

# Exploring Leadership in the Academic Context: Perceptions and expectations of academic leaders.

Glasgow Conference December 2012

The University of the West of Scotland has in the past invested in the development of senior management and also in the management teams within the support functions, the glaring omission was academic areas. Aware that a staff development initiative on its own would not gain traction we joined forces with our own Business School to look at the issue of academic leadership. A study was then carried out using Focus Groups to capture the perceptions and expectations of academic leadership within the Schools rather than academic leadership at the University level.

Part of the study involved a literature review, in particular we focused on the more comprehensive study carried out by Dr Richard Bolden and the team at Exeter<sup>1</sup>. The findings from this research resonated with the discussions we were having at UWS. Following a discussion with Jean Chandler from the Leadership Foundation we realised that we were not alone in our endeavours to understand the issue of academic leadership. UWS and the Leadership Foundation then worked together to hold a Scottish conference on Academic Leadership pulling some of the key thinkers together.

The conference took place on 5th December in Glasgow, and we were

delighted to have **Dr Richard Bolden**, Senior Lecturer and Head of Centre for Leadership Studies, Exeter University. He presented some of the insights he had gained from the study. In particular the understanding of what it is like to be a citizen of an academic institution. The research identified the sense of ambiguity, vulnerability and exclusion which was frequently reported, also the perceived lack of transparency and the growing sense of managerialism and yet the desire for the sense of citizenship and community. The research explored the expectations of academic leadership in this context. The key messages for academic leaders was: the need to create an enabling environment, to engage in the acculturation and mentoring, providing support for shared identity, and boundary spanning activities. During discussion delegates explored how these academic leadership activities were distinctively different from academic management i.e. the task and processes. There was also an interesting discussion on how academic leadership, which focuses on academic values and identities, need not be dependent on position within the hierarchy but may well be dispersed.

**Dr Bobby Mackie** from UWS Business School then presented the findings from UWS, he described

the multiple interpretations of the term academic leaders and the range of expectations some of which relate to: individual behaviours and characteristics; interpersonal dimensions; and organisational roles and responsibilities. He explained the model that UWS had created from the feedback and from the literature review.

UWS is now using the model, promoting discussion on the themes presented as a way of understanding the expectations of academic leaders

**Professor Peter McCaffery, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, London Metropolitan University** then provided the context for thinking about leadership, emphasising the need to know: your environment; your institution; your department and yourself. One was left with the impression that given the leadership challenges faced by those in leadership positions then a thoughtful informed approach of what it means to be a leader is "mission critical" for the individual, their department, the School and the University. The final speaker was **Rosemary Dean, Vice Principal (Education) Royal Holloway, University of London**, who addressed the issue of how we select and develop our leaders. In a challenging presentation

we were asked to question the limited pool from which we search for our leaders, and the resistance in the sector to developing leaders where training is only valued for networking or in the case of senior programmes as something required for the CV.

The event, which also included a panel question session, was ably chaired by **Professor James McGoldrick**, currently Chairman of Fife NHS Board., who was also able to reference the discussions to the wider public sector leadership challenges

The discussion amongst delegates was that leadership is too important to leave to the managers, and that as academics there is a responsibility to take on board the academic leadership challenge, articulating what it means to be an academic, and championing the academic values and help create the sense of identity.

**Adrian Egglestone, Chair of Management and Professional Development Group Scotland**

1 Academic leadership: Changing conceptions, identities and experiences in UK Higher Education. May 2012 Dr Richard Bolden, Professor Jonathan Gosling, Dr Anne O'Brien, Dr Kim Peters, Professor Michelle Ryan, and Professor Alex Haslam. University of Exeter.

## Performance (Talent) Management in Higher Education – Developing the Project

Performance for All (PFA) is a project run by universities for universities. For two years we have been working with over 50 HE institutions in five countries to understand and develop best in class performance management approaches, solutions and processes for the Higher Education (HE) environment. PFA is led by a steering group of HR Directors from across our diverse HE sector.

