
Challenge accepted: Women claiming leadership in higher education learning and teaching

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Abstract

A recognised challenge for women in higher education learning and teaching is of rightfully claiming leadership. Higher education processes for recruitment, promotion, awards, grants and fellowship are founded on an ability to document and convincingly present one's leadership contribution. The focus is on evidencing from a traditional, formal positional role view of leadership. However, the leadership contribution of women to learning and teaching often accords with a more distributed leadership approach. This may lead to women, unguided in how to evidence their leadership contribution and impact, being unable to self-acknowledge and claim their leadership contribution. The challenge for women is in claiming their leadership contribution and impact so as not to be disadvantaged in academic career progression and recognition. Drawing on a database of 15 years of research into a distributed leadership in learning and teaching, a Linguistics Inquiry approach is employed to explore reflections of female academics to their leadership contributions in learning and teaching. This reveals evidence-based strategies that have successfully supported a positive transition, by women, to self-acknowledge their leadership contributions. Many of these are resource intensive and difficult to sustain in the current higher education sector context of diminishing and reduced resources. To present a low-resource alternative, the six tenets of a Distributed Leadership approach structure a low-resource framework alternative that provides key conceptual prompts for presenting a leadership case. Vignettes of applying the framework in practice are provided to illustrate its transferability across a range of scenarios for women to rightfully claim their leadership contribution.

Practitioner Notes

1. Women academics are more proportionally represented at the lower and mid-career academic roles and in learning and teaching roles. Programs and strategies to support women in leadership have been resource intensive and achieved limited outcomes in terms of career progression.
2. The challenge identified for women is how to rightfully claim their leadership. There is a lack of guidance on how to self-identify the diverse leadership roles they, as academics focused on learning and teaching may be undertaking, but not recognising.
3. Our proposal is to move away from evidencing from a traditional, formal positional role view of leadership to one of evidencing with a distributed leadership approach. The basic tenets of distributed leadership have potential as a guidance mechanism for developing a case for leadership, that is simple in structure and economical in cost.
4. Based on the tenets of distributed leadership. the 6Es, we have designed a 6 step, low-resource framework – the *Claiming leadership with the 6E framework*. This framework enables women to systematically develop a robust, evidence-based case for claiming leadership with confidence, with the 6Es providing the structural lexicon on which to build a case.

Keywords

Women academics, Distributed leadership, University leadership, Tenets of leadership

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Introduction

Leadership in higher education is complex in several ways. It demonstrates a unique combination of positional leadership that incorporates managerial, strategic, and administrative functions and informal leadership that incorporates research, learning and teaching and engagement with external stakeholders (Morley, 2013). It includes a broad mix of tasks and responsibilities, including “management of staff strategy, finances and resources, operational planning, policy development, quality assurance processes, improving student outcomes, and encouraging community and the professions/industry” (Morley, 2013, p.9). It is a contested concept in academic settings in which there is “potential for ambiguity and conflict between professional and managerial roles” (Bolden et al., 2015, p.6).

A recognised challenge for women in higher education learning and teaching is of rightfully claiming leadership. Morley (2013) reports that “throughout the 27 countries in the EU, only 13% of all institutions in the higher education sector and 9% of universities awarding PhD degrees, were headed by women” (p.3). This is notable given that ten years earlier the United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation had published a good practice guidebook (UNESCO, 2002) aimed at assisting women to attain management positions in higher education.

In the UK only 25.5% of professors in 2017-8 were female (Johns, 2020). A study of women academics in the Hong Kong Academy found women to be in the minority of both formal (senior managerial), and distributed and informal leadership roles (such as professor and program leaders) (Aiston & Yang, 2017). This led to a claim that, while there is lack of data at present to generalise across Asian higher education, it does appear that women are similarly under-represented, indeed absent, in Asian higher education leadership

Similar findings have been found in the USA for “while women have made significant inroads into the senior leadership of American higher education, parity for women presidents¹ has yet to be reached” (Ballenger, 2010 p.1). Three cultural and structural barriers were identified as causal factors: lack of mentoring, the ‘good old boys’ network (p.16) and gender inequities.

In Australia, a study into gender segregation in the university workforce found that there were more women in administrative (positional) leadership roles of Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, than in functional (informal) leadership as Professors, concluding that “the senior ranks of Professor (Level E) and Associate Professor (Level D) are still the preserve of men” (Strachan et al., 2011, p 311). This led to the suggestion that “access to this relatively small administrative elite may be more open to women than the highest-level research positions” (p.311).

