

Taking the Lead professional development program: a case study at the University of Western Australia

by

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Abstract

Between the start of 2005 and the end of 2007, the University of Western Australia Library embarked on a program of activities and projects that would implement its ambitious Strategic Plan: [Re-placing the Library](#). Among the projects were implementations of: Open URL linking service, federated searching, Library portal, document delivery end-user requesting, a learning objects repository, and a research repository. There was also a project to investigate and implement Web2.0 technologies.

To ensure the Library had the knowledge, skills, organisational structure and roles to implement these projects and thus achieve the objectives of the strategic plan, the strategic plan also included a theme – Transforming the Organisation. Broadly this theme had as its aims to change the way staff worked together and to improve staff roles and skills so that the strategic plan's objectives could be achieved.

Amongst other responses to this theme, the Library identified the need to develop a management team that is forward thinking, pro-active and ready to lead staff in addressing the challenges that change involves. In 2006 The University of Western Australia Library commenced a leadership program that would identify each manager's skill gaps and a range of training and development strategies for its 24 most senior staff. This group made up about one sixth of the total Library staff.

The program included the use of a 360 degree feedback instrument and a personal profile system to determine the management skill gaps for each member of staff. Each participant then developed a training plan in conjunction with the program team leader. The individual training plans were collated and skills were identified that would best be addressed in a group setting and a group training programme was put in place to do this. Once the group and individual training programs were completed the 360 degree feedback process is to be repeated. At the same time as the formal program was running its course, monthly informal forums for participants to discuss leadership and management topics were conducted.

Two evaluation processes were established to identify whether the program was a success: post workshop questionnaires were completed and a survey of participants was conducted at the completion of the program.

The evaluation analysis showed that all program participants identified positive outcomes from the program, although these depended on their level of experience and the readiness of the individual to participate.

1. Why a leadership professional development program?

Academic libraries are grappling with new ways to deliver information and services to patrons. At the forefront of the digital revolution they provide access to digital information through information discovery tools, create digital content, deliver e-learning modules and they are experimenting with ways to interact with patrons via Web 2.0 technologies. Some academic libraries including The University of Western Australia (UWA) Library are also advancing teaching and learning through e-learning resource systems. (Poleykett and Benn 2007) Diane Kresh in her preface to the Whole Digital Library Handbook states “digital content embodies more and more of the world’s intellectual, social and cultural history” and academic libraries are confronting this head-on at what sometimes seems like break neck pace. (Kresh 2007)

A key characteristic of this digital revolution is the empowerment of individuals through technology via the Internet. Many academic libraries are working hard to engage with the digitally empowered in the rapidly changing ‘infosphere’. It is imperative they learn to adapt quickly and continue to adapt to the “new information seeking and usage behavior of students and faculty.” (Nicholson 2006)

At the same time academic libraries are still managing print collections, providing spaces for study, and offering services that support these. The addition of new digital information services to the existing print collections and associated services means that “we are all adding to our responsibilities and not eliminating any preexisting ones”. (Kresh 2007) At the same time there has usually been no accompanying increase in budgets supporting these new resources and service. (Kyrillidou, Sousa et al.)

Thus academic library managers find themselves in an increasingly complex and ever-changing working environment and it is essential that they have at their disposal, and use, a broad range of leadership skills. In other words academic libraries require management teams that are forward thinking, proactive and ready to lead staff in addressing the challenges that these changes involve.

In the last fifty years our understanding of what makes a good leader has changed and there have been many studies and academic papers that have advanced our understanding of leadership. In 1961, W.C.H Prentice defined a successful leader as one who understands people and is able to enlist their participation for the good of the organisation. This democratic description of leadership changed the general approach to teaching leadership skills and led to other studies and theories of a similar nature. (Prentice 2004)

Marshall says, “While ‘good’ and/or ‘effective’ leadership is almost universally recognized, its nature remains elusive.” He then goes on to say that developing leadership capability in individuals “is not a simple process, it is a complex, multifaceted process that must focus on the development of individuals as well as the organizational contexts in which they are called to operate”. (Marshall 2006)

