

# Learning Leaders *in times of change*

## *Academic Leadership Capabilities for Australian Higher Education*

Geoff Scott, Hamish Coates & Michelle Anderson

May 2008

University of Western Sydney and  
Australian Council for Educational Research



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# About this study

It is not as if we can avoid change, since it pursues us in every way. We might as well, then, make the best of it ... The answer is not in avoiding change, but in turning the tables by facing it head on. The new mindset is to exploit change before it victimises us ... We can learn to reject unwanted change more effectively, while at the same time becoming more effective at accomplishing desired improvements. Grappling with educational change in self-defeating ways has been the modal experience over the last thirty years.

Fullan, M (2007)

## Context & need for the study

This study, funded by Australia's ALTC for Learning & Teaching in Higher Education, has identified the capabilities that characterise effective academic leaders in a range of roles and has produced resources to develop and monitor these leadership capabilities. It has identified that the core focus for leadership in the current, highly volatile, operating context faced by our universities has to be on achieving effective change management and implementation.

The external pressures for change in higher education – radical change in many instances – are increasing not decreasing. Funding per capita from the public purse is down; competition is up; the pressure to create new sources of income has grown; institutions are more commercial; students are more numerous, diverse and forthright about getting value for the money paid; instances of litigation against universities are emerging; government scrutiny is increasing; and external quality audits are in place. Rapid developments in Communications and Information Technology (CIT) have made possible modes and approaches to learning unthought of thirty years ago.

What has unfolded in the world over the past 25 years is now calling into question whether the traditional concept of a 'university' is what is best suited to developing a nation's total social, intellectual and creative capital in the 21st century. It raises fundamental questions, therefore, about the extent to which a university must be a place where new knowledge is created and research occurs away from the mainstream; and where learning primarily is seen to involve transmission of



set content using a ‘one-size-fits-all’ model delivered in lecture theatres, tutorials and labs on a set timetable operated at the institution’s convenience over fixed semesters.

Such questions are not new. But what is new is the increased pressure to address them; pressures built up by the combined impact of a rapidly globalising economy; increased competition for students; the entry into the world economy of new international players like China and India; the development of the European Union, including a European Higher Education area; rapid population growth and global warming; and the continued, rapid developments in CIT already noted.

To remain viable, universities must build their capacity to respond promptly, positively and wisely to this interlaced combination of ‘change forces’<sup>1</sup>. As noted in a 2004 keynote address to the Australian Universities Quality Forum on effective change management in higher education (Scott, 2004), the motto now must be “good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas”. That is, universities and their leaders have to become particularly skilled at not only identifying what learning programs, research initiatives, engagement projects, structures, approaches, priorities, quality improvements and strategic developments consistent with their mission should be emphasised to keep up with the continuous movement in their operating context, but also at making sure these agreed changes are put into practice successfully and sustained.

As Vincent Tinto, professor and chair of the higher education program at Syracuse University, observed when speaking at the US National Symposium on Student Success at College & University in November 2006:

One might argue that we already have sufficient research on student success (at university) ... What is missing in our view is the ability to transform the knowledge that we have into practical knowledge.

Failed change in higher education has costs—not just economically but strategically, socially and psychologically. When enthusiastic university staff commit to a change project and that project fails they take the scars of that experience with them. Students and the country receive no benefit from failed change. Institutions that take on an essential reform project that founders suffer a loss of reputation and, in the current climate, this can lead to a loss of income and, as a consequence, closure of courses, schools or faculties with an associated risk of redundancies.

Sitting in the midst of this challenging and rapidly shifting environment are our university leaders. As one Deputy Vice-Chancellor recently observed:

Sitting between the IT revolution, the market and community responsiveness is a particularly uncertain space for our universities right now.

Another Pro Vice-Chancellor at one of the study’s national workshops noted:

I don’t think we have all really noticed how radically our focus, context, daily work and ways of thinking about higher education have changed over the past twenty years. It has just crept up on us—like the middle aged spread.

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<sup>1</sup> See Fullan, M (1993): *Change forces: probing the depths of educational reform*, London, Falmer; and Fullan, M (2003): *Change forces with a vengeance*, London, Falmer Press.