Some historical statistics indicate that change is slow. In the UK, in the 10 years between 2008 and 2018 the number of female vice chancellors increased from 12 to only 50 (Johns, 2020). In Australia in 2004 “28% (or 11 of 39) of Vice-Chancellors were women, 26% of Deputy Vice-Chancellors were women and 39% of senior administrative staff... were women. In late 2009, 18% (or 7 of 39) of Vice-Chancellors were women, 34% of Deputy Vice-Chancellors were women and just on 40% of senior administrative staff were women (Universities Australia, 2010, p.2). By 2017 “one in four Vice-Chancellors and one in six Chancellors are women. One in three Deputy Vice-Chancellors are women, but only one in seven DVC” (Corporates) (WomenCount, 2017, p.4). Over the period of 2015 – 2019 the percentage of senior academic women (level D & above) increased by an average

¹ The highest leadership position in higher education in the US

of 4 percentage points (Universities Australia, 2020) so that by 2019 there were “86% more men than women at associate professor and professor levels” (Devlin, 2021).

Women continue to be “concentrated in the lower academic ranks” (Blackmore, 2020, p.1334). In addition to family responsibilities, identified barriers include gender bias, men in gatekeeping roles and a “boys club”, and managerialism re-emphasising “the discrimination of women in working towards promotion” (Francis & Stulz, 2020, p. 49). Overall, however, there is limited empirical data to explain poorer outcomes of academic careers for women compared to men in Australia (Sharafizad et al., 2018)².

Acknowledgment of this gender inequality in leadership in higher education has led to many change proposals. Morley concluded that “it seems we require a re-invigorated and re-textured vocabulary and expanded lexicon to focus on leadership value and challenges that lie ahead for HE...” (2013, p.15). It is to the challenge of re-invigorating and re-texturing vocabulary and expanding the lexicon that this paper is focused. The authors explored the opportunity created for women as more ‘post heroic’ forms of leadership emerge in response to complexity. These theories include Complexity Leadership Theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007); Relational Leadership Theory (Fletcher, 2004); Shared Leadership Theory (Bolden et al., 2015; Pearce & Conger, 2003), and Distributed Leadership Theory (Bolden et al., 2012; Gronn, 2002; Jones et al., 2012a).

Distributed leadership, as a form of post-heroic leadership, eloquently provides the vocabulary and lexicon that allows formal leaders to recognise the leadership contribution of the many experts and the formal and informal leaders across higher education. The lexicon of distributed leadership provides the structure on which women in higher education learning and teaching can construct a case for their claim to leadership.

Framed by a synthesis of 20 funded studies undertaken by the authors and a distillation of data gathered over 15 years, the paper has three main aims. With a focus on the Australian higher education context, first, an overview of strategies that have been employed to support women and leadership is outlined. Next the challenge of women claiming leadership is posed. Third, to counter the historical resource-intensive strategies employed to support women in leadership, a case is presented as to how the tenets (6Es) of distributed leadership can provide the lexicon and a simple 6 step structure to assist women in developing a claim for leadership. These 6 steps are illustrated by authentic vignettes and supported with templates.

The context and culture

An overview of the context and academic career progression cultures of women academics is presented, from the broader macro, or national level, through to the individual or micro level.

National

At the turn of the century, the Australian Vice Chancellor’s Committee developed an action plan for women employed in Australian universities (AVCC, 1999). This action plan built upon the work of five universities of the Australian Technology Network [ATN] who, in 1996, established the Women’s Executive Development Program (WEXDEV). This program was designed to support women into (formal) senior management through two strategic foci – mainstream affirmative action into university strategic planning processes together with training programs and a mentoring scheme

² For a full account see Winchester and Browning (2015).

(ATN WEXDEV, 1999). The AVCC plan was followed by two more cycles of plans covering 2006-2010 and then 2011-2014 (Universities Australia, 2010).

The effect of these programs was mixed. While they did assist women to become competitive for promotion positions, there was little evidence of systematic change (Devos et al., 2003). On the one hand, many participants did report significant benefits arising from “creating spaces in which women can meet and discuss shared, and in some cases, different, concerns separate from and confidential to their immediate workplace” (p7). This included visibility at the university and, in some cases promotion. In one university for example, it was found that “women registered in the Women and Leadership program in 2002 were promoted at double the rate of all academic staff” (Browning, 2006, p.8). On the other hand, there was little evidence that the program had become aligned with institutional processes that would have enabled women to “contribute more systematically to university strategic goals in relation to research, and in regard to gender equity” (p.8).

These mixed findings led to a comprehensive study of academic women’s promotions in Australian universities (Winchester et al., 2006). The study found examples of positive policies, of progressive strategies, of formal processes together with examples of organisational level strategies available to dismantle cultural barriers that prevent women from achieving seniority in universities. However, it also found that “while equity policies and programmes have been in existence for 20 years, the number of women in senior academic positions in universities has not increased significantly to achieve a critical mass (p.507). Further analysis of women’s leadership development programs (Tessens, 2008) focused on the need to identify the type of philosophical approach underpinning programs: whether they were narrow – “fix the women” - or broad (change the organisational culture), developmental (long-term change) or training (short term upskilling of individual women) focussed; and whether they exhibited a cohort (targeted) or smorgasbord (broad sweeping) approach. The conclusion reached was that “without a clear strategy that includes the focus on organizational culture, programs will continue to help individual women fit into organizational cultures while leaving those cultures untouched” (p.338).

