

Women and Leadership in Higher Education: Facing International Challenges and Maximising Opportunities

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Introduction

Universities all over the world are facing significant new challenges and some fascinating opportunities in an increasingly competitive global context. The continuing under representation of women at more senior and management levels of the international higher education sector is receiving renewed attention with the recognition that neither institutions nor the countries in which they are located can afford to continue to overlook their management abilities nor to neglect their leadership potential. This seminar offers the opportunity to improve this situation on two fronts: by enhancing those leadership skills and abilities amongst participants which are critical to our universities' success and perhaps even to their survival; and by tackling some of the factors which might otherwise prevent our contribution and potential being utilised to their full extent. In this paper I will explore the interconnected nature of these two challenges pointing out the reinforcing benefits available if they are pursued together.

The context

The globalisation of the economy, and of higher education as one industry within it, increased and increasing international competition, and rapid technological change are each and together transforming the context in which universities operate, locally, nationally and globally. These three intersecting trends are impacting upon organisations, and the nature of work and working conditions within them, including universities. Much has already been written about the implications for organisations of the fundamental shift from the old industrialised to the new knowledge economy¹. Universities face the double challenge of

¹ See for example Reich, R., *The resurgent liberal and other unfashionable prophecies*, 1989, Times Books, New York and Marginson (forthcoming) *The changing nature and organisation of work, and the implications for vocational education and training in Australia*,

responding to these challenges both as organisations per se and also in terms of the implications of them for the professional futures of our graduates. This context demands changes both to what and how we teach, our research priorities and the conduct of our research, as well as offering interesting opportunities to work in new forms of partnerships and alliances as we face these challenges.

Implications for organisations and leadership

The organisational change management literature which explores the implications of these changes for organisations stresses the importance of learning organisations, and of developing learning communities within them which can develop and use strategic and effective approaches to collective workplace learning.² It also points out that as we develop new organisational shapes and structures in response to this rapidly changing context, organisations need to foster what is referred to as relational capital³ as the foundation for networks, alliances, partnerships, joint ventures, spin offs, and the integration of ideas and effort which will be pivotal for future organisational development and success. The new and emerging communication technologies demand communication skills of a particular and new kind, and also “protean” managers flexible and adaptable enough to thrive in constantly changing environments⁴. The rapidly changing context also requires much faster decision making and the ability to synthesise, evaluate and integrate information at a similar pace. And the new leadership skills demanded by the new and global economy include the ability to transform organisational cultures by a willingness to question the status quo⁵. Conceptual skills required include the ability to see issues from a variety of viewpoints, to manage ambiguity, and understand the complexities of other culture’s values and priorities; the ability to manage through dialogue and inter-personal negotiation rather than through power and control; and the capacity to recognise that learning is an on-going process involving the need to continuously re-think what we are doing and how we are doing it.⁶ Collective rather than individual entrepreneurship is required so that skills

National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), Adelaide, both referred to in Robinson, C. “Post-compulsory Education and Training: Looking to the Future”, paper delivered at *New Skills, New pathways: Lifelong Learning is the Key*, an NCVER Conference at the Lifelong Learning Network, University of Canberra, 27 August, 1999

² See Waterhouse, P., Wilson, B. & Ewer, P., *The changing nature and patterns of work and implications for VET*, review of Research, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide, 1999

³ HR Monthly 1999, p.16

⁴ Barner, R., “The new millennium workplace: seven changes that will challenge managers – and workers”, *The Futurist*, March-April, 1996, Vol. 30, No.2, p.14

⁵ HR Monthly 1999, p.19

⁶ Sheldrake, P., “Great Expectations: education in the world of work”, the 1997 A.W. Jones Lecture, 26 March 1997, Australian College of Education, Adelaide

are shared amongst others rather than hoarded by individuals, and transformed into organisational achievement rather than personal competitive advantage.⁷

It is interesting that universities already possess or are in a good position to cultivate or adapt many of the organisational attributes demanded by this changing global context. Universities already see themselves as learning communities and so are well placed to apply what we know about encouraging learning amongst students in order to develop effective approaches to collective workplace learning among those who work in and manage them. And many (but not all) of the capabilities required of new managers and leaders are also more likely to be attributes associated with women managers than their male colleagues. Thus CEOs responding to a recent Korn Ferry research project⁸ identified women managers as empathetic, supportive, relationship-building, power sharing and information sharing, whereas male managers were characterised as risk-taking, self-confident, competitive, decisive and direct. Half of the CEO respondents to this survey also said that the characteristics shown by women, particularly our readiness to share power and information, were also the qualities needed by managers of the future.⁹ Studies on the leadership attributes of men and women in universities, for example that conducted in Malaysia by the Association of Commonwealth Universities' CHES program, have found that women are more consultative and conciliatory, avoid conflict, and are more likely to be task oriented than their male colleagues.¹⁰ And words commonly associated with women's leadership in universities include co-operative, team oriented, collaborative, fair, and contextual, compared with those associated with men's as competitive, hierarchical, winning, rational, cold, and principled.¹¹

Women's continuing under representation at senior levels

Yet the correlation between women's leadership styles and characteristics and those which organisations need to face the challenges of the new globalised context has not to date translated into an advantage either for our universities or in terms of the position of women in them. As Singh points out "women are grossly under-represented in higher education management", citing a UNESCO report which found that "With hardly an

⁷ Reich op.cit., 1989, p.103

⁸ Korn Ferry International *1999 Annual Board of Directors in Australia and New Zealand Study*, 1999

⁹ Referred to in Eveline, J. and Haydon, L., "Women Activating Leadership", on *Millennium Changes; what will change for women and men in the 21st century?*, WA Women's Policy Office, 2000, p.2

¹⁰ Singh, J., ABCD, No.133, April 1998, p.7

¹¹ Referred to in Singh 1998 op. cit.

exception the global picture is one of men outnumbering women at about five to one at middle management level and at about twenty to one at senior management level”.¹² In terms of administrative positions, an ACU study found that “women are more likely to succeed as registrars, librarians or heads of personnel, than if they aspire to be vice chancellors (or their deputies) or directors of finance or even deans of faculties.”¹³ As a result, the UNESCO study¹⁴ previously referred to concluded that “Women deans and professors are a minority group and women vice-chancellors and presidents are still a rarity.” Thus the immediate problem confronting women in terms of their leadership in universities is not so much that we lack the attributes demanded by the challenges facing our institutions, nor that our organisations are ill-equipped to respond to these challenges, but rather that our leadership contribution and further potential continues to be neglected, under recognised and insufficiently integrated into the management structures of our universities.

This situation is cause for concern not only on the grounds of equal opportunity and as a matter of basic human rights, but also in terms of the productivity of the higher education sector at the institutional, national, regional and global levels. For example, a large national Australian work place study¹⁵ conducted in both public and private organisations of all sizes found a direct and consistent correlation between higher productivity and higher levels of gender equity, and concomitantly lower productivity with greater gender inequality. And if women were found in equal numbers and proportions at more senior levels, the higher education sector, our universities, and the students studying in them would benefit from the different perspectives and experiences as well as the additional educational leadership and administrative management abilities and experience which women as well as men can contribute. Indeed the ongoing wastage of management and leadership talent which arises from and is perpetuated by the current marked under representation of women at the senior levels of universities seriously undermines their ability to respond to change and threatens their future viability and vitality in the face of the challenges referred to above.

¹² Singh 1998 op. cit., p.4

¹³ ACU CHEM survey. *Single Sex Education? Representation by Gender amongst Staff at Commonwealth Universities*, ACU, 1998

¹⁴ Referred to in Singh 1998 op.cit

¹⁵ Peetz, D., Gardner, M., Brown, K., Berns, S., “A Gender Equity Index and Australian Workplace Performance”, paper presented to 13th conference of the Association of Industrial Relations Academics of Australia and New Zealand, Adelaide, February 1999. Probert et al, op. cit.

And its causes

Much has been written to identify and analyse the causes of the significance under representation of women at senior and leadership levels of organisations, including universities. And all over the world, legislative and programmatic structures have been put into place both to dismantle the barriers to sex equality in organisations and to counteract their negative effects. However despite the legislative sanctions against sex discrimination in employment and education, and despite the immense array of such programs, progress towards greater equality for women in management and leadership has been far slower than expected or hoped. Indeed the intransigence of the barriers preventing the achievement of equality between men and women at the highest levels of organisations, despite the widespread efforts to dismantle them, is itself challenging accepted explanations of the causes and commonly held assumptions about the remedies to this enduring sex based inequality in organisations of all types throughout the world.

