



Using a network of Program Heads to enact successful change in a higher education institution

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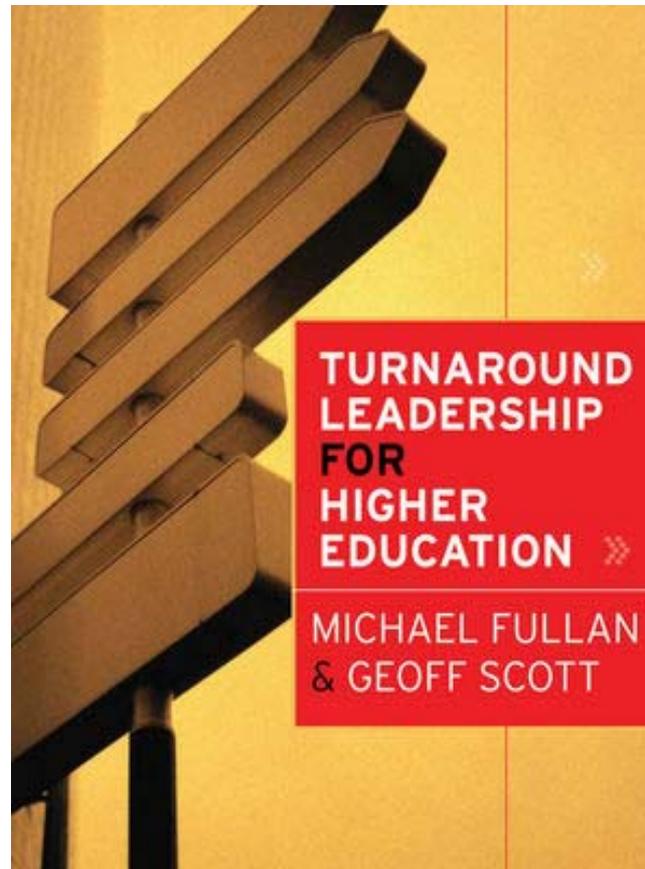


Outline

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 - Increasing importance of staff peer networks in higher education
 - Key functions of these networks
 - Empirical evidence: ALTC report *Learning Leaders in Times of Change*
- A network of Heads of Programs: The UWS model
 - Background
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Staff peer networks in HE: Context





Staff peer networks in HE: Functions

- Provide peer support in times of change;
- Help motivate staff to engage in change or improvement effort;
- Facilitate staff learning through access to a “fellow traveller” further down the same career path.



ALTC report

Learning Leaders in Times of Change

(Scott, Coates, & Anderson, 2008)

- Analysed survey data from 513 academic leaders (Pro and Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans, School, Department and Program heads, and Directors of learning and teaching units) from 20 Australian universities;
- Reviewed the study results with 1,200 HE leaders in the national and international workshops;
- Identified most effective forms of learning in helping HE leaders in different roles develop their leadership capabilities.



Activities most effective for leadership learning and support in rank order for HoP

Item	HoP ranking (n = 91)	HoS ranking (n = 130)	Combined pool ranking (N = 513)
• Learning “on-the-job”	1	1	1
• Ad hoc conversations about work with people in similar roles	2	2	2
• Being involved in informal mentoring/coaching	3	5	4
• Participating in peer networks within the university	4	3	3
• Completing a tertiary qualification relevant to leadership	5	13	10
• Study of “real- life” workplace problems	6	4	5
• Attending learning and teaching conferences	7	18	9
• Participating in peer networks beyond the university	8	7	6
• Undertaking self-guided reading on leadership	9	8	7
• Participating in higher education leadership seminars	10	9	8



Recurring themes in the ALTC study review workshops

- Recognise the difference between people with line responsibility and those who operate only by “influence”. Set up support groups for the “influencers”.
- Establish a network of “fellow travellers” in the same role – both formally and informally.
- Develop a support group for beginning leaders.
- Offer a mentoring program, especially for the recently promoted, using the data from this study on the capabilities that count most in the role.



A network of Heads of Programs: The UWS model

- HoPNet was set up in 2005 and is led by the University's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching).
- It enables HoPs to work directly and reciprocally with senior management on key focus areas for learning and teaching improvement.
- It is an informal network with no reporting accountabilities.
- It allows the University to achieve a focused, efficient two-way flow of information between local change managers and University's executive management, Academic Senate, etc.
- It encourages discussion of changes in learning and teaching and its effective support from a crossdisciplinary perspective.



Challenges in setting up HoPNet

- Clarifying the role of Head of Program as the term was used to describe activities of differing scope, size and levels of responsibility;
- Identifying all UWS Heads of Programs and keeping an up-to-date database on who is currently in the role;
- Achieving convenient and productive communication between some 60 Heads of Programs spread over six campuses through a user-developed WebCT site for the network upon which meeting notes and resources are also lodged.



HoPNet operation

HoPNet meets three or four times each year. Its forums include:

- **information sessions** – involve staff from the academic administration delivering short items on innovations or revisions, e.g. online enrolment, and then seeking feedback from HoPs;
- **group work on a strategic issue** – configured as opportunities for HoPs to give feedback to senior management on draft policies or strategies;
- **professional development components** – user-determined sessions which usually involve a facilitator working with the group on a specific issue identified by HoPs for development attention.



