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Reflections on Learning Leaders in Times of Change

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Need for Leadership Research in Higher Education

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- Higher Education is at a turning point
- Change doesn't just happen – it must be led – deftly
- We have a leadership succession crisis
- There is little empirical research situated in the specific context and leadership roles in tertiary education institutions

Universities & the challenges of the 21st century

Broad

- Global stresses
- New world players
- Exit of the baby boomers
- IT revolution
- Fractious divisions
- Sustainable development

HE Related

- Opening up of access
- Funding pressures & new sources of income
- Growing competition
- User pays & changing patterns of participation
- Changing expectations
- Maintaining 'standards'
- Improved implementation

History of the research approach used in the *Learning Leaders* study

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- Alan Tough – the Adult's Learning projects
- Australia's Skill Olympians
- Successful Graduates in nine professions
- NSW DET School Principals 2003 (n = 322)
- The ALTC project 2008 (n = 512)
- ATEM professional leaders 2011 (n=159)
- Successful sustainability leaders in HE 2013 (n=188)
- Validation with 3700 L&T leaders around the world in the OLT National Senior Teaching Fellowship 2014-17

The ALTC study

Learning Leaders in Times of Change

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- Experienced leaders identified as being effective
- 512 from DVC to Head of Program
- National & international scrutiny of the results for veracity and implications (n=1000 leaders)
- Countries involved: Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, USA and the UK

Analogies



Common

- Herding cats, turtles
- Juggling

Head of Program & School

- Meat in the sandwich
- Swimming in a tidal pool
- Having a Ferrari with no fuel
- Surfer in a rough sea
- Working with a dysfunctional family
- Minister in a church where only the converted come
- Plumber
- Working in a bar
- Sole parent
- Flying a plane with limited ground support and no co-pilot

- Tour guide with people all wanting to do different things
- Advancing through a bureaucratic mud
- Trying to nail jelly to the roof whilst putting out spot fires with my feet
- Oarsman without an oar
- Living in a medieval castle
- Being in groundhog day

DVC/PVC

- Gardener
- Conductor
- Keeping a flotilla going in one direction
- Trying to turn around an iron ore carrier
- 21st century Sisyphus

Most important areas of activity in the role of HOP

(Rank order 1 – high 25 - low)

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1. Working on student matters (HOS 16) (DVC/PVC 21)
2. Identifying new opportunities
3. Developing learning programs (DVC/PVC 18)
4. Managing relationships with staff
5. Managing other staff
6. Reviewing teaching activities (HOS 10) (DVC/PVC 17)
7. Participating in meetings
8. Scholarly research (HOS 14) (DVC/PVC 25)
9. Strategic planning (HOS 4) (DVC/PVC 2)
10. Responding to ad hoc requests (HOS 23) (DVC/PVC 22)

(HOS ranking that is significantly different from HOP)
(DVC/PVC ranking that is significantly different from HOP)

Key indicators used to judge your performance (Rank order)

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1. Achieving high quality graduate outcomes
2. Receiving positive user feedback (HOS 12) (DVC/PVC 15)
3. Producing significant improvements in L&T (DVC/PVC 9)
4. Successful implementation of new initiatives
5. Bringing innovative policies into practice (HOS 13)
6. Improving student satisfaction ratings
7. Establishing a collegial working environment (HOS 1) (DVC/PVC 2)
8. Delivering agreed tasks or projects on time and to specification
9. Producing successful learning systems (HOS 18) (DVC/PVC 19)
10. Achieving positive outcomes for reviews of my area

(HOS ranking that is significantly different from HOP)
(DVC/PVC ranking that is significantly different from HOP)

Impact of different influences on daily work as a HOP

(Rank order)

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1. Balancing work and family life **(DVC/PVC 13)**
2. Decreased government funding
3. Managing pressures for continuous change
4. Slow administrative processes **(DVC/PVC 9)**
5. Finding and retaining high quality staff **(DVC/PVC 1)**
6. Handling unexpected events **(DVC/PVC 15)**
7. Growing pressure to generate new income **(HOS 2)**
8. Rapid changes in technology **(HOS 17) (DVC/PVC 14)**
9. Dealing with local university cultures
10. Clarifying strategic directions **(DVC/PVC 2)**