Institutional

At the level of the institution, universities and their teams, departments, schools and faculties have independently made choices about approaches to, and programs for, supporting the leadership development and recognition of women in learning and teaching. This ad hoc approach had provided flexibility to experiment and respond to contextual needs, but it also resulted in a lack of any consistency and, possibly, systematic equity across the sector in how women can claim leadership.

Examples of the diverse approaches and strategies adopted by universities as part of a distributed leadership approach have included: supporting leadership development and recognition through a Faculty Scholar program; providing mentorship via education champions, traditional leaders and/or central learning and teaching units; provision of formalised leadership training; encouragement of reflective practice, and creation of Communities of Practice (see Jones et al., 2012a, pp. 34-37). In addition to federal government funding to address national level strategies, these universities provided resources to fund the provision of these strategies.

At one university developmentally appropriate support (Harvey, 2013) was provided to emerging leaders of learning and teaching. Participants first self-identified their professional learning needs, followed by the offering of tailored literature, workshops and networking to meet these needs. Recognising that participants were hesitant in how to document their reflections, structured monthly reflection sessions were designed to provide one-on-one support for recording reflections about leadership.

More recently, several universities have supported academics to gain leadership recognition through international fellowship schemes (such as that offered through AdvanceHE). It has been posited that such schemes offer a better fit in recognising the collaborative, non-competitive approaches women often adopt when leading teaching (Beckmann, 2019). Such strategies rely on mentoring, an approach identified as facilitating career progression for women academics (Francis & Stulz, 2020).

These strategies, operating at the institutional level, have been successful - in terms of promotion and transition to formal hierarchical leadership roles (Fraser & Harvey, 2008) - but resource intensive. At an individual level, however, the impact on the women academics has been more nuanced, as is explored in the next section.

Individual

A literature-based search of individual academic responses to leadership provided a better appreciation of academics' attitudes to leadership practice. In practice, academics with a traditional work model of 40:40:20 (research: teaching: leadership and service) find they need to resort to a strategy of presenting "research upfront" (Bosanquet, 2021, p. 434), prioritising research before leadership and teaching. Probert (2013) concluded that "the 40:40:20 formula suggests, at least superficially, an equality of effort and standing between teaching and research. In reality, however, in the period following the creation of the unified national system, research became the dominant element in defining the status of both individual universities and individual academics" (p.8). Recent research has revealed a negative "gendered impact" on research outputs for women as a result of the pandemic (Shankar et al., 2021, p. 171). Accordingly, individual women seeking to claim leadership for learning and teaching may face additional challenges. Furthermore, while many promotions policies are standards-based, asserting promotion based on merit, some women find otherwise as in this case:

"I was first struck by the malleability of merit from my experience of sitting on university selection committees. On one not atypical occasion, several well-credentialed women were passed over in the compilation of a short list in favour of an objectively less distinguished male candidate who was strongly supported by the chair of the committee. Although the chair conceded that the candidate's record was less than outstanding, what the favoured candidate had to make up for his shortcomings, the chair assured us, was 'potential'" (Thornton 2013, 129).

From the overview of the national, institutional and individual strategies for supporting and recognising leadership in learning and teaching one common factor can be identified: developing and claiming leadership is resource intensive. This is exacerbated by the challenge in claiming leadership as it is 'relatively scarce, hard to measure; slow to gain or lose; and often decided on by insiders' (Blackmore et al., 2016). These findings also suggest that a broader focus on a less traditional heroic or leader-centric approach in higher education may create opportunities for women to claim their leadership contribution.

Identifying the challenge

In the context and culture of universities (as outlined above), support for development and recognition of leadership remains

"... *ad hoc* or absent altogether in any systematic sense. Responsibility for developing the knowledge, skills and capabilities necessary to effectively lead learning and teaching is generally left to the individual, and largely gained 'on the job' and developed through experience. Formal professional development programs, where they are provided, often focus on either learning and teaching

practice, or leadership and management development more generally, with the latter targeting staff already in formal positions of management responsibility.” (Bosanquet et al., 2008, p.3).

Given that women are more proportionally represented at the lower and mid-career academic roles and that women are more likely to have heavy teaching loads and are therefore “more visible than men in teaching and student support roles” (Beckmann, 2019, p.56), there is a particular need to support these women with their career progression. While mid-career academics recognise the constraint of lack of leadership opportunities that they can claim to progress their careers (Allen et al., 2021, Gibbs et al., 2009), we suggest that a principal reasons for this is a lack of guidance on how to self-identify the diverse leadership roles they, as academics focused on learning and teaching may be undertaking, but not recognising.

