

# **Authentic, sustainable leadership in VET**

**Ideas of women leaders in the Australian vocational education  
and training sector**

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# Purposes

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The immediate purpose of this book is to communicate to the vocational education and training (VET) sector the ideas of women leaders about aspects of leadership. The longer-term purpose of this book is to influence positively leadership in VET by stimulating professional reflection by all its leaders, female and male.

## **Origin, style and contents of book**

In May 2008, a group of thirty women leaders participated in the second VET Women Leaders Forum in the Yarra Valley, Victoria, following the first forum in October 2007. The photographs of the participants from both forums are included on the cover of this publication. I facilitated the forum with support from the planning group of Ruth Browne (GM, Pivot Point International Academy), Pam Christie (Institute Director, TAFE NSW-Sydney Institute), Liz Harris (MD, Challenger TAFE), Dr Anne Jones (Pro Vice-Chancellor vocational education, Victoria University) and Julie Moss (MD, Photography Studies College).

Following the 2008 Forum, the twelve think pieces in this publication were written by participants, on aspects of authentic or sustainable leadership or both. In preparing their pieces, the authors were encouraged to decide on the length, style and level of formality, leading to a wide range of different think pieces.

The thirteenth item in this publication is a paper by Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University, who was a keynote speaker at the 2007 Forum and whose organisation was a sponsor of both Forums. In part of her paper Professor Harman analyses the book which emerged from the first Forum, *Women's Leadership in VET* (Mitchell 2007).

## **Target users**

While the book is relevant to all VET personnel, some individuals who could use this book include the following: people who are currently in leadership positions in VET organisations; practitioners preparing for promotion and who wish to know more about leadership in VET; and people undertaking study programs in vocational, adult or further education.

Other intended VET user groups for this book include:

- leadership and management teams who are seeking fresh ideas;
- project groups undertaking structured professional development activities;
- groups of staff within Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) who wish to learn from others about ways to respond to the changes moving through the sector.

## **Thanks**

My thanks are extended to the planning group for the forum, the participants at the forum, particularly those who submitted think pieces, and *Campus Review* and Victoria University for their sponsorship of the forum.

***John Mitchell***

# *Introduction: Exploring authentic and sustainable leadership in VET*

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The VET Women Leaders Forum in regional Victoria in May 2008 focused on the two themes of authenticity and sustainability in leadership in vocational education and training (VET). During the Forum participants interrogated the terms authentic leadership and sustainable leadership and also considered whether it was possible to integrate the two terms. To further explore these terms, participants at the Forum were invited to submit think pieces – of any length and style – for this publication. Twelve were received from the thirty participants, ranging from short, informal, conversational pieces to longer, formally referenced essays.

This publication contains those twelve unique think pieces. It concludes with a paper by Professor Elizabeth Harman, Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University, and reproduced with her kind permission, on women taking the lead in post-compulsory education.

The aim of this introduction is to provide further background to these think pieces and to the subject of authentic, sustainable leadership in VET. Hopefully the introduction will assist the reader to gain optimum value from reading the diverse insights of the authors of the think pieces.

## **Introducing these VET women leaders**

The women leaders who participated in the two Forums and contributed think pieces for this publication are responding to the call from Professor Harman for women to take the lead in higher education and vocational education and training, to seize the moment and act now. It is time to put energy into finding what women need in order to flourish and navigate their way:

We've spent a lot of time and energy finding barriers, things that prevent women getting ahead (the walls of the labyrinth). We need to put as much time and energy into finding what women need to flourish and navigate their way. (Harman 2008)

In her paper, Harman refers to the book that arose from the first Women Leaders Forum in October 2007 – *Women's Leadership in VET* (Mitchell 2007) – and makes these summary observations about the features of VET women leaders profiled in the book:

Reading Mitchell's interviews with these women, I am struck by a recurring theme in their approach to their work and their sector. In times of huge change, flux and challenge their discussions of leadership focus on transformation, adaptation and leading rather than directing. Their focus is on networks and relationships, with their students, staff, industry, employers and local communities. They reflect on their practice, are open to learning and to trying new ways of doing things. Working in a dynamic sector these women consistently look to their staff to identify issues and solutions, they are reflective, (persistent, pursuing continuous improvement). They have a passion for their work which fits with their personal values. Most of those interviewed talk about how much they love their work and the chance it provides to make a difference for individuals and communities. (Harman 2008)

These features of VET women leaders are also evident in this publication, especially the determination to improve the sustainability of both their organisations and the vocational education and training sector.

