VET Leadership for the Future

Contexts, characteristics and capabilities

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Executive summary

This study examines leadership in Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector. VET leaders make a vital and growing contribution to learners, industry and society, yet research on their work is limited. This has direct implications for ensuring leadership is most effective, and for framing evidence-based capacity development. To assist the sector, and in particular the people who find themselves running large and complex training organisations, this study paints a picture of what VET leaders do, and of how they can do it best.

Effective leadership is now more important and challenging than ever. Leaders are under constant pressure to be more responsive to the mounting expectations of government, the fluctuating requirements of industry, and the diverse needs of communities and individuals. Commercial pressures have been with VET leaders for some time, but they now face new pressures arising from the recognition of VET as a key vehicle for national workforce development and productivity. Increasingly, the Australian VET sector is becoming globally focused, domestically competitive, and is playing an ever-more vital role in social and economic life. VET leaders are central to determining how the sector continues to develop, deliver and expand, both as a vehicle for workforce development and for improving broader equity and social outcomes.

As VET leadership grows in significance so too does the clear and present need for sustained research. To further define and boost understanding of the profession, there is a need for greater insight into what leadership involves in the unique operating context of VET – what leaders do, what influences shape their work and, in particular, the defining characteristics of effective leadership. Leadership is commonly conceptualised in terms of task-specific competencies, but it is much more than just a 'to do' list. Hence this study goes behind the assumptions, delving deeper to build a more nuanced picture of the emotional, social and cognitive capabilities that underpin effective leadership. The Australian VET sector needs strategies for managing the looming leadership succession crisis, and to help VET leaders excel in times of change and uncertainty. Drawing together research-based insights, this study

defines strategies for identifying and developing future leaders and thereby assuring capacity across the system.

This research is multipronged in its approach, drawing together reviews of complex and often competing contexts, analyses of prior research, and results from a national survey of 327 practising VET leaders. While the study is squarely focused on VET leadership, it builds on prior research into those who lead learning and teaching in higher education. The application of a common capability framework yields insights on VET leadership, and also flags the emergence of a broader pan-tertiary form of leadership in Australia.

Analysing what VET leaders report doing in their jobs suggests that while they are attuned to the education-focused demands of their roles, they now need new capabilities to respond to internal and external developments. VET leaders have the capacity to manage industry and clients, but they need skills to deal with contexts that are made increasingly complex by tensions between competition and regulation. This requires the deployment of commercial practices in ways that are sensitive to underlying educational motives and objectives.

Interestingly, results from the national survey show that in many respects the concerns of leaders are only loosely aligned with the broader pressures confronting the VET sector – graduate outcomes, quality and education fundamentals. In broad terms, VET leaders are focused on input-side factors such as student numbers and funding. A challenge for the future involves developing a more outcomes-focused orientation, one centered on effective change implementation, on delivery, and on high-quality graduate outcomes.

To identify the powerful forces which shape leadership, the study established the criteria seen to mark out effective performance in each role. It highlighted a set of indicators identified by VET leaders as being the ones most important in making judgements about the effective delivery of each role. Identifying indicators of effective performance is important, as it is these which, ideally, drive leaders'

aspirations and behaviours. Leaders are driven by these outcomes which, in turn, play an important role in shaping leadership.

As noted, the study has produced an empirically-validated leadership capability framework. The capabilities are based on a conceptual model of leadership grounded in educational and psychological theory, and empirically validated in the survey of VET and, previously, higher education leaders. This framework affirms that leadership involves a dynamic and situationally contingent interplay between several cognitive, emotional and social factors, and the application of role-specific and generic knowledge and skills. Yet it is the underlying capabilities, rather than the explicit competencies, that leaders flag as most important for effective performance.

The future capacity of VET in Australia will be underpinned by the capability and regeneration of its leadership. Building the capacity of Australia's VET leaders, in terms of both capability and numbers, hinges in no small way on effective professional learning. Clearly professional learning is not essential for leadership – many leaders have little formal training in leadership prior to assuming their roles and perform well, but leadership training is a helpful and undoubtedly useful means of ensuring leadership is done well.

Yet this study's findings suggest that leadership programs may lack currency, and that there is a need to recast the focus and approach of leadership support and training. New programs need to focus on concrete change management skills, working through complex real-world problems, and leading change in ambiguous environments. The more authentic and active modes of learning were advocated by VET leaders, who expressed an overwhelming preference for practice-based and self-managed, as opposed to formal, forms of professional learning.

There is enormous scope for converting the research-driven picture of leadership formed through this study into a professional framework that captures different kinds and levels of performance. The outcomes of the current research are not singularly sufficient to underpin this framework, but they affirm the need and value of further work on this front. An integral part of this framework could be the specification of entry-level qualifications for VET leadership, as well as ongoing professional development.

Read together, findings from this study propel the need for new conceptualisations of VET leadership. While the results affirm prior trends, new narratives appear to be driving contemporary leadership – such as competition, commercial pressures, and developing change-capable cultures. Our understanding of leaders needs to change accordingly, and these new understandings need to be drafted in ways that advance policy and practice. Fundamentally, this should involve raising the profile of VET leadership, and of the attractiveness of this profession.

This study has advanced new thoughts about VET leadership, including that there is much more to be known. Two specific directions are defined. First, there is a need to build on this study in order to conduct larger national research on the tertiary workforce and leaders. Second, and optimally in a coordinated fashion, there is a need to replicate such inquiry in more detailed fashion within specific roles, and with sub-sections of the VET industry. Enacting more evidence-based approaches to leadership development should, in future, make such research routine.

Research focus and rationales

An overview of the study

This study examines leadership in Australia's vocational education and training (VET) sector. VET leaders make a vital and growing contribution to learners, industry and society, yet research on their work is limited. This has direct implications for ensuring leadership is most effective, and for framing evidence-based capacity development. To assist the sector, and in particular the people who find themselves running large and complex training organisations, this study paints a picture of what VET leaders do, and of how they can do it best.

Effective leadership is now more important and challenging than ever. Leaders are under constant pressure to be more responsive to the mounting expectations of government, the fluctuating requirements of industry, and the diverse needs of communities and individuals. Commercial pressures have been with VET leaders for some time, but they now face new pressures arising from the recognition of VET as a key vehicle for national workforce development and productivity. Increasingly, the Australian VET sector is becoming globally focused, domestically competitive, and is playing an ever-more vital role in social and economic life. VET leaders are central to determining how the sector continues to develop, deliver and expand, both as a vehicle for workforce development and for improving broader equity and social outcomes.

The Australian VET sector needs strategies for managing the looming leadership succession crisis, and for helping VET leaders excel in times of change and uncertainty. But too little is known about leaders and their work – what leaders do, what influences and aspirations shape their role, and what capabilities and competencies underpin effective performance.

This national study of both public and private providers recognises and contextualises leadership in a diverse and changing operating environment. The project was sponsored by the LH Martin Institute to identify the capabilities that characterise effective VET leadership, and to provide an evidence base for producing resources to develop and monitor these capabilities. To build a rich picture of VET leadership, it investigated the factors and challenges impacting on VET leaders, the influences and support mechanisms shaping leaders' roles, how leaders themselves judge effective performance, and how leaders feel capabilities are best supported and developed.

Specifically, the study sought to produce:

- a comprehensive evidence-based profile of effective VET leadership;
- an empirically-validated leadership capability framework;
- a defined suite of resources and strategies that organisations can use to develop leadership;
- insights into how to make leadership programs as engaging, relevant and productive as possible; and
- methodologies for linking the framework with leadership recruitment, development and review.

Australia's VET system is large and complex. This study did not seek to conflate this complexity or to provide anything resembling a 'comprehensive national picture of VET leadership'. Instead, the study sought to empirically test a conceptually grounded and practically focused summary of the characteristics of effective leadership. As such, it provides a robust foundation for stimulating and prioritising future work.

The VET sector is a highly contextualised learning and working environment which intersects with a complex range of contexts, involves a tapestry of government and private funding, is intimately linked with industry, blends facets of school and higher education, and has become an important export industry in its own right .

It is important not to underplay the value of generality, however. Leadership practice is a situated activity, but as the findings of this study affirm leaders move between organisations and industries, draw on a range of general capabilities, and are engaged in constant cycles of learning and change. In addition to detailed studies of individuals and organisations, building VET leadership for the future requires research such as the current study that looks at how leaders engage with complexity and bring about effective change.

The study focused on a relatively small but strategically broad sample of registered training organisations (RTOs). Australia's VET leaders work in around 5,000 RTOs. These include TAFE colleges, private providers, group training organisations, private enterprises, government agencies, community-based providers, and universities. To make this study manageable and ensure a sufficient number of responses, it focused on leaders

whose organisations enrol more than 1,000 equivalent full-time VET students.

Within these organisations, this study limited its definition of leaders to people in roles classified as senior managers "to whom other managers report" (Mulcahy, 2003: 14). While a broad definition, it helps to identify people who might colloquially be considered 'VET leaders'. But even within this definition identifying VET leaders is a complex task given the diverse ways that leadership roles are defined and the diverse array of management structures within RTOs. As the findings suggest, these people may be working as Chief Executive Officers, Institute Directors, Pro-Vice Chancellors, General Managers, Heads of Department, Associate Directors, Campus Managers, Training Managers, and Program Managers. All such roles represent people who are positioned as formal leaders in the VET context, but is should also be remembered that there are likely to be others who are engaged in leadership from an informal position. While beyond the scope of this study, there would be value in further work that reviewed the nature and impact of informal leadership in VET.

Contexts and rationales shaping the study

The nature and speed of change facing today's VET leaders has not been seen before. Managing diverse and at times conflicting priorities is placing new and escalating pressures on VET leaders and their organisations. Public funding per student is decreasing as regulatory activity increases. The need for highly skilled workers continues to climb, but the capacity to plan for growth is becoming more difficult. Competition between public and private providers is increasing, pressure is growing to create new sources of income from fee-for-service business activities, and not-for-profit institutions are becoming much more commercially focused. Students, both domestic and international, are more numerous, diverse and forthright about getting value for money and accessing better course information. Australia's training industry is operating in an increasingly international environment that brings with it new pressures and expectations.

This environment makes fresh demands of the VET industry and of its leaders. It drives a pressing need for

Key insight

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research that provides insights into how VET leaders respond in times of rapid and complex change. Such insight helps with planning and policy development, with professional learning, and with the practice of leadership itself. This report provides many insights into VET leadership, one of which is the under-studied nature of the profession and the need for more – much more – research and development. There is a profusion of literature on the generic concepts of 'leadership' and 'management', particularly as these relate to the business sector, but the amount of empirical insight situated in the unique operating context of vocational education and training in Australia is generally limited to mostly qualitative studies in public providers (Callan, 2001; Mulcahy, 2003; Callan, et al., 2007; Simmons, 2008).

The study responds to this need for mixed-method quantitative and qualitative research into VET leadership that is conceptually grounded and empirical in nature. Although compelling, informative and personable, a considerable amount of writing on leadership is anecdotal or normative. The current study took a different approach. It began with a conceptual framework that has already been tested in several large-scale studies of effective leadership in the school and higher education sectors (Scott, 2003; Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). It then used this platform to capture a large amount of data from more than 300 leaders, and to convert this into findings and recommendations that move systematically beyond current knowledge.

The study responds to the need to understand the characteristics of effective VET leadership – what they are and how they interconnect. It follows that changes to policy, operating and learning environments will bring changes to the nature of leadership in the VET sector. To be effective, VET leaders need a detailed knowledge of their industry along with a range of personal and organisational skills. While these competencies are necessary, however, they are not sufficient. As these findings affirm, VET leadership is more than a list of task-specific competencies. Today's leaders also require a deft understanding of commercial matters and the capacity to foresee and plan for uncertain situations and implement effective strategies for change. It is critical that we develop a better understanding of what capabilities are central to effective leadership in this sector. Knowing how to develop these, through teaching and experience, is essential.

- Looming succession crisis from large-scale staff departure over next decade

- Great challenges facing tertiary institutions – effective leadership now more important than ever

- Need for more and better insight on identifying and developing leaders

- Need for insights on leadership nuanced by the unique operating context of VET

- Profile leaders – little information is available on leaders' backgrounds or daily experiences

- Most conceptions of leadership list task-specific competencies – leadership is more than a 'to do' list

- Much leadership research based on concept and anecdote, not theory and evidence

- The capabilities that underpin effective leadership are hitherto undefined

- Optimum approaches for leadership selection and learning untested

Figure 1: Factors driving this study

There is a need to build a general picture of the VET leadership workforce, a workforce that will change rapidly over the next decade with retirements and leakage to other industries. While little is known about the demography of the VET workforce, enough information exists to confirm a looming succession crisis (NCVER, 2009; Brown & McKenzie, 2009). Like the Australian workforce in general (Skills Australia, 2010), the VET workforce is aging, even more so the age profile of tertiary leaders (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). This presents an urgent need to build a robust picture of leadership and, in particular, what effective practice involves and how this can be learned and developed. This study did not include large-scale analysis of the demography of Australia's VET leaders, (a gap in current knowledge), but it did incorporate analysis of how leadership varies and is experienced by different groups. Such insight is vital for understanding the attractiveness of and pathways into VET leadership.

How leaders respond to uncertainties and change is an underpinning driver for this study – the need to understand how to develop leadership capability, and hence the overall capacity in the sector. This has been investigated through the empirical work and, importantly, through reference to the capabilities linked with effective performance.

This study comes at a time when a wide range of factors are driving the need for more and better understanding of VET leadership, and how leaders and leadership can be developed. Figure 1 shortlists key drivers that frame the study's perspective, stance and outcomes.

An overview of the research approach

As noted, this study deployed a range of research methods. An overview of the study's approach is provided here, with more detailed information provided in Appendix 1.

The project began in October 2008 and the main fieldwork was concluded in early 2010. The project involved a partnership between the LH Martin Institute, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and more than 400 leaders at more than 40 training organisations.

A range of background reviews were conducted – reviews of research literature and policy reports, and of contemporary operating environments. Peter Noonan prepared a review of the contexts relevant to contemporary VET leadership in Australia. John Mitchell prepared a review of existing research on the nature and experience of VET leadership. Together, these reviews provided a vital contextual dimension to the project.

An iterative approach was then used to develop the survey instrument that operationalises the capability framework. This instrument was adapted from a prior study of higher education leaders led by Geoff Scott, Hamish Coates and Michelle Anderson (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). Initially, insights from the background reviews were used to refine the instrument. Feedback on this draft was obtained through interviews with around a dozen senior VET leaders. The instrument was further revised and enhanced, and then deployed in a data collection that was national in scope.

An initial draft of the study's results was produced. A series of regional and institution-specific workshops helped test the project team's preliminary analyses and disseminate research findings. Further analyses were conducted to position and focus the results, and shape up the key findings.

The final phase of the project involved reporting research findings and developing resources to enhance practice. Key outputs include this project report, an online leadership learning system, and summary reports and papers on the key findings for wide dissemination across the VET sector.

The flow of this report

The next chapter presents a broad review of the contexts surrounding VET leadership, focusing in particular on key external drivers that shape leaders' work. Understanding these dynamics is essential to building a considered picture of what leadership involves.

Chapter three moves the focus squarely back to leaders and leadership – the nature of leadership, how it differs from management, what leaders do as part of their roles, and what they see as the indicators that shape their performance. This chapter reviews how VET leaders experience and respond to the change pressures, contexts, influences and challenges identified in chapter two.

Chapter four reviews the contexts shaping leadership. Looking at leaders' perceptions is informative, and it also provides background for detailed examination of leadership capability. The results presented in this chapter suggest that current methods used to identify, select and evaluate leaders may need to be significantly revised.

Chapter five provides an analysis of how, based on reports from the 327 responding leaders, VET leadership can be learned. The analysis reviews how leadership programs could be best focused, and the delivery approaches that are likely to be most effective.

The final chapter brings together key findings into an integrated picture. It offers conclusions and recommendations for enhancing VET leadership.

Each chapter concludes with a summary and series of suggestions. Evidence-based strategies for improving practice are given.

Contexts shaping VET leadership

Introduction

VET leaders invariably have to navigate a complex set of pedagogical, industrial, social, organisational and political challenges. Exploring these forces provides an important backdrop for understanding the performance and experience of leadership.

This chapter analyses the broad contexts that shape VET leadership. It highlights the diversity of VET providers and the importance of this diversity in terms of leadership models, identifies the key drivers that will influence VET provision in the future, and summarises the implications of these drivers for VET leadership models.

For readers who have less familiarity about the make-up of Australia's VET system this chapter provides a broad overview. For all readers, this chapter captures the enormous complexities that characterise vocational education in Australia. The chapter sets the scene for the following chapter, which discusses the study's findings on how VET leaders are responding to and dealing with these rapidly changing contexts.

The diversity of the VET sector

VET leaders work in a very diverse industry. This diversity is reflected in terms of provider size, location, learner types, scope and mode of delivery, governance, internal structures, markets and the jurisdictions within which registered training organisations operate.

Around 5,000 RTOs provide nationally recognised VET qualifications in Australia. These RTOs range from TAFE institutions that employ thousands of staff, enrol tens of thousands of students and generate revenue in excess of $150 million per annum, to very small organisations that employ only a handful of staff, enrol only a few hundred students and generate revenue of several thousands of dollars.

RTOs use a diverse range of ownership models. Even within the public sector, some public TAFE institutions are semi-independent statutory authorities with governing boards, while others are business units within government departments. Some are no longer branded as TAFE institutions and others operate within dual

sector (both VET and higher education) universities or offer higher education as well as VET courses.

There is even more diversity amongst non government RTOs. Some are subsidiaries of dual-sector education and training companies, some are publicly listed companies. Most are privately owned or are owned and managed by community and not for profit organisations. Enterprise RTOs are often operated by the training and development units of larger enterprises. Many government and non government schools operate as RTOs also under diverse governance models.

There is great diversity in the mission and purpose of RTOs. Public TAFE institutions essentially serve the public interest, and must be highly responsive to government policies and priorities – although most are highly engaged in the commercial training market. Many community and not for profit RTOs also see their role in public interest terms, although less directly aligned with immediate government policies and priorities. Some of these RTOs also operate in private and commercial fee for service markets. Conversely, for profit private RTOs are not directly aligned with government policies and priorities, but many provide government funded or government subsidised programmes, while others operate mainly in commercial and private markets.

There are important differences in the role and mission of public institutions. Some directly serve local and regional communities and Indigenous populations, while other metropolitan based institutions may serve students and industries across metropolitan areas and may be the principal provider for particular industry sectors. Historically, the TAFE system has developed a strong focus on equity and 'second chance' education (now referred to as social inclusion). Some non government RTOs also explicitly focus in this area.

RTOs operate across a diverse range of markets: government funded programs, full-fee programs (increasingly through income contingent loans), full-fee international students, through commercial training contracts with enterprises in local, national and international markets and through by providing tailored services to enterprises from training needs assessment, delivery, and product development and design.

Delivery strategies vary significantly – from traditional face-to-face delivery, workplace delivery, e-learning and

blended approaches, with some providers focusing almost exclusively on specific strategies such as workplace delivery. A distinguishing feature of VET is that most VET qualifications reflect competency outcomes specified by external industry groups with a high degree of prescription in their structure and content.

RTOs offer qualifications to diverse groups of learners ranging from those with minimal levels of formal education and workplace competence to learners engaged in or seeking to enter occupations requiring high levels of knowledge and technical competence.

RTO staffing and management models vary widely. Some, particularly larger and public RTOs, have a much higher level of full-time staff although they also employ many casual and sessional staff. Many smaller RTOs employ staff on an ad-hoc basis. Employment conditions also vary widely. Managers in public institutions operate under the jurisdiction of broad industrial agreements with little discretion over employment arrangements compared to their counterparts in the non government sector.

Further diversity is created by the differing policies and priorities of the state and territory governments, in particular RTOs in Victoria face major opportunities and challenges as a consequence of demand- and entitlement-based funding reforms.

Economic and labour market contexts

Although the global financial crisis had a far less substantial impact in Australia than in other countries, there was a notable effect on labour market opportunities for young people during 2009, including reductions in apprenticeships and traineeships. These were associated with fluctuations in the labour market, with major job losses in industries and occupations traditionally served by VET.

A decline in the rate of employment growth, possible falls in investment by firms in education and training and increased investment by government in counter cyclical measures, will likely result in government policies, programs and funding priorities having an

even stronger influence on VET than they had in recent years. Declines in private sector investment and slow employment growth may also threaten the revenue base of providers that are highly focussed on enterprise based, fee-for-service delivery.

These economic and labour market pressures influence the nature of the VET student base, with likely increases in the number of full time students (with attendant pressure on student services and facilities and learner support) and reductions in the number of students engaged in workplace learning or combinations of work-based and institutional delivery such as apprenticeships. For example, apprenticeship and traineeship commencements declined by 6.2 percent by June 2009 compared to the same period in 2008, and full-time student enrolments had already increased by 4.7 percent in 2008 – before the full impact of the economic crises (NCVER, 2009).

The impacts of the downturn on the structure of the labour market, also highlights the need for VET learners to acquire the broad skills and capabilities required to effectively participate in the future labour market.

A key challenge for VET providers, and therefore for VET leaders, is capitalising challenges and opportunities posed by such economic slowdowns. In particular, to develop innovative programs and teaching and learning strategies to assist displaced workers, new entrants and re-training existing workers to develop the skills and capabilities to enter a potentially different workforce as the economy recovers.

Policy drivers shaping leadership

For all types of providers, national and state level policies play a formative role in directing and shaping VET in Australia. Government policy has wide-ranging implications for direct and indirect forms of funding, regulation and governance, transnational and export opportunities, workforce demands that shape student and teacher flows, and also the broader social drivers that shape training operations and hence VET leadership.

For current purposes, these diverse and intersecting forces are explored under the headings of productivity

Managing change, managing student diversity and equity needs and meeting the needs of the industry.

and workforce participation, social inclusion, trends towards a broader tertiary sector, and national regulation. Reviewing recent trends in these areas paints an important backdrop to the subsequent analysis of leaders' perceptions in such areas, not least by underlining the inherent and growing complexity of leading training organisations in Australia.

Productivity and workforce participation

As highlighted above, government policy at both a state and national level remains strongly focused on the connection between skills productivity and economic growth, assumptions that have underpinned the development of the national VET system in Australia over the past two decades.

