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A report of an evaluation of the Women in Leadership Program Edith Cowan University

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A REPORT OF
AN EVALUATION OF THE
WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

SANDRA MILLIGAN
LYN GENONI

Ashenden Milligan Pty Ltd
March 1993
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Women in Leadership is an exciting programme about affecting change in the workplace.

This report provides a window on a project that supports women initiating meaningful change in their organisation. Women in Leadership would not have been possible without generous funding support from the Staff Development Fund and Edith Cowan University.

Most significantly, Women in Leadership is the result of the contribution of women – as participants, speakers, facilitators and supporters.

Hopefully, our experience at Edith Cowan University will inform and encourage other women and organisations to develop new and meaningful leadership strategies.

Jacquie Hutchinson
Co-ordinator
Women in Leadership Programme
Edith Cowan University
Perth, Western Australia

May 1, 1993
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INTRODUCTION

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE

In the early 1950s Australia had only a handful of universities in Australia serving a student body of less than 50,000. Of every 100 who went to school fewer than five went on to university. Now Australia’s 40 or more universities make up a mass system which takes in more than a fifth of the age group. There are more than half a million university students.

This remarkable growth has been accompanied by considerable turbulence within the universities. Along with massive expansion, universities have experienced staff shortages, criticisms of teaching quality and research priorities, demands for greater public accountability, increased competition for research support, shrinking per capita funding and badly stretched physical plant and facilities.

There is no sign that the level and pace of change in universities will change in the 1990s. The university sector will continue to grow and to have more new tasks and problems than resources. In these circumstances effective university leadership will be vital.

A NOVEL STRATEGY

Most institutions are developing their leadership capacity through training and development, re-vamped appointment procedures and policies, changed organisation charts, and by tapping new kinds of expertise and people. In each of these respects Edith Cowan University is typical. It adds to these, however, an unusual and promising way of drawing into its leadership the energies, talents and capacities of women.

The Women in Leadership Program began in 1992, with support from the Commonwealth Government’s Staff Development Fund. Conceived as a training and development program in leadership skills and abilities for 30 female staff members, the Program grew and developed momentum and insightfulness going well beyond its planners’ expectations.

THIS REPORT

This report focuses on the lessons learned in the Women in Leadership Program about leadership, about training and development, and about ways of tapping the skills and capacities of women staff in universities.

The report emerged from an external, independent evaluation of the Women in Leadership Program which had two objectives. It sought, first, to describe the Program and to provide a record of its work and the understandings it fostered. Second, the evaluation made an assessment of the success of the Program in improving skills, abilities, understandings and support for women in leadership roles, and of its impact on the policies, practice, structure and understandings which underpin the existing patterns of leadership in the University.

The evaluation was based on information gathered in the following ways:

- analysis of documentation of the Women in Leadership Program administration;
- interviews with planners, organisers, facilitators, and presenters of the Program;
- interviews with participants in the Program;
• observation of some Program initiatives;
• analysis of internal evaluation of selected components of the Program; and
• interviews with senior academic and administrative staff of the University.

The report is expected to be of interest and use to staff in other higher education institutions concerned to foster leadership appropriate to contemporary universities.

The report is structured as follows:

• Chapter 2 provides a brief overview of ECU, outlining its leadership challenges and the relationship of women to these.

• Chapter 3 concerns the conceptual foundations of the Program, and the thinking which made the Program unusual; its approach to the concept of leadership; its approach to training and development; the organisational context of the Program; and the events sponsored.

• Chapter 4 identifies the key outcomes of the Women in Leadership Program, and reports perceptions of key successes for participants and for the institution, and areas for improvement in the Program.

• Chapter 5 sums up the Program and identifies the characteristics that made it uniquely successful.
CHAPTER 2

THE UNIVERSITY: AN OVERVIEW

THE INSTITUTION

ECU is an old institution but a young university. Formed as a university only two years ago from the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, ECU has a long and impressive history, especially in teacher education, stretching over 90 years. Its present institutional shape was reached through a series of amalgamations and reorganisations. It is now the second biggest university in Western Australia, with four metropolitan and one regional campuses. One third of Western Australia's higher education students are at EUC.

The new University is concerned to grow beyond its origins as a teacher training college. It is expanding the range of programs, appointing well-qualified staff who have expertise and experience in universities, and encouraging research. The new Vice-Chancellor has signalled that the institution will aim to have a small but high quality research effort within one of the country's premier teaching programs.

ECU has few endowments. A challenge for the University leadership is to reconcile desires for new or better programs with a tightening financial climate. The University has succeeded in attracting a thriving cohort of overseas students. It is responding to pressures to improve quality of teaching. It is accommodating the need for increased accountability to both funding organisations and the students themselves. It is a young institution pushing hard to grow in size and stature.

WOMEN AT EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

There is much about ECU which appears to be congenial to women and their interests. It is named for the first woman elected to an Australian parliament. Edith Cowan won the West Perth seat in 1922, and proved to be an outspoken and forceful advocate for improved infant health and sex education, for the idea of a housewives' union, and for women's rights and migrant welfare.

Both the staff and student bodies of ECU are dominated by women. Sixty three percent of students are female, well above a national average of 52 percent. No less than 52 percent of the academic staff are female, compared to a national average of 30 percent. ECU has Australia's second most feminised university staff, topped only by the Australian Catholic University.

Figure 2.1 GENDER BALANCE IN STAFF AND STUDENT NUMBERS
The academic program of the institution gives priority to traditionally female routes to the workforce: the humanities, education and nursing. The male-dominated fields of study (engineering, computing and the sciences) account for a mere 16 percent of student enrolment.

ECU has a program of affirmative action on behalf of women. An innovative sexual harassment policy won a commendation in the 1992 Affirmative Action Agency Awards. A program to increase enrolment of women in the sciences began in 1991.

In other respects the position of women at Edith Cowan is discouraging or worse. The proportion of women staff is well above the national average, but the proportion in positions of leadership is not. A bleak reality is captured in the statistical profile of the workforce in Figure 2.2.

**Figure 2.2.1 GENDER BALANCE IN GOVERNANCE**

![Bar chart showing gender balance in governance at ECU](chart1)

The workforce at ECU is heavily segregated along gender lines. Women are relatively over-represented in the non-academic areas, and relatively under-represented in the academic areas. Women in the academic streams are congregated at the more junior levels of the academic pecking order. They make up the bulk of the sessional staff. They are under-represented on the governing body and key committees. Women in the non-academic areas are congregated in the clerical areas, and junior classifications.

**Figure 2.2.2 GENDER BALANCE IN ACADEMIC STAFF**

![Bar chart showing gender balance in academic staff at ECU](chart2)

4
Women's position and role have been a focus of open conflict at ECU. Some ECU staff, for example, opposed the basic logic of the Women in Leadership Program, arguing that it was divisive, and unfair to men. There was a public controversy about how the university was to be referred to, with some staff wanting reference in daily speech to 'Cowan University'. Other saw this as an anti-female move to distance the institution from the reputation of Edith Cowan.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Edith Cowan University is new, growing, under-resourced, spread over a number of campuses, and combining different histories. The institution presents many challenges to leadership, not least in its treatment of women. One of many encouraging signs for ECU's future is that it conceived and developed a novel and very successful program which went beyond the important goal of improving the position of women in the University to show that the University and women have much to offer each other.
CHAPTER 3

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

What should a 'women in leadership' program aim at? A common answer: getting more women promoted, faster. Those involved in the early days of the Women in Leadership Program were reluctant to accept this formulation as the sole basis for the Program, and decided to ask other and harder questions. What are the challenges of leadership for women in the context of change at ECU and in the wider higher education sector? What is leadership? What skills, knowledge and values do leaders need? Why don't women participate more in leadership? What personal and organisational strategies are necessary to include more women in academic leadership?

This chapter outlines how the Women In Leadership Program encouraged thinking about itself and its objectives. It describes the foundations on which the Program was built, and suggests why this turned out to be so important in the Program’s design, and success.

LINKING THE PERSONAL AND THE ORGANISATIONAL

The Women in Leadership Program drew much of its initial momentum from the anger and alienation of women at ECU. Many women in the institution felt that for too long they had been excluded from leadership and decision making.

The organisers responded to and harnessed this feeling. But they also felt that the Program should have more than just therapeutic value, and should go beyond the common institutional response of developing personal coping and assertiveness skills. They recognised from the outset that the University and women have much to offer each other. There was a need to match the skills and abilities of women and the leadership requirements of the organisation. They recognised that for women to improve their relationships with power and authority in the organisation, they would have to understand and challenge the culture and shape of the organisation itself. The Women in Leadership Program reflected this thinking, and adopted as its purpose:

to enable women to claim their place at ECU and play a role in its future by shaping its structures and culture in ways which will recognise and reward women’s contribution.

A FRAMEWORK FOR THINKING ABOUT LEADERSHIP

This ambitious goal presented a challenge to the Women in Leadership Program management group: how to develop in participants an understanding of the organisation and its workings, and the skills necessary to participate effectively in it, and to shape and influence it too. This meant that developing an understanding of the political, economic and industrial environment of the University was as important as developing individual technical, personal leadership and management skills.

To guide development of the Program, planning work began in the year before the Program commenced. A conceptual framework was developed by the organising group to capture the full range of leadership capacities women would need. The framework was first fully articulated at an intensive two-day workshop. Group members drew on their own experiences of leadership in the institution, and on their knowledge and understanding of gender research and change management theory. They established four overlapping categories which broadly covered the leadership capacities they considered essential for women at ECU.
The four categories were:

- capacities associated with work identity and competence;
- capacities associated with becoming a creator of environments;
- capacities associated with being a strategist; and
- capacities associated with having a public voice.

Figure 3.1 FRAMEWORK OF LEADERSHIP CAPACITIES

**Capacities relating to being a STRATEGIST**

- Understanding the existing power structures
- Having a clear vision of the desired future
- Knowing the organisations' procedures, policies and committees
- Analysing the organisational culture
- Recognising potential allies and enemies
- Understanding resource use: funding, equipment, human resource policies
- Making choices and decisions
- Understanding costing: personal, human and financial
- Strategic planning
- Debating skills
- Communication skills
- Valuing risk taking, collegiality, patience
- Conflict resolution and negotiation
- Cultivating mentors
- Knowing your limitations
- Managing discomfort and vulnerability

**Capacities relating to having A PUBLIC VOICE**

- Documenting achievements and views
- Understanding the use of language
- Making recommendations
- Understanding media and mediums
- Understanding the audience
- Understanding when to speak and when to be silent
- Using enquiry, putting views, negotiating
- Representation: political, academic and organisational
- Forming alliances
- Knowing appropriate forms of communication
- Capacity to summarise
- Public speaking, debating and marketing skills
- Valuing courage, sincerity, persistence
- Knowing your own image

**Capacities relating to WORK AND IDENTITY COMPETENCE**

- Developing competence in scholarship, teaching, community service, research
- Knowledge of industrial awards, organisational structures, funding structures, government policies
- Understanding impact of technology, political and academic changes
- Understanding policies impacting on universities, such as TAFE, restructuring, performance, management, broadbanding
- Delegating
- Facilitating

**Capacities relating to being CREATOR OF ENVIRONMENTS**

- Knowing the history of the organisation
- Shaping departmental structures and culture
- Setting up a learning environment
- Managing change; making a difference
- Mobilising resources
- Time management
- Collaboration and cooperation
- Team building
- Valuing the capacity to take responsibility, the capacity to take risks, maintaining personal, moral and ethical standards. Valuing mutual respect.
Examples of some of the leadership capacities and how they were grouped under the four headings is shown in Figure 3.1.

