

Australian *Flexible Learning* **Framework**

Supporting Flexible Learning Opportunities

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Smoother

An Evaluation of the Organisational Impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders Program in 2000 and 2001

February 2003

I & J MANAGEMENT SERVICES



Flexible
Learning
Leaders 

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An initiative within the Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000-2004



Faster ... Straighter ... Smoother

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I & J Management Services would like to acknowledge the input of the Flexible Learning Leaders Steering Committee and the significant contribution of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project Manager Jenny Dodd and her team. We also wish to acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the 2000 and 2001 Flexible Learning Leaders for their insights into the impact their Leaders' experience has had on the organisations in which they work. Their willingness to share their stories was greatly appreciated. We also wish to thank the Leaders' managers, colleagues and staff who contributed to the evaluation through completion of surveys and interviews that sought their perspectives on the organisational impact of the Leaders program.

Faster ... Straighter ... Smoother

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Flexible Learning Leaders program is one of the professional development projects within the Australian Flexible Learning Framework that supports the goal area *Creative Capable People*. It aims to develop a nationwide group of people able to lead Australian vocational education and training in flexible learning pedagogy. The project provides development opportunities for managers, leaders or champions in order to increase their effectiveness in implementing flexible learning. There were 23 Flexible Learning Leaders in 2000, the first year of the program, with a further 30 in 2001.

The objectives of this evaluation were to establish the impact the Flexible Learning Leaders program is having on improved organisational capability to undertake flexible learning and identify whether organisations' capacity for flexible learning has increased by having a Flexible Learning Leader.

The feedback from within organisations is overwhelmingly that their Leader's project has had a significant impact on flexible learning strategy, practices and skills. Around 90% of Leaders, their managers and colleagues believe that the Leader's project has enhanced their organisation's capability for flexible learning, and 82% are optimistic about their organisation's future capability to undertake flexible learning.

"The Flexible Learning Leaders has been a unique opportunity for a personal professional development program to develop an organisation." (Colleague)

The impacts of the Leaders' projects have been many and varied, and in undertaking the evaluation it has been important to put them in context and recognise that:

- the Leaders have different levels of experience and positions of responsibility
- their organisations have different levels of experience with and emphasis on flexible learning
- their projects were different and anticipated different types and levels of impact on their organisation
- the changes that have occurred in organisations since their projects may have been influenced by many factors, of which the Leader's project may be only one.

Having said that, the list of examples where there have been practical changes to an organisation's capability for flexible learning as a direct result of the Leader's project is impressive, and includes:

- development of strategic and business plans focused on flexible learning (in some cases the inaugural plan dealing with flexible learning in the organisation)
- professional development programs that equip staff to better apply flexible learning to their teaching activities
- development of flexible learning programs and resources
- implementation of learning management systems
- development of funding sources and commercial activities.

Less tangible, but potentially more powerful, has been the significant impact the Leaders have had on organisational decision-making processes related to flexible learning. As a result of their scholarship, having read widely and seen how other organisations approach flexible learning, the 2000 and 2001 Flexible Learning Leaders have a greater level of knowledge and experience of flexible learning applications and possibilities. They also have greater confidence in their knowledge base and because of their experience are seen in their organisations as more credible sources of advice on flexible learning issues.

Put all that together and the Leaders are now playing a greater and more influential role in decisions about flexible learning in their organisations. This is not to say that they did not fulfil this role prior to

their project. Many of them did. But it very quickly became clear in discussions with Leaders, their managers and colleagues that the most significant impact of the program has been more efficient and well-informed decisions and change management processes related to flexible learning. That is:

- *faster* – the change would have happened anyway but the organisation was better able and more confident to proceed with what it wanted to do
- *straighter* – decisions and programs are more focused on what the organisation needs, drawing on the Leader’s experience and knowledge from research and visiting other organisations
- *smoother* – the Leader’s greater awareness of practical issues that might positively or negatively influence the success of an initiative has smoothed the implementation process.

“Without the Leaders project we would not be as far down the track as we are. I can now say to people, ‘These are the possibilities. If we go there, I’m confident that these outcomes are possible.’ ” (Leader)

Furthermore, the Flexible Learning Leaders program has had an impact in organisations by raising awareness of and generating an enthusiasm for flexible learning. Through formal and informal knowledge transfer, through exposing organisations to flexible learning experts and other Leaders, through provision of access to external resources and information, and just by being an accessible and well-regarded reference point on flexible learning issues the Leaders have contributed to improvements in the flexible learning capabilities of their organisations.

“It is not my ‘project’ that has had a direct impact on my organisation’s capacity for flexible learning, but rather what I learned during the process of my investigation and how I have used that to encourage others to take risks with online learning.” (Leader)

So the Flexible Learning Leaders program has made a really valuable contribution to the advancement of these organisations. But the level of impact has varied, and been influenced by factors that include:

- the level of alignment between the Leader’s project and the organisation’s readiness for change
- the level of senior management commitment to flexible learning and the Leader’s project
- the type, size and flexible learning experience of the Leader’s organisation
- linkages with other AFL projects (e.g. LearnScope, Flexible Learning Fellows).

These factors do not strictly dictate that specific outcomes will or will not be achieved, but have been seen to influence what has occurred in different organisations, and are therefore factors that need to be considered at the earliest possible opportunity if Leaders hope to significantly influence their organisation’s capability for flexible learning.

In terms of organisational impact, the Flexible Learning Leaders program has been successful. It has invested in individuals and enabled them to become, or become more influential, leaders in their organisations. It has also been effective because it is part of a wider program of initiatives supporting implementation of the AFL Framework, and the Leaders have enhanced their organisation’s capability to effectively leverage their participation and involvement with other AFL Framework activities.

“Given the pressures to cater for a diverse range of clients across a variety of programs with continually updated products, the capacity to deal with change is an ever present dilemma. Projects such as the Flexible Learning Leaders ensure that there is an opportunity to harness and exploit the energy of enthusiasts interested in exploring creative and innovative ways to offer vocational education and training that suits our 21st century lifestyle.” (Manager)

The Flexible Learning Leaders program has broad objectives that encompass individual, organisational and sector-wide impacts. However, given the focus of this evaluation on identifying the

organisational impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders program, the scope of recommendations that can be made is best limited to maximising the benefits to organisations of having Flexible Learning Leaders. As detailed in Section 5, the report recommends:

- continued investment in the Flexible Learning Leaders program as one means of creating capable people able to lead Australian VET in flexible learning pedagogy
- continued efforts to develop both formal and informal leaders in flexible learning across all components of the VET sector
- continued pursuit of opportunities for Leaders to showcase within their organisation and the VET sector the findings and organisational impacts of their projects
- profiling the impact of Flexible Learning Leaders on all aspects of innovation, not just in the area of flexible learning
- continued leverage of the Flexible Learning Leaders program and other AFL Framework projects to enhance flexible learning outcomes
- endeavouring, to the extent possible, to align Leader's projects with organisational strategy and circumstances
- that where Leaders change organisations during or soon after the Leaders project efforts are made to ensure that both the sponsoring organisation and the new organisation have the opportunity to benefit from the Leader's project.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Flexible Learning Leaders

In 1999, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) CEOs endorsed a framework to provide strategic directions for flexible learning in the national vocational education and training (VET) system over the next five years – the *Australian Flexible Learning Framework for the National Vocational Education and Training System 2000-2004*. The AFL Framework is supported by an annual implementation plan funded by ANTA.

The Flexible Learning Leaders program is one of the professional development projects within the AFL Framework that supports the goal area *Creative Capable People*. It aims to develop a nationwide group of people able to lead Australian VET in flexible learning pedagogy.

The project provides development opportunities for VET managers, leaders or champions in order to increase their effectiveness in implementing flexible learning. These opportunities allow VET managers and practitioners to enhance their skills, knowledge, and experience and thus to increase the capability of their organisations to deliver or support flexible learning. The selected participants are expected to provide leadership within their own organisations as well as contributing to the development of flexible learning at a state/territory and national level.

VET organisations propose a member of their staff for participation in the Flexible Learning Leaders program. The application includes a development plan for the proposed participant and also indicates how the organisation will benefit and how the participant will be able to make a leadership contribution to the organisation, state/territory and national VET system. In 2000 and 2001 funding of up to \$20,000 was given from the Flexible Learning Leaders program to support the development plan of individual participants. The participant's organisation was required to provide a minimum of \$10,000 in matching funding.

There were 23 Flexible Learning Leaders in 2000, with a further 30 in 2001 (see Appendix A).

1.2. Evaluation

There have been two previous evaluations of the Flexible Learning Leaders program. The 2000 evaluation primarily addressed the effectiveness of the application process and project management. In 2001, greater attention was paid to outcomes for individuals, organisations and the VET sector as a whole. The 2001 evaluation noted that “there is no point in conducting further evaluations of the project processes implemented to support the frenetic period of activity that characterises the initial phase of the program”.¹ It recommended that future evaluation activities focus on the medium and longer-term outcomes of the project and the issues surrounding sustainability and knowledge management.

Consequently, the objectives of this evaluation are to:

- establish the impact the Flexible Learning Leaders program is having on improved organisational capability to undertake flexible learning
- identify whether organisations' capacity for flexible learning has increased by having a Flexible Learning Leader.

¹ Leading through Learning, Evaluation Report of the Second Round of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project – 2001, Peter Skippington and Phoebe Palmieri, February 2002.

This evaluation was not to focus on outcomes that have occurred at an individual or sector-wide level or issues related to the administration of the Flexible Learning Leaders program. It addressed the following issues:

- the organisational and individual reasons for participation in the Flexible Learning Leaders program
- organisational awareness of and preparedness to undertake flexible learning
- the focus of the Leader's planned activities and their expected organisational outcomes
- executive, management and peer support during and since the Leader's project
- immediate, medium- and long-term impacts on organisational capability for flexible learning
- demonstrated changes in work practices, processes, skills, structure and organisational culture
- internal and external sources of ideas, stimulation, encouragement and support for implementation of change in the Leader's organisation
- aids to success and barriers to change
- future prospects for improving organisational capacity to undertake flexible learning.

The evaluation methodology is outlined in Appendix B.

Report Format

This evaluation report is presented in four sections.

- Section 2* Identifying Organisational Impact – outlines the context in which the evaluation findings should be considered.
- Section 3* Having an Impact – describes the impact of the Leaders' projects within their organisations, in terms of the effect on flexible learning practices and structures, decision-making processes and organisational capacity.
- Section 4* Unlocking the Potential – identifies the factors that have influenced the degree of impact in the Leaders' organisations.
- Section 5* Faster ... Straighter ... Smoother – presents the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation.

2. IDENTIFYING ORGANISATIONAL IMPACT

One of the challenges faced by the evaluation in identifying the organisational impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders program is that the program does not pre-suppose any specific form of impact on flexible learning. In fact, the structure of the Leaders program and the criteria for selection of Leaders allow for an unbounded range of impacts. Therefore, in endeavouring to establish the impact the program is having on improved organisational capability to undertake flexible learning, the following contextual issues must be noted.

Leaders are different

There were 53 Flexible Learning Leaders in 2000 and 2001. They come from different educational and career backgrounds and have different levels of interest in flexible learning. Some of the Leaders are people that have been leading the pedagogical and technological advancement of flexible learning in Australia for more than 10 years. Their starting point was as acknowledged leaders and experts in the field. Other Leaders had less experience in flexible learning (though no less enthusiasm), and were interested in general or specific aspects of flexible learning (e.g. the application of technology, training other trainers, development of flexible learning resources including toolboxes).

The Leaders also held different positions within their organisations, with varying levels of responsibility for and influence over the implementation of flexible learning. Putting aside the different titles adopted in different jurisdictions and organisations, the Leaders included:

- managers of flexible learning units, flexible learning networks and distance learning groups
- managers of online services and information and communications technology
- managers of organisational and professional development units and training coordinators
- faculty directors, deans and program managers (e.g. in horticulture; business and information technology; information technology, arts and media; communication and community services)
- lecturers and teachers
- research officers and consultants.

There was also, to some degree, differences between the 2000 and 2001 Leaders as a group, as outlined in Jenny Dodd's paper describing the evolution of the program from 2000 to 2002.

