

Asia-Pacific Water Forum

Knowledge Hub  
for Healthy Rivers and  
Aquatic Ecosystems

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# Building Leadership Capacity to Drive Sustainable Water Management

## Why and How?

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# Key Messages

- Building appropriate forms of leadership capacity is a ‘lever’ we can use to help deliver sustainable forms of water management.
- To use this lever we need:
  - A locally validated knowledge base regarding effective leadership processes, attributes of effective leaders, and enabling contexts.
  - Knowledge of the evidence-based strategies we can use to build leadership capacity at an individual, team and organisational level.
  - The will do use these strategies alongside traditional measures.



# Outline

- **What do we mean by *leadership*?**
- ***Why* are certain forms of leadership and leaders with particular attributes (e.g. skills) important?**
- **What do we *know* about leadership in the context of promoting sustainable water management?**
- **What are some of the *strategies* we could use to build leadership capacity in the water industry?**

Plus some 'reflection questions' along the way...



# What do we mean by leadership?

- Definitions can be categorised into 4 groups.
- One contemporary definition is:
- **A process of influence that occurs within the context of relationships between leaders and their collaborators that involves:**
  - establishing direction (shared vision);
  - aligning resources; and
  - generating motivation and providing inspiration to achieve the vision.



Draws from Rost (1993) and Kotter (1998).

# What do we mean by leadership?



- **Implications of this definition:**

- A ‘process of influence’ may involve *many* leaders who drive the process at different times.
- Leadership is not restricted to executive levels.
- Consistent with the “great [southerly] leadership migration” in western organisations (Avolio, 2005).
- Consistent with trends in environmental leadership:

“... complex problems and rapidly changing solutions require more leadership from everyone in an organisation. Leadership skills that were appropriate to the few [i.e. executives] are now necessities for the many.”

(Gordon & Berry, 2006, p. 90).

## Question:

Using this definition, who are the potential ‘leaders’ in your work context who could drive ‘processes of influence’ to advance sustainable forms of water management?

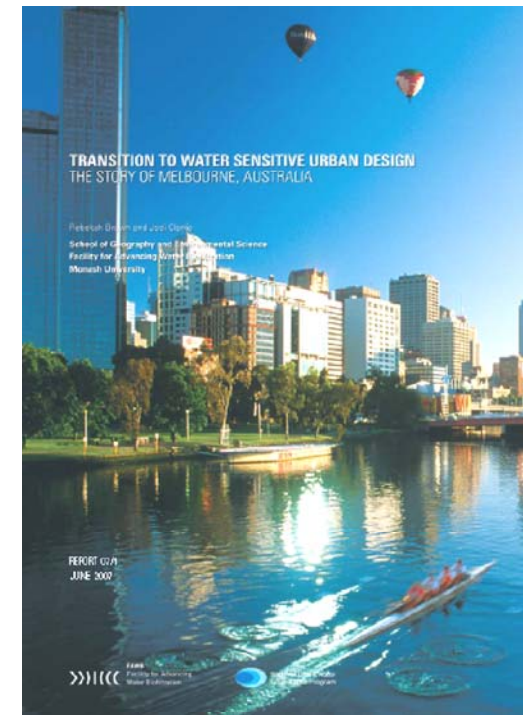
# Why is leadership important in this context?

## 1. Strong evidence that it is at the heart of successful examples of change.

- Example:

**“An important driver of Melbourne’s transition was the legacy of a committed and innovative group of associated champions working across multiple sectors to advance change.”**

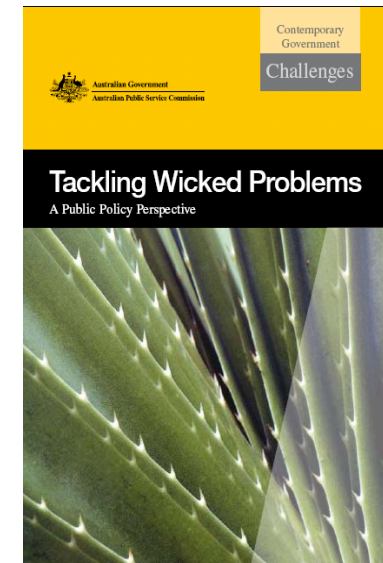
(Brown & Clarke, 2007, p. iv).



# Why is leadership important in this context?

## 2. Our context demand high levels of leadership and certain forms of leadership.

- Example: The context that commonly surrounds urban water managers in Australia:
  - Uncertainty, complexity and change: places a premium on leadership (Conger, 1993).
  - ‘Wicked’ / complex problems (see Rittel & Webber, 1973):
    - Require particular forms of leadership, such as ‘enabling leadership’ by executives (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007).
    - To use these forms of leadership, leaders need specific knowledge and skills (e.g. skills in systems thinking).



Commonwealth of Australia (2007)

## Why is leadership important in this context?

3. Leadership is critical when driving major processes of change, like the transition to ‘water sensitive cities’:

**“Producing change is about 80% leadership ... and 20% management... In most change efforts, those percentages are reversed. We continue to produce great managers; we need to develop great leaders.”**

(Kotter, 2006, p. 14)



**John Kotter,  
Emeritus Professor of Leadership, Harvard**

## Why is leadership important in this context?

4. I believe there is a moral argument – that today’s leaders have an obligation to help identify and build the leaders of tomorrow.
- The International Water Centre’s draft Strategic Plan 2009-2015:
    - Vision: “Water leadership for the future”.
    - Mission: “... creating tomorrow’s leaders in water management ...”.
  - Consistent with widely-used descriptions of ‘core leadership behaviours’ of organisational leaders (e.g. Kouzes & Posner’s [2007] “Ten Commitments of Leadership”).



### Question:

Do you agree with this point? Assuming you see yourself as a ‘leader’ for sustainable water management, what activities does it lead to (e.g. mentoring)?

# Why is leadership important in this context?

Kouzes & Posner's (2007) "Ten Commitments of Leadership":

## 1. Model the way:

- (i) Clarify your values by finding your voice and affirming shared ideals.
- (ii) Set the example by aligning actions with shared values.

## 2. Inspire a shared vision:

- (iii) Envision the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities.
- (iv) Enlist others in a common vision by appealing to shared aspirations.

## 3. Challenge the process:

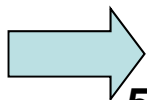
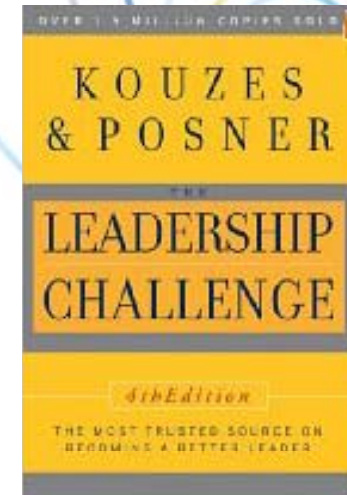
- (v) Search for opportunities by seizing the initiative and by looking outward for innovative ways to improve.
- (vi) Experiment and take risks by constantly generating small wins and learning from experience.

## 4. Enable others to act:

- (vii) Foster collaboration by building trust and facilitating relationships.
- (viii) Strengthen others by increasing their self-determination and developing competence.

## 5. Encourage the heart:

- (ix) Recognise the contributions of others by showing appreciation for individual excellence.
- (x) Celebrate shared values and victories by creating a spirit of community.



