

**Australian Higher education leaders in times of change:
The role of Pro Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor**

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Abstract

This paper discusses responses provided by 31 Pro Vice-Chancellors (PVC) and Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVC) who were part of a larger study of more than 500 higher education leaders in roles ranging from DVC to Head of Program in 20 Australian Universities. Using both quantitative and qualitative data the paper gives an insider's perspective on what the roles of DVC and PVC are like at the daily level. It identifies the key focus of the roles, highlights the criteria these leaders use to judge that they are effectively performing them and outlines the relative impact of different influences on their work. It then discusses their views on what being in such a role is like, including its key satisfactions and challenges; and identifies the capabilities seen to be central to managing in such a context. Finally, it provides insights into how such leaders have gone about learning their role.

The paper indicates how these findings can be used to address the current succession crisis for leaders in such critical roles. It shows how the data generated can be used to build leadership from within by identifying leaders with potential early on in their career, how the findings can be used to give selection processes more focus and how leadership development programs can best be shaped to be effective. Having high level of emotional intelligence is identified as a key ingredient in the successful delivery of such roles.

Introduction

There is ample evidence that universities are at a turnaround moment in their history (Fullan & Scott, 2009: Chapter One) and that, in such a volatile operating context, their leaders – from the most senior to the most junior – play a critical role in making sure that they respond promptly and effectively. Research over the past two decades repeatedly demonstrates that change does not just happen but must be led (e.g., Bryman, 2007; Drew 2006; Fullan, 2001, 2008a, 2008b; Petrov, Bolden & Gosling, 2006; Rosser, Johnsrud, & Heck, 2000; Scott, 1999) and that there is often too much focus in our universities and colleges on talking about what should change and far less focus on how to make it happen (Mintzberg, 2004; Scott, 2003a, 2004; Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). Yet, as observed by Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008) studies of how such leaders manage change, along with how they learn to do this effectively, are relatively rare.

Fullan and Scott (2009), in reviewing the available research on professional learning, conclude that what our learning and teaching leaders in higher education value most are practical, role-specific insights into how the key challenges they and their colleagues face might best be handled in the unique context of a university, along with being alerted to which capabilities count most for effective change management and how best to develop them. The findings from Tough (1979) still hold: a key resource

for learning a specific role is having access to experienced performers who have already encountered and figured out ways of handling common challenges in that role and optimising its satisfactions.

Recent studies by Scott, Coates & Anderson (2008), and Debowski and Blake (2004) suggest that 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 do not always address the capabilities that count, and that the importance of university leaders at many levels in working in synergy to build a change capable culture is either unrecognised or misunderstood.

At the same time there is increasing evidence that Australia, like many other countries, is facing a significant higher education leadership succession challenge. This parallels the challenge facing higher education institutions in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified staff in the academic workforce as a whole (Coates, Goedegebuure, van der Lee & Meek, 2008). In particular, it is noted that the imminent retirement of the baby-boomer generation is expected to have a dramatic impact on the staffing profiles and leadership of our universities over the coming decade (Anderson, Johnson & Saha, 2002; Hugo: 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c; Winchester, 2005). So, while the pool of potential leadership talent is decreasing, the urgency of putting in place change capable leaders is increasing.

While studies on how higher education leaders manage change are comparatively rare in the literature, they are almost non-existent for senior executive roles, such as Deputy Vice-Chancellor or Pro Vice-Chancellor. The existing literature concerning this group of university leaders is mostly focused on the issues of distributed leadership and employment-related inequalities, such as gender bias. Almost no insights can be found on how DVCs or PVCs shape and are shaped by the contexts and environments in which they work. As Smith and Adams (2006) argue “the role of PVC remains under-theorised and has rarely formed a topic for empirical study” (p. 1). Discussing the role and progressive increase in abundance of PVCs in recent decades, Smith, Adams and Mount (2007) conclude that “the more complex challenges faced by academic institutions have increased the need for individuals who weave and maintain a complex web which enables the institution, as the sum of its constituent parts, to function” (p. 5). The authors highlight “the centrality of PVC roles to the working of the dual structures of academic work and management” (p. 5). Furthermore, few insights can be gained from the existing literature on what exactly distinguishes the role of a PVC or DVC in the 21st century university.

The focus of this paper is on the responses of 18 DVCs and 13 PVCs who were part of a larger – and currently extended – study of 513 Australian higher education leaders. The study, “Learning Leaders

in Times of Change”, was funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) and identified the capabilities that characterise effective academic leaders in a range of roles.

