Leadership Insights Series 2022:
Summary of Evaluation Findings and Insights

WIDI WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE | **RMIT** UNIVERSITY

Project Team

Director – Micaela Cronin

Project Manager – Dr Jessica Lee-Ack

Project Officers – Catherine Lake and Alyssa Warland

Program Facilitator – Catherine Santo

Evaluation Team

Dr Carly Millar

Jean Cameron

Casey Hill

Sarah Lucy

Finley Norris-Cluning

Santiago Felipe Munevar Ortiz

WIDI acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct our business. WIDI respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present. WIDI also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

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Executive Summary

In early 2022, the Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) at RMIT University was engaged by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to deliver a non-accredited leadership development program for the disability sector.

The 'Leadership Insights Series' was modelled on WIDI's Leadership Intensive Program which was delivered to over 450 leaders in the family violence sector between 2018 and 2021.

The Leadership Insights Series – which was delivered online – had an explicit focus on topics related to workforce retention. The design of the Program was informed by WIDI's experience with the Leadership Intensive Program, insights from sector experts in the WIDI Team, input from the sector peak body, National Disability Services (NDS) and feedback from participants on their preferred topics.

The Program comprised the following elements:

- **Orientation Sessions** to familiarise participants to the Program and the Learning Management System;
- **Pre-Reading** to introduce participants to new concepts and content that will be explored as part of the Expert Panels and Workshops;
- **Expert Panels** to explore key topics/content areas with guest speakers/subject matter experts; and
- **Workshops** to reflect on content shared as part of the Expert Panel.

The topics explored as part of the Program were:

- Workforce planning;
- Change without pain;
- Adaptive teams; and
- Coaching, mentoring and having difficult conversations.

The Program was delivered between July and September to a cohort of 39 Senior Operational Managers from the disability sector.

A developmental evaluation was undertaken to enable participants to provide feedback on their experience of the Program and their future training needs. Data for the evaluation was gathered through online surveys and interviews. The feedback on the Leadership Insights Series was overwhelmingly positive in both the surveys and the interviews, with many participants declaring their experience as the most useful leadership training they had ever accessed.

Participants interviewed as part of the evaluation described a range of benefits from their participation, including:

- an increase in confidence in people management;
- a pathway forward in the leadership their journey;
- inspiration to pursue other learning opportunities; and
- a reminder of how important leadership is to an organisation, especially in encouraging growth and aspiration across the team, and succession planning.

While the online model enabled participation, particularly for participants based in rural/regional and outer-suburban areas, many participants indicated a strong interest in a face-to-face component in the Leadership Insights Series. Some participants noted the limitations of online models for networking and forming connections with peers.

The evaluation found that many participants had begun implementing changes within their own organisations immediately following each session. However, participants also identified barriers to implementing change within their own organisation including a lack of time allocated to engage in professional development due to workload demands, maintaining work/life balance, limited opportunities for 'on the job' recognition of learning and change fatigue.

In relation to future training needs and offerings, several participants indicated that the Series could be tailored to different levels of leadership: from new, emerging and less-experienced leaders to more senior executive and experienced leaders in organisations. The Evaluation Team concluded that the structure, format and content of the Leadership Insights Series is readily transferrable across the social services sector. The strategic positioning of the Program, as well as the tailoring of content to particular fields of practice, will be important considerations for any future iterations of the Program.

Introduction

The Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) engaged RMIT University's Workforce Innovation and Development Institute (WIDI) to design and deliver a leadership program for leaders in the disability sector.

The Leadership Insights Series is based on WIDI's Leadership Intensive Program which was delivered to over 450 leaders in the family violence sector between 2018 and 2021.

The initial project proposal included:

- Co-design activities with government and sector partners to ensure that the Program meets sector needs;

- Delivery of an online, non-accredited leadership program to up to 30 managers of disability service organisations to further develop their leadership knowledge and capabilities and develop the skills to support increased workforce retention;

- Engagement of guest speakers to deliver content;

- Facilitation of the Program by an expert with deep knowledge of the disability sector;

- Mentoring support for Program participants[1]; and

- A developmental evaluation to inform and support continuous improvement and to identify opportunities to support the future learning and development of leaders in the disability sector.

When the Leadership Insights Series proposal had been approved by DFFH in April 2022, WIDI consulted with National Disability Services (NDS) and WIDI staff with extensive disability sector experience to inform the design and delivery of the Leadership Insights Series. The Project Team also drew on WIDI's experience delivering leadership programs over the past five years, which has highlighted the importance of 'meeting leaders where they are' and designing Program content based on the interests and needs of participants.

The design of the Leadership Insights Series was informed by:

- insights from National Disability Services (NDS);

- insights from WIDI's industry partners in the disability sector;

- experience designing and delivering the Leadership Intensive Program (2018–2021); and

- experience with the Skills in Practice (SKIP) Project and Higher Apprenticeship and Traineeship Social Service Extension Project (HATSSEP).

Based on these inputs, WIDI noted that:

- The disability sector was dealing with significant workload pressures, which limits the amount of time that can be devoted to training and development activities, including mentoring;

- The disability sector was managing increased staff absences linked to ill health (COVID-19 cases and other illnesses), isolation requirements and caring responsibilities;

- Senior Operational Managers were more likely to value and engage with training and development activities with a practical focus that provides them with knowledge and approaches to address workplace challenges;

- Participants in WIDI's previous leadership programs valued insights from subject matter experts as well as opportunities to share with and learn from peers; and

- It is useful for topics/content areas to align with the NDIS Workforce Capability Framework, specifically 'Core Capabilities: Supervision and Frontline Management'.

The design of the Leadership Insights Series sought to take these issues into account and so resources to support the mentoring and work-based project components were reallocated to engage high-calibre experts to present on key topics related to workforce retention.

This report outlines the design and conduct of the Leadership Insights Series and provides an overview of the Program, including the participant characteristics and the Program structure and content.

This report also summarises the evaluation of the Program, including key findings and insights to inform the design and delivery of future leadership training for leaders in the disability sector.

Part One
Program Overview

About the Participants

Recruitment and selection of participants

The target participant group for the Leadership Insights Series was 'Senior Operational Managers' working in the disability sector in Victoria. Applications for the Leadership Insights Series opened on 26 May 2022 and closed on 10 June 2022. The Program was promoted via several channels, including:

- WIDI channels – WIDI Wire electronic newsletter (3000+ subscribers), WIDI LinkedIn page, WIDI Twitter account;

- NDS channels – communications to Workforce Network members; and

- Targeted emails to leaders of disability service organisations.

As part of the application process, applicants were asked to provide demographic and job role information, including line management experience. Applicants were also asked about their topic preferences and availability.

WIDI received a total of 62 applications for the Leadership Insights Series by the closing date of 10 June 2022. WIDI reviewed the applications and selected 44 participants to undertake the Program in 2022. In selecting participants, WIDI considered whether applicants had:

- Provided a complete application form;

- Availability to undertake Program activities; and

- Line management responsibility for staff.

One key insight gained from WIDI's delivery of leadership programs between 2018 and 2021 is that the experience of participants is linked to high levels of attendance and engagement. Consequently, WIDI prioritised applicants who indicated that they would be able to attend the online Expert Panels and Workshops (described in Section 1.2 below).

WIDI also sought to ensure diversity of participants in terms of demographic (e.g., gender, age, ATSI status, disability) and geographic factors (e.g., mix of metro and regional participants).

Applicants who were not shortlisted were placed on a waitlist and five waitlisted applicants were offered a place when other participants withdrew before the Program commenced.

Overview of participants

A total of 44 participants were selected to participate in the Leadership Insights Series. Of these 44, three formally withdrew from the Program and two did not attend any of the live sessions (Orientation, Expert Panels and Workshops). The characteristics of the cohort of 39 participants who attended live sessions can be summarised as follows:

The majority of participants (N: 35) listed their country of birth as Australia, with participants also listing Canada (N: 1), Hungary (N: 1), India (N: 1) and the United Kingdom (N: 1) as their county of birth

None of the participants identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Most of the participants (N: 33) were female, with the remainder of participants (N: 6) identifying as male[2]

Three-quarters of participants (N: 29) were aged between 35 and 54 years of age

Nearly 80% of participants (N: 31) have line management experience in their current role and just over half (N: 22) have had line management experience for 5 years or more

Thirteen per cent of participants (N: 5) identified as a person with a disability

