Learner-centred Leadership in Higher Education

A Practical Guide

Kerri-Lee Krause

Learner-centred Leadership in Higher Education

This is the go-to guide for higher education leaders of learning, teaching and the learner experience. It offers research-enriched, practical insights and case studies, together with a must-have toolkit of strategies for future-focused higher education leaders.

Kerri-Lee Krause combines her extensive track record as a senior university executive, award-winning teacher and higher education researcher. Inspired by the disruptive educational opportunities arising from the global COVID-19 pandemic, Krause takes academic and professional staff leaders on a journey through the core capabilities required of successful leaders in a rapidly changing higher education landscape. Key topics include:

- learner-centred strategy co-design;
- collaborative strategy implementation with learners at the heart;
- leading curriculum innovation and renewal;
- partnering with learners for engagement and success;
- collegial academic and professional staff capability-building and leadership development;
- coming to terms with educational policy development and quality work;
- shaping learner-centred cultures; and
- leading with integrity in higher education.

As universities and higher education providers look for ways to rebuild in the wake of a global pandemic, capable, courageous, learner-centred leadership matters more than ever. This readable, intellectually rich and practical book is for current and aspiring higher education leaders who have a passion for effective leadership with learners at the heart.

Kerri-Lee Krause (PhD) is Vice Chancellor and President of Avondale University, Australia. An experienced university executive leader, author, coach and mentor, she has led several successful university turnarounds to achieve learner-centred cultural renewal and provides national leadership in the field of HE quality and standards. A long-term HE policy research programme enriches her evidence-based approach to university leadership.

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A Practical Guide

Kerri-Lee Krause

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Contents

List of figures ix
List of tables x
Acknowledgements xi
Foreword xiii
Preface xv

PART 1 WHY DOES LEARNER-CENTRED HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP MATTER? 1

1 Understanding learner-centred leadership in higher education 3

2 Leading learner-centred strategy co-design in higher education 28

PART 2 WHO DOES LEARNER-CENTRED HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP FOCUS ON? 57

3 Engaging with students as learners in higher education 59

4 Connecting with colleagues as a learner-centred higher education leader 88

PART 3 WHAT DOES LEARNER-CENTRED HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP FOCUS ON? 115

5 Conceptualising and renewing curriculum 117

6 Enhancing quality through policy and practice 153

PART 4 HOW DOES THE LEARNER-CENTRED LEADER LEAD? 181

7 Shaping learner-centred cultures in higher education institutions 183

8 Leading with integrity 213

References 237
Index 258

List of figures

1.1	Leadership dimensions in a learner-centred HE ecosystem	22
1.2	Emergent learner-centred university ecosystem map	25
4.1	Sample university organisational chart	92
5.1	Interdependent purposes of curriculum for the learner-centred leader	123
5.2	Continuum of curriculum design, review and renewal approaches	135
6.1	Five functions of the policy spine in universities	160
6.2	Indicative policy development, implementation, review and approval cycle	169
7.1	Examples of cultural vectors influencing HE institutional cultures	191
7.2	The recursive journey of culture-shaping	197
8.1	The multifaceted learner-centred leader	218
8.2	Learner-centred leadership capabilities: putting it all together	235

List of tables

2.1 Using the RACI approach to plan your strategy co-design process 44
2.2 Sample planning tool to guide your strategy co-design process 45
2.3 Steps in the strategy implementation and co-implementation process 47
5.1 Higher education curriculum perspectives and purposes for the learner-centred leader 122
5.2 Six dimensions of curriculum 124
5.3 Learner-centred leadership questions about curriculum change 149

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To you the reader – if you have reached this point in the Acknowledgements, it tells me that you are someone who is curious to learn more. May your learning continue, may your leadership journey be a nourishing and joyful one.

Foreword

Professor John Dewar AO
Vice Chancellor and President,
La Trobe University, Australia

This book is an act of extreme generosity on the part of its author. A highly regarded leader and innovator in higher education over many years, Kerri-Lee Krause has distilled decades of research and leadership experience into this practical handbook for current and aspiring leaders. It is a scholarly work, with plenty of references to chase down for those who are interested – but it is, above all, a practical guide intended for those who want to develop themselves as leaders in contemporary higher education. It is full of practical tips and advice. It will also shift your thinking about what leadership in higher education entails.

This is a book written by someone who has thought about, and researched deeply in, higher education leadership, but who has also put her ideas into practice by taking on significant leadership roles herself across the sector. She has been much more than a passive observer of higher education leadership: she has stepped frequently into the fray of actually doing it. It brings together the theoretical and the practical in a way that, uniquely, only this author can. It will have a broad audience – anyone who is, or aspires to, a leadership role in higher education will profit from it.

This book arrives at just the right time, as we emerge from the lingering effects of COVID on our sector. COVID crystallised what many of us have known for some time – that leadership in higher education has become more complex and demanding than ever before. Now, more than ever, universities and other higher education institutions demand more than just competent leadership. This book addresses some of the causes of that complexity and

the ever-increasing leadership demands – but, more importantly, addresses the question of how we can become great leaders under these conditions.

The question is addressed through the lens of 'learner-centred leadership'. This includes, but is much more than, being 'student-centred' and all that entails (all of which is explored in detail here). Yes, we should place students at the centre of everything we do; but being a learner-centred leader also means thinking of ourselves, and those we lead, as learners too. This entails what Krause calls a 'growth mindset' – a willingness to develop professionally by learning and developing oneself and others. It is this wider focus on self-development, and encouraging the same in others, that makes this a guide to higher education leadership in general. As Krause puts it, 'learner centredness opens up a way of understanding and interpreting our work as leaders at a time of supercomplexity'.

Thinking about this book has led me to reflect on how much higher education has changed since I started my career as a young lecturer in the early 1980s, and how that experience would compare with that of our younger staff today. A shift to 'supercomplexity' would certainly be one way of characterising it. For those tasked with leadership of our staff today, in these conditions of extreme complexity, this book will prove to be an approachable and invaluable guide.

Preface

Why this guide on learner-centred higher education leadership, why now?

This is a practical, research-informed guide for current, emerging and aspiring higher education (HE) leaders grappling with the challenges and opportunities of leading universities, colleges and HE institutes in a post-COVID world. It is the result of over 30 years' experience in HE settings, including more than two decades of executive leadership in large public universities and sector-level leadership in HE quality and standards. In that time, I have learned much about what makes effective leaders in complex HE institutions. This guide reflects the highs and lows of leadership lessons learned, with a focus on practical applications for current and future HE leaders.

The need for courageous leadership in universities has always been there but every now and then, a crisis of one kind or another provides a compelling reminder. The global pandemic of 2019–2020 was one such crisis that we all experienced both personally and professionally. The ideas that I canvas in this book have been gestating for years, but it would be fair to say that the COVID-19 pandemic and its multi-pronged impact on the global HE sector was the catalyst for bringing them all together. While the focus does not rest solely on crisis leadership, I draw on the instructive research in this domain, highlighting the applications for day-to-day HE leadership challenges.

My leadership is conceptually framed by socio-cognitive and social constructivist theories (see Chapter 1) that recognise the importance of social and cultural contexts for learning and leadership, together with the pivotal role of learner agency and collaboration in these settings. My leadership philosophy

(see Chapter 8) shapes the approach I take in this guide, combining theoretical and research-based insights with practical leadership applications. A scholarly, evidence-based approach to leadership will enrich your ability to lead with credibility and integrity in your HE context.

This book shines a spotlight on the challenges and opportunities inherent in providing leadership that nurtures a learner-centred ecosystem. Learners of all kinds and in all parts of the organisation contribute to the life of a university. Students as self-directed, agentic learners are core to this learning ecosystem, as are the academic faculty, professional staff and leaders who form part of the learner community.

My analysis of university leadership approaches during the COVID-19 crisis revealed several common themes across universities and across the globe. I observed a tendency towards laser-like focus of organisational attention. The most effective university leaders were able to set aside the noise of multiple competing priorities to focus on what really matters. Prioritising the well-being and mental health support of students and staff was one such priority. In other words, a people focus was paramount during this crisis, despite the many job losses and cost-cutting measures introduced. Related themes included the need to make 'in the moment' decisions about changes to familiar ways of teaching and assessing learning. Another feature was the deliberate paring down of multiple building and infrastructure activities in order to remove distractions, conserve leadership energy and enable focused decision-making and responsive actions.

'Pivot' became the word of the year as students and staff found themselves pivoting on multiple fronts. These included rapid shifts from lecture-based learning and teaching to virtual small group seminars. Academic faculty invented new ways to approach virtual and simulated work-based learning experiences and research faculty pivoted to innovative virtual lab-based methods. During this crisis, all had to be willing to learn new ways of working, learning and rebuilding community. While operating in crisis mode is neither desirable nor sustainable, the human-centred focus that emerged in leadership practices during the global pandemic is instructive for post-pandemic leaders.

It can be tough to balance the pragmatism required to lead large, complex university businesses with the humanistic, learner-centric dimension of the organisation. I argue for an integrated, systemic approach if we are to learn from the lessons of crisis leadership and build stronger, more resilient universities and communities.

Purpose and audience

This book is relevant to a range of HE leaders. It speaks to senior university leaders of learning, teaching and the student experience, including those in roles such as Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) or Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) Academic/Education/Students. It is also relevant for emerging leaders and those aspiring to more senior academic or professional staff leadership roles. The learner-centred (L-C) leadership capabilities outlined in this guide are equally meaningful for Faculty Deans, Heads of Department and Programme Leaders and those in senior professional leadership roles, including Dean of Students or Academic Registrar.

Those who supervise such roles such as Vice Chancellors and Provosts will also find this an instructive reference. For example, chapters on co-designing strategy (Chapter 2), shaping learner-centred culture (Chapter 7) and leading with integrity (Chapter 8) apply across leadership types and roles. This includes Chief Operating and Financial Officers, Chief Information Officers, marketing and recruitment departments and their teams. From a pragmatic perspective, the ability to meet financial and student recruitment targets is enriched by an understanding of what it takes to enhance learner engagement and understand factors shaping the changing student experience in order to recalibrate your universities' value proposition and to compete successfully in competitive markets.

HE students, researchers and policy-makers will find this book educative given the emphasis throughout on research-informed links between HE leadership, policy and practice. The ideas are relevant for leaders in large public universities and smaller independent HE institutions alike. In a post-COVID environment, there is a pressing need for adaptive, change-capable (see Chapter 1) senior executive university leaders with a deep understanding of how to lead and learn with and from their university communities through unprecedented change.

A note about terminology

The term 'university' is used throughout the book as a proxy for HE institutions of various types, typically offering a combination of bachelor's and graduate degree programmes and with a commitment to scholarship and research. At times the terms 'college' or 'HE institute' are used interchangeably. The

term 'staff' encompasses academic faculty with disciplinary expertise and professional staff with a range of administrative or corporate functions in central teams or in academic departments.

Navigating this guide

Learner-Centred Leadership in Higher Education is organised around four questions examining the why, who, what and how of L-C HE leadership. Each of the eight chapters covers a core leadership capability of effective HE leaders who recognise that learners and learning are core to their purpose.

Part one establishes the 'why' of the book. Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of the book. It covers the core capability of understanding your leadership context through a learner-centred lens. The second chapter considers the capability of strategic co-design in creating your university learning ecosystem. The second section of the book addresses the 'who' of learner-centred leadership, introducing the core capabilities of engaging students as learners and connecting with colleagues across the institution to develop a shared focus on learner-centred strategy in action. Part three moves to the 'what' of leadership. This section addresses the complex subject of curriculum. It incorporates definitions of curriculum, the value of co- and extra-curricular learning, and the capabilities needed to lead whole-of-institution curriculum renewal effectively. I also examine the leadership capabilities involved in monitoring, assuring and enhancing academic quality through coherent approaches to academic policies, processes and governance as a learner-centred leader.

The final part of the book shifts to the capability of self-reflection and developing a deeper understanding of how you lead, how others experience your leadership and how you might continue to grow, develop and learn as a leader. The penultimate chapter introduces the capability of culture shaping, inviting you to contemplate your own leadership style and mindset and your role in shaping a L-C culture. The last chapter poses the question: what does it mean to lead with integrity in HE these days? It includes reflections on building your capability as a scholarly, ethical HE leader.

Following is a summary of the four sections and eight chapters of this guide (see Figure 1.1 for a visual summary).

Eight learner-centred leader capabilities

Part 1: Learner-centred HE leadership: why?

1. Understanding learner-centred leadership principles
2. Co-designing strategy

Part 2: Learner-centred HE leadership: who?

3. Engaging students as learners
4. Connecting with colleagues

Part 3: Learner-centred HE leadership: what?

5. Conceptualising and renewing curriculum
6. Enhancing quality through policy and practice

Part 4: Learner-centred HE leadership: how?

7. Shaping learner-centred culture
8. Leading with integrity

Each chapter includes:

- theory and research to guide an evidence-based understanding of L-C HE leadership capabilities;
- practical examples and case studies drawing on real-world HE leadership challenges;
- reflection questions to challenge your thinking;
- discussion points and thought-starters to share with peers, mentors or line managers; and
- tips to support your growth as a leader.

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PART 1

WHY does learner-centred higher education leadership matter?

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1 Understanding learner-centred leadership in higher education

As higher education (HE) leaders, whether experienced or new to the role, in a large metropolitan university or a smaller HE institute, we share one common characteristic: we all grapple with complexity on a daily basis. Regardless of location, institutional size or mission, one of the many privileges and challenges of leading in HE is that we find ourselves at the centre of supercomplexity (Barnett, 2000) and wicked problems that come across our desk or desktop multiple times each day.

This practical guide is designed to extend your leadership capabilities through research-informed ways of reflecting on and approaching HE leadership. I focus on evidence-based strategies to enable you to lead positively and productively in the midst of supercomplexity. While you may be inclined to head straight to the hints and tips sections, I encourage you to take a few moments to lift your gaze. Look beyond your office door, beyond your institutional boundaries to understand your role in a broader context. I think of this exercise as an opportunity for sensemaking through helicopter thinking.

From your metaphorical helicopter, examine your leadership role and your university community in a wider context. Consider implications for your leadership of factors such as: the massification of HE; systemic inequalities; disruptive forces such as technology, changing learner engagement patterns, demands for more flexible work arrangements, rapidly evolving labour market expectations; and the far-reaching consequences of unprecedented events like the global pandemic. From this vantage point, you will see that HE leaders around the world face the shared challenge of rethinking some of the fundamental elements of HE. This includes existential questions about how to be relevant to learners and their communities

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Reflect

- Before we go any further, take a moment to check in on your institutional system. I use the helicopter analogy. You might have a metaphorical drone or perhaps a gyroplane that enables you to rise above your supercomplex environment to see the big picture. Throughout this guide I invite you to take time out to reflect on what you perceive in your systemic context, what you are learning as a leader and how to apply your learning in practical ways.

in contemporary knowledge economies and how to engage learners from diverse backgrounds with increasingly diverse expectations of HE.

Enhancing the quality of learner experiences and assuring standards while providing wraparound support for the well-being and safety of university communities are equally compelling leadership priorities. The savvy HE leader also recognises that an engaged workforce is integral to positive learner experiences. University leaders share a common focus on connecting with a workforce that has been challenged by the rapid 'pivot' to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, changing work practices and the need to juggle the competing demands of curriculum innovation, research performance imperatives, civic engagement and rapid changes in the nature of academic work.

This chapter begins by reflecting on why L-C approaches to HE leadership are especially relevant in this rapidly evolving landscape. I introduce three conceptual frames that shape our understanding of the benefits of L-C leadership in contemporary universities before moving to practical implications for enhancing your leadership capabilities.

1 Understanding learner-centred HE leadership in a systemic context

My focus on learner-centredness is intentional. The notion of the HE student as learner subsumes the valuable tasks of studying prescribed discipline-based curricula, recognising that learning extends well beyond

curriculum boundaries. Learner-centredness represents a more expansive view of learners engaged in lifelong, lifewide learning unbounded by time, institution or place. Examining HE leadership through the lens of learner-centredness also allows us to take account of staff as learners and as agents of institutional adaptation and change. The leader as learner adds a further dimension to our understanding of L-C HE leadership. Further discussion of the implications of this learner-centred approach for your leadership follows later in this chapter.

We now turn to three conceptual frameworks that are woven throughout this guide and shape my own leadership philosophy and practice (see Chapter 8). These are systemic and ecosystemic approaches to thinking about HE institutions; the role of sensemaking in the midst of supercomplexity; and the value of a growth mindset for L-C HE leaders. I recognise that the theories informing these interweaving conceptual threads are developed, contested and recontested in a seemingly endless cycle. There is no single way of thinking about HE leadership and the theorising is far from static. My hope is that the lessons I have learned about the value of theory-informed, evidence-based approaches to HE leadership will inspire you to reflect more deeply and explore further for yourself within your own leadership environment.

1.1 HE leadership in the context of systems and ecosystems

The first conceptual framework shaping the approach I take in this guide is that of systems thinking in a HE context (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Ramage, Magnus & Shipp, 2009; Senge, 1990). Systems thinking is a way of making sense of the complexity of your leadership role by looking at it in a broader systemic context. Systems thinking involves a way of understanding your work and your environment in terms of relationships, connections and interdependencies. As a leader, understanding the power of systems thinking is a significant capability worth developing. Systems thinking takes you beyond the component parts of your university or college and gives you a lens through which to examine the many dimensions of university life that influence and shape you as a leader and that you, in turn, influence.

Ecosystems thinking goes one step further by drawing on an ecological metaphor to depict dynamic interconnections among people, services and resources in organisations. There is now a rich body of literature relating to learning ecosystems (Barron, 2006; Hecht & Crowley, 2020; Kinchin &

Gravett, 2022; Otto & Kerres, 2023). Barnett's (2018) idea of the ecological university, centred on seven ecosystems, has stimulated extensive interest in the application of ecological analysis of the university as an enterprise. From a different perspective, Kinchin (2022) has extended our understanding of the ecological university by focusing on the dynamic cyclical processes that characterise HE teaching contexts, particularly during periods of 'ecological shock' (p.686) such as those of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ecosystem analogy is an instructive one for HE leaders. It highlights the complex interrelationships that we find in universities; for instance among academic departments and administrative service areas, among students and staff, among university, government, industry and community groups, to name but a few. The ecosystem analogy reminds us that the university is a living, evolving organism in many ways. As such, it requires HE leaders who appreciate the social, political, economic and historical conditions in which their institutions operate. It also requires a leaderly appreciation of the diversity of leadership roles across the institutional ecosystem and the distributed leadership patterns that characterise universities (Tight, 2022). Later in this chapter, we will look more closely at leadership dimensions in a L-C HE ecosystem (see Figure 1.1).

Appreciating the big picture and the systemic reasons for the complexity you encounter as a leader is a useful starting point for thinking about the many dimensions of your role. Recognising the factors contributing to that complexity can be particularly helpful. This chapter is a reminder that one of the most powerful leadership steps you can take is to carve out time in your day to stop and reflect, to develop a deeper understanding of who you are as a leader and the context in which you lead. Intentionally make time to step away from the to-do list, hop into your helicopter, analyse the system of which you are a part, look at your role from various vantage points.

1.2 Sensemaking in supercomplexity

A second conceptual and theoretical framework informing my approach to leadership is that of organisational sensemaking. Sensemaking appeared in research in the mid-1960s examining how individuals constructed and communicated meaning (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). Weick (1976) first introduced the term in his study of sensemaking in educational organisations and the construct has formed the basis of a rich vein of work in the field over time (Dervin, 1998; Simkins, 2005; Weick, 1995, 2020). I have

found Ancona's (2012, 2020) approach helpful for developing my own leadership sensemaking capabilities and for leading university communities and teams in this process, especially during periods of intense institutional change, unpredictability and crisis. Building on Weick's cartography metaphor (2001), Ancona emphasises the role of leader as one who is able to create, co-create, review and progressively update maps of complex environments in order to make sense of them. This involves looking closely at the organisational system in which you are leading, collaborating with others to understand and make connections between seemingly disparate events, key pieces of information and data, and the human responses that characterise times of turmoil, including anger, frustration, shock or disengagement. Your ability to 'read' and make sense of your university environment and its broader context in this way is foundational to the leadership capabilities addressed in this guide.

Sensemaking involves being open-minded, willing to learn from and with others, a focus on making meaning in seemingly chaotic and confusing situations, and a willingness to test hypotheses and experiment in order to innovate and find new meanings in times of change (Ancona & Bresman, 2018). Sensemaking is not a one-off event. It is a mindset, a way of engaging with the world. As a leader, you play a key role in role modelling sensemaking values, attitudes and behaviours in order to foster a sensemaking culture (see Chapter 7). Sense-giving (Rheinhardt & Gioia, 2021) is a helpful way to think about your leadership role of efforts to create and co-create meaning as you communicate and engage with students and staff colleagues. In my experience, sensemaking and sense-giving are two sides of the same coin. They occur in recursive cycles that bring together individual efforts to make sense of change along with social processes of coming together

Reflect

- Take a moment to reflect on your leadership sensemaking capabilities. Do you see merit in conceiving of leadership as a sensemaking process?
- When was the last time you engaged in sensemaking with students or colleagues as part of your systemic leadership role?

as small teams or a whole institution to co-construct sensemaking maps in supercomplex, rapidly evolving university environments.

In the context of this guide, five sensemaking principles are relevant to our purposes:

1. Individual agency is foundational to sensemaking. Members of organisations actively construct their environment by looking for ways to organise and make sense of it.
2. Sensemaking adopts a systemic view of organisations like universities. It recognises that the language and tools we use to make sense of situations within that system are shaped by the social, cultural and historical contexts.
3. It focuses on how individuals and groups work together to make sense of a situation by organising information, chunking, categorising and labelling what they perceive as they construct sense maps, test these out and create shared meaning. It is particularly relevant in contexts when we are dealing with the unknown, the unexpected and the ambiguous. The impact of the global pandemic on institutions, individuals, communities and nations is a prime example of how leaders across the globe were challenged to make sense of the unknown, the ambiguous and the completely unexpected (Ancona, Bresman & Mortenson, 2021). The connection between wisdom and sensemaking when leading through change and ambiguity is further explored in Chapter 8.
4. The role of effective communication is foundational to the sensemaking process. This includes communication that is timely and fit for purpose in terms of language and modes of communication used for different audiences. Use of stories, symbols and rituals that are meaningful in your institutional context form part of the culture of sensemaking and what some call sense-giving (Kezar, 2013). These themes will be expanded further in Chapter 7 as we look at communication and learner-centred culture.
5. Sensemaking recognises that small steps, small gestures, small teams and seemingly insignificant moments matter a great deal and have significant consequences (Glynn & Watkiss, 2020; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

We will consider the practical applications of these five sensemaking principles for your leadership practice in Chapter 6.

Reflect

- How would you describe your leadership mindset? Are you open to further growth and development as a leader?
- Start thinking about what your leadership growth plan looks like.

1.3 The learner-centred leader's mindset

Understanding the role of leadership mindsets is a third framework shaping my approach in this guide. My focus on learner-centred leadership in HE is based on the view that leaders, too, need to be learners. There is always room for growth as a leader. My leadership philosophy is based on nurturing a sensemaking capability and a growth mindset that recognises the dual role of inherent capabilities and personal characteristics alongside professional learning and intentional cultivation of leadership capabilities. I have been influenced by Dweck's widely cited research (2017) which distinguishes between the fixed mindset – where we tend to adopt a fixed view of our qualities and capabilities – and the growth mindset which recognises that innate qualities can be fostered, developed and enhanced. A learner-centred leader is one who values learning, development and personal and professional growth. They prioritise ways to foster this growth potential in their own leadership and among the members of their university community. Acknowledging the variety of mindset development theories (Hastings & Schwarz, 2022), I draw on Dweck's growth mindset concept because it has been demonstrated to have a positive influence on leadership behaviours by challenging others to learn and develop (Kouzes & Posner, 2023).

2 Understanding leadership in HE contexts

There are myriad books, blogs, journal articles and courses of study devoted to the subject of leadership. No doubt you have a few of these on your bookshelf or in your digital library. Textbooks, guides and professional learning workshops on effective HE leadership abound. Definitions of leadership range from minimalistic – '…leadership is influence – nothing more, nothing less' (Maxwell, 2008) or '… a leader is someone who has followers' (Drucker, 1993, p.103) – to those that are somewhat more complex:

Getting things done through others, by creating a common purpose where all concerned believe that the goals can credibly be achieved and that they, individually, have the wherewithal to do so in the context of a shared culture, marked by mutual professional and personal respect' (Newton, 2021, p.4).

Many leadership definitions are context agnostic. In other words, they comprise principles that apply no matter where the leader finds themselves. These broad definitions tend to have several common elements, including:

i. the social context of leadership – leadership does not happen in a vacuum;
ii. the ability to communicate a goal or vision that resonates with individuals and groups in the social context; and
iii. the ability to influence people, their behaviours, perceptions and emotions.

Gigliotti and Ruben (2017) challenge these context-agnostic definitions, arguing that leadership combines technical and field-specific competencies with those that transcend particular settings, such as personal, communication and analytical competencies. They depict these as 'cross-cutting leadership competencies' (p.101) with generic horizontal leadership competencies cutting across vertical context-specific competencies. The most effective leaders are those who are able to combine the two.

In HE settings, effective leaders recognise the unique elements of the context and its implications for their leadership. These characteristics include the unique combination of teaching, research, service and community engagement characterising the values-based missions of universities. Other defining qualities of university settings include the moral purpose and the values-driven nature of HE (Gigliotti, 2022), along with the cultural distinctiveness that results from a community that combines late-teen and adult learners, discipline-based academic staff experts, and administrative and professional staff with expertise across a wide range of strategic and operational domains. Taken together these unique elements of HE require specific leadership capabilities in combination with those that might apply in any other organisational setting.

My focus on L-C HE *leadership*, rather than *management*, is deliberate. This is not to reduce the crucial importance of management skills and competencies such as budgeting, staffing, operational target-setting and

problem-solving. An effective HE leader will rise or fall on their ability to manage adeptly and to contribute to organisational goals. For our purposes, leadership is the focus. It recognises the importance of strategic vision, ability to bring people with you and to foster agency in collaborative leader-learner HE environments. While both management and leadership are key in fluid, ever-changing HE environments, I subscribe to the view that, when faced with wicked problems of change and uncertainty, 'leadership will come into its own and will have to demonstrate its capacities for wisdom, in attempting to hold together concepts, ideas and outlooks that simply won't be reconciled' (Barnett, 2019, p.25).

A substantial proportion of HE leaders fall into the category of academic leaders who are affiliated with disciplinary communities (Hosein, Rao & Kinchin, 2022). The term 'academic leadership' covers a broad spectrum of roles in universities. Typically, senior positions of responsibility such as Faculty Dean, Provost or Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) Academic or Research are held by academic leaders. This leadership category may also encompass those in mid-level leadership roles such as Head of Department and those responsible for smaller teams such as a research team leader, course, programme or discipline leader.

The following research case study outlines characteristics of successful academic leaders and invites you to consider how applicable these leadership qualities are in your context.

Research Case Study 1.1: Characteristics of successful academic leaders

(Scott, 2023; Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008)

An Australian study of the characteristics of successful academic leaders (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008) identified and ranked overlapping personal, interpersonal and cognitive leadership capabilities combined with management-related generic and role-specific competencies. These to continue to provide a relevant diagnostic tool to enable leaders to reflect on their experience (Scott, 2023). Scott points out that leadership and management are closely connected, forming a continuum in leaders' day-to-day practice. Management is conceptualised in this research as a 'subset of leadership' (Scott, 2023, p.101).

The top ten academic leader capabilities, in rank order, identified by Scott and colleagues (2008, p.74) are:

i. being transparent and honest in dealings with others;
ii. being true to one's personal values and ethics;
iii. remaining calm under pressure;
iv. empathising and working productively with staff and other key players;
v. understanding personal strengths and limitations;
vi. being able to organise work and manage time effectively;
vii. energy and passion for learning and teaching;
viii. identifying from a mass of information the core issue or opportunity;
ix. making sense of and learning from experience; and
x. admitting to and learning from errors.

Apply the research

- ✓ Which of these ten leadership capabilities are most important in your experience of effective leaders?
- ✓ This research was conducted in Australia some years ago. Do you think leadership capabilities have changed since then? Would this list look different in your context?
- ✓ The research involved academic leaders. Is there a different set of capabilities for professional and administrative staff?
- ✓ Looking at this list, where are your strengths?
- ✓ Where would you like to grow and develop your leadership capabilities? Discuss this with a trusted peer or mentor as you think about developing a leadership growth plan.

The mutually reinforcing suite of academic leadership capabilities identified in Research Case Study 1.1 can readily be adapted to describe effective leadership in professional and administrative roles in HE, including Academic Registrars, Heads of residential colleges and the like. Whitchurch (2019b) reflects on the rise of the third space professional roles that operate in the increasingly overlapping space between academic faculty roles

and professional staff roles (see Chapter 4). Examples of such roles include educational developers, student learning support staff, staff responsible for leading academic advising initiatives in faculties, student engagement and retention support staff, work-based learning coordinators and academic quality support staff.

In summary, HE leadership qualities include:

- self-awareness and optimism;
- a core belief in the value and capability of people in your university and their ability to learn and grow;
- willingness to share responsibility for learning, problem-solving, strategising and decision-making with others, including students and staff representing diverse backgrounds, experiences and perspectives;
- a sense of personal, professional and organisational purpose;
- a learner-orientation that demonstrates care for the well-being of your learner community and an understanding of the importance of fostering positive relationships; and
- together, these qualities underpin leadership integrity, a capability addressed in Chapter 8.

Having considered definitions of leadership and qualities of effective HE leaders, we turn our attention to the heart of this guide: understanding the significance of learner-centredness as a threshold concept (Meyer & Land, 2003) designed to challenge perceptions and open up new ways to think about and enact HE leadership in rapidly evolving contexts.

Reflect

- Who and what has shaped your concepts of HE leadership?
- Who springs to mind as a successful HE leader in your experience?
- Do you recognise any of the five leadership qualities summarised above in the successful leader of whom you are thinking? What would you add to the list above?

3 Understanding the implications of learner-centredness for HE leaders

Building on the three conceptual frameworks outlined in Section 1, this section examines some of the implications of learner-centredness, as distinct from student-centred approaches in HE. I then present a definition of L-C HE leadership that forms the basis for the chapters to follow.

3.1 Learner-centredness and HE leadership: a challenging threshold concept?

I argue for learner-centredness as a threshold concept (Meyer & Land, 2003) in the field of HE leadership. As such it provides fresh ways to think critically about your role and purpose as a HE leader. I recognise the extensive literature on student-centred approaches in HE learning and teaching (e.g., Bremner, 2021; Gravett, Yakovchuk & Kinchin, 2020; Hoidn & Klemencic, 2021). This body of work makes a worthy contribution to shifting the focus from teacher-centred to student-focused approaches to HE pedagogy and partnerships. The terms 'student-centred' and 'learner-centred' are often used interchangeably (Hoidn & Reusser, 2021).

My choice of the term 'learner-centred' in this context is deliberate. I seek to shift the scholarly and practical dial even further, showing that L-C HE leadership:

i. draws attention to the human, learner dimension of organisational leadership. In an era of continuous change, disruptions and global crises, emphasis on understanding the networks of people who work and learn in HE institutions is one of our greatest leadership needs. Understanding and enabling their collective capabilities for creativity, innovation and adaptability will strengthen individual well-being, community resilience and organisational sustainability. While many refer to the learning communities that populate university ecosystems, I refer rather to 'learner communities' for the purposes of this guide. The implicit vision is that learner-driven values, cultures and actions will coalesce over time to shape learner-centred universities; and
ii. recognises that all members of the university community – students, staff and leaders alike – are first and foremost learners. This is particularly relevant in times of uncertainty when confronted by unprecedented and

unexpected wicked problems. No amount of study can fully prepare one to deal with these immanent challenges. Instead, individuals and teams must be willing to learn and make sense of uncertainty and ambiguity in new ways, using all available expertise combined with personal wisdom, courage and resilience. In this sense, a learner-centred leader needs to be ambidextrous (Alghamdi, 2018; Duwe, 2022; O'Reilly, 2013), taking a both-and approach that respects the value of expertise while remaining open to learning. Role-modelling this open-mindedness as a learner leader is an important part of effective HE leadership.

For HE leaders, learner-centredness opens up a way of understanding and interpreting our work as leaders at a time of supercomplexity when the purposes of HE are being questioned, traditional face-to-face modes of learner-teacher engagement are challenged and the disruptive influences of unanticipated crises like the global pandemic are changing the once familiar ways of university life and operations (Jorgensen & Claeys-Kulik, 2021). These sources of complexity are not all negative. Change and disruption has many positive outcomes including unprecedented innovation. Nevertheless, it can take its toll if leaders are under-prepared and fail to learn how to be change-capable (Fullan & Scott, 2009).

3.2 Adapting as a learner-centred HE leader

Leading in supercomplex HE environments demands new ways of understanding, new leadership lenses, if you like. It requires a philosophical and conceptual shift (Vodicka, 2020) that may be distinctly disturbing for some. It challenges our long-held views of the role of expert faculty member and novice student. We are also challenged to think differently about the power dynamic in the university community, about hierarchies and power differentials when we consider all members of the university as learners coming together for collective purposes. This kind of thinking can be uncomfortable, even somewhat threatening, but I argue that it is essential for us to move out of our comfort zones, if we haven't already been catapulted out by the disruption of crises like the global pandemic.

Learner-centredness, with its focus on co-creation, co-design and strengthening partnerships among students, staff and leaders, requires a willingness to adapt to new ways of thinking, relating and working. Looked at from the student learner perspective, there is the potential to reset conversations

and strategies relating to the student experience. Looked at from the staff learner perspective, a L-C approach to curriculum development, learning and teaching may challenge existing learning and teaching regimes. The aim of this guide is to outline practical strategies that enable you to lead adaptively (Harris & Cullen, 2008; Heifetz, Linsky & Grashow, 2009) in order to learn from, problem solve with and support your community as they engage in more learner-centred practices.

I acknowledge that paradigm-shifting of the kind contemplated in this guide takes time and implementing such a vision may be a slow process. In this context, a systemic leadership mindset will be important to enable you to recognise the many interdependencies in your university's learning ecosystem (Hecht & Crowley, 2020). Envisaging your work as a series of interrelated adaptive cycles (Kinchin, 2022) may be helpful in maintaining your leadership focus and sense of momentum. I note the potential risk of placing students as learner at the core of the ecosystem (see Figure 1.2) for this potentially risks losing sight of the multitude of forces that make up the wider learning ecosystem (Hecht & Crowley, 2020). I take the view, however, that students as learners should remain as a central focus and that the potential risks of narrowing the focus can be overcome within the broader L-C approach underpinning this guide.

3.3 Agency and the learner-centred HE leader

Appreciating the link between learner-centredness and agency is foundational to my philosophy of leadership (see Chapter 8). While there are numerous conceptions of human agency, I draw on the socio-cognitive theory of Bandura (2001) who identified the following four components of human agency, namely: intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-effectiveness. There may be different modes of agency (Bandura, 2018) including: individual agency where a person is able to exercise agency to achieve a desired outcome; socially mediated proxy agency where individuals influence others to act on their behalf; and collective agency which arises from group effort. The enhancing and enabling of student and staff agency on the part of HE leaders is a catalyst for shaping a learner-centred culture that encourages collective and agentic sensemaking. Kinchin (2022, p.37) suggests that agency can be likened to a process of engagement within particular contexts. This engagement may involve other people or non-human actors like technology, for example.

I contend that L-C HE leaders play a key role in building the agentic capabilities of students and staff learners through strategies such as co-creation and co-implementation of strategy (Chapter 2); student-staff partnerships (see Chapter 3) and collaborative approaches to curriculum renewal (see Chapter 5). These approaches to student engagement, partnership and connecting with staff contribute positively to well-being and sensemaking capabilities that are particularly important in times of change when a sense of self-efficacy and the ability to self-regulate are key.

The next section provides a definition of L-C HE leadership followed by a visual representation of the ecosystemic approach that underpins this leadership guide.

4 Learner-centred HE leadership: unpacking the definition

The following theory-informed definition of L-C HE leadership provides a foundation for the chapters to follow. The definition comprises three dimensions which are expanded in further detail before inviting you to consider an illustrative case study.

The L-C HE leader:

places learners at the heart of organisational planning and action;
applying the principles of agentic co-creation with students and staff; and
to facilitate sensemaking and growth in HE ecosystems.

Let's look more closely at these three qualities of the L-C HE leader that will be examined in greater depth in the chapters to follow.

4.1 Learners are at the heart of the learner-centred HE leader's strategising, planning and action

Figure 1.2 conceptualises HE learners in the context of an organisational ecosystem. It depicts students as learners at the core of the university because after all, they are the principal reason for a university's existence. I invite you to think about the role of academic faculty, staff, managers, community and

industry representatives as both experts and learners who are integral to this network within and beyond your organisation.

As a L-C leader responsible for leading teams, developing and co-creating institutional strategy, allocating resources and scaffolding the learning environment, you will be a leader who applies the learner lens to all aspects of your work. Chapters 5–8 explore the capabilities needed to lead curriculum renewal, assure and enhance quality and frame your strategic planning, policies and processes with the learner at the centre. Your day-to-day conversations, planning and sensemaking with colleagues have at their conceptual core a focus on students as learners, who they are, why they attend your university, what challenges they face in their learning journey, and how best to collaborate with them in developing higher learning capabilities for a complex world.

4.2 The learner-centred HE leader applies the principles of agentic co-creation

My early development as a L-C HE leader was influenced by constructivist theories, informed by the cognitive constructivist approach of Piaget (1972, 1985) and the social constructivist theoretical framework of Vygotsky (1978). Both theorists emphasised the pivotal role of the social environment and social interactions in learning and cognitive development. This social network includes peers, teachers, family and community members who may be involved in the learning process. Vygotsky went a step further to examine the role of socio-cultural influences on learning, emphasising that meaningful, scaffolded social interactions and participation contribute positively to advanced forms of cognitive development and reasoning.

There is a connection between Vygotsky's work on socially situated, scaffolded learning and the principles of organisational sensemaking advocated by Weick (2005). Situated cognition (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989) similarly recognises the integral connection between cognition, learning and cultural context in which learning takes place. For this reason, an entire chapter is devoted to the capability of shaping learner-centred cultures in universities. Recognising the experience, knowledge and skills that individual learners bring to the learning environment and respecting their prior learning is a further feature of the situative constructivist frameworks (Hoidn, 2017) that have shaped my emphasis on the importance of learner agency and co-creation.

The sociology of knowledge and related matters of structuring, power and control of knowledge (Bernstein, 2000) in educational contexts have been formative in my leadership thinking, particularly given my experience of working in universities with substantial proportions of first-in-family learners from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Understanding the unique dimensions of disciplinary discourses (Krause, 2014) and the importance of intentionally supporting first year students' transition to new academic contexts also played shaped my views on HE leadership and the importance of fostering students' agency in new and unfamiliar learning environments. The L-C leader will develop a deep understanding of the social, cultural and context-specific nature of learning in the HE context and will draw on this capability to promote individual, group and organisational learning. This leadership quality is examined in Chapter 2 where we explore leadership capabilities in relation to co-design in partnership with learners.

While preferencing socio-cognitive and constructivist theoretical frameworks, I recognise the valuable insights that come from many other theoretical frameworks and traditions. I encourage you to consider the theories and approaches that shape your current leadership approaches and whether there is scope for further professional growth, reading and development in this area.

In order to co-create with learners, leaders must understand the meaning of learner engagement (see Chapter 3). In this guide, learner engagement is positioned as a reciprocal relationship-building process involving students, staff and leaders of the university (Krause, 2005). Engagement isn't something that is 'done' to students as they walk through the university door. It involves a collective, agentic relationships involving: disciplinary experts who lead the design of curricula to enhance learning and learning outcomes; professional staff experts who provide IT support, curriculum

Reflect

- What theoretical frameworks inform your approach to leadership?
- How do they shape your approach to your day-to-day conversations with students and staff or your priority-setting and strategic decision-making?

design support and student support services designed to enhance learner engagement in the learning environment; and student learners who are responsible for taking proactive steps to engage with those learning experiences and support services.

Our focus is the university leader's responsibility for L-C design of institutional strategies, organisational structures, resource allocation and environments that promote engaged and agentic learning. The remainder of this guide expands on ways to develop your leadership capabilities as you promote engagement with students as learners (Chapter 3), connect with colleagues (Chapter 4), and shape a L-C culture (Chapter 7).

4.3 The learner-centred HE leader has a growth mindset and understands the value of systemic sensemaking

Your university ecosystem may be fluid, evolving and messy (Kinchin, 2022). It includes a complex array of individuals, teams, departments and faculties, not to mention many others who play a role in enhancing learner engagement; for example those responsible for engaging with students in work-based learning environments, residential living and learning communities, co-curricular activities such as volunteering and service learning or extra-curricular learning experiences through sporting and cultural activities and the like. Student life teams, student advisors and student finance staff also contribute to the learning ecosystem, as do community and industry members who facilitate student learning in work-based settings. To be an effective L-C HE leader, you will need to develop ways to engage constructively with various individuals and teams, often with diverse and conflicting interests and perspectives, particularly with regard to the various fields of educational theory and disciplinary differences. In this context, sensemaking and an open-minded growth mindset are ideal travel companions for your leadership journey.

