

Transfer of Training in an Academic Leadership Development Program for Program Coordinators

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Abstract

The higher education sector has increasingly begun to pay more attention to academic leadership. This qualitative study explores how such an investment in a 20 week leadership development program influenced the behaviour of 10 academic staff in the role of program coordinator six to 12 months following participation in the program. Otherwise known as program directors or department chairs, academic staff in this role are responsible for coordinating and leading degree courses or programs. Leadership learning and changes in the behaviour of program coordinators was evident, particularly in regard to building influence, communicating more effectively and managing upwards. Improved confidence in their ability to perform the role was a lasting outcome and the use of peer learning and coaching was an important part of the success of the intervention. However, workload factors, succession planning and orientation were seen to be factors that influence leadership development in this role. The findings suggest that participation in well designed academic leadership programs can result in a lasting transfer of training for program coordinators.

Introduction

The higher education sector has increasingly begun to pay more attention to academic leadership in response to globalisation and expansion efforts, calls for accountability, increases in student heterogeneity, an ageing academic workforce and increasing use of technology.(Stigmar, 2008; Bisbee, 2007; Scott, Hamish, & Anderson, 2008) In many countries, universities also face ongoing pressure to ensure high quality teaching and learning outcomes.(Scott, Hamish, & Anderson, 2008) Leadership, as a result, has become a critical component of academic administrative positions in higher education over the past decade, which previously focussed more on management.(Bush, 2008)

For universities to respond to the challenges they face, leadership is needed at all levels within the organisation.(Hotho, McGoldrick, & Work, 2008) This requires the leadership of learning to shift towards more collective or distributive approaches which reflect the collegial working culture of higher education.(McRoy & Gibbs, 2009)

One cohort of university staff who have a significant role to play in leading high quality teaching and learning outcomes is the Program Coordinator (PC). This position is also known as course coordinator, program director or department chair and designates academics responsible for a degree course or program . Unfortunately, these individuals often get left out of formal institutional leadership development (LD) initiatives because their role is usually viewed as something between a general academic staff position and Head of School/Department on the organisational chart.

Program Coordinators often find themselves in these positions as a result of being competent and qualified senior academics who, by virtue of their accomplishments, advance to the role of managing and leading a university course.(Yielder & Codling, 2004) Yet, in the development of these academic leaders, the system has tended to rely upon ‘learning on the job’ in relation to learning and teaching.(Southwell, Gannaway, Orrell, Chalmers, & Abraham, 2005) As a result, PCs often find that they are not prepared for the demands of this academic leadership role, particularly with the pressures facing contemporary higher education, even though teaching and learning quality is often measured at the course or degree level. The PC role, therefore, is like a ‘king pin’, as they are central to the teaching and learning quality equation and thus the need for LD at this level. (Ladyshefsky & Jones, 2007)

The challenge for the PC is that in addition to having academic credibility they must lead and manage the course team without having any line management authority. Hence, they must build their influence through collegiality and informal relationships. In fact, Hellowell & Hancock (2001) note that the most collegial relationships in universities occur at the program team level. This emphasis on collegiality, in part, may stem from the often temporary nature of the PC role, which is performed for a period and then relinquished to another course team member. (Rowley and Sherman, 2003) With the dynamic of these working relationships at the course level, it is therefore of no surprise that leadership for the PC is a complex and challenging process, as noted below:

“It is somewhat obvious why leadership is a problem here. The person who is responsible for providing leadership is not necessarily willing to be a leader, and knows that leadership must be highly collegial or it will be very difficult to return to a faculty. (Rowley & Sherman, 2003:1059)”

Leadership for the PC is problematic, therefore, as it does not fit more traditional notions of leadership roles and their implied hierarchy. In spite of a lack of formal authority, and often a reluctance to direct their academic “peers,” the PC must still execute leadership to ensure high quality course outcomes. According to Gibbs (2006), if department leaders facilitate a good teaching environment then instructors are more likely to use a student-focused approach, which in turn results in far superior student outcomes due to a deep approach to learning. (Martin, Trigwell, Prosser, & Ramsden, 2003; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997; Ramsden, Prosser, Trigwell, & Martin, 2007) It makes sense, therefore, that PCs receive opportunities to develop their leadership capabilities so that they can achieve high quality learning and teaching

outcomes within their course in the context of this pressured and changing environment.

Given the complex nature of their leadership role within the university, transformational and transactional leadership capabilities are important for the PC to possess. Transformational leadership is about being inspiring, visionary, and paying close attention to team members' potential whereas transactional leadership invests in more control oriented systems to gain compliance and to ensure that the team meets its performance targets.(Bass, Jung, Avolio, & Berson, 2003) In practice, both are needed for effective academic leadership in the PC role. To enhance the leadership of the PC, therefore, programs are needed that support them in this process.