Although the Library had invested in training and developing its staff, up to mid-2006 there had been no systematic library-wide and coordinated leadership and management training for senior staff at the UWA Library. It is usually a relatively easy task to train staff in the use of technologies; it is standard for most organizations to do this. We realised before we started this programme that it would not be so easy to develop in staff the leadership skills required to manage the complexities of the changes that were confronting us. This paper describes *Taking the Lead*, the leadership programme implemented at the Library in 2006 and evaluates its impact on the Library. It also attempts to identify a way forward for the training programme at UWA Library and hopefully offers some encouragement for other organizations to attempt such a programme.

2. Library Strategic Theme: Transforming the Organisation

In 2004 the Library launched its strategic plan *Re-placing the Library: Strategic Plan 2005-2007*. Annual operational plans were developed that identified activities and projects which would see the strategic plan implemented. Among the projects were implementations of: Open URL linking service, federated searching, Library portal, document delivery end-user requesting, a learning objects repository, and a research repository. There was also a project to investigate and implement Web2.0 technologies.

In order to maintain and develop its services according to the priorities laid out in this strategic plan the UWA Library needed to ensure that its internal systems and the quality of its services were constantly reviewed and improved.

One of the key themes of the plan was *Transforming the Organisation*. The major outcome of this theme was to have staff with attributes, skills and expertise that would facilitate the achievement of the library's strategic objectives. Seventeen activities were identified that would achieve the full aims of the theme. Since 2004 nearly all of these activities have been implemented and others will be completed by the end of 2007. Some of these activities were: develop a program to give staff an understanding of the Library overall and how each part fits together; equip staff through a skills training program for the changes being introduced by the strategic plan; early professional development for recruited professional staff; develop staff recognition mechanisms; and break down the silos within the Library.

Taking the Lead was one project within Transforming the Organisation. Its major aim was that Library managers have the skills and knowledge required to drive the required changes and achieve a positive and high performing workplace.

3. Taking the Lead introduced

Taking the Lead was launched in August 2006 and was due to finish in August 2007. The programme set out to achieve the following outcomes:

- ❖ determine the management skill gaps for each member of staff at level 7 or above using a 360 degree feedback instrument and a behavioural style inventory

- ❖ identify which skills are best addressed in a workshop or group setting
- ❖ identify the range of options for addressing those skills not delivered in a group setting
- ❖ determine an individual training plan for each participant
- ❖ source and schedule the training
- ❖ provide an ongoing forum for participants to discuss management issues
- ❖ evaluate the project
- ❖ repeat the 360 degree feedback process for each participant. (At the time of writing the repeat 360 degree feedback has not been run)

The process was managed by Ms Vivienne Blake, an independent facilitator external to the Library, a Senior Lecturer in the University's Staff Development Services. She identified, sourced and co-ordinated the learning and development activities and workshops based on the outcomes of the 360 degree survey and information from the individual training plans and facilitated the Foundation Workshop and two of the four subsequent workshops.

Participants in the programme came from all sections of the Library. They were a mix of library and non-library trained staff members and had varying degrees of supervisory responsibilities and experience. Of the 24 participants 19 were professional librarians, one was from the Administration section and four from the Information Technology section. There were 22 participants who supervised staff and two with no current supervisory role.

360 degree survey:

The skill gap analysis was provided by a commercial 360 degree feedback provider – the Quality Leadership Profile for Senior Staff from the Queensland University of Technology. This was a confidential and anonymous process. The QLP's "formalized 360° feedback . . . focuses specifically on the appraisal of managers by their subordinates, peers, customers, and superiors based on critical competencies associated with the supervision or leadership." (Queensland University of Technology 2007) The value of the use of such 360 degree feedback is that it "increases the accuracy of self-perception", and gives participants information about how others see them. Once the participant has increased his or her self-awareness and identified the need for behaviour change, she can identify what changes to make to improve or rectify the situation. (Waldman and Atwater 1998)

The QLP 360 degree feedback comprised an online questionnaire. Each participant received feedback from at least five respondents in two categories of staff in order to maintain anonymity and to give valid results: staff who reported to the participant and peers of the participant including non-library staff. Those who supervised fewer than five staff negotiated with others who reported to them on an occasional basis, for example in project work. All responses were voluntary. The supervisor of the participant and the participants themselves also had to complete the assessment.

