There is extensive commentary regarding ‘masculine culture’ as the most critical barrier facing women in workplaces today. While people have some commonsense understanding about what this means, it requires unpacking to be useful from a practitioner perspective. What kinds of organisations do we want instead? What do we know about what women want and need in order to thrive? Where does a programme such as LDW fit and how can it contribute?

The work of Chesterman, Ross-Smith and Peters (2004b) provides a useful framing device to begin to answer these questions. Chesterman et al studied 255 senior men and women in the public, private and higher education sectors. Their analysis suggests that the characteristics of cultures that support and sustain women are:

- Strong formal support and encouragement from organisational leaders
- A critical mass of other women
- Networks
- Flexibility and family-friendly policies and practices, and
- Explicit commitment to values.

In 1993 the LDW programme was designed to build on and enhance supports that were already in place at UWA — such as backing from the Vice-Chancellorship and women’s networks. To achieve cultural transformation it was necessary to build a much-needed critical mass of women, while demonstrating a wide-ranging commitment to values such as new forms of leadership and family-friendly workplaces. Although initially based on the practical experiences of women’s organisations and networking capacities, the programme design was successively enhanced by the introduction of tried and trusted theories and practices from feminist-inspired organisational studies.

A leading journal identified recently the difficulties women face in a male dominated environment. These include:

- Lack of easy access to informal ‘boys’ networks
- Shortage of appropriate mentors
- Lack of workplace flexibility
- Poor job design, and
- Inability to navigate the political maze.

Programme foundations

The gendered organisation

The programme structure outlined in Chapter 2 has remained substantially the same over the ten years of the programme. The foundations laid by the Planning Group in conjunction with Sally Jetson, the first co-ordinator, have proved farsighted and durable. The discontinuation of action learning projects (1997), which proved hard to fund, and the addition of peer learning (2002), have been the most substantial changes. While the programme structure has remained stable, the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the programme have refined and developed over time.

LDW has never been an ordinary leadership programme. It was customised to both the University environment and the actual experiences of women in their working lives here at UWA. This is in contrast to the still commonplace practice of presenting standard leadership programmes, usually designed for a mixed group or mostly male audience, to an all female group. This approach undermines women because it fails to understand or acknowledge that the workplace is gendered; and, as a result, it cannot be assumed that men and women experience leadership in the same way.

Another common trap is to deliver programmes designed to ‘equip the women or teach them how to play the game’ (Meyerson & Fletcher 1999). This approach, referred to as a Frame 1 approach, situates women as the problem. This is in contrast to their Frame 4 approach which situates the organisational culture as the problem. The work of the Centre for Gender in Organizations’ (CGO), of whom Meyerson and Fletcher are a part, has been influential for the Planning Group and LDW staff and facilitators in providing a framework and theoretical underpinning to what the programme was already doing. The work of the CGO takes a systemic approach to re-visioning work cultures and provides a number of useful tools.

The programme begins unashamedly, as does the CGO, with the understanding that the workplace is gendered. Gender is not equated with sex or sex category but rather seen as a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interactions and constructed through psychological, cultural and social means. It is not a given attribute, a trait or a role but something actively constructed. It therefore becomes possible to be ‘doing’ gender and, indeed, necessary to keep ‘doing gender’ recurrently. (West & Zimmerman 1987).

This gendered perspective can be difficult for men to understand and the view that organisations are gender neutral is often encountered. Writers such as Acker (1990) contend that this is actually ‘gender blindness’. When men are asked about the impact of their gender in relation to their career success, they are taken aback, whereas for women this is not an unusual perspective (Chesterman et al. 2004a; Currie et al. 2002).

Email

“Each time I walk out with more understanding … I am becoming increasingly able to recognise behaviour which is gendered.”

Email
Acker (1990) stresses the importance of linking work and gender, both as ways of understanding gender segregation, income and status inequality in the workplace, as well as organisations being a critical place where gender is created and reinforced. Gendered processes may be overt or they may be deeply hidden in organisational processes. As Meyerson and Fletcher suggest, a revolution will not work to drive out discrimination because most barriers today are insidious. “Rather gender discrimination is now so deeply embedded in organizational life as to be virtually indiscernible” (Meyerson & Fletcher 1999:127).

