

Activity 1 Leadership Retreat



The rationale for this activity was to provide an opportunity for scholars to:

- develop an understanding of leadership in the context of higher education and their leadership development; and
- expand their awareness, knowledge and understanding of leadership and the relevant skills for leading in a higher education context.

Overview

A 3-day leadership retreat was held at the beginning of each stage of the project. The purpose of the retreats was:

1. to provide scholars with an opportunity to develop and foster relationships with each other;
2. to enable scholars an opportunity to formulate and discuss aspects of their faculty-based projects; and
3. to engage scholars in explicit leadership development activities.



Activity 1 Leadership Retreat

Context

In Stage 1 the 3-Day leadership retreat was held at the Grange Conference Centre, Lancefield Victoria from 17th – 20th March 2007. The retreat was attended by eleven of the twelve scholars, project leaders from the two participating universities (University of Wollongong and University of Tasmania), the external evaluator, the project manager/retreat convener and the stage 2 project leader from Flinders University.

In stage 2 the 3-Day leadership retreat was held at Hawthorn Suites at 13th Beach, Barwon Heads Victoria from 17th – 20th February 2008. This retreat was attended by twelve of the thirteen scholars, project leaders from the three participating universities (University of Wollongong, Flinders University and La Trobe University), the external evaluator, the project manager/retreat convener and three of the Stage 1 scholars.



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Program of Activities

In stage 1 the leadership retreat activities focused on:

1. Providing an overview of the project and related activities
2. Scholar's presenting a précis of their faculty-based projects.
3. Exploration and examination of:
 - the importance of leadership;
 - distributive leadership;
 - leadership styles;
 - resilience and well being in leadership;
 - leadership in the context of higher education;
 - opportunities and challenges for leadership and leadership capacity development; and
 - the importance of leaders in managing change and leading change from a distributive perspective.
4. Reflective journaling;
5. Providing scholars an opportunity to design, develop and get feedback on their strategic action plans;
6. Introducing scholars to the EdNA/Carrick Exchange as a tool for facilitating institutional and cross-institutional communication and collaboration;
7. Strategies for evaluating, assessing and monitoring;

8. Providing scholars an opportunity to collaboratively plan the roundtable; and
9. Strategies for promoting faculty-based projects in the higher education community.

The retreat culminated with scholars presenting their formulated faculty-based project action plans to senior leaders from their institutions (University of Wollongong and University of Tasmania) for feedback.

The leadership retreat was formally evaluated at the conclusion of the retreat and stage 1. The program of activities for the stage 2 leadership retreat was informed by feedback received from stage 1 participants. The consequent changes to the program of activities included:

1. A more detailed overview of the project and its associated activities;
2. An examination and exploration of effective leadership - the importance and implications of effective leadership and the elements and competencies of effective leadership; and
3. An investigation of strategies for addressing issues, obstacles and difficulties in implementing the faculty-based project action plan.

A further development in stage 2 was the addition of a leadership workshop. This was directly related to the feedback from Stage 1 scholars that an extra event similar to the leadership retreat conducted mid-way through the project would be beneficial.

Activity 1 Leadership Retreat

Success Factors of this Activity as Reported by Scholars

Facilitating the retreat off-site enabled the scholars time and space to engage and focus on the project.

“The project was very generous and spoilt scholars, the accommodation and venues provided for the major activities was exceptional and it was nice to feel pampered, valued and important.” (2008 Scholar)

The retreat sets the tone for the ongoing collaboration and engagement of scholars in the project. Therefore it is essential that the overall experience is positive.

“The retreat got us going, momentum was at least started.” (2007 Scholar)

Ensure the retreat activities provide an opportunity for scholars to: gain a deeper understanding of the expectations for them in facilitating the project activities, and equips them to carry out the project activities.

“The retreat went very well - there were lots of project related activities and it was a good introduction to the project.” (2008 Scholar)

The leadership retreat enabled scholars to develop a deeper understanding of leadership related theories and practice as well as confirming some of the things they were already practicing in regard to leadership.

The retreat provided the opportunity for scholars to establish networks and build camaraderie across the institutional and cross-institutional groups.

“The retreat went well. I was really struck by how well the group came together and I think that was largely due to the retreat and whatever you did at the retreat to get that going. It was a remarkable group development process that happened.” (2008 scholar)

The retreat provided the opportunity for tangible and consolidated planning for the implementation of the faculty-based project and national roundtable.

Key Challenges Experienced by Scholars

Ensuring the group dynamic was one of openness, acceptance and tolerance where scholars felt secure in sharing personal insights, opinions, and values.

Review and Improvement

It was suggested that the retreat could provide some opportunity for instruction in research practices (e.g. focus groups) that some of the scholars were using in their faculty-based projects.

Links and Resources

A more detailed overview of the Retreat including agendas, associated resources and evaluations is available at: www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership