Council approaches to leadership

Research into good practice

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ACELG
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Following sector discussions, the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) has undertaken a research project with a focus on council approaches to leadership development that are identified as 'good practice'.

This project sits within ACELG's Governance and Strategic Leadership program area and aims to:

- present examples of councils with good practice approaches to in-house leadership development initiatives
- outline the themes and program structures within the council examples that work well to build the leadership capacity of local government managers
- provide some practical guidance for local governments in developing their own leadership programs
- explore some different examples of leadership capability frameworks in use by the sector.

Eight councils were selected across Australia to participate in the research. Senior representatives from each council's learning and development function areas were interviewed on a range of topics related to local government leadership and the programs offered by their council.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 Introduction

Following sector discussions, the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) has undertaken a research project with a focus on council approaches to leadership development that are identified as 'good practice'.

This report on the research contains a range of ideas and discussion prompts on leadership for local government that have emerged from interviews with the councils on their 'good practice' approaches to leadership development programs for staff.

Section 1 provides a summary of the background to the research and an overview of the research methodology.

Section 2 focuses on three main areas identified through the research as being common contributors to good practice council leadership programs.

Section 3 presents a summary of the information and views that were shared by the participating councils in the interviews. This includes the challenges of developing leadership programs, advice from the interviewees for their peers and the sector, and ideas and innovations.

Section 4 provides a concluding summary of suggested areas for reflection and discussion by the sector based on the outcomes of the research. Continuing possibilities for further research is also presented.

The **Appendices** include a copy of the interview questions, examples of council leadership frameworks and successful programs from the participating councils, and a selection of further ideas and perspectives from the interviewees on different aspects of leadership in local government.

Through the research, the three main foundations of a good practice leadership program are identified as:

1. **A 'values-based' leadership ethos** in which values, principles and beliefs are aligned with a clear line of sight to purpose and the culture and behaviours of the organisation. A leadership ethos that is 'values-based' is strengthened when it:

Aligns with council vision and goals	Reflects culture and values
Inspires and influences staff	Has the support of senior management
Promotes leadership at all levels	Connects with the context and purpose of working in local government

2. **A support structure,** including the use of approaches, frameworks and strategies to provide tangible ways to engage with, understand and develop leadership capability. A strong and robust support structure can include:

Leadership development theory and models	Leadership frameworks
Appreciation of learning styles	Advocated participation
Smart resourcing	

3. **Measuring progress** based on an understanding of the need for, and challenges of, evaluating the success and yield of a leadership development strategy, which is indicated by:

Alignment with performance	Feedback and data
Evaluation	Return on investment

In addition, the following information from the interviews can provide additional stimulus for discussion and consideration by councils when reflecting on and improving their approach to leadership programs:

Challenges: the participating councils identified the following areas as being particularly challenging when designing and implementing a leadership development program:
- the amount of effort involved
- engaging staff
- leading leadership at the executive level
- catering for a diversity of needs
- having open communication
- managing talent.

Advice: the participating councils provided a range of advice to other councils when reviewing and/or developing leadership programs. This advice included: *be strategic, work resourcefully and choose what works for design, content and delivery*.

Innovation and ideas: emerging areas of innovation and ideas for leadership programs for local government that were identified through the research process include:
- designing an in-house customised methodology
- connecting staff wellbeing with quality of service to the community
- exploring partnerships and exchanges
- strengthening diversity in leaders
- utilising existing staff capital
- strengthening the capability of the sector as a whole
- charting success after people leave.

ACELG have conducted this research to assist councils in the review and development of their council leadership and to provide discussion prompts for reflection and debate. While it is recognised that this research is based on a small sample of councils, the outcomes from this research indicate several areas for consideration by councils and the sector as whole:

- One successful council leadership program can be very different to another; programs work best when they are tailored to the particular council and its needs.
- The support and commitment to leadership of the GM/CEO is crucial to the success of any leadership initiative in the organisation.
- There are a range of support structures that can be utilised to guide content and learning. Programs work best when these guiding principles are in place
- The evaluation of leadership impact is an increasing area of importance and interest.
- There are opportunities for councils to partner with each other to share ideas and advice and explore strategies that overcome the challenges of implementing leadership programs.
- While developing individual and organisational capacity is important, there are wider strategic purposes to leadership that are unique to the sector. They include working

effectively with the community and elected members, and raising the profile of local government as a desirable profession.

It is an exciting time for leadership in local government, with new ways of thinking and working, stimulating contextual change and a national cohort of committed leadership enthusiasts.

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Leadership in context

There are a number of key international drivers which are prompting local governments across the world to re-consider the way they organise themselves, manage service delivery, work with stakeholders, engage with citizens and hold themselves accountable (Evans et al. 2012, p. 5).

The context of local government in Australia continues to change. Structural reform, the diversity, complexity and expectations of communities, changes in political direction, increased accountability to multiple stakeholders and outcomes, emphasis on innovative approaches to service delivery, environmental concerns, skills shortages, economic pressures and booms in population and technology require a new style of leadership that is adaptable, resilient, collaborative and different to more traditional managerial archetypes.

Local government urgently needs to nurture its next generation of leaders (Mellor 2010, p. 4).

At the executive and 'next generation' levels the sector requires leadership that can offer expertise and experience, embrace change and understand how they can contribute to organisational performance and positive community outcomes. This research looks at examples of development opportunities that councils provide to enable their leaders to make a greater contribution to improving their councils' performances now and into the future.

1.1.2 The Advancing Leadership Initiative

The Advancing Leadership Initiative is an activity stream within ACELG's Governance and Strategic Leadership program that aims to 'increase understanding of effective strategic leadership and to build the capacity of local government to achieve consistently high standards in leadership and governance' (ACELG 2014).

The initiative was established in 2010 in response to research and feedback from the sector highlighting a need for tailored and better networked leadership development opportunities for mid-tier local government professionals (Mellor 2010).

The key activities of the initiative included:

- development of an Advancing Leadership capabilities framework
- design of tailored subjects within a model Graduate Certificate in Local Government Leadership
- delivery of subjects within the Graduate Certificate in Local Government Leadership in different areas of Australia
- establishment of partnerships between universities, associations and providers to offer flexible and tailored programs and pathways to postgraduate study
- a memorandum of understanding for councils and universities whereby recognised in-house leadership programs can receive credits towards university qualifications
- consultation with the sector via discussion papers, forums and a dedicated 'advancing leadership' roundtable (Bruce 2012, pp. 2-13).

1.1.3 The Advancing Leadership Roundtable

The Advancing Leadership Roundtable, held in November 2012, was attended by representatives from councils, universities, associations and local government professional bodies. It identified ideas for possible new projects and research areas.

One area identified by the roundtable for a potential ACELG research project was a review of good practice leadership programs by councils. Following the roundtable, ACELG endorsed the research project to go ahead. This review will be designed to improve sector understanding of leadership by:

- identifying key themes that are important when designing and delivering leadership development programs for local government
- providing the sector with the opportunity to learn from each other by showcasing examples of good practice approaches to leadership development
- providing a practical overview of different tools and approaches for councils (and an opportunity for less resourced councils to adapt ideas)
- showing how leadership frameworks can be utilised to underpin effective local government leadership learning initiatives
- highlighting trends in approaches to developing leaders.

1.2 Methodology

Eight councils across Australia were approached by the researcher to participate in the review. The selection process focused on councils with an established relationship with ACELG's activity areas in local government leadership, councils who were represented at the Advancing Leadership Roundtable, and councils who had been identified as offering good practice leadership development opportunities to staff.

It is important to reiterate that the eight councils are a sample set for the purposes of this review only, and are by no means the only councils in Australia that offer good practice approaches to leadership.

Table 1: Participating councils in this review

Council	Location	Number of staff (fte)
Fairfield City Council	NSW	780
Knox City Council	VIC	680
Logan City Council	QLD	1100
Maroondah City Council	VIC	880
City of Marion	SA	380
City of Melville	WA	480
Randwick City Council	NSW	520
City of Salisbury	SA	480

Telephone interviews were conducted with nominated representatives from each council's learning and development departments. The interviews were constructed around 15 mostly qualitative questions (see Appendix A).

Interviews were regarded as being the most appropriate method for this research given that the research interest areas required a level of perspective, opinions and detail. Telephone

interviews were chosen, given the geographical obstacles to conducting face-to-face interviews. The interviews were constructed around open ended questions and a conversational process to generate more in-depth responses.

Interview transcripts were subsequently reviewed and key themes and commonalities were grouped using a descriptive coding system that represented different areas of interest. These commonalities formed the basis for presenting the information contained in this report.

1.2.1 Limitations of the research

It is acknowledged that there are limitations to this research which should be taken into account when reading the report:

- While providing rich and interesting information, using qualitative interviews has created a level of subjectivity in the data which reflects the opinions and biases of the particular interviewees.
- The depth of personal information created using this interview method limits the ability to make more generalised findings from a small group of interviewees to the larger sector. However, the research is designed to capture the opinions of a sample group of 'good practice' councils, in order to initiate debate and discussion that is applicable to the wider sector
- The councils contributing to the research are predominantly larger metropolitan councils and this will influence the research findings. A wider research study on good practice councils of different sizes, including councils from regional and remote areas, is likely to provide varied and different information that is more representative of the sector as a whole.
- The depth of qualitative information was challenging to analyse. By using descriptors, similarities and parallels between the transcripts were identified. While this helped to structure the write-up of the research, the researcher's perspective on what descriptors to use has had an influence on the findings.

2 Contributors to good practice

The interviewees were asked a series of questions that were structured around the following areas:

- individual and organisational perspectives on leadership, including definitions of leadership and leadership development
- how councils provided leadership programs, including questions on identifying need, content, format, frameworks and delivery styles
- the progress and importance of building leadership capacity in local government, including evaluating impact, challenges and advice to sector peers.

The information gathered from the interviews provided the scope for this research. Through the interview findings, three main areas that underpin a good practice leadership program and/or initiative have been highlighted as:

1) *a 'values-based' leadership ethos* in which values, principles and beliefs are aligned with a clear line of sight to purpose and the culture and behaviours of the organisation

2) *a support structure*, including the use of approaches, frameworks and strategies to provide tangible ways to engage with, understand and develop leadership capability

3) *measuring progress,* based on an understanding of the need for, and challenges of, measuring success and the return on investment of a leadership development strategy.

Figure 1: Contributors to Good Practice Leadership development programs offered by local government councils

Commonalities between the interviewed councils in terms of contributions to these main areas further emerged from the research. The following section presents further details of these contributing themes.

1.2 A values-based leadership ethos

A council's underlying ethos (which could also be called a philosophy, attitude or belief system) of leadership and leadership development clearly influences the overall culture of the organisation. When this ethos is values-based, core values are regarded as fundamental to guiding behaviours, staff wellbeing and organisational potential[1], as one respondent suggests:

> *There's a very strong alignment between our leadership aspirations and what culturally we want as an organisation to be. (Interviewee)*

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[1] A selection of articles and discussion regarding values-based leadership can be found in the *Journal of Values-Based Leadership* http://scholar.valpo.edu/jvbl/

Leadership was described by interviewees as a 'cultural ambition', a 'climate' and an 'enabler' through which an organisation can achieve higher purpose and strategic goals. Leadership can therefore be described as drawing on a core value set in order to create the environment for positive and constructive outcomes.

Leadership development initiatives are regarded as mechanisms with which to inspire and orient staff towards a purpose, and 'grow' the skills and capabilities required for individuals to personally contribute towards higher objectives.

As expressed within the interview responses, a leadership ethos that is values-based:

- aligns to council vision and goals
- reflects organisational culture and values
- inspires and influences staff
- has the support of senior management
- promotes leadership at all levels
- connects with the context and purpose of working in local government.

Figure 2: Contributing factors to a values-based leadership ethos as expressed through the interview findings

2.1.1 Aligns with council vision and goals

When you've got an articulation of mission and you believe in your reason for existence, your performance in that role is much better. (Interviewee)

In terms of overall leadership ethos and strategy, aligning with and articulating the council vision and goals was a common imperative across all the interviewees. They generally agreed that having an understanding and appreciation of the council's mission, vision and values enables employees to make more effective contributions.

The ethos of leadership within councils is also aligned with the wider strategic context of what it means to work for the local community.

Developing the capacity of local government employees to understand and commit to vision and objectives for the community was regarded as directly connecting to productivity, effectiveness and delivery of public services.

Enabling delivery of the ultimate goal, which is best public value and best community value around our services. (Interviewee)

2.1.2 Reflects culture and values

The leadership focus is the embodiment of the behaviours that underpin our cultural values. (Interviewee)

While understanding and aligning with the council vision and goals was considered important, a common thread running through the interviews was the existence of an organisational culture that gives life to mission statements or arbitrary words such as 'values'.

Emphasis was placed on how the behaviours and aspirations of individuals are a direct reflection of the values of the organisation, and vice versa. The leadership ethos of the participant councils include supporting individuals to embody and display values, behaviours and beliefs that promote and reflect the philosophies of their organisations.

Culture was explained as something that is ingrained throughout the organisation. Individuals display the qualities of the culture through their leadership behaviours. Tangible behaviours are expected of leaders, as are abilities such as being able to 'embed culture', 'implement vision' and speak a 'shared language'. These were considered important contributions which leaders make towards sustaining the desired culture of the organisation.

2.1.3 Inspires and influences staff

If you can influence your peers in a direction that is consistent with the ideology of the organisation then you are in fact in a leadership role. (Interviewee)

The council interviewees emphasised that leadership initiatives are an important way to inspire and motivate employees to engage with their development.

Being able to relate personal leadership development to tangible and meaningful outcomes and social contribution was considered to be a way to inspire staff.

It was also recognised that staff who are considered leaders have a responsibility to 'inspire', 'influence', 'motivate' and 'engage' others to achieve their own personal potential in tandem with organisational performance and productivity goals. Leadership in this regard is seen as enabling others to see a line of sight from their effort and hard work to positive outcomes.

2.1.4 Support from senior management

The language and the messages need to come from the top. (Interviewee)

It was agreed across all the interviews that leadership initiatives will only be effective if they have the support and engagement of the Chief Executive Officer/General Manager and senior management and leadership groups within the organisation.

The top-tier commitment to development throughout the organisation (including their own continuous learning) is clearly related to engaging and inspiring staff. Admiration and trust was directed towards CEOs and GMs that have a personal investment in and connection to the leadership development of employees and who have 'belief and passion' for achieving learning and development outcomes.

The concept of a 'mature learning organisation' was highlighted as a desirable goal, where open and honest conversations can be held about leadership development at all levels of the hierarchy. A key enabler of this type of learning organisation is the executive team who lead by example through their actions and behaviours.

In this way senior management are seen as having an 'obligation and responsibility' to make learning and development a relevant and valued component of the workplace, and a successful executive team is regarded as one that has a strong focus on culture and people development.

2.1.5 Promotes leadership at all levels

You can't just develop your senior managers and not look at the rest of your group because it's not going to work. It is a bit of leadership at all levels. (Interviewee)

A further commonality across the interviews was that an understanding of leadership was considered relevant for staff across the organisation.

While specific leadership programs are generally tailored for those employees in supervisory or above roles, the organisation can still provide to all staff learning and development opportunities that expose them to notions and understandings of leadership.

Leadership was acknowledged as being relevant across all levels of the organisation, and participants acknowledged that all staff can be engaged in discussion and learning through professional development, performance reviews and whole staff initiatives.

Emphasis was placed on 'emotional and social intelligence', 'self-awareness', 'wellbeing' and 'leadership actualisation' as being relevant to all staff, as supported by the executive and cultural direction of the organisation.

Mid-tier local government managers were viewed as a particularly important conduit between executive and the organisation, and as internal agents of cultural change. A differentiation is made between management and leadership, for example:

We have made a distinct difference between leadership and management. With leadership we're focusing on goals and outcomes and skills to get there, compared to management where we need the technical skills to achieve tasks and projects. (Interviewee)

In this context, leadership development can be associated with enabling this 'emerging' or 'aspiring' level of manager to understand a wider, more outcome-focused style of leading and managing. As asserted by one interviewee, this management level is considered a particularly important cohort for development programs in terms of embedding positive leadership and management behaviours.

The biggest risk for local government is not its upper echelon; it's in its junior to mid-management. That's when leadership/management behaviours are created. (Interviewee)

2.1.6 Connects with context and purpose of working in local government

Our staff have told us that it's really important for them to know [that] there is a purpose as to why they're there and that what the organisation is trying to achieve is still a bit bigger than the individuals that make up that organisation. For local government it's important that that purpose is communicated really strongly. (Interviewee)

Having a holistic view of local government was considered integral to effective leadership in that the more an individual can understand how their role impacts on other areas of the organisation, on other stakeholders, on wider strategic goals and on the community, the more effective the performance in that role.

