

Stepping up to Leadership in Higher Education^{*}

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Abstract

Leadership in Higher Education is as yet an under-researched topic but one which is clearly coming to the forefront in current higher education literature. Universities are under as much pressure as other public funded entities to change and adapt to the challenges we face in the 21st century. An important aspect of that change is to examine our conceptions of leadership and our identities as leaders and ask ourselves how we might make a stronger and more explicit contribution to developing the leaders of the future. On the one hand universities are charged with becoming more bureaucratic, more managerial with institutional leaders perhaps overly focused on performativity and revenue generation. On the other hand there are growing expectations of higher education to contribute more to society by strengthening its role in building leadership capacity and capability. This article explores different interpretations, viewpoints and epistemological approaches to leadership and leadership development and challenges readers to take more responsibility for engaging with the leadership literature and blending the scholarship of leadership and the scholarship of learning and teaching.

Keywords: Higher education, leadership, engagement, scholarship of leadership.

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Introduction

Leading and learning are indispensable to each other (JFK)

The intention of this article is to promote wider interest in the complexity of the concept of leadership in higher education in the 21st century and to explore ways in which higher education institutions can develop a widely distributed leadership culture.

The article will emphasise key factors that relate to the urgency for higher education to play a stronger role in developing graduates as the leaders of the future and will offer frameworks and models for academic leadership capacity and capability building as a core aspect of organisational mission in higher education. A brief case study of a 'ladder to leadership' academic development strategy in action at the University of Auckland will also be presented.

For some years now, certainly since the onset of the Global Economic Crisis, and the widespread perception that poor leadership led to the crisis, there have been calls for a new leadership, a leadership for the 21st century. As a consequence "leadership" is a popular topic for discussion, dialogue and research locally and globally, in business and in public service, in complex organisations and small enterprises. That insights and research on leadership appear to be increasing exponentially is evident from even the most cursory overview of the leadership literature available, which ranges from the anecdotal, inspirational and top tips to the scholarly outputs from many different disciplines and organisations. One might say there is an avalanche of anxiety about leadership in local and in global terms.

Higher Education is not immune to this call for more or better leadership. The university is a place of academic inquiry with the fundamental aim of promoting human welfare by intellectual and educational means (Maxwell, 2008 p3). We might ask what role higher

education plays in building leadership capability and capacity for the future. What role does it play in developing the leaders of the future as an integral aspect of the university curriculum in its broadest sense?

In the current climate of austerity impacting on much of the Western world, there is a tension between university leaders leading for fiscal responsibility and security and leading the way in academic and collegial pursuits that maintain social integrity. As Barnett (2011) suggests, a consequence of the ever shifting milieu for universities has been a shift to the 'bureaucratic university'. We live in a '*performative*' environment where everything is managed, where administrative staff outnumber academic staff (Barnett, 2011). Clearly, sound business practices are essential to the university achieving its mission, but too much focus on the dollar leads some to ask if we are in the business of higher education or in the higher education business (Lederman, 2009). Successful organisations require good management practices but also good leadership. Good management should not be considered to equate with good leadership and it is not axiomatic that good managers are good leaders.

Today the university has to manage its way through societal shifts not within its control. Globalisation, internationalisation, widened access, the knowledge explosion, the implications of shifting student demographics, changes in means of curriculum design and delivery and the increasing use of new technologies are all impacting on the business of higher education (Gordon, 2010). Universities also have a complex array of stakeholder needs to satisfy, as well as compliance procedures imposed upon them as part of the canon of performance measurements beloved of government departments.

Despite the outpouring of books and articles on leadership, there is no general theory of leadership for the past, present or future that can be adapted, modified and implemented into higher education. If we want to conceive of the future of leadership in higher education, we need to traverse the current literature on the topic, ask

challenging questions about the terms, 'lead', 'leader', 'leadership' and test the applicability of our responses within the cradle of academia. We may not find the answers but in the seeking we can at least educate ourselves on the complex concept of leadership in the academy.

Exploring Leadership in Higher Education

“When you become a leader, success is all about growing others” (Jack Welch)

It is surprising perhaps, given the complex nature of universities that leadership in higher education is a relatively under-researched topic, notwithstanding the groundbreaking research reported by MacFarlane in his recent book *Intellectual Leadership: Reviewing the Role of the University Professor* (2012). MacFarlane concludes in his meticulously researched book that the intellectual leadership that (should) underpin(s) a University and hence a university education, has been replaced by a culture of managerialism, primarily concerned with the bottom line, the dollar value of every staff member and every student. In offering a framework for leadership in higher education, MacFarlane embraces the importance of values based leadership (MacFarlane, 2012) and comes close to articulating the same leadership values as espoused by some of the world's most successful business leaders, as being critical to underpinning a renewed and refreshed conception of the leadership role of the university professor.

