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# LEARNING PARTNERS IN DISCOVERY AND INNOVATION

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## ABSTRACT

*The late Ernest Boyer (Boyer 1990, in Ramsden 1998) identified ‘the scholarship of discovery’ and ‘the scholarship of integration’ as two of four touchstones for rethinking academic work, capable of fostering ‘deep’ (understanding-rich) approaches to learning in a changing environment. ‘Learning Partners’ suggests that the real triggers for effective collaboration are found first in identifying the personal characteristics and responses which promote or preclude partnering. Senge says that we have to ‘stop looking at the organisation as a big ship with somebody steering it from a captain’s chair’... rather, as with Alistair Mant, ‘the real patterns of interdependency are much deeper’ (Fyffe 2002). The authors of this paper argue that the deep effects of these interdependencies (e.g. tapping into the best of participants’ inclusive attitudes, skills, visions and unique contributions for the goals to be achieved) bring about effective regeneration and change. Herminia Ibarra, Working Identity (Harvard Business School Press 2003) argues that change does not come about by knowing what we want to do next and then using that knowledge to guide our actions. Ibarra says that change usually happens the other way around – ‘doing’ first and ‘knowing’ second; ‘we evaluate alternatives according to criteria that changes as we do...where we end up often surprises us’. This paper argues that building personal capacities for partnering and innovation creates the conditions in which personal growth can take place. While the ‘scholarship of application (interaction between intellectual and “real world” problems of practice)’ and the ‘scholarship of learning’ (Boyer’s third and fourth touchstone) are important, Boyer’s scheme ‘cuts through the unfortunate academic tendency to place application and action on a lower plane than discovery’. He argues, ‘Nothing could be more menacing to tangible progress’ (Boyer 1990, in Ramsden 1998). Our paper outlines the ‘discovery’ philosophies that underpin the design of three vital professional development programs at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), expanding leaders’ experience of self in partnership. The paper proposes that we ‘take ownership’ and begin to change the ‘climate’/ culture in which we are situated in the daily “real world” of people and organizations.*

## 1. Introduction

All involved in leadership and management in the higher education sector may agree that the only certainty in the current highly mutable tertiary environment is that a capacity to lead through accelerated change is critical. It might be agreed that a range of factual information on the health of our leadership practices is no longer a luxury but a priority if research teams are to prosper to the full. The ‘hit or miss’ approach to management/leadership development, if undertaken at all, has long been redundant as the position of the target changes even as the ‘shots’ of various development interventions take aim. This paper outlines how one university has worked to increase self-knowledge and other-focus amongst its senior and near senior ranks, identifying and addressing key development needs in three separate, focused programs. The targeted approach ensures that development activity is focused, tailored, gain-related through discovery at personal/profession and strategic levels.

## 2. Discussion

The following Discussion Section of this paper considers new understandings of self as cultural beings, creating and carrying forth our life learning and our life work. As such our stories are not laid upon us, they are ours to make and own. They are also ours to create in relationship rather than in isolation, oneself with and as another. In accepting that responsibility we can see *all* our stories as worthy of consideration in choosing those actions which will be most useful and ethical in guiding our developmental leadership education and learning, now and in the future.

The theoretical understandings the authors therefore suggest be considered here are based on theoretical foundations where self in relationship presents new metaphoric possibilities such as permeable boundaries, boundary-less self and Self as Other, 'Le même et l'autre'. In recognizing and understanding such alternative metaphors, there is then the possibility to understand other-directedness.

The programs described reflect the process of story-making, narratives of developmental possibilities for the participants. Paul Ricoeur (1991:12-14) describes that process as a cultural experience of time, as an emplotment, a story-making, a narrative which connects our individual acts in our lives. These are the stories by which we make sense of our ordinary actions.

The following stories, evolving out of '360' degree surveying, are descriptions of three programs at Queensland University of Technology – 'Creating Vital Leadership Teams using the Quality Leadership Profile ("360" degree survey)', 'Enhanced Leadership', and 'Communication In Research Leadership' - which reveal an exploration of stories of self-development, in time and in community, revealing their implications for lifelong learning based on research in leadership, trust, and relationships.

### 2.1 Staff development implications and '360' surveying

The poly-ocular capacities of 360 degree surveying have been with us for quite a time, somewhat more rare is the conscious decision to apply a program of interventions at the points of need, and moreover, to assist the university identify and play to its clear strengths.

