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DIPLOMARBEIT

Learning and Teaching Leadership

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der Technischen Universität Wien

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ABSTRACT

In 2006 the Charles Darwin University conducted a leadership development project for rural and remote vocational education managers. The aim of this project was that the VTE managers become strategic change agents for CDU within their remote localities and communities. The milestones were a facilitated skills audit conducted on the group, a facilitated residential at Katherine Campus for the group targeting leadership development, continued leadership development utilizing work based projects via video conferencing, and a facilitated evaluation workshop. Some of the project's goals were not achieved satisfactorily. Therefore it was necessary to find out how the participants responded to the methods and activities, and possibly improve them to be better prepared when the next similar project will be organized.

During my stay in Darwin I conducted a qualitative study to research the effectiveness of last year's project. I designed a questionnaire and sent it out to all participants of the Katherine residential, which took place in August 2006. I also visited the campuses in Katherine and Alice Springs to make interviews with some of the vocational education managers to ask them more specifically about last year's project. These trips also helped me to better understand their work and the problems they are facing due to their geographical and organizational isolation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My work on the master's thesis was based on the knowledge I gathered during my studies at the Technical University of Vienna and also the experience I gained during my internship at the Charles Darwin University (CDU). Many persons have helped me in various ways to develop ideas and concepts that were necessary to complete my project which was the core of the thesis. There is no way to adequately characterize individual contributions. Therefore I thank here only those whose impact on the thesis has been most significant.

Prof. Gerhard Hanappi, my advisor at the Technical University of Vienna, who provided me with very instrumental guidance during my research. Ms. Susanne Armstrong, with whom I worked most closely during my stay in Darwin. Her advice was invaluable in helping me to understand the work and problems of vocational education managers in the unique environment of the Northern Territory. Prof. Leigh Deves, my academic advisor at the CDU, who helped me to get a good understanding of the theoretical background of my project. All the colleagues, whom I met during my time at the CDU, especially those who took the time for the survey and interview, which were necessary parts of my project. Last but not least I would like to thank my parents, who have always been a great support for me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

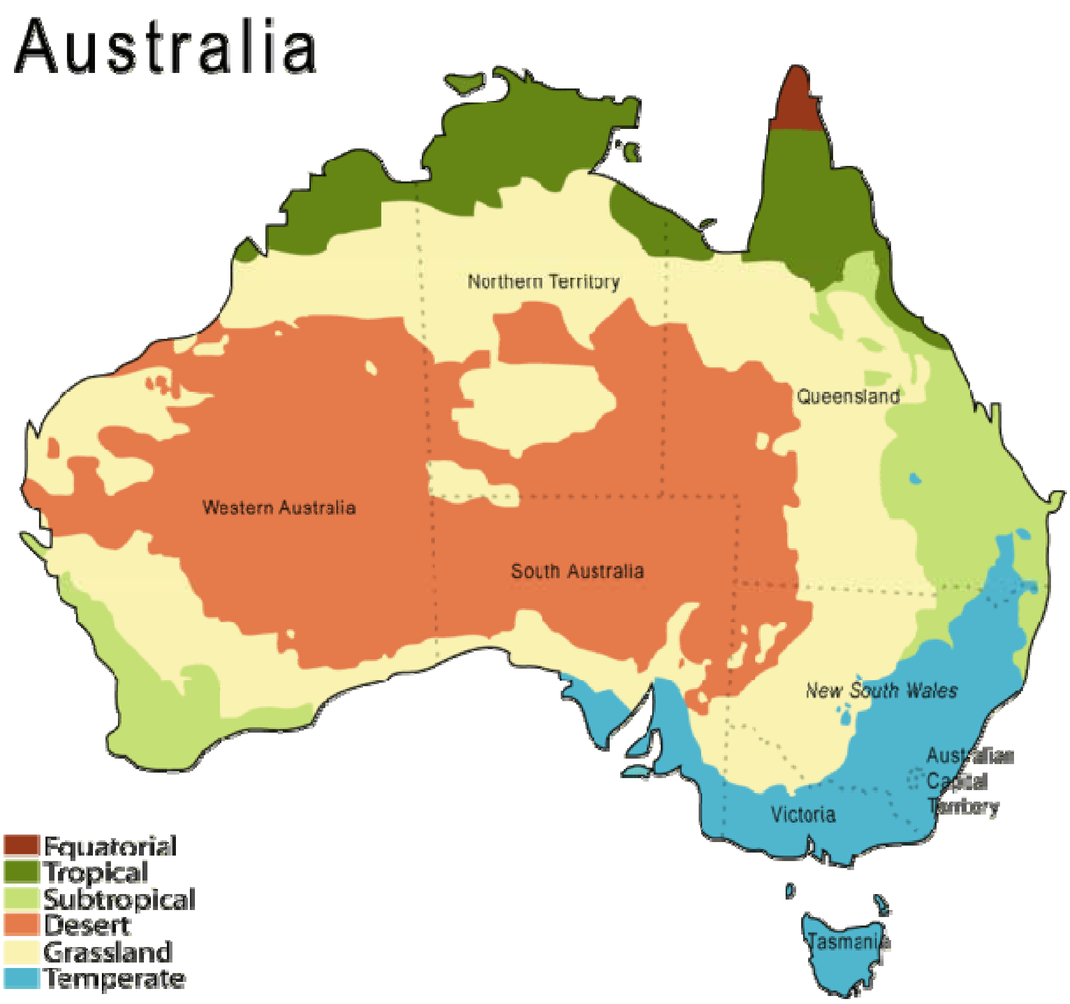
ATQF	Australian Training Quality Framework
CDU	Charles Darwin University
DEET	Department Employment and Education Training
e.g.	exempli gratia, for example
ibid.	ibidem, in the same place
n.p.a.	no page available
VTE	Vocational Technical Education

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1. The Northern Territory and the CDU

1.1.1. Geographical and demographical conditions in the Northern Territory

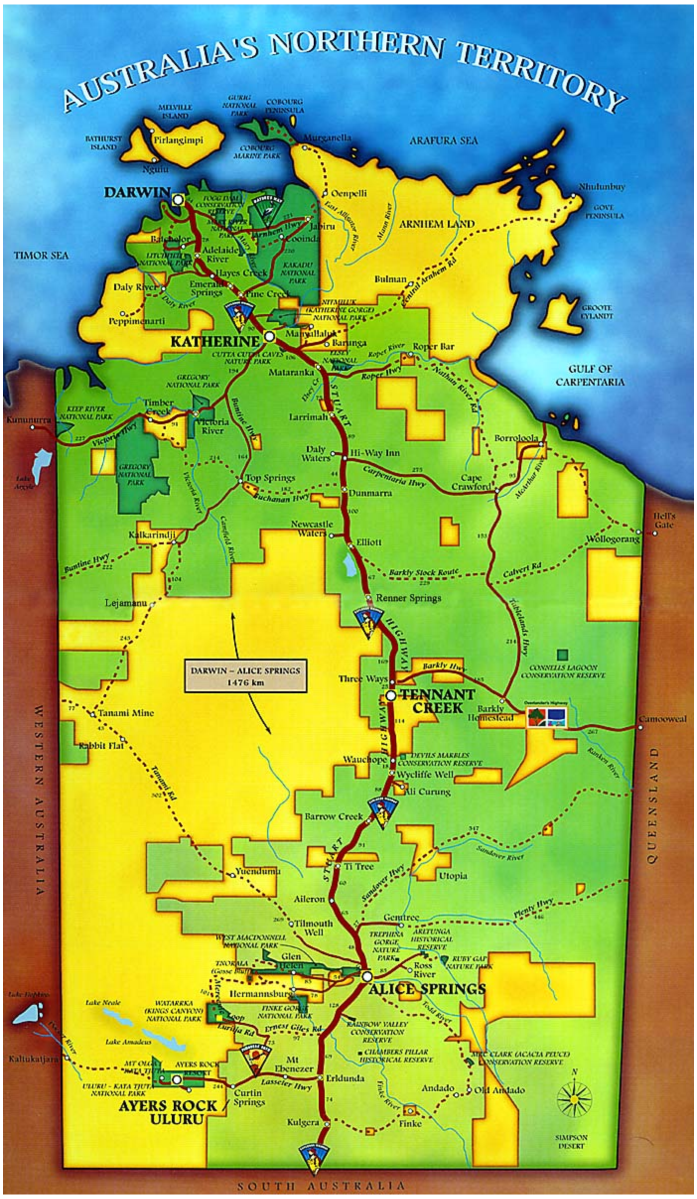
Figure 1: Map of Australia



Source: Wikipedia (2007), n.p.a.

Australia is divided into six states and two major territories. The states are New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia. The two territories are the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory.

Figure 2 : Map of the Northern Territory



Source: Goway (2007), n.p.a.

The Northern Territory makes up for 17,55% of Australia’s land area (1,352,158.0 of 7,703,556.6 km2), but it amounts for just 1% of its population (207,700 of 20,674,400 people), which accords to 0,15 residents / km2. Thus the Northern Territory has by far the smallest population density of all states and territories in Australia. (Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007), n.p.a.)

Darwin and nearby Palmerston (109,400) account for more than half of the population of the Northern Territory. Alice Springs has 28,000 residents and Katherine 11,000. These three areas make up for 71,45% of the. The remaining 28,55% live in very remote areas scattered around the territory. No other town has a population of more than 4,000 people. Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Alice Springs, as well as many small towns are located on the Stuart Highway, which links the Northern Territory to South Australia. (ibid.)

The northern part of the Northern Territory, which includes the Arnhem Land, the Kakadu National Park and the area between Darwin and Katherine, is tropical. The rest of the region consists of grassland and desert.

1.1.2. The Charles Darwin University

1.1.2.1. History of the CDU

In 1951 the Northern Territory introduced the first adult education classes in Darwin. Supervised study was provided for apprentices, typing, shorthand, French and subjects for public service examinations. (Charles Darwin University (2007), n.p.a.)

In the following years enrolment grew and in 1958, the Adult Education Centre in Darwin got its first full-time principal. One year later the first institution offering post-secondary studies in the Northern Territory was founded, with a total of 19 teachers and more than 500 enrolments. (ibid.)

By 1973, the number of students had increased to more than 5000 and in 1974 the Darwin Community College was built on the site of Charles Darwin University’s Casuarina Campus. It was a multi-purpose, post-secondary institution, which had teaching as its first priority, but also served social, commercial, and industrial community needs. (Berzins and Loveday (1999), p. 15-25)

In 1985, the Northern Territory Government examined establishing a local university. At the same time the community college was renamed the Darwin Institute of Technology. In 1987 the University College of the Northern Territory was opened, with 250 enrolled students. In the same year the Commonwealth Government decided to replace the binary system of higher education with the Unified National System. Therefore the University College and the Darwin Institute of Technology merged in 1989 and formed the Northern Territory University. (Berzins and Loveday (1999), p. 93-115)

In 2003 the Northern Territory University and the Alice Springs Centralian College joined to form the Charles Darwin University. The CDU became the only Australian institution to offer the full spectrum of education, starting from senior secondary, through VTE, to undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs. (Charles Darwin University (2007), n.p.a.)

Today more than 19000 students are enrolled at the CDU (ibid.), which is Australia’s youngest and most diverse University. International students from more than 50 countries are studying at the CDU. (Charles Darwin University (2005), p.24)

1.1.2.2. Campuses of the CDU

The campuses and education centres of the CDU are spread all over the Northern Territory. They are situated in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Jabiru, Nhulunbuy, Alice Springs and Yulara.

The Casuarina campus, the University’s main campus, is located in the northern suburbs of Darwin, approximately 12 kilometres from the city centre. (Charles Darwin University (2005), p.33)

The city of Palmerston is situated 21 kilometres south of Darwin. (Charles Darwin University (2007), n.p.a.) The campus is the home of the school of Tourism and Hospitality and also houses the “mini School” of Conservation and Land Management. (Charles Darwin University (2005), p.34)

Figure 3: Campuses of the CDU

Source: Charles Darwin University (2007), n.p.a.

Jabiru is home to 1100 people (Charles Darwin University (2007), n.p.a.) and is approximately 200 kilometres east of Darwin. The Jabiru Centre is located in the World Heritage-listed Kakadu National Park and provides VTE courses for the surrounding areas of Kakadu and Arnhem Land. The subjects include Conservation and Land Management, Information Technology, Community Services, Business, Horticulture, and General Education. (Charles Darwin University (2005), p.33)

Nhulunbuy is located in the eastern part of the aboriginal Arnhem land, approximately 750 km east of Darwin and has a population of 4000 people , which makes it the fourth largest town in the Northern Territory (Charles Darwin University (2007), n.p.a.). The subjects of the VTE courses include Business and Office Administration, Information Technology, Community Services, Workplace Assessment and Training, Engineering, and Numeracy and Literacy. (Charles Darwin University (2005), p.33)

Katherine is approximately 300 kilometres south of Darwin. (Charles Darwin University (2007), n.p.a.) VTE courses include Business, Computing, Community Services and Child-care. The Northern Territory Rural College, which is located 16 km north of Katherine focuses on agricultural training for VTE courses and traineeships in agriculture. It also offers units in trade-based study areas such as welding, vehicle maintenance and driving. Besides studying, students get hands-on experience in rural studies at Mataranka Station, a 77,000-hectare commercial cattle station. The Katherine campus also runs user-pays classes on topics such as Microsoft Powerpoint, Create your own Web Page, Basic and Advanced levels of Word processing, Databases, and Spreadsheets. (Charles Darwin University (2005), p.34)

Tennant Creek has a population of 4000 people (Charles Darwin University (2007), n.p.a.) and is situated approximately 1000 kilometres south of Darwin and 500 kilometres north of Alice Springs. It offers accredited courses in the trades and VTE sectors. Programs are conducted in conjunction with the Alice Springs campus. From the Tennant Creek campus training is delivered to many remote areas. (Charles Darwin University (2005), p.34)

Alice Springs offers students a multi-sector campus including a library, an electronic Learning Resource Centre, facilities for tourism and hospitality studies, and art trade workshops. (ibid.)