“The 2000 Flexible Learning Leaders were characterised by people who had been selected for leadership because they were experts. ... A group motivated by achievement whose members did not hold positions of power. Their influence came through expertise and drive.

“(In 2001) while the focus still remained on leading practitioners as the ideal profile for a Flexible Learning Leader, the emphasis shifted toward practitioners whose concern was pedagogical, rather than technological. ... These people might not have had any specific track record in flexible learning, but were committed to organisational change.”²

Leaders' organisations are different

The 2000 and 2001 Leaders came from 50 different organisations across Australia (Western Institute of TAFE in NSW, Southbank Institute of TAFE in Queensland and Canberra Institute of Technology in the ACT had Leaders in both 2000 and 2001). Leaders' organisations covered all states and territories and both regional and metropolitan areas.

² The deliberate evolution of a leadership program: Flexible Learning Leaders, Jenny Dodd, August 2002.

Table 1: 2000 and 2001 Flexible Learning Leaders Organisations (by state/territory and type)

Organisation Type	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	NT	ACT	Total
TAFE/Institute of Technology	7	10	5	6	5	-	1	1	35
State training agency	2	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	5
Industry/government	2	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	4
ACE/Adult education	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Private providers	-	-	-	-	2	1	-	-	3
Total	11	13	5	8	7	2	3	1	50

Although 70% of the 2000 and 2001 Leaders' organisations were TAFE institutes, there was also a moderate level of representation of Leaders from state training authorities, ACE, industry and private providers. It should also be noted that since their Leaders project nine of the Leaders have changed organisations (see Appendix A).

There was also a significant degree of variation in the size of organisation, from the Hunter Institute of Technology and RMIT with over 50,000 students and thousands of staff to small private RTOs and organisations such as the Northern Territory Retail & Business Services ITAB and Pelion Consulting Pty Ltd with total staff of three or less.

Most significantly, each of these organisations was in a unique situation with regard to flexible learning when their Leader started their project. They:

- had different strategic drivers and directions
- faced different customer demands for flexible learning
- had different levels of access to experienced flexible learning practitioners
- had different levels of experience in the take up of flexible learning
- had different levels of resources to commit to flexible learning.

Leaders' projects are different

The Flexible Learning Leaders program provides the opportunity for organisations to nominate an individual to undertake a specific course of scholarship related to flexible learning. The selection criteria ask more about organisational and individual commitment and interest than they do about the specific nature of the project proposed. This provides applicants with a freedom to design and undertake a project that best meets the interest area of the proposed Leader and to a lesser degree their particular organisational circumstances.

For it should also be noted that in 2000 and 2001, particularly with the inaugural group in 2000, the Flexible Learning Leaders program was promoted as a personal professional development opportunity for the Leaders. While some of the group had been sanctioned by their organisations to undertake professional development activities that would be used internally within the organisation, this pathway was not a specific requirement of the program.³

Consequently, the topics investigated by the Leaders and the approaches taken were as individual as the Leaders. For example, the 2000 and 2001 Leaders projects addressed:

- the relationship between business models and pedagogical strategies for flexible delivery, including the possibilities for e-learning and e-commerce and the use of online role play and simulation (Brooks, 2000)
- developing a framework of review against which the cultural sensitivity of flexible delivery models developed within the VET sector can be measured (Goodear, 2001)

³ The deliberate evolution of a leadership program: Flexible Learning Leaders, Jenny Dodd, August 2002.

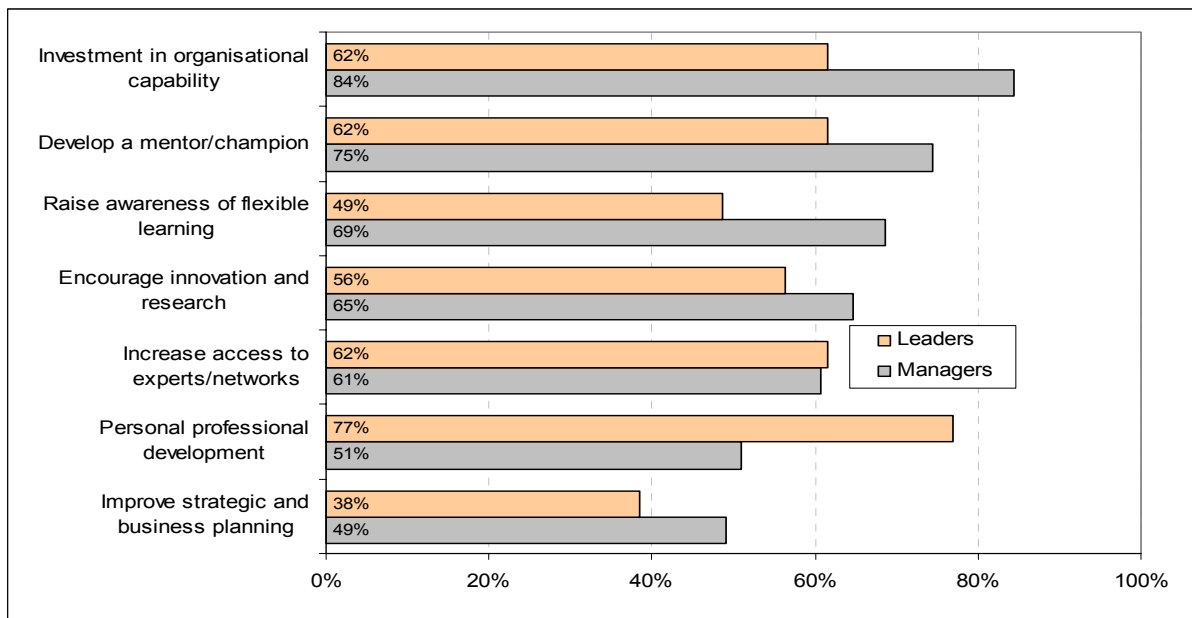
- content for an implementation plan for the organisation’s convergent classroom with specific emphasis on indigenous program delivery (Barnett, 2001)
- the provision of induction and support services for flexible learning students and how best to manage the development of online learning resources (McPherson, 2000)
- how teachers respond to the pressure placed on them to take up flexible and online delivery (Walsh, 2000)
- industrial workplace training and the design, content and delivery of computer based training and assessment to meet the educational, economic and safety needs of business (Kesting, 2001)
- developing an understanding of international marketing to improve effectiveness of marketing plans in the online training market (Aspin, 2000).

The projects were undertaken through varying combinations of international, national and local site visits, attendance and presentations at conferences, undertaking courses to acquire qualifications (e.g. online facilitation, technological skills), literature reviews, interviews, surveys and more.

Furthermore, several 2000 and 2001 Leaders found that their project objectives changed during the course of the project. In some cases this was due to the realisation that the initial objectives had been overly optimistic. In other cases, when Leaders went looking overseas for answers to their questions they discovered that their international counterparts were struggling with the very same questions.

With each Leader doing different things, each organisation had different expectations of the potential value and impact of their Leader’s project. For managers, the major organisational reasons for participation in the Leaders program were to invest in organisational capability for flexible learning (84%) and to develop a flexible learning mentor/champion (75%). For Leaders, the emphasis was on personal professional development (77%). While seeking improved organisational capability to undertake flexible learning, the Flexible Learning Leaders program has never assumed that this would mean or be the same thing in all organisations.

Figure 1: Major reasons for the organisation sponsoring participation in the Flexible Learning Leaders program



Things change or are hard to measure

Having acknowledged that there are significant differences in the Leaders, their organisations and their projects, the evaluation exercise was not one of comparison against program-wide standards (which

don't exist) or initial project objectives (which changed), but one of assessing what had happened in each organisation since the Leader's project and identifying to what extent the Leader's project had contributed to this outcome.

This task was further confounded by the inevitable truth that things change. Since Leaders started their projects, some organisations have, for reasons beyond the Leader's control:

- been amalgamated or disaggregated
- faced financial conditions that constrain investment in flexible learning
- undergone changes in senior management and personnel that have stimulated or impeded advancements in flexible learning.

So even if the Leader had been successful in undertaking their stated project objectives and had identified implications for their organisation, there was no guarantee that these would have been accepted by their organisation, nor, even where these were accepted, that they would necessarily have been implemented. Of course, things change for the better too, and examples of these are presented later in Sections 3 and 4.

Finally, in seeking to identify whether an organisation's capacity for flexible learning had increased by having a Flexible Learning Leader, it was important to view the Leaders and their projects in the broader context of other organisational, jurisdictional and national VET activities that have influenced, whether positively or negatively, the advancement of flexible learning.

For example, how do you distinguish the impact of a Leader's project in an organisation from the impact of their organisation's LearnScope activities? If external demand pressures for flexible delivery coincide with a Leader's research identifying opportunities for expansion of flexible delivery into new markets, to what extent can the organisation's commitment of resources to content and staff development in this area be attributed to the Leader's project?

"I look back to where I started last year and it seems that I have come such a very long way. It is hard to determine how much influence the Flexible Learning Leaders program has had over what I have done because it was so intertwined with my work at the organisation." (Leader)

There are some organisational outcomes that can be directly linked to the Leaders' projects. There are many more where the Leaders' projects have influenced, and often significantly influenced, organisational approaches to flexible learning, but done this in association with other factors.

This project has endeavoured to identify the organisational impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders program by looking at the strategic, operational and cultural changes that have occurred in organisations during and since their Leader's project, and assessing whether there is a direct and/or indirect link to the Leader's project. It has sought to isolate the impact of the Leaders program from the many other influences at play, but recognises that in many cases this is not possible.

3. HAVING AN IMPACT

The Flexible Learning Leaders program has influenced the awareness of, motivation to adopt and capacity of organisations to undertake flexible learning. The Leaders’ projects have influenced:

- organisational strategy and decision-making processes
- development of flexible learning programs and resources
- professional development programs and teacher support
- organisational awareness of and attitudes toward flexible learning
- engagement of people in flexible learning programs
- access to networks of practitioners and flexible learning resources.

When asked to rate the impact of their project on their organisation’s capability for flexible learning, Leaders said on average there had been a good to moderate impact to date (4.6 out of 7). Understandably, given the nature of the Leaders program, this was less than the high personal impact (6.2) and the moderate impact (3.9) of their projects on the VET sector to date.

Table 2: Leaders’ assessment of the impact on flexible learning capability

Timeframe	Impact* on flexible learning capability of ...		
	... me personally	... my organisation	... the VET sector
a) Anticipated impact prior to the project	5.5	4.5	3.7
b) Actual impact to date	6.2	4.6	3.9
c) Expected future impact	6.0	5.2	4.3

* Leaders were asked to rate the anticipated or actual impact of their project using a 7-point scale from 7 – High impact to 1 – No impact.

Notably, Leaders from 2000 rated the organisational impact to date at 4.8, slightly higher than their 2001 counterparts at 4.5. This reflects the time lag that many Leaders expect to face in seeing the benefits of their project flow through into the organisation, and explains the gradual increase over time in Table 2 in anticipated organisational impact.