The survey included 35 items grouped in the nine categories: staff development, consultative management, team environment, systems and

processes, making decisions, change and innovation, client focus, community outreach and academic leadership. All participants were briefed individually by the facilitator on the results of their feedback survey and on the areas where improvement could be expected and development required.

Foundation workshop:

After the 360 degree survey briefing a one-day Foundation Workshop was held where participants discussed their survey results and where the DiSC® personal profile system was introduced. The DiSC® model provided the ability to explore behaviour across four areas:

- ❖ **Dominance:** those who are direct, decisive, and strong-willed and like accepting challenges, taking action and getting immediate results.
- ❖ **Influence:** those who are optimistic, outgoing, “people people” who like working in teams, sharing ideas and energizing others
- ❖ **Steadiness:** those who are sympathetic, consistent, cooperative, helpful and good listeners, and like working behind the scenes.
- ❖ **Conscientiousness:** those who are concerned, correct, and systematic and like planning and checking for accuracy.

The DiSC® process required that a self-test was completed in which participants had to think about how they would act and feel in a work situation. One word of a group of four was selected by the participant that most described the participant and one that least described the participant. A total of 28 of these groups of words were completed in this manner. The results were then counted, recorded, tallied and plotted onto a graph that represented each of the four behavioural areas and identified a profile for each participant. Each participant gained an understanding of herself through her profile and of her unique behavioural pattern. Because the profiles were then shared, an understanding of other participants’ behavioural profiles was gained. Part of this discussion was an interpretation of the profile including behavioural tendencies, and an action plan that would assist the person become more effective in a work situation especially in dealings with others.

Individual leadership development plan:

During and after the Foundation Workshop, each participant, in conjunction with the facilitator and the supervisor developed an individual leadership development plan. These plans had two main aims: to develop knowledge, skills and abilities and to change the work environment to enable the staff development to occur. Each development plan included: identification of specific areas for leadership development, and planning strategies for achieving the set development objectives, monitoring progress, and reviewing the outcomes of the plan. Participants specified what action would be taken, in what time frame, what kinds of challenges would be confronted and how these challenges would be overcome. The participant then had the option of publicly outlining their plan to a staff meeting. This public airing of the plan was expected to assist the individual’s commitment to meet these goals.

Based on the most common areas identified for development in the individual development plans, four workshops were identified and subsequently delivered. They were: Supervisor as coach, Managing conflict, Team building,

and Community engagement. The selection of these workshops was based on the most commonly identified skills gaps in the individual development plans. Attendance was optional but encouraged.

Leading into the Weekend monthly leadership forum

Each of the twenty four participants was involved in a monthly forum called *Leading into the Weekend*. This forum was informal and self-managed. In turn each participant sourced, advertised and managed a leadership related learning activity for their colleagues in the programme. These activities held late on a Friday afternoon were usually followed by an informal social gathering at the University Club.

4. How was the programme evaluated?

The evaluation was a combination of formative and summative evaluation. Summative evaluation allowed reflection on the overall value of the programme and provided a guide to future development initiatives. Formative evaluation assisted in determining the future directions of the training programme including any improvements or modifications.

The Kirkpatrick Evaluation ‘four level’ model was chosen as it achieved both the summative and formative aims. As Donald Kirkpatrick says: “The four levels serve more than the obvious purpose of evaluating training after the fact; they are a great model for developing programs”. (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2005)

The Kirkpatrick model measured four things.

- ❖ Reaction: how trainees reacted to the program or the measure of customer satisfaction;
- ❖ Learning: the extent to which learning has occurred;
- ❖ Behaviour: the extent to which on-the-job behaviour has changed as a result of the programme; and
- ❖ Results: the extent to which results have occurred because of the training.

