Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus

Final Report

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Glossary of Acronyms

ARE  Action Research Enabler
DAL  Developmental Action Learning
DL   Distributed Leadership
ICVF Integrated Competing Values Framework
LAP  Leadership and Assessment Project
LEAP Leaders in Effective Assessment Practice
PAR  Participatory Action Research
Executive Summary

The Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus project aimed to develop through a distributed leadership model, multi-level academic leadership across the institution, to promote and support the strategic and systematic enhancement of assessment and feedback, and the development of transparent and coherent policy frameworks at all levels (unit, program, department and division). It achieved this and more.

The main factor that supported this achievement was the LEAP (Leaders in Effective Assessment Practice) model for developing higher education leadership capacity in assessment. This integrated model combines the synergies of Distributed Leadership with Participatory Action Research creating an efficacious methodological framework.

New indicators were developed by the project for use in evaluating Participatory Action Research (PAR) when framing projects with the aim of leadership capacity building. The piloting of these indicators provided informative data and now await further trialling in other projects.

Supported Reflection Sessions proved a successful method for supporting active engagement in critically reflective practice, a key component of the project. LEAP fora were equally successful in supporting collegial reflection, often resulting in the generation of effective strategies and tools to progress the project.

The project’s Action Research Enablers (AREs) have now claimed leadership status in assessment. This leadership capacity has been recognised across the organisation as the new leaders are invited to lead assessment change in both formal and informal, distributed and hierarchical roles. The sustainability of this leadership is suggested by the ongoing leadership initiatives and activities that have continued since the end of the project.
1. Project outcomes

The overall aim of *The Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus* project was to develop through a distributed leadership model, multi-level academic leadership across the institution, to promote and support the strategic and systematic enhancement of assessment and feedback, and the development of transparent and coherent policy frameworks at all levels (unit, program, department and division).

Four main goals or outcomes were proposed for the project, to be achieved over the three phases of the project. These were:

1. Develop and implement a sustainable and systematic leadership and organisational development model for the enhancement of assessment practice across higher education institutions.

2. Develop a transparent and coherent policy framework for assessment and feedback at all levels (unit, program, department and division).

3. Foster ‘leaders of effective assessment practice’ at all levels of the institution by enhancing these leaders’ scholarly understanding of assessment and feedback in higher education, and their knowledge and ability to work in cross-level and integrated teams. These individuals will be representative of various disciplines and organisational levels within the university.

4. Establish a community of practice in higher education assessment and feedback across the sector. (Original project proposal to Carrick, 2006, p.6).

These original outcomes are in the process of being achieved or have already been achieved. Use of a PAR approach has been effective in supporting a distributed process of leadership capacity building for the leaders of effective and engaging assessment, and more discussion on this follows in the next section. The original project approach provided for systematic development of leadership capacity across the thirteen participating departments, with a process of regular reflection (including on the theoretical literature) and supportive collaboration in developing context specific strategies, consultation, then initiation and enactment of strategies. Supported reflection sessions were highly valued by the AREs, as were the developmentally appropriate support of regular LEAP fora, and a range of workshops. The sustainability of the project, past the initial funding period, is already evident in outcomes such as the ongoing role of AREs on an organisation wide assessment working party, where they lead new policy development and review. One ARE has recently been appointed as the Associate Dean of Learning and Teaching for her faculty. To sum it up, as more than one ARE has stated “this will never stop”.

When the project commenced there was no assessment policy for the organisation. The approach to assessment across campus was not consistent and practice tended to follow unconsidered and unchallenged precedent, basically, as we had done it this
way for years, it must be the right way. The AREs, starting with their assessment profiles of departments, initiated a new dialogue around engaging assessment. This dialogue raised many questions, of which the majority could not be answered as there was no policy. The literature provided insight into good practice and there were many examples of good practice across the campus, however this was still ad hoc. Two-thirds of the way through the project, the organisation’s executive made a call for policy. With the establishment of a working party, the AREs were empowered to lead and inform this policy development based on their expert knowledge, working with representatives from across the organisation. They began to change the culture around assessment (for example, from a norms-based approach to a standards-based approach). As a result a new assessment policy was, not only drafted but, recently passed by Academic Senate for implementation in the new year. The policy is evidenced based and clearly promotes principles of good assessment. A large number of related policies and documents (for example, examinations policy) have also been drafted and are in the consultative phase. The organisation now has a policy framework. The serendipity of the executive calling for, and funding the development of, policy was opportune. The AREs had developed the capacity to lead this change and the organisation resourced the process, enabling scholarly and efficient policy development.

The AREs, singularly and collaboratively as LEAPers, have demonstrated their capacity to lead assessment. Each has led the process of profiling assessment in their department and used this as a stimulus to engage their department in a new discourse around engaging assessment practice. As a result, each of the departments has worked towards systematically improving assessment practice, for example, varying the nature of the assessment tasks and planning more efficient assessment tasks. Many have led workshops to support this change. Another serendipitous outcome is that once assessment had been reviewed, it led to the curriculum of departments also being reviewed. This is also in synergy with the organisational goals, as the university undergoes both restructuring and academic review.

As LEAP teams, the AREs have worked in cross-level and integrated teams. In addition to the assessment working party, they have been members of organisational curriculum working parties, have facilitated workshops in whole-of-organisation fora and shared their learnings at national and international fora and conferences, and through invitation on national research projects.

Through these fora they have gained membership to a wider community of practice. While a website was established for a more formal community of practice, its’ use as a discussion forum has been irregular. A public website that acts as a repository of project resources is underconstruction.

Project outcomes are proving to be sustainable. Each of the AREs has clearly articulated their plans for leading ongoing collaborative assessment change (refer to the ARE summary reports in the Appendix). This commitment to collegiality and communication has been an essential requirement for the success of this project. The collegiality evident in the manner in which the AREs undertook the assessment
development process, also extends to research collaborations. These “collaborations” (McGinn, Shields, Manley-Casmir, Grundy and Fenton, 2005) initiated by the AREs, are forming within and across departments. Within departments some AREs have adopted a team approach to leading assessment and are now planning further collaborative action research projects (Staniforth and Harland, 2003). These projects will act as a means of gathering data while also engaging a large proportion of their academic colleagues in the process and thus the project. This active involvement in the project by all “relevant parties” (Wadsworth, 1988), this “authentic participation” (McTaggart, 1989) is a central tenet of the Participatory Action Research framework. In their quest to improve assessment practice, AREs have reached “across the divide” (Inch and McVarish, 2003) to other departments and are forming new partnerships for research and new teams to support the research process.
2. Theoretical Approaches

2.1 Introduction

One of the original aims of the Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus project was to build the capacity of a group of cross-disciplinary leaders to create effective and engaging assessment practice across one Australian metropolitan university. An underlying assumption of building leadership capacity across the organisation has been that the leaders will continue to actively lead assessment across the organisation, and therefore ensure project sustainability beyond the project funding period.

The project succeeded in attaining this and other outcomes, in part, due to the underlying methodology (as outlined in Section 3 of this report) and the use and then advancement of existing knowledge, including links to other ALTC projects. Two main theoretical approaches informed the methodology: each phase of the project was framed within a Participatory Action Research approach and the development of assessment leadership capacity was based on a distributed model of leadership.

2.2 Participatory Action Research

A Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) model was adopted as the methodological framework for the project. This approach was chosen as it was believed that it would provide the opportunity for participants to develop different assessment strategies tailored in response to the needs of their contexts, that is, their departments. While the project started with the participation of three departments, it grew to include thirteen departments, across a range of disciplines. As each department brought contextually specific assessment needs, an approach that provided a high degree of research flexibility was essential in enabling appropriate strategies for each context. PAR also offered an emphasis on collaboration, intervention strategies, the construction and testing of new knowledge and theory, and an evaluative component for each stage and phase (A. Burns, personal communication, November 22, 2006).

Action Research has had a long tradition as a methodology in education research projects (Goodnough, 2003; Gray, Chang and Radloff, 2007; Harland, 2003; Minty, Weedon, Morss and Cannall, 2007, and Staniforth and Harland, 2003) and is well documented as a method for encouraging innovation and change at local levels of organization (Pedlar, 2006; Pedlar, Burgoyne and Brook, 2005). The incorporation of aspects of Developmental Action Learning (DAL) for the development of leadership capacity (Raelin and Raelin, 2006) was compatible with the PAR cycle as it stresses...
the importance of collegial reflection on real life challenges in their own educational environments. DAL brings an emphasis on introducing theory, then reflection on the theory and on experience prior to the activation of project phases, especially during the early stages of each process (Raelin and Raelin, 2006).

The simplified cycle of the PAR process, being: Plan, Act, Observe and Reflect (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988), together with the introduction of theory as a stimulus for reflective practice (after DAL) that informs action, provided clear and systematic direction for informing the progress of the project. At regular meetings, fora and workshops, project participants therefore engaged with the literature on the theory of PAR (as well as leadership, see below) and were supported with developmentally appropriate resources, responsive to their needs within the action research cycle, and each project phase before they initiated a series of actions.

2.3 Distributed Leadership

Theoretical stimuli included the exploration of theories and conceptualisations of leadership (for engaging assessment). Leadership in Higher Education has been an elusive and variable concept, ranging from traditional authoritarian and hierarchical to democratic and transformational (Anderson and Johnson, 2006). Less is known about developing leadership capability (Marshall, 2006), or capacity, in assessment.

It was not assumed that project participants would already be in formal, especially hierarchical, positions of leadership across the organization. Rather, the project would provide an opportunity for those with an interest in improving assessment practice to pursue this interest whilst developing the capacity to lead change in assessment in their departments, and then expand their leadership across a wider range of influence.

For the project, Leadership was viewed as an “emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals“ (Bennett, Wise, Woods and Harvey, 2003, p.7). In keeping with the ethos of Developmental Action Learning, the project participants were provided with literature, workshops and fora to focus their reflection. Reflecting upon and synthesising the literature supported participants in developing their conceptualisations of, and framing their strategies for building personal capacity in leading effective assessment. Indeed, as their personal capacity grew, together with the capacity of the whole project team, they began to investigate new theories and models.

Theories collaboratively investigated included Bolman and Deal’s (2003) Reframing Organizations, supported by McDonald’s (2007) reflections; Critical Action Learning (as proposed by personal communication with Marshall, November 22, 2006); Duignan and Bezzina’s (2006) principles of effective leaders and Sergiovanni’s transformational leadership (e.g. 2005). CEDAM’s DVD on Leadership in Teaching (2007) was used as another stimulus for collective reflection and as preparation for a practice in leadership workshop. One leadership model, that was not just explored but tested as a reflective prompt for Developmental Action Learning, was the integrated competing values framework (ICVF) (Vilkinas and Cartan, 2006).
All the models and approaches explored were compatible with a PAR approach, and all contributed to shaping the conceptualisations of leadership of assessment in this project. In this way, the PAR framework, with its pivotal role of reflection, was “connecting” (Warwick and Swaffield, 2006) to the emerging developmental leadership framework.
3. The project methodology

3.1 Phase 1

The Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus project was planned as a three phase project over a two year period. The first phase commenced with three departments with staff who had expressed an interest in learning and teaching, and specifically effective assessment practices.

Each of these participants, representing a department, were known as Action Research Enablers (AREs) and to ensure multi-hierarchical support, each was paired with an Influencer, either a Head of Department, Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) or Dean of Division or Faculty. Thus, the AREs had a supportive colleague, located within their own department and, of equal importance, a champion for enhanced assessment practice. While three departments were initially involved, there were four AREs, as in one department two participants decided they would like to share the role. With a theoretical underpinning of distributed leadership together with a participatory action research framework, the proposal to collaborate by job-sharing a role was highly compatible. Each ARE and their influencer signed a Memorandum of Understanding (Appendix 1).

A PAR model for research stresses collegiality. The Action Research Enablers met monthly at a supportive and strategic forum, forming the Leaders in Effective Assessment Practice (LEAP) group, a collegial support network. In addition, these leaders in effective assessment were also supported with regular workshops and fora facilitated by the project team. Supportive resources were supplied throughout the project, starting with a package of selected literature on assessment to provide foundational concepts and issues for consideration (Cummings, Phillips, Tilbrook and Lowe, 2005; Harris, 2005; Issacs, 2001; James, McInnes and Devlin, 2002; Struyven, Dochy and Janssens, 2005; Swann and Ecclestone, 1999 and The University of Queensland, 2006). Experts have facilitated workshops on Leadership, on Participatory Action Research and on Evaluation. The funding body (ALTC) also supported project participants with a range of fora and workshops on leadership and assessment (refer to section 9 for details).

