Leadership in Action (LiA) at the University of Warwick Review and Impact Report

Background

Leadership in Action is a three part experiential leadership course which was run at the University of Warwick in June 2015 and November 2015. Taking place over a period of three weeks, participants were provided with lunch and an afternoon of leadership training away from the office/lab environment. The course is designed to offer insights into leadership through practical work-based examples of leadership situations. The course covers:

Day 1
Leading in a meeting
Leading strategy

Day 2
Leading from a distance
Leading in a crisis

Day 3
Leading to get results
Leading multi-tasks

Participants are able to demonstrate their own unique leadership styles and to receive feedback from a group of peers. The course has a nationwide success track record and is proven to help participants to:

- explore leadership in theory and in practice
- understand personal strengths and weaknesses
- recognise achievements and how to use these to create future success
- understand the impact of leadership styles on those who are being led
- influence people towards a common goal/purpose
- recognise personal values and how these affect decisions
- identify how these skills can be of benefit
- receive feedback on personal leadership styles and identify how these can be developed further

The University of Warwick adapted version of a Vitae (supported by Research Councils) produced national course allowed participants to gain a real insight into the leadership challenges facing Research Active Staff, an understanding of the leadership and governance structure of the university and offered practical Warwick-centred examples of leadership situations.
**Review and Evaluation**
This impact briefing draws on the work of the Vitae Impact and Evaluation Team and utilises an adapted Impact and Evaluation Framework to demonstrate the impact of Leadership in Action (LiA) fourteen months after the first course was completed.

**Impact Level 0: Foundations**
In June 2015, LDC piloted the first LiA course specifically designed for members of staff with 'research', 'academic' or 'teaching' in their terms and conditions of employment. This pilot was used to demonstrate the need for a bespoke programme of leadership development designed especially for Research Active members of staff. The positive feedback and success of the pilot course led to a second course being run in November 2015.

The 2 courses ran over a period of 3 weeks at a cost of £226 per participant excluding external facilitator costs. In addition, the course required support from two course facilitators – we used one salaried & one freelance facilitator (6 hours per week plus preparation time) and salaried administrative support (20 hours in the run up to the course).

**Impact Level 1: Reaction**
The initial reaction to the LiA course has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants reported that the course was worthwhile and useful. The course structure, being spread over three weeks, worked effectively allowing participants time to think and reflect on the leadership facets demonstrated and discussions from each week, in addition to the various aspects of their role as a researcher at Warwick.

The variety of leadership scenarios, including leading at a distance, leading in a crisis and leading to get results proved popular with participants who stated the course to be of high-quality, well-facilitated and stimulating. The course provided an excellent combination of practical and theoretical approaches with a learning by doing approach coupled with constructive feedback in a secure environment. The tailor-made opportunity to broaden their skills-base enabled participants to quickly embed theories into reality. In addition to the praise for the content of the course, participants appreciated the opportunity to meet, interact and network with Research Active Staff from different disciplines at Warwick.

**Impact Level 2: Learning**
Leadership in Action is a hands-on / experiential learning workshop. The learning outcomes include exploring leadership in theory, understanding personal leadership strengths and weaknesses, understanding the impact of leadership styles on those who are being led, practising influencing
techniques in order to lead people towards a common goal/purpose, recognising personal values and how these affect decisions and finally receiving feedback on personal leadership styles and identify how these can be developed further.

Participants reported their learning in terms of increased leadership skills and a change in their personal attitude towards leadership, including the leadership and management of the University, as a whole.

"Beyond leadership skills alone, the course has been invaluable in picking up best practice hints and tips on project management, assertiveness and university governance."

“I learnt about the university system - different people and divisions within which they worked.”

Participants stated that the design of the course enabled them to learn about different elements of leadership including leadership theory, and use situational leadership techniques and skills. Specifically, participants reported they learned the skills needed to lead in:

- Meetings including skills in meeting administration (preparation and follow-up), delegation, time keeping and assertiveness
- Research projects including working and communicating with colleagues at a distance/different locations especially relating to productive email etiquette.
- Preparing strong research bids including collaborating effectively across teams and institutions, thinking creatively and innovatively, and the importance of aligning research bids with call objectives/University strategic aims and partners.

LiA encourages participants to observe peers whilst in a leadership position and provide constructive peer feedback, allowing for improvement and learning.