The majority of participants (N: 38) listed 'English' as their main language spoken at home, with one participant listing 'Auslan' as their main language
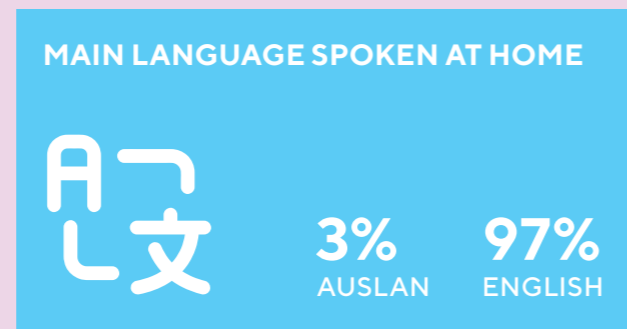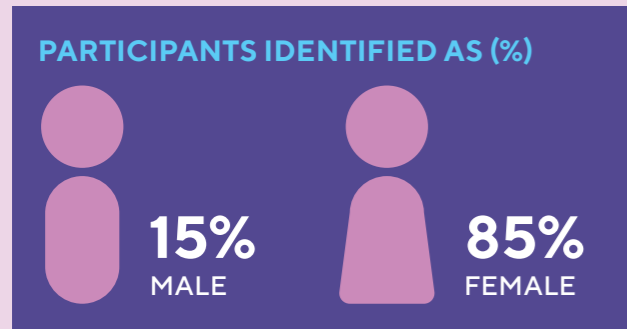
Sixty-five per cent of participants (N: 25) work in Metropolitan Melbourne, with the remaining participants based in Regional Victoria (N: 14)

The majority of participants (N: 31) have been working in the disability sector for 5 years or longer and around one-fifth of participants (N: 8) have been working in the sector for 4 years or less;

Nearly all of the participants (N: 37) had completed a post-secondary qualification

The participants in the Leadership Insights Series were drawn from over twenty disability service organisations across Victoria, specifically:

- Able Australia
- Amicus Community Services
- Araluen
- Barwon Disability Resource Centre
- Berry Street
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- Care Professionals
- Care Choice
- Colac Otway Disability Accommodation
- Community
- Southwest
- EACH
- Leisure Networks
- Mansfield Autism Statewide Services
- Melba Support Services
- Possability
- Scope
- Uniting VIC TAS
- Wallara
- Wintringham
- Yooralla
- Youth Disability Advocacy Service

Participant Profile

PARTICIPANTS IDENTIFIED AS (%)

15% MALE **85%** FEMALE

MAIN LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME

3% AUSLAN **97%** ENGLISH

64% of the participants worked in metropolitan Melbourne

36% of the participants worked in regional Victoria

PARTICIPANTS WITH A DISABILITY

13% YES

87% NO

COUNTRY OF BIRTH

1 CANADA
1 HUNGARY
1 INDIA
35 AUSTRALIA

AGE OF PARTICIPANTS

1 AGED 25–29
0 AGED 30–34
10 AGED 35–39
7 AGED 40–44
2 AGED 45–49
10 AGED 50–54
4 AGED 55–59
5 AGED 60–64
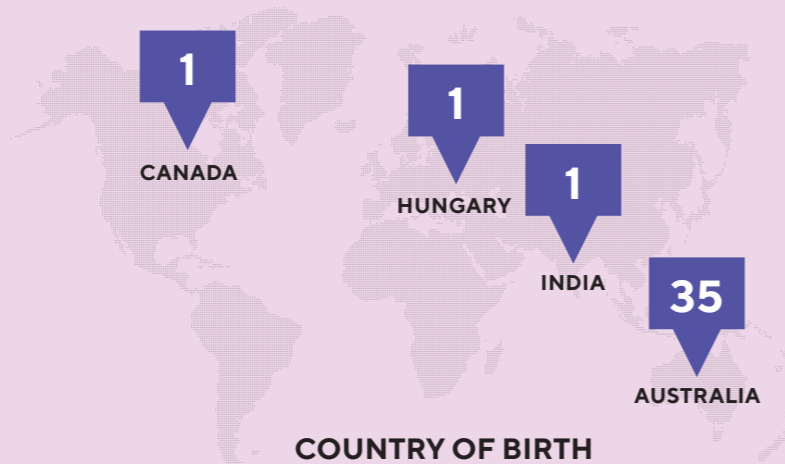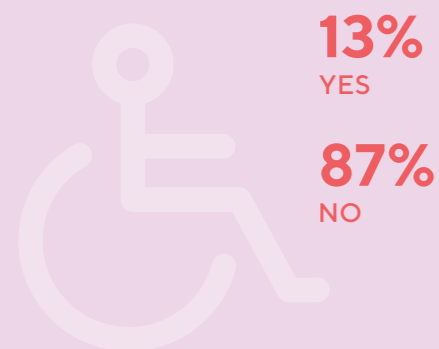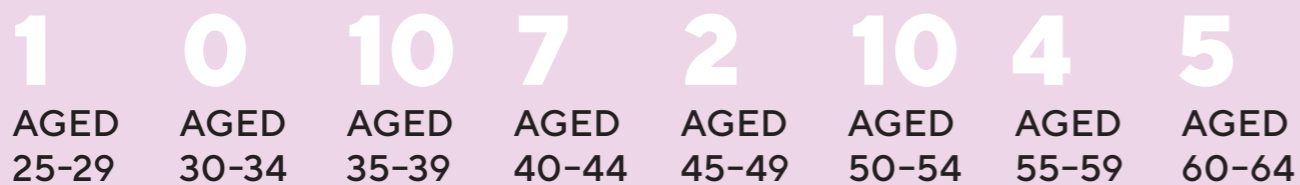
ATSI Status: All of the participants identified as 'Neither Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander'. None of the applicants for the Program identified as Aboriginal, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or Torres Strait Islander. Three applicants selected 'Prefer not to say'. Of the three who selected 'Prefer not to say', one had not provided their name or email address and two had indicated that they were only available during one of the nine timeslots for Program activity.

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION

Postgraduate Degree
Grad Dip/Grad Cert
Undergraduate Degree
Dip/Adv Dip
Certificate III or IV
Certificate I or II
Year 12
Year 11 or below
Completed overseas

0 5 10 15 20

JOB TITLE

Other
Senior Ops Manager
Operations Manager
Team Leader
House Manager
Area Manager
Practice Leader
Comm Service Leader

0 5 10 15 20

TIME IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR

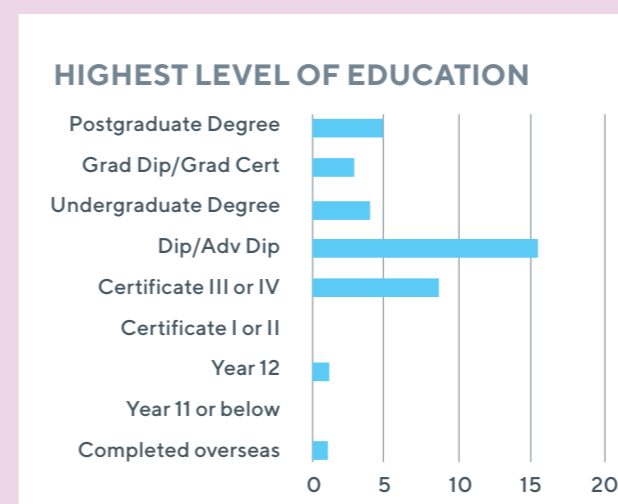More than 20 years
16–20 years
11–15 years
5–10 years
3–4 years
1–2 years
6months – 1 year

0 5 10 15

AMOUNT OF TIME IN CURRENT ROLE

More than 20 years
16–20 years
11–15 years
5–10 years
3–4 years
1–2 years
6 months – 1 year
Less than 6 months

0 5 10 15

AMOUNT OF LINE MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

More than 20 years
16–20 years
11–15 years
5–10 years
3–4 years
1–2 years
6 months – 1 year
Less than 6 months
Blank

0 5 10 15

LINE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY

NO

YES

The Job Titles provided by applicants who selected 'Other' were: Business Leader; Community development; Director: People and Culture; Executive Officer; Group Manager; Human Resources Business Partner; Human Resources Manager (N: 2), Manager; Manager, Team Impact; National Manager, Finance; Operations Coordinator; People and Culture Officer; People, Learning & Safety Manager; Programs Coordinator; and Residential Cluster Manager.

About the Program

Learning Outcomes

The purpose of the Leadership Insights Series was to support leaders in the disability sector to develop their leadership knowledge and capabilities and develop the skills to support increased workforce retention. The learning outcomes for the Program are set out in Table 1.

Program Structure

As outlined in the Introduction, in designing the Program WIDI drew on a combination of insights and advice from sector experts – notably National Disability Services (NDS) – as well as experience delivering non-accredited leadership training since 2018. Based on these inputs, the Project Team developed the structure for the Program as shown in Figure 1.

TABLE 1 – LEARNING OUTCOMES	
1. New knowledge	Participants will gain new knowledge, insights and skills to foster and develop a capable workforce.
2. Reflective practice	Participants will reflect on their leadership practice and how new ideas and approaches can be applied to their team/organisation.
3. Professional networks and peer learning	Participants will expand their professional networks and connect with and learn from their peers.

