

**Evaluation**

**Of**

**Leadership Circles®**

**June 2003**



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## **INTRODUCTORY NOTE**

This evaluation of Leadership Circles was carried out in 2003 by Professor Brian Hansford for Education Queensland.

It follows a previous evaluation by Professor Hansford, commissioned in 2001 by The Growing Edge Consulting Service.

We commend this evaluation to your consideration.

We believe that Leadership Circles provide a “robust vehicle” for creating more confident and successful leaders.

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## EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP CIRCLES

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following are the most significant outcomes of the evaluation of six Leadership Circles for the Queensland Department of Education.

- ✍ The overall evaluation provided results that were extremely supportive with regard to member's experiences in Leadership Circles.
- ✍ Circle members were very positive about the outcomes relating to individual members, establishment of learning communities, assisting with innovation and change and impacting on organisational capability. The strength of these positive perceptions is demonstrated by the fact that in the 17 outcome items the percentage of "agreement" responses ranged from 79% to 100%.
- ✍ Circle members believed that indications of positive outcomes would be even stronger with the passage of time.
- ✍ Questionnaire and interview data indicates that Circle members who had completed their Circle involvement perceived they had participated in a program that had been significant in terms of personal and professional growth. Those members in ongoing Circles endorsed these positive perceptions.
- ✍ The great majority of Circle members identified the collegial sharing of concerns, the discussion of leadership strategies, the acquiring of knowledge from guest speakers, the awareness that others had workplace problems and the opportunity to reflect on leadership issues in a safe and confidential environment as important components of Circle meetings.
- ✍ The highly positive reactions to involvement in Circles did not seem to have any strong links to organisational arrangements, gender, previously completed professional development experiences or departmental classifications.
- ✍ Members indicated they were pleased they joined a Circle (87% "strongly agree") and would recommend involvement in Circles to others (82% "strongly agree"). Their responses also indicated they believed the investment in Circles was worthwhile (74% "strongly agree").
- ✍ The positive perceptions regarding Leadership Circles included the general logistics of the process and the quality of facilitation.
- ✍ In terms of problems mentioned by Circle members, the most significant appeared to be the distance between member's workplaces and from meeting sites. Some expressed concern about individual member commitment to their Circle responsibilities and also

spoke about the need to ensure adequate briefing of quality speakers. In settings where the organization was constructed around one day meetings there were comments about maintaining the necessary strength of association between meetings.

- ✍ From the comments made during interviews it would seem that there is no clear and obvious way to determine the nature of Circle membership. Perceptions varied from a belief that all members should be the same classification through to a preference for mixed classification groups. Others spoke of the possibility of a Circle having a focus on an individual school while others thought it may be worth considering inviting leaders from other organizations to join a Circle.

## **Overview**

It would be difficult to locate an evaluation with such strong perceptions regarding the personal and professional value of a particular program. Circle members believed they had participated in a collegial and safe environment and the initial perception by some that the program may be a waste of time was indeed far from the mark. Members expressed extremely high levels of satisfaction with both personal growth and development and perceived outcomes.

Brian Hansford  
**Emeritus Professor**  
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## PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP CIRCLES

✍ *I looked at the outcome items...and thought...in the next two years...I should be able to say ...absolutely...strongly agree to more than half...if this is not the case...should consider a new occupation. (High School Principal)*

✍ *Best learning I have engaged in associated with leadership. (Executive Director)*

✍ *I find it of enormous value to listen and learn from others in EQ – school, district, and central office people. A greater appreciation of others...relevance to our learning. (Primary School Principal)*

✍ *Our group worked well...a means of clarifying...sharing healthy debate. (Classroom Teacher)*

✍ *To have the space to think deeply on a topic that enables a clarification of issues and then a pathway for action. (Executive Director)*

## **EVALUATION OF LEADERSHIP CIRCLES**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background**

One of the strategies used by the Queensland Department of Education in the development of leaders has been to support the establishment of Leadership Circles. These Circles were developed in a belief that their operation would assist educational leaders with their individual learning journey, help support networks of learning communities, assist leaders in their understanding of innovation and change and enhance potential organisational capacity.

The concept of Leadership Circles is built around a program of regular meetings of people with similar workplace challenges. The precise organisation of Leadership Circles may vary but the basic format for a three-hour breakfast meeting is as follows:

- ? Breakfast on arrival.
- ? Opening of meeting.
- ? Guest speaker.
- ? Discussion of current concerns.
- ? Topic of interest led by a group member.
- ? Closing meeting.

(Source: Facilitators Handbook 2002, Ken Gilbert and Associates.)

The basic model is for Leadership Circles to meet on ten occasions at a time acceptable to all participants. However, the frequency of meetings and length of meetings may vary as a consequence of specific constraints. For example, North Queensland, one of the Circles in this evaluation decided to meet for full days rather than the customary three hours. This decision arose as a consequence of substantial distances between member's workplaces and the complexity of getting the group together.

The decision to implement an evaluation was to ascertain whether the perceptions of Circle members regarding the nature of outcomes and levels of satisfaction justified the support that had been provided by Queensland Department of Education.

#### **Methodology**

The methodology of the evaluation was built around a questionnaire and interview approach for the collection of data. The major objective of the evaluation was to establish the learning outcomes and levels of satisfaction experienced by members of the Circles. Data were to be collected by means of a questionnaire from those members of Circles who had completed the series of meetings, while interview data were to be obtained for two purposes. The first was to clarify issues raised in the completed questionnaires and second to establish the satisfaction of Circle members who were still participating in a program. Interviews were to be conducted by

either email or phone calls. Although the Circles had commenced, it was decided to seek expectation data from members. These reflective expectations were either obtained by email request or by members completing a response sheet. In both approaches the Circle members were asked to identify their hopes, expectations, fears and concerns, for the proposed Circle.

### Sample

Six Leadership Circles were involved in the evaluation and these varied from five to fourteen members. These Circles were named Executive Directors, Gympie District, NRG (Network Resources Group), Gold Coast, Multi Region Group and North Queensland. In total, there were 65 participants in the Circles and each Circle was constituted in a somewhat different manner. The Executive Director’s Circle consisted entirely of Executive Directors while the Gympie District Circle included primary school principals, teachers associated with special education and a District Office member. The NRG Circle consisted of two primary school principals, two high school principals and an Executive Director. The Multi District Circle contained personnel from district and head offices and principals. The North Queensland Circle consisted of Executive Directors and the Gold Coast Circle of school principals.

The details concerning the six Circles are set out in Table 1.

**Table 1**

**Details of Participating Circles**

Circle Name	Number of Participants	Organisation	Finished	% Response Rate	
				Expectations	Survey
Executive Directors	13	3 hours	Yes	67	92
Gympie District	11	3 hours	Yes	82	82
Gold Coast	14	3 hours	Yes	72	100
NRG	5	Day Blocks	No	100	80
Multi Region	10	3 hours	No	80	-
North Queensland	12	Day Blocks	No	67	-

It should be noted that four of the Circles were based on three hourly sessions and the other two on blocks of one day. This decision regarding session organisational was based on the preferences of Circle members. Table 1 also indicates that three of the Circles had completed all of their meetings. However, the NRG Circle was also asked to complete the final questionnaire as they had been working as a group since completing the Strategic Leaders Program. Response rates for both the reflective expectations of participants and the questionnaire were good.

## **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire used in the evaluation for Circles was based on a trial questionnaire developed in 2001. The final wording of items contained in the 2003 questionnaire was determined following discussion with the two facilitators of the Circles and Queensland Department of Education. (See Appendix 2)

## **Data Collection**

Data collection occurred in a series of stages and these are now outlined.

**Stage 1:** All participants were asked to provide reflective expectation data. This was more difficult for the Executive Directors Circle and Gympie District Circle as both groups had completed their series of meetings. Given this situation the response rates were considered very good.

**Stage 2:** Once expectation data began arriving the interview process was commenced and this continued through out the entire data collection period. Considerably more interviews were based on email than phone calls, but it should be noted that there were Circle members who chose to respond in writing or by phone call. Two interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting.

**Stage 3:** Questionnaires were mailed to the Circles who had completed their programs, namely Executive Directors, Gympie District and NRG Circles. The Gold Coast Circle completed the questionnaire in their final meeting. In all instances, the response rate was over 80% and this was exceptionally good as some of the members had moved on, or were on leave.

**Stage 4:** Interviews were particularly directed toward the two Circles who had not completed their programs, North Queensland and Multi Region Group. The objective of these interviews was to gain “in progress” information regarding these Circles.

## Evaluation of Leadership Circles

## **EXPECTATIONS**

As mentioned previously this evaluation was not implemented at the time the various Leadership Circles commenced and as a consequence it was not possible to ascertain the expectations of Circle members as their meetings got underway. However, it seemed a worthwhile exercise to request participants to reflect back to the time their Circle commenced and ask for comments regarding their expectation/hopes and fears/concerns regarding the potential outcome from involvement in a Circle.

This request was particularly difficult for members of both the Executive Directors and Gympie District Circles, as they had completed all their meetings. In a similar vein, the members of the NRG Circle had been involved in a previous leadership program and had formed a Network Resources Group prior to gaining funding for a Leadership Circle. As a consequence the members of the NRG Circle had both discussed and put in place their expectations before their Circle commenced formal operations. The expectations for the Gympie District Group are based on documents prepared at the time and the reflections of some members.

There were a group of participants who when contacted by the consultant regarding their expectations made comments like “It is just too difficult to recall my thoughts at that time” or, “I could probably write down things for you, but I think they would be coloured by what took place in the Circle”. There seemed to be no apparent benefit in asking these members further questions with a focus on expectations. The bringing together of the expectations of the members from six Leadership Circles was rather complex. This in part arose from the fact that the responses varied from a few bullet points to three pages of writing and from a need to simplify, with as little distortion as possible, the ideas presented. The following information is based on the frequency with which expectations were identified.

In terms of hopes and expectations for Leadership Circle members the five most frequently identified were:

### **Major Hopes and Expectations**

1. Establish a productive and collegial network.
2. Establish a safe, confidential, sharing and cohesive group.
3. Acquire knowledge and skills regarding leadership.
4. Value of contact with both peers and other professionals.
5. General opportunity for personal and professional development

The four major fears and concerns for members of the Leadership Circles were as follows:

### **Major Fears and Concerns**

1. A possible waste of time.
2. Content may not be relevant or challenging.
3. Membership issues – commitment, respect, compatibility, comfort level, distance.
4. Personal capacity to commit and benefit from involvement.

Greater detail concerning the expectations of individual Circles can be found in Appendix 1 - Summary Of Expectation Comments For All Circles.