Theoretical Basis of Leadership Development Programs

There are many recommendations in the literature on how to structure and deliver leadership development programs. Preiss & Molina-Ray (2007), for example, describes a LD framework which focuses on participative management, based learning opportunities to discover how democracy, positive feedback and communication influence leadership. Programs should also provide: opportunities for feedback, discussion and support (Bolden, Gosling, & Petrov, 2008), information on the person's leadership capabilities using a leadership competency framework, and a 360 degree review process (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001, 2006), with opportunities for coaching and reflective practice.(Kerka, 1996; Ladyshevsky & Varey, 2005) A 360 degree review is a common leadership development tool that collects feedback (usually via an anonymous online survey) on the participant's performance from their colleagues. The participant's peers, line manager and staff reporting to them provide the feedback on the participant's leadership, hence the 360 degree nature of the survey. Toegel & Conger (2003) Ideally, the program should also be built upon

experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984) and be situated in the workplace.(Boud, 1999) In addition, academic LD initiatives should be contextualised to higher education and the local culture of the university in which they are delivered.(Flavell, Jones, Oliver, & Ladyshevsky, 2008) Even differences within disciplines need to be taken into consideration in developing LD initiatives in higher education.(Blackmore, 2007)

These LD program requirements are supported in the literature (Al-Musawi, 2008) and indicate that LD requires more than mere training. What is required is the opportunity to learn through experience in a supportive culture that allows for growth and change. Furthermore, in his review of academic leadership, Gaither (2004) asserts that experience and observation are critical for learning about leadership. He views LD as a continuous learning experience requiring ample opportunities to practice with ‘the right to fail’ as part of the development process. In the area of academic leadership, emotional intelligence and team building capability are crucial given the shift in higher education from a work culture attuned to individuals to one of cooperation and collaboration.(Boud, 1999) Significantly, in *Learning Leaders In Times of Change: academic capabilities in Australian higher education*, Scott, Coates, & Anderson (2008) support practice based learning as a LD strategy and found that PCs expressed a preference for learning on the job, involvement in informal mentoring and coaching, self-guided reading on leadership, and participation in educational leadership seminars which are tailored to their needs. Information on leadership styles and skills, as measured through objective 360 degree review systems, were also preferred.

Transfer of Training

Despite the careful planning, design and delivery of LD programs, as noted above, the question still exists as to how an institution is able to measure whether the investment of effort produces a return that is of benefit to the institution as well as to the individual. Even with high percentage agreement on LD program evaluations, how does one measure transfer of training to the workplace given the wide range of organisational and individual factors at play? In the field concerned with theorising and quantifying the value of training and development, transfer of training is a concept used to explore how well individuals transfer learning from development programs to the workplace in a lasting manner.

While evaluations often provide an indication of a program's quality, they don't usually investigate how well the learning outcomes have been translated to the work context (Baldwin & Ford, 1998; Cromwell and Kolb, 2004) as the evaluation is usually done during and at the end of the initiative. If a LD investment is going to be considered successful the learning must be generalised to the work context and maintained over a period of time.(Broad & Newstrom, 1992) More complex evaluation methods must, therefore, occur many months later. According to the literature, many programs fail to produce lasting practical changes in faculty.(Al-Musawi, 2008) Other research, however, suggests that well designed programs are more likely to have long-term positive results. For example, Chibucos & Green (1989) report on an evaluation of the American Council on Education Fellows Program, an initiative to train college and university administrators. They found, over the long term, that individuals developed a greater understanding of the complexity of institutional administration as a result of their involvement in their program.

To support transfer of training, so that it is embedded in practice, a range of strategies can be put in to place. One of these is to incorporate social learning support strategies

that engage learners with program content over time, in applied ways. Cromwell & Kolb (2004), for example, found that peer support reinforced the trainee's use of, and engagement with, program materials whilst learning on the job. Toegel & Conger (2003) found that those who demonstrated the most professional growth were those who had positive attitudes about the process and engaged a mentor or coach to support them in the development process. Similarly, Olivero (1997) reports on a public sector training program which was followed by coaching. They found that eight weeks of coaching increased productivity by 88 per cent whereas training alone only produced benefits of 22 per cent.

Other methods believed to increase the transfer of training are 'constructive alignment' principles, where program learning outcomes are aligned with assessments, a concept coined by Biggs (2003). Action learning projects, which are embedded in an organisation's daily activities and build upon the concepts covered in academic LD programs, are tools which have been applied successfully to engage academic program directors to transfer learning into practice.(Stigmar, 2008)

Rewards have also been identified as significant incentives in business.(Stigmar, 2008) and although often seen to be insufficient in the higher education sector they do influence how academics direct their efforts.(Rubeck & Witzke, 1998; Webb & Murphy, 1997) Awarding advanced study credits for completed action learning projects, or including these as outcomes worthy of promotion, may be rewards that are enticing to some academics.

Other factors which promote transfer are time release from duties or reductions in workload to successfully participate in these LD programs.(Webb & Murphy, 1997)

Workload issues and time pressures are common work environment factors that influence outcomes and participation in professional development initiatives in the

higher education sector.(Stigmar, 2008; Trowbridge & Bates, 2008) The result is that learning cannot be transferred to the workplace because productivity pressures overtake the time needed for reflection and thought in considering how learning from a leadership program may be applied to practice.