FIGURE 1 – LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS SERIES PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Orientation	Pre-Reading	Expert Panels	Workshops	Evaluation
1 x 1.5 hour Orientation Session introducing participants to the Program and online learning environment	Sharing of relevant materials via online learning platform (Canvas) prior to each Expert Panel – total of 4 hours	4 x 1.5-hour facilitated Expert Panels featuring guest speakers	4 X 1.5-hour small group moderated workshops (15–20 participants) to explore content	2 x 10-minute surveys – mid-Program and end-of-Program 1 x 20-minute interview – post Program
PURPOSE To orient participants to the Program and the Learning Management System	**PURPOSE** To introduce participants to new concepts and content that will be explored as part of the Expert Panels and Workshops	**PURPOSE** To explore key topics/content areas with guest speakers/subject matter experts	**PURPOSE** To reflect on content shared as part of the Expert Panel	**PURPOSE** To enable participants to provide feedback on their experience of the Program and their future training needs
FORMAT Facilitated online workshop to introduce the Facilitator, Program Aims, Workshop Groups (A and B) and to provide an overview of the Learning Management System (Canvas) and online meeting platform (Microsoft Teams)	**FORMAT** Online resources stored in the Learning Management System (Canvas), including articles, videos, podcasts, etc.	**FORMAT** Facilitated online meetings for all Program participants featuring two guest speakers focusing on a particular topic/content area	**FORMAT** Facilitated online workshop in a small group with activities linking theories and ideas to practice	**FORMAT** Two online surveys (10 minutes each) at the middle and end of the Program and a one-on-one interview at the end of the Program

Topics

The NDIS Workforce Capability Framework developed by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission includes a list of core capabilities for 'Supervision and Frontline Management'.[3] As illustrated in Table 2, in line with the focus on retention, the Project Team mapped the topics delivered as part of the Leadership Insights Series to the capabilities for 'Foster[ing] and develop[ing] a capable workforce'.

TABLE 2 – MAPPING OF PROGRAM TOPICS TO CORE CAPABILITIES: SUPERVISION AND FRONTLINE MANAGEMENT				
Foster and develop a capable workforce	Workforce Planning	Change Without Pain	Adaptive Teams	Coaching, Mentoring & Having Difficult Conversations
Ensure workers are well-matched to meet participant needs and preferences	✓		✓	✓
Use the Framework to check that workers have the capabilities needed for their roles	✓		✓	
Identify where workplace characteristics or situations, such as high workforce turnover or shift changeovers, present heightened risk	✓	✓	✓	
Provide opportunities for workers to reflect on their practice, debrief about challenging situations or events, and share learnings		✓		✓
Provide regular, timely feedback on work performance and arrange for workers to access training, development and ongoing learning		✓		✓
Pursue opportunities for your own learning and development		✓		✓

Table 3 provides an overview of each of the four topics explored as part of the Leadership Insights Series and the expert panellists who presented on each topic.

TABLE 3 – TOPIC OVERVIEWS

TOPIC 1 **Workforce Planning**	TOPIC 2 **Change Without Pain**	TOPIC 3 **Adaptive Teams**	TOPIC 4 **Coaching, Mentoring & Having Difficult Conversations**
Panellists: David Moody, Micaela Cronin	Panellists: Andrew Marty, Keran Howe	Panellists: Yumi Stamet, Perrie Ballantyne	Panellists: Tricia Ciampa, Layton Pike

TOPIC 1 – Workforce Planning

The healthcare and social assistance sector is the largest and fastest growing industry in Australia.

As has been continuously demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this sector is critical to the functioning of our society and economy and provides vital services and supports to some of the most vulnerable in our community. This sector is also facing significant workforce shortages, including in client-facing roles.

Workforce shortages and high levels of employee turnover have a significant impact on individuals, teams, organisations and clients. In the worst cases, low staff retention can result in poor outcomes putting workers' and clients' health, wellbeing and livelihoods at risk.

In our first panel discussion, our experts will reflect on how to build, grow, and sustain a workforce during a period of immense upheaval. As part of this, our panellists will explore questions such as:

- What is happening in the sector and in the job market? And what does this mean for recruitment and retention?
- How do you identify the skills and capabilities that you need in the future?
- How do you create career pathways for staff and support staff to develop and grow?

TOPIC 2 – Change Without Pain

There is an old saying that 'There is nothing permanent except change'. Over the past decade, the disability sector has been undergoing a period of unprecedented growth and transformation.

The introduction of sweeping reforms in the form of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) beginning in 2013, a Royal Commission into violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of people with disability established in April 2019 and a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic have radically reshaped the sector. In this context, leaders may feel that everything around them is changing but at the same time the change that they want to see and make is out of reach.

In this session, our expert panellists will share their experience of leading and navigating change. As part of this, our panellists will explore questions such as:

- Is 'change without pain' possible? And if so, how do you go about it?
- How do you talk to staff about change? How do you deal with 'change fatigue'?
- How do you manage setbacks and adapt?

TOPIC 3 – Adaptive Teams

A healthy work culture where people feel valued is critical to staff retention. As leaders, you play an important role in building a healthy work culture.

A shared purpose and values base, open communication, accountability – for leaders and for staff – and a commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of all staff are all key to the success of any team. In this session, our expert panellists will share their thoughts and insights on how to build and sustain an adaptive team. As part of the panel discussion, our experts will reflect on:

- What does an 'adaptive team' look like and how do you create/build one?
- How do you identify the resources/supports that you and your team need to thrive?
- How do you sustain successful performance over time?

TOPIC 4 – Coaching, Mentoring & Having Difficult Conversations

The significant impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the disability sector, clients, their families, and staff have been well documented.

As we continue to emerge from the shadow of COVID-19 and the upheaval and trauma that everyone has experienced in their personal and work lives, it is timely to consider how we can connect with and support each other. This sometimes requires difficult conversations with your staff and colleagues. In our final panel session, our experts will explore coaching and mentoring approaches and how these can be used to support and grow your team. As part of the panel discussion, our experts will reflect on:

- What is the difference between coaching and mentoring?
- What are some coaching and mentoring approaches and techniques and when should you use them?
- How do you prepare for a difficult conversation?
- How do you know if you are making progress?

Program Schedule

The Leadership Insights Series was delivered across seven weeks from 27 July 2022 until 14 September 2022. Following an online orientation session in late July, participants took part in four online Expert Panels and Workshops. A 'Reflection Week' following each Expert Panel and related Workshop provided participants with time to consider the material.

Accessibility

The Leadership Insights Series was delivered through the Canvas Open Learning Management System (LMS) with online activities (i.e., Orientation, Expert Panels and Workshops) delivered via Microsoft Teams.

One of the participants listed Auslan as their first language. WIDI engaged Auslan Interpreters to support specific online activities (1 Orientation session, 4 Expert Panels and 4 Workshops).

Live transcripts were available to all participants via the online meeting platform Microsoft Teams with instructions Instructions for turning on live captions included in the Canvas Site and shared during live sessions. Recordings of the Expert Panels were made available to all participants.

Attendance

Several participants missed one or more of the live sessions (Orientation, Expert Panels, Workshops) due to work or family commitments. Expert Panels were recorded and uploaded to the Canvas site so that they could be viewed at participants' convenience. To enable full and frank discussion, Workshops were not recorded. The size aof the breakout groups was adjusted based on the number of attendees at each Workshop.

TABLE 4 – LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS SERIES: PROGRAM SCHEDULE					
WEEK	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
Week 1 – 25/07			Orientation Session – Group A 9.30am – 11.00am Orientation Session – Group B 12.00pm – 1.30pm		
Week 2 – 01/08		EXPERT PANEL 1: Workforce Planning 9.30am – 11.00am	Workshop 1 – Group A 9.30am – 11.00am (1.5 hours) Workshop 1 – Group B 12.00pm – 1.30pm		
Week 3 – 08/08	REFLECTION WEEK				
Week 4 – 15/08		EXPERT PANEL 2: Change Without Pain 9.30am – 11.00am	Workshop 2 – Group A 9.30am – 11.00am Workshop 2 – Group B 12.00pm – 1.30pm		
Week 5 – 22/08	REFLECTION WEEK				
Week 6 – 29/08		EXPERT PANEL 3: Adaptive Teams 9.30am – 11.00am	Workshop 3 – Group A 9.30am – 11.00am (1.5 hours) Workshop 3 – Group B 12.00pm – 1.30pm		
Week 7 – 05/09	REFLECTION WEEK				
Week 8 – 12/09		EXPERT PANEL 4: Coaching, Mentoring and Having Difficult Conversations 9.30am – 11.00am	Workshop 4 – Group A 9.30am – 11.00am (1.5 hours) Workshop 4 – Group B 12.00pm – 1.30pm		

The average attendance at Expert Panels was 78%. The average attendance at Workshops for Group A was 62% and 55% for Group B.