Recent specific government outcomes and measures emphasise:

- the importance of foundation skills and the need to raise overall levels of educational attainment to support increased skill levels and higher levels of workforce participation and productivity;

- the importance of skills and broader individual and workforce capabilities essential for effective participation in the labour market of the future;

- a closer relationship between the supply of skills and labour market needs; recognising that skills shortages have both quantitative dimensions (aggregate supply and demand) and qualitative dimensions (the extent to which qualified workers have relevant skills); and

- a new focus on how skills are used, recognising that skills utilisation in firms underpins productivity growth – not just skills acquisition.

In the last few years these measures led to a joint project between the National Quality Council and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Skills Working Group on VET Products for the 21st Century (TVET, 2008). This project promises to deliver a stronger focus on VET learners achieving both occupational and job related skills as well as improved levels of literacy and numeracy, the capacity for further learning and the

capacity to adapt rapidly to changing labour market circumstances.

This kind of emphasis places a greater premium in VET on the quality of outcomes for individual learners and in the importance of high quality teaching and learning and assessment practices. It affirms a stronger focus on VET learners acquiring full qualifications, particularly by those without initial qualifications, not only to meet the COAG targets but also to ensure that learners develop the skills and capabilities to effectively participate in the workforce throughout their adult lives.

Such improvements will best be achieved through high-quality professional practice within VET providers and not just through the design of qualifications or by regulatory compliance. Good professional practice flows from, and must be sustained by, strong leadership in education and training providers, by creating a culture and establishing systems which create high expectations of both staff and learners and provides a supportive teaching and learning environment.

Social inclusion

The COAG productivity agenda also has a strong focus on improving participation, attainment and outcomes for individuals and groups with low levels of attainment through coordinated strategies across all sectors of education and training. This emphasis represents a powerful consensus between both economists and those committed to equity in VET that improved equity in education, training and employment is essential to Australia's future economic and social well being as workforce skills requirements intensify and the working population ages.

Indigenous education and training is a particular priority across all sectors of education and training. Priority for access to publicly funded training is also likely to be increasingly directed to improving equity in access to and outcomes from VET.

The issue of equity is strongly related to the quality of teaching and learning, learner support and improved outcomes for VET learners as VET learners achieving only lower level qualifications or not completing qualifications receive poor returns in terms of labour market outcomes and participation in further learning.

Effective teaching and learning and assessment strategies, and strategies to engage, support and enable learners to complete courses and progress to further learning are essentially driven at the provider level and require strong and sustained leadership and commitment.

Trends towards a broader tertiary sector

Another important government policy driver for VET relates to decisions taken to date on the outcomes of the Review of Australian Higher Education (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) and its recommendations in relation to forming a broader tertiary education sector. The review supported the concept of a broader tertiary sector encompassing both VET and higher education, and argued that VET diplomas and advanced diplomas should be seen as part of Australia's higher education effort, as is the case with equivalent qualifications in other OECD countries. The review strongly argued for distinctiveness of the VET and higher education systems to ensure diversity of provision across the distinct sectors of the labour market and student cohorts served by each system.

The review made a number of recommendations to ensure that student choices were not distorted by differing funding models between the sectors. These included extending its proposal for a student entitlement supported by income contingent loans to VET diplomas and advanced diplomas in the first instance, and other qualifications thereafter, and by establishing complementary national regulatory frameworks for VET and higher education, administered by a national tertiary education regulator. The review also recommended improvements to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) – a classification that, broadly put, describes different fields and levels of qualification – to strengthen articulation and credit transfer pathways between VET and higher education.

However the jury is still out on the extent to which a more integrated tertiary education sector will evolve

Interpreting government policy from a customer centric position, and supporting and influencing senior leadership in the organisation and across the sector.

in Australia. The evolution of a broader tertiary sector will more likely reflect decisions taken by individual institutions to operate in both sectors or to enter into partnerships with institutions in other sectors. Unless the Bradley review recommendations to extend tertiary education learner entitlements to VET are adopted, it is difficult to see significant growth in higher education provision by VET providers (an option which some have proposed and to which some individual VET institutions aspire). The distinctive qualification types and pedagogy of the VET and higher education sectors are likely to continue but within a framework of more effective credit recognition and pathways. Demand from both individual learners and industry for improved pathways, integrated responses to workforce needs and their capacity to move more easily across the tertiary sector are nonetheless likely to increase.

Effective and informed leadership will be required in VET institutions to clarify and plan the role of each institution in the broader tertiary sector, to anticipate and plan for changes from national regulation in both sectors, to capitalise on new pathway possibilities opening up as a consequence of reforms to the AQF and to negotiate partnership agreements with higher education institutions where these are consistent with the organisation's strategic intent.

Strengthened national regulation

As highlighted, COAG has agreed to a proposal from the Australian Government to establish a national VET regulator from 2011 as a federal statutory body, assuming the responsibilities of the state and territory registration and accreditation bodies. Western Australia and Victoria have not supported this decision, however.

COAG also agreed to measures to strengthen the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF), mainly in response to concerns about provider quality and provider failure in international student markets. These measures focus mainly on stronger standards for initial registration of providers and strengthened powers for regulators in relation to assessing the financial viability of providers.

The move to national regulation of VET should reduce inconsistencies in the interpretation and application

of the AQTF between jurisdictions which have been a source of both cost and frustration to RTOs operating in multiple states and territories. For providers with well developed relationships with the existing state based bodies, and an understanding of the approaches to regulation within their home jurisdiction, the move to a different and national regulator has major implications. Leaders will need to plan for the transition to the new national regulator, including self assessment against the revised AQTF standards.

Other drivers shaping leadership

National VET governance

The Australian VET system is funded, regulated and governed under an inter-governmental National Partnership Agreement, which in various forms has been in operation since 1992. Under this agreement, VET governance and funding is a shared responsibility between the federal and state governments.

In the latter years of the Howard Government, there was a growing trend towards funding of federal initiatives (Australian Technical Colleges and Skills Vouchers) outside of the federal and state VET agreement. The election policy of the Rudd Government also foreshadowed that additional federal funding would be driven by nationally assessed industry need and allocated through national Industry Skills Councils with a state contribution. However since its election, the Rudd/Gillard Government has strongly recommitted itself to national reforms through COAG under a cooperative federalist model and as part of broader reforms to federal and state relations. The achievement of the productivity and workforce participation goals set out above and other agreed measures are the subject of the National Agreement on Skills and Workforce Development between the federal and state governments.

Additional federal funding under the Productivity Places Program was initially allocated directly by the Australian Government, but under a separate COAG agreement is now allocated through the states. While the government

Annual growth (%)
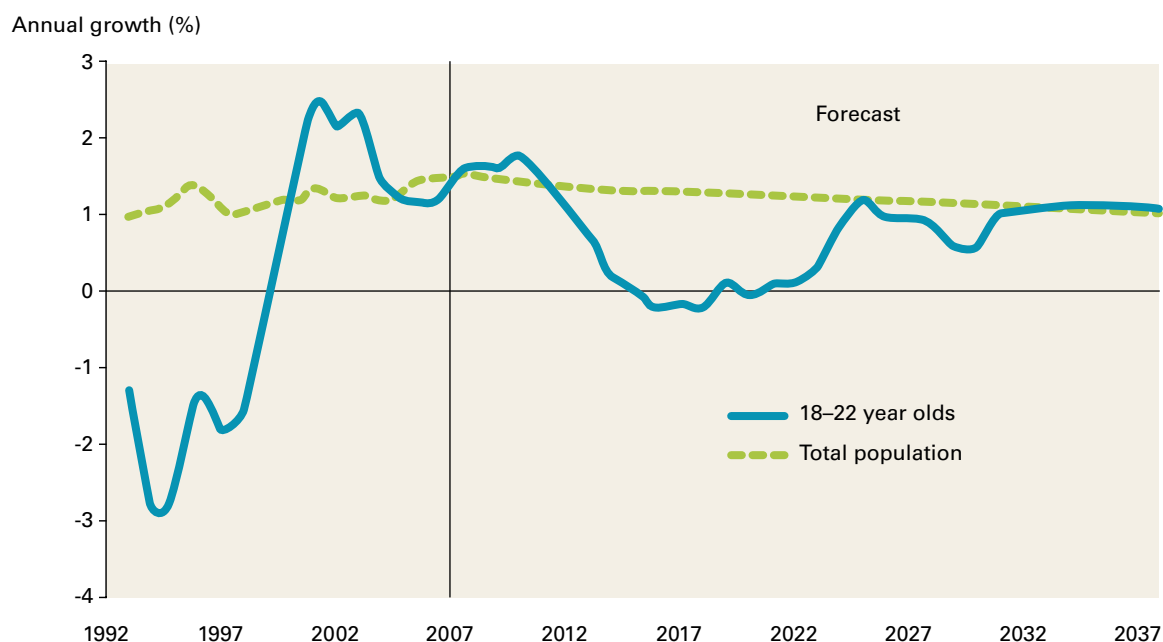
Figure 2: Australia's 18 to 22 year old age cohort
Source: Access Economics (2008)

has identified its required outcomes through that agreement (such as contestability, a stronger focus on full qualification completions, existing workforce retraining), the new national VET agreements see a return to the federalist model for VET governance and funding in Australia, largely at the heads of government rather than ministerial level. The exception to this federalist approach is in the decision by COAG under strong pressure from the federal to establish a national VET regulator as a federal statutory authority (and not under a devolved and joint governance model as some states proposed).

As these changes imply, VET leaders will need to continue to be aware of both national and state policies and priorities and be able to manage the complexities and ambiguities which inevitably flow from intergovernmental agreements. Within jurisdictions, VET leaders will face different challenges. In Victoria, for instance, the state's skills reforms with demand-based funding, eligibility criteria for different learner cohorts to access different levels of public subsidies and full contestability for public funding is being implemented in 2010 and 2011.

Demographic change

Another major driver that will influence the nature and pattern of VET provision in the future is demographic change, in terms of population growth in aggregate terms and in particular localities and the impact of population aging.

There are two overarching points to make about the impact of these trends. First, unlike some other OECD countries there are signs that Australia's population will continue to grow over the next few decades, driven by an increased birth rate and strong immigration. Notwithstanding this growth, population growth in the 18 to 22 age cohort will fall until the end of the decade as a consequence of low birth rates in previous decades (see Figure 2). Although the Australian population has grown strongly in recent years, the impact of increased birth rates will not be felt for at least a decade in post-school education, while migrants entering Australia comprise both older and younger cohorts.

The other driver is that the impact of population growth is very unevenly spread. While Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast population growth to 2018 will exceed three per

cent, in other areas (such as eastern Sydney) growth will be under one per cent. Other regions will record population declines (such as northern and western South Australia). Even in some regions recording population growth, however, the 15 to 24 year old age populations will actually decline. Indeed, this age cohort will decline in 23 regions across Australia including in some capital cities.

These trends highlight the challenges which lie ahead for people leading RTOs in these regions to respond to this demographic context. Some will have to manage high levels of growth in demand simply as a consequence of population growth, while others will have to actively stimulate demand among older potential learners and existing workers.

Two specific leadership challenges emerge. The first is the need for very different approaches to marketing, course structures, pedagogy and delivery for older learners, particularly those with low skills levels and who are disengaged from learning. The second is the need for intersectoral partnerships and approaches to manage the consequences of both population growth and population decline.

The financial outlook for VET

As highlighted, a major consequence of the recent economic downturn has been deterioration in the financial position of the federal and state governments (although this has not been as severe as first projected or as experienced in other countries). Australian Government expenditure on VET, based on forward estimates, will grow from $2.7 million in 2007/08 to $3.6 billion in 2012/13 principally to implement its Productivity Places Initiative with a one-off injection of $200 million in capital funding However, federal VET expenditure is projected to continue at those levels at a time when its higher education expenditure will increase to meet the target of 40 percent of 25 to 34 year olds holding a degree by 2025.

As outlined above, additional federal VET funding will be allocated through the states and, although national agreements require the states to achieve agreed outputs, there is no requirement for the states to maintain expenditure on VET.

Victoria has announced an additional $316 million over four years through its skills reforms package, although TAFEs will face increasing levels of competition for that funding. Other states have not provided forward estimates of expenditure on VET beyond the 2008/09 financial year, and some state VET systems have experienced budget reductions in recent years. All face, at best, a static resourcing environment.

The most significant area of increase in VET revenue between 2004 and 2008 has been in fee-for-service activity, comprising both services to enterprises and full fee programs to domestic and international students. These revenue sources, particularly from international students, are now threatened by a range of domestic and international forces, with RTOs unable to depend on these revenue streams as a sustainable source of income.

At best, the total revenue outlook for VET is uncertain and, at worst, there may be a real decline in public revenue as a consequence of the budgetary position of state governments at a time when governments have set important policy objectives for VET including ambitious qualification attainment targets. In contrast, the higher education sector will commence a period of funded growth with strong incentives for institutions to expand their undergraduate intakes, possibly in competition rather than collaboration, with VET.

Managing ever-changing expectations against a static or declining resources base with increased and demand-based funding in higher education may well be the biggest challenge VET leaders face in the next few years. Doing more with less – in particular, graduating more people with high-standard qualifications while at the same time sourcing funding and staffing resources – would appear to be the main challenge facing Australia's VET leaders.

Findings and implications

The above analysis shows a continuing context of rapid change for VET in Australia with potentially major impacts in the short to medium term on the level and pattern of demand for provision and for innovative strategies that address the new realities of the economy and the labour market. In summary, the review has shown that:

- VET will be more than ever at the centre of national economic, labour market and policy but with a new emphasis on assisting individuals adversely affected by the economic slowdown and as part of rebuilding Australia's social and capital infrastructure to assist with economic recovery.

- The emphasis in the COAG process on building levels of educational attainment and workforce participation and social inclusion, together with intensifying skills needs and uncertain future labour market needs, will see a stronger focus on outcomes for qualified individuals Additionally, this will result in a renewed commitment to high quality learning outcomes for individuals through a stronger focus on professional and provider capability.

- A particular focus will, and must, be the needs of learners who participate least or, if they do participate, gain least from the current system.

- There will be increasing emphasis on improved student movement between VET and higher education including through credit-based pathways and potentially new forms of collaboration between VET and higher education including multi sector institutions. But the development of a broader tertiary education sector in Australia will be shaped more by the decisions of individual institutions than systemic decisions taken by government.

- VET regulation is likely to progressively become a national responsibility and consequently more nationally consistent, possibly administered by a single national tertiary regulator in 2013.

- Demographic change will impact differentially across regions and for providers, but many RTOs face declining demand from the youth cohort and must look to active strategies to stimulate and meet demand amongst older learners.

- VET funding will, to varying degrees across jurisdictions, be increasingly contestable and most likely be managed though a federalist model.

- Despite the policy ambitions set for VET in common with other areas of the public sector, the resourcing outlook for VET is weak with, at best static and possibly declining, real levels of expenditure in most jurisdictions, significant declines in revenue from international markets particularly for some private RTOs.

Perhaps more so than in other areas of education, the direction and operation of VET organisations is influenced by contingent and often competing policy developments and changes. As the following chapters affirm, there are a range of other forces shaping VET organisations and leaders in Australia, including industry pressures, international competition, and staffing challenges. These and other factors create new imperatives for VET leaders, the need for new relationships, new opportunities, new challenges and, above all, the need for well informed and decisive leadership and change management.

The experience of VET leaders

Introduction

This chapter illuminates the world of the VET leader in the context of the broader political economic and social concerns described in the previous chapter – what leaders do, what pressures shape their work, and what they hold up as markers of effective performance. The analyses present important findings on the disjunctures between how leadership is formalised in titles, position descriptions and performance management, and the daily realities of VET leadership.

Leadership is often discussed through a normative lens by drawing on a series of philosophies, typologies or methodologies. Leadership has been discussed in terms of trait or 'great person' theories, which assume that people who have the gift to lead possess certain innate characteristics. Behavioural theories, in contrast, focus on observed behaviours, making minimal assumptions about prior or underpinning qualities. Situational perspectives view leadership as a contextualised activity that is shaped by contingencies and the ways in which leaders and followers transact or transform each other. Compared with trait and behavioural theories, the situational lens separates the process from the person – leadership from leading – and starts a trend continued with conceptions of leadership that see it as distributed or participatory in nature. The end of this continuum is occupied by what could be termed 'universal' or even 'phantom' leadership, in which leadership is an organisation-wide phenomenon where 'everyone is considered a leader' or in which formal leadership roles are dispersed rather than concentrated in select roles. The conceptual model that underpins this study, which is introduced in the next chapter, integrates each of these perspectives.

Conceptual models are important to developing our understanding of VET leadership, but viewing leadership solely through this lens invariably compresses its nuance and substance. The conditions under which VET managers and leaders are required to operate is "a moving feast, being dictated in part by the forces of change" (Falk and Smith, 2003: 14). Hence this chapter not only takes account of normative perspectives, policy contexts and research insights, but builds on these to explore insights from the national survey of VET leaders. Reviewing these results helps build a picture of contemporary VET leadership in Australia from a nuanced evidence base.

Who responding leaders are

An edge, and at the same time constraint, of the current study is that it is based on the perception of practising leaders. This helps delve into the ways VET leaders see their work, into its intrinsic qualities and characteristics. Like any complex phenomenon leadership can be studied from many angles, and future research will extend the insights of the leaders' reported here.

To frame the study's empirical insights it is helpful to flag characteristics of the respondent sample. In reviewing these, it is useful to consider as a counterpoint the extent to which the leaders' demography reflects Australia's VET student or staff populations. Of the 327 responses from 27 RTOs:

- 61.5 per cent were from a public institution, 9.8 per cent were from a private RTO, and 28.7 per cent were from a dual-sector university;

- just over half – 54.7 per cent – were female;

- 4.6 per cent were between 25 and 35 years of age, 16.8 per cent were between 36 and 45, 53.5 per cent were between 46 and 55, 24.2 per cent were between 56 and 65, and just 0.9 per cent were over 65;

- about half (48.6%) had a background in the education industry, and the largest industry background outside this was business (9.8%);

- a large number of roles were identified, with just under a fifth being in the top two leadership ranks, just under a fifth having a program or school level directorship, slightly more than half having a management position, and small number identifying as teachers;

- around a sixth (16.4%) had held their current role for under a year, while the largest proportion (44.1%) had held their role for between one and three years and 39.5% had held their role for more than four years;

- most (55.3%) intended to apply for another VET leadership role within the next five years; and

- just over two-thirds (68.4%) previously held a leadership role outside an RTO.

These figures are provided mainly as background to the analyses that follow, but a few trends jump out.

While it may be an artefact of the response process, it is interesting to note that the age of the leaders appears younger than might be expected given the workforce regeneration challenges facing the sector. Further, the workforce appears rather mobile, with many leaders only being in their jobs for short stints, and more than half planning to look for new opportunities. Around two-thirds have transitioned into the VET sector from another industry, again prompting reflection on the extent of mobility.

The purpose of this study was not to produce statistical estimates representative of a specific population. In turn, a purposive rather than probabilistic sampling approach was used. This involved developing strata for RTOs and leaders, and using a snowballing technique to recruit organisations and leaders into the study. Very few organisations that were approached declined to participate, but the purposive selection approach means that only those organisations willing to participate became involved. Further, while RTO contacts were given parameters to guide their selection of target leaders, cross-validating population lists to ensure their comparability across organisations is inherently difficult

for reasons explored below. The results may be further influenced by the voluntary nature of the response process and hence biased towards certain kinds of leaders. These uncertainties are compounded by the previously identified lack of national statistics on the VET workforce.

Brief reflection and caution on the classifications of leaders' roles is helpful. Leaders' roles are almost necessarily peculiar to the organisation and industry in which they work, and are rarely generalisable or linearly defined. Role titles reflect organisational histories and aspirations, as well as professional status and preference. They say much about the many different descriptions and conceptualisation of RTO leaders.

Respondents were asked to provide an open-ended description of their role in the survey. A vast variety of role labels were provided as anticipated, and an effort was made to categorise in terms of the three levels and five groups listed in Table 1. These groupings conflate considerable role and organisational diversity and must be treated as indicative. They do, however, provide a basis for analysis and reporting.

Table 1: Role classifications used in this study

Level	Role	Indicative position titles
Senior strategic leader	Chief executive	Chief Executive Officer, Executive Director, Managing Director, General Manager, Director
	Senior executive	Associate PVC, Chief Finance Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Dean, Deputy Chief Executive, Deputy Director, Deputy Director TAFE, Executive Director Academic, PVC VET, Registrar
Senior manager	Education manager	Director Education, Director of Academic Services, Director of Course Development, Director of Studies, Director of Teaching and Learning, Educational Manager, Head of Department, Head of School, Learning Portfolio Manager, Learning Portfolio Manager, Learning Programs Manager, Manager Educational Programs, Program Coordinator, Program Manager, Program Manager, Training Manager
	Corporate manager	Business Development Manager, Director Planning, Director Strategy and Performance, Director, Corporate Services, Director, Workforce Development, Faculty Administration Manager, Financial Development Manager, IT manager, Manager Financial Development
Senior practitioner	Senior educator	Course Manager Head Teacher Senior Educator

Key insight

Senior executives report a capacity to shepherd their organisation forwards within manageable parameters, whereas leaders with more operational roles sound increasingly distressed and distracted – trying to manage amid uncertain challenges and without the support or space required to deliver against their role.

How VET leaders see their world

Survey respondents were invited to develop and explain an analogy that best describes what it was like to be in their current VET leadership role. These analogies offer an inviting entrée into the world of the leader. Importantly, they reveal how leaders see themselves and their work – its challenges, influences and opportunities.

Table 2 reports a subset of these analogies sorted by five very broad role classifications. A note of caution on these role classifications is required. Respondents were asked to provide an open-ended description of their role in the survey. A great variety of role labels were provided as anticipated, and an effort was made to categorise these under the five generic headings. These groupings conflate considerable role and organisational diversity and must be treated as indicative.

While the role groupings are tentative, sorting by role is informative, for it shows a movement through different types and pressures of leadership – from 'being a magician' and 'running a very small country with several different and distinct cultures', to 'being on a roller coaster', 'juggling with lots of balls', and 'owning a fantastic car – having the keys and a full tank of petrol, but very little of the map to where we are going' and 'skating on thin ice'.