(HOS ranking that is significantly different from HOP)
(DVC/PVC ranking that is significantly different from HOP)

Some key challenges for Heads of Program

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- Staff – relationships, complaints, engagement & quality
- Working productively with resisters
- Having to manage both up and down
- Managing change
- Bureaucracy and ‘value-add’
- Appropriate administrative support
- Student matters
- Balancing time and workload
- Working with reduced resources
- Limited recognition by senior staff

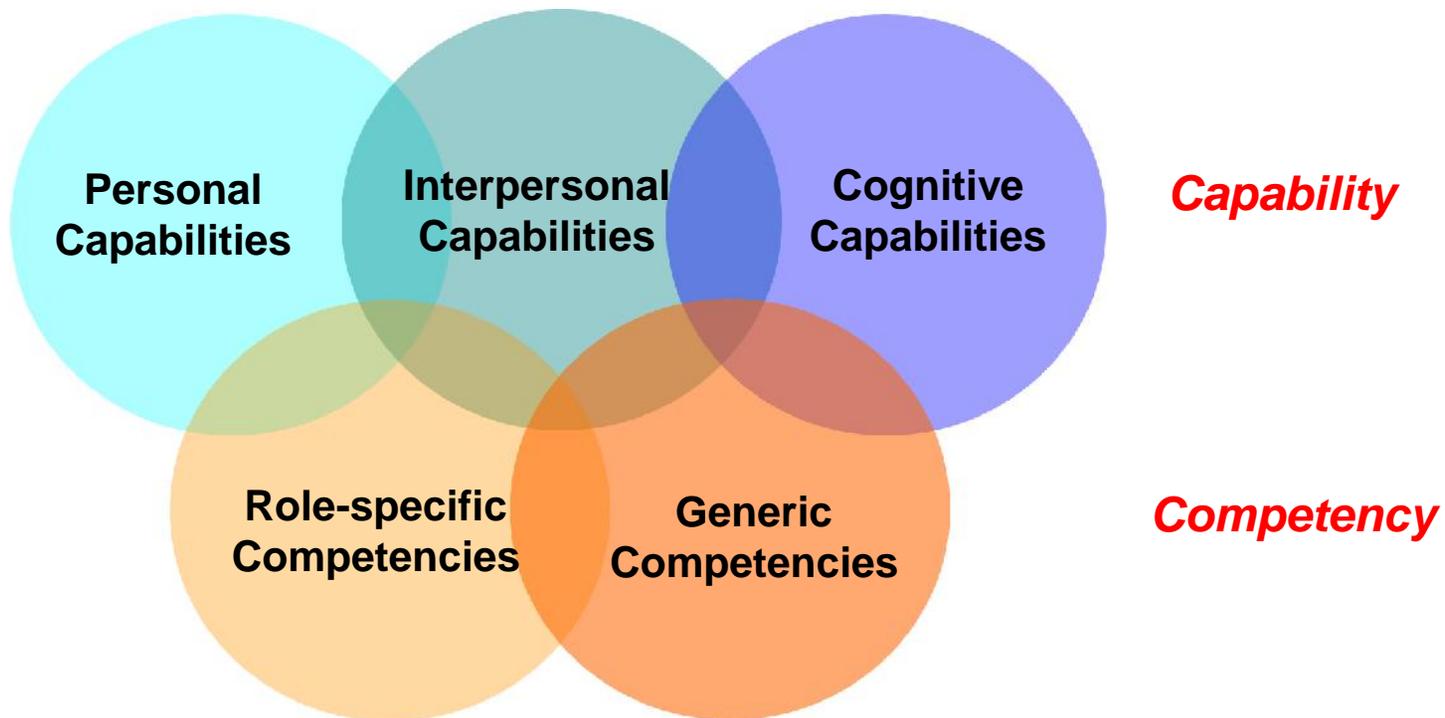
HE Leadership Capability Framework

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The capabilities that count for Heads of Program (Top 10 rank order)