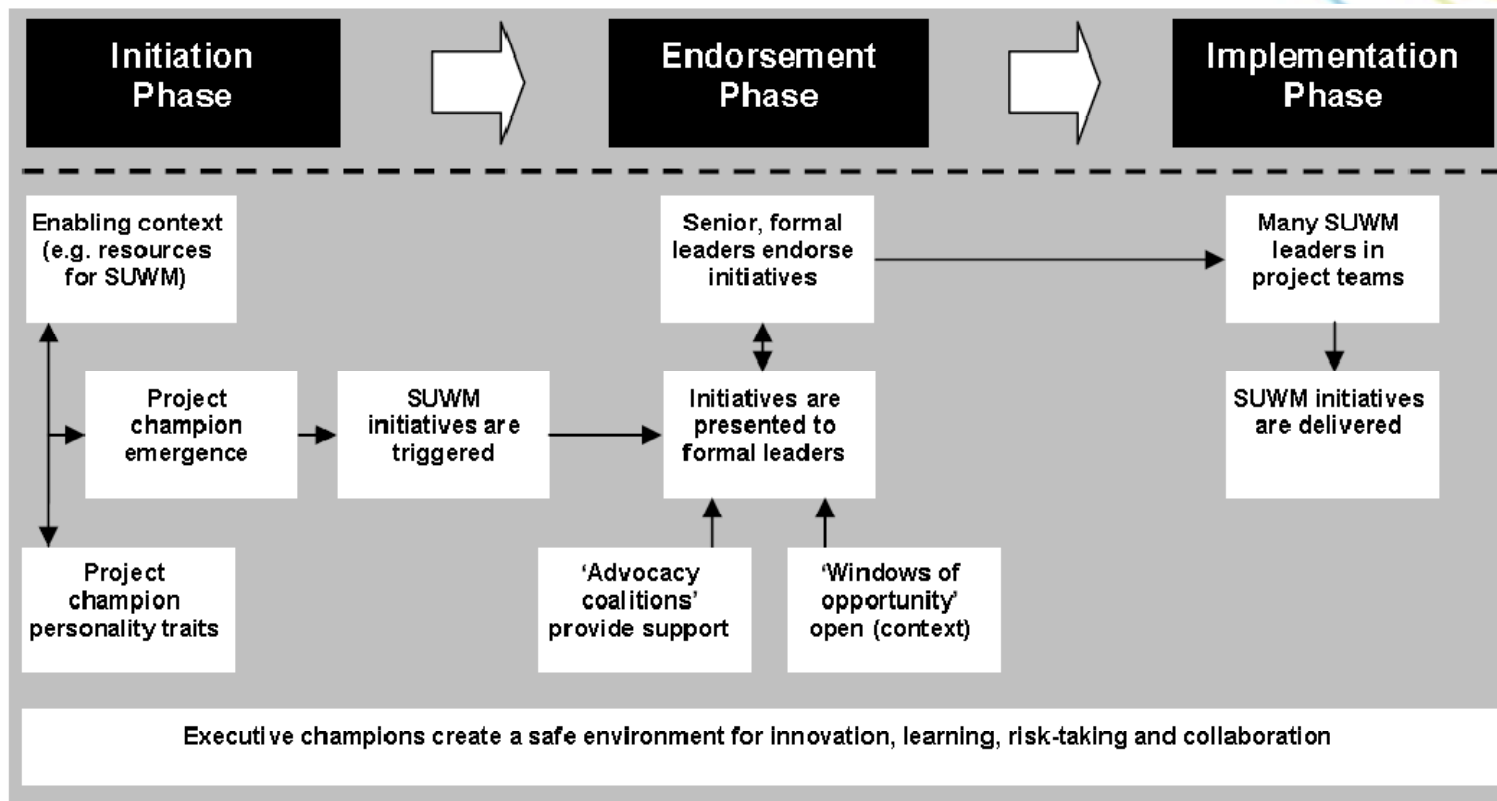
## What do know about relevant forms of leadership?

- **Research investigating the adoption of *sustainable* practices in organisations (e.g. Benn *et al.*, 2005, 2006a & 2006b):**
  - A cadre of “change agents” is typically needed at all managerial levels.
  - Direction of leadership = both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’.
  - Quote from a Regional President of BP Australasia:
    - “Leadership comes from the passion of the change agents and identifying who those people are becomes very important. Building a network of committed leaders at all levels is a first step to change. ...  
Leadership from below can work, but the layers above need to become ‘surrounded’ in order for the most intransigent to move. It is far better to have leaders near the top of the organisation, linked to enthusiasts throughout, driving change.” (Benn *et al.*, 2006a, p. 163).