One of the first actions in Phase 1 was the identification of suitable members of a project steering committee. The aim was to have a representative, preferably a Director of Learning and Teaching, from each of the university’s divisions; experts in PAR, Leadership in Higher Education and Assessment; undergraduate and postgraduate student representation and additional members external to the university with leadership and dissemination roles in the Higher Education sector. Terms of Reference for the steering committee were established (Appendix 2) and meetings were then convened each 3 months.
A critical component of the action research cycle has been that of reflection. Assessment leaders were asked to maintain a critically reflective journal of the process of developing leadership in assessment. One effective and successful strategy for supporting reflective practice has been the structured reflection sessions. These sessions have been facilitated by the project research manager who used two semi-structured questions as a prompt for the AREs to verbalise their reflections from the past month. These sessions supported the AREs by providing them with a regular and systematic opportunity to consider the praxis of theory and action and to journal the process of capacity building in leaders of effective and engaging assessment. Each session was digitally recorded and then transcribed providing rich data to inform the building of a process model of leading effective assessment practice.

**Structured reflection sessions** for each of the Action Research Enablers provided a regular and systematic opportunity to:

- consider the praxis of theory and action and
- journal the pathway of capacity building in leaders of assessment.
After collecting copies of each unit, or course, outline for those taught in their department, the AREs had baseline data on current assessment practice. This data had to be synthesised into a format that would be succinct and present a visual profile of assessment in a department. Through LEAP fora an assessment profiling tool, originally developed as a matrix by RMIT, an Australian University (The Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, 2006) was collaboratively modified and then successfully used to profile assessment practice. Profiling, rather than auditing, assessment was a deliberate conceptual choice as auditing carried (negative) surveillance and compliance connotations, whereas profiling was more aligned to providing a picture, a colourful visual insight. The matrix proved to be an excellent initiator for department level discourse on current assessment understandings and practice. How each ARE initiated this conversation on assessment was flexible as each ARE adopted a strategy in response to their individual department needs and context. This development of context specific strategies was an important part of each ARE’s growth as a leader. One ARE identified the use of the assessment matrix as one of the most valuable project activities undertaken:

At first glance I considered the compilation of the assessment matrix to be a necessary, but essentially clerical task. The justification for this activity seemed to reside primarily in the need to obtain a baseline reading of the department’s assessment profile. While obtaining such a baseline reading was indeed important, this activity also provided me with the chance to become familiar with the content of unit outlines more generally. This in turn, allowed me to identify areas were my efforts could most fruitfully be deployed. As an example of what I mean by this, it was apparent that few unit outlines made an attempt to inform students of exactly how the various assessment tasks were meant to help achieve the stated learning objectives for the unit. While lecturers may take this connection as being self evident, there is much to be said for making this connection very clear to students. Preparing the assessment matrix made the contrast between unit outlines that made this connection clear and those that did not very stark. This in turn gave me something very concrete to suggest to colleagues in discussions with them. Suggestions such as these were usually well received by colleagues and I take this as evidence of the effectiveness of this activity. In addition I would also suggest that this activity provided an opportunity to develop confidence in my ability to lead a discussion of assessment within my department. I would offer that increased level of confidence as additional evidence of the effectiveness of this activity. (ARE 2.1, Final Summary Report, July, 2008).

The data told many interesting stories including assessment practice with a heavy emphasis on final semester examinations, a lack of variety in assessment tasks, no staggering of due dates for assessment tasks and all within an organisational context of no assessment policy, a context not compatible with engaging assessment.

The next phase involved AREs interviewing colleagues who were the unit coordinators in their departments (the academics responsible for writing the curriculum, including developing the assessment tasks) about their assessment practices. Issues
that were investigated included the role played by formative and summative assessment, details on feedback (inclusive of timing) and an examination of the alignment of outcomes, content and assessment. As the departments were very different, in discipline, in staffing and in level of engagement with assessment issues, how the interviews were to be structured and conducted had to be flexible. AREs supported each other (through the LEAP fora) with developing their strategies, and in turn, each was developing their leadership capacity as they led the data collection, profiling, interviewing and dissemination in their departments. A LEAP forum provided focused support on in-depth interviewing strategies (Guion, 2006 and Keats, 2000). Through this phase the AREs began to construct an assessment profile of his or her department’s assessment practices and understandings.

Additional and unobtrusive data were useful in informing the AREs and the project about assessment practice. The research managers submitted a request to the university’s Information Management Unit to obtain the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) data for each participating department. This was shared during the month’s reflection session and then electronically distributed together with an explanation of the subscales, providing interesting insights from the students’ perspective. Some departments were required to undergo an accreditation process through their professional body and reports from earlier processes provided strong unobtrusive data. Departments also had access to the summary reports from the internally administrated Learner Evaluation of Unit (LEU) surveys. The triangulation data from these multiple sources provided a more comprehensive profile of assessment practice in the department.
## 3.2 Phase 2

Three additional departments joined the project in the second phase. Support was again provided for the AREs in the form of influencers, workshops and a new LEAP group. The first LEAP group strongly believed that the second phase members had to originally meet separately as this provided the opportunity for the new group to have space to identify their own needs and therefore project roles.

The new AREs undertook similar tasks to the first phase members, of mapping out assessment practice to produce a profile, interviewing colleagues with a responsibility for assessment and opening up, often, a new dialogue with colleagues around engaging assessment through departmental meetings and local workshops they initiated. They quickly assumed leadership roles in effective assessment.

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**supported by**

- Project Leader
- Research Manager
- Subject Experts
- Steering Committee
### 3.3 Phase 3

The final phase of the project saw another seven departmental or divisional (faculty) teams join as they led small assessment research projects targeting a “burning” issue they had identified. At the project’s end, these projects were being finalised, although many were planned as seeding projects, with the intention that they will be ongoing and grow into larger projects.

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*supported by*

- Project Leader
- Research Manager
- Subject Experts
- Steering Committee
4. Project contributions to advancing existing knowledge

The Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus Project aimed to build the capacity of a group of cross-disciplinary leaders in effective assessment practice. While there are substantial and separate bodies of literature on leadership and assessment in higher education, there is a dearth of research, and therefore literature, on the nexus between leadership and assessment. This project aimed to, contribute to and, advance the scholarship of leadership and assessment, and of leadership of assessment positioned within a PAR paradigm. The two main foci were:

- leadership capacity development, and
- evaluating PAR.

4.1 Developing Leadership Capacity of Assessment in Higher Education

A wide literature base on the scholarship of assessment theory and practice has provided a strong foundation of evidence based research to support academics in their learning and teaching roles. The pivotal role played by assessment and feedback in supporting quality learning and teaching has been acknowledged (Biggs, 2003, Boud, 2000). Building on this generic literature base in assessment, a more recent development has been the emergence of specialised literature that explores a range of focus areas including student perceptions of assessment (Struyven, Dochy and Janssens, 2005, Winning, Lim and Townsend, 2005); formative assessment (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, Yorke, 2003); the role of alternative assessment such as self and peer assessment (Segers and Dochy, 2001), and a general movement away from assessment of learning to one of assessment for quality learning (Taras, 2002 and evident in Carless, Joughin and Mok, 2006, Rust, O’Donovan and Price, 2005).

Literature on leadership in higher education has traditionally drawn from the extensive body of theories and models used by management (such as Bolman and Deal, 2003) which have been applied to the higher education sector (as by Vilkinas, 2002). The literature base, specifically on leadership in learning and teaching in higher education, is still in its infancy and ‘limited’ (Marshall, 2006) with few studies (Stark, 2002, Stark, Briggs and Rowland-Poplawski, 2002, Martin, Trigwell, Prosser and Ramsden, 2003) available.

While there is a growing body of literature on leadership in higher education and a wide literature base on assessment in higher education, there is a dearth of research, and therefore literature, on the nexus between leadership and assessment. There is a
need for research that will contribute to the scholarship on leadership and assessment, and of capacity building of leaders of assessment. The Leadership and Assessment Project aimed to build the capacity of a group of cross-disciplinary leaders in effective assessment practice, to document the successful strategies that supported this process as well as the leadership in assessment capacity building process.

Each of the AREs joined the project due to their high level of interest in teaching and learning, but specifically their interest in assessment. The strengths and motivational drivers for the AREs therefore was this interest in assessment, rather than a desire to build their individual leadership capacity. A particular challenge for the project therefore, was to build an understanding of the nexus between assessment and leadership, and to support the development of leadership capacity of the AREs.

Investigating leadership, and for this project the development of capacity for leadership of assessment at a departmental level, has enabled us to better understand the change process (Gibbs, 2005). As the AREs are all appointed at a lecturer, or senior lecturer, level they are not viewed as leaders in an hierarchical or authoritarian sense, nor do they necessarily see themselves as leaders. Australian researchers of leadership in higher education (Anderson and Johnson, 2006) however, recognise a distributed model of leadership as the most appropriate for Australian universities, with the caveat that solely investing in a single model may not be an effective process (Ramsden, 1998). Consequently while the project encompasses a distributed model of leadership, a range of supplementary leadership models (Duigan, 2003, Sergiovanni, 1999, Vilkanas and Cartan, 2006) have been investigated and trialled. The team’s explorations of these models have been developmentally time appropriate, that is, the team explores the possibilities of alternative leadership models as they progressively engage with what it means for them to act as leaders, and develop their capacity as leaders in assessment.

One strength of the project has been the focus on the nexus between leadership and assessment, where traditionally these two areas have been considered, and researched quite separately. While the Phase 1 AREs were reluctant leaders, assuming comfortable acceptance of their leadership roles in about their eighth month of participation, the Phase 2 AREs assumed leadership almost immediately. One explanation for this may be that the project was better prepared and more experienced in supporting the second wave of AREs as leaders of assessment.

The reluctance of the first AREs to define themselves as leaders are exemplified in the following quotes:

*I like to think of myself more as a facilitator than a leader. I'd like to see myself as a facilitator ... not a ...traditional type of leader.* (ARE 1.4, January 2007)

and
I think you know I’m not going to be a leader in the kind of up front sort of leader. I think I’m going to have to work on the one at a time level to try and create it. (ARE 1.2, February 2007)

These perceptions of leadership can be contrasted most powerfully when we read the summary reflections from the AREs on their final conceptualisations of their own leadership at the end of the project. These reflections, which demonstrate their new capacities as leaders are presented in the following extracts from the AREs’ reflective case study notes and are quoted verbatim.

**ARE 1.2 on leadership**

Leadership depends very largely on credibility. This can come from a position of formal leadership, personal characteristics, or recognition as an expert in one's field. Having the position does not automatically confer the credibility, but it creates a presumption in your favour. Having the expertise by itself is not sufficient, rather it is the recognition of that by others especially at the institutional level than confers the credibility. I felt my promotion to senior lecturer helped a lot, as did winning various teaching awards, especially the Carrick which attracted a lot of recognition. Being Assoc Dean has made a huge difference, in that now I am expected to lead, rather than having to persuade people that I am worth listening to. I have access to far greater information than previously, as I sit on various committees and work closely with the other Assoc Deans from Humanities and SCMP. I also have real power in that I control resources, which enables me to make things happen, by funding L&T projects, inviting speakers, putting on a retreat, funding teaching awards etc. It also means I have specific tasks (curriculum restructure, assessment policy etc) which it is my job to get done, so I have automatic authority to ask people to co-operate. The idea of distributed leadership in my case seemed to work well at the University level ie I had gained recognition and influence through my role on various university committees, being asked to speak at graduation, winning an ALTC award etc, but not at the Divisional level. I was extremely conscious of the climate in my Division, dramatic staff losses, dramatically increasing workload (mine went from 8 hrs face to face p/wk to 14 hrs), serious concern and loss of morale amongst teaching staff, lack of support from the Dean (who replied to a question on notice at a meeting that he fully supported 100% exams), huge pressure to research to get off the 12 hr teaching pattern, all of which meant I felt powerless to ask people to do more with less. My colleagues were barely surviving. Many had cut back on assessment requirements to cope with increased workload. One staff member (an award winning teacher) I asked to be interviewed declined because she had moved to an optional assignment, which in reality meant 100% exam, and she said she was ashamed. Many others had either cut the number of assignments or cut the permitted length.
**ARE 1.4 on leadership**

Changed perception of what leadership is: from a dominant authoritative role to that of a collaborative, collegial mentorship.

Leadership can occur at all levels of hierarchy

Leadership could even be a simple planting of ideas

Colleagues might not even perceive as being led.

**AREs 1.5 and 1.1 on leadership**

One of the AREs has been the Teaching Director of the department for several years. This has greatly facilitated the implementation of effective changes. A better alignment between learning outcomes and assessment tasks, the reduction of the weight of the final exam across all our units, or the creation of unit portfolios are examples of such concrete actions. Also the LEAP project has been supported from the beginning by our successive Heads of Department.

More generally, our colleagues have been very receptive and largely cooperative, showing a genuine will to reflect on and to develop their practices. In very rare occasions, we felt the pressure of the hierarchy would prevent us from acting.

**ARE 2.1 on leadership**

I now feel capable of leading a discussion within my department about assessment. I have a good knowledge of the key issues and on that basis feel that I have the ability to offer some leadership on the issue. I think that I have also acquired some useful insights into what it means to ‘lead’ such a discussion effectively.

I have established a reputation within the department as someone who is worth consulting on matters relating to assessment. Since my involvement in this project I now find that colleagues frequently use me as a sounding board for ideas on assessment.

I have always thought of myself as a reflective teacher, I could not imagine approaching teaching in any other way. The possibility that I could enhance my teaching, and potentially the teaching of my colleagues, by involvement in a project on assessment was therefore attractive to me. On the other hand I have never had any inclination towards seeking leadership roles as such. The idea that leadership and improving teaching were connected was an attractive enough idea for me to embrace the leadership aspect of the project.

Nevertheless the ‘leadership’ aspect of the project was for much of the time the more challenging aspect for me. Something of a turning point occurred when I read the paper “Articulating and connecting frameworks of reflective practice and leadership: perspectives from ‘fast track’ trainee teachers” by Warwick and Swaffield. The
authors of this paper offer a reconceptualisation of reflective teaching as being closely related to some key elements of leadership. They assert that the core components of reflection and leadership are values and relationships. This reconceptualisation helped to build a bridge between what I was already doing as a reflective teacher, and what I needed to do to lead a discussion on assessment in my department.

**AREs 2.2 and 2.3 on leadership**

Neither member of the project team holds a formal position of leadership within the department. The model of leadership used involved team members increasing their knowledge of contemporary teaching theory and practice and then applying this to their own teaching practice. Sharing of both the new knowledge and the impact of these in-class applications was chosen to encourage other staff in a “lead by example” approach.

In the new academic year, mid-way through the project, approximately half of the staff members in the Department changed. From this point a new approach was needed. Staff members, including project team members, were unfamiliar with the skills and expertise of other staff members. For this new context the project team decided to function more as facilitators in a process that involved both team building for staff members and a co-operative approach to Assessment Practice development that was built from their collective knowledge and understandings.

Team members were satisfied that this change in approach was the right thing to do. At the beginning of the project the role being played by the project team was understood by the staff who had worked together for many years. It was understood that the team were not and did not claim to be “experts” in this area. It was felt that such an impression may have been mistakenly given to new staff members if we continued with the same approach. On reflection we believe the second approach proved to be successful and had the added advantage of building bonds between staff members.

Participation in the project allowed team members to reflect on the nature of ideal leadership practice in general. Team members felt that a distributive leadership model can allow an institution to utilize a greater range of the talents that are held by individual within that institution than more top-down models do.

**ARE 2.4 on leadership**

During the LEAP project leadership has been distributed to such an extent that most people in the department have now ‘forgotten’ that it was the LEAP project that began the process of change. Many of the practices originally introduced through literature, reflection and training have now become taken-for-granted aspects of everyday work practices. I would conjecture that this is to the extent that most staff members would consider that they ‘own’ these new practices themselves rather than attribute them to
any other source. I suspect I will learn more about this through the interview phase of the project.

Leadership, for me, has been about relationship building between myself and others and watching other staff member’s relationships develop through collaboration and trust.

4.1.1 The LEAP model of developing higher education leadership capacity in assessment

The basic tenets of the LEAP model of building leadership capacity in assessment and feedback suggest that projects:

- acknowledge that while the role of influencer is variable, it is essential (multi level);
- are enacted within a PAR framework;
- allow time for capacity building as this is widely variable and situation specific;
- allow participants to define leadership as no one definition of leadership fits all, and
- provide needed resources (literature, workshops and forums) and support (supported reflection sessions, dedicated research manager/ project officer).
4.2 Evaluating PAR

4.2.1 The process of evaluating PAR

The role of PAR in enabling outcomes

As the project was progressing it was becoming obvious that adopting PAR as the foundational approach to the project contributed to the project’s success and outcomes. The basic components of the PAR process: plan, act, observe and reflect were a strength, as these research cycles provided an inherent flexibility which allowed for the evolution of each level of the project in direct response to time and context specific requirements. A more structured approach may have led to project failure. In one department undergoing a high rate of staff attrition, the “influencer” changed three times in the first year and then the role was left vacant. Observation and reflection on these events allowed for planning of different strategies in response to these events and the project continued. Likewise, initiating discussion on engaging assessment practice with departmental colleagues was effected using established departmental meetings in one context, however, in other contexts dedicated workshops were most effective. While each of the departments worked towards many shared goals (e.g. assessment profiling, policy development) their journeys were different. A one model suits all (departments) would not succeed, and PAR provided this necessary flexibility.

Next it was decided that a more systematic methodology was needed to evaluate PAR, to support the experiences and anecdotes of positive outcomes emerging from the project. The team decided to work collegially on drafting a set of indicators to evaluate how successful a PAR approach is in such projects.

A combined LEAP forum (LEAP 1 and LEAP 2 participants) was dedicated to this generation of indicators of a successful PAR project. This was to some extent in response to the steering committee meeting (February, 2008) where the external evaluator facilitated a session on project evaluation and the following individual reflection sessions where AREs considered project evaluation.

The LEAP groups were very committed to developing indicators that could be used to measure the effectiveness of a PAR approach in a project, particularly in a leadership and assessment project. One forum (April, 2008) was dedicated to developing these indicators. Preparation for the forum included reading the literature (Bryman (2007), Burns and Hood, (1997), Kekale and Pirtila (2006), Margolin (2007) and Warwick and Swaffield, (2006) and participation in a LEAP workshop (March, 2008) on reflecting on the PAR process across this project facilitated by the project’s PAR expert as well as an international visiting academic with expertise in PAR (Dr Yoshi Sato).

A grounded approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was used at the forum. The LEAP teams had collected, immersed themselves and reflected upon data for the past 18
months. One key question of “what are the indicators of the effectiveness of PAR in a Leadership and Assessment project?” was now the prompt to investigate the indicators of successfully leading assessment within a PAR paradigm.

The discussion commenced with a reflection on the readings, particularly focusing on leadership. As it moved to the role of PAR in supporting leadership of assessment and on identifying indicators of the effectiveness of PAR in our project many issues were raised. Quotes that were recorded at the forum include that leading assessment “is a journey and you take others with you on the journey”. “Leading by example” “is to show the way” and needs to “relate to context”. “Effective leadership has an effect on internal changes, and an effect on others – external change”. However this change is experienced as “treacle wave of change, that is, change is slow.” Nevertheless, the project had “seen a serendipity and a synergy between the university wide academic program review and our project. The academic program review has acted as a catalyst.”

As you journey through the PAR process you need to “keep an open mind” and “grow yourself” as the project is “a working hypothesis”. For PAR to be effective “a strong theoretical base” was needed; “resourcing must be adequate” and “support is needed from the top, that is, the “influencers”.

By this final stage of the project the LEAP teams had concluded that “distributed leadership IS working”. Several participants questioned “could it have been possible to undertake this project in any other way????” and they could not envisage any approach, other than PAR, as suitable!

The outcome of this collaborative session was a list of 15 indicators by which to evaluate if use of a PAR approach had been effective in a (Leadership and Assessment ) project. These indicators were identified as being critical and unique to an effective implementation of a PAR approach. The grounded development of the indicators reflected that the concept of ownership was important to the team. The evaluation indicators were then formally presented to the Steering Committee (May, 2008). The evaluator was uncomfortable with the use of the term “indicator”, perceiving it as too scientific, but also wanted metrics. The project team strongly argued the need to retain the term indicator, as this term most closely represented the role of their evaluation tool, that it would provide data that indicated and communicated information about the direction of the project. The decision to retain the term was unanimous. The team agreed to design a likert style scale for each of the indicators, thus providing data in the form of metrics.

Following a meeting between the research manager and the PAR expert (June 2008) the indicators underwent further refinement (for example, an original single indicator for participation was separated into 4 indicators), resulting in a final 18 indicators (as listed in Table 1).

There had been extended discussion on how the measures and their use could be further strengthened. It had been decided not to reverse each indicator to increase reliability of results, as too few respondents would be providing data for this trial of
the indicators, but that in future applications of the indicators each item could be 
reversed. It was also acknowledged that the indicators were very specific to this 
project, and that any future users need to consider if indicators need to be adjusted to 
meet the needs of their specific context. A final recommendation was to incorporate a 
“control” group when a project was planned, so that data using the indicators could be 
collected from a participating and a non-participating department enabling some 
comparisons to be drawn.
Table 1. Indicators of the effectiveness of PAR in a Leadership and Assessment project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Reflecting on the Leadership and Assessment Project, my experience has been of ....”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular participation as part of the LEAP team, that is, involvement over time versus attendance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular participation within my department</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular participation within the university</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular participation through outreach activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An adequate time frame</td>
<td>Project duration, requires a minimum of 1 semester/ 1 year to effect change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of ownership</td>
<td>by all participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluid boundaries</td>
<td>In PAR there can be a conflation of the researcher / participant role, an impact on my academic role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing confidence</td>
<td>Developing individual confidence over time (part of the developing leadership role)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledging emotions</td>
<td>of not knowing – as the PAR process leads you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular communication</td>
<td>is pivotal - with individuals and with groups and all with a critical, inquiry perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>to respond to contextual (e.g. departmental) needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally appropriate strategies, that is, strategies developed in response to chronological needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some project structure</td>
<td>e.g. supported reflection sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>individual (autobiographical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>communal (LEAP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing on theory</td>
<td>of literature (versus readings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing credibility</td>
<td>equals impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.2 Evaluating PAR – the results

The eight AREs of project stages 1 and 2, representing 6 departments, completed the indicator checklist. The trial of these indicators was viewed as a pilot exercise. Each ARE was asked to respond by indicating their level of experience in reference to the statement “Reflecting on the Leadership and Assessment Project, my experience has been of ….”. The likert style rating provided a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating a response of “never” and 5 a response of “always”. Most AREs also contributed written comments to either clarify or elaborate upon their scoring of the indictor. A summary of the results is represented as Figure 1.

All AREs responded with the highest rating of “always” for 5 of the indicators: collaboration; some project structure; flexibility; regular communication and a sense of ownership. They all perceived that there was a high level of collaboration, amongst themselves and colleagues in their departments, especially between those who job-shared the ARE role and across the LEAP team.

*I have selected 'always' to indicate that my experience was always one of being part of a collaborative effort. As such my experience throughout this project was quite different from the more solitary experience I am used to when engaged in research.* (ARE 2.1)

The project succeeded in providing some project structure (within the flexibility that is PAR). Participants appreciated the reflection sessions which were “very good” (ARE 1.5) and elaborated on the value of the LEAP fora:

*It was great having the individual as well as group reflection sessions. Invited speakers value-added to the deliberations.* (ARE 1.4 & 5)

*I have selected 'always' to indicate that my experience was one in which I felt my efforts received the appropriate support. The availability of regular LEAP meetings, an influencer within my division, supported reflection sessions, as well as the option of communicating with other LEAP team members at will, combined to create a supportive structure within which to work.* (ARE 2.1)
Our project has given participants credibility across the institution and has resulted in participants’ leadership extending to different spheres. (Leap forum on indicators, April, 2008)
Figure 2. ARE ratings of PAR indicators

Ratings of PAR Indicators (N=6)

- Developing credibility
- Drawing on theory
- Reflection
- Collaboration
- Some project structure
- Developmentally appropriate strategies
- Flexibility
- Regular communication
- Acknowledging emotions
- Developing confidence
- Fluid boundaries
- A sense of ownership
- An adequate time frame
- Regular participation through outreach activities
- Regular participation within the university
- Regular participation within my department
- Regular participation as part of the LEAP team

1 Never  2  3  4  5 Always
These were very important for reminding me that I was part of a project and the changes were not merely 'organic'. (ARE 2.2)

One of the critical factors that contributed to the success of the project was the flexibility offered by PAR. The Leadership and Assessment project succeeded in providing this ability to respond to contextual needs and as a result the approach was seen to “remain relevant” (ARE 2.2).

*My observation was that the PAR model allowed for the required flexibility. Indeed the idiosyncrasies of the various departments involved in the project were regularly under discussion.*  (ARE 2.1)

Communication may be considered the key to the effective management of any project, including a PAR project. This indicator also emphasised that communication needed to adopt a critical and inquiry perspective. Communication was evaluated as being constant:

*I would qualify by saying 'constant' communication. It is communication that is the key to PAR.*  (ARE 2.2)

*We had a lot of meetings/discussions at different levels, among the AREs, with colleagues in our Department, across the University*  (AREs 1.2 & 1.5)

*The quantity and quality of communication throughout the project was excellent.*  (ARE 2.1).

The AREs also perceived a sense of ownership around their participation in the project.