The analogies put particular focus on the pressures and freedoms that shape leaders' work, and in particular their lack of a sense of control and self-efficacy. Senior executives report a capacity to shepherd their

organisation forwards within manageable parameters, whereas leaders with more operational roles sound increasingly distressed and distracted – trying to manage amid uncertain challenges and without the support or space required to deliver against their role.

These analogies resonate with many subsequent results, highlighting that leadership in VET involves complex navigation of uncertainty, initiating and dealing with change, working with cumbersome organisational cultures and processes, and dealing with the unexpected.

Read broadly, analysis of the hundreds of analogies provided reveal that many VET leaders may not see themselves as 'leaders' or, that they do not see themselves having sufficient capacity to lead change. This reflects the complex and ever changing policy, funding and regulatory environment within which VET leaders operate. The analogies given by many leaders spotlight efforts to struggle or cope with rather than enact and deliver effective change. One respondent likened the job to 'being in a blender with the government pouring in more and more policy, scrutiny, compliance and audits, at the same time dimming the lights.' This underlines the need affirmed in many results in Table 2, to define the profession of the VET leader.

Being a meerkat, spending time in the burrow (office) getting on with stuff, and regularly sticking my head out so I know what is going on and immediately respond to what's important for survival.

Table 2: VET leaders' analogies for their work

Role	Leadership analogy
Chief executive	Balancing a seesaw on an ocean liner in the high seas.
	Being a magician.
	It often feels like being on a roller coaster – lots of ups and downs but an exciting journey all the same.
	Juggler who is juggling more balls in the air than you have routinely practiced. As you become adept at the number of balls in the air, the VET environment throws another object at you and this time it might not be a ball.
	Leading a trek through often unknown territory with blind alleys and thick jungle to cut through (and dragons to leap out unexpectedly), interspersed with fabulous and exciting views from tops of mountains and occasional plain sailing over lakes... I could go on re my companions and their skills but you get the picture...
	Running a very small country with several different and distinct cultures.
	State and federal policy and legislation is diametrically opposed to organisation health and sustainability.
Senior executive	Herding cats in a dustbowl where few want to explore past the edges, they just mill and hide.
	An iceberg - very little shows on the surface, majority of work is all done in networking, forming relationships, influencing people to do things that will result on positive outcomes.
	Being a leader of an academic area of TAFE is like driving a Porsche with the handbrake on.
	Being a meerkat, spending time in the burrow (office) getting on with stuff, and regularly sticking my head out so I know what is going on and immediately respond to what's important for survival.
	Being a sheepdog, you have a whole flock of very keen people ready to run off in all directions and you need to keep them focused and heading in the right direction.
	Being in a maze.
	Being the captain of a huge ocean liner – need to be heading in the right direction, keeping passengers satisfied and crew engaged, motivated and high-performing – providing the best level of service possible, avoiding ice bergs.
	Steering a ship that is slowly moving forward because the current is moving very fast.
	The organisation has to learn who is the master, who is the dog and what the tail is for.
	Working in an environment where everything is a movable feast and timelines for delivery of information/responses is 'yesterday'.
Education manager	Rather like being a sailor with a rudder between her feet, her hands furling the sails, her eye to the telescope scanning 360° for danger and for new land, while calling out encouragement to all the other sailors going about their equally diverse tasks and praying that the Gods deliver the winds she needs to simultaneously keep everyone safe while heading for new countries.
	An Air traffic controller, decisions need to be made continually, correctly and in the minimum time.
	Being a fire fighter, constantly putting out fires/issues and the amount of short notice given to action or respond to requests from senior management. You can never plan for what's going to happen the next day.
	Being a rabbit caught in crossfire.
	Being given responsibility for a luxury car and not being allowed to drive it.
	Keeping bees alive in a jar. Need to keep the passion levels (i.e. buzz) high whilst harnessing this energy into teaching. Most staff have passion for their industry and need encouragement into their teaching and learning.
	Trying to heard tom cats, coordinate militia, dodge loose cannons and manufacture silver bullets to sooth indulgent self-promoting power-addicted academic egos.

Role	Leadership analogy
Corporate manager	At times, managing a complaints department, the remainder herding cats.

At times I feel like the meat in the sandwich.

Balancing balls in the air and having no control on which one will drop next.

Being a fighter jet pilot: keeping hands firmly on the controls, while closely monitoring the instrument displays and regularly looking towards the distant horizon.

Being a leader in my RTO is like trying to complete a Rubik's cube while someone keeps changing the colours!

Being on a roller coaster, bumpy ride with many ups and downs, sharp turns and sitting at the front can be a lot more exhilarating than taking a back seat.

Constantly fine adjusting and fine tuning the sails of a sailing vessel. You can never rest as there are so many moving parts and the winds of change constantly blow in!

Constantly moving goal posts. Every time there is a new policy, compliance requirement or audit, we find out we are working to new standards, they are rarely the same and requires us to continuously update and change and a lot of internal work practices and policies.

Cooking a soufflé - when it rises it is the most wonderful experience and all enjoy the experience, but when not everything comes together perfectly, at the right time, it looks unappealing and tastes terrible.

Juggling many balls at once while standing on a shifting floor. |
| Senior educator | Being on a roller coaster, there are as many high's as there are low's, lots of thrills and excitement coupled with fear of the unknown and at the same time the anticipation of what will be new around the next bend!

A never ending journey, with great views of ever changing scenery, a relatively clear intended destination, but no map.

I used to think it was about juggling with lots of balls in the air at the same time but I think it is now moving on a very steep uphill curve with no end in sight while still juggling all those balls.

Owning a fantastic car – having the keys and a full tank of petrol, but very little of the map to where we are going.

Skating on thin ice; when it works well it's graceful, exhilarating and rewarding, but there's a looming sense of danger and it can turn wet and cold very quickly. |

What VET leaders do – the focus of their work

The analogies paint interesting images about leadership, providing general insights into leaders' perceptions of their roles. To build a rich picture of leadership it is helpful to probe further and to find out what leaders report as the focus of their work.

Finding out what leaders do might be considered to involve a straightforward review of role titles, position descriptions and organisation charts. But this is not the case. Prior research (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008) suggests that finding out what leaders actually do requires considerable background research and empirical review. This is not due to the enigma of leadership, but because leaders' roles are complex and varied and comparatively little work has yet been done.

Before venturing further into an analysis of leadership it is helpful to briefly distinguish, somewhat imperfectly, 'leadership' from 'management'. The terms are often used interchangeably, which muddles what each entails and confuses practice. While it is not possible to be overly prescriptive, for the most part 'leadership' is used to denote professional practice that involves:

- clarifying directions – identifying new strategies, approaches and procedures;
- engaging people in change, sometimes transformational, and taking them forwards;
- exhibiting a distinctive set of qualities – being motivational, inspirational and perhaps transformational;
- taking executive decisions, changing status quo, and providing visions to make sense of new approaches; and
- working within and through groups of senior colleagues, and influencing the work of other staff, often drawing on personal qualities.

This list of characteristics is by no means exhaustive of, or exclusive to, leadership – the phenomenon is too complex to be bottled in such a list. Listing the qualities in this way does help, however, to distinguish it from 'management'. While management and leadership are overlapping, management can be identified as being:

- more operational in focus – focused on implementation and the present rather than the future;

- working within specified systems and strategies to deliver efficient and quality outcomes – a focus on clarity and stability and continuous improvement;
- doing things according to procedure, often in roles with set parameters, and within the frame of positional authority; and
- executing learned competencies which are often technical in nature.

Major VET leadership studies (for instance: TDA, 2001; Callan, 2001; Mulcahy, 2003; Callan, et al., 2007; Simons et al., 2009) generally concur that the work focus for VET leaders – beyond perennial work such as developing strategies, guiding staff, cultivating clients, promoting the organisation, managing risk and balancing budgets – includes:

- stimulating innovation;
- managing complexity;
- implementing new technologies;
- strengthening networks, partnerships and relationships; and
- positively influencing workforce development.

Mulcahy (2003) found that the roles of both senior and frontline managers in VET providers are expanding. Managers themselves note that "there is a much more complex range of functions than managers were involved in five years ago". Senior managers are now found to perform five broad leadership and management roles: business management and development, strategic leadership, change leadership, people-centred management, and boundary management (external focus). Earlier, Callan (2001) had also noted that VET CEOs, managing directors and other senior managers are more likely than frontline managers to identify developmental needs in 'corporate vision and direction', 'achieves outcomes' and 'develops and manages resources'.

Frontline managers' roles are less integrated than senior managers' roles and are both strategic and operational found Mulcahy (2003). She reported that frontline managers perform six broad leadership and management roles: financial management, administration and operational management, strategic management, people-centred management, consulting, and educational leadership. Ultimately, she finds, their responsibilities are financial, human and physical

Building and maintaining strong links with industry in order to meet their training needs.

resource management, while the responsibilities of senior managers include an additional emphasis on being focused on external developments.

While the previous chapter highlighted the diverse context in which VET leaders operate, from an experiential perspective there appear to be more similarities than differences between the work focus of VET leaders working in different RTOs. Common challenges shared by TAFE and non-TAFE leaders include the need to form and sustain partnerships, to develop innovative training and assessment services and to undertake business development initiatives. Clayton, Fisher, Harris, Bateman and Brown (2008: 7) provide this summary of the similar drivers on training organisations:

> *While there were subtle differences in emphases between public and private, large and small, old and new, metropolitan and regional registered training organisations, the key drivers for all of the organisations were similar. They included Australian Government policies, state-based training imperatives to address skill shortages, working within financial constraints, meeting client, community and regional needs and developing the business of the organisations.*

A publication on women leaders in VET (Mitchell, 2007) shows that women leaders in private organisations and community colleges are as focused as their TAFE counterparts on strategic management, change management, innovation planning and managing complexity.

But the work of TAFE leaders can be different to that of their peers in the private sector. The head of a TAFE Institute is often like the head of a large corporation with many layers of staff within the organisation, whereas the head of private provider might have many fewer management layers to oversee and might be much more involved in deal making and daily business (Mitchell, 2007). TAFE leaders commonly need to manage community expectations that they will provide a comprehensive program, balance social inclusion with revenue generating activities, and navigate complicated governance arrangements. Clayton et al. (2008: 8) found that the "existence of multiple cultures was most readily evident in TAFE institutes" and that the leaders of larger organisations were more likely to be grappling with cultural change than the smaller non-TAFE organisations. "While the smaller registered training organisations in

the study remained culturally stable, widespread culture change was a feature of all of the large organisations" (Clayton, 2008: 8).

The work of VET leaders within universities shares many features with the work of TAFE leaders but requires additional determination in meeting a major challenge, according to Ballagh, the Director of TAFE at RMIT University, one of the dual sector universities in Australia:

> *Two adjectives commonly applied to the RMIT staff culture are passionate and creative. You could add determined when it comes to those TAFE and higher education staff who relish pushing the boundaries on the dual sector potential (Mitchell, 2008b: 16).*

A senior TAFE leader adds that there is still work to do to unravel the issues around the interface between the sectors:

> *There is a growing acceptance that RMIT's continuing success as a multi-sector education and training provider, in a complex and shifting post-compulsory education*

and training policy context, lies in its ability, as Ballagh concludes, "…to confront and work through the knotty issues embedded within the VET-higher education interface" (Mitchell 2008b: 16).

The work of leaders of community colleges often includes some of the tasks of TAFE leaders and leaders from private providers, particularly balancing community obligations with commercial considerations (Simmons, 2008). While community colleges are normally not-for-profit, they often need to undertake significant commercial operations to cross-subsidise other programs they offer. The leader of one such community college (Simmons, 2008) commented on the importance of commercial work for survival:

> *Ten years ago at our planning day we discussed yet again our need to move away from dependence on government funding and we set a goal to achieve 50% of our own funding base. Today we raise 75% of our own funding through fee for service activity; two enterprises – The Community Café and The Child Care Centre; and 'selling' staff skills and resources developed by the organisation. …These actions have been informed by sound business management which includes the development of a business case for all ventures and enterprises.*

Some of the work of leaders of private provider organisations is different to that of their peers in the public sector (Clayton et al., 2008; Guthrie, 2008). This distinctive work includes undertaking succession planning to avoid the possible extinction of the business or facing transition challenges after a new investor purchases a training provider (Mitchell, 2008a). In some cases, leaders need to juggle complex family ownership issues or manage the expectations of diverse investor groups who own shares in the business. A common challenge for private providers is to manage the ramifications of growth in the business. As described by Guthrie (2008: 12):

> *The dangers they face occur, firstly, as they expand and, secondly, as they try to maintain their organisational strength and culture. They have opportunities when they expand, but this may mean changing or giving up some of the things which have characterised their previous success. So, growth is a time of change, of opportunity and of danger. It also means that growing private providers may have to make some very hard decisions.*

There are other differences of degree, not kind, between the work of leaders in the private and public domains.

Key insight

The kinds of tasks given most emphasis by leaders appear, while framed within the VET context, to be generic in nature inasmuch as they could pertain to leadership roles in many different settings. In contrast, it appears the roles that leaders put least emphasis on are those more directly focused on education.

For instance, private providers are frequently searching for new or improved business models while being free of some of the constraints that can hamper their public sector peers pursuing new business models. However, Guthrie (2008) cites research by Smith and Hawke (2008: 5) which suggests that, in the future, the external strategies of public and private providers may become more similar in a more market-based sector:

> *…it seems private providers try to differentiate themselves in the market through new and innovative products or by focusing on a niche segment. In contrast, public providers are currently much more focused on cost leadership than are private providers. However, from their survey, Smith and Hawke suggest that, in the future, private providers believe they will move that way too.*

Some of the work of VET leaders in private enterprises is different again to that carried out in TAFE institutes and private providers, especially where the focus on training needs to take second place to the focus on business imperatives such as staying profitable. As reported by Mitchell (2007), the RTO manager within a national enterprise comments on the demands of his job:

> *As an RTO manager within an enterprise, I am expected to be able to answer training questions from anywhere within our large organisation, such as how to deal with eight different state or territory training authorities across Australia. It all comes to my desk. The issues are mind-boggling.*

Establishing and maintaining relationships with customers in order to design learning programs that suit the market.

VET leaders in private enterprises sometimes have their VET work as the sole or main part of their role, but in many cases the VET work is a minor component of their work. Sometimes the employer doubles as the VET leader and, commonly, the VET leader organises some training by in-house staff and engages external providers to deliver other programs.

Smith, Oczkowski, Noble and Macklin (2003) explored the changing nature of the demand for training in enterprises which have adopted new management practices. The new practices they examined included the learning organisation, total quality management, lean production, team working and business process re-engineering. The researchers found that the most powerful driver of training in the enterprise was not so much the adoption of new business practices, but nature of the business strategy of that enterprise. They found that "where training is linked to business strategy both the volume and the quality and diversity of training provision increases" (Smith, Oczkowski, Noble & Macklin, 2003: 61). Hence, one distinctive feature of the effective VET leader in a private enterprise is managing this link between training and business strategy.

In brief, while there are certainly differences in the work of VET leaders depending on the type of organisation in which they work, the similarities in their work are more significant, mostly because they all need to conform to a national quality, qualification system and for public funding common accountability framework. The traditional dichotomy of TAFE being non-commercial, on the one hand, and private providers being commercial, on the other, is gradually being replaced by the convergence in business practices across these different types of organisations.

These insights were used to shape up a list of work tasks that could serve to test empirically what VET leaders do in their work. The initial set of tasks was sourced from prior research with higher education leaders (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). This list was validated against the above research, and then through interviews with senior executives in several participating organisations. Leaders were then asked to rate the relative importance of each activity in the delivery of their role, with 1 being 'low importance' and 5 'high importance'.

Table 3 shows the tasks ranked in importance for a number of leadership roles. The cautions regarding role titles must be re-emphasised, but the results show that VET leaders across the board place most importance on the broader more strategic facets of their work – leading and managing change, managing relationships with senior staff, solving complex problems, promoting a compelling vision and budget management. Considerably less time is spent on more specific tasks, particularly those which have a specific education focus – managing assessment activities, preparing variation to scope applications, developing accredited courses and training package development.

Comparing these tasks that are rated highly to those given less importance brings out an interesting split. The kinds of tasks given most emphasis by leaders appear, while framed within the VET context, to be generic in nature inasmuch as they could pertain to leadership roles in many different settings. In contrast, it appears the roles that leaders put least emphasis on are those more directly focused on education. Coupled within findings reported below, this raises questions about the distinctiveness of VET leadership – of the extent to which the work of VET leaders is grounded intrinsically in the industry rather than involving more general capabilities and practices.

The interplay between business and education activities is manifest in many of the results that follow. As a participant in one of the current study's workshops noted, VET leadership involves "constant tension between balancing educational outcomes and business outcomes". A recurring theme in many of the findings is the contemporary VET leader appears commercially focused and educationally committed.

As with other results produced by this study, it is informative to review this list against the experience of leadership in VET – to identify areas of alignment and difference. While the results are conflated across leaders from many different backgrounds, organisations and industries, they offer an informed snapshot of what VET leaders do in their roles.

Managing relationships within a dual sector context to ensure all voices are heard and equal significance is given to the VET sector – negotiating on what is a tertiary landscape.

Table 3: The focus of leaders' work by role (item ranks)

	Chief executive	Senior executive	Education manager	Corporate manager	Senior educator	All leaders
Managing relationships with senior staff	1	1	3	1	20	1
Leading and managing change	3	2	2	2	13	2
Managing other staff	14	13	1	4	13	3
Solving complex problems	6	4	5	3	16	4
Promoting a compelling vision	4	6	8	5	28	5
Strategic planning	2	3	11	9	18	6
Participating in meetings	17	23	6	6	22	7
Budget management	5	8	7	13	38	8
Networking outside the organisation	8	7	13	16	20	9
Driving and sustaining innovation	9	11	10	17	22	10
Responding to ad hoc requests	31	26	12	8	9	11
Ensuring a high-quality experience for students	28	25	4	31	1	12
Developing improved business processes	10	9	23	11	36	13
Promoting a learning organisation	13	18	9	21	6	14
Leading complex projects	17	10	18	7	47	15
Networking within the organisation	22	19	15	14	18	16
Monitoring organisational performance	7	5	24	12	45	17
Staff development	19	15	20	18	12	18
Promoting a demand-driven culture	20	12	21	19	29	19
Reviewing peoples performance	22	20	17	20	34	20
Being entrepreneurial	10	16	22	24	32	21
Participating in consultations	24	16	26	15	26	22
Managing quality assurance and compliance	36	14	13	29	11	23
Managing external client relationships	16	21	25	23	29	24
Identifying new market opportunities	12	24	19	32	27	25
Encouraging the adoption of technology for flexible learning	15	37	16	33	3	26
Preparing reports	32	32	38	10	39	27
General administration	41	34	30	22	16	28
Your own professional development	29	27	33	26	10	29
Maintaining currency of staff knowledge and experience against industry practice	40	29	27	28	13	30
Chairing meetings	25	34	34	25	43	31
Working with industry partners	26	41	28	37	32	32
Building community and regional networks	21	31	36	39	41	33

	Chief executive	Senior executive	Education manager	Corporate manager	Senior educator	All leaders
Managing an aging workforce	50	47	29	34	40	34
Building relationships with individual enterprises	30	44	31	40	34	35
Dealing with complaints	47	48	32	35	37	36
Maintaining currency across changing federal and state VET policies	33	28	40	38	46	37
Delivering presentations	34	45	45	27	29	38
Building industry and enterprise networks	27	38	37	42	52	39
Developing organisational policies and processes	35	22	49	30	56	40
Negotiating with government agencies	39	30	52	36	58	41
Reviewing training activities	55	52	43	45	25	42
Meeting training package and course accreditation requirements	59	55	39	49	2	43
Managing student diversity and equity needs	54	50	41	48	5	44
Marketing planning activities	37	43	47	43	55	45
Preparing proposals and tenders	37	49	46	41	54	46
Managing learning programs	58	57	35	47	24	47
Liaising with higher education organisations	41	36	48	46	50	48
Designing pathways between sectors for student cohorts	51	40	42	54	44	49
Monitoring sectoral and industry research	43	39	54	44	51	50
Overseeing the customisation and implementation of training packages	53	61	44	56	8	51
Influencing government VET policies	49	32	55	52	60	52
Designing internal workforce development programs	57	54	51	50	53	53
Working on learner matters	61	60	50	58	6	54
Liaising with schools	52	57	56	53	48	55
Presenting bids	44	53	62	51	59	56
Liaising with state training authorities	48	42	63	55	60	57
Developing accredited courses	56	62	53	61	49	58
Training package development/reviews/ influencing	62	56	57	60	42	59
Liaising with key VET bodies such as ISCs, TDA, ACPET, ERTOA, etc ...	46	46	60	59	62	60
Preparing variation to scope applications	60	59	58	57	57	61
Leading internationalisation	45	51	59	62	63	62
Managing assessment activities	63	63	61	63	4	63

Key insight

Managing organisational change is flagged as highly important by leaders in all roles. Leaders in more senior ranks engage in more organisational planning and development, and more networking and community engagement. With the notable exception of leaders who identified as being directly involved in teaching, participation in teaching and learning was flagged by all other leaders as the least important facet of their work. This is concerning given that it is the core business.

Figure 3 and Table 4 report sub-group breakdowns for nine defined areas of work focus. As elsewhere in this report, Figure 3 reports average scores on the five-point response scale. In general, a difference of 0.3 on the five-point scale is likely to be 'statistically significant'. Such differences may or may not be considered educationally, organisationally or managerially relevant. The standard deviations of these scores lay around 1.0, meaning that a difference between 0.3 and 0.5 may be a meaningful effect.

Echoing the findings from Table 4, Figure 3 breaks down the nine work focus scales by role. Tellingly, managing organisational change is flagged as highly important by leaders in all roles. Leaders in more senior ranks engage in more organisational planning and development, and more networking and community engagement. With the notable exception of leaders who identified as being directly involved in teaching, teaching and learning was flagged by all other leaders as the least important facet

of their work. This is concerning given that it is the core business.

The qualitative feedback sheds further insight on what leaders do. Directors and CEOs, for instance, cited creating visions, setting priorities, leading and managing change, managing budgets, and leading organisational growth as major facets of their work. But 'leading and managing change' was identified as by far the most significant facet of their role.