In his call for debate and dialogue on the future university and the future of the university, Barnett suggests *that a task of university leadership is that of infusing a university with energy, with spirit* (Barnett 2011 p153). Good leadership also requires that leaders live the values so often espoused in institutional Mission Statements.

A recent scandal involving a university professor in a prestigious university in Australia, who was also a government advisor on school level education, sending emails which were racist in content and tone and highly insulting towards the indigenous population

of Australia and about ethnic minority students, is but one example of a high ranking academic abdicating his responsibilities as a 'leader' (New Matilda, 2014). On the one hand regarding this well publicised scandal, we may put forward the notion of 'one bad apple' not being representative of behavioural norms across the institution. However, the emails were apparently read by many staff across the university including by some in senior management positions. Presumably this behaviour would have continued had the emails not been leaked to an Australian online magazine. We need to ask why it is that most of the recipients considered such behaviour to be acceptable. Were the institutional leaders taking their leadership responsibilities seriously?

There is ample anecdotal evidence of such crass lapses of leadership within higher education institutions. If we don't question our own behaviours and the influence of these behaviours on our student populations, we cannot lay claim to the university as '*a place of academic inquiry with the fundamental aim of promoting human welfare by intellectual and educational means*' (Maxwell, 2008 p3) and we cannot lay claim to be educating the leaders of the future.

The sheer burden of responsibilities for today's university renders it problematic to offer a simple or single theory or framework of leadership for higher education. But we need to do more than talk about or write about leadership, we need to take a meaningful approach to actively and deliberately build leadership capacity and capability across our institutions. We can and do often make the argument that leadership in higher education is a special case and that most leadership models and frameworks don't fit an academic environment. Even if that is the case, it may be time for us to take the reins and establish frameworks ourselves that do work within such a highly heterogeneous environment. There is much to be gained from examining interpretations of and epistemological approaches to leadership to enable us to develop models and frameworks that align with the complex domains that exist within

today's university.

A university comprises many components, including faculties, schools, departments, research centres and specialist centres. Through its staff, it is highly networked and engaged at local, national and international levels. There is a multitude of projects in research, in learning and teaching and in service. There are multiple opportunities for exercising effective leadership, which suggests that the university comprises and embraces many leaders, but much of that leadership is 'silent', invisible, assumed. By its nature a university operates within a highly distributed leadership framework but it is often a flawed model because little or no attention is paid to developing the leadership capabilities of individuals with responsibilities to lead, be a leader and show leadership. Leaders and leadership can be accidental in some cases, individuals chosen, not necessarily for their leadership capabilities, but for their knowledge and expertise. Perhaps it is time to be more explicit about what we mean by leadership within and across the multiple contexts within higher education, be more explicit about our definitions and interpretations of leadership and leading.

Leadership Frameworks

The key to successful leadership is influence not authority (K.H. Blanchard)

The current leadership literature is vast and perhaps it is not surprising that academics dealing with their daily business within their discipline or domain of practice are not accessing this literature. However, academic developers can and should be taking a lead in supporting leadership capability building across institutions and to do this effectively we must take more responsibility for engaging with the leadership literature and blending the scholarship of leadership and the scholarship of learning and teaching. We must also take seriously our own responsibilities as leaders.

Insights into how we might interpret leadership within different contexts and environments come from many different sources and thus it is not possible within a single article to explore in any depth the multitude of offerings. It is clear however that the topic of higher education leadership has come to the fore in recent times. The theme of this volume of the AISHE Journal is but one indication. The work of MacFarlane (2012) and Barnett (2011) give further credence to a growing sense of leadership as an integral aspect of our identity as scholars. In the Southern Hemisphere, the growing importance of Higher Education Leadership is highlighted through for example the Special Volume of the highly esteemed Higher Education Research and Development Journal entitled *Leading the Academy: defining the future of leadership in higher education* (HERD, 2013), and the work of Fullan and Scott in their recent book *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education* (2009).

