Exploring Leadership in Higher Education

CHALLENGES, TENSIONS, CONSTRAINTS AND USEFUL FRAMEWORKS

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Outline

• Leading learning

• Leaders and leadership
  – characteristics, behaviours and contexts

• Approaches to leadership research and practice
  – theoretical and practical frameworks

• Leadership tensions and constraints in Higher Education
Teaching and developing curriculum provides an opportunity to lead...

...students and their learning
...staff and their teaching
and
...curriculum design and delivery
Leaders and leadership

Exercise (padlet walls – see links in iLearn unit)

• Visualise an effective leader you know.

• Identify the characteristics or attributes of this person as a leader.

• Identify the behaviours or actions that illustrate this person’s “leadership”.

• What do leaders achieve?
Some typical comments from staff:
“... I’m not a leader...”

“... I just explain why we need to do things this way.”

“... I just persuaded people to try something new...”

“... people just needed to see that it could be done a different way...”

“... I just want to really challenge students to think for themselves and act on that...”

“... I just realised I needed to learn more about [technology in teaching] so I could help the tutors understand it and use it.”
Some useful frameworks

From the general leadership & management literature:

• Kotter (1990)
  Leadership and management “action systems”

• Bolman and Deal (2008)
  Four “frames” for analysing organisations and guiding leadership

Specific to Higher Education learning and teaching:

• Harvey et al (2012)
  Distributed leadership collaborative framework for Higher Ed.

  Leadership and management in domains of practice in Higher Ed.
Leadership and management as separate but related “action systems” (Kotter 1990)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Management</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating an agenda</td>
<td>Planning and budgeting</td>
<td>Establishing direction</td>
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<td>Developing a human network for</td>
<td>Organising and staffing</td>
<td>Aligning people</td>
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<td>achieving the agenda</td>
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<td>Execution</td>
<td>Controlling and problem-solving</td>
<td>Motivating and inspiring</td>
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<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Predictability, order, consistency, stability</td>
<td><strong>Change</strong></td>
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Table derived from Kotter (1990), p6
Change: a key leadership goal

Change in Higher Education may be organisational, technological, occupational, cultural and/or political.

➢ The changing nature and/or organisation of work
➢ Uncertainty and complexity
➢ Expansion or contraction of institutions and/or institutional units (universities, faculties, departments, programs, administrative offices, service units)
➢ New technologies in teaching, research and administration
Bolman and Deal (2008) propose four “frames” – perspectives that can help leaders analyse situations and solve problems:

- **Structural** – systems, rules, functions, roles, responsibilities
- **Symbolic** – culture, values, beliefs, assumptions, rituals, symbols
- **Human resource** – human needs, recognition and reward
- **Political** – power, alliances, coalitions, negotiation, compromise

No single perspective explains everything! You need to use them in an integrated way to understand the complexity and nuance of organisational situations.
Domains of practice in learning and teaching

Domains of practice in learning and teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Components</th>
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<tr>
<td>Leader-focused</td>
<td>• Leader characteristics/personality, behaviours, disposition</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Power, authority</td>
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<td>Situation-focused</td>
<td>• Organisational context</td>
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<td>• Staff (follower) characteristics</td>
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<td>Relationship-focused</td>
<td>• Nature of relationships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• “People skills”</td>
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<td>Values-based</td>
<td>• Moral purpose</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Authenticity</td>
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<td>• Ethics</td>
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<td>• Sustainability</td>
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Distributed leadership framework (Harvey et al 2012)

A collaborative and inclusive philosophy involving academic, administrative and executive staff.

5 dimensions
• context, culture, change, relationships, activity

Inputs to support these dimensions:
• Expertise-based involvement; systematic processes; professional development encouraging collaboration; resourcing for collaborative activities; working conditions to support individual participation.

Values and practices encouraging collaboration:
• Trust, respect, recognition, collaboration, commitment to reflective practice
Challenges for and constraints on Higher Education leaders (1)

*Changing nature of the HE workforce*

- Generational change – baby-boomers to Gen Y
- Growth in research-only workforce
- Shrinking of “traditional” university teaching-and-research academic workforce
- Growth in casual and fixed-term teaching-only or teaching-focused university workforce
- Professionalisation of university administration
- International market and mobility
Challenges for and constraints on Higher Education leaders (2)

**Complexity**

- Plurality of goals
- Communication difficulties
- Measurement of outcomes
- Impact of technology
- Internationalisation
- Regulation and reporting requirements
- Deregulation and market competition
Challenges for and constraints on Higher Education leaders (3)

Lack of resources, power, political influence

- Decreasing public funding
- Increasing external regulation
- Fee deregulation
- Changing view of the purpose and role of Higher Education in society, economy, culture
- Political interference
- Media influence
Challenges for and constraints on Higher Education leaders (4)

Academic culture, values, beliefs, traditions
- Skepticism about “vision”
- Belief in non-alignment
- Autonomy, independence
- Academic and intellectual freedom

The need for new leadership styles
- Industrialisation and fragmentation of academia
- Changing expectations of curriculum
  - “co-construction”, “co-creation”, “flexibility”
  - technological developments
Developing leadership practice in Higher Education

Personal awareness and knowledge of institution
- Structures
- Policies
- People
- Culture

Mentoring and support

Distributed leadership in practice
- Encourage innovation (= allow failure)
- Build trust
- Build relationships

Courage, resilience and a sense of humour!
References and recommended reading