Attrition

The Project Team was aware that at the time the Program was delivered, Senior Operational Managers in the disability sector were facing significant workload pressures. To ensure that there were enough participants to enable lively discussion in large and small group settings, the Project Team offered places to 44 leaders to allow for a level of attrition. As noted previously, three leaders formally withdrew from the Program and two did not attend any of the live sessions, leaving a cohort of 39 participants across two Workshop Groups.

Technical Issues During Online Sessions

The live sessions (Orientation, Expert Panels, Workshops) were delivered online via Microsoft Teams. This platform was chosen over the Collaborate Ultra platform due to its superior accessibility options including live captions.

Experts from RMIT's AV Support Team were engaged to provide technical support for the live sessions. There were some technical issues experienced during the live sessions due to a range of factors including poor internet connections. There were a few instances where technical issues resulted in participants missing part of the live sessions. The Technicians and Project Team followed up with individual participants to address specific issues as they arose.
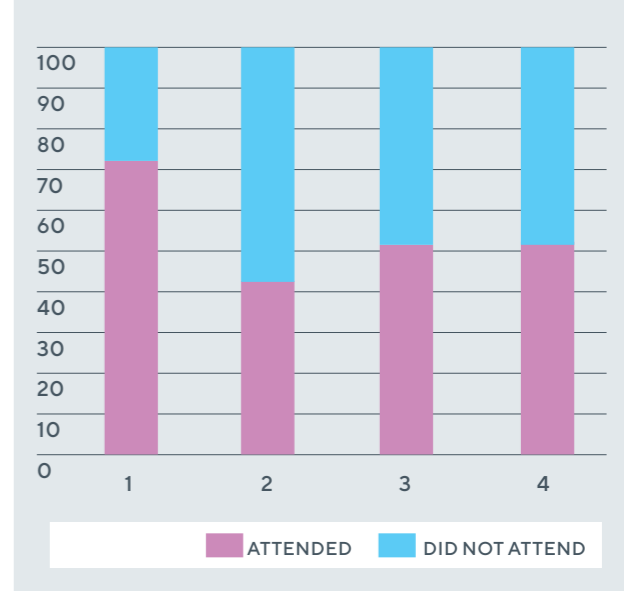

ATTENDANCE – EXPERT PANELS
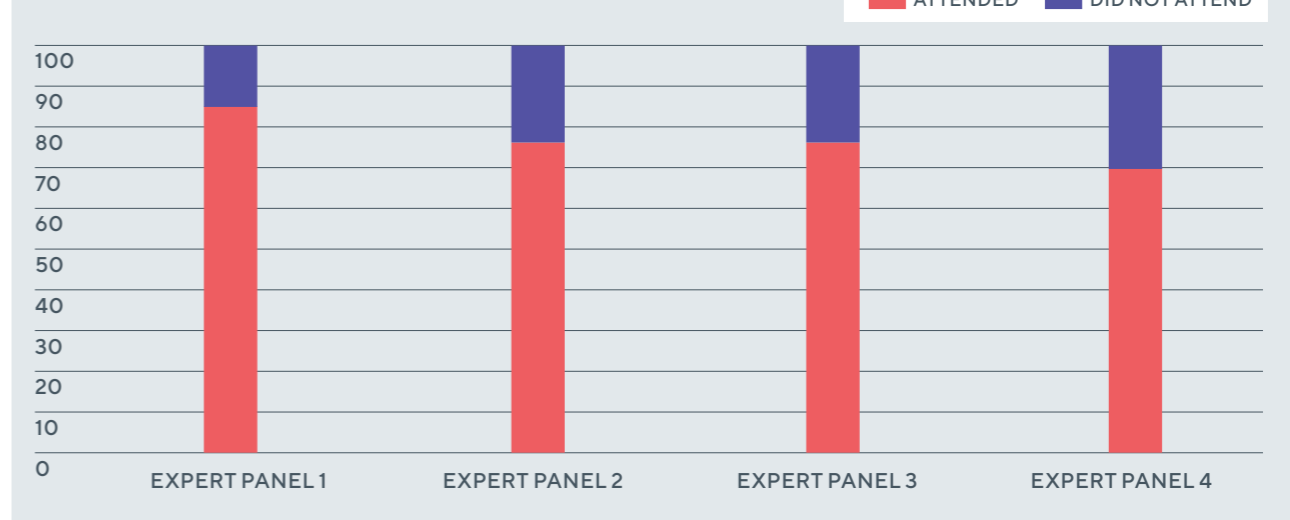
WORKSHOP ATTENDANCE – GROUP A

WORKSHOP ATTENDANCE – GROUP B

The Leadership Insights Series was subject to a developmental evaluation across the delivery period which supports continuous improvement of the Program through cycles of reflective practice. Part Two of this report provides an overview of the evaluation process and findings with data and insights used to identify opportunities to support the learning and development of leaders in the disability sector in the future.

Part Two
Evaluation Report

Introduction

The purpose of the evaluation was to enable participants to provide feedback on their experience of the Program and their future training needs. The primary questions investigated as part of the Evaluation of the Leadership Insights Series were:

- How satisfied were participants with the structure and content of the Program?

- How satisfied were participants with the model of online delivery?

- Do participants intend to implement any new approaches as a result of attending the training, and what challenges/barriers to implementing new knowledge and approaches will they face?

- What are the future training and development needs of participants?

- What are the demographic characteristics of the participant cohort?

Methodology

The evaluation used a mixed methods approach involving surveys and qualitative research to enable:

1. the measurement of change and understanding the extent to which outcomes have been achieved

2. the generation of context and insight into participant experiences, including the identification of key success factors and areas for improvement.

The research involved two participant groups – 1) Senior Operational Managers from the disability sector who took part in the Leadership Insights Series and 2) the Facilitator of the Program.

Evaluation activities for Participant Group 1 (participants in the Leadership Insights Series) involved:

- a Mid-Program survey;

- an End-of-Program survey; and

- Individual interviews following the completion of the Program.

The mid-course survey was administered at the halfway point of the Leadership Insights Series and sought to establish the level of satisfaction with the Program content and structure over the first two topics covered, including the speakers and facilitation.

A more in-depth outcomes survey was administered at the end of the Leadership Insights Series to understand:

- the level of satisfaction with the Program content and structure over the final two topics covered, including the speakers and facilitation;

- the extent the course has had an impact on the leadership capability of participants;

- relevance of topics included;

- feedback on delivery approach; and

- any differential outcomes amongst leaders based on their demographic or organisational situation.

Participants were invited to take part in an interview after the Program was completed to allow greater understanding of the impact of the Leadership Insights Series, such as the application of knowledge, changes participants have been able to make, and the challenges and barriers they have faced. These individual interviews enabled the Evaluation Team to explore in greater depth the individual circumstances and experiences of participants.

In addition to leaders who had taken part in the Program, the Evaluation Team also interviewed the facilitator of the Leadership Insights Series (Participant Group 2) at the end of the Program.

Ethics approval for this project was granted by RMIT's Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network on 6 June 2022.

Evaluation Activities: Participant Group 1

All 39 participants were invited to take part in the Mid-Program survey, End-of-Program survey and an interview to reflect on their experience of the Program and identify their future learning needs.

Twenty-one participants (54%) completed the Mid-Program survey, consisting of questions related to their experience of the orientation and first two parts of the Program. Twenty-three participants (59%) completed the End-of-Program survey, which sought their feedback on their experience participating in the series, the activities in the second half of the Program, and future directions of the Leadership Insight Series.

Over one-quarter (28%, N:11) of participants agreed to participate in the interviews, representing almost 50% (N:10) of the 21 organisations involved in the Leadership Insight Series.

The majority of interviewees (N:8) were from organisations based in inner- and outer-metropolitan locations, with a smaller number (N:3) from rural/regional locations. In accordance with ethics approval, the Mid-Program and End-of-Program surveys were completed anonymously and as such there is no demographic data for these respondents.

It should be noted that almost half (N:6) of the interviewees' organisations offer services across regions or multiple regions and may also operate at a state-wide or national level. Most interviewees described an increase in the size, scope, and catchment areas of their organisations due to a range of mergers in recent years and indicated that these amalgamations had been largely driven by the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Interviewees described their organisations as providing a range of services, including social and civic support and advocacy, residential accommodation, day programs, supported employment, in home support, recreation and community hubs, regional brokerage, capability building and resourcing disability action planning.

Interviewees represented a range of roles in both executive and operational management. Most of the participants (N: 10) had line management responsibilities that ranged from 6 to over 30 people reporting directly to their positions.

Evaluation Activities: Participant Group 2

The Facilitator of the Leadership Insight Series was invited to participate in a 60-minute interview with the Evaluation Team to consider their reflections on the Program. The Facilitator brings 40 years of social service sector experience to their role and has previously facilitated the Leadership Intensives Program for the family violence workforce. Some of their key insights are captured below (see 1.4.2 Participant Group 2: The Facilitator).

Limitations

The Mid-Program and End-of-Program evaluation surveys received lower response rates than anticipated, with 54% and 59% of Program participants completing each survey respectively. These low response rates can be attributed to the time and workload pressures experienced by the participants. The small but surprising uptick in the response rate for the End-of-Program survey signals the commitment of participants to the Leadership Insights Series and the Program's relatively low attrition rate.

We acknowledge that these low survey response rates imply that it is difficult to draw conclusions from the available data, however, they were triangulated by semi-structured interviews with a diverse range of participants and document reviews.

PARTICIPANT GROUP DESCRIPTION				
	Number of potential participants	Actual participants – Mid-Program Survey	Actual participants – End-of-Program Survey	Actual participants – Post-Program Interview
Participant Group 1: leaders from the disability sector who took part in the Leadership Insights Series in 2022	39	21	23	11
Participant Group 2: the Facilitator of the Leadership Insights Series in 2022	1	N/A	N/A	1

Key Evaluation Insights

Participant Group 1: The Cohort

All interviewees stated that there was strong managerial and organisational support for engagement in the Leadership Insights Series which influenced their motivation to register. In addition, most interviewees identified leadership as a key area for professional development in their roles.

The feedback on the Leadership Insights Series was overwhelmingly positive in both the surveys and the interviews, with many participants declaring their experience as the most useful leadership training they had ever accessed.

There were several areas that were highly valued, including:

- the overall design of the Program;
- the effectiveness of communications with the Project Team;
- the quality of the facilitation of the Expert Panels and Workshops;
- the Program Team's commitment to addressing Program glitches, including the issues that arose with the Auslan Interpreter and troubleshooting any individual participants' difficulties with the Canvas learning management platform;
- the quality and diversity of Expert Panel members; and
- the relevance and range of resource materials provided.

Interviewees described a range of benefits from their participation, including:

- an increase in confidence in people management;
- a pathway forward in change to their leadership journey;
- inspiration to pursue other learning opportunities; and
- a reminder of how important leadership is to an organisation, especially in encouraging growth and aspiration across the team, and succession planning.

Respondents to the End-of-Program survey offered the following feedback:

'The sessions were run really well, Catherine was a wonderful facilitator with clear understanding and knowledge of the content.'

'The program team were so positive and enthusiastic which helped myself focus on the presentation rather than issues at work.'

Participant Group 2: The Facilitator

The Program Facilitator reflected on the 'the fantastic team' who had worked on the Leadership Intensives from 2018–2021 and the expertise attained from previously delivering this leadership training to the family violence sector:

'we learned a lot and I think those learnings have flowed through the subsequent programs, including this one'.

She identified the 'perennial issues' common to all social service sector workers as a lack of 'the sheer time and capacity to be a learner'. Workforce shortages and workload pressures are acute in the disability sector, exacerbated by successive COVID-19 waves, illness, burnout and absenteeism. Participants in the Leadership Insights Series therefore require 'organisational sanction to be a learner' to encourage their attendance, focus, and success.

The Program Facilitator noted that participants responded positively to the panellists and the content in the Leadership Insights Series.

The group dynamic in the two Workshop groups was very positive according to the Facilitator:

'They were … hungry for the learning, and really keen to engage with each other and keen to even help each other and people were exchanging contact details … there was a … collaborative feel amongst the participants. … And I found that really wonderful. And I think they really grasped what the opportunity was to have leaders from across their sector coming together from different places, so I think that led to a really positive dynamic.'

In terms of challenges, the Facilitator noted that there were occasionally technical issues but acknowledged that the Project Team was very efficient in troubleshooting, which was also echoed in the evaluation interviews.

Program Content and Structure

All participants in the post-Program evaluation interviews described the content of the Leadership Insight Series as comprehensive with no additional topics recommended for inclusion in the future.

The effectiveness of the course content included in the Leadership Insight Series 2022 maintained an extremely positive result across the four themes covered.

'Workforce Planning' was rated as effective by 95% (N: 21) of respondents, and only slightly effective by 5% (N: 1). Similarly, 'Change Without Pain' was also considered effective by 100% (N: 23) of respondents. 'Adaptive Teams' and 'Coaching, Mentoring and Having Difficult Conversations' rated almost as highly as the two topics covered by the Mid-Program survey. 'Adaptive Teams' was rated as effective by 95% (N: 18) of respondents, and only slightly effective by 5% (N: 1). Similarly, 'Coaching, Mentoring and Having Difficult Conversations' was considered effective by 89% (N: 17) of respondents, and only slightly effective by 11% (N: 2).

Most interview participants mentioned the effectiveness of 'having difficult conversations' as a topic. Some indicated that this was applicable to both their own direct reports and managing up with the executive team. One interviewee commented that the tools and guidance around 'having difficult conversations' allowed them to avoid procrastination and engage in a conversation with their CEO immediately following the Expert Panel presentation on the topic.

Pre-session Learning Material and Resources

All interview participants commented on the quality, diversity and accessibility of the resources supporting the series. This view was supported by the responses in both surveys across all topics.

The survey responses indicated that 74% of participants engaged with the pre-session learning material for each of the sessions. In the interviews, many participants spoke about the challenge of finding the time to read or view materials prior to Expert Panel Discussions or Workshops, however, they expressed an intention to do so or had already accessed them after the completion of the Program.

Expert Panels

The Expert Panel discussions were very highly regarded with most interviewees commenting on the expertise of the presenters. The sessions were characterised as offering in-depth knowledge based on significant leadership experience, challenging participants to think 'outside of the box' and encouraging solution-based outcomes.

There was a mixed reaction to some aspects of the Expert Panel discussion on discussion on Adaptive Teams, with some participants valuing the innovative approaches to the engagement of new staff and others considering them not relevant to their own organisations.

The survey responses reflected the comments made in the evaluation interviews. When asked in the Mid-Program survey to rate their level of satisfaction with panellists, the results indicated that the majority of participants were satisfied, with responses to this selection sitting between 52–76% (N: 22–N: 24) for all panellists. Similar to the Mid-Program survey, the results for the End-of-Program survey again indicate that the majority of participants were satisfied with the panellists, as indicated by the response rate of 50–89% (N: 15–N: 17) with only 3 or less people expressing neither satisfaction or dissatisfaction and 1 person being somewhat dissatisfied.

The respondents to the End-of-Program survey identified the following topics of high impact:

> *'Adaptive teams was a great topic, how to agitate for change with little funding!'*
>
> *'[The] delivery of Having Difficult Conversations [had the biggest impact] as I feel that this is a real gap in my current experience, and I need to address this as a matter of urgency. It was very relevant to my current, immediate situation.'*
>
> *'[Change Without Pain] ... reminders of how people work and how we need to approach change in our organisations.'*
>
> *'The speaker's concept of giving direction not instruction.'*

Workshops

The Workshops were also highly regarded by most interview participants, although one participant indicated that they were too operationally oriented and were therefore not as useful for those in more executive leadership roles.

Most participants commented on the usefulness of hearing about others' experience and recognising that there were common issues across the sector.

Several participants felt that there was insufficient time in the breakout sessions which sometimes meant that not everyone could share their insights.

The survey results indicate that the breakout rooms were effective for meeting and mingling with other sector leaders; exploring the practical application of the topics, and reflecting on leadership style, with only 5% (N: 1) of respondents to the Mid-Program survey and 11% (N: 2) of respondents to the End-of-Program survey finding them not effective at all.

EFFECTIVENESS OF BREAKOUT ROOMS IN MEETING AND MINGLING WITH OTHER SECTOR LEADERS

Not effective at all ■ Slightly effective ■ Moderately effective ■ Very effective ■ Extremely effective
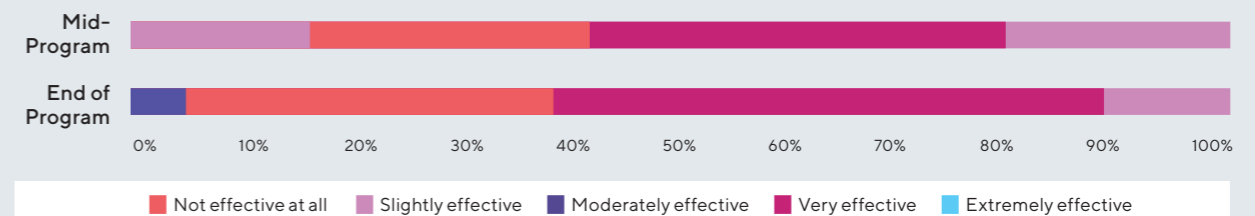
EFFECTIVENESS OF BREAKOUT ROOMS IN HELPING YOU EXPLORE THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE TOPICS

Not effective at all ■ Slightly effective ■ Moderately effective ■ Very effective ■ Extremely effective
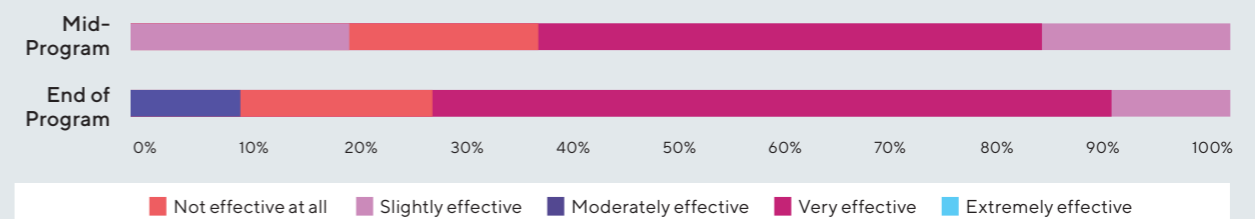
EFFECTIVENESS OF BREAKOUT ROOMS IN REFLECTING AND DEEPENING YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR OWN LEADERSHIP STYLE AND PRACTICE

Not effective at all ■ Slightly effective ■ Moderately effective ■ Very effective ■ Extremely effective
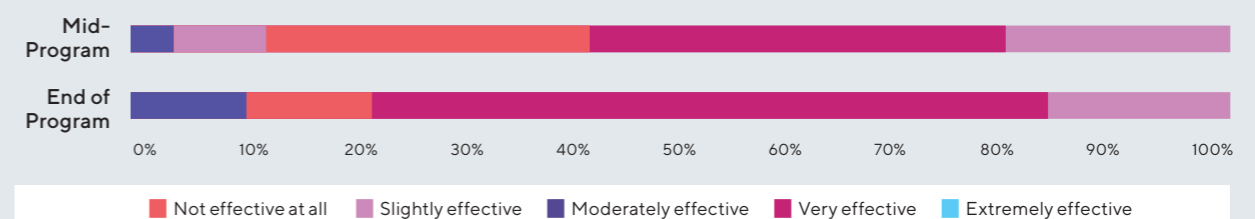
The respondents to the survey indicated that the Series offered a safe and respectful environment:

Eighty-eight per cent of respondents to the Mid-Program survey (N: 21) and End-of-Program survey (N: 16) agreed with the statement

> *'I was comfortable discussing my experience in the class in an open and honest manner'.*

Seventy-nine per cent (N: 19) of respondents to the Mid-Program survey, and 78% (N: 14) of respondents to the End-of-Program survey agreed with the statement
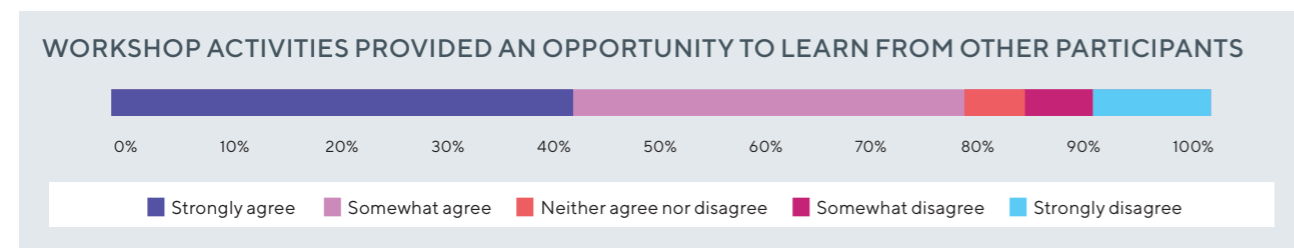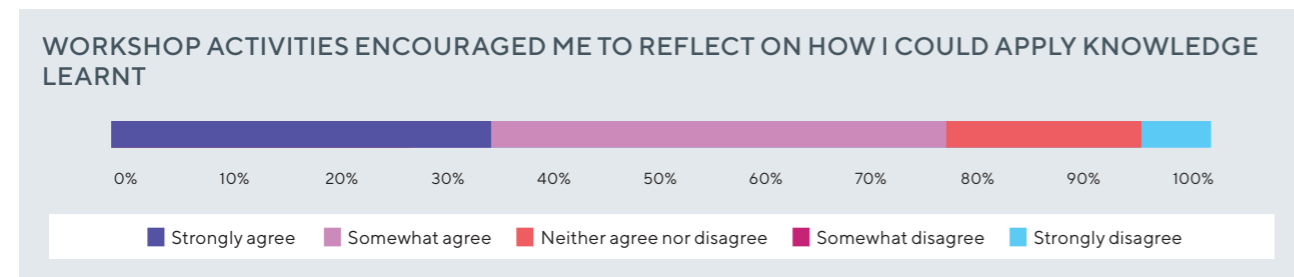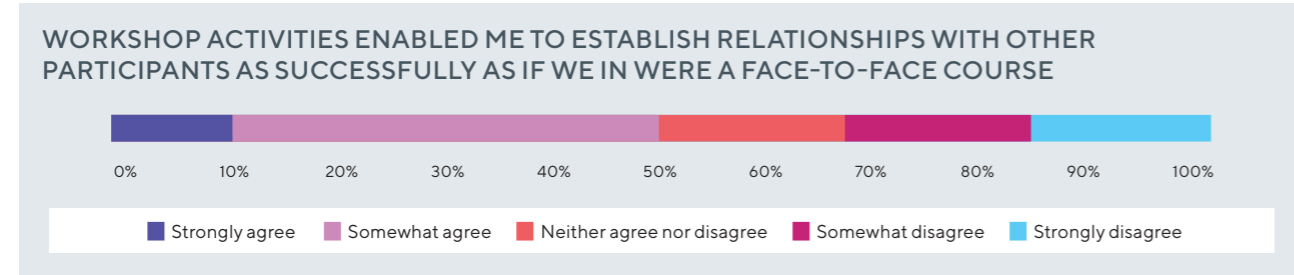
> *'I believe the other participants in the course respected me'.*

Eighty-three per cent (N: 20) of respondents to the Mid-Program survey, and 83% (N: 15) of respondents to the End-of-Program survey agreed with the statement

> *'I felt I could trust other participants in the course'.*

Satisfaction levels with the facilitation of the Workshops across both the Mid-Program and End-of-Program surveys displayed similar trends to the responses regarding the facilitation of the Expert Panels. For each topic, the responses indicated that participants were satisfied with the workshop facilitation: 87% (N:20) for 'Workforce Planning', 88% (N: 22) for 'Change Without Pain', 79% (N: 17) for 'Adaptive teams', and 79% (N: 15) for 'Coaching, Mentoring and Having Difficult Conversations'.

In the Mid-Program survey, the majority of responses (83%, N:22) indicated that the workshop activities were effective in helping explore the application of topics. The End of-Program survey showed a more varied response, with 63% (N:17) indicating that the workshop activities were effective.

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES ENABLED ME TO ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PARTICIPANTS AS SUCCESSFULLY AS IF WE IN WERE A FACE-TO-FACE COURSE

Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES ENCOURAGED ME TO REFLECT ON HOW I COULD APPLY KNOWLEDGE LEARNT

Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES PROVIDED AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN FROM OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Program Delivery

Program Structure

There were a range of comments about the timing and structure of the Leadership Insights Series, but a consistent view did not emerge from the survey or interview data. Some participants suggested that the Expert Panel Discussions and Workshops could be held on the same day; others proposed that the timing of the Expert Panel Discussions and Workshops was convenient but that the sessions needed to be closer together; another felt that the Series could be run as an intensive over a week. Most participants indicated that the structure of the Series suited their needs.

One participant noted that the inability to switch between Workshop groups prevented them from engaging in the Series and suggested that there needed to be greater flexibility in this area.

Online Model of Delivery

A few participants were technologically challenged by the Canvas platform, however, the majority described it as accessible and user-friendly. Many commented on the value of the support available through the Project Team to troubleshoot any issues they had with the platform.

A few participants experienced connectivity problems with Microsoft Teams and suggested that other platforms were more efficient.

Most participants indicated that the online model of delivery guaranteed their capacity to be involved in the Program. This was particularly relevant to those in rural/regional and outer-suburban areas who explained that the additional time and travel commitment would have been a barrier to their participation.

Many participants, including those from rural/regional and outer suburban areas, also indicated a strong interest in a face-to-face component in the Leadership Insights Series. It was suggested that the online model of delivery made it difficult to form connections with their peers. Most were enthusiastic about the possibility of testing a hybrid option that addressed the gap in networking opportunities.

Most respondents to the End-of-Program survey indicated that the Leadership Insights Series was not their first experience of online learning, with 72% (N:13) reporting that they had engaged in online learning previously, while only 28% (N:5) had not. Those survey participants with online learning experience were asked to rate the Leadership Insight Series. Most (46%, N:6) felt that the experience was 'about the same', however, 31% (N:4) found the experience to be 'much better', while 15% (N:2) believed it was 'slightly better', and one person (N:1) found it to be much worse.

The effectiveness of the digital delivery method for the online and recorded Expert Panels in Microsoft Teams received very positive responses, with only one participant describing them as 'not effective at all'. The Canvas interface also received mainly positive responses, with only one participant finding it to be 'not effective at all'.