Yulara is located 450 kilometres south-west of Alice Springs and just 15 kilometres from the famous Ayers Rock. This CDU Centre offers courses in the trades and VTE sector. Programs are conducted in conjunction with the Alice Springs campus. (ibid.)

1.2. The 2006 Leadership project at the CDU

1.2.1. Goals of the project

In 2006 the CDU conducted a leadership development program for rural and remote VTE managers. The major goal was for the participants to become strategic change agents for CDU within their remote localities and communities. (Armstrong (2006 – Project Application), p. 2-3)

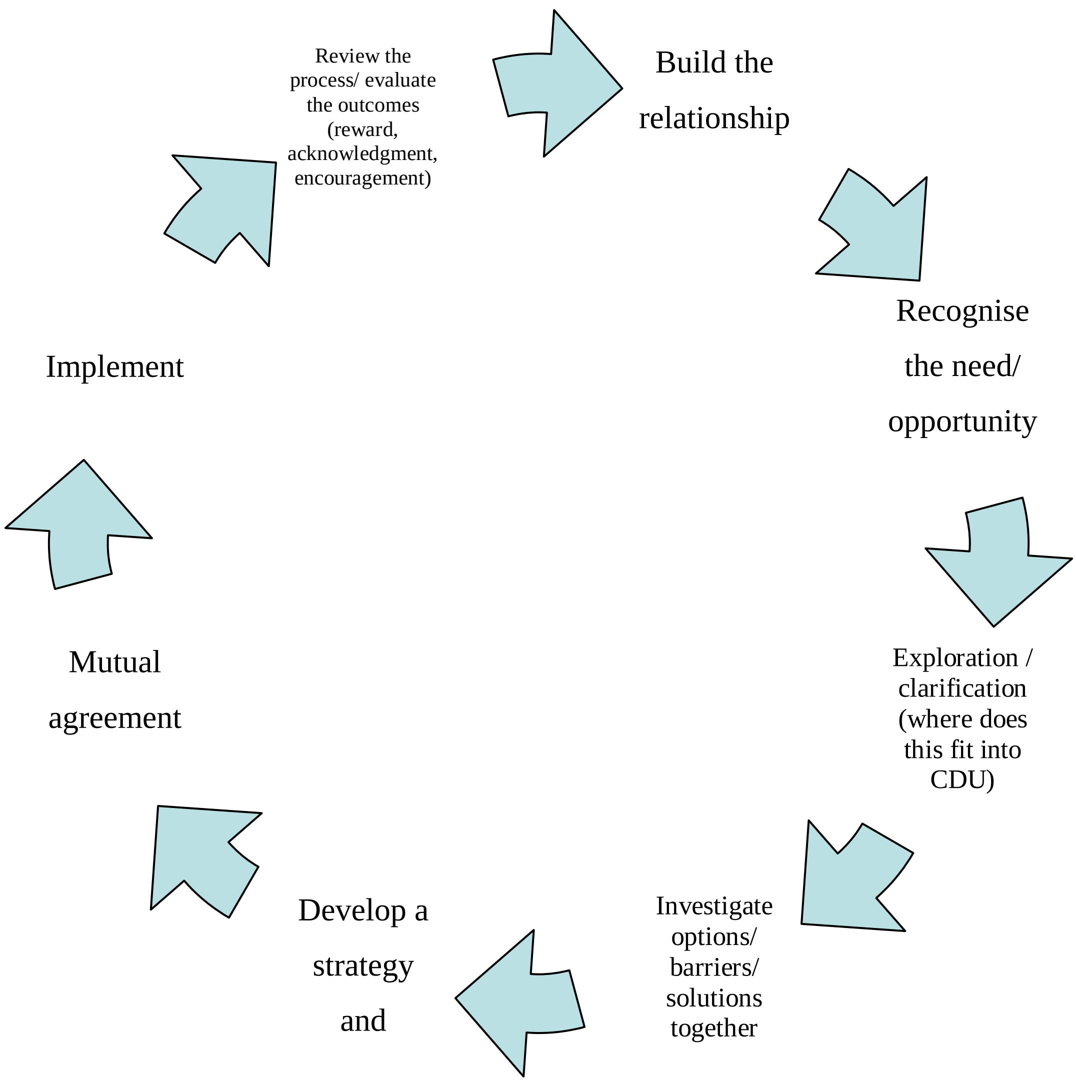
The anticipated outcomes of the project were (Armstrong (2006 – Action Plan), p. 2-3):

- Structural and / or cultural modifications to the CDU;
- Achievement of characteristics of a high-performing organisation including an improved client focus;
- Improved communication pathways between CDU colleagues, campuses, schools and faculties;
- Increased knowledge and use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for VTE program delivery, professional development, meetings and forums;
- Implementation of an ongoing network for rural and remote VTE professional support and development in CDU;
- Implementation of a mentoring program for rural and remote VTE managers;
- Acquisition of coaching skills for project participants;
- Improved quality of VTE program planning, delivery and evaluation;
- Increased knowledge of VTE issues across rural and remote regions; and
- Enhanced practitioner confidence to develop strategies for improvement.

1.2.2. Course of events

The participants of the project designed their own skills audit to be able to measure their performance. At the primary self assessment point the average score of the 17 participants was 74 out of 100. (Armstrong (2006 – Mid-Term Report), p. 2)

Figure 4 : Katherine Wheel



Source: Armstrong (2006, Mid-Term Report), p. 2

In late August 2006 the remote coordinators and administrators gathered in Katherine for a facilitated coaching workshop. During the two day residential at the Katherine Rural

Campus the group designed their own model of coaching termed “The Katherine Wheel”. (ibid.)

This model designs a set of strategies to create change to meet the needs of VTE delivery in the regional and remote centres of Northern Territory. It was invented to be utilised internally within the University to create change and improvement, and externally to develop relationships with communities and clients to ensure quality training is delivered in line with what the target groups need. (ibid.)

1.2.3. First review of the project

Feedback from the participants indicated that they have implemented the Katherine Wheel with success and have continued usage in internal meetings as wells as in external contacts with clients. Unfortunately only 7 of the 17 initial pre-test participants responded to the final skills audit evaluation. This feedback revealed a significant shift to the high-end of skills competency, 81,43% compared to a 69,71% pre test score. (Armstrong (2006 – Final Report), p. 4)

The lack of response directly relates to the issue of communication. Many staff members don’t read their e-mails regularly and can’t be reached by phone because they work out-bush.

The top three benefits for individual managers were (ibid.):

- Improved communication and problem solving skills;
- Ability to promote team building and team effectiveness; and
- Higher visibility within the organization to promote remote issues and gain managerial support and access to resources.

The top three benefits for the CDU were (Armstrong (2006 – Final Report), p. 5);

- The ability to gather staff from remote locations and allow them to identify specific VTE issues for their isolated areas, and create strategies and solutions to overcome these problems and improve the delivery of VTE for their clients;
- The value of networks and developing relationships with CDU staff who are difficult to contact due to their isolated locations and time restraints; and
- The gathering of valuable information to assist CDU create more informed structural change.

1.3. Goals of the Study

The first review took place at the end of last year's project and didn't include questions about the workflow of the project. Therefore the CDU wanted to get feedback from the participants to find out how they benefited from it and which suggestions they have to improve leadership nursing in the future.

The standards, by which judgments were made about the effectiveness of the leadership development project, are:

- Improvement of coaching skills;
- Improvement of communication between VTE managers;
- Improvement of communication pathways of the CDU;
- Usefulness of the Katherine Wheel; and
- Usefulness of the Katherine Residential.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Definitions of Leadership

The term "leadership" was taken from the common vocabulary and was incorporated into the technical vocabulary of scientific discipline without being precisely redefined. This created ambiguity of meaning. Additionally confusion is cause by describing similar phenomena using other imprecise terms such as power, authority, administration, management, control and supervision (Yukl (2006), p.2). Bennis (1959), p.259 – quoted in Yukl (2006), p.2, summed this dilemma up as followed:

> *"Always, it seems, the concept of leadership eludes us or turns up in another form to taunt us again with its slipperiness and complexity. So we have invented an endless proliferation of terms to deal with it … and still the concept is not sufficiently defined."*

Leadership is defined by researchers according to their individual perspectives and the aspects of the phenomenon, which are most relevant to them. There are many definitions in terms of behaviours, influence, traits, interactions patterns, occupation and role relationships (ibid.). Table 1 shows some representative definitions over the past 50 years:

Table 1: Definitions of Leadership

- Leadership is "the behaviour of an individual … directing the activities of a group toward a shared goal." (Hemphill & Coons, 1957, p.7)
- Leadership is "the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organization." (Katz & Kahn, 1978, p.528)
- "Leadership is exercised when persons … mobilize … institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers." (Burns, 1978, p.18)
- "Leadership is realized in the process whereby one or more individuals succeed in attempting to frame and define the reality of others." (Smircich & Morgan, 1982, p. 258)

- Leadership is "the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement." (Rauch & Behling, 1984, p.46)
- "Leadership is about articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished." (Richards & Engle, 1986, p.206)
- "Leadership is a process of giving purpose (meaningful direction) to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve purpose." (Jacobs & Jaques, 1990, p.281)
- Leadership "is the ability to step outside the culture … to start evolutionary change processes that are more adaptive." (Schein, 1992, p.2)
- "Leadership is the process of making sense of what people are doing together so that people will understand and be committed." (Drath & Palus, 1994, p.4)
- Leadership is "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization…." (House et al., 1999, p.184)

Source: Yukl (2006, p.3.)

The numerous definitions appear not to have much in common. However they all reflect the assumption that leadership involves a process in which intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to structure, guide, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization. Still the opinions vary in many respects, including who exerts influence, the manner in which influence is exerted, the intended purpose of the influence, and the outcome of the influence attempt. The differences reflect deep disagreements about identification of leaders and leadership processes. (ibid.)

Because of the inability to come up with one widely accepted definition, some theorists question whether it is even useful as a scientific construct (e.g., Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Miner, 1975). Nevertheless, most behavioural practitioners and scientists believe that leadership is a real phenomenon that is important for the effectiveness of organizations. (ibid.)

There are also often confusions about the difference between the meanings of the terms management and leadership. It is obvious that a person can be a manager without leading (some managers don't even have subordinates, e.g. a manager of financial accounts), and a person can also be a leader without being a manager (e.g. an informal leader). Still there is a disagreement about the overlap. Some writers (e.g. Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Zaleznik,

1977) go as far as suggesting that leadership and management is mutually exclusive and cannot occur in the same person. Others (e.g. Mintzberg, 1973) however claim that leadership is one of the managerial roles. (Yukl (2006), pp. 5-6)

Table 2: Comparison of Leadership and Management

	LEADERSHIP	MANAGEMENT
Motto	Do the right things	Do things right
Challenge	Change	Continuity
Focus	Purposes	Structures and procedures
Time Frame	Future	Present
Methods	Strategies	Schedules
Questions	Why?	Who, what, when, where, and how?
Outcomes	Journeys	Destinations
Human	Potential	Performance

Source: Tomey (2004), p.169

2.2. Models of Leadership

2.2.1. Autocratic, Democratic, Laissez-Faire Leadership

Autocratic leaders are critical, directive and punitive. They maintain strong control, do the planning, make the decisions and give the orders. Through giving themselves a higher status than other group members, they reduce trust, open communication, autonomy, creativity and self-motivation. This leadership style might be appropriate for emergency situations, but it does not develop people. (Tomey (2004), p.170)

In comparison to authoritarian leaders, democrats maintain less control. They involve the people in planning, problem solving and decisions making, and also ask questions and make suggestions rather than issue orders. This style works best when group members work well together and have knowledge as well as skills. (ibid.)

Laissez-faire is nondirective, passive and permissive. The leader does no planning or coordination. Unless an informal leader emerges, members may work independently and chaos is likely to develop. This leadership style may work with very mature, autonomous workers, but most likely it ends up being inefficient and unproductive. (ibid.)

Table 3: Comparison of Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-faire Leadership

AUTOCRATIC	DEMOCRATIC	LAISSEZ-FAIRE
Strong control	Less control	No control
Gives orders	Offers suggestions	Nondirective
Does decision making	Makes suggestions	Abdicates decision making
Leader does planning	Group does planning	No planning
Directive	Participative	Uninvolved
Fosters dependency	Fosters independence	Fosters chaos

Source: Tomey (2004), p. 170

2.2.2. Great Man Theory

The Great Man Theory focuses on the person and argues that a few people are born with the necessary characteristics to be a great leader. It was most closely studied between 1930 and 1950 and investigated factors such as height, personality, intellect, age and class to find the secret ingredient of leadership success. (Tate (1999), p. 36)

According to the Great Man Theory leaders display supportive and instrumental behaviour. Supportive activities allow for consultation and participation from subordinates for decisions that affect them. Instrumental leadership strives towards achieving the organization’s goals and includes planning, organizing, and controlling the subordinates’ activities. Especially important is the process of obtaining and allocating resources such as people, materials, equipment, funds and space. (Tomey (2004), p.168)

People who display supportive and instrumental leadership behaviours are regarded "great men". Many people criticize this theory, because it premises that leadership cannot be developed and that leaders are born, not made. (ibid.)

2.2.3. Charismatic Theory

Gardner D.L. (quoted in Swansburg (1996), p. 425) defines charisma as "*the quality that sets one person apart from others: supernatural, superhuman, endowed with exceptional qualities or powers*". Charismatic leaders emerge in relation to the state of mind of constituents, oftentimes during a crisis.