Fullan and Scott interpret the purpose of higher education as: *'not being to impart knowledge or even to develop critical thinking as an end in itself but to help students make judgements based on a combination of analytic insight and responsible reasoning applied to typical intractable problems that they and others inevitably face in real life'* (Fullan and Scott, 2009 p149). Through the use of compelling international data, Michael Fullan and Geoff Scott build a comprehensive argument for why change is needed in higher education, and detail a new agenda that uses 'change knowledge' to guide learning and improvement. These renowned scholars are proposing a *turnaround* for universities. In their thesis on the idea of the university, they propose: *'a more integrated conception of the role of knowledge that combines collaborative engagement with real world issues, analysis and application; learning and teaching at the very heart of the triumvirate of research, teaching and service; turning inquiry on itself to establish quality processes, data and implementation; building leadership capacity based on theory and knowledge'* (p43).

In a similar vein of thinking, in their Handbook for Executive Leadership of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (McInnis, Ramsden and Maconachie, 2012) affirm that robust leadership is required to inspire, influence and enable colleagues including deans, associate deans and heads of school who have operational responsibility for providing an excellent student experience. In turn we require these leaders to inspire and influence faculty to remember their role as role models to their students. McInnis *et al* (2012) put forward five principles for action for building a culture of leadership in learning and teaching:

- (1) Shape the Strategic Vision – ensuring it makes sense to everyone, faculty, students, administrators and support staff
- (2) Inspire and Enable Excellence –promoting institution wide commitment to excellence in student learning outcomes and learning experience
- (3) Devolve Leadership of Learning and Teaching – encouraging and supporting wide ownership and comprehensive engagement of staff and students with the vision and its implementation
- (4) Reward, Recognise and Develop Teaching – explicitly reward teaching – and outstanding teaching in particular –as a core component of academic work
- (5) Involve Students – increasing the involvement of students to enhance engagement and acknowledging students as active partners and change agents in the learning experience

The Handbook, sponsored by the Office for Learning and Teaching (Australia) is clearly targeted to the Senior Executive of universities but should make for compelling reading for everyone involved in the learning and teaching enterprise. The overarching theme of the handbook is leadership in higher education, with a particular focus on learning and teaching, providing insights into what these actions mean in practice and in

addition, body of evidence underpinning the principles. Examples and case studies from universities which have applied these principles are also offered. As with the work of Fullan and Scott, McInnis *et al* (2012) put learning and teaching at the heart of the leadership capacity and capability building strategy.

In the UK, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE) is also playing a strong role in promoting commitment to leadership capacity building in higher education. In their recent book *Engaging Leaders: the Challenge of Inspiring Collective Commitment in Universities* Gentle and Forman (2014) are explicit about the depth of the challenge to inspire commitment to leadership across HE institutions. It is well known that academics have not always been demonstrably interested in how they were led (see for example Bryman, 2007 and Gentle and Forman 2014). However, the act of setting up a Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (UK) in 2004 is in itself an indication that government considers leadership in HE to be important!

In *Engaging Leaders* Gentle and Forman (2014) offer a narrative of change that not only spells out why universities need to work differently, but also takes the reader through clear practical steps which any practising leader at any level can take to build a professional, 'leaderly' culture that is collaborative and engaging. This groundbreaking work provides the underpinning research and scholarship relating to leadership and pragmatic actions that can be taken by academic staff at all levels across an institution.

A point to which many commentators will attest, there is a multitude of interpretations and definitions of leadership. To take a brief look at some of the current highly rated leadership literature can give us new ways of thinking about leadership which might resonate with our complex and complicated environment. Donna Ladkin for example, in her recent book *Rethinking Leadership: A New Look at Old Leadership Questions* (2012) applies a philosophical lens to the concept of leadership and invites us to rethink 'leadership' as a collective process, not reducible to 'the leader'. She poses the questions 'What kind of phenomenon is leadership? Is it a whole, a piece or a moment?' She argues that leadership is

a relational phenomenon. It cannot exist without people who are in some way identified as leaders and other people who are identified as people who they will lead. Neither can leadership exist outside of a particular community or organizational culture or history. Therefore, she argues, rather than being a “whole”, leadership can best be described as a “*moment of social relations*” (p26). Ladkin poses questions about the relationship between leaders and followers in the leadership dynamic, for example, what happens in a particular context in terms of the way people understand that context? She suggests that in order to be effective a leader needs to have the courage to try different things. Sometimes what is required of a leader is *vision*, in other contexts being able to have a perspective on what is happening in the here and now is more important. Ladkin’s premise is that the relationship between leaders and followers, or those being led, is fluid and dynamic, context dependent. She encourages a new look at old leadership questions and a relinquishing of old assumptions about leadership. Ladkin departs from mainstream views on leadership and provides new insights into the complexities, meanings and dynamics of leadership and workplace relations. Her interpretation of leadership has much to commend it and it may resonate with our distributed leadership model which itself can be fluid depending on context.

