

The Institutional Leadership Paradigm project: an implementation methodology

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This article describes the Institutional Leadership Paradigm (ILP) as a critical reflection tool that emerged from a collaborative action research project involving five Australian and three North American universities. The article describes the process involved in developing the ILP and provides an analysis of what the ILP is, why this terminology was adopted, and how it was developed collaboratively through a series of Working Seminars, using keyword analysis. Finally, it reports on of the ILP in action, drawing on university participants' action plans that have been developed to trial ILP in their respective institutes.

Background

The research partners in this project have been involved in higher education projects with a focus on educational leadership and in the process became aware of the need to address the issue of how institutions with Indigenous staff and students encouraged and

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developed policies and practices to positively respond to the needs of these members of their institutions. In a series of articles for this journal, the team members have presented a description of the context and need for a project to consider ways to encourage the leadership of tertiary institutions to improve the outcomes for Indigenous students and staff, and to address issues of poor higher education access as well as low retention and graduation rates for students. In addition, there was concern expressed for the need for greater employment and improved prospects of promotion for Indigenous academic and general staff members, to which could be added a greater involvement of the Indigenous community in the governance of those bodies.

The resulting two year project with the title: *Institutional Leadership Paradigm—transforming practices, structures and conditions in Indigenous higher education* was funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (formerly the Carrick Institute) through the *Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching program*. The purpose of the project was to develop a creative and innovative approach to institutional change and strengthen institutional leadership capacity to devise strategies to deliver culturally appropriate and relevant Indigenous teaching and learning programs within the participating institutes. This strengthened capacity was intended to support and encourage academics, students and administrators to change and transform institutional leadership practices, structures and conditions, in order to effectively advance excellence in Indigenous teaching and learning, to generate new knowledge and to serve the community (Lane 2009; Mellor & Corrigan 2004; Kemp 1999).

It was anticipated that a key resource emanating from this project would be a values-based ILP and the ILP would be available for use by others seeking to improve institutional leadership for Indigenous outcomes. Five Australian and three North American tertiary institutions became involved in the project through a process of self-selection, by responding to a broadcast invitation to participate from the project team. The participants represented a cross-section of roles and responsibilities in their institutions. From the outset, it was established there would be no single strategy or procedure from the project applicable to all participants. Rather, there would be a collegial sense and understanding that change and improvement was possible in higher education contexts involving Indigenous students and that directions for change would emerge from the research process. It was anticipated that participants would leave the project with experiences and concepts which had been developed and discussed with peers and which could then be applied in their home institutions. Through the workshops, presentations and informal networking, participants would be able to explore new insights into the ways their institutions would be better able to support

Indigenous students and staff to succeed in tertiary education. It was realised that the coming together and the collective insights and mutual support from such a group, would provide an atmosphere in which each participant was able to reflect in a collegial and supportive environment, on issues and challenges relating to their individual institutions. They would be able to return to their own institutions with a better understanding they were not alone in their roles and they now had access to a supportive and collegial network. They had background and experience in the development of the ILP, a result of the pooling of their collective wisdom and experiences gained through two face-to-face workshops and regular conference calls. Participants also developed good working relationships and equipped themselves with tools to carry out change and renew institutional structures, practices and conditions back home.

The strategy of the two Working Seminars, one held in Alice Springs, Northern Territory in December 2006 and the second in December 2007 in Brisbane, Queensland, proved to be a positive and affirming experience. Working Seminars were designed as an opportunity for participants, who usually worked in isolation, to work together to share and reflect on institutional policies, practices and conditions. As the project was collaborative and guided by the participants, they were asked in the first Working Seminar to work in groups to identify the key values they believed could support institutional change in the best interests of Indigenous students and staff. They developed a document referred to as the ILP. The ILP was then used to guide and support them to undertake specific leadership activities within their own institutions in order to modify some aspect of their institution's practice, policy and/or conditions. Participants' activities focused on different issues and impacted at different levels depending on their spheres of influence within their institutions. They then reported back to the group in the second seminar and received support and advice for ongoing activities.

The two methodologies referred to in this paper—keyword analysis and metaphor analysis—were used to enable the participants to identify a set of values that should be present within an institution to facilitate transformative leadership within that institution.