'360 degree' surveys have been found to be an effective method of providing feedback to senior managers (Atwater, Ostroff, Yammarino & Fleenor, 1998; Childs, 1998). The Quality Leadership Profile (QLP), researched and developed at QUT, comprehensively validity tested and further refined in 2000, is tailored to the university/research/knowledge environment. The QLP item set has been rigorously researched to allow a manager to monitor and improve his/her performance on specific practices which will provide high quality outcomes for organisational units. The on-line survey is well embedded at QUT for use by academic and general senior staff, providing a focused approach to development. Other universities in Australia are also using the QLP as all participants benefit from the instrument's institutional-specific and national 'norm' facility in the electronically provided result reports which are personally debriefed to participant individuals and teams.

### 2.2 The programs

This paper outlines the design of three specific programs, informed in part through national

aggregate data from the QLP which has identified consultative (partnering) capability and communication of strategic vision as key needs for improved performance among leaders and managers in the tertiary sector. These programs are:

- ❖ *Creating Vital Leadership Teams using the Quality Leadership Profile 360 degree survey*’;
- ❖ *The Enhanced Leadership Program* – for current middle managers and future leaders in the tertiary sector;
- ❖ *Communication in Research Leadership* - for leaders of research teams in Co-operative Research Centres.

2.2.1 The First Program - Creating Vital Leadership Teams using Aggregate ‘360’ feedback

The ‘360 degree’ feedback instrument known as the Quality Leadership Profile, since its revision and on-line accessibility, has been adopted by a number of other Australian universities as a leadership development tool. Through the ‘360 degree’ feedback instrument, which is institutionally and nationally normed, perceptions of individual senior managers are compared with those of respondents consisting of the senior manager’s subordinates, peers and supervisor in assessing critical aspects of managers’ roles.

**Quality Leadership Profile (QLP)**  
**QLP Areas**

QLP Area	QLP Factor
Staff Motivation and Involvement	Staff Development
	Consultative Management
	Building a Team Environment
Strategic & Operational Management	Implementing Systems and Processes
	Making Decisions
	Managing Change and Innovation
Client Service and Community	Demonstrating a Client Focus
	Demonstrating a Community Focus
Academic Leadership	Academic Leadership

**Figure 1: QLP Factors**

Within the ‘Vital Leadership Teams’ program the QLP delivers both individual and combined aggregate reports for the leadership team. The aggregate report provides a picture of leadership/management strengths and weaknesses on researched QLP factors specifically tailored to the academic and professional/knowledge environment. Managers are assisted to discover their own strengths and development needs in leadership as perceived by respondents and self, and, in turn, as a group of leaders. This permits informed discussion at a number of important levels, details of which are omitted here, but the targeted and more focused development that is permitted through the insights of the QLP is already helping to

forge vital, high-performing teams. Documented results over time will be the subject of a later paper.

Some underpinning theoretical principles are briefly outlined. What is leadership? Responses range from notions of 'born attributes' or 'qualities' to a set of learned skills, and all points in between. 'Leadership', suggests Amanda Sinclair, is always a transaction, by which a group of people recognise in someone, something they have come to understand as leadership. That understanding may be strength, toughness, purpose, or, more rarely, generosity and nurture' (Sinclair 1998:1). Sveiby & Lloyd (1987) propose a leader as 'a creator of the work environment and a tutor', explaining that as such a leader ideally 'channels intellectual energy'. The word 'leadership', derived from an Anglo-Saxon word that means a road, a way, the path of a ship at sea (Adair, 1990), is 'knowing what the next step is, and having the confidence and commitment to take it' (Parry 1996:42).

Though it is suggested that leadership, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, so powerful is the presence or absence of it in teams that people will recognise when leadership is present or is lacking. The concept of 'management' is different. The word 'manage' derives from the Latin *manus*, the hand. 'Managing is related to handling a sword, a ship, a horse'; the word 'management', doing things by hand, is a stem of 'manufacture', which is the process of making something by hand and machine (Parry 1996:42). The QLP system is used to provide an overall picture or to drill down to the discriminating elements of leadership and management against specific question items to note strengths and weaknesses of leaders and to plot the needs of the future. The QLP survey, linked to the development imperatives of Performance Planning and Review and a Senior Management Development Program, supplements workforce planning practice to identify current and future skill/talent needs to take the institution forward most strategically.