PFA is about understanding, addressing and sharing the specific challenges of improving individual and organisational performance in HE today. As well as developing a comprehensive online system and ways of working to support this, PFA members are also invited to local, regional and national knowledge sharing and development workshops and conferences. To make sure we understand what can be achieved and what will maximise its benefit, PFA has recently commissioned an academic study to inform and support approaches, development activities and return on investment metrics.

identify opportunities for improvement. We are HE people doing this for HE organisations, and so understand the challenges our particular culture faces (as well as the tremendous opportunities if we get things right).

Performance for All has developed, for both academic and support staff, an online system and ways of working which can be used institution-wide to help fill the gaps. This has been designed to integrate easily and seamlessly with your existing systems and to be customised and implemented at different rates in different parts of the institution. If you already have systems or processes which are effective (for example HR/LMS/Research Output systems) we would look to complement these, not to replace them.

PFA partners can start by implementing our highly acclaimed online review process across parts of / the entire organisation. This is quick and simple to implement, and adds immediate value with minimal change. It is also designed to be used as a foundation for introducing more sophisticated functionality over time.

### PFA also provides its members with:

- PFA Readiness Assessments:** We consider your existing ways of working and what the actual, measurable benefits of working with PFA would be for you. We suggest the options, timescales and likely success of implementing performance management systems in specific teams/parts of your organisation.
- Implementation planning:** Drawing on our experience of what works and what doesn't work in over 50 universities, we can support you throughout the entire implementation process, from defining success criteria to ensuring positive buy-in from both your support staff, your academics and leaders.
- Training and coaching:** Where it is required, we can engage and train your people in new ways of thinking and working.
- Local, regional and national workshops:** We run regular workshops designed to share knowledge, experience and to develop new ideas. Recent workshops have covered topics such as academic staff engagement and building the business case for performance management.

### What does PFA do?

The PFA project is designed to help HE institutions put in place the systems, processes, ways of working and reporting that will maximise the performance of the organisation by maximising the performance of its people.

*"The pressure on universities from increased competition and greater student voice is likely to lead to only the most effective and efficient universities succeeding in the medium and long term."*

Ronnie Magee, HR Director, University of Ulster (November PFA conference)

In all 50 of the HE institutions we have worked with, different parts of the organisation have had different strengths and areas for improvement. PFA is designed to ensure that where an organisation (or team) has good processes and practice in place; these are retained and built upon.

### What can PFA do for me?

The PFA team and its partners can work with your organisation and individual teams to help understand current practice in more detail and



connecting supporting developing

# SDF UPDATE

Spring 2013



## Welcome to the Spring 2013 SDF Newsletter 'Little darling, its been a long cold lonely winter'.

*Mid March and still scraping ice off the car on a morning – I was wondering when and if Spring will ever arrive but the daffodils and snow drops are coming and SDF is preparing for its biggest yet Spring Conference to be held in York next month.*

At the time of writing we are grappling with the prospect of being oversubscribed for this event which has become established as a key event in the HE staff developers

calendar. We have gone from modest beginnings when around 28 of us went to UEA in 2007 to what will be a packed house of around 80 this coming April in York – grateful thanks to all those who have helped this be successful through their contribution to organising and attending over the years.

This newsletter also includes a feature on the latest colleagues to be recognised as Fellows of the SDF. As the pace of change and relative complexity of life in our institutions ramps up it is really gratifying to know that staff development colleagues continue to rise to the challenges of



our ever changing environment, and that we in SDF can recognise the exceptional contribution of our peers.

Enjoy Spring when it comes for real.

**'Here comes the sun  
and I say its all right'.**

Paul Dixon  
Chair of SDF

### About SDF UPDATE... and a call for contributions

Update is a twice-yearly newsletter for staff developers in Higher Education. Limited numbers of paper copies are distributed to HEIs in the UK, and it is available as a PDF download from the SDF website. We'd love you to share your news or a practical tip or information about a resource, or if you have a suggestion or comment about this issue, we'd really like to hear from you, especially about ways it can be improved.