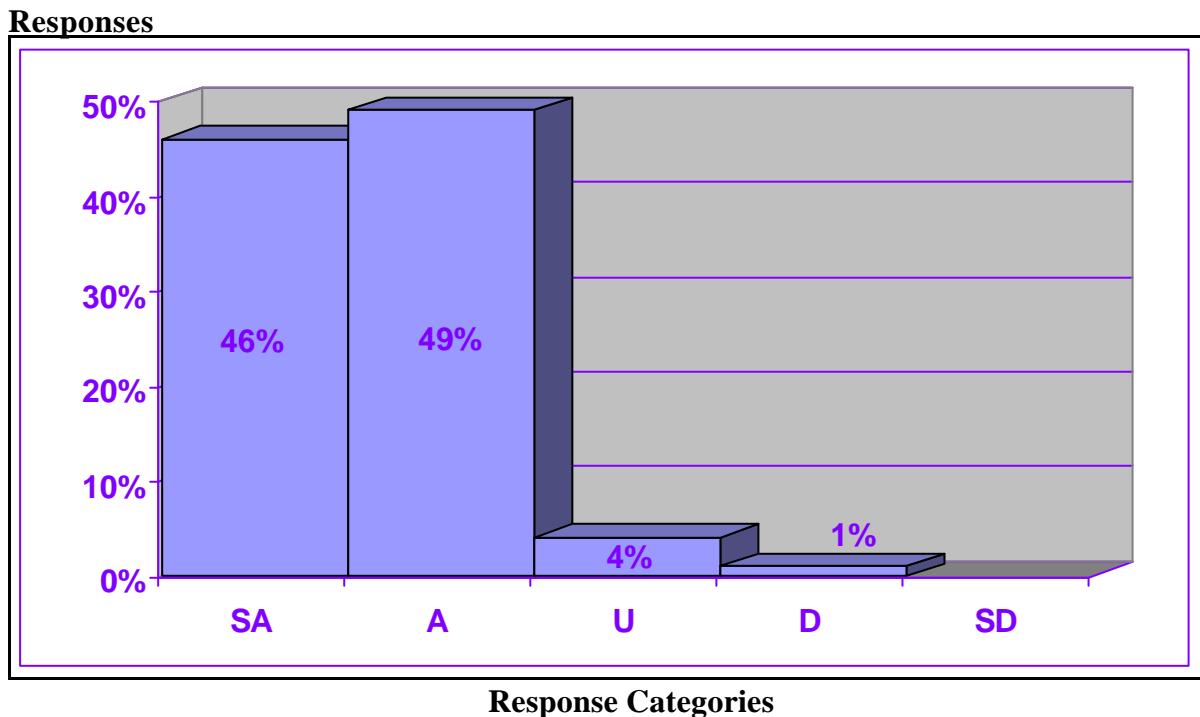
## QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

### Summary of Results

An examination of the combined responses from the four Circles that completed the questionnaire indicates that the participating members held extremely positive perceptions regarding Leadership Circles. These combined percentage figures are reported in Appendix 2. The widespread use of the two ‘agreement’ categories can be demonstrated by totalling across the responses to all questionnaire items. The results of such a totalling indicates that, in rounded figures, 46% of responses were in the “strongly agree” category, 49% in the “agree” category and 5% in the “undecided” category (See Figure 1). This is certainly a strong indication of the apparent value these participants attached to Leadership Circles.

**Figure 1**

**Percentage of All Questionnaire Responses in Each Category**



### Snapshot of the Strongly Agree Category

As a consequence of the predominant use of “agreement” categories it was decided to focus more closely on the use of the “strongly agree”. The following analysis (Table 2) presents those items from the major sub-sections of the questionnaire where 70 percent or more of the responses were in the “strongly agree” category. Although the setting of a 70 percent is somewhat arbitrary, it does represent a positive response rate of considerable strength.

**Table 2**  
**Questionnaire Items**  
**Seventy Percent of Responses In Strongly Agree Category**

Questionnaire Section and Item	Executive Directors	Gympie District	Gold Coast	NRG	Total Completed Circles
<b>Outcomes</b>					
Improved understanding of workplace change	v			v	
Participated in valuable personal learning		v	v		
Assisted with enhancement of existing network		v			
Use networks for learning and reflection				v	
Enhanced personal development				v	
<b>Logistics</b>					
Venue away from workplace	v	v	v	v	v
Venue was good			v	v	
Venue provided good food			v	v	
Venue has good facilities			v	v	
Venue has good parking			v	v	
Number of sessions was appropriate			v	v	
<b>Speakers</b>					
Provided a range of viewpoints	v			v	
Quickly engaged members in discussion	v				
<b>Group Discussions</b>					
Led to a genuine rapport		v	v	v	v
Were open and frank	v	v	v	v	v
Made me reflect on leadership attributes	v	v	v	v	
Were dominated by individuals				v	
Were focussed on topic				v	
Helped clarify learning experiences				v	
<b>Finally</b>					
Pleased I joined program	v	v	v	v	v
Have ongoing member contact		v	v	v	v
Would recommend to others	v		v	v	v
Worth investing in Circles	v	v	v	v	v
Would send staff to future Circles	v	v	v	v	v
Will participate in future years			v	v	

The quantitative data has shown that members of Circles have indicated significant positive perceptions regarding Leadership Circles and Table 2 endeavours to further explore these perceptions. The following comments are a summary of the trends depicted in Table 2.

1. With regard to **outcomes** section of the questionnaire (Table 2) there were a few items that met the rigorous requirement of 70 percent of responses in the “strongly agree” category. However, this should not be taken as implying there was a somewhat less than positive response relating to perceived outcomes. In Figure 2, the percentage responses to the various items relating to individual outcomes, network and community learning outcomes, innovation and change outcomes and organisational capability outcomes have been combined to produce a percentage chart. For example, there were five items dealing with individual outcomes and if these are combined, 38% of Circle members responded in the “strongly agree” category, 59% in the “agree” category and 3% in the “undecided” category.

**Figure 2**

**Outcomes  
Percentage of Responses in Each Category**

Outcomes	Response Categories				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Individual	38%	59%	3%		
Network & Learning Community	40%	54%	6%		
Innovation and Change	40%	52%	8%		
Organisational Capability	32%	58%	8%	2%	

2. The responses regarding **logistics** suggest a very high level of support for Circle meetings being held away from member’s workplaces. It should also be noted (Table 2) that both the Gold Coast and NRG Circles indicated strong support for most logistic items.

