

# Activity 7 Cross-Faculty, Institutional & Cross-Institutional Communication & Collaboration

# 7



**Cross-faculty, institutional and cross-institutional communication and collaboration provided an opportunity for scholars to engage with each other. This engagement largely focused on sharing knowledge, understandings and experiences of leadership in regard to leading a faculty-based project.**

The strength of this network resided in the fact that while the scholars were at varying stages of their career and had different experiences of leadership they were all engaged in a similar process of implementing a faculty-based project. As such the scholars were often experiencing challenges and issues related to both the process of leading change initiatives and also to influencing change without positional leadership authority.

*“The ongoing communication with other scholars was great and I enjoyed the collegiality and mentoring that came out of this interaction.” (2007 Scholar)*

The scholars regularly met to discuss the implementation of their projects. The dialogue that transpired in these meetings fostered leadership development through:

- Understandings and knowledge that were gained from scholars’ shared experiences, challenges, achievements and practice in leading a faculty-based project. Often

the strategies that one scholar shared about managing a challenge informed another scholar’s future management of a similar challenge; and

- The discussion of strategies for leading a faculty-based project.

## Context

Cross-faculty and institutional networks were established in each of the participating universities prior to the leadership retreat. These networks comprised the institutional scholars and institutional leader. Regular formal and informal meetings of these networks transpired over the course of the project.

*“Connection with scholars was inspiring.” (2007 Scholar)*

Cross-institutional networks were established at the leadership retreats. These networks comprised the institutional scholars and leaders from each of the participating universities. Face to face, teleconference and videoconference meetings of this network transpired over the course of the project.

## Program of Activities

The cross-faculty and institutional network of scholars met regularly to discuss:

- the status, progress and developments in the implementation of their faculty-based projects;
- issues relevant to leadership in the context of the institutional setting and climate; and
- Organisational details for the facilitation of the roundtable.

*“The regular meetings that occurred were good opportunities to touch base with people who have similar values, challenges and contexts.” (2008 Scholar)*

Cross-institutional meetings, after the leadership retreat, predominantly discussed details regarding the organisation and facilitation of the roundtable. From May these meetings transpired on a monthly basis. Two web-based tools designed for Australian higher education communication and collaboration were trialed with the 2007, then the 2008 scholars. Neither was greatly utilised by either group, other than as a repository for sharing resources.

Time poor academics indicated that the learning curve was too steep to make them useful and where they could not see real benefits, they were not prepared to allocate the time required to learn to use them efficiently. Email communication proved to be most effective as a means for scholars to share personal reflections on their leadership development and implementation of their faculty-based projects.

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## Success Factors of this Activity as Reported by Scholars

Set a schedule of formal and informal meetings early in the year so that time is set aside to engage in collaborative and team building activities.

Ensure there is an imperative for scholars to attend the cross-faculty/institutional meetings and clearly communicate this to them.

Require a firm commitment from all scholars to actively and regularly engage in cross-institutional communication.

Ensure the tool used to facilitate online communication and collaboration is robust and intuitive to use.

Establish communication protocols for organising and facilitating the cross-institutional meetings.

Strive to create a culture of sharing and communication throughout the project.

*“There is a tendency in universities to think that you work in silos and the opportunity to break that down is not a bad thing.” (2008 Scholar)*

## Key Challenges Experienced by Scholars

Attending the scheduled meetings – time and work commitments often presented obstacles for attendance.

Apparent lack of engagement by scholars in the cross-institutional communication and collaboration.

Establishing contact with individuals from the other universities.

*“The retreat and videoconferences made it easier for contact with the wider group but not so useful for individual contact.” (2008 Scholar)*

## Review and Improvement

Incorporate sufficient budget funds to establish an institutional site explicitly for the project which includes an opportunity for communication tools such as blogs, chat space, and resource sharing that can be used by the institutional groups. Ensure staff development activities are established and a real purpose for using the tools is identified.

Some scholars reported that they presented within their institutions and within their faculties on their faculty-based projects to keep their staff informed on progress. A suggestion was also made that the cross-faculty/institutional groups should deliver presentations on their faculty-based projects at the beginning and end of project implementation to institutional forums.

Scholars were keen to explore ongoing collaborative opportunities for:

- presentations at national forums such as conferences;
- journal articles; and
- compiling an edited book.

Although there was some sharing of generic assessment resources there was opportunity for more resource sharing across disciplinary boundaries. Establishing a culture of this and possibly even some imperative for this (e.g. a project repository) might address this deficit.

Some of the faculty-based projects were not completed by the roundtable which was the last formal meeting scheduled for the cross-institutional group. Scholars felt it would be beneficial if they could learn about the outcomes of other scholars' faculty-based projects.

## Links and Resources

Resources to support cross-faculty, institutional and cross-institutional communication and collaboration are presented on the GREEN website:

[www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership](http://www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership)