

Chapter 15

Changing Culture: Developing a Framework for Leadership Capacity Development

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter presents a framework for the development of leadership capacity in higher education institutions that is underpinned by the concept of distributed leadership; this approach focuses on the development of all members of the institution as leaders, not just those in formal leadership positions. The case study used to illustrate this approach is drawn from an initial program at a regional university in Australia. This program, known as the Faculty Scholars Program, has become embedded in practice at the university. The program empowered a group of academics, who were not in formal leadership positions, to lead key change initiatives within the institution. The chapter describes the pilot program initiated locally and how the program was expanded in 2006-2008 through funding by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council to include three other institutions, with further funding provided in 2009 to expand to two more institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

As higher education institutions face the challenges of the twenty-first century, the key to embracing new strategies for improving the academy is in the hands of the current early and mid-career academics, our future leaders. Facing this challenge requires not only an improved capacity for institutional leadership but also a commitment to organizational change. This chapter presents a framework for the development of leadership capacity in higher education institutions that is underpinned by the concept of distributed leadership. The approach focuses on the development of all members of the institution as leaders, not just those in formal leadership positions.

At a time of increased change, where academics are feeling considerably overloaded, new avenues for faculty development outside of standard workshop practice are seen as essential for engagement to enhance teaching practice (Taylor & Schönwetter, 2002, p. 6). One such practice at a regional university in Australia is a faculty-based leadership development initiative that partners new leaders for teaching and learning with a centrally located faculty developer. This program, known as the Faculty Scholars Program, has become embedded in practice at the university. Leadership capacity development was supported by people at many levels in the institution combined with a significant allocation of resources and focused action learning projects aligned with university and faculty strategic goals. The framework developed through this process empowered a group of academics, who were not in formal leadership positions, to lead key change initiatives related to teaching and learning within the institution.

Whilst the pilot program was initiated locally, the program was expanded through national funding by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) to include three other institutions and later further funding was provided to expand into two more universities. All of the participating institutions focused on improving assessment practices through faculty based initiatives embedded in action learning projects. Annually, four faculty scholars were selected in each institution to engage in the Faculty Scholars Program. The scholars nominated issues for a funded research project that had direct relevance to their faculty needs and were aligned with the university's strategic plan for improving teaching and learning. The scholars were supported in their research through engagement with a centrally based academic developer, regular network meetings and engagement and support of the senior executives. On completion of the funded project faculty scholars disseminated the outcomes of their research through a national assessment forum and many continued the process of dissemination through conference or journal publication.

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