It is important to remember that this gendered workplace is historically created as a result of universities, as Burton (1997:17) describes, being “organised around the cluster of characteristics, attributes and background circumstances typical of men”. In the case of UWA this history is poignantly recorded in The Missing Chapters by Crawford and Tonkinson (1988).

We are, as Acker (1990) points out, not ‘disembodied workers’. It makes a difference if there are 11 men and one woman sitting around the table at a meeting, or the reverse, 11 women and one man. Not only do men and women have different expectations of themselves and each other in the workplace, women behaving or speaking in the same way as men will not necessarily be treated or understood in the same way.

But for example, where you have got three grants allocated, we just had national grant announcements, and all the women in the department who applied got them and all the men were knocked out. So we’re celebrating. And the head of school who is a man was saying “Oh, it’s all the women who got them and not the men”, and we were all laughing, but if it had been the other way around … It would have been normal, but you couldn’t say it. The head of school couldn’t have come out and said, “Oh, all the men got it, but not the women”, you know.

Focus group participant

Cultures and cultural literacy

Once we have this understanding of gender, we can highlight organisational culture to see how gender is expressed and maintained. As Thomas notes,

> a cultural framework provides a lens through which the multifaceted layers of gender relations can be revealed and analysed (1996:143).

In developing what the LDW programme calls ‘cultural literacy’, the use of a ‘gender lens’ (Kolb & Meyerson 1999) to understand and critique organisational assumptions and practices is critical.

Cultural literacy is the capacity to read and understand the gendered workplace culture. This concept is an important emphasis of the programme. It allows women to see a bigger picture before they make choices as to how to respond.

Cultural literacy facilitates the realisation that women often articulate in LDW, that issues in the workplace they assumed to be unique to them are actually shared and systemic, and not nearly as personal and

Focus group participant

I do sometimes think that if I was a man, things would be perceived differently. You know, if I say something it is not necessarily taken as seriously coming from a woman, than if I were a man, or if I do have to make tough decisions, I am the heartless bitch, but if a man comes along making the same decision, then he is a manager. That’s what I sometimes come across and I find it frustrating.

Focus group participant
individualised as they may have thought. The relief felt by programme participants in identifying shared experience is a common one, and also occurs when school managers or other functionally similar staff meet, for example. It is accentuated, however, when looking at cultural issues that can be hard to identify and name. This de-personalising of experiences is one of the major benefits of bringing together a diversity of women from across campus, and is particularly strong for women coming from numerically male dominated areas.

It has shown me that a lot of my ideas and approaches are valid and useful and that the problems I encounter may not be due to my own shortcomings, but a reflection of a less than ideal work environment.

1998 review session
I was not alone in my feelings of angst and vulnerability.
Reunion lunch

The focus on cultural literacy is one area where it is possible to fall into the trap of teaching women ‘to play the game’. While cultural literacy can become the vehicle for being able to operate effectively and strategically in the workplace (reading the play and the players) it is also highlighted as a way of challenging the cultural assumptions and the status quo. Participants are asked to examine how their own behaviour might contribute to or support unwelcome aspects of the culture.

Cultures do not spring ready-made from above: people make cultures.
Bacchi 1998:78

This examination of the culture, and cultural literacy, serves to highlight issues other than gender. The culture of the academic/general staff divide and the behaviours that create and sustain it can sometimes be more easily observed and named. These concepts are then applied to the construction of gender in the workplace. The everyday nature of behaviours that sustain unwelcome aspects of the culture is clearly articulated by a 2004 participant when she says

I practice self censorship and think about how my actions are perceived, realising that UWA’s culture of staff divisions needs to be tackled in the same way as sexism or racism, by each of us, every day.

PERSONAL STORIES

When a group of committed professionals accepted the challenge to investigate Work-Life balance as part of their LDW peer learning group, they focused on making significant changes to their own lives.

Debby, Yew-Keng, Danni and Narelle met at LDW in 2003 and formed a group based on their joint ambition to achieve a work-life balance.

The four of them say they clicked with each other immediately, even though they represented different personality types and family situations.

“We met more often than any of the other peer learning groups,” one member said. “I think that was because we were a small group and it was much easier for us to agree on a meeting time, rather than trying to get six or eight people together.”

Another said she thought they all worked so well together because, while they all loved to talk, they also were willing to let others have their say.

They agreed that the trust created through LDW enabled them to be open and honest with each other, which enriched their growing friendship as well as helping their learning process.

“We did learn from each other,” one said. “At times our meetings were like group therapy sessions, but we certainly learned from each other’s experiences, ideas and advice. One of
Developing cultural literacy becomes the foundation for becoming a ‘change agent’ in the workplace. It is crucial, however, not to put the onus on the women to change the ‘male dominated’ culture as this can become a different version of ‘fix the women’. Clearly the dominant group, in this case men, must carry a major part of the responsibility.

This focus on ‘cultural literacy’ is augmented by an emphasis on ‘small wins’ (Meyerson & Fletcher 1999) and ‘tempered radicalism’ (Meyerson & Scully 1995). Critical for developing a sense of agency for the women, that three-pronged approach maintains the focus on the organisation as the problem and not the women.

I could be proactive and benefit not only myself, but those around me.
Reunion lunch

Leadership is not just about being in charge.
Reunion lunch

Managing from underneath and being a leader from anywhere in the system.
Reunion lunch

LDW provides a good opportunity to reaffirm personal values/integrity, and therefore how to interact in the workplace with others, even where the broader culture is not very good. I tried to bring these to my leadership role to implement change [with] limited results.
Reunion lunch

Leadership

In the context of a gendered workplace, leadership becomes problematic. Leadership is a gendered construct, where masculine and feminine traits are differently valued, and where men and women experience different degrees of ‘fit’ with the predominant leadership style. Leadership as a concept within a women’s programme, therefore, requires extensive deconstruction and reconstruction. Several key researchers can assist in this process. Bond (2000) highlights the complex relationships and interactions that exist between gender, positional power and structure (gendered workplace). Eveline (2004), in coining the term ‘companionate leadership’, explores models that move leadership beyond the heroic, while the work of Sinclair (1998) likewise assists in the re-visioning of leadership.
Traditional models of leadership such as ‘Transformational Leadership’, elaborated by Kouzes and Posner (2002), and ‘Situational Leadership’, described by Hersey and Blanchard (1989), are presented and participants have the opportunity to critically examine these dominant models of leadership and the behaviours they recommend.

It is clear from the literature (Bond 2000) that there is not one female (or male) leadership style. The examination, however, of the post-heroic models of leadership is done with an awareness that the capacity for women to take on prescribed leadership behaviours will be mitigated by the constraints embedded in the gendered organisational culture. Sinclair (1998) emphasises the expectations of followers, and this provides a useful reminder that women leaders are seen and judged differently to men. The work of Schein et al (1996) in their aptly titled paper Think Manager — Think Male explores the relationship between sex role stereotypes and characteristics perceived as necessary for management success, noting that these were more commonly ascribed to men than to women.

Specific leadership skills extensively explored in the programme include the ability to act strategically and to be mindful in approaching situations where there is a high investment in influencing the outcome. Women tend to be comfortable with and skilled in the ‘glue work’ of ‘companionate leadership’ (Eveline 2004) but need to recognise the requirement to engage with issues of power in their organisation. Leading from the front is at times a necessary behaviour, as is forming strategic partnerships and understanding the ‘politics’ of the organisation. These are behaviours that may be more difficult for women to adopt for reasons elaborated by Sinclair (1998).

Research by Mann (1995) noted three reasons for women’s reluctance to engage in organisational politics and to acknowledge and fully exercise their power bases: these were their lack of confidence, a lack of competence, and a distaste of politics. LDW participants are encouraged to recognise that all behaviour in organisations is viewed politically, whether or not you are an active player. Opting out completely is not an option.

[The penny really dropped for me] when I realised the personal is political — my poor time management had unforeseen political consequences. I was doing plenty, but not doing it strategically.

Reunion lunch

the things we learned is that, while our unbalanced working life was partly due to overwork and understaffing, we could be at fault at times because of our desire to pay attention to details and do the best job possible.”

One member was able to achieve some work-life balance by writing things in her diary like ‘Go home now’, and doing it!

“If I had a family commitment, I would write it in my diary and then work around it. Before I did LDW, it used to be the other way around. I would try to change the commitment or just try to fit it in, without much success.” This member works flexible hours and has a very supportive supervisor, but others in the group were not so fortunate.

Another member was embracing UWA’s family-friendly policies by working one day a week at home. However, other staff in her work area felt it was an unfair arrangement and she was forced back to five days a week in the office. This change happened during the LDW programme. “My peer learning group really helped me to deal with it; they were very supportive,” this member said.

The group agreed that sometimes the policies at UWA, which look so good on paper, are difficult to implement. In the above case, it was because of others’ incorrect perceptions that this staff member was doing less work than she should be.
Strategies based on the work of Bellman (1992) that enable playing politics with principle are presented. The ability to read the ‘organisational play’ effectively and to build the appropriate alliances in an organisation are important leadership competencies.

Participants are encouraged to make choices about what leadership means to them and how best to match their own leadership skills and style with the needs of their workgroup and the behaviours that have currency in the University. They are supported in identifying, valuing and making visible the usually invisible skills and behaviours of ‘companionate leadership’. Understanding the gendered workplace equips them to make more informed choices based on an ability to anticipate more accurately the response of the organisation to their behaviours as women leaders.

Support from the LDW group in developing leadership styles and skills that are effective, visible and a ‘comfortable fit’ for the women is an important goal of the leadership components of the programme.

In tandem with this challenge to traditional understandings of leadership is the necessity of moving beyond gender, maintaining, as Itzin (1995) argues, a multifaceted or prismatic lens that includes other patterns of oppression. The necessity of maintaining a lens wider than gender is explored in Chapter 6, How am I a minority?

These core concepts — gender, the gendered workplace, cultural literacy and gendered leadership — become strands woven and developed as the programme progresses. They inform sessions such as those developed around communication, organisational politics, influence, acting strategically and networking.

Women need a forum. If you bring in men you change the nature of things … as long as it’s producing results it’s silly to change it.

Female mentor

I think the men in my department feel left out. It is like there is this women’s club and the men aren’t included. And I think because it has got leadership in the title, I think they feel we are getting special privileges in terms of advancement, which I mean, I don’t think that was the case. But yeah, it has been mentioned quite a bit.

Focus group participant

But the other thing is that a lot of the women who have done LDW have such a good experience that they are always talking about it, so the men get to hear about it more than things that apply to them only. For example, my former head of school did it and when I was having a difficult time, she suggested that I do it, and I did. And I talk about it now.

Focus group participant

Women together — secret women’s business?

There are many who refer either positively or negatively to LDW as “secret women’s business”. Those who are disparaging are perhaps threatened by the women-only nature of the programme. The women who use it positively, play up the ‘mysteriousness’ of the programme while enjoying the novelty of a women-only space and the different, more supportive (Limerick et al. 1995) environment that it provides. Clearly there are ways that women can speak about and understand the gendered organisation,
which probably would not, or perhaps even could not, occur in a mixed group.

"I still remain in contact with my peer-learning group. ... even if we have not spoken for months — we just continue on from where we left off. It is great to share life stories with each other."

Reunion lunch

The LDW programme is designed to encourage connections between the women. It is a cohort programme, where a group progresses together, as opposed to a smorgasbord programme where people pick and choose from a menu of events, with no continuity of participants between events. The substantial nature of the programme in terms of time commitment, the two-day core programme, combined with dinner or drinks and, most particularly, in recent years the peer learning groups all contribute to building strong group connections. The building of a learning community is essential to the nature of the programme. As Martin (2004) emphasised at the Australian Technology Network Women’s Executive Development (ATN WEXDEV) conference Senior Women Executives and the Culture of Management, women need to connect with each other, both those who have very dissimilar experiences and those who are more similar. Women need to look beyond individual women’s leadership styles to realise that the problems and barriers are shared, and they can pull together and support each other. This is not an individual issue.

Peer learning

The concept of peer learning groups is an adaptation based on ideas taken from the action learning literature. Action learning, often project based, is based on the work of Revans (1982) who described it as ‘the development of self by the mutual support of equals’. Its aim is to develop ‘questioning insight’, the ability to ask ‘fresh and useful questions’. Multidisciplinary teams are assembled to work on a shared organisational problem. The problem and the learning process both become the focus of the groups as they work in a disciplined way through a learning cycle of reviewing and reflecting on what has been done, developing a new plan for action, and then trying actions in line with the learning gained. Also commonly used in management development programmes, the focus has, on occasions, shifted to individual projects, still using the group to assist the learning process.

