Leadership at Universities

Thoughts on leadership and leadership development in scientific working contexts and a practical example

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Universities as complex organisations – challenges for leadership

Executive bodies
(academic senate, executive board, etc.)

Administration & Support
- Finance
- Human resources
- IT
- ...

Academic departments
- Natural sciences
- Humanities
- Social sciences
- ...

Politics
Societal trends
Funding
Professors as leaders in scientific working contexts

Professors...

- hold a unique position within the university system:
  - “line managers” in the larger context of department and university, but
  - mostly independent “CEOs” of their individual research unit

- usually preside over a team of followers:
  - doctoral candidates
  - PostDocs
  - technical and administrative staff

- operate in a highly complex and competitive working environment:
  - Complex university system
  - Scientific community
  - Limited funding opportunities

- But: do not necessarily perceive themselves to BE leaders!
The professorial role set

Leadership at Universities

(Macfarlane, 2008, 2011; May et al., 2010; Peus et al., 2008; Schmidt & Richter, 2008)
Why leadership is critical for scientific excellence
What do we mean by “leadership”? 

Leadership…

- is a conscious and goal-directed influence on others.
- creates a common understanding of what shall be accomplished as well as how it can be done.
- promotes individual and collective efforts towards common goals.

(e.g., Yukl, 2013)
Why is good leadership important in scientific working contexts?

- Science is a demanding working environment
  - Scientific progress is more than ever a collaborative effort
  - Followers hold high expectations with regard to their supervisors
Major concerns with leadership in scientific contexts – examples from an interview study

(May et al., 2011)
Why is good leadership important in scientific working contexts?

- **Science is a demanding working environment**
  - Scientific progress is more than ever a collaborative effort
  - Followers hold high expectations with regard to their supervisors

- **Leadership research indicates that leadership “works”**
  - Leadership is a central predictor of follower wellbeing and productivity
  - Initial evidence suggests that this is also true for scientific working environment
An example of effective leadership: The Full Range Model (Bass, 1985)

**Transformational Leadership:**
- Inspirational Motivation
- Idealized Influence
- Intellectual Stimulation
- Individualized Consideration

**Transactional Leadership**
- Contingent Reward
- Management by Exception

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follower attitudes
follower motivation
follower performance
...

e.g., Judge & Piccolo (2004), Wang et al. (2011)
Effectiveness of Transformational Leadership in scientific environments

- Department chairs’ transformational leadership predicts faculty members’ satisfaction with supervision, perceived organizational effectiveness and willingness to extend extra effort (Brown & Moshavi, 2002)

- R&D-team leaders’ transformational leadership predicts the teams’ work performance in terms of technical quality, cost and schedule performance (Keller, 2006)

- Professors’ transformational leadership was positively related to followers’ work satisfaction and team performance in terms of peer-reviewed publications (Braun et al., 2013)
Why is good leadership important in scientific working contexts?

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- **But: “Good” leadership is rarely promoted in scientific environments**
  - Scientific leaders are usually ill-prepared for the leadership role
  - German universities have begun to invest in leadership development for scientific leaders only relatively recently (approx. 10 years)
Dahlem Leadership Academy
at Freie Universität Berlin

Leadership development for full professors
The DLA-Idea in a nutshell

➡️ Our principle
   ▪ A program from science for science

➡️ Our goal
   ▪ Promoting successful collaboration between professors and their teams through leadership knowledge and skills

➡️ Our guideline
   ▪ Leadership principles of Freie Universität Berlin
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Principles of Freie Universität Berlin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>leaders are role models</td>
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<td>leaders provide room for maneuver</td>
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<td>leaders encourage a transparent flow of information</td>
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<td>leaders act fairly</td>
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Date: 29 June 2017
Our training philosophy

- modular workshop content
- compact workshops
- evidence-based methods
- free choice of curriculum
- small workshop groups
- continuous evaluation
Core development topics of DLA

- Leadership skills
- Communication
- Team leadership
- Conflict resolution
- Support for new professors
Program development

Supporting topics

- Time and project management
- Personnel selection
- Work-life-balance
- ...

Structure & quantity

- Combination of introductory and follow-up workshops
- 6-8 workshops per semester
- 1-2 special events per year (e.g., panel discussions on current topics)

Further development of program through constant feedback from our target audience
Questions? Questions!

I got promoted to a leadership role.

It means I get to tell people to work hard, but I don't have to do any work myself.

That doesn't sound right.

I could use a fresh one of these.
References


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