

Feedback from participants in 2016 Masterclass: The Hague

On the last day, participants were asked 3 questions. Below is a summary of the responses received to inform organisers and future planners

Most significant learnings?

About leadership and process

- There is a common thread in good leadership - that is the ability to take a complex situation, analyse it and find a solution which can be acted on now to advance the issue.
- Concepts around collaboration to get consensus – 390 stakeholders! Learning about consensus as the dominant paradigm in the NL system.
- The importance of voice in the policy process and listening to get buy-in. The importance of people feeling they have been heard.
- Futures focus – looking forward, not focusing on analysing and recriminations about the past. The need to stay strategically focussed and be crystal clear about the desired future state.
- Imagining what will be next wave and how to influence change (and having our prepared ideas waiting in the bottom drawer awaiting an opportunity!)
- The reminder that as a leader, good intent is seldom enough, you must have positive impact - understand the impact of your leadership and/ or the position you are championing on people.
- Importance of trust and respect when working in complex environments - collaborate or perish
- Listening to the leadership that emerges at all levels of a system – vital
- We liked the tree and rhizomes metaphor and the paradox of seeking broad participation and then being overwhelmed by the variety (and confusion) of issues and voices.
- The importance of temporal architecture and understanding that timing is a key strategic element.
- Leadership= passion and resilience

‘New leadership is fluid not structural; influencing not telling; horizontal not vertical’

About me

- Needing to let go being responsible for others and focus on my own place
- Separating observation from judgement
- Underestimated how conflicted I would feel about being politely critical about issues our welcoming and generous hosts were obviously sensitive about - but I figured I'm not there to 'be nice' but to be effective!
- Learning to be more confident in my leadership, knowledge and skills – I offer a young, contemporary approach which can challenge the norm – and this program helped confirm for me that I need to keep doing that
- Once I was in the zone I found I was open to the whole experience and it meant I was much more observant than usual.

- Amazing what can be learnt and what emerges when away from the business and busyness
- I became acutely aware of power dynamics and how this plays a significant role in all aspect of leadership. This is not necessarily a bad thing, nor is it unavoidable, but it is certainly something that should be named and owned by those leaders who truly wish to bring those around them along on the journey.

'This program provided the opportunity to be open minded in a safe space with fellow executives and to building confidence in my own leadership'

About the country

- Minority governments are a novelty for us and yet rainbow politics/parliament is their normal. So different from our winner takes all approach. Great food for thought about the pros and cons of different political systems.
- The man-made country and history in water governance.
- Many commented on the ability of the NL to articulate their culture in a way we don't. The 'engineering approach' or DNA which explained other things such as the apparent need for very structured - logical - approaches to housing and homelessness seemed to make more sense. People need housing - we need to make it happen - but of course!
- Started us thinking and discussing – what's the Aussie DNA?
- There's such a sense of social contract between government and citizens. That contrasts strangely with Australia's very emotional response, ie, all poor people are just lazy and incompetent so it's their fault they haven't got anywhere to live so why should they come to government for a handout.
- I was also surprised given the engineering approach that there was the disconnect between measuring outcomes, collecting data etc.
- Hearing about the country's response to the refugee crisis was very interesting – again a position of compassion which is such a contrast to our country's recent behaviors.
- The gender issue was an interesting one - I was expecting a generally socially progressive (and proud of it) society and therefore gender equality and issues to be much more advanced given their progressive approach to health and wellbeing.

Thoughts on the process that was used?

- The presenters were excellent and cutting edge
- Very intense program – would like it over a longer period and to have space for dedicated reflection (but recognise the time constraints in this type of program)
- Would like to have done more learning/reading around the 'live case study' concept before coming
- The process was refreshing in its innovation and appreciated the freedom with which we were afforded to self-direct our own learning. At first I was concerned about the ambiguity of it all, however once we got underway I felt comfortable enough (and support to) follow the learnings that I felt pertinent to me.

- Some of the more structured thinkers were a bit stressed by the overall program ambiguity and about being able to going with the flow. A learning experience on many levels!
- I have learnt as much from the process as from the content.
- The live case study was seen as an exceptional and a highlight by all participants. Live case study format was a great process to enable cross sectoral understanding quickly and for observations across the system more broadly
- There were conflicting comments about reflection, and some suggestions that building in more individual, paired and group reflection could strengthen the program. Time for reflection, both individual and collective was well executed
- Smooth learning process, recognise much work must have been done to achieve this.
- Pretty good balance of work, with time for some play which is where relationships can also be build. Maybe build in sometime to see the city (maybe come an optional extra – arrive a day early for a day tour of the city). We spent a lot of time there and only saw a very small part.
- Suggestion for future programs to provide a logic framework - maybe around 'leadership in the 21st Century' – the diverse presenters could cover their ground, but always end with a couple of key questions/points that would link them back to core theme.

Group dynamics

- Group closeness and composition was exceptional
- Enjoyed strengthening relationships, and gaining deeper understanding of each as people but also their roles in their organisations
- Significant opportunities for future collaboration between group members emerged.

What are you going to do with your learnings from this experience?

- Continue networks created through this and encourage collaboration across sectors
- Stay engaged with ECA and the Alumni and offer my support wherever I can.
- Apply my learnings to organisational reforms within my specific and inform strategic design to future operating model
- Advocate for my organisation to empower the right people using right tools to build future models
- Continue to advocate for more investment in innovation and futures work
- Take willingness to invest in others' development as a primary value in my future leadership
- Do more writing on the different leadership styles, and in particular explore this idea that power relations heavily influence all of the discourse surrounding the way we look at leadership. I would also like to
- Use for my own educational path and further studies
- Look for opportunities to use live case study in Aus/Qld context – maybe even in internal context

"I just want to do it all again!"

Other

- There were comments about the lack of representation of women in delivering the program – maybe even an opportunity to talk to a ‘Minister for Women’
- A comment that participants would have liked to have heard more about some of the Netherlands ground breaking innovations/trials

“Under pressure everything becomes fluid” – creating space for innovation