There is ample evidence of how critical the presence of effective and capable leaders is to workplace productivity, morale and making essential change work in our universities. This is because change does not just happen but must be led—and deftly. Leaders of learning and teaching in universities have a central role in ensuring that their institutions not only survive but thrive in the new trans-national, IT-enabled, volatile and competitive environment now faced. And with this has come a significant growth in the complexity and span of what they are expected to do.

Yet studies of how higher education leaders manage change along with their own learning and development are relatively rare compared, for example, with studies of how higher education students manage change and their learning and what sorts of environment and strategies optimise their engagement and retention. For example, Robinson et al. (2008:16) in a meta-analysis of studies of educational leadership observe:

... the fact that there are less than 30 published studies in English that have examined the links between leadership research and student outcomes indicates how radically disconnected leadership research is from the core business of teaching and learning (see also Robinson 2006 and Rowe 2007).

The studies that do exist have repeatedly identified how unsure learning and teaching leaders are about what they might best do to lead in such a context and ensure that essential change takes hold sustainably and consistently in daily practice.

Development work over the past twenty years across Australia and with higher education systems in Scandinavia, South Africa, New Zealand, South East Asia, Oman and Canada has repeatedly revealed that what our learning and teaching leaders want are practical, higher education specific and role-specific insights into what would be the best approach in taking ‘good ideas’ and making them work in ways that benefit both students and the university’s ‘bottom line’.

We have found that the selection and development processes for higher education leaders are often unrelated to what is necessary to negotiate the daily realities of their work, that the nature and focus of leadership development programs don’t always address the capabilities that count, and that the central role of university leaders in building a change capable culture is either unrecognised or misunderstood. As Debrowksi and Blake (2004: 2 & 6) have observed:

The translation of amateur academic leaders to effective professionals relies on the infrastructure and support which is integrated into the university setting (Middlehurst, 1993) ... While these are sound principles, the actual enactment of support for those engaged in teaching and learning may remain collegial and therefore ad hoc in nature for many universities (Orsmond & Stiles, 2002). We would argue that one reason for this is the inadequate delineation of what leadership entails for those supporting teaching and learning in universities ... the developmental needs of academic leaders should be regarded as a fundamental issue if universities are serious about improving their educational standards ... universities need to invest in academic development to enable tailored support at specific strategic levels.

At the same time there is increasing evidence that Australia is facing a significant higher education leadership succession challenge. This parallels, but is more acute than, the challenge facing the academic workforce as a whole (Coates et al. 2008). A large cohort of senior leaders – the so-called baby boomers – is about to depart. Yet many institutions report not having a coherent succession plan in place or a clear picture of what is needed to fill the gap in high-level expertise that will result from this departure. What is troubling is that this is a worldwide phenomenon. For example, at a recent (December 2007) meeting of the Vice-Presidents of Canada’s universities, succession planning

for leadership was identified as one of the most pressing challenges the Canadian HE System expects to face in the coming five years.

So, while the pool of potential leadership talent is decreasing, the urgency of putting in place change capable leaders is increasing.

Although there is a welter of writing on leadership in business and industry, much of it is neither empirical nor tested for its applicability to the distinctive operating environment of a university. As already noted, our review of the literature on higher education leadership in preparation for the current study generated only a modicum of empirical research and little that covered the full gambit of leadership roles in universities. Only limited insights are available on how leaders in universities shape and are shaped by the contexts and environments in which they now work. As one of the senior academics at the national workshops that reviewed the present study's results observed:

Leadership of learning and teaching in the higher education sector is a complex and under-explored concept. It is interpreted and practiced in multiple ways depending on the level and role within the organisation.

## Focus of the study

The current study explores and identifies productive ways to address the above issues and challenges. The approach has been to build upon a decade of studying professional capability, development and change leadership in a range of contexts—most recently in a study of more than 300 effective leaders in Australian school education (Scott, 2003).