The sources of the information which formed the basis of the evaluation at the four levels varied. Feedback sheets from participants involved in workshops measured the reactions to the training and customer satisfaction. A participant survey measured the extent to which learning had occurred and the extent to which on-the-job behaviour had changed because of the programme. An interview conducted by the programme facilitator with the Library Executive made up of the three most senior staff in the Library measured the extent to which the positive results occurred because of the programme. Table One summarises the focus and source of the evaluation information.

Table one: the focus and source of the evaluation

Levels	Focus	Source	Time
1. Reactions	Participants’ satisfaction	Participants – feedback sheets completed after each workshop	During the programme

2. Learning	Acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviour	Questionnaire of participants	On completion of programme
3. Behaviour	Improved behaviour on-the-job	Questionnaire of participants	On completion of the programme
4. Outcomes	Organisational results achieved by participants	Interview Library Executive	On completion of the programme

The most substantial evaluation method – the survey – included questions about the 360 degree feedback process, the Foundation and other workshops, the Leading into the Weekend sessions, the individual leadership development plans and overall comments about the programme. For each workshop, information was sought about: the usefulness of the content, how well organised the session was, the effectiveness of the facilitator and whether the participant would recommend the workshop to others.

5. What were the programme evaluation outcomes

Workshop evaluation responses

At the end of each of the five workshops, participants were encouraged to fill in evaluation forms. Forms were analysed for all workshops except for Community Engagement and Supervisor as Coach which were mislaid. There was a high rate of return ranging from 21 out of a possible 24 for the Foundation Workshop, and 17 for the others.

The Foundation Workshop was rated good or better by 95% of the respondents. When asked which were the most useful aspects of the session about half identified the DiSC® process. This identification of the importance and value that attendees held towards the DiSC® process was replicated in the survey and the Executive interviews.

All respondents found the Team Building workshop valuable or of significant value. In response to the “three most significant things learned from the workshop”, 53% of the comments recognised that strengths in a management style can, when overused, negatively impact on their team’s performance.

All evaluation forms for the Managing Conflict workshop indicated the workshop was at least of some value, with 70% finding it of significant value. Of the comments to the three most interesting things learned, one half related to an increased understanding of how peoples’ goals and fears affect the way that they respond to conflict.

Survey evaluation

Sixteen out of a total of 24 or 67% of participants responded to the survey.

General responses:

Participants were asked to rate four general statements about the programme. A large majority of respondents (88%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had “gained useful insight into my personal capacities and preference style as a

leader”. A significant majority (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had “gained an increased understanding of the knowledge and skills involved in leading and managing”. Similarly 75% agreed or strongly agreed that through the programme they had “productive interactions with colleagues”.

By way of contrast, in response to the statement “The Taking the Lead Programme allowed me to have my stated needs addressed”, no respondents strongly agreed and only 33% agreed. The vast majority 60% neither agreed nor disagreed. It is possible this response occurred because participants were not asked to identify and state their needs before the programme commenced and so could not have been expected to respond positively to this statement. Table Two is a summary of the survey responses for the four general statements.

Table Two: General survey results

Question	5 Strongly agree	4	3	2	1 Strongly disagree
Gain useful insight into my own personal capacities and preference style as a leader	38%	50%	13%	0	0
Gain increased understanding of the knowledge and skills involved in leading and managing	19%	56%	13%	13%	0
Have productive interactions with colleagues	31%	44%	19%	0	6%
Have my stated needs addressed	0	33%	60%	7%	0

The survey provided the opportunity for respondents to provide comments on the timing of the Taking the Lead programme, the extent to which knowledge and skills were gained, and the changes in behaviour attributable to the programme. It is difficult to summarise these comments because they varied considerably. However a number of comments stated that the spacing between sessions was good and that there were times when it was difficult to attend workshops and that some were too long. In regard to the acquisition of knowledge and skills there were a small number of comments that indicated little was gained from the workshops. By contrast there were an equal number which stated that self-knowledge was gained rather than skills and supporting the contention that changes in behaviour were attributable to the programme. These mostly referred to respondents being more confident in leadership and management, and they had an increased awareness of other styles of management.