In a very different framing of leadership Peter Drucker, a legendary management consultant and author of almost 40 books on effective leadership, management, innovation and entrepreneurship suggests that leadership is not dissimilar to a marketing job! While primarily relating his work to business leaders and business success, Drucker viewed knowledge workers as partners in the organization and ‘*as partners they cannot be simply ordered around or managed – they must be led, and this integrates persuasion with strategic thinking, segmentation, differentiation and many other elements of marketing*’ (Cohen, 2013 p235). In common with other business commentators, Drucker sees the setting of a clear vision as being a key role of leaders. As opposed to a view of marketing as manipulation and trickery, what Drucker’s work might mean for higher education is that by presenting a clear vision rich in values, a vision which is

visible and explicit, university leaders could pick up on the challenge of marketing this overarching vision in order to compete with the discipline loyalties and obsessions of faculty. Drucker's emphasis on *vision* is common to all leadership frameworks, and much of his work on approaches to leadership is applicable not just to whole organisations but also to the different levels and strands of leadership required in the Higher Education enterprise.

There are other leadership frameworks which 'speak' to higher education such as R.K. Greenleaf's concept of '*servant leadership*' (Greenleaf,1970) whereby the servant leader is servant *first* as opposed to *leader* first. A servant leader focuses primarily on the growth and wellbeing of people and communities to which they belong. On the other hand some leaders may show a tendency to assuage a need for authority and power rather than seeing their role as to empower others. Greenleaf's essay has been much studied and in his recent book *Servant Leaders for Higher Education: Principles and Practice* Daniel Wheeler (2012) provides ten principles of servant leadership and how these principles apply to common issues faced in departments, Faculties and institutions of higher education.

What becomes clear from this brief introduction into some of the current discourse relating to leadership in higher education is that leadership is not invested in a single 'heroic' leader, rather it is distributed, providing many and varied leadership opportunities. Leadership is not simply a title or a position, it carries with it responsibilities. All academics should recognise and understand that they are role models for their student population and understand the impact of their behaviours and actions. However to build a 'leadership culture' across institutions requires us to be more explicit about ourselves as leaders and to develop our own mental frameworks of leadership within our different contexts in higher education.

The next section details approaches taken by the Centre for Learning and Research (formerly the Centre for Academic Development) at the University of Auckland to build a *'ladder to leadership'* through provision of strategic learning and teaching development programmes and opportunities intended to build capacity and capability across the university Faculties.

Realising Academic Leadership

As we look to the future leaders will be those who empower others (Bill Gates)

CLear, the Centre for Learning and Research is the University of Auckland's hub for higher education learning and research. Clear was established in 2013 after a restructure of the Centre for Academic Development (CAD). CAD comprised five interconnected learning and teaching development functions: academic practice, student learning support, e-learning, English Language Enrichment and multimedia support. The complexity of CAD and the geographical (dis)locations of the different teams provided an opportunity to build leadership capacity and capability within the Centre. Team leaders were coached explicitly for leadership either internally as part of the line management process or using the services of external coaches and mentors. In turn, team leaders empowered their staff, encouraged innovation, and ensured all staff within the Centre could access professional development opportunities. The Centre was *'managed'* by a highly capable administration group whose leader also accessed institutional programmes such as the renowned University of Auckland Women in Leadership programme and ensured growth and development opportunities were available to her staff. A culture of leadership was developed, promoted and sustained within the Centre with all staff recognising and acknowledging their role as leaders in organisational development and change.