*My experience was that the PAR approach is conducive to fostering a sense of ownership of the project by all participants. Indeed I think this approach serves to maximise the sense of ownership.*  (ARE 2.1)

This sense of ownership has supported their developing leadership capacity. Several of the indicators can be seen to have links to developing leadership capacity in assessment. Owning the project, having an active role in decision-making through collaboration has established roles and responsibilities for the AREs in their own departments and across the campus in leading assessment. This has contributed to their developing confidence over the time of the project, in tandem with developing their new leadership roles.

Another 5 indicators were rated as “always” or “nearly always” experienced as part of the project: individual reflection; communal reflection; developmentally appropriate strategies; developing confidence and regular project participation as part of a LEAP team. Reflection, both individual and collaborative with LEAP partners, was regular and integral.

*LEAP meetings and fora were always an occasion to reflect on our own practice and a source of inspiration too (AREs 1.2 & 1.5).*

and
Particularly for reinvigorating our enthusiasm for the project. (AREs 2.2 & 2.3)

The flexibility offered by PAR allowed for developmentally appropriate strategies to be developed. As each ARE participated in the project different needs arose at different times and consequently a range of different strategies had to be employed in recognition that no one model would fit all departments. This is mentioned in the section 5, Factors Critical to Success. It was also beneficial to the project to develop these strategies in response to larger changes impacting on the project, for example, the university’s decision for an immediate need to develop policy, so that

*The need might be 'own' or extraneous (e.g. self vs Dept; Dept vs University)*

(AREs 1.3 & 1.4)

As they actively engaged with the project the AREs developed confidence, in themselves and in the value and worth of the project aims.

*I have selected 'sometimes' to indicate that my confidence in my ability to assume a leadership role in relation to assessment within my department increased in a slow but steady manner throughout the project.* (ARE 2.2)

The point has already been made that the regular LEAP fora were valued as a support by the AREs, and these encouraged involvement over time. Indeed, one ARE, who was unable to attend some fora expressed his remorse at missing out:

*I was unable to attend several of the LEAP team meetings and this created a sense for me that I was not fully participating/engaging with the project. This was to some extent compensated by the Supported Reflection Sessions. Ideally however I would like to have engaged more fully as a member of the LEAP team.* (ARE 2.1)

The single indicator that received the lowest ratings was that of regular participation through outreach activities with 4 out of 6 of the AREs rating their experience as ‘Never’ or “Almost never”. Even though the AREs have been involved in disseminating the project findings at conferences and workshops, they did not relate those activities to outreach.

*I do critique the concept of 'outreach', as I believe that 'external communities enter the University through thousands of 'tentacles', not the other way around. However, my LAP (Leadership and Assessment) leadership learnings are always valuable at the community level.* (ARE 2.2)

The implication is that it may be necessary to refine this indicator to make its meaning clear and support the indicator with a short descriptor or examples.

### 4.2.3 Future implications for the evaluation indicators

When reviewing the scores for the experience rating using the PAR indicators, for the majority of these measures, the Leadership and Assessment project has achieved positive outcomes. PAR has been enacted effectively as an approach for this project.
The indicators have been trailed and found to be useful not only as an evaluative measure of how successfully the principle tenets of PAR have been enacted, but also as a valuable source of additional data on the PAR process. The challenge is now extended to future Higher Education projects to apply these indicators as either a guide and/or an evaluative measure. As a guide the indicators can be useful in informing the basic pragmatic tenets of a PAR project which can inform a new project in its planning stages. As an evaluative measure the indicators can be used, (with or without a likert scale) to gauge how effectively the PAR process has been enacted throughout a project, providing informative data collection on how the PAR process was perceived by the project participants.
5. Factors critical to project success

Many factors were identified as critical to ensuring project success. These factors are now listed and discussed.

5.1 The flexibility of Participatory Action Research

Across the course of the project consideration was given to how the project was progressing and identifying the factors that were enabling of progress and outcomes as well as factors acting as inhibitors. The foundational action research cycle of Participatory Action Research directed that the project continually and systematically review these factors as part of practising critical reflection. As factors were identified they were recorded as part of the supported reflection sessions, in the regular internal project progress reports, reported to meetings and, more formally, in the reports required by the funding body.

The overriding single strategy for success was the decision to adopt an appropriate approach and, as a consequence, methodology for the project. A Participatory Action Research approach critically provided flexibility with the methodology. The cycles of plan, act, observe and reflect were occurring not just with each project phase, but monthly at the supported reflection sessions, at the LEAP fora, at the workshops and even daily as AREs engaged in the reflective process. Reflection-on-action (Schon, 1987) resulted in the project participants adjusting, even changing, their leadership of assessment and, at times, there were incidences where reflection-in-action (Schon, 1987) saw project participants altering their plans while they were implementing them. One ARE, while in the act of reflecting on how many colleagues to interview about assessment, changes her plans:

I might maybe do half a dozen interviews and pick people who I think are sort of influencers- oh maybe more than half a dozen- maybe ten- that's half the faculty there. And then do the seminar and then say who else would like to come. You know, I'm just thinking about this... (ARE 1.1, March, 2007)

The same ARE had to continue to adapt across the project as

My anxieties are quite high about this project. One is- as we've talked about before- that I no longer have the support of the Dean. (ARE 1.1, March, 2007)

Collectively, the project had to continually make adjustments and changes to plans, after reflection, to ensure the continuation and success of the project. One example is the change in use of the website, originally intended as an environment to support an active community of practice. If the project was adhering to a positivist methodological approach, then the website would be deemed a complete failure as it indeed failed to be used as originally planned. However, after much extended and
collaborative reflection, the website was reconceptualised as a repository for project resources, in response to the stated needs of the project participants.

5.2 Self selected project participants

Key project participants, such as the AREs, were all self-selected. As the project proposal was being developed, the original project leader discussed the project plans with colleagues across the campus who had demonstrated a passion for learning and teaching, and in particular assessment. Several of these colleagues expressed an interest in the project, and more specifically in participating in the project. Then, when the project commenced these people were more formally approached. All agreed to participate in the first phase.

By the second phase, colleagues began to nominate themselves or peers. All but one was enthusiastic about joining the project. The one who declined cited workload reasons, explaining that now research was what mattered, and therefore she had to concentrate on research not teaching and this was possible a reflection on the changing university climate.

The third phase participants responded to an open invitation to project participation with an expression of interest and thus were self nominated. All phase 3 participants chose to work in teams which they created.

Project members who were not self-selected included the influencers, who participated as a result of their hierarchical leadership role. There were several changes experienced in who acted as influencer. Phase one, saw one influencer in a stable role and in the worst case, where one department experienced very high staff attrition over one year, the influencer changed four times until there was no influencer. While these are only trends, they support the theory that autonomy in decision-making may influence participant commitment to a project.

5.3 Teaching release

When specifically asked to identify what support they needed to enact their roles in the project the reply was “…as of now I think it is time and space” (ARE 1.3, January 2007). Project funds were budgeted to allow the AREs to “buy-out” some teaching, marking or administrative workload. For most AREs this was essential, as it freed up their work schedules allowing them to commit to the project by undertaking their developing leadership roles.

However, this buy-out was not always possible, as in some departments there was a shortage of casual staff who could be used to fill the role. “…it's not always so easy because even though there might be that availability there are still certain things which you can't always find somebody else to do it. For example, we can't get contractors to convene units.” (ARE 1.4, June 2007). Project management advice is
therefore that if funds are allocated to teaching release, an adequate lead time is needed to appoint casual staff.

An extension to the buy-out of teaching was the project funding of the Phase 3 research projects. While these funds could buy teaching release, they were also used to employ research assistants. Although only small, in terms of budget, they were highly successful in outcomes. A recommendation for future projects is to consider different ways of planning the budget, including funding smaller projects which distribute the project much wider across the organisation.

5.4 Participation of influencers

In accordance with the original project proposal which not only aimed at a distributed model of leadership, it was aimed to develop multi-level academic leadership of assessment across the organisation. Systematic change in assessment practice requires learning to take place at both an organisational and an individual level. A coherent approach is needed throughout the system, with assessment leaders facilitating the alignment of philosophies and goals at all levels (Cummings, Phillips, Lowe and Tilbrook, 2005). Drawing on a traditional, hierarchical concept of leadership, a person of influence from each of the participating departments would act in the influencer role, a role critical in providing strategic dissemination of project details and progress at the Department, Division or Faculty levels. Of equal importance the influencer would provide higher-level support and act as a champion for the project, a role that may be as simple as sanctioning the project as a standing item on meeting agendas, to supporting local workshops and fora. Without this support from the “top” change would remain very localised and not as sustainable. The one ARE who had difficulty in achieving smooth progress of the project across her department, was the one who ultimately was without an influencer (due to staff attrition).

5.5 Developmentally appropriate support

The AREs, individually and as LEAP teams, were provided with developmentally appropriate support throughout the project’s duration. The descriptor of developmentally appropriate has been specifically chosen to remind project managers of the efficacy of providing support that responds to the development needs of project participants. While there may be general needs of project participants that remain fairly constant across a project, such as funding for project activities, there are also developmentally specific needs that emerge at each phase of the project. Hence, different support will be required during the early phase of a project, changing as the project progresses and culminates. Use of a Participatory Action Research approach allows for the identification of support needs, through systematic reflection, and consequently the provision of those support needs. The flexibility of this approach also allows for the support to be tailored to the needs of individual AREs. Project support included supported reflection sessions; LEAP teams and fora; LEAP
workshops; ALTC fora and having a dedicated project and research manager. Examples of how these supports were developed, so as to be developmentally appropriate, are now provided.

5.6 Supported reflection sessions

A critical part of the action research cycle is that of reflection. Each ARE was asked to maintain a critically reflective diary of the process of developing leadership in assessment. Past project experience had indicated that systematic journaling was not often achieved by project participants and therefore a strategy to support reflection needed to be developed and trialed.

One essential factor critical to the success of the project was the strategy trialed as a support mechanism for the developing leaders of assessment - the structured reflection sessions. These sessions were facilitated by the research manager who used two semi-structured questions as a prompt for the AREs to verbalise their reflections from the past month. The first question asked was “Reflecting on your role in the Leadership and Assessment project what have been some (if any) of your positive experiences?”, after which they were asked about any challenging experiences. Prompts were also provided to cover any key activities that had occurred during the previous month such as fora, workshops or meetings.

This support provided each ARE with a regular and systematic opportunity to consider the praxis of theory and action and to journal the process of capacity building in leaders of assessment. Each session was digitally recorded, providing rich data on the process of strengthening the capacity of developing assessment leaders in higher education. Of equal importance, the sessions provided an opportunity for the AREs to consider what developmentally appropriate support they required at the time.

Each of the AREs has identified that the structured reflection sessions were an effective strategy in providing them with a dedicated time to critically reflect upon the process of building their capacity as leaders in assessment, to refocus on leading assessment, to identify their needs, and to have a useful record of their reflections in the form of the audio files and transcriptions.

While this was a successful strategy, it should not be considered an easy one. The practice of reflection was alien to most participants. Indeed for those who worked in disciplines that tended to rely on a positivist approach to research the suggestion of engaging in reflective practice was an unfamiliar process (ARE 1.3, March 2007) as they would “just like to go and do things, rather than reflecting on things…” (ARE 1.4, March 2007). However, with support and the development of new insights, the relationship with the reflective process changed until it was an integral part of their work, illustrated by the statement that “…I’ve been doing more to reflect on the changes I’ve introduced in my unit and trying to see if they work or not” (ARE 1.2, June, 2007). After one such session the interviewer concludes that there had been “…lots of thinking, lots of reflection, lots of ideas being generated here. That's quite productive.” (June, 2007).
The supported reflection session provided individual and developmentally appropriate support to the AREs, but it was the formation of LEAP teams that provided the opportunity for collaborative reflection, and more. This opportunity was enjoyed and appreciated as a support for the ARE’s as they developed their leadership roles. Regular meetings, or fora, facilitated by the project manager, were a positive factor critical to the success of the project. As the AREs reflected…

\[\text{The } \ldots \text{reflection as a group, definitely as more than one person is very, very useful because that is what usually enhances each others’ experience, and the sharing of experience, I think, only occurs in those sessions more than anywhere else. Because it’s there that we come out and say, ‘hey, I have tried this, this works, do you want to try it?’ } \ldots \text{we verbalise it, and talk in others’ presence, in a supported environment…}\]

(ARE 1.3, March, 2007)

I found it useful. I quite enjoyed it actually.

(ARE 1.4, March, 2007)

Or more simply…

Yeah, they’re good.