The paper begins with an overview of the larger study and the characteristics of the DVCs and PVCs group. It then presents the quantitative data on participants’ daily realities, influences, challenges, the leadership capabilities they have found to be the most important for effective performance, and what forms of learning and support they see as providing the most/least assistance in developing these capabilities. Further, the paper summarises the analogies given by participants that describe what it is like for them to be a DVC or PVC and their views on the most/least satisfying aspects of their role. Collectively, the analysis identifies what might best be done in the unique operating context of a university to successfully identify, select, prepare and develop a new generation of senior leaders at a turnaround moment for the sector.

Overview of “Learning Leaders in Times of Change”

This is one of the largest empirical studies of learning and teaching (L&T) leaders in higher education in the world (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). It is being undertaken through a partnership between the University of Western Sydney (UWS) and the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) and is funded by the ALTC. It builds on a parallel study of effective leadership in school education completed in 2003 (Scott, 2003b) and applies a refined version of two conceptual frameworks tested in that study: one concerning leadership capability and the other concerning learning leadership. Studies using the same frameworks and approach have also been undertaken with successful graduates in the early stages of their career across nine professions (Rochester, Kilstoff & Scott, 2005; Scott & Yates, 2002; Scott & Wilson, 2002; Vescio, 2005; Wells, Gerbic, Kranenburg & Bygrave, 2009). Ethics clearance for the study was provided by both ACER and UWS.

The aims of the study are to:

- Profile University L&T leaders and their roles from DVC to Head of Program;
- Clarify what “leadership” actually means in this context;
- Illuminate the daily realities, influences, challenges and the most/least satisfying aspects of each role;
- Identify the key criteria respondents in different roles use to judge the effectiveness of their performance;
- Identify the capabilities they see as being most important for effective performance in their role;
- Identify what forms of formal and informal support are of most/least assistance in developing these capabilities;
- Determine where there are similarities and differences between roles;

- Compare the findings with the existing literature on higher education leadership and those from parallel studies in other educational contexts.

The study has involved an extensive literature review, benchmarking with overseas agencies like the UK Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, analysis of a detailed online survey with more than 500 L&T leaders and a critical review of the survey findings and their implications by an additional 1,200 academic leaders in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa, the UK, the USA and the Middle East. The key findings of the study have been set into the broader change context for universities in “Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education” (Fullan & Scott, 2009).

The *Learning Leaders* research has directly informed the development of a prototype Online Leadership Learning System (OLLS) for higher education leaders in specific roles from DVC to Head of Program. The OLLS development is also funded by ALTC and is currently the subject of trials across Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, with further user testing scheduled for Canada and the US later in 2009. The system is distinctive because it:

- is higher education and role-specific;
- is validated against the experience of a wide range of existing higher education leaders;
- enables prospective or existing leaders to compare their own perceptions of their chosen role with that of dozens, sometimes hundreds, of people in the same position;
- provides access to role-specific case studies on how the common challenges faced in each role might best be handled.

In combination, the *Learning Leaders* research and the OLLS are proving to be a timely and useful resource for universities seeking to sharpen their leadership identification, selection and development strategies at a time when the sector is facing a significant leadership succession crisis.

Method

Participants

In terms of demographic characteristics, of the 31 leaders who identified themselves as a DVC or PVC, most are male (19 / 31). The respondents are distributed almost equally between the two age groups 46-55 and 56-65 years of age. In terms of their disciplinary background, most have a background in the Natural and Physical Sciences (13 / 31) followed by Society and Culture (6 / 31), Education (4 / 31) and Health (4 / 31). About half have been in their role between one and three years and just under 30% between four and 10 years. The participants work in 17 institutions broadly representative of Australia’s 38 public universities in terms of type and location. The majority indicate that, unlike some other higher education roles in the *Learning Leaders* study (e.g., Dean or Head of

School), they have relatively few direct reports. A number of the PVCs report aspiring to the position of Vice Chancellor or DVC. However, most of the respondents report having no intention of applying for another position. Around 40% of the sample indicate having held a leadership position outside higher education.

Instrument

The survey instrument used in the study built upon a parallel instrument that had been validated in an earlier study of leadership in school education (Scott, 2003) and in a range of studies of professional capability amongst successful graduates (Vescio, 2005).

The quantitative items in the survey focus on:

- the leaders' profile;
- the major areas of focus in their role;
- the indicators they use to judge their effectiveness;
- the influences that they see as having most impact on their daily work;
- the capabilities necessary for successful performance as a learning and teaching leader; and
- the effectiveness of a range of activities and support systems in developing these capabilities.

Nine open-ended questions are also included. These questions seek leaders' views on issues such as:

- which aspects of their role they find most and least satisfying;
- the major challenges they experience in the role and how they resolve them;
- what it is like being a leader in their role; and
- what they believe are the most effective methods for developing the capabilities of leaders in their situation.

The open-ended questions give leaders the opportunity to expand on issues raised by the survey items or to make comment on additional issues. The original survey data was generated online using Teleform software with an overall response rate of 48%. Additional data have been recently generated through the Online Leadership Learning System (OLLS) using an identical survey design. The instrument was extensively field tested before distribution and is designed for completion in around 30 minutes, depending on the amount of open-text feedback provided.

Procedure

In the larger study, a National Higher Education Project Reference Group (PRG), comprised of senior leaders in 20 universities, identified and invited experienced and effectively performing leaders to participate in the survey. A confirmatory note was then emailed to the respondent by the project's survey administrator with the web link to the online survey. Original data collection took place during

October and November 2006. Three follow-up emails were sent by the project team at weekly intervals and each PRG contact undertook personal follow up as necessary. Responses were received in confidence and were not linked with information in the sampling frame. In this paper the original DVC/PVC data have been complemented by a follow up survey with the Universities Australia DVC and PVC group in early 2009.

Data analysis

A range of methods were used to analyse the survey data. Validity and reliability checks were conducted on the capability and context scales to confirm the precision of measurement and the existence of the proposed constructs. Statistical methods were used to explore and scale the survey data, to validate the items and scales, and to determine the nature and strength of patterns in response. To facilitate interpretation of results, the paper presents a summary of mean based ordinal ranks compared through variance-explained statistics. The open-ended responses were sorted and thematically analysed initially by role. They were then analysed independently by different members of the project team, using the study's conceptual framework for academic leadership as a guide. Comparisons with the quantitative findings were made. Insights were then pooled and validated by team members. The qualitative software program Nvivo7 assisted with this process.

Results for DVCs and PVCs

Quantitative results

The Tables below summarise the DVC/PVC results for the wide range of questions asked in the survey. Each table lists the items in their order of importance to the 31 DVCs and PVCs (highest first). This is noted in the second column. In the third column the importance rank for the same item given by the combined pool of 513 respondents is shown. For example, Table 1 shows that "Developing organisational processes" was ranked 3rd highest on importance by DVCs and PVCs but only 13th highest on importance for the combined pool (i.e. the combined set of respondents from DVC/PVC, Dean, A/Dean, Head of School, Director, to Head of Program, Team Leader etc).

DVC/PVC items which have significantly different mean ratings from the combined pool are marked *. (Please note that, while ranks can be close or the same, mean ratings can vary significantly. For example, for the item "Managing relationships with senior staff" in Table 1, the mean rating for the DVC/PVC group was 4.90 whereas the mean rating for the combined pool of respondents was 4.23.)

Insert Table 1 about here

Insert Table 2 about here

Insert Table 3 about here

In order to establish how important particular aspects of emotional intelligence and cognitive capability are seen to be for effective DVC/PVC leadership, all 57 capability items have been pooled and the top 15 ranked items overall are identified in Table 4. Where there is a significant difference from the ranking given by combined pool of respondents this has been noted.

Insert Table 4 about here

Insert Table 4 about here

The findings in Table 5 generally align with the findings on what engages and retains students in productive learning (Scott, 2008).

Qualitative results

The world of the DVC and PVC

Respondents were asked to invent an analogy that best describes what it is like for them to be a DVC or PVC. Below their analogies have been sorted into a number of recurring themes. They give insight into the world of the DVC and PVC and identify some of the common challenges and satisfactions of these roles.