The aims of the study have been to:

- profile academic leaders and their roles;
- clarify what 'leadership' means in an academic context;
- illuminate the daily realities, influences, challenges and most/least satisfying aspects of the wide range of learning and teaching roles in our universities;
- identify the perceived markers of effective performance in each role;
- identify the capabilities that leaders see as being most important for effective performance;
- identify the forms of support that may be of most/least assistance in developing these capabilities;
- determine key similarities and differences between roles; and
- compare the study's findings with the existing literature on higher education leadership and the outcomes of parallel studies in other educational contexts.

The focus has primarily been on formal leadership roles for learning and teaching in our universities. The specific roles studied have been: Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching); Dean; Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching); Head of School/Department; Head of Program; and Director (Learning and Teaching).

Some of these roles focus almost exclusively on learning and teaching (e.g. the relatively recent roles of PVC [Learning and Teaching] and A/Dean [Learning and Teaching]). Other, more long standing roles like Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Dean, Head of School or Head of Department focus not only on learning and teaching but often on research, engagement and a range of budget and staff performance matters. Some leadership roles (e.g. PVC or Director of L&T) have a pan-university

scope; others (e.g. Dean or Head of School) are more focused on particular portfolio responsibilities of the institution.

## **A partnership**

The project has been delivered through a two-year partnership between UWS, ACER and senior colleagues from some 20 Australian universities under the guidance of a National Steering Committee chaired by Professor Peter Booth, Senior DVC at The University of Technology, Sydney, and Chair of the Universities Australia DVC (A)'s group.

The partnership approach is somewhat distinctive in that not only was an online quantitative and qualitative survey undertaken with more than 500 experienced Learning and Teaching (L&T) leaders in 20 Australian universities – people from DVC to Head of Program – but also an extensive series of sector-wide workshops and a national forum were undertaken with a further 490 higher education leaders from Australian universities. Their express purpose was to test the veracity of the results and collectively identify their key implications for both individual academic leaders and their institutions. In addition, the same feedback process has been replicated in a series of workshops on the results with almost 100 leaders in South African and Canadian higher education and through benchmarking with parallel research being undertaken by the UK Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

## **Methodology**

The study undertook an extensive international literature review, an online survey (Appendix Two), and a series of national and international sector feedback workshops that tested the veracity of the results and identified their key implications.

As noted above, some 513 learning and teaching leaders from 20 Australian universities, occupying roles from Deputy Vice-Chancellor to Head of Program, completed the online survey; and nearly 500 leaders attended the national forum and workshops on the results, along with an additional 100 leaders at the international review workshops. The systematic use of sector-wide feedback on the results is comparatively distinctive and is an approach that is recommended for use in subsequent studies. It has ensured that the results are both valid and owned by those well positioned to action them, and that the key recommendations made in the report are authentic.

More extensive detail on the study's methodology is provided in Appendix One.

## **Structure of the Report**

The report commences with an Executive Summary. This section of the report gives a succinct, integrated picture of what the study has uncovered. It highlights the key findings, products and insights that have emerged, and lists a series of core recommendations for acting upon these findings in ways that will both help to address the leadership succession and capability crisis faced and secure Australian Higher Education during the challenging times that lie ahead. The recommendations made have been identified not only by the 513 leaders involved in the empirical phase of the study but also validated by the additional 600 higher education leaders from Australia and across the world who have evaluated the results.

The Executive Summary is followed by a series of chapters, which justify and explain the key findings and recommendations given in the Executive Summary. In each chapter patterns of similarity and difference in the responses to the online survey by the leaders in the range of learning and teaching leadership roles studied are given. Each chapter also brings together what the available empirical literature says on the issue being addressed, what the online survey revealed, and what the participants at the national and international workshops said. Links to parallel findings from other ALTC leadership projects are also noted where appropriate.

Chapter One focuses on understanding the nature of academic leadership in our universities, the people who undertake it, and the key concepts that underpin the study. In this Chapter the often misunderstood concepts of 'leadership' and 'management' along with 'capability' and 'competence' are clarified. This is followed by an exploration of the extent to which leadership in learning and teaching differs from leadership in research, business or the public sector. A profile of academic leaders in Australia is then presented and a range of emerging implications are identified. At the same time, the literature on each of these areas is reviewed. Finally, the conceptual framework for leadership capability in higher education which has guided and been tested in the study is presented.