Peer learning groups were introduced to LDW in 2002 to assist the learning process in several
Peer learning, without adding an unwanted project to people’s busy lives, asks participants to engage in a group learning process organised around a theme. During the two-day core programme themes are identified and these provide both the topics for group formation and for workshops during the year. They vary between the two strands of the programme and can include managing upwards, managing others, acting strategically, visibility, work/life balance, communication and assertiveness, and changing workplace culture. Peer learning groups allow for an individual learning focus within a group of women exploring a similar issue.

Peer learning encourages learning to occur at several other levels. Leadership, particularly in a university setting, is often exercised with colleagues who are peers, through meetings and in other less formal settings. Additionally, good leadership relies on the person’s capacity to reflect and learn from mistakes. Peer learning allows both of these to occur in a supportive environment. Participants are introduced to a ‘critical friend’ process where they are asked to engage with their own issues by talking and reflecting with the group, returning to the workplace to try something new, and then using the group once more to reflect on the results of their intervention.

There are two further layers to this learning experience. Participants are asked to report back on their learning process to the larger group at the time of the workshop where their topic will be covered. This keeps the group on task and grounds the learning from the workshops in the lived experiences of the women who have presented. The workshop facilitator can refer to their examples in framing the issues. At the end of the year, all groups present to the larger group and from this work, which summarises a great deal of their learning processes during the year, a combined final presentation is crafted.

A critical, but not necessarily popular, component of the learning for participants is reflecting back or mirroring to the larger University community the issues and concerns for women in the organisation. While
this presents enormous opportunities for leadership, visibility and strategic influence, women are sometimes resentful of this aspect of the programme. This is exacerbated if the learning process has been deep and personal, in which case their feelings of vulnerability and exposure are heightened. Encouragement is provided to ensure that these presentations do not become dominated by the more accomplished presenters or by the dominant academic discourse of the University, where knowledge is constructed in particular ways. The learning has often occurred in very creative ways and the power of women’s stories always shines through. Preserving this learning, despite the anxiety of presentation to senior University staff, mentors and colleagues, can be difficult.

The introduction in 2002 of peer learning did not proceed smoothly. Participants struggled throughout the year, unable to focus on their learning process, instead becoming focused on the end of year presentation. Feedback post-presentation included comments from participants indicating that they felt like they were engaged in ‘show and tell’, had not connected as well with people in the larger group beyond their peer learning groups and, as a result, had not had as much fun as previous years! The huge variability of presentations on that occasion, which

As a chemist and biochemist, Susan Barker likes to use the image of a catalyst to describe her experiences with the LDW programme.

“I see the whole process as something that’s familiar to chemists: the catalyst that changes something from one state to another, without changing the individual components.”

Susan’s LDW experience was the start of a major personal reassessment and development which she has used to change the culture of her workplace.

“I had no idea that communication skills were what I was lacking,” she said. “But the programme showed me that was the core of my problem with my manager. At an LDW workshop, we did a model exercise in troubleshooting, and everything changed from there.

“I modelled how to present myself to my supervisor. Then, when the session was over, I went straight to his office and I took the first step in turning our whole relationship around. I told him how I saw myself fitting into the future of the school. I hadn’t been able to communicate that to him or even see that it was important, until I learned it at that workshop.

“Until you can communicate clearly, you can’t move ahead. We now have an increasingly positive relationship, and he is also getting better at interacting with his staff. I feel it’s a positive, rather than a negative relationship now, thanks to LDW.”

continued on page 41
coincidentally was attended by all five members of the Executive, led to some revisions in process. Individual group presentations are now synthesized into a combined presentation. This allows the whole group to prioritise and select what they want represented for the broader public. Time is built in for practice and confidence in using alternative ways to communicate a message has grown.

This final feedback loop to the University, while occasionally nerve-wracking for the women and the facilitators, provides an important reality check for the University, maintains programme accountability and builds community support. It dovetails in with the dual aims of the programme, which includes impacting on the organisational culture.