To make sense of this complexity for yourself, you might consider developing a learner ecosystem map (see Case Study 1.2 and Figure 1.2). Similar to a concept mapping exercise, this visual prompt can help you to identify progressively the various individuals, teams, organisational areas or external stakeholders who have an influence on the learning environment. This is a helicopter exercise. You need to map out the big picture and analyse the interrelationships among various members of your university community to

guide your analysis of what is working well and where you might need to invest time and resources to improve learner engagement. You will find it helpful to apply the ecological metaphor of the ecosystem when analysing your organisation and its many layers. Ecosystems thinking (Joshi, Khan & Rab, 2021) is a useful capability for leaders who need to understand how the various parts of a university connect, overlap and support one another. Equally important is an ecosystems mindset that is on the lookout for disjuncts and failures to connect in ways that support a healthy ecosystem.

5 Learner-centred HE leadership in practice

This section presents practical ways to apply your evolving understanding of L-C HE leadership in the context of your organisational ecosystem. The visual representation in Figure 1.1 summarises the interrelated leadership capabilities covered in each chapter of this guide and the case study suggests approaches for mapping the community of learners in your institutional context.

5.1 Eight dimensions of learner-centred HE leadership

The definition outlined in the previous section is captured in Figure 1.1 below. This visual depiction brings together the four leadership questions and eight core capabilities covered through this guide, encouraging you to think about your leadership in the context of an interconnected HE ecosystem that operates in a broader institutional and national context.

The L-C HE leader recognises that they are part of an ecosystem comprising institutional dimensions such as the mission of the institution, its strategies, organisational structures, governance arrangements, services, policies and processes. The HE institution, in turn, operates in a national and global context that determines government policy, industry expectations, professional accreditation requirements and community perspectives. The global context in which you lead is equally significant, though a detailed discussion of external factors lies beyond the scope of this book.

Figure 1.1 provides a scaffold to guide your reading and is a useful reference point. Learners, learning experiences and outcomes are all integral to the idea of the L-C organisational ecosystem. Learning is conceived

Figure 1.1 Leadership dimensions in a learner-centred HE ecosystem

as an integrated process that takes place both individually and in the context of membership of a multiplicity of communities and microcultures (see Chapter 7).

Ecosystems thinking enables us to look at our leadership in the context of the social, political and economic conditions affecting HE institutions. The leadership dimensions covered in this Guide can be applied no matter which part of the university you work in, no matter what sort of leadership role you have or may wish to have. If you are a member of the University Executive, you will have Executive leadership responsibility right across the

organisation and beyond. Fostering L-C leadership capabilities among your senior team and role modelling this approach from the most senior level will have a significant impact on your university.

If you are an academic leader in the role of Dean, Head of School or Course Leader you, too, have a role to play in engaging with your students as learners and in partnering with colleagues to promote connections and enhance quality. If you are a leader of student support services you have a key role to play as a L-C leader. And if you are an emerging leader looking for ways to think about your leadership journey, whom you might connect with and learn from, you will benefit from considering this L-C ecosystems perspective.

5.2 A newly appointed leader starts the journey of learner-centred HE leadership

The following case study introduces Prof Naidoo whose leadership journey you will trace through future case studies (see Chapters 2, 6 and 7). Prof Naidoo's efforts to sensemake and grow as a leader while experimenting with ways to build the capability of others illustrates many of the core concepts of this guide. Each case study also invites you to consider practical applications for your own leadership.

Case Study 1.2: Mapping your learner ecosystem in a new leadership role

Professor Naidoo has recently been appointed as DVC Education and Learner Experience at Glass Lakes University (GLU). She is new to the university and understands the importance of building strong connections with members of the university community. During the first few weeks she prioritises introductory meetings with colleagues, student representatives and industry stakeholders who partner with GLU to provide industry placements in such courses as Engineering, Business and Teacher Education. Each meeting is 30–45 minutes and she keeps the conversation fairly open-ended. Before each meeting, she asks just one question: *What role can I play to support you in your work and/or your learning at GLU?* As you can imagine, people are very pleased to

have an opportunity to meet with the new DVC and, most importantly, to have their say.

By the end of Week 3 in her new role, she finds her head spinning. How will she keep track of all these people and their roles? How will she manage to keep in touch with all these people? How can she possibly respond to all the issues they have raised? There simply isn't time in the calendar or bandwidth in her head. It seems an impossible task.

Her executive coach introduces her to the idea of stakeholder mapping, borrowing from the corporate world. Prof Naidoo looks for ways to adapt this to her HE setting. She treats it as a brainstorming exercise to begin with and it is a relief to get all those names out of her head and onto her tablet. She works on chunking the names into their respective functions and areas of responsibility. Her initial focus is the people, roles and functions within her university. She will add industry, government and community representatives in the next phase.

Bit by bit, she starts to see some order emerging in the spaghetti of lines. But something is missing. She realises that she has overlooked the common thread that unites all these people and their roles: the university's learners and their experience. She adds a circle for learner at the centre of her map and rearranges some of the other parts of the map (she is very pleased that she decided to do this on her tablet so that she can edit, drag and drop!).

As she studies her map and recalls her conversations, she realises that the students aren't the only learners in her ecosystem map. Many of the staff talked about the challenges of needing to learn how to pivot to online learning during COVID and adapt hybrid working arrangements post-COVID. She's interested in pursuing the idea of staff as learners along with students and how she might facilitate more student-staff collaborations as part of her new strategic plan. You can see the emergent learner ecosystem map that Prof Naidoo developed in Figure 1.2 below.

She will keep this draft ecosystem map on her tablet as a useful visual reminder of the complexity of the community people who make up the ecosystem in which she plays a key leadership role. It will be helpful

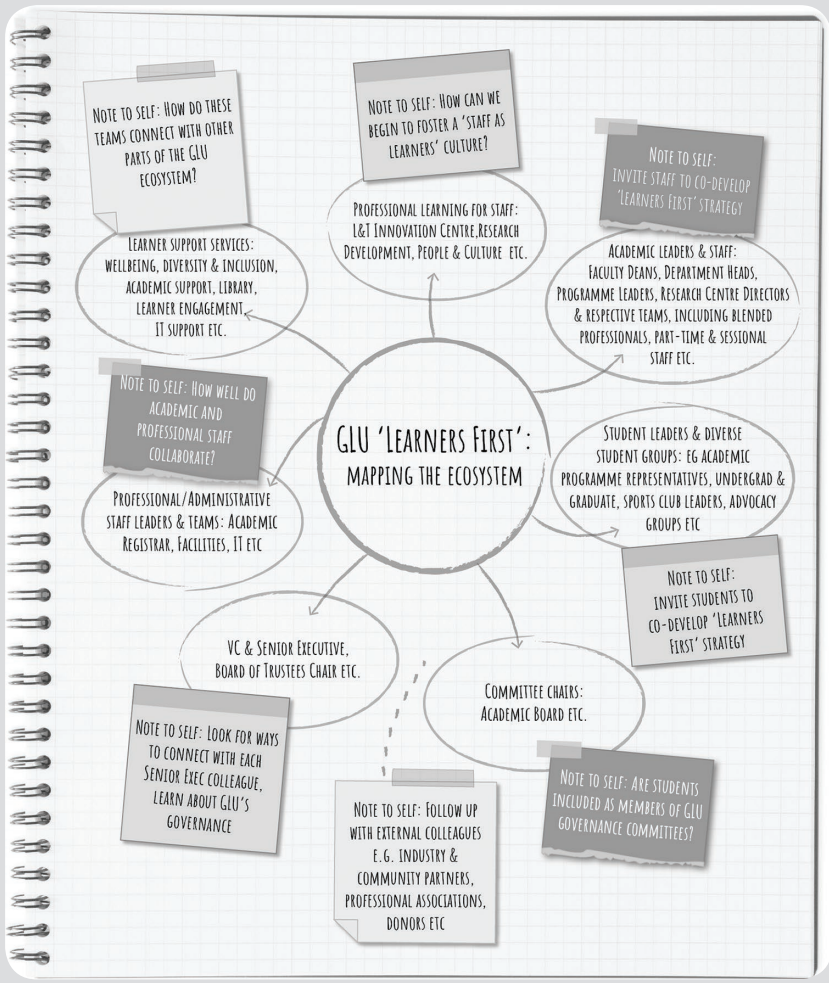

Figure 1.2 Emergent learner-centred university ecosystem map

to update, add connecting lines when relationships are developed or strengthened and annotate when there are areas to be improved. It is also a useful tool to help with helicopter thinking. At a glance, Prof Naidoo is able to see the big picture. As she develops her 'Learners First' strategic plan she will use the map to identify strategic priority areas, to assess what and who is working well and where improvements are needed.

Apply: What Would You Do?

- ✓ What do you see as the merits of setting up as many meet-and-greet opportunities as possible in the first few weeks of a new leadership role? Are there any down-sides?
- ✓ Who are the key members of your university's learner ecosystem? What opportunities do you see for extending your view of learners to include staff as well as students in your HE institution?
- ✓ What are the inter-relationships and inter-dependencies among people and departments in your institution? Have you noticed any disjuncts or broken connections between areas that really should be collaborating?

6 Bringing it all together: 5 big ideas

In this chapter, we have set the scene by asking why L-C leadership matters. In addressing this question we have covered five big ideas:

1. L-C HE leaders place learners at the centre of their thinking, planning and actions. Consider extending your view to include students and staff as learners and co-constructors in your organisational ecosystem.
2. L-C leaders may operate in any part of the university in formal or informal leadership roles. They may include academic leaders, professional staff leaders, and senior executives.
3. A growth mindset focuses on the value of learning and potential for further development of leadership capabilities.
4. Systems thinking is a useful tool for understanding your university, its people, relationships and operations as an interdependent ecosystem.
5. Jumping into your metaphorical helicopter from time to time gives you a big picture, systemic perspective of your university and your unique leadership contribution in the midst of supercomplexity.

Investing time in developing your understanding of the key concepts and theoretical underpinnings of L-C leadership is a core leadership capability worth honing. The next chapter examines the capability of co-designing strategy in a L-C university.

Apply – discuss these ideas with peers, supervisors and Mentors

- ✓ Discuss the ten academic leader capabilities outlined in Research Case Study 1.1. Carry out a stocktake of your leadership capabilities and discuss this with a trusted colleague.
- ✓ Which of the three L-C HE leader qualities (see Section 4) are most relevant to you at the moment? What further qualities would you add to a definition of L-C leader for your institution or work setting?
- ✓ How can you apply a growth mindset to your leadership (see Section 1.3)? Seek advice on developing your leadership growth plan. You might consider one or more of the following as professional learning goals for the next 12 months:

  i. 1 × leadership book to read;
  ii. 1 × colleague to learn from;
  iii. 1 × capability-building workshop to attend;
  iv. 1 × leadership capability to develop further.

Grow as a leader

- Tip 1. Carve out time to develop your understanding of L-C HE leadership. Make it a priority to hop into your metaphorical helicopter to make sense of the big picture of your department, your university and your leadership role in it.
- Tip 2. Map your institutional ecosystem using Figure 1.2 as a guide. Review and update it regularly. Notice the new connections, the connections that are broken or yet to be joined up. Consider the leadership role you play in making these connections and in helping others to make sense of the sometimes confusing institutional landscape in which they find themselves.
- Tip 3. Identify your leadership mindset – is there scope for growth? Develop a plan for growing your leadership capabilities.

2 Leading learner-centred strategy co-design in higher education

In this chapter, we address the question of why L-C HE leadership matters from the perspective of strategy co-design. Drawing on cognitive and social constructivist theories outlined in Chapter 1, this chapter applies the concept of co-design to higher education leadership and systemic strategy development and implementation. We focus on the meaning of strategy and how to bring your university or college community with you in co-designing and co-implementing L-C strategy.

As in the previous chapter, a helicopter perspective is helpful for providing a systemic view of the leadership task and its connection to strategy before examining the various layers of strategy at the university level, the department level and the local level. We will consider the benefits of co-design for building an inclusive, whole-of-institution approach to strategy and implementation. The chapter concludes with a section on tips for successful implementation of strategy in partnership with learners in your university community. Core principles for learner-centred strategy leadership are introduced in this chapter, forming the basis for the chapters to follow.

1 What is strategy and why does it matter?

Why include a chapter on strategy so early in the book? You will find myriad books, business magazine articles, courses and do-it-yourself resources on strategy in the corporate context. In my experience, however, there is relatively little by way of comparable resources for HE leaders. In universities we typically draw on and adapt key concepts and theories derived from approaches deployed in the corporate sector, looking for ways to apply these

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in university settings. For the most part, this gets the job done, but there is an argument for developing a bespoke understanding of the distinctive qualities of effective strategy design and execution in a HE context.

Put simply, strategy is a plan of action to achieve a set of goals. As a leader, one of the most powerful capabilities you can develop is that of learning how to strategise and how to bring others with you in the process. In a post-pandemic HE context, leaders face numerous new challenges that demand strategic responses rather than short-term tactics. For example, the globally experienced lockdowns resulting from COVID-19 in 2020 drove people into work- and study-from-home mode. Traditional work and study patterns were disrupted and communities fragmented. In this environment, HE leaders have had to be strategic about how they rebuild and sustain their institutional communities, how they approach the demand for more flexible approaches to work, and how they address the massive increase in well-being and mental health challenges experienced by HE students and staff. Strategy design and implementation is a core capability for effective leaders in this new learning and working environment.

Strategy is like a map. If you need to travel from your university campus to a meeting with a colleague in a neighbouring university an hour's drive away, you may type the address into your smartphone map app and wait for the various route options to pop up. Usually, a recommended route appears in a bold line, with perhaps a few other options in lighter shades indicating alternatives that may take longer or cost more in tolls. Your goal is to arrive at your meeting on time. Your plan is to take a series of actions along the route to reach your destination. Typically, your map will indicate whether there are roadworks, speed cameras, traffic lights or tolls along the way. Similarly, effective strategy development starts with your end goal, what you want to achieve and the actions you plan to take to arrive at your destination.

Typically, strategy concerns itself with medium- to long-term goals, while tactics are short-term actions that form part of the journey. For example, as you set off on your trip to visit your colleague, armed with your trusty digital phone map safely mounted on your car's dashboard in hands-free mode, the map may throw up multiple side routes to avoid traffic or road works. One tactic may be to take a side road detour to save some time. Another tactic may be to take the toll road as a way to save time in the long run. These short-term tactics are actions that may help you to accomplish your ultimate goal of getting to your destination on time. All the while, your longer-term strategy of taking a car trip to visit with your colleague doesn't change.

Reflect

- Reflect on the range of strategies in your university or college. Which ones are front of mind for you? Is there an institutional strategy that affects your work priorities at the moment? It might be your university's five-year strategy, or perhaps the institutional strategy for learning and teaching or research and enterprise. When was the last time you discussed this strategy with your colleagues? Would you describe it as a 'living document' or is it something you store on the shelf and rarely look at?
- In your current role, what responsibilities do you have for designing and developing strategy? Even in leading a small team, how might a deeper understanding of strategy help you in your work?
- What do you most look forward to in designing strategy? What are you most concerned about?

You may feel that strategy is something you did not sign up for or perhaps it is in someone else's job description. In fact, the ability to think and act strategically is a capability that is well worth developing and one that is essential for leaders. There are many resources on strategy and just as many on methodologies and approaches to use. I am not advocating for a specific methodology in this Guide. Instead, the emphasis is on core principles of effective HE strategy leadership with an emphasis on the L-C principle of co-design in partnership with your students, staff and peer leaders. As strategy partners, they have the opportunity to learn with you about how to co-design, co-implement and co-evaluate strategy in your institutional setting.

For HE leaders, there are many lessons to learn from strategic planning and development in the corporate sector. Nonetheless, there are some distinctive characteristics of HE strategy, particularly for those leaders focused on L-C design, as outlined in the next section.

1.1 Approaches to strategy in HE contexts

What is the difference between approaches to strategy in corporate business contexts and HE institutions? To answer this question let's consider

some of the defining characteristics of HE. There are many university types with particular emphases. For example, research intensive-universities may have a different emphasis to that of universities that are more teaching-focused or those with a strong social justice mission of inclusion. Our aim is not to define all possible characteristics of the different types of universities but rather to examine a few of the defining qualities that distinguish HE from corporate settings. This will help us to understand how to adapt our approach to strategy design and implementation accordingly.

Noting the diversity of the HE sector internationally, following is a list of characteristics that may apply to a greater or lesser extent to your institution. Universities typically share the following characteristics and values:

1. learning in disciplinary or multidisciplinary contexts;
2. academic faculty whose professional identity is closely linked to their disciplinary expertise;
3. discovery of new knowledge in the form of disciplinary research;
4. applying new knowledge to address social and global challenges;
5. educating the next generation of citizens, scholars and researchers;
6. opportunity for advanced levels of study from bachelor to doctoral degrees;
7. development of students' citizenship and employability capabilities;
8. civic leadership and community engagement;
9. a distinctive approach to shared academic governance with associated policies and processes;
10. commitment to the principles of freedom of speech and intellectual freedom.

In isolation, any one of the above characteristics may not be considered unique to universities. Many of them could be said to be true of socially responsible corporations, for example. However, when taken together they paint a picture of defining qualities that characterise institutions of higher learning.

The extent to which your university demonstrates these characteristics may vary, depending on institutional type, history, sociocultural context or national policy settings. This, in turn, will influence the way in which strategy is conceived, developed and implemented in your institution. There is no formula to apply when it comes to developing strategy in your university.

Instead, we will focus on core principles and some practical steps for action to guide your leadership.

Each university's mission, shaped by its social and cultural context, will drive the strategic goals in place and will determine how those goals are achieved. A university's strategic goals may cover an array of priorities.

Reflect

- Here is another helicopter opportunity. Take a helicopter view of your university's metaphorical landscape:
  a. what are its key characteristics?
  b. what are its core mission, purpose and values?
  c. how are these reflected in your university's current institutional strategy?
  d. how often do you or your colleagues review and renew your institutional strategy to reflect changing conditions within and beyond your university?

- What role do you, or will you, play in shaping the institutional strategy? How do the characteristics listed above influence your institution's strategy? Are there any characteristics missing? Any that are especially relevant to your institution?
- Depending on your role and level of experience, you may have the opportunity to shape the institution-level strategy and to influence some of the strategy design processes. Alternatively, you may be responsible for developing strategy that cascades from the institutional strategy. For example, you may be responsible for designing your institution's Learning and Teaching Strategy, perhaps you are leading the development of a new Student Engagement Strategy for your university, or maybe you are tasked with leading a strategy for improving the quality and range of blended curriculum offerings in your department or academic programme level. Whichever your level of leadership responsibility, an important starting point is the big picture at institution level to ensure alignment of strategic goals and actions.

These include: increasing student numbers; improving the quality of the student experience; improving the quality and impact of research; engaging more effectively with industry; giving students more industry-based learning experiences;

improving staff morale and culture and more. Depending on your leadership role and responsibilities, you will need to develop your strategy in a way that links to and cascades from the institution-level strategy.

1.2 What is distinctive about learner-centred *HE strategy?*

As a L-C leader, it is useful to build on what we have learned so far about the meaning of strategy and the characteristics of universities and colleges that will influence your approach to leading the process of strategy design, development and implementation.

The ten characteristics of universities, highlighted in Section 1.1 above, give a helpful clue about how to take a L-C approach to HE strategy. The focus on learning and discovery, the pivotal role of disciplinary cultures and identities in university life, together with the value attached to shared academic governance lay the foundation for the L-C leader to develop strategy in partnership with their university community.

In Chapter 1, we noted that L-C leadership is based on a theoretical framework that situates learning in social and cultural contexts. Moreover, learning is a social process. Social constructivism (Noweski et al., 2012; Pande & Bharathi, 2020; Vygotsky, 1978) underpins our understanding of the value of co-design. If your students, staff and peer leaders are actively involved in co-designing the strategy that affects their learning and professional lives, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership, to learn through the process and, in turn, to become more actively engaged members of your university community.

Successful strategy leadership recognises the social and cultural elements at play and understands how to involve students and staff colleagues in the process of strategy design, development, implementation and review. L-C strategy is anchored in the people and the purposes it serves. It is useful to think about strategy as an onion with multiple layers. For our purposes, the focus is on the layers of individuals and teams that make up your university's community. But there are many others who have a stake in L-C strategy including industry members and employers, accrediting bodies, government, regulators and community members who form part of your broader

Reflect

- Chapter 1 introduced the idea of a learner ecosystem map (Figure 1.2) as a way to map out the members of your institutional community. Revisit your emergent map through the lens of strategy development.
- Who are the key people, individuals, groups, internal and external to your university whom you need to consider in designing your strategy?
- Are there any priority individuals and groups with whom you might need to meet in the early stages of your work on strategy?
- How will you keep track of these participants and ensure that you are hearing representative views?

network of stakeholders. An example of a much larger learning community network is provided in Research Case Study 2.2.

Often the 'why' of strategy leadership is overlooked. This chapter focuses primarily on the design elements of a successful strategy, whether it be at university-wide level or within a small team at the local level. As a leader, it may seem like a good idea to jump straight into the strategy implementation phase of your role, particularly if you are outcomes-focused and keen to get on with the job of leading with strategic intent. However, I encourage you to start by taking a step back in order to be mindful in your planning. Clarify your strategic purpose and develop an understanding of the principles of strategy co-design and building partnerships with your co-design partners before executing. Sutton and Rao (2016) describe this as slowing down in the initial phase of work in order to speed up and be more effective and efficient in implementing your strategy down the road.

The chapters to follow explore in more depth some elements involved in implementing your strategy including engaging with learners (Chapter 3), connecting with colleagues (Chapter 4), addressing curriculum, quality and policy priorities (Chapters 5 and 6), and fostering a L-C culture (Chapter 7).

1.3 Core principles for learner-centred strategy leadership

The following five principles underpin successful L-C strategy leadership in HE.

1. Identify your strategic purpose: your 'why'.

   Be clear in your own mind about why you are developing a new strategy or refreshing and renewing an existing strategy. How will it affect learners? How will it affect staff?
2. Clarify your strategic goals: your 'what'.

   Your goals may evolve and be refined over time but you need to be clear about your goals. These are the signposts that form part of your strategy roadmap. How did you arrive at these goals? Did student learners and staff colleagues have a say in identifying and prioritising these goals?
3. Know your university community: your 'who'.

   Who needs to know about the process? Who needs to be involved in the process, in what ways, how, when and how often? Whose interests need to be considered? Who is consulted, when, how, how often, to what end? Have you challenged yourself to ensure that you are being truly learner-centric in your approach?
4. Develop your plan of action: your 'how'.

   Be willing to review, develop milestones, have a project management approach – be clear about how long you will consult, with whom, and when you'll make a call as a leader. How will you involve a diverse range of people and perspectives in the process of strategy co-design, co-implementation, co-monitoring and co-evaluation? How will you satisfy yourself that you have represented their interests in your strategy? Will it be 'your strategy' or 'their strategy' or 'our strategy'? How will you develop a sense of ownership and agency among your university community members when it comes to the strategy design and implementation process? How will you communicate key messages? How will you know when it's time to conclude the co-design stage and move to implementation?
5. Evaluate with intent: your 'how well'.

   Plan the evaluation of progress and strategy outcomes at the start. Be strategic about how you gather information, feedback and data for the purposes of formative and summative evaluation. Plan how often, how and with whom you will communicate the outcomes of your evaluation.

Having considered the core principles of L-C HE strategy leadership, the next section introduces practical steps that you can take to develop your strategy leadership and co-design capability.

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ Apply the five principles underpinning L-C strategy leadership to your current context. How well do these apply to your setting? What would you change and why?
- ✓ If you are responsible for designing a strategy in the near future, how might you apply these principles? How easily could you apply them as steps in the strategy design and implementation process?
- ✓ If you have recently developed and implemented a strategy in your HE leadership context, use the five principles as a checklist to guide your evaluation of the strategy implementation. Consider lessons that you might apply to your next strategy design process.

2 Developing your learner-centred strategy co-design leadership capability

Having outlined the meaning of strategy and some of the distinctive characteristics of L-C strategy in HE, we now consider how to develop the capability of co-design in the strategy development process. The notion of co-*design* is used intentionally here in relation to the process of designing strategy in your university, regardless of your level of leadership responsibility. All leaders are involved in strategy development, implementation and review in some way, whether you are an emergent leader of a small team at the local level or an experienced leader operating at the whole-of-university level.

The term 'design' connotes creativity with a view to developing a plan of some kind. If you are artistically inclined, you may associate design with creating a sketch or a drawing. Design thinking is a useful way to think about leading your strategy co-design process. As a design tool for leaders, it offers one potential approach for addressing complex tasks and real-world problems, focussing on creative ways to achieve outcomes that are human-centred (Auernhammer & Roth, 2021) or, in our case, learner-centred. Human-centred design is typically used in business contexts to emphasise the importance of placing the needs of people at the centre of plans to develop products or services (Landry, 2022). In a university context, human-centred design aligns well with our emphasis on learner-centredness. In the context of your leadership of strategy development, this

means designing strategy in such a way that those most affected by it and those most crucial to implementing it are active participants in the process.

In Chapter 1 (Case Study 1.2) we met Professor Naidoo, recently appointed as DVC Education and Learners at Glass Lakes University (GLU). Case Study 2.1 illustrates how she applies design thinking methodology in co-designing the university's new Learning and Teaching Strategy.

Case Study 2.1: Applying design thinking to co-design a learning and teaching strategy

During her first few weeks, Prof Naidoo found it useful to develop a stakeholder map to keep track of all the people she was meeting, both within the university and externally. Progressively, she added to the map and used it to guide her thinking about the priorities that needed to be addressed in GLU's next Learning and Teaching Strategy. She inherited a five-year strategy that was in its final year of implementation when she started the role of DVC. While she found this useful, she was mindful of the fact that it was developed pre-COVID and that several new priorities now needed to be considered.

Having attended a short course on design thinking principles as part of her professional learning programme, she decided it was worth applying some of these principles to the task of preparing the new Learning and Teaching strategy. She opted to represent it as a renewal of the existing strategy. She wanted to convey the message that she was building on many of the outcomes of the previous strategy, while revising the strategic goals and changing several of the strategic priorities. Her high-level goal was to ensure that the Learning and Teaching Strategy addressed the contemporary needs of a university committed to enhancing the quality of hybrid learning and teaching while also prioritising the well-being of learners and colleagues across the institution post-COVID.

Prof Naidoo wanted to try a new approach to engaging with members of her university community. During her first few weeks at GLU, she observed that staff morale seemed low. In her conversations with people across the university, she realised that quite a few staff and

students were finding it challenging to return to campus and reconnect with peers.

Staff often commented on the fact that they felt overwhelmed by all that had to be done. The rapid pivot to fully online teaching and assessment during the global pandemic had taken every ounce of energy and resilience they had and they were exhausted. Similarly, they observed that the learners in their classes and those using support services seemed to be even more difficult to engage in university life and learning in positive ways. Counsellors observed that the students who used their services were experiencing high levels of anxiety and learner feedback surveys confirmed that well-being and mental health concerns were among the top sources of worry for GLU students.

Taking on board the need to re-engage the university community with one another and with a shared sense of purpose, Prof Naidoo decided to plan her strategy design and implementation process around five stages of design thinking (Stanford University, 2022). Applied to GLU's Learning and Teaching Strategy context, these are:

1. **Empathise**: understand the needs of your university community, including learners, staff, external stakeholders like industry and professional associations.

   Prof Naidoo drew on her conversations with people around the university when she first started in her role. She identified where she needed more information and advice from various groups and individuals. She also compiled data on learner outcomes and feedback, and historical information about previous Learning and Teaching Strategies, along with various other institutional strategies with which they intersected. These included the University Strategy, the Research and Innovation Strategy, the IT and Infrastructure Strategy and the Student Well-being and Support Strategy.
2. **Define**: this step involved collating the information gathered to help Prof Naidoo define the problems, issues and priorities to be addressed in the Learning and Teaching Strategy. She had devoted time to planning and had clarified in her own mind the following core purpose of the new Learning and Teaching Strategy: to enhance the quality of learning, teaching and learner engagement

at GLU through learner-centred, technology-enhanced curriculum, support services and co-curricular learning opportunities. Now she needed to test this out with those most closely connected with the strategy.

Prof Naidoo applied four co-design principles:

a identified her co-design partners (see Table 2.2);
b set up a process of collaboration and consultation;
c shared her primary purpose statement with her co-design partners for feedback; and
d created small group discussion teams of students and staff to collectively define the problem from their perspective. Prof Naidoo had learned about human-centred design and was keen to present the primary purpose of the Learning and Teaching Strategy in the form of a problem to be addressed from the perspective of learners from different year levels, disciplines and backgrounds. At the same time, she asked professional and academic staff to share their perception of the problem to be addressed before moving to the third stage of looking for solutions. She also sought input from executive colleagues and senior portfolio leaders to learn more about their views and feedback.

3. **Ideate:** this is the idea-generating stage of design thinking. There are many ideation techniques. Brainstorming was one that Professor Naidoo was most comfortable with as a starting point. She made a few tweaks to the strategy purpose statement based on the 'Define' stage feedback from participants. She invited her strategy co-design partners to look at the strategy from a range of perspectives and to come up with innovative solutions and ideas for achieving the strategic goal. Prof Naidoo used a combination of small group, in-person gatherings, online Zoom conversations in small groups and an opportunity for individuals to give their feedback via an online survey. This expanded the opportunity for participants to share their perspectives in a range of ways, depending on their comfort level and time availability.

There was quite a deal of disagreement over some of the suggestions. Professor Naidoo welcomed this and used it to encourage

participants' willingness to engage in constructive disagreement in a scaffolded and supported environment. For a couple of the group meetings, Prof Naidoo invited an expert facilitator to assist with the process and to create a culturally and psychologically safe space for discussion, sharing, disagreement and debate (De Leersnyder, Gundemir & Agirdag, 2022; Kostopoulou et al., 2022).

4. **Prototype:** in this stage, Prof Naidoo worked with her co-design partners to develop a draft or prototype strategy. It included a number of the ideas and solutions identified in the Ideate phase. These ideas needed to be tested through consultation with a broader range of stakeholders, including Prof Naidoo's University Executive colleagues. There were a lot of suggestions as well as broad support for the way in which the draft strategy was shaping up. She was pleased she made the effort to share the draft strategy at an early stage before taking it further.
5. **Test:** the penultimate draft Learning and Teaching Strategy was ready to be finalised. It included a selection of the actions and suggestions that emerged through the idea-generating phase. The prototype testing of ideas was useful for further refining the strategy and testing out pragmatic issues like resourcing, staffing capability and availability to deliver on some of the creative ideas, physical infrastructure limitations, the ability of the learning management system to deliver innovative solutions.

Prof Naidoo recognised that the design thinking process was not originally intended for the purpose of strategy development, but she found the five steps a useful way to facilitate conversations and partnerships with a wide range of students, staff and peer leaders across GLU. She also recognised that the design thinking process is not linear. It doesn't follow a lock-step sequence. On several occasions she found that she was addressing a couple of the design thinking steps at once, or even skipping them when the discussion became particularly animated in some groups.

As a new leader in the DVC role, Prof Naidoo thought it was worth applying these ideas of co-design to build a stronger connection with the students and staff at GLU. Feedback from the process indicated

that quite a few participants felt uncomfortable with the process and would have preferred being given the strategy with a set of instructions and actions they were expected to carry out. Nevertheless, feedback gathered through small group focus groups and an anonymous evaluation survey indicated that the majority of learners and staff appreciated being part of the process.

Apply: What Would You Do?

- ✓ What do you think of Prof Naidoo's choice of design thinking steps in this case study?
- ✓ Would this approach apply in your leadership context? If yes, what is most relevant? If no, why?
- ✓ What might you do differently in your context?

2.1 Practical planning steps to guide your strategy co-design: the 5 Ps

Planning a co-design process to develop strategy in your university takes experience and time, regardless of your role and context. Before starting out it's worthwhile to consider the 5 Ps of strategy co-design for L-C HE leaders: parameters, purpose, people, planning and process. Each of these five P steps is outlined in more detail below.

Step 1. Clarify the parameters of your strategy

WHAT is the scope and timeline for your strategy?

For example,

- Are you operating at a university-wide level? Or at a department or team level?
- Are you developing a five- or ten-year institution-level strategy, or is it a relatively short-term strategy of two years?

Step 2. Confirm the purpose of your strategy

WHY are you developing this strategy?

For example,

- Do you need to achieve a significant financial turnaround in your university by developing more contemporary course offerings, thereby attracting more students?

- Are you introducing new types of student services post-COVID to meet student well-being needs in your Faculty?
- Do you need to shift your university's business model from predominantly campus-based courses to more online and hyflex offerings, with associated investment in new types of learning spaces and technologies?
- Are you wanting to improve the quality and relevance of your academic programme by involving students and industry partners over the next two years?

Step 3. Construct a map of the people to be involved in co-design

WHO is involved in this strategy co-design exercise?

For example

- If you are operating at the whole-of-university level, have you included all the key stakeholder groups in your map?
- Are student learners from diverse backgrounds included in your design phase? What about those who are offshore or online? How will you include their perspectives?
- Have you only included 'the usual suspects' – in other words, the staff who are most often included in your committees and working groups because they are active participants? Have you also included the less vocal colleagues? What about the voices that are not typically around the table? How will you include a representative group of staff?
- Do you need industry representatives or community members involved in your strategy design process?

You can progressively review and update your people map, but it is important to be clear in your own mind about why, how and with whom you are embarking on the strategy co-design process. Too often strategy design exercises are derailed due to lack of focus, lack of clarity, competing voices and distractions that can take you off course.

Step 4. Craft your strategy co-design action plan

HOW will you work with your co-design partners and other members of your university community to develop your strategy?

For example

- Are there regular student and staff forums or departmental meetings that you could attend to assist in the co-design process? Do you need

to schedule half-day strategy co-design workshops? Will you need an expert facilitator?

The success of your strategy co-design process relies on your knowledge of your university and its cultural norms (see Chapter 7), whether you are operating at a small team level or an executive, whole-of-university level. Implementing a co-design process takes careful planning and plenty of conversations with colleagues to seek their advice and input.

- What pre-work do you need to do to prepare your co-design partners to participate productively in the process?

  Unless your institution has fostered a culture of collaboration of co-design involving students, staff and external stakeholders, you can expect resistance of various kinds. But don't let this deter you. For the most part, you will find that colleagues and students will appreciate your efforts to introduce a culture that respects the values of learning together, in community, listening to one another, disagreeing respectfully and involving them in a process designed to give them agency (see Chapter 3 and 4). Many will need to learn new ways of engaging with one another and with the university organisation as a system in the co-design process.
- How will you manage the process of co-design? Who needs to be involved in the process? Who needs to be consulted or kept informed, rather than directly involved in the co-design process?

To answer these questions, you may find it useful to consider a widely used project management tool known as the Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed (RACI) Matrix (Brower, Nicklas, Nader, Trost & Miller, 2021). This tool is useful in a range of leadership contexts. Table 2.1 below outlines how you might use this matrix in your strategy planning process.

As a starting point for your strategy co-design plan, take a look at Table 2.2. This includes illustrative examples of the institutional contexts in which you may be leading, along with examples of a range of strategy design purposes. Table 2.2 also sets out examples of the people whom you may involve in your strategy co-design process. In addition to identifying your strategy co-design partners, that is those actively involved in the design process, it is also important to identify those whom you will keep informed, rather than directly involved or consulted, using the RACI matrix as a guide (see Table 2.1). Table 2.2 is a starting point to guide your planning. You may find it useful to adapt this to suit your context. For university-wide strategy

Table 2.1 Using the RACI approach to plan your strategy co-design process

Role in the strategy process	**Extent of involvement in the strategy process**
Responsible	Who 'owns' the strategy – i.e., who has overall responsibility for planning, delivering, monitoring and reviewing your strategy?
Accountable	Who is accountable for delivering the strategy? This may be one person or a team of people with specific accountabilities.
Consulted	Who is consulted to provide input into the design and implementation of your strategy? For our purposes, this includes co-design partners (see Table 2.2 below).
Informed	Who is notified of progress and kept informed without direct involvement in the strategy design and implementation process?

Reflect

- Think about a strategy relating to your current or future leadership role. What are the parameters of your strategy, i.e., the scope and timeline? What is the purpose of your strategy?
- Map the people involved in your strategy development and implementation. How could you involve them more actively as partners in co-design (see Table 2.2)?
- Have you used the RACI approach (Table 2.1)? How well does it apply in your leadership context?

co-design processes, all students and staff should have the opportunity to have their say as the strategy is being designed and developed. Participation of this kind may occur through open forums, online surveys and the like. This is further discussed in the section to follow.

The take-home message in Step 4 of the strategy co-design planning phase is: set aside time to plan your approach before embarking on the co-design process. This chapter intentionally devotes considerable time to strategy design and planning, ahead of action. A common leadership misstep is the tendency to jump into the 'doing' of strategy prematurely, skipping the all-important foundation design steps 1–4 listed above. Mapping out

Table 2.2 Sample planning tool to guide your strategy co-design process

Strategy parameters and context	**Strategy design purpose**	**Strategy co-design partners and stakeholders**
1. Institution-level e.g., University executive, People and Culture Department, Provost, Research Department.	e.g., Design a university-wide five-year strategy as a blueprint for achieving our aspiration to be in the top 50 young universities in the world. e.g., Design a learning and teaching enhancement strategy that enables us to develop and deliver contemporary learning experiences and successful outcomes for all learners.	Student representatives, including student leaders, with due consideration to demographic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, disciplinary representation and mode of study (e.g., online, commuter, residential students) Academic and professional staff representatives, with due consideration to demographic characteristics, level of seniority and experience, disciplinary affiliation, heads of faculty, heads of department, professional staff leaders and managers, external stakeholders, as appropriate – e.g., professional accrediting bodies, community and industry representatives, university governing body, council or board, benchmark partners in comparator institutions
2. Departmental level e.g., Academic departments, student support and well-being department, university library, professional learning support department	e.g., Design a holistic learner engagement strategy in partnership with learners to enhance well-being and success. e.g., Design a university-wide professional learning strategy to extend staff knowledge and enhance professional practice across disciplines and faculties. e.g., Design a future-ready library strategy that places learners at the heart of all that we do in optimising digital library experiences across the university.	
3. Local level e.g., Academic programme team, virtual learning environments team, student volunteer team	e.g., Design a two-year strategy for improving the quality of student experiences in the Bachelor of Arts. e.g., Design a three-year strategy to enhance online curriculum design and delivery in the bachelor of engineering. e.g., Design a two-year strategy to increase student participation in co-curricular and volunteering activities.	

your strategy with careful attention to design features and investing time to foster a co-design culture will set you up for successful strategy execution.

Your planning process will also include a communication plan which may be as simple as an email to your team, or a more sophisticated communication plan if you are embarking on a whole-of-institution strategy development process. For more on communication see Chapter 3.

Step 5. Catapult into action – proceed with strategy co-implementation, monitoring and review

HOW WELL will you execute your strategy and deliver intended outcomes?

Having completed your strategy planning and design stage, it's time to implement and co-implement where feasible. Strategy execution comprises several parts, including monitoring of progress, celebrating successful milestones of achievement with your university or college community and reviewing the outcomes of your collective implementation efforts through formative and summative evaluation.

In summary, the 5 P planning steps involved in successful strategy co-design for L-C HE leaders are: parameters, purpose, people, plan and proceed with strategy execution. The next section outlines five action steps to guide your implementation and co-implementation of strategy.

3 Strategy co-implementation: five action steps based on co-design principles

Five practical steps are outlined below to guide you in moving from strategy design and development to action (see Table 2.3). It may not always be pragmatic or feasible to collaborate on all aspects of strategy execution. No doubt there will be challenges in shifting your institutional culture (see Chapter 7) in the direction of partnership and collaboration with students and staff. Nevertheless, I use the default term 'co-implementation' to remind you of its importance in framing your L-C leadership mindset. You may also need to adapt your approach according to your institution's preferred strategy implementation methodology and project management framework.

