A comparative thematic review of the vocational leadership literature from the USA and Australia

Brian Crossman

School Of Management, University of South Australia, Adelaide and Navitas Australia

Email: Brian.Crossman@unisa.edu.au

Tel: + 61-8-83644202

Roslyn Cameron

School of Management, Curtin University, Perth, Australia

Email: Ros.Cameron@curtin.edu.au

Dr Brian Crossman works for both the University of Australia and Navitas as a lecturer and tutor in management and education. His research interests are in leadership, followership and vocational education

Dr Roslyn Cameron is a Research Fellow with Curtin University and has a research interests in vocational education and training, skills formation and utilisation, skills recognition and skill shortages.

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Abstract

Vocational education and its leadership is an important sphere of economic activity worldwide and is being impacted by several trends including: the increasing significance and centrality of skills development in today's economies, economic trends associated with globalization (internationalization of education and emergence of global labour markets) and, demographic trends resulting in aging populations and workforces. Leadership in vocational education contexts is crucial to the economic success of this sector. The aim of this paper is to provide a comparative thematic review of the research and literature on leadership in vocational education between the USA, Great Britain and Australia posed by the research question: *What are the key leadership issues facing vocational education and training sectors in the USA, Great Britain and Australia?* This study contributes to the research and literature by identifying key impact factors for vocational education leadership in these nations over the last 13 years. Results from the comparative review established the following three key issues: a concern over equity and diversity; the importance of change management and; leadership skills and their development. Although leadership competencies are the subject of some debate there appears to be a broad consensus that leaders are developed not only by formal courses but more importantly by on-the-job experiential learning. The future development of leaders within vocational education is discussed in relation to the implications for policy and practice and suggestions for future research are provided.

Keywords
Vocational education, leadership, Australia, USA, Britain, diversity, leadership competencies, change management

Introduction

Globally, '80% of the world's workforce use technical and vocational skills in their work' (Maclean 2009, xii) and as vocational education is becoming more internationalized, its leaders are being called upon to lead within an increasingly global context (Bissonette and Woodin 2013; Boggs and Irwin 2007; Coates et al., 2010). Indeed, international leadership networks have been developed with an American community college initiative, *The Chair Academy Program*, being used in Australia and Europe (Carter and Morgan 2002; RMIT 2008; TAFE Directors 2010). This review stems from a larger, international Australian

based study in which one of the research questions was*: How does the Australian literature on leadership in the VET sector compare with its British and North American counterparts?*

Comparative studies in education have proved invaluable as they examine existing issues to describe and evaluate the respective countries' approaches to similar problems (Philips and Schweisfurth 2006). Moreover, comparative education studies are receiving renewed interest fuelled by a desire for international benchmarks to measure the 'efficiency' and the 'quality' of educational systems (Novoa and Yariv-Mashal 2003, 429). Pertinent findings derived from comparative research in education can facilitate improvements in practice, provide fresh insights that have been overlooked or underestimated as well as acting as pointers for future research, (Bray, Adamson and Mason 2007; Curtain 2004; Novoa and Yariv-Mashal 2003).

This article firstly examines the definitions of VET and leadership before outlining the search method, sources used and delimitations. The literature is then reviewed in two parts. The first part is by country; Australia, Great Britain and the USA, drawing attention to the differences of each. The second part of the review discusses three key themes common to both countries as reflected in the literature: (i) equity and diversity issues; (ii) managing change; and (iii) leadership skills and their development. Finally implications for policy and practice are discussed along with avenues for future research.

Towards Defining VET & Leadership

Determining a precise definition of vocational education is a problematic task. The term VET falls within what the OECD has termed the Non University Sector (NUS) (Gellert and Pratt 1991), a heterogeneous group which has also been variously called post-secondary, post-compulsory, further education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and occupational-technical education.

In Australia, such education is provided by Technical and Further Education (TAFE) colleges that offer vocational education in the form of traineeships and new apprenticeships, adult and community education and preparation for higher education. In Australia TAFE is the largest VET provider but VET policies and practices also encompass VET in secondary schools, the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector, and private independent VET

providers (Chappell 2003, 26). Similarly in Great Britain vocational education there are a diverse group of institutions composed of General Further Education Colleges (GFECs), Sixth Form Colleges (SFCs), adult education colleges, as well as colleges specialising in agriculture, art, design and the performing arts (Briggs 2004b). In the US community colleges have functioned to provide a range of preparatory courses for universities (Bragg 2001), however vocational education is now central to these junior or two year colleges with estimates varying between 40-60% of all community college students enrolled in occupational-education programs (Brint 2003; Cellini 2008; Dougherty 1994; Gordon 2003). Notwithstanding potential differences between the countries this study, like Lauterbach (2008) regards the three systems as broadly equivalent.

