

Investigating approaches to sustaining and building educational leadership

An interview with Professor Victor Callanⁱ, of the University of Queensland, leader of research activity 7: Educational leadership.

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Interviewer: *Professor Callan, the research activity you are leading has a busy program of research into educational leadership capability in VET organisations. What stage is your research at now?*

Professor Callan:

First, there is what I hope is seen by readers to be a plain speaking **review** of current thinking about leadership and the capabilities required of leaders in and outside of VET. That is available at <http://consortiumresearchprogram.net.au>

I am currently firming up, with the cooperation of numerous public and private VET organisations, the timetable for **visits and interviews** during May-June 2006. **I am still open to contacts from organisations that may want to talk to me by telephone or email** about what they are doing or planning to do in terms of developing educational leadership at various levels in their organisation.

Included among these leadership development activities might be outcomes from Reframing the Future projects; new learning and development initiatives being put in place for staff in varying functions; mentoring, coaching, and leadership development programs; special workshops on teaching; use of action learning; partnerships and so on that are providing opportunities for building management and leadership capability across a wide range of staff.

Interviewer: *You started this research activity by doing the literature review of recent thinking about educational leadership in VET. Comparing your recent research with that, have you been surprised by what you have found in VET organisations?*

Professor Callan:

I do a lot of consulting research and projects with a wide range of public and private sector organisations throughout Australia and New Zealand. **Many of the challenges facing managers and leaders today are similar across sectors and industries.** These include constant change, ageing workforces, difficult decisions about where to allocate limited resources, clever ways to attract, retain and develop staff, increased competition, more savvy and informed clients, the need for specialised and more flexible services for clients, and the need to define the strategic intention of the organisation around what is the

core business and what will be a source of sustained competitive advantage. **A lot of what I am hearing supports what I know from my past work in VET**, as well as work I have done in industries like telecommunication, banking, energy and the airlines.

A major re-focus that is occurring is the view that we need leadership at all levels of our organisations today – it is not just the prerogative of the senior team. I will be especially tuned into how VET organisations are taking up opportunities for developing a culture of leadership among staff doing varying roles (managers, teaching staff, support staff) within their organisations.

As is well known, a large number of VET organisations are public sector based. What is not reported in detail in the management and leadership literature is the special challenges of managing and leading in public sector environments. In particular this current project provides further opportunity for examples of **how public sector managers and leaders are dealing with what are often called “wicked policy problems” that are beyond just short-term fixes.** I will also be looking at **how organisations are supporting new styles of managing and leading, and how they are building leadership capability at all levels of the organisations,** not just in their senior teams.

Interviewer: I understand your research will produce diagnostic tools for organisations to use. What will these look like?

Professor Callan:

In past VET research funded by NCVET and Department of Employment and Training (Queensland), I have developed **capability frameworks for senior and middle managers, teaching staff, and administrative support staff.** This project on educational leadership will allow me to revisit and to expand upon those frameworks. I am sure organisations will find those useful outputs from this project that can guide their learning and development activities, succession planning, and related human resource activities for various groups of staff. In addition, the project will provide a **range of ideas sourced from the VET organisations** we will talk to, about what they are doing or planning to do; as well as other **leadership and management development strategies** I will bring in from my and others' experiences **in non-VET contexts.**

Interviewer: How do your research findings so far relate to the whole consortium research program?

Professor Callan:

A major emphasis of the Consortium project is upon **human resource management.** This project called RA7 links in particular into the work of other Consortium research on building organisational cultures (RA4) that support new styles of managing and leading; appropriate human

resource management practices and strategies in changing environments (RA6); and key decisions about the type of workforces required now and in the future (RA8).

Interviewer: *What do you believe is the greatest value of your research?*

Professor Callan:

There is a scarcity of research that is developing a clearer understanding of the capabilities required of VET staff at all levels to operate in increasingly complex and changing environments. This project will add to our **understanding on what capabilities are required of staff at various levels, what VET organisations are doing to promote and to build staff capability, and what else might be considered from “outside the square”**.

Interviewer: *Thank you for your time, Professor Callan. I believe you will be speaking on your research at the AVETRA conference in April. We look forward to your conference paper – and to seeing more of your research on the consortium website.*

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