Lepsinger and Lucia (1997:202,203) note that individual enhancement systems or programs informed by 360-degree data bring distinct benefits to –

- enhance personal awareness and clarify expectations
- improve decisions
- monitor progress
- enhance coaching experiences
- clarify further training/development priorities

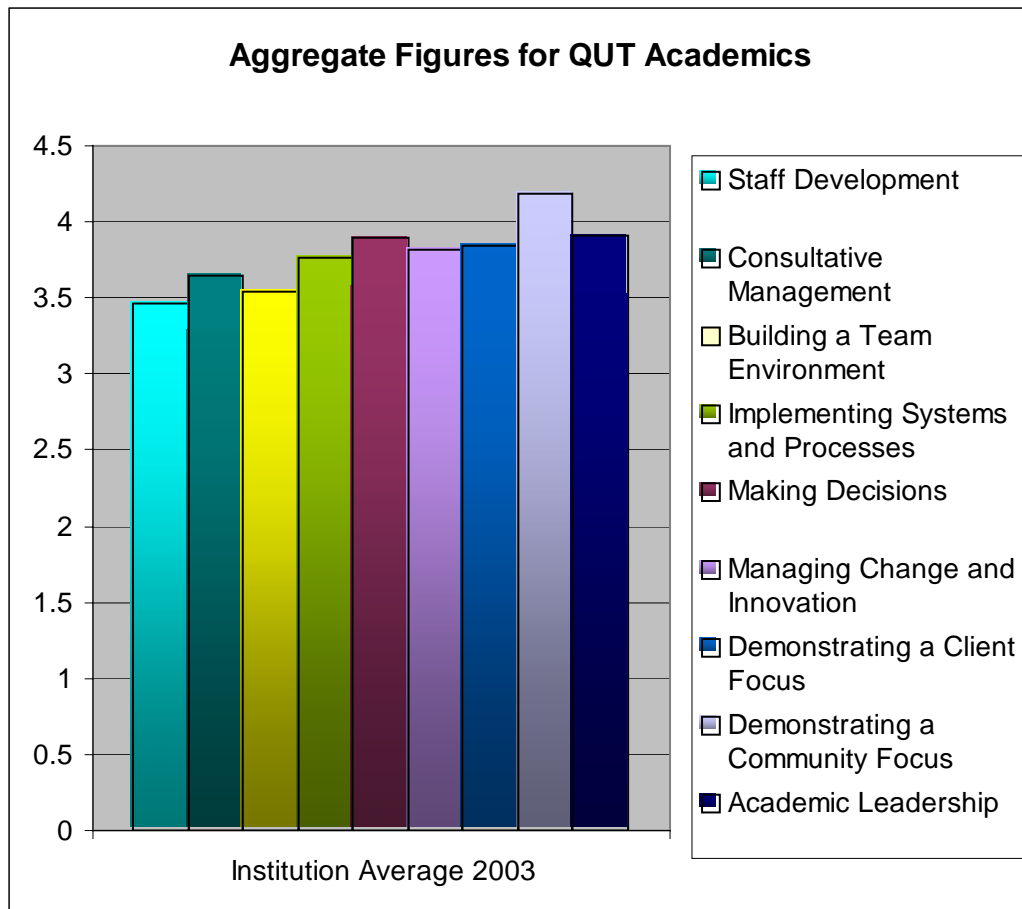
Developed in its current, on-line form in 2000, aggregate QLP data at August 2003, covering users of the instrument at QUT and nationally, reveal that factors under 'Staff Interaction and Involvement' (staff development, consultative management, team environment) scored lower than 'Strategic and Operational Management' (systems and processes, decision making, innovation and change), 'Client and Community Focus' and 'Academic Leadership'.

Also, the aggregate results of self, staff, peer and supervisor reports identified that most 'development required' was under 'Staff Interaction and Motivation' (development of self and others).

**Quality Leadership Profile (QLP) Aggregate Figures  
for QUT Academics**

<b>QLP Factor</b>	<b>Institution Average 2003</b>
Staff Development	3.47
Consultative Management	3.65
Building a Team Environment	3.54
Implementing Systems and Processes	3.76
Making Decisions	3.89
Managing Change and Innovation	3.82
Demonstrating a Client Focus	3.84
Demonstrating a Community Focus	4.18
Academic Leadership	3.91

**Figure 2a: QLP Aggregate Results**



**Figure 2b: QLP Aggregate Results**

The communication and 'interpersonal skills' involved in items under 'Staff Interaction and Involvement' factors are relevant to all of the other areas. These connections are evident in cross-referencing items of the QLP across factors. For example, if strategic planning (items under 'Strategic and Operational Management') is not accompanied by a manager's ability to communicate to and empower his/her staff (items under 'Staff Interaction and Involvement') it is likely that the strategic plan has little currency in the minds of those who might have given effect to it.

This kind of information pinpoints where the key need for development effort lies. In the time-poor environment of our academic/research/professional environments, this targeted approach takes the guesswork out of development activity and places the investment costs (dollars and time) in alignment with real needs identified by data.

Development activities are then designed to increase 'self-knowledge' and 'other-focus' which are critical to gaining buy-in of staff to the organisation's or group's strategic agenda.

The research of Lepsinger and Lucia (1997) notes that '360' feedback is most effective when it is used for goal setting, that is, where the focus is on looking ahead rather than back...that it should become the basis for a conversation...about strengths and development targets going forward.

While individual QLP results are debriefed individually prior to Vital Leadership Teams session, graphs of the aggregate scores and team development needs identified by the QLP are presented to the leadership team. Skilled interpretation of the data is provided before opening up the session for full discussion. Development interventions are designed and followed through. The process may be repeated with the leadership team in a year or two year's time to monitor change, so that 'development targets...serve as the baseline from which progress toward desired levels of performance is periodically tracked' (Lepsinger and Lucia 1997:212,213). The notion of 'going forward' with a targeted focus informed by specific evidence has been sufficiently compelling for a number of universities to take up the QLP Program. Further research and publication is expected to result from the experience of the QLP nationally to assess its effectiveness as a diagnostic tool within the tertiary sector.

At QUT, Organisational Development professionals took account of QLP data, organisational climate survey results, discussions with Heads of Schools, Research Centre management feedback and numerous formal and informal 'strategic conversations' to identify key development needs.

It was decided to create two programs designed to foster self-discovery, the synergy of working well in teams and of improved partnerships with key others in inter-organisational and external environments. Benefiting from the 'situated learning' approach, participants in both programs could put to work immediately the principles learned and explore innovative ways of operating illuminated by better understanding of self and others. Given the lower representation of women in senior positions in the tertiary sector nationally, strong female representation for the programs was sought.

## 2.2.2 The Second Program – The Enhanced Leadership Program

Subtitled ‘The Emergence of Leadership in Innovative Enterprise’, the Enhanced Leadership Program is a project-based program for academic, general and senior staff, on invitation basis as nominated by senior supervisors.

Program elements were linked with QUT’s Workforce Capabilities Model which in turn reflects the key skills and knowledge embedded in QUT’s top level strategic plans: Lifelong Learning, Managing Change, Social Responsibility, Customer Service, Commercial Attitude, Multidisciplinary Focus, Research Partnering, Information and Technology Literacy, and Business/Knowledge Management.

Core values of the Program were:

- ❖ Exposure to the academic institution, issues and operations, particularly in leadership, teamwork and innovation.
- ❖ Experiential learning – learning best by doing. Experiential learning activities and experiences are used to bring to life collaborative self-understanding, leadership skills, team skills within an expanded diversity of interests, and an increased understanding of the academic institution and its links to the ‘real world’.
- ❖ Use of participants’ experiences. The program enables higher-level academic and general staff to get to know each other as individuals and to benefit from each other’s past experiences and future aspirations as well as their understandings of leadership, teamwork and change. Through exposure to others unlike oneself, participants learn to not make assumptions about motivations and skills, learn to develop the ability to work in groups with individuals holding different perspectives, skills, behaviour preferences and opinions.

Use of tools designed to promote self-awareness assists this process, and the key to its use is not a ‘stand alone’ point of insight, but making use of the insights in real applications and monitoring the ‘differences in understanding’ experienced in teams.

Underpinning the Program Design is a body of ethnographical research. In the relevant methodologies, one:

- ❖ Learns from people about their culture by observing their behaviour
- ❖ Writes complete descriptions, as in project outcomes; termed ‘thick descriptions’ (which take into account a richer, people-focused and end-user-focused view)
- ❖ Captures the ‘outsider’s’ view, thus recognizing there is not an objective understanding guaranteed (Galanti 1999: 1-3).

The design allows people-centred, rather than production-centred, development focused on human development, resource access and sustainability (Henson et al 2001; Harding 1987; Brown 1985; Hall 1981).

Data from a range of sources revealing the need for true engagement with self and others, made it seem appropriate to design elements of the Program which meet the needs of organizational multi-context exposure (such as talks from and discussions with key university executives), a strong emphasis on innovation outworked in formation of project teams supported by articles and discussions from the literature on innovation and creativity in Academe/industry.

Two aspects of the program highlight engagement activities and innovative exploration, core to the development goals of this program.

#### A. Innovation Project Teams – Working Together With Creativity

Participants develop their ability to facilitate relations within groups to address conflicts, generate common agendas, and focus work efforts. Participation in this program will resemble service in a University work group of academics and general staff, in which the group must create ways to govern itself and accomplish its goals. Two specific skills intended as a learning opportunity outcome in this are:

##### i. Innovative Thinking

Innovative experiences lead participants to discover how to get something to ‘market’ and how to get ‘it’ to work. An opportunity is provided to learn what techniques can sponsor innovation and how to come up with good ideas.

##### ii. Handling Ambiguity

Participants increase their capacity to handle situations in which the information available does not permit a complete analysis. From time to time, all leaders must act without complete information or understanding about a situation or issue. This program seeks to increase participants’ capacity to handle these situations and generate innovation and creative thinking at work within such an environment.

Participants were broken into groups of 5 or 6 people with a mix of academic and general staff and no overlap of Faculty, Division or discipline area. Of the 12 non-academic participants, 9 were women; and out of 33 academic participants, 12 were women, and out of 5 senior staff participants, 1 was female.

After initial opportunities to meet all participants, and after a part of a session was provided to finalise groups, the participants gathered during lunch hours on a regular basis to deal with the issue of actually developing a prototype innovation. The innovation, related to QUT, was to be either a process or a product.

The group then dealt with issues of group governance, set their group goals, report to each other, discuss their experiences, give and receive feedback, interview external innovators at assigned times, report to the larger participant group of the program, and prepare a ‘poster session’ or ‘booth, laser light show, ‘e-learning technology’ or other presentation for the Innovation Fair. The Innovation Fair was held on 27-28 October, in conjunction with the Symposium on ‘The Changing Nature of University Work’.

#### B. Logic Study Day - Using the Community as the Basis for Learning

The program occurs in the context of a specific community. This can be defined as both the QUT environs and the wider community, which is the university’s domain. The community’s tensions, relationships and current challenges can be used as examples to examine the larger field of academic affairs and the changing nature of academic work. This enables participants to see, through observation and participation, how different parts of the community impact and interact with efforts to bring about- or frustrate - change. Such a learning experience is developed specifically through a Logic Study Day, based on the work of the CORO Foundation’s public service leadership program in North America.

The Logic Study Day, also recognised as a community study, is an intensive one day program, on a particular issue, during which participants immerse themselves in the issue,

meet with local leaders and interest groups, to understand their perspectives. The theme is Innovation and the emergence of leadership during innovative enterprise. The goal is to determine processes of inspiring, sustaining and making durable both creativity and innovation in participatory groups.

Participants are asked to explore the issues in an unfamiliar environment under time constraints and in cooperation with team members. They are charged to study the social, economic, political attitudes and activities on the issue, and then to synthesise and share their findings in public presentation.

The first half of the day consists of on-site at place of business interviews with pre-selected people in industry in Brisbane who are recognised as innovators in their field. Literature is used to enhance the findings.

The group must then re-meet and prepare a brief report on their findings regarding concepts of inspiring, sustaining and making durable both creativity and innovation in groups.

The second half of the day will consist of a Cross-Pollination Luncheon and Meeting Session. During this time, one member of each team will meet in a new 'leadership circle', consisting of one member of other groups/teams. During the lunch and following discussion each team member will share the findings of their Project Team's interview(s) and their synthesis of findings. The new group will provide a written synthesis of all reports, for later publication and dissemination to all participants and University senior managers.

The Logic Study is central to this leadership program. It pushes participants to develop the vital skills of exploration, inquiry, observation and teamwork. While it often humbles participants, revealing how much they do not know, and causes them to struggle with group process, it also makes team mates of strangers, and creates a common basis of experience that facilitates personal connections between participants. After a Logic Study, participants are more open to discussing group process and addressing personal assumptions.

### C. The Innovation Fair – Effective Communication

Regarding effective communication, the skill sought is based upon one's ability to bring about results in a larger community arena or even in a smaller arena, which hinges to a large degree on one's ability to communicate.

The program is intended to develop one-to-one communications skills, as well as the skills necessary to participate in and sometimes lead a group or to present an idea in public. In a group context, such as the Innovation Fair, it is important to hear and listen, and to be able to stand on one's own feet and 'deliver the goods' to others. This can make the difference between an effective leader, manager, innovator, academic or public servant and a merely conscientious one.

The components of this communication exercise include:

- Listening and feedback
- Factual Reporting
- Asking Effective Questions, and most importantly in this situation,
- Persuasive Presentation

which provides participants with opportunities to improve their presentation skills. In the context of some situations like the Innovation Fair, the focus is on speaking to larger groups or communicating with small groups, external representative, senior management, or more.

In addition, there is Recognition, which is an important part of self-affirmation, particularly when new practices are being explored. The 'Innovation Fair' at the end of the Program ensures that project teams present their innovation publicly and have appreciative inquiry regarding the innovations.

### 2.2.3 The Third Program - The 'Communication in Research Leadership Program'

Conger's assertion '...if you believe in people's abilities they will come to believe in them' reflects the importance of 'a full circle of communication' personally and corporately:

- Personally, where the culture of communication and dialogue is improved by senior managers modelling receptivity to feedback to their staff, and
- Corporately because of the opportunity to use aggregated data to inform the 'support and developmental' process for senior managers (Conger 1989:18).

The goal of the Communication in Research Leadership Program is to build the richest resource of an organisation – its people – into as effective, informed and strategically motivated a group as possible.

This program is based on a three-tier model of (a) Strategic Vision, (b) Strategic Relationships and (c) Strategic Outcomes. The conceptual framework is based on the premise that (i) the self- and other-awareness are the touchstones of effective communication, (ii) effective communication is paramount to successful outworking of strategy; and (iii) in order for the conditions required for (c) above to prosper, the principles for (a) and (b) are essential.

As found in QLP data, individuals who are interested in their own self-learning and growth typically are more interested in fostering the learning and growth of others. The converse applies, witnessed sadly in the failed research team experience. Interestingly, the 'conditions', be they the former or the latter, occur covertly more than overtly because of the power of leaders' behaviours in creating environmental landscapes that are either dry or verdant. The data reveals that individuals in teams identify quickly which space they occupy, and indeed contribute to. Hence a tenet of the program is that each research leader thinks seriously about the culture they are fostering.

The conceptual framework of the program, which, like the Enhanced Leadership Program, is able to be tailored to different environments, It is linked to the strategic goals of the Centre's Research Management Plan, and to an overall vision statement.

A suite of activities, which is omitted here in detail, allows participants to work with their own real issues of decision, concern, and interest. For example, an innovative exercise is facilitated to 'find the gap' in understanding and in solving an actual problems. There is emphasis on 'right' decision-making where behaviours are role played to demonstrate that all too often the genuine views are expressed after the door closes on a meeting and participants go their separate ways in the ineffectual aftertaste of weak consensus and a wrong decision.

How does a team disagree productively and welcome divergence of opinion and move forward? Our program suggests the fundamental need is trust.

Trust comes forth from processes based on the earlier mentioned ethnographic methodologies and from the tradition of action research (Passmore and Friedlander 1982).

We find therein the possibility that:

- Researchers, as participants, act together in inquiry and critical analyses
- All parties are learners
- Control of the research process is shared
- Commitment is made to constructive action rather than detachment
- Participation promotes empowerment and understanding  
(Hall 1981; Freire 1970/1983, 1974/1980; Brown 1985).

Such participatory research focuses on actors, practice (praxis), issues, values and ideology. As Brown notes, 'potentially, participatory research can produce mutual education, new knowledge, and solutions for specific problems' (Brown 1985:71). He also notes that self-reliant activity grounded in local needs exemplifies the potential contribution of participatory research to people-centred development...[and also to] explaining single [local/contextual] cases...[rather than/as well as] developing general laws" or shared narratives (Ibid; De Los Reyes 1997; Kerr-Edwards 1994).