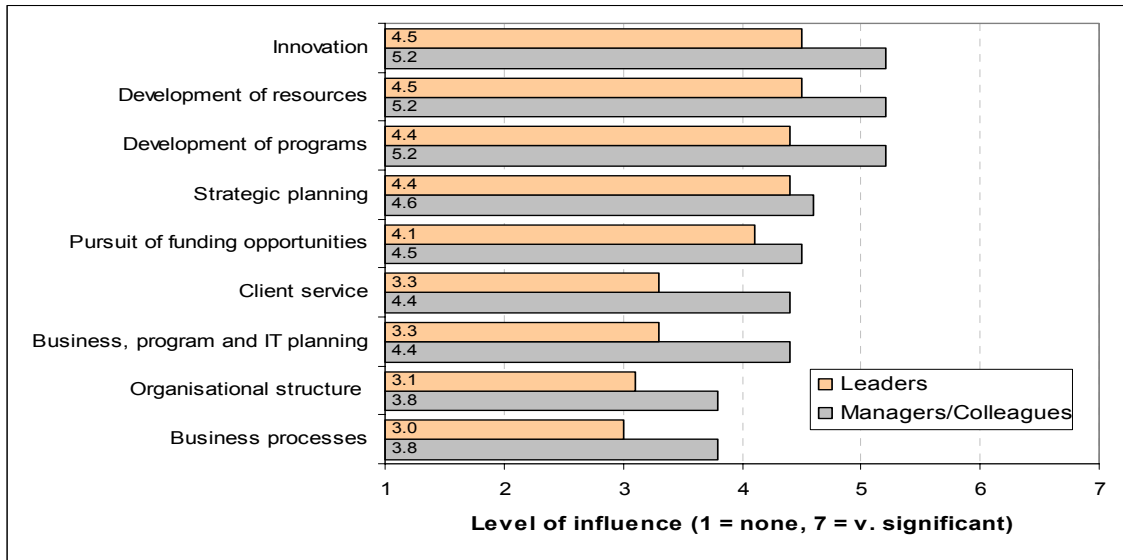
“The benefits for the Institute are in potential rather than actual form at this stage. I think the most significant benefit for the organisation will be the knowledge and experience I have now gained, including the network of contacts I have developed which we can draw on for information, partnerships and assistance. The challenge at this point is how best to implement my knowledge and experience.” (Leader)

In practice, the exact type and level type of impact has varied considerably from organisation to organisation. The Leaders consider that the most significant influences of their projects, in terms of organisational strategy and programs, are in innovation, the development of flexible learning programs and resources and strategic planning, all of which they rate at around 4.5 out of 7 (see Figure 2). Leaders believe that they have had less impact to date on business processes, business planning and organisational structures for flexible learning, with ratings around 3 out of 7.

Interestingly, however, while the Leaders’ managers and colleagues rank the impacts in the same way as the Leaders, with a greater emphasis on innovation than business processes and structures, they consistently rate the impacts around 0.7 points higher than the Leaders. For example, where Leaders rate their impact on innovation at 4.5 out of 7, their managers and colleagues rate the impact on innovation at 5.2 out of 7.

This quantitative differential was also evident in the qualitative aspects of the evaluation where Leaders consistently undersold the impact they believed they had had on their organisations. One reason for this may be the Australian tendency to play down personal achievements. Another may be the Leaders' capacity to draw a greater distinction between the specific impact of their Leaders project and their broader impact on their organisation's capability for flexible learning. Even if this latter point is true, the perception of other people in their organisation is that the Leader is now having a moderate to sizeable influence on flexible learning strategy and programs.

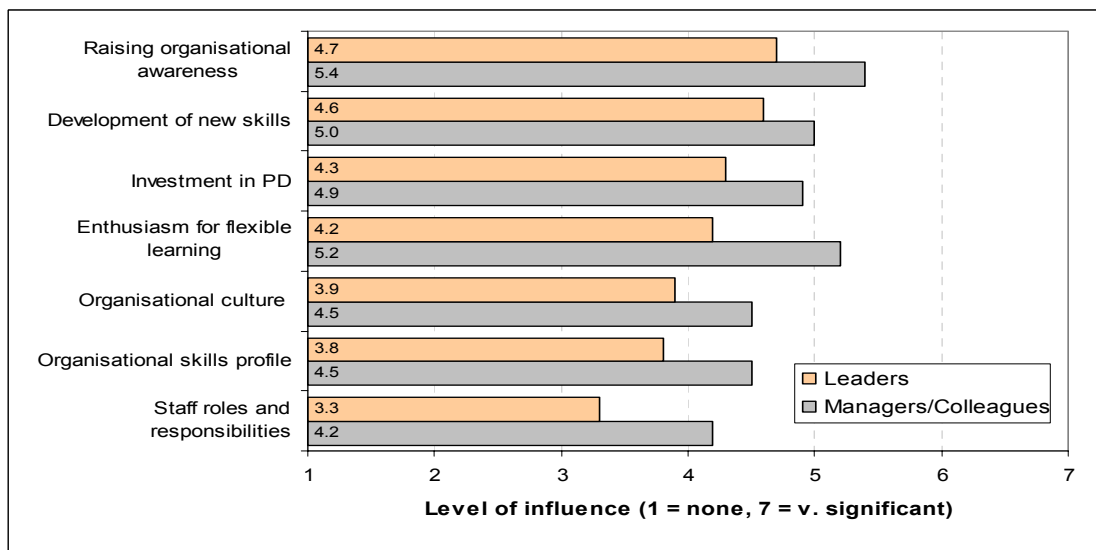
Figure 2: Influence on flexible learning capability of organisations* – Strategy and Programs



* Respondents rated the level of influence using a scale from 7 – Very significant influence to 1 – No influence.

A similar differential was evident in the ratings of Leaders' influence on issues related to people and organisational culture (see Figure 3). In these areas Leaders placed greatest store on their raising organisational awareness of flexible learning (4.7 out of 7, vs 5.4 from managers and colleagues) and development of new skills (4.6 and 5.0). It is notable that managers and colleagues rated the Leaders' influence on the level of enthusiasm for flexible learning particularly highly.

Figure 3: Influence on flexible learning capability of organisations* – People and Culture



* Respondents rated the level of influence using a scale from 7 – Very significant influence to 1 – No influence.

Overall these are quite encouraging results, and are generally consistent with the findings of earlier evaluations of the Flexible Learning Leaders program. They suggest that the program has had an impact on organisational capability for flexible learning across a wide range of different areas. The evaluation identified many practical examples of these impacts which are discussed in greater detail in the following sections of this report.

3.1. Influencing Organisational Practices

The most tangible, and easily identifiable, impacts of the Flexible Learning Leaders program are where organisational work practices and processes for improving flexible learning capability have been directly influenced as a result of the Leader's project. For despite the caution raised earlier in Section 2 about attributing outcomes, there have been real changes in organisational practices that were very heavily influenced by the Leaders' projects.

Strategic and Business Planning

Leaders and managers rated the impact of the Leaders' projects on strategic planning at around 4.5 out of 7 (see Figure 1). Some Leaders explicitly set out to explore flexible learning issues and develop a plan to guide their organisation's future directions. Others used the findings of their scholarship as a significant input to their organisation's strategic and business planning. For example:

- the OTEN Online Strategic Plan, Online Steering Committee and e-learning Unit have all been implemented with a focus influenced by Greg Webb's Flexible Learning Leaders project
- Dion Barnett developed an implementation plan for the convergent classroom (incorporating recommendations for a management model, Resourcing, staff training, staff mentoring and evaluation)
- Vicki Marchant worked on development of Riverina Institute's *Be e-Effective* IT Strategic Plan
- Olga Brown developed an e-learning strategic plan for Central Coast Health
- based on Stephen Conway's and Wendy Burns' Flexible Learning Fellowship and Carol Hampton's Leaders project, Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE established the *Educational Innovations 2002* project which placed flexible learning as a strategic priority
- since her Leaders project Claire O'Connor has moved into a more senior position in the organisation's strategy directorate that provides her with capacity to significantly influence strategic directions at a whole-of-institute level.

ONLINE LEARNING STRATEGIC PLAN

Lyn Ambrose consolidated the findings of her project in writing Southbank Institute of TAFE's first Online Learning Strategic Plan in 2001/02. The whole-of-Institute plan looked at what it could achieve in a 12 month timeframe with no additional expenditure. The development of the plan is now an annual process and its scope is included in the Institute's Business Plan. In the 2002/03 plan the Institute committed funds to further enhance online product and professional development.

Organisations have benefited significantly from this form of contribution as it has enabled them to advance their flexible learning practices and culture in a more focused way, consistent with their own particular environmental conditions.

"We previously had a piecemeal approach to flexible learning. Following the project we have now consolidated our position for the future." (Leader)

"(Previously) the institute had no capacity to allocate time for the serious thinking and conceptualising which should underpin our strategic thinking for the future." (Manager)

Professional Development

Many of the Leaders' projects led to or influenced organisational and staff participation in professional development programs on flexible learning. In many cases these were linked to LearnScope projects where the organisation was encouraged to seek LearnScope funding for a particular activity or existing LearnScope activities were complemented by the Leader's research or networks (e.g. inviting other Leaders or leading flexible learning practitioners to contribute to LearnScope activities). For example:

- Sylvia Arthur established a Teaching and Learning Initiatives Fund in South Western Sydney Institute to provide support to staff for innovative projects in teaching and learning
- Bev Childs drove establishment of professional development programs to support implementation of a new learning management system that was recommended by her Leaders project
- as part of her Leaders project Christine Bateman brought several leaders in flexible learning (Thiagi Sivasailam, John Gundry, Gilly Salmon) to WA for workshops with staff in RTOs
- drawing on observations at Maricopa Community College in the US and funding from a LearnScope project, Ken Gooding established a mentoring approach called 'Chisholm Online' in which enthusiastic teachers are supported as mentors for other teachers on flexible learning
- as a direct result of Sue Thompson's project Central TAFE has established five learning technology mentor positions to champion flexible learning and mentor teaching staff wishing to adopt flexible learning methodologies
- Marie Jasinski facilitated a national workshop program for educational leaders delivered by Thiagi Sivasailam, including targeted professional development activity within Douglas Mawson Institute
- Allan Parsons has moved into an organisational development role that formally focuses on improving organisational capability through mentoring and professional development.

DEVELOPING PEOPLE

In January 2002 Janice Anderson was appointed to the position of Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Community Services at Canberra Institute of Technology. In this position Janice has been able to significantly influence the professional development of staff for flexible learning, consistent with the findings of her Leaders project. For example:

- having staff undertake professional development in flexible learning, shifting the emphasis of professional development strategies from technology to pedagogy
- running a forum on blended learning
- encouraging teacher participation in NET*Working 2002
- training technical support people and building capability for on-the-ground implementation.

Of particular note has been the emphasis of some Leaders on addressing the professional development needs of the 'slow adopters' in their organisations. An interesting approach adopted by one Leader has involved using a blended model of face-to-face, online and video-based learning to deliver general professional development activities to teachers who have a stated preference for face-to-face delivery. This has encouraged these teachers to think differently about the way they teach.

"The Leaders project influenced me strongly and I share this with our staff every day of the working week – in inducting new lecturers, mentoring and putting together the professional development calendar for academic staff." (Leader)

Learning Programs and Resources

As shown in Figure 1, Leaders, managers and colleagues rated the impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders program as greatest on innovation and the development of flexible learning programs and

resources. These covered a wide range of initiatives which have been instrumental in facilitating the smooth adoption of flexible learning in these organisations and generating enthusiasm for flexible learning. For example:

- development and delivery of flexible learning courseware and approaches
 - development of materials in areas such as the metals trades, professional writing and editing, administration and management, literacy and ESL
 - development of websites for horticulture and agriculture
 - introduction of innovative delivery practices (e.g. email games, simulation) for classroom based, online and blended learning models
- development of flexible learning models and tools
 - an ‘e-traineeship’ model
 - models for flexible learning in communities (notably regional communities and among marginalised learners)
 - flexible learning benchmarks that will enable areas across the organisation to rate their area on a 1-10 scale and develop strategies for improvement
 - a guide for online facilitation
 - a template for writing online guides
 - new quality assurance documents
- initiation of improved flexible learning processes
 - establishment of a database to manage and leverage knowledge assets for business stability and flexibility
 - guidance on management of intellectual property
 - a best practice strategy for targeted Toolbox implementation
- implementation of systems and platforms
 - design and development of an online learning platform specifically tailored to the needs of the organisation’s teachers and students, providing them with quick online access to shared resources
 - evaluation of delivery platforms and recommendations for selection of a learning management system
 - negotiating increased bandwidth to enhance and allow development of flexible learning initiatives
- partnerships and alliances with industry and government based on models observed overseas.

OUTBACK TOWNS

Megan Funston has recently overseen development of a mobile computer classroom that comprises twelve laptops, a server and communications equipment in the back of a ute. Now students in remote outback communities in WA do not need to travel to undertake their education and training programs – the facilitator and the classroom can travel to them.

These initiatives have contributed to significant increases in the uptake of flexible learning.

“There has been a ten-fold increase in the number of hours delivered online and the number of students learning online.” (Leader)

“15 new teachers have included online components into delivery of their courses.” (Leader)

“We have trialled and are now implementing a new learning management system on which to extend our online components into mixed mode delivery.” (Manager)

As a specific example, the commitment to development of flexible learning resources by the Exxon Mobil University in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region was directly influenced by Jim Kesting’s

Leaders project. The combination of informed advice on pedagogical, technological and implementation issues has enabled the organisation to take a significant step forward in the efficient delivery of training to staff across the region.