Other leaders put emphasis on similar activities, again with a broad emphasis on managing internal and external change, managing relationships with staff and industry, and managing performance. Working with the challenges of leading by influence was mentioned by leaders with more operationally focused roles – 'bringing two cultures together to effect the new organisation', 'supporting and coaching team leaders in being the best that they can be', and 'providing information and support to staff so they can deliver high quality student outcomes'.

Table 4 reports average scores for each of the nine focus areas. It shows that leaders with a background in the education industry placed slightly more emphasis than others on planning and policy development, learning and teaching, networking and organisational development and expansion. The differences are very slight, but hint that such leaders may operate in a more contextualised fashion than those with a background outside the VET sector.

Interestingly, leaders with previous leadership experience outside RTOs (but possibly still with an education industry background) placed greater emphasis on planning and policy development, learning and teaching, networking, organisational development and expansion, and community engagement. But the differences here are slight, indicating that people who transition into VET leadership do not vary markedly from other leaders in this facet of their work, which carries implications for the portability of leaders.

A leader's age bore a consistent relationship with people's identification of what they do in their job, possibly due to a loose but notable link between age and role. In general, older leaders simply reported doing more of most things than their younger counterparts.
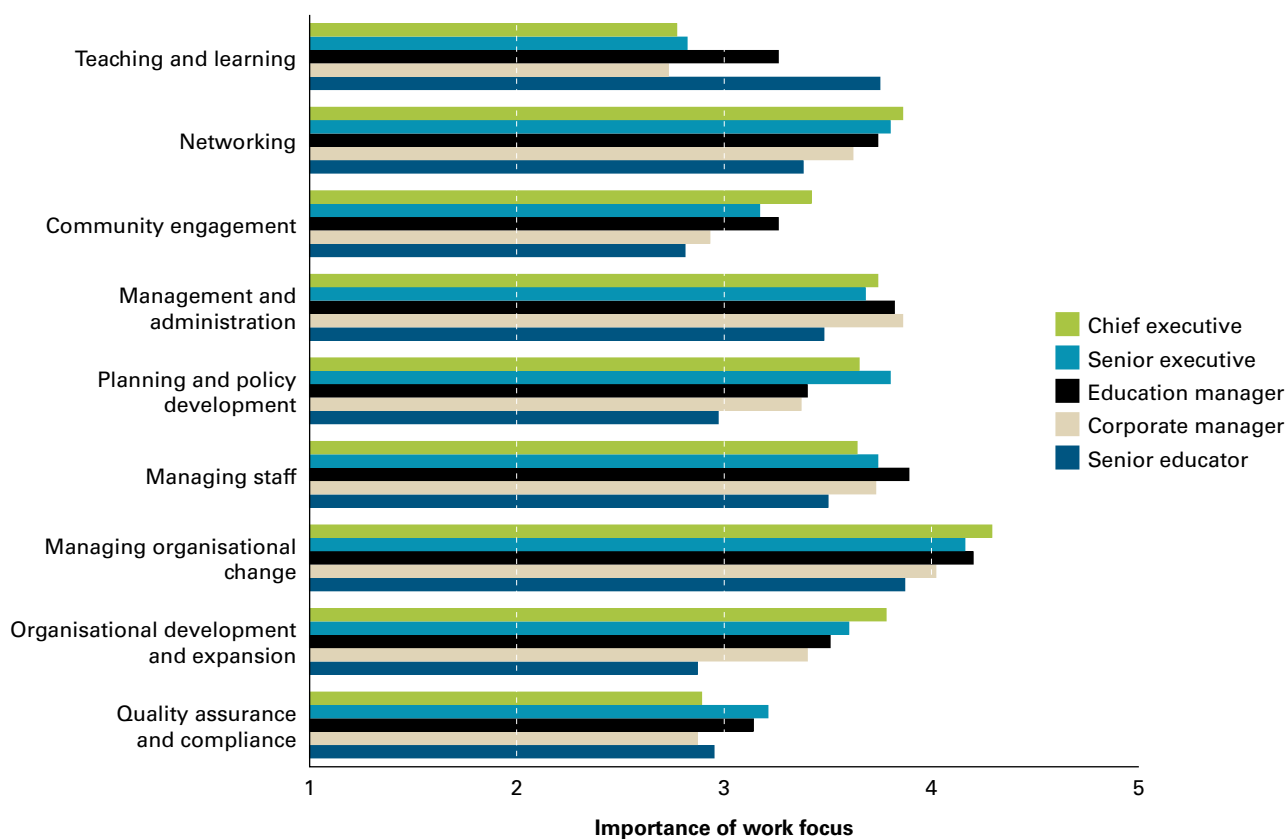
Figure 3: Variation in work focus by role group (scale average scores)

Table 4: Sub-group variation for work focus scales (scale average scores)

	Industry background		Age			Leadership outside an RTO	
	Education	Industry	45 or under	46 - 55	56 - 65	No	Yes
Teaching and learning	3.1	2.9	2.9	3.1	3.0	2.9	3.0
Networking	3.8	3.6	3.4	3.6	3.9	3.5	3.7
Community engagement	3.2	3.1	2.8	3.1	3.3	3.0	3.2
Management and administration	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.7	3.8
Planning and policy development	3.5	3.3	3.1	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.4
Managing staff	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.8
Managing organisational change	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.1
Organisational development and expansion	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.5
Quality assurance and compliance	3.0	3.0	2.8	3.1	3.1	2.8	3.1

The pressures shaping leaders' work

As the previous chapters and review of leaders' work focus has identified, VET leadership is shaped by a range of organisational and external forces. Leaders are under constant pressure to be more responsive to the mounting expectations of government, the fluctuating requirements of industry, and the diverse needs of communities and individuals. Commercial pressures have been with VET leaders for some time, but leaders now face new pressures arising from the elevation of VET as a key vehicle for national workforce development and productivity.

Analysing the pressures leaders face provides critical insight into their work. These drivers shape people's aspirations and daily work, and they also influence the outcomes. Hence understanding the work of VET leaders requires not just analysis of what they do, but also of the pressures shaping their work.

In responding to the survey, VET leaders were asked to rate the relative importance of a series of influences shaping their role. These specific influences were sourced from the precursor study (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008), and refined during the formation of the context review reported in the previous chapter. The items were clustered into seven scales: competitive pressures, external accountability, increasing productivity, industry pressures, institutional change capacity, social pressures and student pressures. Again, the link between statements and clustering is based on prior research and expert review.

Table 5 presents average scores for the influence statements with these sorted in terms of the importance of the influence on a leader's daily work. In the response scale presented to leaders, 1 denoted 'low importance' and 5 'high importance'. Average item scores are shown for both VET leaders, and also for higher education leaders, drawing on evidence from Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008).

For all leaders, the five least important influences shaping their work were increased learner complaints, growing risk of litigation, increased international competition, social and community service obligations, and difficulties in providing institution-based students

with workplace learning opportunities. Read broadly, these appear to be non-specific pressures associated with broader external trends and developments. In contrast, the influences pressing most heavily on leaders are largely commercial in nature – managing pressures for continuous change, working within budgets to meet required outcomes, finding and retaining high quality staff, growing pressure to generate new income, and balancing work and family life.

Table 5 shows that leaders' perceived intensity of these influences resonates with their task focus and background. It appears that more general and non-VET specific pressures are more salient than those associated with the VET or education industry more broadly. Indeed when looking at the influences it is only 'increased focus on filling enrolment targets' – ranked 10 – that has an explicit focus on education. By contrast, five of the bottom 10 least important pressures had an explicit education or student focus.

Worthy of note is how this ranking of reported influences relates to many of the broader issues facing VET. The quality of provision and graduate skills dominate many policy and public conversations about VET, yet issues on this front are not rated particularly highly by VET leaders, the people with responsibility for driving improvement on these fronts. This disjunct is noteworthy. Are today's VET leaders, for instance, working within an industry and policy environment that enables them to focus on these fundamental issues of national significance? Or are VET

Table 5: The influences shaping VET leaders' work (item average scores)

Item	VET	HE
Managing pressures for continuous change	4.0	3.9
Working within budgets to meet required outcomes	4.0	
Finding and retaining high quality staff	3.9	3.6
Growing pressure to generate new income	3.9	3.5
Balancing work and family life	3.9	4.0
Expectations and pressure from government	3.8	
Increased focus on lower unit costs for delivery	3.7	
Slow administrative processes	3.7	3.6
Greater government reporting and scrutiny	3.7	3.5
Dealing with local organisational cultures	3.6	3.4
Understanding and responding to complex policy and system changes	3.5	
Handling unexpected events	3.5	3.5
Clarifying strategic directions	3.5	3.5
Increased costs of compliance with quality assurance standards	3.4	
Demands of accreditation and quality assurance	3.4	
Managing difficult staff	3.4	3.2
Increased focus on filling enrolment targets	3.3	3.0
Maintaining a specific corporate image	3.3	3.2
Rapid changes in technology	3.3	3.4
Increased local competition	3.2	2.9
Aligning learning to industry needs	3.2	
Challenges associated with implementing and customising training packages	3.1	
Expectations and pressure from industry	3.1	
Increasing impact of fluctuations in business and industry	3.1	
Increased learner diversity	3.1	3.2
Increasing responsibility to external groups and agencies	3.0	3.0
The standing of VET compared to other sectors	3.0	
The complexities of the national training system across multiple states	3.0	
Increasing learner non-completion rates	2.9	2.8
Expectations and pressure from schools and universities	2.9	
Difficulties in supporting workplace delivery and assessment	2.9	
Meeting student training demand	2.8	
Difficulties in providing institution-based students with workplace learning opportunities	2.8	
Social and community service obligations	2.5	
Increased international competition	2.4	2.6
Growing risk of litigation	2.4	2.6
Increased learner complaints	2.2	2.4
Decreased government funding		3.9
Declining status of academic work		3.0
Increasing dependence on business and industry		2.7
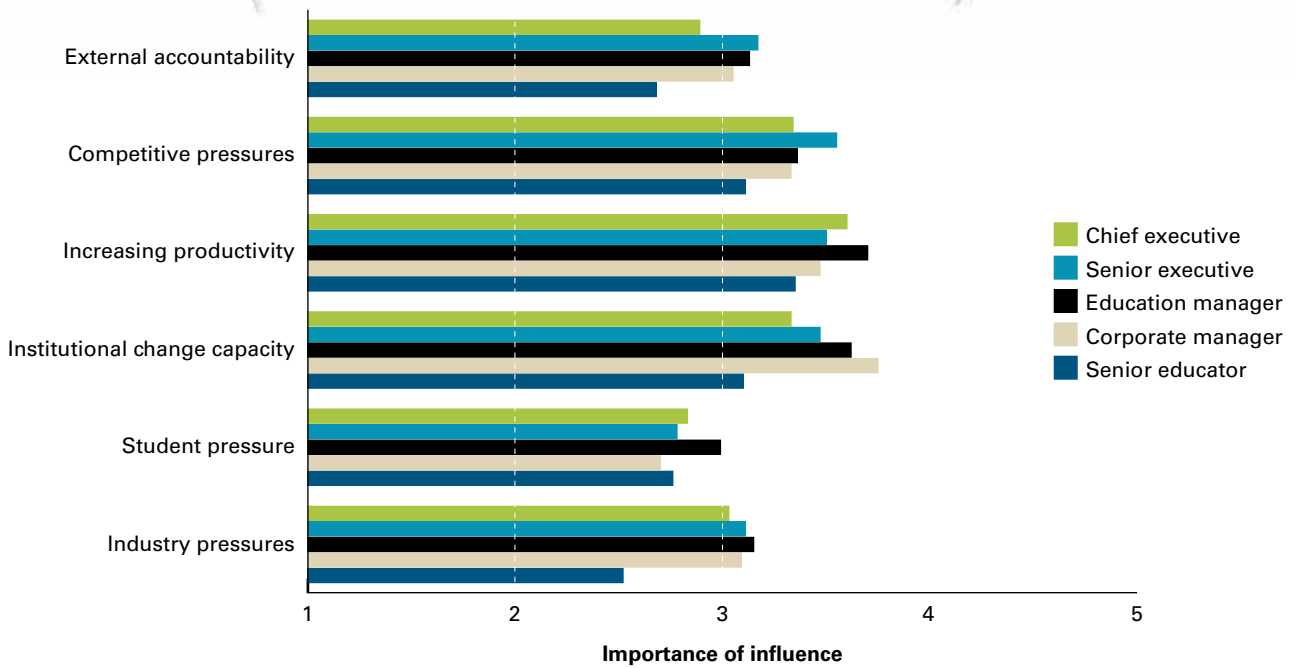
Figure 4: Variation in work pressures by role group (scale average scores)

Table 6: Leadership influences by sub-group (scale average scores)

	Sex		Age			Leadership outside an RTO	
	Female	**Male**	**45 or under**	**46 - 55**	**56 - 65**	**No**	**Yes**
External accountability	3.1	3.0	2.7	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.1
Competitive pressures	3.5	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.3	3.4
Increasing productivity	3.6	3.6	3.3	3.6	3.7	3.5	3.6
Institutional change capacity	3.6	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.6
Student pressures	2.9	2.7	2.6	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.8
Industry pressures	3.0	3.1	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.1

leaders preoccupied with survival to an extent that they are in danger of losing sight of core business?

It is informative to compare VET and higher education (HE) leaders' perspectives of the influences shaping their work, particularly in light of moves towards a more unified tertiary system. The item average scores for higher education leaders have been sourced from responses provided by 513 academic leaders in universities (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). While the influences are sorted by the average ratings given by VET leaders, the shading shows that where overlap exists the influences are given an almost identical ordering. VET and higher education leaders see themselves as working with very similar environmental pressures and constraints.

Figure 4 links perceptions of work pressures with role groups. Again, the indicative nature of the role groupings must be affirmed, but nonetheless very interesting patterns jump out. Notable is the low emphasis put by most leaders on student-related pressures. Industry and regulatory pressures are higher, but still lower than might be expected. By contrast, leaders put most emphasis on productivity-focused influences – institutional change, productivity improvement, and competition. Interesting patterns emerge across roles, particularly in relation to institutional change.

Leaders' background characteristics interacted in interesting ways with their perceptions of the forces influencing their work (Table 6). The results suggest that female leaders, perhaps due to current roles and contexts, place greater emphasis on student and general competitive pressures, that there is a linear increase between the perception of pressure and age for all except student- and industry-related pressures, and that productivity, industry and competitive pressures are felt most by leaders with experience outside RTOs. But as with the work focus scales, differences between perceived influences based on this subset of characteristics are slight.

These results are affirmed by leaders' responses to a survey question asking about the biggest challenges in their roles. Leaders in senior executive (Director, CEO) roles identified a range of external and internal forces, including:

Meeting budget and delivery expectations and then the short term nature of some state and federal 'projects'

which always have short timeframes with expectations of long term social, community or individual change!

Diversity and rapid change across VET sector – keeping abreast of government imperatives and effectively implementing them. Managing difficult customers and difficult staff within a public sector organisation.

Meeting budget and productivity targets. Managing change in a large / diverse organisation. Keeping all staff motivated and enthused about complex strategic directions.

Senior leaders with portfolio responsibilities saw the main influences as being of a similar level of scope, but with a sharper operational remit:

Managing requirements for organisational change using systems that are not responsive enough to meet our needs. The challenges of doing more with less resources including the implementation of new training packages. The expectation that staff can just keep doing more especially the increased compliance and reporting requirements

Keeping abreast of the current policy environment and ensuring that our local plans are aligned to the policy changes. Attracting and retaining specialist staff particularly in the area of business improvement, sustainability and web development. Ensuring best practice approaches to organisational capability development.

Maintaining/meeting delivery targets with increasingly constrained budgetary environment Increasing the flexible approach to delivery (RPL/blended/online/ workplace options) within the teaching workforce to meet the expectations/demands of students/enterprises. Maintaining/developing skills of staff.

Leaders with senior or mid-level management responsibilities reported more specific and increasingly task-related pressures:

Pressure to increase productivity with no funding or support; upskilling staff and maintaining morale; rep tape and compliance issues

Managing staff, managing change, managing client expectations

Changing the internal outdated culture of employment conditions and approach to professional duties to a modern, high quality, agile business unit that can respond to client needs. Finding suitably skilled teaching staff to deliver technologically based training based on the current and future needs of industry. Balancing the quality of my work with timelines.

Ensuring quality in tight fiscal contexts for both local and international stakeholders (including students and staff), meeting institutional requirements for accountability in response to demands put on them by funding agencies carrying out a multiplicity of roles constructed to enable a holistic and responsive approach to my field of education.

Staff with line management leadership roles focused on even more specific constraints with a more explicit emphasis on internal staffing and student matters, and processes required to underpin change:

Reconciling antiquated systems and infrastructure with training needs, risk adverse government and associated layers of communication and lack of progress

Delivering quality programs within a diminishing budget; getting staff to adapt to the changing educational requirements for students; balancing conflicting demands from within the school.

Lack of budget, lack of senior management understanding and buy in to marketing strategy despite lip service; trying to develop digital strategies without the technical support/systems to do so.

While leaders' impressions vary with the scope and focus of their work, as may be expected, a common theme in the responses is the disparity between the need for change and the capacity to drive productive change given RTO cultures, resources and procedures. These results highlight an important general influence shaping leaders' work – the extent to which their organisation is capable of change. As well, the feedback spotlights how many leaders appear to spend much of their time solving problems or addressing specific events rather than formulating strategy.

But the capacity, or otherwise, of VET leaders to negotiate change through their organisation is just one of the dimensions of change shaping their work. Researchers such as Callan et al. (2007), Smith and Hawke (2008) and Mitchell (2008a, 2008b) generally agree that the nature of VET leadership today is influenced by some continuing forces of change which are common across VET organisations. These are summarised in Table 7.

Despite the recent emergence of these role-influencing features in the VET sector, a brief examination of Australian VET research since 2001 reveals that many of the leadership issues identified in 2001-03 (TDA, 2001; Callan, 2001; Falk & Smith, 2003; Mulcahy, 2003)

Table 7: Types of change facing VET leaders

Change force	Description
Leading demand-driven organisations	The roles of VET leaders are changing due to the evolving nature of the sector as it becomes less supply-driven and more demand-driven and more aligned with industry's varying needs. These leaders' roles are changing as VET becomes more intertwined with macro political and economic concerns such as reducing skills shortages, retraining unemployed people, accelerating apprenticeship training, enhancing human capital, increasing productivity, influencing workforce development, improving workforce participation and achieving international competitiveness.
Leading changing organisations	There are increasing expectations on leaders in all service industries, including VET, to build more agile, customer-facing organisations that are more networked and collaborative.
Leading an aging cohort of staff	There are ongoing issues for VET leaders in addressing the aging of the current cohort of senior managers and responding to related leadership issues such as talent identification and succession planning.
Leading amid convergence	While there are some different challenges for VET leaders in the public sector than for leaders the private VET sector, such as the need for VET leaders in the public domain to assist governments achieve their policy goals, there is an increasing number of shared practices between public and private sector leaders. In particular, public providers in VET are becoming increasingly entrepreneurial, bringing them closer to some core practices of private providers. And some private providers are immersed in social inclusion programs that were once seen as the speciality area of public sector VET organisations. These converging practices impact on leaders' work tasks and are discussed further below.
Leading across boundaries	With the gradual blurring of the boundaries between schools and VET on the one hand and higher education and VET on the other, VET leaders are developing new skills for both competing and collaborating with these other sectors.

> *Encourage and support new and existing leaders to gain formal qualifications in Educational Leadership and management.*

are still relevant today. For instance, TDA (2001) asked TAFE Directors to indicate what they regarded as the most pressing leadership development issues for their institution. Broadly, four areas emerged from their responses:

- succession planning;
- developing business and enterprise skills and financial acumen, particularly in the face of the changing nature of global business and the rapid development of information technology;
- developing leadership capacity across institutes to cope with rapid change; and
- developing middle and front line managers including assisting them with the transition from specialist to manager, and the need to move to a more progressive management culture.

Other concerns tabled by TAFE Directors in 2001 were knowledge management, leadership in teaching and learning, customer orientation, people management and development of shared values. All of these earlier challenges for VET leadership are repeated in recent studies, particularly by the most extensive study, Callan et al. (2007). They also affirm the results of the current study. Invariably, studies return to the same issue – that VET leadership is increasingly the focus of 'the moving feast' of external demands (Falk & Smith, 2003). This resonates with Clark's (1998) influential analysis of the 'demand overload' facing universities.

Indicators of effective VET leadership

VET leadership is not only composed of what leaders do and the externalities that shape this work, but also by what leaders themselves desire to do and achieve. Leadership is intrinsically aspirational, and exploring this dimension – specifically, what VET leaders see as the indicators of effective leadership – further rounds out a picture of VET leadership in Australia.

Considered broadly, perceptions of effective VET leadership appear to have changed little over the last decade. Core capabilities identified at the start of the decade (TDA, 2001; Callan, 2001; Mulcahy, 2003) and that are still advocated (Callan et al., 2007) include providing corporate vision and direction, focusing strategically,

achieving outcomes, and developing and empowering people. These core capabilities are very similar to the ones advocated by the Australian Public Service's Senior Executive Leadership Capability Framework (APS, 2009) and the United Kingdom's Management and Leadership National Occupation Standards (LLUK, 2009). It is useful to take stock of these and related developments.

Beginning in 2001, the VET sector generated a series of management and leadership capability frameworks that have much in common. The capability framework that emerged from Callan's (2001) initial study consisted of nine core capabilities: provides corporate vision and direction; focuses strategically; achieves outcomes; develops and manages resources; change leadership; interpersonal relationships; personal development and mastery; business and entrepreneurial skills; and develops and empowers people. These nine capabilities for leaders and managers have many elements in common with Mulcahy's (2003) findings, the later research of Callan et al. (2005, 2007) and the list of capabilities identified by TDA (2001, 2003), Foley and Conole (2003) and WA DET (2004).

As a sample of these frameworks, the TDA (2003) capabilities are set out in Table 8. Note the five areas in the left hand column are similar to Callan's (2001) nine capabilities cited immediately above. Note also the term 'competencies' – a popular term in VET with its competency based training system – although the term capability is more commonly used in VET leadership frameworks. A distinction between these two terms is explored in the next chapter.