"The course has raised my awareness of what is involved in leadership activities and where the areas are that I need to hone”

"The leadership in action helped me to identify what I should and should not do when I lead in different settings”

The skills learned in giving and receiving feedback have been applied and utilised away from LiA allowing for continued learning long after the end of the course. Participants have identified leadership role models and are more aware of leadership opportunities to embed the learning from the course.
"I learnt to reflect not only on my own style of leading [research project] meetings but also on other people's styles and practices"

"It has also helped me identify good practices and role models among my colleagues"

"I have learnt how important communication is in everything I do, to watch people around me to see how they approach their roles"

"I have learnt to take more notice to everyday leadership situations such as chaired meetings and presentations, group meetings and my collaborations.”

Impact Level 3 Behaviour
The extent to which participants have changed their behaviour as a result of attending LiA was assessed 6 to 12 months after the course. Participants reported feeling more comfortable and confident being involved in leadership roles and as a result being more proactive and assertive in order to “get things done” most frequently in meeting situations.

“I have chaired team meetings and I have helped to organise a meeting with a number of people involved.”

“I have led a couple of meetings for my own project which includes partners across Europe.”

Most importantly participants who attended LiA recognise that leadership is a role they can adopt regardless of grade or job title. One member of research staff reported that they felt confident enough, after leaving the course to “make decisions in relation to a project in which I was not the lead”, another reported "I am trying to use these skills in everything I do, which also means that I try to rise to challenges that I might have otherwise deflected”.

Impact Level 4: Outcomes
This level measures the final impacts of LiA including changes in behaviour which have resulted in positive outcomes. Throughout this review of LiA, participants consistently reported increased confidence and a more positive outlook on leadership roles. Participants are more proactive in seeking out opportunities to practise the skills learned and this change in behaviour is resulting in LiA alumni sharing examples such as "I have been invited to join the committee of an international association, which will involve leading the committee at some point.”

"I am more ready to accept leadership roles as and when they are required – as a result I submitted a collaborative bid for funding,
for which I took the lead, in Autumn 2015. I also applied for promotion this last academic year.”

The format of the course fostered positive experiences for participants. Ensuring the course drew from a variety of faculties ensured a mix of subject area specialisms and potential opportunities for collaboration.

“I met people from different departments and joined a research group on mixed methods by talking to another participant who organised it. It was nice to observe and reflect on the different practices of the participants”

The LiA has fast tracked opportunities for researchers in relation to collaborative bids and research papers. A successful multi-disciplinary research bid looking at emotions in caring professions was submitted to the International Studies Association (ISA) by LiA alumni alongside an ISA Advancing Grants bid. The LiA course provided stimulus and brought people together with an interest in similar topics, but more importantly time for ideas to develop. Three other participants have reported initiating collaborative projects or being invited to join a bid for funding as a result of attending LiA. One participant has reported utilising the knowledge and skills from LiA in a successful promotion application.

Review and Recommendations

LiA is a successful course. The learning outcomes for participants are far exceeded and level 4 impacts have been reported within 12 months of completion of the course.

Confidence and Preparedness
Participants consistently report leaving the course feeling more confident, “we came away with sharpened skills”. They also felt prepared for leadership positions within their current role and also in roles further in their career. This increase in confidence has enabled participants to lead meetings, make leadership decisions and use the peer feedback from the course to hone their skills when leading.

Networking
It is noteworthy that many participants talk about the value of meeting other researchers and building an "extended friendship network" that "enables academics from different departments to share their ideas on leading in a higher education context”. Others felt they now had a network of "colleagues [that] would readily respond as and when needed”.

Recommendations
Participants were overwhelming satisfied with the course agreeing that the format and timing of the course over three weeks enabled time for reflection. The end time of 5.30pm did cause some difficulties for those using the University nursery (closing at 5.45) - and would have preferred an earlier finish. The light touch approach to follow-up work and additional reading suited those who wanted further information but didn’t distract those who preferred classroom only learning.

The following list of recommendations to further enhance the course have been suggested by participants:

- A follow-up programme, for example, Action Learning Sets or particular interest groups, to provide structure and rationale for such networks and include further CPD for participants.
- A member of the LDC team to attend one of Advancing Grants meetings to review bids.
- Holding networking/collaborating lunches [to follow-up on conversations started at LiA].
- Organise a networking session a few months after the course.
- Creation of a LiA community (maybe online) where all Research Staff have registered their interests and research to be able to identify easily with whom you share common interests.

Additional recommendations would include:

- A structured programme to support collaborative bids or participants wanting to utilise their leadership skills in organising research development activities.
- To include an activity to identify a potential Research Staff Network and write a funding bid for Research Staff Network Funding. The bid must specify the leadership skills required and utilised in order to manage the network.
- To return to participants who have reported preparing collaborative bids to follow-up on research outputs in 12 months.