(ARE 1.1 December, 2006)

Interdisciplinary collaboration was seen as a positive outcome of the LEAP team.

\[\text{For me I think the most positive experience has been sharing the experience of other departments and divisions which is unusual, because usually we are so caught up with our own.}\]

(ARE 1.3, December, 2006)

Well the meetings are always a positive experience, it is always interesting to get in touch with others in other departments...I think the interaction is working quite well. Everybody is bringing something. Every time we have a meeting I think there are new ideas ... good input from everybody, to do something that is quite nice and working...Yeah, so definitely positive.

(ARE 1.2, February, 2007)

As needs were identified through the reflection session and fora, the next forum was then planned by the project’s research manager who developed a program and resources specific to developmental needs. Examples of forum content developed in response to specific developmental needs include fora on:

- developing the assessment matrix to fit contextual needs in undertaking an assessment profile of departments (Biggs, 2003; Harris, 2005; REAP, 2006)
• in-depth interviewing to support the AREs as they embarked on interviewing unit convenors about their unit outlines;
• project dissemination strategies, including preparing for the ISSOTL conference;
• communities-of-practice for leaders in preparation for the CEDAM two-day workshop where additional support materials were introduced (Brookfield, 1987, 1995) to support the generation of critical incidents;
• writing up and publishing project outcomes;
• reflecting and reviewing on the role Participatory Action Research as a project methodology, and
• developing, using a grounded approach, evaluative indicators for measuring the success of PAR in this leadership and assessment project;

5.8 LEAP workshops

As the project commenced it became evident that the AREs had several commonalities, for example, a resistance to seeing themselves as leaders and little, or no, experience or knowledge of Participatory Action Research. Workshops were therefore designed to investigate these issues. The first workshop brought in an expert in Leadership in Higher Education and an expert in Action Research to explore both these concepts with the project team. All members of the project team were invited for the half-day workshop (21st November, 2006), inclusive of AREs, influencers and project staff. The workshop provided foundational theory on which the AREs could base their practice. It was also especially challenging to the AREs who had traditionally worked within a positivist environment, and much of the content appeared to overwhelm the participants. There was too much theory too early for this team, and this was not developmentally appropriate. Consequently the design of the next workshops was changed.

So I thought that that workshop was useful...I found that very helpful.

(ARE 1.1, December, 2006)

Adhering to a PAR approach, reflection and evaluation after this first workshop informed the planning for each of the consequent workshops for the next phase participants. Phase two participants had slightly different needs. They still required detailed information on Leadership and on Action Research, but they had embraced their leadership roles very early on and were ready for investigating the theory of leadership. As such the next workshops on Leadership and on Action Research were not only conducted separately, but the structure of the workshops was radically different. As the second phase participants, the AREs and their influencers, were proactive in leading, the workshop was very interactive and adopted a strengths-based approach, drawing upon their experience and understandings first, before drawing all
concepts together into a theoretical framework. This was a successful approach, with participants making comments such as

*I really enjoyed the action research training, I thought that was really good.*

(ARE 2.2, March, 2008)

*That was very nice; because we’ve had these kinds of notions of what it is but ... for me it’s always been read a paper here, have a colleague give me some ideas there. I’ve never had a nice clear presentation of what is and isn’t participatory research; because at the level that I’ve been used to it was at the classroom level. So it’s trying to see what we’re doing in this big project, and what I’m used to the idea of it being over in my classroom, but that I could see that they were both the same thing; because I think I got a clearer idea of what it is and what it isn’t. And then, once you understand that you can research anything...so that was very useful.*

(ARE 2.4, March, 2008)

By the third phase of the project the workshop had again adopted a very different format in response to the different needs of the participants. The structure was informal and focused more on developing a community of practitioners, leading assessment across the organisation.

**5.9 Use of Experts**

Project success was supported by the use of subject experts. The original project budget allowed for workshops facilitated by experts and this was a budgetary decision that was effective in supporting project outcomes. An expert in Leadership and Higher Education facilitated workshops for each of the three LEAP teams, as did an expert in Participatory Action Research. An expert in Assessment in Higher Education, who was a steering committee member, also co-facilitated a seminar for the project.

Project efficiencies were achieved by having access to a pool of subject specific experts as the experts could workshop succinct overviews of knowledge areas thereby alleviating the need for the participants having to start form “scratch” in immersing themselves in these, often new, subject areas. The experts also recommended relevant examples from the literature to support the participants in their study of these subjects. Each of the experts was also invaluable in providing advice and counsel throughout the project to the research manager and to any other project members who required this support.

**5.10 ALTC fora**

The funding body offered a range of relevant fora and workshops to the project. Project members attended all workshops and fora that were offered, and these proved
to offer support that was developmentally appropriate to the project. Attendees at these workshops and fora always reported positively on outcomes for themselves and for the progress of the Leadership and Assessment project. Detail of the support offered is outlined in section 9 of this report.

5.11 Steering committee membership

A strategically considered selection of steering committee membership included inviting external members with an expertise in both assessment and Higher Education, and, locally, the chair of academic senate who provided hierarchical leadership and dissemination of the project to the wider organisation. Associate Deans of Learning and Teaching representing each Division in the university were members. Both undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives provided additional perspectives to the project.

5.12 External Evaluator

An external evaluator was a requirement of the funding body. However, how that evaluator was appointed and the role that was developed for them within the project was determined by the project team. The role of an external evaluator could be considered an anathema to Participatory Action Research with its emphasis on participation and active involvement.

As the role was conceptualised it moved towards the external evaluator acting as a participant observer in accord with the action research framework. This role development was the result of extensive consultation, discussion and debate between the project leader, research manager, AREs, the members of the steering committee and, of course, the evaluator. Consequently the evaluator was a member of the steering committee, attended some of the workshops and fora, had access to all documents on the website and had regular meetings with the project leader and research manager. This participation also supported the evaluator in reflecting upon and developing a compatible role. The project described this role as a dual role, observer and participant.

Performing in a dual role was essential to supporting the progress of the action research cycles. In addition, it was essential that the evaluator have a good knowledge of, and preferably experience in, Participatory Action Research. As a result, any formal evaluation plan needs to have an inbuilt flexibility to respond to the changing and additional trajectories the project may follow.

5.13 Project and research manager

It was evident across that project that to ensure consistent and regular progress towards the outcomes, that the AREs would need to be supported in their developing
leadership roles. The initial project proposal allowed for a project and research manager working three days a week. The appointment of a research manager in a dedicated role was critical to the success of the project. Having this research manager to coordinate the project and its participants was one successful strategy that resulted in steady progress towards achieving project outcomes and deliverables a necessary reality for any funded project. The specific functions of the research manager role evolved in response to the needs of the project and its’ participants.

Some of the roles included:

• Initiation of each project phase;
• Acting as a communications manager between and across the multi-levels of the project;
• Developing Terms of Reference for the Steering Committee;
• Establishing, convening, facilitating and minuting the project’s Steering Committee;
• Managing, facilitating and supporting the LEAP fora;
• Establishing, convening, facilitating and minuting the university’s assessment policy working party;
• Monitoring the processes at departmental level so as to gauge appropriate and efficient timing of interpersonal and resource support;
• Collecting and reviewing project resources, for example, relevant readings for the AREs; for example,

*But I think that's the way of- I appreciate your role in summing up things and gathering the documents... Yep. So that definitely facilitates and at least we only need to look at the cream.*

(ARE 1.3, October, 2007)

• Managing and facilitating content specific workshops in response to project needs;
• Writing up regular progress reports (refer to following section);
• Writing up and submitting all project related ethics applications;
• Developing and maintaining the internal project website and community of practice;
• Managing collected data, followed by analysis and interpretation;
• Liaisoning with colleagues across the organisation and Nationally across other organisations;
• Recommending appropriate dissemination strategies and supporting their delivery, for example, through conference registrations for presentation; and crucially
• Conducting supported reflection sessions with the AREs and providing a general support for the AREs.

By having the services of a project and research manager, there was one dedicated person to ensure that the project was adhering to its’ planned time frame and continued to work towards achieving its original outcomes. This necessitated the development of a role that was compatible with the action research and leadership approaches espoused by the project - a role that provided a scaffolded support, always developmentally appropriate to the stage of the project, but kept the project on task.

5.14 Progress reports

The project and research manager wrote up progress reports monthly which were then posted to the website. Report writing provided a structured opportunity to systematically review and identify progress against the project’s original outcomes and time frame. The writing process also ensured regular reflection on the project, which, when following the cycle of action research, fed into the next planning and action phases, allowing modifications and adaptations in response to project needs.

All the report writing provided a strong foundation of project data on project process. This documentation proved to be a useful resource in informing the writing up of the six-monthly reports required by the funding body, the writing up of conference papers and presentations, an internal validity check when triangulated against other data collected (e.g. supported reflection sessions). Progress reports also “provided valuable summaries of progress against the project’s milestones, and have helped to keep the whole project team informed” (External Evaluation, Brief Project Report 1).

5.15 Summary of critical factors

Supporting the development of leadership capacity in assessment, underpinned by an action research methodology, is resource intensive. These resources include: human capital; time; literature; workshops; supported reflection sessions and the actual project funding.

The main factors critical to the project’s success which reflect the resources supporting the project were:
• A Participatory Action Research approach and methodology that encouraged critically reflective practice and provided the flexibility that allowed the project to cater to each department’s contextual needs;

• Self-selected project participants (AREs) with a passion for learning and teaching and particularly assessment;

• Funding to allow teaching release time for AREs (who could then participate in leading assessment within their departments) with adequate lead time to source casual staff;

• Participation of influencers who provide higher-level support and strategic dissemination of project details at a divisional or faculty level;

• Ongoing, developmentally appropriate, support for project participants (including supported reflection sessions; LEAP teams and fora and workshops);

• Use of subject experts;

• Participation in ATLC fora and workshops;

• A strategically considered selection of steering committee membership;

• An external evaluator acting as a participant observer in accord with the action research framework;

• A dedicated research manager to co-ordinate the project, particularly supporting the AREs, and

• Regular progress reporting.
6. Factors that impeded project success

During the regular individual and collaborative reflection sessions it was possible to identify factors that were impeding the smooth progress of the project.

6.1 Institutional Overhead Levy

The *Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus* project was one of the earlier (chronologically) funded projects by ATLC and as such tested the congruence between funding body and university organisation. Before the project could commence a transfer of funds was delayed as the university insisted on deducting a significant Institutional Overhead Levy, a levy that was not accounted for in the proposed project budget.

After two months of extended negotiations the university agreed to not deduct the levy and ALTC modified their financial statement of acquittal of funds to include a section allowing for an Institutional Overhead Levy. ALTC also disseminated the need to include, where different universities required, the levy in budget proposals.

This factor only impeded project success to the extent of delaying the project start, and necessitated an adaptation of the project timeframe. It should no longer be an impediment for future projects.

6.2 The ethics process

The university’s ethics process and committee is less familiar with projects that undertake an action research methodology. In spite of seeking and receiving extensive counsel and advice on preparing an ethic’s application where PAR was the central approach, delays in ethics approval were experienced (for Step 2 of the assessment profiling process to be undertaken by the LEAP 1 team). The project had to reply with emendations to the process by responding in detail to six conditions identified by the ethics committee.

This experience and resulting learnings were drawn upon for the next ethics application for the LEAP 2 team, where the application for ethics approval went smoothly and was approved without any attached conditions. Projects undertaking Action Research need to be skilled in writing up ethics applications.
6.3 Project time frame

Many aspects of the project’s time frame, summarised in a Gantt chart in the original project proposal, were unrealistic, thereby potentially setting up the project to failure. Unrealistic aspects included:

- Planning for the two year project using a Gantt chart over 26 (not 24) months, meaning that two months of project activity had to be rationalised, limited or cut out;
- Only allowing one month to convene the steering committee, when at least 3 months are needed;
- No time allowed at all for the recruitment of the project and research manager;
- No acknowledgement that project participants are entitled to, and take, leave of four weeks per person per year, again meaning that project activity had to be rationalised and adjusted;
- Although the project planned to collect large amounts of data there was no acknowledgement, let alone allowance in the time frame for data analysis, interpretation and writing up, all resource intensive activities;
- No time allowance for recruitment of an external evaluator,
- No time at all was allocated to writing up interim (internal and external) progress reports, and
- Too little time (one month, on 3 days per week) was allocated for writing up this final report, necessitating economies being made in report writing.

Future projects should set realistic timeframes and, when adopting an action research approach, provide adequate resource allocation (time, human capital, etc) for data analysis, interpretation and writing up.

6.4 Project budget

Although it was planned to collect qualitative data, the project budget only allowed a very small allowance for a research assistant. Many hours of support were in fact required for the transcription of the reflection sessions, the cost of which then had to be funded separately. It is recommended that projects drawing upon qualitative data, common to Action Research, develop a budget that realistically covers transcription costs (3-4 hours transcription cost per hour of interview).