Co-design of strategy involves building partnerships with learners and staff in your university community. In any co-design process, be prepared

Table 2.3 Steps in the strategy implementation and co-implementation process

Strategy co-implementation steps	**Key actions and tasks**
Design and co-design	Communicate your plan to refresh/develop the relevant strategy. Invite members of your university community to be involved in the strategy co-design phase. Implement the co-design or methodology you have chosen to apply, including guidelines for co-design participants (see Case Study 2.1).
Develop and co-develop	Develop your draft strategy action plan, including timelines, responsibility matrix (RACI, see Table 2.1), expected outcomes and targets and indicators of success. Consult and seek feedback on the draft, particularly from those accountable for delivering parts of the strategy (e.g., staff) and those affected by the strategy (e.g., learners). Co-develop annual action plans. Typically, this is a process you will need to lead but you may co-develop, inviting strategy co-design partners to contribute.
Execute and co-execute	Execute and deliver strategy the actions and outcomes outlined in your strategy. Co-execute by partnering with learners and colleagues, raising their awareness of the strategy and linking actions and initiatives back to the strategy on a regular basis. Co-execution of strategy is likely to require skills in leading and managing change, as outlined in Chapter 7.
Monitor and co-monitor	Monitor progress in the context of your strategy, its stated outcomes and indicators of success. This may involve regular verbal updates as you meet with students and staff or written reports to committees. Use a variety of evidence types to monitor progress, including quantitative data, qualitative feedback from learners, staff and other stakeholders. Co-monitor progress, seeking input from those directly involved or impacted by the strategy and its actions.
Review and co-review	Review the progress and outcomes achieved against the original intent of your strategy. Draw on data gathered through the monitoring process. You may also include external review through an individual or a panel, depending on the scale of your strategy. Include your strategy co-design partners in the formative and summative co-review process, seeking their input on achievements, missed opportunities and areas for improvement. Celebrate milestones and achievements at key review points with your university community, particularly with your strategy co-design partners.

for disagreement and contestation. Plan for time to debate, discuss and disagree. And then plan to move ahead. It's essential to maintain momentum in the strategy design process. This will set the boundaries for those with whom you are working. They may not agree with you but, for the most part, they will respect clarity, focus, intentionality and time allocated to hear diverse perspectives, followed by strategic momentum and action.

4 Benefits and limitations of strategy co-design

In a university setting, applying co-design and co-creation principles to your leadership is a powerful way to build a sense of community and shared ownership of the strategic direction, whether you are leading at the whole-of-institution level or in a small team or department setting.

Selected benefits of co-design include:

i. Foster an inclusive, whole-of-institution, whole-of-department or whole-of-team approach to strategy.
ii. Open up strategy goals for shared input and problem-solving.
iii. Develop agency and buy-in among learners and colleagues in your institution.
iv. Build confidence and capability among members of your team and across the institution when you invest in an educative approach to strategy co-design and co-implementation.
v. Enhance clarity about the purposes of your strategy and the role that each person plays in achieving the outcomes.
vi. Increase accountability, particularly when individuals and groups of learners and colleagues understand and agree to their role in contributing to the success of the strategy.
vii. Role model ways of working that learners will be able to apply in their professional lives and community activities.
viii. Give a voice to learners and colleagues with diverse perspectives and background experiences.
ix. Connect learners and colleagues with one another, to learn about a range of divergent views, in ways that may not otherwise occur.
x. Design strategies and actions that are creative and grounded in the diversity of your institutional ecosystem.

Some challenges relating to strategy co-design may include:

i. Time commitment may be considerable. It may not be feasible to bring people with different schedules together easily. The co-design process typically needs to build in ample time for collaboration.
ii. Willingness to participate may be challenging. Learners who have paid work commitments or assignment deadlines may not be willing to participate. Similarly, staff with busy schedules may not see the value. Be prepared for resistance and seek advice on the best ways to engage with members of your university community.
iii. Developing a collaborative mindset among your co-design partners may be difficult. Many will not be used to this form of involvement and participation.
iv. Differences in level of experience, perceived power dynamics and perspectives may impede the process if not handled with care and expertise. For example, if students are in the same group as the Professor in their discipline, they may feel intimidated. Alternatively, in some institutions, there are strong cultural divides between academic faculty and professional administrative staff. You may need to consider an expert facilitator and pay close attention to group structures and dynamics, depending on the nature of your approach.
v. Co-design will fail if you don't apply a range of strategies to include diverse participants with diverse views and experiences. Bringing an appropriate mix of people together, in psychologically and culturally safe spaces, is vital to the success of your co-design process.

Reflect

- Strategy co-design may be a daunting prospect for some HE leaders. What initial steps can you take to apply the principles of strategy co-design and co-implementation in your context?
- Noting the benefits and challenges listed above how has this chapter influenced your thinking about the meaning of L-C strategy and the potential value of strategy co-design?

vi. It can be difficult to build consensus within large groups, especially if individuals and/or those perceived as most powerful dominate the process. You may find it useful to consult a resource such as that of Tucker (2021) on facilitating constructive disagreement (see also Komori-Glatz, 2018).

5 Summary tips for successful strategy co-design and implementation

This chapter introduces a number of practical steps to guide your leadership journey in the area of L-C strategy co-design and co-implementation. There is no algorithm to give you the 'right answers' in this regard. Each strategy design process you lead will differ, depending on such factors as your institutional context, the purpose of your strategy and your leadership responsibilities. The following tips will be a useful addition to your strategy leadership toolkit as you consider ways to apply the key messages of this chapter to your L-C leadership.

i. Understand your role as a change leader and culture shaper.
   - Leading strategy co-design and implementation involves leading change and shaping culture (see Chapter 7), regardless of your level of leadership responsibility.

ii. Develop your understanding of these core concepts and how they apply to your leadership role.

iii. Plan intentionally.
   - Invest time in your strategy planning process.
   - Be mindful of the tendency for leaders to jump straight into the implementation phase to achieve results and 'quick wins'. Action is important, but so is the planning stage.

iv. Anticipate the needs of your university community.
   - It will take time to introduce your ideas, to share the purpose of your strategy and to bring students and staff with you on the strategy co-design journey.
   - Co-design and co-implementation take time. Build this into your implementation timeline from the start.

v. Take an educative approach to L-C strategy co-design.

- Develop co-design capabilities among your learner community, including students, peers and staff colleagues.
- Don't assume that all will be comfortable or know how to engage in the process constructively.
- Be prepared for disagreement and develop participants' capabilities of constructive disagreement.

vi. Be prepared to be flexible and recursive in your process.

- Be willing to revisit goals, revise implementation steps and reiterate purpose time and time again.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate. At each step of your strategy co-design, co-implementation and co-review process, consider who needs to know about it, who may need to receive targeted communication or personalised messages. Seek the advice of your co-design partners on your communication strategy. Communicate in partnership with them. Consider ways to restate the intent of your strategy via different communication channels and media to ensure that you reach your audience effectively and regularly.

Research Case Study 2.2: Applying human-centred co-design to the UN sustainable development goals

(Agusdinata, 2022)

Agusdinata (2022) reports on a four-year study to address community development and sustainability issues in two of the least developed regions of Indonesia. The case study adopts human-centred design principles which put the needs and experiences of people and communities at the centre of the co-design process (Van der Bijl-Brouwer & Dorst, 2017). The main purpose of the human-centred design and shared-action learning strategy was to apply the principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to eradicate poverty for local food producers by increasing their household income. The strategy involved 50 students from a large, research-oriented university in Indonesia, guided by university staff in partnership with local communities, businesses and government.

Agusdinata outlines a range of steps in the strategy co-design process. Students and staff involved in the process needed time to develop

content knowledge, as well as practical travel and start-up funding to support their proposals. Students also needed support to engage safely and confidently with community members and real-world challenges. The planning phase involved design thinking to produce 'simple and effective responses to complex and ill-defined problems that span disciplines and stakeholder groups' (p.1594). Other tasks in the planning and co-design phase included: building of empathy as students and staff developed a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the communities with whom they were partnering; conflict management; problem-solving and the building of trust.

The strategy co-design process was based on a foundation of mutual respect and intellectual humility where the expertise of community members was acknowledged and respected. Discussions and co-design occurred through workshops, community consultations, mentoring and internship programmes, partnerships with industry and close collaboration with communities at the local level (p.1589).

Outcomes included opportunities for students to engage with national and international researchers as they work in teams to apply their learning in real-world settings. Students also developed life and work skills as they learned how to work in teams, tackle fundamental sustainability problems in practical ways, and collaborate with a diverse range of stakeholders from community, industry and government. Students were embedded in private companies, local universities and government offices to give them practical experience of exploring community needs. They learned to empathise, generate solutions to challenging problems and apply their learning in real-world settings.

The lead university team co-implemented with students, staff and local communities as they considered options for achieving their shared goal of eradicating poverty. They regularly monitored their implementation progress, focussing on ways to sustain the outcomes for the benefit of the local communities. They also developed a system for co-monitoring the impact of the strategy on student learning, partnership outcomes and community benefits.

Evaluation of the outcomes of this strategy highlighted several areas for improvement and further learning, including the challenges of investing in long-term community relationships, cultural and language

barriers, the cost of implementation, the frequent turnover of students who typically enrol in courses for only one semester, and the need to incentivise academic staff who may not see value in a long-term commitment, given their other priorities of research and teaching.

Apply the case study research

- ✓ Agusdinata (2022) documents a four-year case study demonstrating the principles of human-centred strategy co-design and co-implementation. How might you apply the principles outlined in this case study to your leadership context?
- ✓ The UN SDGs are the vehicle for this collaborative approach to shared-action learning involving students, staff and community members. In what ways do you integrate the SDGs into your approach to co-designing and co-implementing L-C strategy as a leader?
- ✓ This case study highlights challenges and opportunities of involving learners in the co-design and co-implementation process. In what ways do these challenges and opportunities resonate with you? For more on this topic see Clark, Stabryla and Gilbertson (2020).

6 Bringing it all together: five big ideas

In this chapter, we have examined the leadership capability of strategic co-design. We have covered five big ideas:

1. Strategy is a plan of action to achieve a set of goals. L-C strategy is anchored in the people and the purposes it serves. For our purposes, the focus is on the people who make up your university or college community – specifically the learners and colleagues in your institution.
2. Whichever your level of leadership responsibility, an important starting point is the big picture strategy at institution level to ensure that your strategic goals and actions align with and cascade from the university-level strategy.
3. Often the 'why' of strategic leadership is overlooked. It's important to identify your strategic purpose before identifying your strategic

goals – your 'what' and your people – your 'who'. You can then develop your plan of action to outline 'how' you will co-implement your strategy; and evaluate 'how well' you have done so.

4. If members of your institutional community are actively involved in designing the strategy that affects their learning and professional lives, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership, to learn through the process and, in turn, to become more engaged.
5. The notion of co-*design* connotes creativity in the strategy design process. Co-design involves identifying your strategy co-design partners, that is those actively involved in the design process. Your strategy co-design partners may also contribute to co-implementation, co-monitoring and co-evaluation of your strategy.

The remainder of this Guide looks at the who, what and how of L-C leadership that will help you in developing and delivering on your strategy. The next chapter examines implementation through engaging with learners and connecting with staff.

Apply – discuss these ideas with peers, senior colleagues and mentors

- ✓ How have the COVID-19 global pandemic and its consequences influenced your university and its learner community? In what ways might a L-C approach to strategy design and development help to build the morale and strengthen the connections among students and staff of your institution?
- ✓ This chapter emphasises the importance of setting aside time to plan your approach before embarking on a strategy co-design process. Is there a risk of taking too long to plan? As you plan your approach to strategy leadership, what is one burning question you want to discuss with your peers, your supervisor and your mentor, respectively?
- ✓ This chapter introduces several concepts that we explore in more depth in Chapter 7. These include: L-C culture, change leader and culture shaper. If these terms are new to you, why not ask your colleagues what meaning these concepts hold for them.

- ✓ Talk with your peers and senior colleagues about the practicalities of implementing a strategy co-design process in your team, department or university. What would work? What wouldn't work and why?

Grow as a leader

- Tip 1. It's never too early to learn about strategy and to think about your leadership role in the context of strategy co-design with partners in your university community.
- Tip 2. Think of strategy as a journey, not a destination. It is a plan of action, a map with signposts to keep you on track. L-C strategy co-design is a social process and an opportunity to partner with your learner community.
- Tip 3. Remember the cascading principle. Regardless of your level of leadership responsibility, the most effective strategies cascade from and align with the organisational strategy. Make it a priority to acquaint yourself with the strategies that affect your work, your team and your leadership portfolio, starting with your institution-level strategy.

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PART

2

WHO does learner-centred higher education leadership focus on?

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3 Engaging with students as learners in higher education

Having considered the 'why' of learner-centred leadership, we now focus on the 'who' in Part 2 of the guide. Who are the learners in your university community? While you will engage with many people in your leadership role, Part 2 emphasises two learner groups: students and colleagues. Learner-centredness shines a spotlight on the need for leaders to conceptualise the students in their organisation as learners with agency, whether in timetabled, prescribed curriculum contexts, out-of-class interactions, in person, virtually, on campus, in the community or in the workplace. This chapter begins by examining research on characteristics and constructs of contemporary higher education students as the basis for further developing your learner engagement capabilities. It addresses learner-centred approaches to engagement with students, acknowledging the evolution of the student engagement concept from performativity tool to genuine co-production enabler.

I emphasise the practical aspects of leading collaborative approaches to engaging with students as partners, recognising the diverse needs of contemporary higher education student cohorts, and co-producing frameworks for supporting student mental health, resilience and well-being. In this chapter, we also explore the need for engaged leaders to take account of the diverse needs of learners. Case studies include a successful university-wide students-as-partners initiative and practical exemplars on leading institution-wide approaches to student well-being. The chapter emphasises the value of bringing together the most senior leaders of your university with student representatives and staff to achieve sustainable and high impact enhancement across your organisation.

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1 Students as learners: conceptualising contemporary higher education learners

The deep thinking and intentionality needed to develop your identity as a L-C leader (see Chapter 8) mirrors the journey of identity formation of your students as they come to terms with what it is to be a HE learner. Identity is shaped by context. It is a self-image that derives from a range of sources, including family, linguistic and socio-cultural factors, and prior personal experiences (Stryker & Serpe, 1994). This section explores HE student identities and constructs that play a role in your approach to L-C leadership. In this guide, I make a case for conceptualising HE students as learners. I recognise, however, that the term 'student' dominates prevailing discourse. For that reason, I adopt a pragmatic approach, using the term 'student' where it is most widely recognised (e.g., in relation to student identities, student demographics or students as partners). I challenge you, nonetheless, to remain curious as a leader, to push the boundaries in your thinking and practice as you look for ways to broaden perspectives on the role of students as learners in the HE learner ecosystem.

1.1 Contemporary higher education student characteristics

On a global scale, OECD nations have transitioned from mass to universal HE provision (Marginson, 2018). As a result, HE student populations across the globe are more diverse than ever. Unfortunately, expanded provision is no guarantee of equitable access and outcomes. Inequity continues to be a challenge in developing countries, just as it is in developed nations. A case in point is the unacceptably low HE participation rates among First Nations communities in Australian HE, for example (Grant-Smith & Irmer, 2022).

Sources of student diversity include demographic characteristics such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, nationality, linguistic and cultural background and parental education level. Other sources of diversity include mental and physical health and ability, religious affiliation, sexual orientation and gender identity, previous educational, work and community-based experiences. The language of diversity is not uniformly applicable across all nations (Pineda & Mishra, 2022). It is widely used in North America, Europe, the UK and Australia, but less familiar in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. It will be important for you to consider the implications of key messages in this chapter for your local context, taking into

account the unique characteristics of your student cohort and the national context in which you work.

As a L-C leader, it is likely your responsibilities will involve working with students in a diverse range of settings. For instance, in addition to working with undergraduate and graduate students, your cohort may also include those enrolled in pre-university pathways that feed into your undergraduate courses, or mature learners enrolled in professional learning short courses.

Demographic characteristics of your student cohort are a useful starting point for understanding how best to co-design engagement strategies. While demographic characteristics provide helpful background information, you will also need to come to terms with a range of other characteristics and constructs that help you understand even more about your student learners. This includes the ways in which they are represented in your institution's language, policies, practices and interactions, as illustrated in the next section.

1.2 Higher education student constructs

One familiar construct of the contemporary HE student is that of student as customer or consumer. There is much debate about this consumerist approach to HE. Nonetheless, it is worth reflecting on why many HE leaders have reoriented their strategies based on market research and customer service approaches (Temple, Callender, Grove & Kersh, 2016) in an effort to attract, engage and retain students.

Various policy and funding imperatives have contributed to the customer-focussed orientation that you may observe in your university's policies and practices. The student-as-consumer paradigm is particularly apparent in countries where students pay fees to attend university, including the US, the UK and Australia (Tight, 2013). There are various concerns that this consumerist identity may devalue HE quality and contribute to HE students conceptualising learning as a transactional process (Tomlinson, 2018). The 'McDonaldisation' of HE (Hayes, 2019) is a term sometimes used to depict this consumerist approach that likens HE to a product to be bought rather than a process in which students have agency and accountability as autonomous learners. Student identities may be shaped by factors external to your institution, including government policy, media and social media representations. When students are portrayed as consumers or customers, their 'intellectual investments and identities are valued against

their financial contributions and roles as paying customers' (Finn, Ingram & Allen, 2021, p.193).

While consumerism may be alive and well in HE, there is evidence to show that some students are resisting taking on this identity because it removes their agency in the higher learning process (Tomlinson, 2017). Adding further complexity is the fact that some students see value in consumerism from a consumer rights perspective (Raaper, 2020). In other words, it is important to protect their rights as students, while at the same time they don't want to see their educational experience reduced to a mere transaction. Muddiman (2020) highlights disciplinary differences in students' orientations to their study. In a cross-national investigation of students in business and sociology courses, those studying business demonstrated more consumer-oriented attitudes and behaviours than those enrolled in sociology degrees.

As a contemporary HE leader, regardless of your geographical location, institutional type or level of responsibility, there is merit in being aware of the student as customer construction of learners. Think about how this construct shapes your perceptions, interactions and decision-making as a leader.

Alongside the student as customer construct, there are myriad other depictions of contemporary HE students around the world, as outlined in Research Case Study 3.1

Reflect

- How do your university's strategies, policies, practices and language depict HE students in your organisation.
- Do you see evidence of a student as customer mindset in your institution?
- How does this manifest itself? Does it vary by portfolio, department or discipline, for example?
- Can you see any benefits to engaging with students as customers or consumers in your institution? What are the limitations and risks of a student as customer approach?
- As a leader, how might you role model a L-C approach to complement the customer-centric construct that may prevail in your university?

Research Case Study 3.1: Student constructs in contemporary European HE

(Brooks, Gupta, Jayadeva, Lainio & Lazetic, 2022)

Brooks and colleagues (2022) analysed the characteristics and perceptions of contemporary undergraduate European students across Denmark, England, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain. This study presents six ways in which HE undergraduate students are perceived by themselves, by staff, the media and policy-makers. These constructs represent students as:

1. in a state of transition;
2. political actors and citizens;
3. hard-working and enthusiastic learners;
4. future workers;
5. stressed; and
6. threats and objects of criticism.

As anticipated, there were differences between countries, disciplines and institutions. Student socioeconomic background also played a role in these constructions. The researchers conclude that their student participants 'consider themselves to be rounded individuals, committed to their academic work, who are developing personally, and as citizens – and not mere 'economic resources'' (2022, p.155).

HE staff across all six countries involved in this study expressed the view that students 'had become more instrumental in their approach to learning, and less likely than previous generations to become involved in the wider life of the university' (p.163). By contrast, however, student participants described themselves as 'enthusiastic and motivated learners' (p.163).

Apply the research

- ✓ How might a L-C leader bring these apparently contradictory and disconnected student constructs together?
- ✓ How well do you know your student learners? Consider the following questions:-

- Why have they enrolled in your institution?
- What are their expectations of their experience in your university? How might you shape their expectations and expand their understanding of themselves as learners?
- What are the challenges they face as learners in a HE context?
- What support do they have from their families and communities?
- What distractions and impediments threaten the likelihood that they will persist in their chosen course of study?

✓ What data sources do you use to shape your understanding of your student cohort? Are these sufficient or do you need to do more to develop an evidence-based understanding of your student learners?

On a regular basis, remind yourself and your colleagues that your university would not exist if it weren't for the students enrolled at your institution. To be truly effective as a leader in HE, you need to know who your students are, what their expectations and aspirations are and how to engage with them effectively. It is surprising how often this self-evident fact is overlooked in the day-to-day strategising and decision-making of which you are an integral part. The next section examines the concept of learner engagement and its power as a capability in your leadership toolkit.

2 Learner engagement – what is it and why does it matter to leaders?

One of the five characteristics of a L-C HE leader outlined in Chapter 1 is that of understanding and applying the principles of engagement. The extensive field of HE student engagement was informed by student involvement theories such as that of Astin (1985, 1993) who posited that students learn by being involved in educationally purposeful activities. Complementary research, primarily out of the US, found a positive connection between student involvement and persistence, academic achievement and overall satisfaction with their HE experience (Kuh & Vesper, 1997; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 2017). Similar themes emerged in UK research (Entwistle &

Ramsden, 1983) on the role of student involvement and engagement in effective university learning experiences.

The principle of student involvement and engagement still has considerable relevance for contemporary university settings. However, it is worth noting some developments in the ways in which students are positioned in the evolving definitions of student engagement. In 2005, I defined student engagement as 'the time, energy and resources students devote to activities designed to enhance their learning at university' (p.3). This definition connoted the institutional responsibility for designing learning experiences and activities to enhance student learning and was heavily influenced by the view that students' time spent on campus, learning with peers, or completing an assessment was a key indicator of engagement.

My own thinking on student engagement has evolved since the early 2000s and it has informed the L-C approach of this guide. Student engagement is far more than simply time spent on pre-determined tasks that are designed by university experts and consumed by students. Bowden and colleagues (2021) identify four pillars of student engagement in the form of behavioural, affective, social and cognitive engagement. Their research finds that affective and behavioural engagement are key determinants of student well-being, self-efficacy, self-esteem and transformative learning, concluding that 'highly involved students are more likely to feel happiness, pride and enthusiasm towards their institution' (Bowden, Tickle & Naumann, 2021, p. 1219).

While 'engagement' is usually conceptualised as a positive enabler of learning, it may have other connotations. For some students 'engagement' reflects positive involvement, yet for others, the meaning of the term may be more akin to an appointment in the weekly diary, alongside many other engagements. A further interpretation of the term 'engagement' is that of engagement in battle and for some students, this aptly describes their university experience (Krause, 2005).

Taking a L-C approach to engagement challenges leaders to contemplate engagement as a reciprocal process that involves partnerships between students and staff as collaborative learners and partners in the process of higher learning. You will notice the emphasis in this chapter is not so much on engaging students but engaging with students as learners. This reflects a shift away from a focus on engagement as a transaction – that is, something institutions do to students – towards a more relational approach to engaging *with* students as learners in the learning journey. A L-C engagement

paradigm emphasises the importance of agency, reciprocity and partnership in engagement processes. Nevertheless, there is merit in being aware of the various interpretations and critiques of student engagement before you consider ways to integrate this into your leadership practice.

2.1 Critiques of the student engagement paradigm

The concept of student engagement is not without its critics given its use in political, funding, quality assurance and performativity debates. Some commentators observe the rise of interest in student engagement in OECD nations coinciding with massification of HE, increased international student enrolments and transnational HE. Gao and colleagues (2022, p.65) posit that 'When it was no longer feasible for teachers and students to know each other individually, the need arose to forge more structured forms of engagement'.

Critiques of the evolving use of student engagement rhetoric in neoliberal contexts (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017) highlight the instrumentalist ways in which student engagement is equated with student satisfaction and is thus harnessed to demonstrate institutional performance and institutional comparisons in a marketised HE sector. A further critique lies in the lack of inclusion evident in student engagement discourse, thus disregarding the multifaceted nature of multiple engagements typical of diverse student populations (Hayes, 2019).

It will be important for you to be aware of these perspectives and potential risks to be mitigated as you consider the role of L-C engagement and partnerships with students as learners in your leadership. A useful way to think about student engagement is in the form of a continuum involving different forms of engagement and different types of collaboration for different purposes in different contexts across your institution. Lowe and Bols (2020, p.272) depict student engagements ranging from consumer-driven transactional engagements at one end – for example students' engagement with institutional complaint systems – to reciprocal forms of partnership with the institution on the other. The latter might involve a students-as-partners programme, as outlined in the next section of this chapter.

This array of engagement practices is a useful reminder of the diversity of engagements that characterise student experiences in HE. They form a helpful basis for considering engagement from a L-C perspective, as outlined in the next section.

2.2 A Learner-centred lens on engagement

Taking a L-C approach positions engagement as the intentional and purposeful partnership between students and staff, including leaders, who collectively devote time, energy and resources to enhance mutual learning and engagement in the university context. In other words, as a leader you have the opportunity to create the conditions that will offer student learners from a range of backgrounds with a range of needs and interests the best opportunities to engage with their learning and with the learner community affectively, behaviourally, cognitively and socially.

Engagement is not simply about designing a course of study and delivering it to students, like a pre-ordered meal delivery service. It is mutual, respectful commitment and agreement among student learners, university leaders and the staff and teams they represent. Engagement from a learner perspective is not simply about signing up, completing the assessment and receiving the graduation certificate after a period of time. Engagement involves a focus on learning as a process of reciprocity, partnership, a shared commitment to the learning experience and accountabilities on the part of all involved.

Learner-centredness encompasses the role of learners as students who are enrolled to study a particular course, benefitting from the disciplinary expertise of academic staff and the extensive contribution of expert professional staff who contribute and provide support services in a range of ways. Moreover, the L-C lens empowers leaders to consider the value of reciprocal engagements between students and staff as learner-partners in the learning process. This reciprocal learner partnership may occur in the virtual classroom, on campus, in the broader university context, in co-curricular settings or in the workplace. It may include academic and professional staff, as well as others who contribute to the institutional learning ecosystem. Practical examples of this partnership approach to learner engagement are outlined in Sections 3 and 4 of this chapter.

2.3 Communicating as a learner-centred leader

A key component of effective engagement is communicating with learners. You may be well supported by the communications team in your university, department or faculty or you may be responsible for developing your own communications. Either way, this should be a key item on your to-do list as

you think about practical implementation of a learner engagement strategy. If you are looking for tips for communicating with your student learners in your leadership role, consider the following:

1. Be informed about the range of student communication channels already in place. These typically include mass emails, targeted text messages, learning management sites, digital signs and plasma screens, websites and weekly newspapers or equivalent. Other channels may include student-led TV and radio stations.
2. Coordinate student communications, taking account of purpose, timing, audience and format. All too often, students are bombarded by emails from multiple sources within your university on the same day or during particularly intense times of the academic year, such as orientation or pre-exam weeks. It is relatively rare for a university or a department to have a communications schedule that takes account of when, why, how and how often students receive messages from the institution.
3. Develop a communication plan. Lead a coordinated approach to your communication plan. Seek student advice and input on communication channels and key messages that will reach their peers. Where possible, delegate aspects of the communication plan to your students. Give them agency in the communication process and in developing key messages that will be most meaningful for their fellow students. Include diverse student perspectives to ensure that the language and approach of your student communications is fit for purpose and relevant to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Reflect

- How would you assess your communication skills when it comes to communicating with your students? What are your strengths? Where might you need to develop further communication capabilities?
- How feasible is it to include students in your communication plan? Have you seen examples of student-led communication in your university? What concerns you most about giving students more agency in your institutional or local department or faculty communications? What excites you most about this opportunity?

3 Leading in partnership with learners

So far in this chapter, we have considered some key characteristics and constructs of the contemporary HE learner and the importance of a multi-dimensional leadership approach to engaging with your university's students as learners. Chapter 2 introduced the leadership capability of strategy co-design and foreshadowed subsequent tasks of co-developing and co-implementing strategies with learners. Building on the principle of L-C engagement, we now turn to practical approaches for leading in partnership with students as learners.

3.1 Learner-centred approaches to partnership

The Students as Partners (SaP) approach to engaging with learners has been described as 'an ethos . . . a lens through which to reconsider the nature of higher education' (Healey & Healey, 2018, p.6). Also referred to as student-staff partnerships (SSPs), this relational approach to engagement represents a 'radical cultural shift' and a shift in mindset (Matthews, Cook-Sather, & Healey, 2018, p.24). It involves shifting from staff-led decision-making toward closer collaboration between students and staff as co-learners, partners and collaborators with shared goals and purposes.

Healey and colleagues (2014) developed a conceptual model depicting ways in which students could be involved as partners in learning and teaching and curriculum design. This model forms the basis for a rich vein of work that extends well beyond the scope of this guide, but you and your colleagues may find it useful to explore this literature in more detail (see Healey & Healey, 2021). The applications of this model for your work in leading curriculum renewal will be considered in more detail in Chapter 5. The principles of this partnership approach apply to leaders with a range of portfolio responsibilities across the institution. It may be applied in research and graduate study settings, community engagement programmes, admissions and student services (see Case Study 3.2) or in addressing design challenges involving IT and space design (see Case Study 3.3), to name a few examples.

In this chapter, our focus rests on broader applications of partnership principles such as co-learning, co-designing, co-developing, co-producing, co-researching and co-inquiring (Matthews, Cook-Sather, & Healey, 2018). These principles are powerful levers that may assist you in bringing about

cultural and practical changes to achieve your goal of L-C strategy and action (see Chapter 2). The key to your leadership success in this regard involves going beyond the familiar steps of student consultation or selective involvement of a few individuals in university committees. Instead, I encourage you to create opportunities intentionally to partner with student learners in authentic ways. Examples of such partnerships are included in Case Study 3.2 and 3.3.

Case study 3.2 illustrates a whole-of-institution initiative designed to bring students and staff together to address the strategic goal of improving the overall student experience in a large multi-campus Australian university.

Case Study 3.2: Partnerships to improve student experiences

(Dollinger & Vanderlelie, 2021)

This strategic co-design initiative was co-led by the Deputy Vice Chancellor, students and a senior academic colleague at a large multi-campus university in Melbourne, Australia. The goal of the partnership was to develop a whole-of-institution approach for partnering with students to provide an outstanding student experience, based on student perspectives, ideas and experiences. The senior executive leader and sponsor was committed to extending engagement with students well beyond student surveys. The aim was to gather a range of other forms of feedback and to partner with students to embed strategies for enhancing the quality of student experiences across the multiple campuses of the university.

Following is a brief summary of the implementation steps outlined in Dollinger and Vanderlelie (2021, p. 46).

Step 1: The researcher invited a group of students and staff (n=10) to discuss how a whole-of-institution programme could be designed and supported.

Step 2: Students expressed interest in understanding more about university policies and practices, leadership structures and why the university was taking this partnership approach to gathering feedback.

Step 3: The researcher worked with colleagues to co-develop workshops to build students' governance and leadership capabilities. Information about the workshops was communicated through: student union/associations, libraries, course coordinators, newsletters and flyers.

Step 4: A selection of students who participated in the workshops formed the initial cohort of students invited to participate in the co-design workshops, called CoLabs.

The CoLab included students and staff with a shared goal of co-producing reciprocal and collaborative platforms to engage with students. Academic and professional staff were involved in focus group-type workshops with students.

Other features of the CoLabs included:

- workshops on such topics as
  - student volunteering at orientation;
  - redesign of a campus library;
  - designing a student dashboard for managing complaints and questions;
  - improving the student experience on one of the smaller campuses;
- online suggestion surveys initiated by staff and students to expand the topics for discussion;
- equal numbers of students and staff participants to reduce potential power imbalances;
- co-design activities to facilitate dialogue and co-investigate challenges or areas for improvement with the university; and
- follow up sessions some months later for staff to communicate to students how they had integrated their ideas and suggestions and close the feedback loop.

Four techniques used in the CoLabs to facilitate student-staff partnership were (Dollinger & Vanderlelie, 2021, pp.47–49):

1. storyboarding: staff were able to witness and interact with students to understand the student journey;
2. shadowing: staff had the opportunity to shadow students in an assigned task. In these instances, staff observed the student without interfering and took down notes;

   'The shadowing technique nicely complements storyboarding, in that while the storyboard helps staff understand the student journey across a broad experience (i.e., enrolment), shadowing focuses on a specific task' (p.47);
3. flash thinking challenges: students and staff worked together to list topics such as all the services offered by the library, or all the events throughout the year. Through the exercise, which often lasts a few minutes, staff were able to identify gaps in student awareness. This may also serve as a way for students to judge gaps in staff awareness of key issues that matter to them; and
4. life boat exercise: to find out more about students' values and priorities. In the exercise, staff worked in teams to create a pitch or idea to help students solve a particular issue. Staff teams pitched their idea to a panel of students, who provided feedback on which team had the best idea and therefore was granted a seat in their life boat 'which is set to sail for 'University 2.0'' (p.49). Students provided guidance to staff on what they were looking for and also had the opportunity to ask questions during the pitch.

The authors acknowledge that this is but one way of establishing a partnership between students and staff to address shared challenges and priorities and to reach collective outcomes. You may wish to explore another example of partnership and co-production led by the Head Librarian at La Trobe University (Salisbury, Dollinger & Vanderlelie, 2020).

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ How might a co-design workshop, or CoLab, with students and staff help to solve a leadership puzzle that you are grappling with at the moment?
- ✓ What challenges do you foresee in leading an initiative like this?
- ✓ How might you go about preparing for a collaborative student-staff workshop if it is a completely new idea in your institution? What skill development might be needed to prepare your colleagues and your student partners? Who might you need to involve in your leadership team to support you before embarking on such an initiative?

3.2 Core partnership values, challenges and opportunities

Partnership is underpinned by values that you, as a leader, will need to articulate for yourself (see Chapter 8), make transparent in discussions with your learner partners and colleagues, and review from time to time to confirm that you share these values with others. You may consider co-developing a set of shared values with your learner partners in the early phase of your collaboration.

Learner partnerships are underpinned by the values of reciprocity, mutual respect, shared responsibility, shared purposes, collaborative action and complementary contributions (Bovill, 2017). This means moving well beyond listening to students or responding to student feedback. It includes co-producing 'knowledge through active participation, rather than act as, respectively, providers and passive recipients of its transmission' (Naseem, 2018, p.228). Students are treated not as subordinates but as co-learners, 'junior colleagues' (Brew, 2006, p.96), partners and co-constructors. Students reflecting on partnerships observe that, to be truly authentic, the values underpinning SSPs must also be integrated into the fabric and culture of an institution (Ntem et al., 2020; see Chapter 7).

Enacting these values as a leader will pose challenges as you set out to lead partnerships with your student learners. Embedding partnership

activities with students is counter-cultural in most universities and the principle of reciprocity may be unfamiliar and even confronting for many (Bovill & Felten, 2016). Other challenges include resistance and reluctance on the part of students and staff, time constraints, curriculum constraints, lack of diversity in perspectives, limited resources and support (Cook-Sather & Matthews, 2021). Efforts to establish SSPs may threaten 'taken-for-granted' ways of engaging where the faculty member is positioned as the expert and the student as 'inexperienced listener' (Tong, Clark, Standen, & Sotiriou, 2018, p.315). SSPs also have an inherently emotional dimension that is often overlooked and under-estimated in terms of its potential impact on participants (Healey & France, 2022). In their practical guide on engaging through partnership, Healey and colleagues (2014) provide useful suggestions for reconciling the tensions and potential barriers you may encounter in establishing a partnership culture.

One of the many challenges encountered during the global pandemic was that of shifting partnerships online. Student authors representing five countries (Malaysia, the US, Hong Kong, Canada and Australia) reflected on the impact of COVID-19 on partnership practices (Ntem et al., 2020). They examined the central role of values in initiating, maintaining and pivoting to online partnerships. These students observed that virtual spaces can be conducive to building trust and developing meaningful connections between students and staff but they also caution that socioeconomic disadvantage and access to suitable technologies and bandwidth may be barriers. The values of respectful, ongoing dialogue about shifting roles, responsibilities and circumstances become even more important when transitioning partnerships online during a crisis such as the global pandemic.

Virtual spaces may be conducive to introducing or maintaining existing partnerships, though the astute L-C leader will:

- be mindful of context and potential equity considerations when moving to online collaboration;
- prioritise regular check-ins on student and staff well-being and support needs; and
- have the courage to pause or change the direction of a partnership initiative when unanticipated challenges arise, particularly during times of crisis.

3.3 Learner-centred leadership implications

In their interviews with senior university leaders, Matthews and colleagues (2019) identified a tendency to frame SSPs as transactional rather than transformative and relational. These initiatives were more likely to be characterised as a product designed to gauge student customer satisfaction rather than, primarily, as an opportunity to engage in dialogue with learners from a diverse range of backgrounds. While SSPs have the potential to provide you with student feedback as a leader, they offer so much more. Matthews and student co-researchers conclude that SaP may be conceived as 'a liminal space that enables participants to rethink, re-imagine, and try out other ways of being' while creating a space 'wherein competition is suspended and cooperation defines success' (p.2204).

It will be important for you to be intentional as a leader when embarking on a partnership initiative. All partnerships are context-dependent. Be sure to allocate time to think through your local context. Is a partnership approach appropriate for your context? What preparatory groundwork might be required to pave the way for SSPs in your institutional context? Plan ahead by clarifying expectations and providing a structure in which principles for the partnership will be negotiated, agreed and reviewed. Be intentional about structures and processes that create an environment in which partners are valued for the expertise and experience that they respectively bring to the partnership, whether from a student or staff perspective. This may involve a delicate balancing and re-balancing act as you lead the partnership process to ensure that the balance of power doesn't shift to one extreme or the other.

As a starting point, consider the following steps for addressing some of the potential challenges you may face in leading a partnership initiative with student learners.

1. articulate the values that underpin your partnership initiative, take time to develop a shared set of values;
2. recognise the questions, tensions, fears and uncertainties that students and staff may have about the partnership activity;
3. allocate time to develop trust among the partners involved;
4. prioritise capability development among the students and staff involved. You may involve a facilitator to clarify assumptions and expectations,

tips on negotiation disagreements and conflict and advice for staying on track to achieve shared goals; and
5. make time to step outside the process, undertake informal and formal formative and summative evaluation and review, involving all partners.

While challenging, partnerships with student learners have the potential to make a powerful contribution to your university. In a knowledge economy where access to information is ubiquitous and expertise is questioned, positioning students as learners and helping them to learn how to learn and how to co-construct and co-produce knowledge is more important than ever. The following case study illustrates the value of SaP in shifting your university towards co-designed collaborative spaces to enhance learner engagement and connectedness.

Case Study 3.3: Students as partners in education-space design

(Streule, McCrone, Andrew, & Walker, 2022)

StudentShapers is the SSPs programme at Imperial College London. This case study reports on a research-informed initiative that brings student learners and staff together to co-design informal learning spaces. These spaces include a silent study corridor, in the pilot phase, and a large foyer area spanning two floors outside a large lecture theatre.

Key elements of the partnership include:

- an intentional collaborative partnership between academic staff discipline experts, students, a department operations manager and a member of the central estate's team. Each brings their respective expertise and perspectives on the design problem;
- a learning space design challenge that extends beyond the more familiar learning and teaching context in which many partnerships are situated. It provides a useful example of the value of SSPs that extend broadly across the institution;
- a staged approach to co-designing, co-creating and co-implementing the programme of work, involving a pilot stage, followed by full-implementation in partnership with students and staff;

- challenges and opportunities encountered as a result of the global pandemic. This involved adapting the partnership approach to online engagement that allowed for collaborative decision-making on design options and introduction of software to enable space visualisation in virtual environments when partners could not visit the space in person; and
- a commitment to 'genuine partnership, with students involved until the final decision point … This ensured that student and staff agency over the design was maintained throughout' (p.85).

Some lessons learned through this partnership initiative include:

1. identify the nature of student expertise. Recognise that they are 'experts in how students learn, socialise and interact in various spaces' (p. 86);
2. equip student and staff partners with the 'tools, knowledge and participatory structures' (p. 86) they need to engage fully and authentically in the partnership process;
3. secure and confirm financial commitment and sponsorship from relevant institutional leaders before embarking on the process;
4. be prepared for unanticipated challenges, including a global pandemic, that may affect implementation timeframes and channels of communication and engagement; and
5. think broadly about opportunities for engaging students in partnership.

An unanticipated outcome of the timing of this case study was the impact of COVID and its role as a catalyst for highlighting the critical importance of student expertise in guiding decisions about post-pandemic learning spaces, patterns and expectations.

Apply: what would you do?

✓ This case study provides a worthwhile example of how students as learners can partner with academic and professional staff experts to address a design problem. Can you think of an equivalent opportunity that would enable you to bring academic and professional staff together with learners in a partnership that lies beyond the formal learning and teaching context in your institution?

The remainder of this chapter focuses on practical ways in which you might incorporate the principle of partnerships and co-implementation into your leadership, whether you are leading at a university-wide level or in a local department or team.

4 Leading institution-wide partnerships to enhance students' mental health and well-being

The priority of well-being and mental health is one shared by national governments, organisations and industries, communities and individuals alike. Mental health incorporates physical, mental and social well-being. It extends well beyond the absence of disease (WHO, 2022), and is best described as 'a state of well-being' in which individuals are able to cope with the stresses of life, are able to work productively and contribute positively to their community (WHO, 2004).

4.1 Mental health and well-being among university students: the context

On a global scale, we have witnessed rapidly rising rates of mental ill health which have been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indicators of this so-called silent pandemic include increased suicide rates, heightened psychological distress (Aknin et al., 2021) and exponential growth in demand for mental health support services. This challenge spans age groups and communities, but nowhere is it more prevalent than among youth. As a result of the lockdowns and social isolation that characterised the global pandemic in 2020 and 2021, younger adults reported some of the biggest declines in social connectedness and life satisfaction. Concerns have escalated internationally regarding the prevalence and risk factors for mental health challenges among university students (Sheldon et al., 2021).