Observations were also requested about what parts of the programme should be retained, what changes were recommended and comments in general

about the programme. As to what should be changed, there were a few comments about making the workshops shorter. In regard to what should be retained there was strong support for the 360 degree survey, the Leading into the Weekend sessions and the DiSC® profile activities.

There were many general comments that supported the programme and requested that it continue. There were a couple of comments, possibly from more senior participants that the programme was particularly helpful for junior members of staff.

360 degree feedback process:

All 24 participants completed the 360 degree feedback process and all the sixteen survey respondents expressed strong support for it. Also all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the process was well organised. There was also strong support in all the other survey questions for the 360 degree process. A high percentage (88%) agreed or strongly agreed that the debriefing interview helped “me understand and analyse the results”, 69% that the programme was useful and 63% that the process helped “identify my strengths and areas for development as a leader”. Also, 63% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Taking the Lead programme “provided me with the opportunity to follow-up on leadership strengths and weaknesses identified in the 360 degree process”. Finally, 88% would recommend the 360 degree feedback process to others.

Workshops:

Nearly all participants (81%) attended the Foundation Workshop. However it is important to note that all programme participants who were absent at this workshop subsequently completed the full range of these activities with the facilitator. Respondents agreed that the Foundation Workshop was the most successful of the workshops. It was well organised (84%), included useful content (74%), was conducted by an effective facilitator (100%) and 78% of the respondents said they would recommend the workshop to others.

Attendances at the other four workshops were high except for Managing Conflict where there were only 9 attendees or 56% of programme participants. There were no reasons offered in the survey results for this low turnout; however it may be that training sessions on this topic have been offered on a regular basis in the past and so many opted out.

Although there were variations in ratings, a majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the four workshops were well organised and facilitated. Only 31% of Community Engagement workshop attendees agreed or strongly agreed that the workshop was useful. And only a bare majority agreed or strongly agreed that the Managing Conflict and Team Building workshops were useful. For all of these workshops less than 50% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they were implementing into the workplace “some of the things I learnt in this workshop”. There were no comments in the survey that clearly stated why so few felt the workshops were useful or why few were implementing what was learned into the workplace. It could be that the more experienced participants felt they have accumulated sufficient knowledge and skills over the years in these areas and so gained little new information from the workshop. In other words they may not have gained as

much as less experienced participants. A few comments about the workshops reflect this view.

There were a variety of replies on whether respondents would recommend the workshops to others. Support ranged from 31% who agreed or strongly agreed they would recommend the Supervisor as Coach to 80% for Community Engagement. It is hard to speculate why respondents would recommend the Community Engagement workshop to others and at the same time give little support for implementing what was learned into the workplace. However it could be that few had attended a course on this topic before and for this reason found it valuable, even though they didn't want to implement it in the workplace.

The Supervisor as Coach workshop also received a mixed range of ratings. It was well organised with a good facilitator and was found only to be moderately useful. By contrast there was little support to implement what was learned in the workplace and there were few who would recommend it to others. Survey comments give an indication of why this might be so. Of the four comments given about this session, two said the session was too long and one that the venue was uncomfortable.

Leading into the weekend

All 16 respondents to the survey supported the Leading into the Weekend activities with 75% attending at least half of the sessions. 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the activities were well organised, and 61% agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the activities to others. Only 56% agreed or strongly agreed that the activities were useful. This may have been because the activities varied a great deal one from the other and so one participant may have found one session useful but may have not found the next session so valuable. This was reflected in the respondents' comments.

Coaching

During the Supervisor as Coach Workshop all participants were encouraged to continue coaching others after the workshop and/or to seek out a coach for themselves. Of the 16 respondents to the survey, 5 or 31% continued to be involved in coaching after the workshop. Most attended four coaching sessions, and most of the comments indicated that objectives of the coaching were met.

Individual leadership development plan

Of the 16 respondents, 15 or 94% respondents responded to questions on the Individual leadership development plan. There was good support for the plans with 9 or 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the plans were a useful tool.

