theory with authentic practice & learning activities*	*Opportunity to discuss cases with the Project Team prior to the Summit*	*Project team presentations on conferences and senior leader meetings of*	*Case presenters included in panel*
Resources are available	*Free conference registration*	*Case presenters invited to contribute to a*	*Summit designed to*	*Network established*

	through OLT financial grant	Special Journal on DL	enable single day attendance	

The invitation to the national summit succeeded in attracting a range of participants, consisting of a mix of attendees in leadership positions, experts not in leadership positions, and academic and professional staff from a range of university faculties and divisions. In advance of the summit, participants were invited to self-evaluate their experiences in deploying a DL approach in their institutions, by using the benchmarking framework for DL (reconfigured as an online interactive tool). This self-evaluation formed the basis for presentations at the summit. This approach ensured the **engagement** of a broad range of leaders.

Providing the opportunity for case presentations **enabled** a context and culture of collaboration to be developed, as stated by participants (responding to questions like - *was a context of trust (respect), acceptance of the need for change created?*):
  ➤ *a context of trust was created by the open call for case studies... real life case studies are valuable to trigger reflection on [one's] own practice and prompt ideas to apply in [our] own context, (Participant A National Summit)*
  ➤ *a culture of respect was created by all voices being listened to. (Participant B National Summit).*

The design summit activities **enacted** involvement through the sharing of expertise, in various ways. This supported in many participants a deeper engagement with possibilities. As a participant noted:
  ➤ *acceptance of the need for change was demonstrated through 'sharing and trading' experiences. (Participant C National Summit)*

The national summit was **assessed** by participants by applying the rating system devised for the DL benchmarks. The summit was classified as Accomplished/Exemplary in regard to **enabling** people to participate and contribute their leadership expertise and Functional/Proficient in terms of **enacting** a DL process (Jones & Harvey, 2014). In addition, the ability to provide a contribution to **emergence** of future change was evidenced by the decision made at the summit to establish a networked community of participants, coupled with a commitment to collaborate in a joint scholarly research output.

Extending DL Benchmarks alignment with impact

The addition to the DL benchmarks of a final framework designed to assess the impact of government funded learning and teaching projects provided an additional and alternate means to assess impact. Entitled the Impact Management Planning and Evaluation Ladder (IMPEL), this framework was designed to evaluate 'the difference that a project makes in its sphere of influence, both during and after the funding period' (OLT, 2014). It is based on the principle that dissemination is not something that simply occurs after the project (sharing results and outputs) but also involves influence during as well as beyond the project (impact). The IMPEL framework identifies seven spheres of influence – team members, immediate students, spreading the word (*dissemination*), institutional opportunistic (*implemented*), institutional systemic adoption, and broad (cross) institutional opportunistic (*grasped*) to broad systemic adoption.

Of 22 cases presented at the Summit, three, have been selected for inclusion in this paper as they were identified as using the five spheres of influence. First, all cases identified impact upon the *project team* members in building their own leadership capacity. This was demonstrated through the resulting promotion of project team members to leadership positions, or more substantial positions, and/or recognition though awards. This demonstrated not only an increase in an individual's leadership capacity but that this leadership capacity was recognised by the institution. There was no evidence of direct student impact in projects attempting to build student leadership. However Case 1 - Polycentric Law Project (PRP) and Case 2- First Year In Higher Education (YHE) presented in this paper, demonstrated direct student influence.

The national summit was effective in *spreading the word* about how a DL approach could build leadership capacity by disseminating information through the Australian HE sector. That was evident in those attending the summit being representative of eleven universities and representing not only city-based research universities but also city-based teaching universities and regional teaching-focused universities. Each of the project teams have also disseminated knowledge of their project through publications in journals, project reports and through project specific websites (eg www.distributedleadership.com.au). This dissemination provided the potential for *broad opportunistic adoption,* for example three cases described below provided examples of *narrow opportunistic* impact across institutions. Two of the cases - Case 2 FYE and Case 3 - Sessional Academic Success Strategy (SASS), provided examples of *narrow systemic adoption* across the respective institutions. The FYE provided evidence of *broad opportunistic adoption* through evidence of the reach to other institutions (local and interstate). There was no evidence of *broad systemic adoption* for these initiatives at this stage in their pursuit. The levels of impact of each case, as assessed by the IMPEL framework, is summarised in Table 3. This set of results suggests that the DL and IMPEL are complementary frameworks. It also suggests that a DL approach has the capacity to have impact in most spheres of influence.