The definition of a leader likewise proves elusive as the terms *manager* or *administrator* are also widely used. A number of commentators regard leaders as those who go beyond being managers by being able to inspire and motivate personnel to exceed the simple execution of their duties (Bennis 1989; Kotter 1990; Rost 1993). These terms are also confounded by their differing interpretations and usages in practice (Richmon and Allison 2003). For example, VET in both Australia and Britain, unlike other government and education sectors, seems not use the terms *administrator* or *leader* widely but favours the term *manager*, even at executive levels. In Britain's FE institutions *leaders* are the first level of management in a supervisory or team leading role (Briggs 2004a). In the US one study of a particular community college reported that vocational and technical faculty primarily used the term *management*, whereas liberal arts faculties tended to use *administration* (Ayers 2005, 18), the term most commonly used in American community college journals.

Yukl (2006, 6-7), whilst conscious of these ambiguities argues, '[most] scholars agree that success as a manager or administrator in modern organizations necessarily involves leading'. This study accepts that the work and roles of leaders, managers and administrators can be similar and regards the three as synonymous.

Thematic review method, sources and delimitations

Initially the chosen period for the review was for the first decade of this century but this has been extended to cover the period January 2000 to December 2013. Firstly, the following leading education journals were searched with 'leadership' as a subject term using a EbscoHost to search educational databases

Educational Administration Quarterly;

Journal of Educational Administration;

International Journal of Educational Management;

Educational Management, Administration and Leadership and;

Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management.

Higher Education Quarterly

The results were then distilled by using: Vocational education; Community colleges and Further Education as refining subject terms. This search method yielded very low numbers with a limited number of articles on vocational education (0, 0, 1, 4, 1, 0 respectively) as these journals tended to concentrate on schools or universities. Given these scant results a further search concentrating on leading journals specifically aimed at community colleges in the USA, FE colleges in Great Britain and VET in Australia. Table 1 displays the search results conducted for the term 'leadership' across these additional journals as of 4 January 2014.

<Insert Table 1 here>

As can be seen from Table 1, and as observers in other fields of leadership have noted, the vast majority of studies originate in the USA (Bass 1997; Gronn 1997) which was the primary reason for this comparative study. The first delimitation is the prolific US literature is limited to the three journals in Table 1 (*Community College Journal of Research and Practice; Community College Review* and; *New Directions for Community Colleges*). Table 1 also indicates there is only one leadership study from Australia. However *The International Journal of Training Research* changed from *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Vocational Education Research in 2003* and there were two earlier papers (Rice 2000, 2002). There have also been a few articles on Australian VET leadership published in British journals catering for an international audience. Nevertheless, the number of journal papers is relatively small when compared with the American and British literature and so the review was broadened to include the *Australian Vocational Education and Training Research Association* (AVETRA) conference papers (2000-2013) and *National Centre for Vocational Education Research* (NCVER) reports in order to maintain an Australian focus.

As a result 11 conference papers and NCVER reports have been included in the review of the Australian literature.

The second delimitation of this study is that no such conference papers or similar government or institutional reports from the USA or Britain are included and is restricted to journal articles only. It should be noted, for example, there has been significant output of leadership publications by three major centres in Britain: the *Further Education Staff College*; the *Centre of Excellence in Leadership (CEL)* and the *Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)*, however these have not been included. With these delimitations in mind the article now presents the first part of the literature review by country starting with Australia.

VET Leadership in Australia

Due to the sparse literature on Australian VET leadership it is not really possible to categorize it to any great extent although independent studies focus more on lower levels of leaders whereas the government funded NCVER reports are more generic aimed at all levels within organizations. For example, and independent study by Black (2009, 15) found that head teachers suffer from 'poor morale … administrative overload and audit compliance demands' with limited support from their managers. Another study revealed few teachers appear to be interested in becoming head teachers themselves (Adams and Gamage 2008). Indeed another study determined that teachers who had the support of transformational leaders who provided clear goal setting and individualized encouraging attention were more likely to possess self-leadership and self-efficacy (Marshall, Kiffin-Petersen and Soutar 2012)

Mulcahy and Perillo (2011, 127) extend spoken and written discourse to include the proposition 'that people and artefacts co-produce practices', so leadership is viewed not necessarily as the intrinsic property of individuals, but also by the physical environment and multifaceted collective networks.

In a similar vein, a recent NCVER report researched 16 private VET training organisations and found that leadership was dependent on context (Harris and Simons 2012). It is not simply top down but multidirectional and contends that 'educational leadership as not only embedded in personal capabilities but as equally situated in practices in particular organisations' (Harris and Simons 2012, 10). Context does seem to be a significant

framework for leadership studies as will be seen later when examining more recent USA studies.

Leadership of further education in Great Britain

In Britain a substantial portion of publications in the early 2000s followed on from a major restructuring in the 1990s when FE was taken from Local Education Authorities with policy and strategic planning becoming centrally mandated government functions. This shift towards a more businesslike, managerial ethos had the effect of forging a wedge between Britain's FE lecturers and their leaders resulting in high job losses, tension and strikes. Many of the initial articles were predominantly against or at least questioning the managerialist reforms (Lumby 2001; Lumby and Tomlinson 2000; McTavish 2003; Simkins and Lumby 2002; Smith et al., 2002; Watson and Crossley 2001a; Williams 2003).

One study addressed the question of the 'us' versus 'them' tensions during this time. Most senior managers had been teachers themselves once but with little history of a collegial culture and the shifting identities of principals meant there was no real shared discourse which further exacerbated the differences (Loots and Ross 2004). These were difficult tensions to reconcile but by no means quite as schismatic as some of the earlier research in the late 1990s would suggest (Lumby 2001; Simkins and Lumby 2002, Briggs 2004a). As one longitudinal study revealed, labour relations did heal after the initial turmoil, and institutions responded differently to the changes of the early 1990s with different principals employing different leadership styles (Withers 2000).

A cultural framework was also adopted by Harper (2000) who applied a clan/culture model and determined that, typically, colleges have roughly a three tier system: senior managers (principals, directors, assistant principals); middle managers (program directors, managers, team, subject or section leaders); and thirdly, lecturing and support staff. First and mid level leaders have the dual role of financial accountability, overseeing teaching and sometimes a substantial teaching load themselves. This meant they experienced a lack of role definition and role ambiguity, however, many were able to reconcile the sometimes conflicting interests of teaching imperatives versus managerial directives (Briggs 2001; Leader 2004).

Other research on FE mid-managers was centred more on the roles and duties of middle level leaders. Briggs (2002) identified four dimensions to middle management roles:

transactional; transformational; supervisory; and representative. In a later work this is expanded by applying mechanistic/organic organisational theory correlating them with transactional/transformational leadership styles (Briggs 2004b). Certain tasks such as collecting data, implementing or managing procedures are more mechanistic and transactional, whereas contributing to corporate change and leading people in their own team are more organistic and transformational (Briggs 2003, 2005). Recently an interesting development in leadership theories explicated a new direction in 'sustainable leadership'. Lambert (2011, 138) reviewed a number models and definitions of sustainable leadership which involve 'striking a balance between short- and long term objectives … [and] development of leaders at all levels of the organisation … underpinned by a moral dimension'. The author then proposes a new model of sustainable leadership for British FE which draws upon appropriate components from extant ones.

Overall, the British literature focuses more on lower/mid level leaders as whereas, as the next section notes in the USA senior leadership levels have received the most attention.

Community college leadership in the USA

One initial difference with the US community college literature is that it concentrates more on senior leaders at president or vice president level (Boggs and Kent 2002). General studies have noted that declining taxpayer funding, fiscal leadership and finding alternative private income has become a critical part of college presidents' role (Jeremiah-Ryan and Palmer, 2005; McGee, 2003; Phelan, 2008) as well as deans (Watba and Farmer 2006). Grasmick, Davies and Harbour (2012) report the value of leaders' vision when implementing participation and shared decision making and Hlinka (2013) points out the importance of leaders fostering a student centred culture. The changing nature of leadership is discussed with presidents in future needing to frame their leadership skills and values with changing contexts (McArdle 2013) and be actively involved in liaising and promoting colleges education with the local community and civic leaders (Deggs and Miller 2013) . A number of commentators have also researched ethical decision making of leaders (Garza Mitchell 2012). Wood and Hilton (2012) discuss ethical paradigms and offer guidelines which community college leaders can use in practice. Virtue ethics are espoused by Propheter and Jez (2012) for leaders in their administration and Stumpf et al (2013) likewise favour virtue ethics when leaders evaluate faculty.

One area of interest shown by a number of researchers deals with crises management in relation to sudden changes in leadership. Several articles outline guidelines for presidents when encountering crises (Floyd, Maslin-Ostrowski and Hrabut 2010; Floyd and Maslin-Ostrowski 2013; Thompson, Cooper and Ebbers 2012) which can be exacerbated by personal cyber attacks in the social media (Maslin-Ostrowski, Floyd and Hrabak 2011). Maslin-Ostrowski and Floyd (2012) describe the experiences of a number of college presidents and their sense of isolation when terminated or resigning under pressure and how preplanning could have given them more of a sense of leaving on their own terms.

Human resource issues

One comparatively well researched area in the USA which has as yet to receive close attention in Australia or Britain are human resource and succession planning issues. The American literature contains numerous warnings about the impending retirement of ageing baby boomer leaders and the need for leadership development and succession planning (Ebbers, Conover and Samuels 2010; Fulton-Calkins and Milling 2005; McNair, Duree and Ebbers 2011; Plinske and Packard 2010; Reille and Kezar 2010; Scott and Johnson 2011; Wallin 2006; Sullivan 2001). Human resource issues such as recruitment, retention and personnel planning figure quite strongly. Frost (2009) described a private consulting organisation providing recruitment as well as filling positions on a temporary basis and noted the difficulty in attracting candidates for rural colleges. Eddy (2007, 289) reported the difficulty in recruiting for rural and remote areas. Developing and training 'homegrown leaders' who have a greater understanding of their community has advantages, however, Eddy (2007) cautioned such newly promoted leaders need to approach issues with fresh eyes. Another study found the majority of hires came from within the college or state, and similarly cautioned care was needed to avoid inbreeding and stagnation (Cejda and McKenney 2000).