Interview with Library Executive

In the interview of the Library Executive the three members expressed their commitment to the programme, commented positively on how it was run and supported the continuation of the programme into the next year. As an indication of their commitment all three attended a significant number of the programme's workshops and activities.

The Executive team was asked to discuss any changes they had noticed in staff who attended the programme relative to the acquisition of knowledge or skills, changes in behaviour, changes in attitude, general confidence as leaders, leadership capacity and general networking.

The Executive team believed that the programme had helped increase the sense of the Library as 'one unit' and strengthened the sense of 'one management team'. In this it achieved one of the aims of the Transforming the Organisation programme, to break down of silos within the Library. It was agreed that participants especially the younger managers, showed a greater confidence, an increased understanding of leadership, a greater acceptance of management responsibilities, and a more mature view of their role in managing change.

The programme was acknowledged as a great 'leveller'. This was indicated by younger staff confidently debating issues with more experienced and senior staff. It was felt that all attendees believed their participation and contribution was valued.

Specific programme elements were discussed. The DiSC® model was a very useful tool which gave staff a way of thinking about and discussing different workplace styles. Comparable sessions using DiSC® were subsequently run in a number of sections with all levels of staff. The workshops were seen as generally very valuable. The Leading into the weekend was regarded as effective, simple to organise and of great benefit to the organisation. It was hoped this would continue as long as the group felt it worthwhile.

6. The way forward

It is clear that the Taking the Lead programme was successful in terms of the Kirkpatrick 'four level' model. (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2005) The workshop feedback forms and the survey results showed that participants were satisfied with the programme, had acquired leadership knowledge and skills and had seen improved behaviour on the job. All participants including the Library Executive believed that substantial organisational benefits had been achieved. Some of the activities especially the 360 degree survey and the DiSC® profile process were almost universally well regarded. The many comments on the DiSC® profile indicated it provided a common language to discuss management and leadership styles.

Most of the other activities were less well regarded but were still found by many to be useful. In any significant staff development programme it is to be expected that some workshops will not be as highly regarded as others and that skills learned may not be implemented into the workplace. Sometimes sessions will be offered that may not turn out to be well supported. It can never be certain what skills and knowledge will be useful or taken up and implemented. However the future planning for the programme will benefit from the lessons learned in this evaluation process

It is similar for the Leading into the Weekend activities; there will always be activities that are more useful than others. For those who attended, Leading into the Weekend activities were valuable and important. This support indicates it should continue for as long as the participants value and nurture it.

The outcomes of the interview with the Library Executive also identified satisfaction with the programme and a commitment to its continuation. Perhaps the most pertinent observation from the Executive interview was that young managers gained most from the programme and that this group would benefit most from its continuation. However the continued participation of experienced older managers is important as they can contribute ideas and reflections which benefit the management group as a whole.

The next stage of the Taking the Lead programme needs to be well planned to retain the support of participants. A call for fresh ideas for activities has been sent out and in conjunction with other evaluation results a programme will be developed. The 360 degree survey will be rerun and participants will be asked to review their individual training plans in light of its outcomes.

The real test of the programme's effectiveness will not be seen for some time. Careers will take their course, some will blossom and others stagnate. Above all for less experienced UWA Library leaders, it will take time to integrate newly learned skills into their personal styles. The leadership gains made will only be fully captured in the Library's professional development reviews. These are conducted on an annual basis and provide the opportunity for staff members and their managers to reflect on the previous year's achievements. UWA Library's younger managers should take every advantage of the continuation of Taking the Lead and attempt to shape it to meet their purposes. After all they have their careers in front of them and all to gain.

In the introduction, it was noted that Marshall acknowledged that the development of leaders and leadership skills is "not a simple process". (Marshall 2006) Those of us involved in organising *Taking the Lead* will vouch for that. However I believe a way forward has been identified for leadership training at UWA Library. This has not yet taken the form of a detailed series of activities based on lessons learned so far. But it is the considered intent of the Library to continue with a leadership development programme that has delivered what it set out to do and to persist with trying new things in endeavoring to do so.

Finally I would like to offer encouragement to other organisations to attempt such a programme, as it is worth it.

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