Being able to embed the wider purpose of the function of local government into a leadership program was rated highly, suggesting that there is a significant link between this and a values-based leadership ethos. Serving the community is a core value and fundamental purpose for people working in local government, and it is understood that the leadership behaviours of governing bodies impact on the delivery of good outcomes for the community.

A major contextual area that is regarded as a unique and critical element of leading in local government is the ability to work within a political environment, or as one interviewee expressed it, having 'political savvy'. The relationships and interactions between local

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government staff and elected councillors were seen as an increasingly important area for council leadership programs to address, and as an area that warrants further development.

Connecting to reform and change is also regarded as an important element of a leadership program that is tailored to local government. Leadership in local government requires people with an ability to grasp changes quickly and ensure that the vision stays on track or that changes are introduced for the right reasons.

Within the leadership ethos, the research suggests that there is a shift in thinking about how local government responds to change; rather than just have 'managers', or implementers of change, there is also an opportunity for local government to have 'leaders', or 'drivers' of change, regarded as fundamental to the progress of the sector as a whole:

> *The reformation of local government will hang on leadership that will actually engage and inspire and without it, we're just going to keep running the same treadmill. (Interviewee)*

1.3 A support structure

> *Having that baseline framework and the principles and things in place so ... if we're going off target, if it doesn't fit with the strategic context, we can manage that, notwithstanding we need room to move a little bit, but having [those things] in place before doing anything has been really valuable. (Interviewee)*

While an underlying ethos for leadership is important to the success of a leadership program, it was evident from the research interviews that guiding principles or 'structures' are also required to direct the development of a program and inform the learning and development.

The types of supporting areas that contribute to a strong and successful council leadership program, as expressed through the interview responses include the following:

- the use of leadership development theory and models
- an appreciation of leadership capability frameworks and/or core competencies
- appreciation of learning styles
- encouraging staff to participate in programs
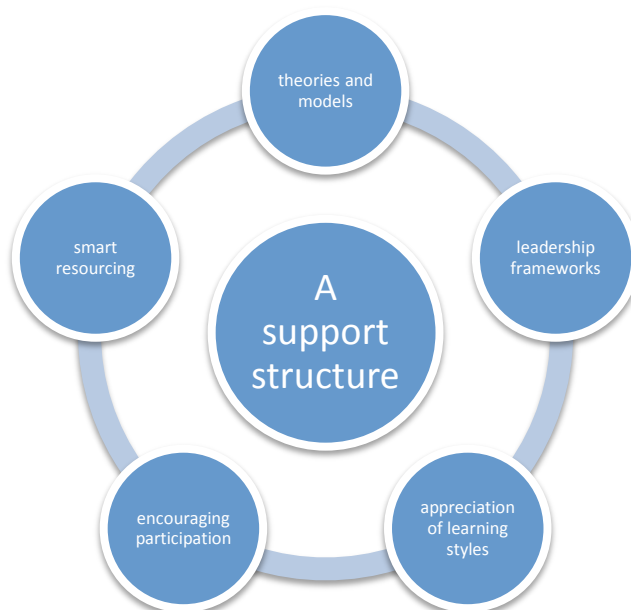- smart resourcing.

Figure 3: Types of support structures that assist successful council leadership programs

CONTRIBUTORS TO GOOD PRACTICE

2.1.7 Leadership development theory and models

[Staff] need to have self-awareness, the ability to change, the ability to assess and measure themselves and develop emotional and social intelligence. (Interviewee)

There are many different leadership philosophies and approaches that are used by councils when developing leadership programs for staff.

All of the councils interviewed were proactive researchers and users of approaches sourced from leadership theory and contemporary learning and development practice.

Examples from the case study interviews included reference to the following theoretical models, frameworks and tools. These have been included in this report by way of example only and are by no means reflective of the only approaches used:

Self-leadership	Distributed leadership	Authentic leadership
Holistic wellbeing	Appreciative Inquiry	Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
John Adair's action centred leadership	Hersey-Blanchard's situational leadership	Learning Styles Inventory
Pyramid theory	Enneagram	Hay McBeer Leadership Climate and Styles Survey
The Business Excellence Framework	Human Synergistics	Myers Briggs

While there are a variety of approaches, the common component of the leadership development theory, models and approaches used is **self-awareness**. All interviewees referred to self-awareness as an integral element of any leadership development program or initiative.

Self-awareness for an individual was referred to by one interviewee as having an 'internal locus of self-control', a means with which to understand how personal motivations, values and behaviours can connect to higher performance and the improved ability to lead others. Self-awareness is regarded as an ongoing process of development, and 'a bitter pill to swallow' that can be challenging for individuals along the way.

The self-awareness of individuals is linked not only to their own leadership, but also to a wider goal of being part of a progressive organisation. Having organisational self-awareness is linked to council achieving a positive and forward-thinking culture, but it is also recognised that the organisation as a whole needs to be ready for this type of commitment to learning:

The room of mirrors is not a pretty place to be and getting over that hurdle takes a level of organisational maturity when you do it en masse. (Interviewee)

2.1.8 Leadership frameworks

The interviewed councils were in general agreement that having some type of capabilities framework is useful for setting out expectations and agreeing on minimum baseline for core competencies. The framework can then be used as a guideline for development and performance appraisal.

We've been wanting to distil down to five or six core competencies that we need to ensure that our leaders have, and we've realised that we never had that. Whilst we've had probably a feel about that … we want to document it so everyone is agreed on it. It almost becomes the minimum base from which people operate. (Interviewee)

A leadership framework evolves from the 'leadership ambition' of the individual council; in other words, the council's overall culture and values, its vision and goals. This in turn provides a baseline for core competencies, values and attributes that can include corporate learning development programs, position descriptions, succession planning etc. The framework can also align with higher council goals and orientate continuous improvement strategies.

The leadership frameworks used by some of the participating councils in this research are in Appendix B. They provide useful examples of the types of capability areas considered relevant to local government leadership.

A competency framework of this nature provides a way to create a leadership profile which can be used to design tools, programs and development plans. The articulation of preferred behaviours and the structure of performance reviews are regarded as beneficial flow-on effects from a framework. It is also noted that a competency framework also provides a way for employees to understand the shifts from management competency to leadership capability, and to align their own personal development with those shifts.

Not all councils utilise an agreed or set framework. It was noted by one council that having less structure with no corporate themes, competencies or acronyms, and no focus on policies and priorities, has worked well to open up opportunities for honest and open conversations around leadership on a more informal basis. This approach is regarded as leadership development on an individualised basis with a focus on personal growth.

2.1.9   Appreciation of learning styles

An understanding and appreciation of the fact that people learn differently was evident in all the council interviews. The leadership programs examined in this review offer a variety of learning styles to engage participants, including action learning, council projects, a mix of practical and theoretical approaches, workshops, competitions, online learning, individual and group practice, discursive, reflection and written outputs.

Across all the interviews, action learning emerged as a particularly popular and successful style of learning, indicating that a connection to a real-world context is an effective ingredient when developing the leadership capability of local government professionals.

In addition, tailoring a leadership program to the specific context of that council was regarded as highly important. Whilst interviewees utilised generic leadership theory and in some cases external providers, it was widely acknowledged that learning is made more meaningful by incorporating the real issues and context of the individual council:

Leadership is only as relevant as the environment within which you operate which means to try and take an off the shelf strategy or approach is false logic. (Interviewee)

Running programs for a cohort or group is considered an effective way to help people to learn from each other and provide co-support through the process. In addition, incorporating an element of self-reflection and the opportunity to review progress with a manager or mentor is also a valuable component for embedding a more personalised development plan that the individual can engage with and learn through.

2.1.10 Encouraging participation

> *Part of the culture is that we don't say 'this is mandatory' or 'that is mandatory'. We tend to use the word 'obligation' or 'responsibility'. (Interviewee)*

The council interviewees agreed that attendance on leadership programs needed to be encouraged and advocated for by the GM/CEO and senior management and positioned as an important element of an individual's role and contribution to the organisation.

If a council makes programs available to all who wish to attend, they can become costly. Some councils have merit-based selection processes using short lists and interviews, or nominations by managers.

A fully targeted needs-based approach, which meets the organisation's needs and not just the individual's, based on audits and customer feedback, could save money but is also very selective and potentially detracts from a whole-staff approach towards leadership development.