A relatively small budget was provided for the employment of an external evaluation consultant. When it came to advertising and recruiting for the consultant it became evident that the budget was not aligned to current market rates. The limited budget for the external evaluation thereby significantly reduced the pool of potential evaluation
consultants that could be recruited to the project. Future projects need to budget adequately to employ evaluation consultants.

6.5 Research Manager and the project proposal

This project, in common with many others, did not involve the project and research manager in its’ initial project proposal development. As a result the manager needed time to immerse themselves in the project, its plan and its intended outcomes and this takes time that was not planned for in the project time frame. A project manager can also help to inform the development of a proposal by contributing their learnings from past projects (such as those listed in this report). However, it is acknowledged that this is not necessarily a realistic possibility as most project managers are only employed after the project has been funded and commenced.

6.6 Staff attrition

A factor that no project can control for is that of staff attrition. The original project leader moved to another university necessitating the role to be assumed by the project and research manager, not an ideal solution in terms of workload, but one that ensured project continuity. Staff attrition was also a wider issue, for example, one steering committee member left her position with an external organisation, a series of four influencers from just one participating department left the university. The result was the delay to the project as a replacement was recruited, or when no one was available, time to make an adjustment to project plans. Again, this is an impediment that can not be controlled for when planning projects.

6.7 Lack of external evaluators

The project funding body requires the services of an external evaluator. However, the pool of evaluators, especially when one establishes criteria such as knowledge and experience in the Higher Education sector and in Participatory Action Research, is small and difficult to locate. Unplanned time was used to develop an evaluation brief, to develop an expression of interest application, to review applications and interview candidates, however, most time was dedicated to locating potential consultants to invite to submit an expression of interest (within the project budget). This impeded project progress. It would be beneficial to future projects if a centralised database of evaluation consultants was to be made available.

7. Transferability of outcomes

The approaches of a distributed model of developing leadership capacity, specifically in assessment for this project, and of Participatory Action Research were both factors
critical to the success of the project. The three phases of the project enabled an evaluation of the transferability of the approaches as the project rolled out across departments, representing diverse disciplines (as listed in the figure below).

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<td>Computing</td>
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<th>Phase 2</th>
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<td>Asian Languages</td>
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<td>Economics</td>
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<td>Indigenous Studies</td>
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<th>Phase 3</th>
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<td>Accounting and Finance</td>
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<td>Asian Languages</td>
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<td>Early Childhood</td>
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<td>Economic and Financial Studies</td>
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<td>Linguistics</td>
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<td>Psychology</td>
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The successful project roll-out across these diverse disciplines provides evidence that the approaches adopted are amenable to implementation in a variety of locations, or departments and divisions/ faculties. The Participatory Action Research approach offers a flexibility that invites adoption in any institution or location, and likewise a Distributed Leadership approach invites adoption by participants at any level of an organisation. So, while it is hypothesised that these approaches would be transferable to other institutions, ongoing research conducted through ALTC projects will provide further evidence of the extent of transferability.
8. Sharing of project outcomes

Resources from the project had been uploaded to the WebCT site, but this site had not been regularly accessed by team and project members. Hence, it became imperative to explore other options for project dissemination. As an interim measure prior to loading resources publicly through the ALTC exchange, the project developed a public page for the project. This site is under continual development as

http://www.cpd.mq.edu.au/teaching/lap/, most recently relocating to

http://www.mq.edu.au/learningandteachingcentre/for_staff/projects/leadership.htm

The AREs have been active in disseminating project outcomes through conference presentation and will continue to be so. Examples of project presentations include:


the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSOTL), July 2-5, 2007. Sydney, Australia.

Forthcoming


9. Making links with other ALTC projects

Both the project leader and research manager received invitations to several ATLC (Carrick) sponsored fora throughout the duration of the project. Several of these fora were pivotal in providing a research network and thus enabling the possibility of links being made between the Leadership and Assessment project and other ALTC projects.

9.1. Carrick National Assessment Project Forum

University of Melbourne, Wednesday, 6th December, 2006

While attending their first forum, since the commencement of the Leadership and Assessment project, the work of the team led by Dr Kim Watty (RMIT University) (Jackson, Watty, Yu and Lowe, 2006a, 2006b) provided an insight into assessment practices in other higher education organisations. As the LAP team were exploring possible tools to assist with data collection, Dr Watty was questioned about her data collection and she explained the use of an assessment grid tool, making use of easily accessible Excel software. She had found this to be a powerful and effective tool for engaging whole-of-department staff in reflecting upon assessment. After this meeting Dr Watty agreed to share the assessment grid tool with the LAP team.

An example of the assessment grid was received the following month and the project’s LEAP 1 team workshopped its use as it was further developed and adapted to fulfil the needs of the participating departments. Development included introducing a colour coding scheme for assessment tasks, so that a colourful visual summary could be produced as a discussion and reflective stimulus for departments. Additional assessment categories were added to the list, to reflect those currently in use across the participating departments. Completing the assessment grid, now renamed the assessment matrix by the LEAP team, constituted an early step in the baseline data collection phase of the project. The tool has now also been disseminated to additional departments for their use.

**Outcome for LAP:** Development and adaptation of the assessment grid as a data collection tool and as a visual stimulus for discussion around assessment practice.

**Benefit to the Discipline:** Refinement and application of a simple assessment data collection tool that can be used in any discipline to map assessment practice.
9.2. Enhancing Assessment in the Biological Sciences National Seminar

*University of Melbourne, Thursday, 7th December, 2006*

The keynote speaker at the seminar was Dai Hounsell (Professor of Higher Education at the University of Edinburgh) and he spoke passionately about the need to consider the role of feedback when exploring assessment. A main concern was that feedback was often the missing link in the assessment process (Hounsell; McCune, Hounsell, and Litjens, 2006). This paper was then shared with the LEAP team, all of whom agreed on the importance of the need for effective and timely feedback.

This remained an issue for action throughout the duration of the project and the outcomes resulting from this awareness are best evidenced in the newly developed university assessment policy. This policy, informed by the LEAP team, now states that

Assessment procedures and practices will be derived from evidence-based assumptions that:

*Embody high quality, timely feedback as an essential element that must have value for students in improving their learning performance and developing their capacity to self assess.*

(Macquarie University, 2008a, italics added).

The related Assessment Code of Practice supports this essential role of feedback. It states that it is a responsibility of Departments and Faculties that “students receive formative assessments and feedback and gain adequate information in a timely fashion in order to learn from past activities and become effective in self assessment”, and academic staff have the responsibility to “review and give timely and useful detailed feedback on work submitted”. Accordingly, students in turn have a right to the “timely return of results with feedback to enable improved performance”.

(Macquarie University, 2008b).

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**Outcome for LAP:** A new focus on the role of feedback for learning in the assessment process, ultimately reflected in the university’s new Assessment Policy and Assessment Code of Practice.

**Benefit to the Discipline:** Implementation of good principles of assessment across an organisation, underpinned by policy.
9.3. Building capacity for assessment leadership via professional development and mentoring of course coordinators.

At the assessment seminar a flyer with an Invitation to Collaborate on a Carrick Associate Fellowship led by Associate Professor Merilyn Goos and Dr Clair Hughes (School of Education, The University of Queensland) was distributed. Contact was made the following week indicating the project’s interest in collaboration, and this was also followed up at the Carrick Leadership Forum (see below). This did not result in any outcomes as no response was received to our expression of interest.

**Outcome for LAP:** No outcomes

9.4. Carrick Leadership Workshop

*Sydney, Thursday, 8th February, 2007*

Attendance at the Carrick Leadership Workshop introduced project members to the IVCF (Integrated competing values framework) theoretical framework of leadership (Vilkinas and Cartan, 2006). Permission was granted by the author to use this framework within the Leadership and Assessment project. The framework was discussed and reviewed by the AREs. Use of the framework as a reflective tool on leading assessment was trialled two months later during a supported reflection session and repeated the following year to measure if conceptualisations of leadership of assessment were static or developmental.

**Outcome for LAP:** Use of the Integrated Competing Values Framework to collect data on the conceptualisations of the leadership of assessment role.

**Benefit to the Discipline:** Contribution to a model for developing leadership capacity in assessment.
9.5. Practice in Leadership: Developing Leadership Capacity through Group Processes Workshop

Sydney Olympic Park, Thursday 28th and Friday, 29th June, 2007.

The project leader, together with the LEAP 1 AREs were invited to attend this workshop, part of the Carrick funded *Promoting Learning and Teaching Communities: Institutional Leadership at the Australian National University* project. Prior to the workshop participants workshopped concepts of leadership using stimulus DVDs (*Leadership in Teaching and Building University Communities*) and writing up a personal critical incident on leadership.

This workshop provided participants with the opportunity to actively, and critically, engage with their group in exploring concepts of leadership. Building upon the previous work in the LEAP fora this workshop occurred at an opportune time in the ARE’s development of their personal sense as leaders in assessment. They had been struggling to acknowledge that they could be leaders of assessment, and felt challenged by how they could lead assessment. At the end of the two days the AREs had attained new insights into leadership, especially styles of leadership. Each ARE reported on how beneficial the workshop was, but more significantly each became more comfortable in viewing themselves as a leader. They were beginning to realise that distributed leadership within a community of practice could be both effective, and sustainable, in our project. The reflective quote from one of the AREs who attended the workshop illustrates this realisation.

*And I guess one of the things I learned from that is that ... is the balance between telling that group what to do and allowing that group to do something. So, you know, in a way that group is going to feel more empowered if they decide themselves to do something or other. And it was fairly clear that not having a (one) leader was actually quite good. So not having a distinct Chair in the meeting was actually quite good in that the Chair flowed around and sort of emerged from the discussion. Since were all sort of fairly vocal people there was a bit of competition for, you know, the floor and things like that, but that all worked itself out. So, you know, it's a nice model for a group.*

(ARE 1.5, July, 2007)

**Outcome for LAP:** Practice in, and application of, distributed leadership.

**Benefit to the Discipline:** Contribution to a model for developing leadership capacity in assessment.
9.6. ALTC Leadership Report

The Project Leader and the Research Manager met with and were interviewed by Professor Lesley Parker (13th December, 2007). Professor Parker was acting on a brief for ALTC to prepare a report on Leadership projects. Issues covered included project overview, learnings from the project and weakness and the limitations of approaches adopted. The sharing of project insights provided a reflective opportunity to synthesise project developments and progress to date.

**Outcome for LAP:** Opportunity to reflect on the project’s development and progress with an external reporter. An additional, if serendipitous, evaluation process and report.

**Benefit to the Discipline:** Contribution to the *What’s happening in leadership?* report on the 22 ATLC leadership projects.

9.7. ALTC Assessment Forum

*Adelaide, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 2008*

Two members of the Leadership and Assessment project are to attend this forum. The project leader, with years of experience as a result undertaking LAP looks forward to sharing learnings from the project with other ALTC projects. The second attendant will be an ARE from Phase 2, who has been exceptionally enthusiastic about leading assessment within a department that was initially very reluctant to engage with any change in assessment. Her learnings through the process will also be valuable to other projects. She is also interested in pursuing an ALTC grant in the future and attendance at such a forum will provide an opportunity to continue to build capacity as a leader in assessment and can be perceived as a mentoring support.

**Outcome for LAP:** Reflection of project process and outcomes in leading assessment change.

**Benefit to the Discipline:** Sharing of project learnings in successfully developing leadership capacity in assessment using a distributed model of leadership together with a PAR approach.
10. Evaluating the project

10.1 Starting the evaluation process

The process of selection of an external evaluator entailed several stages. The first was the preparation of a brief. An Evaluation Brief was developed by the project leader and the research manager (can be viewed as Appendix 3) as a resource to support the invitation of expressions of interest for the role of an external evaluator. This brief, outlined the project, evaluation guidelines, evaluation project budget, stakeholders, deliverables and project outcomes. The development of the brief immediately focused attention on the need to consider evaluation as soon as the project commenced, and in tandem with each project step and phase. Effective evaluation can only be attained if the evaluative process is integral to the research process, if plans encourage the collection of baseline data and if all project participants are contributing to the evaluation.

Next, a pool of evaluators had to be identified. This was achieved through discussion involving the project team, other Carrick projects and the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education staff (as it was then named). After much time and effort a short list of consultant evaluators believed to have the knowledge and skills required to undertake the role were identified.

Invitations were then issued to individuals to submit an expression of interest for the role and the reader is reminded of the challenges of this as outlined in the section Lack of external evaluators. Upon receipt of the expressions of interest the project team was convened to review, against listed criteria, the expressions of interest received and to make selection decisions.

The selected evaluator was a freelance consultant to higher education. Her submission, in response to the expression of interest, highlighted her commitment to participatory work-based learning and the development of distributed leadership, coupled with her experience in evaluation at multiple levels. With the appointment of an evaluator, it then became necessary to further conceptualise how this role would be enacted within a PAR framework.

10.2 The External Evaluator and PAR

The appointment of an external evaluator, a requirement of the funding body, originally presented a dilemma to this PAR project. Firstly, at a broadly conceptual level, action research incorporates evaluation as a normal part of the reflective process of the PAR cycle, hence the requirement for an external evaluator and an evaluation plan may be viewed as redundant. Secondly, as action research embodies principles of inclusiveness and collegiality, and has evaluation as an embedded part
of participants’ engagement in the action research cycle, the concept of externalised evaluation may therefore be deemed to compromise the social underpinnings of the project.

Consequently, it was agreed by the project participants at the first steering committee meeting (November, 2006) that while undertaking a “meta-evaluation” of the project the external evaluator would adopt a role of “participant observer” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), with the balance of these two elements (participation and observation) shifting during the phases of the project. This was a new way of conceptualising an evaluator role for some of the project’s participants, for example,

...I thought they were there just to observe, but she seemed to have quite a lot to say and I just wondered whether that was a part of her role or not, but I thought as an observer, she was told just to observe and not take part.

(ARE 1.4, December, 2006)

In the role of participant, the evaluator would:

• participate in meetings of the Steering Committee and a limited number of project meetings, contributing ideas that focus on evaluation processes;

• contribute to reflective discussions about the project’s progress, through various communication channels including the online community, and

• provide direction and advice to the project on evaluative data collection.

In the role of observer, the evaluator would:

• observe discussions in the online community forum;

• critique products generated through the project (for example, the assessment auditing tools);

• design and implement any additional evaluation tools for enabling a “meta-evaluation” of the project, and

• prepare reports (as listed in the evaluation brief).

This role of participant observer immediately drew the external evaluator into the action research cycle of plan (the evaluation), act (collect evaluative data), observe (as a participant observer) and reflect (or evaluate). In the role of meta-evaluation, the evaluator also acted as provocateur challenging participants to articulate their theoretical understandings and stance, as well as their research strategies.

**10.3 Formative Evaluation**

The process of reporting project progress each month acted as one form of formative evaluation, where progress was reported and mapped against the projected timeframe and against attainment of project outcomes. These reports were shared with all project
participants, including the external evaluator. Each of the monthly reports provided a regular evaluative function.

The six-monthly reports to the funding body provided systematic accountability and evaluation opportunities, involving external participants. Also, on a formal basis the six-monthly reports written up by the external evaluator provided evaluation to the funding body and to the project participants. Evaluation, and the feedback this provided, was actively considered and responded to. If any items were a source of disconnect with the project, these were then clarified, for example in the second external report (submitted with Phase 1 summative report) the evaluator wrote

> Similarly, student feedback on their learning experience over time (including the open-ended responses from graduates on the Course Experience Questionnaire analysed through CEQuery tool) would provide a useful window on assessment practices, along with an account of how such data are incorporated into the curriculum review processes.

and the clarification in response

> Each ARE has already been provided with the CEQ data for reflection (their initial reaction was to be shocked by the data!). It was decided that this would be useful at the March LEAP forum and then I individually delivered the data to each ARE and asked about their reflections on this data in our supported reflection session.

(email correspondence, August, 2007)

Such communications were part of the negotiation (Owen, 2006) essential to effective evaluation. Evaluation was regularly discussed: by the steering committee; the LEAP teams, project leader and manager, and with the evaluator. AREs provided formative reports, often verbal, to the steering committee. On a micro level, each supported reflection session with the AREs provided the AREs and the research manager with a time when project reports could be retrospectively reflected upon, progress evaluated and future action planned.

From the very start, the AREs were interested in the evaluation process:

> I would like to know more of the role of the evaluator.

(ARE 1.1, December, 2006)

and maintained this interest:

> I think it’s very important, the evaluation side is very important.

(ARE 1.2, March, 2008)
10.4 Summative evaluation

The external evaluator developed a detailed draft evaluation plan (forwarded as an attachment), starting in January 2007. The plan was presented to the project participants and disseminated via the community of practice website. It was challenging to engage wide participation in further developing the evaluation plans, so reflection sessions as well as LEAP fora were used as avenues for discussion. The outcome was that participants were aware of the diversity and range of measures to be used and their role in collecting and using evaluative data. One had admitted to struggling with … what will be the criteria or the descriptors for success? and reflected that

Um- I liked the evaluation document a lot as giving us an understanding of the sorts of outcomes you might be aiming towards and as giving us- not mandating a set of criteria which you will measured against and found wanting if you don't get there. But as at least giving me a clearer picture of the kinds of outcomes that I might be looking for.

(ARE 1.1, March, 2007)

It was very much a document that developed in response to project participant input.

What the external evaluator put forth which sounded a bit too guided- but we've talked about all that and it's all fixed up. And I'm aware that she's was aware of that situation. Ah but at the time I found that a little frustrating. But that's all resolved- that's fine.

(ARE 1.4, March, 2007)

An essential component of this evaluation plan was the development of a tool to capture the assessment practices in each participating department (Assessment matrix). This data collection was necessary to provide baseline data that would enable objective evaluation measures of assessment change achieved across the project. Additional baseline data collected included the collection of all unit outlines for courses of study offered by each of the participating departments. Data was chiefly collected by the AREs and the research manager.

One year later, in February 2008, one steering committee meeting was dedicated to project evaluation. Preparation for this session included the development of an Evaluation Stimulus Paper by the evaluator (Appendix 4). The meeting was then conducted as a workshop on project evaluation where possible strategies for an evaluation plan were shared and assessed with project participants reporting that this helped them in refocusing on working towards achieving project outcomes. However, there was evident tension arising from what the evaluator was suggesting in terms of the wording of the key evaluation questions with the pairing of indicators of success compared to how the participants (AREs and Influencers) had experienced and practiced PAR. The participants were desirous of having a tool that was aligned philosophically with PAR, and that was therefore able to provide a new way of
viewing research projects. As a result the participants decided to develop the project’s own evaluative indicators for measuring the success of the PAR process in Leadership and Assessment. These indicators are discussed in detail in the section Evaluating PAR.

Acknowledging collaboration and participation, all project participants were therefore involved in the summative evaluation process. Initially through reviewing and contributing to the development of the evaluation plan, as members of a LEAP team in workshopping evaluation, and as individuals in writing up their own evaluation of their roles in the format of the ARE summary report. The main formal summative evaluations for this project have been the ARE summary reports, this report and the external evaluator’s final report.

10.5 ARE reports

As well as contributing to the formative evaluation data as the project progressed, the AREs were requested, and agreed to the writing up of individual summative reports. At the combined LEAP forum, dedicated to evaluation (April, 2008), the possible basic components of a final report were discussed and developed. A draft had been developed by the research manager as the basis for discussion and an emerging suggestion was for each ARE to include a case study (autobiographical) to illustrate the impact and effectiveness of using PAR for this project in their department as the AREs believed they had strong illustrative examples of the impact of the project on delivering positive outcomes departmentally.

Components of the report finally included a listing of the activities undertaken as part of the project, justification for these activities and some explanation as to the effectiveness of the activities (and evidence of this); planned future activities; a reflection on leadership, one case study illustrating an activity undertaken; one example of best practice in leadership and assessment (to be converted later in the year into a web-based resource) and the completion of the PAR indicators checklist.

This draft proforma was then circulated once again for feedback, form fields added to make responding easier and then distributed to the AREs (June, 2006) for completion. Each of the AREs from Phase 1 and Phase 2 completed the summative report and these can be viewed in the appendices section by department, namely:

Law (Appendix 5)
Computing (Appendix 6)
Health and Chiropractic (Appendix 7)
Economics (Appendix 8)
Indigenous Studies (Appendix 9)
Asian Languages (Appendix 10)
10.6 Phase 3 reports

All project leaders and their teams, who were successful in obtaining funding for Phase 3 grants, submitted final summative reports on these projects. The seven reports are included as Appendices 11-17.

10.7 Lesley Parker’s report

Participation in the ALTC Leadership Report project provided an addition source of summative evaluation (Carrick Institute, 2007). Lesley Parker’s report is included as Appendix 18.

10.8 Independent Evaluation

An independent evaluation conducted by the project appointed external evaluator was conducted, a requirement of the funding body. This report provides insight into the role of an external evaluator in a PAR project.
References


Appendices

Part 1
APPENDIX 1. ARE Memorandum of Understanding.

Action Research Enablers Memorandum of Understanding

We welcome you to the Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus project. As an Action Research Enabler you will be funded for time-release for the duration of your involvement with the project: that is, as a Phase one participant, you will be funded for approximately **2 days per month over a 15 month period** (or as a Phase two participant, over a 12 month period). This allowance will be shared between the two participants for the Department of Chiropractic and Health.

Funding for time release can be used to replace some activity which is a regular part of your work commitment, for example, teaching, marking, research, administrative duties. Funds may NOT be spent on purchase of equipment nor consumables. Funds must be fully spent by 31 December, 2007.

As the Action Research Enabler for your department you are to lead the assessment Participatory Action Research (PAR) process. You have been invited to participate in this project as you have demonstrated an interest in teaching and learning development, and, in particular, an interest in assessment. We also believe that you have the necessary relationship building skills, critical reflection skills and the team working capacity required to energise and engage your departmental colleagues in the process.

The project adopts a Participatory Action Research framework. It is envisaged that, as an Action Research Enabler, you will hold a pivotal role in leading the action research cycles in your spheres of influence and as such be involved in: maintaining a reflective journal of your action research process, leading audit teams, leading policy reviews, updating existing policies and procedural frameworks; developing and implementing strategies for change; liaising with teaching and learning committees within your division; and developing a case study report for your area. In addition, as an enabler contributing to the LEAP 1 team, you will be involved in developing and refining the action research model and the assessment audit tools.

You are required to lead professional conversations about assessment, as well as to report back to your department and demonstrate iterative findings of this project. As a member of the LEAP (Leaders in Effective Assessment Practice) group you will be a member of the project’s steering committee, to meet every three months, and a part of the wider Macquarie University assessment community of practice, which will be supported by a wiki.

The project will support you in your role with two half-day workshops facilitated by a Leadership expert, overviewing principles of leadership and management, and an Action Research expert. The first workshop will be held early in the project and will focus on the principles of participatory action research and its role in sustainable organisational change. Later in Phase 1 the second workshop, while adopting an action research framework, will support your development of strategy and departmental policy.
Name: __________________________________________

Please sign this form, obtain the signature of your project “influencer” and return to Marina Harvey, Centre for Professional Development, by Friday, 5th January, 2007.

I have read and understood the requirements for the Action Research Enablers of the Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus project.

Signature of Action Research Enabler: ______________________________________
Date: ____________________________________

Signature of Project “Influencer”: ______________________________________
Date: ____________________________________

Signature of Head of Department: ______________________________________
(if not Project “Influencer”)
Date: ____________________________________
APPENDIX 2. Steering Committee Terms of Reference

Support for this project has been provided from the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. It will run at Macquarie University from September 2006 until July, 2008.

Assessment and feedback are key components of curriculum throughout the Higher Education sector playing a critical role in shaping the quality of student learning. While there are many examples of good assessment practice within tertiary institutions, many of these are at an individual academic or unit level. In this project, Macquarie University intends to develop ‘assessment leaders’ who will promote and support the strategic and systematic development of assessment and feedback throughout the institution.

The Aim
The purpose of the project is to develop through a distributed leadership model, multi-level academic leadership across the institution, to promote and support the strategic and systematic enhancement of assessment and feedback, and the development of transparent and coherent policy frameworks at all levels (unit, program, department and division).

The Process
A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach will be adopted to:

- investigate,
- develop and
- align assessment practices.

The project will encompass the:

- individual,
- unit,
- program (starting with three departments in the university) and
- institutional levels.

A feature of the project is that of developing practitioners who are an empowered group of leaders in effective assessment practice. These leaders will be able to positively influence departmental, institutional and ultimately, sectorial thinking. The project will incorporate elements of Developmental Action Learning (DAL) in order to strengthen the acquisition of leadership knowledge and skills by the participants. The participants will not only investigate
and reflect upon their own assessment practices but also those at a unit, departmental and program level and how to effect change at each of those levels.

The project will be developed in three phases:

1. Formation of the multi-level ‘Leaders in Effective Assessment Practice’ (LEAP) group to participate in the action research process. This group design and implement an assessment audit at departmental level and use this and other data to inform a review of departmental processes and policies on assessment.

2. A refinement of the leadership and organisational development model and roll out to other divisions, through the further engagement of members from other cognate areas to the LEAP group.