A number of studies have examined the career paths of community college leaders as a means to aid recruiting and personnel policies (Amey, VanDerLinden and Brown 2002). McKenney and Cejda (2000, 754-756) profiled Chief Academic Officers (CAOs) who were predominantly white males in their early fifties with almost 80% possessing doctorates. Another investigation reported '30% of CAOs went on to become president' with an almost equal number staying at the same level and some going back to faculty level (Cejda, McKenney and Fuller 2001, 142). Garza-Mitchell and Eddy (2008) concentrated on the

lesser researched mid-level leaders at one particular community college and found many of them expressed little desire for promotion. This could make replacement and recruitment problematic and the researchers posed the question: 'How to make senior positions more attractive?' (Mitchell and Eddy 2008, 808). In a study investigating deans and vice-presidents, those who would traditionally become presidents, Keim and Murray (2008) warned that while senior leaders were retiring their potential replacements at mid-level were also about to do the same which could further exacerbate skills shortages at senior levels.

One study examined the qualifications needed by college presidents to impress interview panels. Ideal candidates should possess moral character, energy, presence, a Masters degree though not necessarily a doctorate, financial expertise, be innovative and coming from business or industry (Plinske and Packard 2010, 308). The recruiting process itself has also been examined. Basham, Stader and Bishop (2009, 375) cited cases in the corporate sector where improvements in recruiting have cut 'attrition and turnover rates as much as 51%'. They examined the theoretical underpinnings of the hiring process which has not received much attention in the education sector and recommended more rigour in hiring procedures and pre-screening candidates (Basham, Stader and Bishop 2009).

While such research into human resources forms a marked difference between the three countries, the next section examines, *equity,* the first of the three common themes found across the Australian, British and American literature.

Equity and diversity issues

In Australia there have been three articles on gender/equity issues. A study with senior female VET managers found they tend to place a heavy emphasis on relationships, consultation and democratic leadership but nevertheless could also be authoritarian, critical, ruthless and aggressive (Rice 2000a). Generally this group found it difficult to balance the need for accepting a transformational style of leadership with its concomitant need for encouragement, trust, support and 'letting go' whilst shouldering increased accountability (Rice 2002b). The only other Australian gender-based study appears to be Shore (2006), who argues that leadership discourse and leadership development in VET is not only a gender issue but also racialised. Embedded deep in the discourse of everyday management is the discourse of the European white male.

The UK has also one study based on ethnicity with black managers being underrepresented (Mackay and Etienne 2006) but most research concentrates on gender. These have indicated there has been a marked increase in female managers with a few reaching senior levels in the historically male domain (Cole 2000; Deem, Ozga and Prichard 2000; McTavish and Miller 2009). Leathwood (2000) views the traditional discourse of FE colleges as paternalistic, autocratic, bullying and essentially masculinist. In contrast, research on female FE managers found them to be 'open, democratic, consultative, supportive, fair, consensual, listening, encouraging drawing on people's strengths' (Leathwood, 2000, 173). Likewise Kerfoot and Whitehead (2000) regard FE and managerialism to be essentially sites of competitive masculine discourse. Hughes (2000) differentiates between women managers and feminist managers. Conservative or liberal women managers parallel their male counterparts whereas feminist managers were more concerned with 'the ethics of care [and] social revolution', so to be a true feminist manager was not feasible given the then prevailing FE climate (Hughes, 2000, 253). Deem, Ozga and Prichard (2000) adopted a softer cultural position with some male managers chosing to lead using forms of femininities with more consultation and greater sensitivity to the feelings of their team, whereas some female managers chose to adopt male attributes of aggression, status and hierarchy.

Equity and gender issues figure highly in the US literature. In an investigation of Hispanic equity Gutierrez, Castaneda and Katsinas (2002, 297) reported 'Community Colleges have become the dominant educational vehicle of Latinos' but were under-represented by Hispanic leaders. In a more recent study of female Latina presidents, it was found equity of representation had not yet been attained, although the study revealed Latina presidents were well prepared academically (Munoz 2010).

Ebbers et al. (2000) also reported that community college boards of trustees still retained conservative attitudes that favoured males when hiring college presidents. Opp and Gosetti (2002) discovered that more females were filling leadership positions: white females the most; followed by Black, Hispanic, Asian-American and indigenous American-Indian women, respectively. However, in a review of the community college literature from 1997 to 2007, Drake (2008) ascertained inequities persisted in spite of increased representation of female leaders. Eddy and Cox (2008, 77) argued that community colleges were still hierarchical in that they have a 'male normed organizational structure' and one study determined some females with larger families are disadvantaged in leadership promotion

prospects (Seay, 2010). Women tend to use more democratic, inclusive leadership styles suitable for contemporary, flatter, team-based organisations, whereas males traditionally have employed top-down hierarchical systems (Evans 2001; Stephenson 2001).

A study of the discourse employed in articles in a leading higher education publication found that 'many indications of masculine hero model' are used to explicate leadership (Wilson and Cox 2012, 287). Wilson and Cox-Brand (2012, 81) also argue the current American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) competencies, whilst espousing participation, reveal 'a type of patriarchal hegemony' when the discourse is analysed more deeply. However, not only were gender differences reported, but an analysis of the discourse leaders use to describe themselves and their roles found little difference between males and females (Eddy and VanDerLinden 2006).