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[www.staffdevelopment.ac.uk](http://www.staffdevelopment.ac.uk)





# Update on SDF Fellowships

Following the Panel meeting in October last year we are delighted to recognise and present our latest SDF Fellows. Two colleagues submitted their portfolios of evidence to meet the three principles of Fellowship status. These are to:

- Demonstrate a leadership contribution to the development and delivery of institutional staff and organisational development policy, strategy and practice;
- Evidence a significant contribution to at least one specialist area of expertise and practice within staff and organisation development;
- Demonstrate a significant engagement, commitment and continuing contribution to the profession as a whole by contributing to policy formulation and professional practice beyond their institutional boundary at regional, national or international level.




*Paula Keane, Staff Development Manager at St Mary's University College Twickenham was commended, amongst other things, by the panel for the excellent work she had taking forward at St Mary's in developing a coaching culture.*

The recognition panel also approved the case for Honorary Fellowships for three current and past colleagues.



*Matt Levi, former Chair of SDF was acknowledged as the man who firmly put development of technical staff on the HE agenda through his national work on the Heated Project. Colleagues will reflect on Matt as committed and passionate about development and to supporting others*



*John Doidge, now retired, had held senior positions at a number of Midlands Universities, had lead many sector wide projects, and for many years had contributed selflessly to the work of UCOSDA, HESDA and forebear institutions to the SDF. John is regarded as a mentor, friend and colleague by so many in the Midlands and nationally.*



*Sally Wilson, formerly of Edge Hill University, was a familiar figure, supporter and ally to many in the North West who miss her wit charm and gravitas.*

*SDF Fellowship was also awarded to Helen Walker, Staff Development Adviser at the University of Huddersfield. Helen's achievement was particularly worthy of note in that she is the first colleague to be recognised as an SDF Fellow who does not have a role as a Head of Development Unit. In the light of her achievement we asked Helen to let us have some reflections on how it is possible to lead in HE staff development whilst not formally in a leadership position*

## On becoming strategic

Can I be honest (and possibly a little iconoclastic)? I didn't set out to be strategic. In fact I am a little suspicious of people trying to "be strategic". It's like going on a diet with the express purpose of becoming a size 8. It feels like a side effect rather than something to work towards for its own sake. Instead, my aim as a staff developer has always to be to do work that is interesting, challenging and fun. Work that helps colleagues enjoy their work more and be better at it.

So, having said all that, how did I end up being involved in such interesting and, yes definitely, strategic work here at the University of Huddersfield without having a management role in the Staff Development function?

This is the process I followed:

1. Discovering elements of work I could get enthusiastic about that meant playing to my strengths, following my curiosity and negotiating with my manager.
2. Produced high quality work in those areas, becoming good at niche things (the things that excited or scared me). Aspired to be

better by reading, honing, reflecting and taking risks with new ideas. I also had to try to learn not to downplay the things that are easy for me and seem challenging to other people.

3. Paid attention to the organisation. Really listened to people, looked for patterns and systems at work.
4. Found allies amongst the positive people and for people with too much on who would be willing to accept help. Quality is MUCH more important than quantity when it comes to building those alliances. I collect 'interesting colleagues'.
5. Said "yes" to small projects with those interesting people, given them a chance to test me out on difficult or time-pressured projects.
6. Being a 'good' colleague, of course this means different things to different people, for me it is doing work on time, listening, being an enthusiastic, fun collaborator and most importantly being honest about what I could achieve.
7. Started things. So, no one is clamouring for a course or event that I think needs to run? I did it anyway and started small or found allies from my interesting people list and gone big; and part of that process is learning to trust my gut and my understanding of the organisation.

Of course this isn't a recipe for universal adoration, but in the words of Seth Godin

*"Pleasing everyone with our work is impossible. It wastes the time of our best customers and annoys our staff. Forgive us for focussing on those we're trying to delight."*



# SaHOOTS - Students at the Heart of Our and Their System – An Update

The SaHOOTS project was originally agreed by the SDF Exec as a major initiative to equip/develop the SDF community to face challenges ahead regarding the student agenda post Browne and White Paper. In order to help bring about the cultural change already underway in HE it was felt that a project of such importance and significance would greatly benefit the wider HE community in a number of ways.