## What do know about relevant forms of leadership?

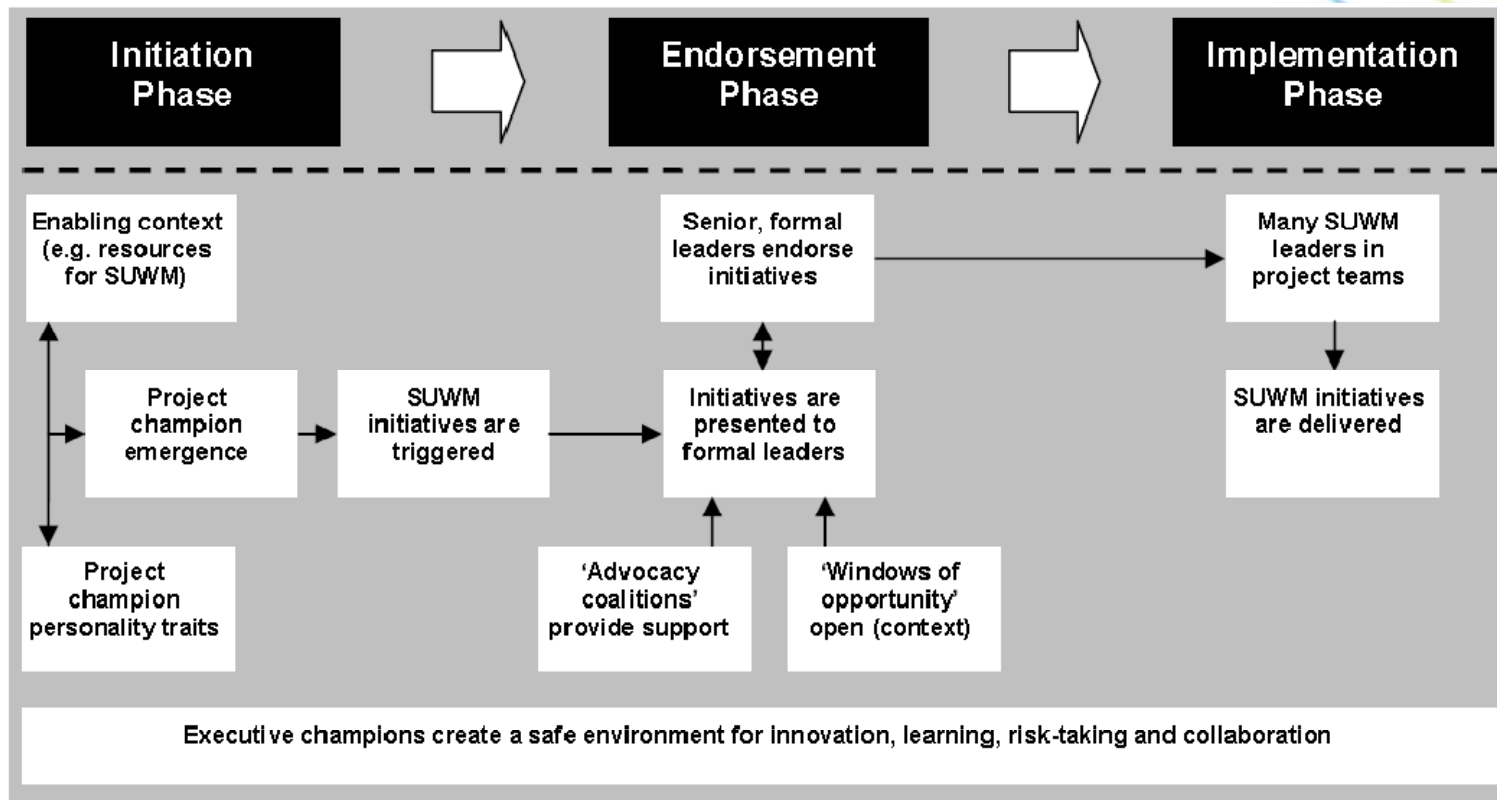
- Research investigating the 'champion phenomenon' in Australian water agencies (e.g. Taylor, 2008 & 2009):



## What do know about relevant forms of leadership?

### Question:

This process commonly operates in Australian urban water agencies. How relevant do you think it is for the agencies you work most closely with?



## What do know about relevant forms of leadership?

- Such research highlights the importance of: group-based leadership processes, individual attributes of leaders, and their leadership context.



Building resources and support towards a 'critical mass'

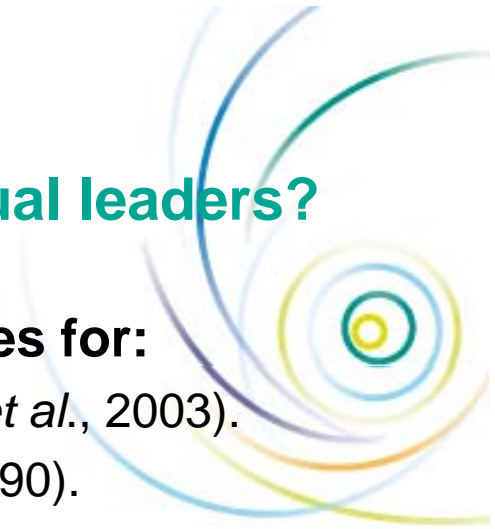
- Increasing resources, strengthening policy framework, and greater community, political and executive support.

Context is now suitable for the emergence of champions

- Increasing support from the dominant organisational culture (driven by executives), colleagues, resources and policy framework.