While the presentation aspect of the programme, after an initial steep learning curve, has become easier with experience over the four groups, it is by no means wholeheartedly embraced by all participants. It adds administrative complexity and requires a greater degree of commitment and involvement on their part. Feedback from the 2004 participants, (their views will not be reflected in the survey as they had not yet completed the year), has been the most enthusiastic so far regarding their experiences in their peer learning groups; however, scepticism regarding the final presentation was still strong. From a facilitator’s perspective, the introduction of peer learning has deepened the engagement and learning of the participants although it does not, of course, suit everyone and not every group functions well. In a development programme such as LDW peer learning provides opportunities for valuable, although not necessarily comfortable, experiential learning.

One thing that I would have liked to do more at that time, and we didn’t have the peer learning groups, would have to have been to have a bit more concrete tasks to work on, because it was all in my head there and I could see — but to commit yourself … We had this little thing where we had to write what we hoped to achieve by the end of the year, and actually I did most of it. When I opened my envelope I had done this, but perhaps to work a little bit more concretely on one aspect of our work life, or life/home balance or something like that and to report on that and show some kind of change, because unless you do it you think, Oh yes that’s a good thing to do, but if you don’t actually do it then it may not work as well. But maybe the peer learning groups are about that. I don’t know.

Focus group participant, prior to the introduction of peer learning

LDW in context

Now that the conceptual framework and substance of the programme have been examined in some depth, it is useful to consider how LDW is situated both nationally and internationally.

A recent report compiled by Dr Jasbir Singh (2005) provides an overview of gender equity initiatives in higher education in Commonwealth countries. Australia is most notable for its leadership programmes, both in-house programmes such as LDW and inter-university programmes as is the case with the Australian Technology Network Women’s Executive Programme (ATN WEXDEV). LDW was one of three in-house programmes cited as being comprehensive, (others were Queensland University of Technology and Monash) and was singled out as being an evaluated programme. Singh commented on the often explicitly stated dual agenda of Australian programmes; to both develop the women and change the
culture, noting that ‘tackling the culture of Higher Education is the toughest and most complex task’. Overall the paper notes that empirical research, preferably including before and after measures, of best practice initiatives is needed.

The participation of the author in an overseas study tour in 2000 (UK, Europe and Canada) along with attendance at the European Conference on Gender Equality in Higher Education (Zurich 2000) confirmed the impression that Australia is leading the world in its in-house programme support for women. While several national women’s associations or groups provided women-only development opportunities for senior women, even these were not longstanding or ongoing. In the UK and Europe the focus remains on women in science, technology and engineering, despite under-representation of academic women across all disciplines. In-house support programmes were small, sporadic and not well supported institutionally.

It is not intended to give an overview of Australian programmes here, nor to review the evaluations that have been done. Women’s programmes tend to operate on the edge of the equity office or staff development unit, or even sometimes part of research units or linked to Vice-Chancelleries. They are not often considered to be the core business of anyone. Co-ordination is often a part, sometimes even an incidental part of people’s roles; indeed, it is unusual for it to be the defining feature of a person’s role as is the case with LDW. Practitioners, budgets and support from the top come and go, and continuity is often lost.

In 1998, following the University of Technology Winds of Change conference at which there was an enthusiastic gathering of practitioners, the LDW co-ordinator convened a national higher education practitioners network. This network, with the acronym sdfw (staff development for women) has a current membership of around 70, and a regional focus on Australia and New Zealand, with a few members further afield. Two national meetings have been convened, the first in Canberra in 2001, the second in Tasmania in 2003. Both were organised to coincide with the EOPHEA (Equal Opportunity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia) conference to cater for individuals who belong to both networks. On both occasions practitioners presented best practice work, shared dilemmas and issues, and formed and strengthened links with the Senior Women’s Colloquium and the Australian Vice-Chancellor’s Committee (AVCC).

Susan said she felt the programme strengthened women’s capacity within the system. “But I’m only just seeing now some of the benefits of the programme. At the time, I didn’t see some things as useful to me.

“Perhaps it would be worth restructuring the programme, to do a short one, for say, three months, then go away and put what you’ve learnt into practice and really see the benefits, before you go back, at a later stage, for a longer programme, by which time you’re open to more learning opportunities.”

She said at first she couldn’t see herself using the skills learned through LDW, but, now that she’s moved on, she can see their benefit.

“I didn’t get much from the mentoring or the peer learning group, but I did get a lot from modelling alternative leadership.

“I am not a classic academic supervisor. I tend to have emotional responses that make it difficult for me to give negative feedback. I couldn’t bring myself to say something negative to a student, even though it might be helpful in the long run.