Most recently, analysis of this issue in universities has focussed on the considerable difference between the context of overall opportunities in which women work and pursue their careers and that experienced by their male colleagues. Two distinct differences in these gendered opportunity contexts have been isolated as particularly pertinent: women's unequal share of domestic and particularly child rearing responsibilities and men's greater access to mentoring, sponsorship and patronage through informal systems of information and other career advantaging benefits.

i. the career impacts of child bearing and rearing

With respect to the first of these contextual differences, recent studies have revealed that academic women's lower classification levels and therefore lower remuneration is directly due to having less years overall in university employment and being less likely to have a PhD than male academics. For example, recent Australian research identified that 36% of women compared with 56% of male academics had a PhD, and that they had 8.9 years of university employment compared with men's 13.8 years.¹⁶ These outcomes arise from the gender related pattern that women academics typically begin and/or finish their doctoral qualifications later, are more likely to work part time for a period or throughout their careers, and tend to have more career interruptions than male academics, a pattern directly related to child bearing and women's greater responsibility for child rearing. In addition, as the data analysed in this study reveal, family related career breaks not only delay academic women starting or progressing their careers, but often lead to their

¹⁶ Probert, B., Ewer, P. and Whiting, K. *Gender Pay Equity in Australian Higher Education*, National Tertiary Education Union, Melbourne, 1998

movement down the career ladder. The negative impact of family related career breaks arises however not from the breaks themselves but their purpose. Indeed similar employment breaks for other reasons, such as for study or professionally-related experience, have a positive effect on both classification level and income.¹⁷ Of great interest also is the finding that the disadvantage to women's position relative to their male colleagues arising early in their careers, often due to them bearing and caring for children, actually compounds and accumulates over time and throughout their careers.

ii. and of women's exclusion from networks etc

The second distinct difference in the context in which men and women's different university career trajectories are forged revolves around women's lack of knowledge of and opportunity to enter the informal systems for career advancement used for so long and to such good advantage by our male colleagues.¹⁸ Exclusion from informal networks, career sponsoring relationships, and other avenues which provide the basis for career advancement and advantage to their male colleagues has been identified as critical for women in all forms of organisations, including in universities. And there is now a growing body of international research across a range of organisations which identifies and explores the disadvantage that women face in contrast to their male colleagues in this regard. For example, research¹⁹ conducted in the United States through the 1990s by means of interviews with the CEOs and human resource professionals in the Fortune 500/Service 500 companies, identified women's exclusion from informal communication channels as a critical barrier to their advancement into leadership positions in private companies and corporations. The same research identified that this exclusion from networks prevents women from gaining the knowledge needed for them to accumulate the experience critical for leadership positions in their organisations, the information necessary to identify and access 'gateways' and 'gatekeepers', and the visibility for their contribution and achievements which leads to advancement.

¹⁷ Referred to in Sullivan, M., "Status of Women in Australian Universities – Myths and Realities", review article in *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 30, 1999, Carfax, Oxford

¹⁸ For example, Collins, N.W., *Professional women and their mentors*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ:Prentice Hall, Inc., 1983; Eberspacher, J. & Sisler, G., "Mentoring relationships in academic administration" in *Initiatives*, 51 (4), pp. 27-32; Thompson, C.M., "Mentoring among nurse faculty" in *Women in higher education: changes and challenges*, pp. 216-222, Praeger Publishers, New York, 1990.

¹⁹ The research was conducted and published by Catalyst, a New York based national organisation which works with business and industry to progress gender equity.

Not surprisingly those few women who do occupy leadership positions in such organisations experience isolation due to their lack of a critical mass, which also means that they lack mentors and role models. Some of these women report outright hostility from their male peers, but more commonly that they do not experience the same level of support from them. Similarly in universities, research suggests that as women rise in the organisational hierarchies their peer support falls away and they become isolated from other women. Sixty percent of the managers interviewed in the US study referred to above reported that networking is more difficult for women and seventy five percent that male discomfort is a critical factor in their exclusion. Resonating with these findings, research in Australian universities has identified that “relationships between men and women are not as comfortable as they need to be for professional relationships to flourish.”²⁰ Another issue for women in leadership positions is that they continually have to establish and re-establish their credibility, not only with their peers but also with subordinates and supervisors, which drains morale and threatens productivity.

In universities increasing attention is being given to the significance of women being less likely be mentored by an eminent senior scholar and to have strong international networks, both of which are significant and career enhancing advantages more often available to their male colleagues. For example, recent international comparative research found that men in all fields of study participate more in the internationalisation of academic work and garner resources for their research more than academic women, “most noticeably as international networks”.²¹ Indeed this study found international evidence that women academics face a deficit of resources compared to their male peers, which is partly related to their field of study, but also in relation to prestigious mentors, broad international networks, and time. Collegial networks are crucial in higher education, acting as a means of transmitting, reproducing and reinforcing standards for professional behaviour and socialisation into the profession of scholarship,²² and indeed for excluding those who, not having been so inducted, do not know how to conform. Similarly scholarly networks across the globe determine what research gets funded, which journals are prestigious, and what areas of research are judged to be valuable and relevant, and which does not and is not.

²⁰ Burton, C., *Gender Equity in Australian University Staffing*, Department of Employment, Education, Training and youth Affairs, Canberra, 1999, p. 29

²¹ Poole, M. and Laurel, B. “Career Development of Academics: Cross-cultural and Lifespan Factors”, *International Journal of Industrial relations*, 1998, 33(2):209-236.

²² Wunsch, M.A., “Giving structure to experience: mentoring strategies for women faculty” in *Initiatives*, vol. 56 (1), p.68.

Initiatives to counteract women's career disadvantages - mentoring

For many years now, a range of programs and initiatives have been put into place to challenge and change the overall disadvantage women face in terms of the context in which their careers are defined and constrained in organisations generally and in universities specifically. Amongst these efforts, organisational mentoring programs have become particularly common, and for at least the last twenty years an extensive international literature has been amassing evidence on their prevalence, nature and impact. For example, an estimated one third of the major companies in the United States have formal mentoring programs.²³ The conclusions from this literature in terms of the efficacy of mentoring for career development and advancement are overwhelmingly positive, including the more recent and relatively few studies dealing specifically with women.²⁴ In Australia a large number of institutionally based higher education mentoring programs have been operating for at least a couple of decades. While some of the commonly identified benefits of mentoring relate to individual career planning and effectiveness, such as conceptualising and building a career, setting career priorities and using time productively, others are much broader in their scope and include developing networks and dealing with organisational climate and senior colleagues.²⁵

- and networking

It is interesting to note that an earlier emphasis on formal and informal mentoring programs to counteract the barriers to women's advancement has now been overtaken by an increasing focus on the establishment and operation of networks. While the opportunity to develop networks was initially seen as an ancillary albeit noteworthy benefit of mentoring programs, in universities as in other forms of organisations increasing attention is being given to the significance of informal networks and channels of communication per se in terms of gender employment equity. While networks may include program elements such as a formal mentoring program, it is particularly significant that all such networks offer opportunities for non-hierarchical mentoring between peers. Further it is noteworthy that the developmental relationships which are made possible by and thrive in the context of networks are more likely to be two-way and mutually beneficial, and therefore more attractive to and effective between women, than the more traditional and hierarchical mentoring relationships

²³ Ragins, Belle Rose & Cotton, John, "Formal mentoring relationships: trend or tool?", ASTD Research Award Presentation, ASTD Conference, May 21-25 2000.

²⁴ For example Cullen, D.L., & Luna, G. "Women mentoring in academe: addressing the gender gap in higher education" in *Gender and Education*, 5 (2), pp.125-137, 1993.

²⁵ Wunsch, M.A, op. cit., p.66.

which are the focus of much of the literature on mentoring referred to above.