Some councils opt to position leadership programs as compulsory components of the role and leadership development of the targeted cohort. Making participation optional can mean people avoid programs out of fear, as one interviewee recounts:

> *One of the mistakes was making it optional – the moment (the program) meant facing difficult conversations or difficult realisations people avoided it, which is normal human behaviour. (Interviewee)*

The best outcome is if the program is well-regarded and people want to participate voluntarily as part of their remit and contribution to council. When councils have made participation in programs optional, staff have demonstrated an unspoken sense of obligation and/or personal responsibility to attend.

2.1.11 Smart resourcing

> *LG as a whole needs to be very smart and with our limited resources, we need to multi-task. (Interviewee)*

All interviewees agree that looking at the needs of an organisation as a whole, while working within a limited budget, is a challenge for leadership development initiatives, and that councils need to be clever with their use of resources.

Some of the suggestions for smart resourcing include:

- Having an overall budget for everyone, rather than an allocation per head, means that resources can be used in a way that is tailored towards cohorts.
- While external providers can deliver very effective programs, these can be costly and are not always tailored to reflect the culture of the council.
- Increasing in-house program development and delivery using simple inexpensive tools, and program input/mentoring from the executive can be an effective strategy. An additional benefit of this approach is the development of internal change and development agents as a permanent resource within the council.
- Joining forces on program development and delivery with other partner councils or neighbouring councils can achieve economies of scale.
- Pilots are good way to test the success of program before committing future spend.

Of ultimate importance for the sustainability and effectiveness of a program is obtaining the support and guidance of those who will lead and champion it from the outset:

> *I can't tell you how many conversations I've had with my peers et cetera in other organisations who have been set this challenge or this project to deliver this outcome, but it's evident within*

10 minutes of conversation that there's no belief again. So it's getting the right people on the bus and getting them in the right seats. You've got to find the people with the passion for it to lead it. That's critical to resourcing. (Interviewee)

1.4 Measuring progress

The area of measuring and evaluating the impact of programs was highlighted in the interviews as an important consideration for leadership development programs in terms of understanding their impact and assessing the returns on investment.

Measuring progress is continually highlighted as a guiding factor in the overall success of a leadership program, indicating its significance in good practice. While much work is being done by councils to demonstrate progress and impact of learning and development initiatives, it was commonly agreed by the interviewed councils that this can be a challenge, and all were keen to develop and improve in this area:

For us, the areas where I would absolutely like to improve is around the measurements around our program in every instance. So at the beginning how a participant enters into the program, what we're looking for, for those people to be more successful in their application than others. Then what is - what's really going to be the learning outcomes of the course, of the program. When are those learning outcomes achieved? How do we review them? How do we evaluate them? (Interviewee)

The contributing factors when measuring progress were articulated in the interviews as follows:

- an alignment to performance
- collecting feedback and data
- conducting evaluations
- consideration of returns on investment.

Figure 4: measuring progress as part of good-practice approach to leadership development

2.1.12 Aligned to performance

We've got good organisation data around our leadership standards. (Interviewee)

Setting a benchmark and having a clear and robust framework was considered to be a good way of aligning a leadership program to performance.

It was acknowledged that a leadership competency framework that is linked to the corporate plan and organisational values takes time to implement, but by utilising it consistently over a period of time, such a framework can provide a historical and useful picture of how the organisational culture is shifting.

Clear learning objectives need to be set at the beginning of a program to align leadership with performance and capability. These objectives can be used in conjunction with performance related indicators in personal development plans and wider organisational performance measures.

Leadership program participants from one of the interviewed councils undertake a self-assessment of their capability before, in the middle of, and after the program and they then look at these self-assessments to gauge how their thinking and behaviours have shifted:

> *I know it's not the most accurate measure in the world, but it's measureable. If you run on the basis that capability improvement directly relates to increased performance and you need a 14% capability increase to justify the program – we're running at nearly 30%. (Interviewee)*

2.1.13 Feedback and data

All of the councils regarded participant feedback as an essential component of measuring progress and developing leadership programs and opportunities for staff.

Program participant evaluations were seen as providing useful short-term data and measures while wider surveys were seen as a way to help set benchmarks that reflect the organisation as a whole. Feedback from individual work groups or departments can provide useful data sets:

> *So when we look at culture results of a team, we're seeing to a greater extent a reflection of the impact of the leader on those teams. (Interviewee)*

Surveys of organisational culture also provide data and longer-term measures of how programs are impacting the roles of developing leaders and the performances of their teams. Cultural surveys can take various forms, including: questionnaires which ask for opinion-based responses, interviews which are part of annual performance reviews, and engagement surveys that measure the impact of behavioural shifts on staff wellbeing.

The councils reported using analysis of training needs to help produce data and measure success. Tools such as the Human Synergistics Learning Styles Inventory (LSI) are utilised at the start and end of a program to measure the impact of participation in the program on capability and wellbeing.

Conversations are a valued method of gaining feedback on training and development needs. A desire to incorporate a wider data pool was also expressed:

> *Ultimately a lot of [evidence for what development is needed] is anecdotal but I'd like to be looking at changing that towards a more structured approach where we look at full training needs now, based on (wider) things such as audit reports, customer feedback and complaints, grievances, looking at our Learning & Development training requests, our conference requests. (Interviewee)*

2.1.14 Evaluation

> *What does success look like? How do we know we have it? How do we measure that? At this point, a lot of that information is anecdotal or qualitative rather than quantitative. (Interviewee)*

Participants said using feedback from programs was valued as part of shorter-term evaluations which examined whether the content was aligning well to the needs and development requirements of individuals.

The longer-term evaluation that includes reviewing the practices that have been improved across the organisation due to the improved skill sets of leaders is more of a challenge. Reasons given for this were that measuring soft skills is problematic, indicators of leadership growth can be intangible, and a program needs to have been running for a long period of time before start and finish comparisons can be made.

All of the councils interviewed are seeking to develop their longer-term evaluation methodologies. One work-in-progress project includes the development of a behavioural evaluation model that gauges improved leadership skills sets. Another council is considering using resident surveys to provide more data on the community leadership performance of staff.

One council uses individual and work group data sets to provide regular point-in-time evaluations of their competencies. With the use of learning tools, this council uses these evaluations to maintain a consistent development of those competencies, and to refine individuals' development plans in terms of their organisational roles and overall council progress:

> We've got good data in the first instance of the perceived competence – and I say perceived because it's the individuals opinion of themselves and the managers opinion of the individual – and there's a million things that can change in that environment. But as far as this sort of stuff goes I don't reckon there'd be many comparative evaluations out there that stack up as well. (Interviewee)

2.1.15 Return on investment

> In local government, we've got limitations on how we manage our business because of the environment we're in; the ability to increase expenditure and income and things like that are limited. So our avenue to make our business more effective is to look at internally how we deliver higher quality, better services, more effectively rather than say to raise rates. That's the investment as to why we do it. (Interviewee)

Measuring success 'in real terms' of return on investment (ROI) is a focus for councils. While career progression and individual performance capability is one important aspect of evaluation, being able to provide a business case for why it is worthwhile to invest in the leadership development of staff was considered to be a desirable outcome by all of the interviewees.

The ROI of leadership development programs is equated to the delivery of quality services to the community, although participants believed there was a lack of longer-term or new methods of evaluating this.

Using measurement tools (such as the LSI) is seen as one way of showing ROI in terms of leadership shifts and tangible changes in performance.

Other ROI indicators include retaining good and effective staff due to staff engagement, development and wellbeing needs being met through participation in leadership development programs. Even if staff end up leaving a council, the value in the longer-term of the investment in their career to the local government sector is also recognised:

> We are hoping and betting and investing that those people may either stay in the industry or come back to the industry at another point in time. (Interviewee)

3 Sharing information

The council interviewees shared a range of information on leadership development processes and indicated a variety of program offers that are available for different levels within their organisations. While specific, more advanced and/or formal programs are considered particularly important for senior or people managers, leadership development opportunities also exist for all levels of the organisation.

Self-awareness, mentoring and coaching, tailored programs and whole staff approaches emerge as particularly important components of leadership development programs.

Opportunities for staff at different levels to interact are considered important for networking, strengthening cultural values, building rapport and enhancing communication. Whether the program is for one group or for the whole organisation, tailoring the content to the needs and nuances of the organisation is linked to its ultimate success:

> *One of the great things our participants get out of the program is the uniqueness to our organisation. (Interviewee)*

The opportunity to spend time with senior managers as role models and mentors is highly regarded and cannot be outsourced to external providers.