## Primary reference point

To stimulate discussion at the 2008 VET Women Leaders Forum, participants were sent beforehand, as pre-reading, a copy of the book *Leadership for the disillusioned* by Amanda Sinclair (2007). Some specific reasons for issuing this book as pre-reading were as follows.

- It is written by an Australian academic who continually links leadership to learning: an approach to leadership popular with the VET women leaders profiled in Mitchell (2007).
- Sinclair debunks aspects of the standard approach to leadership development as being based on male heroes (e.g. Steve Vizard, ex-Telstra director, p.8) or on flawed or immoral assumptions (e.g. the role of the leader is to transform others to meet business ends, p.xvii).
- She is concerned that most of the approaches to leadership promoted in leadership programs and literature are unsustainable, often leading to bland, predictable ‘McDonaldized leadership’ (p.27).
- She provides a model of how to think and talk about leadership from a personal perspective – how to use your own story or journey as a source of learning for your own leadership development. Again, this is an approach modelled by many of the women profiled in Mitchell (2007).
- Sinclair’s ultimate interest is in promoting leadership which liberates: “Rather than being used as a means to compel compliance and conformity, to dominate or prescribe, leadership can invite us to imagine, initiate and contest” (p.xix). This is an approach that aligns well with the features of VET women leaders interviewed in Mitchell (2007) and summarised above by Harman (2008).

In relation to the theme of authenticity for the 2008 Forum, Sinclair criticizes shallow interpretations of authenticity (pp.136-139), especially if it fosters a pre-occupation with self (p.138). In her think piece in this collection, Dr Robyn Tudor expresses similar concerns that “it seems pompous and egotistical to lay claim to authenticity when authenticity is not readily definable as an individual human attribute”. Tudor adds: “Authenticity tends to mean different things to different people under different social, cultural, economic, educational and occupational circumstances.”

Sinclair is mindful of the dangers of leaders crafting authenticity as an end in itself, which is why the 2008 VET Women Leaders Forum took up the challenge of seeing whether authenticity could be integrated with sustainability. Sinclair says:

The crafting of authenticity can become an end in itself rather than a vehicle through which we promote leadership ends such as freedom or happiness. (p.138)

However, she does see the search for authenticity as potentially good:

The search for meaning or greater authenticity in the way one lives and works can also fuel an appetite to do leadership in a different way. (p.182)

In relation to the theme of sustainability for the 2008 Forum, Sinclair regularly asks throughout her book just what is the purpose of leadership? One answer she gives is this: the purpose of leadership is to liberate (p.xix). She continues:

Good leadership aims to support people (including leaders themselves) to make thoughtful choices about what to do and how to influence. (p.xix)

Sustainable leadership is, then, thoughtful and open to different options, not rigid and inflexible. And the work of leaders is never settled, complete or finished:

So leadership is both an intensely personal and a relational process of constructing meaning and purpose. To describe it as a journey is a cliché, yet the way we proceed down a path is as important in leadership as arriving at the destination – indeed, I believe it more so. (p.xix)

In summary, Sinclair’s book provided a useful and informed reference point for participants at the 2008 VET Women Leaders Forum to explore aspects of, and connections between, authenticity and sustainability in leadership. A number of the authors of the think pieces refer to Sinclair.

## Some definitions of authentic leadership in the literature

Authenticity emerged as the shared characteristic of participants at the first Forum conducted in October 2007, I argued in the Introduction to the resultant book, *Women's Leadership in VET*. The book also illustrates a range of other capabilities of VET women leaders besides authenticity. For instance, the think pieces in that book demonstrate their authors' capacity for fresh thinking about VET policy and the articles on them show their substantial abilities as strategists, change agents and innovators, as well as their ability to function effectively in the midst of complexity. However, the overriding characteristic which emerged from the 2007 publication is the authenticity of the women leaders.

In modelling authentic leadership, the leaders described in Mitchell (2007) have met a key challenge for contemporary organisational leaders, according to management theorist Kets De Vries:

The challenge for twenty-first-century leadership is to develop authentic leaders and employees, and to create authentizotic organisations. (Kets de Vries 2006a, p.379)

The somewhat awkward term authentizotic was coined by Kets de Vries (2006a, p.379) and combines the Greek words *authentikos* (authentic) and *zotikos* (vital to life). Kets de Vries (2006a, 2006b) and others such as Goffee and Jones (2006) and Roberts (2007) suggest that authentic organisations are positive and engaging organisations where people feel valued, show commitment and are creative. Such organisations are characterised by collaboration, teamwork and mutual support.

For Kets de Vries, authentic leadership is about having confidence as well as humility; about having strength as well as compassion. Roberts (2007) adds that authentic leadership has many positive connotations including "self-confidence, genuineness, reliability, worthwhileness, a deep sense of one's values and beliefs, a focus on building followers' strengths, and an ability to create a positive and engaging organisational context" (pp.332-333).

Authentic leaders introduce a set of values in their organisations that transcend the traditional lists of values in organisations: a sense of community, a sense of enjoyment and a sense of meaning (Kets de Vries 2006a, pp.377-378). Creating or supporting a sense of meaning in the organisation is a high order achievement of a leader says Kets de Vries (2006a): "authentic leaders are able to create a sense of meaning that gets the best out of people, drawing forth imagination and creativity (p.378)".

In an interview I conducted for *Campus Review* with Rob Goffee in April 2008, he made some pungent remarks about the loss of trust in leadership in Australia and internationally, pointing to some lurid media reporting about an inquiry into alleged local council corruption in NSW and an inquiry into possible state government corruption in WA, suggesting that a focus on authentic leadership is entirely necessary.

Just as there is all over the world, there is a crisis of authenticity [in leadership in Australia]. I'll give you some anecdotes. I started my trip in Perth at the beginning of February and barely a day went by without a story on the front page about Brian Burke. Then I arrived in Sydney in mid-February and the first week I was here most of the stories on the front page of the *Sydney Morning Herald* were about the property issues and potential bribery claims at Wollongong Council. Those two examples show a loss of faith and trust and belief in leaders in both the public and private sectors. That issue is all over the world, not just in Australia. (Goffee in Mitchell 2008)

Goffee also supports Sinclair's focus on origins as a basis for authenticity: it is about knowing your origins, knowing where you have come from.

If you look up the Oxford English Dictionary definition of authenticity, it says 'of undisputed origin'. I think that connecting with your origins is quite important – it's a question about roots. People who are good at it are, I think, a bit better at knowing who they are. That doesn't mean you are always stuck with your origins but it means you never forget them. We live in a clever world where we are more mobile, we're all over the place, socially, educationally, geographically. If you are very mobile you often end up a long way from where you started. People who look to me like fakes are people who write off their origins. Equally people who only ever talk about their origins and never adapt to where they got to, are also kind of stuck. It's this

ability to balance origins with destination which is a clue to the people who are best at being authentic. (Goffee in Mitchell 2008)

Goffee's emphasis on knowing your origins is modelled in this publication by think piece authors such as Ruth Browne, Pam Christie, Belinda McLennan and Sue Slavin. They discuss their origins in ways that avoid a danger noted by Sinclair (2007), that leaders "who are disconnected from their early identity, and intent on crafting a grander one for themselves, often become more vulnerable to corruption" (p.56).

The concept of authentic leadership was examined in the introduction to *Women's leadership in VET* (Mitchell 2007), in the analysis of the interviews with VET women leaders and their think pieces. Nine different authentic aspects of VET women's leadership were identified:

- The first authentic aspect of the women leaders portrayed in this book is they are able to present their true selves.
- The second authentic aspect of these women leaders is their humility.
- The third authentic aspect of these women leaders is their compassion.
- The fourth authentic aspect of these women leaders is their positive outlook.
- The fifth authentic aspect is their determination.
- The sixth authentic aspect of these women leaders is their sense of community.
- The seventh authentic aspect of these women leaders is their ability to form and sustain relationships, both within and outside their organisations.
- The eighth authentic aspect of these women leaders is their ability to cater for the individual needs of a variety of staff.
- The ninth authentic aspect of these women leaders is their understanding that staff want a workplace that is enjoyable, where exploration is encouraged.

Acknowledging the primacy of authenticity in VET women leaders does not diminish the importance of the other capabilities identified in Mitchell (2007), such as VET women leaders' capabilities as creative thinkers. However, acknowledging the primacy of authenticity provides a new way of appreciating and learning from the VET women leaders profiled in Mitchell (2007). It provides a new lens through which to view their capabilities.

### **Exploration of authentic leadership in the current think pieces**

In her think piece in this publication, **Pam Christie** recounts how she was appointed in 2006 to head up TAFE NSW – Sydney Institute, the country's largest and oldest vocational education and training institution. On commencing in the position a question at the front of her mind was "How would I approach this challenge and what would be my leadership approach?" To respond to the question, she went back to her origins and reflected upon some early leadership influences including an inspirational teacher at a crucial stage of her secondary schooling and her father who had a strong influence on her values:

He came from a rural background and a large family which was separated during the depression. His life was a remarkable story starting as a copy boy and rising to be CEO of the country's largest bank. As a leader he showed enormous respect for his staff and humility in relation to his own importance.

Her father taught her about the benefits of honesty and openness:

I learnt from my father that you can lead with humility and compassion without losing power or control. Quite the opposite, the more honest and open you are about yourself, the greater respect

and loyalty you get from your staff.

Pam Christie's self-examination enables her to identify a range of characteristics of authentic leaders:

authentic leaders show humility and compassion

authentic leaders don't hesitate to take on challenges

authentic leaders have a good sense of purpose and value new ideas

authentic leaders are open and honest in their communication

authentic leaders are clear about performance expectations

authentic leaders care about the health and wellbeing of all staff

authentic leaders give regular feedback and celebrate achievements

authentic leaders seek feedback and value learning from others

authentic leaders embrace new ideas and take risks.

**Sue Slavin**, in her think piece, shares some thoughts stirred by her reading of Amanda Sinclair's chapter on going back to and learning from one's origins:

Sure I had "an absent father" for some crucial development years (he died when I was fourteen) and I have indeed "taken longer and (went) via a more circuitous route...to find...leadership identity". I found a leadership model that is "more attuned to and comfortable with expressing emotion"...

Others have commented too on my leadership being more consultative in style, perhaps "with a natural instinct for democracy". According to Sinclair this is consistent with growing up in a large family and later in birth order. I was the fifth daughter, with sisters ranging from 6 years to 16 years older.

This reflection on family origins resonated for Sue Slavin as she contemplated the continual disappointments of the last five years in her college, followed by getting up off the canvas:

A reflection on my family position might certainly explain the drive that, over the past five years, has helped me get myself and my team back on our feet and back into the fray after continual knockbacks and disappointments, like self-righting toys.

Recent successes are described by Sue Slavin with a related metaphor: "If I reflect on Sinclair's theory in chapter four, it might also mean that I've made it to the big kids' circle!"

**Ruth Browne's** think piece refers to the Shakespearean quote "This above all: To thine own self be true" and she explains what this means to her in her VET work:

When embarking on any process within the VET sector I must first of all be completely comfortable about my purpose and role and be assured that I am operating from my own true self.

When we use a façade to present the 'expected face' to the world there is a little voice inside us that soon challenges our directions and decisions. I must feel that what I am doing is a true reflection of what I believe as the best course of action, aimed at producing the best results for our clients, students and staff.

Ruth Browne then sets out and explains behaviours she aspires to in relation to being authentic:

Behaviour 1 – Speak out against non-genuine actions and choices

Behaviour 2 – Stay focussed and act with authenticity

Behaviour 3 – Seek a wiser counsel to affirm your direction

Behaviour 4 – Develop your people – they produce the results.

### **Some definitions of sustainable leadership in the literature**

Sustainable organisations are adaptive, dynamic and effective in an increasingly complex world; they are learning systems that bring about their own transformation; their succession strategies are embraced, enduring and effective (Fullan 2005, Collins 2006).

In *Good to Great and the Social Sectors. A monograph to accompany Good to Great* (2006), Collins describes how building a great organisation proceeds in four basic stages: stage one, disciplined people; stage two, disciplined thought; stage three, disciplined action; and stage four, building greatness to last (pp.34-35). In stage four, he describes how there are multiple leaders, not one charismatic leader:

Truly great organisations prosper through multiple generations of leaders, the exact opposite of being built around a single great leader, great idea or specific program. Leaders in great organisations build catalytic mechanisms to stimulate progress, and do not depend upon having a charismatic personality to get things done; indeed, many had a ‘charisma bypass’. (p.35)

Collins also describes stage four as involving ‘Preserve the core and stimulate progress’:

Enduring great organisations are characterised by a fundamental duality. On the one hand, they have a set of timeless core values and a core reason for being that remain constant over long periods of time. On the other hand, they have a relentless drive for change and progress – a creative compulsion that often manifests in BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals). Great organisations keep clear the difference between their core values (which never change) and operating strategies and cultural practices (which endlessly adapt to a changing world). (p.35)

Sustainable leadership enables organisations and people to continuously improve; it motivates people to take on the anxieties of difficult change. According to Fullan (*Leadership and Sustainability* 2005), leaders in education develop sustainability through:

- taking seriously the moral purpose of delivering value to the public
- fostering the ability of the organisation to continually transform itself
- developing lateral capacity across the system, through the building of networks
- using intelligent accountability and accessing multiple systemic relationships
- embracing deep learning to solve difficult problems
- committing to the achievement of both short and long-term results
- managing people’s energy cyclically, to avoid innovation overload. (p.14)

### **Exploration of sustainable leadership in the current think pieces**

In her think piece **Catherine Brigg** focuses on her Institute’s executive team identifying the future capabilities required for leaders at East Gippsland Institute of TAFE. “We recognise that the leadership capabilities of our people are critical if we are to consolidate our ambition as an employer of choice,” she notes. Hence the Institute constructed a Futures Leaders Program for staff. For Brigg and her colleagues, a key to the future is that both individuals and the organisation benefit:

... while the focus of the program naturally gravitated towards the learning outcomes for individual participants, we also recognised it was essential that organisational learning be captured, valued and used to inform future decision making and shape future programs.

Based on staff responses to a satisfaction survey, says Brigg, “it would seem our organisation is on track to recruit and retain VET leaders who are committed to ensuring that our workplace culture is both satisfying and sustainable”.

**Sue Seawright**, in her think piece, reinforces Catherine Brigg’s view about the criticality of succession:

Focussing on purpose is easy when we see our efforts as enduring. Sustainability is greatly about succession, surely a most important priority for us as leaders. Why invest to build something so strong and vibrant only to imperil it by not ensuring succession to its care? This is the long term priority.

**Gail Eaton-Briggs** says in her think piece that she connects with the term authenticity, listing fifteen ways of acting authentically, but she does not relate easily to sustainability as a leadership capability.

Sustainability does not speak to me as a leadership capability, more as a state to aspire to. It’s also not a term that I can easily integrate with authenticity – although I do believe that a state of sustainability can be reached by acting in a number of ways – and acting authentically is only one of them.

She views sustainability as a desired state and authenticity as one of the ways of achieving it:

In my view, sustainability is the state that is desirable, sought after and planned for – it’s the ‘what’. ‘How’ I get there is by acting with authenticity, and being resilient and resourceful – capabilities that will contribute energy, ideas and ‘bounce back’.

**Sue Freeman** took away a number of key reflections from the 2008 Forum, both related to sustainability. One was the importance of relationships:

Much of our reflection has highlighted the importance of integrity and effective relationships and I found this a recurrent theme of many of the presenters at the 2008 Forum. Successful relationships are critical to building a business and providing a stimulating workplace and it is these relationships developed through FIR [First Impressions Resources] over the last twenty years which keep me coming to work.

Her second reflection was the need to ‘change proof’ her people, to respond to an environment that will never stop changing:

The ‘business of education’ discussions at the 2008 VET Women Leaders’ Forum highlighted the importance of us change-proofing our people, building a *change capable culture* to be able to continue to grow and respond to the changing environment which will never stop changing. My ‘take’ from this as an employer was that this message needs to be put out to our staff at every opportunity, building an understanding that there is no chance in sight of time to consolidate.

**Robyn Tudor**, in her broad discussion of sustainability in her think piece, argues that “those of us in positions of some authority can play the game provocatively and adapt rather than blindly adopt the wave upon wave of externally imposed strategies” in VET. She suggests a number of specific actions:

We can act to safeguard the integrity of purpose and lobby for increased flexibility. We can promote internal best practice in order to demonstrate credible and well-defined institutional identities. Leaders can defend the validity of multiple educational methodologies used to frame and assert our specific educational missions. Most importantly we can direct our primary energies toward generating and enacting locally developed pedagogical strategies, justifying independent interpretation of both educational input and outcomes within appropriate applications and contexts.