The five areas of competencies identified by TDA (2003) and set out in Table 8 are consistent with the five capabilities promoted by the Australian Public Service as part of the Senior Executive Leadership Capability (SELC) Framework: shapes strategic thinking; achieves results; communicates with influence; cultivates productive working relationships; exemplifies personal drive and integrity. Table 9 provides a brief summary of these various Australian frameworks, arranged in order to highlight similarities.

The similarities suggest that leadership in all contemporary service organisations need to be increasingly focused on meeting client and customer needs, moving away from any tradition of being supply-driven or internally focused.

A greater sharing around of acting opportunities, both short term and long term, to provide professional development.

Table 8: TDA's capability framework for VET CEOs

Areas	Competencies
Shapes Vision and Provides Strategic Direction	Thinks and acts strategically Harnesses information and opportunities Develops effective inter-related strategies for realising the vision Inspires a sense of purpose and direction
Achieves Outcomes	Fosters the organisation's entrepreneurial capabilities to achieve educational outcomes Steers and implements change Marshals professional expertise Actively manages resources and performance Is decisive in leading the organisation to achieve outcomes Delivers on intended results
Exemplifies Personal Drive and Integrity	Demonstrates strong ethical standards and personal integrity Shows enthusiasm and passion for the job and its complexities Demonstrates self awareness and a commitment to personal development and mastery
Communicates Effectively with a Range of Audiences	Demonstrates effective listening and communication skills Develops and maintains high level networks and relationships, at both individual and organisational levels Is client focused and manages stakeholder expectations Shows effective mediation and persuasive negotiation skills Demonstrates political sensitivity and awareness
Develops and Empowers People	Nurtures a positive organisational and learning culture Cultivates productive working relationships Values individual differences and diversity Guides, mentors and develops people Builds trust, values, culture and empowerment

Source: TDA (2003)

Table 9: Leadership frameworks – summary of capabilities

Australian Public Service (2009)	Callan (2001)	TDA (2003)	Foley and Conole (2003)	WA DET (2004)
Shapes strategic thinking	Provides corporate vision and direction focuses strategically	Shapes vision and provides strategic direction	Organisational vision and direction	Shaping the vision, values and strategic direction of TAFEWA
Achieves results	Achieves outcomes	Achieves outcomes	Growing the core business	Leading individuals, teams and clients to achieve college goals
Communicates with influence		Communicates effectively with a range of audiences	Communication and interpersonal skills	
Cultivates productive working relationships	Develops and empowers people interpersonal relationships	Develops and empowers people	Developing and empowering people Working as a team	Establishing and maintaining strong relationships
Exemplifies personal drive and integrity	Personal development and mastery	Exemplifies personal drive and integrity	Self efficacy and personal integrity	Developing personal mastery
	Develops and manages resources			Developing and managing resources within TAFE WA
	Business and entrepreneurial skills		Innovation and risk taking	
	Change leadership		Change management	
			Customer focus and quality	Providing excellent client products and services

Note: Foley and Conole (2003) also identified three specific contextual leadership capabilities unique to the sector: education leadership, understanding and working with industry and the community, and working with the vocational education and training system.

Table 10: Australia and UK leadership capabilities and standards

Australian Public Service Commission (2009)	UK Management and Leadership National Occupation Standards (2009)
Shapes strategic thinking	Providing direction
Achieves results	Achieving results. Using resources
Communicates with influence	Facilitating change
Cultivates productive working relationships	Working with people
Exemplifies personal drive and integrity	Managing self and personal skills

The similarities also are evident internationally. Table 10 provides a brief summary of the leadership capabilities or standards advocated by the Australian Public Service Commission and the UK's government funded body UK Lifelong Learning (LLUK) that oversees the Management and Leadership National Occupation Standards. These two sets of capabilities have been aligned as far as possible to bring out the convergence in these two conceptions of leadership.

While there is considerable overlap between the Australian and UK leadership frameworks, both frameworks can be used in flexible ways by those designing sector-specific leadership programs. LLUK not only has developed generic standards for leadership and management for all sectors but also has defined the role of the principal in further education colleges. The LLUK's 'Role Specifications for Principals of Further Education, Sixth Form and Specialist Colleges' lists 54 activities on which a principal spends time. These activities are classified under six elements of the National Leadership and Management Standards. LLUK is now developing contextualised materials for the generic standards cited in Table 10 to meet the needs of further education, adult and community learning and work-based learning communities in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

A shared feature of these various leadership frameworks from Australia and the UK is that they are not prescriptive. Their proponents commonly invite those who design and conduct leadership programs around these frameworks to populate those programs with customised examples relevant to the participants in the programs. A strong message that arose from LLUK's national consultations in 2007, and one that resonates strongly with the results presented earlier in this chapter is that "without contextualised leadership and management training, managers and other staff with management responsibilities will not be able to respond to the changing needs of individual constituencies" (LLUK, 2009). A recent study of the role of the principal in further education colleges in the United Kingdom (Collins, 2008), mapped to the LLUK framework, confirms the relevance of these national UK standards and the ability of college principals to interpret and relate to those standards from their sectoral perspective.

This focused review highlights many factors considered important for VET leadership. Insights from this analysis

Being a kelpie in charge of the flock! Sometimes I can get them to go where they are supposed and other times not! Often I am running around in circles and often backtracking to talk it through again.

Table 11: Indicators of leadership effectiveness by role (item ranks)

	Chief executive	Senior executive	Education manager	Corporate manager	Senior educator	All leaders
Achieving high quality graduate outcomes	3	1	1	1	3	1
Delivering successful team projects	6	7	3	4	5	2
Delivering agreed tasks or projects on time and to specification	8	3	9	2	2	3
Successful re-registration audits	11	5	4	3	7	4
Receiving positive feedback from the community	1	2	2	8	22	5
Winning resources for your area of responsibility	8	4	5	6	9	6
Establishing a collegial working environment	5	9	8	7	24	7
Bringing innovative policies and practices into action	18	11	14	5	17	8
Receiving positive feedback from industry	13	6	13	12	10	9
Improving student satisfaction ratings	10	19	19	9	20	10
Receiving positive user feedback for your area of responsibility	20	17	15	10	25	11
Enhanced representation of equity groups	2	21	12	14	14	12
Formative involvement of external stakeholders in your work	4	18	7	24	4	13
Maintaining high levels of staff support	7	8	25	13	21	14
Successful implementation of new initiatives	28	15	22	11	19	15
Achieving a positive financial outcome for your area of responsibility	23	24	10	20	1	16
Promoting your teams achievements	22	12	21	15	17	17
Securing competitive funds or increasing revenue	13	9	17	18	29	18
Winning awards and prizes	16	16	20	23	6	19
Achieving positive outcomes for other staff in your division or area	17	13	6	27	16	20
Producing significant improvements in learning and training quality	18	14	16	26	7	21
Increased student completion rates	25	20	18	16	28	22
Achieving goals set for your own professional development	15	22	11	28	12	23
Producing future leaders	11	23	23	22	23	24
Successful variation to scope applications	23	24	24	25	11	25
Achieving positive outcomes from external reviews of the area	21	27	26	19	15	26
Receiving positive feedback from enterprises	30	26	29	17	13	27
Being invited to present to key groups	29	28	27	21	27	28
Meeting enrolment targets	26	29	30	30	26	29
Achieving a high profile for your area of responsibility	27	30	28	31	31	30
Implementing successful learning systems or infrastructures	31	31	31	29	30	31
Effective management of quality and compliance	32	32	32	32	32	32

were combined with those from the prior research with higher education leaders to elaborate and then refine a list of 33 specific indicators that VET leaders might consider relevant as indicators of effective performance. To assist with analysis, these indicators were clustered into six discrete leadership effectiveness scales. They focus more on indicators concerning positive implementation and impact than on indicators concerned with the quality of inputs, which are seen as being necessary but not sufficient to indicate effective performance.

The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of each indicator as a criterion for judging effectiveness in their role. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the foundation in prior research and practice, most of these indicators were rated as significant by VET leaders.

Table 11 lists each of the 33 indicators ranked by the indicative role classifications. Although the variation between those performance indicators rated low and high was not great, those rated down the list tended to concentrate on systems pertaining to learning and quality assurance. In contrast, the top five areas concentrated on achieving positive outcomes, funding and producing significant improvements in learning and training quality.

Table 12 shows that industry background and leadership experience were associated with little variation in people's identification of the indicators of effective leadership. But as with other leadership characteristics, age was associated with difference. Unlike work focus and perceptions of pressure, however, there is a less direct correlation with age and a bigger divide between those leaders 45 and under compared with those older than 46 years of age.

Figure 5 plots all leaders' average ratings of leadership effectiveness. There is variation, but as per Table 12 this shows that all broad outcomes are rated highly. This affirms the relevance of this suite of characteristics as indicators for identifying, supporting and assessing leadership effectiveness. This is important, for it suggests that the results of this study provide a conceptually grounded and evidence-based template against which current processes and practices can be compared.

The insights given in this chapter could be synthesised in many different ways. As a suggestive summary, Table 13

Key insight

The contemporary VET leader appears educationally committed, but very much focused on responding to pressing forms of internal and external change. Looking at what VET leaders do shows that while VET leaders have adjusted to education-focused demands of their roles, they now need new capabilities to respond to commercial pressures and opportunities. Leaders have the capacity to manage education, industry and clients, but they need skills to deal with new complex contexts that carry tensions between competition and regulation.

reports the scales used to measure leaders' work focus, influences and effectiveness, with these grouped in a rough conceptual alignment. This presentation evokes the potential of looking in more detail at relationship between what leaders report doing and what priorities (in terms of relevance to effective performance) they attach to different facets of their work. Figure 6 maps this relationship for the area of learning and teaching, showing that many leaders give considerable focus to areas they consider high priority, but that in this area there are many who devote less focus despite a recognition of the priority.

Table 12: Effectiveness indicators for selected sub-groups (scale average score)

	Industry background		Age			Leadership outside an RTO	
	Education	Industry	45 or under	46 - 55	56 - 65	No	Yes
Personal and interpersonal outcomes	3.9	3.8	3.7	4.0	3.8	3.9	3.9
Learning and teaching outcomes	4.0	3.9	3.8	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Recognition and reputation	3.8	3.7	3.6	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.8
Financial performance	3.9	3.8	3.6	3.9	3.8	3.9	3.8
Effective implementation	4.0	3.8	3.8	4.0	3.9	3.8	3.9
Successful registration and audit outcomes	3.6	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.7	3.7
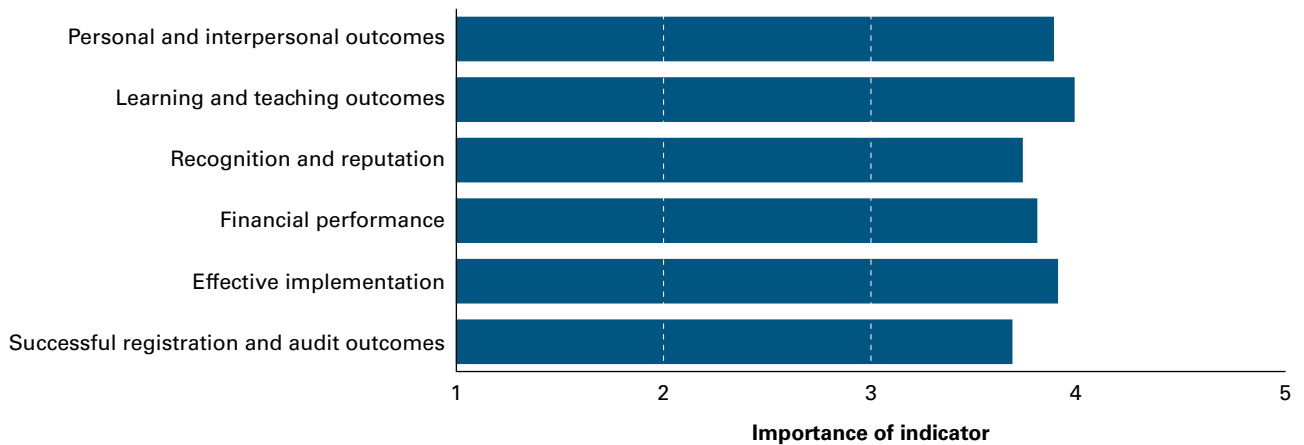
Figure 5: Leadership effectiveness indicators (scale average score)

Table 13: Leadership experience scales aligned by theme

Focus	Influences	Effectiveness
Teaching and learning	Student pressures	Learning and teaching outcomes
Networking		Personal and interpersonal outcomes
Community engagement	Industry pressures	
Management and administration	Competitive pressures	Financial performance
Planning and policy development		
Managing staff		
Managing organisational change	Institutional change capacity	Effective implementation
Organisational development and expansion	Increasing productivity	Recognition and reputation
Quality assurance and compliance	External accountability	Successful registration and audit outcomes
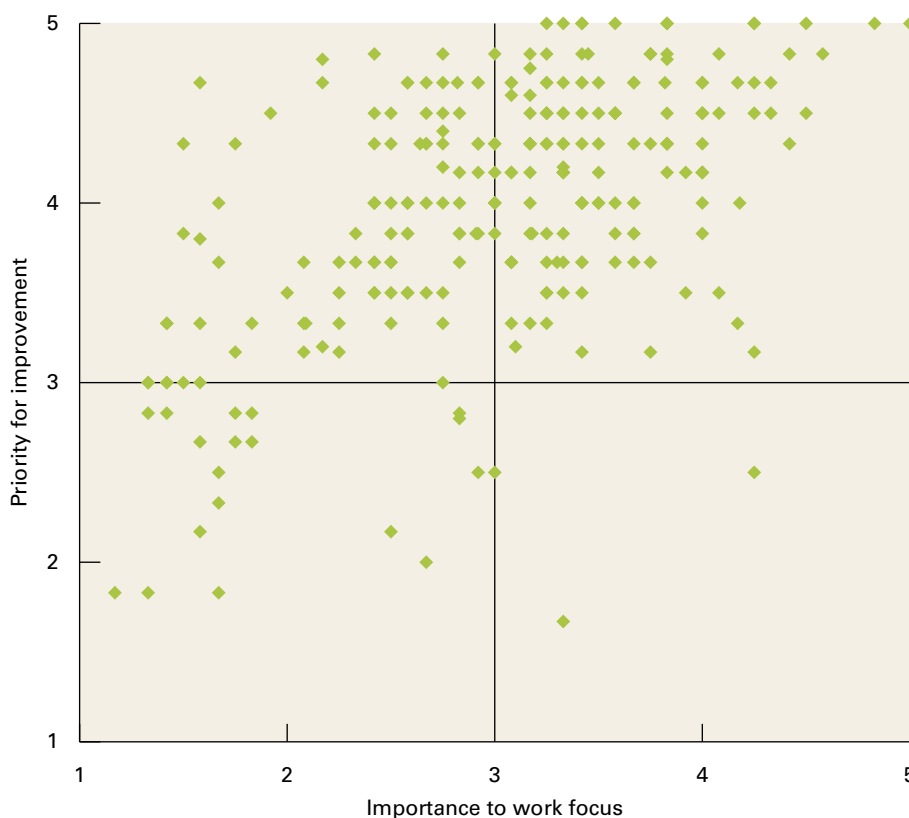
Figure 6: Link between work focus and improvement priority

Findings and implications

This chapter has looked inside the world of the VET leader – how people perceive leadership, what leaders do, what influences shape their work, and what leaders aspire to achieve. In broad terms, the chapter can be seen as offering a glimpse into the sociology of leadership.

A missing ingredient from this analysis is robust information on the characteristics of the VET workforce. Further research needs to be undertaken to profile the demography of Australia's VET leaders. Given the dynamic nature of this workforce considerable value would be derived from linking such analysis into a broader study of the tertiary workforce.

The contemporary VET leader appears educationally committed, but very much focused on responding to pressing forms of internal and external change. Looking at what VET leaders do shows that while VET leaders have adjusted to education-focused demands of their roles, they now need new capabilities to respond to commercial pressures and opportunities. Leaders have the capacity to manage education, industry and clients, but they need skills to deal with new complex contexts that carry tensions between competition and regulation.

This concern with commercial or organisational matters is echoed in what leaders flag as the important influences on their work. Clearly, managing internal and external business matters is a large part of VET leaders work, yet makes different demands to the technically focused areas which they are also responsible for. Many forces shape what leaders do, and there would appear to be value in expanding the market and sectoral research to which leaders have access.

To identify the powerful forces which shape leadership, the study established criteria seen to mark out effective performance in each role. It highlighted a set of indicators identified by VET leaders as being the ones most important in making judgements about the effective delivery of each role. Identifying indicators of effective performance is important, as it is these which, ideally, drive leaders' aspirations and behaviours. Leaders are driven by these outcomes which play an important role in shaping leadership.

Taken together, many results underline a pronounced need to define the profession of the VET leader. Read at face value, repeated results touch on the need to manage and cope with rather than drive change or maintain stability. Separating management from leadership will play an important role in defining the future VET leader. The future health of the sector rests on the capacity for leaders to understand and implement effective change, not be hamstrung by circumstance.

These insights provide insight into what VET leaders do in their jobs, offering a frame for reading current practice and a foundation for more detailed investigation of capability. For while it is informative to build a picture of the nature of VET leaders' work, it is imperative to look beyond this at the capabilities that underlie effective leadership – the focus of the next chapter.

Evidence-based strategies for improving practice

- Use the list of tasks to look at what practicing leaders actually do, and align this with role and organisational requirements.

- Support programs that help leaders understand the characteristics of change, strategies for making RTOs more change-capable, and how to balance commercial and educational forces.

- Implement programs that help leaders develop systems thinking and, in particular, link education processes and outcomes with commercial realities.

- Review the influences shaping leaders' roles, and coordinate institutional research that helps leaders make operational sense of challenges, complex systems and emerging opportunities.

- Align indicators of effective leadership with performance indicators, and revise incentive structures where necessary.

- Workshop these high-level findings with cohorts of leaders, using the data and conversations as a springboard for understanding and developing practice, and in particular developing new narratives about leadership.

- Use an analysis of work roles, pressures and incentives to forecast looming flashpoints and build space that helps people lead.

Capabilities for effective VET leadership

General insights

The previous chapter looked at the experience of VET leaders – the work leaders do, the influences shaping their work, and the indicators of effective performance. This chapter extends the analysis of effectiveness by reviewing capabilities and competencies that leaders flag as important for successful delivery of their roles. The chapter presents the study's capability framework, and explores further insights harvested from the national survey of leaders.

As in the precursor study (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008) the evidence affirms that a specific set of capabilities centring around personal and interpersonal intelligence, along with a contingent and diagnostic way of thinking, are critical to effective VET leadership. An implication of this finding is that the profiles and methods used currently to identify and select VET leaders may need revision. There are also important implications for what should be given focus in leadership identification, selection and development programs.

As the following analysis suggestions, 'effectiveness' is not a neutral term but one which requires careful elucidation. Conceptually, effectiveness is linked with productivity, targeting and delivery – achieving things in the right ways. Effectiveness is not the same as efficiency, although the terms are often conflated in management contexts. The current analysis attaches the concept of effectiveness to the style or stance rather than the outcomes of leadership, and sees this effectiveness as multidimensional in nature.

The leadership capability framework

The study is driven by a conceptual perspective on leadership capability. This framework has underpinned the study's design, and has been tested through the empirical work. It is based on the framework validated in studies of successful early career university graduates in nine professions (Vescio, 2005), in a detailed study of 322 effective school leaders (Scott, 2003), and in the precursor higher education leadership study (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). It draws on insights developed in previous studies on how VET leaders manage change (Scott, 1999). The framework provides a window into much of the literature reviewed above, as well as the empirical literature reviewed by Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008).

Figure 7 shows three overlapping aspects of leadership capability: personal, interpersonal and cognitive. These domains are underpinned by two overlapping forms of skill and knowledge: role-specific and generic leadership competencies. The overlapping nature of the framework indicates that all five dimensions are necessary for effective performance as a VET leader, and that the five domains identified both feed into and off each other. A number of scales are flagged in dialogue boxes. These are summarised below.

The leadership framework makes a distinction between 'capabilities' and 'competencies'. It is helpful to clarity these two commonly used (and confused) concepts, a confusion compounded in the context of VET where the term 'competence' is a cornerstone of the sectoral nomenclature. For the purposes of this study, 'capability' refers to largely intangible or holistic psychological qualities that may be characterised as an enduring talent or gift. In contrast, 'competence' refers to knowledge and skill that can be documented in discrete units, learned and demonstrated. Prior leadership research has focused on both these dimensions of leadership (Rankin, 2004; Byham, 1996; Tucker, 1992; Aziz et al., 2005; Ramsden, 1998), with USA-based research putting particular emphasis on capability.

The framework assumes that leadership involves:

- reading human and non-human situations;
- interpreting situations and problems;
- forming and drawing on response strategies — often with only partial information; and
- implementing solutions through a mixture of generic and role-specific competencies.

