Lessons learnt: identifying synergies in distributed leadership

Bringing together four previous projects on distributed leadership

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Aim of the project
The aim of this project is to identify a common understanding of how distributed leadership (DL) is conceptualised and practised.

Distributed leadership is described in this project as action taken by many people working collectively across an institution to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching. This differs from other, more traditional, approaches to building leadership capacity in which the traits, skills and behaviours in individuals, identified as leaders, is emphasised.

The Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT)
The ASERT has been designed by the project team, from research into the common elements of the four initial projects that used a DL approach, to build leadership capacity in learning and teaching. The ASERT consists of an Action Self Evaluating Taxonomy and an Action Research approach.

The Action Self Evaluating Taxonomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Distributed Leadership</th>
<th>Dimensions and Values to enable development of Distributed Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People involved</td>
<td><strong>CONTEXT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes are supportive</td>
<td><strong>CULTURE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development is provided</td>
<td><strong>CHANGE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources are available</td>
<td><strong>RELATIONSHIPS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expertise of individuals is used to inform decisions</td>
<td>All levels and functions have input into policy development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals participate in decision making</td>
<td>Communities of Practice are modelled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared leadership is demonstrated</td>
<td>Leaders at all levels proactively encourage DL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralised groups engage in decision making</td>
<td>Collaboration is facilitated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DL is a component of leadership</strong></td>
<td><strong>Leadership contribution is recognised and rewarded</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mentoring for DL is available</strong></td>
<td><strong>Flexibility is built into infrastructure and systems</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunities for regular networking are supported</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Action Research: A reflective collaborative approach

**Step one:** Identify the institutional level being targeted for a DL approach.

**Step two:** Identify a Criteria from the ASET on which to focus.

**Step three:** Identify a Dimension (value) related to the chosen Criteria from the ASET.

**Step four:** Reflect on the extent to which the identified Action, proposed in the cell that intersects the chosen Criteria and Dimension, occurs currently in your institution.

**Step five:** Reflect on future activity that could be taken to achieve this Action outcome using reflective prompts.

**Step six:** Reflect on how to ensure that activity proposed from steps four and five is consistent with the achievement of the other desired Actions identified in the ASET.

**Step seven:** Identify a plan of activity to achieve the desired Action outcome.

**Step eight:** Repeat steps two to six for each Criteria and related Dimension.