“I didn’t have this understanding of myself before doing the programme but, once I did, I still didn’t feel this should discount me from being part of the system.

“I’ve been practising giving negative criticism with a smile and I am now aware that it is necessary. The raising of that awareness has made me a better supervisor.”
While the practitioner’s network is useful, more could be done. Low priority within institutions, as described above, results in a fragmented field and it is often difficult to get a good picture of what is happening. Surveys conducted by the AVCC in 2000 and 2003 provided a more comprehensive picture of programmes in the sector; however, they have been spasmodic and have not been delivered in a timely fashion, thus limiting their usefulness for practitioners. A greater level of national support or co-ordination would be useful. Certainly the ATN WEXDEV model, providing part-time national support and liaison between the five Technology universities, has been extremely successful in encouraging healthy in-house programmes in the universities involved. Within Australia universities, there is a wide range of programmes on offer. The most recent AVCC data indicates there are a number of universities without programmes, with the remainder offering a mix of occasional events, short programmes (eg a programme that lasts several days but does not extend over a period of time, smorgasbord programmes (range of events over time) and cohort programmes (a defined group meeting over a period of time). Interestingly a recent study, (Browning 2004) replicating the 1998 LDW programme evaluation, but comparing cohort and smorgasbord programmes, concluded that cohort (referred to by the author as structured) programmes achieved better results.

Convening the sdfw practitioner’s network, the comprehensiveness, longevity and stability of LDW and the continuity of co-ordinator has led to a significant national leadership role and profile for the LDW programme. There has been significant role modelling and active mentoring of programmes by LDW, as well as adoption of models similar to LDW in the last few years. The University of Auckland programme used LDW as a starting place for their programme design and the LDW co-ordinator was involved in delivering training for its first intake of mentors. More recently Griffith University, The University of Tasmania, and Charles Sturt University have all customised the LDW model for their own use. In the UK, the University of Exeter has expressed interest in the LDW model and a funding submission to the European Union for a programme encompassing a number of Business Schools was submitted, again based on the LDW model.

Interest in LDW has also come from outside the higher education sector, with a particularly high level of interest in the mentoring component of the programme. Public and private sector organisations have consulted with LDW and, for the first time in 2004/5, the LDW programme in its entirety is being delivered for an external organisation, the WA Police Service. The nature of the LDW model, which focuses on the workplace culture of participants, appears to be well suited to translating across organisational cultures. Consideration is being given to trade-marking the LDW programme, an initiative which would open up possibilities for delivering the programme to other organisations, while ensuring that the intellectual property of the programme is preserved and some funds return to the University’s LDW programme.

Conclusion

This chapter has articulated the broad philosophical and theoretical underpinnings for LDW and has positioned the programme as being a particular ‘kind’ of women’s programme. It has explored the inherent tensions of a programme that works primarily with women, but does not position women as the problem. The chapter has also articulated the major themes of gender, the gendered workplace, organisational culture and cultural literacy, and a re-visioned leadership. Incorporating these in every aspect of the programme is an ongoing challenge.
LDW helped Susan to recognise her communication difficulties and to overcome them; to successfully manage upwards; and to achieve a supportive academic environment.

“That’s what keeps me here. I am aware, through LDW, that what I am doing is OK, that I am not a failure, and that I shouldn’t listen to the voice inside me telling me that I’m a failure, because that is what makes some women drop out.”

She said that having a family stopped the ego problem in wanting, but not having, a leadership role at work. Her leadership role at home is well established and satisfying.

“The LDW programme is fantastic – there’s nothing like it anywhere else in Australia or overseas. Fay Gale and Alan Robson were the reasons I came from Adelaide to UWA, and their support of LDW has resulted in my staying here.”

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**Footnotes**

1. At Simmons Graduate School of Management, Boston.
2. Wells, J. & Townsend, J. 1997, *The WAR Story: Enhancing the Careers of Women*, Women’s Action Research (WAR) Program, University of Western Sydney, Macarthur is a good example of using this in a women’s program.
3. ‘Room at the Top’, developed by UCoSDA, UK; The Glass Ceiling Group, UK; Senior Women Academic Administrators Canada (SWAAC); Centre for Higher Education Research Development (CHERD), Canada.