A full endorsement for the project from the SDF Advisory Council was provided and with that support it was felt that the project would provide opportunities to develop collective thinking and practice in a number of ways:

- Exploring current gaps in terms of development support;
- Sharing and developing resources;
- Cascading the findings and planning how best to provide the community with relevant tools to advance the student agenda in their HEIs.

## Review of the North West CPD Retreat 10/11 January 2013

Members from our Regional Group engaged in our annual CPD Retreat at Storrs Hall, Windermere.

The theme centred on 'The Student Experience', sharing practice, learning from each other of trials and tribulations, supporting the work of colleagues responsible for training and developing all staff. In preparation for the event participants were invited to complete a pulse survey, reflecting on how their own institutions were enhancing the student experience and their perceived challenges. Whilst the pulse survey has closed the SDF national SaHOOTS Project BOS remains open.

Our planned programme of activity included a range of stimulating presentations by colleagues from, Bolton, Manchester, LUMU, Huddersfield, Lancaster and Chester Universities. A creative partnership approach in supporting academics, a model of practice for engaging OD Thinking, an overview of research on student retention, a model for academic engagement and delivering an excellent 'Super Converged' service were all shared and explored.

We piloted a simple and enjoyable hands-on toolkit 'Ketso' [www.ketso.com](http://www.ketso.com) In small groups we wrote and shared our ideas on the student life cycle focusing on the key areas of Recruitment, Retention, Personal Development and Employability. The Ketso-type approach enabled us to think creatively, analyse and review our own practice on how we develop others to enhance the student experience. Impactful and thought provoking drama based 'real life' student scenarios were also role played by colleagues demonstrating staff



aims with expert local speakers, interactive exercises and discussion. Major highlights apart from the excellent key note speakers were the 'Bricks' exercise at Hertfordshire and the 'Ketso' approach to the student experience' at Manchester, which both involved colleagues in practical explorations of the key issues and possible solutions. The level of engagement at the events was positively charged and discussion about the many issues emerged and has been captured. One interesting aspect of attendance was that attendees came from different backgrounds and roles, some with experience and others moving into new areas of work as well as new structures. As one result a number of resources have been posted on the SDF web site and we anticipate that

continuing to grow. There is seeming enthusiasm to run local events in the future as well as follow up events to start to build on the good work already done.

The next steps are crucial and the steering group will work to take things forward, learning from the experience. In the meantime we hope that you will get involved in the project in one way or another. Information about the project and the current body of gathered resources can be found on the SDF web site. We welcome participation and discussion and ask that you get in touch with us regarding any aspect of this project. **Please contact Matt Levi – E mail: [mattlevibrookside@gmail.com](mailto:mattlevibrookside@gmail.com) if you are interested in finding out more about the project**

The SaHOOTS Team.



- training for volunteer student advisors. Positive feedback confirmed that all speaker contributions had been valuable to participants.
- 'Apart from the fab location, I enjoyed the format of the event. It was interesting to hear about the experiences of colleagues from other institutions'.
  - 'The cultural and organisational shift required delivering a truly student-centred experience, it was reassuring to know we're not alone and that others have walked the path'.
  - 'Would like to work with colleagues on more "student related" development and support around the QAA move to monitor/assess impact of Staff and OD resource on Student Experience - recruitment and retention'.
  - 'It was a great opportunity to take time out and share experiences and learn from colleagues in other organisations – both in and outside of OD roles'!
- Meriel Box, Regional Co-ordinator, FSDF
- Sally Wilson, Consultant, FSDF

# What's on my mind

**What's on my mind: an occasional article in which a member of the staff development community shares what is currently occupying their thoughts. In this edition Lynne Howlett, Leadership Development Manager at Newcastle University shares.....**

It's hot in Singapore, the food is different, the humidity is intense, the buildings are much taller and leading a university is very different there.

As my own University, Newcastle, has recently been establishing more international ventures, partnerships and even a Medical School in Asia, we Staff Developers have been finding ourselves challenged to work very differently in order to try to provide an equivalent standard of service to our international colleagues, often at distances of thousands of miles.

The work in Singapore is different, the time zones are different, the degree programmes are different and the teaching and research requirements are different, therefore leading and managing such complexities in what are inevitably more intense and more multi cultural teams is not at all straight forward.