Chapter Two looks at the current context and key challenges faced by our academic leaders. This aspect of the study has identified how broader social, political, economic, technological and demographic changes nationally and internationally over the past quarter of a century have triggered a set of higher education specific change forces that, in turn, have interacted with a set of local institutional and cultural factors.

The key point is that the factors outlined are intertwined and feed into and off each other; and the key implication is that they make the effective management of change and implementation a key imperative for universities and their leaders if these institutions are to not only survive but thrive in a new, more volatile operating context. This chapter sets the scene for Chapter Three.

Chapter Three shifts focus onto how our higher education leaders experience and respond to the change pressures, context, influences and challenges identified in Chapter Two. First, the insider's experience of leading in such a context is identified using the analogies that the 513 leaders involved in the study developed to describe what their daily world is now like. The major areas of daily focus in each role are identified, along with their major satisfactions and challenges. Finally, the indicators our leaders use to judge that they are delivering their role effectively in such a context are discussed. This chapter identifies some important areas of misalignment between titles, roles, performance management and position descriptions on the one hand and the daily realities of each university leadership role on the other.

Chapter Four identifies the capabilities and strategies that count most in addressing the key challenges and areas of focus identified in earlier chapters for each of the higher education leadership roles studied.

The findings align with studies of successful leaders in other sectors of education and of successful graduates in nine professions. In particular, a specific set of capabilities around personal and interpersonal emotional intelligence, along with a contingent and diagnostic way of thinking emerge as being critical to effective role delivery across all of the leadership positions studied.

A key implication of this finding is that the capability profiles and methods used to identify, select and evaluate leaders may need to be significantly revised. There are also important implications for what should be given focus in academic leadership development programs.

In Chapter Five the question of how our higher education leaders prefer to learn and develop their capabilities is explored. The key findings here confirm that the same flexible, responsive, role-specific, practice-oriented and just-in-time, just-for-me learning methods that are being advocated for use to engage higher education students in productive learning and retain them apply just as well to assisting the learning and development of academic leaders. This has important implications for a radical revision of current, workshop-based approaches to leadership training in higher education. It also indicates that, if we want our learning and teaching leaders to be strong advocates for the new approaches to higher education learning now being advocated, they need to have experienced the benefits of what is intended for themselves.

Chapter Six brings together the key findings from each of the above chapters into an integrated picture. It also identifies what participants at the sector workshops said they intend to do to act on the study's findings and summarises the key recommendations that have emerged from the extensive feedback given on them. The key products generated by the study are also identified.

The Appendices provide the more technical and detailed data and analyses that underpin the conclusions drawn. Appendix Two includes a copy of the online survey.

It is anticipated that the report will be of relevance to everyone in a university who is confronted by a call or an opportunity for change and who wants their efforts to make a difference—from members of governing boards, Vice-chancellors, Provosts, Presidents and other university executives to Deans, Heads of School or Department, Program Coordinators and university administrative and service directors. It also carries important, practical policy messages for public interest groups, government departments and higher education agencies.



# Executive Summary

This study has uncovered an interlocked story:

## Change matters

The study has shown how the broader societal change forces that have unfolded over the past quarter century have generated a set of higher education specific pressures on universities to change, which, in turn, are testing the extent to which these institutions and their leaders are ‘change capable’.

It has found that, currently, the most important ‘change forces’ pressing academic leaders are (in rank order) decreased government funding, growing pressure to generate new income, balancing work and family life, managing the pressures for continuous change, having to deal with slow and unresponsive administrative processes, finding and retaining high-quality staff, and increased government reporting and scrutiny.

In spite of these challenges there is clear evidence of strong commitment to the ‘moral purpose’ and mission of higher education held by academic leaders.

The study has identified that responding promptly and wisely to these ‘change forces’ by not only formulating high-quality responses but making them work consistently and effectively in practice is the central challenge faced by our universities and their leaders in the highly volatile environment they now face. It has found that doing this is critical if institutions wish to remain not only financially viable but also to continue to contribute to the total social, intellectual, cultural, and creative capital of Australia.