This framework became the pivot for the program, informing its shape and content as well as its operation.

EFFECTIVENESS IN TRAINING

If linking the personal and the organisation was the key to the Women in Leadership Program, how could it be translated into an effective program? Traditional training and development methods alone, with their focus on the development of knowledge, could hope at best to be partially successful. To claim their place in the organisation, the women at ECU would also have to be supported to develop new attitudes and values, to see new possibilities for themselves and their role in the university.

The Women in Leadership Program’s answer was to adopt as one of its three major strands an unusual and innovative approach to training and development: the use of a collegial approach to professional development.

The collegial approach was developed in the United States and imported into ECU in the late 1980s through the University’s International Institute for Policy and Administrative Studies (IIPAS). The model had been successfully used in a leadership development program for school principals and senior education officers. The core of the approach is to build an atmosphere of mutual support in which participants, guided by trained facilitators, share work-related problems and develop strategies to solve them.

A collegial group is usually structured to operate across existing personal and professional networks and friendships so that colleagues can meet and address common issues. A collegial group of 10-12 members meets over a period of time for half- to one-day blocks of time. Each group is lead by a trained facilitator, whose role is to implement processes and introduce content to establish and maintain the learning environment necessary to achieve the program’s goals and objectives. The facilitator is not there to provide solutions but to help the group find ways of identifying issues, examining them and finding means of resolving them. The collegial approach is extremely interactive and acknowledges that everyone has a largely under-utilised and unrecognised body of tacit knowledge acquired through both formal education and personal experience. This knowledge is shared and is critical in the group developing their own agenda within the framework of goals and objectives established for the program.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

The collegial approach to professional development was an important component of the Program, but not all of it. Three core Program activities were developed: the Collegial Groups, based on the collegial approach; the Public Lecture Series; and the National Conference. Each of these had its own life but sharing aims, objectives and strategies.

Collegial Groups

Four Collegial Groups formed the central component of the Program. Three trained facilitators, each highly skilled in group processes, were selected to run these sessions: Ms Marie Finlay and Ms Deborah Pearson, Perth-based consultants, and Dr Pat Klinck from Calgary University in Canada. The facilitators used the Framework of Leadership Capacities, their understandings of group processes and the goals of the Program to devise a program for the Collegial Groups. 52 women from across the university (See Figure 3.2), and including approximately 15 per cent non-academic staff, participated in the groups, and committed substantial amounts of time to them. The collegial component of the Women in Leadership Program began with a two-and-half day workshop that focussed on exploring and accepting the program’s overall conceptual framework, goals and objectives. This activity also began to establish group norms by the exchange of personal and professional information. Each group developed a variety of problem solving strategies. As professional issues were examined by colleagues, the wisdom and strength of each member was highlighted and enhanced.
'...it was obvious that for this group of women, the opportunity to exchange views and experiences was a very important one. In many respects, the tacit knowledge of the women contained broken dreams, moments of injustice and struggles which were part of their roles as women in a tertiary institution. To talk about these with colleagues in a public setting was a unique experience. For these women, it was also an essential experience in order to move beyond the identity which was rooted in anger, to becoming a strategist of creative environments and having a public voice.' (Collegial Group Facilitator)

Each participant attended a two-day residential workshop followed by eight one-day sessions throughout the second semester. There was also a shorter (2 1/2 hrs) joint collegial session, and three seminars with guest speakers for Collegial Group members.

Figure 3.2 COLLEGIAL GROUP PARTICIPANTS

<table>
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<th>Group B</th>
<th>Group C</th>
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Public Lecture Series

The Public Lecture Series was the most public and high-profile of the Program's elements. The seven-lecture Series ran in parallel with the Collegial Groups. The speakers, all well-known and respected in their fields, presented a variety of thoughtful and challenging perspectives on topics related to women in leadership.
The lectures provided a rich source of external input to the Program, complementing the group-generated issues and strategies developed by the Collegial Groups. In several cases the speakers presented follow-up seminars for members of the Collegial Groups, and for other senior staff members.

The National Conference

The third and culminating component of the Women in Leadership Program was a national Conference organised around the theme, Women, Communication and Power. The Conference provided a way to draw on and contribute to research and ideas from the Australian academic and corporate communities. It focussed on women, power, and communication in the contexts of place, work and the wider world.

The two-day Conference drew women from around Australia and overseas. Four speakers of international standing presented keynote addresses, and some 50 women offered workshops across a very broad range of issues. Many workshop presenters were members of the Collegial Groups and used their 'public voices' to share their experiences. The Conference was extremely well received, with participants impressed by the 'variety of speakers', the 'diversity of ways that ideas and knowledge were presented', and 'the excellent mix of academic, corporate and popular approaches'.

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MANAGEMENT OF THE PROGRAM

Practising what they preach

One of the pay-offs of the searching thinking in the Women in Leadership Program formative phase was the realisation that to make a real difference to the institution and the people in it, the Program needed to exemplify the kind of leadership it proposed for the University as a whole. The organisers resolved to practise what the Program preached, and used as its management touchstone the Framework of Leadership Capacities that was developed to inform the educational basis of the Program. The managing group were committed to ensuring that the Women in Leadership Program was competently and strategically managed, that it develop a public voice, and that it created an appropriate environment in which to succeed.