Research Aims

Given the arguments presented above in relation to the leadership development needs of the PC, and issues related to transfer of training, the main aim of this research was to explore the transfer of training (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Cromwell & Kolb, 2004) experience in PCs six to 12 months following an academic LD program. A second aim was to explore factors which supported or hindered academic leadership development following delivery of the program. Kirkpatrick (1996) described four levels of evaluation of training which include people's reaction or feelings towards the program, the learning that they received, the behavioural changes as a result of the training program and the results that are produced. This research focuses predominately on the second and third levels of this model. Namely, what was learnt and how this influenced behavioural change six to twelve months following the LD program. Changes in program results, the fourth level of evaluation, were beyond the scope of this study.

Methodology

Research Paradigm

This study adopted a qualitative research method (Creswell, 2003) as the aims of the research lent itself to this approach. Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach to investigation that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings (Hoepfl, 1997), in this case, the PC and their LD experience within the context of

their work environment six to 12 months after completion. With respect to data collection in qualitative research, the investigator does not attempt to manipulate the data (Patton, 2002) but rather seeks to understand and interpret it. Nevertheless, the investigator is always a part of the study's final construction. This is markedly different from quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings from the data through their statistical manipulations. Qualitative researchers seek instead, illumination, understanding, and extrapolation or transferability to similar situations.(Hoepfl, 1997) As a result, small sample sizes are utilised in qualitative research because of the large amounts of textual data that are generated during interview processes, the main form of data collection. These small sample sizes are acceptable given that the interpretation and extraction of meaning of the data is the focus.

This qualitative research, as all research, emanates from a philosophical perspective. The perspective for this research is constructivist. Constructivism, as the name suggests, takes a relativist perspective as it sees knowledge as being produced (or constructed) by the individual as it is contingent upon human understanding based on people's interactions with the world.(Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Hence, trying to understand what may be real is relative as the objective and subjective are intrinsically linked. Because of this, the researcher becomes part of the construction of this knowledge as he cannot separate himself completely. (Porta & Keating, 2008)

From an epistemological perspective, this study is interpretive and assumes that not all people experience their reality in the same manner (Neuman, 1997) and it is the job of the investigator to interpret and discover meaning in the shared experiences of participants. However, in building theory, one cannot entirely discount what is actually known in the scientific literature. Hence, in interpreting the experiences of

participants, what is known may also influence the building of a theory or explanation. Whiteley (2004) calls this a grounded research approach. She argues that this approach makes sense, particularly in the business setting, where a substantive and credible body of empirical research can be found. It would be unreasonable to ignore previous research in the formulation of new research. Grounded research, therefore, takes on board advances in knowledge that apply to the context that is under investigation.

In light of this constructivist and interpretive perspective, this study is conducive to a qualitative methodology and therefore employed questioning formats that are consistent with symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) explores the meaning that people attribute to their experiences. The focus of this perspective is that individuals respond towards events in their life based on the meaning these events have for them personally. Hence, the meanings that they create are developed from social interaction and then modified through their own world view and interpretative systems. (Blumer 1969)

The Leadership Development Program

The participants in this study took part in a ten module academic leadership program designed for the PCs. This program was put in place to promote, "...the enhancement of faculty members' educational knowledge and skill so that they can make educational contributions that advance the educational program rather than only teaching within it."(Rubeck & Witzke, 1998:32) Each session was delivered face-to-face on a fortnightly basis for two hours on campus with accompanying online resources. The use of blended learning strategies (face-to-face instruction with online resources and tools) has been shown to positively influence participants' attitudes towards learning in professional development programs.(Green & Cifuentes, 2008)

Full details on the development of the course, needs assessment, evaluation and resources can be found on:

http://academicleadership.curtin.edu.au/course_coordinator/ . Level one evaluation of the LD program (Kirkpatrick, 1996) reported percentage agreement for overall satisfaction for each module, across the two years of the program, of at least 90 per cent. A description of the LD program modules are provided in Appendix 1.

Informed by the current research, the program incorporated many of the leadership development frameworks and concepts described in the literature earlier. It was highly collegial, was situated in the context of higher education, included peer coaching and had a 360 degree review process which was aligned with a well established leadership framework entitled ‘the integrated competing values framework’ (Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, & McGrath, 2003; Vilkinas & Cartan, 2006). The LD program was also contextualised to the PC role in the current environment, with learning scenarios being developed from common challenges and issues confronting the PC . This was critical, to ensure that academics engage with the educational development program (Stigmar, 2008). Overall, the program’s theory of action was centered around experiential learning. (Kolb, 1984) The focus on actual experience, with opportunities for reflection in the seminars and with peer coaching partners, helped to build conclusions which participants could take back and apply in the work setting. Teaching productivity rewards were provided on completion for participating in the program (which could translate into a grant to be used to further develop their scholarship of teaching). Participants were also encouraged to use the outcomes delivered by the LD program in discussions regarding their performance and promotion. Support by senior management and running the seminars in a prestigious venue also enhanced the significance of the program.

The program focussed on three domains of learning: personal leadership development, conceptual understanding, and skill development. Personal leadership development focussed on intrapersonal skills such as emotional intelligence, reflective practice and individualised learning plans. Conceptual understanding focussed on learning about key leadership theories and pedagogical concepts in curriculum design and delivery. Skill development focussed on specific interpersonal leadership skills such as communication, team building, conflict management, managing upwards and program management skills like program review and evaluation. The program was facilitated by internal specialists in leadership and curriculum design and delivery.