Think piece author **Jan Simmons** is CEO of an adult and community education (ACE) organisation that is focused on sustainability:

For me and for Morrison House, being a strong and efficient provider is an important part of our future sustainability. However there are continuing challenges to our operations. Being able to

manage these challenges effectively is the key to sustainability.

She lists four focus areas she and her colleagues focus on, to build sustainability:

Knowing who we are – we have a clear knowledge of who we are, embodied in a clear statement of the programs and services that Morrison House will provide to customers and stakeholders.

Organisational capacity – we have the resources, the structure, people processes and partnerships to enable the organisation to achieve the desired impact within the community

Linkages – we have built collaborative arrangements with other organisations that sometimes exhibit in partnerships and co-operations

Revenue Base - we have increased the amount of income coming to the organisation and diversified our funding services.

Finally, **Ruth Browne** provides a list of six behaviours to increase the sustainability of VET organisations:

ask what the client wants and needs

listen to clients' responses

educate the client about what we can and cannot do

educate our staff to deal with our clients appropriately

be flexible without giving up your validity and authenticity

challenge your client's thinking patterns about old paradigms.

### **Integration of authentic and sustainable leadership in the think pieces**

The 2008 VET Women Leaders Forum focused on identifying ways in which Australian VET women leaders either currently or could integrate the two approaches – authentic leadership and sustainable leadership – to develop their own workforces and to build responsive training organisations. A theme in the think pieces is that sustainability – for leaders and organisations – can build upon authenticity. For instance, **Ruth Browne** links the two concepts when she advocates the following behaviour in relation to managing clients and sustainability: “be flexible without giving up your validity and authenticity”.

**Gail Eaton-Briggs**, after sharing her concerns about whether the two terms can be connected, finds a way to resolve the relationship between the terms:

So, after all that reflection, where am I at with integrating the two concepts of authenticity and sustainability? Both are desirable – and they do sit well together when I accept authenticity as the ‘how’ and sustainability as the ‘what’.

**Belinda McLennan** learnt from experience to become a more determined driver of change and to develop survival skills at the senior level – “to plough on despite criticism if I am convinced and able to convince others of the efficacy of my plan”. She also learnt that she had to push on with what she thought was right for the organisation, being as transparent and fair as she could be. “Being true to your convictions and taking account of the human aspects of the situation is one of the hardest juggling roles of leadership.”

She then brings together the two terms as follows:

I think this speaks to the leadership issues of sustainability (move on with determination once alternative options have been considered and an approach committed to, with the right checks and balances in place) and authenticity (conviction about the right course of action, consistent

with personal values) – especially with doses of persistence, empathy and considered risk taking in the mix.

My learning from this period about myself as a leader and about leadership in an educational context was that key sustainable and authentic ingredients are:

- a vision that matters to people
- confidence in my capacity to articulate it, and to build commitment to it in others because it matters and because its achievable;
- perseverance; and
- the skills and input of others in a trusting environment where there is senior / CEO sponsorship.

I still feel that these aspects are very important, though further experiences have suggested there's more to it – a sense of humour is invaluable, and never forgetting I've still lots to learn!

For **Christine Robertson**, leaders in VET are being forced to seek answers to this question: “How can we effectively work within our current institutional and governance structures to respond to these multiple and complex demands?” Her summary of her approach combines sustainability as the goal with authentic leadership as the way, a position taken by Gail Eaton-Briggs and others:

As a leader of leaders in VET at RMIT, my approach to building sustainability involves supporting staff to experience the challenge of creating their own paths – a self directed approach that builds confidence, trust and new networks across the organisation.

This reflects my own ideological perspective and practice framework which involves a personal commitment to empowering change management, and requires ongoing conscious reflection on what influence I have to continue to build a sense of place, community and continuity in my area of responsibility.

Kets de Vries identifies this as authentic leadership. He assures authentic leaders that

...the work that they and their people do will succeed in tomorrow's marketplace, and that their organisations will ride with grace the new global economy's surging waves of change. (2006, p.381)

**Vicki Tuchtan** in her think piece suggests that both authentic and sustainable leadership are about being real and staying real:

We could ponder for endless hours what the traits authenticity and sustainability mean in terms of leadership. Or we could not and just get to the point! To me, the terms authentic and sustainable bring up one singular image; one iconic brand that epitomizes what it means to be authentic and sustainable in the marketplace – the real thing!