1. Keyword analysis

Participants at the first Working Seminar identified a number of key values that they believed guide higher education institutional leadership for Indigenous students and staff. These values were identified through analysis of participants' views as they were articulated and taped in the first Working Seminar. Keywords that recurred in participant's views were paired with their opposites and these paired keyword opposites informed the development of the ILP.

The keyword opposites method was used as a data analysis tool. Each institutional profile was analysed in terms of what was said about Indigenous education programs and practices for Indigenous students in that institution, as portrayed by each participant. It was not an analysis of the person who reported at the seminar or of their personal leadership approach, rather it was an analysis of their institution's approach as they perceived it. Each comment by the participants was assigned a keyword which encapsulated the sense or meaning of the quote. From the group of comments with the same theme, keywords were identified. These were paired with keywords that had an opposite meaning. For example, comments might relate to the institution's *openness* in its responses to Indigenous education. The keyword *openness* was then paired with comments relating to an opposite stance, such as a *reticence*.

The ILP keywords and their opposites identified in this project were:

- *openness/reticence*: through a demonstrated belief that Indigenous education is everybody's business, not just Indigenous student services
- *enduring leadership/transitory leadership*: through a long-term commitment to an Indigenous employment strategy
- *transformation/static*: by extending the learning of the individual into their respective communities
- *cultural integrity/cultural expediency*: through approaches to teaching and learning imbued with Indigenous traditions
- *empowerment/hindrance*: including and involving students' families as well as the students themselves
- *partnerships/isolation*: bringing Indigenous communities into the university
- *inclusion/exclusion*: providing higher education within communities.

After the participants' comments were sorted into the keyword opposites categories, a descriptive analysis of the comments was made by asking, for example, 'What do X's comments indicate about the nature of institutional leadership at his/her institution, in terms of reticence or openness to Indigenous education?' The responses were gathered under the headings and are reported below.

This approach is limited in what it can claim about institutional leadership at any of the participating institutions. It can only tap into and analyse the perceptions of the individuals who participated in the project, rather than claim a *truth* about the leadership within their institutions. However, this approach draws on the comments of key insiders who are in a position to have important and valid perceptions on this topic and about their own institution and is therefore valuable.

In addition, the method is not relying on their comments alone; it is supported by examples and evidence they cited to confirm their perceptions. Essentially, the keywords are tapping into values held by participants about what should guide institutional leadership. These values are apparent in participants' portrayals of their institutional profiles and provide a rich source of material on which to base the ILP projects in their respective institutions.

2. Metaphor analysis

Metaphor analysis occurred at the ILP keyword level. Various propositions were formed and the reflections and insights of the participants were gathered under headings. Below are some examples. Verbatim comments are indicated with quotation marks. Comments made by multiple participants are paraphrased to reflect the collective essence of their comments but written here without quotation marks.

- At the *reticence/openness* opposite, institutional *reticence* occurs:
- by not engaging with the challenges students face as Indigenous students
- by not exploring 'the reasons why students are unwilling to engage with the university processes'
- by thinking only 'within the financial boundaries of what is possible'
- by not providing adequate and culturally relevant support for students who face the hardships and anguish of undertaking further study and
- by ignoring important values, such as family relationships, held by Indigenous students and staff.

Similarly, *openness* can be analysed in terms of how reticence can be addressed and promoted by an institution at a student and systems-wide level:

- through students understanding and sharing each other's challenges
- by engendering dialogue in the context of community
- through considering assumptions about knowledge
- through considering the place of universities in relation to Indigenous communities' aspirations
- through openly recognising Indigenous identity
- through showing support for social justice and equity via Mission Statements and Reconciliation Statements
- by being honest and upfront about problems or inadequacies and seeking ways to further improve and develop programs

- by ensuring that policy, programs, and strategies are not just talked about but put in place and implemented at all levels
- through a demonstrated belief that 'Indigenous education is everybody's business not just Indigenous student services' and
- through recognition, in policy and practice, of the importance to Indigenous students and staff of relationships, to each other and to the land.