Table 3: Aligning DL and IMPEL spheres of influence

SPHERE OF INFLUENCE	DL EXAMPLE
1. Project team	*All cases*
2. Direct student	*FYHE*
3. Spread the word	*National Summit DL*
4. Narrow opportunistic adoption	*All cases*
5. Narrow systemic adoption	*FYHE and Sessional*
6. Broad opportunistic adoption	*National Summit DL*
7. Broad systemic adoption	*None*

Case examples of DL and their benchmark alignment with output and impact aspects

In addition to identifying the cases in terms of their sphere of impact, the cases presented at the DL national summit were used to test the Benchmarking tool for DL. Selected case examples illustrate both the authentic application of DL and the real-world outputs and impact that were realised. The latter were identified through the Benchmarking tool.

     Case 1: Polycentric Law Project

The Polycentric Law Project (PLP), at LaTrobe University, occurred in the context of a multi-disciplinary, multi-campus environment. The aim was to design a blended (online and face-to-

face) introductory (compulsory) course in law for non-law students in areas where knowledge of law is essential to their professional practice. Course designers were required to have broad-based skills, as well as disciplinary knowledge, given the particular framework within which law operates at the university. This aim was also driven by a lack of student appreciation of the relevance of law for their primary discipline focus (Garnett, 2015). The decision to use a DL approach was made in recognition that developing the online environment needs a 'higher level of dependence on mutual support *[between academics and technology experts]* than an academic may normally experience' (Holt, Palmer, Gosper, Sankey, & Allan, 2014, p.383), and that 'no single individual is capable of possessing all the relevant expertise' (Ameijde, et al., p. 766).

The complexity of the project, given the need for collaboration between academics from different disciplines and located on different physical geographical sites, made it ideally suited for progressing naturally through successive stages of institutionalisation of practices. Following the completion of the project, the benchmarks for DL were used to evaluate actions taken to enable a DL approach.

There was strong evidence of the *engagement* of formal leaders, informal leaders, discipline experts, and functional experts. A series of roundtable discussions between law and science academic experts resulted in the effective design of an introductory generic skills module that explored differences in approaches between scientists and lawyers to environmental issues and regulation. In addition, a small group of four School of Business staff, who successfully trialled a range of desktop video capture software tools and methods to teach students about different aspects of law, continued as a community of practice.

A DL approach was *enabled* with evidence of significant cultural change. This included evidence of an increase in the power of experts, who were not in formal positions of leadership, to make and implement decisions. For example, the academic project coordinator was afforded a significant degree of autonomy in making decisions to underpin the School's broader blended learning strategy; individual lecturers were provided with greater autonomy to 'put their own stamp' on the development of curriculum and learning activities and to use various interactive blended learning tools and approaches in formulating their contributions to learning design.

Support for the *enactment* of a DL approach was evident through support for informal communities of practice, and the establishment of other networking opportunities for staff across disciplines and campuses, with financial support provided for training and workload relief of a range of contributors. For example, a strategy being developed included a workload allowance and financial support to free up 150 hours of time to any subject coordinator engaged in conversion of a subject from face-to-face to blended delivery

The project was *assessed* as having a positive impact in developing collaboration and growth in leadership capacity between academics and professional staff, and in scholarship associated with the initiative. Several participants were recognised through appointment to formal leadership positions (including the project coordinator becoming Director of Teaching and Learning) and through University teaching awards and grants. The project coordinator also became the chair of a college-level Blended and Online Delivery Strategy Working Group comprising disciplinary experts from the schools of education, business, and humanities, a regional campus representative, and teaching and learning design and technical experts.

There was evidence of sustainable impact of the PLP on *emergent* change. For example, it was agreed that university Teaching and Learning staff would survey and interview School of Law academic staff, professional staff, library and student support staff, students and other stakeholders engaged in the conversion of the Bachelor of Laws to blended delivery. This survey would serve as the data collection phase to explore the perceptions and evidence of the effectiveness of the deliberate DL and cultural change process undertaken to complete this project.

In addition, feedback gathered through since 2011 (1076 usable surveys one site alone) resulted in significant revision of the initial subject designs – including modularisation and introduction of more interactive and authentic video learning resources. Reflections on the progress of the PLP were formally recorded in a paper presented at the 2015 Corporate Law Teachers Association Conference. A group of senior leaders who were engaged in the project continue to champion the initiative as an exemplar of a similar strategy for a multi-campus blended and online delivery across the wider University.