## Change does not just happen—it must be led, and led deftly

The study has identified how our higher education leaders play a critical role in helping their institutions maintain quality and manage continuous change. It has found that what they need to know and be able to do is changing rapidly—that they need to be deft not only at management of



current operations but at successfully leading their institutions into new directions. Effective higher education leaders not only take an active role in making specific changes happen by engaging people in the process of personal and institutional change and improvement; they also help reshape the operating context of their institutions to make them less change averse, more efficient and agile, and more change capable. In this regard it is the interaction between sound, linked leadership and a directly aligned, agile, efficient and supportive operating context and culture that counts.

## **Change is a complex learning (and unlearning) process for all concerned**

The study has highlighted that formulating and implementing desired change is not an event but a complex learning and unlearning process for all concerned. It is a learning process because, if something new has to be implemented, those who are to deliver it – for example, administrative and academic staff – have to **do** something new. To do something new requires them to **learn** a ‘gap’ in their expertise. Such learning for change does not just happen—it must be directly assisted and deftly led.

And it is here that the study has identified a critical role for our universities’ learning and teaching leaders. The approach, attitude and interpersonal strategies found to be most effective in helping staff make a desired change work closely with those used by the most successful higher educators with their students. This insight is important because it implies that the most effective leaders not only help their staff engage with and learn how to do necessary change, but they also set up an efficient and supportive environment that fosters productive engagement in such learning. Just as the informal as well as the formal elements of interacting with others can help or hinder student learning, so too relationships and context count for staff as they seek to respond to and learn how to achieve improvements in their daily work.

It is in this way that the study has found that individual capabilities for leadership on the one hand and reshaping the context of higher education to be more change capable and less change averse on the other are interlocked. And it has shown how personal capabilities and values can both model and help build organisational capabilities and values.

## **Context counts: making room to lead**

The study has identified that many leaders find they have ‘no room to lead’. That, for example, they are so busy complying with bureaucratic and reporting procedures that do not demonstrably add value to achieving the core purposes of their roles; they are so occupied by dealing with complaints arising from faulty systems or miscommunication; so involved in responding to unexpected events or attending meetings that are poorly formulated, chaired, or which have no outcome; that they have little time left to lead or to think and operate strategically.

Similarly, such cultural factors can create conditions where line staff find they have ‘no room to teach’ or to learn how to make desired changes work.

However, there is ample evidence in our research that the universities that are adapting successfully to the rapidly changing operating environment and are achieving productive outcomes are addressing such issues head on—and their leaders are explicitly aware of how they are doing it.

This finding aligns well with studies of effective leadership in other contexts. As Wheeler et al. (2007) conclude in their review of research on effective approaches to strategic leadership in the most successful corporations:

... the effectiveness of leaders depends, more than is generally realized, on the context around them. Over time, the leader's capability is shaped by the top team's quality, and by the capabilities of the full organization. These can either provide invaluable support for the changes a leader wants to make or render those changes impossible. Hence the best leaders pay a great deal of attention to the design of the elements around them.

## **The academic leadership succession crisis**

The study has confirmed that many universities are confronted by a leadership succession crisis and are eager to identify how best to address it. This study provides a range of material and suggested strategies with which to formulate a sound response.

It does this by identifying the optimum focus for each academic leadership role – from DVC to Head of Program – and the indicators that experienced leaders in each role apply to judge that they are performing effectively. It has identified the key capabilities these experienced leaders say count most in successfully handling the challenges of leadership and change faced in each role. And it has checked that these self-report findings align with the available research from other sources and has tested their veracity in the national workshops.

Consistent with the study's underlying conceptual model and the findings from a wide range of studies in other contexts, a particular set of personal and social aspects of emotional intelligence and a contingent and diagnostic way of thinking, which are critical to successful leadership in higher education, have been identified. The study has confirmed that a high level of up-to-date knowledge about effective learning and teaching in higher education, about how universities work and their efficient organisation, is necessary but it is not sufficient for effective leadership of the area.