Gender issues in the USA also overlap into the second thematic group of the literature centred on *change* with Giannini (2001) arguing women's ways of knowing ideally place them as change agents in leadership positions needed for educational reform and new technologies. This theme of change is now more fully explored in the next section again starting with Australia.

Managing change

In Australia NCVER research reports refer to change as being an integral factor in leadership (Callan 2001; Callan et al., 2007; Falk & Smith 2003; Mulcahy 2003). A number of studies have argued that middle managers in Australian VET are in the key positions of implementing change within a fragmented schedule of work but have had very little, if any, leadership training (Rice 2000a: Rice 2001; Briggs 2007). Rice (2002a, 2003, 2004, 2005) extended this line of inquiry to head teachers[a] whose intensified workloads, stress and mounting *administrivia* has led to role overload and role conflict. Head VET teachers like female senior managers are expected to be consultative, transformative and decisive, balancing educational leadership with the business-like expectations of managerialism. Black (2005) believes head teachers are strategically situated at the interface between management and teaching but analyses this dilemma in terms of discourse concluding VET head teachers struggle to reconcile educational and managerialist discourses. Foley (2011a,

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[a] In Australia, senior, experienced teachers leading teams of classroom teachers yet who are still expected to teach themselves. In other contexts such teachers could be called team leaders, supervisors or firstline managers.

2011b) also analysed discourse using a poststructuralist underpinning and found frontline managers possessed multiple identities complying with strategic changes by using business like discourse. However, other identities allowed more for educational expectations and frontline managers were able to resist at times. One study took a more situational, context-based approach to 'enabling leadership' centred around change in a jointly owned, collective endeavor (Falk and Smith 2003).

One aspect that runs through much of the literature is the need for strategic management to bring about change. There is a need for leaders or change agents at all levels to implement change management tailored to a particular organisational context and the type of change desired (Mitchell 2003). Mulcahy (2004, 186) analysed strategy as the primary 'mode of organising' or management in VET institutions from a discourse perspective. Whilst situated within changes of government policy, business and educational constraints, these discourses are never complete but can be negotiated and renegotiated. Senior leaders can influence government policies whereas mid-managers and first level managers can contribute to reconciling the competing interests at a more grass roots level (Mulcahy 2004). Training issues were also considered because considerable skills, knowledge and organisational support are needed since not every manager has the skills to conform to the ideal of being change agents (Mitchell and Young 2004). Ellis-Gulli (2010) reported on the implementation of the strategic planning of one large college and found senior leaders had responded to changes in government policies but a divide existed whereby lower levels of managers and teachers were not fully aware of the reasons and need for such changes. However, as Coates et al. (2013) advise a preoccupation with change needs to be balanced by leaders providing sustained consistency in sometimes fast changing, unpredictable environments.

Strategy and change issues are also echoed in Britain at both senior and mid-manager level. Smith et al. (2002) developed a theoretical model for strategy for senior managers and Hannigan (2006) argued that senior FE leaders who had attended to strategic concerns had been more successful in their external audits than those who did not. At the next level down, the involvement of mid-managers in strategy making processes varied from college to college (Briggs, 2002; Leader, 2004). Two studies that investigated strategy from a theoretical perspective argue that uncritical transfer of private sector strategic planning models to education is problematic, but if regarded as more of a social process they could

actually enhance organisational learning and cultural changes (Watson and Crossley, 2001a, 2001b).

In the USA Stout-Stewart (2005) studied change in community colleges to investigate transformational leadership across rural, suburban and inner city colleges. The study found no significant difference between the locations, however, Caucasian female presidents were least likely to use inspiring shared vision and encouraging behaviours associated with transformational leadership (Stout-Stewart 2005). Malm (2008, 625) investigated organisational change, and concluded there were 'no universal recipes for effective community college change processes' and Wallin (2010, 8-9) gave leaders guidance on how to implement change with a model focused upon a framework summarized as: 'anticipates, analyze, act, and affirm'

Language and communication issues also figured in the change literature. Eddy (2003, 2010) argued that community college presidents should frame change and communicate it well to allow their followers to make sense of organisational change. Ayers (2005, 19) similarly noted that diverse discourses and their meaning need to be considered when planning organisational change. In a later study the author called for more research on organisational climate using critical discourse so leaders can negotiate power and competing interests to foster desirable change (Ayers 2009). In a similar vein, O'Banion, Weidner and Wilson (2012) report on innovation initiatives in a group on colleges and the importance of leaders fostering a culture of change whilst acknowledging the ideas of innovative individual staff members and teams.

While change, like equity and diversity issues, form significant themes across the three countries the next theme, leadership skills and their development, constitutes by far the most investigated area.

Leadership competencies and their development

A series of NCVER reports in Australia were commissioned primarily to define the capabilities and skills required by VET leaders; and secondly, to determine what professional development was necessary. One of the first reports identified nine core capabilities:

> …corporate vision and direction, focuses strategically, achieves outcome, develops
> and manages resources, change leadership, interpersonal relationships, personal

development and mastery, business and entrepreneurial skills, developments and empowers people (Callan 2001, 5).