3. Few items in the **speaker’s** section of the questionnaire met the cut off (Table 2). Given some of the comments made regarding speakers it does seem that this component of Circle meetings could be lifted from an already high base figure.

4. The items relating to **group discussions** suggest that Circle members felt extremely positive about open and frank discussion, genuine rapport and reflecting on leadership attributes (Table 2).

5. The summary section of the questionnaire, entitled **finally**, suggests that many Circle members were extremely satisfied they had joined a group (87% “strongly agree”), felt it would be worth investing funds in future Circles (74% “strongly agree”) and indicated they would be willing to send a staff member to future Leadership Circles (71% “strongly agree”). There was also a strong indication from many Circle members that they would be having ongoing contact

with Circle members (79% “strongly agree”) and they would recommend similar programs to others (82% “strongly agree”) (See Table 2).

**Snapshot of Undecided and Disagreement Responses**

A small number of questionnaire items had response rates of 10 percent or more in the undecided and disagree categories and these are reported in Table 3. There are two points worth noting. First, in the interpretation of Table 3 it is important to keep in mind that when it is indicated that 10 percent used the undecided and disagree categories we are talking about four Circle members. Second, there were no item responses in the strongly disagree category.

**Table 3**

**Analysis of Undecided and Disagree Categories  
Greater Than 10% of Responses in Undecided/Disagree**

Questionnaire Section and Items	Completed Circles	
	Undecided	Disagree
<b>Outcomes</b>		
Assist with creation of a learning community in my workplace	11%	
Improve capacity to support innovative workplace developments	16%	
Enhance organisational level outcomes	16%	5%
<b>Logistics</b>		
Venue provided good food	11%	2%
Venue parking was good	13%	5%
<b>Speakers</b>		
Were of a high quality	12%	3%
Sufficient time for discussion	13%	3%
Present material in a manner than enhanced learning	13%	2%
Quickly engaged members in discussion	8%	5%
<b>Group Discussion</b>		
Always relevant to the acquisition of leadership skills	11%	2%

**N.B** 10% is equivalent to four Circle members.

An examination of Table 3 indicates that more of the responses were in the undecided than the disagree category. A brief summary of the data in Table 3 is now provided.

In the *outcomes* section three items had responses of 10 percent or more in the undecided category. It is worth noting that 21% of Circle members used the undecided or disagree

categories when reflecting on the item concerning their ability to enhance outcomes at the organisational level. The database contained a number of comments that relate to outcomes and some of these are now presented.

- ? *It's not long enough to talk about outcomes...I'm hopeful.*
- ? *Working at it ...ask again in 6 months.*
- ? *It would be difficult to enhance outcomes of our organization...especially like me...a classroom teacher.*
- ? *If tried a few things and am now waiting to see...the effort was put in, will the outcomes follow?*
- ? *I looked at the outcome items...and thought...in the next two years...I should be able to say yes...absolutely...strongly agree to more than half...if this is not the case...should consider a new occupation.*

The two items from *logistics* in Table 3 focus on parking and food at the venues. The majority of undecided and disagree responses about parking came from the Gympie Circle, whereas the responses linked to food came from across the Circles.

Four items regarding *speakers* had ten percent or more of Circle members using the undecided or disagree categories. These responses came from the Executive Directors, Gympie District and Gold Coast Circles.

In the *group discussion* items only one reached the ten percent cut off and this was “always relevant to the acquisition of leadership skills”. Several Circle members either underlined “always” or wrote such words as “mainly” or “generally”, thus suggesting the item was too encompassing.

## ISSUES RAISED

During the processes of evaluation there were a number of topics or issues that made fairly frequent appearances in the data set. It should be noted that these topics or issues reflect both positive and negative perceptions regarding the involvement in Circles. Each of these is now discussed.

### General Perception

Throughout all the data collected there was a clear theme relating to widespread participant satisfaction with both the operation of, and perceived outcomes from, Leadership Circles. The following comments are indicative of those made by members of Circles.

- ? *The program is the best PD I have had...created networks of support...The fee is a small price to pay to recognise the value of senior officers.*
- ? *The best learning I have had for along time.*
- ? *A very worthwhile experience...The trust built up in the group was excellent, especially during a turbulent time.*
- ? *Impacted positively on my leadership...helped me with better balance of work/family/leisure.*

- ? *Best learning I have engaged in associated with leadership.*
- ? *Usually I don't spend time completing surveys...but Circles are something well worth supporting.*

One member of a circle made a rather detailed comment regarding involvement in the group and to a large extent it sums up the high degree of satisfaction in Circles generally.

- ? *I see the benefits of the LC as a mixture of personal (which assists in all aspects of my life) and organisational.*
  - it provides 3 hours of intense, focused, reflective, activity (away from the 'busyness' of day-to day ops) involving participants from schools, district office and central office coming together ...all with a common purpose.*
  - it allows participants access to intimate details about each other's working/learning conditions and leadership perspectives which lead to greater appreciation of the pressures and issues each faces*
  - it exposes each participant to other world views- our horizons are expanded by the reported experience of guest speakers and others in the group.*
  - it forces each participant (individually and collectively) to confront everyone's issue of concern- to think it through, offer advice and to learn our lessons, often from the advice we hear others proffer.*
  - there is a great mix of personalities and lots of good humour, openness and trust developing in our circle. I never go away without a big smile on my face and a shared joke and generally high spirits of the circle.*
  - I reflect during the following weeks on what has gone on in the most recent circle. I find myself passing on advice and information to other staff members that I have picked up at the circle.*

It would be wrong to assume that there are no comments regarding things that cause concern for some members of Circles. For example in both the North Queensland and the Multi District Circles there was mention of the distances travelled. There is some criticism of members who do not turn up to sessions, who leave early, or who do not contribute during the meeting. Some teaching principals made comments as to the cost incurred as a consequence of their Circle membership. There were also several participants who felt uncertain, even insecure, regarding their capacity or ability to 'enter in and contribute meaningful' as a consequence of being relatively new in their leadership role. As mention elsewhere in the evaluation, there were comments made about being able being able to 'do better' with the selection of guest speakers.