So, what's been on my mind recently is how to identify, select and then develop senior staff to work in international environments where they often have fewer support systems and fewer staff to call on, where networking is essential to get things done, where language difficulties prevail and where they are required to work more autonomously than ever before. Our international leaders need to be more flexible and creative in their leadership and have diplomacy skills which are second to none. At Newcastle we don't have all the answers yet but we are at the point of identifying what makes an excellent international manager so that we can recruit the ones who are most likely to survive and thrive. We are also just starting to develop our international staff development provision. We are aligning our HR processes, holding in-country interviews, running dual-location Induction programmes and commissioning coaches and facilitators at our international locations.

So, as you can see the change isn't all about our international colleagues.

As UK-based Staff Developers we are having to learn to challenge our own cultural assumptions, manage our own behaviours and to work differently



to simply deliver our work. Working late at night or early in the morning to attend skype meetings or to be involved in long distance conference meetings is no longer unusual for us. Pre-briefing international staff on the telephone, rather than face to face, so that they can do our psychometric instruments which we then feedback via skype is very new to us - and we don't always feel comfortable with it at first. Condensing 2 day programmes into half days so they can be delivered more efficiently on-site and requiring us to travel internationally is becoming the norm. Making information films and being recorded doing our work so that it can be streamed to our international colleagues is starting to happen, as is developing our use of on-line and blended delivery.

This is all new to us. At times it is daunting but mostly it's a fascinating new phase for most of us. A few years ago, whoever would have thought that we would be doing our day job at the other side of the world in flip flops?!

If you are interested in the area of international leadership development, Lynne and her colleague Martin Cussons from Nottingham University have just published a report entitled Developing Capacity for Leading International Projects. This was funded by the LF as part of their Small Development Project strand. The report can be found at <http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/en/research-resources/small-development-projects/sdp2011/new-not-po.cfm>

You can contact Lynne at [lynne.howlett@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:lynne.howlett@ncl.ac.uk)

# Old Groaners' Corner – is it just me...

...or is anyone else getting sick of the debate about the difference between leadership and management. If I have to observe another syndicate exercise where groups are asked to list the differences between leadership and management in two columns on a piece of flipchart paper I swear I will garrotte the facilitator. This is a sterile debate and any value it has ever had has long gone. Why is it a problem?

- by inference it defines those lower down the pecking order as less worthy (as managers) than the visionaries who inhabit the higher echelons of our institutions;
- it posits a binary that is really quite unhelpful.....either you are a leader or a manager.a more useful focus would be the

behaviours required to creatively organise self, others, resources and outcomes;

- it perpetuates the heroic leadership discourse that is such a turn off for many colleagues in HEIs – leaders as transforming visionaries, inspiring all through their charisma, drive and semi mythical personal magnetism;
- it raises self doubts and anxieties for many in senior roles whose personality tendencies err more towards the introverted, sensitive and under-stated – can these people live up to the leader as hero discourse – often they fret that they can not, it also strikes me we risk propagating a very gendered discourse of leadership that is a concern for many female colleagues;

So back to our lists and flipchart. A first line manager providing a service to students has as much 'leadership requirement' inherent within their role as any others. To succeed they need to promulgate a vision for what good service looks like, inspire and excite others towards that vision, initiate change to arrive at the vision, celebrate success on arrival and so on. Lets get back to talking about what good managers do – they do all the things that leaders do and always have done. Its not clever, its banal ....so lets get beneath labels and figure out and identify behaviours and approaches that will really move our institutions forward without creating unnecessary divisions.

Anonymous

*I wonder what Adrian thinks? see over.....*



If you want to have a rant about anything to do with staff development in HE let us have your possible contribution to Old Groaner's corner. We promise not to reveal your identity. Send any rants to Paul Dixon: [Paul.A.Dixon@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Paul.A.Dixon@manchester.ac.uk) or Becky Robson: [becky.robson@sdf.ac.uk](mailto:becky.robson@sdf.ac.uk). Successfully published rants will NOT receive the opportunity to be entered into a prize draw for an iPad.