

## Domain 1



### Growing

**Scholars engaged in activities designed to develop their understanding of the social and cultural context of leadership and leadership capacity development in higher education and expand their awareness, knowledge and understanding of leadership and the relevant skills for leading in a higher education context.**

#### Project Findings

In reviewing and evaluating the activities and experiences that comprise this domain, scholars reported that:

- Formal training through professional development activities was highly important for the development of leadership.
- Professional development should occur prior to the commencement of other leadership development activities.
- It is advantageous to have a professional development event mid-way through the program.
- Professional development is best conducted at a time that does not interfere with teaching commitments.



- The professional development events generated enthusiasm and deeper engagement in the project.
- The focus of professional development should be towards advancing leadership knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to the higher education context.
- Conducting intensive professional development over a number of days and at an offsite venue is advantageous.
- Professional development should be portrayed as a significant component of the program. Investing in a high-quality venue was seen as a subtle means for communicating this.
- Professional development provided the space and opportunity for scholars to contemplate, design and progress their leadership capacity development.
- The professional development events were crucial in establishing and advancing ongoing cohesiveness, communication and collaboration among the institutional and cross-institutional scholar groups.
- A crucial requirement is that scholars are interested and committed to their development as a leader.

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## Underpinning Theories and their Practical Application in the Project

The experiences and activities that comprise this domain are underpinned by the early work of Vygotsky's psychological theory of social constructivism. The theory develops the social context for learning and points to the need for cognitive tools for development to be provided.

The ensuing development of a learner depends on the type and quality of those tools. Vygotsky's insights into learning and the needs of learning continue to shape educational research and practice.

In this project, scholars participated in a formal leadership development retreat at the commencement of their engagement in the project. The activities implemented at this retreat were designed to:

- provide a background and overview of the culture and history of leadership in higher education;
- encourage and facilitate a deeper understanding of leadership and the necessary tools and skills required for effective leadership in the higher education context;
- facilitate social connections among the scholars that would promote ongoing communication and collaboration; and
- facilitate thinking and action planning, by scholars, for their engagement in the project.

In the second year of the project, scholars participated in an additional leadership workshop. This workshop was conducted mid-way through the project and served to:

- reconnect scholars;
- enable reflection and assessment of their leadership capacity development and consider future development needs and opportunities; and
- progress understanding of leadership and the tools and skills for effective leadership in the higher education context.



## Characteristics of Good Practice Drawn from the Interviews with Scholars

1. Ensure that there are adequate opportunities for scholars to establish social connections with each other.
2. Clearly communicate project deliverables and activities and negotiate a realistic timeline for the achievement of these.
3. Provide opportunities for Institutional groups to establish social connections and plan for ongoing communication and collaboration, (e.g. negotiation of a schedule of institutional meetings throughout the duration of the project)
4. Carefully consider activities that are best achieved/ suited to a face to face forum and ensure these activities are incorporated into the program.
5. Ensure the facilitated activities: are engaging; provide the opportunity for social collaboration and development of existing knowledge, understandings and skills; and centre on meaningful, authentic contexts that reflect practice.
6. Conduct the face to face events at an off-site venue that communicates to the scholars the importance of their work.
7. Schedule the face to face events to ensure the timing of these events is suitable for the scholars' workload and teaching commitments (e.g. outside of teaching sessions).

8. Provide ongoing professional development outside of the formal face to face events (e.g. through virtual forums - provision of journal articles and research on effective leadership for higher education).
9. Ensure there is a clear understanding and definition of distributive leadership for the context and purpose of the project. This was a difficult concept for many of the scholars to comprehend given their experiences of hierarchical leadership in higher education institutions.

### Key Challenges

Scheduling events to accommodate the commitments of all participants.

Designing professional development activities that suit the learning styles and needs of all participants.

Sustaining engagement in professional development activities.

Ensuring that the professional development activities meet the needs of scholars.

*“The retreat served to cement a union among the group.”  
(2008 Scholar)*

*“I found all the face to face activities valuable – being able to go away and stay in a nice place – it communicated the value of the project.” (2008 Scholar)*

*“The best learning in my circumstance came from coming to terms with my responses to the indifference I encountered ... in effect the authentic learning. I also believe there was good learning from working with the scholars group.”  
(2008 Scholar)*



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Employ some form of testing or measurement of leadership capacity before and after the program is implemented. This will enable some tangible assessment of the value of the implemented program.

A more detailed overview of the professional development activities, resources and evaluations are available at: [www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership](http://www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership)

## Associated Project Activities

**Activity 1:** Leadership Retreat

**Activity 2:** Leadership Workshop



## Future Considerations

Provide definitions or a clear explanation of key terms and aspects of the project, e.g. distributive leadership. These could be incorporated into a booklet or manual that was given to participants prior to the commencement of the project.

Establish a repository or space for existing and future project resources such as relevant leadership and assessment journal articles, leadership theories, leadership styles and practices to be stored.

## References

Palincsar, A. S. (1998). Social constructivist perspectives on teaching and learning *Annual Review of Psychology*, 49, 345-375.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society*, MIT Press Cambridge, MA.

Additional information about social constructivism and an annotated bibliography is available from the GREEN Website at: [www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership](http://www.uow.edu.au/cedir/DistributiveLeadership)