As this sequence suggests, the framework helps clarify how effective VET leaders work with, learn from and respond to changing circumstances. It allows for the fact that leadership is a highly contextualised phenomenon. It blends the competency and capability perspectives on leadership. It emphasises that possessing a high level of skill and knowledge about how one's organisation operates or what makes for a productive approach to education is necessary but is not sufficient for effective VET leadership. It is also essential to have a highly

Personal capabilities *Commitment* *Decisiveness* *Inclusiveness* *Responsiveness* *Self awareness*	**Interpersonal capabilities** *Empathising* *Influencing*
Diagnosis *Flexibility and responsiveness* *Strategy* **Cognitive capabilities**	*Educational management* *Self-organisation skills* *Change management* **Role-specific and generic competencies**
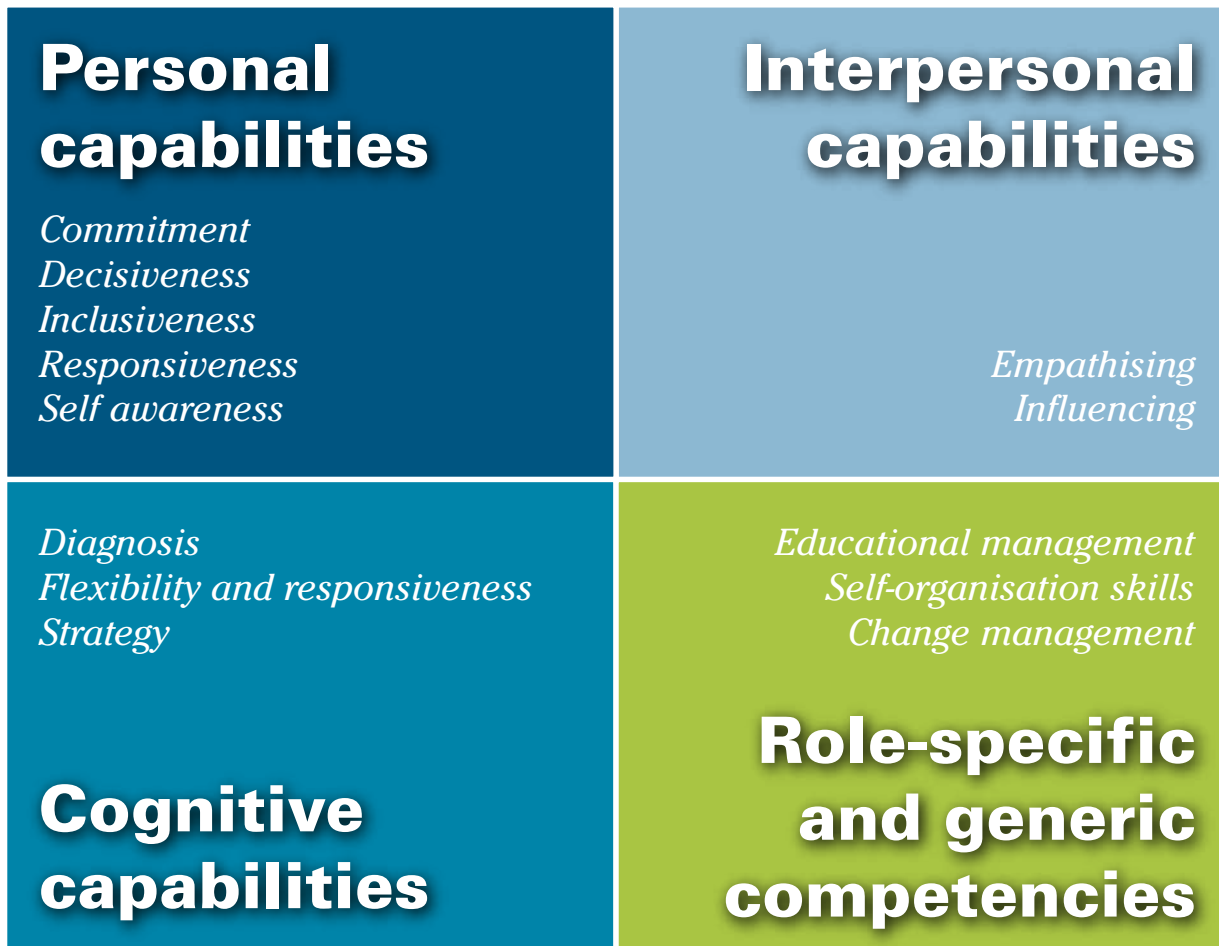
Figure 7: Leadership capability framework

Move those with leadership aspirations into different leadership positions in the organisation for at least brief "real life" experiences with mentoring support and provide reports on performance for selection panels. Provide some funding to supplement costs of relevant formal quals.

developed emotional intelligence and a contingent way of thinking that enables people to know when to deploy these competencies.

In what follows, each of the five dimensions of capability and competence are given operational meaning by outlining the scales and items tested in this study. As noted, the items have already been tested in previous research on educational leaders.

Personal and interpersonal capability

Leaders need to be able to manage their own emotional reactions to uncertainty and complexity. At the same time, as all leadership has a human dimension it is important to have a high level of interpersonal capability in order to better understand what is happening and to sort out what might work best to resolve the situation.

Both personal and interpersonal capabilities have been extensively researched over the past decade by researchers like Goleman (1998; 2000) and are often referred to as a leader's 'emotional intelligence'. The importance of emotional intelligence is stressed in several analyses of VET leadership. In the current conceptualisation, personal capability is conceptualised and measured in terms of five interlocked components: self awareness, decisiveness, commitment, responsiveness and inclusiveness.

As Table 14 shows all statements pertaining to personal capability were given a rating of high or very high by those leaders surveyed. This provides an important form of validation for the inventory, for it suggests that each of the indicators affirms an important facet of VET leaders' personal capability. Within these items, responding leaders put particular emphasis on acting with integrity, respecting other members in a team, being willing to take responsibility for decisions, and remaining calm under pressure or when things take unexpected turns. Less emphasis was given to facets of effective leadership that involved 'reflecting', 'coping' and 'tolerating'. Higher ratings for these dimensions of decisiveness fit with earlier findings on change management, and affirm a shift towards a more commercial orientation that is exposed through a range of findings.

Table 14: Personal capabilities importance (item average scores)

Item	Average score
Acting with integrity, showing respect and being accountable	4.8
Respecting other members in a team	4.8
Being willing to take responsibility for decisions	4.8
Being willing to take a hard decision	4.6
Supporting (and standing by) staff within my area of responsibility	4.6
Being true to my personal values and ethics	4.6
Wanting to achieve the best outcome possible	4.6
Being willing to ask for information if I don't know	4.6
Demonstrating resilience in the face of continual challenges	4.5
Operating in an inclusive manner in the organisation	4.5
Being an empathic listener	4.5
Having energy, passion and enthusiasm for vocational education and training	4.5
Bouncing back from adversity	4.5
Maintaining a good work/life balance and keeping things in perspective	4.4
Persevering when things are not working out as anticipated	4.3
Taking responsibility for program activities and outcomes	4.3
Handling multiple organisational objectives, from commercial goals to social obligations	4.3
Reflecting on significant events	4.2
Coping with fluctuations in government policy directions	4.1
Tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty	4.1
Pitching in and undertaking menial tasks when needed	4.1
Shifting from a supply to a demand-driven perspective	4.0

The capability framework (Figure 7) separates interpersonal capability into two subscales: influencing others and empathising with others.

Table 15 reports importance ratings for the interpersonal capabilities items. As with the personal capabilities, all are rated highly. The only exception to this – a rating lower than 4.0 on the five-point scale – pertains to the item about empathising and working productively with learners from a wide range of backgrounds. This is concerning given policy intentions that are seeking to broaden access to training.

Cognitive capability

The dimension of cognitive capability in Figure 7 refers to a leader's capacity to diagnose situations, particularly those which are unexpected. This involves identifying the situation's human as well as technical or administrative dimensions, determining if the problem is worth addressing in detail, and having the ability to match an appropriate course of action to this diagnosis. A high level of intellectual capability is necessary to make clear sense of uncertain or unplanned situations, and determine appropriate actions and responses. It is in this way that the three top circles in Figure 7 are linked.

Cognitive capability is operationalised in three scales: diagnosis, strategy, and flexibility and responsiveness.

As with the other two dimensions of capability, Table 16 shows that all items used to measure the cognitive dimension of leadership capability were rated highly by the VET leaders, affirming its perceived relevance for effective leadership.

Leadership competence

Effective leadership involves not just capability – those psychological qualities that help people develop and convert new ideas into change. Leading a VET organisation also requires generic and specific knowledge and skills – the bottom circles in Figure 7. These areas of competence provide a scaffold for diagnosing situations, and also a source for shaping and delivering the right response.

The scales that make up the competency component of the study's leadership framework divide the statements

Table 15: Interpersonal capability importance (item average scores)

Item	Average score
Being transparent and honest in dealings with others	4.7
Motivating others to achieve positive outcomes	4.6
Inspiring people to work effectively	4.6
Influencing people's behaviour and decisions in effective ways	4.5
Empathising and working productively with staff and other key players from a wide range of backgrounds	4.4
Giving and receiving constructive feedback to/from work colleagues and others	4.4
Developing and contributing positively to team-based programs	4.4
Listening to different points of view before coming to a decision	4.4
Understanding how the different groups that make up how my organisation operate and how they influence different situations	4.4
Working with very senior people within and beyond my organisation without being intimidated	4.3
Developing and using networks of colleagues to solve key workplace problems	4.3
Working constructively with people who are resistors or are over-enthusiastic	4.3
Negotiating with a wide range of external stakeholders	4.1
Empathising and working productively with learners from a wide range of backgrounds	3.7

> *More rigorous selection process that addresses personal capabilities and emotional intelligence.*

Table 16: Cognitive capability importance (item average scores)

Item	Average score
Reflecting critically and learning from experience	4.6
Thinking creatively and laterally	4.5
Diagnosing the underlying causes of a problem and taking appropriate action to address it	4.5
Identifying from a mass of information the core issue or opportunity in any situation	4.5
Making sense of and learning from experience	4.5
Adjusting a plan of action in response to problems that are identified during its implementation	4.4
Having a clear, justified and achievable direction in my area of responsibility	4.4
Seeing the best way to respond to a perplexing situation	4.4
Seeing and then acting on an opportunity for a new direction	4.4
Using previous experience to figure out what's going on when a current situation takes an unexpected turn	4.3
Knowing that there is never a fixed set of steps for solving workplace problems	4.3
Setting and justifying priorities for my daily work	4.3
Tracing out and assessing the likely consequences of alternative courses of action	4.2
Recognising patterns in a complex situation	4.2
Recognising how seemingly unconnected activities are linked	4.1

into specific skills and knowledge concerned with the area of learning and teaching, and two clusters of more generic skills and knowledge – one focused on institutional operations and the other on self-organisation.

The possession of these skill and knowledge components of leadership competence is necessary but it is not sufficient for effective performance. For this to occur the capabilities identified in the top three circles of Figure 7 have to be present and all five components have to work in an integrated and productive way over time. As this suggests, a weakness in one area will affect the operation of the others. For example, someone unable to remain calm when things take an unforeseen turn will not be able to use a well developed cognitive ability or draw appropriately on knowledge about student characteristics or regulatory policy. Competence without capability is not sufficient for effective leadership – simply knowing and being able to do a lot does not, by itself, constitute effective leadership of either learning or change.

Echoing leaders' reports of the influences shaping their performance, respondents gave the lowest importance ratings to statements about learning and teaching or, more broadly, the education-specific facets of VET leadership (Table 17). Conversely, the highest levels of importance were attached to managing colleagues and change – helping staff deliver change, developing change strategies, and having sound administrative and resource management skills. There was no variation in leaders' perceptions of competency requirements in terms of their industry background, experience leading outside an RTO, or age.

Figure 8 summarises the ratings given by responding leaders to each of the capability scales. Average scores for higher education (HE) leaders are also included. As discussed above, it shows that all leadership competencies are ranked highly with the notable exception of competencies associated with learning and teaching. This corroborates other insights from the survey and the workshops that it is planning and leading change in increasingly commercial contexts that is the focus of VET leadership, rather than education-specific matters.

Juxtaposing the VET and HE results is telling, for it suggests that the same underlying capabilities drive effective leadership in both areas of tertiary education.

Table 17: Leadership competency importance (item average scores)

Capability	Average score
Being able to organise my work and manage time effectively	4.6
Being able to help my staff learn how to deliver necessary changes effectively	4.5
Being able to influence my peers to collaboratively formulate effective change strategies	4.5
Having sound administrative and resource management skills	4.4
Understanding national and state vocational education and training policy and future directions	4.3
Being able to make effective presentations to a range of different groups	4.2
Understanding how training organisations operate	4.2
An ability to chair meetings effectively	4.1
Being able to use IT effectively to communicate and perform key work functions	4.1
Knowing how to identify and disseminate good learning and management practice across the unit or organisation	4.1
Up to date understanding of relevant state and federal legislative requirements for compliance and continuous improvement	4.1
Understanding the role of risk management and litigation in my work	4.1
Being able to manage my own ongoing professional learning and development	4.0
Understanding of industrial relations issues and processes as they apply to vocational education and training	3.9
In-depth and working knowledge of competency based training and assessment	3.8
Understanding of how to develop a new service for a market segment	3.8
Having a high level of up-to-date knowledge of what engages learners in productive learning	3.8
Understanding how to implement successfully a new vocational education and training program	3.7
Understanding how to develop an effective vocational education and training program	3.7
Understanding how to design and conduct an evaluation of a vocational education and training program	3.5

Key insight

All leadership competencies are ranked highly with the notable exception of competencies associated with learning and teaching. This corroborates other insights from the survey and the workshops that it is planning and leading change in increasingly commercial contexts that is the focus of VET leadership, rather than education-specific matters.
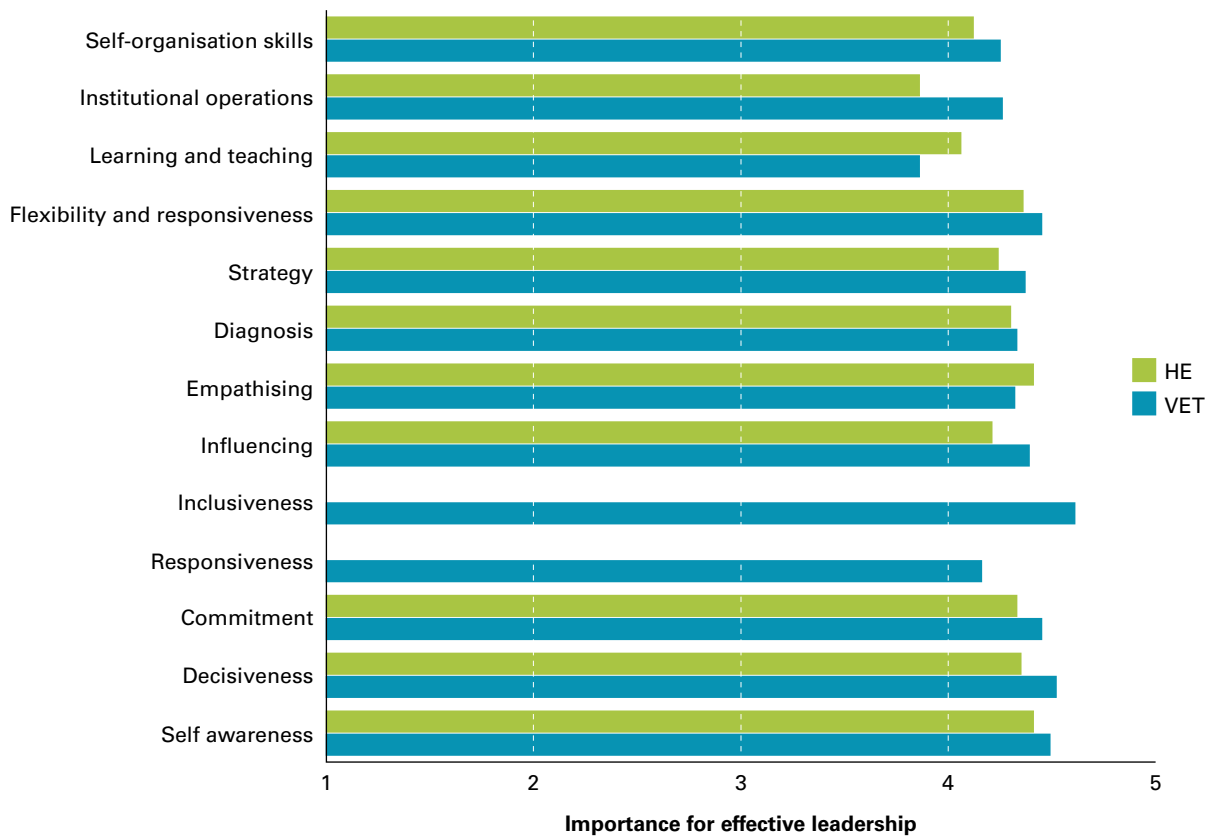
Figure 8: Leadership capabilities importance (scale average scores)

This commonality carries important implications for building tertiary-wide conceptions of effective leadership.

Findings and implications

In line with initial aims, this study has produced an empirically validated leadership capability framework. The capabilities are based on a conceptual model of leadership grounded in educational and psychological theory, and empirically validated in the survey of VET.

This contribution affirms and extends earlier work with higher education and school leaders. Such cross-sector parallels are important for they affirm the value of helping leaders build a portfolio of skills that are somewhat portable across contexts. Broadly, this raises questions about whether these are generic capabilities for leading professional organisations. Identifying a common substrate can do much to help focus the development of leadership capacity.

The framework bridges two perspectives on leadership – a focus on people's talent and capability, and a focus on people's capacity to learn and implement generic and role-specific competencies. Evidence from the 327 leaders who participated in this study affirms that effective leadership involves both individual talent and a situated capacity to implement. Specifically, leadership involves reading the human and practical dimensions of opportunities and uncertainties, diagnosing a situation's salient characteristics, identifying and selecting appropriate solutions, and implementing effective responses.

Underpinned by interviews, surveys workshops and previous research, this framework paints a vivid picture of how VET leaders manage change, and also what change-capable leadership looks like. While this conceptually grounded the model is not complex, it offers a sophisticated instrument for understanding and building leadership capacity. Coupled with insights from the previous chapter, it offers a rich picture of contemporary VET leadership, and flags those nuances of particular relevance to effective performance. It also yields evidence for developing a suite of resources and strategies – the focus of the next chapter.

Evidence-based strategies for improving practice

- **Develop leaders' understanding of the capabilities that underpin effective leadership, of the characteristics of change, and of how change plays out in RTOs.**

- **Identify context-specific management strategies that leaders can use to make RTOs more change capable, and to work productively with ambiguity and the unexpected.**

- **Map existing selection, development and promotions resources against the validated leadership capability framework, noting overlaps and areas for revision.**

- **Embed these findings into the organisation – report in staff orientation and induction programs, invite current leaders to reflect on these characteristics, and use this validated perspective to identify future leaders.**

- **Use this validated framework as a basis for benchmarking across like RTOs, looking towards forming broader profession-, industry- or tertiary-wide conceptions of leadership.**

Educating VET leaders for the future

Making leadership learning relevant

Building the capacity of Australia's VET leaders, in terms of both capability and number, hinges in no small way on effective professional learning. Clearly professional learning is not essential for leadership – many leaders have little formal training in leadership prior to assuming their roles and perform well. Yet leadership training is a helpful and undoubtedly valuable means of ensuring that leadership is done well.

This chapter brings together earlier insights on effective leadership into an analysis of how VET leaders prefer to learn and develop their capabilities. It spotlights preferred focus areas for leadership development, and the approaches which are seen as being most effective. Unsurprisingly, the results show that leaders favour the same methods that also engage students in productive learning (see Coates (2006) for discussion of the latter). This has profound implications for current approaches to leadership training and education.

As in most industries, with people finding themselves falling into senior roles based on technical competence but without specific leadership training, .progression into VET leadership roles leadership is not linear. As with higher education leaders (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Gmelch, 2002) many VET leaders assume their roles without prior administrative experience or pre-service training – around 67 per cent according to the current data. It is easy to imagine a future in which current and aspirant VET leaders receive leadership training that equips them with the capabilities and competencies they need to effectively deliver their roles.

Leadership can be both learned and taught and, as with most complex activities, this learning and teaching can play out in both productive and unproductive ways. Leadership education is likely to be most productive if it focuses on the things that drive effective leadership, and if it helps people acquire these in ways they can apply in practice. But as echoed in the findings that follow, much existing professional learning falls short, either because it focuses on generalities or overly specific competencies, or because it is provided in ways that fail to engage leaders or help them test their learning in practice.

Ensuring programs are relevant

Unless leadership training programs target the capabilities that are essential for effective leadership then they will miss the mark and fail to provide the boost to VET leadership that Australia requires.

To test whether leadership programs experienced by practising leaders have been effective, survey respondents were asked to rate the relative importance of the various statements that make up the study's leadership capability framework. They were asked to identify the extent to which leadership development programs to date had focused on each of the aspects of capability they rated as most important.

Figure 9 presents the results, with 1 indicating 'low importance' and 5 indicating 'high importance'. These results indicate that only a moderate amount of professional development has been devoted to enhancing the capabilities that respondents identify as being the most telling for effective leadership. Average scores for selection and promotion are even lower, indicating a misalignment between the capabilities identified as important for effective leadership and how leaders are identified and promoted.

Such results are helpful, because they indicate the extent to which leadership development activities are perceived to be relevant by focusing on the capabilities identified by the experienced leaders themselves as counting most for effective performance. The results highlight that organisations should implement strategies for assessing leadership potential. Cost-effective ways for assessing leadership potential and the capabilities that count, which go beyond standard interview selection procedures and the use of referees' reports, should be explored in more detail.

Table 11 lists the statements that VET and leaders were asked to rate in terms of their relevance as indicators of leadership effectiveness. Respondents were also asked to rate the extent to which improvement in each of these areas was a priority. Hence improvement was investigated using the same items and scales given in Table 11. The average results on these scales are shown in Table 18. Results are shown by role classifications for VET leaders and, for comparison, for all higher education (HE) leaders.

Of the top ten rated areas for improvement, three concentrated on financial outcomes, three focused on quality assurance, two on delivering projects, and two on securing positive feedback from stakeholders. Less focus was placed on learning how to improve profile and generate positive external reviews. When read together, these low- and high-ranked items do not cluster into natural groups. The list nonetheless provides a useful source of evidence on areas where VET leaders feel development programs could best be focused.

The results do affirm that as with perceptions of the criteria for leadership effectiveness, it is aspects of implementation that leaders provided the highest responses. That is, leaders reported that improvement in their capacity to bring change successfully into practice is their highest priority for professional development and personal improvement. This is a very important finding and confirms the overall conclusions of the study. It implies that a key focus is to concentrate on building leaders' capability in this area as a prerequisite to building organisational capacity for better managing the change pressures identified in the second chapter. Notably, compared with higher education results securing competitive funding and increasing revenue has been flagged as an improtant facet for development by VET leaders.

Organisations should implement strategies for assessing leadership potential. Cost-effective ways for assessing leadership potential and the capabilities that count, which go beyond standard interview selection procedures and the use of referees' reports, should be explored in more detail.
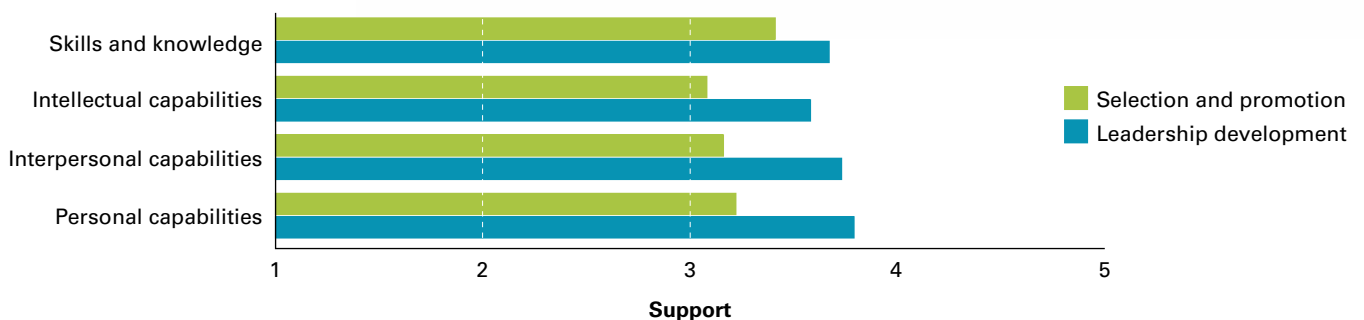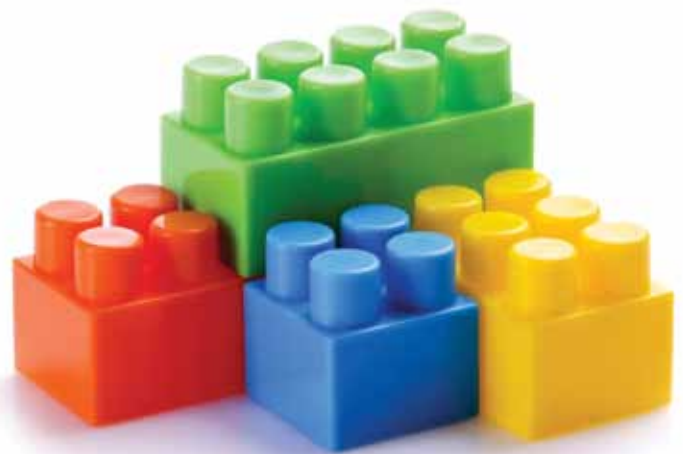
Figure 9: Emphasis given to various capabilities (scale average scores)

Table 18: Focus areas for improvement activities (item average scores)

	VET						All HE	All leaders
	Chief executive	Senior executive	Education manager	Corporate manager	Senior educator	All VET		
Securing competitive funds or increasing revenue	3.6	4.0	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.8	2.9	3.2
Delivering successful team projects	3.8	3.4	3.6	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.7
Delivering agreed tasks or projects on time and to specification	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.5	3.9	3.6	3.9	3.8
Receiving positive feedback from the community	3.6	3.4	3.7	3.7	3.4	3.6		3.7
Winning resources for your area of responsibility	3.5	3.4	3.9	3.5	3.3	3.6	3.6	3.6
Successful re-registration audits	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.6		3.6
Achieving a positive financial outcome for your area of responsibility	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.9	3.6	3.3	3.4
Improving student satisfaction ratings	3.2	3.3	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.6	4.0	3.9
Producing significant improvements in learning and training quality	3.4	3.7	3.7	3.2	3.7	3.5	4.2	4.0
Enhanced representation of equity groups	3.3	3.4	3.7	3.5	3.2	3.5	3.1	3.3
Maintaining high levels of staff support	3.6	3.5	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.8	3.7
Achieving positive outcomes for other staff in your division or area	3.1	3.5	3.8	3.1	3.4	3.5		3.5
Formative involvement of external stakeholders in your work	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.2	3.8	3.5	3.2	3.3
Achieving high quality graduate outcomes	3.6	3.2	3.4	3.7	3.4	3.5	4.2	3.9
Successful implementation of new initiatives	3.3	3.4	3.7	3.4	3.2	3.5	4.1	3.9
Successful variation to scope applications	3.2	3.5	3.7	3.2	3.4	3.5		3.5
Increased student completion rates	3.5	3.1	3.7	3.3	3.0	3.4	3.3	3.4

Table 18: Focus areas for improvement activities (item average scores) continued

	VET						All HE	All leaders
	Chief executive	Senior executive	Education manager	Corporate manager	Senior educator	All VET		
Winning awards and prizes	3.2	3.2	3.6	3.3	3.7	3.4	2.6	2.9
Producing future leaders	2.9	3.4	3.6	3.4	3.1	3.4	3.6	3.5
Establishing a collegial working environment	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.1	3.4	4.2	3.9
Receiving positive feedback from industry	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.1	3.1	3.4		3.4
Bringing innovative policies and practices into action	3.2	3.6	3.4	3.3	2.9	3.3	4.1	3.8
Receiving positive feedback from enterprises	3.4	2.9	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.3		3.3
Achieving positive outcomes from external reviews of the area	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.7	3.6
Promoting your teams achievements	2.9	3.3	3.4	3.1	3.4	3.3		3.3
Being invited to present to key groups	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.1	3.2	2.7	2.9
Receiving positive user feedback for your area of responsibility	2.9	3.1	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.8	3.6
Achieving goals set for your own professional development	3.4	3.4	3.4	2.7	3.2	3.2	3.5	3.4
Achieving a high profile for your area of responsibility	2.8	2.7	3.2	3.0	2.2	3.0	3.7	3.5
Meeting enrolment targets	2.5	3.0	3.1	2.7	3.1	2.9	3.1	3.1
Implementing successful learning systems or infrastructures	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.9	2.2	2.7	3.7	3.4
Effective management of quality and compliance	2.7	2.1	2.6	2.3	2.1	2.4		2.4

Putting in to leadership positions
those with the expertise in education.

Figure 10 draws a link between leaders' ratings of the importance of personal and interpersonal outcomes for effective performance, and the extent to which leaders have also flagged this as an area in need of improvement. As per Figure 6, the quadrant shows leaders who have rated this area as important for their work and an area in need of improvement, and those for who this facet of their work is considered important but not a focus area for improvement. Diagnostic maps such as this can help steer professional learning plans to ensure that learning activities are targeted in effective ways.
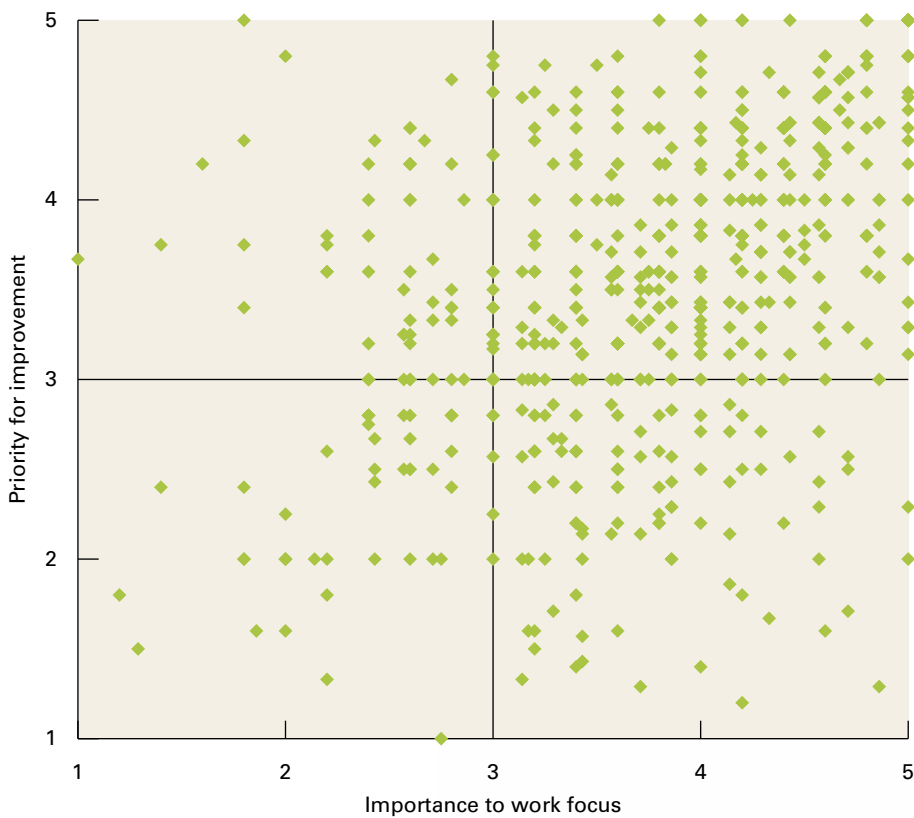
Figure 10: Targeting improvement for personal and interpersonal outcomes
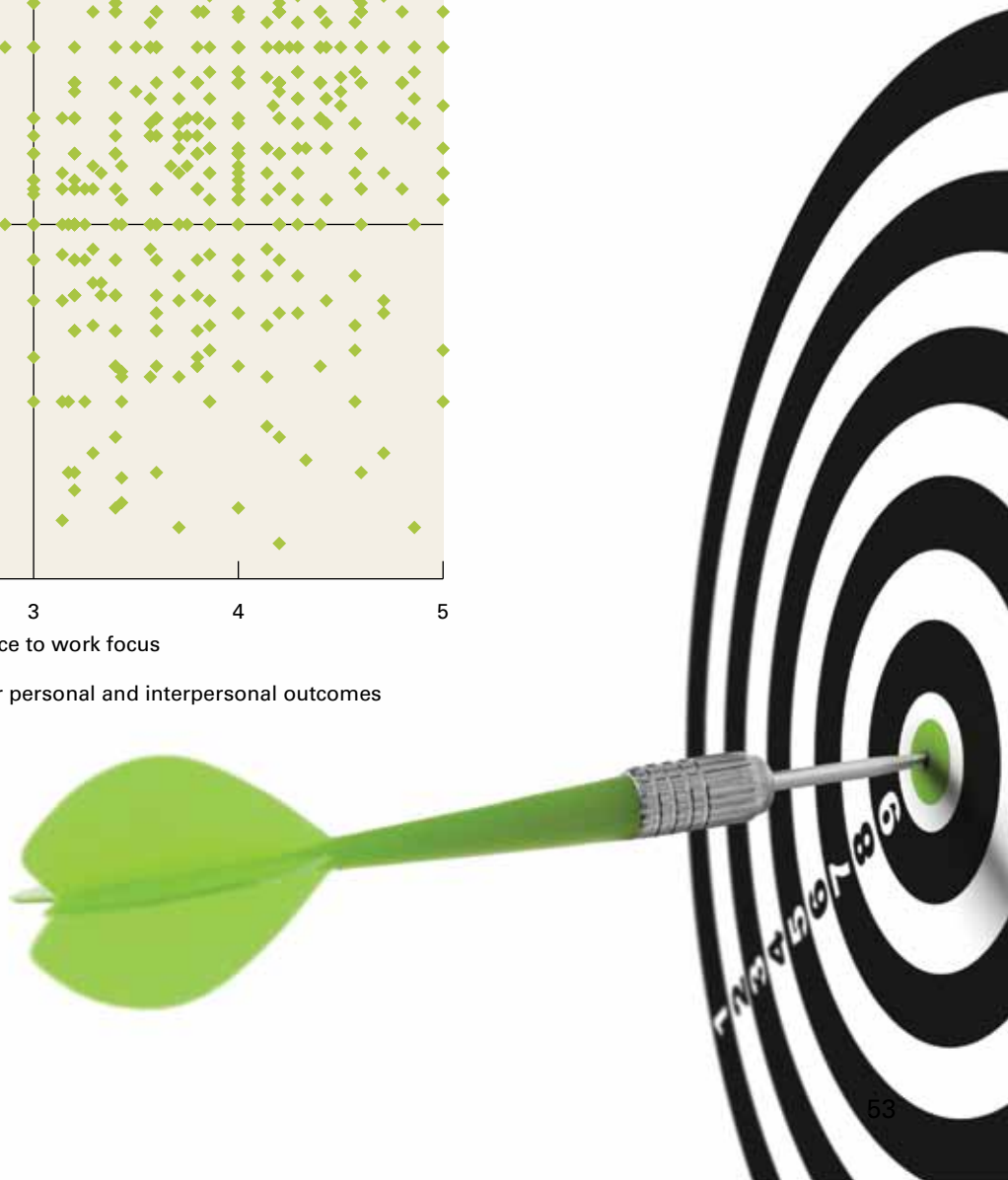
Key insight

Most leaders express a preference for practice-based learning, followed by formal development activities and finally self-managed learning. It is possible that the relatively low ratings for many of the more formal development activities may be due to poor execution or misalignment with the focus of training rather than their intrinsic worth.

Preferred ways to learn leadership

Leadership can be learned and taught in many different ways. Spotlighting not only the preferred focus areas for leadership development but also the preferred strategies is important in order to ensure that training programs are most effective.

Working from extensive review of the adult learning and professional development literature (Tough, 1977; Foley, 2000), prior research with higher education leaders (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008), recent research on productive learning in higher education (Coates, 2006), and a parallel study of leadership learning in school education (Scott, 2003), this study enumerated different strategies for learning leadership. These were shortlisted into 21 strategies which, in turn, were clustered into three broader styles: self-managed learning, practice-based learning, and formal leadership development.

In the study's online survey the 327 respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of each of the above learning approaches in assisting their development. A code of 1 was used to flag 'low' and 5 as 'high'. The results are given in Table 19.

The figures show that most leaders express a preference for practice-based learning, followed by formal development activities and finally self-managed learning. It is possible that the relatively low ratings for many of the more formal development activities may be due to poor execution or misalignment with the focus of training rather than their intrinsic worth.

The relative emphases given to different kinds of leadership learning were largely sustained across the demographic and leadership sub-groups assessed as part of the survey, with the notable exception of age. A leader's age was inversely related to support for both practice-based and formal leadership development, but not for self-managed learning.

Qualitative feedback affirms these patterns and emphases. Directors and CEOs prefer more flexible and individually focused forms of coaching and mentoring, coupled with access to broader peer support networks. Leaders in second- and third-tier roles favoured these kinds of approaches, but also made reference to more formal approaches to development – attending conferences, formal networking, and structured peer feedback and support programs.

Along with looking at specific approaches to leadership development, the survey asked leaders to identify the one key step that their organisation could do to improve the selection and development of leaders. The following list summarises (in no particular order) the suggestions that were made:

- developing a robust capability framework to set expectations and serve as a basis for building leadership capability;
- actively identifying potential leaders and accelerating the advancement of younger staff;
- developing clear pathways for leadership development that highlight opportunities and requirements;
- implementing personalised and targeted programs, and particularly mechanisms for immersing emerging leaders through mentoring, exchanges, acting roles and work shadowing;
- greater formalisation of leadership development – potentially as a baseline requirement – and incorporating training programs and peer support into ongoing professional learning;

Table 19: Approaches for learning leadership (item average scores)

	Chief executive	Senior executive	Education manager	Corporate manager	Senior educator	All leaders
Learning on-the-job	4.2	4.2	4.3	4.0	4.0	4.1
Study of real-life workplace problems	3.3	3.8	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.7
Ad hoc conversations about work with people in similar roles	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.6
Undertaking a tertiary qualification relevant to leadership	3.7	3.4	3.6	3.4	4.2	3.6
Being involved in informal mentoring/coaching	3.2	3.6	3.4	3.8	3.7	3.5
Participating in peer networks within the organisation	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.5	4.0	3.5
Participating in peer networks beyond the organisation	4.1	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5
Undertaking self-guided reading on leadership	3.5	2.9	3.2	3.6	3.4	3.3
Being involved in formal mentoring/coaching programs	3.4	3.1	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.3
Completing formal leadership programs given by external providers	2.8	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.3
Participating in 360 degree feedback reviews based on known leadership capabilities	3.4	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.3
Attending conferences	3.2	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.5	3.2
Participating in annual performance reviews	3.4	3.2	3.2	3.3	3.1	3.2
Completing formal leadership programs provided by your organisation	2.6	2.8	3.2	3.2	3.4	3.1
Participating in leadership development programs which are custom-tailored to your needs	3.1	3.2	3.0	3.2	3.1	3.1
Undertaking site visits to other institutions or agencies	3.4	3.4	3.0	3.0	2.9	3.1
Participating in VET leadership seminars	2.8	3.2	3.1	3.0	3.5	3.1
Involvement in professional leadership groups or associations	3.4	2.9	2.9	3.0	3.5	3.0
Undertaking work-placements or exchanges	2.6	2.4	3.1	3.0	3.6	3.0
Shadowing a peer from another organisation	2.3	2.6	2.5	2.5	3.4	2.6
Accessing leadership information on the internet	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.5	2.6

Key insight

More could and should be done to boost leadership development, particularly among emerging leaders. The need for effort across the board was stressed – for boosting the conceptualisation, identification, selection, diversification, development, promotion, support and recognition of leaders and leadership. Considered broadly, this could be seen as a general call to give increased definition and structure to the profession of VET leadership.

- generating space and capacity for people to lead – finding a way of giving people space for creativity, reflection and growth;
- evidence-based and independent promotions processes, based on people's skills as well as experience and qualifications; and
- diversifying leadership teams in terms of demographics, professional backgrounds and existing alliances.

An evident theme underlying these suggestions is that more could and should be done to boost leadership development, particularly among emerging leaders. The need for effort across the board was stressed – for boosting the conceptualisation, identification, selection, diversification, development, promotion, support and recognition of leaders and leadership. Considered broadly, this could be seen as a general call to give increased definition and structure to the profession of VET leadership.

Various approaches can be used to give more structure to the definition of VET leadership. A good way to begin is by drawing together the research-based pictures presented in this study. An initial step in this direction is made in the concluding chapter of this report. Such perspectives of leadership have the potential to act as a springboard for building more extensive professional frameworks that define different types and standards of leadership. Qualification expectations and professional learning can then be derived from such frameworks. In turn, this can provide an evidence-based foundation for building capacity for the future.

Findings and implications

The future capacity of VET in Australia will be underpinned by the capability and regeneration of its leadership. The VET workforce needs renewal to combat a looming wave of retirements over the next decade (Skills Australia, 2010), and this is most pronounced in the ranks of leaders. Demography, and a contemporary awareness of the importance of leadership and the limitations of past education, impels a need to improve leadership learning for the future.

This chapter has assessed how VET leaders participating in this study prefer to learn, and their existing experience of leadership programs. As the findings flag, programs appear to lack currency. Much leadership training thus far appears to have been accidental. The findings affirm a need to recast the support and leadership learning approaches intended to develop leaders, using the findings in this chapter as a source of evidence. New programs need to focus on concrete change management skills, working through complex real-world problems, and leading change in ambiguous environments. More authentic and active modes of learning were advocated by VET leaders, who expressed an overwhelming preference for practice-based and self-managed as opposed to formal forms of professional learning.

The findings indicate that the selection of VET leaders should be shaped by an understanding of the characteristics of effective leadership. This highlights the need to get a much better alignment between formal processes and the actual activities, and between effectiveness indicators and capabilities necessary for
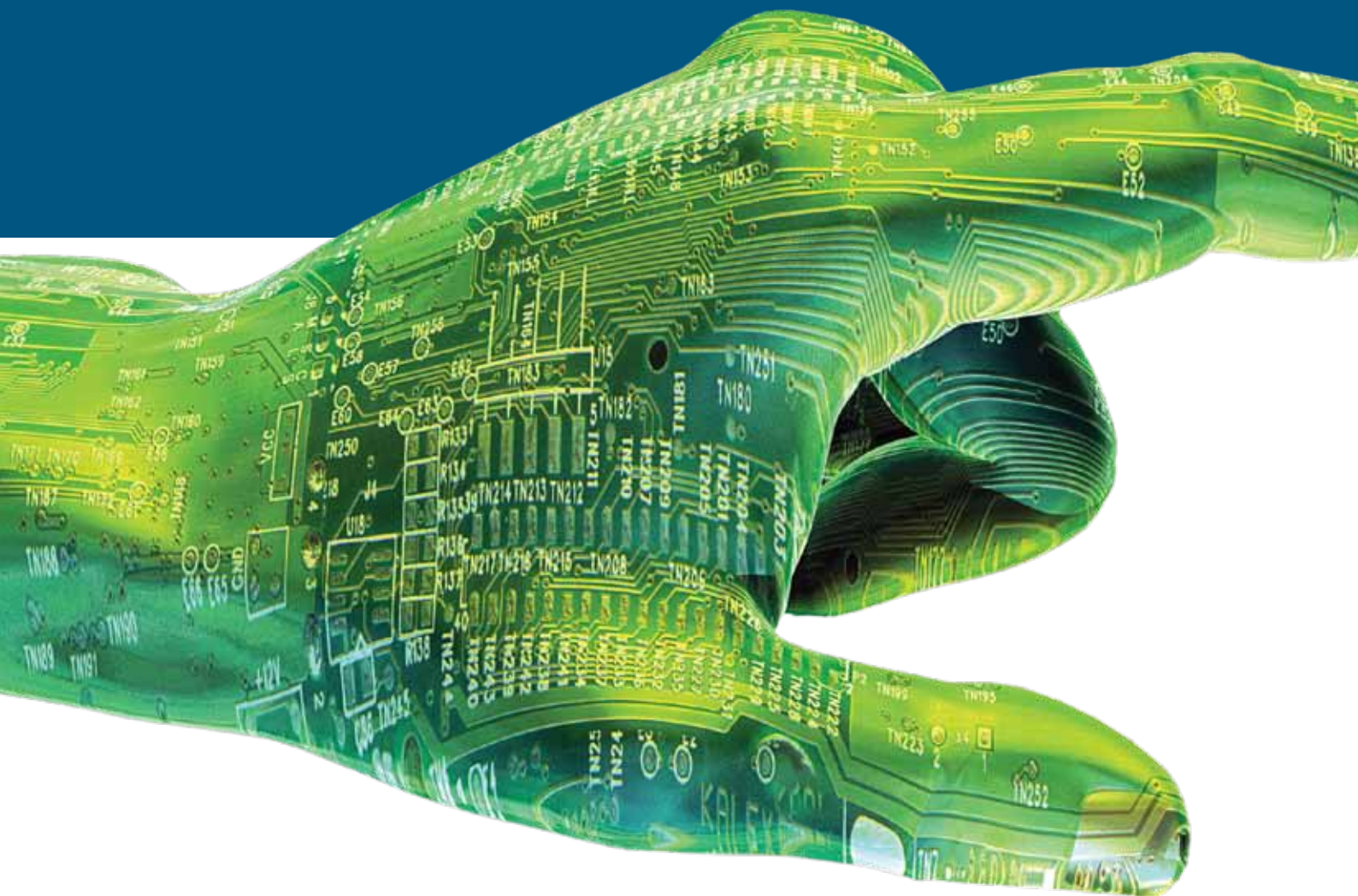
successful performance. If these are the capabilities required for effective VET leadership, they should be front and centre of leadership learning activities.

Like their peers in higher education, VET leaders prefer to learn leadership in ways that involve supported experience of, interaction with and reflection on challenging, uncertain and relevant real-world situations. Key ingredients of this observation include:

- support – engaging leaders with the confidence and opportunity to test new ideas, and providing tailored structures that help them work through complexity and uncertainty;

- experience – being exposed to and involved with challenging and thought-provoking situations;

- interaction – optimally, people 'get involved' as active participants when learning leadership;

- reflection – training should support leaders in taking stock and diagnosing their reading of situations, and how they have planned and enacted a response;

- relevant – the training must engage a leader and be aligned with a leaders' current or future work; and

- real-world – the situation, whether simulated or 'ready made', should be complex and realistic, and as with all learning it must be pitched at threshold levels that challenge learner's knowledge and mental models.

Leadership development and learning programs should be reviewed and aligned with the findings of the study concerning how and what VET leaders prefer to learn. Where possible, programs should be underpinned by evidence-based insights into effective professional practice. In doing this it is recommended that RTOs set up learning networks for people in the same leadership roles.

These broad criteria could be read as affirming one-on-one mentoring or coaching as the ideal format for all leadership development. This is not necessarily the case, and nor is it often the most efficient or scalable approach. As with the practice of leadership itself, many forms of leadership education will be networked or distributed rather than solo in style. Hence this summary does not attempt to sow a formulaic approach for leadership development, and neither does it attempt to define in a prescriptive way what leadership development should necessarily be.

Findings from the antecedent study of higher education leaders spurred development of the Online Leadership Learning System (OLLS) (see: http://olls.acer.edu.au). Current findings affirm the value of this architecture for helping people self-reflect on their leadership and enabling people to immediately compare their leadership perceptions with those provided by experienced leaders. This system is one way to address the view of VET leaders that learning leadership should be tailored to people's contexts and backgrounds, and the challenges they face in their work.

These insights have the potential to play a major role in reshaping the approaches which are used for leadership selection. Current position descriptions, performance management criteria, selection and succession plans should be reviewed against the evidence-based presented in this report. Items in generic performance management systems should be checked for validity and relative importance against this study's findings, which has explored leadership in detail in a VET context. Organisations should build key findings concerning the priority areas of focus in each leadership role, along with the performance indicators and the capabilities identified as counting most for effective performance, into revised position descriptions, succession plans, selection procedures, development processes and performance management systems.

Arguably the most important implication of this study is the need to implement tested strategies for identifying and developing aspiring leaders. Given the size and significance of the challenge these need to be structured and well planned. Yet at the same time they must be nimble and facilitate devolved practice-based learning. They must be sufficiently flexible to spot and accelerate capability through a suite of pathways rather than make essential a stepwise progression.

Key insight

Arguably the most important implication of this study is the need to implement tested strategies for identifying and developing aspiring leaders. Given the size and significance of the challenge these need to be structured and well planned. Yet at the same time they must be nimble and facilitate devolved practice-based learning. They must be sufficiently flexible to spot and accelerate capability through a suite of pathways rather than make essential a stepwise progression.

Leadership education carries the weighty responsibility of making leading VET an attractive proposition to a new generation of leaders. As current leaders retire, it must attract, engage and retain new people, both from inside and outside the sector. In doing this, it has the capacity to map out new conceptualisations of the profession. Education must be individually tailored, but developed against leadership standards to assist with definition of the profession. Organisations and governments must continue to highlight the importance of VET leadership in order to attract a new generation of leaders as the current, older generation of leaders leaves the system.

Developing leadership capacity is important in itself, but it also carries wider implications for the overall formation of the VET workforce. Hence there is a need for broader workforce development agendas to address leadership development, and also to unfold leadership development in ways that advance the workforce.

Evidence-based strategies for improving practice

- Revise current selection approaches against evidence of the capabilities required for effective leadership.

- Re-validate position descriptions, succession plans, selection procedures, development processes and performance management systems

- Design and implement RTO-specific and more general industry-wide strategies and pathways for identifying and developing aspiring leaders.

- Implement more practice-based approaches to learning leadership, ensuring that these are based on evidence of what works and are scalable.

- Blend formal, structured leadership development programs with informal/incidental approaches to self learning.

- Use tools such as the Online Leadership Learning System to enhance the science of leadership education by embedding the collection of evidence.

- Review existing programs to ensure currency, and focus professional learning on boosting leaders' capacity to understand external change and to propel internal change.

- Define a new conceptualisation of VET leadership that sets forth key qualities and rewards of the profession, and seeds growth of a standards framework that acknowledges progression and success.

VET leadership for the future

The Australian VET sector needs strategies for managing the looming leadership succession crisis, and for helping VET leaders excel in times of change and uncertainty. But too little is known about leaders and their work – what leaders do, what influences and aspirations shape their role, and what capabilities and competencies underpin effective performance. This study has shed light on these facets of VET leadership, and insights on focusing leadership selection, learning and promotion.

In broad terms, the findings profile leadership as focused on managing change. This learning and growth requires a change-capable culture, and the opportunities and resources to allow leaders the room to grow. Hence the findings carry implications for leaders and for their organisations as well. A focus on effective change implementation is central because of the need for RTOs to continually adapt to a uncertain and shifting operating environment.

Change is evidently an important facet of leadership, but there is more to leading VET than leading change. As the reports from leaders in this study convey, leadership often involves sustaining consistency and direction, in volatile contexts or otherwise. To some extent, a preoccupation with change is concerning given the

Leadership is about managing change and also stable growth in fluid environments

Leadership requires a 'change capable culture' that gives space to lead

We need strategies for managing the looming succession crisis

Too little is known about leaders and their work

Leaders' roles and work focus are not clearly defined

Markers of effective performance are not clearly defined and deployed

Produce a framework of key capabilities and competencies

Effective leadership education must be current and shaped by understanding of effective practice

Figure 11: Summary insights from the research

core business of teaching and learning. Constantly responding to shifting goalposts, or focusing on shifting goalposts, may be deterring from attention to education.
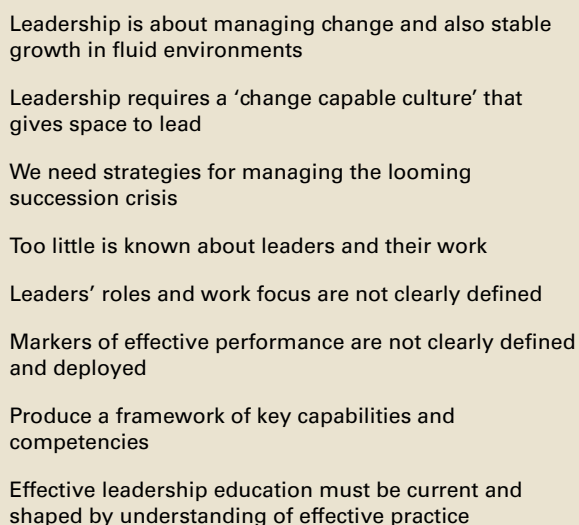
The study has produced information on what VET leaders do in their jobs. This data is important, for much of the knowledge and understanding of VET leadership has been fragmented and incomplete. Yet it seems difficult to advance leadership without a cogent picture of leaders' experiences and leadership practice. Results from the survey have helped to build insight into what leaders see as the criteria for effective performance. Demystifying VET leadership is an important step to addressing issues of role function and succession, such as recruitment and ongoing development.

Analysing leaders' duties suggests that while VET leaders have adjusted to education-focused demands of their roles, they now need new capabilities to respond to change pressures. Leaders have the capacity to manage industry and clients, but they need skills to deal with new complex contexts that carry tensions between competition and regulation.

The results show that in many respects the concerns of leaders are only loosely aligned with the broader pressures confronting the VET sector – graduate outcomes, quality and education fundamentals. In broad terms, VET leaders are focused on input-side factors such as student numbers and funding. A challenge for the future involves developing a more outcomes-focused orientation, one centered on effective change implementation, on delivery, and on high-quality graduate outcomes.

To identify the powerful forces which shape leadership, the study established criteria seen to mark out effective performance in each role. It highlighted a set of indicators identified by VET leaders as being the ones most important in making judgements about the effective delivery of each role. Identifying indicators of effective performance is important, as it is these which, ideally, drive leaders' aspirations and behaviours. Leaders are driven by these outcomes which play an important role in shaping leadership.

In line with the initial aims, this study has produced an empirically-validated leadership capability framework. The capabilities are based on a conceptual model of

leadership grounded in educational and psychological theory, and empirically validated in the survey of VET and, previously, higher education and school leaders. It has yielded evidence for developing a suite of resources and strategies that organisations can use to develop leadership, along with data on which forms of formal/ informal support were most useful for developing leadership capabilities.

Read together, findings from this study propel the need for new conceptualisations of VET leadership. While the results affirm prior trends, new narratives appear to be

driving contemporary leadership – such as competition, commercial pressures, and developing change-capable cultures. Our understanding of leaders needs to change accordingly, and these new understandings need to be drafted in ways that advance policy and practice. Fundamentally, this should involve raising the profile of VET leadership.

Part of this new understanding should involve developing industry-wide understandings of different leadership roles. The large number of role descriptors and loose association between roles and activities

highlights a lack of role clarity. This has implications for, among other issues, the mobility and recognition of VET leaders within and from outside the sector.

Role confusion and role clarity are both contributing factors in what the study brings out as another finding about the world of VET leaders. Many leaders reported inconsistency between the expectations and requirements of the role and the resources – not least time and thinking space – available to deliver.

More broadly, while the term 'leader' implies influence, innovation and development, many VET leaders reported feeling hamstrung by changing expectations of what it means to be a leader in VET and the contexts in which they work. People are only able to exercise leadership to the extent that organisational conditions configure and allow for that to happen.

Hence the findings also affirm the need to build more change-capable cultures. Reports from leaders suggest that at present many RTOs are unable to respond effectively in increasingly competitive operating environments.

The study examined how to improve the focus and approach of leadership development. The findings suggest that many current programs lack currency. New programs need to focus on concrete change management skills and leading in times of change. More authentic and active modes of learning were advocated by VET leaders. In their survey responses, leaders expressed an overwhelming preference for practice-based and self-managed leadership development as opposed to formal forms of professional learning. Leaders say they learn leadership most effectively from other people and their own experiences of leading.

The findings also indicate that the selection of VET leaders should be shaped by an understanding of the characteristics of effective leadership. The findings highlight the need to ensure a better alignment between formal processes and the actual activities, effectiveness indicators and capabilities necessary for successful performance. There is scope, as a result, for the findings from this study to play a major role in reshaping the approaches which are used for leadership selection. Current position descriptions, performance management criteria, selection and succession plans should be reviewed against the study's findings.

Key insight

The findings also indicate that the selection of VET leaders should be shaped by an understanding of the characteristics of effective leadership. The findings highlight the need to ensure a better alignment between formal processes and the actual activities, effectiveness indicators and capabilities necessary for successful performance.

More broadly, there is scope for converting the research-driven picture of leadership formed through this study into a professional framework that captures different kinds and levels of performance. The outcomes of the current research are not singularly sufficient to underpin this framework, but they affirm the need and value of further work on this front. An integral part of this framework could be the specification of entry-level qualifications for VET leadership, as well as ongoing professional development.

This study has advanced new thoughts about VET leadership, including that there is much more to be known. Two specific directions are defined. First, there is a need to ripple this study into larger national research on the tertiary workforce and leaders. Second, and optimally in a coordinated fashion, there is a need to replicate such inquiry in more detailed fashion within specific roles, and with sub-sections of the VET industry. Enacting more evidence-based approaches to leadership development should, in future, make such work routine.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The study's methodology

This appendix provides a description of the study's phased methodology is given and the caveats on interpreting the results identified at the sector workshops are noted.

A phased approach

The study was implemented in seven interlocked phases, including:

- project scoping, positioning and initiation;
- foundation consultation with a reference group;
- discussions between the project team and external experts to identify the sample for the empirical phase;
- detailed research review by John Mitchell;
- detailed review of the current VET policy and operating environment by Peter Noonan;
- empirical phase in which the 327 VET leaders completed an online survey;
- meetings and workshops with an additional group of just over 100 leaders to discuss the results of the online survey in terms of their veracity, meaning and key implications for action; and
- production and refinement of the final report.

Literature review

The focus of the literature review was primarily on empirical studies specifically related to VET leadership, both in Australia and internationally. Within this framework, John Mitchell was commissioned to conduct a review of the research literature available on VET leadership in Australia and overseas. Key Australian and international education databases were searched to identify relevant resources to the project scope. This enabled the project team to identify major shifts in focus and findings over time, as well as enduring themes. The project objectives informed the development of the key search terms for the literature review. These included: 'leadership', 'educational leadership', 'leadership qualities', 'vocational education and training', and 'empirical research'. Each of the studies identified

was reviewed for its research focus, the quality of its methodology, sampling, the presence of a conceptual framework, its context and scope, and findings. The summative review from the literature then informed the development of a RTO sampling frame and the criteria for inclusion in the survey i.e. managers to whom other managers report.

Policy review

The focus of the policy review was primarily on identifying those existing and emerging factors influencing the role of the VET leader of today and tomorrow. Peter Noonan was commissioned to conduct a review of the VET policy environment in Australia to set a context for the project findings and recommendations. This review was drawn from extensive experience at senior public policy levels and in-depth knowledge of policy at the State and Commonwealth level. A review of publicly available resources including policy documents, budget papers and ministerial statements were used to paint a picture of the current policy and operating environment in Australia to set a context for how these factors may be influencing and impacting on the role of the VET leader.

The empirical phase

A stratified snowballing sampling technique generated responses from 24 RTOs. Organisations were invited to take part in the study through a direct approach from the project team. Attention was given to ensuring that a representative range of Australian institutions and leadership roles were involved. The RTOs that participated in the study are listed in Table 20.

Each RTO was approached through the Director or CEO equivalent to invite participation in the study and forward the survey URL to leaders within their organisation. The directions for disseminating the survey focused on individuals that were in scope of the 'VET leader' definition indentified in the project literature review: "people in roles classified as senior managers to who other managers report" (Mulcahy, 2003). While a broad definition, this helps target people who might colloquially be considered 'VET leaders'. A broad range of roles were recorded in the study including: director, chief financial officers, general managers, program

Table 20: Organisations participating in the study

State/ Territory	Registered Training Organisation (RTO)
New South Wales	Albury Wodonga Community College
	Think: Education Group
	TAFE NSW – Northern Sydney Institute
	TAFE NSW – Western Sydney Institute
	TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute
	Martin College (Study Group Australia)
	Qantas
Victoria	Kangan Institute
	Pivot Point International Academy
	Insurance Australia Group (IAG)
	University of Ballarat
	MEGT (Australia) Ltd
	Victoria University
	William Angliss Institute
	RMIT
Queensland	Southbank Institute of Technology
	First Impressions Resources
South Australia	TAFE SA – Adelaide North
	TAFE SA – Regional
Western Australia	Central TAFE
	CYO Connor College of TAFE
	Industrial Training Institute
Tasmania	Tasmanian Polytechnic
Australian Capital Territory	Canberra Institute of Technology
Northern Territory	Charles Darwin University

managers/heads/directors, heads of school, or their equivalent.

As no existing sampling frame existed for this population it was necessary to construct one for this study. The decision as to whom the survey should be distributed to was left to the discretion of the director, CEO-equivalent, or delegated officer. That is, the research team did not conduct a case-by-case assessment of whether particular groups, divisions or individuals should participate in the survey beyond providing broad advice on how the project definition might be applied to the particular organisation.

Identifying the people directly responsible the range of activities conducted in Australian RTOs is not a straightforward task. For example, the variability of titles, roles and responsibilities, authority ascribed to particular titles can have profoundly different meaning in different contexts, particularly when drawing on a sample of both public and private sector organisations with a range of hierarchical structures. The level of formal leadership responsibility will vary between people, divisions and organisations, and, as the study demonstrates, is not easily defined by a particular portfolio or position name. Importantly, titles used in one organisational context do not necessarily map evenly or universally across to other leadership roles, even though they may share the same title.

A focus on informal leadership was outside the scope of this project. There is, however, a need for specific research on the area, ideally using the same methodology and framework as the present study so that the results can be meaningfully compared.

Ethics clearance for the study was provided by both ACER and the University of Melbourne.

Survey instrument design

The survey instrument used in the empirical phase of the study (Appendix 2) was delivered and completed online. It built upon a parallel instrument that had already been validated for leadership in school education (Scott, 2003) and higher education (Scott, Coates and Anderson, 2008) and in a range of studies of professional capability amongst successful graduates (Vescio, 2005).

A draft of the instrument was reviewed in detail by a number of experienced VET practitioners and researchers and against the VET leadership literature. It was then modified in light of this. In particular, there are a range of nuanced political, social and operational pressures at play in the VET that became new items in the survey.

The quantitative items in the survey focus on the:

- learning and teaching leaders' profile;
- major area of focus in their role;
- indicators they use to judge their effectiveness;
- influences that most have an impact on their daily work;
- capabilities necessary for successful performance as a learning and teaching leader; and
- relative effectiveness of a range of formal and informal activities in developing these capabilities.

Nine open-ended questions are also included. These questions seek leaders' views on issues such as:

- which aspects of their role they find most and least satisfying;
- the major challenges they experience in the role and how they resolve them;
- what it is like being a leader in their role; and
- what they believe are the most effective methods for developing the capabilities of leaders in their situation.

The open-ended questions give leaders the opportunity to expand on issues raised by the survey items or to make comment on additional issues.

The survey was completed online using ACER's standard survey software. It was extensively field tested before distribution and was designed for completion in around 25 minutes, depending on the amount of open-text feedback provided.

Survey administration

The RTO contact, or delegated officer, in each organisation personally invited each of their identified respondents to participate in the survey and explained its purpose and significance. The snowballing sampling technique involved a recruitment process over the period of July 2009 to February 2010 in order to build a statistically reliable sample of respondents. Follow-up emails were sent by the project team at weekly intervals and each RTO contact undertook personal follow up as necessary. Responses were received in confidence and were not linked with information in the sampling frame. Data gathering was complete by early February 2010.

Response sample

The research team received responses from 327 leaders from 24 RTOs. The relatively high response yield and large number of open-ended comments makes this one of the largest cross-sectoral empirical studies of leaders in vocational education and training. The response sample is relatively representative of the sector, taking into account the limited overall data on available VET leadership.

Quantitative analysis

A range of methods were used to analyse the survey data. Validity and reliability checks were conducted on the capability and context scales to confirm content and face validity. Statistical methods were used to explore and scale the survey data, to validate the items and scales, and to determine the nature and strength of patterns in response. To facilitate interpretation of results, the report concentrates on summary means and ordinal ranks. The means are reported on the response scale included on the instrument. The variance-explained statistics are reported using a percentage metric. This modelling was undertaken in an exploratory fashion, given the limited amount of empirical research on VET leadership and, hence, of explanatory models upon which to base the current analyses.

Qualitative analysis

Initially, the open-ended responses were subjected to a close read by the team members. This assisted the team to become familiar with the respondent comments. The responses were then sorted and thematically analysed initially by role. They were then analysed independently by different members of the project team, using the

study's conceptual framework for academic leadership as a guide. Comparisons with the quantitative findings were made. Insights were then pooled and validated by team members. Collectively, these processes allowed the team to approach the data from multiple perspectives.

The approaches used by researchers such as Miles and Huberman (1994) and Grace (2002) were adopted to enhance the analysis process. This included a focus not just on thematic analyses but identification of the degree of emotion evident in what leaders wrote, how often they returned to a topic or theme, and how much they wrote on particular issues. Comments used throughout the report are faithful to the overall stance of a leader for any given question. Generally, comments are included that reflect an overall pattern in responses on a particular issue. However, the team did not shy away from outlier comments because these may introduce points of contradiction, new ideas or ways of looking at an issue. Such spaces may provide opportunities for advancing our thinking and practice in academic leadership.

National reviews of the results

The results of the online survey were discussed in detail at a series of three-hour workshops held across Australia between November 2009 and February 2010. These took place in Brisbane, Sydney, Adelaide and Melbourne. More than 100 people ranging from a wide range of organisations, roles and industry backgrounds attended these workshops. Each workshop focused on the following:

- the study's need and aims;
- its methodology and caveats that might arise from it;
- the study's findings on
  - nature of leadership in universities, analogies;
  - major areas of focus in different leadership roles;
  - the most satisfying and challenging aspects of each role;
  - key influences shaping leadership in universities;
  - how VET leaders judge their performance to be effective;
  - the capabilities associated with effective leadership; and
  - learning leadership;

Importantly, participants were invited at the end of each workshop to write responses to the following questions:

- What are your broad reactions to the key results and preliminary findings?
- What appear to be the main influences and challenges facing contemporary VET leaders?
- What are the best ways of developing the capacity of current VET leaders, and what are the main focus areas?
- How can the findings help clarify and further professionalise VET leadership?
- How can the capabilities that count for effective performance be used for leadership development?
- What are the best approaches for identifying and building a new generation of VET leaders?

This feedback provided an additional and highly significant source of data for the study. The data generated from this phase has been used to ensure that the recommendations and key insights reflect accurately the collective views of a wide range of experienced leaders in Australian VET and not simply the views of the project team.

The feedback given at all of the above events has been recorded, placed into a detailed spreadsheet, and then sorted by the agenda for each workshop and analysed qualitatively.

Compilation of the final project report

For each key project objective the report has, as noted earlier, produced a triangulated picture of what the literature says, what the respondents to the survey said and what the participants at the national workshops said in evaluating the veracity of the findings and identifying their implications. This draft report was then circulated for further review at a national forum on the project, before a final version was readied for publication.

Appendix 2:
The feedback instrument

Snapshots of the study's online survey instrument are provided below.

VET Leadership for the Future