## **Membership of Circles**

A number of Circle members made either unsolicited comment concerning membership of a Circle, or responded to a specific question raised during the evaluation. The analysis of data appears to suggest at least four different perspectives and these are represented in the following statements.

- ? *It is probably best to have Circles especially tailored to meet needs... Separate Circles for principals, for directors, for HOD's etc.*
- ? *I...would seek to work with a more diverse group ie not solely Ed Qld personnel.*
- ? *I would advocate the notion of choice. One of the things that made our circle successful and forced us to learn and grow outside the narrow focus of secondary education, was that we were not all secondary principals...people should have a choice. The construct of a circle should be based on relational rather than status issues.*
- ? *There are benefits...having more than one member from a school.*

The last comment came from the Gympie District Circle and it is worth noting some comments made about the membership of that Circle.

- ? *The Gympie School Leaders Network was interesting in that it was a diverse group of participants- small school principals, middle size school principals, deputy principals, guidance officers, HOSES, District Office personnel –I think this concept of a circle takes the whole notion of “leadership” to a new level and density not addressed in other circles that I am aware of.*
- ? *In 2002, 3 members of the Gympie West school staff and 2 personnel on our campus participated in the circle. This was invaluable in the growth of team spirit in our leadership team. In 2003 another member of staff has joined our ongoing Network as a leadership growth initiative.*

## **The Agenda**

The precise nature of the agenda or program following in a particular Circle was determined by discussion among members. The following selection of member statements indicates that it was possible to impact on the direction followed by a Circle and in some instance this created welcome surprise.

- ? *So much PD centres around EQ agendas. Refreshing to participants in Circles when we influence agendas to meet our needs.*
- ? *My feeling...Ed Qld wanted to impact on the agenda.*
- ? *We owned the agenda and that was a different experience for me.*
- ? *I made a suggestion, it was discussed, we changed direction, unbelievable!!*

## Speakers

Overall, the survey data suggests that speakers were a valuable component of a Circle meeting and that their input was valued and relevant. However, it was clear that speakers differed in their impact and perceived value. Even within a Circle members held quite divergent perceptions as to the value of a presentation to the understanding of leadership. A selection of member's perceptions is presented below.

- ? *Guest speakers varied in respect to their preparation, knowledge of the group, quality of information and presentation.*
- ? *Each speaker did a great job and moved the group in their learning.*
- ? *I found the speaker section the least rewarding component of Circles.*
- ? *Speakers stimulated provocative discussion.*
- ? *Quality speakers are important...one area we could have done better.*

## Group Discussions

During the period of the evaluation it was abundantly clear that group discussion was perceived as a vital component in the positive assessment of Circles. It would seem that as members got to know each other, and more importantly, trust each other, there were numerous statements about the personal and professional value of group discussions. The segment of Circle meetings where individual members can present an 'issue of concern' also received considerable positive comment. The following statements are a reflection of the types of comments made by Circle members.

- ? *Our group worked well...a means of clarifying/sharing...healthy debate.*
- ? *Discussion gave us a chance to group problem-solve.*
- ? *The process we developed engaged all members in helping clarify the situation and providing helpful strategies for the person to move the situation on.*
- ? *As with most group discussions, those with the most valuable insights were not always given "airplay"...should have been avoided.*
- ? *Built friends and developed an extremely useful way to problem solve.*
- ? *Group discussions and particularly the "issue of concern" agenda were vital in the forming of our Circle.*

## Facilitators

The same facilitator was involved in the four Circles that completed the questionnaire and based on comments made it seemed clear that there was high level of satisfaction attached to the way this role was performed. The following comments are considered indicative of those made by participants.

- ? *Overall organization excellent...remembers personal detail...modelling skills.*
- ? *Moved from leader/facilitator to group member.*
- ? *Provided good structure...accessed good speakers...good background and experience.*

- ? *Welcoming...process driven...able to listen...challenging.*
- ? *Excellent skills...sensitive...unobtrusive...responding...challenging...knows the group...integrity.*
- ? *Ensuring participation...readings... follow through... developed a safe, confidential environment.*
- ? *Excellent theoretical and “knowledge” background.*
- ? *Non-judgemental...trustworthy... insightful...outstanding networks.*

## **ONGOING CIRCLES**

### **North Queensland and Multi Region Circles**

Both the North Queensland and Multi Region Circles were continuing with their programs and the following member comments provide an interim indication as to their progress. These comments were in response to a series of questions posed in emails to members of the two Circles.