The challenge identified for women is how to claim their leadership, how to convincingly present their leadership contribution for processes associated with recruitment, promotion, awards, grants and fellowship. Our proposal is to move away from evidencing from a traditional, formal positional role view of leadership to one of evidencing with a distributed leadership approach. The basic tenets of distributed leadership have potential as a guidance mechanism for developing a case for leadership that is simple in structure and economical in cost. Guided by the tenets for how to evidence women’s leadership contribution and impact, they provide a lexicon for structuring a case whereby academics can systematically self-acknowledge and rightfully claim their leadership contribution for career progression and recognition.

Methodology

Reflection is the chosen research methodology (Fook, 2011). This approach is founded on systematic enquiry, aligned with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) (Daniel & Harland, 2018) and structured by Brookfield’s (2017) multiple lenses of reflection. These lenses include scholarly research, the reflections of peers, and autobiographical reflections or field notes. By using multiple sources, we are able to triangulate our data and this can contribute to the robustness of the research by substantiating findings (Daniel & Harland, 2018). Human ethics approval was granted for all data collected.

The first step in our reflective method was to explore the impact of leadership programs and outcomes on individual women, the transcriptions of the supported reflection sessions (undertaken to support leadership development as part of the emerging leaders of learning and teaching program mentioned in the Institutional section) were revisited. This provided rich text-based data upon which to analyse the reflective texts of four women academics using LIWC (Linguistics Inquiry and Word Count) (Pennebaker et al., 2015). LIWC is a computer-based text analysis software that allows the study of “various emotional, cognitive, and structural components present in individual’s verbal and written speech samples” (p. 1).

The reflective transcripts of four women academics from their first and last structured reflection sessions were analysed using the a priori dictionaries of LIWC to undergo “closed vocabulary text mining” (Hickman et al., 2020, p.12) which categorises text for drives, emotions, and processes. The analysed text revealed a similar change for all four academics over time, namely that affective processes decreased from time 1 (the first session) to time 2 (the last session, a duration of 12 months), that is, there were fewer incidences of emotive language in the text by time 2 (see Table 1). A deeper mining of this category shows that it was the text relating to positive emotions that reduced over time.

At Time 1 the reflectors used emotive words to describe the start of their leadership journey as interesting, exciting, and positive. By Time 2, they are talking about being uncomfortable, struggling, a challenge.

One other category that changed was the cognitive category of “tentative”, with all four academics speaking less tentatively over time. At Time 1 tentative words included probably, maybe, sometimes, quite confused, might and perhaps. By Time 2 they used fewer speculative words when discussing their leadership journey.

These results have been interpreted to indicate that, with developmentally appropriate support over time, women academics can develop stronger convictions when verbalising reflections on their leadership. They were developing confidence about leadership. The juxtaposition with the findings is that, over time, they were also less positive about leadership.

Table 1.

Reflecting on leadership - words by category at times 1 and 2.

Academic	Affect T1	Affect T2	Posemo T1	Posemo T2	Tentative T1	Tentative T 2
Ashley	3.86	3.62	3.37	3.28	4.37	3.76
Kym	3.70	3.58	2.82	2.63	3.73	3.50
Alex	4.50	3.51	3.59	2.42	3.40	3.03
Kalani	3.52	3.00	3.14	2.68	4.54	3.74

Step two was to draw upon the authors’ 15 years of research into distributed leadership in learning and teaching in Australian higher education and the multiple empirical research outputs that included project reports (from over 20 funded distributed leadership projects, see Harvey & Jones, 2021 for details), a national survey (n=110), and over 21 peer-reviewed publications (n=21). The lens of our peers was provided through first-person data including transcripts of academics reflecting on leadership (n=4), and field notes or diaries of academics leading distributed leadership projects (n=4). The autobiographical lens drew on the authors’ systematic documentation of reflective notes over 15 years.

Meeting the challenge: Women claiming leadership through a distributed leadership approach

The theory of distributed leadership

Distributed leadership is posited as an approach that can provide a structure for claiming leadership. Theorising distributed leadership has been complex and challenging as it is based on multiple foundational concepts and assumptions. An important step in theory building is to clearly define key concepts and articulate the underlying assumptions on which the theory is founded in order to avoid “conceptual confusion” (Harris & Spillane, 2008 p.28). The underpinning assumptions need to be “tested for their validity” and “critically interrogated” (Kreber, 2004, p.43). This was achieved by interrogating the existing research and theories to “enfold” the literature (Eisenhardt, 1989), and to undertake process and premise reflection in over 20 funded research projects using Distributed Leadership (see Harvey & Jones, 2021).

The resultant, substantiated assumptions, our taken for granted truths, are that distributed leadership:

- acknowledges that all individuals have strengths to contribute (Harvey, 2014)
- acknowledges and involves traditional hierarchical leaders (Jones, Harvey et al., 2014).
- assumes that team-work is collaborative and democratic (Jones et al., 2012a)
- assumes that leadership is distributed, referring to multiple people across multiple disciplines and hierarchical levels of an organisation (Jones & Harvey, 2017a)
- is reflective and therefore inherently flexible in critiquing and responding to contextual needs (Jones et al., 2011)
- is action and goal oriented, aligning best with Action Research (Harvey & Jones, 2021)
- offers a good fit with the organisational culture of universities (Jones, 2017; Jones & Harvey, 2017b).