At the *transitory leadership/enduring leadership* opposite, *transitory leadership* occurs when institutions are characterised by instability, superficial change and impermanence. It is seen at an institutional level for example;

- through constant rotation of leaders which shifts the emphasis 'on the player' rather than the leader
- through lack of practices and structures that provide ongoing support for the maintenance of strong cultural identity for Indigenous students and staff and
- through provision of short-term programs to meet short-term goals, without long-term commitment to these goals.

On the other hand, *enduring leadership* at an institutional level is demonstrated:

- by assisting and supporting Indigenous students to encourage others, to 'multiply' the Indigenous population with the goal of reaching a critical mass
- through a philosophy and strategy of 'seven generations' which refers to 'when leaders, community leaders, are sitting together to plan, they are looking seven generations into the past and learning from it, seven generations into the future, and actually anticipating the future, but planning for those yet unborn' (a particularly important North American First Nations' perspective)
- through a long-term commitment to an Indigenous employment strategy, from trainee positions to senior managers
- through an acknowledgement that Indigenous leaders will strengthen their leadership by 'sacrifice, commitment and "patient impatience", where there is a positive unsettledness, that is not being satisfied with where you are but continuously moving forward' (Kotter 2008)
- by supporting Indigenous leaders to take 'a five strand approach' in Indigenous higher education through roles in 'teaching and learning, curriculum, research, staff development and training and student support' and
- by supporting and providing a career path for Indigenous academics at a senior level.

At the *static/transformation* opposite, institutions can remain *static* by undervaluing Indigenous people, not recognising the value that Indigenous people bring to the institution and by not pushing beyond the status quo. This is evident where institutions:

- set non-challenging student graduation numbers
- don't commit to 'some sort of capacity building' of programs
- don't recognise Indigenous knowledges and
- see Indigenous culture as static and incapable of change.

Institutions can be *transforming* rather than static:

- by setting out to transform students' lives
- by recruiting Indigenous academics
- by setting Indigenous enrolment goals
- through negotiating appropriate and relevant curriculum
- by building an open curriculum that incorporates a diversity of cultures
- by ensuring that the impacts of learning are not limited to individual students but extends to their communities
- through participants affecting an impact on the lives of others
- by extending learning of the individual into their respective communities
- by 'identifying a common ground of caring, respect and flexibility, and an orientation towards action from which collaboration and program delivery and co-construction of curriculum can flow'
- by recognising and accepting, when and where necessary, that 'things are not going well'
- by ensuring Indigenous content is taught in all programs, either as an elective or as a core part of the degree
- by supporting Indigenous students within the mainstream university instead of within an enclave within the university so that student support is everybody's business
- by encouraging 'transforming systems' through 'larger spaces of knowledge, processes, structures and organisation within the university'
- by providing for, and allowing 'vertical integration' of Indigenous studies into 'every core subject'
- by the 'development of explicit practices and approaches that recognise and incorporate western and Indigenous knowledges'
- seeing Indigenous culture as dynamic and
- by being willing to transform their mainstream practices to incorporate Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being.

At the *expediency/cultural integrity* opposite, institutional *expediency* can occur when culture is used by institutions in a way that is not genuine or meaningful or is cynically political. This is seen institutionally through:

- a veneer approach to program development and delivery where there is a 'sprinkling' of Indigenous content or a siloed approach, with a course here and there
- policies that promote Indigenisation but lack of practices to back these up and
- accepting funding with 'assimilationist' purposes because the institution can't afford to turn it away.

Cultural integrity can be analysed in terms of how expediency can be addressed by institutions:

- through affirming and supporting Indigenous identities
- through approaches to learning and teaching imbued with Indigenous traditions
- by maintaining and not compromising Indigenous culture
- by recognising, celebrating and remembering strong Indigenous leaders such as David Unaipon, a renowned scholar and inventor who is featured on the Australian currency \$50 banknote note, whose 'name signals determination, strength and dignity'
- by indicating to Indigenous students and the university community that Indigenous students are valued and supported
- by maintaining a 'closeness that works' with students and creating a 'feeling of family'
- through ensuring authenticity of cultural traditions and practices by involving Elders and
- by adopting Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching and learning in all course areas.