#### **North Queensland Circle**

##### ***1. What is the value of the Leadership Circle to both yourself as an educationalist and to your employing organisation?***

- ? *To have the space to think deeply on a topic that enables a clarification of issues and then a pathway for action.*
- ? *The Leadership Circle provides for a wider range of experiences than would be available through the usual professional development activities provided by EQ. I find these experiences are of personal and professional value.*
- ? *It is a simple way of providing experiences that our organization would find difficult to do itself.*

##### ***2 .What comments do you have about the structure of the program?***

- ? *I feel that we are too far between meetings so the cohesion is less than it potentially could be. I know the tyranny of distance impacts on all our capacities to meet more regularly.*
- ? *It seems to be working well...just wish we were closer together.*
- ? *I enjoy the structure of group meetings with colleagues, individual contact with the facilitator and the inclusion of people from other walks of life. The collegial atmosphere and nonsystemic emphasis works well.*

##### ***3. What changes would you suggest if similar programs were to be organised?***

- ? *In regional situations I am wondering if the process needs to be “in house” or if it is something that could be perpetuated with other leaders to enable the meetings to occur more regularly.*
- ? *A regular email/telephone contact with the facilitator to create a dialogue around activities and interests. This currently occurs around organization.*

*Knowledge of readings, follow up activities, conferences etc which may be accessed could be provided through a regular update.*

- ? *Greater use of technology among ourselves and with the facilitator...telephone...email...videoconferencing...what else...need to give this more thought.*

**4. Would you recommend others to join similar Circles?**

- ? *Yes, don't just let it slip away.*
- ? *Absolutely yes.*
- ? *Yes-especially those from cloistered organisations such as EQ.*
- ? *Especially those in the regional areas.*

**5. What special problems face the operation of Circles in North Queensland? How can these be minimised?**

- ✍ *Distance-difficulty in getting together.*
- ? *Perhaps concentrating participants in as close proximity as possible.*
- ? *Members in our circle come from Mackay, Townsville, Cairns & Mt Isa. This is too ambitious and limits what we can do.*
- ? *An appropriate skilled leader in the area... would help. X's knowledge and skill adds so much value, getting greater access to him and the quality of people he brings to the group is essential.*

**6. Any other comments?**

- ? *I enjoy the learning circles and think that despite some difficulties it is in my interests to try and contribute.*
- ? *I feel that there could be some value adding around these activities. If we members are able to overcome the getting together problem.*

**Multi Region Circle**

**1. What is the value of the Leadership Circle to both yourself as an educationalist and your employing organization?**

- ? *Personally I find the discussion and issue sessions very enlightening and valuable to my learning.*
- ? *Having a range of personnel from different areas of the department adds a different perspective to my thinking. It is great to hear how a Principal or Executive Director approaches the same issue.*
- ? *I find it of enormous value to listen and learn from others in EQ – school district and central office. A greater appreciation of others stands out for me. It allows relevance to our learnings by the guest speaker only being what the group is interested in and/or finds pertinent to our needs.*
- ? *I find the leadership circle invaluable as a professional network.*

? *I “lost” my mentor a couple of years ago and have had a difficult time trying to replace him with a significant other. The circle fills the gap for me and provides a “safe” place to download and reflect on work related issues. The members of my circle all have great experience which is relevant to my situation and I value their advice.*

**2. What comments do you have about the structure of the program?**

- ? *The structure is fine – I like the social/networking component as this builds trust and connections among the group. More discussion of the guest speaker topic after their departure would be interesting.*
- ? *The issue of concern session is valuable – In our group we have had a series of fairly similar topics.*
- ? *I like the structure because there is a structure and it works given the number of people/personalities and the time factor.*
- ? *I enjoy the structure of our circle – it means that all members are heard, there is a professional input, a constructive process for sharing issues and we can present for each other because we formally check in.*
- ? *The 3 hours is tightly structured. I’d like more feedback in subsequent weeks about the failure of people to resolve or manage their issue of concern. yet there is enough flexibility created (through the judgement of the facilitator) to allow segments of interest to be extended. There is sufficient ‘meat’ and interest packed into the time that I have never left feeling it was time was time wasted.*

**3. What changes would you suggest if similar programs were to be organised?**

- ? *There is nothing to connect some of the group in the days between sessions. I think it would be a good idea to create an activity or excuse to share more between times.*
- ? *My only concern is grouping people where a bit of travel is going to be needed coupled with a 7.00am start.*
- ? *A little more input into the focus of the guest speaker’s address.*
- ? *A fuller brief about the Education contexts and influences...some of the guest speakers don’t seem to be aware of the specific issues associated with the Education context...the impact and influence of Queensland Teacher’s Union...*

**4. Would you recommend others to join similar programs?**

- ? *Recommend that the classification of members is carefully considered as circles are put together. An LD component is always maintained. It might be the only time that month that you get that quality input.*
- ? *Absolutely yes.*

- ? *Yes – If they are interested in hearing the views of others and interested in broadening their thinking and decision making influences.*

**5 . What special problems face the operation of this Circle? Can these be minimised?**

- ? *Venue is an issue for me (and perhaps the home/work locations of the participants could be better considered) as I am a far southsider travelling to the far north and have to leave home at an unreasonable time to make the 7.00am starts, though I think the b'fast concept is a good one. Even 30minutes would be more manageable.*
- ? *The prior 'connectedness' of the group is a factor.*
- ? *The quality of guest speakers and the resonance of their messages are a key binding element in the success of the LC... as are the qualities of the facilitator...*
- ? *I don't believe I have any...To me it is a matter of commitment to the task. While there may be circumstances beyond your control...the onus is placed firmly on the individual.*
- ? *Problems arise when members can't make the time...date claimers...commitment.*

**6. Any other comments?**

- ? *Being an... introvert...find the feed back sessions difficult...feel inadequate at times...when others are able to provide immediate responses...a little discomfort...one of my motivators to push myself in this area.*
- ? *...in relation to the non-participatory behaviour from a participant(s)...the facilitator needs to be very skilled in managing.*
- ? *Keep the circles going as we well may take up the model ourselves. It may be our only chance that some individuals get to open up professionally. Our jobs are getting harder, not easier – this strategy helps to stop people from shutting down – and look toward professional growth.*
- ? *X is an insightful, organised, experienced facilitator and coach whom I've learned a great deal from.*
- ? *I tend to see the benefits of the circle as something I personally gain from and that benefits to the organization are subliminal and subtle. It's the 'unconscious imbuing' of concepts and learning over extended periods of time that pay off in how I approach changes and issues. The fact that the organization has shown it thinks employee development is important and worth spending money on is a huge sign that keeps me motivated. If this were to fall away it would be another huge sign, a negative one.*

**CONCLUSIONS**

- ? **Qualitative and quantitative data were obtained regarding the operation of six Queensland Leadership Circles. These Circles had been sponsored by the Queensland**

Department of Education and the evaluation was to provide an assessment of member satisfaction and perceived outcomes.