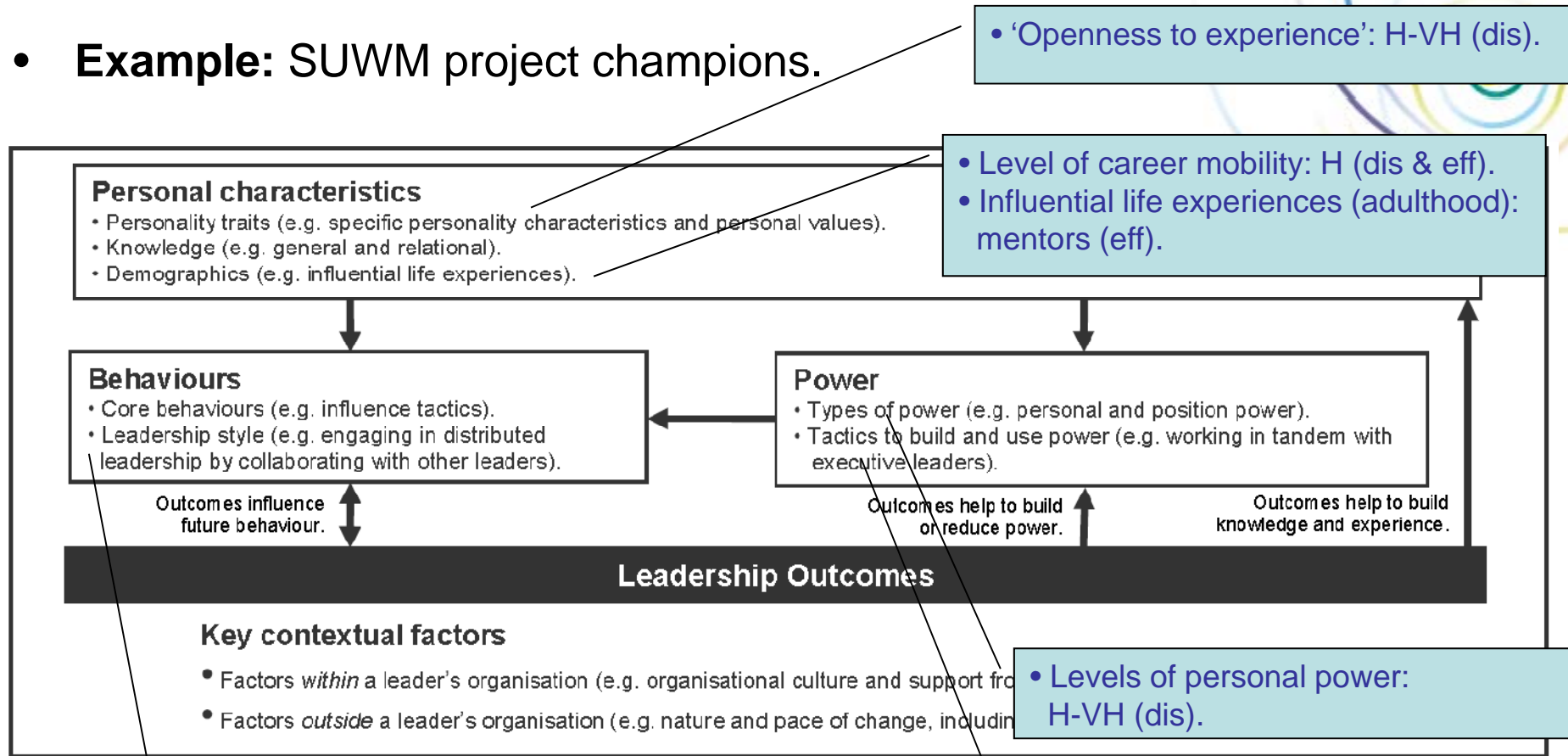
## What do we know about key attributes of individual leaders?

- **The literature provides long lists of key attributes for:**
  - Environmental / sustainability leaders (e.g. Dunphy *et al.*, 2003).
  - Champions of innovations (e.g. Howell & Higgins, 1990).
  - Organisational leaders (e.g. Yukl, 1989).
- **However, leadership is acutely sensitive to context (Bryman *et al.*, 1996), so local empirical research is often needed to:**
  - identify attributes of effective leaders (and effective leadership processes); and
  - build valid conceptual models that can inform the development of leadership development interventions (e.g. customised leadership development programs).



# What do know about key attributes of individual leaders?

- **Example:** SUWM project champions.



Key transformational leadership (Bass, 1985) behaviors at particular times, such as:

- Questioning the status quo: H-VH (dis & eff).
- Articulating visions for sustainability: H-VH (dis).
- Expressing enthusiasm and confidence: H-VH (dis).