Data Collection.

At the time of this research, the LD program had been running for two years. The two iterations of the LD program that the PCs participated in were considered pilots as the program was still undergoing refinement. Participants in this research were drawn purposefully from both pilot cohorts. Hence, some individuals, at the time of this research, were anywhere from six months to one full year post-program completion. Ethics approval for this study was also received from the University's ethics committee.

Initially, a familiarisation study (Whiteley & Whiteley, 2005) was undertaken with three PCs who had participated in the program. They were asked a series of questions relating to their LD program and their experiences. The purpose of this familiarisation study was to assist the researchers in framing the questions and testing them out with participants within the work setting. Following this familiarisation, interview questions were reframed and a larger sample of ten PCs, who completed the LD program, were approached to participate in this qualitative research. The ten participants were selected randomly and selection was based on their availability to be

interviewed. There were six female and four male PCs with ages ranging from 34 to 56 and a mean age of 47.5. Years of experience as a PC ranged from 1 to 20 with a mean of 6.2. Of the sample, two PCs had 10 and 20 years of experience in the role respectively. The other 8 PCs had far less experience ranging from 1 to 7 years.

There were seven PCs from health science programs, two from humanities programs and one from engineering and science.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted by two academics with Ph.D qualifications aligned to the LD program. The primary investigator who facilitated the LD program did not conduct any of the interviews as it was felt that more candid interview responses would be shared by participants through this approach. Interview questions were framed around the transfer of training frameworks of Baldwin & Ford (1988) and Cromwell & Kolb, (2004) discussed earlier. Hence, interview questions focussed on how the individual participant's behaviour had changed and what personal insights to their practice had emerged as a result of their involvement in the LD program. The questions also explored what parts of the LD program, and associated methodologies, influenced the PCs' leadership and practice. Lastly, the questions also explored what work environment factors influenced their LD and practice.

All interviews were audiotaped, transcribed and analysed using nVIVO, a data management software application for the social sciences. The primary investigator interrogated and coded the data using methods described by Strauss & Corbin (1990). Coding moved from initial nVIVO coding to open coding. Further analysis involved a re-examination of categories to determine how they were linked in order to map a conceptual framework, a process referred to as axial coding. Constant comparison techniques were used to summarise the text and to identify themes that emanated from

the data.(Creswell, 2003) The researchers were interested in both theory development (new findings emanating from the data) as well as theory confirmation (findings consistent with the literature on leadership development and transfer of training). Areas of commonality was a focus of the interpretation, rather than exploration of outliers or differences. Hence, themes that were identified by at least half of the respondents are explored in more detail and reported in this paper.

By considering the ideas and explanations inherent in the data, and seeking agreement with one of the other co-investigators, this triangulation aids the process of increasing trustworthiness or rigour in the data collection process.(Johnson, 1997) Hence, the conceptual framework and coding definitions were subjected to review by one of the other co-investigators, a method to ensure credibility. Member checking with two PCs who were interviewed in the research was also undertaken to explore the conceptual map and key findings. A third PC who was approached did not provide any input. Given the high workload demands of the PCs identified in the research, a larger member checking cohort was not solicited. Both validated their experiences strongly against the findings of this research, thus adding further rigour or trustworthiness to the findings.

Results

There were four conceptual categories that could all be linked to a central super category entitled confidence. These conceptual categories were: the leadership program; Program Coordinator as Leader; leadership skill sets; and workplace factors. The first of these mid-level categories (the leadership program) related to factors endemic to the design of the leadership program. The second mid-level category PC as leader) related to the impact on the individual person as a result of participation in the LD program. The third mid-level category (leadership skill sets) related to

workplace factors that influenced the LD experience. A fourth mid-level category (workplace categories) emerged which identified skills sets that were particularly valued by participants.

Within each of these mid-level categories, two to three sub-categories were identified. Each sub-category was represented by at least 50 per cent of the PCs interviewed in this research as the focus was to identify commonality rather than differences or outliers. The mid-level category and its sub-categories are described in more detail below. Quotations by individuals are separated by these markings ‘//’ to illustrate a range of views where relevant.

The ‘Leadership Program’

This mid-level category represents dimensions of the leadership development program itself, in particular, how it was structured and delivered. Its sub-categories are explained below.

Experience in Role

As the leadership program was open to all PCs, those with a range of experience participated in the program. What became apparent was that individuals experienced the program in different ways, depending upon their experience in the PC role. Those with more experience found the program at times not offering them what they wanted because they had already been operating in the role for quite some time.

“one or two of the activities ...separating out because ... that was old hat to experienced coordinators” // “I’ve done management courses in the past ...a bit more depth in that area would have been even more helpful.” // “for those of us who ... have a more strategic role to play, just to take us that bit further.”
“...haven’t benefitted from this course as much as I would have done had that course been run say three or four years ago.”

It was felt that the LD program was geared more towards those new in the role.

“I think it was a level for those who are relatively new to program coordination”
// “...was more geared to those who perhaps had less experience in actual coordinator.”