- ? The largely reflective expectations data collection suggested that members had joined a Leadership Circle in a hope that a productive and collegial network would be created in a safe, confidential environment. However, as members joined these Circles there was a reasonable high level of concern that the program would lack relevance and challenges and thus become a waste of time.
- ? In both the responses to items from the questionnaire and comments made during phone and email interviews there existed highly positive perceptions of the role played by Circles in member's professional development generally and in particular, in their growth and development with respect to leadership in educational contexts. The sharing of concerns, the consideration of decision-making strategies, the acquiring of information from speakers and the awareness that others face leadership challenges appear to have had a substantial impact on Circle members. However, more than anything else, it was the perception that members could discuss their educational problems in a safe and confidential environment that led to the development of collegial and professional experience within Circles.
- ? The ongoing Circles, namely North Queensland and Multi Region, provided data that tended to strongly support the trends evident from the Circles that had completed their meetings.
- ? The responses to many of the questionnaire items were heavily focussed on the "strongly agree" and "agree" categories. This response pattern suggested that irrespective of organisational arrangements, gender, other professional development programs completed and departmental classification there was strong support for the concept of Leadership Circles. This positive perception of Circles was also evidenced in the comments made during interviews and when responding to open-ended questions.
- ? In terms of outcomes relating to individual members, establishment of learning communities, assisting with innovation and change and impacting on organisational capability the questionnaire data indicated extremely positive perceptions. In fact, the lowest 'agreement' response rate among the 17 outcomes items was 79%. This was for the item regarding "has helped me enhance outcomes at the organisational level". Twenty one percent of Circle members responded to this item in the 'undecided' or 'disagree' categories.
- ✍ An examination of the questionnaire responses indicates that the greatest strength of positive response is associated with items relating to:
  - ✍ The venue being away from the workplace.
  - ✍ Genuine rapport in the group.
  - ✍ Discussions being open and frank.
  - ✍ Reflecting on leadership attributes.

- ✍ Being pleased they joined a group.
  - ✍ Having ongoing contact with members.
  - ✍ Recommending programs to others.
  - ✍ Worthwhile investing money in future Circles.
  - ✍ Being willing to send staff to future Circles.
- ? There are areas of concern regarding Leadership Circles and the two major ones appeared to be distance between member's workplaces and a perception that a very small number of members lacked commitment to the process. There was a high level of satisfaction about the notion of having a guest speaker but during interviews there were comments about the relevance of some speakers to the concept of leadership.
- ? The questionnaire data indicated very little difference in the perception of members from Circles with day block organization and those with monthly three- hour meetings. However, the responses to interview questions seem to suggest that there is greater cohesion and group identification from the Circles with regular three hourly meetings.
- ? There was consistent praise from Circle members for the competence and professionalism of facilitators.

# **APPENDIX 1**

## **Summary Of Expectation Comments For All Circles**

## Overall Hope and Expectation

In five of the six Circles the most frequently identified hope/expectation related to the value that could potential arise as a consequence of establishing, or being part of, a network. Frequently this notion of networking was linked to statements about collegiality. The responding members of the Executive Directors Circle did not develop the concept of networking to any extent and this may be explained by the fact that many of these participants had been associated in a previous Circle.

## Overall Concern and Fear

The most frequently identified concern/fear was that participating in the meetings of a Circle could be a waste of time as these may lack relevance. In the Executive Directors Circle there was one similar comment and that was expressed as a hope it would not become a “talk fest” of complaints. .

## Executive Directors

- (i) **Hopes and Expectations:** The most clearly articulated and frequently expressed hope and expectation was that they would continue to learn about leadership and leadership theory through input from a range of professionals. This was closely followed by a desire for the Circle to be a safe, non-threatening, and confidential setting where members could explore issues. This setting would be such that members could experience collegial support irrespective of the pathway travelled. Members also indicated a hope they would experience professional growth and have their assumptions questioned by topics and issues that were in tune with the needs of group.
- (ii) **Concerns and Fears:** The most frequently mentioned fear or concern of the group related to issues surrounding membership. This was expressed in various ways, but included a concern that membership had changed, that new members had to come into an established structure and the need to respect new members. There were comments about a concern that “EQ” may try to control the agenda, that future support may not be forthcoming for Leadership Circles, that effectiveness may be influenced by group size and the capacity of the group to engage each other “below the green line”.

## Gold Coast

- (i) **Hopes and Expectations:** This Circle went beyond the notion of networking and collegiality and spoke about a setting that would be conducive to learning, cohesive, trusting and sharing. There was also a strong expression for growth in personal skills and attributes. There were comments indicating a hope that the alliance of principals would become stronger and that they would gain insights into how others lead.

- (ii) **Concerns and Fears:** Added to the concern that the Circle could be a waste of time were the thoughts that there may not be open sharing and participation and that levels of confidentiality may not be as strong as desired.

### North Queensland

- (i) **Hopes and Expectations:** Although networking and collegiality was the most frequently identified hope. This was closely followed by growth in personal and professional skills and by deepening and developing understanding of leadership.
- (ii) **Concerns and Fears:** There were comments about the possibility of being “over cooked” in leadership programs and about the potential cohesiveness of the Leadership Circle as a result of the distances involved. Some wondered if the content would be challenging enough and whether the members would be committed to the Circle.