At the *hindrance/empowerment* opposite, institutional *hindrance* occurs:

- by not exploring the reasons—beyond the intellectual—for poor completions
- by having low expectations of Indigenous students and staff
- by not involving Indigenous representation in the decision-making, policy-making processes from the outset but at the end when the essence of policies or concepts has been finalised
- by not having Indigenous representation at senior management level
- by not acknowledging—and building into university systems—the importance and role of 'family'

- by the higher education experience being ‘community draining’ rather than ‘capacity building’
- by not providing a ‘space’ for Indigenous people to come together, resulting in ‘dissolution’
- by not providing other models of program delivery, for example community-based programs
- by not providing support and opportunities for Indigenous students to be ‘reintegrated’ back into their communities
- by allowing the tertiary experiences to be capacity depleting rather than capacity strengthening
- through programs that are not ‘respectful of cultural diversity’ and ‘do not acknowledge that there are many trails that lead up the mountain’
- by expecting Indigenous staff ‘to teach all Indigenous content, which could lead to staff becoming stressed and burnt out’, and by over-committing limited Indigenous staff on committees in order to have the Indigenous representation
- by ‘mainstreaming’ Indigenous staff, students and program ‘out of existence’
- through a lack of commitment to staff development
- by not engaging Indigenous people at ‘professor levels’
- by not acknowledging Indigenous connections and responsibility to land
- by not remembering history and ignoring the politics of Indigeneity and
- by not acknowledging, including and welcoming families as well as students.

Institutions are *empowering* when they:

- ‘educate and support non-Indigenous staff in their teaching of Indigenous units, while at the same time ensuring Indigenous knowledge is taught with relevant resources and support and integrity’
- ‘look at the gaps in programs and employment and address these needs in a practical way’
- encourage Indigenous staff to ‘convene first year course subjects’ so they can control what needs to be taught
- broaden their ‘understanding of what constitutes an academic within the university’
- give Indigenous people access to their own knowledge
- consult Elders for gaining knowledge as this empowers them to empower others

- acknowledge Indigenous connection and responsibility to land
- include and involve the students' families, as well as students themselves, regardless of the age of the students and
- provide explicit pathways and encouragement for students into higher education because 'having access to a higher education does not mean that they realise they have that access'.

At the *isolation/partnerships* opposite, institutional *isolation* can occur when institutions:

- 'shut First Nations people out of planning and decision making processes'
- do not seek 'partnerships and engagement with external indigenous organisations'
- are inconsistent in the development of Indigenous centres at a systems wide level
- are isolated from other Indigenous organisations and
- are 'apolitical when it comes to Indigenous issues'.

On the other hand, *partnerships* occur when institutions:

- encourage the involvement of Elders
- 'bring communities into the university, and/or go into the communities'
- engage with communities to 'talk about what they could do, what they wanted to see happen ... to see ways in which they could work together, (and) to develop that kind of program that they were looking for'
- are open to advice and act on it
- seek to develop a common ground
- are genuinely engaged with communities
- engage with external professionals and encourage their support and contributions to the development and delivery of Indigenous programs
- actively engage with other Indigenous groups for the sake of local people and
- understand and value their connection to other education sectors including primary and secondary schools.

At the *exclusion/inclusion* opposite, institutional *exclusion* occurs:

- through a lack of recognition of Indigenous 'voices', 'knowledge' and 'historical understandings'
- through a lack of representation at various levels and participation in key decision-making bodies

- through a 'disconnect' between the institution and communities
- through the 'suppression' of multiple stories
- by not recognising 'that most Aboriginal people in this country have a different type of career path trajectory within the university', one that includes an expected commitment to their communities alongside obligations to work
- where, 'although structures and processes are in place, gaps still remain in the system where academics undertaking Indigenous research bypass the Indigenous college for advice and guidance' and
- discriminate on the basis of 'blood quantum' in regard to Indigenous identity of students.