In summary this case illustrates the impact of a DL approach on project teams members as well as providing evidence of narrow opportunistic adoption and some potential for direct student influence.

Case Two: First Year in HE (FYE)

The First Year Experience (FYE) program at University of Technology Sydney used a DL approach to underpin a strategy to intentionally develop first year curriculum to support students from low socio-economic status backgrounds, with the aim of improving student success and retention overall and within this group in particular. The project drew on Transition Pedagogy (TP) and First Year (FY) curriculum principles (Kift, 2009). A DL approach evolved through the need to engage academic and professional staff from across the university. It was achieved through embedding a combination of central and faculty coordinators, providing resourcing for bottom-up grants to implement curriculum change practices, and fostering learning communities of academic and professional staff through FYE forums designed to enable participants to share their expertise.

There was evidence of *engagement* by a broad cross section of formal (positional) senior and middle-level university and faculty leaders, academics (including sessional staff) and professional staff members. This enabled alignment and engagement between curriculum-focused and co-curricular student support strategies to encourage university-wide change. From an initial workshop with 15 participants there was a gradual broadening of engagement through grants and FYE forums. Within twelve months the original group of 15 had increased to 120 participants–70% academics and 30% professional staff. Five years later, more than 580 participants had engaged in FYE activities.

Cultural change was *enabled* through the combination of top-down coordination and bottom-up strategies, with Transition Pedagogy providing a common framework for underpinning change. The central and faculty coordinator group met regularly, providing opportunities for mutual support, reflection and sharing of practice and expertise. Evaluation surveys showed that central FYE forums enabled participants to learn from each other and feel part of a community that valued FY practice. Interlinked faculty coordination activities spread these

features at the local level and encouraged participation in grants proposals and projects as ell as in learning communities.

A DL approach was *enacted* through the activities of the coordination group, FYE forums, and the commitment of an annual budget allocation to resource coordination, grants and forum catering. Professional staff members were allowed time to participate in events. A dedicated part of the main Teaching and Learning website was allocated to the FYE, and regular presentations were made to meetings of the Teaching and Learning Committee, Academic Board and Associate Deans Teaching and Learning. The linking of FYE forum topics to other university strategic priorities encouraged participation and the sharing of practices by a wider range of participants.

The program was *assessed* as having a positive impact in engaging a broad community with a FYE culture and practices, with resulting improvements on standard metrics. Good FYE practices spread from faculty to faculty through the collaborative actions of grassroots academics and professional staff. They were embedded across 88 subjects, influencing FY students in all courses. Low SES student success and retention improved significantly at institutional level.

Examples of joint publications by grant holders and community members were also evident of impact. FYE achievements were recognised in workloads and performance reviews, teaching awards and academic promotions. The program clearly built leadership capacity, with FYE coordinators and active community contributors appointed to formal leadership positions. Former sessional staff and contract staff influenced changes in practice and gained continuing positions.

Evidence of *emergence of the* FYE program was demonstrated by the reflective process followed for each forum and round of grants, building on successes, and the use of bottom-up feedback, university data and broader university strategies to identify and encourage further actions. The program has also achieved external recognition, with staff from eight local (New South Wales) universities attending FYE forums, and the coordination team (of eleven) gaining an institutional teaching award and an Australian Award for University Teaching citation. The evolution of the program has been described in a 'good practice' paper (McKenzie & Egea, 2016).

In summary this case illustrates the impact of a DL approach on project teams members as well as providing evidence of narrow opportunistic and narrow systemic adoption and some potential for direct student influence.

Case Three: A Sessional Academic Success Strategy

The Sessional Academic Success (SAS) program at QUT employed a DL approach to design and implement a 'just in time' and 'just for me' academic development and support program. The program catered for sessional academics from a variety of disciplinary contexts with associated diverse cultures, processes, practices, and teaching approaches. The aim of SAS is to enhance the leadership capacity of experienced sessional staff as SAS Advisors to enable them to support, share exemplary practice with, and design local academic development for their sessional peers. Following training, and using a codesign approach, the SAS Advisors initiate, design, develop and implement programs of activities that are contextualised for the discipline base of their sessional peers. The goal is for SAS to provide timely access to support,

build a sense of community, and deliver localised focused academic development activities for sessional academics.