All of the councils interviewed offer a suite of leadership programs and initiatives for their staff as part of their corporate training calendar. For the purposes of this report, one program has been selected from each council and summarised in Appendix C to provide a sample of different types of successful in-house leadership programs for local government.

3.1 Challenges

The interviewed councils identified different areas of challenge when designing and implementing leadership programs. The common challenge of evaluating and measuring success is presented in Section 2.3 as being a particularly pertinent consideration to good practice. Other areas of challenge included:

3.1.1 Effort
- It can take time to see results and this can be frustrating when there is a perceived lack of progress or improvement in the short term.
- Learning initiatives require constant implementation as new staff come on board.
- It is difficult to achieve economies of scale as a one-size-fits-all approach isn't appropriate.
- The process of agreeing on a vision for the organisation and defining leadership competencies that fit into this vision takes hard work, iterative discussions and time.

3.1.2 Staff engagement
- There are difficulties in engendering staff willingness, enthusiasm and camaraderie.
- Staff can be daunted by a new initiative and need to be able to see how a tool integrates with their own development.
- There are mixed levels of need and willingness throughout organisations – particularly at the senior level.
- There is a risk of a plateau effect when staff respond positively to a leadership initiative and are performing well. Not having a 'next step' can impact on individual drive and passion.
- There can be resistance to change brought about by a new leadership initiative or program.

- It can sometimes be difficult to engage more senior members of staff in changing leadership behaviours.
- There is a lack of understanding of the importance of the relationships between council staff and elected members

3.1.3   The leaders of leadership

- Coming up with new and different ideas can be a challenge for leadership teams.
- While there is a general acceptance that good leadership is needed, the process of achieving this does not always run smoothly.
- Leadership models are good for self-development, but leaders also need to be able to do business.
- Not all executive lead by example across the organisation and it can be difficult to address this.
- The egos of leadership teams can get in the way of purposeful resource sharing.
- Leaders can be more interested in highlighting their strengths and position than in exploring how they could be better leaders.

3.1.4   Catering for a diversity of needs

- The diversity of the workforce means that everyone has different leadership development needs.
- While identifying needs is seen as a strength of most councils, it is more challenging to identify what is needed to fill the gap between what is wanted and what currently exists.
- It is challenging for leaders to help their staff to develop leadership when they can be very different from each other. Leaders find it easier to focus on their own leadership development.
- While it is recognised that a council is a collective community resource, understanding how to tailor this resource to the different needs of the community is a complex leap.
- People who have been in the organisation a long time often have a resistance to change and may therefore have a need for a different type of conversation.
- Senior management are a mixed bag, not just in terms of competence, but also in terms of their desire and will to achieve outcomes.
- Mixed levels of need mean it is difficult to achieve some economies of scale or an efficient way to apply one size to all solutions.

3.1.5   Open communication

- More open communication is seen as imperative, but continues to be a testing area for most councils.
- Staff willingness and ability to ask the right questions in order to understand what is being developed and/or what is needed requires an openness to learning from colleagues and peers.
- Different teams and departments in a council (such as community service or engineering) can regard their leadership roles very differently, so achieving a common language that is relevant to all is a challenge.
- There is a lack of experience and practice in having good leadership conversations at every level.
- An organisation needs a level of cultural maturity before upfront authentic conversations can be had.

3.1.6   Managing talent

- There is a limit to available promotion opportunities or management positions, so managing the career goals of those who exceed performance expectations is difficult.

- Once staff have participated in a leadership program they can often find better jobs external to the organisation.
- Councils can be limited in what they can offer due to the classification of job roles.
- Achieving the leadership program outcome of motivated and highly talented staff members is not enough to sustain their commitment to the organisation.
- As capability grows, so does a desire for challenge.
- After the leadership program, there can be a lot of turnover where people leaving to pursue other opportunities, rendering return on investment an untenable business case.

3.2 Advice

The challenges identified were counterbalanced by a range of positive strategies and considerations for leadership programs.

In response to interview question 15 ('*What are the top 3 things you would advise councils to consider when designing or reviewing their leadership development offer to staff?*'), answers have been grouped according to three areas of advice:

- being strategic
- what works for design, content and delivery
- working resourcefully.

3.2.1   Being strategic (summary of responses):

Building a supportive and safe culture within the council will enable leadership programs to thrive.	There is no 'best leadership'; it is the right leadership in the right environment for the right people.	Agree on a constructive culture language within the organisation that is led through leadership of everyone.
Tackle en masse; don't make program optional as people may avoid it out of fear.	Communicate purpose and what the council is trying to achieve.	Develop culture and values and leadership framework and then align the programs to these.
Cannot be reactive; need to integrate leadership initiatives within workforce and succession planning strategies.	Align outcomes to planning of council. Look at corporate objectives and skills required to support a corporate plan.	A 'mature' culture (from an emotional awareness perspective) is required for initiatives such as a 360 degree feedback program.
Aim to become an emotionally mature organisation which can have upfront and honest conversations with staff.		

3.2.2   What works for design, content and delivery (summary of responses):

Conduct an assessment of a) what the organisational culture is and b) what you actually need.	Design a program that is unique to organisation – don't buy off-the-shelf.	Engage at a senior level and obtain passion, belief and commitment to achieve outcomes.

Seek out philosophies and approaches from outside of the organisation.	When designing look at what the individual needs are and align to your goals for leadership.	Have the top level living and breathing the leadership ethos before starting to roll it out to other staff.
Choose external providers with a demonstrated understanding of the importance of culture and excellence; their delivery has to be consistent with how the council operates.	Run programs together for different levels for learning opportunities provided by working together.	Have staff spend time with managers and senior executives and have role models within the organisation and build a rapport with them; this cannot be outsourced.
Include formal experiential-based learning – this is highly effective for leadership growth	Longer programs allow for conversations in between sessions, learning becomes more ingrained and more successful. Develop a training environment where staff are able to be promoted from within into leadership positions	Build internal capability to deliver; leadership requirements are more believable if they come from within the organisation than if they come from an external body.
Back-up program with continuum of learning to sustain the development and engagement of leaders.		

3.2.3   Working resourcefully (summary of responses):

If resources are low, some leadership initiative is better than none at all.	Don't underestimate existing council staff – their commitment, experience and willingness to pass on knowledge is a fantastic internal resource.	Avoid reinventing the wheel by sharing information with other councils and explore how things can be done better together.
With limited funds or budgets, choose core competencies around understanding of leadership, setting expectations, knowing and valuing the staff, giving feedback, rewarding good performance, managing poor performance.	Focusing on core competencies with every level of management can go a long way to developing leadership capacity throughout the organisation.	If you are working within L&D within a smaller council you have a great opportunity to get to know everyone. Use this to your advantage by aligning messages around leadership and following up with staff in terms of their behaviours.
Don't go for a gold package leadership program if unable to sustain this.	A highly constructive and engaged L&D team will make a little go a long way.	

3.3 Ideas and innovations

The interview process generated additional discussions with respondents on progressive approaches and perspectives on where council approaches to leadership could be developed. Examples include:

3.3.1 In-house customised methodologies

Councils seeking new and innovative ways of delivering effective leadership programs could consider a completely customised approach to development and learning methodologies.

One of the interviewed councils has developed an online organisational learning and development portal, a self-directed learning toolkit and resource, a competency framework and a cultural leadership survey. The application of this bespoke and structured methodology seeks to influence and align the attitudes, beliefs, values, ethics, behaviours and technical capabilities of staff and those in leadership positions with the council's strategic ambition.

Another interviewed council, in partnership with an external service provider, has developed and published a book for their leadership program participants. This published book contains program content and discussion prompts and invites each participant to co-author their own bespoke copy via their reflections and learning.

3.3.2 Staff wellbeing and the community

Some interviewees highlighted the connection between staff wellbeing and the welfare of the community. They saw this as being an important consideration for an evolving leadership approach that is committed to effective local government. As one interviewee said:

> We recognise that if our leaders are in a good space from a wellbeing point of view, then that will make a significant difference in regard to their impact on our staff and the community. (Interviewee)

Leadership development is therefore not only about skills, knowledge, experience and competencies, but also about development of the overall wellbeing of individuals. It recognises that if leaders are thriving, then this should make a positive difference to how they work with the community.

3.3.3 Partnerships and exchanges

One of the interviewed councils has an agreement with a university that recognises elements of their leadership programs as pathways to receiving credits towards a postgraduate leadership qualification. This provides an additional learning path for participants to engage with further leadership content aside from what the council offers.