The investment in building leadership capacity and capability across CAD was reflected in their approach to working with students and staff across all academic domains and disciplines. The leadership shown by CAD staff was recognised and acknowledged at the most senior level in the university. The approaches to supporting CAD staff in understanding leadership and what it means to be a leader were drawn from much of the literature previously mentioned. The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership Model as described in *The Leadership Challenge* (Kouzes and Posner, 2012) provided an excellent tool to support leadership development. Kouzes and Posner through their extensive leadership studies over 30 years and across all different organisations, including Higher Education, conclude with affirmation that leadership is about behaviour, an observable set of skills and abilities. The five practices of exemplary leadership and interpretations as applied to our context are as follows:

- **Model the way** – have self-awareness as a leader and a role model; show respect and dignity for all regardless of status, influence and advocacy ; show commitment to and engagement in institutional democratic processes
 - **Inspire a shared vision** – Promote collaborative effort within teams in alignment with organizational goals and democratic processes; allow freedom of engagement, dialogue and different voices to be heard; engender a spirit of ownership for any vision especially if the vision is being handed down from on high
 - **Challenge the process** – Remember that leadership in HE is not about maintaining the status quo; encourage innovation, experimentation, and a research-led approach to change; enhancing individual performance, enhance organizational performance

- **Enable others to act** - Create a climate of trust, lift people up, be generous with leadership roles, build capacity and capability; encourage mentoring and coaching for staff at all levels; show transparency in career progression, and reward processes
- **Encourage the Heart** - Recognize achievement, reward high performance, show generosity of spirit; live your values, be a role model for values based leadership; show the best, encourage the best; engage, lift, enthuse, inspire

When CAD was restructured, the underpinning philosophy was to increase return on investment or gain additional added value from the high level skills and expertise of CAD staff. In a situation whereby the investment in developing a culture of leadership in CAD could have been lost, instead, many CAD staff members were appointed to leadership roles within the new institutional structures for academic development and higher education learning and research.

The Centre for Learning and Research has built on the strong reputation of its staff to further cultivate a culture of leadership across the institution. In the words of the Director, Professor Helen Sword: *“CLeaR offers an integrated ‘staircase’ of programmes designed to help University of Auckland staff progress through their own academic careers in their own way and at their own pace. Some of the programmes cater mainly for early-career academics; others target colleagues already in academic leadership roles or with demonstrated leadership potential. Some programmes are cohort based, others are self directed. Each step on the staircase is built on a firm foundation of higher education research and supported by a suite of workshops, courses, e-learning projects and consultations.”* (Sword, 2014)

The development programmes on the staircase include: an Introduction to Learning and Teaching Programme entitled Teaching Catalyst; Early Career Catalyst is a programme designed to support pre-Continuation staff (new academic staff in their probationary period) succeed in their academic career; CLear LighTs Leadership in Teaching programme encourages staff at any level to try out new pedagogical initiatives and develop evidence of leadership in learning and teaching. Next steps to leadership programmes include the pg Certificate in Academic Practice programme which has strong support across the institution with Faculty Deans encouraging enrolment, participation and completion. Faculty Fellowships have been introduced whereby a 0.2 buyout has been agreed and a staff member from each Faculty will work together as a team and individually on an agreed annual theme which aligns with the institutional vision and goals for learning and teaching.

Through its programmes, staff expertise and focus on leadership, CLear is making a significant and tangible contribution to building a culture of academic leadership across the university. CLear can call on a wide range of skills, discipline based knowledge and leadership from colleagues across all Faculties to provide support and to mentor colleagues within their discipline and to work in partnership in workshops. Alumni of the University of Auckland postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice programme have an outstanding record in winning both internal and National Teaching Excellence Awards. Most importantly, the strategy is encouraged, supported and promoted at the most senior levels in the University. The approach to building a leadership culture through learning and teaching sits well with the five principles for action for building a culture of leadership in teaching and learning put forward by McInnis et al in their Handbook for Executive Leadership in Learning and Teaching (2012).

All of the programmes and the concept and underlying principles of the CLear 'staircase to leadership' strategy are detailed in the most recent CLear Magazine, ACADEMICS (2014) This academic leadership strategy is sustainable, reaching into all Faculties and departments, and it is transferable in that the approach could be taken by other institutions. Most importantly the outcomes of the academic leadership capacity and capability building strategy are visible and tangible, recognized and acknowledged.

It is a significant challenge to build leadership capacity and capability across complex organizations such as universities and higher education institutions – but we must try to do so! This brief case offers an innovative approach to enhancing the behaviours of academic leaders in higher education in a manner that is realistic in terms of resource and in alignment with the daily responsibilities of faculty and with the organisational mission.

Concluding Comment!

Leadership is lifting a person's vision to higher sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations (Drucker, 1999, p370). Drucker's words on leadership should resonate well with the academic mind-set, after all, as scholars, researchers and facilitators, isn't that what we do?

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