International reviews across 15 nations (Batra et al, 2021) revealed high rates of depression and anxiety among college students, while a post-pandemic longitudinal UK study (Toth, Faherty, Mazaheri & Raymond, 2021) found depression levels among UK students were double pre-pandemic levels. Similar patterns are reported among Chinese college students (Ma et al., 2019), intensified by COVID-19 lockdowns and social isolation. Some student groups are at higher risk of mental ill health. For example, lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender/gender diverse, intersex, queer/questioning, asexual and other (LGBTIQA+) students continue to be at higher risk of poor mental health and suicidal behaviours than the general population. These patterns of inequity and risk are consistent across a range of countries, including the US and Canada, UK, South Africa, Hong Kong and Australia (Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity, 2019; Pogrmilovic et al., 2021; Suen, Chan & Wong, 2020; Sumbane & Makua, 2023). In the Australian context, First Nations students experience disproportionately high rates of mental ill health (Waling & Roffee, 2018). Barriers to addressing these issues include lack of culturally appropriate and safe services, feeling alienated, socially excluded and displaced. When a student belongs to multiple at-risk groups, for example, young LGBTIQA+ people from First Nations communities, this further increases the rates of mental ill health (Soldatic et al., 2021). Comparable intersectionality is evident in the UK where students with 'protected characteristics'– such as ethnicity and gender/sexual identity – experience higher rates of mental ill health (Gray & Simpson, 2021).

4.2 Addressing student mental health and well-being as a learner-centred HE leader

Student mental health and well-being is one of the most significant challenges you will encounter. It is a priority for university and college leaders globally. You will find numerous resources to guide your leadership in this regard. A useful starting point is the Okanagan Charter (2015). This international charter focuses on issues relating to health, well-being and sustainability of communities. The principles of this charter informed the development of the Canadian Campus Well-being Survey (Faulkner, 2020) which includes a number of health and well-being topics such as mental health, food security, physical activity and more (CCWS, 2022).

There are several national and cross-national initiatives in place to address the priority of student mental health, resilience and well-being in universities, given the prevalence of these challenging issues among university student cohorts. For instance, the Ontario Government has funded the Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health (2022) to partner with Ontario post-secondary universities and colleges, student associations and health providers to address the priority of mental health and well-being in a systemic way. In the Australian context, the commonwealth government

funded an evidence-based resource to support student mental health and well-being. This resulted in a framework that was developed in collaboration with students, university representatives and mental health experts (Orygen, 2020).

In the UK, Piper and Emmanuel (2019) developed a toolkit to guide co-production of mental health strategies with students. The Embrace HE programme (2022) is a partnership involving universities in the UK, Spain, Greece, Serbia and Lithuania to improve HE policy and practice in the area of student well-being. Its goal is to create policy and practical resources for universities to adapt and adopt. The Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe (WISE, 2022) initiative promotes and encourages student well-being in European universities. You will also find numerous examples of institution-level innovations designed to support student well-being. For instance, Ohio State University brought together a group of students, staff and university leaders to develop a Wellness App (The Ohio State University, 2022).

We will revisit the subject of mental health and well-being in relation to staff (Chapter 4), in the context of L-C curricula (Chapter 5) and policy-setting (Chapter 6), in the context of culture (Chapter 7) and, importantly, in the context of your own self-care (Chapter 8). For the purposes of this chapter, Research Case Study 3.4 illustrates university-wide approaches to embedding digital well-being initiatives in partnership with students.

Research Case Study 3.4: Embedding digital student well-being initiatives in partnership

(Lister, Riva, Kukulska-Hulme & Fox, 2022)

This case study outlines two participatory projects designed to support student mental well-being at the Open University and the University of Warwick, respectively. They were designed to address barriers to student well-being, including environmental, skills-related and study-related barriers.

Warwick introduced a digital repository co-designed with students to share practical pedagogical practices to support student well-being in teaching and learning environments. The Open University piloted several digital resources to support student well-being for those engaged in online and distance modes of study.

Both projects involved participatory methods. At the Open University, collaborative learning design in partnership with students involved students as core members of project teams and participatory design workshops. Similarly, Warwick appointed students as leaders on elements of their project. They also adopted the 'friendship method' which involved student 'friendship pairs' working collaboratively to gather data through conversations, 'guided by prompts without a researcher present' (Lister et al., 2022, p. 6).

Evaluation of these projects across both universities revealed similar themes: student participants felt valued when they were included as part of the team, they perceived that their ideas were recognised and celebrated and they described the process as equitable. Students also commented on the skills they developed and the agency they experienced as a result of participating actively in decision-making. Staff commented on the enhanced quality of the outcomes of the participatory approaches as a result of student leadership and input throughout the process.

Challenges identified include:

- time required to facilitate meaningful participation;
- challenges with power imbalances where staff initially outnumbered students in focus groups, for example;
- last minute cancellations and no-shows that compromised the group composition;
- students initially reported feeling 'less confident advocating for their ideas' (p.19);
- COVID-19 and lockdowns meant that many aspects didn't proceed as planned and alternative arrangements had to be made; and
- volunteer bias was an issue in some contexts. Student participation was typically on the basis of self-selection, thus potentially biasing the responses and limiting its representativeness.

The researchers conclude that there is 'no one-size-fits-all approach to supporting student mental health and well-being, no 'right' way to approach it' (p.18). The key message is that there is value in adopting context-appropriate methods and approaches to partnering with students in ways that are 'inclusive and participatory in their approach' (p.18).

Apply the case study research

- ✓ A challenge noted by these researchers is the self-selected nature of the participants. What steps could you take to include students from different age groups, different year levels and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in collaborative partnerships at your institution?
- ✓ What challenges do you foresee in trying to include undergraduate and graduate student perspectives in such partnerships?
- ✓ Do you think it would be important to include international students in a collaborative partnership at your university? If yes, how would you go about doing so?

5 Implications for learner-centred HE leaders

In this chapter, we have explored several dimensions of what it means to engage with your students as learners. What are the implications for leaders who are looking for ways to place learners at the centre of their thinking, planning and decision-making? L-C leaders who apply the principles of engagement, collaboration and partnership recognise that, regardless of their characteristics, student learners will benefit most from their HE experience when they are engaged with peers, staff and the institution as active participants and co-constructors of their educational experiences. Following are seven principles to guide your efforts to engage with students as learners, collaborators and partners.

Seven leadership principles for enhancing learner engagement and partnership

1. **Engage with learners intellectually: Create and maintain a stimulating intellectual environment**

   - timulate discussion and debate, exploration and discovery within and beyond the formal curriculum (see Chapter 5).
   - Foster partnerships among students and staff from all parts of the university to create a culture of discovery and reciprocal learning.

2. **Engage with learners emotionally: acknowledge the challenges, celebrate the achievements**

    - Acknowledge that a large proportion of them may be juggling multiple responsibilities and commitments while studying.
    - Prioritise support for learner well-being.
    - Role model strategies for managing the different dimensions of their lives.

3. **Engage through data: Monitor and respond to demographic subgroup differences and their impact on engagement**

    - Make it a priority to get to know your learners, their needs, aspirations and motivations.
    - Understand the subgroup differences and develop targeted strategies for engaging student learners according to their needs and background experiences.

4. **Engage with clarity: Ensure expectations are explicit and responsive**

    - Communicate expectations clearly and consistently across your institution and within faculties and departments.
    - Reiterate expectations at appropriate times through the year and in different settings – before classes start, and in anticipation of peak stress times in the academic year.

5. **Engage through co-construction and partnership**

    - Develop a partnership ethos and mindset among your small team, department, faculty or university community.
    - Be intentional about building student and staff capabilities to enable co-construction of ideas and collaborative problem-solving.

6. **Engage socially: Foster social connections**

    - Design spaces and be proactive in creating opportunities for the people in your university to come together in a range of ways and for different purposes.
    - Ensure these are culturally appropriate, psychologically safe places that build confidence, trust, mutual understanding and respect among your university community members.

- Facilitate opportunities for civic engagement with communities beyond the university.

7. **Engage holistically: Recognise the complex nature of engagement in your policy and practice**

   - Engagement involves connecting learners with peers, staff and senior leaders of your institution. It may be a battle for some learners who may struggle to adjust to university life; and it may simply be an appointment for some who see university as one of many engagements in their daily calendar of activities.
   - Aim to foster mutual respect, trust and shared accountability through engagement with your learners.
   - Connect your learners to the university learner ecosystem in an engagement relationship that is mutually beneficial and continues well beyond graduation.
   - Remember that learners' engagement changes over time – monitor the changes from one year level to the next in transitions to and through the institution. Be responsive in supporting different forms of engagement throughout their experience.
   - Adapted from Krause (2005, pp.12–14).

Reflect

- Think about the learner environment for which you are responsible. It may be an academic department, a learner support team, a faculty or whole-of-institution student services portfolio.
  - What are some of the engagement opportunities available to learners in your leadership sphere of influence?
  - As a L-C HE leader, how have you created the conditions that offer learners opportunities to engage with their learning and/or with peers, staff and senior leaders in your university?
  - What steps have you taken to communicate these engagement opportunities? Have you considered inviting the learners to be part of your communication strategy?

- What difference do you think the student as learner perspective makes to your approach to engagement? Do you think there is a difference between student engagement and learner engagement?

6 Bringing it all together: five big ideas

In this chapter, we have considered how you develop the leadership capability of engaging with students as learners. This builds on the co-design leadership capability outlined in Chapter 2 enabling you to shape a culture in which you co-develop and co-implement strategy in partnership with students as learners. Five big ideas in this chapter are as follows:

1. Having a deep knowledge of the demographic characteristics of your student cohort, as well as constructs shaping your institution's view of students is an important foundation of L-C leadership.
2. L-C engagement extends the concept of student engagement beyond a transactional performativity tool to a genuine enabler of co-production, collaboration and co-inquiry.
3. L-C approaches to partnership include students-as-partners initiatives which may represent a significant cultural shift in how you bring your students and staff together in partnership to address collective challenges and priorities.
4. SSPs are underpinned by values of reciprocity, mutual respect, trust, shared purposes and shared accountabilities. There are many challenges involved but the opportunities include building a culture of trust, collaboration and agency among your students as learners and partners.
5. Enhancing students' mental health and well-being is one of the most important priorities you will have as a leader. As a L-C HE leader, there is value in collaborating with learners in inclusive and participatory approaches to co-designing and co-producing strategies and practical resources to support their well-being.

The next chapter examines the complementary capability of connecting with your colleagues as experts, collaborators and co-learners in the sense-making process.

Apply – discuss these ideas with peers, supervisors and mentors

- ✓ Think of one key initiative that you are leading at the moment. How well are diverse learner perspectives represented? Is there scope for expanding your collaborations with students as learners? What steps would you need to put in place? What advice and practical support or sponsorship do you need from your peers, mentors and/or line manager?
- ✓ In your leadership role, what are your views on the differences between engaging students and engaging *with* students as learners?
- ✓ As a leader, what are some practical ways in which you might increase the agency of your learners? What are the challenges and opportunities of increasing learner agency in your institutional context? How might your staff peers respond?
- ✓ How prepared do you feel to lead a partnership initiative involving students and staff in your leadership context? What support might you need from peers? What sponsorship might you need from other leaders and senior colleagues in your institution before embarking on such a journey?

Grow as a leader

- Tip 1. Engaging with your students as learners may be a new way of perceiving your students. Take a helicopter view of your styles of communication, and your personal constructs of HE students. Consider whether there is scope for collaborating in new ways with your students to strengthen engagement and partnership.
- Tip 2. Comprehensive data about your student cohort is a powerful tool available to you. Make it a priority to have this data at your fingertips early in the academic year. Supplement the data with regular conversations with your students, get to know them, what matters to them and the opportunities they see for collaborating with you as a leader. Take an anthropologist's perspective as you look around your institution to understand more about

how students are perceived in your university – are they seen as customers? hard working learners? workers? partners?

- Tip 3. Introducing a partnership initiative with your students may not be appropriate for you or your institution right now. Partnership with students may not be fit for purpose in some settings. Do your homework, read the culture of your context, assess the readiness of your team, your colleagues and your institution before embarking on a partnership initiative.

4 Connecting with colleagues as a learner-centred higher education leader

A L-C leader recognises that colleagues are learners too. In this chapter, we explore how you can connect with your colleagues as experts and learners in the context of complexity and disruption. The chapter opens with an overview of the various colleagues with whom you may engage, ranging from the Vice Chancellor and senior executive peers, to multi-functional teams of senior leaders and staff, to academic faculty and professional and administrative staff across seniority levels and departments. You will increasingly encounter colleagues working in flexible modes and short-term itinerant contracts. Typically, senior academic and professional staff leaders must rely largely on leadership by influence to effect change and achieve their leadership goals. We examine the implications of this in the context of leading change, including through times of crisis. Case studies in this chapter consider the role of academic promotion policies and capability frameworks in fostering a culture that supports staff connections and career development. The value of leadership development is also addressed, along with the critical subject of staff well-being and your role in this regard.

1 Leading collegial complexity in higher education

Universities are widely considered to be among the most conservative and longstanding of institutions in modern society. In medieval Europe, universities enrolled a select group of males for the purposes of theological and philosophical education. Notwithstanding the many changes that we now

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see in 21st-century universities, the concept of a community of scholars that emerged during medieval times has informed the disciplinary cultures that we see in academia today. The entrenched disciplines of universities have contributed to well-established academic cultures, tribes and territories (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Krause, 2014).

While the notion of collegium is most often associated with academic faculty (Manning, 2013) I use the term 'colleagues' to encompass all staff members of the university, including professional staff and academic faculty. My approach emphasises the importance of leadership capabilities that adeptly connect academic and professional staff in a collective approach to decision-making and sensemaking. This focus does not negate the powerful influence of microcultures that operate across your institution, including those within academic disciplinary communities, as outlined in the next section.

Collegial complexity has come about as a result of generational and demographic shifts, the massification and internationalisation of HE, changes in the configuration of academic and professional staff work (Krause, 2009) and increasingly itinerant work patterns. The global pandemic further intensified substantial changes in the nature of collegial relationships and work patterns, with the rapid expansion of the work-from-home phenomenon. Nevertheless, there remains a disciplinary core to universities, alongside the many changes.

Throughout this guide I use the terms 'academic staff' and 'faculty' interchangeably to refer to those who are responsible for teaching in disciplinary contexts. Typically, these colleagues also engage in discipline-based research and/or the scholarship of learning and teaching relating to their discipline. The terms 'professional staff' or 'administrative staff' are widely used in Australasia and the UK to refer to those with responsibilities beyond the discipline-based academic sphere. Their areas of expertise may include student support, administrative roles, IT support, outreach and industry engagement, facilities management and similar. In using the term 'professional' to describe one group, this is not to suggest that academic staff aren't professional in their approach to work. The terms 'professional' and 'academic' staff are often used as short-hand to describe the traditional bifurcation of roles in universities. However, this simplistic approach to categorising roles is far from satisfactory in depicting the rich diversity characterising the colleagues with whom you will connect as a leader, as discussed in Section 2 of this chapter.

HE leadership roles, too, carry many different titles, some of which are more familiar in certain countries than others. For instance, senior leaders with titles such as President or Vice Chancellor, Vice-President or Deputy Vice Chancellor tend to be categorised as 'administrators' in the US or managers in the UK and Australia, but the terms are generally interchangeable. The notion of leaders as managers is sometimes associated with neoliberal managerialism and corporatisation in HE, conveying the connotation of us versus them, staff versus management. In all cases, these labels are value-laden and may carry cultural meaning in your institutional and national context.

The aim of this chapter is to challenge you to connect with colleagues in fresh ways as a L-C HE leader. I reflect on the importance of moving beyond the traditional bifurcated HE workforce divide of professional staff and academic faculty, raising your awareness of the diverse range of roles, role labels, identities, work patterns and career profiles that characterise the colleagues who will form part of your leadership journey.

Reflect

- What are the characteristics of your institution? Is it old, with a rich history of tradition across multiple disciplines, or is it a newer teaching-intensive institution with a focus on scholarship? What difference do you think this makes to your approach to connecting with colleagues as a L-C HE leader?
- What kinds of collegial complexity are you facing? Does your role involve a focus on connecting with academic faculty? Are you primarily involved with leading professional and administrative staff? What potential do you see for strengthening connections among colleagues with different roles across your university to achieve shared goals and priorities?
- Rhoades (1992) describes the collegial model as 'nonhierarchical, cooperative decision-making' where academic faculty are brought together by 'common interests and by a sense of academic community' (p.1377). As a leader, how comfortable do you feel with this approach to decision-making? In what ways do you think the collegial model might also include professional staff colleagues?

1.1 Understanding the context and organisational structure of your university

Emerging and experienced HE leaders, alike, benefit from taking a helicopter view of the organisational structure of their institution on a regular basis. Regardless of your role or the number of years you have been employed at your university, it's useful to think about your collegial connections through the lens of your institution's structure. This approach builds on the emergent university ecosystem map that you developed in Chapter 1 (see Figure 1.2). The sample organisational chart shown in Figure 4.1 illustrates a simplified representation of a structural arrangement typical of many universities. It depicts the familiar three-part combination of academic functions, including research and teaching, professional services operations, sometimes called corporate services, and community and industry engagement functions or similar.

The academic, discipline-based portfolios are usually arranged in the form of faculties, schools or departments. These areas include teaching and research activities and usually report to a Provost, Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic or equivalent. Research functions in universities are typically arranged in a parallel portfolio that works in tandem with academic faculties. The scope and scale of the research function will vary according to institutional type and mission.

In parallel with the academic and research functions of institutions, a third dimension of HE institutions comprises various functions that are not considered academic, per se, but that support the operations of the institution. Configurations vary widely but usually include functions relating to: finance, human resources, information technology support, facilities management, student-related administrative and services functions, library, community engagement, marketing and fund-raising. Your institution's organisational structure may also include a portfolio focused on international engagement. Once again, this will depend on the scale and mission of your institution.

Depending on the configuration of your university you will find multiple structures under the umbrella of the institution-level organisational structure. For instance, there are cascading formal structures in each academic faculty, school or department, institute or centre. Similar cascading structures exist in each professional portfolio. These professional services functions might include: the Chief Operating Officer, External Relations, Academic Registrar, Student Well-being Services or similar. If you are working in an

institution with multiple campuses or clinical sites, these, too will have their unique structure. Organisational structures and titles often reflect the university's mission, strategic priorities and the preference of the Vice Chancellor or President at the time. For example, your university may have a specially designated senior portfolio for Sustainability or Global Relations, Student Success or Equity and Diversity. Understanding these portfolio titles and those of the people working in them is an important part of your preparation to connect meaningfully with your colleagues.

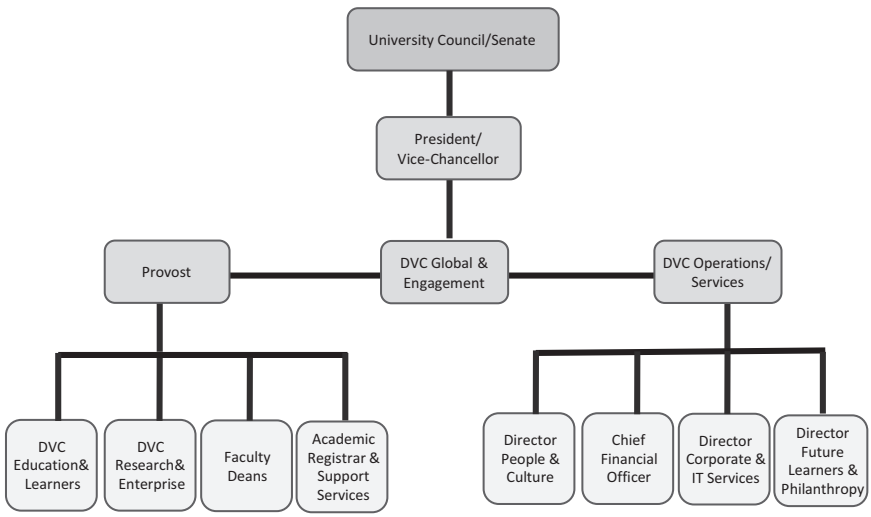

Figure 4.1 Sample university organisational chart

Reflect

- Take a closer look at your institution's organisational structure chart. Make an honest assessment of the parts of your university about which you know least. Is this an impediment to your leadership role?
- Depending on your role and leadership responsibility, it may not be necessary to connect with all parts of your organisation; but more often than not, an effective HE leader will take a systemic approach when considering the importance of collegial connections. What are your top three priorities for connecting colleagues within and across teams, departments, campuses or portfolios?

No doubt, your institution will have a variation on this simplified configuration. Paying attention to how your institution is structurally configured deepens your understanding of the colleagues with whom you are working. Organisational structure and role configurations influence staff members' identity and sense of connection with your institution. Section 2 of this chapter explores these themes in more detail.

1.2 Colleagues as learners in learner-centred higher education contexts

L-C HE leadership is a both-and proposition. It recognises the primacy of engaging with students as learners and simultaneously prioritises connections with colleagues as learners in your institutional ecosystem. If your goal is to engage with student learners, the starting point must be to engage intentionally with those who are integral to your university – your colleagues. No matter where they are located in the organisational structure, each one of your colleagues plays a role in shaping a L-C community of students and staff in your institution.

Staff in HE are grappling with wide-ranging disruptive forces including technological innovation and the impact of mass HE, together with global social justice movements like *Black Lives Matter*, not to mention the disruption caused by the global pandemic. These forces of change bring into sharp relief the need for HE staff, regardless of role or title, to be learners, adaptive to change, capable of bouncing back and adjusting to new ways of working. Van de Ven (2021) observes that, while organisational change in the past may have been characterised as top-down, episodic and carefully planned with time for consultation and deliberation between change programmes, we now find ourselves in a world where change is increasingly 'unplanned and continuous … emergent, bottom-up…and evolutionary' (p. 57). The global pandemic and its aftermath represents a stark example of continuous, emergent change that has had a significant effect on the well-being of people across the globe, including those in HE contexts. Working in an environment of perpetual change takes its toll on staff and leaders alike, yet it also presents opportunities for the imaginative and courageous leader.

In this environment, you can play a pivotal role as a sensemaker who helps others to understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate and reframe how they think about change and the process of changing. Taleb's (2012, p.3) notion of antifragility is a powerful one in this context. Antifragility extends beyond resilience or robustness to suggest that individuals and organisations

need to develop the antifragile capability to grow, adapt and improve when confronted with volatility, uncertainty and change.

Connecting with your colleagues as learners, while also respecting their expertise and experience, is not a simple leadership task. It entails a focus on fostering collegial relationships (Marchiando, Myers & Kopleman, 2015) and this takes time. It takes deep work within your university's culture, understanding the big picture context and, at the same time, respecting the individual roles and responsibilities, challenges and anxieties, dreams and aspirations of the colleagues who are so key to shaping L-C HE cultures (see Chapter 7).

2 Higher education staff identities and cultures in changing times

To understand more about how you might connect with colleagues, it's useful to understand a little about how these various communities are constituted, what makes them distinctive and why they are so important to your leadership. First, we will examine research on academic cultures and identities, followed by consideration of emerging roles that span traditional cultural and role boundaries in the form of third space or blended professionals.

2.1 Academic tribes, microcultures and nomads in higher education

Connecting with your colleagues involves a process of shaping a L-C culture, or perhaps more aptly, a series of L-C microcultures. The research on disciplinary differences over the past three decades leads me to conclude that we need to move beyond thinking of universities in terms of a single monolithic culture. Instead, it's helpful to think of your institution in terms of interdependent microcultures, all with their particular characteristics. The leadership capability of shaping learner-centred cultures and microcultures within your university is further expanded in Chapter 7. In the context of the present chapter, our interest lies in features of academic and professional staff cultures and the implications of the blurring boundaries within and between them.

Understanding how academic staff define themselves and their work is an important part of your toolkit as a HE leader. The notion of academic

tribes and territories (Becher & Trowler, 2001) draws on anthropological perspectives (Biglan, 1973) of academic work and the deeply rooted 'tribal' differences between the disciplines and their research traditions. Some of these differences emerge as a result of unique rules and conventions shaping disciplinary discourse and forming boundaries between disciplinary groups (Bernstein, 1996).

Social and cultural forces, particularly at the academic department level, play a powerful role in shaping disciplinary identities. To understand academic work through the disciplinary lens is to appreciate the complex and messy interplay of people, processes and policies operating at macro, meso and micro levels of your university (Fanghanel, 2011; Malcolm & Zukas, 2009). Martensson and Roxa (2016) investigated academic microcultures in the context of university teaching in disciplinary contexts (see also Chapter 7, Case Study 7.3), noting that a microculture comprises a group such as a teaching team or academic department that develops certain ways of teaching and assessing students, along with ways of talking about teaching that form the basis of recurrent practices, tacit assumptions and traditions.

Academic departments and disciplinary cultures continue to play an important role; yet at the same time, the nature of academic work is changing rapidly. Academic identities are challenged and are in a state of flux for many (Brennan, Naidoo & Franco, 2017). The shifts in academic territorial boundaries and the reshaping of some disciplinary tribes challenge academic identities, creating fault lines that can fragment academic work (Gumport, 2019). These fault lines may result from disputed views on the purposes of HE, or they may be fault lines between teaching and research and the fragmentation of knowledge. While fragmentation and unbundling (Macfarlane, 2011) operate on the one hand, there is blurring of boundaries on the other, including between the traditionally divided domains of academic and professional work, as outlined in the next section.

The tribes and territories metaphor is a useful one, though it is also instructive to think about the staff 'nomads' who feel they belong to no particular tribe. In my own research (Krause 2012), I identified some of these academic nomads who were conducting research in emerging fields such as Tourism and Hospitality. Others were involved in interdisciplinary research which meant they had a foot in more than one disciplinary territory and thus felt they didn't truly belong in either.

Further illustrating the nomadic nature of academic staff who don't quite fit the classic mould of disciplinary tribes, Whitchurch (2019b) reports that

Reflect

- As you think about connecting with the academic faculty in your institution, how does the notion of academic tribes, territories and nomads help you to think about ways to connect meaningfully with those colleagues?
- How important do you think it is to understand academic identities in your leadership role?
- Can you see evidence of fragmentation and unbundling of academic work in your university? Is there scope to reframe this 'fragmentation' more positively? For example, in the form of teaching-specialist roles or research-focused roles with commensurate career and progression opportunities?
- What role can L-C HE leaders play in supporting academic staff as they learn how to adapt their career planning and progression, together with their sense of professional belonging and identity, in rapidly evolving HE environments?

in the US and the UK, fewer than half of academic staff have contracts that formally include both teaching and research responsibilities. Similar patterns are evident in Australasia, Canada and Europe. No doubt, the disruption of the global pandemic has further intensified trends towards itinerant academic roles. The itinerant academic tends to occupy several professional spaces simultaneously, challenging the once familiar linear approach to academic staff career progression (Whitchurch, 2019b). Such an academic may develop a portfolio career that comprises a combination of academic work, professional consultancy work, engaging with professional bodies and working in industry and community settings. The fluid, evolving nature of academic work and its implications for leaders is further expanded in Section 3.1.

2.2 Understanding the professional workforce in higher education

As well as understanding the changing nature of academic work and the power of disciplinary communities, your ability to connect with staff will be strengthened by a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of the

contemporary professional staff workforce in your university. Whitchurch's (2013, 2019a) extensive work on third space professionals depicts the blurring boundaries between academic and professional staff roles in HE. Kallenberg (2016) goes one step further, describing 'fourth power' professionals as educational administrators with sector-specific knowledge who work alongside third space professionals, academic managers and other specialist professionals in HE institutions.

Fluidity is a term widely used to depict the ways in which staff are spanning traditional role boundaries in academic and professional staff contexts (Whitchurch, 2019a). Often their work takes place in multidisciplinary, multifunction team-oriented settings such as educational development units. These boundary spanning staff tend to progressively add to their capabilities, reinventing themselves as new opportunities arise. There is evidence of gendered patterns in the emergence of third space professional roles like PVC Education roles and similar (Denney, 2021). Generational factors also play a part in the boundary spanning phenomenon. Whitchurch observes that younger staff tend to be more likely to take up the portfolio careers that often characterise third space roles.

Reflect

- In light of Figure 4.1, look closely at your own institution's organisational chart. Where do you see evidence of third space teams working together e.g., student support, academic programme design, educational development, graphic designers?
- Does your university make the most of multiskilled, multifunctional teams in third space environments? Is there scope for you to foster third space environments to achieve your strategic priorities as a leader?

Research Case Study 4.1: Optimising the third space

(Veles, 2023)

This investigator examines a number of third space environments through multi-case study research conducted in Singapore and Australia, identifying the need for boundary-crossing capabilities

(Veles, 2023, p.180) within institutions and across cultural boundaries. In this context, boundaries provide an opportunity for extending oneself to learn new ways of working drawing on diverse perspectives and the challenge of new contexts.

The third space projects outlined in Veles' research comprise five intercultural, cross-campus collaborations involving 'crossing boundaries of culture, organisational structure, and professional group identities while collaborating' (2023, p. 39). These third space projects include the core activity domains of teaching and learning, research community engagement. Projects include:

i. collaboration between professional and academic staff teams in a Medical School to develop a new medical training programme. Key outcomes of the project were that:
ii. 'professional staff, given an opportunity and encouragement to take a step outside of the boundaries of their substantive roles, can really step up and prove that their capabilities and mindset are sufficient for a project to succeed. Professional staff most of all value their peers' and managers' appreciation and recognition, which manifest through being given further opportunities to contribute in a significant way, and by simply saying "Thank you for a job well done".' (p.71)
iii an intercultural, cross-campus collaboration between academic and professional staff in a university in Singapore and Australia, respectively, to launch a Research Institute with a shared vision, shared research culture and a 'new research focus' that 'involved changing the individual and collective value systems related to academic work and recalibrating academic staff profiles' (p.97). The researcher identifies several outcomes of this third space project, including:

    a. leadership capability development;
    b. learning the importance of making time to get to know the skills and capabilities of professional staff involved in collaborative projects; and
    c. understanding that professional staff value acknowledgement from their managers and peers even more than financial rewards.

Veles identifies the following benefits of collaboration in third space environments:

i. improved student engagement and experience;
ii. building collegial relationships;
iii. developing innovative solutions while fostering a culture of innovation in the institution;
iv. opportunity to gain a competitive advantage that comes from working in an interdisciplinary team (p.153).

The researcher concludes with the recommendation that institutions consider introducing a new third space professional staffing category 'with embedded career progression steps and a peer-reviewed reward process to facilitate entry into and advancement within it' (p.154; see also Bare et al., 2021)

Apply the case study research

- ✓ What role do third space professionals play in your institution?
- ✓ Do you see an opportunity to embed these colleagues with boundary spanning capabilities in your institution by clarifying their roles and career progression pathways?
- ✓ As a L-C HE leader, what do you need to learn about fostering third space environments to achieve your strategic goals?

3 Connecting with higher education colleagues through career progression and professional learning

Connecting with colleagues in meaningful ways involves getting to know them, hearing their stories, understanding what is important to them and what motivates them as fellow learner colleagues in your university community. This section outlines three practical strategies for you to consider and adapt as you look for ways to connect with your colleagues through professional learning and development opportunities. These are:

- connecting with academic faculty through academic promotion processes;
- empowering colleagues through capability frameworks; and
- developing staff capabilities and agency through strengths-based leadership.

The applicability of these strategies may vary according to your leadership role and responsibilities, your institution's mission and characteristics, and the HE system in which you work. Nevertheless, each example illustrates core leadership principles that are summarised in the final section of this chapter.

3.1 Connecting with faculty through academic progression and promotion

Earlier in the chapter we looked at what it means to connect with your colleagues as learners in a L-C culture comprising multiple microcultures. Understanding the power of these microcultures in shaping professional identities and approaches to academic work is a helpful starting point.

Academic career progression and promotion is an important dimension of any HE institution, though career models vary in different parts of the world. For example, in North America and parts of Europe, formal tenure-track career models are the norm, with various hurdle requirements for tenured academic positions (Pietila, 2019). In some European research universities, tenure-track academic faculty models are in place for promising researchers who meet performance expectations as they move from post-PhD fixed-term roles to permanent positions (League of European Research Universities, 2014). In Chinese HE, substantial reforms have taken place in academic life as a result of internationalisation and global competition. Research-intensive universities, in particular, have adopted a tenure track model similar to the US, with heightened emphasis on research outcomes (Xie, 2018). Similarly, tenure track models are evident in South Korea, Japan and many other Asian nations.

A well-established academic career progression model in the UK, Australasia and Southern Africa involves academic staff within an institution applying for promotion from the level of Associate Lecturer to the most senior level of Professor, based on the institution's academic promotion policy framework. Academic staff roles typically encompass three functions – teaching, research and service. The latter usually comprises

a combination of leadership, administrative, committee and external engagement activities. This configuration of academic work will be familiar to many readers.

Counteracting these linear career progression structures is the 'concertina' career which describes the periodic expansion and contraction of academic staff careers over time (Whitchurch, Locke & Marini, 2021). This flexing of an individual's career progression reflects local and personal circumstances and opportunities. In other words, academic career paths are more 'dynamic and complex than suggested by fixed career models and linear career paths … leading to a fluidity in career-making across formal parameters' (p.647). While the current research tends to focus on the concertina career phenomenon among academic staff, no doubt an equivalent concertina effect is apparent among some professional staff in your university. Learning how to flex and adapt in career contexts is yet another reason for L-C leaders to consider the role of staff as learners who face the challenges of adapting to rapidly evolving HE work environments.

As an executive leader and Provost, I have learned the value of connecting with academic staff through the academic promotion process. For many staff, academic promotion is treated as an application to be completed, a destination to aim for, rather than a career development journey. The promotion process can also be a contentious one, where concerns about systemic inequities (Sadiq et al., 2019) and prioritisation of research performance over teaching contribute to staff dissatisfaction (Machado-Taylor et al., 2017).

In shaping institution-wide academic policy frameworks (see Chapter 6 for further detail), I have prioritised strategies to recognise and reward academic staff contributions across the domains of teaching, student experience, disciplinary research, the scholarship of learning and teaching,

Reflect

- Think about your own career progression. Has it been linear or more concertina-like?
- How might you need to adapt your leadership approach to connect with colleagues across the spectrum of career-making experiences?

as well as industry engagement and academic citizenship. One successful strategy for connecting with academic faculty with a passion for teaching is to introduce teaching-focused roles. These are also known as Educator Track roles in the UK (Geertsema et al., 2018) and some parts of Southeast Asia, including Singapore (Brooke et al., 2020). These roles provide teaching specialists with career pathways to the most senior academic levels, based on evidence of scholarly teaching, high-impact scholarly outputs and curriculum leadership with impact. Chapter 6 examines the keys to successful implementation of such academic promotion policy changes.

Another strategy for making meaningful connections with academic staff is to invest in their professional learning, giving them the tools they need to make sense of their academic work in integrated ways. Academic citizenship (Macfarlane, 2007a, 2007b) is one such tool that enables academic staff to conceptualise their administrative work, leadership roles (e.g., Course Coordinator or Head of Department), committee responsibilities, professional contributions and external engagement activities as an integrated part of their contribution as a citizen of the university community.

Academic citizenship refers to 'attitudes and activities connected to internal and external service work supporting the infrastructure of academic life and the wider civic mission of the university' (Macfarlane & Burg, 2018). In many cases, service, the third dimension of the typical academic work pattern, is devalued (Brew, Boud, Lucas & Crawford, 2018) in relation to research and teaching. Academic colleagues tell me that the use of the term 'academic citizenship' carries with it a powerful sense of belonging, connectedness and valued contributions within the university community. Integrating academic citizenship into promotion processes and equipping academic staff to draw together sometimes disparate strands of their day-to-day 'service' work is an empowering way to enable staff to tell the story of their work and its impact.

As a citizen, one has a sense of legitimate belonging with reciprocal rights and responsibilities, together with active participation in and contribution to one's community. In a post-COVID environment where many staff have shifted to more flexible, work-from-home arrangements there is evidence that many feel disconnected from the university community and this affects their well-being (see Section 4 below). Consider ways in which you might extend the notion of citizenship to professional staff and third space professionals in your leadership role.

Apply: what would you do?

1. How would you assess the academic promotion process in your institution? Would your colleagues describe it as a bureaucratic exercise or a purposeful part of their career development journey? Is there scope for reframing the process as a vehicle that empowers academic faculty to tell their professional story, supported by robust evidence?
2. Have you considered the idea of academic citizenship as a way to enable your academic faculty to reflect on their service and leadership activities as a citizen and scholar?
3. How might the notion of citizenship be applied to professional staff colleagues and third space professionals?

3.2 Empowering higher education colleagues through capability frameworks

Many HE institutions have introduced staff capability frameworks, or similar, as a means of articulating values, attitudes and behaviours that characterise their culture. These frameworks may operate along a continuum from a behavioural emphasis at one end to a more aspirational emphasis on the other. Some universities use language that focuses overtly on staff behavioural competencies, using staff capability frameworks for the purposes of performance development and review, or equivalent. For example, The University of Birmingham (2022) has a separate capability framework for academic and academic-related staff and support staff linked to performance and progression processes.

The Australian Catholic University (2022) uses its staff capability framework to enable 'a whole-of-organisation approach to developing and strengthening capability', while the University of Otago in New Zealand (2018) introduced a capability framework to describe knowledge, skills and abilities among university professional staff. Their framework includes the following five capabilities: engage, enable, personal attributes, people management, language and culture. The capabilities span all professional staff roles at the university, including those in the most senior roles. Similar to many institutions, Otago also deploys its framework to guide decisions

about investment in professional learning programmes for individuals and teams.

Leadership capability frameworks are another useful tool for you to consider. The University of Manchester (n.d.) uses a leadership capability framework to articulate leadership skills, behaviours and knowledge including role modelling for inclusion, leading change, communicating and engaging, acting with integrity, and innovating and taking risks. Leaders are encouraged to use the leadership capability self-assessment tool as the basis for personal and professional growth, 360 reviews and conversations with their respective line managers. Southern Cross University (n.d) in Australia also has a leadership capability framework designed to establish shared understandings, clarity of expectations and career development pathways for aspiring leaders.

The terminology and intent of equivalent frameworks may be quite different in your country and institution. The principle underpinning these frameworks is that of providing a helicopter view of the range of capabilities that staff – including academic, professional staff and leaders – might develop and hone across a career journey. Such frameworks also provide the opportunity to establish shared expectations and understandings, using consistent language. Frameworks of this kind may be a useful addition to your leadership toolkit as you look for ways to connect with colleagues to promote a collegial, learner-focused culture, mutual expectations and self-assessment.

3.3 Developing higher education staff capabilities and agency through strengths-based leadership

Two further tools available to you as a L-C leader include: adopting a strengths-based approach to leadership (Rath & Conchie, 2009) and developing your coaching capabilities to facilitate professional learning and growth among your colleagues. Strengths-based leadership is conceptually based on positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and encourages leaders to focus on the virtues and strengths of an individual or team (Dronnen, 2022). This approach equally applies to your own self-assessment as a leader (see Chapter 8). A number of strengths assessment tools are available, including the Values in Action Inventory (www.viacharacter.org) based on the work of Peterson and Seligman (2004). These researchers

identify 24 strengths of character classified into six virtues. These include wisdom and knowledge, courage, compassion, justice and social responsibility, humility, hope, humour and gratitude.

As a L-C leader, I encourage you to take time to understand more about your own character strengths and virtues and the role these play in your leadership. In turn, look for ways to foster a deeper understanding of strengths among your colleagues. Strengths-based leadership is positively correlated with staff well-being (Ding & Yu, 2022) and a sense of staff flourishing in their work (Hone et al., 2015).

Coaching your colleagues and leadership teams to identify and further develop their strengths and capabilities is an effective way to connect with them and to build a sense of agency and engagement among staff. As we recover from the disconnectedness brought about by the global pandemic, it is worth investing time in these capability-building activities among your colleagues. The leader-as-coach approach to connecting with staff involves applying coaching skills like open-ended questions, challenging for learning, growth and accountability to increase staff agency, autonomy and problem-solving capabilities (Luckman & Flory, 2019).

I have found coaching-based approaches, combined with strengths-based workshops particularly useful in creating and sustaining cross-functional leadership teams and in developing the leadership capabilities of cohorts of staff, including Heads of School or Faculty, academic programme leaders. For example, if you are leading an enhancement initiative to address common priority areas like strategies for improving student retention or engaging students more effectively through technology-enhanced curricula, you will need to bring together academic and professional staff who may not ordinarily work together. A strengths-based approach involves making the most of the strengths of a multi-functional group of colleagues. This may involve identifying overtly the strengths that various members of the group bring to the problem to be addressed. Coaching the group as a team involves asking questions, creating opportunities for them to have increased autonomy in coming up with creative solutions to the challenges and facilitating group conversations in such a way as to draw out the perspectives of those who may not feel confident to share their perspectives (Caddell et al., 2022).