Two Australian networks for women in universities

In Australia we have considerable experience in establishing and maintaining regional and national women's networks. Based on that experience and some evaluative analyses of their impact, we have reason to believe that these networks are effective both in counteracting the factors which prevent women from advancing to more senior levels of employment in our universities and in enhancing our leadership effectiveness and impact when we do. It is relevant to note that by far the most significant and successful strategies to achieve greater gender employment equity for women in Australian universities have both been based on the establishment of networks of senior or near senior women. These are the Colloquium of Senior Women Executives in Australian Higher Education,²⁶ which amongst other outcomes has achieved the development and implementation of a national Action Plan for Women in the Sector, and the Australian Technology Network's women's executive development program (ATN WexDev).²⁷ Each of these operate across the nation geographically and institutionally, the Colloquium across all universities in the Australian unified national system and the ATN program across a consortium of five like institutions which are located in far flung corners of the continent. Each of these initiatives has already attracted some international attention for their achievements and potential, and in both cases international linkages are being established with similar networks in other countries. It is interesting as well that both of these initiatives rely heavily on the new communication and information technologies for both their existence and effectiveness.

The Colloquium of Senior Women Executives in Australian Higher Education

The Colloquium is the larger, and structurally and administratively less formal of these two national Australian networks. It was established in 1995 when the presidents of all Australian universities agreed to a proposal²⁸ that

²⁶ The Colloquium of Senior Women Executives in Australian Higher Education. See the Colloquium's website at < <http://www.avcc.edu.au/ncswe/> > for information about its membership and role.

²⁷ ATN WexDev. See < <http://www.uts.edu.au/oth/wexdev/> > for more information about the program.

²⁸ The proposal came jointly from the University of South Australia and Griffiths University, the two institutions which had appointed vice presidents with particular responsibility for educational and employment equity, Professor Margaret Gardner and the author of this paper.

the most senior women in higher education should meet nationally in order to exchange information and support, and has operated since then as an effective virtual organisation. The first meeting's decision to establish a national network for senior university women was recommended to and subsequently endorsed by the combined presidents of all Australian universities²⁹ since the formation of such a group was considered timely and useful given the continued under representation of women at more senior levels both within individual universities and across the higher education sector nationally.

While there has not yet been any formal evaluation to identify the effectiveness of this initiative, it is acknowledged both by the growing number of senior women who make up its membership, and by the AVCC itself, to have performed very successfully in terms of its four foundation objectives.³⁰ Through the Colloquium the steadily increasing number of women at the most senior levels have instant access to all other senior women in the sector, and therefore contacts at senior levels in almost every university in the country. This provides an immediate source of information, advice, support, insights, and understanding about what is happening in higher education at both the institutional and national levels. It also counteracts the isolation identified in the international literature as a debilitating feature of the professional lives of women in leadership positions, an isolation which is compounded in Australia by the size and geography of our continent.

Both the Colloquium itself and some of its more tangible achievement, such as the AVCC's electronic Register of Senior University Women³¹ and its

²⁹ The Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee and Council of Australian University Presidents (or AVCC).

³⁰ The Colloquium's objectives remain those adopted at its establishment, as follows:

- To improve the representation of women in policy and decision-making positions in higher education;
- To provide an opportunity at the national level for networking, information exchange and sponsorship amongst women in higher education at senior levels;
- To identify and monitor the responsibilities, expertise and representation of women working at senior levels in Australian universities;
- To provide leadership and co-ordinated advice at the national level on significant issues, as appropriate.

The Colloquium's achievements in terms of each of these objectives are analysed in the paper given at the Second European Conference on Gender Equity in Higher Education, held in Zurich, September 12 – 15, 2000. See Ramsay, 2000, pp. 8-10.

³¹ The AVCC's electronic Register of Senior University Women can be accessed at <http://www.avcc.edu.au/avcc/pubs/rsuw.htm> It was established by the AVCC, following prompting to do so from the Colloquium, the goal of which is to improve the representation of women in policy and decision-making positions by making their experience and expertise more widely known and available within the university, government and business sectors. It currently provides contact details, duties, classification, position, areas of special expertise/interest and committee membership of over 3,900 senior university women. In the AVCC's own words, this Register therefore

Action Plan for Women in the Higher Education Sector,³² have significantly increase the visibility and hence impact of senior women across the sector by making their names, contribution and expertise more widely known. And our resulting increased representation on key sector wide committees, boards and other fora has significantly increased the effectiveness and impact of women's policy voices locally, nationally and to some extent internationally.