Learning from peers within the sector as part of a leadership exchange program is an evolving area for leadership development in local government. While there are leadership initiatives that involve neighbouring and partnering councils, another idea is to explore the possibility of leadership staff participating in other successful council leadership programs in order to see what works and then incorporate good practice back into their own programs.

3.3.4 Diverse leaders

Good workforce succession planning needs to include leadership development opportunities for diverse employees. Considerations such as an ageing workforce, changing demographics and appreciation of cultural and gender diversity are being increasingly integrated into leadership content in order to retain, attract and develop a wide range of leaders.

Attracting professionals from other sectors into local government is regarded as a way of bringing fresh ideas in to councils around leadership development. It is recognised that there

opportunities exist for councils to ensure that local government is seen as an attractive profession and sector choice.

New ways of working and collaborating across departmental and organisational boundaries are providing new opportunities for integrating the skills and capabilities of diverse project teams into leadership programs and performance development frameworks.

3.3.5 Existing staff capital

Initiatives that involve tapping into the resources, experience and potential of existing staff is an area that councils are incorporating into their leadership development strategies. The depletion of government funding means that more innovative solutions to building capability to cope with the demands of leadership are needed. One way of doing this is to identify prospective leaders and maximise their willingness to contribute to the organisation in return for developing their potential. As one interviewee explains,

> To be sustainable we'll have to tap into the potential of our staff and the capital we've already got … we need to tap into our staff's discretionary effort and we'll need to find better ways to do things. (Interviewee)

Contextual considerations such as population growth, budget cuts and cross-collaborations is creating a need for building leadership across the whole organisation to retain experience, lessen the pressure on skills training of new staff, and develop the future leaders of the council.

Creating opportunities for leadership conversations at every level, regardless of role, was identified by one council as an effective way to engage staff with leadership capabilities across the organisation.

Another council has an internal reinforcing program in which examples of good leadership are showcased to all staff in order to support and engage emerging leaders in the organisation.

3.3.6 Strengthening sector capability

Strengthening sector capability is linked to an aspiration of replacing the view that local government has a 'dinosaur' way of thinking, with the view that it is a contemporary and credible sector. Councils are looking for ways to strengthen their leadership development offers and seek opportunities for their leadership programs to be well thought of by the private sector.

Another area of innovative thinking around local government leadership that emerged from the interviews was a shift of perspective from it being about building the capability of individual council to the wider view that is about strengthening the capability of the sector as a whole. As one interviewee explained:

> [Our view] of local government is that we are not in competition with each other and that we are an industry. While we are wanting to be the best local government that we can possibly be, we also have the opportunity to improve an industry and where those opportunities come up we should encourage these opportunities. (Interviewee)

In this way, retaining good leaders is not just about keeping an individual within a particular council; it is also about ensuring that their talents and expertise stay within local government at another council, or that they return to the sector in the future.

3.3.7 Charting success

One council suggested a different slant on measuring the success of their leadership development program. While a turnover measure has been an indicator of success in the

past (i.e. retaining good staff is a successful outcome of a leadership program), they are now exploring ways to measure progress should that staff member leave the organisation. As they explain:

> *We want to measure the success of our people, not just in regard to when they're with us, but when they leave us. One of the things we're working on is around creating an alumni to catch up with people and say, 'How successful have you been since you left the organisation? What impact did the organisation have on that success?' (Interviewee)*

Evaluating success in this way provides this council with a way to understand the legacy of their leadership development programs on a wider level. It also creates an avenue to keep in touch with talented past employees who may end up returning to council, or contributing to council outcomes in some other way.

The selection above provides a range of different ideas for improving aspects of leadership approaches and strategies. Additional perspectives from each interviewee are provided in Appendix D.

4 Conclusion

This report has been compiled in response to an identified area of importance and relevance for research in local government leadership practice. It is intended to encourage councils to reflect on and review existing leadership program offers and opportunities, assist councils in the development of new offers and provide discussion prompts for debates and dialogue about leadership in local government.

Through the information gathered via the interview process, this research has presented a range of themes and ideas on council approaches to leadership from good practice organisations within the sector.

Findings from the research establish a range of factors for councils to consider in the development of leadership programs. These factors are grouped into three key areas for consideration:

- an integral leadership ethos that is values based
- guiding elements to provide a support structure for the program
- the incorporation of measures to understand impacts and progress.

Additional material from the interviews that contribute to this research include:

- the challenges councils face in providing leadership development programs
- advice to councils about reviewing or developing leadership offers and opportunities for staff
- emerging areas of innovation and ideas for leadership programs for local government
- a sample of successful programs from across the participating councils.

The information contained within this report aims to assist councils in the review and development of their council leadership offer and provide discussion prompts for reflection and debate. Suggestions arising from this research are:

- There is no set formula for a successful council leadership program; the best programs are those that are tailored and contextual and that align to values and purpose.
- A leadership initiative requires the support and commitment of the council's GM/CEO in order to embed it across the organisation, and it requires a supporting structure or framework of reference to guide the content and learning
- To achieve a sustainable business case for a leadership program, gaining an understanding of impact and progress should be factored into the overall strategy.
- Councils share many common challenges in developing local government leadership programs. This indicates that there is an opportunity for local governments to share and explore strategies and solutions to work with and dilute these challenges.
- Councils across Australia are striving for leadership excellence and are open to sharing their successes with their peers. They are a resource whose advice and experience can be of use to other councils.
- The strategic purpose of council leadership programs is to develop individual and organisational capacity, and to enhance community services and progress local government as a sector.
- Innovations in local government leadership are emerging in different ways and are being sparked by new ways of thinking and working, championed by committed L&D individuals and enabled by executive teams with belief and vision.

4.1 Continuing research possibilities

Further research possibilities to inform the sector about ways to enhance leadership capability across local government through the development of programs, methodologies and frameworks may include:

- research to identify areas of importance for leadership development using an extensive survey of professionals working within local government across Australia to assist councils, providers and associations to provide appropriate program content
- research to identify areas of need in learning and development to assist councils, providers and associations to plan and network courses and programs in their regions
- further exploration of the similarities and differences between leadership programs that are offered for local government nationally and internationally to provide case studies and guidance on effective and contemporary leadership programs
- research on evaluation methodologies for leadership programs. This could include the development of a guiding evaluation methodology to be used by the sector when assessing return on investment for leadership programs.
- continuing research into the use of leadership capability frameworks as a guidance tool for the local government sector in the design of leadership programs and for use in staff performance reviews. This could include the development of a national capability framework that includes: leadership competencies informed by sector research; parallels with existing public sector and local government frameworks; and the development of behaviour descriptors for competencies and competency ranges to inform expectations of leadership at different levels.

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Appendix A   Interview questions

Council approaches to leadership: research questions

Council Name:
Location:
Number of staff:

1. How would you define 'leadership' and 'leadership development'?

2. What leadership development opportunities does council offer to staff?

3. Is this a 'whole staff' approach, or is it tailored to specific target groups (e.g. team leaders, executive team, emerging talent)?

4. How did/do you identify the need for leadership development? How is it decided who goes through the programs (e.g. nominated, self-selected)?

5. How often do these opportunities occur (annually, ad-hoc, as per a specific schedule)?

6. What, if any, are the theoretical frameworks that underpin the leadership programs that you offer?

7. How are the programs structured (day workshops, block mode, residentials)?

8. Who designs and delivers the programs?

9. How would you describe the learning style of the program (e.g. self-directed, didactic, action learning, theoretical, practical)?

10. What are the key areas of content that the program covers?

11. Are the program objectives aligned to a leadership competency framework or measurements for performance and/or development?

12. What practical resources are available for staff undertaking programs?

13. How do you evaluate the impact of the program on 'leadership'? For the individual? For the organisation?

14. What do you regard as the particularly important aspects of increasing leadership capacity in local government?

15. What are the top 3 things you would advise councils to consider when designing or reviewing their leadership development offer to staff?

Additional ad-hoc questions

What are the main challenges of designing leadership programs?

What would you like to learn from other councils?

Appendix B   Frameworks

B.1 Framework examples from City of Melville, and Maroondah Council

Skills

Leadership Competencies

Our Leadership Competencies were developed by a cross functional internal team and forms part of the Personal Development Plan process.