In summary, connecting with your colleagues involves wise compassion and the courage to 'do hard things in a human way' (Hougaard & Carter, 2022, p.5). At no time has the capability to combine wisdom with

compassion been more critical than now, as colleagues learn how to tackle the many challenges of rebuilding their personal and professional lives after a global pandemic. The next section builds on this theme by looking at the leader's role in supporting staff well-being.

4 Prioritising staff well-being as a learner-centred higher education leader

In Chapter 3 we considered the importance of prioritising student well-being in L-C HE environments. Equally important is the priority of staff well-being. The global pandemic brought this priority into sharp relief with the rapid shift to fully online teaching and work-from-home requirements. Just as for students, the lock-downs, uncertainty and volatility of the COVID-19 experience exacerbated existing trends in mental health and well-being challenges among staff in HE (Jayman, Glazzard & Rose, 2022), whether they be academic faculty, professional staff, or boundary spanners who work across the two spheres. Reasons for this include: workload, role conflict, short-term contracts, poor communication, frequent change that is poorly executed and lack of agency in decision-making processes (Fontinha, Van Laar & Easton, 2018; Makikangas, Mauno, Selenko & Kinnunen, 2019). As for students, our staff colleagues also need the opportunity to learn how to be well and how to thrive in times of change and uncertainty. You play a key role in creating the conditions that foster a L-C mindset among your colleagues. Case studies 4.2 and 4.3 showcase the importance of leadership with respect to well-being initiatives at national and institutional levels.

Research case studies on staff well-being during COVID-19

The following two research case studies highlight the global challenge faced by staff in HE institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first national case study presents data on staff experiences in the UK and the second examines a whole-of-university faculty and staff well-being case study in Canada.

Case Study 4.2: A national case study – staff well-being patterns in UK HE

(Wray & Kinman, 2021)

A national research study conducted in UK HE institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Wray & Kinman, 2021, p.3) found that:

- staff perceptions of how well their institutions managed psychological health and safety were poor and lower than equivalent ratings in other organisations, thus increasing the risk of staff work-related stress and poor mental well-being;
- more than half of staff respondents reported experiencing unrealistic time pressures on a regular basis; and
- the reported level of mental well-being among HE staff was considerably lower than UK population norms, with 29% of respondents feeling emotionally drained every day and more than half (53%) showing signs of probable depression.

Worryingly, this study also found that more than half of the sample (59%) expressed the fact that they would be seen as weak if they sought support for their well-being, while more than two-thirds (71%) were concerned that seeking well-being support would harm their career. The stigma attached to staff seeking mental health and well-being support in UK universities, as identified in this study, points to a systemic issue. It highlights the importance of leaders who are compassionate and capable in terms of identifying staff well-being risks. Leaders also need to take action to create a culture that encourages staff to: learn about well-being strategies; feel confident about seeking support; voice their concerns in safety; and be part of the solution in co-producing strategies that are conducive to mental wellness and well-being.

Strategies that staff identified as helpful for supporting their well-being included (Wray & Kinman, 2021, p.12):

- managers who are aware of the workload challenges and pressures;
- increased autonomy and the ability to work flexibly;

- improving institutional policies and practices in relation to well-being (this is discussed further in Chapter 5);
- a sense of agency and opportunities for active involvement in decision-making;
- feeling appreciated, valued and respected; and
- bespoke counselling from experts who understand the work pressures of the HE sector and psychological support available in a range of modes to cater for staff with various home and family responsibilities (p.14).

Apply the case study research

✓ Thinking about the national approach to supporting staff well-being in UK HE institutions, how useful do you think a national approach is in this regard? If you are based in the UK, has it made any difference in your institution? If you work in another jurisdiction, are you aware of initiatives in place to recognise and support a sector-wide, national approach to staff well-being? If yes, are these having a positive impact on your institution?

✓ Consider the strategies that staff identified as helpful for supporting their well-being (Wray & Kinman, 2021, p.12). In what ways does a L-C leadership approach assist you in applying these strategies in your institution or within your local team?

Case Study 4.3: An institutional case study – faculty and staff well-being at UBC

(The University of British Columbia, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c)

The University of British Columbia (UBC) takes a whole-of-university approach to the mental health and well-being of all members of the university community, including academic faculty and professional staff. As a founding member of the *Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Universities and Colleges* (2015, see Chapter 3), UBC is committed to the principle of embedding health into all aspects of campus culture, administration, operations and academic

endeavours (The University of British Columbia, 2022c). Starting with a focus on collaborative leadership and co-construction, the University Vice Chancellor recognises that 'if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organisation or community' (The University of British Columbia, 2022a). The Vice Chancellor's commitment is to embed well-being into policies, practices and decision-making on a daily basis.

As in the UK (Wray & Kinman, 2021), UBC is aware of concerns about the stigma attached to seeking support for mental health. UBC's priorities are to:

- reduce mental health stigma;
- foster a supportive campus culture;
- ensure that faculty, staff and students have the resources to help them learn about and understand more about mental health issues; and
- improve resiliency and coping skills.

UBC takes a positive, health promoting approach to mental health rather than simply reacting to issues by providing a suite of services. The goal of the university leaders is to equip the UBC community with 'the skills they need to live well and improve their health by creating environments that support them' (The University of British Columbia, 2022b).

Several elements contribute to the success of this initiative at UBC.

1. Strategy: A well-being Strategic Framework communicates UBC's commitment to embedding well-being across the institutional culture, policies and practices.
2. Communication: Each year, the UBC Well-being Annual Report highlights the collective efforts of students, faculty, staff and community members in support of well-being and mental health.
3. Sharing stories and research: UBC community members are invited to share stories of success as well as their research on well-being initiatives.

4. Funding: Grants and strategic initiatives funds are available to all academic and administrative staff to support health and well-being initiatives. Projects include: mental health literacy workshops, community garden developments, showcasing effective teaching practices that support learner well-being.
5. Distributed leadership: Workplace Well-being Ambassadors champion mental health and well-being in their academic department or administrative unit.
6. Empowerment: practical strategies for staff to prepare them to speak with their manager about their mental health.
7. Leadership resources: tools and resources for managers, heads and deans to help them to support their teams to promote mental health and well-being.

Apply the case study principles

- ✓ The UBC case study identifies seven factors contributing to the success of the whole-of-university faculty and staff well-being initiative. How might you apply these principles to your institution?
- ✓ If you are leading a small team or department, how could you adapt these principles to your context?
- ✓ What challenges or roadblocks might you anticipate in your institutional context as you look for ways to introduce staff mental health and well-being strategies?

5 Learner-centred leadership principles for connecting with colleagues in higher education

In this chapter, we have considered the complex array of characteristics of the colleagues with whom you will come in contact in your leadership role. Whether you are leading a university executive portfolio or a small team in a department or central services unit, prioritising meaningful collegial connections and the power of continuous professional learning will be key to your effectiveness in the role. While organisational positioning as a leader may bring with it some power (Phillips & Snodgrass, 2022), key to your

success will be your ability to influence colleagues as you support them to be both experts and learners through complex times of change.

5.1 Eight learner-centred leadership principles for connecting with colleagues

The following principles summarise key messages designed to help you to develop your leadership capability of connecting with colleagues through influence and a learner-centred approach that prioritises staff capability building in times of continuous change. These principles highlight a form of leadership power that extends well beyond your leadership position or title in the university. They are also a reminder that one doesn't necessarily need a leadership title to have a positive leadership influence.

1. Lead with influence: Shape the culture of your team, department or institution through the power of influence by connecting with colleagues, understanding the challenges they face and factors affecting their sense of professional purpose.
2. Focus on strengths: Develop a deep understanding of your own leadership strengths and ways to identify, foster and learn from the strength of others, particularly in collegial teams.
3. Foster capability development: Make explicit the capabilities, strengths, values and behaviours that give your colleagues a clear picture of how they might grow professionally as they learn and further develop their capabilities and strengths.
4. Invest in future leaders: Spread your leadership influence through investing in the leadership capabilities of others, enabling them to learn about opportunities to lead.
5. Develop agency with accountability: Empower colleagues through collaborative decision-making, constructive dialogue and debate to build a sense of agency while remaining accountable.
6. Communicate with respect: Be consistent, intentional, credible and empathetic in your communications with colleagues.
7. Connect through collegial relationships: Develop your relational leadership capabilities by spending time with colleagues, wherever they are, whether in coffee shops, staff common rooms, working from home, meeting online via Zoom, or scheduling walking meetings around your campus.
8. Remember the power of compassion: Demonstrate empathy, with wisdom and compassion.

6 Bringing it all together: five big ideas

In this chapter we have examined ways to further extend your L-C leadership capabilities through connecting with colleagues. Five big ideas from this chapter are:

1. Leading collegial complexity involves understanding your institutional structure and context and the implications for connecting meaningfully with colleagues across the organisation as both experts and learners in rapidly changing environments.
2. University cultures comprise microcultures that are shaped by long-held disciplinary identities, together with third space professional roles that span the traditional academic-professional staff role boundaries.
3. Three ways to connect with colleagues to foster a sense of agency and purpose include: academic staff promotion processes that focus on celebrating career development journeys and academic citizenship contributions, staff capability frameworks and strengths-based approaches designed to promote professional learning and positive engagement with staff by focusing on strengths and virtues.
4. Staff well-being is a priority in HE institutions and it is important for L-C leaders to connect with colleagues to co-develop capabilities to promote staff mental health and well-being.
5. L-C leadership principles for connecting with colleagues include the power of relational, compassionate leadership, distinguishing between influence and positional power, empowering colleagues through collaborative decision-making and honing your communication capabilities.

This chapter concludes part 2 of the guide, examining the 'who' of L-C leadership. In the previous chapter we discussed the importance of engaging with students as learners. This chapter has highlighted the importance of building collegial connections with staff, whether they be academic faculty, professional staff or colleagues working in third space boundary spanning roles. In the part 3 we turn our attention to the 'what' of L-C leadership, exploring new ways of conceptualising curriculum, along with the capabilities you will need to lead in the area of quality enhancement and policy development.

Apply – discuss these ideas with peers, supervisors and mentors

- ✓ This chapter examines the importance of building connections with your colleagues. This is not a simple task, however. How do you deal with colleagues who challenge your leadership, either overtly or tacitly?
- ✓ The UK research on staff well-being during the global pandemic (Wray & Kinman, 2021, p.4) identified the stigma attached to staff seeking mental health and well-being support. Do you think this is an issue in your institution? How might you explore this issue in wise, compassionate ways with your colleagues?
- ✓ What are some of the enablers and impediments to connecting with colleagues across disciplinary boundaries and departmental siloes in your institution?

Grow as a leader

- Tip 1. Recognise the limits to your perceived 'power' and 'control' as a leader and learn the value of connecting with colleagues to address the shared wicked problems you face.
- Tip 2. Connect with colleagues within and beyond your immediate team, recognising microcultures that exist and looking for ways to collaborate across institutional siloes to strengthen collegial connections.
- Tip 3. Prioritise staff well-being and connect with colleagues in wise, compassionate and courageous ways to co-design well-being and health-promoting strategies.

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PART

3

WHAT does learner-centred higher education leadership focus on?

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5 Conceptualising and renewing curriculum

So far in this guide we have considered the *why* (Part 1) and *who* (Part 2) of L-C HE leadership. This chapter marks the beginning of Part 3, examining *what* the most effective L-C HE leaders focus on in their leadership. We will explore two key levers available to HE leaders, the first of which is curriculum. The first section of this chapter examines HE curriculum perspectives, purposes and definitions, highlighting the contested nature of this concept. We then look at the role of curriculum as a lever for engagement, renewal and enhancement from a L-C perspective. Terms such as curriculum 'renewal', 'refresh' and 'transformation' are unpacked, along with capabilities that will enable you to co-design and partner with students and staff colleagues to achieve sustainable curriculum change in your university. Case studies explore practical ideas for leading purposeful curriculum renewal, including tips on effective ways to engage and communicate with your university community during curriculum change processes. This chapter includes practical leadership tools that enable you to identify and mitigate some of the risks inherent in curriculum change while facilitating dialogue and constructive debate about the shape and purpose of curricula in your institution.

1 Conceptualising curriculum as a learner-centred leader

Leadership in matters of curriculum and curriculum renewal is core to the capability set of L-C HE leaders. Many associate curriculum with the work of academic staff with disciplinary expertise to develop course materials,

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along with academic developers and curriculum specialists who advise on curriculum design and assessment. While these colleagues play a prominent part in designing, delivering and reviewing curricula, our focus is on the implications for HE leaders of an informed appreciation of the role of curriculum in day-to-day leadership responsibilities.

The study and practice of curriculum in HE is the subject of extensive research, countless publications and expert praxis in university settings. The aim of this chapter is to point you in the direction of selected curriculum concepts and practical leadership implications. I emphasise the unifying potential of curriculum conversations in your leadership context. Some readers will have extensive expertise in curriculum leadership, others may not have considered curriculum relevant to their role and may find it instructive to read further on the subject.

Curriculum is a Latin-derived word originally used to depict the act of running a race around a race track. Often the term 'course' is used as a synonym for 'curriculum', yet the term signifies much more than this. This chapter takes a broad view of curriculum both as a concept and an action. At the macro university-wide level, the concept of curriculum encapsulates all the planned learning experiences that your institution offers. Beneath this umbrella are multiple interweaving layers of curricula at the meso department level and micro subject level. Curriculum includes course design in academic contexts but it extends well beyond disciplinary settings to encompass the experience of students in formal and informal learning settings, in co-curricular and extra-curricular contexts facilitated by the university. As an action, currere – the Latin infinitive version of curriculum – refers to the lived experience of curriculum, depicted by Pinar (1975, 2023) through the metaphor of an ongoing, complicated conversation with oneself and others.

In the context of this guide, the role of every HE leader interfaces with curriculum in some way, for curriculum incorporates the expertise of academic and professional staff, the active participation of students as agentic learners, and the wide-ranging contributions of external stakeholders. Developing the capability of conceptualising curriculum applies equally to academic leaders and professional staff leaders, Vice Chancellors and senior executive managers. Curriculum has significant implications for all parts of your institution. Far from being an objective phenomenon that is constructed and delivered following a formula of learning objectives, assessment and outcomes, curriculum is socially constructed, value-laden and contested, extending well beyond the bounds of so-called 'formal' learning environments.

Prudent leaders will appreciate that conceptualising curriculum is no easy task. There are multiple, ever-shifting definitions and conceptualisations of curriculum (Deng, Gopinathan & Lee, 2013) shaped by diverse theoretical frameworks and contemporary discourses. While conceptions vary and may be contradictory, I encourage HE leaders to conceptualise and re-conceptualise curriculum and how learners experience it across their institution. Your curriculum conceptualisations will be influenced by several factors, including your personal theoretical and philosophical frameworks as well as your institution's mission, values and strategic priorities, funding imperatives, and regulatory and policy settings. Three curriculum metaphors that I have found useful in shaping my leadership thinking are as follows:

- HE curriculum is a *bellwether* that indicates shifts in government policies, political priorities, labour market forces and institutional strategies;
- curriculum also functions as a *barometer* of national and international socio-political and economic trends which, in turn, shape views of the purposes of HE; and
- it is a *mirror* that reflects your university's values, mission and culture, along with the tribal nature of disciplines and the ways in which your institution welcomes or silences diverse voices in the context of curriculum contestation and debate (Krause, 2022).

1.1 Curriculum perspectives and purposes

In responding to an increasingly complex environment, competing educational theories, pressures from government agencies, social and economic upheavals and the wicked problem of inequality inherent in our educational systems (Coutinho, 2022), HE leaders often struggle to formulate coherent strategic responses. Your institution's macro-level curriculum – and the multiple meso- and micro-curricula that it comprises – can play a key role in addressing strategic priorities while also engaging learners in your institutional narrative. The key to success is setting about this leadership task with intentionality and an informed understanding of the power and purpose of curriculum in your context. Table 5.1 proposes a starting point to guide your conceptualisation of curriculum perspectives and purposes in your institution.

Curriculum may be conceptualised as an enabler of holistic perspectives, as a journey and as a lens to guide your strategic thinking and, in turn, to enact your strategic goals. Let's examine the potential of these perspectives in turn.

i. **Curriculum as an enabler of holistic perspectives**

Throughout this guide, I encourage you to take a helicopter perspective of your institution and its community. The curriculum ecosystem comprises multiple micro-curricula, dimensions and participants. Your ecosystem might include: a team working on the introduction of short-form courses and microcredentials; some courses may be moving to fully online curriculum delivery; all departments may be involved in addressing priority areas such as work-integrated learning, integrating the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), internationalisation of the curriculum, inclusive practices, assessment innovation and much more.

The curriculum ecosystem involves and affects all members of your university community in some way. While academic staff experts are most commonly associated with curriculum responsibilities, many others are involved when one adopts a holistic perspective of curriculum. Think about the colleagues across your institution and their role in curriculum processes and practices. Your list may include staff responsible for learning space design, IT specialists, curriculum developers, facilities and maintenance staff who care for spaces where learners congregate, and industry experts who provide guest lectures or advice to enhance the relevance of your curriculum. Student perspectives are a critically important dimension of the curriculum ecosystem. Students as learners need to have scaffolded opportunities to be active participants and co-constructors of learning (see Chapter 3) and their involvement in curriculum design, delivery, assessment and review is key. Often overlooked or invisible are the equally important contributions of curriculum contributors who may include library teams, careers advisers, academic support and student affairs staff, health services staff, and many more.

Reflect

- Who forms part of your university's HE curriculum ecosystem?
- Are you overlooking any contributors?
- What actions can you take to encourage a more holistic perspective of the curriculum ecosystem in your institution?
- What value could a holistic perspective of curriculum add to the effectiveness and impact of your leadership?

ii. **Curriculum as a journey**

While short-term shifts may be necessary from time to time – such as those we witnessed in the context of the COVID-19 pivot to online teaching and assessment – curriculum design, delivery and review is best conceptualised as a journey and an iterative process. Conceptualising curriculum in this way harmonises with Pinar's (1975) longstanding exposition of *currere* in which he shifts the focus from *how should we develop the curriculum?* to *how should we understand the curriculum*? (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995). This nuanced shift to thinking about curriculum – currere – as an action and a process, rather than an end point, is a powerful insight for L-C leaders. Your leadership presence and relationships are pivotal to the success of this curriculum journey (Pinar, 2023).

iii. **Curriculum as a lens**

The curriculum of your institution is also an educative lens for examining the epistemological practices across disciplinary contexts and departments in your institution (Krause, 2021). As a lens, curriculum gives you a long-term and wide-angle perspective of student experiences in your learner community. It also facilitates microscopic analyses, underpinned by data, to give you a deeper understanding of your institution as a complex ecosystem of networked people, knowledge, learning contexts and processes. Curriculum work may also operate as a bifocal lens (Coutinho, 2022) that engenders '*critical agency*' (p.4), simultaneously enabling self-study and a focus on the 'complicated conversation of curriculum as a collective public moral enterprise' (p.5).

Complementing these three curriculum perspectives, Sections 2–4 of this chapter examine the power of curriculum as a lever for L-C HE leaders to engage, enhance and renew within their institution, as outlined in Table 5.1.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the interconnected and recursive nature of these curriculum levers, as we shall see in the sections to follow.

Before considering how you might leverage curriculum in your leadership, it is helpful to be aware of some of the dimensions and definitional complexities surrounding curriculum.

Table 5.1 Higher education curriculum perspectives and purposes for the learner-centred leader

Curriculum as enabler of holistic perspectives. **Curriculum as a journey.** **Curriculum as a lens.**	**Higher education curriculum purposes:-**		
	Engagement **Curriculum is a lever for engaging…**	**Renewal** **Curriculum is a lever for renewing…**	**Enhancement** **Curriculum is a lever for enhancing…**
	• students as learners and partners.	• attitudes and approaches to curriculum and its role in your institution, faculty/department, course/unit.	• quality of learner experiences and outcomes.
	• staff – professional, third space professionals (e.g., academic developers, IT support, library, infrastructure), discipline-based academics, sessional staff, researchers, policy makers, etc.	• capabilities of learners and staff developed through curriculum – e.g., fostering agency, technology skills, assessment literacy, cultural humility and sensitivity, partnership capabilities and critical thinking skills.	• institutional coherence, connectedness, sense of purpose and curriculum scholarship.
	• industry and community.	• curriculum design, content renewal (e.g., integrating Indigenous perspectives), modes of delivery, assessment renewal.	• relevance, innovation of course offerings (e.g., through SDGs, research-led curriculum).

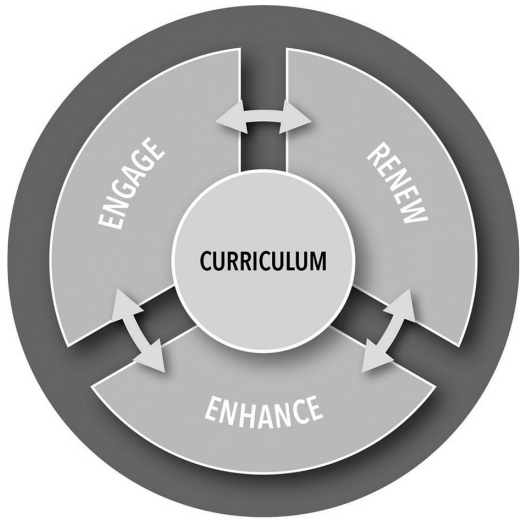

Figure 5.1 Interdependent purposes of curriculum for the learner-centred leader

Reflect

- What value do you see in asking '*how should we understand curriculum in our university*?' before embarking on curriculum development and change?
- In what ways could you use curriculum as a lens to take a wide-angle and microscopic look at your institution?

1.2 Curriculum dimensions and definitions

You will find many definitions and dimensions of curriculum in the literature. If you are an academic leader responsible for leading curriculum renewal that includes a focus on the quality of learning and teaching at course and subject level, no doubt you will make it a priority to delve into the curriculum literature more deeply. Within the scope of this chapter, I provide a high-level overview of key curriculum concepts relevant to leaders across portfolios of responsibility. From this vantage point, you can dive more deeply into the literature and available resources, according to need.

Table 5.2 summarises six dimensions of curriculum (DiPietro et al., 2022). While taxonomies of this kind may differ and the language may vary, this list points to the complexity inherent in the work of curriculum leadership, whether you are at the helm of leading a whole-of-institution curriculum renewal strategy (see Case Study 5.3), overseeing curriculum review in your department, or contributing as a member of a professional portfolio.

Expanding on the dimensions outlined in Table 5.2, the designed curriculum is sometimes referred to as the formal curriculum, as compared with the so-called 'informal' curriculum that refers to the 'idiosyncratic, sporadic, and happenstance learning that occurs … on the fly, and thus is often unscripted' (O'Donnell, 2014, p.7). Such interactions typically occur beyond the formally planned curriculum, yet institutions may design physical and virtual student gathering spaces, on-campus accommodation, coffee shops and the like to increase the likelihood of these ad hoc interactions which increase students' sense of belonging, engagement and persistence (Krause, 2007; McFarlane, Spes-Skrbis & Taib, 2017; Tinto, 2017).

Another set of curriculum dimensions encompass extra- and co-curriculum offerings. This is a particularly blurred set of curriculum concepts for the boundaries between the academic curriculum, co-curriculum and

Table 5.2 Six dimensions of curriculum

Curriculum dimensions	**Explanation**
Designed curriculum	The planned curriculum, formally communicated by universities and outlined in academic programmes.
Implemented curriculum	What occurs in scheduled class settings, including what learners and teachers do and how they interact.
Experienced curriculum	What learners gain and understand from their learning experiences.
Assessed curriculum	Ways in which student learning is assessed and measured.
Hidden curriculum	Tacit ideas, 'concepts and practices that are embedded into the curriculum but which are not always made explicit to the learners' (p.12).
Null curriculum	The value-laden absence of ideas, skills and ways of understanding and knowing in the curriculum, communicating potentially negative messages about their value or validity.

Based on Di Pietro et al. (2022, pp.11–12).

extra-curriculum are increasingly porous. The co-curriculum is conceived as complementary to the designed academic curriculum, often incorporating learning objectives and outcomes that extend student learning beyond the discipline-based course of study.

Extra-curricular activities tend to be further removed from the requirements of the academic curriculum (Hordosy & Clark, 2018), though their contribution to learner skills, capabilities, sense of belonging and well-being (Finnerty, Marshall, Imbault & Trainor, 2021) should not be overlooked. Extra-curricular involvement may be wide-ranging, encompassing paid employment, sporting activities, volunteering, mentoring, involvement in student clubs and societies and the like. The distinction, however, is not always clear. In some universities, for instance, students have the opportunity to negotiate inclusion of extra-curricular activities as part of their course assessment (Press, 2017, p.212).

In my experience, the role of co- and extra-curricular learning is taking on greater importance in the overall curriculum design thinking of universities and their leaders. One reason for this stems from the recognition that learning beyond the formal academic curriculum contributes substantially to the capabilities that learners need to live and work successfully in a complex, ever-changing world. Another reason lies in the fact that it is unrealistic to expect the discipline-based curriculum to meet all the needs of HE learners. Participation in social enterprise and community activities, leadership development, building social networks and learning on the job are dimensions of learning and development that are best addressed through a holistic approach to conceptualising curriculum and its various dimensions.

Illustrating the growing importance of the co-curriculum in preparing well-rounded HE learners, Case Study 5.1 presents two examples of whole-of-institution co-curricular initiatives.

Case Study 5.1 Practical ways to recognise co-curricular learning

Mini case study 1: The Melbourne Plus co-curricular digital credential

The University of Melbourne has introduced Melbourne Plus (2022), a catalogue of co-curricular activities validated by the university and designed to build and demonstrate learner capabilities in four categories:

people leadership, community engagement, sustainability advocacy and innovation. Students are invited to scan the Melbourne Plus Catalogue to find one or more activities that have met university-determined eligibility criteria and that can, as a result, contribute to a learner's Melbourne Plus digital credential, based on a self-reflective written submission on capabilities developed as a result of participation in the activity. Find out more here: https://students.unimelb.edu.au/student-life/melbourne-plus

Mini case study 2: The co-curricular record at Michigan State University – a multi-year initiative

King and colleagues (2021) report on the design thinking approach (see Chapter 3) used to prototype the co-curricular record at MSU. MSU defines co-curriculum as activities occurring outside of the academic (for-credit) coursework that contributes to student learning outcomes. Examples include involvement in undergraduate research in collaboration with faculty, community volunteering, on-campus employment in residential halls or student leadership roles. These authors outline an initiative designed to 'track and validate co-curricular learning outside the scope of academic credit' (p.217).

Of particular interest for L-C HE leaders is the emphasis placed on leadership and sponsorship from the Provost portfolio, resource allocation and intentional approaches to design and prototyping. This case study illustrates the key role of leaders in bringing students and colleagues together from all parts of the university, including student affairs professionals, academic faculty, subject experts and administrators. Governance arrangements included advisory and steering committees comprising academic deans, associate provosts, the registrar and student success staff. Core to the work of these groups was a focus on communication across campus to build awareness and encourage buy-in. Students were integral to informing decisions about the name of the initiative, the brand, identity and value proposition of the co-curricular record.

While there was a strong IT underpinning to this initiative, the authors share the following lesson:

> The entry point of change can serve as a lens through which stakeholders saw the project, so if we always said this is an

> information technology project, eventually we would have lost the enthusiasm of folks primarily interested in student learning. Similarly we could have easily named this an assessment project … and quickly lose the interest of almost everyone else. Our task … was to regularly reframe the kind of project we were prototyping to help include more stakeholders and their potential insights and feedback.
>
> (p.228)

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ Both case studies refer to institutional validation of co-curricular activities in order for them to be eligible for recognition and inclusion in the co-curricular record. How important do you think such validation is? How would you go about cataloguing and validating co-curricular activities in your institution?
- ✓ The Melbourne Plus digital credential is awarded on the basis of student self-reflection. Does your institution assess co-curricular learning outcomes? What are the challenges and benefits of this approach?
- ✓ The MSU case study highlights the importance of senior academic leader sponsorship in bringing students and staff together to develop a prototype CCR. How could this be achieved in your institution? What leadership role would you play?

Given the varied conceptualisations of curriculum, its multiple dimensions and the many members of your university community with a stake in curriculum, perhaps the most useful advice to guide your leadership in this regard can be summarised as follows:

1. Promote a holistic and agentic approach to curriculum in which students are empowered to 'create their own ecologies for learning' in the context of a 'lifewide curriculum' (Jackson, 2020, p.89);
2. Distinguish between co- and extra-curriculum, 'understanding their different approaches and capabilities, and accepting their strengths and limitations' (Press & Padro, 2022, p.852);

Reflect

- What challenges do you envisage in promoting a holistic and agentic approach to curriculum in your institution?
- Who would need to be part of your trusted network of advisers and collaborators to enact the three suggestions listed above?

3. Make 'deliberate and meaningful connections between formal and informal learning environments and between the university and the world beyond' (Kek & Huijser, 2017, p.25).

2 Curriculum as a lever for engagement

Curriculum has the potential to be a lever for engaging meaningfully with your students, staff and industry and community members. This engagement does not manifest itself as a matter of course, however. It requires intentionality, planning and collaboration. Curriculum equally has the potential to disengage, exclude and silence voices in your university community. This section introduces principles of inclusive curricula in the context of an ecological approach to conceptualising curriculum as a L-C HE leader.

2.1 Engaging through the curriculum ecosystem

The previous section presents dimensions and definitions of curriculum to inform your thinking about what curriculum is and might become through your leadership. While curriculum definitions are a useful starting point, the reality is that the learners in your organisation experience curriculum in an organic way at multiple levels simultaneously. On any given day, they may experience: the subject-level curriculum through their morning seminar; followed by co-curricular learning in an undergraduate research programme or a social enterprise service learning module that contributes to their course grade; a lunchtime extra-curricular student club meeting or sports training session; and finally a course-related work placement in the local hospital in the afternoon. For the student learner, these engagements with various dimensions of the curriculum merge into a single experience that illustrates the non-hierarchical fluidity that characterises education ecosystems

(Blaschke, Bozkurt & Cormier, 2021). Just as institutional ecosystems are made up of a 'constellation of organisational ecosystems' (Jackson, 2020, p.84), the macro institution-level curriculum is a constellation of interconnected curricula operating across your university or college.

As a L-C leader you, too, will interact with a constellation of curricula on a daily basis. Engaging with the curriculum ecology of your institution means engaging intentionally with the various teams, departments and individuals who contribute to the ecosystem. Industry and community members external to your institution also form part of this ecology, as outlined in Section 2.5 below.

As a precursor to engaging meaningfully with students and staff in, through and about the curriculum, it is critical that these learners and colleagues perceive that they have a valid and legitimate role to play in the complicated conversation (Pinar, 2023) of curriculum. An inclusive approach to leading curriculum conversations is important. A starting point for inclusive leadership is the inclusive curriculum.

2.2 Engaging through the inclusive curriculum

HE curricula play a pivotal role in addressing systemic inequalities relating to disability, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, socioeconomic status or language background.

Engaging through inclusivity takes courageous leadership because it may involve struggle, contestation and substantial shifts in mindset and practice among students and staff across your university. This resonates with Pinar's complicated conversation metaphor. Nevertheless, such conversations are essential if leaders are to be truly learner-centred and inclusive of all learners in their curriculum contexts.

The inclusive curriculum is one that is 'culturally sensitive' and 'affirms, validates and respects students' diverse cultures, identities and contexts' (Thomas & Quinlan, 2022, p.2). Inclusive curriculum practices manifest themselves in many ways. In the Australian context, embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the curriculum is a priority across the higher education sector. To engage in the journey towards meaningful inclusivity means developing respectful, Elder- and community-led, place-based practices, building trust and relationships with First Nations peoples and learning the value of intellectual and cultural humility. A holistic approach to integrating Indigenous values, practices, ways of knowing and doing in the

university curriculum involves the following: 'Aboriginal values, principles and perspectives would need to be part of the university, aligned with local Aboriginal epistemologies, ontologies and cosmologies – skilfully intersecting with Western knowledge systems' (Bullen & Flavell, 2022, p.1409). Similar decolonising priorities are evident in countries like Canada (Cote-Meek & Moeke-Pickering, 2020), and South Africa (Ajani & Gamede, 2021). It will be important for you to determine what is most culturally appropriate in your institutional context.

To achieve sustained systemic curriculum change that embeds the principles of inclusivity and cultural humility in authentic ways requires a leadership commitment for the long haul. It involves a willingness to listen, learn and partner with colleagues and community members from diverse backgrounds. A helpful leadership insight in this regard is that of the Indigenous concept of Deep Listening or *Dadirri* in the Ngangikurungkurr language of the Daly River in the Northern Territory of Australia. This form of learning involves 'listening respectfully … It draws on every sense and every part of our being' (Brearley, 2015, p.91). The L-C leader committed to deep listening will also need an inner resolve to engage courageously in complex curriculum conversations with a clear sense of the ultimate purpose.

Research Case Study 5.2: Developing culturally sensitive curricula

(Thomas & Quinlan, 2022)

The aim of this research study was to examine the extent to which students, particularly Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) students perceive their university curriculum to be culturally sensitive. The researchers developed a survey instrument comprising four scales that explored (p.7):

i. the extent to which people from diverse backgrounds were referenced in the curriculum;
ii. whether people from diverse backgrounds were portrayed in positive or negative ways;
iii. how the curriculum challenged dominant ideologies, privilege and power; and

iv. whether students perceived the learning environment to be respectful of cultural differences and different perspectives.

The sample comprised 262 students from one university in England. The majority were undergraduates of African heritage, with a smaller representation of other ethnic groups across five discipline areas. The teaching staff at this university are described as 'predominantly White' and the institution is depicted as a 'diverse institution' with 37% BAME undergraduates (p.6).

Findings revealed that:

- BAME students perceived their curricula as less culturally sensitive than their White peers across all four areas covered in the survey (p.11);
- positive perceptions of a culturally sensitive curriculum were associated with increased interactions with academic staff. Fewer interactions with staff were reported by BAME students who expressed more negative perceptions of cultural sensitivity in the curriculum (p.13); and
- when students perceived the curriculum to be culturally sensitive they showed a greater level of interest and engagement in their programme of study; the reverse was evident among BAME students who experienced the curriculum as less respectful of cultural differences and diverse perspectives (p.13).

The authors conclude that, while it is important to adopt strategies like representative authors in the curriculum, it is also important to pay attention to more fundamental inclusive strategies that present positive portrayals of people from diverse backgrounds, including those from different ethnic and cultural traditions, languages, religions, nationalities, diverse family structures, differently abled people and marginalised communities (p.7). Equally important is the need to ensure that, when social problems such as crime or violence are presented, people of colour are not stereotyped in negative ways. Encouraging learners to be proactive in promoting equity is another important practice, as are inclusive practices such as making the effort to pronounce student names correctly and role modelling respectful behaviours.

Apply the case study research

- ✓ As a leader, what role could you play in role modelling and applying these inclusive curriculum principles in your setting?
- ✓ If you're not directly responsible for leading and designing curriculum in a disciplinary setting, how might you lead by influencing inclusive curriculum practices?

2.3 Engaging with students as learners in curriculum contexts

In Chapter 3 we considered the leadership capability of engaging with students, forging strong partnerships with them and inviting them into a process of co-creation, particularly in relation to strategy. This section expands on these themes with a focus on how leaders can engage students as learners in curriculum contexts. In an academic curriculum setting, co-creation occurs when students and staff collaborate in such areas as co-designing authentic assessment tasks or collaboration in relation to pedagogical approaches and learning resources. Co-creating curricula has many positive outcomes including improved learner motivation, positively contributing to identity development, enhancing learners' metacognition and self-regulation and improved performance on assessment (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2021).

Co-creating in partnership with students may also pose challenges (see Chapter 3). These include: resistance of staff who may feel threatened or uncomfortable as a result of shifting power dynamics; ensuring that the opportunity for co-creation is available to all students, not just a privileged few; the time-intensive nature of co-creation processes; resistance of students who are not keen to devote time to activities outside of assessable tasks; and the need for capability-building among students and staff.

Notwithstanding these challenges, there is merit in considering the opportunities that curriculum co-creation might bring through your leadership. Examples of co-creation in curriculum contexts include opportunities for learners to take the lead on course conceptualisation and design, participate as active members of curriculum design committees, and contribute to curriculum review processes. In this way, students may take on the role of representative, consultant, co-researcher and pedagogical co-designer (Bovill & Felten, 2016). Involving students in these ways has the 'potential to bring

new voices and perspectives into discussion of curricula and to challenge existing ways of thinking about knowledge and curriculum' (Bovill & Woolmer, 2019, p.417). Peer learning in the form of Peer-assisted Study Sessions or the like (Donald & Ford, 2022) provides another ideal opportunity for leaders to partner with learners through curriculum renewal.

As a leader looking for ways to partner and co-create with learners in curriculum contexts, it is useful to consider your institutional settings before launching co-creation activities. Chapter 6 outlines the role that policies can play in enhancing quality, facilitating change and innovation, while Chapter 7 expands on strategies for fostering a L-C culture. These factors contribute to your institution's readiness to engage in change. Ultimately, meaningful and sustainable co-creation with learners is underpinned by a philosophical, even moral (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015), commitment to learner agency in curriculum processes.

2.4 Engaging with staff to engage students in curriculum contexts

As outlined in Chapter 4, disciplinary cultures are powerful shapers of institutional culture. The astute L-C leader will pay close attention to achieving the delicate balance between recognising and validating staff expertise and the principles of student co-creation and partnership. Similarly, when engaging with academic and professional staff in shared curriculum deliberations, role modelling ways to value staff expertise and diverse staff voices are key.

As an academic leader, you may need to bring academic staff together from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and departments to negotiate time and space in the curriculum for priorities like integrating the UN SDGs or changing approaches to assessment. At the same time, you may invite professional staff around the table to benefit from their expertise. This may include co-creating curriculum in partnership with learning designers responsible for working alongside academic staff to improve the quality of online learning resources, and student services experts responsible for providing well-being support and careers advice to the learners in your faculty. It may also include co-designing classroom spaces with updated technologies in partnership with IT and facilities teams. In a context such as this, an appreciation of the curriculum-related reasons for strongly held views and contested perspectives will prepare you well, along with a constant reminder of the power of academic staff agency that resides in disciplines and departments.

Reflect

- What opportunities do you see for leading a process of curriculum co-creation with the students in your organisation?
- What steps would you need to take to ensure that learners from diverse backgrounds are actively involved?
- How do you respond to staff who say they don't have time for co-creation activities in their already crowded curriculum?
- Do you see any value in pursuing the idea of curriculum co-creation if the students in your department, faculty or institution show no interest?

2.5 Engaging with industry and community

While the focus of this Guide primarily rests on the university context and its people, we would be remiss to leave out of account the pivotal role of industry and community in the ways in which the HE curriculum is conceptualised, enacted and renewed. There is much written on the subject of the engaged university (Nyland & Davies, 2022), the ecological university (Barnett, 2017) and the increasingly porous boundaries between universities and their communities. Your leadership will need to take account of this broader ecosystem (see Figure 1.1) if you are to ensure that your curriculum remains relevant, contemporary and fit for purpose in preparing citizens who are socially just, critically aware and able to engage constructively in a 'hypercomplex' world (Kek, Padro & Huijser, 2022, p.871).

3 Curriculum as a lever for renewal: steps to consider

Moving from curriculum conceptualisation to action as a leader is a critical step. An important starting point is clarity of focus and purpose for any curriculum change, followed by a plan of action for executing your planned changes. This section begins with a tool to guide your decisions about the types of curriculum change you intend to lead, followed by steps involved in purposeful curriculum renewal and a reminder of selected challenges you may face.

3.1 Determining your leadership focus for curriculum change

University strategic plans are replete with aspirational goals that promise to transform, refresh, renew and reform curricula. These phrases are familiar and all too often are used loosely and interchangeably with relatively little thought given to what they actually mean and what needs to be done to achieve and sustain the change initiative. Figure 5.2 is a useful starting point for transitioning from conceptualisation to action in curriculum leadership. It reflects the evolving nature of curriculum change along a continuum ranging from initiation and creation of new curricula, to deep transformation that alters curriculum structures, content and approaches. The distinguishing feature of these activities as one moves from left to right along the spectrum is the purpose and extent of change involved in the curriculum initiative. The terms used in Figure 5.2 most commonly apply to academic curricula but as one moves progressively towards curriculum renewal, reform and transformation, there is scope for considering the academic curriculum more holistically in the context of other dimensions of the curriculum ecosystem, as outlined in Section 2.

Your university will no doubt have existing customs, practices and curriculum terminology that vary from those presented in Figure 5.2. You'll need to determine whether there is any justification for revisiting the terms used and, if yes, how you might go about engaging your colleagues in a discussion on the topic. The point is that language matters. If you are about to lead a significant curriculum change initiative, there is merit in clarifying your terminology and purpose first. This is most sensibly done in consultation with relevant members of your university community, including students, to increase the likelihood of their engagement through the change process.