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1. Understanding my personal strengths and limitations (P)
2. Being able to organise my work & manage time effectively (SK) (8)
3. Remaining calm under pressure or when things take go awry (P)
4. Having energy, passion and enthusiasm for L&T (P) (12)
5. Being transparent & honest in dealings with others (IP) (1) (1)
6. Empathising and working productively with staff and other key players from a wide range of backgrounds (IP) (3)
7. Admitting to and learning from my errors (P)
8. Being true to one's personal values and ethics (P) (2)
9. Making sense of and learning from experience (C)
10. Being willing to take a hard decision (P) (5) (6)

(HOS ranking that is significantly different from HOP)
(DVC/PVC ranking that is significantly different from HOP)



DVC/PVC Capabilities ranked much higher than HOPs or HOSs

- **Motivating others to achieve positive outcomes (IP) (3)**
- **Having a clear, justified & achievable direction (C) (4)**
- **Understanding how universities operate (SK) (5)**
- **Influencing people's behaviour & decisions in effective ways (IP) (7)**

Putting the capabilities into practice

Listen, link, leverage then lead

- with a menu & rationale
- Listen to resisters
- Listen to key players before a meeting
- Discuss first then confirm with an email

Leader as model

- Model the attributes of a change capable culture whenever possible
- Deft use of meetings

Leader as Teacher

- Peer group counts
- Link to successful solutions via tracking systems – in the same course and context
- Learn by doing under controlled conditions

Leader as Learner

- Strategic networking
- Use of your leadership network
- RATED CLASS A works for you as it does for staff & students

Learning Leadership

(rank order on effectiveness)

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1. Learning 'on the job'
2. Ad hoc conversations about work with people in similar roles
3. Informal mentoring and coaching
4. Participating in peer networks within the university
5. Completing a relevant tertiary qualification (13) (16)
6. Study of 'real life' workplace problems
7. Attending learning & teaching conferences (18) (18)
8. Participating in peer networks beyond the university
9. Undertaking self-guided reading on leadership
10. Participating in higher education leadership seminars

(HOS ranking that is significantly different from HOP)
(DVC/PVC ranking that is significantly different from HOP)



Effective leadership succession & selection

- This is best seen as being a process not an event
- Sharper & more explicitly complementary position descriptions
- Self-assess using this research – ‘Is this role a good fit for me?’
- Existing leaders identify people with potential using the top 10 capabilities for each role
- Secondments which follow best practice in using the practicum for learning
- Just-in-time, just-for-me gap learning
- Use the top capabilities for diagnosis, reflective learning and coaching when most challenged
- Mentors are carefully selected & trained in using the above
- Strong senior sponsorship for the system

Key lessons from this research

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- The focus now is on implementation
- Listen, link, leverage then lead
- Leader as model, teacher & learner
- Change capable leaders = change capable professionals, teachers and cultures
- Change is learning (and unlearning)
- What engages students in productive change (learning) engages staff and leaders
- Position descriptions, selection & succession planning to use the findings of this research

Change-capable universities = change-capable leaders

- Undefensive & responsive
- Evidence-based
- Outcomes focused
- Set priorities
- Can take a hard decision
- Clear who is responsible & accountable
- Acknowledge complementary role played by all staff
- Judicious use of bureaucracy to manage risk
- Effective use of meetings
- Transparent and collaborative – listen, link leverage, then lead
- Consensus around the data not around the table
- Strategically networked

What next?

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- Replicate the learning leaders study
- Develop a self-assessment tool for those considering applying for a L&T leadership role
- Develop 'lonely planet' guides x L&T role
- Set up a HOPNet
- Use the Learning Leaders findings to validate 360 degree leadership evaluations
- Validate P.D.'s for each L&T role against the findings
- Use the findings to give focus to leadership interviews
- Emphasise how all L&T leaders are models, teachers and learners
- See the 'Making it happen' section of the FLIPCurric site

Further reading

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- Fullan, M & Scott, G (2009) : *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education*, Wiley/Jossey-Bass, San Francisco
- Scott, G., Coates, H., & Anderson, M (2008): *Learning Leaders in Times of Change*, ALTC, Sydney
- Scott, G & McKeller, L (2012): *Leading professionals in ANZ tertiary education*, UWS, ATEM & L.H. Martin, Sydney
- Scott, G et al (2013): *Turnaround leadership for sustainability in higher education*, OLT, Sydney
- Scott, G (2017): *FLIPCurric – ‘Making it Happen’*