People may be leaders because of their charisma, but there are still disagreements about the intangible characteristic. Many researchers argue that it is an inspirational quality that makes other people feel better in their presence. Leaders who possess that quality obtain emotional commitment from followers and arouse feelings of loyalty and enthusiasm. Strong charismatic leadership may overcome big obstacles, however charisma is very elusive, therefore some may sense it and others may not. (Tomey (2004), p.168)

Robert House found during his research that charismatic leaders have a strong conviction in their own beliefs. They also exhibit high self-confidence and a need for power. Oftentimes they set an example by their behaviour and communicate high expectations to their followers. The followers have trust in the leader's beliefs and display affection for and unquestioned obedience to the leader. (Tomey (2004), pp.168-169)

According Conger and Kanungo (1998) charisma is an attributional phenomenon and is more likely linked to a leader who has beliefs discrepant from the status quo, emerges in troubled times, has high self-confidence, and uses personal power and unconventional methods. Bernhard Bass claims that charismatic leaders perceive themselves as having superhuman destiny. That may lead to blind worship and obedience and bad outcomes compared to transformational leadership, which uses charisma for good. (Tomey (2004), p.169)

2.2.4. Trait Theory

The research on this theory was directed identifying physical, intellectual, emotional, and other personal traits of effective leaders. The assumption was that leaders were born, not made, but the researchers couldn't find any particular sets of traits that could predict leadership potential. According to McGregor (quoted in Swansburg (1996), p.423) "*research findings to date suggest that it is more fruitful to consider leadership as a relationship between the leader and the situation than as a universal pattern of characteristics possessed by certain people.*" This implies that different situations require different leader characteristics and that leadership is a human relations function. (Swansburg (1996), pp.423-424)

Even though the trait theory displayed serious shortcomings, some traits have been identified that are common to most good leaders (Table 4).

Table 4: Leader traits and skills

TRAITS	SKILLS
Adaptable to situations	Clever (intelligent)
Alert to social environment	Conceptually skilled
Ambitious, achievement oriented	Creative
Assertive	Diplomatic and tactful
Cooperative	Fluent in speaking
Decisive	Knowledgeable about the work
Dependable	Organized (administrative ability)
Dominant (power motivation)	Persuasive
Energetic (high activity level)	Socially skilled
Persistent	
Self-confident	
Tolerant of stress	
Willing to assume responsibility	

Source: Yukl (2006), p.183

Some other conclusions about leadership traits include (Tomey (2004), pp.169-170):

- Leaders must be more intelligent than the group he leads. However they shouldn't be much more intelligent, because they may not find leadership responsibilities challenging enough and may have difficulties relating to the group;
- Leaders need to be initiative and possess the ability to start courses of action not considered by others;
- Creativity is a very important trait for leaders. The ability to find new ways to be productive and come up with new solutions is an asset;
- Consistency is another important trait. Good leaders do what they say they will and are emotionally mature. They have a sense of purpose and direction, dependability, persistence, and objectivity. It is important for them to spread enthusiasm to followers and work long hours. This requires energy, drive and good health;
- Leaders need to be persuasive to gain the consent of followers. They may ask penetrating questions, supply supportive data, make suggestions, make compromises and request action to persuade others;
- It is important for leaders to have the perception to distinguish between their allies and their opponents, and place their subordinates in suitable positions;
- Leaders need to socialize with various kinds of people and adapt to different groups. They have to be approachable, helpful and friendly, to gain the support and loyalty of others and thus make them willing to cooperate.

The trait theory expanded the knowledge about theory, but it was not perfect. Different researches identified various traits and few if any were included in all studies. There is no agreement as to which traits are most important, which are needed to acquire leadership, and which are needed to maintain it. Trait theory also does not deal with subordinates, environmental influences and situational factors. (Tomey (2004), p.170)

Researchers at the University of Michigan made a study concentrating on identification of relationships among leader behaviour, group process, and group performance. They found that the difference between effective and ineffective leaders was marked by three types of leadership behaviour (Tomey (2004), p.171):

1) Task-oriented behaviour, which includes planning, scheduling and coordinating activities;
2) Relationship-oriented behaviour, which consists of acting friendly, showing trust and confidence, expressing appreciation, and providing recognition; and
3) Participative leadership, which uses group meetings to enlist associate participation in decision making, promote cooperation, improve communications, and facilitate conflict resolution.

2.2.5. Contingency Theory

The contingency theory on leadership was published by Fred Fiedler in 1967. His main point was that the effectiveness of leadership style depends on the job to be done and on the situation. He introduced three aspects of a situation that structure the role of the leader: leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. (Tate (1999), p.38)

Fiedler defined leader-member relations by the amount of confidence and loyalty the followers have with regard to their leader. He also assessed a sociometric index of the least-preferred co-worker (LPC) score. Followers were instructed to rate the least-preferred co-worker, out of everyone with whom they have ever worked, on an eight-point adjective scale, which includes categories such as friendly, accepting, supportive, satisfying, productive, cooperative, interesting and successful. A high score represents a positive rating, while a low score describes a person in negative terms. Fiedler argues that high scorers are mostly relationship oriented, and low scorers are rather task oriented. (Tomey (2004), p.171)

If a task is easy to define, its structure is high. If it is hard to define and to measure progress toward its completion, its structure is low. Fiedler introduced four criteria to determine the task structure (Tomey (2004), pp.171-172):

- Goal clarity: extent to which followers understand the goal;
- Knowledge as to who is responsible for a decision and the extent to which a decision can be verified;
- Multiplicity of goal paths (number of solution); and
- Specificity of solution (number of correct answers)

Position power is defined by the authority inherent in a position, the power to install rewards and punishment, and the organization's support of the leader's decisions. (Tomey (2004), p. 172)

Table 5: Summary of Fiedler Investigations of Leadership Group Situation

LEADER-MEMBER RELATIONS	TASK STRUCTURE	POSITION POWER	LEADERSHIP STYLE CORRELATION WITH PRODUCTIVITY
Good	Structured	Strong	Directive
Good	Structured	Weak	Directive
Good	Unstructured	Strong	Directive
Good	Unstructured	Weak	Permissive
Moderately poor	Structured	Strong	Permissive
Moderately poor	Structured	Weak	No data
Moderately poor	Unstructured	Strong	No relationship level
Moderately poor	Unstructured	Weak	Directive

Source: Tomey (2004), p.172

When the task has a high structure, but the leader is disliked, or the task is unstructured and the leader is liked, the accepting, considerate style of leadership will be most productive. If an unpopular leader faces an ambiguous task, he should use a directive style. (Tomey (2004), pp.172-173)

There is no empirical evidence for the contingency theory and the model is primarily academic. It has not been used in management development for improving group performance and organizational effectiveness. (Tomey (2004), p. 173)

2.2.6. Situational Leadership Theory

Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard (1977) proposed a theory that predicts the most appropriate leadership style from the level of maturity of the followers. A subordinate with high maturity has the self-confidence and ability to do a task, whereas a subordinate with low maturity lacks confidence and ability. The horizontal axis describes low emphasis on task behaviour on the left side, and high emphasis on achievement of tasks on the right side. The vertical axis registers low concern for personal relationships at the bottom, and high concern for relationships at the top. (Tomey (2004), p.174)

Figure 5: Situational leadership theory

Source: C.J. Baxter Group (2007), n.p.a.

The maturity level of the subordinates is registered on the horizontal axis from high maturity on the left side of the model, to low maturity on the right side. The most appropriate leadership style for a given level of maturity is shown by a curvilinear line. To determine the ideal style, the maturity level of the subordinates must be assessed and plotted on the horizontal axis. Afterwards a line at a right angle from that point must be drawn up until it intersects with the curvilinear line. The quadrant in which the intersection occurs represents the best leadership style for a given maturity level. (Tomey (2004, p. 175)

If the subordinates are very immature in relation to the task, substantial task-oriented behaviour should be used. The leader must be strictly define roles, clarify standards and procedures and monitor the progress. Therefore the lower right quadrant (1) depicts an autocratic leadership style with considerable emphasis on production but little concern for relationships. Tomey (2004), pp.174-175 – Yukl (2006), p. 224)

As the maturity of subordinates increases to a moderate level, the leader can provide more relationship-oriented behaviour. He should consult the subordinates, act supportive and provide praise. The upper right quadrant (2) represents much interest for both tasks and relationships, while the upper left quadrant (3) describes a leadership style with high emphasis on relationship, but low concern for tasks. (ibid.)

When the leader is confronted with high maturity of subordinates, he should use a low level of task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviours. The lower left quadrant (4) complies with a laissez-faire style of leadership, that doesn't stress neither production nor relationships. (ibid.)

Even though the situational leadership theory has often been used in management development programs, not many studies have been conducted to evaluate the theory (e.g. Goodson, McGee & Cashman 1989; Blank, Weitzel & Green 1990; Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997). There was little evidence that appliance of the pattern of task and relations behaviour, would result in making leaders more effective. (Yukl (2006), p.224)

2.2.7. Path-Goal Theory

The path-goal theory was derived from the expectancy theory by House in 1971. The expectancy theory “describes work motivation in terms of a rational choice process in which a person decides how much effort to devote to the job at a given point of time.” (Yukl (2006), p.218) It claims that the effort of people depends on the likelihood that a given level of effort will help to complete the task and produce satisfactory results (e.g. promotion, higher pay, recognition) and at the same time avoid undesirable outcomes (e.g. layoffs, accidents, rejection, stress). The perceived probability of an outcome is called expectancy, the desirability is called valence. (ibid.)

In the path-goal relationship the motivational function of the leader consists of minimizing obstructions to the goals and increasing personal payoffs to staff associates for completing their tasks. The leader helps subordinates make beneficial decisions to accomplish the goals. This also improves not only staff performance but also staff motivation and satisfaction, especially satisfaction with the leader. (Tomey (2004), p.173)

The path-goal theory describes four different leader behaviours (Yukl (2006), p.219):

1) Supportive leadership: Considers needs of staff, exhibits concern for their welfare, creates a friendly atmosphere of work;

2) Directive leadership: Structures tasks clearly, gives specific guidance, expects subordinates to follow rules, schedules and coordinates work;

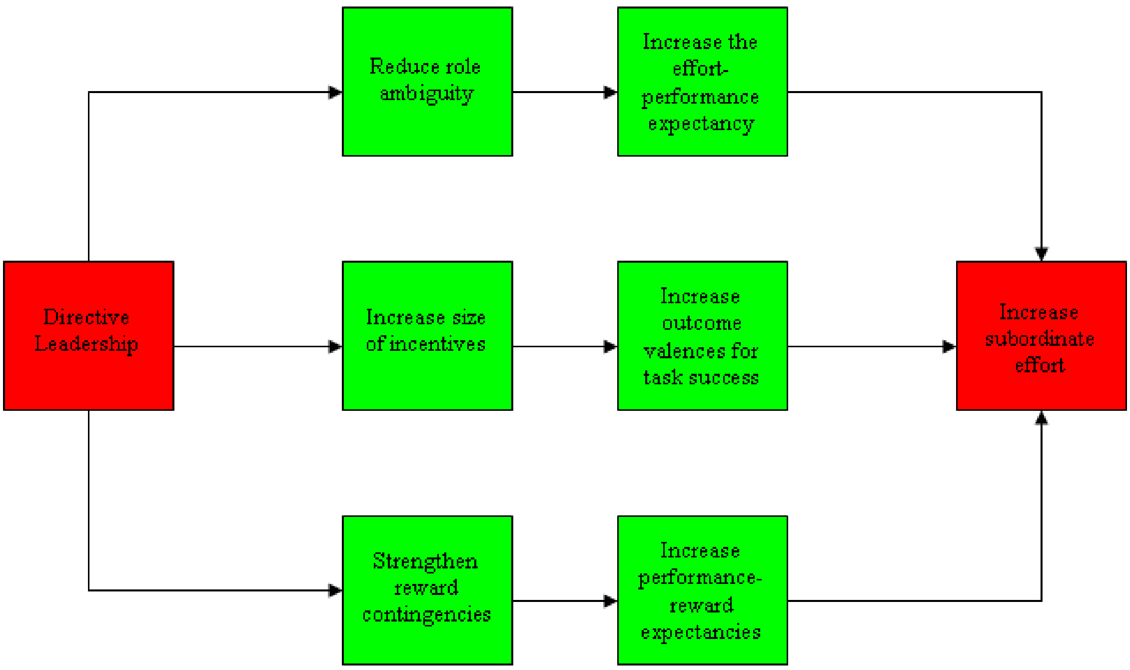
3) Participative leadership: Consults with staff and takes into account their opinions and suggestions; and

4) Achievement-oriented leadership: Sets challenging goals with the aim to improve performance, emphasizes excellence in performance.

The effects of leader behaviour on staff effort and satisfaction depend on the situation, including task and subordinate characteristics. Therefore the situational variables influence the way the leader has to act to improve motivation. The situation also has an impact on staff preferences for leadership behaviour, thereby determining subordinate satisfaction. E.g.: When the task is boring, stressful or dangerous, supportive leadership is the best choice. It increases staff effort and satisfaction and the expectancy that the task will be completed. However, if the task is enjoyable and interesting, this style of leadership has little if any effect (ibid.)

The relationship between the structure of the task, the experience of the subordinates and the use of directive leadership has already been addressed in chapter 2.2.6. Figure 6 shows the hypothesized causal chain for directive leadership.