The HoPNet addresses a key gap in most university implementation strategies

– the failure to systematically engage local players in the process of shaping uniquely suitable ways of handling each strategy and then providing targeted, peer-supported assistance to help them learn how to make their selected change solution work in practice.



Key change areas addressed by HoPNet over the past years

- UWS retention campaign
- AUQA audit of UWS
- Learning and Teaching Action Plans 2005-08 and 2009-13
- Learning Guides and Assessment Project
- Review of the UWS approach to recognising and rewarding good teaching
- E-learning strategy
- University Engagement Plan



UWS retention campaign: Tasks identified and addressed by HoPNet

- First Year Student Exit Survey
- First Year Retention Survey
- Students at Risk project
- Quality of student orientation
- Accuracy and speed of enrolments and fees invoicing
- Provision of contact for students to promptly resolve their administrative problems
- More effective transition of first year students into university study (easy access to IT resources, use of WebCT, group projects, and peer mentors);
- Management of student expectations and clarity about what is expected of them;
- Active and targeted promotion of support services and facilities



AUQA audit of UWS: “listen, link and lead” approach

- **listen** – asking HoPs to identify against a set of self-assessment checkpoints areas they saw as needing improvement and relevant and feasible ways to address them;
- **link** – bringing those strategies together into a plan of action which was, therefore, “owned“ by those who were to implement it;
- **lead** – giving targeted support to these people to learn the “gaps” in their expertise which were necessary to make their agreed change work, and working with them to monitor and refine the pilot versions of different solutions before scaling them up more widely.



Evidence of success: Key performance indicators

- Retention has gone up by 4% from 2004/05 to 2008/09 for commencing undergraduate students.
- The UWS graduates' "explicit overall satisfaction" (% scoring 4 or 5 i.e. max) measured by the national Course Experience Questionnaire has risen by 13% during the same period of time.
- Comparable data from UWS internal surveys on the HDR and international student experience, Indigenous student satisfaction and community engagement support the hypothesis that if University improvement initiatives are "owned" by those who are to implement them, like HoPNet members, this can help enhance the core business of the University.



Evidence of success: HoPNet Survey

Benefits from participating in the network

- It is a valuable discussion forum for discussing T&L issues across disciplines (importance rank = 1, performance rank = 1)
- It supports HoP leadership development (2, 3)
- It is a platform for peer support and sharing experience with people in the same role and context (3, 2)

HoPNet forum features

- Feedback and discussion time – information sharing (1, 2)
- Face-to-face delivery (2, 3)
- Networking with other HoPs (3, 1)



Evidence of success: HoPNet Survey

PD workshop features

- Face-to-face delivery (1, 1)
- Topics – the training sessions meet HoP needs (2, 2)
- Training is content rich (3, 3)

HoPNet WebCT site features

- Being kept in the loop on the events and topics discussed at HoP forums (1, 1)
- One-stop-shop-information for HoPs (2, 3)
- Content (3, 2)



Evidence of success: HoPNet Survey

Written comments on HoPNet: Recurrent themes

- **Communicating with people in the same role and to share experiences on how best to build staff morale and performance**
An opportunity to see that my issues and problems are shared with others
Getting tips from others helped me prioritise
Decreased sense of isolation
Reduced stress – it's not just me struggling with administration
- **Help to Heads of Program who were new to the role**
I highly valued these events, especially when I was new to the role
As a new member of staff – developing an understanding of UWS methods, processes and policies



Evidence of success: HoPNet Survey

Written comments

- **Helping HoPs develop a better understanding of what is happening university wide**

*HoPNet helped me link UWS strategies with program delivery and direction
Get information that does not filter to HoP level in the school*

- **Facilitating bottom up communication and connections with senior management**

Communicating with middle and upper managers

Recognition of my role

We need to see more on how the UWS management has responded to the issues raised in the HoP forum



Evidence of success: HoPNet Survey

Written comments

- **Initiatives undertaken as a result of being involved in the HoPNet**

Meeting with unit coordinators after each forum to advise them of changes or proposed changes

Compiling a program administration folder to make managing the program better

A review of assessment practices in my program

A more active role in course review

Assessment updating and development

Streamlining academic advising protocols and processes; instituting workable Callista rules and publicity for same, education and re-education of BA cohorts about their course rules through institution of planned course sites

My day-to-day management of HoP tasks was improved as was my understanding of my obligations. Review of standards across course



Discussion and conclusion

- HoPNet is a convenient and productive way for middle level leaders to assess the feasibility and relevance of changes proposed by “the centre”, to adjust these to ensure their feasibility and to identify the best way to ensure they are taken up locally.
- It has proven to be an efficient mechanism for identifying locally successful ways of addressing key changes that can be adapted for application in other locations across the university.
- It has proven to be an ideal forum for informal learning and support around a common role and a similar set of challenges and changes.



Discussion and conclusion

- HoPNet has created a useful “third space” between the domains of the governance and management or between the usually separated functions of policy setting and its implementation.
- HoPNet gets grass roots advice and feedback on policies that are being developed by the Senate Education Committee; this feedback is routed back into the formal governance mechanism by the HoP forum convenor – the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching).
- The key factor in developing this responsive “third space” is the leadership of the HoPNet by a Pro Vice-Chancellor who is linked directly into the policy setting and policy implementation domains.



Questions and comments