What these two sets of quotations indicate is that additional thinking needs to be put into place when designing leadership interventions for the PC which take into consideration differing levels of experience. How might, for example, those with more experience be used to support those with less experience? Further, how might discussions and learning partnerships be designed to tap into this greater experience base? Interestingly, Al-Musawi(2008) found that participants in a faculty development program designed to enhance pedagogy already possessed a high degree of prior knowledge. He argued that the existing knowledge base of potential participants needs to be considered in program development and recruitment efforts.

Buddying

The program also encouraged peer coaching strategies as part of its design. Individuals were requested to form strategic learning alliances with each other in the program. This could be through peer coaching or other forms of learning communities. This methodology was supported by participants who invested in this approach and was an important part of the leadership program.

“ ...the thing I found fantastic was to sit in a space and hear things and think, yes, I thought that or then to hear other people sharing ...” // “I think we learnt quite a lot, not only about one another on a personal level, but just what those very different backgrounds mean within the university setting, and the strengths and limitations of those backgrounds.” // “I quite liked the whole notion of coaching, because again, I think for those of us in these positions, that’s something I don’t think we’ve perhaps all taken enough notice of.” // “... but in talking with him that was interesting finding out more about how he does things.”

The use of social learning systems to engage participants with the content appeared to help boost engagement with the material presented in the program. As noted in the quotations, this strategy provided participants with a person or group to unpack their

experience against the information in the LD program thus increasing meaning and utility.

Doing Things Different Across Faculties

The inter-disciplinary nature of the LD program was valued by participants. In one way, it extends the social learning concept by having individuals from a cross section of the University working and sharing their practice with one another. Individuals found hearing how other PCs implemented their role within their department very useful.

“ I enjoyed was the interaction with other people just across the University ... this was a bit of an eye opener because you can tend to be quite cocooned in a sense ... it made me realise that some of the issues that I had weren't just me then.” // “I actually realised just how well off I was. I also hadn't realised, perhaps, just how much difficulty some others were having in other schools...” // “It was quite amazing to find that the role of a program coordinator varies...” // “I was quite surprised when I found out what other people were doing. It was refreshing...” // “What was nice was to sit around in the room and realise that you're not the only one with that exact same issue, ...so that was good”

The perspectives of other PCs appeared to provide participants with a broader perspective on the role of this position within the University context. It helped to confirm practice issues, organisational constraints and other perspectives, which appeared to help PCs understand and ground their role further within the University.

Other than these sub-category themes, there were several comments about the delivery of the program but no clear consensus and hence these views are not represented on the conceptual map even though most participants made comments in this regard. For example, some individuals liked the fortnightly break between sessions as it provided time for reflection and self-guided study time. Others would have preferred a more intensive delivery due to work

pressures. The online resources were well received by participants and they found this valuable.

Program Coordinator as Leader

This mid-level category represents those individual insights and outcomes PCs received from participating in the program. The sub-category concepts are outlined below.

360 Leadership Insights

Participants found the 360 degree assessment very insightful and gave them useful information about their performance. They appreciated receiving feedback from their peers. The comment below was quite reflective of what most people felt towards this assessment strategy.

“I found quite helpful the 360 ... was really helpful because you got different feedback... to me that was really interesting and really helpful.”

For many, the feedback obtained from the 360 degree review was the first time they had ever received any comprehensive feedback from their peers and leaders about their performance and leadership within the role. This had positive motivational effects for the cohort as noted in the above quotation which was reflective of most comments. The positive feedback helped to reinforce good behaviour and the developmental ideas were taken on board as areas for further inquiry or action.

Impact of Program on Personal Leadership

Overall individuals found the LD program provided value. It had an impact by boosting confidence, insights into their practice and skills and making them more self-aware of their leadership style.

“... it did give me some confidence that I’d been proceeding along at least a reasonably correct path ... “ // “...it gives you food for thought and pause for thought as well at times so it was useful, no question ... “ // “...some of the ways the sessions were presented, I’ve certainly taken some of those ideas away...” // “I think I’ve just become more aware of other leadership styles and how people like things done so I can meet their needs as well as meeting the needs of the students.”// “For me it sharpened up a bit of the self reflection about what I do well, what I need to do ...” // “... my notions of being a leader as a result of doing the workshop ... not a day goes by when I don’t consider the responsibilities of leadership...so the course has made me acutely aware.” // “... my perception of the role of program coordinator – I’m now very aware that it’s a role that can galvanise a group of people ... “

What these quotations indicate is that the program, even many months later, had left participants with an orientation towards thinking about their leadership and reflecting on their practice. This heightened metacognition appears to have aided their further development due to the attention they were now paying to their leadership practices.

Leadership Skills Sets

In this mid-level category there were three sub-categories which related to specific modules which were commented upon frequently by the PCs in this research. They are described below.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

In these modules principles of outcomes focussed education and undertaking minor and major program reviews were the focus. Program Coordinators found these sessions valuable as it gave them further information and learning about curriculum mapping, planning, review and delivery.

“Yeah, pedagogy is always – not necessarily for people in my position at the front of their minds, but it certainly is increasingly with me”// “I was going to say the pedagogy ... really helped me.” // “...biggest part for me was the program review because at the time, I was going through a program review...”