ATN WexDev

The second significant Australian nation-wide higher education gender equity initiative is the women's executive development program which was developed and is being implemented by the five universities which together make up the Australian Technology Network.³³ The program design of this successful and innovative program, ATN WexDev, is centred on networking as the fundamental means to establish a critical mass of senior women. It has been running for over four years across the five capital cities and the five states in which these universities are located, and currently has 452 participants. Its four aims³⁴ include two which are particularly relevant to the new leadership and management skills discussed earlier: viz., changing the organisational culture of the participating organisations towards one which values diversity and is more likely to encourage improved representation of women at senior levels; and strengthening strategic alliances with other organisations, locally, nationally and internationally.

This program has successfully built a collaborative network across the Australian continent, using inter-institutional collaboration and electronic communication tools to break down individual, institutional, and geographic

“facilitates the utilisation of the enormous wealth of expert knowledge and experience of senior university women in making appointments to committees, advisory panels and other influential positions by all sectors”

³² For a full copy of the AVCC's Action Plan for Women in the Higher Education sector see the AVCC's web site at <http://www.avcc.edu.au/avcc/whatsnew.htm> under the heading “What's new in July”.

³³ The Australian Technology Network (ATN) is a consortium of collaborating universities consisting of the University of South Australia, in Adelaide, Curtin University of Technology in Perth, the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, the University of Technology Sydney and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology , or RMIT, in Melbourne. See the ATN website at <http://www.atn.edu.au/>

³⁴ The four objectives of the ATN WexDev program are as follows:

- To enhance personal professional development opportunities for senior women to gain appropriate skills and experience for emerging management opportunities.
- To support the growth of organisational cultures that value diversity and encourage improved representation of women in senior executive positions.
- To build on the tangible benefits of the collaborative network between ATN universities by providing significant cross-institutional activities for senior women.
- To strengthen strategic alliances with other organisations, nationally and internationally.

isolation. Like the Colloquium, it has consciously set out to establish development and learning opportunities between administrative and academic staff. Another distinctive feature is that it has used the strong links already existing between the participating universities and our business, industry, government, and community partners to generate placement opportunities for the senior executive development of its women staff. This element recognises and harnesses the positive developmental benefits gained by participants experiencing different and changing environments through placement opportunities outside the higher education sector. An unusual feature of this aspect is that it creates synergies between individual and organisational benefits, providing positive outcomes for our universities by establishing or strengthening relationships with organisations of strategic value to them. Finally the program model is flexible, recognising that the senior women for whom it is designed already have significant managerial and personal responsibilities and hence enabling them to choose between a number of elements which can be accessed at different times, with different levels of commitment.

A number of papers have been written about this program³⁵ and there have been two formal evaluation reports³⁶ to the Australian Government agency (DETYA)³⁷ which provided its 1996 establishment funding; the first focussing on the experience of participants and the second on the extent to which the program has been successfully embedded in each of its host institutions. The outcomes of these evaluations provide strong endorsement of this model of women's executive management and leadership development, concluding that the ATN WEXDEV program has shown itself to be innovative, flexible, and robust. Of relevance to this paper is the fact that it operates as a network as much as a formal career development program, with the range of elements available from the latter in some senses being additional to the benefits available from the network itself, regardless of the actual levels of participation by individual women. This networking occurs both within and across each of the institutions, providing both real and virtual opportunities to share information, professional advice and insights, and to participate in structured group discussions on subjects of strategic significance. Like the Colloquium, this program makes extensive use of and relies heavily upon the new communication technologies. Its home page and e-mail discussion list are both crucial mechanisms underpinning the nature and success of this program, the latter linking all program participants and providing information on development opportunities, and stimulating discussions and consulting on the future development of the program.

³⁵ For example, Chesterman, C., *Women's Executive Development in Australian Higher Education: The WexDev Model* presented at NAWE Conference, New Orleans, 2000

³⁶ In November 1997 and December 1998

³⁷ The Australian Department of Employment, Training and Youth Affairs.

Of significance in terms of the leadership and management attributes identified at the beginning of this paper is the program's emphasis on participants experiencing different and changing environments, to enhance their leadership skills and to change their own perceptions of their leadership abilities and potential. Every element of the program enables participants to go outside of their institutional contexts both actually and virtually, and by experiencing different organisational and management cultures to further develop their capacity to understand and manage change. The experience of different organisational cultures and structures has positively affected both their own and others' sense of their leadership capabilities. The discussions on the e-mail list are also a crucial element as participants identify and explore the implications of changes in their institutions and the wider sectoral context. Both of these aspects have significantly increased participants' recognition of their own leadership potential. And the critical mass created and maintained by the networking aspects of the program has created a micro-climate within which participants have significantly increased their impact as individuals and as a group.