Working with diversity and building a team

- *getting butterflies to fly in formation*
- *herding turtles (or as one respondent said “hurdling turtles”)*
- *keeping a flotilla of large and small boats heading in the same direction*
- *captaining a ship*
- *being an evangelical preacher trying to inspire and convert people*
- *trying to pull a large net full of fish in one direction while they are determined to swim the other way (and gnaw through the net)*
- *being a football coach*
- *being the conductor of a mixed orchestra of classical, rock, folk and jazz musicians, only some of whom can read music*

Having stamina and perseverance

- *performing a convincing and engaging role in a long running musical*
- *trying to turn around an iron ore carrier*
- *being a twenty first century Sisyphus*
- *rowing a leaky dinghy*
- *operating in a washing machine*
- *climbing a ladder*
- *Stanley in search of Livingstone*
- *being involved in a long but exciting chess game*
- *being a relay runner*

Juggling

- *keeping many plates spinning on sticks while encouraging and enticing spectators to join in the task*
- *balancing on a tightrope whilst juggling*

Respondents were invited to identify the most satisfying and most challenging aspects of their work as a DVC or PVC. What they give focus to generally aligns with the activities that attract high importance ratings in the quantitative results and in the other roles investigated in the broader *Learning Leaders* study. Depending on how well they are handled and other institutional factors the same area can be identified as being a source of satisfaction in one context and a key challenge in another.

Most satisfying aspects of the DVC/PVC role

Working productively with high quality staff and students. Examples include:

- *Working with clever, motivated, professional and talented people;*
- *Interacting with a wide variety of staff, faculties and schools within and beyond the university;*
- *Successfully engaging colleagues in discussion, planning and action to address issues that have institutional strategic relevance;*
- *Seeing good staff being willing to “go the extra mile”;*
- *Teaching undergraduates.*

Mentoring colleagues. For example:

- *Mentoring and supporting less experienced colleagues to develop competence and confidence in learning and teaching;*
- *Seeing real improvement by colleagues in their ability to teach and design learning.*

Developing and successfully implementing strategic changes. Examples include:

- *Being in a position to actually make a difference, to identify opportunities, shape institutional directions and then to develop and act on them;*
- *Successful strategic planning, direction setting and change management – especially when based on data analysis and research;*
- *Seeing positive outcomes;*
- *Seeing good ideas being adopted/adapted/built on by colleagues with good outcomes;*

Building a change capable and productive institution. Examples include:

- *Making university systems, practices and processes more agile and responsive;*
- *Creating a positive working and learning environment;*
- *Seeing cultural change happen;*
- *Being involved in policy development.*

Most challenging aspects of the DVC/PVC role

The *Learning Leaders* research indicates that leadership capability is most challenged when events take an unexpected turn, when one is faced by a perplexing situation, when change is in the air or, in the unique context of a university, when one is faced with passive aggression.

The most challenging situations identified by the DVC/PVC group align with this finding. Some are systemic, others are about working with individuals or subgroups. Most have a key human relationships' dimension and there is rarely a clear, correct way to proceed. In many ways the challenges identified concern the same situations which, if well handled, can lead to leadership satisfaction.

Dealing with staff matters. Examples include:

- *Dealing with difficult staff, people uninterested in change, having to resolve complaints and handle stressful, time consuming misconduct cases or convince a staff member that it is in their interest and that of the institution to move on;*
- *Attracting and retaining capable staff;*
- *Trying to engage staff with learning and teaching, key change plans for the area and trying to shift them from a teaching to a learning focus in a devolved institution where "research rules";*
- *How best to select, develop and manage Deans - including how best to focus them on their leadership teams;*
- *Instability in our senior management group;*
- *Dealing with staff in an honest and open way while trying to maintain morale and forward momentum;*
- *Managing redundancies.*

Finding "room to lead". Examples include:

- *Dealing with what one respondent called "archaic university processes". For example: "unending committees and meetings mostly without outcomes"; "organisational indecisiveness"; approval processes that are slow and don't "add value";*
- *Facing a constant round of "ad hoc bushfires" that need management;*
- *Handling the demands of extensive travel; travelling between campuses.*

Managing time and balancing workload. Examples include:

- *Balancing the many competing demands for my time, particularly between keeping on top of day to day correspondence, spending time with people and working on projects;*
- *Balancing internal demands with the current need for greater external focus;*
- *Finding time to do serious thinking.*

Dealing with a very high order of change management. Examples include:

- *Having to oversee a major institutional change in curriculum along with ongoing structural reform;*
- *Getting change through mid level management i.e. Dean and Associate Dean levels;*
- *Ensuring the staff of the University understand what our key direction is and why we need to change;*

Handling issues of authority and alignment. Examples include:

- *Having to concurrently manage up, down and sideways;*
- *Having to "lead through influence";*
- *Ensuring that there is an alignment between institutional strategic directions, goals for learning and teaching, budget allocation, policies and systems, staff development, and recognition and reward mechanisms.*

Having to work within tightening resources and budgets. Examples include:

- *Trying to build income in an increasingly competitive system and tightening financial environment;*
- *Having to meet enrolment targets in a declining or stable enrolment base with increasing costs;*
- *Handling the need to cross-subsidise less successful parts of the university;*

- *Having to provide the same quality of student experience across multiple campuses as those universities which have just one or two;*

Ensuring the mission and strategic goals of the university are realised. Examples include:

- *Establishing clear and achievable strategic directions and priorities;*
- *Maintaining a strategic focus in the midst of multiple distractions;*

Establishing effective quality assurance processes and enhancing the student experience. Examples include:

- *Developing useful systems for tracking how the university is performing and knowing whether we are consistently and effectively achieving our strategic goals;*
- *Identifying new ways to improve the learning and teaching outcomes for students.*

Strategies for handling these challenges productively

The following strategies have been collectively identified by the 1,200 leaders who have reviewed the recurring challenges identified in the *Learning Leaders* study, including those listed above. They give an operational picture of how the top ranking leadership capabilities (Table 4) can be put into practice. The practical suggestions that follow are dealt with in more comprehensive detail in the case study section of the OLLS website <http://olls.acer.edu.au/>.

Working productively with staff

- *Be accessible but within clear limits*
- *Establish clear and agreed expectations from the outset*
When setting up projects or workplans, make sure that what is expected is both negotiated and clear upfront, including the evidence which you and the person(s) concerned will jointly use to judge that what is to be done is working well. This is exactly what students expect in their assessment. Make sure you know and follow due HR process from the outset. Whenever possible look at the evidence and focus on the problem not the person.
- *Listen, link then lead*
Seek the views of those concerned with a particular issue before coming to a decision. In particular, listen to and don't dismiss "resisters", as they can give important insights into the roadblocks that need to be addressed to get a successful outcome and effective implementation; it can also help win their support. Seek then to link together the most relevant and feasible ideas that emerge from this process into a plan of action that is owned by those who are to implement it. When taking a decision and leading action on the plan acknowledge that this input has been taken into account.
- *Confirm key discussions with an email*
After key discussions send an email confirming what was agreed to the person(s) concerned, making clear who will do what, by when and then inviting them to suggest corrections. This allows ownership of what is to be done but also keeps an email trail for later follow up on what exactly was agreed, should this be necessary.

Successful change development and implementation

- *Build early ownership of what has to change*
The best way to foster ownership of necessary change is to identify clearly why, on the evidence available, change in the area concerned is so important for the staff involved. If staff do not see action on the area as being personally relevant and feasible they will not engage. Having secured agreement to address the area, it is suggested that it is useful to then invite those who are to implement the change to review solutions found to work elsewhere and identify ones of their own which they think are likely to be the most relevant, achievable and productive ways to proceed. This is another version of listening and will further develop active ownership of change. This process of steered engagement sets the outer parameters of what needs to be addressed but then invites local, evidence-based input on how best to action them.

- *Peer group counts*
Recognise how important the peer group is as a motivator and that the peer group will talk about proposed changes when you are not there and through a wide range of informal encounters will build a collective positive or negative response to what is proposed.
- *Learning from other universities*
Knowing what similar universities elsewhere have done to successfully address the specific problem at hand can be a key resource. Adapting successful solutions from elsewhere is better than starting from scratch. Having a robust and reciprocal network of contacts facilitates this process.
- *Ensuring resources and rewards align with the change*
See yourself as playing a key role in ensuring that resources and rewards are aligned to supporting the implementation of the agreed change.
- *Learn how to make the change work by trying it out under controlled conditions*
Whenever possible use a team-based approach to testing out solutions to agreed change priorities under controlled conditions in order to identify how to make them work best before moving to scale up.

Change is a learning process not an event

- *Focus on the “gaps”*
In identifying what approaches are likely to be most relevant and feasible specifically ask those who are to implement each change to identify the “gaps” in their expertise which need to be learnt if the change is to work. If nothing new has to be learnt then there is no change – only window-dressing.
- *Motivation*
As noted earlier, everyone with a role in making sure a desired change actually works in daily practice will be asking “How is this relevant to me? Why should I persevere with learning how to make it work? Is it feasible – do I have time to learn how to do this?” The same factors that engage students in productive learning engage staff (Scott, 2008). Of particular relevance is having access to successful approaches used elsewhere, action-learning under controlled conditions and peer support.
- *Using networks for learning leadership*
Build your network of contacts in a similar role. A key function of this network is to enable you to talk through the most perplexing challenges with someone who understands the area.