### Multi Region Group

- (i) **Hopes and Expectations:** Developing an ongoing support network was the major hope but there was considerable mention of a desire to gain insights and different perspectives into their own work by contact with other professionals. It was hoped that speakers would be both challenging and interesting and that their ideas may lead to future actions. Some members hoped that their listening, reflecting and decision-making skills would be enhanced and these in turn would facilitate leadership.
- (ii) **Concerns and Fears:** As in most other Leadership Circles there was the concern about whether the program would be a waste of time. There were also concerns expressed about the need for relevance and practical focus. Also mentioned were commitment, cohesion and group comfort levels.

### Gympie Region Group

- (i) **Hopes and Expectations:** This Circle also strongly identified the hope that a productive network would be put in place; to this was added without the power plays that can go on. There were also expressions regarding growth in leadership capacity, general professional development, taking on new challenges, thinking outside the square and gaining a greater understanding of self.
- (ii) **Concerns and Fears:** Time and the potential energy drain were the major fears. It was also indicated that some were concerned that they may not involve themselves to the level required. It was also indicated that there was a concern that they may not grow personally and professionally from the Circle involvement

### **Networked Resource Group**

- (i) **Hopes and Expectations:** The major expectation was to build a network where participants would learn from each other and the speakers. There were also hopes expressed that knowledge and skills gained would help members to lead in their own schools and assist in the resolution of problems. It was hoped that the Circle members would accept and value all opinions, even those that were confronting.
  
- (ii) **Concerns and Fears:** The major fear was that the Circle may become a waste of time and not live up to the positive expectations created by their previous association as a group.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Item Percentage Responses For Combined Circles**

		<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Outcomes</b>						
a. Individual Outcomes						
Being a participant in a Leadership Circle has helped me:						
(i)	Improve my individual performance as an educational leader/manager	24	71	5	-	-
(ii)	Enhance my personal development	37	63	-	-	-
(iii)	Participate in a valuable personal learning experience	68	32	-	-	-
(iv)	Feel more confident in my capacity to seek help as an educational leader/manager	37	58	5	-	-
(v)	Take on personal challenges I may have otherwise avoided	21	68	8	3	-
b. Network and Learning Community Outcomes						
Being a participant in a Leadership Circle has helped me:						
(i)	Understand how I could create a learning community in my workplace	34	61	5	-	-
(ii)	Assist with the creation of a learning community in my workplace	26	63	11	-	-
(iii)	Assist with the enhancement of an existing network through my active involvement and encouragement	50	45	5	-	-
(iv)	Actively use networks for learning and reflection	50	45	5		
c. Innovation and Change						
Being a participant in a Leadership Circle has helped me:						
(i)	Improve my capacity to support innovative developments in the workplace	29	55	16	-	-
(ii)	Improve my understanding of the dynamics and implications of workplace change	53	42	5	-	-
(iii)	Be more supportive of innovative and					

## Evaluation of Leadership Circles

	change in my work team		42	53	5	-	-
(iv)	Be more prepared to act as a catalyst for workplace change		37	55	5	3	-
			<b>SA</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>UD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>SD</b>

### d. Organisational Capability

Being a participant in a Leadership Circle has helped me:

(i)	Enhance outcomes at the organisational level	1	63	16	5	-	-
(ii)	Positively assist in the building of organisational capability		32	61	5	2	-
(iii)	Identify opportunities to improve the performance of my team/workplace		45	50	5	-	-
(iv)	Implement improvements to enhance the performance of my team/workplace		34	58	8	-	-

### Logistics

I think:

(i)	The venue was very good		63	32	5	-	-
(ii)	The venue should be away from our workplace	95	5	-	-	-	-
(iii)	The venue provided good food	53	34	11	2	-	-
(iv)	The venue has good facilities		50	32	13	5	-
(v)	The venue parking was good		45	55	-	-	-
(vi)	The timing of sessions was appropriate	45	55	-	-	-	-
(vii)	The number of sessions was appropriate		58	42	-	-	-
(viii)	The length of sessions was appropriate	50	50	-	-	-	-
(ix)	The pre-session information regarding Leadership Circles was adequate		55	42	3	-	-

### Speakers

In my opinion, the speakers:

(i)	Provided me with a range of viewpoints and perspectives		40	55	5	-	-
(ii)	Were of a high quality		32	53	12	3	-
(iii)	Left sufficient time for discussion		26	58	13	3	-
(iv)	Were well briefed for the role they performed	21	74	5	-	-	-
(v)	Presented material in a manner that enhanced learning		24	61	13	2	-

(vi)	Quickly engaged members in the discussion	34	53	8	5	-
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**SA      A      UD      D      SD**

**Group Discussions**

In my opinion, group discussions:

(i)	Helped me clarify my learning experience	50	50	-	-	-
(ii)	Were dominated by a small number of members	-	-	3	39	58
(iii)	Were not always focussed on the topic	-	3	63	34	
(iv)	Were always relevant to the acquisition of leadership skills	13	74	11	2	-
(v)	Led to a genuine rapport in my group	71	29	-	-	-
(vi)	Were open and frank	79	21	-	-	-
(vii)	Made me reflect on my leadership attributes	76	24	-	-	-

**Finally**

(i)	I am pleased I joined this program	87	13	-	-	-
(ii)	I am likely to have ongoing contact with members of the group	79	21	-	-	-
(iii)	I would recommend programs of this nature to others	82	18	-	-	-
(iv)	I will be participating in future years if available	66	26	8	-	-
(v)	It is worthwhile to invest money in future Leadership Circles	74	26	-	-	-
(vi)	I would be willing to send a staff member to a future Leadership Circle	71	29	-	-	-

## Evaluation of Leadership Circles

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