The ATN program's emphasis on cultural change at the institutional level differentiates it from many other initiatives which seek instead to change women so that we might fit better into the existing organisational cultural norms and dominant value systems. Like the Colloquium, the ATN program also has the potential to affect the culture and structures of the sector as a whole as well as of the five institutions in which it is organisationally based. Finally, and also like the Colloquium but more recently, the ATN network has forged a range of international linkages.³⁸ These include a project recently funded by the Australian Government to establish a similar training and support network for senior women in higher education management in South Africa.³⁹ Once the South African electronically facilitated network has been established, the links forged at the individual and small group level through these early activities will be expanded into an entire network to network relationship which should prove to be of value to participants, their institutions, and the higher education sectors in both countries. Collaborative activities envisaged in the longer term include cross cultural research and development between senior women in higher education institutions in South Africa and Australia.

Both of the networks briefly described above have been recognised internationally and have made international connections of some significance, however this aspect is currently developmental. This seminar offers a valuable opportunity to explore the potential for linkages between the Australian networks referred to in this paper and existing or emerging Asian women's networks. It will be interesting to see how these

³⁸ See appendix 1

³⁹ See appendix 2

international dimensions evolve, and in particular whether the benefits identified above extend to the international context as anticipated. If this expectation proves to be well founded, in addition to the international exposure and experience this will bring, the impact at the national and institutional level may well be as enhancing of women's position as has proved to be the case for Australian higher educational institutions and individual women themselves from our existing national networks.

And their impact – in terms of the position of women in the sector

While it is premature to draw any validated conclusions with respect to their outcomes, there is clear evidence that each of the two high profile nationwide initiatives briefly described above are having a significant impact for individual women, our universities, and for the Australian higher education sector itself. The numbers and proportions of women at the more senior levels of our academic and general administrative staff structures are slowly but steadily increasing. More significantly, the visibility of women in Australian universities and their impact in terms of their public policy voices have increased more rapidly than their actual numbers as a result of these initiatives. The Colloquium's formal and high profile policy voice has been expressed very publicly and successfully on behalf of all women in the sector. And the peak sector body of Australian university presidents regularly seeks input, representation, comment and advice from the group as a result.

This is important in two respects. It ensures that the policy debates, priorities and directions of the Australian higher education sector as a whole are enhanced by the views and experience of the senior women in the sector. In addition, this formal, effective and public voice ensures that the presence of our senior university women can no longer be overlooked at the individual or collective level, achieving audibility, visibility and credibility for women across the sector - in their own eyes and in those of the "status judges"⁴⁰ who are so influential in determining who is nominated to career enhancing opportunities in the sector and who is identified as having the leadership potential which makes them worthy of sponsorship and encouragement. This aspect also normalises women's presence as senior and significant players, active in shaping and influencing the policy directions of Australian higher education at the sector level, and in doing so, providing the psychosocial basis for this to occur at the institutional level as well. The same outcomes are observable from the ATN network in terms of women's

⁴⁰ The term and its application is taken from the work of Epstein cited in Mertz, N.T., Welch, O.M. & Henderson, J. "Why women aren't mentored", paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Portland Oregon, ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 292953, 1987.

presence in and recognition by the five institutions making up this significant and powerful consortium (which for example accounts for over twenty percent of the Australian higher education student body). In both cases it is clear that there is a wider impact on the culture and processes of the sector and the consortium as a result, which not only alters the context in which we work but that of our male colleagues as well. This aspect can be characterised as creating a microclimate which, through its effectiveness, focus and collective concentration, has an impact more far reaching than the numbers of women involved might otherwise suggest. In this way, a still significantly out numbered group of women have together created a microclimate which has a positive impact which would otherwise be unattainable given our continued under representation and institutional isolation.