There was evidence of *engagement* of a range of formal and informal leaders, academics and professional staff, from senior and middle executive to junior levels. Facilitators of the program included the Associate Director: Academic Development (AD:AD), and school based academics. The SAS Advisors were recruited through an open call to all sessionals in each school and selected on merit by application through a competitive process. School facilitators are recruited through their reputation as program leaders, initiators of innovation, or dreivers of course activities, with the capacity to ensure initiatives can be enacted by SAS Advisors. Functional experts provide service support for events, activities and promotion as requested by the SAS Advisors.

There was evidence of DL being *enabled* through the establishment of a non-hierarchical model. The AD:AD and school facilitators support the SAS Advisors (who are not part of the formal leadership hierarchy), and facilitate their ability to design and implement initiatives. Decision making is shared through multiple tiers of communication, but is driven by the SAS Advisors' determination of need. SAS Advisors assume the role of mentors as well as seek advice and feedback from sessional academics to encourage collaborative decision-making about what activities will benefit sessional academics at school levels. Depite these changes, it was recognised that there is a need for continual vigilance to ensure that initiatives remain bottom up rather than being directed from above. There was risk of SAS Advisors becoming simply impementers, as a DL approach is not a natural state of universities due to the historic emphasis on hierarchies.

A DL approach is *enacted* through professional development for SAS Advisors by experienced facilitators and mentors. Two or more formal events are organised per semester by the AD:AD. SAS Advisors also participate in a cross-school Community of Practice (CoP) that meets regularly in design workshops and other events to exchange ideas. School level networking opportunities are encouraged and supported with catering and meeting space. Finance for collaborative initiatives is provided by the Learning and Teaching Unit (LTU) and by the schools. SAS Advisors are paid by the LTU to perform an agreed (variable) number of hours and a catering budget is provided. Schools also fund catering, provide venues, and in some instances pay sessional attendees. SAS Advisors are recognised by an official title, business cards etc including payment for hours.

The program was *assessed* as having a positive impact on the sessional staff community. For example, in 2014 the SAS Advisors helped to promote use of a Sessional Academic Climate survey by the university to gain feedback, which was followed up by a doubling of the survey responses rate. Regular surveys of SAS advisor experince, as well as attendees at their initiatives, provide quantitative and qualitative evidence of multi-tiered positive impact. Publications by the AD:AD with SAS Advisors and faculty facilitators with SAS Advisors were provided as evidence. Nominations for university awards by the LTU and the schools (10 nominations in 2014), resulted in 6 SAS Advisors receiving university awards. Several have since been appointed into full-time academic roles.

Evidence of impact through *emergence* was provided through the adaptation, transfer and testing of SAS Advisors' initiatives by other schools. Reflective practice was built into the initiatives in the form of peer review with continuous improvement evaluated in terms of sustainability through the iterative design process.

In summary this case illustrates the impact of a DL approach on project teams members as well as providing evidence of narrow opportunistic and systemic adoption.

Conclusion

The importance of building leadership capacity in HE Institutions in order to achieve strategic goals and KPIs has been increasingly recognised over the past decade. As with other fields of academic endeavour (research as well as learning and teaching and community engagement) assessing impact of approaches to developing leadership is becoming as important as measuring outputs in the changing context of higher education. However, demonstrating the impact of leadership is a challenging and complex task. A traditional leader-centric approach might employ quantitative measurements - for example, the number of leaders who have undertaken professional development in skills and behaviours or metrics on the performance of areas of responsibility). On the other hand, a DL approach requires a more holistic approach to evaluating outputs, one that is consistent with the principles of DL and responsive to the complexity inherent in any multi-party initiative. Such a process also requires establishing the extent of impact and influence on multiple spheres and stakeholders.

To illustrate progress in evaluating DL, this paper has presented evidence of how Benchmarks have been used to evaluate approaches to build leadership capacity through DL. These evaluations can be considered successful as they reveal not only examples of effective action to underpin DL but also their impact across most spheres of influence. The benchmarks for DL, particularly in combination with the IMPEL spheres of impact framework, enable the evaluation of outputs - for example the numbers of experts contributing to leadership. They also provide demonstrations of impact - such as leadership capacity building, increased engagement, fostering collaborative practices, dissemination and systemic change. They do so within multiple spheres of influence identified in the IMPEL. This approach – employing benchmarks and the IMPEL spheres of influence - has implications for demonstrating impact in and across the academy. The demonstration of impact, although presented specifically for DL in learning and teaching, awaits testing of its more widespread potential by transferring its application to both research and community engagement.

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