Re-Designing Health Care Academic Leaders in a Higher Education Context.

Prof Karien Jooste

University of the Western Cape

Cape Town
Introduction

• The effective leadership of universities is a crucial issue
• Academic staff have limited experience in formal management or leadership roles and responsibilities
• A number of drivers of change in higher education exist
• Need to understand how academic heads lead the different departments of faculties in a university
Academic leadership

• Building a community of scholars to set direction and common purpose through empowerment
• Most academic leaders in the past have learned on the job
• New models of leadership are needed for the higher education sector that require a less hierarchical approach
• The role of heads of department as leaders is unique
Methodology

• Setting: struggle university from the apartheid era
• Faculty of Health
• Qualitative pragmatic paradigm
• Individuals interviews
• Inclusive: Heads of departments
• Open coding: 2 themes
Theme 1: Views on the development of leadership skills are varied

- Five categories emerged from Theme 1

  (i) leadership developed over time
  (ii) can be learned through different means
  (iii) the role of role models
  (iv) some people have a natural ability, and
  (v) environmental encouragement
Leadership developed over time

• Confirmation of the development of leadership skills being a continuous and ongoing process among the participants in this study includes reports of increased learning capabilities and growth over time as regards their given roles and responsibilities.

• “You learn as you go”. 
**Can be learned though different means**

- Leadership skills can be acquired through various unstructured and structured means which require the involvement and participation of the leader for it to be meaningful.
- Effective leadership skills can be developed through the [personal] “reflection” of the leader.
- It can be developed through structured leadership development programmes as indicated by the statement: “I think it can be facilitated.”
- It was also mentioned: “can attend workshops” to develop their leadership skills and that it can also be achieved through: “a learning organisation.”
The role of role models

• “You should be a good role model”.
• In addition to being a good role model, a leader should assist his or her followers in discovering their individual inherent leadership qualities and abilities, since these are present in every person: “It is about showing or almost being a role model and showing others that you know what we all actually have these qualities on the inside, we all have potential”.

Some people have a natural ability

- Even though leadership can be learned, the inborn or innate traits possessed by the leader still have an influence on the leadership process
- “I think there are born leaders, but I think, of course, people can develop into leaders”
- Another participant revealed: “Some people have skills that they come with that make them good leaders; however, and I think that in professionalism there are people who are leaders as professionals”
Environmental encouragement

• Each person has the ability to lead other people, provided that that person receives sufficient and appropriate support and backing in the context in which the leadership is taking place. To illustrate this, a participant commented: “Everyone can lead given the right environment/encouragement”

• Question: Whether an enabling environment was made available for the leader to be able to function at their utmost capacity - “Are there enough contexts created for leadership? I don’t think so.”
Theme 2: How to redesign as an academic leader
Need for academic leadership development programmes

Training by a knowledgeable professional

• “We should be training our students to do, our post-graduate students and our staff members, and that’s the way I operate”

• “I think leadership is much more than training . . . it is also discovering of yourself and your abilities”
Mentorship and/or coaching programme/various mentors (internal and external)

• “ability to identify where I am lacking . . . my skills . . .”; “understands me holistically”; “help me to look at myself”; “she’s non-threatening . . . share my . . ., maybe all my failures”; “somebody that’s safe and on the outside”; “somebody that you get on well with”;
• “. . . can share her experience and give advice, which I then take or not take” and “who can share their experience, and somebody who is prepared to nurture”. Also, some other participants specified:
• “we can learn a lot from each other”, “should monitor your development”
Shadowing

• Shadowing is a significant part of developing and improving the intrinsic leadership skills of an individual who is to take on a new position of leadership

• One of the participants specified: “the next person coming in shadowing”

• For this reason, it is crucial that shadowing techniques be used in guiding and developing up-coming leaders
Succession planning

- Participants were of the view that generally staff members are disinterested and dispassionate about being in the headship positions in their individual departments.
- Nevertheless, they advocated succession planning programmes, as a way of preparing individuals for such positions.
- “I think ... there must be some kind of a training for the next HOD who will come in because people don’t want to be Heads of Departments . . . it’s academic suicide.”
- “We should be identifying potential leaders within our faculty [and] to be nurturing those leaders”
Resources in leadership development

Administrator allocated to HOD to alleviate administrative burden

• As a means of lessening and easing the workload on the leader and to give the leader more focus time to develop leadership skills, it was stated by one participant that an administrator should be assigned to the leaders

• For instance one participant stated: “They need an administrator that does the admin”
Peer-groups” – meet and share

• Groups were pointed out as a means to develop leadership amongst senior academics: “working in a group”

• One of the reasons for meeting more often in groups was pointed out as having consistency in development programmes: “... so you’re practising a skills three times a year you know, by the time you get to your next PDS training, you’ve kind of forgotten what it was all about”
Formal and informal platforms on different levels

• Leadership development should be planned through creating formal and informal platforms:
  • “the training needs to be formal, you need to read and course work”, and “maybe it’s more informal platforms, but, ja, which we can go and you get together and you can, people feel less intimidated by them and so you can sit down, you come down, it’s kind of casual, it’s kind of nice, yet there is structure to it and therefore you learn and those who really don’t want to, someone can monitor who doesn’t pitch for these initiative.”
Collaboration in leadership

• “non-threatening way, a supportive”, “creating a context where they can discover themselves, where they can find out what are their leadership skills”, “opportunity where we share as leaders what is it that we go through, how do we move forward, how did you address this, that kind of opportunities needs to be created”, and “openness and the opportunities that everybody has an opportunity to grow and develop into a leader”
Conclusion

• Effective leadership development can build the skills needed to lead other people more successfully, in departments and higher education organisations. Within the context of communities of practice, as defined by Wenger (2000), academic leaders should form a community that engages together on how to lead others and continuously enhance their skills to meet the needs of an ever-changing environment.