Figure 6: Casual Relationships for Effects of Directive Leadership on Subordinate



Source: Yukl (2006), p.221

Critics say that the path-goal theory has some conceptual deficiencies that limit its utility. One of them is its reliance on the expectancy theory as to explain leader influence. This leads to an unrealistic description of human behaviour, because the expectancy theory does not assess emotional reactions to decision dilemmas. Other limitations include the reliance on broad categories of leader behaviour and the separate consideration of leadership behaviour. Despite these deficiencies the path-goal theory contributed to the study of leadership by identifying relevant situational variables. (Yukl (2006), pp.222-223)

2.2.8. Transactional and Transformational Leadership

The terms transactional and transformational leadership were introduced by Douglas McGregor Burns in 1978. Two independently working groups of US researchers developed these theories: Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio, and James Kouzes and Barry Posner. (Tate (1996), p.40)

According to Bass, transactional leadership features an exchange process that may result in follower compliance with leader instructions. However it is not likely to result in enthusiasm and commitment to task objectives. By contrast, transformational leadership generates followers’ trust, loyalty, admiration and respect toward the leader, and thus also increases their motivation. (Yukl (2006), p.262)

The original formulation of the transactional theory included two types of behaviour: contingent reward and passive management by exception. Contingent reward behaviour uses clarification of the work required to achieve rewards, and incentives as well as contingent rewards to influence motivation. Passive management by exception includes contingent punishments and other corrective action to counter obvious deviations from acceptable performance standards. Recent versions of this theory (Bass & Avolio, 1990) also added a transactional behaviour called active management by exception. It includes looking for mistakes and enforcing rules to avoid them. (Yukl (2006, p.263)

Bass and Avolio’s model introduced four components of transformational leadership, called the “Four Is” (Tate (1994), p.40):

1) Individualized consideration: Leaders treat their followers according to their needs. They delegate assignments to provide learning and development opportunities;

2) Intellectual stimulation: Leaders encourage people to be creative and challenge their current habits of working. Questioning beliefs, expectations and value, individual’s as well as the organization’s, is supported;

3) Idealized influence: Charismatic leaders are role models and help subordinates to overcome obstacles. Their followers respect and trust them, because they identify with their vision; and

4) Inspirational motivation: Leaders create optimism and emphasize the inclusion of emotional elements to the work to be done.

Based on this research, Kouzes and Posner conducted a study and identified what they called the “five fundamentals of exemplary leadership” (Tate (1996), p.41):

1) Inspiring a shared vision: Leaders find out the hopes of their followers and create a vision of the future. They try to do things differently and inspire others by articulating a common purpose;

2) Modelling the way: Leaders create a sense of integrity and set an example by doing what they say they will do. At the same time they don’t expect others to do what they would not do. They also review work in progress and take corrective action if necessary;

3) Challenging the process: Leaders are willing take calculated risks to realize new ideas. They encourage innovation, experimentation and devolved decision-making, and they support followers when they make mistakes, because they view them as part of learning;

4) Encouraging the heart: Leaders always expect their subordinates to perform well, and maintain morale by recognizing achievements and celebrating successes; and

5) Enabling others to act: Leaders enlist the work of others to achieve their goals. They build partnerships with customers, subordinates, peers and suppliers. They also create strong teams and use delegation as a mean of staff development.

Table 6 illustrates the major differences between the transactional and transformational leadership theories.

Table 6: Comparison of Transactional and Transformational Leadership

TRANSACTIONAL	TRANSFORMATIONAL
Hierarchy	Networking
Competitive	Cooperative
Task focus	Process focus
Exchange posture	Promote employee development
Identify needs of followers	Attend to needs and motives of followers
Provide rewards to meet needs	Inspire through optimism
Exchange for expected performance	Influence change in perception
Contract for mutual benefits	Provide intellectual stimulation
Contingent rewards	Encouragement of follower creativity
Caretaker	Role model
Set goals for employees	Individualize consideration
Focus on day-to-day operations	Provide sense of direction
Management by exception	Encouragement of self-management

Source: Tomey (2004), p.176

2.3. Leadership Development

Yukl (2006, p.386) identifies three main approaches to acquire leadership competencies: formal training, developmental activities and self-help activities. These categories overlap and are interrelated, as learning acquired from one approach can facilitate or enhance learning from other approaches. For instance, a self-help activity such as using an interactive computer program can be helpful to prepare a person for a developmental activity. Another example is a realistic simulation that is used as a developmental activity as part of a formal training course. (Yukl (2006), pp. 411-412)

Figure 7: Three Ways to Acquire Leadership Competencies

Source: Yukl (2006), p.412

2.3.1. Formal training programs

Leadership training can be organized in many different forms, from short workshops that last just a few hours and concentrate on a small set of skills, to programs that last more than a year and cover a wide range of abilities. Some training programs are based on a particular leadership theory, some rely on the application of many theories. However the effectiveness of formal training programs depends on how well they are designed. The following aspects should be taken into account: specific learning objectives, learning theory, characteristics of the trainees, practical considerations, e.g. costs in relation to benefits. (Yukl (2006), pp.387-388) Yukl (2008, pp. 388-390) identifies the following key findings for designing effective training:

Clear Learning Objectives: Learning objectives depict the knowledge, skills and behaviours that trainees are supposed to acquire from the training. They help to define the purpose of the program. It is also useful to explain why the training is important for the people who take part in it. Therefore at the beginning of the training it should be clarified how and why the program will help trainees to improve their leadership effectiveness.

Clear Meaningful Content: The content should build on the trainees' prior knowledge and include lots of concrete and relevant examples. Regular summaries of key points are helpful for comprehension and memorization of material. Category systems, diagrams, analogies, and models should be used to increase conceptual learning.

Appropriate Sequencing of Content: Training should progress from simple to complex contents and the trainer should make sure that all trainees are familiar with prerequisite concepts, symbols, rules, and procedures. Complex material should be separated into modules and appropriate rest breaks should be planned to avoid fatigue.

Appropriate Mix of Training Methods: The choice of training methods should not only take into account the knowledge, skills, and behaviour to be learned, but also the trainees' current motivation, skill level, and capacity to understand and remember complex information. Usually it is better to demonstrate a procedure than to describe it in an abstract way. The methods should also be appropriate for the training conditions, e.g. number of trainees in class. Periodical shifts from lectures to discussions and exercises help to keep up the interest and attention.

Opportunity for Active Practice: Retention and transfer are much greater when a trainee has the opportunity to restate the principles, apply and adapt them to varying situations, and actively practice the skills to be learned. This practice should occur during training sessions and also afterwards in job situation.

Relevant, Timely Feedback: Trainees should receive accurate, timely, and constructive feedback from a variety of available sources. Feedback is only of great value if it helps the trainee to develop better mental models (e.g. what strategy was used, what was done correctly, what could have been done better). Analytical procedures, diagnostic questions and clues about the meaning of various patterns of results are helpful for trainees to analyse and interpret performance feedback.

Enhancement of Trainee Self-Confidence: The trainer should be patient and supportive with trainees who experience learning difficulties, and thus improve trainee self-confidence and expectations that the training will be successful. To make sure that participants have opportunities to experience progress in mastering the material, training should begin with simple behaviours and then progress to more complex skills as trainees become more confident. Praise and encouragement always helps to bolster self-efficacy.

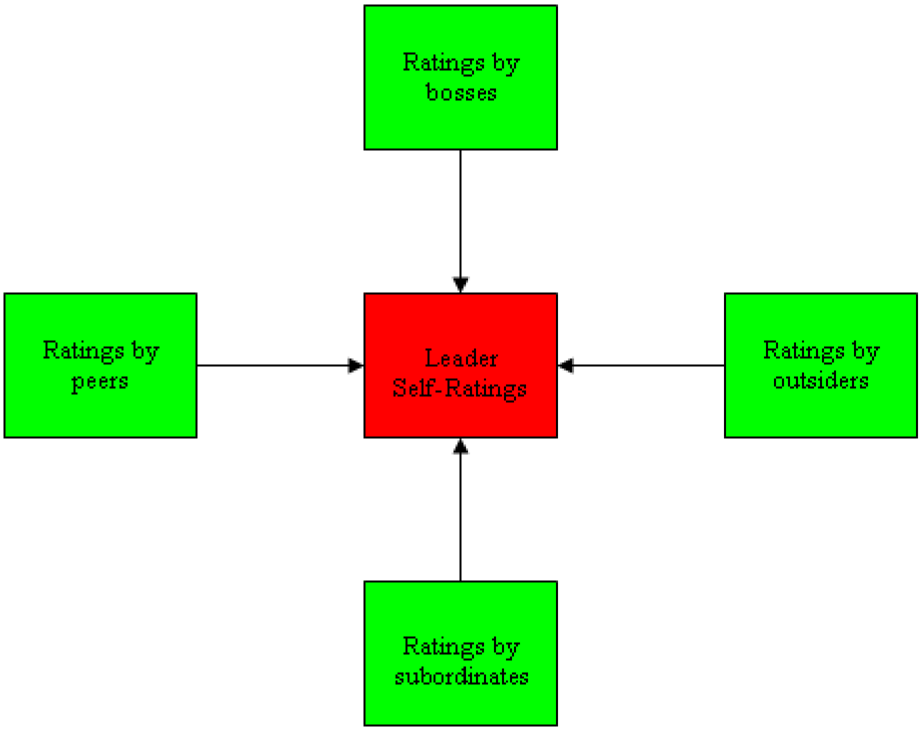
Appropriate Follow-Up Activities: Complex skills are hard to learn in short training courses with limited opportunities to apply them and receive feedback. Therefore follow-up activities should be organized after the completion of the program to review the progress, discuss successes and problems, and provide additional coaching and support. Another helpful method is to make trainees carry out specific projects that require the use of skills learned during the training. Other types of follow-up activities include periodic meetings with trainers and short refresher courses.

2.3.2. Developmental Activities

Many skills that are essential for effective leadership are learned from experience rather than from formal training programs. There are many activities that can be used to facilitate this learning. They can be used to supplement informal coaching by the boss or co-workers, and also in conjunction with formal training programs. (Yukl (2006), p.396) Nine developmental activities will be evaluated briefly.

Multisource Feedback: This approach is also called 360-Degree Feedback. It has become very popular and is widely used in large organizations. Multisource feedback programs are used for different purposes, but primarily they assess strengths and developmental needs for individual managers. A standardized questionnaire is sent out to other people such as peers, subordinates, superiors, and sometimes also outsiders such as clients. They are instructed to share their views about the skills or behaviour of the manager. (Yukl (2006), pp.396-398)

Figure 8: Sources of Information for 360-Degree Feedback



Source: Yukl (2006), p.397

Developmental Assessment Centers: Traditional assessment centers use different approaches to measure managerial competences and potential for advancement. Some of the utilized methods are interviews, personality tests, aptitude tests, situational tests, speaking and writing exercises. Information from theses sources is used to develop an overall evaluation of each participant's management potential. In the past, assessment centers have been used for selection and promotion decisions only, but in recent years, they have increasingly been utilized for the development of managers. (Yukl (2006), p.400)

Developmental Assignments: Some developmental assignments require taking a leave from the regular job, others can be carried out simultaneously with job responsibilities.

Examples include managing a new project, serving as the department representative on a cross-functional team, chairing a special task force to plan a major change or deal with a serious operational problem, developing or conducting a training program for the organizational unit, or assuming responsibility for some administrative activities previously handled by the boss. Developmental assignments away from one's regular job are for instance serving as an understudy or staff member for an exceptional leader in another part of the organization or serving in a visiting assignment to another organization. (Yukl (2006), p.401)

Job Rotation Programs: In this approach, managers are instructed to switch between different functional subunits of the organization for periods of time varying from six months to three years. They don't change jobs as a result of a promotion decision, but for developmental reasons. Job rotation programs offer a number of opportunities. Managers have to learn quickly how to deal with problems for which they lack adequate preparation, and also face the challenge to establish cooperative relationships in a short time. Managers not only learn about unique processes in different subunits, they also get a better understanding of the interdependencies among different parts of the organization, and get the opportunity to develop a large network of contacts in different parts of the organization. (Yukl (2006), p.402)

Action Learning: This method asks for participants to conduct field project on complex organizational problems and develop solutions, which are often applied by the organization. Action learning is usually selected to improve cognitive and interpersonal skills rather than technical knowledge. The individuals meet regularly with a skilled facilitator to discuss, analyse, and learn from their experiences. (Yukl (2006), p.403)

Mentoring: In this approach a more experienced manager helps a less experienced protégé. The mentor usually is not the protégé's immediate boss, but is situated at a higher managerial level. He provides the protégé with psychosocial support (acceptance, encouragement, coaching, counselling) and also has a career-facilitation function (sponsorship, protection, challenging assignments). Mentors can help and reduce stress during difficult job transitions, such as a transfer or promotion to a different functional unit, an assignment in a foreign country, or a promotion to one's first managerial position. (Yukl (2006), p.404)

Executive Coaching: This method is usually used for high-level executives. The coach can be an external or an internal consultant, and is either a successful former executive or a behavioural scientist with experience as a management consultant. The advantages of external coaches are greater objectivity, more confidentiality and wider experience, while an internal coach offers more knowledge of the organization's culture and challenges, as well as easy availability. The primary purpose of executive coaching is advice on how to implement a major change and work with people from different cultures. (Yukl (2006), p.405)

Outdoor Challenge Programs: This approach involves physical activities performed by a group of people. Usually the activities are physically very challenging and require cooperation among participants and mutual trust. An experienced facilitator conducts the program, provides coaching and encouragement, and helps the group members understand the link between the activities and organizational life. (Yukl (2006), p.406)

Personal Growth Programs: This method is designed to improve self-awareness and overcome inner barriers to psychological growth and improvement of leadership skills. Personal growth workshops are based on the assumption that many people have lost touch with their inner feelings and values and that it is necessary to confront the latent fears and resolve the underlying conflicts, before becoming a successful leader. (Yukl (2006), p.407)

2.3.3. Self-help Activities

The focus in the first two approaches was on what organizations can do to develop the leadership skills of their staff. The self-help activities provide individuals with the opportunity to enhance their own abilities. They include: practitioner books, instructional video tapes or compact disks, and interactive computer programs. Some of these techniques are alternatives to formal training programs, some are used to assist the training, and others are intended to facilitate learning from experience. (Yukl (2006), pp.408-409)

There is very little empirical research on the effectiveness of self-learning activities. Yukl (2006, p.409) provides a list of recommendations for self-development of leadership abilities:

- Develop a personal vision of career objectives;
- Seek appropriate mentors;
- Seek challenging assignments;
- Improve self-monitoring;
- Seek relevant feedback;
- Learn from mistakes;
- Learn to view events from multiple perspectives; and
- Be sceptical of easy answers.