Yes, to be authentic and sustainable means that you are real and you stay real; simple as that! It's a no-brainer.

She is focused on how one becomes real and stays real. While acknowledging that it is not easy to become and stay real, it is a worthy goal to find our 'true north' as leaders:

Those who can tap into their internal compass and form a deep awareness of self – those who can comfortably wear their skin and be confident with who they really are and know what it is they truly stand for – will discover their true north.

**Sue Seawright** integrates the two terms as follows:

Doing work that is worthy enables me to be authentic in my leadership role. Doing work that is purposeful helps me work towards sustainable outcomes.

She then calls on VET leaders to continue to pursue both authentic and sustainable leadership:

We must demonstrate our leadership in TAFE to be authentic and our work in TAFE to be sustainable. We have an important responsibility to show our learners, enterprises and communities how this can be done.

**Robyn Tudor** argues similarly that “leading educators have no choice but to be true to themselves, while endeavouring to ‘do no harm’, if we are to maintain our professional integrity in the name of authenticity and sustainability”.

### **Implications for VET**

There are a number of implications of this publication for the VET sector: for ideas leadership, for leadership development programs, for workforce development programs and for the confidence levels of VET leaders.

The first implication of this set of think pieces is that it is possible for **ideas leadership** in VET to be wrested away from what Robyn Tudor, in her think piece, calls “mainstream thinking”. At times it seems that the only public voices in VET are politicians and senior bureaucrats and representatives of interest groups. Understandably, all of these people want to focus the public’s attention on their particular issues and definitions, but this publication shows that women leaders of training organisations are maintaining fresh, individualistic views about the sector. Robyn Tudor discusses the forces attacking individual, unique or authentic voices:

Where we are enmeshed in compliance, and willingly participating in pseudo-consultative processes, it becomes very difficult for leading educators to define let alone achieve ‘authenticity’. This is because our views have been compromised by integration into mainstream thinking, which leaves us little direct access and no real influence over the complexity of increasingly counterproductive external constraints. Nowhere is this more prevalent than in the VET sector.

Fortunately, the ideas about authenticity and sustainability – and the links between these two terms – in the think pieces in this publication are a clear example of the capability of individual educators to debate and define such terms. See for example the distinctive definitions offered in the think pieces by Gail Eaton-Briggs, Sue Seawright and Vicki Tuchtan.

The second implication of these think pieces relates to future **leadership development programs** in VET. These leadership programs need to reject once and for all the image of the brilliant, solo and mostly male transformative VET leader, and replace it with the image of the leader who liberates leadership in other people (Sinclair 2006). This leader has a vast range of skills, a commanding set of values and clearly thought out principles of behaviour. This leader effectively combines authentic and sustainable behaviours. Examples of such leaders are provided by the authors of the think pieces such as Catherine Brigg, Ruth Browne, Sue Seawright, Christine Robertson and Pam Christie.

Additionally, future leadership programs need to acknowledge, cater for and promote the range of ways that VET leaders learn: from learning resulting from experience, including of things that go wrong, to learning from other industries and contexts, to learning from revisiting their family and community origins. Revisiting origins might include re-connecting with learning earlier in life, from significant others such as parents, siblings and teachers. See for example the think pieces by Belinda McLennan, Sue Slavin and Pam Christie.

The third implication of these think pieces relate to **workforce development programs** in VET, of which leadership programs are one component. In future, such programs need to place a greater emphasis on career planning and succession planning, as modelled and discussed by a number of authors in their think pieces, such as Catherine Briggs and Christine Robertson. Future workforce development programs also need to promote the use of performance review and feedback systems and be linked to other elements of the business, such as business practices, external relationships and organisational capacity, as discussed by Sue Freeman and Jan Simmons.

Finally this set of think pieces potentially could have some positive implications for **the confidence of VET leaders**, as they face unprecedented pressures. Hopefully the publication will provide other VET leaders with the encouragement to be proud of their achievements to date, to remain confident and enthusiastic and to continue learning about their own leadership capabilities, as modelled by Pam Christie:

I am proud of the Institute's achievements and success and still very much enjoying the challenging leadership role. Together with my leadership team, I have learnt a lot about my leadership capabilities and through the process have gained greater confidence in adopting a truly authentic leadership style. I have many challenges ahead and a great deal of learning to look forward to as an authentic leader.

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