By declaring assumptions practitioners have a working epistemology and can start with a shared common understanding of this leadership approach. The initial description of the concept of distributed leadership enfolded these theoretical assumptions describing it as:

“... a leadership approach in which individuals who trust and respect each other’s contributions, collaborate together to achieve identified goals. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across an institution. It is an approach in which reflective practice is an integral part enabling action to be critiqued, challenged and developed through cycles of planning, action, reflection and assessment and re-planning. It happens most effectively when people at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular area of expertise.” (Jones, Hadgraft et al., 2014, p. 10).

In this paper distributed leadership is defined as an approach that is a flexible, multi-level and an iterative reflective process in which individuals who trust and respect each other’s expertise collaborate to take responsibility for leading action for change while growing the capacity of the group. Distributed leadership is achieved when the six tenets, referred to as the 6Es, of the conceptual model are practiced.

The 6Es of distributed leadership

The 6E conceptual model of distributed leadership (Jones, Hadgraft et al., 2014) is founded on six key tenets. The tenets were established through a multi-phase and rigorous research process.

An initial project identified the synergies of national projects that had used a distributed leadership approach, described distributed leadership and developed the Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT) (Jones, et al., 2011). Next an audit was undertaken of four pilot universities, who had completed national distributed leadership projects, to assess their processes against the criteria, dimensions and values of distributed leadership using the Action Self-Enabling Reflective Tool or ASERT. The findings of the audit informed the development of an Australasian survey with questions mapped to the ASERT. Survey respondents (n=110) represented 47 institutions. The data derived from the survey were coded, analysed and interpreted to derive six tenets of distributed leadership. Survey items that were positively correlated with using a distributed leadership approach informed the developing tenets (examples in Table 2).

A summary reflection on the survey results by the project team concluded,

“... distributed leadership needs to be seen as an umbrella term that includes the **engagement** of a range of people in action to **enable** the dimension and values of distributed leadership to be **evidenced** through the **enactment** of a range of activities that can then be **evaluated** for good practice.” (Jones et al., 2012b, p.11)

This reflection was the genesis of the six tenets of Engage, Enable, Enact, Encourage, Evaluate and Emergent (as described in Table 2). These tenets provide the principles and guidance by which to practice distributed leadership. We now extend the application of the 6Es as providing a structure for women academics who are developing their case as leaders in higher education.

Claiming leadership for learning and teaching with the 6Es

Women in higher education lead. There is a trend that these women, as senior leaders, lead in teaching and learning or engagement roles (Moodley & Toni, 2017), that is, women academics are over-represented in teaching (Winchester & Browning, 2015).

Women are less likely to apply for promotion as they lack confidence in their academic work (Sharafizad, 2021). They are also less likely to be familiar with the criteria for promotion, finding them unclear and ambiguous (Murphy et al., 2021). The challenge identified is that women need to construct a case to evidence their leadership in learning and teaching when applying for jobs, promotions, fellowships and awards. This challenge can result in women academics deferring (Hardy et al., 2016), even dismissing, developing an application for career progression.

Participants in our research projects (previously cited in the Methodology section) attest to this with Ashley saying “... I have never had any inclination towards seeking leadership roles as such” and “the ‘leadership’ aspect... was for much of the time the more ‘challenging aspect for me’”. Kym talks about “Struggling with understanding my role re leadership, as I had no formal leadership role in my Dept, and did not see myself as being particularly charismatic” and reiterates with “Still cannot see own role as leader vis a vis own dept colleagues ie feel lacking in authority.”

Existing schemes that provide scaffolded support for women to claim leadership in higher education can also be resource intensive for the women themselves. Escalating workloads for women academics exacerbate demands on time (and other resources) needed to apply for promotion. Women academics reflect that meeting the requirements of promotion, including governance and leadership, is “difficult to achieve” (Francis & Stulz, 2020, p.53).

Researchers have offered suggestions for facilitators that would support women’s career progression, for example, through policy, recognition schemes and mentoring to name a few (Allen et al., 2021). Acknowledging the limitations of these, we argue that application of the 6Es of distributed leadership can offer the structure and guidance for developing a strong case for leadership that is not resource intensive.

Table 2.

The six tenets of distributed leadership (adapted from Jones, Hadgraft, et al., 2014).