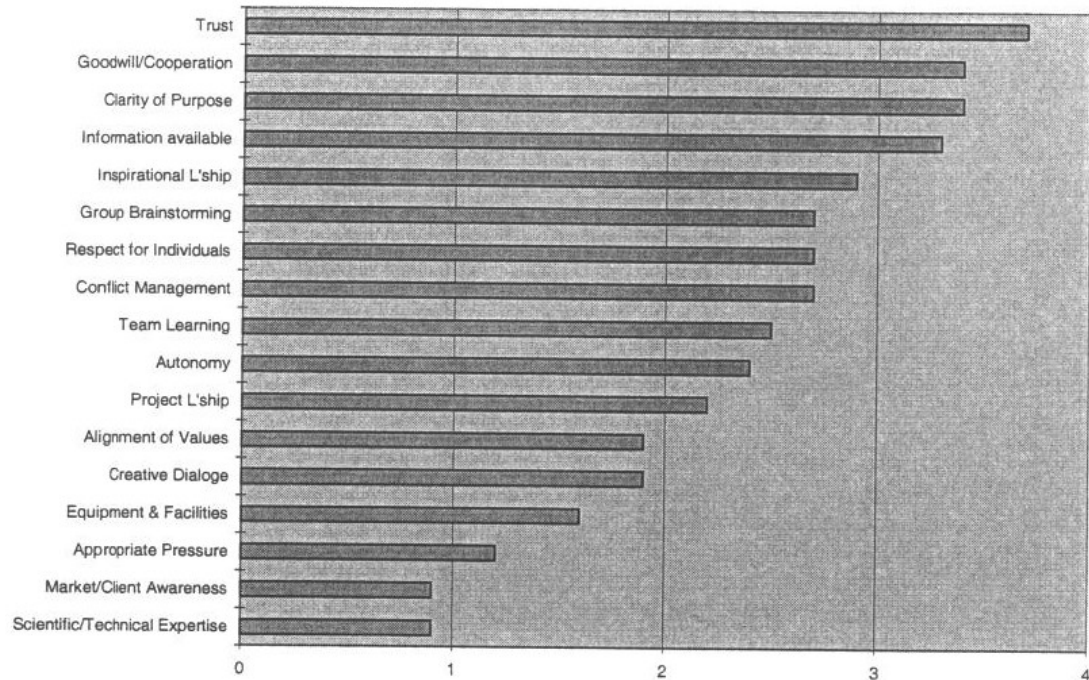
Such participation requires more than representation. A more dynamic relationship develops when the process includes ethical and trustworthy communicated, disclosed, meanings. Habermas (1979:1), in his theory of communicative competence, refers to a universal pragmatic 'to identify and reconstruct universal conditions of possible understanding'. The implication is that by acquiring communicative competence, people participate in an ideal speech situation in which there is, argues Habermas (1979:1-3):

Reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust...and agreement...based on...validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness.

Earlier research (Franklin 1975, Ansari 1988) identified, within broad organisational contexts of favourable climates, that leaders needed to convey a sense that the climate is one in which there is a high degree of trust among its members. Bass, Valenzi, Farrow and Solomon (1975) determined that there was more observed participative leadership in organisations that were described by subordinates as more trusting.

Even more recently, a study carried out by Marshall & Lowther (1997) reveals the critical nature of trust and goodwill to be more fundamental to team effectiveness than any other factor.

**Ranking of Differences between Most and Least Effective Research Teams. Scores normed to base of 10. (RADTEQ Data Base, 1997.)**



Marshall, R.J. and Lowther, J.M. (1997). Teams in the Test Tube. The 1997 International Conference on Work Teams. The University of North Texas: Dallas

**Figure 3:** Research Results On Research Team Effectiveness

How can a leadership team ‘own’ its key values and strategies? The Program teaches that such high goals are impossible unless tackled at the site of the ‘small wins’ of correct, integrity-based decision-making at every turn. Hence, a discussion on trust and relationship-building moves to ‘fitting strategy to vision’ – having a clear purpose in view and holding to that purpose. Otherwise, it is contended, the strategic plan has not a prayer of success. The proof is in how a group actually works together.

A recent groundbreaking study (Nohria 2003), ‘Making 4+2 work for you’ revealed that organisations must have the following four elements: Strategy, Culture, Operation and Structure and at least two of the following: Innovation, Talent, Partnerships/Mergers, Leadership - to be successful. An exercise helps groups examine how they would rate their organisations or units. Speaking to the imperative of partnering for success in research and professional environments, a related activity asks, ‘What does it mean to be a ‘functional silo’?’ and ‘What does it mean to be a ‘connecting sphere’?’ Reflecting on the ‘look’ and ‘feel’ of each of these initiates change-making action to create desired culture for the group. Inevitably, to consider the notion of connecting spheres means talking about intersecting lives and stories.

A further element of the program – the use of story, narrative experience, is used to

demonstrate, for example, how structure and bureaucracy should be kept to a minimum, while an efficient underpinning structure necessarily gives the creative flair the ‘safety in which to fly’ (Ricoeur 1992; Kerr-Edwards 1994).