Funding and Commercial Activity

Development of funding sources and commercial activities was not a major factor in most Leaders' projects, and overall Leaders and managers rated the influence of the projects as moderate (around 4 to 4.5 out of 7). However, in 31% of cases the impact of the Leaders' projects on pursuit of funding opportunities was rated very highly (at 6 or 7 out of 7). In these cases the Leaders have identified or exposed their organisations to potential revenue sources, sometimes through development of internal programs and resources to the extent where their commercial capability becomes evident. For example:

- Margaret Aspin developed plans for marketing flexible learning within the Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE and overseas, as well as for NMIT's Flexible Learning Network (as part of this Margaret also provided input into the development of a business model for online programs in Asia)
- Joeena Simpson facilitated development of a program for provision of services in Japan
- Heather Crawley has facilitated Sunraysia Institute of TAFE's leading involvement in a 'Connected Communities' project with other regional partners
- Lyn Goodear used aspects of her Leaders research in setting up an international teaching program in China with the South West Institute of TAFE and Deakin University.

ONLINE FACILITATION

Brad Beach had a clear goal in his Leaders project to develop useful and practical knowledge of and skills required for effective online facilitation. Building on this knowledge, Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE and William Angliss Institute (with Mary Stewart-Craig) were then successful in winning a state tender for development of an online facilitation and communication course. When it was first advertised enrolments in the fee-for-service course had to be closed after one week due to the high level of interest, notably from organisations that also had Flexible Learning Leaders in 2001. The course now has a waiting list with more courses to be run in the future. It is anticipated that this initiative will generate a relatively significant level of income for the college in 2003.

While not necessarily an anticipated outcome of the Leaders' projects, where the projects have contributed in part to the development of other funding streams the Flexible Learning Leaders is very well-regarded.

Organisational Structures

The impact of the Leaders' projects on organisational structures was less than that experienced in other areas, but still an important outcome for those where it occurred. Structural changes were not things that Leaders generally set out to explore, especially as these are influenced by so many other factors within an organisation. However, some changes to improve accountability and focus organisational resources have occurred as organisations have sought to develop their flexible learning capability.

Improvements to organisational infrastructure for flexible learning include establishment, expansion and/or enhancement of flexible learning units or centres of excellence, sometimes modelled on similar structures seen elsewhere in Australia and overseas. Examples of structural changes influenced by the Leaders' projects include:

- establishment of the Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching at Sydney Institute
- implementation of the Learning Innovation Support Team at Canberra Institute of Technology

- consolidation of flexible delivery and e-learning at Riverina Institute with establishment of supported Independent Learning Centres at all locations
- the transition of PrintWest to eWest at the Western Institute of TAFE, to allow more effective investment in resource development and utilisation and customisation of available learning objects.

“If I had not done the Flexible Learning Leaders project the position I am currently in would not exist, and quite possibly our flexible learning unit would not exist. The organisation would be very different now if the Leaders project hadn’t happened.”
(Leader)

3.2. Influencing Organisational Decisions

Implicit in many of the practical or tangible improvements to flexible learning capability described in Section 3.1. is a more informed approach to the implementation of flexible learning principles and practices. Anecdotally, this is probably the most significant organisational impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders program, for there is no doubt that the Leaders have had a profound impact on decision-making processes in their organisations.

The potential for this impact was evident in the Leaders’ Final Reports and was strongly voiced in discussion with Leaders, their managers and colleagues.

“The most significant benefit from the Flexible Learning Leaders program has been the acquisition of a wealth of knowledge and experience related to e-learning. I have been able to gather valuable data related to current trends, research and technological developments in e-learning, as well as improving my own skills as an online teacher and facilitator. The networks I have formed with other Flexible Learning Leaders and the VET sector also furnish an invaluable source of expertise. This has increased my confidence and improved my ability to provide effective leadership within my organisation. I can now offer sound advice on which informed decisions can be made.”
(Leader)

“My organisation can now operate with confidence that the directions we take in flexible learning in the near future will be appropriate, in the sense that they are informed by the research that the program has made possible.” (Leader)

“We have a more sophisticated and informed approach to new developments based on broader experience.” (Manager)

“The organisation has gained the information to position it for the uptake of online learning, an appreciation of the costs, the processes and procedures and the skills required to develop learningware.” (Leader)

Having undertaken their chosen course of scholarship, having read about flexible learning theory and practice, having talked to people in many different organisations in Australia and overseas, and having had the time to think about the implications for themselves, their organisation and the VET sector, the Leaders are well-placed to influence strategic and operational decisions on flexible learning. And in most cases their organisations have relished this opportunity.

“She has made huge inroads into bringing flexible learning into the mainstream agenda of the Institute.” (Colleague)

“Flexible learning is now embedded in our conversations.” (Manager)

“Flexible learning is now viewed in terms of client needs rather than just technology-driven.” (Leader)

“Our organisation would not be as intelligent about what’s happening outside the organisation and how this organisation can move forward.” (Leader)

In practice this has occurred formally through the involvement of the Leader in new or existing decision-making forums and informally through cultivation of relationships with executives and senior managers.

Even where these opportunities for Leaders to influence organisational decisions on flexible learning existed prior to the Leader’s project (which was common given that many were already in positions of leadership related to flexible learning), feedback to this evaluation indicates that the influence is even greater now than it was before the participation in the Flexible Learning Leaders program (see also Section 4.2.). Leaders indicated that with their enhanced knowledge base they were better placed to be opportunistic, in that they can now see and seize opportunities for alignment of organisational initiatives to advance flexible learning. It was noted in one case that a throw away comment to a senior manager had led to analysis of a situation and development of a business case for refining the organisation’s model for managing flexible learning.

“It’s easier to be flexible if you have a vision of what’s possible.” (Leader)

“I’m better placed to influence change because it is assumed that: a) I know what I’m talking about; and b) I represent a large group of colleagues. I don’t need to make so much noise to be listened to or taken seriously”. (Leader)

Some Leaders also noted that they were now more conscious of the importance of framing a well-rounded case for their argument and were more confident in their ability to address the educational, technological, and resource issues required in organisational decisions.

This outcome has been facilitated by the strength of the relationships formed between Leaders and the networks that exist and are called upon to seek advice or suggestions on how issues were dealt with in other organisations.

It has also been observed that through promotion and/or participation in broader decision making forums, Leaders are now able to influence developments in flexible learning by contributing to decisions that, while not overtly about flexible learning issues, have the potential to facilitate or hinder future developments in flexible learning (e.g. investment in technology platforms for administration services, Faculty structures, change management, professional development programs).

“Having people in an organisation who can see several years into the future of a field is always a competitive advantage.” (Leader)

3.3. Influencing Organisational Capacity

In addition to the practical advancements in flexible learning capability and the contribution of Leaders to decisions on flexible learning, the Leaders’ projects have also influenced organisational capability for flexible learning in ‘soft’ ways (e.g. raising awareness of flexible learning, knowledge transfer, access to external resources and information, generating enthusiasm for flexible learning). As indicated in the earlier evaluation of the 2001 Flexible Learning Leaders project this included “developing and facilitating workshops within their organisations to report on and apply learning

outcomes, working with colleagues on new projects and developing informal ‘common-interest’ networks of people focusing on particular issues”.⁴

Knowledge transfer and communities of practice

Flexible Learning Leaders have adopted a number of different approaches to dissemination within their organisation of the findings of their projects and establishing ongoing means of knowledge transfer. These include:

- breakfast or lunchtime forums or interest group meetings where staff are encouraged to present what they have been doing in online learning, share experiences and network with colleagues
- inclusion of flexible learning issues in organisational newsletters with references and URLs
- regular communication with participants in the organisation’s LearnScope projects
- conversations and one-on-one sessions
- mentoring and informal support of lecturers.

“She constantly disseminates information on contemporary literature and innovations in flexible learning.” (Colleague)

These activities have helped to raise awareness of flexible learning and encourage staff to question, discuss and seek answers to the most effective uses of and approaches to flexible learning in their day to day educational and training activities.

In creating opportunities for knowledge transfer the Leaders have, in some cases deliberately and in others unconsciously, supported development of communities of practice for flexible learning. As this supportive environment for learning and exploring ideas has evolved, staff have become more confident and accelerated their application of flexible learning.

“Sharing of resources amongst practitioners across the institute has gone from close to zero to substantial, resulting in improved quality and consistency.” (Leader)

The establishment of an ‘Innovation Suggestions’ box at Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE has been an effective way of people contributing their ideas to improve organisational uptake of flexible learning.

The importance of knowledge transfer and building communities of practice is twofold. Firstly, it is of direct benefit to those individuals who increase their knowledge and skill base. Secondly, it is a valuable component in changing organisational culture. Leaders have used these activities to create or build a critical mass of people who are interested in flexible learning, ‘get others to say what I want to say’ and bit by bit influence the wider organisation to consider the value of flexible learning.

Exposure to leaders and access to external resources and information

As mentioned in Section 3.1., Leaders have been able to expose people within their organisation to a wider range of resources and experts on flexible learning as a result of their experience. For example, past Leaders have invited 2002 Flexible Learning Leaders to visit and learn about what is happening in the organisation, as well as having them conduct professional development sessions for staff and exposing staff to their experiences.

“This project has allowed someone working in a very remote part of Australia the opportunity to experience the most relevant and current information on flexible learning and delivery. The networks she has developed are priceless.” (Colleague)

⁴ Leading through Learning, Evaluation Report of the Second Round of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project – 2001, Peter Skippington and Phoebe Palmieri, February 2002.

These activities are important in setting the scene and providing a realistic and well-considered context in which individuals can plan for their own adoption of flexible learning.

“There has been an increase in lecturers critically examining what they do and why they do it.” (Leader).

The potential down-side, however, of the Leader becoming an informal reference point for questions on flexible learning is that they become overburdened by this role. While this was noted as a concern by some Leaders they have seen this as a worthwhile contribution to the advancement of flexible learning in their organisation and return on investment in their personal professional development.

“He’s a focal point for flexible learning in our college.” (Colleague)

“She has opened up people’s minds to some of the possibilities of flexible learning.” (Colleague)

Several Leaders also commented on the fact that in undertaking their research they discovered that Australia and their organisation was not, as they had believed, behind the rest of the world (notably the US and UK) in its educational and technological advancement in flexible learning, but on a par or in some ways leading other countries. This knowledge has proved to be a valuable reference point in setting realistic expectations for management and staff of the speed and approach to implementation of flexible learning in their organisation. It has also generated confidence in organisations about what they have already achieved.

“It raised the self esteem of our organisation to realise that we are not at the bottom of the heap.” (Leader)

Inspiration and motivation

Having undertaken their projects, many of the Leaders are now more knowledgeable, experienced and confident in their capacity to contribute to improved flexible learning practices (see also Section 4.2.). And this confidence and enthusiasm rubs off.

“Without this project I would never have been introduced to the future of teaching and learning. It has inspired me to do research, do courses online and deliver online.” (Colleague)

The Leaders’ managers and colleagues rated the Leaders’ impact on organisational enthusiasm for flexible learning very highly (at 5.2 out of 7, with 73% rating it at 5 or above). Although the tangible benefit of this enthusiasm is hard to measure, the fact that the Flexible Learning Leaders program has indirectly led to people feeling more inspired and motivated to explore flexible learning can only be a good thing.

“She provides staff with confidence to try new projects.” (Colleague)

“Her enthusiasm and drive are infectious.” (Colleague)

“In sharing the experiences I have gained, colleagues have commented on feeling motivated to ‘get on board’ and experiment with online delivery.” (Leader)

3.4. Influencing Organisational Profile

Around 90% of Leaders and managers indicated that things that had happened as a result of the Leaders project had reflected positively on the organisation, raising its profile among the VET sector as a flexible learning organisation. This occurred through things such as:

- simply having a Flexible Learning Leader
- the Leader presenting papers or sessions at national, state and international conferences
- requests from ANTA or state training authorities for the Leader or organisation to participate in projects or on advisory committees.

Whilst it is difficult to quantify the value of this reflected benefit, organisations have sought to use their association with the Leaders program to advantage, both within and outside the organisation.

“(This project) has assisted us to be viewed as the pivotal point for flexible learning policy and practice in the state VET sector.” (Manager)

“Having the ANTA logo on the Flexible Learning Leaders project raises the credibility of our training unit.” (Manager, industry organisation)

“She has been a wonderful ambassador for our organisation. We now have the opportunity for others working on national and state projects to make contact with us and share their expertise.” (Manager)

The impact of increased profile and exposure has been the opportunity to develop stronger relationships with ANTA, state training authorities, other VET providers and public and private organisations with an interest in flexible learning. This has led to establishment of alliances between agencies on resource and program development.

BUILDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

As a direct result of her Leaders project Jennifer Batten linked the Western Institute of TAFE into a bid for National Communications Funds to improve technological access for people in rural and regional areas. Consortia partners included the CSIRO, two universities, a city council, two area health services, another TAFE institute, two state government departments and other public and private sector organisations. Whilst the bid was unsuccessful, the partnerships and profile developed through the submission process will be of benefit to the organisation in the future.

Leaders from small organisations indicated that the increased organisational profile (or recognition or leverage or ‘clout’) was of particular value in opening up access to national and statewide programs and decision-makers.

4. UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL

4.1. Critical Success Factors

In seeking to improve organisational capability to undertake flexible learning, the challenge for Leaders and their organisations has been to unlock the potential of the project and translate the Leader's increased knowledge and experience into enhanced flexible learning strategy, policy and practice. The degree to which different Leaders and organisations have been successful in doing this has been influenced by many factors. Some of these are related to organisational features and circumstances, while others are linked to personal characteristics and the nature of the Flexible Learning Leaders program. These factors include:

- the alignment between the Leader's project and organisational strategy
- senior management commitment to flexible learning and the Leader's project
- the size and type of organisation
- the extent of implementation planning undertaken or anticipated by the Leader's project
- the presence of other Leaders and Fellows and participation in other AFL Framework projects.

Alignment

The Flexible Learning Leaders have generally been able to improve their organisation's flexible learning capability where there was a high degree of alignment between the objectives of their project and their organisation's strategic direction and circumstances at the time of the project. This seems almost too obvious – which is why it needs to be said. If an organisation wants their Leader to significantly influence their flexible learning capability then it is important that the Leader's project in some way address the strategic, pedagogical and/or technological issues facing the organisation and provide solutions or recommendations on how to move forward.

Overall the major reason cited by Leaders and senior managers for participating in the Leaders program was to improve organisational capability (see Figure 1). However, it is notable that while 84% of managers saw this as a major reason, only 62% of Leaders did. For Leaders, the major reason for participation was personal professional development.

In some cases where there was a relatively high degree of alignment the impact of the Leader's project has been quite significant. For example, the selection of Donna Hensley as a Leader in 2001, coupled with Jock O'Grady being a Flexible Learning Fellow in 2001, meant that the Hunter Institute of Technology was able to make a significant investment in its flexible learning capability at the same time as it was establishing its Institute Teaching and Learning Innovation Centre (ITALIC). The combined power of these scholarship programs and the capacity to immediately feed their findings into a major organisational initiative has already influenced and will continue to influence ITALIC's directions for some years to come.

In other examples the potential of the Leader's project to influence the organisation was discussed right up front and became a focus for the Leader's activity. As noted in Section 3.1., some Leaders:

- developed strategic and business plans for flexible learning in their organisation
- investigated professional development programs to enhance the skills profile of staff in their organisation
- investigated learning management systems for implementation within their organisation.

“This program provided a wonderful opportunity for a small, regional TAFE institute to investigate best practice and apply it locally.” (Leader)

This is not to suggest that the focus of these Leaders' projects was driven purely by organisational needs, but that there was an area of study that was simultaneously of interest to the Leader and had the potential to significantly benefit the organisation at that time.

For some organisations this alignment occurred by design, in that local circumstances (e.g. need to establish or maintain momentum in flexible learning, impending decisions on structure or technological infrastructure) provided a window of opportunity in which an in-depth assessment of strategic or practical flexible learning issues could move the organisation forward, and senior managers and Leaders planned for this outcome.

"We knew we had a problem and we were looking for answers." (Leader)

"The program coincided with where the college was starting to move." (Leader)

Sometimes the alignment was fortuitous where the opportunity for influence (e.g. organisational restructure, promotion or positional change) arose unexpectedly during or soon after the completion of the Leader's project.

The fact that some Leaders did not set out with such a strong organisational objective in mind does not diminish the value of their projects. Their organisations sponsored their participation and saw the program as an opportunity for personal professional development of a key member of staff. There have of course been organisational benefits – raised awareness of flexible learning, access to flexible learning resources and networks, increased organisational profile – just not the direct flow through to a specific organisational initiative or requirement.

Management commitment

As with alignment of objectives, it seems too obvious to say that senior management commitment to the Flexible Learning Leaders program increased its potential value to their organisation, but it's true, or is at least perceived to be true. The evaluation survey found a highly significant statistical correlation between those Leaders, managers and staff that indicated that there was 'strong executive support for flexible learning following the project' and their level of optimism about their organisation's capability to undertake flexible learning.

Overall, 70% of Leaders, managers and staff felt that there was strong executive and middle management support for flexible learning in their organisation. Where this support existed Leaders report that they have found it easier to:

- communicate with senior management on the findings of their project
- have input to strategic decision making forums
- informally influence senior managers in raising their awareness of flexible learning issues and opportunities
- get backing within the organisation for implementation of flexible learning initiatives.

Leaders also noted that where there was a strong level of executive support for them and their project they were able to get access to other networking and professional development opportunities to enhance their learning and their capacity to give effect to the findings of their project, at either an organisational or VET-wide level.

Even though the Flexible Learning Leaders program requires the organisation to make a complementary financial contribution to the Leader's project and requires senior management endorsement, it should not be assumed that this support exists in a practical sense. In most cases it does. In a small number of cases Leaders commented on the difficulties they had experienced with a lack of opportunity to have their voice heard. This came about because of:

- changes to executive and senior management, with the incoming manager having a lower level of interest in flexible learning
- pressure on senior management to address other issues (e.g. college amalgamation, financial conditions) that limited the attention they could give to flexible learning
- too many layers of management between the Leader and the executive (an issue found in some, but by no means all, large organisations)
- the overly bureaucratic or overtly political nature of the organisation.

In these circumstances, which have been very frustrating for the Leaders, they have endeavoured to influence changes in flexible learning at lower levels of the organisation and/or looked for other opportunities to utilise their knowledge and experience.

Organisational features

A number of organisational characteristics, other than those alluded to in the discussion on management commitment, can influence the level and speed of uptake of flexible learning, and therefore the impact of the Leaders' projects. These include an organisation's size, its type, its operating environment and its prior experience with flexible learning.

Size

A large organisation often has many layers of management, a bureaucratic structure and a broad sphere of interest delivering many different types of education and training opportunities to different industries, communities and students. This can make it difficult for a single individual within that organisation to have a significant impact on any issues, not just flexible learning. Leaders in large organisations have had to contend with this situation, which was not new to them, and develop and utilise appropriate channels for communication of the knowledge and ideas generated by their project to managers and staff in their organisation. Leaders in smaller organisations have less structure to work through.

However, large organisations tend to have more resources at their disposal, a more diverse resource base and better technological and administrative infrastructure and support for flexible learning. Leaders in large organisations have been able to tap into these resources and work with other leading flexible learning practitioners in their organisation to bring to effect the findings of their projects. Leaders in small organisations can be more isolated and constrained in implementation. Overall, 71% of Leaders, managers and staff indicated that financial resources constrained the development of flexible learning in their organisation.

It is notable that the complementary funding that is contributed to the project by each Leader's organisation is a more significant investment in the total professional development budget of a small organisation than a large one. As a result, small organisations in particular have made great efforts to ensure that they maximise the return on the project.

Type

70% of 2000 and 2001 Flexible Learning Leaders were from TAFE institutes or colleges. While these have different geographic and market conditions and areas of specialisation they share a common focus on vocational education and training.

A small number of Leaders work in organisations that contain both a VET and higher education component. Whilst their conditions are similar to those in the straight TAFE sector, the comment was made that as 'scholarship is valued by the university' they were encouraged to be reflective thinkers. In this environment the Flexible Learning Leaders program was seen as an entirely appropriate professional development activity and fully supported.

ACE and adult education providers have a slightly different emphasis, and usually operate on a much tighter cost base with less administrative structure and resource capability. They can also have a more dispersed teaching staff with greater proportions of sessional and teaching staff. This makes it more difficult to communicate consistently with people in the organisation and facilitate professional development on flexible learning.

Flexible Learning Leaders in industry organisations face another set of challenges, one of which is that the ‘core business’ of their organisation is not education and training. For example, Keith Gear and Olga Brown work in organisations where training is very important to the organisation, but not its reason for being. Therefore, the way in which they have approached their Leaders project and its implementation has had to be couched in terms of the contribution flexible learning and improved delivery of training services and quality of training outcomes can make to overall organisational outcomes. This does not inhibit the effectiveness of their Leaders project, but is just another factor that they have to deal with, and again, one that is not new to them.

“Our organisation would exist without VET. The Flexible Learning Leaders program gave us a forum to introduce and raise the profile of VET agendas. If ANTA doesn’t provide the professional development there is a risk that educationalists in industry will be lost.” (Manager, industry organisation)

A number of Leaders are in state training authorities or related agencies (e.g. Greg Webb at OTEN and now the TAFE NSW Professional Development Network, Christine Bateman at the WA Department of Training & Employment, Melanie Sorensen at WestOne). The potential influence of Leaders in these organisations is different to their counterparts in direct training delivery organisations. For example, they have less scope to significantly enhance flexible learning skills within their organisation or the implementation of learning management systems. However, they can translate the learning from their projects to influence strategies, policies, programs and attitudes to flexible learning that have important flow through effects to other organisations.

Operating environment

Some Leaders and managers commented on the impact of their operating environment on their capacity to move forward with implementation of the findings of their project. The issues of note included amalgamation of TAFE colleges and financial conditions which were in part driven by policy changes occurring at a state level. These challenges had caused the relevant organisations to concentrate their energies on their response to this environment, which had inevitably limited the attention that could be given to adoption of flexible learning initiatives. Where this occurred, the Leaders involved expressed a fair degree of frustration and disappointment at their incapacity to give effect to the findings of their Leaders project.

Generally there were no significant differences in the outcomes from the Flexible Learning Leaders projects between states. As noted, some state policies and programs focused attention away from flexible learning while other initiatives were seen to have created fertile ground for the Leaders, by focusing the minds of senior management on flexible learning.

Flexible learning experience

Some Leaders work in organisations that made initial advances into flexible learning in the mid 1990s, and have a culture that is now pre-disposed to think favourably toward flexible learning and implementation of the components of the AFL Framework. For them, the impact of their Leaders project has often been one of facilitating incremental improvement of flexible learning practices. With existing commitment to and awareness of flexible learning, their projects have acted to extend practices and reinvigorate the organisation.

Other Leaders work in organisations that have only started to take tentative steps in the last two or three years. For them, the project had a significant benefit in raising organisational awareness of flexible learning, its possibilities and pitfalls. Depending on the response to these findings, their organisations have then started to build momentum and enthusiasm for flexible learning or continued a slow, but informed, evolutionary process.

The existing organisational culture is a factor in the degree of influence the Leaders projects are able to have, with 58% of Leaders, managers and staff indicating that their organisation's culture 'assisted in the adoption of flexible learning.'

Overall

Having said that these factors can influence the uptake of flexible learning and the impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders in their organisation, it must also be said that they are not necessarily predictors of success. That is, a Leader in a mid-size TAFE institute with a flexible learning culture will not necessarily have a greater impact than a Leader in a large industry organisation that is just starting out with flexible learning. They well might, but the impacts will be different and the 2000 and 2001 experience indicates that the impacts will be driven by the combined affect of the many individual, organisational and environmental factors at play and the circumstances prior to, during and after the Leaders project.