Building a change capable institution

- *Set a small number of priorities*
Make sure staff are properly informed on what really counts, what the top priorities for the faculty, college and university are. They need to know that what is in the notes they receive from the DVC/PVC is immediately relevant to them.
- *Leader as model*
Recognise that culture (“the way we do things around here”) counts. To help shift an unproductive, cynical or change averse culture it is important to model the new, more change capable behaviours you seek in your approach to both the job and your staff. This includes: being honest, evidence-based, non blaming of individuals, avoiding publicly embarrassing anyone, listening before coming to a decision, being transparent about the rules that will be used to come to a decision, seeking to link up people with work that throws to their strengths, remaining calm when things go wrong, avoiding “rising to the bait” when provoked, being prepared to take longer to achieve an outcome than you would like, making sure that what you say about contentious issues is evidence-based. A change capable culture has a similar profile to a change capable leader (Table 8).
- *Evidence-based decision-making*
Seek to build a culture where staff look for consensus around the evidence not simply for consensus around the table.
- *Effective meetings*
Become particularly deft at calling and chairing meetings. Do so only when they are clearly the most efficient and productive way to proceed. Before the meeting directly check that the agenda is addressing what really counts; use meetings to decide on action not simply to gather in ideas or data (do this before the meeting, consolidate it and circulate it in advance so that participants can give a considered response when they get together); focus the meeting on what will be done and by whom; don’t let a dominant individual take up all of the airtime; and make sure the meeting sticks

to the agenda along with its Terms of Reference. At the end of each meeting personally confirm agreed actions and who will take undertake them. Then, at the start of the next meeting, get a report on what has been done. After each meeting immediately send out an email to confirm what is being done and by whom, always inviting respondents to correct any misinterpretations. Always listen to and test the perspective of key players individually before launching a proposal in a public meeting. Giving a consolidated analysis of the varying views and options identified in your consultations with different interest groups at the outset of a formal meeting helps keep the focus on action and decreases the likelihood of the meeting being hijacked by one subgroup.

Discussion

Overview of the results

The study has identified key areas of focus in academic leadership that cut across the majority of leadership positions studied (Table 1). These include: policy formation, managing relationships with staff, involvement in various aspects of planning, and attending meetings. It has also identified areas of emphasis in specific roles that serve to complement the focus of other roles. In particular, DVCs and PVCs emphasise managing relationships with senior staff, strategy formation and developing organisational processes.

The top three ranking indicators that DVCs and PVCs report using to judge the effectiveness of their own performance are: successful implementation of new initiatives, delivering agreed tasks on time and to specification and achieving high-quality graduate outcomes (Table 2). Their ranks (and means) do not significantly vary from those reported by all 513 leaders (ranks 2, 5 and 1). However, the indicators ranked fourth and fifth highest by DVCs and PVCs do. These indicators are: achieving a positive financial outcome for your area of responsibility and meeting student load targets.

These results align with participants' written comments and confirm that the DVC and PVC roles typically have a pan-university focus, whereas most of the others are located in a particular unit or funding area. This, as participants noted, often creates tension as the pan-university roles seek to get disparate areas of the university to work together, whereas particular schools or faculties prefer to focus on their own 'patch' and budget interests. As one senior workshop participant observed:

Some roles – like Head of School – can become very 'baronial' and focused on their 'bottom line' because this is the way universities and their funding models are structured—funding is typically given to local units not to trans-university initiatives; this makes the job of people like PVCs, who have a pan-university focus, tricky.

The results suggest that these senior executives see clarifying strategic directions, decreased funding, having to manage continuous change and institutional image as being the top influences on their work (Table 3). The influences concerning strategy and image were ranked significantly lower by the

combined pool of respondents, whereas decreased government funding and managing pressures for continuous change were ranked similarly. An interesting result is the significant difference in the importance ratings for work-family balance allocated by DVCs and PVCs on the one hand and those in less senior and more line leadership positions on the other. A range of hypotheses have been put forward in the national and international discussions of the data to explain this. They include the fact that people in more senior positions may have adult children who have already left home and have more time available; that they have support staff to which some tasks can be delegated; or that they have become particularly deft at setting priorities. This finding warrants further exploration.