- and in terms of the leadership skills required by universities

Amongst the many achievements of both of these programs, their emphasis on the development of precisely those skills and attributes demanded by the changing global context is of most relevance to this seminar. Thus while each has demonstrably established conditions, processes and initiatives which have increased the likelihood of women progressing to senior levels, they have at the same time equipped them with the very capabilities their institutions require to succeed in the challenging circumstances touched upon at the beginning of this paper. Both programs are founded upon as well as enhance their participants' abilities to foster relational capital, and the development of networks, alliances and partnerships of strategic value to organisational development. Flexibility, adaptability and the ability to thrive in a constantly changing environment is at the heart of the Colloquium's electronic exchange between members of information, understandings and perspectives, and is an explicit objective of the ATN program's emphasis on gaining experience in different institutions and organisations outside of the sector. Both programs target the transformation of organisational cultures through questioning the status quo, and develop in their participants both the confidence that that this is possible and the attributes required to sustain such changes over time. Each of these networks could be characterised as learning communities as well as developing and sustaining new organisational shapes and structures. The fluid and multifaceted nature of the interactive communications at the core of each is clear evidence that they are based on the recognition that learning is an ongoing process. This also ensures that their participants continuously rethink what we are doing, both within the programs themselves, within our institutions, and sector wide. This aspect also facilitates ongoing environmental scanning, the integration of ideas and effort, and participants' capabilities to synthesise, evaluate and integrate information.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the new and constantly changing context in which our universities must survive, and in which they seek to develop successfully, not only demands new leadership and management skills but also opens up new opportunities for women who are already or who aspire to be university leaders. However if women's leadership development is pursued in isolation and without efforts to dismantle existing barriers to women's progression to senior levels, the result may well be yet more highly skilled women who nevertheless remain on the margins of the leadership and management of their institutions. Further such an approach implies that the cause, and therefore the remedy, to women's current under-representation at leadership levels is due at least in part by their lack of the requisite capabilities. In the current challenging environment institutions can no longer neglect the additional leadership contribution available to them from their women staff, which brings a new urgency and determination to tackle those factors which are currently preventing this. Of most interest is the correlation and interaction between programmatic elements which at one and the same time dismantle barriers to and so increase the likelihood of the appointment of greater numbers of senior women while equipping them with precisely those attributes and capabilities their universities need to survive and prosper in the changing global context. This suggests that strategies to increase the representation of women at senior levels of universities and those designed to equip them with the required skills and capacities should not be pursued separately but in an integrated fashion.

Appendix 1

For example, contact has been made with a number of programs in the United States and the UK, and like the Colloquium, the ACU Women's Program keeps in close contact with us. For example, the ACU have developed six training modules for women in higher education management currently being used in various countries. The ATN WexDev program is finalising a training module on mentoring for use throughout the 480 universities which make up the ACU, and its usefulness and application is currently being trialed in the five ATN universities prior to its release. In the United Kingdom ATN WexDev has made contact with through the Glass Ceiling, an advocacy network for senior women, and is aware of the efforts of the Committee of University Career Opportunity (CUCO) to redress the very low numbers and proportion of women in senior positions in universities and colleges. In the United States we have had contact and ongoing dialogue with the Higher Education Resource Service (HERS) which, amongst other initiatives, has been running training academies for women in higher education administration for over 25 years. The ATN WexDev Program Director, Dr Colleen Chesterman, presented papers at the 2000 international conference on women in higher education organised by the National Association of Women in Education (NAWE) which has recently decided to wind down its organisation and activities in favour of mainstreaming their efforts. Contact is also maintained with the Office of Women in Higher Education at the American Council of Education, which runs extensive programs to increase the access of women to higher education management. Finally, we have worked and held discussions with the Research Director of Catalyst, Dr Mary Mattis both in the US and during her recent Australian visit. Catalyst is a non profit private organisation working with the private sector on the promotion of women, family friendly work practices and organisational cultures.

Appendix 2

The project to establish a training and support network similar to the ATN WexDev for senior women in South African universities is being funded by an Australian Government funding through its International development Program (IDP). This has already involved direct contact with a range of senior women in South African universities, including from the Forum for Advancing Women's Education in South Africa (FAWESA). In November of this year a core group of the South African participants will spend time in Australian universities investigating the operations of our regional and national networks in order to refine the proposed structures and activities of the ones being established in South Africa. These key participants will also work with senior Australian women from the Colloquium as well as from the ATN universities. Early next year, a team of senior women from the Australian program will go to South Africa to work with the participants of this new program to establish the ongoing administrative and electronic means to maintain it over time.

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