Implementation planning

The potential impact of the Leaders' projects was enhanced where they were able to concisely present their findings and recommendations for action. In some cases this occurred through the content of the Leaders' Final Report (which notably had a greater emphasis in the 2001 program than it did in 2000). For example, Donna Hensley's Final Report identified ten key directions for VET and then proceeded to present recommendations and a program for implementation of these directions in Hunter Institute.

Other Leaders produced specific reports and presentations that also addressed strategic and operational recommendations for the adoption of flexible learning. Leaders report that where there was a conscious effort to build this level of implementation planning into their project or plan for its implementation soon after completion of their project that things have subsequently progressed smoothly. For example, at Southbank Institute of TAFE implementation of the Online Learning Strategic Plan developed as an outcome of Lyn Ambrose's 2000 Leaders project was facilitated by Bev Childs' 2001 Leaders project. Around 40% of Leaders report that they and their organisation planned for implementation of their project's outcomes as part of developing or during the project.

Changes in roles and responsibilities

The capacity of Leaders to influence improved organisational capability to undertake flexible learning has been affected in some cases by changes to the Leader's role within the organisation.

63% of Leaders have had some change in position or responsibilities since their Leaders' project. As discussed in Section 3.2., for some this has meant an increased level of responsibility for flexible learning within their organisation. For others they have moved into positions (some newly created) of leadership in flexible learning. In these cases the Leaders are now in a position to more directly influence organisational approaches to flexible learning and directly apply the findings of their Leaders' project. Some Leaders have moved to other positions in their organisation. In some cases this has presented an opportunity to promote flexible learning in a different part of the organisation, while in others the Leader has become focused on other organisational issues and been diverted, temporarily at least, from application of their flexible learning experience.

"My new job has facilitated my capacity to influence flexible learning. The Dean has made it public that this is part of my role in the faculty." (Leader)

“I’ve been out of the loop for a bit because of management changes but now I’m getting back into it.” (Leader)

“The ground will become fertile for flexible learning as the Leaders (who are aware of the issues) become senior managers.” (Colleague)

Nine of the Leaders have changed organisations since their project. Depending on how soon after their project this occurred and the processes put in place to communicate the findings of their project, the benefits of the Flexible Learning Leaders to their original organisations have varied from significant to very few. In the latter cases the value of their investment in the Leader and the Leaders program has been questioned, although there is agreement that the net benefit of the program is positive.

“The credibility of the Flexible Learning Leaders program was damaged by the Leader leaving the organisation.” (TAFE Director)

“Because of the circumstances (the Leader leaving the sponsoring organisation) it was a fairly unsuccessful outcome for us. However, it is hoped that the Leader has assisted the organisation where they have moved.” (Manager)

However, in considering the potential impact of any changes in roles and responsibilities, it must be noted that one of the features of a scholarship experience like the Flexible Learning Leaders program is that the Leader carries that experience and knowledge with them wherever they go. Consequently, where a Leader has moved organisation, for example, their new organisation now has the potential to reap the benefit of the program. So in some circumstances two different organisations or VET sectors now have improved organisational capability in flexible learning as a result of the Flexible Learning Leaders program. Unfortunately, this multiplying effect is not guaranteed, as the commitment to and awareness of the Flexible Learning Leaders program that existed in the original organisation may not exist in the new organisation, leaving the Leader with the task of having to re-establish their credibility and capability within the new organisation. The more well-known and understood the Flexible Learning Leaders program becomes, the easier this task will be.

“It’s a bit like starting all over again.” (Leader who has changed organisation since the completion of their project)

The challenge for Leaders, and their organisations, is to ensure that where positional changes occur and for whatever reason, the potential benefits of the Leaders program are realised and not lost.

Innovator or Influencer?

It is not necessary, or even possible, to categorise the Flexible Learning Leaders in terms of their capability to influence organisational outcomes in flexible learning. They come to the program with different levels of experience, hold different positions and have different project objectives. But it is worth recognising that where they do influence their organisations, this occurs in different ways.

For example, some Leaders are acknowledged experts in their field. They are leaders in what the 2001 evaluation of the Flexible Learning Leaders program called ‘The Intellectual Agenda’.⁵ They are pushing the boundaries of what is possible with flexible learning, exploring new pedagogical approaches, testing new technologies and providing the intellectual leadership that the VET sector requires. Other Leaders demonstrate different forms of leadership, be this ‘operational’ in terms of advising their organisation about teaching and learning practices, business processes and systems

⁵ Leading through Learning, Evaluation Report of the Second Round of the Flexible Learning Leaders Project – 2001, Peter Skippington and Phoebe Palmieri, February 2002.

implementation or ‘behavioural’ in working with teachers to raise awareness of flexible learning and mentor their development.

The terms are irrelevant. What matters is that the Flexible Learning Leader is aware of the types of leadership their organisation needs at different times and identifies how they can best provide this or facilitate others in providing leadership.

For information, Appendix C contains a list of attributes, qualities and characteristics that the 2000 and 2001 Leaders identified in a session at the 2002 Flexible Learning Leaders Sharing Workshop in Adelaide as going towards making up an effective Flexible Learning Leader.

Other flexible learning champions

Most Leaders indicated in discussions for this evaluation that the capacity to influence the adoption of flexible learning practices in an organisation was enhanced where there were other people in the organisation also championing flexible learning. Where two or more people, especially from different parts of an organisation, are presenting similar messages about the opportunities for flexible learning and the issues that need to be considered in increasing flexibility, it is more likely (although not certain) that these voices will be heard. Whilst these champions may not be Flexible Learning Leaders, the Leaders are champions. So having more than one Leader in an organisation is generally seen as a good thing.

“A good Flexible Learning Leader very quickly looks for other champions to take the message back to their own areas and pass it on.” (Leader)

“I’ve sourced my champions from within and we are working quietly in the organisation to bring about change.” (Leader)

Although only three organisations had Flexible Learning Leaders in both 2000 and 2001 (i.e. Western Institute of TAFE, Southbank Institute of TAFE, Canberra Institute of Technology), fourteen of the forty 2002 Leaders are in organisations that had a leader in one of the previous two years. Add to this the organisations that have had a Flexible Learning Fellow and a Leader in the past few years and the number of organisations where the Leaders program is contributing to this multiplier effect is steadily increasing.

Of the seventeen 2000 and 2001 Leaders who were in organisations that have had another Flexible Learning Leader or Fellow since 1998, twelve (or 71%) indicated that this had positively influenced the impact of their project on their organisation, with six of these (or 35%) saying that there was a significant positive influence. In three organisations the presence of other Leaders was reported to have had no influence with two Leaders having experienced negative impacts, although in both cases particular organisational circumstances had mitigated against a successful outcome.

During the evaluation a number of Leaders indicated that they were encouraging and nurturing people within their organisation to apply to the Flexible Learning Leaders program in the future.

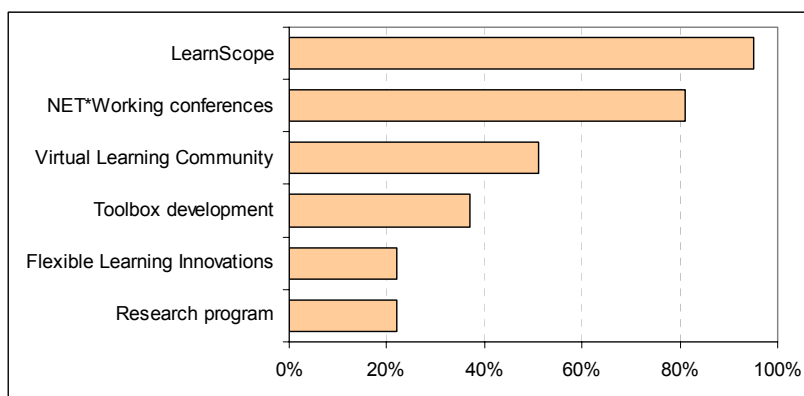
AFL Framework projects

In citing examples of the impact their Leaders project had had on organisational capability for flexible learning, many Leaders referenced the greater involvement with other AFL Framework projects (see Figure 4).

Most notable among these was the

Figure 4: Organisational involvement in AFL Framework projects

these was the involvement with LearnScope projects and the way organisations had been able to use LearnScope funding to support professional development of staff in priority areas directly identified by the Leader's project.



In WA, it is notable that the state LearnScope manager (Christine Bateman) was in a position to speak with first-hand experience about the benefits of the Flexible Learning Leaders program to potential Leaders, and thereby stimulate further uptake of flexible learning in their organisations.

Two of the Flexible Learning Leaders (i.e. Melanie Burke and Melanie Sorensen) have also been Toolbox Champions in 2002, providing information, professional development and brokerage services to facilitate increased and improved use of flexible learning toolboxes across their respective state and territory. Furthermore, in 2002 Carol Hampton was Project Director of the national Flexible Learning Innovations project and several sponsoring organisations have been part of the RTO Case Study project.

Apart from the involvement of Leaders in NET*Working conferences over the past few years (e.g. 20 of the 53 2000 and 2001 Leaders presented or had an active support role in NET*Working 2002), they have also encouraged managers and staff in their organisation to become involved, expanding their knowledge of contemporary flexible learning issues and educational and technological advancements, as well as extending their confidence in flexible learning.

Given the expectation (at least for the 2001 Leaders) that they would “share their experiences with others and contribute to the expansion of flexible learning capability in VET at a state and national level beyond December 2001⁶” the question arises, ‘Is there a relationship between active participation in AFL Framework projects and the level of organisational impact of the Leader’s project, or organisational support for the Leader?’ The short answer is ‘No’.

For example, the drive for some of the Leaders who are relatively more active in VET at the state and national level is a combination of personal and organisational factors, one of which may be related to the outcomes of their Leaders’ project, and even then may be because of the sector-wide application of their project rather than its potential for significant organisational impact. There are those whose project has made or is making a specific impact at the local level but has less application beyond their organisation. Then again, some Leaders are not comfortable with or do not feel as if they have the time or organisational support for more active external contribution to the expansion of flexible learning capability, whilst at the same time some of these people are the ones who warmly welcome a new Flexible Learning Leader who wants to visit and listen to the ‘veteran’s’ experience. As noted throughout this evaluation, the 2000 and 2001 Leaders comprise such a variety of individuals from different organisations with different projects, motivation and experiences that it is difficult to draw many definitive conclusions as to the universal factors for success.

Finally ...

To illustrate the point that many factors – planned and unplanned – influence the improved uptake of flexible learning, it is worth noting the following comment from one of the evaluation surveys:

⁶ Communication from Flexible Learning Leaders Project Manager to 2001 Flexible Learning Leaders.

“The project offered great opportunities that have only partly been realised by the college. Completing this survey has been a good prompt to plan for increased leverage.”
(Manager)

4.2. Confidence and Credibility

Many of the factors identified in Section 4.1. as influencing the organisational impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders program are related to organisational issues, features or programs. However, there are two very significant and influential factors related to the Leaders and the nature of the Leaders program.

Throughout the evaluation, two words kept coming up ... confidence and credibility. In surveys and discussions with Leaders, managers and colleagues there was a recurring theme of Flexible Learning Leaders being better placed to improve organisational capability for flexible learning as a result of their increased confidence in their own knowledge base and their increased credibility as a leader within their own organisation and the VET sector.

Confidence

Many Flexible Learning Leaders said that having undertaken a dedicated scholarship program that had exposed them to a wide range of research into flexible learning and Australian and overseas organisations that have implemented different approaches to flexible learning they felt more confident in their knowledge. Beyond the relatively narrow boundaries of their previous experience the Leaders program had given them a substantially wider and deeper pool of ideas, experiences, resources and contacts. Armed with this ‘intelligence’ they felt more confident in their ability to authoritatively articulate a well-rounded case for adoption of flexible learning in their organisation – citing examples from other organisations and referencing leading practitioners.

“I now know that what I’m doing is right and leading edge.” (Leader)

“I didn’t see myself as a leader, but I emerged as a leader through demonstration and discussion, action and advice.” (Leader)

“At the start I was uncertain whether I was the right person for this because I wasn’t technically competent and not in a management position. But now I’m having an influence and I know I can do more.” (Leader)

“I didn’t need confidence in new technologies or setting up a team. I needed confidence to argue the case from a middle management business perspective.” (Leader)

Given the feedback from managers and staff in the Leaders’ organisations this confidence has clearly come through in the way the Leaders now operate to influence flexible learning strategy and practice.