Psychological Profiles of the Team

In this module the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and facilitating and managing teams were the focus. Individuals learned about different personality types and team facilitation strategies.

“recognising personality types I think whilst was a lot of fun ...I thought it was quite useful too” // “psychological testing kind of thing, they were interesting, they were illuminating” // “the psychological approach was fairly novel to me ...thinking about how my colleagues going to think about this – how will they react to this?”

This session rated very well in the evaluations completed in the pilots, and these comments suggest that the insights into managing teams and personality differences had a lasting impact on participants’ leadership.

Connecting Upwards

In this module, building influence and managing upwards were the focus of the session. Networking was also covered. Collectively, these concepts explored how the PC could increase their power base and influence in the political networks of the University, including their relationship with their Head of Department/School.

“... one that I remember that was quite powerful for my thinking was ...how to please the boss ... that’s not well worded but that was how do you manage up.” // “...realising that in a coordination role sitting in the middle ...so to speak is that I’m now much more aware of when things are asked of me from above.” // “ I think it made me realise how much more importance there was in almost translating information from there to there ...” // “ I think I’m getting better at viewing it being [the University] and searching for opportunities that are not just about our faculty.” // “ ... looking back up, rather than always looking down.”

The nature of these quotations illustrate how important this module was for this group of PCs who find themselves in leadership positions where they must use influence to achieve their goals. They were able to see how important their role was in supporting their Head of Program as well as the University’s strategic

objectives. This connection with management levels above them was a positive outcome as it made them feel ‘part of the system’ and that they had influence.

Confidence

The impact of the program appeared to fuel the super category called confidence and the mid-level categories are all aligned to this central theme. The design of the program, the impact of the sessions and particular topics, all helped to create this central outcome of the LD program.

“It helped me feel more confident.” // “Since this course I’m much more confident saying, ‘these are really important issues’ ... I never would have said that before the workshop.” // “The workshop enabled me to see myself through other eyes ...it gave me personally and professionally some confidence that allowed me to see my strengths and weaknesses.” // “... It gives you the confidence to say, ‘well you actually are part of this process...’” // “I’m certainly more confident in that kind of situation than I used to be...” // “... managing or working with people ...the course gave me a lot more strength, confidence and I think capacity to do that.” // “...I’m sitting forward and putting my two cents inI feel I can do it now whereas before I didn’t.”

Workplace Factors

This mid-level category explored work place factors that influenced leadership development transfer. To maximise outcomes from the LD program, individuals need time to consider their learning and practice, engage with others, and reflect. There were clear impediments that PCs faced in trying to implement these leadership development strategies. These two sub-categories are outlined below.

Workload Strain

“...the amount of work that being a Coordinator involves ... makes it impossible to be a good Coordinator.” // “Coordinators role could be more creative in an intellectual sense but I’m not sure that we’re ever given the opportunity ...” // “There is no admin. support at all. None and there’s less and less and there are more things to do.” // “...it’s a question of how long have you got to do all this kind of stuff ...We’re under a great workload, strain ...” // “... maybe that also reflects just how completely overloaded the working life is.”

These comments suggest that the role of the PC is becoming more complex and more demanding given increases in accountability and reporting in the higher education sector that have emerged in the past ten years. Accurate role descriptions and workload planning are, therefore, becoming more critical for this cohort to enable them to do their job properly. Concurrently, PCs need time release to engage in appropriate leadership development initiatives.

In addition to the workload strain associated with this role, there was also a strong message regarding how individuals are placed into these positions. There is little orientation or formalised support for novice Program Coordinators.

Figuring it out for Yourself

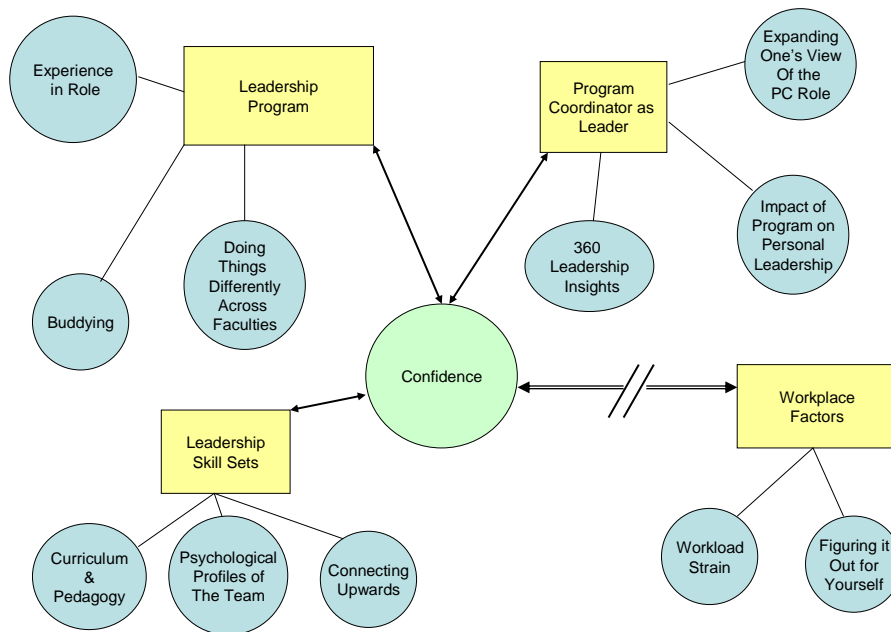
“...you pick it up as you go along.” // “it’s been an accelerating process of learning how this place works. It was a struggle to start with ...” // “... it did startle me in a way that so many PCs there didn’t seem to know those processes ...some of them had been put into positions really without the background...” // “I have been the ‘program coordinator’ for about four years ... and have no training whatsoever ... I wanted to do that particular course to figure out exactly what is the role of a program-coordinator.” // “I had to seek out how to do different parts of it that weren’t necessarily handed over at the beginning. ...there’s all these committees and forms and things you’ve got to get through ... which aren’t very well set out or explained anywhere.”