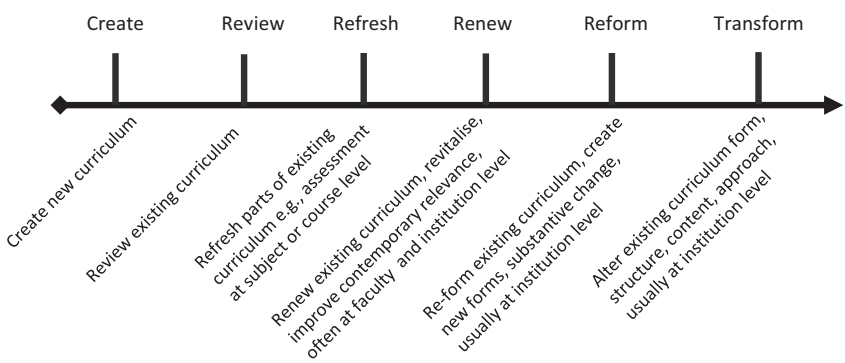

Figure 5.2 Continuum of curriculum design, review and renewal approaches

In my senior leadership roles, I have found this continuum to be a useful tool when making the case for a university-wide curriculum transformation programme like the introduction of the block model at Victoria University. I have also found it useful as a tool for engaging with groups comprising student leaders, faculty deans, student affairs leaders and IT and infrastructure experts to develop shared understandings of the purpose and rationale for curriculum change initiatives. These might include the following approaches:

i. **Curriculum review** typically occurs on a periodic basis within the institutional quality framework or equivalent. These reviews do not necessarily result in any changes but often they involve recommended actions that may lead to activities such as refreshing or renewing the curriculum.
ii. **Curriculum refresh** usually involves delving into parts of the curriculum to update practices or content. Refreshing curriculum through changes to assessment practices in one or more courses if you are a faculty dean or head of department is one example. I conceptualise curriculum refresh as a process that is self-directed within the academic faculty, department or course level.
iii. **Curriculum renewal** is a fulcrum point in the curriculum continuum. It extends beyond 'refresh' and is used to connote a more holistic revitalisation of curriculum, typically at faculty or institution level. An example of curriculum renewal might be a three-year plan to integrate more inclusive perspectives, learning resources and assessment methods into the undergraduate curriculum of all courses in your institution. Such initiatives add relevance to existing curricula, they have the potential to bring unifying curriculum themes across faculties and disciplines while not necessarily changing existing curriculum structures or approaches – as one might expect from whole-of-university curriculum reform.
iv. **Curriculum reform** in the context of this guide takes change one step further to create new forms of offerings, possibly modularising shorter form credentials or reforming curriculum to align with a shift from two six-month semesters to trimesters across the calendar year.
v. **Curriculum transformation** represents a complete overhaul of curriculum forms, structures, content and approaches. Examples of this kind include curriculum transformation at institution level, for example the

introduction of block model curriculum design at Victoria University in Australia (see Section 4.1) and The University of Edinburgh (2022) Curriculum Transformation Programme. Major national-level curriculum transformation examples include Ethiopia's commitment to modularisation of curriculum across the undergraduate curriculum in the nation's public universities (Sewagegn & Diale, 2021).

Curriculum change is not an exact science and these terms may have different meanings in your context. Also note that the spectrum of activities depicted in Figure 5.2 makes no judgement about the qualitative merits of the various forms of curriculum change.

Reflect

- This section provides a few examples of large-scale curriculum transformation initiatives. How do they compare to comparable examples in your institution or jurisdiction?
- Thinking about the continuum in Fig 5.2, how helpful are these distinctions for shaping your curriculum leadership focus?
- Which term applies best to current or planned curriculum changes in your institution?
- The take-home messages for HE leaders involved in curriculum change leadership are:

  i. be intentional about the terms you use when articulating your goals in relation to proposed curriculum change;
  ii. avoid the trap of promising curriculum transformation, when you have little intention, capacity or capability to make substantive changes to the overall form and substance of your curriculum; and
  iii. ensure your curriculum change aspirations are fit for purpose and deliverable. It is preferable to embark on less ambitious curriculum change effectively than to over-promise and under-deliver. The stakes in HE curricula are far too high for leaders to fail.

3.2 Leading purposeful curriculum renewal with learners in mind

There are many ways to lead curriculum renewal initiatives, whether they be at the macro institution level or within a subject or small team. As a starting point, consider the following steps and guiding questions. As with any change process, curriculum renewal is an opportunity to collaborate with your university community in a process of sensemaking (see Chapter 1).

Leading purposeful curriculum renewal: five sensemaking questions

1. WHY? Communicate the case for change to students, staff and peer leaders with a clear sense of purpose: why are we doing this?
2. WHAT? Clarify the meaning of curriculum and curriculum change in your context. What is the scope of the curriculum renewal initiative? What aspects of curriculum are you renewing? If you choose to 'transform' curriculum, what does this mean in your context? What do you expect to achieve through curriculum transformation? If you choose to 'refresh' curriculum, what are your refreshing? What's in and out of scope?
3. WHEN? What is the timeline for your curriculum change initiative? Is it feasible or are you overly ambitious and at risk of failing due to unrealistic timelines? When will you review and evaluate your efforts? When will you provide progress reports? When will the change initiative come to an end?
4. WHO? Who is involved in your curriculum change initiative? See Section 2 for ideas on ways to co-design with students and staff members. Challenge yourself to look beyond the usual participants to those whose voices you may not usually hear.
5. HOW? How will you implement your curriculum change programme? How will you monitor and evaluate? How will you know whether you have achieved your goals? Do individual course leaders and departments opt in and implement locally? Does it matter if some don't participate? How much consistency are you aiming for across your faculties or institution? How are you resourcing your programme of work? How will you prioritise limited resources?

3.3 Curriculum Renewal: Challenges and Risks to Be Mitigated

Curriculum renewal offers many opportunities for positive change and engagement, however, leaders will undoubtedly encounter impediments, challenges and risks along the way. Following are ten risks that HE leaders

Case Study 5.3: University-wide curriculum renewal in action

(Pattison et al., 2022)

Illustrating the five steps for leading purposeful curriculum renewal, Pattison and colleagues (2022) outline the curriculum change process undertaken at The University of Sydney spanning a period of seven years (2014–2021), led by the DVC. This macro-level curriculum redesign initiative encompassed the entire undergraduate curriculum and arguably falls into the category of curriculum transformation. Key elements of this initiative, illustrating the sensemaking curriculum renewal questions listed above, were:

1. WHY? Seeking input and consensus from a wide range of stakeholders on the educational purpose of undergraduate degrees at the start.
2. WHAT? Shifting the focus from graduate capabilities to a 'systematic, future-oriented' (p.6) approach to developing graduate qualities in the curriculum with a view to preparing graduates who are not simply experts in their fields 'but also have the capabilities to continually extend their expertise and to use it 'for good'' (p.6).
3. WHEN? The process started in 2014. The first year of the new undergraduate curriculum commenced in 2018, with the majority of graduates completing in 2020. The reporting period for this initiative is 2014–2021, allowing for evaluation of the impact of curriculum change on learner experiences and outcomes.
4. WHO? The process included extensive input from students and staff, alumni, business and community leaders.
5. HOW? Simplifying the architecture and structure of undergraduate degrees to enable greater flexibility for study in other disciplines and in multidisciplinary contexts. Enhanced flexibility also encompassed what many would categorise as co-curricular learning including involvement in industry and community projects for credit (p.11).
6. HOW? Adopting a common curriculum framework for use across all disciplines articulating practical strategies for developing each graduate's quality.

7. HOW? Assessment plans for each degree, outlining how graduate qualities are developed and assessed.
8. HOW? Evaluating outcomes formatively during the renewal implementation (e.g., through stakeholder focus group, student enrolment patterns and student survey feedback) and summatively at the end of their three-year degree (e.g., through student outcome data and overall student satisfaction compared to national peer universities).

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ This case study outlines a substantial long-term curriculum transformation programme. What evidence would you consider to determine whether or not to embark on such a large-scale change in your institution?
- ✓ The process at the University of Sydney started with seeking widespread input on the educational purpose of undergraduate degrees. How would you address this question in your leadership context?

may need to manage and mitigate during curriculum change processes, particularly at the macro institution level. At the heart of these challenges, and strategies for addressing them, lies culture, the subject of Chapter 7.

i. **Competing priorities**

Risk: Any curriculum renewal initiative needs to be stacked up against other competing priorities such as the need to increase student enrolments and research performance. Often these are perceived as immediate priorities, whereas sustainable curriculum change takes time. As part of this challenge, you will encounter many staff with change fatigue, particularly in a post-pandemic environment.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Do your homework ahead of time. Anticipate the competing priorities and potential arguments against your curriculum proposal.
- Be prepared to make a robust, evidence-based case for change. Gather relevant data, seek advice from students and colleagues across the institution to understand their views. Develop your case in light of this feedback and evidence.

- Be clear about the value of your proposal and look for ways to complement other proposals for change in systemic, mutually beneficial ways. For example, curriculum renewal can contribute to the desire for growth in student enrolments, but it does not necessarily provide the 'quick fix' many leaders are looking for.

ii. **Resources**

Risk: Concerns about insufficient funding to carry out proposed curriculum changes often contribute to staff resistance. The limited resource of time is another challenge.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Resourcing is a key consideration when scoping out curriculum renewal plans and priorities. Before launching your curriculum initiative, seek feedback from staff about the types of resourcing they would find most helpful. Where feasible, invite staff to prioritise their resourcing requests i.e., *which two or three forms of support would be most useful in helping you to make this curriculum renewal programme work in your subject, course, department or faculty?* This may include resourcing in the form of expert curriculum designers to work alongside academic staff for a period of time or a project management function to take responsibility for administrative tasks related to implementation.
- Unrealistic timelines and inadequate time allocation for curriculum renewal initiatives are one of the most common reasons for poor execution of curriculum change. It is better to do less well than to cram change into limited time periods and deliver sub-standard outcomes. As demonstrated in Case Study 5.3, institution-wide curriculum renewal may take several years to fully implement and evaluate.

iii. **Capability gaps**

Risk: Closely linked to resourcing and limited capacity to embark on curriculum change is the risk of capability gaps. This applies equally to students and staff. It also applies to the institution as a whole.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Conduct a gap analysis to identify your institution's readiness to engage in curriculum change. This may be confronting, but it is better to embark on proposed curriculum renewal forearmed and forewarned. Your analysis may include: conversations with academic staff about their self-assessed skill levels to enhance the quality of technology-enriched

learning in their curricula; a stocktake of the capability of existing physical and virtual learning spaces to support planned changes; or fitness for purpose of policies, procedures and quality frameworks to underpin your curriculum renewal priorities (see Chapter 6).

- If your curriculum refresh involves introducing new forms of assessment, or technology-enabled assessment strategies, assessment literacy for students and staff is a capability in which you will need to invest. This is a perfect opportunity to apply your L-C leadership capabilities by prioritising the learning of your students and staff colleagues.
- If you are embedding Indigenous knowledges and cultures into your undergraduate curriculum as part of a curriculum renewal strategy, staff will benefit from culturally appropriate professional learning opportunities. For instance, they may work with Indigenous Elders to adapt learning resources and assessment. Equally important is the need to build student capability as they learn to engage with cultural humility and sensitivity.

iv. **Weak processes**

Risk: Many leaders lack the necessary project management skills to deliver major curriculum renewal initiatives. Risks include poorly conceptualised project plans with limited attention to timelines, accountabilities, milestones and outcomes. Poor communication, lack of robust data, inadequate stakeholder involvement and failure to evaluate also pose risks to successful outcomes.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Ensure that you have access to one or more colleagues with sound project management skills. Depending on the scale of your curriculum renewal initiative, you may need to invest in a project management office or equivalent.
- Empower the project team to partner with you and hold you and others accountable for close monitoring of progress, milestones and review points.
- Develop a communication plan, ensuring you communicate and dialogue early and often with key stakeholders including students, colleagues across the university, relevant committees and governing bodies, and external stakeholders.

v. **The crowded curriculum**

Risk: Substantive curriculum changes inevitably lead to challenging conversations about what stays in the curriculum and what goes. The crowded curriculum phenomenon is the result of demands from various interest groups to shoe-horn content into curriculum because it is deemed to be essential.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Be prepared to lead robust debates, make difficult decisions, listen carefully to the range of viewpoints, seek advice, and check the veracity of claims that this or that content is non-negotiable.
- Ultimately, you may need to make unpopular decisions. Do your best to ensure that you have a network of trusted colleagues within and beyond your institution on whose advice you can rely before making the tough calls.

vi. **Curriculum fragmentation and unbundling**

Risk: Unbundling and fragmenting the curriculum through efforts to move online and increase student enrolments is a risk worth noting, particularly in online environments (O'Connor, 2022).

Risk mitigation tips:

- Invest time in advancing your own conceptualisation of curriculum, its purpose, multiple dimensions and contested nature.
- Foster a coherent and holistic view of the purpose of curriculum in your institution, faculty, department and local learning environment.
- Be willing to listen to advice from experts across your institution, both in disciplinary contexts and in professional portfolios to understand the opportunities, risks and consequences of planned curriculum changes.

vii. **Hierarchical power structures**

Risk: Universities are typically hierarchical in structure, with traditionally held views about who is responsible for curriculum and how change is led. Unfortunately, much curriculum change tends to be perceived as a 'top down' initiative that largely excludes the voices of students and staff. It can also be dominated by disciplinary cultures which mean that the voices of expert professional staff are excluded or ignored.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Hierarchical power structures are often well entrenched and difficult to shift. Be pragmatic in your approach to working with, around and through these structures.
- Make a point of understanding the staff networks, disciplinary dynamics and departmental connections and disconnections in your institution before embarking on your curriculum change plans.
- When leading curriculum change and renewal, prioritise ways to gather feedback, ideas and advice from students and staff across the university at all stages of the process. Close the loop on feedback and demonstrate how their perspectives have shaped implementation.

viii. **Siloed cultures**

Risk: Working in siloes is a widely used analogy in universities. A siloed culture means that colleagues are less likely to collaborate across disciplines, departments and portfolios. This can lead to a lack of coherence and poor connectivity which, in turn, poses risks for a leader who is aiming to develop a joined-up approach to curriculum in their institution, across disciplinary boundaries and among the academic, co- and extra-curriculum dimensions.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Prioritise roundtable planning and decision-making forums that involve leaders and colleagues from across portfolios. If they don't normally come together in this way, you play an important role in scaffolding these conversations, challenging the stereotypical views of roles and responsibilities, equipping them with the skills to negotiate and disagree constructively and, where appropriate to compromise and reach consensus.
- Make a point of being present in places where your students and colleagues gather, whether in person or online. This powerful gesture demonstrates in practical ways that you are role modelling ways to break down siloes, barriers and boundaries.

ix. **Resistance**

Risk: Expect to meet with resistance from students, staff and external stakeholders, depending on the nature and scope of your curriculum change initiative. This resistance may be overt or passive. It may stem from a number of sources, including the inherent conservatism of

disciplinary cultures (see Chapter 4) as well as concern about the impact on staff workload, career progression opportunities and fear of change.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Many of the fears and concerns expressed by students and staff during times of change are real. Treat them seriously and be prepared to acknowledge them. Where appropriate, take steps to address concerns and communicate clearly what you are doing and why in these circumstances.
- Keep the primary purpose of your curriculum change front of mind. Ideally, you will have consulted on this purpose and reached a broad agreement with students and staff on the purpose and principles underpinning this curriculum initiative. When you face resistance or opposition, these anchor points will be important reminders of what you have agreed as a community.
- Make time to listen and, where appropriate, to consult with those who express opposition. Seek out opposing views to give you a full picture of wide-ranging perspectives.
- Be clear about your negotiation points and be courageous in sticking to the principles underpinning your proposed change. Be confident in communicating when the time for consultation and negotiation has come to an end.

x. **External regulatory forces**

Risk: Accrediting bodies and regulators are key stakeholders in the curriculum ecosystem. At times they may frown upon proposed curriculum innovation for fear that it may compromise quality, standards and outcomes. There is often caution, if not suspicion about the potential risks of curriculum change until there is a track record of positive impact on learning outcomes.

Risk mitigation tips:

- Consult with these stakeholders early. Keep them informed of your plans and listen to their concerns and questions periodically through the change process.
- Address questions and pre-empt concerns with robust data that tracks the impact of curriculum changes, particularly on the quality of student learning and outcomes, and on standards relevant to the accrediting body or regulatory framework within which you are working.

Reflect

- Looking at these ten potential risk areas, which are most relevant to your context?
- These risks can appear overwhelming for leaders who are time-poor yet committed to embarking on curriculum renewal. What steps could you take to garner support for your curriculum renewal aspirations as part of your personal risk mitigation plan?

- Be flexible and allow sufficient time to 'go to Plan B' if it is not possible to compromise on external requirements such as those of accrediting bodies and regulators.

This list of risks may not necessarily apply to your institution or leadership context, though many will be familiar. Before embarking on a curriculum change initiative, it is wise to do your due diligence, seek the input of colleagues to co-develop a risk framework and review it regularly to ensure that you stay on top of the risks and challenges.

4 Curriculum as a lever for enhancement

Leading curriculum change and renewal is an opportunity for enhancement in many ways. Three enhancement opportunities are outlined below.

4.1 Enhancing the quality of learner experiences and outcomes through curriculum

Block model curriculum design was first introduced in Australian HE, at whole-of-institution level, at Victoria University (2023). I was Provost at the time this initiative was introduced in response to the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds in a context where student satisfaction, retention and success rates were low and a turnaround was imperative. The curriculum was the focus of attention and the First Year Block Model took shape. This initiative started with a focus on the first year of the university's undergraduate curriculum and was subsequently applied across undergraduate and postgraduate coursework programmes. It is a good example of a long-term, whole-of-university curriculum transformation. Two 12-week semesters

were replaced by four-week blocks of study, where students focus on one block of study at a time, with a maximum of eight study blocks per year (Ambler, Solomonides & Smallridge, 2021). This transformation initiative affected all aspects of the curriculum and pedagogy, including how students engaged in group learning, the amount of content covered and the approach to assessment. Moreover, the transformation involved integration of the academic curriculum, co-curricular and extra-curricular offerings, along with integration of student learning support, career advising services and the like.

In this example, evidence points to several ways in which the quality of learner experiences and outcomes were enhanced as a result of the move to the block model curriculum. Outcomes included improvements in students' assessment of the quality of teaching, significant improvements in student retention, pass rates and overall graduate outcomes. Employer feedback, too, demonstrated improved satisfaction with the level of preparedness in professions like Nursing (Jackson, Tangalakis, Hurley & Solomonides, 2022).

4.2 Fostering coherence and connectedness through curriculum

Curriculum has the potential to be a fulcrum around which people, policies and processes come together purposefully to build connections and coherence in the university learning environment. In this way, an informed leader can use curriculum as a vehicle for sensemaking and meaning-creation in institutions that are often siloed and fragmented. Kandiko-Howson and Kingsbury (2021, p.15) refer to the importance of 'translators' in the form of pedagogical experts, curriculum designers and technology specialists who work with disciplinary experts to effect sustainable curriculum change.

As noted in Section 1, the HE curriculum is multidimensional. If you take a holistic view of curriculum, including the role of the academic, co- and extra-curricular dimensions in the life of your institution, curriculum conversations offer an opportunity to break down siloes and to give voice to those who may not otherwise have a role to play in curriculum conversations.

Case Study 5.3 demonstrates how the curriculum can be a catalyst for articulating and then enacting the deeper purpose of HE and the mission of an institution. Curriculum plays a role in bringing coherence to learning through intentional integration of research into the undergraduate curriculum, for example. Research-informed curricula have the potential to strengthen the connections between students and educators by providing insights into the work of academic researchers in disciplinary contexts

and adding relevance to student learning (Uaciquete & Valcke, 2022). Curriculum also represents a rich vein of scholarly focus for those staff wishing to pursue research on curriculum scholarship and the scholarship of learning and teaching.

4.3 Enhancing educational relevance and encouraging innovation through curriculum

Curriculum is the primary vehicle through which learners engage with the core purposes of HE. As such curriculum is developmental in nature, retaining disciplinary anchor points while subject to renewal and reinvention to ensure relevance for learners in a rapidly evolving world. As a L-C leader, you need to keep a close eye on the relevance of the curriculum in your institution, remembering its bellwether and barometer properties (see Section 1) in a global context. While contested, the HE curriculum is also a fertile site for encouraging innovation on the part of student and staff learners.

Curriculum relevance and innovation is a shared priority in the global south and north. For example, Mpofu-Hamadziripi and colleagues (2022) report on the significant task of transforming HE curricula in the southern African nation of Zimbabwe. The focus of attention rests on achieving curriculum relevance for learners charged with the responsibility of driving social change and grappling with deep-seated economic problems.

The University of Valencia provides an instructive European case study of an institution-level initiative involving a collaboration between students, staff, community members and UN representatives to engage in a dialogic process about strategies for integrating the SDGs into the institution and the curriculum. Reported outcomes include feedback from students who appreciated the opportunity to learn about sustainability in real-world settings and develop strategies for making a material difference in their community (Vazquez-Verdera et al., 2021).

In many post-colonial settings, including South Africa, decolonising the curriculum has been a focus for some years. For example, Stellenbosch University has engaged in a process of curriculum renewal to decolonise the curriculum (Mlamla, 2020) which Le Grange (2021) argues is a 'carrier of coloniality' (p.6). Le Grange positions Pinar's (1975) autobiographical method of *currere* as a form of decolonisation. This brings us back full circle to the value of carving out some of your valuable leadership time to think about how you conceptualise curriculum. What are its purposes in

your context? How might you make the most of curriculum as a vehicle for enhancement in your institution?

5 Leading curriculum change: questions for journey

Curriculum leadership is essentially change leadership. The questions you grapple with, the conceptual and implementation challenges, the risks and the opportunities represented by curriculum renewal are important foundations for broader leadership challenges that you may face. Bok (2020) talks about the need for 'reform-minded leaders' (p.161). The goal of this chapter is to give you a few tools to this end.

Summarised below is a starter list of questions for leaders across the institution to consider, depending on their role in curriculum processes. I have intentionally turned the usual stakeholder list on its head, starting with student leaders, in an effort to reinforce the rich leadership resources available to you when you incorporate diverse voices in the complicated conversation that is curriculum (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3 Learner-centred leadership questions about curriculum change

Curriculum leadership role	**Curriculum questions you might pose**
Student leader	As a student leader, what will I contribute to co-creating the curriculum at my institution?
Subject coordinator	At subject level, what can I do to ensure that the curriculum I implement helps learners to make sense of my subject in the context of the whole degree programme?
Programme leader	What steps can I take to involve academic staff experts, part-time and sessional staff, students, student services, health and well-being staff, curriculum design and technology teams and industry representatives in ongoing dialogue about refreshing my degree programme curriculum to keep it relevant and coherent?
Head of department	I would like the students in my department to feel like they belong to a disciplinary community that cares about their well-being, the relevance of their learning and their employability outcomes. How can I work with my Programme Leaders to achieve these goals through the curriculum?

(*Continued*)

Table 5.3 (*Continued*)

Curriculum leadership role	**Curriculum questions you might pose**
Faculty dean	I need to bring my leadership team together to prepare them for an announcement about a proposed curriculum renewal programme at the university. What preparatory steps do I need to put in place before speaking with them?
Head of learning and teaching enhancement unit	How do I cover all the bases and manage competing priorities across all the Faculties when they ask for input on their curriculum renewal activities? How do I role model productive ways of working with disciplinary experts who can sometimes be resistant to curriculum change?
Head of student services and library	I'm concerned that we will be left out of the key conversations about the university's curriculum renewal programme. How do I make sure we have a seat at the table and a voice in the conversation?
Head of IT services and infrastructure	What IT support is this curriculum renewal programme going to need? Do we have the internal capability and infrastructure to deliver what's needed?
DVC academic	With whom do I need to collaborate to co-develop an implementation and resourcing plan for this five-year curriculum renewal programme? What risks do I need to anticipate and how will I mitigate these?
DVC research	How can I use the curriculum renewal programme to build stronger connections between the university's research and undergraduate learning? I'd like to introduce first-year students to our top researchers and spark their interest in learning more about research in their chosen field. How do I go about achieving this?
Chief operating officer	The Vice Chancellor says we should plan for a five-year curriculum renewal programme. How will I determine the cost benefit of this programme? What resourcing will be required and how will we prioritise funding when budgets are so tight?
DVC engagement and international	What role can I play in contributing to an internationally relevant curriculum that encourages a sense of belonging among international students and celebrates the unique contributions of international staff?
VC	How can I make the most of our planned curriculum renewal process to reinforce our institution's core purpose and narrative through collaboration with our university community?

Apply: what would you do?

- Where do you fit in the leadership list above? What additional questions would you include?
- What does it mean to be reform-minded as a HE leader? How might you develop this capability in the context of curriculum reform and renewal?

6 Bringing it all together: five big ideas

In this chapter, we have introduced the importance of conceptualising and renewing curriculum as another core leadership capability. We have covered five big ideas:

1. The role of every HE leader interfaces with curriculum and your leadership will be strengthened through an informed conceptualisation of the role and purposes of curriculum and its multiple dimensions, including the academic, co- and extra-curriculum.
2. Curriculum enables holistic perspectives of your institution and its community, it functions as both a journey and a process, and it is an educative lens for examining and understanding your institutional ecosystem.
3. An inclusive HE curriculum is characterised by culturally sensitive approaches that respect, validate and reflect diverse cultures and perspectives.
4. HE curriculum change processes may include renewal of existing curriculum to improve relevance or wholesale transformation that alters existing curriculum forms, structure and/or content.
5. Leading curriculum renewal involves risks to be mitigated, along with powerful opportunities to co-create with learners, participate in robust debates, leverage the voices of those who are often silent in curriculum change processes and lead with courage and conviction.

While L-C HE leaders focus on many things, curriculum in all its complexity is one of the primary areas of focus. The next chapter focuses on ways in which you can enhance quality in local and institutional contexts through L-C policy and practice frameworks that function as sensemaking and way-finding tools.

Apply – discuss these ideas with peers, supervisors and mentors

- ✓ I haven't really thought much about the role of co-curriculum and extra-curriculum opportunities in our institution. How can I find out more about what these curriculum dimensions might have to offer our student learners?
- ✓ We seem to be surrounded by siloes of teams, departments and faculties who don't come together much. What could we do to start to break down the walls and encourage an institution-wide conversation about curriculum?
- ✓ I'd like to involve our learners more intentionally in our curriculum renewal process but they don't seem to be interested. What small steps could we take to try to change this dynamic? How do we get learner co-creation on the institutional agenda as an opportunity for curriculum innovation?

Grow as a leader

- Tip 1. Make a point of developing your conceptual understanding of the power of curriculum, and its multiple dimensions, as a lever for enhancing your L-C HE leadership capabilities.
- Tip 2. Curriculum renewal is an opportunity to bring a diverse range of students and staff colleagues together, to listen to the voices that are often ignored, to leverage the passionate views of many and to lead with courage and intent.
- Tip 3. Be realistic about the time it takes to refresh, renew and transform curriculum. It is better to do less well than more poorly.

6 Enhancing quality through policy and practice

This chapter extends our thinking about what L-C HE leaders choose to focus on in their day-to-day leadership planning, strategising and action. Among the myriad possibilities and immediate challenges facing leaders, I propose that you start with a dual priority focus on curriculum (see Chapter 5) and quality. Prioritising quality includes strategic use of institutional policies as a vehicle for shaping practice, fostering a quality culture, sensemaking and increasing agency among students and staff in your university community.

Starting with a brief exploration of the contested nature of the quality construct in HE, we will consider quality enhancement as a core HE leadership capability. There are many avenues for enhancing quality as a leader. I focus here on opportunities to deploy your institutional policy framework as an enabler of quality and as a tool for yourself, your student learners and your staff colleagues. Policies are not often considered as a sensemaking tool for enhancement, but I invite you to consider their purpose in a new light. Institution-level leadership responsibility for enhancing HE quality through policy, practice and intentional, reflective praxis (Harvey, 2022) typically sits with senior academic leaders like the Vice President or Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic or Provost. In the context of an ecological approach to leadership, with students as learners at the centre, we will explore practical ways to draw on the collective intelligence of your university community as you collaborate to enhance quality.

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1 Enhancing quality as a learner-centred higher education leader

This chapter presents a different take on quality in some respects. It is not designed to give you a step-by-step guide to develop a quality assurance framework in your university. Neither is it intended to give you hints and tips on leading local quality audits or meeting the threshold education standards relevant to your jurisdiction. As important as these tasks are, I will assume that they are addressed in your institutional quality framework. Instead, I challenge you to engage with quality leadership as a problematised, yet foundational capability for HE leaders. Along the continuum of quality work (Elken & Stensaker, 2020), I focus here on quality enhancement and the role of policy as a sensemaking tool for HE leaders who are committed to positioning learners at the centre of their quality focus.

Developing the leadership capability of enhancing quality comprises four dimensions that we will explore in this chapter.

1. Conceptualising quality enhancement in the context of quality work (Section 1.1)
2. Appreciating the value of a quality culture (Section 1.2)
3. Sensemaking through institutional policies (Section 2)
4. Enhancing quality through L-C practice (Sections 3 and 4)

Taken together, these leadership dimensions provide a launching pad for extending your leadership toolkit. A focus on quality enhancement and sensemaking as a journey offers a way to strengthen collective ownership (Legemaate et al., 2022) and agency as you learn together with the students and staff in your university.

1.1 Conceptualising higher education quality enhancement in the context of quality work

HE quality may be conceptualised as a wicked problem (Krause, 2012); that is, a contested, ill-defined, under-theorised and multi-faceted challenge. One reason for this challenge is that quality assurance in universities is often associated with neoliberal, instrumentalist approaches that borrow from the corporate world. These approaches invoke a top-down managerial leadership style that is more compliance-driven than enhancement-focused.

Such approaches are likely to alienate staff and achieve the unintended consequences of disengagement and resentment.

In light of these challenges, it is important for L-C HE leaders to apply their sensemaking leadership capabilities (see Chapter 1) to collaborate with colleagues as they interpret and understand the complex quality terrain in your institution and their role in it. Perhaps, paradoxically, it is precisely because it is such a contested and complex subject that it becomes so pivotal to your success as a leader.

Much time has been devoted to distinguishing between HE quality assurance and quality enhancement. For our purposes, quality assurance comprises 'all forms of quality monitoring, evaluation and review' (Harvey, 2004–2023), whether they be external audits or assessments, internal self-monitoring processes, or a combination of these. Quality assurance incorporates policies, procedures, systems and practices designed to protect standards and demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, including external regulatory bodies and government funding agencies.

Some definitions position quality enhancement as a function of quality assurance. However, I make the distinction as follows: quality enhancement builds on the processes and outcomes of quality assurance, with a focus on 'doing things better as well as differently' (Land & Gordon, 2013, p.24). In other words, quality enhancement builds on the strong foundation of quality assurance. In the UK context, the enhancement-led institution review process in Scottish HE is a longstanding example of systemic enhancement-led approaches (QAA Scotland, 2022) that incorporate core quality assurance functions.

While some use the terms quality improvement and enhancement interchangeably, I favour the latter as a way to 'align more naturally with the grain of academics' identities and preferences' (Land & Gordon, 2013, p.16). The South African Council on Higher Education (2021) goes one step further, defining quality enhancement as institutionally developed initiatives that go beyond threshold standards, while quality improvement is concerned with embedding a quality culture. We will examine the quality culture concept in the next section. The idea of quality work (Elken & Stensaker, 2020) is a helpful way to capture the multidimensional nature of institutional quality. It is an umbrella term that encompasses quality assurance and enhancement as well as the routine work that characterises the day-to-day activities of university staff and contributes to overall quality.

Reflect

- Which term(s) best describe quality work in your institution and jurisdiction? Quality assurance? Quality enhancement? Quality improvement?
- Do you see a role for the umbrella term 'quality work' in your institution?
- In what ways have you found quality to be a complex, wicked problem in your leadership role?
- In what ways might quality enhancement contribute to learner-centredness in your leadership practices?

1.2 Appreciating the value of a quality culture in your university

Further to conceptualising the role of quality enhancement in your leadership of quality work, a second dimension of enhancement-led quality leadership involves appreciating the value of a quality culture and your role in shaping it with a L-C focus. The term 'quality culture' has been widely used in European HE institutions for some time (EUA, 2006). Quality culture is a 'shared value of collective ownership and continuous improvement' (Legemaate et al., 2022, p.348). Leaders play a key role in fostering a shared commitment to contributing to and participating actively in the quality culture of a university, where each person perceives that they have agency in contributing to quality. Research Case Study 6.1 traces the development of an inventory designed to gather more information about institutional quality culture.

So far we have examined two of the four leadership dimensions that contribute to enhancing quality as a L-C HE leader: conceptualising quality enhancement in the context of quality work (Section 1.1); and appreciating the value of a quality culture (Section 1.2). We now shift attention to sensemaking as a core enabler of quality leadership and enhancement. A L-C leader thinks about ways to sensemake through institutional policies that may seem obscure, ambiguous and irrelevant to many members of the university community. In particular, we consider ways to enhance institutional quality by: taking account of the impact of policies on students and staff; and involving them as both experts and learners in policy design, implementation and review processes.

Research Case Study 6.1: Measuring quality culture

(Hildesheim & Sonntag, 2020)

The model of quality culture developed by Hildesheim and Sonntag (2020) comprises:

a) structural elements of the university (e.g., a quality assurance unit) and quality assurance tools, such as course evaluations and the like; and
b) psychological elements of culture operating at individual and collective levels (p.897). Collective elements include shared values, while individual dimensions of quality culture include a person's 'commitment, responsibility, and engagement towards quality' (p.897).

Leadership and communication are key to connecting the structural and psychological dimensions of quality culture.

The researchers developed a Quality Culture Inventory (QCI) involving structured interviews and a questionnaire. They explored individual and collective aspects of the quality culture in three HE institutions in Germany: a comprehensive university with excellence status, a cooperative/dual university and a university of applied sciences. A total of 789 questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of 10%. Academic staff accounted for the largest proportion of the sample, followed by administration, service and secretariat staff.

Results showed that quality-oriented leadership behaviour and positive role modelling of quality-oriented leadership behaviours had a strong positive effect on promoting a quality culture. Quality-oriented leadership behaviours are key to promoting agency among staff across the university. These leadership behaviours include: creating a shared quality vision, establishing common quality values, and developing a quality strategy, while at the same time delegating responsibility and building colleagues' capabilities in relation to quality-oriented activities (p.905). The leader's communication skills play an important role in facilitating shared understandings of the meaning of quality, disseminating examples of good practice and learning about staff questions, concerns, values and beliefs.

The researchers conclude that quality culture is characterised by a combination of top-down and horizontal, collegial communication to encourage collaboration and discussion while in the process of developing a quality culture (p.905, see also Bendermacher et al., 2017).

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ Would you consider a QCI of this kind to give you greater insight into your university's approach to quality?
- ✓ This study reports a low response rate (10%) from staff across three institutions. Does this surprise you? What would you do to engage more of your staff in thinking about how to foster a quality culture across your institution?
- ✓ The research did not include students. Do you see an opportunity to include student learners in developing a quality culture? If yes, how might you go about doing so? If no, discuss your rationale with colleagues.
- ✓ As a L-C HE leader, how visible do you think quality enhancement needs to be in the eyes of your student learners? Is there opportunity to partner with them in this regard?

2 Sensemaking and policy leadership with a focus on learners

Institutional HE policies are core to the way a university operates. They shape culture and practice and, in turn, are shaped by these factors. Our interest in this section goes beyond the operational aspects of policies to how leaders understand and use their institutional policy framework to enhance quality and facilitate collaborative sensemaking across the university community.

Usually, institutional policies are maintained in a virtual policy library or repository that is accessible to members of the university. Depending on your jurisdiction and regulatory context, these policies may be accessible to the public. They may be centrally managed and available via the university website homepage, or they may be managed locally in a distributed fashion, in faculties or student services departments, for example.

Most universities have designated individuals with responsibility for maintaining the policy library and for keeping policies up to date. In

some institutions you will find a policy on policies, so to speak. In other words, a policy statement outlining how institutional policies are to be reviewed and approved. It is worth checking on the state of play in your university, including how custom and practice may vary from stipulated policies.

The extent to which you engage with institutional policies will depend on your leadership role. For instance, you may have senior executive responsibility for the team who maintains your institution-level repository of policies, or you may be the leader responsible for reviewing a suite of policies – for example the research policies, the academic policies or the student experience policies. Regardless of your leadership accountability, there is merit in thinking about the role of policies in your leadership and their potential for equipping you to enhance quality through strengthened sensemaking among your students, staff and peer leaders.

2.1 Coming to terms with the policy spine of your university

Sensemaking involves storytelling and the use of metaphors and analogies that are meaningful to those involved. As you prepare to make sense of your university's policies and, in turn to communicate with others, the following analogy may be useful. Policies have much in common with a human spine that holds the body together, performing multiple critical functions simultaneously. Outlined in Figure 6.1 and below are five ways to think about this policy-spine analogy and implications for your leadership.

i. Connect

- The spine has several interdependent parts. Each part of the spine comprises multiple vertebrae. An injury or dysfunction in one part of this complex spinal system can have a negative flow-on effect on the rest of the spine and the body as a whole.
- Similarly, all the policies in your institution are connected in various ways. They have the potential to bring coherence to your leadership conversations and your focus on enhancing quality. Policies are also a way to connect the various members of your university community – students, staff, departments, and portfolios. Conversely, your policies may also be disconnected and fragmented if care isn't given to the ways in which they fit together and complement one another.

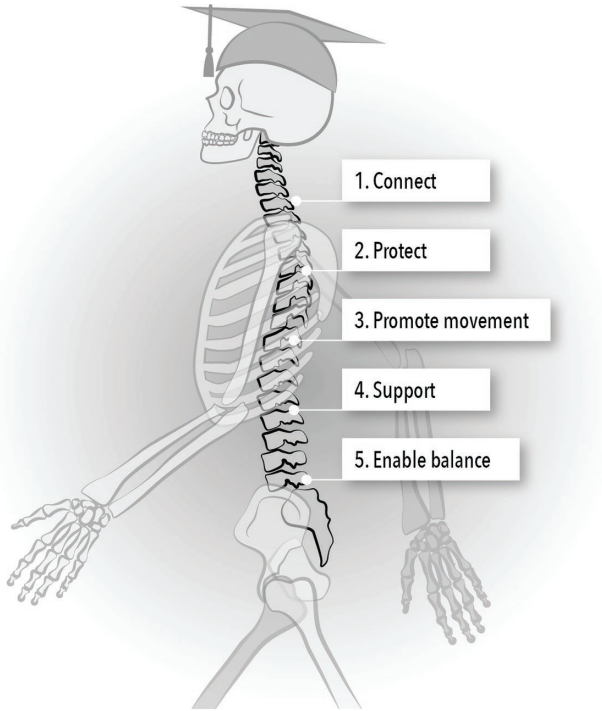

Figure 6.1 Five functions of the policy spine in universities

ii. Protect

- The spine plays a critical protective role. For example, the thoracic spine and rib cage protect the heart and lungs. The cervical spine surrounds and protects the spinal cord.
- Policies, too, play a key role in protecting standards, for example. If designed and used effectively, they contribute to assuring quality and protecting your university in legal and regulatory contexts, when needed.

iii. Promote movement

- When the spine is injured it can create great pain and impede movement. The healthy spine facilitates rotation, flexibility and extension. It allows movement in all directions.
- Just so, your institutional policies have the potential to promote movement, progress and innovative practice. In this way, they can

enhance quality. Unfortunately, the reverse is also true. If policies are only developed in a top-down manner with little flexibility, they become restrictive and compliance-driven. This can apply especially to policies that affect the experience and work of students and staff. It's important to maintain current policies that reflect contemporary practice and allow room for flexibility and innovation. Examples of ways to achieve this are presented in Case Study 6.5.

iv. Support

- The spine supports one's body in multiple ways. For instance, the cervical spine supports the weight of the head, enabling a wide range of movements; while the lumbar spine provides stability for your back as a point of attachment for many muscles and ligaments.
- In a similar way, your university's suite of policies has the potential to provide support for your leadership. Take the time to conceptualise your university's policies as a way to support, strengthen and enable positive movement and action in your work. Conversely, be aware of the potential for dysfunction where policies inhibit action and stifle creativity.

v. Enable balance

- An important role of the spine is to bring balance and to support the body's weight.
- Institutional policies, too, have the potential to help you achieve a balance between assuring quality thresholds and meeting compliance requirements, while also fostering quality enhancement through innovation and creativity.

Reflect

- What are the strengths and limitations of this policy-spine analogy in your context?
- What are the consequences of focusing on only one or two of the above functions? For example, if you emphasise the protective function of policies while disregarding the importance of connectedness, movement or balance, what are the consequences?

One's spine is largely invisible and often ignored until something goes wrong. While some of us pay attention to our posture or to exercise to strengthen the spine, we often ignore these important maintenance tasks until something happens, usually this 'something' comes in the form of pain. Similarly, policies in your organisation may receive minimal attention most of the time. Institutional life usually runs smoothly until something goes wrong or a task needs to be completed. This is often when people look to policies for solutions or advice on steps to follow.