This report advocated for shared transformational leadership asserting that such a style can be found at all levels of an organisation (Callan 2001). In a later report Callan et al., (2007) still concentrated on the nine core capabilities but expanded the training component with two related texts, a literature review and training document which were designed to be used in VET leadership development programs. Mulcahy's (2003, 7) investigation found that senior managers were engaged in five broad roles: 'Business management and development, strategic leadership, change leadership, people-centred management, and boundary management'. This report found the skills VET leaders needed to perform their roles were comparable across hierarchical levels although lower level, frontline managers were more involved with operational and educational leadership (Mulcahy 2003). Similar to Mulcahy (2003) and Callan (2001) a third report determined that certain elements to leadership are generic: 'interpersonal (including communication) skills, risk taking, team building, analytic and decision making skills' which are applicable to range of situations and contexts (Falk and Smith 2003, 6).

In later research Coates et al. (2010, v) adopted a different approach to leadership competencies by extending them beyond task related ones to include 'emotional, social and cognitive capabilities'. Their study also examined leadership development, activities such as mentoring and coaching, and developed an 'Online Leadership Learning System' (Coates et al., 2010, 59).

One overriding issue is what kind of leadership training is the most suitable for a VET context. Training choices include more formal avenues such as coaching, mentoring, action learning, workshops, short courses and postgraduate courses, or more informal professional development such as meetings, support groups and self-directed reading (Callan 2001; Callan et al., 2007; Coates et al., 2013; Falk and Smith 2003; Mulcahy 2003). Callan (2001) asserts that the development of the three levels of managers: senior, middle and first level was generally similar but at senior level more emphasis is placed on corporate vision, achieving outcomes and resource management with coaching the preferred option for more experienced, senior level managers (Callan et al., 2007). Mitchell and Young (2004) favour more group action-based learning within a particular organisation rather than individual learning often derived from formal study.

As well as highlighting a need for leadership development a few studies have reported what leadership training has been put in place. Barratt-Pugh and Soutar (2002) gave a positive account of a frontline management initiative which found considerable evidence for its effectiveness and in another study a reduction in the adverse performance indicators such as number of client complaints, worker compensation and reporting errors (Barrat-Pugh, 2001,44). Callan et al., (2007) found some TAFEs embracing management development with some at more advanced stages with formal training programs in place, whereas some were not. Davids (2010) noted the issues and difficulties involved in the introduction of lead vocational teachers (LVTs), a new role in first level management. Brown (2011) surveyed 327 leaders from 24 institutions and found that structured succession leadership development programs with on the job training such as shadowing and mentoring were regarded as the most effective. Daniels (2009) case study of the 'emergent leaders program' of one college suggested a number of improvements such as the relationship between leadership and strategic intent, feedback mechanisms and enhanced networking opportunities were needed.

In Britain leadership skills and development has not figured so highly in the journal literature, but as noted before the *Further Education Staff College*; the *Centre of Excellence in Leadership (CEL)* and the *Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS)* have a number of publications in the area. Nevertheless it has been reported that few senior leaders in British FE have formal management qualifications and there have been few professional development programs and little research into what contributes to effective leadership development (Loots and Whelan 2000; Loots and Ross 2004). One study investigated the relationship between leadership and leadership development of ten leading FE institutions (Muijis et al., 2006). This study was a large-scale quantitative study centred on transformational, transactional and distributed leadership and revealed just over half of the survey respondents had, indeed, never engaged in leadership professional development. One potentially important finding was that '[e]xperiential leadership development appears to be related to transformational leadership, course based leadership development to distributive leadership, and individual based leadership development to transactional leadership' (Mujis et al., 2006, 103). The authors concluded that further research was necessary to ground leadership development in actual data rather than the leadership fad of the day.

The USA has a large body of literature for leadership competencies and there has been considerably debate over what skills are needed (Watts and Hammons 2002). Summers

(2001) argued the essential leadership skills were foresight and courage, Walker and McPhail (2009) championed the need for spiritual leadership, and Basham and Mathur (2010) called for a balance of management and leadership. Wallin (2006) envisages three main skill areas: firstly, managerial skills such as budgeting and finance; secondly, relationship skills like values and team building; and thirdly, personal self assessment such as knowing one's own strengths and weaknesses. The literature appears to be divided on whether task-related skills or relationship-based skills are more important. Walters and Keim (2003) noted planning, financial issues, curriculum and technology were the main challenges for deans. Likewise Robison, Sugar and Miller's (2010, 620) evaluation of leadership programs in one US state recommended 'less emphasis on social skills such as team building, and more emphasis on more significant topics…such as managing changes, leadership styles and conflict resolution'. However, while acknowledging change as important, Campbell, Syed and Morris (2010, 34) called for 'improvements in essential interpersonal competencies for future leaders' in traditional leadership programs. In a similar vein Amey (2005) espoused hard skills training as somewhat less important than aspects of how to learn so that leaders become more facilitative than administrative. In more generic studies on professional development Stoeckel and Davies (2007) and Sullivan and Weissner (2010) proposed self reflection as important in leadership because it leads to self awareness and personal growth. As a retired college president Hines (2013) provides an interesting reflective piece looking back in his career to balance 'The Good, Bad and Ugly' and offers a comprehensive checklist of key elements for current and aspiring leaders for successful college leadership. Other more general studies reported the advantages of problem-based learning (Herron and Major 2004), 'cohort learning' a structured and collaborative approach (McPhail, Robinson and Scott 2008, 362) and a novel use of case studies (Nevarez and Wood 2012).