These quotations suggest that the leadership program that was developed for these individuals was important given the lack of development and orientation for the PC role. It also suggests that greater attention needs to be put in to place by management to develop appropriate role descriptions for this position within the organisation. Academic programs also have to think about succession planning and handover processes to reduce this issue about ‘figuring it out for yourself’.

Figure 1 provides a conceptual map of the major themes relating to the transfer of training experience that emerged from the data analysis above.

Figure 1: Program Coordinator Transfer of Training Experience

Academic Leadership Program for Course Coordinators – Concept Map



Discussion

In reviewing the four levels of evaluation described by Kirkpatrick (1996) the LD program appears to have produced some enduring learning outcomes, suggesting that a positive transfer of training had occurred. In examining the second level of evaluation, namely, the learning that they received, PCs noted that the program had influenced their confidence positively. They had learned much more about leadership and how leadership was important for the PC role. This confidence developed from the integrated content of the program, its contextualised nature, and the experience of learning alongside others in the same situation. Participants also learned some important leadership skills such as managing upwards, building and understanding teams as well as specific curriculum and pedagogical concepts to support their course(s). Of note was the impact on personal concepts of leadership and how more acutely aware they were about the importance of leadership in their role. For many, they did not conceptualise themselves as leaders at the start of the program because of

a perceived lack of formal power. The LD program was influential producing this shift in their perspective.

The value of having the Integrated Competing Values Framework (Vilkinas & Cartan 2001, 2006) to link their leadership knowledge and theory was extremely helpful, particularly given that most of the PCs in this study did not come from a management science background. It also helped them to look at their leadership learning in the program, and to consider gaps in their competence and capability for further development.

With respect to Kirpatrick's third level of evaluation, namely, behavioural changes as a result of the training program, evidence was found in a range of areas, which all helped to fuel confidence. For example, PCs reported being able to execute program review practices more effectively, and they took on more active and influential roles in the University and in Department/School based meetings. Furthermore, they thought more strategically about communicating and managing work flow processes within their team and in communications with their Head of School/Department. This heightened awareness of the importance of collective or distributive approaches to leadership, as noted by McRoy & Gibbs (2009) and Hellawell & Hancock (2001), was an excellent learning outcome as it is an appropriate leadership behaviour within the context of the collegial working culture in higher education.

With respect to the delivery of the leadership program, the use of peer coaching and the larger group was valuable in helping participants embed their learning and contextualise it to their discipline.(Blackmore, 2007). Listening to how other PCs worked within their role across the University, how they dealt with similar problems in different faculties, and how they became aware of the shared pressures all PCs faced, was extremely valuable and an important design factor in the success of the LD

program. This experiential and reflective approach helped to clarify discipline based practices, thereby promoting shared understanding within the diverse cohort, which has been acknowledged as an important factor in LD programs in the higher education sector.(Blackmore, 2007)

While these learning outcomes are described individually, in reality, they work together to build up the competency and capability of the program coordinator. These outcomes are also the result of having a leadership program that is designed using evidenced based practices such as those described earlier in the literature. (Preiss & Molina-Ray, 2007; Bolden, Gosling, & Petrov, 2008; Kerka, 1996; Ladyshevsky & Varey, 2005)

The use of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1971; Vygotsky, 1986) as a framework for the program, was influential in achieving the transfer of training outcomes. By developing specific skills in team building, managing upwards and communication for example, these help to build confidence, as it enables the PC to exercise their belief in themselves as leader. This occurs through a conceptual shift in themselves as leader, supported by the peer coaching and examples of others in the program. The opportunities for engagement with their peers, in a highly contextualised program, over the course of 20 weeks supported the learning experience. The success of this intervention should suggest to others that similar evidence based approaches should be integrated in to future LD initiatives.

What could have been improved, however, as a design factor in the LD program, was being more cognisant of the varying levels of experience within the group. For example, group work and peer coaching arrangements could have built in more strategic alliances between those PCs with more experience and those with less experience. This may have elevated the engagement of the more senior PCs as they

could have shared their knowledge more directly with less experienced PCs. Given that most PCs reported no formal orientation and training for the role prior to the LD experience, the linkage of less experienced PCs to those PCs with more experience may have elevated program learning outcomes further through the coaching and group interactions.