## What do we know about key attributes of individual leaders?

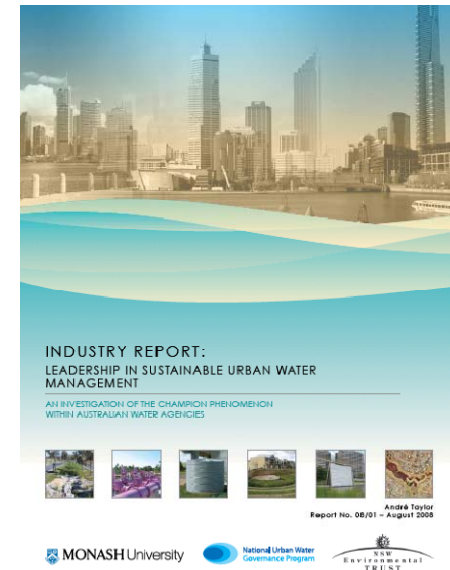
- **Opportunity to reflect on our own work environments:**
  - What capacity building interventions are currently available in your work environment to help leaders build key skills, such as:
    - Using advanced forms of social networking?
    - Using key ‘transformational leadership’ (Bass, 1985) behaviours more frequently?
    - Having the ability to ‘influence upwards’ in an organisation by building personal power (e.g. via certain types of knowledge, relationships, etc.).
    - Coordinating group-based (‘distributed’; Gibb, 1954) leadership processes that cross organisational boundaries?
    - Engaging in forms of ‘enabling leadership’ (Uhl-Bien *et al.*, 2007) to address wicked problems (e.g. building supportive organisational cultures).

# What can we do to build leadership capacity?

- Recent research in Australian urban water agencies:

## 38 evidence-based management strategies for:

- Attracting and recruiting project champions.
- Supervising project champions.
- Developing project champions.
- Developing executive champions as ‘enabling leaders’.
- Fostering coordinated forms of ‘distributed leadership’.
- Building contexts that encourage champion emergence and effectiveness.



# What can we do to build leadership capacity?

- **At an individual level:**
  - Use knowledge of the attributes of effective leaders to attract and recruit them.
  - Routinely look for leadership potential when recruiting.
  - Build locally validated conceptual models of effective leaders and leadership processes to inform the design of LD interventions.
  - Facilitate access to customised LD initiatives, such as 9 -12 month, ‘feedback intensive’ LDPs (Guthrie & King, 2004):
    - ‘360-degree feedback’ instruments.
    - Intensive training on key skills / behaviours.
    - Linked to on-the-job development experiences / challenges.
    - Mentoring and coaching.
    - Use of Individual Leadership Development Plans (ILDPs).



# What can we do to build leadership capacity?

- **At an individual level (cont.):**
  - Recognise the value of well-designed mentoring programs, and that some emergent leaders may avoid them.
  - Ensure developing leaders are using up-to-date ILDPs.
  - Executives:
    - Make the time to learn about relevant research, theories / models, case studies and strategies that are relevant to one's context (e.g. transformational leadership, enabling leadership).
    - Build the skills associated with effective executive leaders in the water industry (e.g. the ability to shape the organisational culture to support sustainable approaches, the ability to work in tandem with emergent leaders at lower levels, system thinking, etc.).



## Question:

Who do you think is responsible for making these activities happen?

# What can we do to build leadership capacity?

- **At a team level:**
  - Place an emphasis on building ‘high performing’ multi-disciplinary, cross-boundary teams to tackle ‘wicked problems’ and drive change.
  - Such teams can benefit from: executive sponsors / mentors; leadership coaches, team charters (Carson *et al.*, 2007), and using major projects as LD opportunities.
- **At an organisational level:**
  - Create environments that foster emergent leaders (e.g. champions), and value innovation, risk taking, experimentation, learning, collaboration and sustainability.
  - Enabling leadership often needs to address:
    - resources for more sustainable approaches;
    - policy frameworks;
    - managerial, political and community support; and
    - the dominant organisational culture.

# Close

- **A suggested 10 year vision for fostering leadership capacity in the sustainable water industry:**
  - Broad awareness of the need to build appropriate forms of leadership capacity to help deliver sustainable water management.
  - Strong desire by today's leaders to help tomorrow's leaders to build the skills they will need to be effective.
  - Emerging and formal leaders have access to customised LD initiatives (e.g. feedback intensive LDPs for emerging leaders, executive forums, etc.) that are:
    - informed by local research in the water industry;
    - designed around best practice principles;
    - delivered by leading practitioners; and
    - continually improved.

## Question:

What do you think of this vision?