## **The capabilities that count for effective academic leadership**

The study has validated empirically the capabilities that count by showing statistically the key ones identified in earlier studies retained their importance across all of the leadership roles studied. It has then identified their relative importance by role and has produced a statistically determined and validated set of subscales for higher education leadership. It has revealed the critical role of emotional intelligence – both personal and interpersonal – and a contingent and diagnostic way of thinking in effective leadership for learning and teaching across all of the roles studied.

Specifically, the study has demonstrated that effective leaders of learning and teaching in Australian higher education not only possess up-to-date knowledge and skills on the area, they are also self-aware, decisive, committed, able to empathise with and influence a wide diversity of people, are cognitively flexible, and are particularly deft at diagnosis and strategy formation. It has also shown that, although this pattern runs across all of the roles studied, the more senior a leader becomes the more developed and integrated these capabilities have to be.

It has shown that these capabilities are most tested when things go wrong, when the unexpected happens and when what is planned is not working out in the ways anticipated. Equally, however, it has found that, in the relatively unique context and culture of a university, one's capability as a leader

can be just as tested when confronted with complacency, cynicism, stonewalling, ‘white-anting’, needless bureaucracy or disengagement.

## **The focus of academic leadership**

The study has identified a number of areas of focus in academic leadership that cut across the majority of leadership positions studied. These include: policy formation, managing relationships, working with challenging staff, involvement in various aspects of planning, and attending meetings.

It has also identified areas of specific emphasis in particular roles that serve to complement the focus of other roles. For example, people in roles like Head of Program report giving far more focus to working directly with students, program development and implementation than other leadership roles; Deans and Heads of School report giving particular focus to budget management, staff management, external relations and identifying new opportunities; DVCs & PVCs emphasise strategy formation and developing organisational processes; Associate Deans report a focus on reviewing teaching activities; and Directors of L&T see networking as an important component of their role.

The study has also revealed that, while common titles for positions are used, some of these (e.g. ‘Pro Vice-Chancellor’ or ‘Associate Dean’) have widely varying meanings and accountabilities across the sector. This has implications for the mobility and recognition of our learning and teaching leaders. The study has also found a clear distinction between those roles (e.g. DVC, Dean and Head of School) that control resources and others that typically do not (e.g. PVC and Associate Dean). In the latter case people in these roles report having to develop the skills of ‘leading through influence’ and leveraging collegiality to engage staff in necessary change.

## **Judging effectiveness as an academic leader**

The top five ranking indicators that the 513 leaders report using to judge the effectiveness of their own performance are: achieving high-quality graduate outcomes, successful implementation of new initiatives, producing significant improvements in learning and teaching quality, establishing a collegial working environment, and delivering agreed tasks on time and to specification. The focus in these indicators is primarily, therefore, on measures associated with outcomes, implementation and impact more than on inputs (like plans produced, restructures completed, resources allocated, or reviews held). They integrate the effectiveness indicators associated with both transformational and instructional leadership identified in other settings (see, for example, Robinson et al. 2008).

Across all roles, being able to implement initiatives successfully and sustainably is seen to be a critical factor for effective leadership. This, for our respondents, includes being able to bring innovative policies and practices into action on time and to specification, and leading successful team-based projects that demonstrably improve student outcomes. The quantitative and qualitative data from the study and the sector workshops showed consistently that delivering on this critical requirement requires leaders who are ‘change savvy’ and who adopt many of the same perspectives and strategies as the highest ranking teachers in universities.

## Effective approaches to the development of academic leaders

The study has identified what needs to be done to make the support given to university leaders more engaging and productive as they seek to learn their role and develop their leadership capabilities.

It has found that exactly the same flexible, responsive, active, problem-based, just-in-time, just-for-me learning methods found to engage university students in productive learning, in studies like those using *CEQuery* (Scott 2006)<sup>2</sup>, is what leaders report they want. The challenge of how to manage and support the provision of such programs remains.