Inclusion can be analysed in terms of how exclusion can be addressed by institutions:

- providing room for 'our voices in essence'
- providing 'Elders on campus' for counselling and spiritual support
- facilitating 'First Nations people supporting First Nations people's opportunities
- providing both-ways learning opportunities
- providing education in the communities
- including 'students from rural and remote regions'
- including Indigenous people on advisory committees and panels
- involving communities in all aspects of Indigenous programs and
- seeing that non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples can be allies, in essence saying, 'You are welcome. You are welcome to learn about us. You are welcome to learn with us'.

At the second Working Seminar in Brisbane, it was agreed that to successfully transform practices, structures and conditions in Indigenous higher education, the needs of individual organisations must be made 'important' and 'explicit'. The analysis of the keyword opposites highlights the explicit needs of Indigenous students and communities to successfully engage in the tertiary education process, and how institutions can address these needs. What now needs to be done is for institutions to consider the relative importance of these needs and to rigorously implement the strategies, so the 'talk matches the walk'.

It was on the basis of this analysis that participants developed projects to be implemented in their respective institutions, the outcomes of which were to be reported at the second Working Seminar in Brisbane in December 2007.

Projects reflecting the ILP

The projects supported by the concepts and framework of the ILP and undertaken within participating institutions resulted in a range of transformations to policies, practices and conditions. Each project, developed through an activity plan, identified the ILP value or values that guided the activity, the activity goals, specific actions and timelines and evidence to demonstrate change. The project results are seen in the following summaries of institutional change that were reported at the second Working Seminar.

Empowerment of a group of Indigenous academic support advisory staff to see themselves, and be perceived by others within their faculty, as 'real' academics, through active engagement in research for the first time.

Partnerships through inclusion of Indigenous Advisory Councils within two universities and their faculties that had no such structures prior to the project. Inclusion enabled representatives from local Indigenous communities to have direct input into university decision making through examining policies and practices impacting upon Indigenous students and/or staff and to provide ideas for change to be acted upon.

Enduring leadership and institutional *transformation* promoted through increased Indigenous academic involvement within two faculties where only one Indigenous staff member had been employed previously.

Openness to diversity and *empowerment* of Indigenous peoples through increased involvement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics in learning more about Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and issues in order to improve teaching practices.

Institutional *transformation* through reflection on the mainstream university culture as a western construct and limited in its capacity to work in true academic partnership with Indigenous communities. True *partnerships* were developed through a strategic establishment of a place on the 'edge' of the institution where the co-construction of knowledge, both local and traditional knowledge as well as western knowledge, was able to take place. The leadership and direction from Indigenous community was prioritised and the university role was to support that leadership.

Promotion of *cultural integrity* through the systematic development of curriculum that was culturally safe, dynamic and innovative. Courses were developed that allowed Indigenous students to grow academically and keep their cultural strength. Through a vertical curriculum approach that infused Indigenous knowledges throughout every course and every unit within every course, all students were advantaged.

Cultural integrity sustained through a policy approach requiring all academics within a faculty to demonstrate Indigenisation of their curriculum. An individual lecturer's capacity to achieve this was then tied structurally to incremental wage increases.

Openness and enduring leadership supported through a strategic intervention in a staff promotion policy in order to address the persistent lack of Indigenous academics at higher levels within the university. This strategy included Indigenisation of position descriptions and assessment criteria for academic promotions within the institution.

Conclusion

The ILP project provided participants with the opportunity to articulate and act on the key values they believed could motivate and sustain change within their higher education institutions. The process provided an important forum for the participants to enjoy the opportunity of shared reflection and strategy building. In turn, this enabled them to influence, in an appropriate way and at a level relevant to their current employment, the leadership practices of their institution with respect to Indigenous students and staff.

As evidenced by the examples, the ILP provided a flexible tool, capable of supporting institutional change through bolstering existing initiatives as well as prompting new ones. In each case, the ILP activities strengthened the capacity of institutions to provide culturally relevant teaching and learning programs for Indigenous staff and students, however modest the impact. To sustain these changes and broaden the impact of the ILP, an ongoing program of critical reflection and refinement of the ILP value statements is recommended. The ILP approach offers a way for Indigenous input and control to impact on institutions that have been relatively impervious to change. Implementation of the ILP into other Australian higher education institutions would be beneficial and a significant response to the national imperatives for Indigenous education of partnerships and action (Kemp 1999).

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