Participative story is used to look at issues such as transparency. Kerr’s research (1997; Kerr-Edwards 1994) reflected that if interpretation remains fixed, there is no recognition of our prejudices. If as Gadamer (1992) says, our own biases are our basis of our openness to the world through the interplay of stories and subsequent reversals that bring new meaning, then rigidity or rejection of interpretation does not allow for new meaning.

All the participants in that 1994 study believed in finding new meaning (Kerr-Edwards: 208-213). It is suggested there that if a fixed interpretation is all that is permitted, then the self does not look at or examine preconceived expectations, and is not critically thinking. If a person does not work out an understanding of assumptions, or if a person is not permitted to be an interpreter, then the text and the narratives of life cannot open up the world to each of us. Instead, we exist in a realm in which we are told what the world is. Understanding is not being told. Understanding is shared communication, in relationship, that discloses that which is deeper in the text of the narratives we create – our stories.

In understanding narrative, Rankin (2002) also reflects on the work of Ricoeur and Bakhtin as a triad of narrative writing, the narrative mode of consciousness and their relationship, which we suggest as well, is to be characterised as communication. As Rankin notes (2002:1-2):

Narrative is gradually coming to be comprehended as the ground in which, the relations through which, and the vehicle by which humans develop knowledge of themselves and the world they inhabit. It can now be seen that human agency, intentionality, actions, perceptions, and experiences are conceived, understood and mediated by cultural and personal narratives, and that the struggle for recognition is played out between humans in the narrative field....narrative brings forth the human processes of knowledge, culture, tradition, truth, reality, consciousness and identity ...and...narrative, as a work or text or product...has the ultimate purpose of telling or unfolding a story.

For the Communication in Research Leadership Program, both the stories/narratives used for demonstration, and those developed by the Research Centre Program participants, present a productive and disclosing possibility of transformation. By applying the Play of Stories (™ 1994), says Kerr-Edwards, to management and leadership training and development, there is an opportunity to apply the story-telling of self to a group process for new understanding. In the 1994 Singapore and Malaysian research, Kerr found that the Play of Stories provided a disclosure of beliefs and values, which path, from the moment of disclosure, was being created out of completely different worldviews of possibility. The possibility of what the participants could all be together was enriched through the process of disclosing the traditions of who they each were, and is similarly enriching in our current development program within the disclosure of who these participants currently are.

By encouraging participants within the Communication in Research Leadership Program to reflect upon the disclosure of their various stories, those opportunities presented a communicative space in which the participants are open to seeing the past and present in relationship to the wider research and industry community. The stories reflect an application

of Ricoeur's (1994) Mimesis 1, 2 and 3 in which events and actions are mediated through plot into narrated story. The narrated stories reflect an application of the intersection of the time and world of the event, the time and world of the text, and the time and world of the hearer, the listener and the reader (Ricoeur 1994:71, Rankin 2002). Such an intersection is an opportunity for and orientation toward new understandings amongst self and other.

These various meanings are at work, interacting with the other dynamics at play in the creation of a new research experience and a new community experience within the Research Centre. Continued and future use of the Play of Stories™ may provide new insights and help transform breakdowns into new creations of trust and understanding.

Acceptance, or at least partial acceptance, of responsibility for creation of these stories allows for the possibility of understanding, reflection, action and change, through their playing and weaving of the individual and the story of their research work as a whole – thus they create “a synthesis of the heterogeneous” (Ricoeur 1984:ix) – they create the meaning of their work.

Looking ahead we might well concur with Drew and Bensley (2001:68) that:

The successful organization of the future then might well be characterized as one which models inside its walls [explored within the sharing of stories and meaningful work] what it offers to the external world, suggesting that in a world where all things are possible, credibility - the proof of outcome – will be the convincing touchstone of success.”

### **3. Conclusion**

Data compiled from users of the Quality Leadership Profile in a number of universities in Australia is providing an increasing number of managers and leaders to benchmark their leadership performance and pinpoint their development needs. It is contended that if more enlightened, self-aware leadership teams operate in a culture of trust and communication the results would be incalculable.

Evidence from the first roll-out of the three significant programs outlined (Quality Leadership Profile, Enhanced Leadership, and Communication in Research Leadership) shows that participants are beginning to apply the models of partnership, trust, relationship-building and strategic alignment. With tools to help them explore issues of importance in ‘real time’ most effectively, ‘doing’ becomes ‘knowing’. The results will be the subject of a later paper. It is hoped to describe how innovation in work practice, and robust communication in research leadership create vital teams that win in process and outcome, where work, in a sense, becomes ‘play’.

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