The leaders in this study expressed an overwhelming preference for role-specific, practice-based, peer-supported and self-managed learning, rather than the more usual one-off, formal and generic workshop-based types of professional learning. Informal mentoring was identified by both male and female leaders across all of the roles studied as an effective method of learning leadership, especially if guided by a role-focused diagnostic framework like that validated in the current study—a framework which enables leaders to make sense of their work and to identify areas of good practice and those requiring improvement. It is particularly valued prior to and early in an appointment, and especially by Heads of School and Program.

The role of Head of School (or Dean in a smaller university) has emerged as being a particularly tricky one—as people in such positions find themselves being held directly responsible for budget outcomes, staff performance, meeting student load targets and productivity whilst having, at the same time, to manage both up and down. The most common analogy used by the 150 Heads of School involved in the current study was that it felt like being “the meat in the sandwich”.

The role least recognised for its critical role as the final arbiter of whether a desired change is actually taken up and actioned locally is that of Head of Program. If these people do not engage then they will not focus and assist their staff to learn how to make the desired change work in practice. The development of Heads of Programs Networks led by a PVC (Learning and Teaching) and their early involvement in the learning and teaching change process to test the relevance, feasibility and clarity of what is being proposed was widely recommended in the study’s review workshops.

It has become very clear, in analysing the extensive quantitative and qualitative data generated by the study, that current approaches to leadership development in higher education need to be radically reconceptualised. If this is done there will be multiple benefits—learning leaders will have experienced approaches known to engage their students first hand, and they will be assisted to fill gaps in their own expertise using the role-specific leadership capability framework and practical knowledge validated by the study.

The study has produced a wide range of role-specific analyses to ensure that leadership development programs are as relevant as possible. It has identified the key aspects of each leadership role that incumbents say are critical, it has identified the capabilities that need to be developed to deliver them, and it has generated an extensive set of role-specific case studies that identify the key problems and challenges leaders in particular leadership positions can expect to encounter, along with the practical strategies these leaders have found work best to resolve them. This role-specific material on key leadership ‘hot spots’ and the practical suggestions on how they might best be addressed is precisely what our leaders have said is missing in many of the leadership programs they currently experience.

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<sup>2</sup> This study analysed more than 280,000 ‘best aspect’ and ‘needs improvement’ comments written on the national course experience questionnaire.

Specifically, the study has identified and tested at its review workshops how one might best approach the common challenges of academic leadership. It has affirmed a set of approaches that show what the findings on the capabilities that count for effective performance look like in daily practice.

These include adopting tactics like the following:

- Listen, link and lead—in that order. Listen first to what others have to say is the most relevant and feasible way to address a learning and teaching issue that requires attention but always with a ‘menu’ of proven options; then link what has been said into a practical, owned, achievable way of acting on the chosen option; finally lead the implementation of the change in ways consistent with the findings of the study.
- Listen in particular to ‘resistors’. They can identify many of the ‘trip-wires’ that must be overcome. Listening to ‘resistors’ is also a positive way to handle disengagement.
- Before holding a public meeting on any contentious issue, canvass the full range of perspectives on it in advance.
- Be accessible to staff but within explicit and agreed parameters.
- Remain calm when things go wrong, avoid engaging in blame by focusing on the problem not the individual.
- Confirm any agreed area for action with the people concerned by email, after discussing what is to be done personally with them.
- Set up agreed and clear expectations of what needs to be done, by whom, with what support and against what tests at the outset; then refer back to this as implementation proceeds—in the same way that we manage expectations about assessment and learning with our students.
- Recognise that all change is a learning process and that what motivates students to engage with change (learning) is exactly what will motivate staff.
- Keep in mind that context and culture count; that change, like learning, is a profoundly social experience, and that one’s peer group is an important source of motivation (or de-motivation) and support.
- Be particularly careful in calling meetings and when one is called make sure it is carefully chaired with a sharply formulated agenda and an evidence-based, action focus; give particular attention to following up at the outset of each subsequent meeting precisely what was achieved in practical terms with the agreed actions from the previous one.
- Always model the values and approaches you want others to adopt in your own behaviour – ‘practice what you preach’.
- Tell staff what really counts, what the key focus for change is in their area, why it is necessary, and what the important role that they are to play in actioning it is.