Tenet	Descriptor	A distributed leadership approach was statistically positively correlated with the following national survey items (item number in brackets)
Engage <i>with</i>	formal and informal leaders from multiple levels and disciplines contributing diverse expertise while building leadership capacity	Involved academics or professional staff responsible for learning and teaching delivery (10.3) Between academics and professional staff (12.3)
Enable <i>through</i>	a context and culture of respect, trust and collaborative relationships achieving change	Collaboration increased over the life of the initiative (13.1)
Enact <i>via</i>	offering support, systems and processes that encourage the people to be involved	Those involved in design of the initiative were also responsible for implementation (11.1) By holding formal meetings (12.2) Facilitation was provided for collective activities (14.3) Participation in this initiative formally acknowledged in work-plans (15.1) Participation in this initiative officially recognised for career development purposes (15.2) Finance (either internal or external) allocated to enable participation in this project (15.3)
Encourage <i>with</i>	Resourcing of, and opportunities for, shared decision-making, recognition of contributions to leadership, developmentally appropriate professional and social learning, and networking.	Decisions regarding the initiative were shared between participants and formal leaders (9.3) Responsibility for the successful outcome of the initiative was shared (11.3) Formal leaders were provided training in distributed leadership (14.1) Through communities of practice (12.2) By other networking opportunities (12.4) Mentoring was available for participants in the initiative (14.2)
Evaluate <i>by</i>	evidence and examples of developed leadership capacity	The initiative built leadership capacity for learning and teaching (16.1) Collaboration was sustained (13.2)
Emergent <i>through</i>	iterative cycles of reflection and Action Research activity	Participation in this initiative increased engagement in learning and teaching initiatives (16.2)

Table 3.

Template - Claiming leadership with the 6E framework generic prompts

Reflecting on your role as a leader of learning and teaching, insert your response to the stem question of “How did you...?”

Tenet 1 ENGAGE	Tenet 2 ENABLE	Tenet 3 ENACT	Tenet 4 ENCOURAGE	Tenet 5 EVALUATE	Tenet 6 EMERGENT
Academic colleagues	<i>...achieve a mutual agreement* to underpin joint L&T initiatives?*</i>	<i>...develop and enact processes and systems to support collaborative initiatives?</i>	<i>... build and maintain collaborative and collegial relationships?</i>	<i>... plan to assess your impact of realising collaboration?</i>	<i>... encourage reflective practice and resulting actions in any collaborative initiatives?</i>
Professional colleagues	<i>... ensure professional colleagues were included in a mutual agreement that underpinned joint L&T initiatives?</i>	<i>... ensure that accurate information was provided to professional colleagues responsible for reporting on L&T quality?</i>	<i>... ensure all relevant professional colleagues were included in decision making related to L&T initiatives?</i>	<i>... plan to assess the impact of including relevant professional colleagues in L&T initiatives?</i>	<i>... encourage reflective practice and actions between academics and professional staff?</i>
Students	<i>... involve relevant students in L&T initiatives?</i>	<i>... ensure processes and systems were developed to enable student engagement in L&T initiatives?</i>	<i>...provide support to students to partner with academic and professional colleagues in an L&T initiative?</i>	<i>... plan to assess your impact in including students in collaborative initiatives?</i>	<i>... encourage reflective practice between students and staff?</i>
Formal Leaders	<i>... ensure the L&T initiative had support from relevant formal leaders?</i>	<i>... develop processes and systems to ensure your initiative accorded with formal expectations eg quality reporting, timely completion, within budget?</i>	<i>... actively engage formal leaders in the L&T initiative?</i>	<i>... plan to assess collaborative engagement of formal leaders?</i>	<i>... encourage formal leaders to contribute to a reflective approach for this initiative?</i>
External Stakeholders other university partners	<i>... ensure the L&T initiative had agreements* for collaborative support from relevant external stakeholders and/or university partners?</i>	<i>... develop processes and systems that promoted external stakeholder/ partner engagement?</i>	<i>... contribute to and encourage external stakeholder / partner engagement?</i>	<i>... plan to assess the engagement of all external stakeholders/ partners?</i>	<i>... encourage stakeholders and partners to engage in a reflective approach for this initiative?</i>

*A mutual agreement is best documented and could formally be a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Terms of Reference, a Mission Statement, and Action Plan or even minutes from meetings. Informally an agreement may be captured in email correspondence or other suitable means.

**The term “initiative” is generic for any L&T activity or project

Any academic applying for promotion, new positions, fellowships and grants needs to present a case for their leadership. A recent job advertised online (ISSOTL, 2021) for a senior learning and teaching position requested that in addition to a resume and teaching philosophy statement that the applicant submits a “leadership statement” and “should discuss 1) what core values define your approach to leadership of people, and of programs and 2) how would these values be specifically brought to bear in leading the advancement of teaching and learning and furthering its mission?”. The recruitment notice concluded that applicants need “to be as specific and concrete as possible in any examples they provide.” Adopting a distributed leadership approach in your practice can provide a clear case for leadership through specific and concrete evidence (Jones, in press).