2.3.4. Contents of Leadership Development Programs

Yukl (2006) describes three major task behaviours, which should be taught in leadership development programs, for the participants to become more effective leaders.

Planning Work Activities: The planning consists of deciding what to do, when to do it, who will do it, and how to do it. It is important to ensure effective use of resources, coordination of activities and efficient organization of the work unit. In order to succeed at planning the work activities, the leader needs to be able to make decisions about objectives, strategies, priorities, organization of work, assignment of responsibilities, scheduling, and allocation of resources among different units according to their importance. Planning is a cognitive process occurring over a period of weeks or months, and therefore is difficult to observe. Some observable aspects are preparing written budgets, writing plans, developing written schedules, and meeting with others to formulate objectives and strategies. (Yukl (2006), pp.68-69)

Clarifying Roles and Objectives: This ability consists of communication of plans, policies and role expectations. The purpose is to make sure people know what to do, how to do it and why it is done. It is essential for each staff member to understand what duties and activities are required and what results are expected. Confusion about these aspects may result in misdirected effort and neglect of important responsibilities in favour of less important ones. (Yukl (2006), p.69)

Table 7: Guidelines for Clarifying Roles and Objectives

Defining Job Responsibilities
- Explain the important job responsibilities.
- Clarify the person’s scope of authority.
- Explain how the job relates to the mission of the unit.
- Explain important policies, rules, and requirements.

Assigning Work
- Clearly explain the assignment.
- Explain the reasons for an assignment.
- Clarify priorities and deadlines.
- Check for comprehension.

Setting Performance Goals
- Set goals for relevant aspects of performance.
- Set goals that are clear and specific.
- Set goals that are challenging but realistic.
- Set a target date for attainment of each goal.

Source: Yukl (2006), p.70

Monitoring Operations and Performance: Monitoring consists of gathering information about the operations of an organizational unit, including the progress of work, the performance of staff members, the quality of products or services, and the success of projects. Before starting the process, key performance indicators have to be identified. Monitoring behaviour includes reading reports, observation of operations, controlling data, inspecting samples of work, holding progress review meetings and measuring progress against plans and budgets. This approach is very important for organizational effectiveness, because it provides information needed for planning and problem solving. It is used to identify problems and opportunities, to formulate strategies, plans, and procedures, to evaluate subordinate performance, assess training needs, and allocate rewards such as a pay increase or promotion. (Yukl (2006), pp.70-71)

Besides the task behaviours future leaders should also be taught relations-oriented behaviour, which includes supporting, developing and recognizing. (Yukl (2006), p.71)

Supporting includes different behaviours that show acceptance, consideration, and concern for the needs and feelings of others. Supportive leadership helps to build and maintain good interpersonal relationships, and is more likely to result in friendship and loyalty of subordinates. This leads to higher job satisfaction not only of staff members, but also of the leader, and this in turn leads to less absenteeism and less turnover. (Yukl (2006), pp.71-72)

Table 8: Guidelines for Supporting

- Show acceptance and positive regard.
- Be polite and considerate, not arrogant and rude.
- Treat each subordinate as an individual.
- Remember important details about the person.
- Be patient and helpful when giving instructions or explanations.
- Provide sympathy and support when the person is anxious or upset.
- Express confidence in the person when there is a difficult task.
- Provide assistance with the work when it is needed.
- Be willing to help with personal problems.

Source: Yukl (2006), p.72

Developing includes several managerial practices, like coaching, mentoring and career counseling. They are used to increase a person’s skills and facilitate job adjustment and career advancement. Guidelines for coaching are e.g. helping a person to analyze his or her performance, providing constructive feedback about the person’s behaviour, demonstrating better ways to do a complex task, help a person to solve a problem, and express confidence that the person can succeed. Guidelines for mentoring include helping a person to identify relevant strengths and weaknesses, helping to acquire necessary skills and knowledge, providing opportunities to learn from experience, provide career advice, promoting a person’s reputation, and serving as a role model. Benefits from developing include faster career advancement and greater self-confidence of the subordinates, as well as higher employee commitment and better performance of the organization. (Yukl (2006), pp.72-73)

Recognizing involves showing appreciation to others for significant achievements, effective performance, and important contributions to the organization. The primary purpose is to strengthen desirable behaviour and task commitment. The three major forms of recognizing are praise, awards and recognition. (Yukl (2006), p.74)

2.3.5. Facilitating Conditions for Development

Regardless of the approaches that are used for leadership development, the acquisition of leadership skills can be facilitated by conditions within an organization. Yukl (2006) identifies three aspects that are critical for this consideration.

Support by the Boss: To facilitate the development of leadership skills of his immediate subordinates the boss needs to understand the importance of coaching and mentoring. He should spend enough time with staff members and has to be secure enough to not fear that the development of his subordinates would make them competitors. The boss also needs to find the right balance between providing necessary guidance and encouraging to solve problems independently. It is also important that he treats mistakes by subordinates as learning experiences and not as personal failures. However he can’t be too protective, but should provide enough challenges, honest feedback, and training activities. (Yukl (2006), p.409)

Learning Climate: The opportunities for leadership development depend very much on prevailing attitudes and values. It is much easier for staff to acquire leadership skills, if individual learning is regarded as important for organizational effectiveness. In such an organization more resources will be devoted to training and managers will provide more coaching and mentoring when they will be rewarded for it. Also individuals are more likely to accept a high-risk assignment if their performance will be evaluated in terms of skill development as well as task success. (Yukl (2006), p.410)

Developmental Criteria for Placement Decisions: Most organizations assign the same types of activities repeatedly to the same individuals and promote persons to higher positions within the same functional specialty rather than moving them to management positions in different functional specialties. The idea of utilizing job assignments for leadership development is contrary to the traditional approach of a good match between job requirements and manager skills, because it minimizes the risk of mistakes and failure. However promoting an individual who does not possess the necessary skills for the new position is likely to increase his skills. (Yukl (2006), p.411)

Table 9: Ways to support leadership training of subordinates

Before the training

- Inform subordinates about opportunities to get training.
- Explain why the training is important and beneficial.
- Ask others who received the training to explain how it was useful.
- Change the work schedule to make it easier to attend training.
- Give a subordinate time off if necessary to prepare for the training.
- Support preparation activities such as distribution of questionnaires.
- Tell subordinates they will be asked to report on what was learned.

After the training

- Meet with the person to discuss what was learned how it can be applied.
- Jointly set specific objectives and action plans to use what was learned.
- Make assignments that require use of newly learned skills.
- Hold periodic review sessions to monitor progress in applying learning.
- Provide praise for applying the skills.
- Provide encouragement and coaching when difficulties are encountered.
- Include application of new skills in performance appraisals.
- Set an example for trainees by using the skills yourself.

Source: Yukl (2006), p.410

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The objective of the research was to analyze the impact of last year's leadership project on the work of the VTE managers. Data were collected by means of questionnaires and in-depth interviews. The research design and methodology used in order to address the problem in this study followed a qualitative approach.

3.2. Qualitative Research

In general, researchers use two different approaches in social scientific research – deductive theory testing and inductive theory building. The deductive theory, also known as quantitative design, is characterized by a focus on description and explanation of numerically quantifiable criteria. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research methods follow inductive or interpretative perspectives. Theories are developed through understanding of a specified issue or problem. The qualitative research approach can be described as follows (Denzin and Lincoln (1994), p.2 - quoted in Creswell (1998), p.15):

> *"Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives."Changes in HR policies and procedures don't get communicated and you don't find out until you try to do something using the former system and it comes back to you saying, this has changed."*

3.2.1. Justification of the qualitative paradigm

In recent decades, qualitative methods have become widely accepted, as they produce in-depth information on a small number of individuals and look beyond people's obvious behaviours. The qualitative approach is best suited for studies that focus on participants' perspectives and their meaning. The researcher should be willing to participate in human science research that is evolving and changing constantly, and doesn't have strict guidelines or specific procedures. (Creswell (1998), p. 16-17) Moreover qualitative data collection methods often are interactive, involve close contact between the researcher and the research participants, and remain open to the unexpected, which allows emergent issues to be explored. (Neuman (1997), p. 146)

Peterson (1994, quoted in Veal (1997), pp. 130) summarizes the potential uses of qualitative research as follows:

1. To develop hypotheses concerning relevant behaviour and attitudes;
2. To understand how decisions are made;
3. To identify the full range of issues, views and attitudes which could be pursued in larger-scale research; and
4. To learn how communications are received.

3.2.2. Criticism of the qualitative paradigm

There are some general criticisms levelled against the qualitative approach. During the analysis of qualitative data the researcher often needs to make personal subjective judgements. Some people claim that the procedures are so vague, that they cannot be replicated, and conclusions are made on the basis of too few cases. Often there is no way to tell if the conclusions are supported by the data (Grinell (2001, p. 112). Generally, disadvantages of a qualitative research approach include (Veal (1997), pp. 131-32):

- Sample sizes are commonly too small to allow for generalizations beyond the selected sample;
- Reliability of data can be difficult and it can not be guaranteed that the study is replicable;
- The meaning can be de-contextualized, if interpretation is taken out of context;
- Interpretation might be subjective and explanations might be oversimplified; and
- In-depth, comprehensive approach to data gathering limits scope.

Therefore there are four requirements for any research that claims to be objective (Grinell (2001, p. 112):

1) If someone else examines the data a researcher has collected and applies the same analytic procedures, the exact same results should be obtained;
2) If someone else collects data from the same kinds of sources, under similar circumstances, and using comparable methods of data elicitation and coding, then similar results should be obtained;
3) The conclusions drawn from the data should be clearly supported by those data; and
4) If a researcher generalizes their findings and claims that the results he has obtained from X_1 will also hold for X_2, X_3… X_n, their claims should be clearly supported by the data, and the rationale for the conclusions should be clear.

3.3. Opinion Research

Kumar (1996, pp.15-21) introduces an eight-step-model for opinion research:

Formulating a research problem: This is the first step in the research process. A research problem tells the researcher, the supervisor and the readers what the study intends to research. It is very important to evaluate the problem in the light of financial resources at disposal, time available, and the researcher's as wells as the supervisor's expertise and knowledge in the field of study.

Conceptualising a research design: The main purpose of a research design is to explain how answers to research questions are found. It includes the sampling strategy, the measurement procedures, the time-frame, the logistical arrangements to be undertaken, and the frame of analysis.

Constructing an instrument for data collection: Anything that becomes a means of collecting information for the study (e.g. observation forms, interview schedules, questionnaires, interview guides) is called a research tool. The construction of a research instrument is the first practical step of a study. The researcher has to decide how he will collect the data and then construct an appropriate research tool.

Selecting a sample: The accuracy of the estimates largely depends on the way the sample is selected. The basic objective of every sampling design is to minimise, within the limitation of cost, the gap between the values obtained and those prevalent in the entire sampling population. The underlying premise is, that a scientifically selected small number of units is selected, it can provide a fairly true reflection with a sufficiently high degree or probability. Sampling theory is guided by the avoidance of bias in the selection of a sample and the attainment of maximum precision for a given outlay of resources. Kumar (1996) distinguishes between random/probability sampling designs, non-random-probability sampling designs, and mixed sampling designs.

Writing a research proposal: The purpose of this step is to provide the supervisor and the reader with the information about what you are proposing to do, how you plan to proceed, and why you selected the proposed strategy. It should contain the following information about your study:

- A statement of the objectives of the study;
- A list of hypotheses, if you are testing any;
- The study design you are proposing to use;
- The setting for your study;
- The research instrument(s) you are planning to use;
- Information on sample size and sampling design;
- Information on data processing procedures;
- An outline of the proposed chapters for the report;
- The study's problems and limitations; and
- The proposed time-frame.

Collecting the data: As part of the research design, the researcher decided which procedure to use to collect the data. At this stage he actually conducts the data collection. Some possibilities for this process are mailing out questionnaires, commencing interviews, conducting nominal/focused group discussions, or making observations.

Processing the data: The way the data is analysed largely depends on the type of information (descriptive, quantitative, qualitative or attitudinal) and the way the report is written. If the study is descriptive, the report can be completed on the basis of field notes through manual analysis. In case of quantitative data it is necessary to decide upon the type of statistical procedures required for the analysis.

Writing the report: The last step is to provide the information that was discovered in the study and also the conclusions that were drawn from the findings. The report should be written in academic style and be divided into different sections based upon the main themes of the study.

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Questionnaires

According to Sproull (1995, p.192) questionnaires should be used when people's attitudes, values, beliefs or self-reports are desired for a study. An important issue in designing a questionnaire is the structure. A structured questionnaire has fixed items, fixed response categories and fixed sequencing of items. This restricts the respondent to specific answers in a specific ordering. Thus the researcher gets the desired answers in the desired form. The disadvantage is that a strict structure does not allow creative responses. However questionnaires can have varying degrees of structure.

There are four common response formats for questionnaires (Sproull (1995), pp. 200-204):

1) Multiple-Choice Response Items are comprised of a question or statement and possible responses, which can form a scale or be categories only. Usually the respondent is told to select only one response, but in some situations is allowed to choose more than one.

Advantages:

- Restricts the respondent to the choices of responses which the researcher desires;
- It is easy and fast to fill out, therefore more issues can be dealt with in the same time, compared to written responses;
- Reduces interviewer bias; and
- Tabulation of data is easier than with written responses.

Disadvantages:

- Limits respondent to determined responses and thus does not allow for creative ideas. This can cause respondent's resentment; and
- Requires more time and effort to come up with unbiased questions, which measure the variables appropriately.

2) Dichotomous Response Items consist of a question or statement and only two mutually exclusive responses. The advantages are that they are easy and fast for the respondent to answer and also easy and fast for the researcher to tabulate. However the amount of gathered information is limited, because there are only two possible responses. Dichotomous response items are overused because of lack of awareness that multiple-choice items would generate more information. Also there are many issues that cannot be answered with this response format.