“He now has increased confidence and self-esteem in advocating flexible delivery.”
(Manager)

This outcome is enhanced by the formal and informal networks that Leaders have created among themselves to encourage, support and inspire one another as flexible learning leaders.

“Even though the project ended, I don’t feel as though the association (with other Leaders) has ended.” (Leader)

The only Leaders that indicated that their Leaders experience had not increased their confidence were some who already had a considerable level of experience and knowledge in flexible learning prior to undertaking their Leaders project.

Credibility

The second significant factor in the capacity of Leaders to influence change in flexible learning is their increased credibility. In part this relates purely to having being selected as a Leader. It is an external acknowledgement of the individual's capabilities and identifies them as someone who has undertaken targeted research into flexible learning. The title has currency both within their organisation and in the VET sector where the program is now more widely-known and recognised.

"I was recently introduced to a high level statewide forum to which I had been appointed as one of the inaugural Flexible Learning Leaders. It's like having a visa. I'm accepted wherever I go." (Leader)

"I now have a lot more scope to do, rather than just ask." (Leader)

"The Leaders project taught me of the need to establish credibility, talk with authority, and suggest practical solutions that take the organisation forward." (Leader)

This credibility and currency can buy a Leader a seat at the table where decisions are being made and 'air time' to have themselves heard. Consequently, just by being a Flexible Learning Leader some Leaders have been able to make a difference. However, there are two important caveats on this situation, where Leaders have indicated that this currency can be devalued. Firstly, Leaders have to continue to earn their credibility and 'walk the talk'. Having got credibility they need to be seen to be actively contributing to the advancement of flexible learning in their organisation, if not also the VET sector, or they will lose it. Secondly, it was noted that if there are 'too many Leaders' the title may lose some of its impact and organisations may lose some of their perceived 'competitive advantage'.

5. FASTER ... STRAIGHTER ... SMOOTHER

5.1. Conclusions

The Flexible Learning Leaders program has had an impact on organisational awareness of, motivation to adopt and capability to undertake flexible learning. Flexible Learning Leaders have influenced:

- organisational strategy and decision-making processes
- development of flexible learning programs and resources
- professional development programs and teacher support
- organisational awareness of and attitudes toward flexible learning
- engagement of people in flexible learning programs
- access to networks of practitioners and flexible learning resources.

This is not to say that all Leaders have influenced their organisations in all of these areas, or even influenced them to the same degree. For there is a whole range of environmental, organisational and individual factors that have influenced the capacity of the Leaders to enhance organisational capability and the capacity of their organisations to respond. Not least of which is the fact that even though the Leaders project has always sought to have an organisational impact, this was of lesser importance in the program's early years. But each Leader has in their own way made a difference in their organisation as a result of having been a Flexible Learning Leader.

In some cases the Leaders project has been the watershed for the organisation to adopt flexible learning, setting it on a path with confidence about where it is going and what it will take to move forward. In other cases the project has redirected energies and resources to emerging priority areas.

Faster ... Straighter ... Smoother

In discussions with Leaders, their managers and colleagues these impacts have often been described in terms of more efficient and well-informed decisions and change management processes. That is:

- *faster* – the change would have happened anyway but the organisation was better able and more confident to proceed with what it wanted to do
- *straighter* – decisions and programs are more focused on what the organisation needs, drawing on the Leader's experience and knowledge from research and visiting other organisations
- *smoother* – the Leader's greater awareness of practical issues that might positively or negatively influence the success of an initiative has smoothed the implementation process.

The number of direct quotes on this theme are too numerous to list, but the following are indicative of the responses.

“Without the Flexible Learning Leaders program the decision to really move on flexible learning would have come later ... maybe another year down the track.” (Leader)

“Prior to undertaking the Flexible Learning Leaders program the advice I provided to the Institute was based on a series of assumptions and limited knowledge. After completing the program the advice and direction I provide is confidently based on a solid bank of knowledge.” (Leader)

“The key is knowing what the problems will be before they hit me ... and avoiding them altogether.” (Leader)

In this light, the impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders program is very encouraging because it indicates that the program has generated confidence in flexible learning as a valuable part of improving vocational education and training outcomes.

Leaders have greater knowledge and experience about the possibilities for flexible learning generally and within their organisation. They have increased confidence in their capacity to lead organisational thinking. As one of Australia's Flexible Learning Leaders who has undertaken a dedicated course of scholarship in flexible learning, the Leaders have greater credibility in the eyes of their organisation. The Leader puts a well-rounded well-grounded argument and the organisation has greater confidence in taking that direction. Programs are initiated, interest is heightened, people are supported, pitfalls are avoided, enthusiasm is generated, results are delivered, momentum is created.

Of course things are not always that simple, but for many of the Leaders' organisations the flexible learning ball is now well and truly rolling ... faster ... straighter ... smoother.

The ways in which the Leaders have gone about influencing their organisation's flexible learning capability have varied. In some cases the Leader's project was targeted at and met a discrete and defined organisational need. In other cases the outcome was less predictable and more fortuitous. What is common, however, is that because the Leaders have had the opportunity to take time out and think deeply about flexible learning they have a much wider perspective of what is possible.

"The best thing you can do for a middle manager is to buy them real time out ... to get out of the place and think." (Leader)

And by being aware of what is possible, the 2000 and 2001 Leaders have been opportunistic in taking advantage of situations that offer the chance to improve organisational outcomes. They leverage resources, they align projects, they develop alliances and through this improve their organisation's capability for flexible learning.

Value

This evaluation was focused on identifying the impact the Flexible Learning Leaders program is having on improved organisational capability to undertake flexible learning. And with the faster ... straighter ... smoother outcomes the program has clearly been of benefit to the Leaders' organisations. But in doing so does it deliver value for money for the investment by ANTA and the organisations involved?

The evaluation concludes that the Flexible Learning Leaders program is an effective means of investing in the advancement of flexible learning – firstly because it invests in leaders, and secondly because it invests in Leaders.

The Leaders program is valuable because it is a personal professional development activity. It allows people in VET organisations to undertake a dedicated and targeted course of scholarship in an area of interest to them. As demonstrated in the evaluation the Leaders now have a deeper knowledge base, wider experience of the application of flexible learning in other organisations here and overseas, and networks of contacts that support and sustain them. Through this they now have greater confidence in their ability to lead flexible learning developments. They may change positions in their organisation, they may even change organisations, but wherever they go their knowledge, experience, networks and confidence goes with them. They are leaders.

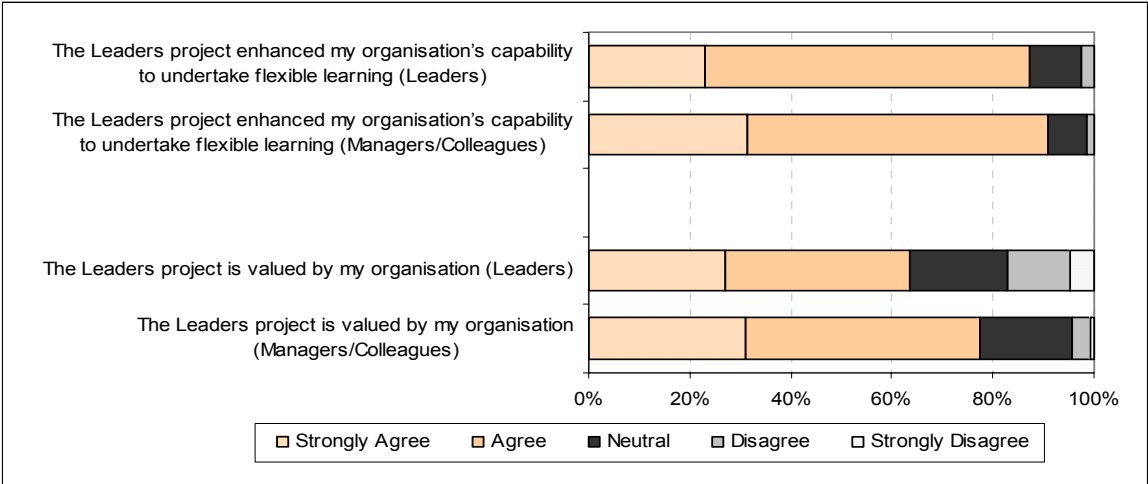
"I now have a much broader perspective ... and once a person shifts the fences, pushes the boundaries, you put them back down and they never get smaller." (Leader)

Secondly, the Leaders program is effective because it is part of a wider program of initiatives supporting implementation of the AFL Framework. Some of these initiatives are designed to support individuals, some support organisations and some support the VET sector as a whole. Some address creative, capable people, others address technological infrastructure and others focus on development of world-class online content, applications and services. No single Framework initiative can control or ensure the uptake of flexible learning in an organisation. There are many other state, organisational and individual factors at play. However, as part of this overall Framework, the Flexible Learning Leaders program makes a significant investment in a person within an organisation. This gives the organisation a resource they can immediately and consistently draw upon who is knowledgeable and flexible enough to help the organisation adapt to its environment. And because the Leaders are an integral part of the Framework, they enhance the potential for the organisation to effectively leverage its participation and involvement with other Framework activities, which is important for the overall success of the Framework. The Leaders make a difference because they are Leaders.

Overall

Overall, around 90% of Leaders, their managers and colleagues believe that their Leader’s project has enhanced their organisation’s capability for flexible learning. Only a handful of people disagree.

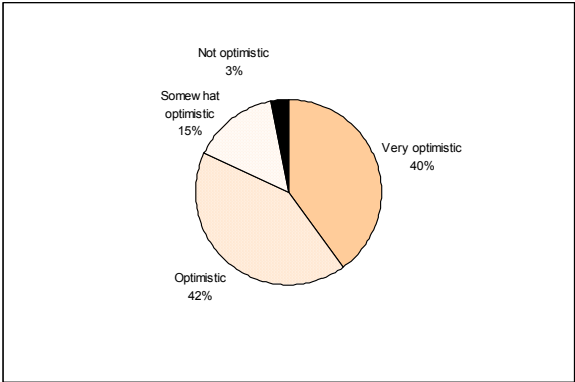
Figure 5: Value of the Flexible Learning Leaders program



It is also true that for some organisations the potential benefits of the Leader’s project are yet to be realised. They will become evident as the seeds that have been sown over the past 12 to 24 months take hold and measurable changes in culture, attitude, skills and flexible learning practices occur.

Looking forward, 40% are very optimistic and 42% are optimistic about their organisation’s capability to undertake flexible learning. This represents a positive outlook for these organisations and suggests that the opportunities for Leaders to continue to influence the adoption of flexible learning will exist for some time to come.

Figure 6: Optimism for flexible learning



5.2. Recommendations

This evaluation has focused on identifying the organisational impact of the Flexible Learning Leaders program. Therefore, the following recommendations are based primarily on how Leaders, their organisations and the Flexible Learning Leaders program as part of the AFL Framework can best maximise the benefits to organisations of having Flexible Learning Leaders. It is understood that adoption of the recommendations will necessarily occur within the broader program context which has objectives that encompass individual, organisational and sector-wide impacts.

In reading the recommendations it should also be understood that these aim to build on a program that has been successful in enabling organisations to more strategically adopt flexible learning and that has already evolved over time to support Leaders in their capacity to influence organisational change.

Flexible Learning Leaders program

This report has concluded that the Flexible Learning Leaders program has to date made a valuable contribution to the uptake of flexible learning in Australia's VET sector. There is still a need for further investment in people to lead the research into and the adoption of flexible learning principles, programs and practices.

Recommendation 1

That the Flexible Learning Leaders program continue to hold a prominent place in the AFL Framework's investment in development and support of creative capable people.

Whilst Leaders have potential to significantly influence outcomes within their organisation, this impact is in absolute terms likely to be greater for Leaders in large organisations than those in small organisations. However, the Flexible Learning Leaders program has deliberately endeavoured to target leaders in all states and territories across the entire VET sector and in both large and small organisations. This balanced approach is supported. For notwithstanding the finding in Section 4.1. that Leaders consider their capacity to influence the adoption of flexible learning practices is enhanced where there are other people in the organisation also championing flexible learning (especially Flexible Learning Leaders and Fellows), the program's efforts to support flexible learning leaders across different types of organisations provides valuable learning and exemplars across the entire VET sector.