The 6E steps for building a case for leadership

Each of the 6E tenets of distributed leadership provides a prompt for developing a claim of leadership. Before reflecting on each of the tenets, a clear articulation of one’s current or future role is needed. Depending on the application, a woman may address all of the six tenets or focus on one or two. Completing the template (provided as Appendix A) can be a good start to the process. The template can be completed as an individual self-assessment task, as a collaborative peer review activity or as part of a more structured and formalised workshop. A completed template will provide the evidence that can be woven through the narrative of a case for leadership. This section also provides authentic vignettes, derived from the research data to illustrate each tenet. Names in the vignettes are all pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

1. Engage with

Reflect on all the people one engages with as a leader of learning and teaching. Identify both formal and informal leaders, their traditional hierarchical level and their disciplines. List these people in the first column of the template, one per row (Appendix A).

Alex, Faculty of Arts

Alex would list: Head of Department, all teaching colleagues in her department, and the central learning and teaching unit. For each person listed by row, examples will need to be provided of Enable, Enact, Encourage, Evaluate and Emergent as steps 2-6. Table 3 also provides generic prompts to assist in completing the template for each of the 6Es.

Alex, and her Head of Department, wanted to ensure that assessment tasks in her department were designed to be standards-based. She invited all teaching colleagues to share their subject outlines and reviewed these by creating a matrix of assessment type and constructive alignment. With subject leaders she reviewed all subject outlines and organised structured workshops, with the central learning and teaching unit, to facilitate this. All subjects in the department were redesigned.

On reflecting on the engagement achieved, Alex comments:

During the project leadership has been distributed to such an extent that most people in the department have now ‘forgotten’ that it was the project that began the process of change. Many of the practices originally introduced through literature, reflection and training have now become taken-for-granted aspects of everyday work practices. I would conjecture that this is to the extent that most staff members would consider that they ‘own’ these new practices themselves rather than attribute them to any other source.

2. Enable through

Reflect on how one has cultivated a context and culture of respect, trust and collaborative relationships. For each name (listed in column 1) provide an example of what actions taken as a leader to achieve a collaborative culture. These examples need to be specific and concrete. Some examples that Ashley could list are provided at the end of the vignette.

Ashley, Faculty of Science

Ashley was concerned that students in her subject’s program of study were being over-assessed. Rather than challenge colleagues who were over-assessing, she created a colour coded map of assessment tasks across the program and used this as a respectful discussion starter with departmental colleagues who had teaching responsibilities. After discussion with her head of department she convened a whole of department forum to workshop solutions to over-assessment. A group of students were part of the forum participants. The outcome was a redesigned curriculum across the program that also had a positive impact on the associated professional accreditation body. When Ashley presented this case in an application she was promoted to Senior Lecturer.

On reflection, Ashley stated that the

... unprecedented collegiality and enthusiastic participation of colleagues, lead to more than usual fruitful discussions and actions. We believe that this collegial approach has been very successful. Using our individual strengths, we have achieved outcomes in both the professional and personal domains.

Tenet 1 ENGAGE	Tenet 2 ENABLE through Collaboration & trust
Head of Department	Meet with Head of Department (HOD), a traditional hierarchical leader, to gain support for the assessment project. Invite HOD to all activities and keep updated on all progress.
Teaching colleagues	Share map summarising all departmental assessment tasks across the program. Initiative respectful and informal conversations about assessment. Invite all colleagues to the assessment forum.
Students	Invite a group of students to the assessment forum. Include an agenda item that provides the student voice. Include students in all group discussions at the forum.

3. Enact via

To enact distributed leadership support, systems and processes need to be offered that encourage people to be involved. Specific examples include meetings and collective activities.

Kalani, Faculty of Arts

When starting to lead and work with her department on curriculum renewal, Kalani immediately realised the need for support and processes to involve people.

Whole staff involvement with the project was an important element of our leadership strategies. In place of a single orientation session, it was decided that regular segments in monthly staff meetings was a better way to keep staff involved and informed. It was our idea to take the staff along with us on this discovery process. Therefore, at monthly staff meetings where we had no particular presentation to give, we still requested time to keep staff up to date with what was happening in the project or give some general feedback.

Her approach was “not a top-down approach” but “conducted in a spirit of collegial support and were always friendly in nature.” At times the role became one of a mentor. Kalani concluded that “a distributive leadership model can allow an institution to utilize a greater range of the talents that are held by individuals within that institution than more top-down models do.”

Tenet 1 ENGAGE	Tenet 2 ENACT via
Teaching colleagues	Agenda item at the departmental monthly meetings, act as a mentor to some colleagues, acknowledged that there was no one expert but that everyone contributed to the curriculum renewal.

4. Encourage with

A distributed leadership approach is encouraged with resourcing and opportunities for shared decision-making. Resourcing can be in the form of recognition of contributions to leadership, developmentally appropriate professional and social learning, and networking events.