Of concern, but of no surprise, were workplace factors that reduced the efficacy and transfer of training outcomes within the PCs. Clearly, the PC role needs further role clarity and planning in the context of the university's human resource structure.

Individuals were very clear that there was no clear succession planning or orientation for these roles, a finding reported in the literature.(Southwell, Gannaway, Orrell, Chalmers, & Abraham, 2005) Yet the PC role is of strategic importance to a program's quality. As a result, directing new PCs into the LD program early is imperative. As mentioned earlier, using those PCs with more experience in the LD program as mentors or coaches would also help to address the issue of succession planning, particularly given the predicted exit of "Baby Boomers" and the loss of this knowledge from the higher education sector.

Workload strain was another problem raised by these PCs, consistent with what has been reported in the literature (Stigmar, 2008; Trowbridge & Bates, 2008; Webb & Murphy, 1997), which interferes with their ability to reflect and think critically about how they might further develop their leadership and transfer the training delivered through the program into practice. Yet, it is so critical to ongoing leadership development as noted by Vilkinas & Cartan (2001, 2006) that those involved in LD need the time to develop their integrator role. The integrator role is about reflective practice and critical thinking in regards to how one executes leadership. Individuals

need dedicated work time allocated to leadership development rather than it being 'added on' to an already straining workload.

This study did not address Kirkpatrick's fourth level of evaluation, namely, the results that are produced on program quality and student learning. Many variables impact on the quality of a program and it would be very difficult to measure how the leadership investment in the PC translated into deeper learning outcomes for students in the program. This would require a different experimental design and a longer time frame. As noted earlier, Gibbs (2006), Martin, Trigwell, Prosser, & Ramsden (2003), Prosser & Trigwell (1997) and Ramsden, Prosser, Trigwell, & Martin (2007) all argue that if department leaders facilitate a good teaching environment through their leadership, then instructors are more likely to use a student-focused approach, which in turn should produce better results and student outcomes due to a deep approach to learning. However, in a review of literature on LD and a link to enhanced student learning outcomes, Southwell & Morgan (2009) found no studies providing evidence in the higher education literature regarding this fourth level outcome. However, they report that a focus on distributed leadership, and LD initiatives that are sustained and focussed around a coherent sense of purpose, may influence staff values and behaviours, which in turn, have an impact in the classroom. This is certainly an important question and worthy of further research.

Conclusion

This qualitative study provides some evidence that transfer of training in a cohort of PCs who undertook a LD program designed specifically for this role in the higher education sector produces enduring changes in learned behaviour. Important design features of the program were the use of peer learning and coaching strategies.

Specific topics were particularly important and were either related to curriculum and pedagogy or in managing others and building influence, important concepts for distributed leadership within this role. Factors which negatively impacted on the transfer of training were high workloads and a lack of role clarity and succession planning. This study raises some interesting perspectives for Universities and academic staff developers charged with LD activities in the higher education sector. Clearly there is a need for leadership development initiatives in this cohort of staff within universities, and senior managers should be directing funds to this strategic initiative. However, careful thought needs to go into the design of these programs in order to produce successful transfer of training outcomes and benefits for academic programs. The role of the program coordinator itself needs further development and clarity within the university sector, and many of the workload, succession planning and orientation issues need to be addressed. Otherwise, these workplace factors may interfere with successful LD outcomes and result in less than positive outcomes for the PC and the courses they lead.

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Appendix 1: Academic Leadership for Course Coordinators Program

Module	Information
Course Coordinator as Academic Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the role of a course coordinator as an academic leader • Understand the concept of academic leadership in the context of leadership theory
Academic Leadership for Excellent Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse a curriculum map to ensure that graduate attributes are achieved through collective experience of units in a course. • Analyse alignment of unit learning outcomes, engaging learning experiences and appropriate assessment. • Evaluate the quality
Leading a Course Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpret key performance indicators for annual course review • Work with a course team to identify course strengths and devise strategies to maintain them • Work with a course team to identify course areas for improvement and devise strategies to address them
Developing Academic Leadership Capability 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the Integrated Competing Values Framework(iCVF)—a leadership measurement tool—to gauge personal leadership capabilities • Understand the importance of 360° appraisal in leadership development(using the iCVF) • Explore the value of peer coaching as a leadership development strategy
Building the Course Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise how their own personality type supports and limits their leadership style using the MBTI • Apply personality theory to manage individuals and teams
Building Academic Leadership Capability 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and understand personal leadership results using the Integrated Competing Values Framework (iCVF) • Formulate a leadership development plan • Strengthen peer coaching relationships
Communicating with Emotional Intelligence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop strategies to monitor self talk and its influence on personal performance • Use a range of processes to reframe and manage interpersonal conflict • Recognise key communication competencies for leadership
Building Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work effectively with staff and students in their sphere of influence • Identify performance problems using a framework • Plan a performance coaching conversation • Work with their line manager to deal with poor performance issues
Leading Change and Managing Resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the reasons for resistance to change • Apply a range of problem solving models to support the change management process
Developing Key Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map the dynamics of their own role and relationship with their Head of School/Area • Develop strategies to build influence in key peer relationships

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