3) Ranking Response Items are comprised of a question or statement and possible answers. The respondent is instructed to rank the responses according to preselected criteria.

Advantages:

- Directions easily to understand for respondent;
- Similar to real world in forcing discrimination among objects; and
- Provides more information than choice of only one response.

Disadvantages:

- Does not yield degree of respondent preference or attitude;
- Respondent may not like any choice, but is not allowed a "dislike" response;
- Response time is longer than in multiple-choice response items, therefore fewer items can be used in the same time; and
- Some respondents resent the task of rank ordering.

4) Open-Ended Response Items consist of a question or statement with no fixed answers. The respondent is instructed to give a written or oral response.

Advantages:

- Can elicit creative and / or original information;
- Opportunity for respondent to give opinions;
- Can measure organization of thoughts, as well as writing, grammatical or spelling ability; and
- Can add new information when there is little existing knowledge about a topic;

Disadvantages:

- Requires much respondent time and effort;
- Handwriting of respondents is often illegible;
- Generates unpredictable information, which can stray from the intent of the question, yielding poor and inadequate data;
- May create respondent resentment about the task, which can lead to invalid responses; and
- Requires much researcher time for coding and tabulation of data, as well as time to generate an instrument to measure the variables in the responses.

3.4.2. In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are a special type of qualitative research instruments. They are used to elicit subjective responses and allow deeper understanding of the participant's situation or point of view. In-depth interviewers aim to collect detailed and content-rich personal information. (Kaufman (1994), pp. 123-25) The process of in-depth interviewing involves open-ended questions and allows the researcher to follow up with probing questions when additional data or explanations are necessary. (Berry (1999), n.p.a.) This approach yields rich insights into individual persons' experiences, values, attitudes and feeling. (Hesse-

Biber and Leavy (2006), p. 119) Therefore in-depth interviewing is considered useful for getting a detailed understanding of complicated behaviour or confidential, sensitive and embarrassing topics. Given the open-ended nature of this method, every interview in a study, even though dealing with the same issues, will be different and hence enables the researcher to get a broad spectrum of different opinions and ideas. (Veal (1997), p. 133)

In-depth interviews tend to be used in three situations (Veal (1997), p. 133):

1. The research subjects are relatively few in number, and therefore a quantitative approach is inappropriate;

2. The expected information is likely to vary considerably from participant to participant; and

3. A topic is explored as a preliminary stage in planning a larger study, for example a quantitative study.

According to Patton (2001, pp. 342-46) there are three basic approaches to conducting qualitative interviewing: the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach and the standardised open-ended interview. These types of interviews have also been defined as structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Atteslander (2003); pp. 146-148) and can be distinguished by the extent to which interview questions are determined and standardised before the interview is conducted. (Patton (2001), p. 342) Structured interviews consist of a set of open-ended questions which are carefully arranged to ensure that each participant will be asked the same questions in the same way. On the other hand, unstructured interviews primarily rely on informal conversations, during which questions arise in the natural flow of the conversation.

Semi-structured interviews are a mix of these two methods and are widely regarded as a popular qualitative method of data collection. Similar to unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews are fluid in nature and follow the thinking processes of the participant. However they involve the use of an interview guideline that contains a set of predetermined general issues to be explored to make sure that the same information is obtained from each interviewee. In which order and to which extent these issues are discussed, can vary based on the conversation flow of each interview. (Mayring (2002), pp. 66-68; Flick (1998), p. 76)

Depending on the extent to which the interviewer is able to specify important issues in advance, interview guidelines can be developed in more or less detail. The guideline provides a framework, within which the interviewer develops questions, sequences those questions and makes decisions about which information to pursue in greater depth. (Patton (2001), p. 344) The interviewer is also free to explore, and ask additional questions that might arise during the conversation. Such probing may allow the interview to develop into new directions that might help to meet the research objectives, even though they were not originally considered as part of the interview. (Atteslander (2002), p. 148)

3.4.3. Research Design and Data Collection Strategies

Based on the goals of the study and also the aim of last year's leadership project, a questionnaire (Appendix C) and an interview guideline (Appendix D) for semi-structured interviews were designed. The questionnaire consisted of twelve multiple-choice response items, six ranking response items and four open-ended questions. The interview guideline was developed before the interviews were conducted. It geared to the questionnaire and consisted of open-ended questions and probing questions to deepen the conversation. There was no need for selecting a sample, because the questionnaires were sent out to all twelve participants who were still with the CDU at the time. Interviews were conducted with all participants who were available. The questions of the interview guideline were dependent on information from the responses that were given in the questionnaire, therefore all the interviewees had to fill out the questionnaire before taking part in an interview.

3.5. Data Analysis

According to Marshall C. and Rossman G.B. (1999, p. 150) "*data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data*". It does not proceed in linear fashion and is a search for general statements about relationships between categories of data. The overall strategy is rather interpretive and subjective than technical and objective. Analytical procedures are divided into six phases: (1) organizing the data, (2) generating categories, themes, and patterns, (3) coding the data, (4) testing the emergent understandings, (5) searching for alternative explanations, and (6) writing the report. (Marshall C. and Rossman G.B. (1999), pp. 150-152)

3.5.1. Organizing the data

Organizing the data is mostly about reading through the data and becoming familiar with it. During the reading process the researcher "cleans up" the data, takes notes and performs the necessary editing to make the notes retrievable. At this stage it is also possible to enter the data into a software program for the management or analysis of qualitative data. (Marshall C. and Rossman G.B. (1999), pp. 152-154)

3.5.2. Generating categories, themes and patterns

This phase of data analysis is the most difficult, complex, creative, and mentally challenging. It demands a heightened awareness of the data and a focused attention to identify recurring ideas or language, salient themes, and patterns of belief. The researcher searches for categories that are internally consistent, but distinct from one another. Once the categories are defined, segments of text are assigned to them. (Marshall C. and Rossman G.B. (1999), p.154) Creating themes and patterns may however be subject to the "legitimate charge of imposing a world of meaning on the participants that better reflects the observer's world than the world under study". (Patton (1990), p. 398 – quoted in Marshall C. and Rossman G.B. (1999), p. 155)

3.5.3. Coding the data

The phase of coding the data is the formal representation of analytic thinking. The intellectual work of analysis was done in generating categories. Now the researcher applies a coding scheme to those categories and marks diligently marks passages in the data using the codes. These codes may have several forms: abbreviations of key words, numbers, colored dots, etc. Computer software for data analysis normally relies on abbreviations of key words. As the researcher codes the data, oftentimes new understandings emerge, necessitating changes to the original plan. (Marshall C. and Rossman G.B. (1999), pp.155-157)

3.5.4. Testing Emergent Understandings

During the process of coding the data, the researcher begins to evaluate the plausibility of his developing understandings and exploring them through the data. During the search through the data, the researcher looks for negative instances of the patterns. This determines how useful the data are in illuminating the questions being explored. (Marshall C. and Rossman G.B. (1999), p. 157)

3.5.5. Searching for Alternative Explanations

Even if the discovered categories seem apparent, the researcher should critically challenge them and search for other, plausible explanations for the data and the linkages between them. There are always alternative explanations. The researcher has to identify them and demonstrate why the explanation offered is the most plausible of all. (ibid.)

3.5.6. Writing the report

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest five different approaches for writing the report. (Marshall C. and Rossman G.B. (1999), p. 157):

- In the purely descriptive life history the author presents a person's view of his or her own life and frames that description with an analysis about the social significance of that life;

- The second approach consists of the presentation of data gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews. The participant's opinions are presented and their worldviews form the structural framework for the report;
- This third model attempts to relate the reality of social phenomena to theory. Descriptive data are summarized and linked to more general theoretical constructs;
- The fourth approach is the most theoretical. Taylor and Bogdan illustrate it with an example using a study about institutions for people with severe cognitive challenges. The report addresses sociological institutionalization theory and the symbolic management of conditions in total institutions; and
- The final model attempts to build theory by drawing on data gathered from several types of institutions, under different research conditions.

3.6. Ethical Issues

All participants of the study took part voluntarily. Prior to filling out a questionnaire or taking part in an interview everyone of them received a letter of information (Appendix A), which explained the purpose of the study, and was required to sign an informed consent agreement (Appendix B). All participants involved in the project were assured confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw at any time. The researcher was the only person who had access to the collected information. Measures taken to insure confidentiality consisted of the researcher destroying all audio recordings upon transferring the interviews to transcripts and all data collected during the project not being identifiable.

4. RESULTS

The main objective of the study was to research the opinions of the participants about the improvement of their coaching skills, the improvement of communication between VTE managers, the improvement of the communication pathways in the CDU, the usefulness of the Katherine Wheel, and the usefulness of the Katherine Residential. Some other major topics in the opinion research included the obstacles in the work of VTE managers, the usefulness of a central database and an internet forum, and suggestions for possible improvements for an upcoming leadership project.

When the review started, 3 out of the 15 participants of the Katherine Residential were not with the CDU anymore. Due to time constraints of the researcher and the participants, only 8 of 12 VTE managers were interviewed. The remaining four participants received the questionnaire by post mail and were asked to return it back by facsimile or post mail. Only one of them sent the questionnaire back. The researcher sent the questionnaire via e-mail to the other three persons, and asked them again to fill it out. This resulted in an answer of one more participant.

The data to be analysed included eight interviews and ten questionnaires. Tables 10 to 16 provide the analysis of the questionnaires. Table 10 identifies all multiple-choice-questions, which had four answer possibilities and also offers an average mark (e.g. very valuable corresponds to 1, valuable to 2, not very valuable to 3, not valuable at all to 4). Tables 11 to 16 show how many persons gave a respective rank to a certain answer, and also the average rank.

Overall the feedback in the multiple-choice response items was very positive. The questionnaire included nine questions that dealt with how valuable or helpful a facet of the leadership project was, or how it improved a certain aspect. 27 times the participants chose the best alternative (e.g. very valuable), 49 times the second-best (e.g. valuable) and 12 times the third-best (e.g. not very valuable). Not even one time did a participant choose the worst alternative (e.g. not valuable at all).

Table 10: Results of the questionnaires' multiple-choice questions

	1	2	3	4	Avg.
Did the Katherine Wheel fulfil your expectations?	2	7	1		1,90
How valuable is the Katherine Wheel for your work?	3	6	1		1,80
Did the leadership project improve your coaching skills?	2	7	1		1,90
Did the leadership project improve the communication between the group participants?	2	6	2		2,00
Did the LP improve the communication pathways in the CDU?		8	2		2,20
How helpful would a central database be to you?	6	3	1		1,50
How helpful would an internet forum be to you?	2	5	3		2,10
How valuable was last year's Katherine residential for you?	6	3	1		1,50
How valuable was last year's Katherine residential for the work of the group participants?	4	4	1		1,67
How valuable was last year's leadership project for you?	5	3	2		1,70
How valuable was last year's leadership project for the work of the group participants?	3	5	1		1,78

Getting to know colleagues personally was clearly identified as the most important aspect of the leadership project, as it received seven out of ten first-place-votes. One participant said that the "*most important, valuable outcome was networking. That's what's really important, getting to know the people that are in situations similar to yours.*" The improvement of the communication pathways was chosen number two getting six second-place-votes, while the implementation of the Katherine Wheel and the acquisition of coaching skills each were voted as the most important facet only once.

Table 11: Participants' opinions on the most important aspect of the leadership project

	1	2	3	4	Avg.
Getting to know colleagues personally	7	1		2	1,67
Improvement of communication pathways	2	6	2		2,00
Implementation of Katherine Wheel	1	3	4	2	2,70
Acquisition of coaching skills	1	1	4	4	3,22

The opinions on the most enjoyable part of the job were very different. Working remote / out-bush had the best average, however working with colleagues had five out of ten first-place-votes and working with students had the most first- and second-place-votes combined.

Table 12: Participants' opinions on the most enjoyable part of job

	1	2	3	4	Avg.	Not ranked
Working remote / out-bush	3	3	2		1,88	2
Working with colleagues	5	1	2	2	2,10	
Working with students	2	5	1	1	2,11	1
Freedom	3		1	2	2,33	4

Bureaucracy was identified as the most frustrating part of the job by the participants. Bad communication was second, while the distance between centres doesn't seem to bother the VTE managers very much.

Table 13: Participants' opinions on the most frustrating part ob job

	1	2	3	4	Avg.	Not ranked
Bureaucracy	6	3	1		1,50	
Bad communication	4	4		1	1,78	1
Distance between centres	1	1	7		2,67	1

Improving communication pathways in the CDU is a distinctive first, when it comes to potential changes that would be most helpful for the work of the VTE managers. Enhancing the communication with colleagues is also a high priority for the participants, while the communication with clients and coaching skills were ranked a distant third and fourth respectively.

Table 14: Participants' opinions on where changes would be most helpful to them

	1	2	3	4	Avg.	Not ranked
Communication pathways in CDU in general	7	2	1		1,40	1
Communication with colleagues	3	3	2	1	2,11	1
Communication with clients		3	3	3	3,00	1
My coaching skills		2	2	4	3,24	2

4.1. Communication pathways in the CDU

The results of the questionnaires clearly show that the communication pathways in the CDU are a major obstacle for the work of the VTE managers. The participants identified bureaucracy as the most frustrating part of their job, and seven out of ten indicated that this area would be the one where improvements would be most helpful to them.