Only one significant difference between the senior executives' group and the combined pool of respondents is evident in the capabilities identified as being most important for effective performance in their roles. Understanding how universities operate is rated much higher by DVCs and PVCs. Other top ranked items (Table 4) are similar for both groups and predominantly concern aspects of emotional intelligence (personal and interpersonal capabilities). The table also shows that context and role-specific skills and knowledge are important, but that by themselves they are insufficient for effective performance. It shows that it is the right combination of emotional intelligence, intellectual capability and relevant skills and knowledge that is most telling. This finding aligns with all previous research and has important implications for what is given focus in selecting, reviewing and developing our higher education leaders.

The results for leadership learning and support show that most leaders express a preference for practice-based learning, followed by self-managed and peer-based learning, and finally formal development activities (Table 5). Compared with other roles, DVCs and PVCs show higher preference for learning via annual performance reviews and more formal development activities and provide lower responses to the practice-based learning and self-managed learning domains.

The most popular analogies across all roles are "herding cats" and "juggling". These highlight the challenges of working with diversity and with the different "tribes" that make up the modern university. When the analogies are analysed by the many roles investigated in the overall study it becomes clear that one's sense of control shapes the type of analogy selected. Expectedly, analogies that indicate more control (e.g., being an orchestra conductor, gardener) tend to be identified by more senior leaders like DVCs and PVCs.

DVCs and PVCs report finding satisfaction in setting strategy and direction, making team-based change happen, and interacting with clever, motivated staff. Their major challenges are centered around dealing with staff matters; having to manage up and down; dealing with a constant round of ad hoc interruptions; dealing with tightening resources; archaic processes; too much travel; attending

meetings without an outcome; organizational indecisiveness; performance management of staff; and having to work with change-averse cultures.

Implications and applications

1. The findings in Tables 1-4 can be used to review and validate the current position descriptions for DVCs and PVCs. They can also be used to help identify and give focus to professional learning, performance management and development systems for DVCs and PVCs – including 360 degree review systems. In addition, there are important implications for what is given focus when seeking to identify new leaders and assess applicants for leadership positions.
2. The findings in Table 5 confirm the importance of ensuring that the way we shape professional learning programs for our Higher Education Leaders should reflect findings on what engages and retains all adults in productive learning – including university students. The implication is that, by intentionally shaping our leadership programs to reflect the findings in Table 5 and the associated research on productive university student learning (Scott, 2008), we will be helping our leaders learn through practical experience what they need to be advocating for use by their staff with their students.
3. The qualitative data identify a range of satisfactions of working in these roles. These need to be made more explicit when trying to recruit people into these positions.
4. The qualitative data on the key challenges faced by DVCs and PVCs can be used for case based learning. The suggested ways of handling them summarised in this paper and outlined in more detail in the OLLS database can help inform peer supported leadership and ensure that mentoring programs focus on what counts. Many of the challenges identified give an operational picture of the findings in quantitative results (see, for example, Tables 1-3).

A number of the challenges which are repeatedly identified indicate the need to make the operating of context of our universities more change capable, agile and conducive to effective leadership. In this regard our DVC and PVC respondents reflect a finding that has emerged from leaders across all roles in the *Learning Leaders* research – that the responsiveness and efficiency of administrative and operating systems in many universities currently give our leaders limited “room to lead”. Particular areas for attention identified in this study include how to ensure meetings are cost-beneficial and have practical outcomes of demonstrable benefit to students, and how to ensure that any hierarchical sign off systems not only manage genuine risk but genuinely add value.

5. In overall terms, the findings confirm the critical role that higher education leaders must now play in ensuring their institutions remain well positioned in a highly volatile operating context; and that they do this by making sure that desired change ideas are actually put successfully and sustainably into practice.

As noted in *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education* (Fullan and Scott, 2009) this means that effective higher education leaders need to *listen, link and lead* in that order and explicitly *model* a change capable approach in their daily dealings with staff; and that they need to actively *teach* their staff how to make desired changes work; and consistently *learn* from experience, using the capability frameworks identified in this study to ensure that this process is focussed.