They apply to every member of the City of Melville and cover the key areas of strategy and planning, manage, governance, people and skills.
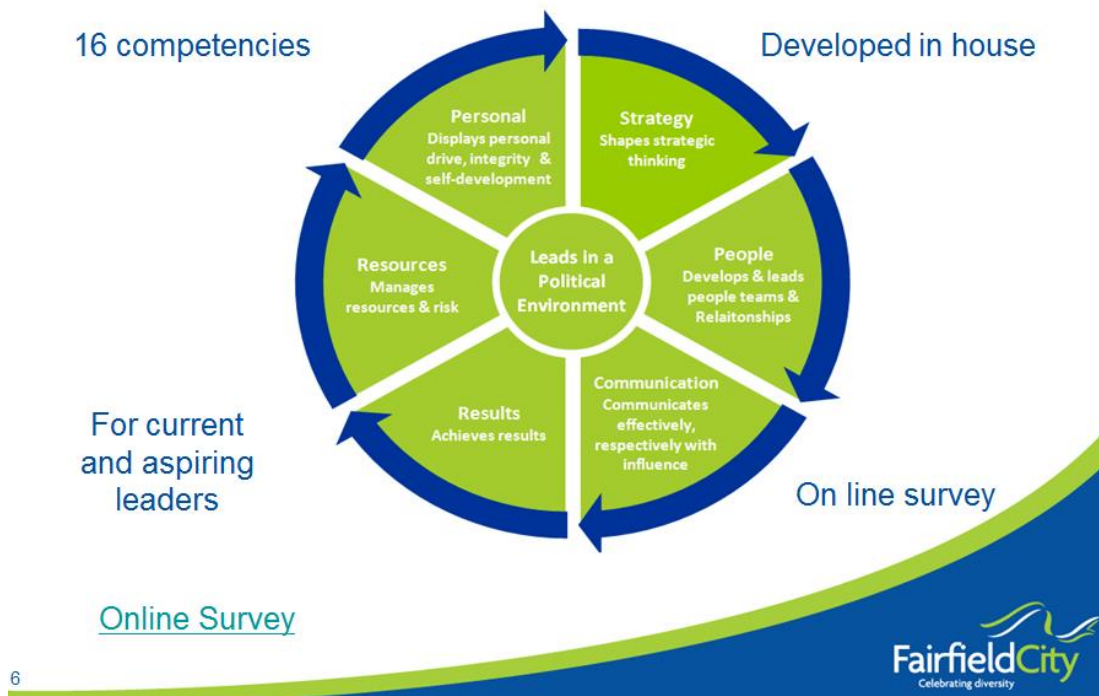

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK
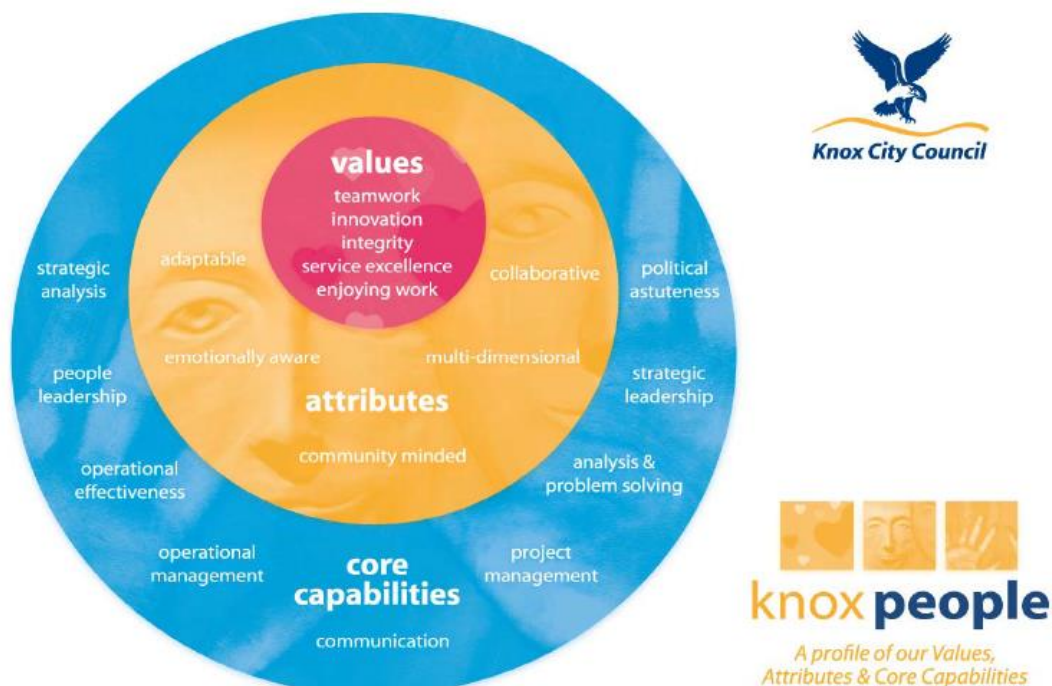
Leaders – Areas of development

B.2 Framework examples from Fairfield City Council, and Knox City Council

FCC Leadership Competencies

16 competencies

Developed in house

For current and aspiring leaders

On line survey

Online Survey

6

Appendix C   Program examples

A sample of the different types of leadership development programs included within the participating councils' corporate training offers. These have been selected for this research to reflect a variety of approaches. In addition, each council offers a range of other programs within its overall leadership package.

Fairfield City Council Emerging Leaders Program

"I guess we've probably taken a less conventional approach to leadership development in that it starts from the leadership ambition, that is what do we want leadership to look like in the context of Fairfield City Council"

- Competitive selection of top 20 employees
- Structured program curriculum over 18 months
- Each participant has an Individual Development Plan
- 6 x Self Directed 'Leadership competency' learning modules are completed online, focused on identified skills development of value aligned behaviours
- 4 x team orientated application workshops and 2 day strategic planning
- Attend at least 2 council meetings and committee meetings over the program period
- Group identify and work on a continous improvement project for council
- Each participants is allocated a Group Manager mentor that they meet with on a monthly basis
- Participants engage with the LGMA Management Challenge pre-challenge task, participation and support of subsequent emerging leader group

Melville City Council Mentoring Program

"It's an overall approach of building a supportive and safe culture where people can raise that I want to be a leader and my mentor can be my advocate"

- Undertaken in parallel to Council Leadership programs
- Participants are strongly encouraged to partner with someone from the organisation who will act as their mentor for the duration of a leadership program (the mentor must be someone who has already completed a leadership program)
- On completion of the program, the participant is then encouraged to become a mentor for a new participant on a leadership program
- In this way, an employee can be a mentor and mentee at the same time
- Mentors support their mentees development
- Mentor reflection booklet aids learning and development and provides a prompt for coaching conversations between mentor and mentee

Knox City Council Talent Management Program

"We've got the philosophy of leaders at all levels, and so our program content is appropriate leadership skills for that level of employee, which relate to those expectations of leadership"

- A pilot that is being trialled in 2014 for potential future leaders
- A 12 month program for 25 selected individuals from across the organisation
- The program emerged from workforce planning & labour shortage in terms of developing and "growing" in house capacity
- Succession and business continuity strategy identified the business critical roles in the organisation
- Managers and directors select possible successors and make an assessment of their skills and capability, and identify what development is needed to develop potential future candidates for those roles
- Program is designed to increase bench strengths and leadership that the organisation specifically requires

Randwick City Council Corporate Leadership Cup

"the program works as we have cross functional teams, the GM's involvement from the start and it provides a way for Councils to showcase their leadership talent to eachother"

- Annual leadership program as part of partnership with other urban and rural Councils to build and develop a workforce to meet current and future leadership needs, provide a cross-council platform to share information and prepare for the LGMA Management Challenge.
- Targets elements of competencies in all 7 categories of the Business Excellence Framework (BEF) and the 6 core capabilities of the ACELG Advancing Leadership Framework.
- A two day event where participants work in teams to complete a range of 'real world' local government leadership and business challenges, with a final winner being awarded the Cup
- Participants may self-nominate by stating why they would like to be considered for this program, or via nomination by their manager.
- Teams are prepared for the cup through a series of meetings and workshops facilitated by mentors (chosen by the GM from participants from the previous year)

Logan City Council Program Leaders Development Program

"local government will need to do more with less. Good leaders are likely to create environments where we get the most out of employees. Leaders who can project manage, adopt continuous improvement systems, manage change, and be innovative will help with productivity gains"

- 18 month development course for middle managers covering core responsibilities around leadership, including people skills, performance management, public speaking, innovation, change management and the LG context
- Mandatory attendance with a mix between theory and practical - aim of 50% action learning.
- Covers the core roles and responsibilities of Program Leaders as outlined in the Logan City Council Leadership and Performance Capability Framework
- Participants complete self assessment surveys before, during and after the progam. Results are kept anonymous
- At regular intervals, a discussion is held between the participant and their manager around the skills outlined in the Leadership and Performance Capability Framework. The aim of this is to support participants in applying learning on the job.