Formal leadership training has also received considerable attention examining short courses, both in-house and national, postgraduate degrees and PhDs which are increasingly being regarded as essential for senior community college leaders (Brown, Martinez and Daniel 2002; Duree and Ebbers 2012; Hull and Keim 2007). There is a 'plethora of programs' specialising in US community college leadership training (Ebbers, Conover and Samuels 2010, 60). Kim (2003) noted six universities offered postgraduate masters and doctorates in college leadership and provided an overview of 15 university leadership programs. Also shorter courses (typically 2-5 days intensive full-time or equivalent part-

time) offered by non-university institutes and organisations have also been reported (Chiriboga 2003; Wallin 2006).

A number of papers have also reported on leadership courses offered by specific academies and institutions. Crosson et al., (2003) detailed the Community College Leadership Academy's (CCLA) first year of operation. El-Ashmawy and Weasenforth (2010) conducted a survey of one leadership program and discovered that the program was well received but more careful pairing of mentor and mentee was suggested. Reille and Kezar (2010) examined the advantages and disadvantages of "Grow-Your-Own" training and found some facilitators and course designers have strong biases regarding what they think is important in leadership and not always in tune with specific college needs. Scott and Sanders-McBryde (2012) regard vision as important for the grow your own leadership programs but overall, courses need to offer suitable subjects, with problem based learning grounded in real world exemplars and experiences (King 2011; Reille and Kezar 2010). Vargas (2013) reports on the curriculum development at one particular university for community college leadership program which stressed the importance of the political nature of leadership within community colleges. Oliver and Hioco (2012) assert leaders are situated in ambiguous context and provides and provide a framework trialed in a Masters course which can help leadership trainers and guide leaders in their ethical decision making.

In a study by Brown, Martinez and Daniel (2002) community college doctoral graduates were questioned to estimate the relevance of doctoral programs to practitioner needs and found some competencies, such as communication skills, were under emphasised in programs investigated. Furthermore Li, Friedel and Rusche (2011, 15) also found 'coursework of doctoral leadership programs lack practical relevance and is disconnected from practice'. However as Friedel (2010) outlined trying to balance the needs of postgraduates, who are both practitioners and aspiring researchers, working within the constraints of their different community colleges is a difficult and challenging task for doctoral providers.

One seminal marker on what leadership skills and competencies are needed was given direction through the *American Association of Community Colleges'* (AACC) in 2005. The AACC identified six core competencies and also outlines the professional development activities needed to achieve them.

<Insert Table 2 here>

A key point implicit in these six core competencies is that leadership is developed not only through the formal training of leadership courses but, like a number of studies, draws attention to the importance of informal experiential learning, mentoring and job shadowing in developing leadership capabilities (Hassan, Dellow and Jackson 2010; McNair, Duree and Ebbers 2011; Romano, Townsend and Mamiseishvili 2009). Much of the literature in the last few years has focused on these six core competencies which have been well accepted (Duree and Ebbers 2012; Hassan, Dellow and Jackson 2010; Haynes, 2009; McPhail, Robinson and Scott 2008; Sinady, Floyd and Mulder 2010; Romano, Townsend and Mamiseishvili 2009; Wallin 2012). Furthermore, these competencies have been in place for sufficient time to ascertain potential areas for improvement and modification as the original AACC 'document itself was designed to be flexible, allowing for change as needed' (Ottenritter 2012, 9).

For senior leaders and community college doctoral programs, Romano, Townsend and Mamiseishvili (2009) employed the AACC six core competencies as a framework and studied doctoral students at 18 universities. Not all respondents felt well prepared for the six core competencies and the investigation noted: 'Perhaps resource management, especially fund raising, is one of the areas where personality, experience, and noncredit professional development programs are better pathways of discovery' (Romano, Townsend and Mamiseishvili 2009, 319). Likewise, Eddy (2013) found that of the six AACC competencies resource allocation and organizational strategy were the two most overlooked yet the two most important in leaders' development.

One construct running through much of the literature of the current and past few years is the importance of *context* so that the six competencies need to be prioritized and balanced in the context of that particular college and its environment (McNair and Phelan 2012: Ottenritter 2012). Indeed Eddy (2012, 36) cautions against oversimplifying the six competencies by regarding them as a checklist and calls for a more holistic approach whereby 'contextual competency resides as core element' of leadership. Contextual differences are also evident between urban and rural colleges (Cedja 2012; Cedja and Jolley 2013) and with community colleges becoming globalized (Boggs 2012) situations change so which competencies are more important also changes and the six core ones may need to be revisited. For example, one study (Alfred 2012) discusses how competencies for leaders in the future may need to change given the evolving context of community colleges and suggests leading from behind as particularly important.