Seventy-two per cent (N: 13) of participants found the Breakout Groups to be effective, with only 11% (N: 2) finding it not effective at all.
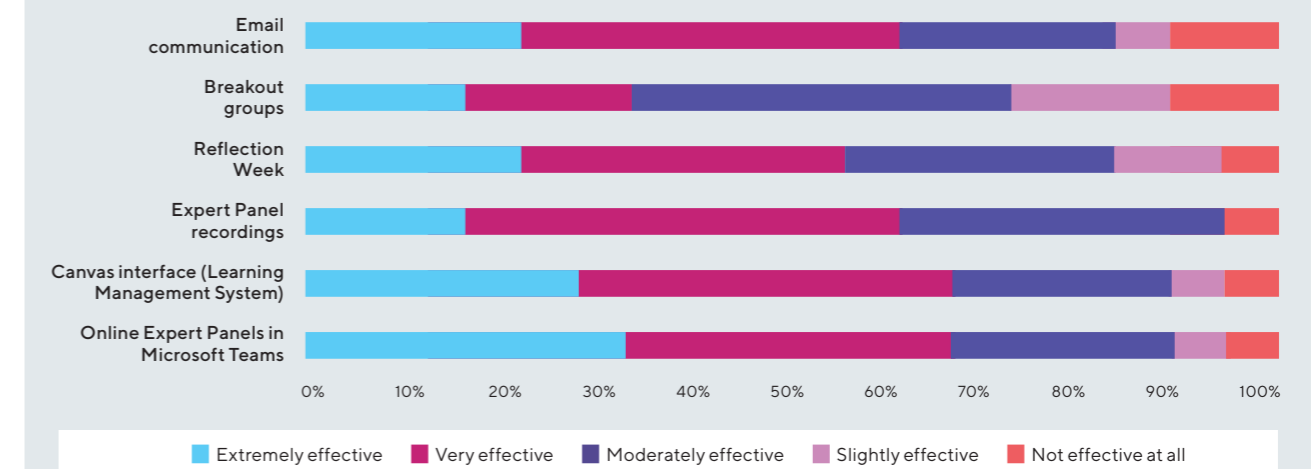
Email communication was considered effective by 83% (N: 15) participants, with only 11% (N: 2) finding it not effective at all.

Participants had 18 contact hours over the duration of the Program. When asked whether this was sufficient to support their learning, the majority of respondents felt the timing was 'just right' 76% (N: 13). A minority (18%, N: 3) felt there was not enough, and only one person felt that it was too much.

Written feedback received from the End-of-Program survey reinforces this:

> *'I think the 1.5 hour commitment was a really appropriate time frame to use. I liked the recap the next day.'*

EFFECTIVENESS OF PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Email communication
Breakout groups
Reflection Week
Expert Panel recordings
Canvas interface (Learning Management System)
Online Expert Panels in Microsoft Teams

■ Extremely effective ■ Very effective ■ Moderately effective ■ Slightly effective ■ Not effective at all

Challenges and Barriers to Implementing Changes

Many participants had begun implementing changes within their own organisations immediately following each session.

Some examples included:

- The topic of 'Difficult Conversations' assisted leaders to immediately begin to create change in their approach to engagement with their teams; and
- One participant was inspired to take up the 100-day challenge discussed by Perrie Ballantyne as part of the Expert Panel on Adaptive Teams and had begun implementation within their organisation.

Interviewees identified barriers to implementing change within their organisation including:
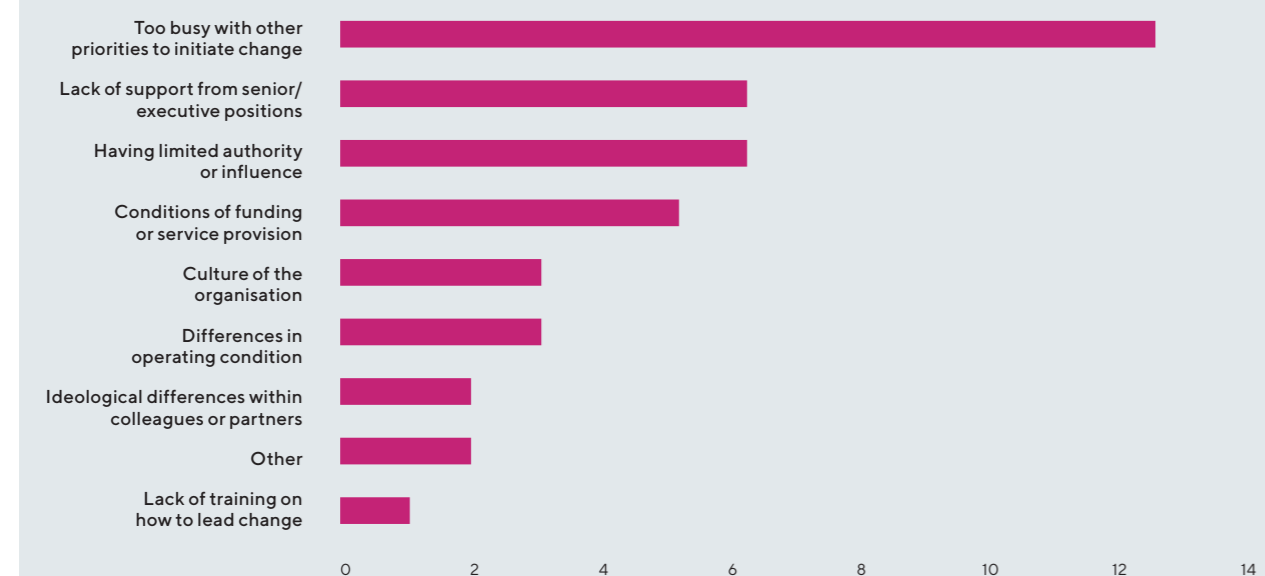
- a lack of time allocated to engage in professional development due to workload demands or work/life balance;
- limited opportunities for 'on job' recognition of learning; and
- the issue of change fatigue amongst the workforce, which is exacerbated by a shortage of both support service staff and individuals qualified for leadership roles.

All interviewees described a strong commitment from their workplaces with the only barriers being time and resources to implement change. The results of the End-of-Program survey confirm this and are presented in the graph below.

The End-of-Program survey asked participants to reflect on how they felt while undertaking the course. The responses reflect the feedback received in the evaluation interviews, with survey responses suggesting that participants felt most strongly that the course encouraged them to reflect on applying the knowledge they had gained from participating and enabled a supportive, peer-learning environment. The responses to the question about relationship-forming were more varied, with evaluation interviews suggesting that this was a key factor missing from the course.

When asked if they had made a new professional connection through the series that they intend to keep in contact with, 17% (N: 3) said yes, 28% (N: 5) said maybe, and 56% (N: 10) said no. This reflects the views expressed in the evaluation interviews, with several participants observing that the Program lacked professional relationship-building and networking opportunities due to the fully online-learning environment.

ACHIEVEMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES DISCUSSED IN THE LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS SERIES
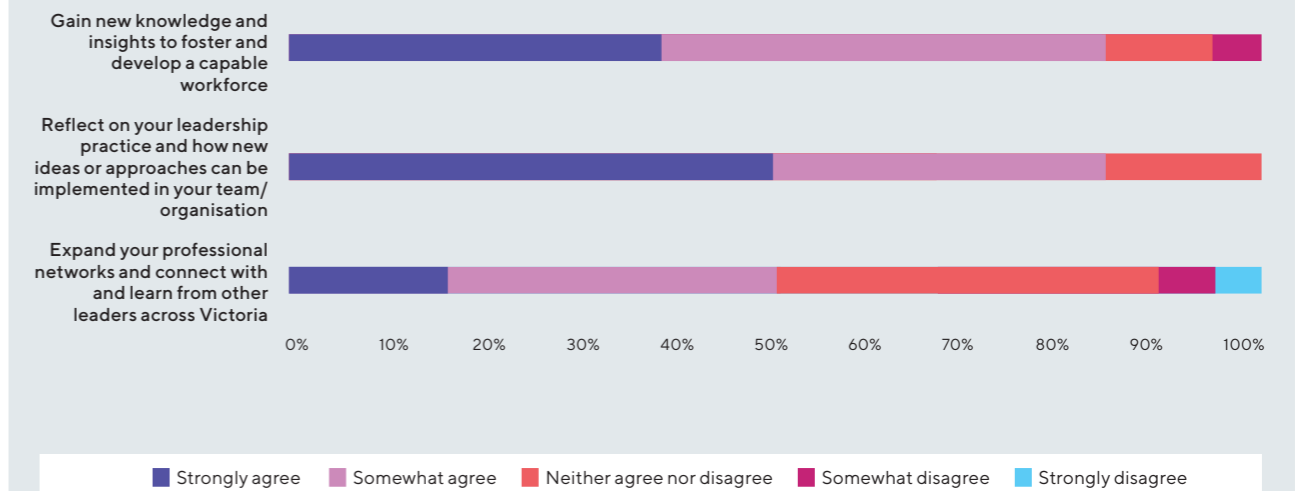

Future Needs

All interviewees indicated that the Leadership Insights Series was relevant to the nature and needs of the disability sector, and many commented on its relevance across the social services sector.