Recommendation 2

That the Flexible Learning Leaders program continue to seek to develop leaders in flexible learning across all components of the VET sector.

Profile and leverage

The Flexible Learning Leaders program is an important and integral part of the AFL Framework that has complemented and supported a range of other professional development initiatives (e.g. NET*Working conferences, LearnScope, Toolbox Champion Services). Wherever possible, and to the extent that individual Leaders are able to participate, AFL Framework projects should seek to leverage the knowledge and experience of the Leaders.

Recommendation 3

That AFL Framework projects be encouraged to leverage the knowledge and experience of the Flexible Learning Leaders and the Leaders program to enhance flexible learning outcomes.

Now moving into its fourth year, the Flexible Learning Leaders program represents a substantial and growing body of research and evidence into the strategic and operational issues affecting the adoption of flexible learning in the Australian VET sector. Each Leader's project is of individual value to their organisation and of broader interest to the overall sector. Wherever possible the Flexible Learning Leaders program and Leaders need to continue to identify opportunities to showcase the findings and recommendations of these projects and the impact the Leaders have had and are having on organisational approaches to flexible learning. These opportunities should include both formal and informal activities such as conference presentations, mentoring, exchanges, hosting current Leaders and participation in national and state working groups and steering committees.

Recommendation 4

That the Flexible Learning Leaders program continue to offer and identify opportunities for Leaders to showcase within their organisation and the VET sector the findings and organisational impacts of their projects, and that Flexible Learning Leaders commit to participation in activities that promote the findings and outcomes of their projects.

Of particular note in this evaluation was the finding that Leaders, their managers and colleagues considered the greatest impact of their Leader's project was on enhancing the capability of their organisation for innovation, even beyond that associated with flexible learning. The opportunity for dedicated research, the exposure to other ideas and approaches and the time to reflect have all contributed to Leaders having the confidence and credibility to influence innovation in their organisations.

Recommendation 5

That promotion of the Flexible Learning Leaders program highlight the contribution of Flexible Learning Leaders to innovation in their organisations, not just in the area of flexible learning.

Process improvement

Leaders and other people within their organisations indicate that the impact of the Leader's project is enhanced where there is alignment between the organisation's strategy and circumstances and the Leader's project. It is not always possible to ensure that this alignment occurs, as circumstances can change over the course of the project. However, if organisational impact is intended as a primary outcome of the Flexible Learning Leaders program, then to the extent possible, the alignment of individual activities and organisational aims should be of prime consideration in the selection process.

Recommendation 6

That, to the extent possible, the process of selecting Flexible Learning Leaders place specific importance on the degree of alignment between the Leader's proposed project and their organisation's strategy, circumstances and level of support.

At the time of conducting this evaluation, nine of the 2000 and 2001 Flexible Learning Leaders had changed organisation. It is not unexpected that Leaders change organisation. They are motivated intelligent individuals that seek opportunities to exploit their learnings and ideas. However, depending on the timing of these changes the sponsoring organisation can reasonably feel that its investment in flexible learning has been diluted. Leaders should be encouraged to ensure that their sponsoring organisation has access to the findings of the project and the opportunity to understand the implications for the organisation.

Recommendation 7

That where Leaders change organisations during or soon after their project, efforts are made to ensure that both the sponsoring organisation and the new organisation have the opportunity to benefit from the project.

APPENDIX A – 2000 AND 2001 FLEXIBLE LEARNING LEADERS

There were 53 Flexible Learning Leaders in 2000 and 2001 from 50 different organisations. Leaders that have changed organisations since their project are marked with an asterisk ‘*’.

2000 Leaders (23)

Leader	Sponsoring Organisation	State
Lyn Ambrose	Southbank Institute of TAFE	Qld
Margaret Aspin*	Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE	Vic
Frank Bate*	West Coast College of TAFE	WA
Margaret Bell	Western Institute of TAFE	NSW
Valerie Bowyer	Wodonga Continuing Education Centre	Vic
Claire Brooks*	Wodonga Institute of TAFE	Vic
Melanie Burke	Retail & Business Services ITAB	NT
Martha Goldman	Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE	Qld
Mark Hunwicks	Regency Institute of TAFE	SA
Marie Jasinski	Douglas Mawson Institute of TAFE	SA
Terese McAleese	Swinburne TAFE	Vic
Elizabeth McPherson	Canberra Institute of Technology	ACT
Jo Murray	Pelion Consulting Pty Ltd	Tas
Claire O’Conor	Sydney Institute of TAFE	NSW
Allan Parsons	New England Institute of TAFE	NSW
Peta Pash	Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE	SA
Josie Rose	Narre Community Learning Centre	Vic
Sue Thompson	Central TAFE-East Perth Campus	WA
Ray Tuckey	Great Southern Regional College of TAFE	WA
Anne Walsh*	Department of Education & Training	NSW
John Weatherley	Box Hill Institute of TAFE	Vic
Greg Webb	Open Training & Education Network	NSW
Leone Wheeler	RMIT University	Vic

2001 Leaders (30)

Leader	Sponsoring Organisation	State
Chris Ainsworth	SA Career Consultants	SA
Graham Anderson	Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE	Qld
Janice Anderson	Canberra Institute of Technology	ACT
Sylvia Arthur	South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE	NSW
Kerry Ashcroft*	Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE	NSW
Dion Barnett	Eastern Pilbara College of TAFE	WA
Margaret Barron	Adelaide Institute of TAFE	SA
Christine Bateman	Department of Training & Employment	WA
Jennifer Batten	Western Institute of TAFE	NSW
Brad Beach	Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE	Vic
Olga Brown*	Central Coast Health	NSW
Bev Childs*	Southbank Institute of TAFE	Qld
Heather Crawley	Sunraysia Institute of TAFE	Vic
Greg Crowe	Department of Health and Community Services	NT
Sally Drummond	Centre for Adult Education	Vic
Peter Forbes	C.Y. O'Connor College of TAFE	WA

Leader	Sponsoring Organisation	State
Megan Funston	Curtin University of Technology	WA
Keith Gear	NSW Fire Brigades	NSW
Lyn Goodear	South West Institute of TAFE	Vic
Ken Gooding	Chisholm Institute	Vic
Carol Hampton	Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE	SA
Donna Hensley	Hunter Institute of Technology	NSW
Helen Houston	TAFE Tasmania	Tas
Wanda Jackson*	Northern Territory University	NT
Jim Kesting	Port Adelaide Training Development Centre	SA
Vicki Marchant	Riverina Institute of TAFE	NSW
Joeena Simpson*	Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE	Qld
Melanie Sorensen	WestOne Services	WA
Mary Stewart-Craig	William Angliss Institute of TAFE	Vic
Neale Waller	Central Queensland Institute of TAFE	Qld

APPENDIX B – EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The evaluation of the Flexible Learning Leaders program was undertaken in four stages between May 2002 and January 2003. The basic methodology is detailed below.

Stage	Activities	Outputs
<i>1. Project Planning</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review Flexible Learning Leaders program objectives, background documentation, planning and the 2000 and 2001 evaluations ▪ Document intended project outcomes and develop initial evaluation themes and questions ▪ Review and agree project objectives, plan, milestones and deliverables. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project workplan ▪ Initial evaluation themes and questions
<i>2. Research and Development</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review 2000 and 2001 Leaders' reports and presentations to identify actual or potential organisational changes initiated or influenced by their project ▪ Develop questionnaires to capture specific information on the past and current organisational impacts of the project ▪ Test questionnaires with a small group of stakeholders ▪ Communicate with all 2000 and 2001 Leaders. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evaluation questionnaires
<i>3. Data Collection and Analysis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Distribute questionnaires to Leaders and a sample of managers and colleagues in each organisation ▪ Conduct site visits at the organisations of six Leaders to discuss impacts of the project and factors facilitating or inhibiting success ▪ Conduct telephone interviews with all other Leaders ▪ Compile and analyse questionnaires, visit and interview data ▪ Attend Sharing Workshop on 1 November. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Quantitative and qualitative evaluation data
<i>4. Report and Recommendations</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Present interim findings to Steering Committee ▪ Draft report and present to Steering Committee for discussion/comment ▪ Finalise report and recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral presentation on interim findings ▪ Final report consolidating findings and recommendations

Questionnaires

Three separate but complementary questionnaires were developed. The full questionnaire was sent to each Leader for completion. A shorter questionnaire was sent to two managers in each Leader's organisation with another short questionnaire sent to three colleagues in their organisation. Overall, 176 questionnaires were received relating to 47 of the Flexible Learning Leaders activities.

Site Visits

The six site visits involved interviews with the Flexible Learning Leader, as well interviews with their managers and colleagues (either in group discussion or one-on-one). Leaders for inclusion in this activity were selected with an aim to provide coverage across different types and location of organisations (e.g. both TAFE and ACE providers, Institutes and enterprise RTOs, different states/territories, large and small organisations, different types of projects, organisations with one

Leader in the period 2000 to 2002 and those with more than one Leader). The Leaders that received site visits were:

- Elizabeth McPherson (2000 – Canberra Institute of Technology, ACT)
- Peta Pash (2000 – Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE, SA)
- John Weatherley (2000 – Box Hill Institute of TAFE, Victoria)
- Sally Drummond (2001 – Centre for Adult Education, Victoria)
- Keith Gear (2001 – NSW Fire Brigades, NSW)
- Melanie Sorensen (2001 – WestOne, WA).

APPENDIX C – ATTRIBUTES OF EFFECTIVE LEADERS

The following list of attributes, qualities and characteristics of effective Flexible Learning Leaders was generated as part of a light-hearted unstructured brainstorming session with 25 of the 2000 and 2001 Leaders who attended the Flexible Learning Leaders Sharing Workshop in Adelaide on 1 November 2002.

As indicated in Section 4.2 of the evaluation report, the issues of ‘confidence’ and ‘credibility’ were paramount, but there were other attributes listed below that received many mentions during the session and others that were raised by only one Leader. This list is therefore provided for information only and is not intended as a rigorous checklist of the requirements for an effective Flexible Learning Leader.

Attributes of Effective Flexible Learning Leaders			
They have ...	They are ...	They are a ...	They will ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Credibility ▪ Confidence ▪ Commitment ▪ Vision ▪ Passion ▪ Influence ▪ Trust ▪ Perseverance and stamina ▪ A thick skin ▪ Courage and internal fortitude ▪ A ‘can do’ attitude and reputation ▪ A good knowledge base ▪ Change strategies ▪ Off the planet ideas ▪ Communication skills ▪ Planning skills ▪ Technical skills ▪ Persuasive skills ▪ A chance to lead ▪ A collaborative approach ▪ Internal and external partnerships ▪ Powerful friends and allies ▪ Personal job security ▪ Balance ▪ Supportive family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creative ▪ Reflective ▪ Energetic ▪ Patient ▪ Trusted ▪ Respected ▪ Empowered ▪ Organised ▪ Resourced ▪ Responsive ▪ Excited by change ▪ Committed to change ▪ Persistent ▪ Resilient ▪ Calculated ▪ Cunning ▪ Open ▪ Focused ▪ Politically savvy ▪ Financially savvy ▪ Cross-VET savvy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Believer ▪ Achiever ▪ Initiator ▪ Motivator ▪ Champion ▪ Change agent ▪ Strategic thinker and operational doer ▪ Risk taker ▪ Networker ▪ Synthesiser ▪ Sponsor ▪ Team worker ▪ Team builder ▪ Role model ▪ Drama queen ▪ Kudos provider ▪ Lifelong learner ▪ ‘Maven’ ▪ Guardian angel and manipulative devil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collect and disseminate information ▪ Push an idea at every opportunity ▪ Facilitate experimentation ▪ Take people with them ▪ Value staff ▪ Excite to a frenzy ▪ Align to advocate ▪ Build a power base ▪ Manage up ▪ Sell their ideas ▪ Find the bait, bait the hook, pull them in ▪ Duck and weave ▪ Enjoy and thrive on a challenge ▪ Take time out ▪ Accept poverty as a state of being

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February 2003