3. Institutional rollout and dissemination of findings to the Sector.

Project outcomes

• An enhanced assessment audit tool for sector-wider use
• A framework for leadership development and capacity building
• A methodology for integrating best practice at a study unit, programme and institutional level
• A methodology of evaluation for a PAR process
• A sector-wide Assessment Leadership Community of Practice

Steering Committee

Terms of Reference

Throughout the phases of the project he committee will meet every 3 months (over a 24 month period of September 06-August 08) and provide advice and assistance by:

• Advising on the continued development of the project’s vision, goals and outcomes for both Phase 1 and Phase 2;
• Identifying sources of, and facilitating access to, information and expertise relevant to the project;

• Contributing to the knowledge base on the use of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in leadership capacity building for assessment in higher education through participation in an on-line community;

• Providing feedback on processes and outcomes emerging from each of the LEAP (Leaders in Effective Assessment practice) groups;

• Reviewing and informing the development of each stage of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) process;

• Acting as stakeholder representatives and sharing insights and reflections on leadership and assessment in their divisions;

• Identifying issues, generating options and making recommendations concerning potential strategies for supporting and fostering leadership and assessment;

• Identifying project risks and the strategies for managing those risks;

• Providing advice on the sustainability of initiatives and their transferability to other departments and division within the university, and ultimately to the wider university sector;

• Recommending approaches for disseminating the PAR model for leadership in assessment as a tool for capacity building throughout the university and the sector.

Project Leader
Dr Sharon Fraser
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9850 8446

Research Manager
Dr Marina Harvey
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9850 9852

Dr Maree Gosper, Team member

Connie Lord, Team member

Professor Stephen Marshall, Team member

Margot McNeill, Team member
APPENDIX 3 Project Overview with Evaluation Brief.

Project Overview

Assessment and feedback are key components of curriculum throughout the Higher Education sector playing a critical role in shaping the quality of student learning. While there are many examples of good assessment practice within tertiary institutions, many of these are at an individual academic or unit level. In this project, Macquarie University intends to develop ‘assessment leaders’ who will promote and support the strategic and systematic development of assessment and feedback throughout the institution.

The Aim

The purpose of the project is to develop through a distributed leadership model, multi-level academic leadership across the institution, to promote and support the strategic and systematic enhancement of assessment and feedback, and the development of transparent and coherent policy frameworks at all levels (unit, program, department and division).

The Process

A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach will be adopted to:

- investigate,
- develop and align assessment practices.

The project will encompass the:

- individual,
- unit,
- program (starting with three departments in the university) and institutional levels.

A feature of the project is that of developing practitioners who are an empowered group of leaders in effective assessment practice. These leaders will be able to positively influence departmental, institutional and ultimately, sectorial thinking. The project will incorporate elements of Developmental Action Learning (DAL) in order to strengthen the acquisition of leadership knowledge and skills by the participants. The participants will not only investigate and reflect upon their own assessment practices but also those at a unit, departmental and program level and how to effect change at each of those levels.
The project will be developed in three phases:

1. Formation of the multi-level ‘Leaders in Effective Assessment Practice’ (LEAP) group to participate in the action research process. This group design and implement an assessment audit at departmental level and use this and other data to inform a review of departmental processes and policies on assessment.

2. A refinement of the leadership and organisational development model and roll out to other divisions, through the further engagement of members from other cognate areas to the LEAP group.

3. Institutional rollout and dissemination of findings to the Sector.

**Project outcomes**

- An enhanced assessment audit tool for sector-wide use
- A framework for leadership development and capacity building
- A methodology for integrating best practice at a study unit, programme and institutional level
- A methodology of evaluation for a PAR process
- A sector-wide Assessment Leadership Community of Practice

Support for this project has been provided from the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. It will run at Macquarie University from September 2006 until July, 2008. One requirement of the funding agreement is that the project undergo an external evaluation process conducted by an independent evaluator.

**Evaluation Brief**

**The Evaluator**

Preferably, the evaluator will have demonstrated knowledge and experience in Higher Education, Assessment, and Action Research.

The external evaluator will perform several key roles within this project including:

- informing the evaluation and monitoring mechanisms for the formative evaluation throughout all three project phases;
• attending steering committee meetings, held every three months, and participating in the online community developed by the project and thus engaging in the participatory action research process, and

• developing summative evaluation tools, analysing resultant data and writing up the final external summative evaluation report.

 Evaluation Guidelines

The evaluation will need to be mapped against the stated project plans and outcomes as listed in the grant application (Appendix A). All evaluation processes will therefore need to monitor all the levels of project participation, namely individual, unit, program and organisation. In addition all elements of the Participatory Action Research Process will need to be monitored to enable the generation of learning outcomes which will be pivotal in informing the action research cycles that make up the project.

 Project Budget

A total of $9,000 has been budgeted for the evaluation.

A possible configuration of the time commitment could include two days of orientation meetings and initial data collection to establish the evaluation plan. The remaining days might be spread across attendance at steering committee meetings and attendance as necessary at project meetings to inform data collection. This will allow for formative evaluation for both Phase 1 and Phases 2/3, a brief summative report for Phase 1 to inform the development of Phase 2, and for the writing up of the final summative evaluation report.

 Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders and audience for the evaluation findings are:

• Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education as the funding body for the project;
• The Project Team and Steering Committee, and
• Academics and participating Departments and LEAP groups.

 Deliverables

The major deliverables are:

a one page progress report (due COB 24th January, 2007)
a brief Phase 1 summative report (due COB 24th July, 2007)
a one page progress report (due COB 24th January, 2008)
a final report (due COB 24th July, 2008).
Expression of Interest

You are invited to submit your Expression of Interest for the evaluation of the Leadership and Assessment: Strengthening the Nexus project. Please forward a one page overview of your evaluation project plan, together with a one page CV by 16th October, 2006 to:-

Dr Sharon Fraser  
Project Leader  
Leadership and Assessment Project  
CPD C4C  
Macquarie University NSW 2109  
sharon.fraser@vc.mq.edu.au  
phone - 02 9850 8446  
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If you would like to discuss any aspect of the evaluation please feel free to contact either Dr Sharon Fraser or Dr Marina Harvey.

Project team members

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Appendix A

Project Outcomes (by Phase and Final)

Phase 1 Outcomes
(May, 2007)

• An overview of the assessment mapping instruments currently available to the sector.
• An effective model for the development of leadership capacity for quality assessment, within participating departments, incorporating PAR and DAL methodologies.
• A framework for supporting quality assessment practice within participating departments, including improved policies and processes.
• Academic teachers who are capable Assessment Leaders.
• Initial findings from the external evaluator on the PAR model for leadership capacity building and organisational development (to be refined in Phase 2).
• Professional development materials arising from the workshops.
• The CPD wiki space to host the Assessment Community of Practice.

Phase 2 Outcomes
(November, 2007)

• A sustainable and systematic model for the development of leadership capacity for organisational development in relation to the enhancement of assessment practice across higher education institutions.
• A methodology for the evaluation of a PAR project, including a description of how the issues identified from Phase 1 of the PAR process were addressed for Phase 2.
• A transparent and coherent policy framework for assessment and feedback at all levels (unit, program, department and division).
• A group of ‘leaders of effective assessment practice’ operating at all levels of the Institution, with scholarly understanding of assessment and feedback in higher education, and knowledge and ability to work in cross-level and integrated teams.
• An Assessment Community of Practice on the project’s wiki space.

Final Project Outcomes
(July, 2008)

• A comprehensive report for publication which will include:
  o a description of the approach for leadership capacity building;
  o an analysis of the critical success factors and issues;
  o a description of the project’s transferability and strategies for dissemination;
  o any materials produced; and
  o discussion of the project’s links with the Carrick agreed Strategic Priority Areas.
• A group of ‘leaders of effective assessment practice’ that have the scholarly and procedural understanding of assessment policy and practice to lead and inform the institution and the Higher Education Sector regarding the enhancement of good assessment practice.

• A framework, both scholarly and procedural, for aligning assessment within the curriculum at a study unit and program level (including assessment policies, good practice guidelines, graduate capabilities, curriculum review guidelines).

• A sustainable process for integrating best practice at a study unit, program and institutional level.

• A research and evidence based model for capacity building and organisational development that is transferable to all academic areas of the institution and the Higher Education Sector as a whole.

• An evaluation of the PAR process as a basis for capacity building within higher education teaching and learning development.

• Conference papers and journal articles to disseminate the study findings to the wider academic community, ultimately promoting the knowledge, and engagement with, the scholarship of teaching and learning, of the sector and, especially, the project participants.

• An enhancement of the practice of, and resources developed by, the Project Team (academic developers) in Foundations programs, postgraduate certificate offerings, evaluation services and local area work.

• Assessment practice at Macquarie University as an institutional strength, rather than the innovative practice of unrecognised individuals.
APPENDIX 4. Evaluation stimulus paper

DIVERSE “SUBJECTS” OF EVALUATION IN THE PROJECT WITH EXAMPLES

**INPUTS**
- Plans, people and resources
  - Communication processes
  - Individual and group activities
  - Workshops and planning sessions

**OUTPUTS**
- A model for developing leadership
- A framework for quality assessment
- Professional development materials

**OUTCOMES**
- Capable assessment leaders
- Better assessment policy/practice

**IMPACT**
- Sustained institution strength in assessment
- Uptake of project outputs / outcomes within the HE sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project goals</th>
<th>What might be our key evaluation questions?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A model of leadership and organisational development for enhancing assessment</td>
<td>▪ How effective... is the PAR model in leadership and organisational development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ How much/how well has the PAR model contributed to enhancing assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A policy framework for assessment at all levels</td>
<td>▪ How effective... is the policy framework for assessment across all levels?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ How much/how well has the PAR model contributed to developing this framework?</td>
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<tr>
<td>A cohort of effective and knowledgeable leaders of assessment</td>
<td>▪ How effective... is the cohort of leaders of assessment?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ How much/how well has the PAR model contributed to the development of their leadership capabilities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A community of practice in assessment across the sector</td>
<td>▪ How effective... is the community of practice in assessment across the sector?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ How much/how well has the PAR model contributed to the development of this community of practice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key evaluation questions for each of the four main goals</td>
<td>Possible indicators of success</td>
</tr>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| How effective... is the PAR model in leadership and organisational development? How much/how well has the PAR model contributed to enhancing assessment? | • Positive reflections by participants in the process  
• Positive reflections by colleagues impacted by the project  
• Positive peer reviews of the soundness and value of the model  
• Growing incidence of uptake of the model within and across universities  
• Persistence and resilience of model in diverse settings  
• Positive peer reviews of the value of professional development resources |
| How effective... is the policy framework across all levels? How much/how well has the PAR model contributed to developing this framework? | • Improved clarity of assessment requirements in unit outlines and study guides  
• Improved alignment between assessment and learning objectives  
• Improved coherence of assessment regimes across programs  
• Reduced gap between policy statements and actual practices  
• Reduced incidence of policy/procedural non-compliance |
| How effective... is the cohort of leaders of assessment? How much/how well has the PAR model contributed to the development of their leadership capabilities? | • Improved understanding by staff about assessment  
• Increased numbers of staff recognised for excellence in teaching and assessment  
• Improved student experience of assessment |
| How effective... is the community of practice in assessment? How much/how well has the PAR model contributed to the development of this community of practice? | • Participation in COP spans diverse groups across the university and the sector  
• Engagement in COP is active and productive  
• Growing access by a wide audience to the scholarly outputs from the COP |
Possible data sets for project evaluation, and example elements

Profile of assessment
• Unit outlines
• Unit study guides
• Assessment alignment mapping
• Policy mapping at multiple levels
• Mapping of practices and procedures (the way things are done around here - assessment culture)
• Resources to support good assessment practices
• History of assessment innovations
• Identified prominent issues
• Minutes of meetings

Student experience
• MU student feedback surveys on their experience of units, teachings, etc
• CEQ graduate feedback surveys on their experience of MU courses
• CEQuery analysis of graduate feedback on open-ended items
• Student focus groups and forums
• Complaints register?

Staff experience
• History of recognition and reward for staff whose assessment practices are excellent
• Focus group session with colleagues of project participants?

Project participants’ experience
• Action Research Enablers’ reflective journals
• Project Research Manager’s reflective journal
• Records of CPD team meetings

Broader community engagement
• Server statistics on usage of WIKI
• Nature of interactions in WIKI spaces
• Formal evaluation survey of members of COP??
Some useful references

Jouni Kekäle; Ilkka Pirttilä
Participatory action research as a method for developing leadership and quality

Eileen Piggot-Irvine
Establishing criteria for effective professional development and use in evaluating an action research based programme
*Journal of In-Service Education*, Volume 32, Issue 4, 2006, Pages 477 – 496

Tony Bush; Ann R. J. Briggs; David Middlewood
The impact of school leadership development: evidence from the 'new visions' programme for early headship
*Journal of In-Service Education*, Volume 32, Issue 2, 2006, Pages 185 – 200

Shelda Debowski; Vivienne Blake
Collective capacity building of academic leaders: a university model of leadership and learning in context