Resources

The management of the Women in Leadership Program was a substantial undertaking, achieved, like other significant institutional programs, at a real cost and through substantial effort and travail. There were costs to the external funding body in the form of the initial grant, costs to the organisation in the form of resources used to support the Program, and costs to individuals in the form of commitment, dedication and hard work over and above usual workloads.

Initial funding came from the Commonwealth's Staff Development Fund. Details of this grant are provided at Appendix 2. This very substantial support was supplemented by considerable support from the University itself. This included paying the salary of the coordinating facilitator for six months, providing some clerical support, and agreeing that the members of the Management Committee could commit some of their work time (and very substantial parts of their private times) to the Program. In addition, various forms of in-kind support for the Program was provided from faculties and divisions across the University. The success of early events (such as the capacity attendance at Dale Spender’s opening public lecture) added momentum and helped to generate contributions, both financial and ‘in kind’, from the University and its staff.

Management

The management of the Program was carefully structured. An outline of the five key management groups is provided at Appendix 1. Overall co-ordination was provided by a small Management Committee, drawn from across the University and chaired by Ms Jacqueline Hutchinson, Deputy Director of Human Resource Management and initiator of the original submission. Members of other committees and groups were selected for their individual expertise and their professional and strategic roles in the University.

Cross-faculty reach and representation was complemented by anchoring the Program in the University’s central administration. The Program was located in the Human Resources Division with the full support of its Director, Mr Frank Bates, and the then Vice-Chancellor Dr Doug Jecks. Dr Pat Klinck, the coordinating facilitator for the collegial group aspect of the program and a Visiting Fellow of the University, was attached to the Division as well.
The Program had to model the management styles and structures it was exploring. The Management Committee took care to use a participative and collaborative management style. A great deal of time and energy went into bringing people together, developing commitment to a common purpose, pooling expertise, fostering a co-operative spirit and using conciliatory approaches to conflict resolution.

A public voice

The Program also modelled the use of a 'public voice'. The media and the public community education program of the University became important factors in Program planning. These were used to generate widespread debate and contact with the Program even for those not directly involved in it. High-profile speakers provided a very public and very effective voice for the Program.
CHAPTER 4

OUTCOMES

INTRODUCTION

Participation rates, participant perception of value, and participants’ desire to continue with the Program all suggest that the Women in Leadership Program was a highly successful program. “The whole event”, one participant told the evaluators, “has been inspiring, giving hope and providing motivation for the ongoing struggle to ‘educate’ those around us, male and female, to the issues”. It was a common response.

Participation in Program events was high, and drop-out low. In all, 52 staff members enrolled in the Collegial Groups (originally planned for only 30), and only seven withdrew, a remarkably small number considering the time commitment required. Most of the withdrawals (five of the seven) were from the group formed at the regional campus at Bunbury, where staff were somewhat isolated from the other components of the Program, and who experienced a cut-down version of the Collegial Group program. The Public Lectures drew a staggering 2320 participants. 225 people from the university, the broader Perth community, interstate and overseas participated in the Conference. Evaluation respondents urged organisers to “ensure that the momentum continues”, to “keep this superb event rolling”, and to “hold it every two years”. A resounding 100 per cent wanted similar conferences in the future. (For evaluation details, see Appendix 4).

These impressive ‘external’ indicators of the Program’s outcomes are reinforced by perceptions of the Program’s impact on participants’ leadership capacities and on the capacity of the institution to tap leadership potential of women. This Chapter describes those perceptions as collected through interviews with participants, predominantly members of the Collegial Groups.

CHANGED CONCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

One of the key outcomes of the Program in the view of participants was its success in developing a more sophisticated and broad-based notion of ‘leadership’ in a contemporary university. One participant’s report summarises a common perception that ‘leadership’ took on a different and more productive meaning.

I was reluctant at first to join into the Program. I am on general staff. I felt I would be unhappy in the group with academic women, who are the important ones in the university. But in the Collegial Groups, we worked on what leadership is. I soon came to realise that I do exercise leadership, because people look to me to solve problems, and to improve things around here. I am now happier with my job because I and others have come to recognise the importance of what I do.

Participants came to the view, in other words, that there is more to ‘leadership’ than that which is exercised through formal position or office. ‘Informal leadership’ can be powerful for individuals, and for the organisation, a fact of great importance to those staff (both male and female) who do not aspire to formal status and position in the institution: people who, perhaps, love undergraduate teaching, who enjoy work in their administrative specialisation, or who for other reasons do not seek management responsibilities, yet who make important but often un-noticed contributions to the quality and smooth running of the institution.

‘Formal’ leadership was scrutinised and re-thought, too.

When the flyer inviting applications to join the Program first came around, I threw it in the bin. ‘Leadership’ had nothing to do with me. A year ago I was asked to be Head of Department, and I said no. I didn’t even consider it. But now, because of my participation in the Collegial Groups, I realise that I have changed my conception of what leadership can be. I realised that my ideas about ‘leadership’ were based on my father’s
behaviour. He was a very negative role model for me. But now I know that there are other ways of doing it. You don’t have to be authoritarian, autocratic, secretive and controlling. I can now make an informed choice about whether I would like to take a formal leadership position. ... A few weeks ago I was asked again to take the Head role. I said no again, because I have to do my PhD. But the difference between this time and last, is that this time I felt real regret, and the PhD was a real reason, not an excuse. I’ll take the position soon!

‘Leadership’, the Program demonstrated, varies in its embodiment, its effectiveness, in whether it is liberating or oppressive for those who exercise it and are affected by it.

These participants’ reports suggest what the participants gained - a deeper understanding of the range and nature of leadership behaviour that is to be found, and which requires development in an institution. It needs to be remembered that these are also gains for the institution, which has acquired through the Women in Leadership Program a range of people with a considered and sophisticated conception of leadership.

BREAKING THE SILENCE

The mere fact of the Women in Leadership Program at Edith Cowan signalled new hope to many women in the organisation. To many it seemed that, at last, a silence had been broken. The fact that there are so few women in leadership was being openly acknowledged, and something positive was being done about it. The prominence achieved by the Program amplified the message.

For those women who took part the Program this acknowledgement went deeper. Hearing leading women talking about the barriers to women’s participation in leadership in other organisations and workplaces, they began to feel less isolated, and silenced. As one participant put it:

Before, I felt that because I was a woman, it was incumbent on me to prove myself, to myself and others. Now I feel I have a right to be here. Women don’t need to strike a blow, we just are.

Others noted that the Program legitimised women’s aspiration to leadership positions, and established that as part of the corporate culture. “Some senior people are now afraid that the institution will be shown up”, one senior administrator said. “They realise that women are unhappy, and are fearful that their management is inadequate. Others are thinking that perhaps they have got it wrong”. The Women in Leadership Program helped to establish leadership and women’s participation in it as an important item on the institutional agenda.

There was considerable discussion before, during and after the Program about whether or not men should participate in the Program. Some women argued for ‘strategic’ ways of involving influential and powerful men. Others felt that that time had not yet arrived. One participant summed up the attitude that prevailed:

One of my colleagues had told me that when he attempted to register for the Conference, he had been politely deterred. At the time, I had thought this unimaginative on the part of the organisers, but now I began to reflect that perhaps if men had been included I might automatically have deferred to them in a group etc. - perhaps it was still early days to expect total inclusivity, and for now it was good to be, as Marie Finlay, [story teller and facilitator of the closing Conference session] called it, “honouring women”.

An issue which tempers the success of many programs such as the Women in Leadership Program is the conflict and suspicion generated by a Program that is seen to further the sectional interests of one group of staff (in this case women) against another (in this case men). Although not a major concern, the issue did arise and needed to be carefully handled by senior staff.

IMPROVED LEADERSHIP CAPACITIES

Low participation by women in leadership is at least partly explained by gaps in competence. The Women in Leadership Program was alive to this, and sought to fill the gaps. Training needs were addressed through the Collegial Groups, the seminars, through the Conference and through development of assistance and advice garnered from networks.
Many participants volunteered lists of personal and professional skills and abilities they felt they had improved: proposal writing; negotiation of contracts and positions; understanding the dynamics of committee work; whether, when and how to put an item on an agenda; knowing the structures of the institution and the facts of how decisions are made; understanding of institutional policies, politics, priorities, budgeting and finance, management structures and procedures; knowing how to record a dissenting opinion; being prepared to express a contrary opinion to senior administrators; being clearer about what matters should go to which meetings, or what other means to use; and learning how come up with solutions rather than dumping problems on a superordinate’s desk.

Participants recognised also a deeper level of competence for leadership:

*When I enrolled in the Women in Leadership Program, what I really wanted was a practical course on ‘how to be a good leader’, with good lecturers, lots of over-heads and tips for practice. I soon realised that the Collegial Groups were not on about just that: I saw them at first as wishy washy, and I felt that I had joined a group of radicals who wanted to change the organisation. I thought it was run by a bunch of mumby-pamby nitwits. I decided that I would wait awhile, discuss what was wrong with it, and withdraw later.*

But I found out that it was what I needed, though I wouldn’t have recognised it at the time. I found, for instance that in the institution I have really missed a trusting environment, where it is OK to make mistakes; and how to keep my confidence; and how to accept that you don’t have to be perfect to begin with. I found it wonderful to be listened to. In this institution no-one listens to you except the students. I am now more forceful and helpful to my colleagues. I just got news yesterday that one of my younger colleagues has won an award I helped him with to attend his first conference. The Women in Leadership Program changed some of the deep structures of my thinking and understanding about leadership.

The Collegial Groups were the most effective way of naming and expanding this deeper level of competence, amongst which participants included:

- **Willingness to act**, rather to complain about unsatisfactory parts of the environment;
- **Self-confidence** to act and recognise that everyone makes mistakes, and that perfection is not a pre-requisite of leadership;
- **Deliberativeness**, arising from as a better understanding of the existing power structures and how to operate through within them.
- **Openness to criticism** about oneself;
- **Risk-taking**, and capacity to try something new, or propose a new way of operating;
- **Optimism** that a real difference can be made;
- **Self-assurance** in the face of phenomena such as entrenched power structures, sexism, harassment, misogynist attitudes, opposition and criticism and being able to recognise, name and discuss these issues;
- **Dispassionate analysis**, in being able to separate the personal from issues and concerns.

Comments of participants that elaborate some of these points are detailed in Figure 4.1.

As the Program drew to a close participants were able to identify some areas of skills and competence not sufficiently well addressed. First, it was felt by some organisers that the Women in Leadership Program underestimated the extent to which people just don’t understand the basics of governance in the University. One of the facilitators pointed out:

*They don’t know about the governing structure of the institution; the role of various committees; the policy development process; how to influence decisions of committees; the legislative and government framework the institution works in; and what impact that has on the institution. Without these basics, it is difficult to exercise real leadership. Next time, we will devote more time to this.*

Another gap seems to have been in a tendency to under-play the importance of professional competence in leadership, and the relationship between specialist skills and leadership potential. A good leader in the area of research, for example, needs to be a competent researcher as well as a bearer of leadership skills and qualities. The need to discuss the linkage became evident as the Program developed.
Participants were, however, almost universally complimentary about the impact of the Program on their leadership capacities. In particular, participants pointed to the 'deep capacities' as the most valued outcomes of the Women in Leadership Program, concluding (with the Women in Leadership Program's initiators) that these capacities will provide the big benefits to both the institution and the individual in the long run.

**IMPACT ON THE ORGANISATION**

Most Women in Leadership Program activities were targeted, appropriately, at improving the skills and abilities of participants. But skilling individuals, while necessary, is not sufficient. Many participants reported that their participation in the Program alerted them to the need for broader institutional reform.

Figure 4.2 outlines some participants' views of deeper organisational change required.

Key areas identified include:

- the nature and definition of merit, criticised for being focussed on academic qualifications, and being insensitive to factors such as industry concerns, demands of good teaching, women's career paths, and practical expertise in a field of endeavour;
- the nature and extent of support for staff development, criticised for the lack of support for staff to obtain external research grants and to do doctorates;
- the balance between teaching and research, criticised because people believe that the need to support the institution's research effort is devaluing the contribution of good teaching;
- the support given to staff for their responsibilities at home and work so that the role of women in the workplace does not jeopardise their home responsibilities;
the lack of collegiality and cooperation in research and teaching in the institution was criticised as being inefficient and conducive to poor performance;

- the policies and practices relating to management and administration in the institution were criticised for their lack of participative, devolved and open approach;

- human resource policies were considered to be insufficiently sensitive to the feelings of envy and hurt which are an inevitable part of competitive systems such as the promotion system;

- the administrative practices of the University were considered to be insufficiently responsive to the isolation sometimes experienced by the staff at the regional campus; and

- the relationships between between the general and academic staff are sometimes marked by deep misunderstandings and mistrust.

In airing these issues, staff became more aware of them as issues which can be tackled, no longer seeing them as institutional givens. While not claiming that they were able to bring about marked reforms, participants reported that they were able to examine and plan what they could do to assist the organisation to address them. They felt better equipped to assist and steer the institution in these directions.

Figure 4.2 REQUIREMENTS FOR BROADER INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Home and work
There is a view in this university that you have to be on-site to be effective. This discriminates against women who are juggling home and work responsibilities. If your organisation is flexible it’s fine, but this institution isn’t. For instance, one head of school refused to restructure a timetable so a woman could be home at 3.30 twice a week, although he thought nothing of juggling timetables to get two weeks for army reserve training. There is no respect for the balance between home and family. If you brought a child to a meeting here that would be interpreted as having no job commitment. But in other institutions I have seen mothers nursing babies. (Senior academic)

Quality of professional relationships
The way people relate in the organisation is basically patriarchal and unprofessional. Even though I run my own research unit, I think my relationship with my head of department was more like one of father and daughter. He was displeased, and I was keen to please. It was not a professional relationship. When this struck me, I noticed other relationships were based on the same family model, not the professional. There was one that reminded me of husband and nagging wife. (Senior academic)

Teaching and research
Research is a huge issue. The shift from being a CAE to being a university has introduced a lack of respect for teaching. Research is what is important. The long-standing staff are being over-ridden by the new people, and quality of teaching is going down. (Lecturer)

Collegiality
The staff, especially women want a sense of collegiality, and less isolation in what they do. There is tremendous pressure to do a PhD, but no support groups. There is tremendous pressure to attract research funding, but no collegial assistance with writing proposals. There is no tradition of working together. (Lecturer)

Human resource management
One person had been on 3 month contracts for 14 years. (Human resource officer)

Decision making
We need to continue to be less centralist and dictatorial about management, especially in the method of budgetary control. We must get to the point, where to be fair and effective, people have the autonomy and control so that those who make the decisions have to live with the results. Money matters around here have tended to be secretive, and bad decisions are made as a consequence. Communication about all of this needs to be better. We find that we do not have much influence on matters such as the balance of funding between the schools, and you ask yourself why don’t I have that influence? I sit on the program committee and I know what the costs are. But somehow my knowledge and viewpoint are disregarded. (Senior academic)

Merit
There is a strong commitment to promotion by merit. The merit is whether you have a PhD, and other paper measures. It should be on your capacity to communicate; the strength of your liaison with the industry; your capacity to administer. Its ridiculous to use a standard way of approaching this issue. For instance in the area of tax law, the top operators only have bachelors degrees. It takes too much effort to keep up with the tax law changes. In nursing they only got bachelors degrees three years ago; Now they demand PhDs. (Senior academic)
SUSTAINED ACTION

I had no idea that there were so many capable and interesting women in the institution. It was very helpful when I wanted to find out different ways of organising the sessional lecturing. It was great to discuss problems and find that there is more than one way of tackling things.

This comment highlights one of the most common comments about the Program: the Women in Leadership Program helped establish networks which are likely to stand individuals and the institution in good stead.

Networks proved to have an instrumental value in tasks such as budgeting, staffing, and staff induction, but they also had a deeper value. Women in Leadership Program participants reported that networks contribute to improving the quality of life at work, providing a space in which like-minded individuals meet, someone to share a coffee with, a defence against a debilitating sense of isolation. The Women in Leadership Program developed a sense of community, a common bond reaching across faculty, campus, and hierarchy.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

The Public Lectures attracted a great deal of interest from within the wider university community and the general public, as shown in Figure 4.3. In addition, the press coverage of the Public Lectures was solid and complimentary. The institution received many requests for further information or congratulatory comment for its Program, from both members of the public, and from personnel in universities and other organisations who wished to initiate similar programs in their own context.

The Women in Leadership Program lifted the profile of the institution as well as the profile of women and the leadership issue. It helped the University involve many members of the community in just the kind of debate universities should stimulate and support.

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Figure 4.3 COMPARATIVE PUBLIC LECTURE ATTENDANCE

SUPPORT FOR SCHOLARSHIP

The Women in Leadership Program advanced scholarship in the areas of women's interests and institutional leadership. The Conference and the Public Lecture Series were the most important vehicles for this, resulting in a series of substantial papers on topics relating to leadership, women's role in universities and other organisations, and women's role in leadership. The Women in Leadership Program organisers and participants also report that they learned much which will contribute to their own scholarship. The texts of the papers from this range of activities are being compiled and prepared for publication.
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERTISE

One of the residues of the Women in Leadership Program at ECU is increased awareness of how effective professional development programs can be, and what makes them effective. This has already had a marked influence on the configuration of the training and development program for 1993, which is continuing the move away from having a varied range of short courses towards building a sustained program of professional development activities which mutually reinforce the priorities and needs of the organisation and the needs of individual staff members.

Women in Leadership Program materials are being made available to people who may wish to run similar programs in their own organisation, a contribution to training and development expertise in higher education, as well as to the substantive issues.

The Women in Leadership Program, like all human enterprises, included its tensions, conflicts, mistakes, inefficiencies. In retrospect, the participants and organisers were able to identify particular things they would do differently next time.

- The residential requirement for the Collegial Groups, for example, created a particular obstacle for a number of women. For others, the time commitment was too great, and there were suggestions that the eight one-day Collegial Group workshops could be cut to half-day programs. On the other hand, the least successful group was one that had no access to the residential component, and required the shortest time commitment to the Collegial Groups. There is clearly a tension between effectiveness and time commitment which requires examination.
- Compilation of a reading list and collection of resources for Collegiate Group participants was suggested.
- Some participants saw the need to strengthen the linkages between the Public Lecture Series and Collegial Groups.
- Participants recognised the scope for providing opportunities for staff to experience one-to-one consultation to continue their own development needs in greater depth.
- Many participants suggested that there is a strong need for follow-up, including opportunities for people to become facilitators to provide continuing support to networks. The Program has whetted an appetite which participants are keen to continue to satisfy.
- The organisers came to realise that it is easy to underestimate the organisational demands of such a program. There are prodigious calls on time and effort of organisers, administrative back-up, institutional infrastructure, and senior administrative support.
- The particular needs of staff at the regional campus, with their greater isolation from the Program in its entirety needs more careful consideration.

A SUMMING UP

In sum, it is clear that the Women in Leadership Program created an enthusiastic group of participants. But there is evidence that it also created deep and probably enduring outcomes which will improve the leadership capacity of individuals and the leadership capacity of the institution.

Participants came from the Women in Leadership Program with a more sophisticated and deeper understanding of leadership, and of how and by whom it can be exercised. They developed a range of skills needed for leadership, some commonly listed in 'leadership competencies', others the deeper attitudes and knowledge not normally touched by training programs — confidence, motivation, sense of self.

Participants also built enduring networks which promise to give them a way of further improving competence and enjoying their work. The Program built a commitment to be active in improving core institutional policies and practices. It placed leadership and women's roles firmly on the organisation's agenda. It generated quality scholarship and community interest. Its impact reached far beyond that normally achieved by a staff training and development program based on a predetermined curriculum.
LESSONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

EIGHT UNUSUAL CHARACTERISTICS

The Women in Leadership Program began its life as a training and development program with the twin goals of improving the depth and scope of leadership skills available to the institution, and increasing the role of women in leadership.

Universities around Australia are tackling these and similar objectives in different ways and with differing levels of enthusiasm. Techniques used include: training programs ('winning research grants', 'assertiveness training for women', 'how to write resumes', and so on); child-care centres to help reconcile women's careers with family responsibilities; higher degree scholarships; sexual harassment policies; and others.

At one level, then, the Women in Leadership Program is an example of an increasingly familiar feature of the higher education landscape. But, as the discussion in Chapter 4 on the outcome of the Program shows, the Women in Leadership Program can claim some special significance, derived from its success in extending the reach and effectiveness of a familiar form.

This Chapter aims to distil what is was about the Women in Leadership Program that seemed to contribute to its special significance, and to put this understanding at the disposal of others. Like other successful programs, its success is not easily attributable. Many factors play a part. In this case, success can in part be attributed to factors such as its generous external funding; its resourcing from within the organisation; the thorough planning it was subject to; and its careful management. But there are other, more unusual factors that are involved as well, and it is these that this chapter focuses on.

Eight characteristics of the Program are identified which seem to contribute to its special significance. Identification of these characteristics provides lessons and opportunities that other organisations may find useful in developing programs of their own.

Characteristic 1 : Right topic at the right time

University staff at ECU welcomed the opportunity to improve their leadership capacities. At ECU, as in other institutions, the organisation is changing rapidly and under great pressure. Staff are highly conscious of the need for improvement in the effectiveness and responsiveness of the institution, as well as the need to boost their own flagging personal and professional satisfaction. This is particularly true for women, who have more reason than others to feel anger and frustration about leadership and how it has been conceived and exercised in the institution. The Women in Leadership Program promised to and did make a difference in this area of concern.

Characteristic 2 : Belief that the University and women have much to offer each other

In approaching the question of leadership expertise, the Women in Leadership Program was determined to benefit both the individuals and the institution. Thus the Program simultaneously provided opportunities for the university to respond more effectively to the demands it faces and opportunities for individuals to improve their personal and professional satisfaction.

Characteristic 3 : Challenged dominant conceptions of leadership in universities

The Women in Leadership Program was based on the understanding that leadership is not only the province of the Vice-Chancellor, heads of department, supervisory staff, and research fellows. Effort was directed to developing different attitudes and improved skills of many (if not most) people who work in universities. Nor was leadership confused with the authority conferred by formal status. 'Leadership' was thought of as behaviour that makes a real difference to the operation of the institution in ways which support the interests
of the institution, its staff and students. Such leadership is needed in the finance office, in the library, in the classroom and lecture theatre, as well as in the Council and committee rooms. The Women in Leadership Program offered the university a way of reconfiguring leadership, esteem and status so that all who contribute 'leadership' can be recognised.

**Characteristic 4 : Going beyond superficial or surface characteristics of competence**

The participants in the Program were most appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the Collegial Groups. These were structured to enabled them to develop deeper understanding of their own leadership potential, and provided opportunities to develop 'deeper' skills, attitudes, understanding and values that are usually untouched by more conventional methods of training and development.

**Characteristic 5 : Promoting constructive reforms to organisational policies, practices and structures.**

The Program encouraged participants to focus attention on how they can constructively improve how the organisation is structured, how it operates, and what individuals do each day. Long-standing policies, practices and conventions across a range of academic and administrative areas were identified as needing change and participants were able to develop strategies and abilities that will assist them to lead such changes. The Women in Leadership Program, for example, identified such policies and practices as staff appointment procedures and application of the merit principle, policies on professional leave, the status of and rewards to teaching, and support provided to upgrade qualifications and to do research, amongst others.

**Characteristic 6 : A whole constructed from disparate but mutually reinforcing parts**

The Program was made up of a number of complementary and mutually reinforcing parts held together with a clear conceptual map of the Program's goals. Conventional approaches to professional development (seminars, conferences) were supplemented with approaches known to be more effective in promoting changed behaviour and attitudes. The Women in Leadership Program gave careful consideration to its own intent, scope, and processes. Its approach included:

- a clear conception of 'leadership behaviour' and of the skills, abilities and attitudes required to exercise it;
- a supportive environment;
- a carefully-designed curriculum; and
- a learning methodology consistent with the objectives, including support to action.

The Women in Leadership Program provides an example of how an carefully-chosen mix of training methodologies can makes a real difference.

**Characteristic 7 : Capitalised on synergies in the University's different programs**

There are high levels of community and business interest in the topics of leadership and organisational change (in general) and women in leadership (in particular). The program exploited a potential market for universities in promoting community awareness and education in the area. It mobilised and tapped into impressive community and academic interest in the area. It developed unexpected synergies between staff training, the university's academic program, and the community education mission of the University.

**Characteristic 8 : Congruence between the message and the medium**

The organisers of the Women in Leadership Program emphasised that the program itself was run in way consistent with the lessons that it was teaching: it was managed in a collaborative style; it adopted participative approaches to decision making; it ensured that it had a prominent public voice; it ensured that it met organisations' needs as well as the needs of individual participants; it ensured that the program was strategically managed.
CONCLUSION

The eight unusual characteristics identified above seem to offer at least part of the explanation of the success of the Women in Leadership Program. These characteristics might therefore provide the basis for planning future programs, at ECU or elsewhere, where the desire is to make a real difference to leadership potential of staff, to effectiveness and relevance of training and development, and to outreach programs and community education programs run by the institution.
Management structure of the Women in Leadership Program

1.1 The Women in Leadership Program Management Committee

Ms Jacquie Hutchinson (Coordinator)  
Dr Susan Robertson  
Ms Wendy Newman  
Ms Lis Pike  
Dr Margaret Crowley

Deputy Director, Human Resource Management Division  
Head, IIPAS  
Co-ordinator, Staff Training and Development  
President, Academic Staff Association  
Associate Professor, Education Policy and Administration Studies

1.2 The Women in Leadership Program Reference Group

Ms Jacquie Hutchinson  
Dr Susan Robertson  
Ms Wendy Newman  
Ms Lis Pike  
Dr Margaret Crowley  
Ms Pauline Carroll  
Ms June Benson  
Dr Pat Klinck  
Ms Marie Finlay  
Ms Deborah Pearson

Deputy Director, Human Resource Management  
Head, IIPAS  
Coordinator, Staff Training and Development  
President, Academic Staff Association  
Associate Professor, Education Policy and Administration Studies  
Lecturer and Chairperson EO Committee  
EEO Coordinator  
Visiting Fellow, Human Resource Management Division  
Training and Development Group (Consultant)  
Training and Development Group (Consultant)

1.3 The Women in Leadership Program Conference Planning Group

Dr Susan Robertson (Convenor)  
Ms Gail Thomas  
Ms Wendy Newman  
Ms June Benson  
Ms Bronwyn Barnes (Student representative)  
Ms Belinda Creswell (Student representative)  
Ms Kim-Lee Trinder (Administrative support)

1.4 The Women in Leadership Program Collegial Groups Planning Committee

Ms Jacquie Hutchinson  
Dr Susan Robertson  
Dr Pat Klinck  
Ms Marie Finlay  
Ms Deborah Pearson

1.5 The Women in Leadership Program Public Lecture Series Coordinating Group

Ms Jacquie Hutchinson  
Ms June Benson
Commonwealth Support for the Program

**STAFF DEVELOPMENT FUND**

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The University contributed the salary of Dr Patricia Klinck (Visiting Fellow). Apart from providing expertise, the employment of Dr Klinck enabled general staff women to be included. In addition, the University provided administrative support to the project.
### National Conference Evaluation Summary

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