Some of the criticism referred to the administrative structure of the University and also changes to this structure:

> *"The University is one institution, but it is made up of a couple of faculties and a couple of schools and each of those work as almost independent autonomous bodies. So your ability to put in place processes in each of those schools doesn't always work. Everyone has their own procedures for getting the information. Streamlining would be very helpful, because bureaucracy generates communication problems."*

> *"Changes in HR policies and procedures don't get communicated and you don't find out until you try to do something using the former system and it comes back to you saying, this has changed. I spend a lot of time reacting to change and putting change forward to people that I supervise."*

> *"We are run by so many organizations, DEET, ATQF... By them upgrading their systems all the time, reporting mechanisms are changing all the time and we are wasting too much time getting the information for the upgrading. This takes away from the time that we should use teaching the students."*

Some participants also said that getting approvals takes much time, and is hindered by inconsistent information and unnecessary formalities:

> *"Getting approvals for things can sometimes take time. Remote lecturers come to me, if they are not getting travel allowance. Then I get on the phone and*

chase it as much as possible. It's about building relationships in Casuarina with people who are responsible."

"There is a help desk, that you can either ring or e-mail, but you still have to fill out a form. We don't seem to realize that the help desk is the form."

"Continuity would be great. One person says one thing, the next person says another thing. You are wasting too much time to figure if the information is right."

There were also VTE managers asking for more flexibility and trust:

"We have got a structure within our corporate services which is understandably administrative driven. It's difficult to build flexibility into a form-based computer driven corporate service. Whereas where we work you have to be extremely flexible. People might go to a particular location to deliver some work. It takes them seven hours to drive there. They get there and find out that no one is there, because everybody is gone to a funeral. And so there hast to be an element of flexibility. This person would no doubt go and find some other work somewhere nearby, but often the bureaucratic process does not allow for this. Someone says "Hey, he was supposed to be at point A, why was he at point B?" There is all of the sudden a great expenditure of energy back through the system to find out why this person went from there to there."

"In the role that I am, I am given a fair amount of responsibility, but I'm only given a limited authority. It's a perception of mistrust, people at the University are not trusted to do the right thing. Because of the wrongs of some people, everybody has to go through a great deal of work that isn't really necessary. You spend much time verifying minor things. Everybody has to be checking on everybody else. Instead of saying, "You are expected to do your job", "Go do your job and we'll review your performance"."

One participant said that there is ongoing improvement in the communication pathways of the CDU:

> *"I think they are improving all the time. I find senior personnel extremely responsive to queries. The people on the ground are pretty responsive as well, it's the people in the middle management that we need to improve."*

4.2. Means of communication

According to the questionnaires, e-mail is the most used means of communication between the participants. Seven out of ten claimed that they mostly correspond via e-mail. Face-to-face and telephone are also used very much, as face-to-face received the other three first-place-votes and telephone had five second-place rankings. Video conferencing is still rather a secondary communication medium, while facsimile and post mail were – except for one vote – only ranked fifth or sixth. Table 15 displays the exact results.

Table 15: Participants' preferable means of communication

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Avg.	Not ranked
e-mail	7	1	2				1,50	
Face-to-face	3	2	4	1			2,30	
Telephone		5	4	1			2,60	
Video conference		2	1	5		1	3,67	1
Facsimile					8		5,00	2
Post mail				1	1	5	5,57	3

Table 16 shows which means of communication the participants would prefer to use. Face-to-face is a clear number one, however all the interviewees said, that obviously it is not possible to meet the colleagues in person on a day-to-day basis, due to the distances between the centres.

"The best communication is face-to-face, however logistics and cost of working in an environment like we work in prohibits it. So the leadership program provides you with that avenue for face-to-face and building relationships."

Table 16: Participants' opinions on which means of communication should be used

	1	2	3	4	5	6	Avg.	Not ranked
Face-to-face	7	1	1	1			1,60	
Video conference	1	4	3	1			2,44	1
e-mail	1	4	1	4			2,80	
Telephone	1	2	4	3			2,90	
Facsimile					9		5,00	1
Post mail					1	8	5,89	1

Video conference was ranked number two even though it is not used as often as e-mail and telephone at the moment. Many participants said that seeing a person during a conversation is very important to them. Two of the quotes were:

"The most effective way to communicate is by full visual face-to-face contact. Language is not nearly as important as facial expression as body language etc. To that extent I believe we always have a paramount lead for face-to-face communication. Video conferencing will certainly play a significant part in providing a large degree of that."

"Video conferencing is best and I use it whenever I can. It makes meetings between Alice Springs and Darwin much more functional. However not enough people participate in video links."

It seems like most of the participants recognize the advantages of video conferences, but are still reluctant to use this tool. One participant said that *"most of the people are still anxious about video conferences."* Another person stated that video conferences are too inconvenient to set up compared to the benefits.

While e-mail is the preferred means of communication for the participants, four of the eight interviewees stated, that getting too many irrelevant e-mails is a big problem for them.

> *"With e-mail being the most useful communication tool across distance, the greatest obstacle is a lack of response or. This comes about through the volume of e-mail each staff member gets on any given day."*

> *"People are using e-mail excessively, copying too many people into it, and it has got to the state where you walk in these days and suddenly you have 50 e-mails and you might be away for three days and you have 200. So a lot of colleagues will say "I don't have the time for that" and delete a lot. If they are getting a flood of mail every day, they are just going to give up in despair. So I put a lot of the problem down to that."*

According to the interviewees the biggest improvement in communication between the group participants occurred due to the relationships built at the Katherine Residential. Socialising, talking face-to-face, as well as understanding and appreciating the work of others helped to enhance the communication. One participant said that *"when your e-mail comes to someone that you know, they will actually open it."* Other quotes included:

> *"Communication improved because until then you knew the name but you didn't know the face. Now you know what the others are about, and you know who you are talking to. You know the person and not just the voice on the phone. It was like breaking the barrier."*

> *"It gave a lot of us a really good idea of the difficulties that we each face. It's more the appreciation of the job roles of each person. I think that once you come together as a group and you have time to have a bit of an informal chat about things, that sometimes works best. It made it easier for me to relate to people and to appreciate what they do on a day-to-day basis."*

Some problems cannot be solved by the CDU as they exist all over the Northern Territory. If a lecturer is away for an extended period of time and the landline at his destination is down, she/he won't be able to answer his e-mails. Mobiles also often don't have coverage in remote areas, so the only solution, according to one interviewee, is the use of SAT phones. They are however very expensive.

Other problems that are not based on communication are time constraints and dedication. One participant said that *"communication itself is not the problem, but people are very busy."* Another interviewee said:

> *"It just takes a great deal of effort to communicate effectively and it's easy to get complacent and say "that's not so important". There is no way really to improve it."*

4.3. Coaching Skills and the Katherine Wheel

The feedback on the improvement of coaching skills and the implementation of the Katherine Wheel was positive, but not overwhelming. The responses as to whether the Katherine Wheel fulfilled the expectations, whether it was helpful for the work, and whether the leadership project improved the coaching skills were almost identical (see Table 10). Most of the participants stated that the leadership project improved their coaching skills and that the Katherine Wheel was helpful and fulfilled their expectations. Only a few answered with "strongly agree" or "very helpful".

One participant voiced the opinion that the coaching part at the Katherine Residential was rather helpful for socialising, than for improving the coaching abilities. Also a few interviewees said that the training can only be seen as groundwork or inspiration and that it is up to every individual to use that information for enhancing their coaching skills:

"Coaching has to be relevant specifically to each one. The only person who can make it relevant is themselves. You can't force it. It can only become useful when it's needed."

"The coaching course is always valuable for breaking the ice and getting people involved. Afterwards it is there unconsciously, sitting in the back of your head."

"The coaching part was very good. Once you start to look at issues as an opportunity to improve, it makes your job a lot easier."

Only two of the ten participants stated that they don't use the Katherine Wheel. However both of them still thought that it was a good model. One of them isn't involved in any activities on which the Katherine Wheel could be applied on. The other interviewee said:

"It's a valuable tool, but it's not something that's at the forefront of my mind. It's been very valuable developing it to put in your mind, but it will be an unconscious part of the mind in my case."

Three other quotes on this topic were:

"I have it on the wall. I don't use it every day, but once in a while I am looking at it. It is a good model, but it is important to reflect on how you use it, in the circumstances in that you use it."

"Most of us were doing much of it before, but we didn't know it. Now we have got a more formalized pathway. To see "Am I doing all these things on a day-to-day basis?" If not, "how can I integrate them in my own context?""

"It achieved more than I expected. The participants were all willing to collaborate, to work on developing a uniform way in which we tackle interpersonal relationships, coaching, mentoring etc. and that's how the

Katherine Wheel came about. It wasn't force-fed in any way, it was something the group developed."

"Within our units the project caused improvement. The people who participated came out with a sense of how to work with others and with the uniform idea "How do we approach coaching", how to work with a person who has a different skill set than I have, a person who has newly arrived to an environment. Having that uniform approach to coaching, has significantly improved the way in which we work. However, this is something we have to continue to work at."

4.4. Central Database and Internet Forum

The participants stated that a central database for VTE managers would be more valuable than an internet forum (see Table 10). Six of them thought that it would be very helpful, three that it would helpful, and only one that it would not be very helpful. At the same time the votes for the respective categories regarding the internet forum were two, five and three.

The suggestions for information to be shared in a central database included relevant resources, travel plans, key contacts for both internal and external people, community profiles including statistical information (e.g. how many students passed a specific course in a certain community), assessments of VTE units, success stories, and VTE programs as well as their respective lecturers, time tables and locations.

Two of the quotes concerning the central database were:

"Before we enroll students we need to have an understanding of not just what their aspirations are and what their background is, but also what things like their reading age is, their mathematical age is, their aptitude for particular

areas is, and also their track record, to maybe pick up flaws in their study habits, or flaws in their study performance overall, early rather than late."

"It would create more efficient ways in which we can deliver our programs. By having a centralised database, we could establish a booking service, such that if there was a program to be conducted in the middle of nowhere, and an aeroplane is going to be booked to take two people out there and there are six more places available, someone might say "I also have to go there, I will join in", and you fill the plane up. Same with motor vehicles. It also creates the possibility to put together packages where one person representing two schools could go and teach the full package, two for the price of one. You go on and on with the possibilities there. With a centralised database you can build in my opinion a whole range of very beneficial tools for the CDU."

While almost all the participants supported the idea of creating a central database, the opinions on an internet forum were diverse. While some thought that it would be a good tool to share experiences and discuss relevant topics, others said that *"it just would become another stress in your life."*

"It would allow us to put forward views in a more relaxed sort of setting, because you don't have to respond."

"After the leadership program, it would have been good to continue with internet forums to see how people were going with it."

"I don't have enough time to go to those things. I would only go there if I wanted to post something, but I wouldn't go in regularly to see if someone else posted something."

4.5. Other problems in the work of VTE managers

One of the major problems identified by the participants is a high turn-over of staff. This isn't just a problem of the VTE managers or the CDU, it is territory wide:

> *"When you are operating in an aboriginal community, it's quite likely that your teacher turn-over could be every 12 months. Therefore the stability of the programs that we are offering is very much at the mercy of who the new teacher is. In a community, a program for the upcoming year might have been decided, but at the start of the new year you have a new teacher or a new principal and they don't want that program any more. Also the students might have left for another community, so you have to constantly develop relationships with people."*

Another problem, according to the interviewees, is that the CDU concentrates its efforts on higher education and neglects VTE. This results in a lack of staff, resources, and support for VTE managers and also creates a perception of a higher focus on concerns of staff on the Casuarina campus, than in the other centres.

> *"Because we are a dual-learning institution, both higher education and VTE, we seem to have the money pumped towards the higher education, research and development more so than to where the money is being generated. We make a hell lot of money. It would be nice for the money to be spread evenly."*

> *"Within the university, the major problem is turnover of staff at all levels and also the understanding of the staff of doing business. We are a dual-sector university and we have a higher education branch and a VTE branch. The methodologies for learning are very different and yet we have heads of schools who are very much higher education trained and experienced and don't relate well to VTE, which is 80 or 90 % of our business. Most of our business outside of Darwin is VTE at very low levels, a lot of literacy and numeracy work, very basic business IT, basic trades etc. There are philosophical misunderstandings*

in a lot of cases between the middle management of the university and the people who are working on the philosophy that we have put in place. Upper management have probably by virtue of their position in a dual sector environment to understand how both sectors work, whereas middle management generally have been the workhorses and do not have the time to actually develop a conscious understanding of the VTE system."

One participant said that the group would do much better work, if it was provided with better infrastructure, decent accommodations and learning facilities, as well as proper resources.

"The biggest problem is a lack of resources. We don't have a massive budget. It is also hard to get the resources to the students, because when we fly, we are restricted to 15 kg luggage. If you take the resources, you can't take many clothes, you can't take any food, and have to buy food and water in remote locations which is very, very expensive. Also while being away we don't get reimbursed for weekends… Some places don't have decent accommodations. We have to sleep on the ground with restricted bathing facilities. Some classrooms can be just a shelter, not proper teaching areas. In one building, I had to spend a whole day cleaning all the broken glass so I could actually use it, because the place was just trashed."

Another concern voiced by an interviewee was, that the computer systems in the CDU centres across the Northern Territory are not compatible and therefore staff members don't have access to their home drives when they log on while being at another campus. This causes complications for VTE managers who don't take their laptop when they are travelling.

4.6. Opinions on the leadership project

Overall the feedback on the leadership project, and especially the Katherine residential was very positive. There were only two persons who stated that the leadership project was not very valuable for them (see Table 10). One of them however said, that it was just because it didn't really fit with his job. She/He still had this opinion about the Katherine residential:

> *"I'm not a great fan of those sorts of get-togethers generally, just because I find them kind of boring and artificial. But I think that last year's one was good, in that it included practical things, it was fun and interesting and it was well run as well. I was envious of the person who conceived and put it together."*

The only participant, who stated that the Katherine residential wasn't very helpful, also had a positive feedback. She/He only criticized that the activities were not continued after the project ended:

> *"It was good to get together and work on a common task. However there hasn't been much follow-up linked to the residential."*

All the other participants voiced the opinion that the Katherine residential and the leadership project were valuable or very valuable for them. One interviewee said however that both activities were not very helpful for the whole group. Also all interviewees stated that a similar project should be conducted in the near future.