2.2 Leadership implications of the policy spine analogy

As leader you need a helicopter view of how policies fit together and how they contribute to your university's quality culture. The five functions of policy, outlined in Section 2.1, operate simultaneously and synergistically, both in the human spine and the policy spine. One enhancement opportunity in many university policy repositories – whether at local or institutional level – is that of streamlining and reducing the number and complexity of policies. To streamline, though, means firstly understanding how the policies fit together, where the interdependencies operate, what may be lost by removing or changing policies and whether there is scope for merging policies or chunking them to form policy suites that make sense to the students and staff who interact with them.

It is easy to fall into the habit of adding policies to address issues as they arise, with little thought given to implications for the coherence of the policy suite, their interdependence and the experience of users attempting to navigate multiple policies that suffer from the malaise of policy accretion. This may be a risk, especially in large institutions, where responsibility for developing, maintaining and updating policies is distributed. While distributed policy ownership and engagement has many strengths, leadership coordination plays a role in providing an overarching view of the policies, where they reside on the website, how they align and complement one another and how they fit together, particularly from the perspective of student and staff users. Case Study 6.5 provides an example of how one leader approached a policy streamlining exercise in her university to enhance quality.

I trust the metaphor linking institutional policies and the human spine has prompted you to reflect on implications for making the most of policy development, implementation and review as a tool for enhancement and sense-making. Consider your policy library as something that is organic, with the

Reflect

- If you are charged with responsibility for introducing a new policy on promoting a respectful and inclusive university, how would you integrate this with existing policies covering such themes as student and staff code of conduct, workplace bullying, resolving workplace conflict, complaints and grievances, discrimination or student misconduct?
- How would you link your new policy to educative programmes available for students and staff through your university's Student Services and People and Culture Offices, for example?
- What steps would you take to apply the five policy functions outlined in Section 2.1 (see Figure 6.1) – connect, protect, promote movement, support, and enable balance?

potential for movement and flexibility while also benefiting from attention and care to prevent pain, frustration and immobility.

L-C HE leadership principles come to the fore in policy contexts. For the most part, students and staff in your institution rarely, if ever, interact with the full policy suite. An insightful leader will recognise opportunities to build the capability of students and staff as they learn about and navigate policies relevant to their work and experience. Such a leader will also create opportunities to co-design policies through collaboration and feedback mechanisms. The L-C HE leader recognises that they have much to learn about the process of policy development and implementation. This includes learning about how policies translate into practice, where the pain points are and how to review and revise policies to move beyond quality assurance to enhancement in their quality work.

2.3 Applying the principles of policy sensemaking in practice

Your university's policies are a potentially powerful sensemaking tool in contexts where students and staff often struggle to understand their relevance and purpose. The following case study provides an example of an opportunity for policy sensemaking with students during challenging transition experiences.

Case Study 6.2: Student sensemaking of university transfer policies in times of change

(Schudde, Jabbar, Epstein & Yucel, 2021)

The process of transitioning into HE study is often a tumultuous time of change for students and their families. Schudde and colleagues (2021) drew on sensemaking theory to examine the many challenges faced by community college students as they interpreted and made sense of policies in their efforts to transfer credit toward bachelor's degree study. The researchers refer to the 'complex puzzle of intersecting policies and services' (p.925) that often impede transfer, particularly for those who are members of minority groups and may be the first in their family to embark on university study. These researchers found that students received policy-related information from a range of sources including agents, general advisers, faculty and institutional websites. The student participants reported that often the information was conflicting and difficult to find, requiring them to make sense of mixed policy messages. Many students reported feeling 'frustrated or confused when deliberating between multiple policy signals and sources' (p.936).

Apply the research: what would you do?

- ✓ What strategies does your institution use to support students' policy sensemaking during admission and transfer processes?
- ✓ How might the issues raised in this case study apply to other student-facing policies and the challenges of sensemaking that some experience, particularly those from under-represented and diverse backgrounds?

3 Linking quality work, policy and governance in your leadership

In the previous two sections of this chapter, we have examined three capabilities relating to quality leadership. First, there is merit in conceptualising quality enhancement in your leadership of quality work. Second, it is helpful to understand the characteristics of a quality culture and your

role in fostering it. Third, we have explored the leadership capability of sensemaking and the pivotal role it plays in helping others to make sense of university policies and their implications. We now turn to some practical ways to link policy, governance and quality work in your leadership, drawing on the sensemaking capabilities outlined in the previous section and in Chapter 1 of this guide.

3.1 Five Opportunities to enhance quality through policy

Through the process of policy development, implementation, review and approval, you will find many opportunities for sensemaking and for enhancing quality in your institution. These include opportunities to enhance quality in the following ways.

i. Relationships: policies bring people together around common language and processes. There may be disagreements and frustration at times, but leaders can use these opportunities to strengthen relationships and connections.
ii. Communication: policy conversations are an opportunity to communicate the 'why' behind policy requirements and the procedures that accompany them. These sense-giving conversations (see Chapter 1) can be robust and challenging but they are critically important for providing a context and a rationale for the policies. Policy-related dialogue with students and staff is an opportunity for them to communicate their concerns, questions and suggestions for improvement. Consultative communication of this kind helps to enhance the quality and coherence of communication across your institution or within your team or department.
iii. Academic quality: for many readers, academic quality and related policies will be your prime focus of interest. While the majority of academic policies are framed in terms of quality assurance, with a focus on protecting and assuring standards, consider ways to use these policies as a launching pad for quality enhancement. For example, in your academic integrity policy, having clarified the consequences of academic integrity breaches, look for ways to enhance students' capability through an educative approach to academic integrity. Use your course quality review policy, to build staff capability in evidence-based quality enhancement of their curriculum through the use of student feedback data,

benchmarking and employer feedback. Your policies on course design and development could encourage enhancement practices like innovative use of technologies in teaching and assessment or strengthening ties between teaching and research in the undergraduate curriculum.

iv. Student and staff experiences: while policies are invariably process-focused, they are ultimately about people – the people who develop them, the people who engage with and enact them and the people whose lives and work are affected by them. For instance, the quality of student experiences may be enhanced through policies such as those relating to well-being or student services. The staff experience may be enhanced by responsive academic promotion policies that recognise a wide range of academic staff contributions while also equipping staff with the resources needed to prepare evidence-based promotion applications.

v. Institutional processes and operations: your policy library comprises a rich variety of policies and regulations covering all aspects of the university's operations. Building on the points above, there is merit in adopting a systemic approach to thinking about how to bring diverse groups of people around the table to consider the impact of policies relating to IT, information systems or learning space design on the student and staff experience, for example. Collective input and advice enhance the quality of these policies and, in turn, the practices that are shaped by policy.

Reflect

- Are you able to identify opportunities to enhance quality through the policies for which you are responsible?
- In your next policy review cycle, how might you use the review process as a way to strengthen relationships and connections in your department, faculty or institution?
- When you communicate with students about policies that relate to them (e.g., the student assessment and feedback policy or the student safety policy), is there scope for thinking of this as a sensemaking and sense-giving opportunity? How might that work in your context?

Case Study 6.3: Making sense of quality through co-design

(O'Leary et al., 2021)

At the Technological University Dublin, the *Our Student Voice* project resulted in a suite of digital training resources to enhance student engagement in institutional quality work by intentionally developing their skills and knowledge. As a relatively new university resulting from the merger of three former institutions, the authors recognise there is much work to be done to align processes across campuses and to develop a coherent quality framework. The *Our Student Voice* project was an ideal opportunity to design a whole of university approach to quality assurance and quality enhancement across the institution.

Learner engagement and involvement is at the heart of the university's quality framework. Students have a central role in the quality work of the university. Students, student leaders and staff from all campuses of the university were brought together to develop the student training resources. This included academic staff and staff from the student development and academic development teams. The project team canvassed student input through surveys and conducted workshops and interviews that informed the training resources. They also prepared reports for the university's Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee to provide timely communication and to role model for students' practical ways to navigate the university governance process.

Student training resources were designed for asynchronous online delivery and students receive a digital badge on successful completion. The project recommendations are as follows:

i. Inclusivity: recognise that 'the voices most requiring recognition are often the voices that find it most difficult to be heard' (p.19).
ii. Knowledge and skills: training for class representatives and the wider student body needs to focus on quality assurance and enhancement as well as meta-level skills that equip them to engage effectively in meetings and committees.
iii. Co-design: effective partnerships between students and staff as co-learners need a high level of support, space and time.

iv. Accessibility and flexibility: the project team are committed to making the resources openly accessible once the project is complete in order to share their learning with others.

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ This case study exemplifies students and staff as learners collaborating to co-design student training resources. At the same time, all participants bring expertise to the process, enhancing the quality of the outcome. Can you see a way to apply these principles in your context?
- ✓ The *Our Voice Project* reported in this study is a good example of collaborative sensemaking and sense-giving. What are the implications for your leadership?

3.2 Navigating the governance process in your institution to enhance quality

Governance refers to the ways in which HE institutions are organised in a formal sense. The most obvious manifestation of governance is the institutional committee structure cascading from your institution's governing body, board or council. Governance arrangements vary across institutions and jurisdictions. Regardless of your leadership role and your place in the organisation, there is value in understanding how governance works in your university. Such an understanding strengthens your ability to build networks across your institutional ecosystem and influence decision-making and practice to achieve positive outcomes on behalf of, and in collaboration with, student learners and staff colleagues.

Taking account of the governance arrangements and committee structure in your institution, a typical policy development, implementation and review process (see Figure 6.2) includes an approval stage of some kind, particularly if the policy is new or revised substantially. The more far-reaching the policy and its implications for the day-to-day lived experiences of the people in your university, the more preparation you will need ahead of the final approval stage. Examples of policies that warrant extensive consultation and review before approval for inclusion in the institutional policy library include equality, diversity and inclusion policies, bullying and harassment policies and academic staff promotion policies. Which institutional policies would you add to this list?

While it may seem appealing to expedite policy changes for quick approval and sign-off, it is well worth conducting your own sense check to learn more about the potential impact of proposed policy changes or potential pain points and concerns that students or staff may raise. Here, too, there is room for considering how you might enhance the quality of

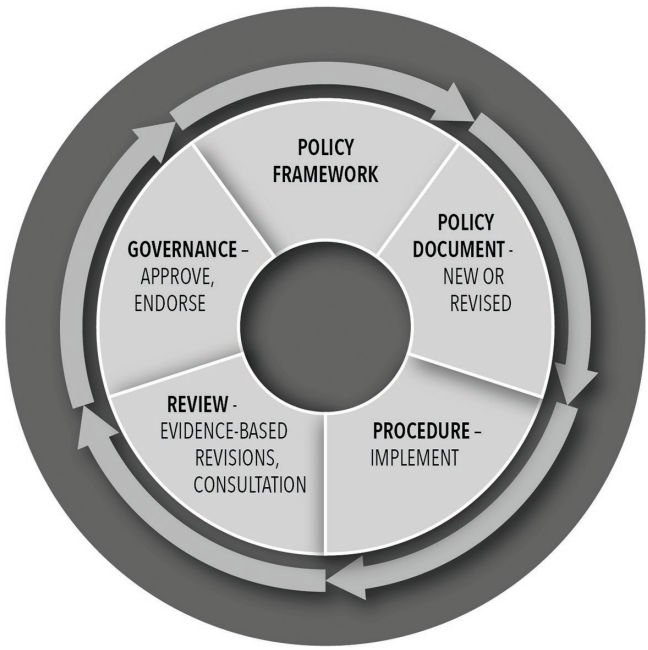

Figure 6.2 Indicative policy development, implementation, review and approval cycle

Reflect

- What does the equivalent policy cycle map look like in your institution?
- Think about a policy or policy suite for which you are accountable. What consultation processes are worth conducting before seeking approval from your Learning and Teaching Committee or Academic Board or equivalent?
- What advice would you give to your early leader self in terms of tips for navigating the policy governance process in your institution?

the policy outcome by paying attention to the seemingly insignificant steps along the way. This is a good reminder of the sensemaking principle that small, seemingly trivial, steps may be loaded with significance and should not be overlooked (see Chapter 1).

As you review existing policies or introduce new ones, it is useful to start by demonstrating how these fit into your institutional policy system or framework. For example, how does your revised assessment and feedback policy fit into the course quality policy framework? Or how does your equality, diversity and inclusion policy fit into the learner experience policy framework?

A critical policy review step is that of evidence-based consultation to seek feedback on areas for improvement, what's working well and what changes are proposed. An evidence-based approach to this policy review step involves gathering sources of evidence including student and staff feedback, and input from others where relevant, including from industry, regulators or professional accrediting bodies. Reflecting staff expertise and diverse learner perspectives in this process is another key element of the process. Quantitative evidence needs to be relevant to the policy in question. In relation to student-related policies, data on student demographics, enrolments, retention, pass rates and the like are instructive.

This evidence-based approach to policy review and navigating your governance processes is especially important when there are robust and divergent views about proposed changes. Ultimately, you may need to make tough calls to finalise the policy but the process is just as important as the outcome here. It is also helpful to spend time listening to a range of dissenting perspectives before taking the policy to relevant committees for endorsement and approval. Ideally, you will have support for the final version of the policy from key members of your university community, but this may not always be the case. Being well-prepared for debate and discussion ahead of important committee meetings is an important part of the process.

3.3 Including student learner voices in governance and decision-making

As noted in Case Study 6.3, students were involved in the governance aspects of the *Our Student Voice* project at Technological University Dublin. They prepared reports for the university's Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and learned about the importance of communicating progress updates and, no doubt, there will be policy implications to be addressed as part of their involvement in the overall quality framework.

Recognising the role of student learners as constituents, decision-makers and active change agents in university governance (Naylor, Dollinger, Mahat & Khawaja, 2021) is a powerful quality enhancement strategy, as illustrated in Case Study 6.4.

Case Study 6.4: Deliberative mini-publics and student participation in university governance

(Kennedy & Pek, 2023)

An innovative example of student participation in university governance and policy decision-making is that of the 'mini-public' approach to student decision-making adopted by the School of Law – Queen Mary University of London during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Borrowing from the realm of public policy, mini-publics involve a group of citizens, selected through a democratic lottery process who come together to deliberate on strategies to tackle shared challenges and wicked problems.

This approach to deliberative democracy is increasingly used in public policy-making (Einfeld & Blomkamp, 2022) as a way to nudge and influence citizens' thinking, enabling co-design of solutions to wicked societal problems through collective discussion, debate and deliberation. Often this results in collectively developed recommendations on issues of shared significance. In the public policy arena, these include issues of climate change or local water supply issues, for example. The School of Law – Queen Mary University of London adopted a similar strategy involving a students' jury of 12 law students, selected via democratic lottery, to:

i. hear the views of students, staff and other experts;
ii. reflect on their own views; and
iii. with the support of independent facilitators, deliberate about approaches to manage aspects of their educational experience throughout the COVID-19 public health crisis.

The student deliberations resulted in a final report with 13 recommendations (QMU of London School of Law, 2021) about the School's approach to pandemic learning.

Reflect

- In what ways do you include student learners in your university governance processes?
- How might you introduce deliberative mini-publics or a students' jury as part of your university or faculty decision-making and governance processes?
- What benefits could such an approach contribute to the policies and practices in your institution? What challenges do you foresee?

Policy-making and governance processes are important aspects of your institution's ability to assure quality and standards, to ensure compliance and to meet requisite standards. At the same time, they provide scope for enhancing the quality of engagement and collaboration with students and staff as learners, experts and active agents in the work of your institution. How you engage with this process, particularly in relation to policies that have significant implications for students and staff, is an important signal of your commitment to collaborative approaches to quality work and leadership.

4 Leading quality work in partnership with students and staff as co-learners

Leading quality work involves a combination of leadership capabilities. What does this combination look like in practice? The following case study builds on Professor Naidoo's earlier leadership experiences and discoveries (see Case Study 1.2 and 2.1). As you read, consider the following aspects of Prof Naidoo's leadership practice. How do these leadership dimensions apply in your context?

1. Quality work: working with academic staff to make sense of quality assurance as a lever for quality enhancement (see Section 1.1).
2. Quality culture: fostering a quality culture (see Section 1.2).
3. Policy as a spine to enhance practice: using the policy as spine analogy to connect, protect, promote movement, support and enable balance in day-to-day leadership with students and staff (see Section 1.3).

4. Sensemaking in action: applying these principles to leadership of quality work (see Section 2 and Chapter 1) to:-

   i. foster individual agency;
   ii. adopt a systemic view;
   iii. help individuals and groups to learn to categorise and chunk information to manage ambiguity and promote sensemaking;
   iv. communicate consistently and continuously; and
   v. recognise that small structures and brief moments have large consequences.

Case Study 6.5: Making sense of policy to enhance quality

We met Prof Naidoo, DVC Education and Learner Experience at GLU in Case Study 1.2 and 2.1. During her first year in the role, she found her L-C ecosystem map to be a useful helicopter device. In the midst of day-to-day meetings and what seemed like a mountain of administrative challenges, the map reminded her to step away to study her institutional ecosystem from time to time. She used the map to plan and prioritise and updated it periodically as she developed her networks across the university (see Figure 1.2).

Part I. Course quality policies and the staff experience

As she came to know the people of GLU and as she sat in meetings and observed processes, there seemed to be a number of disconnects between day-to-day practices and the policies of the university. When she looked more closely, she noticed many out-of-date academic policies. For example, the assessment policy hadn't been updated to reflect the latest artificial intelligence tools and their implications for academic assessment and integrity. She also noticed a pattern in her conversations with academic staff across departments when discussing the course quality review process. They couldn't understand why they needed to write so many reports that seemed to focus on compliance issues when they really wanted to spend their time innovating in their teaching and doing their research. They were also frustrated about the number of seemingly contradictory requirements in a range of course quality policies that were dotted around faculty and university-level websites. When Prof Naidoo dug deeper, she found that several policies relating to course quality had

been progressively added to the university website in an effort to meet compliance requirements at various points in time. She started to understand why staff found it difficult to keep track of them all. In fact, in some cases, these policies did contradict one another.

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ How would you respond to staff frustrations if you were in Prof Naidoo's role?
- ✓ Do you have a role in overseeing the policy framework in your institution? If not, how might you contribute to improving the policies? If yes, what steps do you take to ensure coherence and connectedness in your institution's policy framework?

Part II. Navigating a complex array of policies: the student experience

Prof Naidoo made a point of talking with student learners and student leaders across the university on a regular basis. They often commented that student-facing policies were located in a number of different places across the university website. It wasn't always easy to know where to find them when needed, especially during high-stress times of the year when they needed to know how to apply for special consideration in an examination or express a grievance. Several of the student leaders also approached Prof Naidoo to express concern that the student mental health and well-being policy was out of date and didn't reflect the diverse needs and backgrounds of the study body. They wanted to know how they could be involved in updating and improving it.

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ How would you respond to student questions and frustrations if you were in Prof Naidoo's role?
- ✓ What practical steps would you take to involve your student learners in decision-making in relation to policies that directly affect them? What boundaries might you need to put in place, if any?

Clearly, there was room for improvement but no one seemed to have oversight of how all these policies fitted together. While the academic policies were her primary responsibility, she also realised that they

were closely interwoven with a host of policies relating to student services, IT, infrastructure and student accommodation.

Prof Naidoo took a step back to think about the best way forward. She realised that it was a mammoth task to review every policy and she recognised that she would need the buy-in of her senior executive colleagues if changes were to be proposed. Remembering the university's strategic plan priority of enhancing the quality of learner well-being, she wondered how a policy stocktake might support this strategic priority. She recalled reading about the benefits of sensemaking, enabling leaders to 'explore the wider system, create a map of that system, and act in the system to learn from it' (Ancona, 2012, p.3). This seemed like a useful way to start her proposal for revisiting policies and making sense of their impact on students and staff and their well-being.

She spoke with her peer leaders on the senior executive team and with Faculty Deans and Heads of Department. They all agreed that it would be a good idea to take a holistic look at the university's policy library and to link it to the university's strategic focus on quality enhancement and learner well-being. The DVC Operations agreed to co-chair the working group so that they could work together to lead the conversation with students and staff across the university's academic and professional staff teams. They included student leaders in their planning discussions and agreed to pilot the student jury concept as part of the process of policy review.

They kept the working group small and secured a project officer to scope out the task. Their process included a timeline of 12 months during which time they:

1. agreed that the two DVCs would sponsor the work, provide high-level oversight, remove roadblocks and oversee communication and progress;
2. convened a small policy taskforce group supported by the project officer, including student representatives and members of staff across academic and professional staff portfolios;
3. conducted a professional learning workshop which included all policy taskforce members to build their skills and knowledge of policy and governance processes at GLU. Staff and students received a certificate of participation to add to their resume;

4. consulted with student and staff representatives on the project purpose and a proposed name for the programme of work. The agreed purposes were to: align; consolidate and streamline; and enhance policies, starting with those directly related to the experience of students and staff. Students suggested the following name: *Project Policy Align, Consolidate and Enhance* – students and staff agreed that *Project PACE* was a good reminder that their university's policies needed to keep pace with change*;*
5. convened a user group to test out proposed changes and improvements, including students and staff users; and
6. prioritised policy suites for review, consultation, updating and streamlining.

Prof Naidoo used the process to apply sensemaking principles. She realised that the majority of staff and students had little interest in or awareness of the university's policies, except when they needed them! There was an opportunity to learn and work collaboratively with her university community in a shared sensemaking and sense-giving process to make sense of the policies relevant to their working lives and their role in enhancing quality.

As she reflected on the 12 months that she devoted to *Project PACE*, Prof Naidoo made notes on what worked well and what she would do differently next time. She also reflected on how she would build on this work the following year.

Reflect

- What advice would you give Prof Naidoo on assessing the impact of her leadership of *Project PACE* and her efforts to enhance quality culture?
- As Prof Naidoo reflects on the activities outlined in Case Study 6.5, what indicators would you suggest she consider to assess whether or not she has enhanced the quality of her practice and of the experience of the students and staff colleagues with whom she works?

5 Making sense of quality in your leadership

This chapter addresses the complex concept of quality in HE, focusing on quality enhancement while recognising quality assurance as a cornerstone of quality culture. I have drawn connections that encourage you to consider the links between quality, policies and governance in your institution. Making sense of the implications for your leadership practice is not a simple task, particularly given the diversity of institutional cultures, practices and contexts when it comes to quality and policy.

Consider the following points as you follow your own sensemaking process.

1. Take a holistic view of quality in your leadership role.
    - While academic and course quality tend to be the primary focus of quality initiatives in HE, consider your university as a system.
    - Think about quality work as a construct that encompasses quality assurance and enhancement.
    - Consider the implications for all parts of your university system, from student support services to space design, from IT and library services to campus maintenance, from research infrastructure to first-year curriculum.
2. Recognise, validate and reward reflective praxis in the work of others.
    - Praxis extends practice, emphasising critical and reflective engagement with 'challenging issues to address educational concerns' in HE (Langelotz, Mahon & Dahlberg, 2020, p.v). This can apply in a range of contexts, including in the area of quality.
    - Create opportunities for professional staff to document the impact of their contribution to and leadership of quality enhancement initiatives.
    - Recognise and reward reflective praxis in the area of quality, strengthened by a robust policy spine in the work of academic staff through academic promotion processes, showcasing good practice in meetings, and drawing on the outcomes of their work in university strategy and policy documents.
3. Approach quality leadership as an opportunity to encourage reflective praxis that connects people across your university in new ways.
    - In their research on creating a student-centred campus and a culture of praxis across the campus, Rice and Alexakis (2015) found that

introducing the notion of praxis challenged many of the taken-for-granted conventions of 'faculty versus administration, student affairs versus academic affairs' (p.123) and the power relations between students and their teachers.
    - One aspect of the cultural change involved including faculty and senior university administrators in the same pedagogical development seminars. In this way, the administrators became 'leading learners' (p.127) to lead by example and to learn and reflect together about how to enhance the quality of the student experience of learning in their institution.

4. Respect the expertise and experience of students and staff in policy design, implementation and review, while also recognising them as learners in the process.
    - Involve student learners in academic governance and in policy co-design, review and enhancement, especially in relation to policies that affect them directly and which give them a voice in broader social policy matters.
    - Co-design policies with your students and staff in key strategic areas such as sustainable practices, institutional investment in renewable energy, or the university's stance on addressing sexual assault and domestic violence.
5. Learn from policy co-design practices beyond your institution.
    - Consider the lessons from emerging work on public policy co-design, demonstrating the value of deliberative democracy as a form of empowerment (Kennedy & Pek, 2023).
    - Remember that policy co-design puts people at the heart of the creative problem-solving process (Einfeld & Blomkamp, 2022) to address real-world issues in practical ways.

6 Bringing it all together: five big ideas

Chapter 6 is the second of two chapters looking at the 'what' of L-C HE leadership. In Chapter 5 we examined the importance of curriculum leadership. In this chapter we have identified the capabilities of quality leadership,

policy leadership and sensemaking leadership, all of which make up the L-C HE leader toolkit.

This chapter's big ideas include the following:

1. Quality enhancement is a focus for L-C HE leaders who want to make a difference, noting that quality is a contested construct in HE and quality work is a helpful way of combining quality assurance and quality enhancement.
2. Institutional policies are like a spine for your university and your leadership, connecting parts of the institution and its people, performing a protective function for things that matter, like standards; while also promoting movement and innovation, supporting the work of the institution, including your leadership; and enabling balance, for example between the work of quality assurance and enhancement.
3. Sensemaking is a core leadership capability with several dimensions, enabling you to make sense of rapidly changing environments and, in turn, to work with students and staff using sensemaking principles, including in relation to navigating institutional policies.
4. Your institutional policies present an opportunity to enhance the quality of:

    i. relationships with your learner community;
    ii. communication;
    iii. academic quality;
    iv. student and staff experiences; and
    v. institutional processes and operations.

5. Leading quality and policy enhancement work in partnership with students and staff involves a willingness to engage in debate, listen and respond to feedback, recognise the expertise and experience that they bring while also recognising the need to scaffold their learning about policy and quality processes.

Having considered two of the core focus areas for L-C HE leaders – curriculum and quality – we now move to the final section of the guide. The next chapter considers how you shape L-C cultures and the final chapter invites you to reflect deeply on how you go about leading with integrity.

Apply – discuss these ideas with peers, supervisors and mentors

- ✓ There isn't an obvious link between quality enhancement and policy in our institution. Is it worth pursuing this link and if yes, how do I make a start?
- ✓ The idea of a student jury sounds like an interesting way to include diverse learner perspectives in universities. But I'm not sure it would work in our department/faculty/institution. What preparatory work would I need to do before discussing it as an option with our student leaders?
- ✓ Sensemaking is a useful way to think about the impact of the change initiative I'm leading this year. How could I introduce the principles of sensemaking at our next leadership team meeting? What would I need to do to influence my more resistant leadership peers to show an interest in sensemaking?

Grow as a leader

- Tip 1. Enhance the quality of your leadership through reflective praxis to foster a quality culture characterised by collaboration, consultation and co-design.
- Tip 2. Develop your leadership sensemaking and sense-giving capabilities to equip your students and staff to learn and sensemake with you during times of change and uncertainty.
- Tip 3. Look at your institutional policies through new eyes to appreciate the opportunity they present to assure and enhance quality through your leadership.

PART

4

HOW does the learner-centred leader lead?

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7 Shaping learner-centred cultures in higher education institutions

This chapter marks the beginning of Part 4 of the guide, focusing on the *how* of L-C HE leadership. Here we consider the culture-shaping capability of L-C HE leadership before moving to the final chapter which examines the role of personal and professional integrity in your leadership. The present chapter starts with a broad overview of the subject of organisational culture. We then look at some of the unique characteristics of HE institutional cultures and microcultures. Section 2 proposes some distinctive elements of L-C HE cultures, followed by practical steps for embedding L-C cultures in your university. Building on themes covered in earlier chapters, we explore leadership strategies for engaging with students, staff and peer leaders to shape and sustain cultural shifts underpinned by values. Case studies illustrate systemic approaches to shaping culture, along with practical tips to support your leadership journey and capability development. The chapter concludes with principles and practical implications for culture-shaping leaders.

1 What is culture in the context of organisations?

Much has been written about organisational culture. It spawns a multiplicity of theoretical perspectives, it occupies the strategic planning time of governing boards, it exercises the minds of executives and challenges human resources leaders. HE institutions have a great deal in common with other industries; yet there are distinctive cultural qualities that warrant closer study. This is particularly the case for L-C HE leaders seeking to develop their leadership capabilities and to make a positive difference in their university communities.

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Reflect

- What are some defining features of your university's macro culture – i.e., what are the cultural symbols and practices such as dress codes, working patterns, communication protocols and language that define the cultural DNA of your university?
- What advice would you give to a new staff member about how to adjust to the culture of your university – i.e., the way we do things around here?

The word 'culture' is derived from the Latin *cultus*, meaning 'care' and the French *colere*, connoting cultivation of and care for the earth (Wagner, 2016). Viewed through an anthropological lens, culture, then can be understood as a process involving intentional action and care, with a focus on growth. This aligns well with our emphasis on learner-centredness and growth mindsets in leadership, as we shall explore throughout this chapter.

A short-hand definition of culture is 'the way we do things around here'. This apparently simple depiction of an abstract construct carries substantial meaning when you unpack what sits behind it, including the assumptions, beliefs and values that shape customs and practices across an institution. I use the singular form of the term 'culture' in the early part of this chapter; however, I favour the plural form as we look more closely at HE institutions with their multiple dimensions and microcultures. We will examine this plurality further in Section 1.2 where I use the term 'microcultures' in preference to the alternative term 'subcultures'. Our focus throughout the chapter is on practical leadership implications for shaping L-C cultures at the macro and micro levels of your institution.

1.1 Some perspectives on organisational culture

The literature on organisational culture is plentiful and wide-ranging. Management consultants spend a lot of time advising business leaders on how to turn their organisational culture around to achieve improved performance. Culture theorists present diverse perspectives on dimensions of institutional culture and an equally diverse range of frameworks exists for analysing culture and its impact on people and organisations. For our

purposes, a brief, high-level scan of selected perspectives sets the scene for considering practical implications for HE leaders.

In the business and management literature, Schein (2016), has written extensively about the links between organisational culture and leadership. He proposes a dynamic and holistic definition of culture as a process that involves: shared learning among group members; shared problem-solving using approaches that are subsequently taught to new group members; and a system of beliefs, values and behavioural norms that shape assumptions and eventually become tacit, taken-for-granted ways of thinking and behaving within the organisation (p.6).

Organisational culture is a complex construct comprising multiple dimensions. These include formal rituals and celebrations, habits of thinking and shared language, symbols and climate (Schein, 2016). The notion of institutional climate captures organisational members' perceptions of the impact of the learning or work environment on themselves (Glisson, 2015). Organisational climate also encompasses the meanings people attach to institutional practices and policies, and the kinds of behaviours they perceive to be recognised and rewarded in day-to-day interactions (Ehrhart, Schneider & Macey, 2014). In a HE institution, the significance of these perceptions applies equally to students and staff who, together, learn, experience, shape and perpetuate their university culture.

Another way of thinking about organisational culture is proposed by Martin (2002) whose depiction of three complementary perspectives of culture continues to be relevant in helping us to understand the characteristics of culture in complex settings. Martin proposes three ways to interpret organisational culture:

i. The *integration* perspective focuses on shared cultural characteristics of the organisation, emphasising areas of broad consensus and agreement. For example, there might be broad agreement that the university is a research-intensive institution and this shapes the prevailing organisational culture.
ii. The *differentiation* perspective of culture draws attention to examples of cultural inconsistency at the organisational level, while emphasising the strength of consensus at the micro levels of the institution. In a university, this is well illustrated by the strength of disciplinary microcultures, as outlined in the next section. Martin equates these to 'islands of clarity in a sea of ambiguity' (2002, p.94). These islands of clarity

reinforce identity and sense of belonging among members and may also contribute to divisions in relation to other microcultures or, indeed, with respect to the strategic directions of institutional leaders.

iii. The *fragmentation* perspective of culture draws attention to the ambiguity experienced by members of the organisation as they try to interpret culture. You may observe group collective agreement on specific issues like the importance of embedding sustainability in the curriculum, for example. However, this consensus is transient and may not automatically extend to other issues such as a proposal to remove the statue of a contentious historical figure on your campus, or transgender student rights. At some points, members of the organisation may come together and agree on an issue, but this behaviour is not stable, follows no recognisable pattern, and may change as new issues arise.

The three perspectives framework can be a useful lens for understanding the cultural complexity of your university. At times you will see integrated consensus across the institution, at times it's helpful to understand the reasons for differentiated microcultures and what contributes to those 'islands of clarity' (Martin, 2002) characterised by a deep sense of group identity and internal consensus.

At other times, it's instructive to reflect on reasons for cultural fragmentation associated with ambiguity and transient collective views. Cultural boundaries in organisations may be fluid, blurry and permeable (Martin, 2004). These boundaries may also function as an exclusionary device, reinforcing entrenched views and behaviours that impede positive change. We will return to this theme and its implications for L-C leaders in Section 4.

Appreciating how the culture of your organisation evolves in social contexts will extend your culture-shaping leadership capability. Tierney's (1988) work contemplates the socially constructed nature of HE institutional cultures, influenced by anthropological (Geertz, 1973) and sociological (Clark, 1989) frames of reference. This perspective 'acknowledges the pluralistic, occasionally cacophonous, landscape of the contemporary university' (Tierney & Lanford, 2018, p.2). Conceiving of your leadership role as an anthropologist, setting out to observe, listen and understand the culture of your university is an apt metaphor that we will explore further in this chapter.

Leadership and culture are inextricably linked. As outlined in Chapter 6, sensemaking also plays a role in providing a systemic view of your university.

Reflect

- Imagine yourself as an anthropologist, observing the culture of your institution. Which social factors play a role in shaping your university's cultural characteristics?
- How useful is Martin's (2002) suggestion that you examine your institution through the integration, differentiation and fragmentation cultural lenses? Can you see examples of all three in your institution? What challenges and opportunities does this pose for you as a leader?

It enables you to construct a map of the interdependent factors shaping your institution's culture, to identify opportunities to make a sense of what you observe and, in turn, to shape the culture around L-C values. Enabling students and staff to make sense of the institutional culture, to navigate the complexity and to take an active role in culture-shaping and change is a core part of your leadership role. A cultural perspective of your university promotes a deeper appreciation of human agency (Tierney & Lanford, 2020) and the role that your student learners and staff colleagues play in working closely with you to shape a healthy culture.

Drawing these perspectives together, the culture of your institution can be depicted as relatively stable, based on long-term group-based learning of shared patterns of behaviour, values, language, perceptions and mindsets. However, organisational culture is not monolithic. Cultural boundaries may fluctuate and be porous. You will find microcultures characterised by robust local cultural practices and values, especially in academic disciplines and departments. These microcultures often represent long-held ways of knowing and being. From a systemic perspective no doubt you will observe examples of cultural fragmentation and ambiguity across your university. This may be evident, for instance, where first-generation students from refugee backgrounds struggle to navigate their first year of study in complex institutional terrain infused with unfamiliar cultural practices, language and taken-for-granted ways of engaging with others and with the university. Culture goes deep into the psyche of an organisation. It is learned over time, embedded and often tacit.

To understand more about your university's culture and how to lead effectively within and through it, the next section dives a little deeper to examine characteristics of HE institutional cultures.

1.2 Distinctive elements of higher education institutional cultures

While the broader organisational culture literature is instructive, there are some defining characteristics of HE institutions to consider as you develop context-appropriate approaches to leading and shaping culture. In a competitive HE context, universities and colleges are faced with multiple priorities, many of which are influenced by the world beyond institutional boundaries. These include factors such as: government funding and policy imperatives; internationalisation and the associated impact of global health crises on international student travel; the need to compete with peer universities globally on a range of research performance metrics; mission-based priorities like civic leadership and community engagement priorities; philanthropic endeavours; industry collaborations; and goals for growth in student enrolments that challenge existing business models and include rapidly expanded online educational delivery in many cases. This diverse array of factors makes it challenging to identify a single, coherent HE culture. Nevertheless, it is important for leaders to examine closely their institutional culture in all its complexity if they are to lead effectively, to anticipate challenges resulting from cultural differences and divisions, and to shape culture when needed.

Distinctive cultural characteristics of HE institutions include the following.

1. Students bring combinations of individual demographic, cultural and linguistic heritage with them into the university learning environment. Significant challenges arise when student learners from diverse cultural backgrounds, including international students, are expected to adjust to the cultural practices and values of universities without appropriate transition support (Pedraja-Rejas, Rodriguez-Ponce & Labrana, 2022).
2. Academic microcultures are shaped predominantly by disciplinary cultures (see Chapter 4) with deep historical, epistemological and ontological roots. These academic microcultures are often closely aligned with research cultures and the values of academic freedom and freedom of intellectual inquiry that shape university departmental cultures. This combination of factors has significant implications for staff identities and for the students who learn within these disciplinary contexts.
3. Professional or administrative staff work alongside academic faculty. They, too, have distinctive microcultural characteristics. Added to this are the third space or blended professionals (see Chapter 4 and Section 4.3 of this chapter) who straddle the traditional cultural boundaries between academic and administrative professionals.

4. HE institutions are characterised by distinguishing features and core functions that contribute to culture. Depending on the institution, its history and context, these features include a deep commitment to social responsibility and community engagement, combined with core teaching and research functions. This combination of cultural factors manifests itself in various ways, including the work patterns of academic staff who engage in teaching, research, service and civic leadership (see Chapter 4 on the subject of academic citizenship in HE).
5. The combination of institutional mission, intellectual roots, external government, funding and regulatory influences and the corporatisation of HE represents a unique mix of culture-shaping factors in HE institutions.

Further cultural complexity arises for those who are members of several microcultures simultaneously. For example, a Faculty Dean may be promoted from the ranks of one academic department in a large faculty. She brings to the role a disciplinary microcultural identity, yet she must also adapt to the leadership role, demonstrating even-handed sensitivity towards several other disciplinary microcultures in her faculty. She will join her peer group of Faculty Deans who, in turn, are part of a larger leadership team comprising the heads of professional staff portfolios like Student Services and Finance. These functional groups are likely to comprise distinctive microcultures. This leadership group, in turn, interfaces with the university executive team which, no doubt, demonstrates its own microcultural characteristics.

Reflect

- HE institutional cultures have been characterised as complex clusters (Harman, 1989) of microcultures, some of which harmonise while others do not. Take a helicopter look at your university's culture. Where do you see cultural clusters? Are there examples of misalignment between microcultures?
- What personal leadership challenges would you envisage for a new Faculty Dean who was previously a member of one of the faculty's academic departments?
- What advice would you give to the newly appointed Executive Dean who encounters a clash of disciplinary and departmental microcultures in her faculty?

Another useful way to analyse your university's culture is through the following dimensions (Tierney, 1988; Tierney & Lanford, 2020):

i. the *mission* and core activities of the institution;
ii. the *environment* in which the institution operates, including the physical environment and location, student and staff demographics and the university's relationship with its local community;
iii. the process of *socialisation* including how students and staff are socialised to the culture of the university and its values;
iv. how individuals learn about the institution and who holds useful *information* that will help them to understand the place more effectively, this includes a focus on communication strategies used across the institution;
v. institutional *strategy* and how it is developed – in other words, does the university have a top-down approach to strategy decision-making or is it characterised by participative decision-making and shared governance?
vi. *leadership*, including the role of informal leaders who may not hold positions of formal leadership, yet they are recognised, respected and trusted within the university.

These dimensions represent a useful set of lenses through which to reflect on the cultural makeup of your university, its people, policies, priorities and patterns of behaviour.

Reflect

- Thinking about your university's mission statement and strategy, what evidence of organisational culture do you observe? Are there examples of language or institutional stories that reveal the distinctive culture of your institution? Do you see any evidence of L-C cultural values in action?
- What does the physical and virtual environment of your institution reveal about its culture?
- Consider the leadership structures in your institution, including how the university senior executive team relates to leaders across the institution. Do you observe a healthy culture of trust and respect or is there room for improvement?

- Who are the informal leaders in your institution, i.e., those with no formal leadership role who are trusted and respected for their wisdom and knowledge of the university and its people? What role do these informal leaders play in shaping the culture of your institution?
- How might you work with formal and informal leaders to shape a L-C culture in your university?