The End-of-Program survey responses also support this commentary. Survey respondents were asked about the preferred composition of participants for the Leadership Insight Series, with most reporting that it should be confined to only the disability sector, or the disability sector and broader social services sector. 'Only the disability sector' received 41% total responses, 'the disability and broader social services sector' received 35% of all responses, 'anybody who is interested, including government, private sectors and interested individuals' received 18% of all responses, and 'the not-for-profit and government sectors' received one response.

PARTICIPANT VIEWS ON PREFERRED COMPOSITION OF COHORT FOR THE LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS SERIES
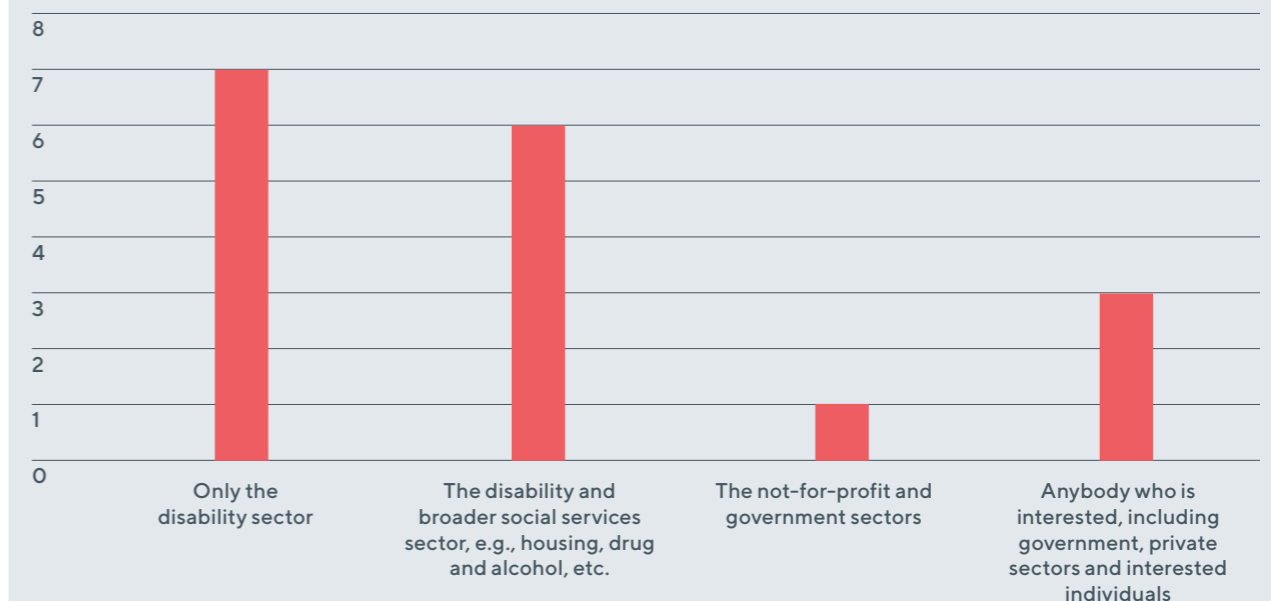
Accredited Learning

Results were mixed when survey respondents were asked about their interest in a Leadership Insight Series as an accredited course with assessed work. The evaluation interviews confirmed that there is a desire to continue learning, however, the off-job time required could present challenges to work-life balance. The strongest appetite appears to be for the Certificate (600 hours), with 35% (N: 6) of responses, closely followed by 'Not Interested' with 29% (N: 5). The Diploma received 24% (N: 4) of responses, and finally the MBA with 12% (N: 2), which is unsurprising given the greater time commitment.

Recommending the Leadership Insight Series

All interviewees indicated that the Leadership Insights Series had been of some benefit to them in their roles as leaders, however, one participant indicated that, while the Expert Panel discussions had been of interest, the Series overall was more relevant to middle managers and emerging leaders.

The majority (71%, N:12) of survey responses indicated that they would recommend the Leadership Insight Series to others; with three indicating 'maybe' and two indicating that they would not recommend it.

In describing their personal leadership journeys, participants spoke about:

- few opportunities for training and mentorship throughout their careers;
- the value of the Leadership Insight Series in recognising existing experience and applying it to leadership skills and knowledge;
- their improved understanding of the distinction between management and leadership; and
- the skills required to progress from good manager to inspiring leader.

All participants suggested that a consistent approach to leadership was essential within their organisations, across the disability sector, and in all social service organisations.

Several participants indicated that the Series could be tailored to different levels of leadership: from new, emerging and less-experienced leaders to more senior executive and experienced leaders in organisations.

End-of-Program survey respondents and interviewees suggested that some ways to improve the Leadership Insights Series in the future might include:

> *'Involvement of the most senior managers Eg CEO.'*
>
> *'I would like to see it delivered in a shorter time frame. It felt like it was stretched out too long so could have been completed over a 4-week period.'*
>
> *'I think it needs at least some face to face delivery.'*
>
> *'Include disabled people and/or a broader range than just NDIS service providers.'*
>
> *'More than 25 minutes with guest speakers.'*
>
> *'I was looking forward to difficult conversations and while I did pick up some tips, perhaps a role play may have also benefited participants.'*

Key Themes for Future Consideration

The feedback provided by participants in the Leadership Insight Series indicates that there may be some merit in exploring the design of the Program to accommodate:

1. Engagement of organisations to support participants' attendance of the Leadership Insights Series. This could potentially include the exploration of opportunities for practical application of learning to organisations by engaging the managers of Program participants in the pre-Program survey to facilitate the return on investment for employers.

2. Targeting different cohorts of leaders in terms of early and emerging leaders; experienced and established operational leaders and executives.

3. Incorporation of greater professional networking opportunities (either online or face-to-face).

4. A range of timing options, including an assessment of the appetite for delivery of intensive leadership programs over shorter periods of time.

Concluding remarks

The evaluation of the Leadership Insights Series highlights that the Program content and delivery was extremely well received by participants and satisfaction levels with each aspect of the Program were high. Valuable insights have also been gleaned regarding the future need for leadership training and potential improvements to the Program.
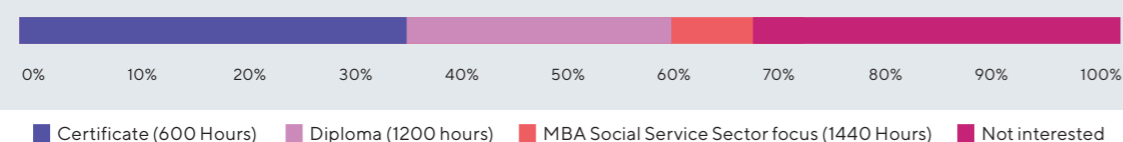
The Facilitator observed that participants 'didn't want [the Series] to end...they wanted more, and they were hungry for more'. She felt it was 'very interesting and encouraging' that participants not only valued the content but wanted more time to engage with it, noting that, in the final week of the Program, a significant number of participants had requested ongoing access to the online resources and permission to share these resources and the recordings of the Expert Panels in their organisation and with their managers:

> *'I think it's about the opportunity, seeing the benefit, feeling that camaraderie with their peers very early on, realising that they had similar experiences, that they might be coming from different organisations, but they were really connected through the commonality of the experience as well as being in the [disability] sector.'*

The structure, format and content of the Leadership Insights Series is readily transferrable across the social services sector. The strategic positioning of the Program, as well as the tailoring of content to particular fields of practice, will be important considerations for any future iterations of the Program.

PARTICIPANT PREFERENCE FOR ACCREDITED LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

| 0% | 10% | 20% | 30% | 40% | 50% | 60% | 70% | 80% | 90% | 100% |

■ Certificate (600 Hours)　■ Diploma (1200 hours)　■ MBA Social Service Sector focus (1440 Hours)　■ Not interested

1 WIDI initially proposed mentoring to support leaders to put their learning into practice. Early feedback from the sector indicated that the target cohort – Senior Operational Managers – were already dealing with significant workload pressures and many were unlikely to be able to invest time in attending mentoring sessions. In recognition of the pressures facing participants and the project timeframes, the mentoring sessions were not included as part of the program, however, the program featured an Expert Panel on 'Coaching and Mentoring'. Resources initially earmarked to support mentors will be re-allocated to engage high-calibre guest speakers for the Expert Panels.

2 None of the participants identified as 'Non-Binary' or 'Gender Diverse'.

3 See https://workforcecapability.ndiscommission.gov.au/framework/level#mgr_manageOthers_0_0