> *"We are never going to get to the end of the journey, but in doing so we can have some very good achievements along the way. And we have to keep tailoring what we do, to the people we are working with."*

4.7. Possible improvements for future leadership projects

While all the participants were at least satisfied with the leadership project, many said that there was a lack of follow-up activities (*"We identified problems, but nothing changed").* All interviewees said that a similar program should be conducted in the future, and there were many suggestions concerning improvements.

One of the ideas was to make the project more valuable by conducting activities for people from specific sectors, or even by individualizing them:

> *"Because it was the first one, there will be a natural improvement. But you could improve in being more specific and saying we're looking for leaders from a particular sector."*

> *"It is a general sort of thing. At the same time you have such a diverse group of people and they all have different roles within the university. None of us does exactly the same job. The project would be more valuable if you individualized it for specific persons."*

Other suggestions included defining clear goals, planning follow-up activities in advance and involving young staff members:

> *"The goals should be more clearly explained and worked forwards. In the residential we seemed to be doing lots of activities but I didn't see a link to an overall good, other than a networking opportunity. I have made use of networking for my own role but the group as a whole has dispersed back to wherever."*

> *"Better project management is important, so that participants are identified in advance and are 100% committed to the project. Some dropped out after the Katherine residential never to be heard from again. Not enough people participated in any follow up activities as they could not be drawn together time wise."*

> *"I would like to see some of our younger people attend, so we start to build some succession planning. For new people an initial outline is needed to explain where the program came from, what the general outcomes were, and what the goals are."*

Some participants also suggested that people from other sectors of the CDU should be involved:

> *"It was a shame that there were not more people there from more of the other centres. It was very Alice Springs centric. I think it needs to be much wider."*

> *"We have to see that this Katherine Wheel approach infiltrates a wider sector of the university and community. For the next program I would see that we actually bring in key members from the wider community and University to get a wider input."*

Another point stressed by some interviewees was that it would be important to involve more middle and senior management:

> *"It is absolutely necessary to involve management. There were not enough people interested in the project. People who are running VTE should take part, not necessarily the practitioners."*

Other suggestions included more practical project work, and time management practice during the project. One participant also stated that the departments should engage more in mentoring programs:

> *"The mentoring program should spread out across the university. I think we are waiting for PMD to direct us to do it. But that needs to come from the leaders or managers in each of the departments. We also need to look at the management skills of people we put into positions. It should be part of everybody's professional development."*

5. CONCLUSIONS

The response to last year's leadership development project for rural and remote VTE managers was very positive. All interviewees said that they profited from it, and think that it is a good idea to continue the work. It was even one of the points of critique that there was no follow-up project.

Concerning the communication pathways in the CDU, one of the most desired changes is the uniformity of the processes and reporting systems across all faculties and schools and also more continuity in that area. This would save valuable time and allow the VTE managers to concentrate more on their work. If policies do change, these changes should be communicated as soon as possible.

Another important request is to allow for more flexibility. Now, the VTE managers can't adjust to unanticipated incidents in remote areas, without getting approval from their supervisors. This sometimes prevents them from doing what is best for the students. The group would like to receive more authority and trust in their ability to do their work.

As far as means of communication are concerned, the results of the questionnaires show, that video conferencing should be encouraged. Facial expressions and body language are very important parts of communicating. I think it is just a matter of people starting to use video conferencing more and getting used to this communication medium.

Many VTE managers stated that they are getting too many irrelevant e-mails. This problem should be communicated to all staff members, to make everyone aware of the fact, that some people don't even read all their e-mails, because they simply don't have enough time. Once people realize that, they will hopefully shorten their recipient lists, which would reduce the amount of e-mail traffic.

All the participants liked the coaching part of last year's project. However some of them said that it would be better if more specific, individualized training was included. I think it would be a good idea to gather the preferences of the participants about this topic when the follow-up of the project is being planned. This doesn't only apply for the coaching part. In my opinion the whole group should be included in planning future activities. This might also be the first topic of a new internet forum. Even though some participants said that this tool wouldn't be very helpful for them, most of them thought it would be a good idea and the effort for setting it up is not very big.

Almost all participants said that a central database would be of much value to them. Many ideas as to which information should be available in this tool were listed in Chapter 4.4. It would still be good, to get more input about this before the database is set up. In my opinion a central database would be very important to the work of the VTE managers.

As some participants stated that middle management's lack of understanding of VTE concerns is a big problem, it would be very profitable to include as many staff members of this level as possible in all planned follow-up activities. If management gets a better insight into VTE, this might also help to solve problems like the lack of resources.

I also think that it would be a good idea to create a reporting system for problems in the work of VTE managers. There should be one person who is responsible for passing these problems on and chasing solutions.

The questionnaires and interviews showed, that the most important and valuable part of last year' project was to get to know the other colleagues personally. Socialising, networking and exchanging work experiences are critical. Therefore I think that these sorts of get-togethers should not be exceptional cases, but should be organized regularly. This would guarantee continuity and would help to solve problems successfully. Therefore I recommend not to start a project that is limited to a short period of time. Most of the problems mentioned in this report are continuous therefore they also require continuous solutions. One of the interviewees made a statement, that I think sums up that idea very well, especially because it provides a good analogy to the Katherine Wheel:

"It's not one of the things that you do once, and get away from. Everybody still needs to get back together to improve the systems that we have started. You don't run a wheel forever without taking it to the mechanic to realign and balance it. Therefore we need to make sure we are going ahead not backwards."

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Designate one person who is responsible for the teamwork and cooperation of the VTE managers. He / She should be responsible for helping to solve the problems of the individuals and the group, and also for organizing get-togethers;
- Meetings like the Katherine residential should be held regularly. They are indispensable for socialising, networking and understanding each other's work and problems. They also help to create continuity in the work of VTE managers;
- Include all participants in the planning of get-togethers;
- Integrate middle management in the meetings, to make them more aware of the importance of VTE and the problems in the work of VTE managers;
- Facilitate communication via video conferencing;
- Reduce e-mail traffic: Use mailing lists only for important topics and send the mails only to relevant staff;
- Make computer systems compatible in all CDU centres;
- Set up a central database and an internet forum for VTE managers;
- Reduce bureaucracy to a minimum and establish uniform, continous processes and reporting systems across all faculties and schools. Allow for more flexibility and give more authority to VTE managers;
- Install a mentoring program for VTE managers.

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8. APPENDICES

8.1. Appendix A: Letter of Information

Letter of Information

Title of Project: Review of the leadership development project for rural and remote vocational education managers

My name is Marek Makowski and I am a student at the Technical University of Vienna. I am currently engaged in the above research project. My supervisor is Prof. Leigh Deves.

The main goal of this project is to qualitatively research the effectiveness of the leadership development project for rural and remote vocational education managers, which was conducted in 2006, and thereby gain more value from it. The information will be gathered by questionnaire and you may be invited to an interview. Please sign the consent form and return it along with the questionnaire to the facsimile number 8946 7355 or to the following address:

Marek Makowski
Building 24.20, Casuarina Campus
Charles Darwin University
Ellengowan Drive, Darwin, NT 0909

The researcher will be the only person who will have access to the collected information. Measures taken to insure confidentiality consist of the researcher will destroy all audio recordings upon transferring the interviews to transcripts and all data collected during the project will not be identifiable.

Results of this study may be disseminated in reports, at conferences or in publications. No information will be included that may identify individual participants unless specific consent for this has been obtained. Individual participants may request feedback on the results of the study.

Involvement in the project is voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without explanation or penalty.

If you have any questions or require any further information about the research project, please send me an e-mail or give me a call. I can be contacted at marek.makowski@cdu.edu.au or 0431 467705.

Kind regards,
Marek Makowski

8.2. Appendix B: Informed Consent Agreement

Informed Consent Agreement

Project Title: Review of the leadership development project for rural and remote vocational education managers

Name of Researcher: Marek Makowski

Name of Supervisor: Prof. Leigh Deves

I ………………………………………………………… confirm that I have been provided with a copy of the Information Letter regarding this project and that I have read and understood the information provided, I have been provided with the opportunity to ask questions and I am aware that I can contact a member of the research team at any time for further information.

I understand that all information will be kept confidential and used only for this research project and that the identity of participants will not be disclosed without their consent.

I understand that my participation in this research project will involve:

Completing one questionnaire
May be invited to one interview

I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identified. I understand that I may be invited to one interview. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. I also understand that the recording will be erased once the interview and focus group session is transcribed.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from this project at any time without explanation or penalty.

Under the above conditions, I freely agree to participate in this project.

Signature (Participant):…………………………………… Date:........…………

Signature (Witness):……………………………………… Date:……………….

8.3. Appendix C: Questionnaire

Name	Location (Campus)

Position Title

This questionnaire was designed to evaluate the effectiveness of last year's leadership development project for rural and remote vocational education managers and thereby gain more value from it. Please fill it out and thus help us to improve the methods and activities that we use to support the VTE managers. I might contact you during the next two weeks to arrange a face-to-face interview, in order to gather more specific information.

This questionnaire is confidential and will not be viewed by anyone except me. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Please read each question carefully then mark the box that best represents your response. If you are asked to rank, please indicate with 1-7 (e.g. 1 most important, 7 least important):

1. What was the most important aspect of last year's project (please rank)?	
Getting to know colleagues personally	
Implementation of Katherine Wheel	
Improvement of communication pathways	
Acquisition of coaching skills	
Other, please specify:	

2. Did the Katherine Wheel fulfill your expectations?	
Strongly agree	❑
Agree	❑
Disagree	❑
Strongly disagree	❑

3. How valuable is the Katherine Wheel for your work?	
Very valuable	❑
Valuable	❑
Not really valuable	❑
Not valuable at all	❑

4. If you don’t use the Katherine Wheel, please explain why.	
Never liked this concept	❑
It didn’t work the way I envisioned it	❑
Other, please specify:	❑

5. Did the leadership project improve your coaching skills?	
Strongly agree	❑
Agree	❑
Disagree	❑
Strongly disagree	❑

6. Did the leadership project improve the communication between the group participants?	
Strongly agree	❑
Agree	❑
Disagree	❑
Strongly disagree	❑

7. What mean do you use to communicate with colleagues (please rank)?	
Face-to-face	
Video conference	
Telephone	
e-mail	
Facsimile	
Post mail	
Other, please specify:	

8. If you experienced obstacles in communicating with your colleagues, please describe them and suggest improvements:

9. Please rank in order of importance which mediums should be used for more improved communication with colleagues:	
Face-to-face	
Video conference	
Telephone	
e-mail	
Facsimile	
Post mail	
Other, please specify:	

10. Please give reasons for your preferable communication medium. If it is different from the medium you are currently using please explain why it is not functioning satisfactorily in the moment:

11. Did the leadership project improve the communication pathways in the CDU?	
Strongly agree	❑
Agree	❑
Disagree	❑
Strongly disagree	❑

12. What is the most enjoyable part of your job (please rank)?	
Working with students	
Working with colleagues	
Working remote / out bush	
Freedom	
Other, please specify:	

13. What is the most frustrating part of your job (please rank)?	
Distance between centres	
Bad communication	
Bureaucracy	
Other, please specify:	

14. In which area would improvements be most helpful to you (please rank)?	
Communication with colleagues	
Communication pathways in CDU in general	
Communication with clients	
My coaching skills	
Other, please specify:	

15. How helpful would a central database[1] be to you?	
Very helpful	❑
Helpful	❑
Not very helpful	❑
Not helpful at all	❑

16. Which information would you like to share in a central database?

17. How helpful would an internet forum[2] be to you?	
Very helpful	❑
Helpful	❑
Not very helpful	❑
Not helpful at all	❑

18. How valuable was last year's Katherine residential for you?	
Very valuable	❑
Valuable	❑
Not very valuable	❑
Not valuable at all	❑

[1] A database is a structured collection of records or data which is stored in a computer so that a program can consult it to answer queries. You can e.g. find out which lectures are assigned to a certain VTE lecturer.
[2] An Internet forum is a facility on the World Wide Web for holding discussions and posting user generated content.

19. How valuable was last year's Katherine residential for the work of group participants?	
Very valuable	❑
Valuable	❑
Not very valuable	❑
Not valuable at all	❑

20. How valuable was last year's leadership development project for you?	
Very valuable	❑
Valuable	❑
Not very valuable	❑
Not valuable at all	❑

21. How valuable was last year's leadership development project for the work of the group participants?	
Very valuable	❑
Valuable	❑
Not very valuable	❑
Not valuable at all	❑

22. What changes/improvements do you suggest for the next leadership project?

If you have any further comments, suggestions, criticism etc. you are more than welcome to share them with me. Please contact me via e-mail or give me a call if you want to talk to me in person.

Please return the completed form until the 18th of May the latest to the address or facsimile below.

Marek Makowski
Building 24.20, Casuarina Campus
Charles Darwin University
Ellengowan Drive, Darwin NT 0909

Mobile: 0431 467705
Phone: 8946 7313
e-mail: marek.makowski@cdu.edu.au
Facsimile: 8946 7355

8.4. Appendix D: Interview Guideline

What are the most essential problems in your work?

Why was the (choice in response item 1 of questionnaire) the most important aspect of last year's project?

How did the project improve the communication between the group participants?
Why did the project not improve the communication between the group participants?

Why do you use (choice in response item 7 of questionnaire) as your primary mean of communication with your colleagues?

How did the project improve the communication pathways in the CDU?
Why did the project not improve the communication pathways in the CDU?

Why is (choice in response item 13 of questionnaire) the most frustrating part of your job?

Why would improvements in (choice in response item 14 of questionnaire) be most helpful to you?
What suggestions do you have to achieve those improvements?

Why would a central database (not) be helpful for you?

Why would an internet forum (not) be helpful for you?

Why was the Katherine residential / leadership project (not) valuable for you?
Do you think it was well organized?

Do you think that the other participants were involved in the residential / project?
Do you think that the other participants profited from the residential / project?