These six competencies also provide an interesting comparison to two reports in Australia around the same time and aids some answers to the research question from the larger study: *How does the Australian literature on the VET sector compare with its British and North American counterparts?*

<Insert Table 3 here>

It can be seen from Table 3 there are strong fundamental similarities: leaders in both the US and Australia are expected to give a sense of strategic direction, manage resources and be involved in their own personal development as well as developing others. Community college advocacy (in the US) and business and entrepreneurial skills (in Australia) appear to arise from somewhat different ideological underpinnings in the two countries. The US community college system historically has advocated inclusive, open education for all as 'Democracy Colleges' and have also be grounded in a strong liberal arts base whereas Australia (and possibly Britain) historically have been more instrumental in their vocational training focusing on the needs of industry and employers. However' contemporary US college presidents are increasingly expected to become more involved in fund raising and entrepreneurial activities (Duree and Ebbers 2012; McNair and Phelan 2012) and it would appear more business like entrepreneurial activities could become more of a mandate for American community colleges.

Conclusion

According to Mabey (2013, 359) the nature of leadership is 'politically sensitive, culturally complex and institutionally embedded' and consumes a significant amount of organisational resources. Comparing the key issues impacting VET sector leadership across nations can provide valuable insights that can inform both policy and practice as vocational education leadership is a crucial element to the efficiency, productivity and sustainability of the VET sector. Drawing upon published work, the intention of this paper has been to examine the key issues impacting leadership in vocational education across three nations.

So how does the Australian VET leadership literature compare with that of the UK and USA? In response to this question Australia fares quite well. Admittedly the paucity of journal articles needed supplementing with reports and conference papers but there have some cogent empirical studies. Each country has their differences with American research

concentrating more on senior leaders, whereas Britain and Australia concentrate more on the middle and lower levels. One important area where the American literature is ahead is in the domain of human resource management and succession planning, a potentially important area for all countries with an ageing populations and workforce.

In response to the research question posited: *What are the key leadership issues facing vocational education and training sectors in the USA, Great Britain and Australia?* Three key thematic areas were identified: equity and diversity; change management and; leadership competencies and their development. The latter has received most attention with the AACC competencies in the USA and NCVER research in Australia showing substantial agreement on what skills are needed. By British and Australian standards, American community colleges have an impressive array of short courses and postgraduate degrees in college leadership. However, the importance of experiential learning and on the job development is favoured by both Australia and the USA. Another area of some agreement is the significance of *context*, in which leadership is dependent on whether the institution is rural or urban, large or small, as well as the increasing global nature of vocational education.

One potential avenue for further research is whether there is enough teaching staff who have the ambition or desire to become leaders in the future. In the USA, Mitchell and Eddy (2008) concentrated on the lesser researched mid-level leaders at one particular college and found many of them expressed little desire for promotion. Interestingly, this finding was similar to Adams and Gamage's (2008) study in Australia, which found that few TAFE teachers appear to be interested in promotion. This is a concern that could well benefit from examination by practitioners and researchers alike.

A second area is with the preference for on the job training, such as mentoring and coaching for leadership development, as there appears to be little research on what does and does not work. It is an area in which researchers and practitioners could collaborate more closely to enhance both theory, policy and practice.

Overall, it can be seen that some of the extensive US literature could well be adapted to other countries with issues such as an ageing workforce and the belief that leadership development is of paramount importance. As an endnote to this study it should be remembered it was written from an Australian perspective. Knowledge of VET leadership would benefit from other perspectives, America and Britain themselves as well as Germany and the Nordic countries which have a tradition of quality vocational education and training.

Furthermore leadership issues in emerging VET systems from countries in Asia, South America, Africa and South America are also needed as the sector and its leadership becomes increasingly globalized.

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Table 1. Search results in vocational education journals for 'leadership'.

Journal Title	Country base of the journal	No. of results for 'leadership' as a subject term
International Journal of Training Research	Australia	1
Research in Post Compulsory Education	Great Britain	6
Journal of Vocational Education and Training	Great Britain	2
Journal of Further and Higher Education	Great Britain	6
Community College Journal of Research and Practi	USA	109
Community College Review	USA	28
New Directions for Community Colleges	USA	72

Table 2. Core leadership competencies and their development.

Core competency	Professional development activities
Organisational strategy	Progressive and challenging job responsibilities
Resource management	Progressive and challenging job responsibilities
Communication	Feedback and challenging job assignments
Collaboration	Progressive and challenging job responsibilities
Community College Advocacy	Networking, mentoring/coaching and workshops
Professionalism	Mentoring/coaching and postgraduate courses

Source: Adapted from Hassan, Dellow and Jackson (2010, 186-187)

Table 3. Comparison of leadership competencies in Australia and the USA.

Australian Studies	AACC Core Competencies
Corporate vision direction Achieves outcomes Focuses strategically Develops and manages resources	Organisational strategy Resource management
Interpersonal relationships Change leadership	Communication Collaboration
Business and entrepreneurial skills	Community college advocacy
Personal development and mastery Develops people	Professionalism: mentoring, coaching and postgraduate courses.

Sources: Callan (2001); Callan et al., (2007); AACC Core Competencies - Hassan, Dellow and Jackson (2010).