Finally, one of the key things to emerge from the national and international workshops on the study’s findings is how supportive it is to realise that what one thought were unique dilemmas and challenges are, in fact, shared by so many others in the same role. Leaders at these workshops repeatedly reported how validated and encouraged they felt upon hearing that they were ‘not alone’ and how helpful it was to have a framework and some national empirical data within which to locate and make sense of their individual experiences.

## Recommendations

On the basis of feedback from the national and international workshops on the findings of this study and from the project's national steering committee it is recommended that:

1. Universities build the key findings concerning the priority areas of focus in each learning and teaching leadership role, along with the performance indicators and the capabilities identified as counting most for effective performance, into a revised and complementary set of leadership position descriptions, succession plans, selection procedures, development processes and performance management systems for each of the roles studied.
2. Cost-effective ways of assessing academic leadership potential and the capabilities that count, which go beyond standard interview selection procedures and the use of referees' reports, be explored in more detail. This would include investigating the use of a proposed online, role-specific Leadership Evaluation & Development Resource (LEADR) based on the findings of the current study.
3. The items in currently used, generic 360-degree performance systems for academic leaders be checked for validity and relative importance against the study's findings and that this process be differentiated by role.
4. Institutions and government continue to highlight the importance of learning and teaching in order to attract a new generation of leaders to this critical role as the current, older generation of leaders leaves the system; and that the moral and financial importance of effective leadership of learning and teaching in universities to the individuals, surrounding communities and the country be emphasised.
5. Leadership development and learning programs be reviewed and aligned with the findings of the study concerning how and what academic leaders prefer to learn, and that the fact that this is identical to the way in which higher education students wish to learn be made explicit. Where possible, programs should be underpinned by evidence-based insights into effective professional practice in the specific leadership roles involved. In doing this it is recommended that universities investigate ways of setting up learning networks for people in the same role, in particular Heads of School, A/Deans and Heads of Program.
6. The key lessons from research on effective change implementation in higher education be part of every orientation and development program for learning and teaching leadership.
7. Further research be undertaken on:
  - a. The profile of Australia's academic leaders;
  - b. The nature and impact of informal leadership in Learning and Teaching;
  - c. The similarities and differences between the roles of learning and teaching leaders and those in other roles—for example, leaders of research, university engagement and administrative services;
  - d. Leadership teams that have specifically achieved significant improvements in student outcomes, along the lines already used in studies of school effectiveness.
8. Universities Australia develop comprehensive, publicly available databases of senior leaders, with appropriate defining information (i.e. variations by role).

## Products

The study has produced:

1. A validated capability framework for effective leadership in higher education. This includes an empirically and statistically determined set of higher education leadership capability domains and subscales.
2. A functional prototype of an online tool to enable future leaders in each role to complete the same survey as the 513 participants in the current study and compare their responses with these 'fellow travellers'.
3. A set of role-specific case studies and proven methods for handling the key challenges identified for each role.
4. A mechanism to revise not only leadership selection but its development in universities.
5. A set of quality checkpoints for ensuring academic leadership learning programs are productive and engaging.
6. A set of checkpoints for shaping and developing a change capable university culture, which bring together the study's key findings on this issue (Appendix Three).
7. A set of slides summarising the study's results, which have been field-tested nationally and internationally for clarity and relevance.
8. A tested methodology for efficiently gaining extensive sector feedback on and engagement with the outcomes of such studies.

It is important to re-emphasise that the findings, implications and recommendations outlined above were not developed by the study team alone but in a focused partnership with around 1000 higher education leaders from around the world. Many of those who have participated in the study's workshops on the findings are already actioning the recommendations that have emerged. Others are feeding in further refinements of the insights and strategies generated.

It is in this way that action on the results has already commenced and is being continuously tested and refined. It is very important that follow-up monitoring is undertaken to ensure that the knowledge and resources produced in this study are being consistently and effectively used to support a change in leadership practice.

What now follows gives more specific detail on how the above insights were developed, what has been found, what justifies the recommendations made and the key suggestions on how they might best be implemented.