Kym, Faculty of Law

Kym was encouraged to develop her distributed leadership capabilities through a university wide project that provided resourcing for her personalised and structured reflection sessions, tailored workshops and learning opportunities. She was then able to encourage her disciplinary colleagues:

Fabulous breakthrough! Grasped for the first time how leadership can work when not positional. Once I understood that modelling, influencing, working with colleagues in my own units, influencing students through teaching, influencing peers through conference work and publications, are all forms of leadership, I was on solid ground. I suddenly grasped the notion of leading from behind/within, not having to lead from the front (positional).

In addition to the realisation that she needed to encourage her colleagues, her Head of Department in turn recognised her contributions to leadership and with the Vice Chancellor invited her to provide the Occasional Address at graduation, where she chose to speak on leadership and teaching.

Great experience for me in researching and writing the speech. I think being invited enhanced my credibility a lot in eyes of Law colleagues. Now one month later I have been appointed Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching).... My experience over the last 2 years in [leading assessment], both working in a team with lots of support and more experienced people to learn from, and also reflecting over a sustained period on my own developing capabilities as a leader, meant that I felt confident that I could take on this role and do a good job of it.

Tenet 1 ENGAGE	Tenet 2 ENCOURAGE with
Head of Department	Meetings about assessment redesign, and accepting invitation to present Graduation Address, and appointment as Associate Dean.
Teaching colleagues and disciplinary peers	Collaboration on redesigning assessment tasks, share good practice through SOTL conference presentations and papers, role modelling SOTL activity.

5. Evaluate by

When developing a case for leadership it is imperative that women can evidence impact, including the development of leadership capacity. A guiding rule is to “build in” (Wadsworth, 2010) evaluation into all leadership activities and document all outcomes and impact. There is a plethora of approaches to evaluation and women need to select an approach that offers the best fit for their context.

Leaders of national learning and teaching projects (authors of this paper)

When co-leading national projects on learning and teaching, detailed evaluation frameworks were co-designed at the conception of any project. Co-design engaged project “leaders” and managers, team members, external evaluators and stakeholders. This early planning ensured that evaluation data addressed the intended project outcomes and impact, and was collected on a cyclic basis.

Examples of data collected include transcriptions of: supported reflection sessions and focus groups; reflective field notes of workshops, communities of practice and meetings; institutional and national surveys; meetings minutes; university and national project reports; working papers and email communications. The data allowed for ongoing research and related outputs such as peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters and other publications. The data and outputs were then claimed by the authors, aligned to the tenet of evaluate, when they (successfully) applied for promotion, awards, fellowships and grants (see Jones, in press).

6. Emergent through

Leadership does not often occur as a single activity at one point in time. It emerges through iterative cycles of reflection and activity. Promotions committees and recruitment panels want to be assured that no matter what one has already led and achieved in learning and teaching, clear plans for future leadership activity can be articulated.

The academics of the vignettes realised this as they each had plans for ongoing reflection and activity. When asked about ongoing plans Kym was able to provide significant detail about forming and chairing a Learning and Teaching committee,

... implementing new assessment policy, including setting transition goals, and organising professional learning (PD) to support the process... I have implemented Dean's teaching awards, ...arranged 3 guest speakers on L&T matters, who are experts on curriculum design, critical thinking, and online teaching and learning. I plan to hold a ... retreat on L&T matters. I have funded a number of small (\$5000) grant projects to research various aspects of L&T from my budget as Assoc Dean.

Conclusion

Women academics are not proportionally represented in leadership roles in higher education. There are a multitude of reasons for this. We have focussed on a reticence to claim leadership. This reticence can stem from a limited conceptual and theoretical understanding of leadership, and a lack of confidence in identifying their leadership roles. Programs to support women in leadership have had some limited impact on women gaining formal leadership positions but are resource intensive to maintain.

Women in higher education lead, especially in learning and teaching. It is time for women academics to accept the challenge – to rightfully claim their leadership. In adopting a distributed leadership approach, women academics have “Changed perception of what leadership is: from a dominant

authoritative role to that of a collaborative, collegial mentorship. Leadership can occur at all levels of hierarchy. Leadership could even be a simple planting of ideas”. With this realisation, “The breadth of what leadership actually entails has become clearer” (Ashley).

The theoretical tenets of distributed leadership, the 6Es, are expanding both conceptualisation and language around leadership. Based on the 6Es, we have designed a 6 step, low-resource framework – the *Claiming leadership with the 6E framework* (Table 3). This framework enables women to systematically develop a robust, evidence-based case for claiming leadership with confidence, with the 6Es providing the structural lexicon on which to build a case.

While the initial context has been focussed on the Australian context, given that the challenge of women academics claiming leadership is a global phenomenon, the application of the 6E framework has potential to extend across the broader international context, and to include all genders. Initial explorations (Jones, in press) demonstrate how the 6E steps can be used by women academics to demonstrate leadership contributions in learning and teaching. The framework offers transferability to research and engagement roles, as well as to contexts other than higher education and we make a call for those outside of higher education to test its’ transferability as an effective strategy for accepting the challenge and claiming (distributed) leadership.

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