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Tables

Table 1: Highest ranking areas and activities for DVC/PVC compared with the combined pool

In rank order for DVC/PVC, highest first (total number of items = 25)

| Item | DVC/PVC Importance ranking | Combined pool Importance ranking |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| ▪ Managing relationships with senior staff | 1 | 1* |
| ▪ Strategic planning | 2 | 4 |
| ▪ Developing organisational processes | 3 | 13* |
| ▪ Managing other staff | 4 | 3 |
| ▪ Chairing meetings | 5 | 15* |
| ▪ Identifying new opportunities | 6 | 2 |
| ▪ Developing policy | 7 | 8 |
| ▪ Networking within the University | 8 | 11 |
| ▪ Participating in meetings | 9 | 6 |
| ▪ Liaising with external constituencies | 10 | 18* |

Table 2: Highest ranking indicators for judging effective performance for DVC/PVC compared with the combined pool

In rank order for DVC/PVC, highest first (total number of items = 25)

| Item | DVC/PVC Importance ranking | Combined pool Importance ranking |
|--|----------------------------------|--|
| ▪ Successful implementation of new initiatives | 1 | 2 |
| ▪ Delivering agreed tasks or projects on time and to specification | 2 | 5 |
| ▪ Achieving high quality graduate outcomes | 3 | 1 |
| ▪ Achieving a positive financial outcome for your area of responsibility | 4 | 18* |
| ▪ Meeting student load targets | 5 | 21* |
| ▪ Producing significant improvements in learning and teaching quality | 6 | 3 |
| ▪ Bringing innovative policies and practices into action | 7 | 6 |
| ▪ Producing future learning and teaching leaders | 8 | 15 |
| ▪ Winning resources for your area of responsibility | 9 | 14 |
| ▪ Establishing a collegial working environment | 10 | 4 |

Table 3: Highest ranking influences on daily work for DVC/PVC compared with the combined pool

In rank order for DVC/PVC, highest first (total number of items = 23)

| Item | DVC/PVC Impact ranking | Combined pool Impact ranking |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ▪ Clarifying strategic directions | 1 | 7* |
| ▪ Decreased government funding | 2 | 3 |
| ▪ Managing pressures for continuous change | 3 | 2 |
| ▪ Maintaining a specific institutional image | 4 | 12* |
| ▪ Finding and retaining high quality staff | 5 | 4 |
| ▪ Increased focus on filling enrolment targets | 6 | 15* |
| ▪ Dealing with local university cultures | 7 | 11 |
| ▪ Growing pressure to generate new income | 8 | 6 |
| ▪ Increased student diversity | 9 | 14 |
| ▪ Greater government reporting and scrutiny | 10 | 8 |

Note: Rank 1 in the combined pool is “Balancing work and family life”.

Table 4: Highest ranking leadership capabilities for DVC/PVC

(Significant differences from the combined pool ranking are noted *)

| | |
|--|--------|
| 1. Being transparent and honest in dealings with others (IP) | |
| 2. Understanding how universities operate (SK) | (* 31) |
| 3. Being true to one's personal values and ethics (P) | |
| 4. Being willing to take a hard decision (P) | |
| 5. Wanting to achieve the best outcome possible (P) | |
| 6. Motivating others to achieve positive outcomes (IP) | |
| 7. Remaining calm under pressure or when things take an unexpected turn (P) | |
| 8. Influencing people's behaviour and decisions in effective ways (IP) | |
| 9. Being able to make effective presentations to a range of different groups (SK) | |
| 10. Being able to organise my work and manage time effectively (SK) | |
| 11. Having a clear, justified and achievable direction in my area of responsibility (IC) | |
| 12. An ability to chair meetings effectively (SK) | |
| 13. Persevering when things are not working out as anticipated (P) | |
| 14. Taking responsibility for program activities and outcomes (P) | |
| 15. Seeing the best way to respond to a perplexing situation (IC) | |

Code: P (personal capability); IP (interpersonal capability); IC (intellectual capability); S/K (skills and knowledge)

Table 5: Highest ranking activities for developing leadership capabilities for DVC/PVC compared with the combined pool

In rank order for DVC/PVC, highest first (total number of items = 20)

| Item | DVC/PVC Effectiveness ranking | Combined pool Effectiveness ranking |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| ▪ Learning “on-the-job” | 1 | 1 |
| ▪ Ad hoc conversations about work with people in similar roles | 2 | 2 |
| ▪ Participating in peer networks beyond the University | 3 | 6 |
| ▪ Participating in annual performance reviews | 4 | 14* |
| ▪ Participating in peer networks within the university | 5 | 3 |
| ▪ Participating in 360 degree feedback reviews based on known leadership capabilities | 6 | 15* |
| ▪ Study of “real-life” workplace problems | 7 | 5 |
| ▪ Participating in higher education leadership seminars | 8 | 8 |
| ▪ Completing formal leadership programs given by external providers | 9 | 17 |
| ▪ Undertaking site visits to other institutions or agencies | 10 | 11 |