City of Salisbury Espresso Shot Program

"This structure works for our every day development. The Espresso Shot has become a banner of a program for anything to do with leadership for managers and leaders in the organisation. We stick those sessions to two-hour workshops doing action learning, and people love that"

- For all people managers and leaders in the organisation
- 2hr sessions designed as "short, sharp, pick me ups" throughout the year (@every 6-8 weeks)
- Sessions are both presentation/workshops
- Sessions are based around three streams of: Understanding Self, Understanding Others, Understanding Organisation
- Aligned with Salisbury leadership brand and principles
- Each session has specific learning outcomes connected to a key leadership principle of the organisation

Maroondah City Council Team Leader and Manager Development Program

"they all understand that the group they're sitting with in that room are experiencing the same leadership challenges no matter what expertise they have in their technical field"

- Team Leader development program and Manager development program are separate programs with different core components including emotional intelligence, continuous improvement, coaching, business planning and strategic influencing.
- Programs are experiential and include case study work
- The two cohorts come together during the program sessions.
- This face-to-face element increases opportunity to learn from eachother and support one another through the learning process
- Creates diversification of workforce and networking- people come together who wouldn't normally interact
- Developing rapport and inter-group bonding helps move away from silo's and hierarchy

City of Marion Equation program

"It's so different … they reflect on the conversations and we end up with people who've really got a lot out of the program and see them putting their hands up for other things and looking for new opportunities"

- Self leadership program for employees in a non-people management role
- A nine week program run annually
- Designed in response to employees looking for new opportunities and to build the capacity of future leaders in the organisation
- Modules are designed around 'conversations' with a different focus each week
- Sessions include presentations, activity and discussions, including understanding yourself, understanding your strengths, behaviours and beliefs
- Equation workbook and reflection log provided to each participant – bespoke publication written in collaboration with training partner
- In the final session managers meet with their staff and have a conversation about what they've learnt and what their staff see as opportunities for where they want to go
- participants undertake a 360 survey at the beginning of the program & again 12 months later

Appendix D   Further ideas

Further ideas on different aspects of local government leadership from each of the interviewees are included here:

D.1 Structure of development programs

There are really three components (to our approach). It's around clear expectations, which are really essential for any form of development with some objectives upfront. Some development support, whether it be training, coaching, feedback, performance appraisals. Some accountability is the third mechanism.

So if we've got expectations upfront, the development is really giving people the skills and the knowledge and hopefully some of the desire as well to perform to those expectations. Then the accountability is a conversation around those expectations and whether or not they're being met.

How we manage that is by setting the expectations through our leadership and performance capability framework. So we've got some very tangible behaviours expected of leaders, that forms the basis of our leadership program and in the performance review process where the first conversation is on where I fit in around here and how their program and how them personally, in their position, is contributing.

We've done a few internal surveys and it is very high on what – feeling like staff contribute to some sort of meaningful outcome is quite high on what they value.

Interviewee 1

D.2 Initial program design

It's important to really do an assessment of what your organisational culture is and what you actually need. It's great to get ideas from other organisations, but as long as people don't have the view that one size fits all. You also need to understand where the organisation is at in terms of maturity level before using tools that require a level of emotional awareness.

Also, an assessment of the level of commitment. Where is the team at? What is their view around their accountability and responsibility to their own development and being part of the leadership team. It's important to start at the top because the language and messages start at the top. Then you can't just stop at the top. Middle management is critical in terms of being a conduit between staff and the CEO.

Interviewee 2

D.3 Developing an in-house program

The biggest failing in development strategies in my experience over the last 20 years, has been that everybody's very good at identifying the needs but not good at identifying what you need to do to fill the gap between what you want and what you've got. So where we focussed was giving the answer to that question. We built our own tools because it was easier than trying to lock into a proprietary thing and we had enough capability within our group to do that and do that very well, and it made it relevant to us.

Leadership is only as relevant as the environment within which you operate, which means that to try and take an off-the-shelf strategy or approach – of itself is a false logic. All it'd be able to teach you is a type of leadership that has been seen to be successful, it doesn't necessarily correlate that it's going to be successful for us in the environment within which we work.

So there is an extensive amount of work in pulling the competencies together. We could have grabbed any number or any set of competencies we wanted to and yes, they look pretty good, but instead we crafted it around the leadership aspirations and wants of the people that actually are leading this organisation. Where do we want this to be? How do we want that characteristic of leadership to be displayed in this organisation? That's what we did so that's what we're chasing because it's about meeting what we require.

Interviewee 3

D.4 Aligning leadership initiatives with council outcomes

So people are doing their day-to-day role – how are we going to incorporate these leadership activities into what they're doing? How are we going to align, where we can, the major projects that are happening within the municipality?

An example of this is: one of the CEO's key performance indicators, which has come through the council plan, is engaging the community and engaging our workforce. That was one thing that cascaded down the line throughout all of the director's KPIs – how we're engaging our team to actually be successful in all the things that we're saying that we're going to do.

So that set about the need for our employee engagement survey (as part of the overall leadership strategy for council), because we currently don't measure ourselves on that. We have no benchmark in terms of how we're going year to year on any of that. That's our internal process that we put in place. Our external was a new community consultation process that our planning departments are now undertaking.

Interviewee 4

D.5 Leading by example

I think you can develop awesome leadership across your organisation and not spend any money, so look at the alternative ways to develop leadership and the highest impact return of investment would be one thing we've learnt. Things like the management behaviour are going to have far more impact than sending anyone to a 12-month course. So actually changing the management behaviour to thinking we'll make a difference, and you can do that with a little bit of external resources, in-house coaching, setting expectations, nipping it in the bud, all of that stuff.

The lead by example is a biggie – I know we all say it but it matters so much, having that top level engaged and living it and breathing it before you start rolling it out to other members of staff. We side-stepped that and had to revisit it.

Interviewee 5

D.6 Succession planning

Local government needs to set the benchmark bar as being very professional and also look at the long-term and not be reactive. I really believe succession planning is how we can increase leadership. It's too late when you have an aging workforce and someone's going to retire in three months and you start running around trying to find the next leader who will replace that person. I think it's a long-term project. That's why it's really important that we do our workforce planning and succession planning really well.

I feel really strongly about that because there are lots of aspiring leaders in local government but firstly are they being noticed and are they being asked the question, would you like to be a leader? Are we having crucial enough conversations with our people to see who they are? I really think we need to ask our people because depending what kind of manager you have – or a leader – it will depend on your growth unfortunately quite often.

So I think it's an overall holistic approach of building a supportive and safe culture where people can raise the fact that they want to be a leader.

Interviewee 6

D.7 Leadership in local government

Local government is complex. We're a moving beast. We're constantly changing and a lot of that change is out of our control. I find that the people who are in leadership positions in organisations in local government are people who adapt very well to that level of change.

Therefore, when it comes to leadership, in order for local government to continue to be strong or become stronger, we need a generation of people with strong technical experience in local government but also the ability to grasp changes quickly and do the best for the communities they represent, through leadership. I think leadership becomes a really important part then of those programs.

I think it's dangerous to talk about leadership as this really great thing that everyone should have without truly understanding why it's important. I think what people forget about local government is that it's the level of government with the most change and fluctuation, and that's – in those instances of change and fluctuation is when leadership becomes really, really important.

Interviewee 7

D.8 Looking ahead

Leadership development for us is in terms of not only what are the skills, knowledge, experience, competencies et cetera that are needed, not just now but into the future, but also about development of the wellbeing of the individual for us. We're starting to think about development being around holistic wellbeing of the individuals. We recognise that if our leaders are in a good space from a wellbeing point of view, then that will make a significant difference in regard to their impact on our staff in the community.

We're starting to have conversations now within the leadership group around making those decisions about the community, that you do so from a wellbeing point of view, not just a service delivery point of view. That's quite a different mindset. We see that as being the next phase or the next leap for us in regards to the culture of the organisation. It's about taking who we are and the culture of this organisation past the boundaries of the organisation.

Interviewee 8