

As joint recipients of the TEFMA/OPUS Leadership Development Program Scholarship, we are pleased to submit a collaborative article about our experiences and learnings at the TEFMA Leadership Development for Facilities Managers course in August. The course was once again held at Aitken Hill in Melbourne and the facilities and food well surpassed any glowing report we'd ever heard. Not only was it a fantastic venue, but a fantastic course too. There were so many great presenters with so much knowledge to impart! All helped, of course, by the outstanding participants, representing Universities from across Australia and New Zealand and all areas of Facilities Management.

On our first day of learning, Eugene Fernandez (who is brilliant by the way) taught us the ins and outs of leadership. Among other things, we learnt the differences between being a manager and being a leader. We also determined where our own strengths and weaknesses lay through the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). This tool proved to be a real eye-opener for many of us, as it enabled us to analyse ourselves more objectively.

Mac Hay presented on the Tuesday and in this session we worked on developing our communication skills and conflict management skills. As well as these learnings, we were given tools to enable us to have those often difficult, but necessary, courageous conversations with work colleagues. The open forum at the end of the day was very refreshing. As a group, we were able to bounce concerns around the room and a number of us came to the realisation that the problems we faced in our personal work environment were actually quite common across Facilities Management Departments in general.

Our third day of learning got off to a bit of a bumpy start, with a number of attendees taken ill... While most likely a virus, we all decided to blame the "bar nuts" instead. Our wonderful presenters, Paul Merton and Terry Gaven, had a much smaller group to present to, but still did a great job.

Thursday started to bring together the information we had learnt about ourselves earlier in the week, with Terri Mandler taking us through negotiation and coaching skills. Throughout the day, Terri gave examples of how different MBTI types might approach the same situation and gave us tools to enable us to maximise the effectiveness of that situation. As well as sharing information with us on the theory behind successful negotiation and effective coaching, Terri had arranged some practical sessions. For the coaching sessions, we teamed up in groups of three where we each got to coach, be coached and observe the coaching – this was a great way for us to benefit from each other's knowledge and experience, using real-life situations.

By the Friday, we were all feeling very full – full of knowledge and food (!) – so it was incredibly rewarding to be able to put our various skills, previous knowledge/experience and new learnings into practice by presenting our group presentations to the TEFMA representatives.

While challenging, the presentations were a great way to cap off a week of learning, and draw on the strengths of each and every course participant. The feedback we received from Andrew Smith and Barry Inglis was both constructive and thought-provoking – the course had us engaged to the very end!

Looking back on it now, it is hard to believe that we only spent a week together. The sheer volume of information we took on board (and the volume of food we consumed) makes it difficult to comprehend that it was such a short period of time.

Since then, there have not been many situations where there's been a need to tell someone that we're an INFJ or an ESTP personality type, and we haven't had many opportunities to demonstrate our exemplary cup-and-straw bridge building skills... For us, the real benefit of those five days was the opportunity to learn so much about ourselves and how we interact with others. So although we're no longer locked up with nothing but three course meals and dedicated facilitators to keep us together, relationships have continued and we are constantly reminded that one of the most important lessons of all is that come what may, we are not alone!

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