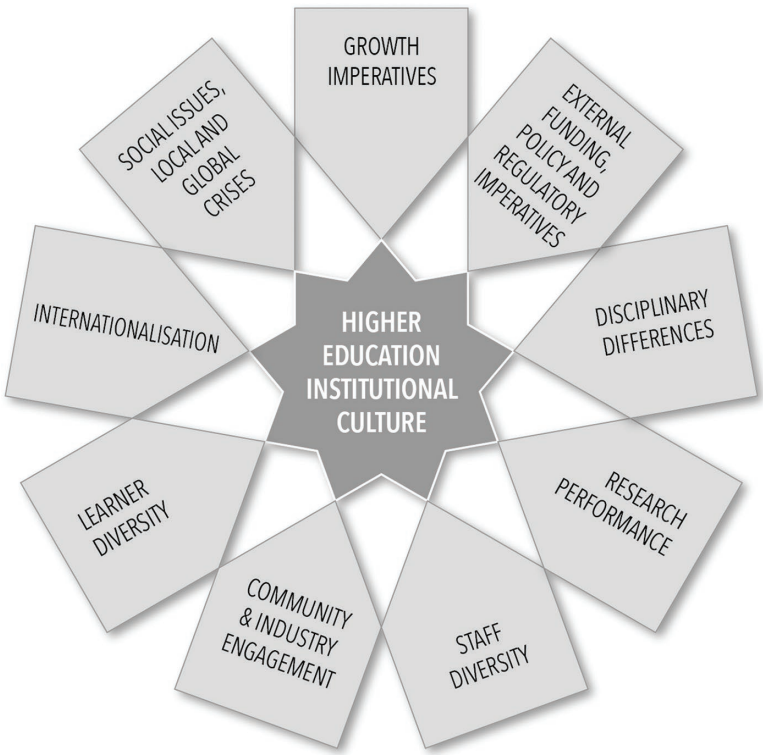

Figure 7.1 Examples of cultural vectors influencing HE institutional cultures

As you examine your institutional culture and its multiple dimensions, it's likely that you will observe, and indeed experience, tensions of various kinds, for cultural characteristics often function as vectors, pulling forcefully in different directions simultaneously. This adds to the cultural complexity of HE institutions and poses challenges for leaders seeking to shape their culture in particular ways. Figure 7.1 illustrates a selection of these cultural vectors which may vary considerably by jurisdiction, institutional type, history and mission.

Reflect

- How does this suite of vectors align with your institutional context? What's missing?
- Select one cultural vector that is most relevant to your leadership role. What impact does it have on your day-to-day leadership? How does it influence your institutional culture? Is it contributing to cultural integration, differentiation or fragmentation (Martin, 2002)?

Each of the dimensions shown in Figure 7.1 represents a bidirectional vector with the power to influence and be influenced by your university's culture.

It may be daunting to consider the many dimensions of culture and the associated tensions that arise when cultural vectors pull in different directions; but experience teaches me that the whole organisational culture is greater than the sum of its parts. In other words, while it's important to understand the microcultural characteristics that you are working with, it is also important to look for ways to bring your university community together around shared values and a common purpose. Microcultures are powerful and potentially divergent. The L-C HE leadership challenge is to appreciate the many cultural differences and tensions, while also considering what unites and binds your institutional community (Tierney, 2022). This frame of reference is foundational to thinking about ways to shape L-C cultures in the midst of complexity.

2 Higher education institutional cultures and learner-centred cultures: making the link

Having considered the broad characteristics of organisational culture along with several defining qualities of HE cultures and microcultures, where does the idea of L-C cultures fit in an already rich mix of cultural vectors within universities? This section outlines some key characteristics of L-C HE cultures and presents a case study illustrating how one university leader approached the challenge of culture-shaping in their university.

2.1 Characteristics of learner-centred cultures in higher education

Building on the L-C leadership capabilities covered in earlier chapters, it is now appropriate to extrapolate what this means in the context of institutional culture. A HE L-C culture is multidimensional, underpinned by values and focused on students as learners. It promotes a view of staff, including leaders, as learners, while also respecting their professional and academic expertise.

Five cultural qualities that, together, capture the essence of a L-C culture are outlined below. A L-C HE culture is a:

a. *learning culture* that values the primacy of people first, followed by processes as enablers of learners and learning. A L-C approach positions the people in a university as learners, whether they be students or staff. At the same time, each person brings knowledge and expertise of different kinds to the organisational learning environment. Chapters 4 and 5 highlight the deep expertise of staff while Chapter 3 addresses the expertise and experience that students as learners bring to HE. A L-C culture is a joint learning enterprise. Individuals and groups learn from one another and, together, foster a deep appreciation for higher learning and discovery;
b. *connected culture* that respects diverse voices and perspectives. It connects networks of learners, and their respective microcultures, through partnership and co-design principles (see Chapter 3) that apply equally to students and staff. Through these connections, mutual trust and collegiality grow;
c. *sensemaking culture* that values individual agency, carves out space and time for individuals and groups to come together to make sense of ambiguous and wicked challenges and uncertainty, prioritises mutual sense-giving through robust evidence, collaboration and communication, and recognises the value of small steps, quiet voices, individual contributions and diverse perspectives (see Chapter 6);
d. *sustainable culture* that prioritises practical actions to promote the health, well-being and safety of all members of the institution (see Chapters 3 and 4). In so doing, a L-C culture increases the likelihood of shaping and sustaining an institution; and
e. *purposeful culture* that is intentional about collaborative culture-shaping in ways that are mindful, self-aware and reflective. These qualities of leadership are further examined in Chapter 8.

Each of these cultural values, separately, could apply to a number of different types of institutions. When taken together with a focus on the learners in your university, however, they represent a potentially powerful force for positive cultural renewal in HE. The key lies in the leader's ability to apply these in practical ways. Case Study 7.1 illustrates one university leader's culture-shaping journey.

Reflect

- Where do you see elements of a L-C culture already in place in your university? How could you build on these positive cultural characteristics in your efforts to shape a healthy, L-C culture?
- What would you add to the five L-C cultural qualities above? Do you see one characteristic as more important than others?
- Do you perceive any difference between 'learner-centred' cultures and 'student-centred' cultures in HE? What opportunities do you have for introducing 'learner-centred' terminology in your institution, faculty, department or team? Is there an opportunity to role model these cultural qualities without introducing new language?

Case Study 7.1: One leader's culture-shaping journey

Prof Naidoo is 18 months into her role as DVC Education and Learners at GLU. She has spent time co-designing the university's *Education and Learners Strategy*, cascading from the new five-year university strategy with the tagline *'Learners First'*. Feedback from students and staff alike indicates that they appreciate the focus on co-creation and partnerships with learners and they hope that 'learners at the heart' is more than just a fancy slogan.

In support of the new university strategy, the People and Culture team proposes the following five values that align with the university's mission, purpose and strategy: Integrity, Inclusivity, People-focused, Excellence, and Collaboration. The marketing team designs a poster to capture the five values and distribute these to all staff and

student leaders. Students receive a QR code that links to the values in their orientation pack at the start of the academic year. The People and Culture Department even invests some of their annual budget in specially branded coffee cups to remind them of the university's values.

A year on, Prof Naidoo observes that the values posters are faded and some have been partially ripped off the walls. The People and Culture mugs are chipped and moved to the back of the staff kitchen cupboard. Hardly anyone makes reference to the values and they seem long forgotten. She raises the topic of values at an executive leadership team meeting one morning. All agree that something should be done, though they seem rather vague on the detail of who might be responsible for next steps. Prof Naidoo volunteers to start the process with some practical ways to link the *'Learners First'* strategic plan priority with the university values. She has attended a webinar on the importance of values-based leadership in HE and she's keen to apply her learning. She's a little disappointed that none of her executive colleagues volunteered to help. Nevertheless, she decides to talk through her ideas with the Vice Chancellor who agrees that bringing the university's values to life will help to reinvigorate the institutional culture.

At the next executive leadership team meeting she starts with an example of where she has seen the cultural value of collaboration in action in a recent student leadership meeting. She invites her colleagues to share an example of where they have seen one of the five values in action in the past week. After a lengthy silence, the CFO offers an example of where she'd observed a staff member on a Zoom call with a first-year student who was struggling to pay the bills. She was impressed with the way the staff member explained options for scholarships, deferred fee payments, accommodation support, food vouchers and financial hardship loans. This seems like a good example of inclusivity and people-focused values in action. This broke the ice and other executive members became more involved in the conversation. The DVC Research cited an example of excellence and collaboration in action in the form of recent research grant success in partnership with a local non-government organisation. And the Provost

is pleased to see the Faculty of Business introducing a co-design project involving first-year students and academic faculty collaborating on a social enterprise initiative. The leadership team nod in agreement – this definitely demonstrates the value of collaboration as students and staff come together to learn from one another.

After ten minutes, the Vice Chancellor draws the values-sharing segment to a close. The executive members agree this is a useful exercise that helps them to think about practical ways to bring the values to life. After a few weeks, Prof Naidoo shares the idea with the Heads of Departments and Faculty Deans group, encouraging them to initiate a similar practice in their respective leadership team meetings. She agrees to visit their meetings over the next few months to hear about what they are learning from the process of making the university's values more explicit in this way.

At the same time, Prof Naidoo talks with student leaders to let them know what some of the staff leaders are doing to bring the university values to life. The students think this is a great idea. They plan to do likewise in their student leadership meetings. They also suggest that it would be good to have the chance to nominate students and staff across the university as GLU Values Ambassadors. Someone also suggests it would be good to have an event every few months where people who live out the values are recognised and celebrated. By the end of the year, there is an institution-wide conversation about GLU's values. Three celebratory morning teas have been hosted to hand out certificates to those who have been nominated as Values in Action Ambassadors (VAAs). Interestingly, they have even seen some improvements in the annual staff engagement survey and the student satisfaction ratings.

Prof Naidoo talks with her mentor about her reflections on the process. While she didn't set out to transform the whole university's culture, it seems like there have been a few culture shifts that started small and eventually spread. On her ipad, she jots down some of the elements of the process. Figure 7.2 captures her thoughts about the process of culture-shaping and culture-shifting as a leader. This could be the beginning of a turnaround that is bringing student learners and staff together around shared values.

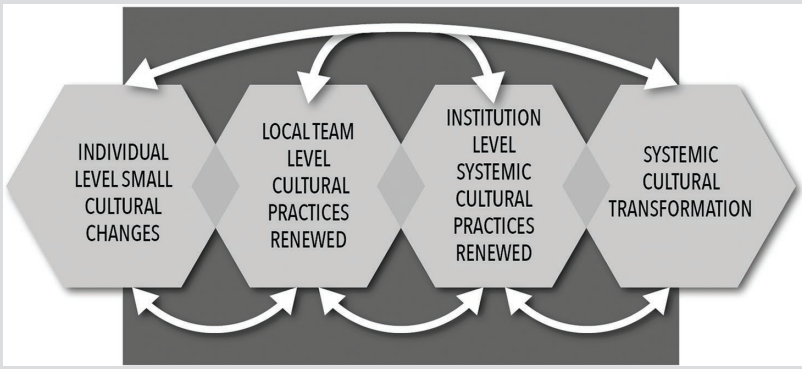

Figure 7.2 The recursive journey of culture-shaping

The recursive nature of the culture-shaping journey is an important one. One stage feeds into the other. Prof Naidoo also finds that it's important to check back with individuals and teams to see how things are going, what they are learning from the process, areas for improvement and ways to share what's being learned.

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ Prof Naidoo is trying to shape the culture of GLU to support the *Learners First* strategic focus. Where do you see evidence of a learner-centred, purposeful culture emerging?
- ✓ What are your institution's values? How could you draw on them to shape culture around L-C principles?
- ✓ Prof Naidoo sometimes feels that she is a lone voice in her executive leadership team. What advice would you give to help her to build a coalition of supporters among her executive colleagues as she proceeds with her culture-shaping journey?

3 Shaping institutional cultures through learner-centred principles: key considerations

So far in this chapter we have established that HE institutional cultures are multidimensional, comprising distinctive characteristics and cultural vectors. It is helpful for leaders to understand these in the context of efforts to shape and influence culture. This section builds on Case Study 7.1, outlining

key considerations for L-C HE leaders as you set out to shape culture and sustain cultural shifts in your university.

3.1 Respect and build on institutional microcultures

A useful metaphor of institutional microcultures is that of sailboats and ships of various kinds, each with distinctive identities and characteristics, yet each (more or less) sailing in a common institutional ocean. Without a unified purpose and direction, these microculture vessels make their way in diverse directions, some moving more slowly than others, but all seaworthy and robust in their own way. Rather than envisaging institutional culture as a single large tanker or cruise ship, McEwan (as cited in Muldowney, 2022) proposes that leaders consider their institutional ecosystem as a flotilla of microcultures.

As you look around your HE institution, how do you perceive the arrangement of microcultures? Are they 'sailing' at cross-purposes? What steps can you take to shape and shift your university's microcultures to align around a common goal and purpose? A starting point is to recognise their existence, spend time within each microcultural group, and learn about their history and what binds them together. Demonstrate your respect for their identity and take time to understand their shared purpose. As you are doing so, look for ways to build on their shared values so that you can connect the microcultures in your university around a common purpose. This process of developing a mutual understanding of one another's purpose, values and cultures is an invaluable learning opportunity, as illustrated in Case Study 7.2. It aptly illustrates that L-C cultures are as much about students as learners as they are about staff as learners in your university.

Research Case Study 7.2: Working with academic microcultures to enhance quality

(Roxa & Martensson, 2013)

This exploratory case study involved five academic microcultures at Lund University, a research-intensive institution in Sweden. The study was part of a larger initiative designed to enhance the overall educational quality (see Chapter 4).

This investigation was based on the hypothesis that there is a strong relationship between academic culture and quality enhancement in universities (p.9). Five milieus or microcultures were identified. Each was characterised by quality academic practices in both research and teaching within the university, based on a combination of institutional research metrics, quality assessments and interviews with students and institutional leaders.

Using a sociocultural framework and semi-structured interviews with students, staff and leaders, the authors report the following:

1. The academic microcultures are characterised by high levels of internal trust, between academic staff and their leaders, and between academic staff and students.
2. The microcultures provide collegial support for new academic staff. There is evidence of self-monitoring and self-regulation in relation to quality of teaching within the microculture.
3. The microcultures demonstrate active collaboration beyond their local culture, based on their 'underlying value system and initiatives. The formal organisation (faculty/university) as such is rather invisible' (p.5) to the microculture members.
4. Within each microculture there is evidence of a shared sense of purpose 'tightly related to underlying basic values within the groups' (p.5).

Implications for HE leaders seeking to further enhance the quality of education and learner experiences in their universities include: i. build on the strong sense of identity and value systems within the microcultures; and ii. go beyond the easily measurable artefacts and metrics to understand more deeply the cultural values and practices and shared trust that underpins strong academic microcultures.

Apply the case study research: what would you do?

✓ Applying the lessons from this case study to your institution or local context, what are some of the deeply held cultural values and practices in the academic microcultures of your institution? What opportunities do these represent if you want to encourage more L-C practices?

✓ This case study depicts relatively healthy microcultures with high levels of internal trust and a broad commitment to the values of quality education. What leadership steps would you take if you encountered a less healthy microculture with toxic elements and lack of overt support for quality education? How could you work with members of this microculture from outside the group? How would you handle the situation if you were a newly appointed leader of such a microculture? Whose support and advice would you seek?

3.2 Articulate a common purpose

In my experience, one of the most powerful binding forces in HE institutions is the value attached to learning and discovery in the areas of teaching, scholarship and disciplinary research. No doubt you will find this to be a helpful rallying point, together with the common purpose of collaborating to engage with, challenge and support learners.

As you meet with staff and students, as you listen to their stories and hear their concerns, look for the connective tissue that brings people together around a common purpose. Few will argue with the value of learning and, by association, the core priority of fostering learner agency and growth in higher education settings. No doubt you will encounter diverse views about how people learn, the extent of support they need, whether or not it is appropriate to depict staff as learners alongside students in co-design contexts and the like. You can anticipate resistance and robust debate on many of these issues. Nonetheless, look for ways to nudge debate in the direction of shared values whenever possible.

In their analysis of the challenges of shifting HE institutional cultures in post-apartheid South Africa, Adonis and Silinda (2021) outline the very real challenge of shifting and shaping longstanding university microcultures, particularly in historically white universities. The authors point to the frustration experienced by black learners who experience 'the incongruence between the promises of transformation and the existential realities they face on campus' (p.89). While the common purpose of cultural transformation underpinned by inclusivity and social justice is articulated, these authors point to the fact that much work is yet to be done to achieve true and

lasting shifts in behaviours, attitudes, assumptions and long-held cultural practices. In other words, articulating a common purpose is not sufficient. Practical leadership actions are essential.

One example of institutional leadership in this regard is at the University of Cape Town (UCT) – home of the student-led 'Rhodes Must Fall' decolonisation movement. UCT has created a senior executive Deputy Vice Chancellor role responsible for transformation, student affairs and social responsiveness. The role is designed to address a range of institutional priorities including cultural change, inequality and social justice. This traditionally white university acknowledges that it continues to grapple with the 'legacies of colonialism and apartheid' (Ramugondo, 2022). Nevertheless, the creation of this bespoke leadership role exemplifies one institution's commitment to a systemic approach that brings together a focus on student learners, transformation and social responsiveness, with a view to achieving positive cultural change.

3.3 Harness the unifying power of learner-centred values to shape culture

Section 2.1 outlines five characteristics of L-C cultures. Such cultures are characterised by the values of learning, connectedness, sensemaking, sustainability and purpose. As you go about your daily routine of meetings, emails, corridor or Zoom conversations, you have the opportunity to bring one or more of these values to life. Often, these values are tacit in our work, but I encourage you to think about how you can be more intentional about integrating them into your leadership practices.

Bringing together your university community, your faculty, department or team around a common purpose and values is particularly important in times of crisis, such as that of the global pandemic, and in hybrid learning and work environments that are now so prominent in HE. It is equally important when faced with long-standing systemic cultural challenges.

While systemic cultural renewal may seem a daunting task, the premise of this chapter is that you can achieve small-scale cultural shifts, right where you are, on a daily basis. The key to success in accomplishing these small shifts is to be intentional, adopt a systemic approach to collaboration and networking, and invest time in learning about the diverse cultural characteristics of your institution and its multiple facets. To build on the flotilla analogy in Section 3.1, this might require you to invest in a tug boat so that

you can manoeuvre alongside the large faculty tankers to better understand them as you move toward a focus on learners. Alternatively, you may need a Jet Ski to enable you to move in agile ways from one sailing vessel to another, spending time on student leadership team sailing boats or departmental tall ships in order to listen, learn and link the shared values that will help you to guide the flotilla towards a common horizon point.

4 Partnering with student learners and colleagues in culture-shaping processes

Throughout this guide, I have emphasised the principles of collaboration, partnership, co-design and co-creation as core to L-C leadership. Nowhere is this more important than in the work of culture-shaping, whether it be at the local team level or systemic institutional level. You have an important part to play in role modelling practical ways to foster cultures of shared responsibility in which members of your university community have agency and accountability. This section outlines three examples of the types of partnerships to consider as you think about how to shape L-C cultures in your institution.

4.1 Partnerships with graduate learners to foster a well-being culture

In an analysis of factors that promote graduate student well-being, Posselt (2021) argues for the primacy of cultural factors in the academy that promote well-being among graduate learners. Well-being risk factors for this learner cohort include the fact that they are often mature learners with families, career and financial responsibilities. The juggling act required to manage these competing priorities, along with study demands, adds considerable pressure to their lives.

On a personal level, the graduate experience can be isolating, particularly for those enrolled in online degree programmes and those from international backgrounds. Culture-shaping leadership includes: normalising conversations about mental health; fostering awareness of the multidimensional nature of well-being including physical, economic, social and emotional aspects; and nudging the institution in the direction of an 'all-hands' approach to well-being. In other words, it's important to shape an environment in which everyone understands they have a role to play in 'proactively

creating healthy cultures' (p.9). Establishing partnerships with graduate learners to involve them in developing strategies, policies and practices that shape a health-promoting well-being culture (see Chapter 3), can have a positive impact on your institutional culture.

4.2 Partnerships across the institution to make sense of culture shifts and change

In Case Study 7.3, Petersen and Bartel (2020) report on the impact of significant change processes on organisational culture and the importance of partnering with change champions within the university to shape and sustain cultural shifts.

Case Study 7.3: When culture and change collide

(Petersen & Bartel, 2020)

University X, a medium-sized, highly ranked public university in rural US is historically a residential campus with no fully online degree programmes or course offerings. The faculty largely have responsibility for the curriculum, with a shared governance structure acting as a collective voice through the Faculty Senate. University X has experienced a steady decline in enrolments and university revenue, along with increasing costs. The situation is deemed unsustainable.

An environmental scan of the institution and the broader economic and demographic factors points to the need for greater flexibility in modes of course delivery. The university leaders agree to develop a fully online degree programme in an effort to attract more local and international students. This proposal runs counter to the prevailing organisational culture that revolves around face-to-face learning and residential on-campus learner experiences.

Recognising the clash between the existing culture and the proposed change to online delivery, the institutional leaders take the following steps. They:

i. study their organisational culture to understand how it might inhibit or support the change initiative and how to address potential obstacles;

ii. define a leader group to champion the change initiative from initial conception to completion;
iii. gather robust evidence to demonstrate the need for change;
iv. work with champions of change, along with students and staff across the university progressively to gain support for the change; and
v. maintain regular, effective communication while 'having the perseverance and determination to see the initiative succeed' (p.51).

Over a period of 18 months, the fully online master's degree is developed and successfully introduced. The authors note some faculty resistance, along with the willingness of others to consider other online opportunities.

Reflecting on the culture change journey, the researchers conclude: 'Online education began to slowly become part of who the organisation is and how it operates on a daily basis. It was becoming part of the organisation culture, where just two years before it was distinctly absent from the culture.' (p.55). Another positive outcome is the fact that the 'adjustment in culture' regarding online education that occurred just before 2020 had the added benefit of equipping the university and its people to adapt more easily to the rapid pivot to online teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Apply: what would you do?

- ✓ The culture clash that arises through the process of introducing online course offerings in primarily face-to-face learning environments can pose significant challenges for leaders. Have you seen evidence of similar culture clashes in your institution?
- ✓ The leaders in this case study were intentional about the change to online delivery. They defined a group of change champions early in the process to assist with the change process. Who would you include in your change champion group for an existing or future change process?
- ✓ The cultural adjustments that emerged through the change process outlined in this case study enabled staff and students to pivot more easily to online teaching during the global pandemic. What cultural factors enabled your university to adapt effectively during the

height of the COVID-19 pandemic? Are there any cultural factors that inhibited your institution's ability to adapt during this time?

- ✓ Effective communication is identified as one success factor in this change process. What leadership steps could you take to enhance your organisational culture through effective communication, whether at the local or institutional level?

4.3 Partnerships across cultural boundaries to enhance quality

In Chapter 4 we examined the evolution of blended or third space professional roles in HE. These roles span the traditional boundaries between academic faculty and professional staff work. As these staff groups progressively develop a sense of identity and as they are recognised for their significant contribution, they, too form microcultures that shape and in turn are shaped by the culture of their institution. They have specialist knowledge and are pivotal to enhancing the quality of learner experiences and in problem-solving on several fronts in academic departments (Gray, 2015); yet they are so often defined in terms of what they are not (i.e., non-academic staff) instead of what they are.

Briody and colleagues (2022) found that professional staff leaders in boundary-spanning, faculty-based roles demonstrate a 'constellation' of identifiable characteristics that help to define an emergent microculture. These characteristics include: a holistic view of team goals; deep systemic knowledge; a can-do problem-solving orientation despite setbacks; pro-active and persuasive communication that draws on the expertise of students and academic staff; perseverance; and decisive leadership. These characteristics can be attributed to role and job features, but the authors argue they can also be attributed to an emerging microculture characterised by 'dedication, commitment and perseverance to team goals' (Briody, Rodriguez-Mejia & Berger, 2022, p.317).

Another boundary-spanning HE microculture is that of academic developers. While some of these staff may have academic backgrounds, many are experienced, highly qualified professional staff who work closely with faculty to enhance the quality of teaching, curriculum and assessment, often through innovative practices and technologies. Stensaker (2018) describes academic development as cultural work – 'a deliberate attempt to develop

and disrupt the organisation on the basis of established and emerging practices and knowledge' (p.277). Academic developers can play a key role in the cultural work required to bridge cultural gaps represented by diverse organisational functions that come together in the context of curriculum development and renewal (see Chapter 5). These groups might comprise disciplinary experts, student learners, quality assurance staff, course marketing experts and finance teams responsible for monitoring the financial impact of student enrolments in each course. Group members bring their values, norms, beliefs and practices to the table. The role of academic developers includes helping to promote improved mutual understanding across groups to shape a culture that values enhanced quality of teaching and learner experiences.

5 Principles and practical implications for culture-shaping leaders

As you contemplate the place of L-C cultures in complex HE institutions, what are the implications for leaders who see an opportunity to apply L-C principles in their strategies, practices and policies? This section outlines several leadership principles and implications for you to adapt to your organisational context.

5.1 Learner-centred principles in action

Bringing L-C principles to life in practical ways requires a deep and reflective understanding of how to work with and within the culture of your institution. My depiction of this work as culture-shaping is deliberate. Ultimately your goal may be fundamentally to transform your university's culture. It's not impossible to do so, but it takes considerable time, sustained focus and commitment from all leaders in the institution. It also requires resources that are not easily found in times of fiscal constraint and pressing competing priorities. A culture-shaping approach recognises that even the smallest steps can achieve positive culture shifts. In times of uncertainty and change, it is worth considering the option of small, sustainable culture shifts in the desired direction when wholesale culture change may not be feasible.

Crises such as the experience of the global COVID-19 pandemic, are precisely the time when culture comes to the fore as an enabler or inhibitor

of institutional and individual resilience. The foundation work of culture-shaping can be adapted for your local context, while also having an impact across the university. It can happen in small bite-size chunks, starting with an individual leader who is intentional and inspires others through seemingly insignificant cultural experiments that progressively shift the dial. During periods of overwhelm this approach is often more feasible and practical than attempting a whole of institution change process.

5.2 Leadership implications for learner-centred, culture-shaping leaders

Three practical implications of a culture-shaping approach to HE leadership are outlined below. These are especially relevant to leaders who are relatively new to their role or to the institution, though they apply across leadership roles and levels of experience.

5.2.1 Recognise your place in the cultural ecosystem of your university

- Whether you are aware of it or not, you are working within a microculture that sits alongside and often intersects with a host of other microcultures. This is an important starting point for leaders seeking to understand their context. Are you an academic programme leader, head of department or faculty dean in a departmental disciplinary microculture? Are you a student services portfolio leader, head of an academic development unit, or an executive leader responsible for university-wide strategic leadership? What are the characteristics of your local microculture? What do these microcultural characteristics have in common with those of other departments and teams, and how do these align with the broader cultural characteristics of your institution?
- A helpful way to think about your culture-shaping role in complex institutional contexts is to think about leading from the inside-out and the outside-in, rather than top-down or bottom-up. As a leader, you are located within a cultural setting. How do you reach out from within your immediate microcultural context to shape and influence other cultural clusters? In other words, how do you develop the capability of inside-out leadership that challenges the traditional hierarchical top-down, bottom-up approaches? While many notable scholars and authors (e.g., Cashman, 2017; Kouzes & Posner, 2008; Maxwell, 2020; Vij, 2021) use 'inside-out leadership' with reference to the importance of self-examination and

Reflect

- What difference do you think it makes to think of your culture-shaping leadership as an inside-out-outside-in process, rather than a top-down-bottom-up one?
- What practical steps can you take to assess the extent to which you are an inside-out-outside-in leader?

personal beliefs as the starting point for effective leadership, I use the term in this context to refer to the 'inside' of the leader's cultural setting in the organisation and their ability to reach out beyond their own micro-culture to understand those of others, including the tacit beliefs, values and assumptions that shape behaviours.

- The reverse of inside-out cultural leadership is an outside-in perspective. In other words, how do you remain receptive as a leader to ensure that you are able to learn from those outside of your immediate microcultural context? Are you open to developing the capability of outside-in culture-shaping that comes as a result of learning from your colleagues and students? How might you foster such a mindset among your colleagues?

5.2.2 Assess your university's readiness in order to adapt your approach

- We have considered a number of L-C principles throughout this book. Assess the extent to which these principles challenge the status quo of your institution and the beliefs, practices and assumptions that characterise your institutional culture. For instance, the principle of strategic co-design with learners and staff colleagues may challenge the underlying assumptions that many of your staff hold regarding the role of academic expertise in curriculum design, the role of power relationships in the learning process, and disciplinary approaches to learning and assessment.
- Introducing L-C perspectives and looking for ways to build these capabilities in your institution may challenge assumptions, beliefs and values of student learners and staff alike. Be prepared for resistance. Some learners may resent L-C practices like co-design. Reasons for this include: they are paying fees to learn from experts; they want value for money; they may feel anxious that they are missing out on the expert knowledge

of the academic staff in their discipline if there are shifts away from traditional lecture modes and assessment; or they hold the cultural belief that a content-rich university curriculum delivered by experts will set them up for career success. Others may feel uncomfortable with shifts in power relationships between teachers and students because their cultural norms value teacher expertise and knowledge.

- Recognising your own cultural characteristics and assessing your university's readiness for cultural change are precursors to deciding how you will proceed. Case Study 7.1 illustrates one approach to working towards culture shifts incrementally, starting at the individual level and moving progressively to the systemic level. Such cultural shifts also recognise the need continually to assess institutional readiness and ways to work in and around prevailing microcultures to bring about change.

5.2.3 Be intentional, patient and courageous

- Building your culture-shaping capability as a leader takes time, intent and courage. This is particularly the case for L-C leaders who need to recognise that if they hope to introduce and embed L-C cultural qualities in their institution, there is likely to be resistance, apathy or both. Your university President might lead the way with an overtly L-C strategic plan, but shaping culture and practice around learner-centredness is quite a different prospect. It is helpful if there is a high-level strategic ambition to assist your effort. But if there isn't, don't be deterred.
- The key is to be intentional about communicating what learner-centredness is in your context, why it matters, and what it looks like in practice in your institution, whether that be in your local team, in your department, faculty, portfolio or across the institution. Role modelling plays a key part in demonstrating practical examples of learner-centredness in curriculum, in strategy documents, in the language you use, the stories you share, the symbolic gestures you use and your sensemaking practices. You may also be a cultural role model by sharing the good practices of others.
- Nudge practices (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) can be useful in this context. In Chapter 3 we learned about the benefits of nudging participants in co-design settings (Einfeld & Blomkamp, 2022) to influence their actions and decision-making. When considering nudge practices to shape culture, it is important to ensure that nudges follow ethical principles of transparency, freedom of choice and a focus on positive outcomes for

Reflect

- There is much to consider when setting out to shape the culture and microcultures in your institution. Which of the three implications in this section is most helpful as a starting point for you?
- Have you used nudge practices to bring about change in your leadership journey so far? Where have you seen nudge practices work effectively in the leadership of others who are seeking to shape cultural change?
- How would you assess the readiness of your university, faculty or team for a more L-C approach to their thinking and their work?
- To what extent are your student leaders a helpful source of support for your work in shaping L-C cultures across your institution?

participants. Nudging can be helpful in shaping culture intentionally. Case Study 7.1 illustrates some nudging principles to shape institutional culture around values. Nudge practices also align with the inside-out-outside-in leadership approach to culture-shaping mentioned in 5.2.1 above.

6 Bringing it all together: five big ideas

Five big ideas addressed in this chapter on L-C culture-shaping leadership are:

1. HE institutional cultures have much in common with other organisational cultures including rituals, shared language, symbols and habits of thinking; however they also have distinctive cultural qualities which may function as cultural vectors that pull in different directions. These include a mix of academic microcultures, boundary-spanning professional staff microcultures, learner cultural characteristics, unique missions, intellectual roots and values.
2. L-C cultures have the potential to enrich and bring a collective sense of purpose to existing HE cultures through the values of learning, connectedness, sensemaking, sustainability and purposefulness.

3. Three leadership actions to consider as you embark on your institutional culture-shaping initiatives are as follows: respect and build on existing microcultures; articulate a common purpose; and harness the unifying power of L-C values to shape culture.
4. Partnerships with student learners and staff often involve spanning cultural boundaries in order to shape culture, nudge practices and collaborate with learners at all stages of their learning journey, including graduate learners, academic staff in disciplinary microcultures, boundary-spanning professional staff in academic departments and professional staff supporting core functional areas.
5. Three practical implications for L-C culture-shaping leaders are: recognise your place in the cultural ecosystem and develop the capability of inside-out-outside-in cultural leadership; assess your university's readiness for L-C cultural shifts; and be intentional, patient and courageous in your cultural leadership.

Appreciating the DNA of your institutional culture and its many facets is core to successful leadership. This capability is particularly important for L-C leaders who may encounter resistance and other challenges in their culture-shaping endeavours. If you understand the cultural factors at play, it can help in your personal sensemaking endeavours as a leader and, in turn, enhance your resilience and effectiveness. The final chapter extends the theme of leader effectiveness by focusing on the importance of underpinning your leadership capabilities with personal and professional integrity.

Apply – discuss these ideas with peers, supervisors and mentors

- ✓ We have listed five values in our university strategic plan but they seem invisible. What steps could we take in our small department to bring the values to life and give them practical meaning in the experience of our students? Do you think it's feasible to start small with cultural change when the rest of the university doesn't seem interested in doing so?
- ✓ As a Faculty Dean, I'm concerned about the negativity of some of the staff in one of our departments. There are a few informal leaders in that group who have a strong influence on the group

culture. As a member of the senior leadership team, they see me as management and seem resistant when I talk about the importance of L-C principles. We really need to transform the culture in that department but I'm struggling to do so. Can you suggest a few steps I could take?

✓ As the Provost leading the new *Learners First Academic Strategy*, I'm thinking of involving our students in helping us to articulate what 'learners first' means to them. The language of learner-centredness will work well in this context. But how do I start the conversation with students? How do I get them more involved?

Grow as a leader

- Tip 1. As a culture-shaping leader develop your capabilities as an anthropologist seeking to understand the cultures and microcultures that characterise your institution.
- Tip 2. Your institutional values are core to shaping, shifting and sustaining healthy HE cultures. Make them explicit by identifying practical ways in which you and others see them enacted.
- Tip 3. Culture shifts involve small steps. Be patient, persistent, intentional and courageous in taking small steps that contribute to systemic cultural change over time.

8 Leading with integrity

Having considered the *why*, *who* and *what* of L-C HE leadership, Part 4 considers *how* to lead with a focus on learners. The previous chapter examined how leaders shape L-C cultures across their HE institutions. This final chapter explores the question of how to develop a L-C HE leadership mindset, shining a spotlight on leading with personal and professional integrity.

I begin with a personal leadership reflection, highlighting themes that have influenced my philosophy over more than 25 years of HE leadership in a diverse range of universities and from the vantage point of numerous leadership roles and career stages. Drawing together the themes and capabilities covered in this guide, I propose a conceptual model depicting multiple facets that characterise the L-C HE leader who leads with integrity. In this chapter, we examine what it means to be a values-based leader in HE, exploring how one leads with integrity across cultures. We also consider such factors as self-care and mindful leadership before concluding with career development tips. The aim of this chapter is to provide you with research-informed practical ideas to support you as a learner leader.

1 Learner-centred leadership and leading with integrity: making the connections

We have covered seven defining L-C HE leadership capabilities in the guide thus far (see Figure 1.1). Our focus now turns to what I consider to be the lodestar capability – that of leading with integrity. This capability becomes particularly relevant in times of ambiguity, uncertainty, crisis and change when you discover that textbook leadership solutions are inadequate.

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Thinking about how to lead with integrity combines your personal leadership philosophy with practical ways to navigate your leadership journey and professional growth. This section opens with reflections on my leadership philosophy as a starting point for encouraging you to think about what you have learned and are learning about the importance of leading with integrity. We then move to a conceptual model of the multifaceted L-C HE leader, encompassing key concepts and theoretical lenses covered in this guide.

1.1 A University leader's reflection: themes that shape my learner-centred philosophy

This guide, with its central theme of L-C HE leadership, arises from a leadership journey of over 25 years. During that time, I have held leadership roles at subject and programme level, department, institute and university executive levels across seven universities. Over the last 15 years, my pan-university leadership responsibilities have been primarily in large, multicampus universities with an emphasis on equity and social justice, combined with quality improvement and growth imperatives. As a HE change leader responsible for leading several university-wide transformations and turnarounds, I have learned the primacy of articulating the values underpinning proposed change programmes while ensuring these resonate with my own values. Aligning the values behind the 'why' of change strengthens the likelihood that you will be able to lead with conviction and integrity; and, in so doing, that you will bring your university community along with you in this process.

The institutional turnarounds that I have led have shared three common characteristics:

1. a focus on the university's financial bottom line and the imperative to increase revenue through growth in student numbers;
2. a recognition of the need to do things differently, particularly in relation to curriculum and student engagement; and
3. whole-of-university programmes of change with implications for students, staff, policies, practices and systems.

The characteristics listed above are presented in that order intentionally. These are typically the stated reasons for change. However, I have discovered the importance of analysing the root cause of these change catalysts, rather

than focusing on them as the reason for change. This has led me to focus on learner-centredness as the heart and soul of HE. You may choose to describe this differently, but in my experience, if one starts with aligning values and centring focus on the 'why' and the 'who', the priorities for the 'what' and 'how' of action soon become clear. Starting with an action plan without doing this systemic, values-based groundwork is a recipe for failure. It may create a sense of urgency and forward movement, but sustaining and embedding change systemically demands a more considered approach. Starting with 'first things first', it has been important for me to take time to observe and perceive the institutional ecosystem in its broad systemic context (see Figure 1.1). This ecosystemic perspective includes understanding the university's mission, values and people, before launching into detailed planning and execution.

Conceptualising students at the centre of one's turnaround planning is a helpful starting point. However, I have found a L-C approach, that considers students and staff as co-learners and collaborators through change processes, is an even more powerful and enduring strategy. Appreciating the value of learning collectively and discovering effective ways to navigate change is what underpins a change-adaptive university community. It keeps you going through the tough times and sustains you when surrounded by wicked problems with no simple solutions.

L-C HE leadership involves a holistic view of your university community. This includes knowing who your learners are, where they come from, what their higher education aspirations and challenges are, why they chose to come to your institution and how you can learn with and from them in times of change (see Chapter 3). Similarly, a holistic perspective entails knowing your staff colleagues, understanding their areas of expertise and what they bring to the process of change. A L-C approach is not limited to staff involved in learning and teaching or student services. It involves professional and academic staff from all parts of the organisation – whether it be research, community engagement, marketing or finance – and at all levels of experience and seniority, working together.

Prioritising the perspective of students as learners has shaped my leadership over many years. In my first year of university teaching, I was a junior lecturer responsible for a first-year undergraduate subject in Educational Psychology. I recall standing before lecture halls of 550 students, with a further 200 studying by distance. I distinctly remember a conversation with a young man at the end of a lecture one day. He stayed behind to ask a question as hundreds of his peers poured out of the lecture theatre. As we

spoke, I asked how he was finding his first few weeks at university. His reply was starkly honest:

> Well, I'm finding it a bit difficult to adjust to be honest. I don't really feel like I belong here. I'm a commuter student and there are days when I come on campus, go to classes and go home again and the only person I've talked to is the person at the cafeteria checkout counter who asks me how I'm going today.

This was a formative learning moment in my leadership journey. I was an early career leader responsible for a single subject at that stage, but that brief conversation challenged me to think about how I could make a difference. Since that time, I have looked for ways to listen to the stories of learners across year levels, courses of study and discipline areas. From that early point of teaching undergraduates, I recognised that it was important for them to do more than attend class and study. I had a role to play in facilitating their learning beyond the content of the formal syllabus. In other words, it made a material difference to perceive students as learners. I had a role to play in creating opportunities for them to learn to connect with peers from diverse backgrounds, learn how to navigate the university system, how to listen and critique the perspectives of others respectfully and in an evidence-based way and so much more.

I have come to learn the value of developing deep connections and collaborations with staff across functional areas of the university in leading turnaround programmes (Chapter 4). Drawing on the contribution of academic faculty and professional staff at all career stages has helped me to better understand the institutional ecosystem, what's working well, and what needs to improve, change, stop or commence in order to truly make inroads as a L-C leader. I have grown professionally as a result of making it a priority to seek out those who have recently started at the university with fresh eyes and enthusiasm, together with those who have worked in the institution for many years, having watched many leaders come and go, each with their particular focus and change agenda. Hearing the views of experienced leaders in the organisation – about what's been attempted before, what they believe will and won't work – has underpinned my own systemic sensemaking processes. Listening to members of the broader university ecosystem has also been key. This includes community stakeholders, professional bodies, donors, politicians and regulators. All play a role in informing HE change leadership.

Reflect

- How would you summarise your leadership philosophy?
- As a leader in times of change, whose perspectives do you listen to and prioritise? What have you learned as a result? Are there any perspectives missing?
- In what ways do you make time to listen to the learners of your institution – students and staff – when you're very busy in the middle of leading a change programme?

Another dimension of my leadership philosophy is this: while much change leadership energy is quite rightly focused on the action plans and goals, starting with who I am as leader is foundational to bringing people with me, whether at institution level or in a local team context. This involves taking a holistic approach to *how* I lead through a major change process. My effectiveness as a HE leader is influenced by my mindset, my values, how I perceive the organisation and its people, how I behave and engage with others, and how I care for myself and others in my institutional community. At the core of *how* to lead effectively is what I believe to be the most fundamental attribute of a L-C HE leader: leading with integrity.

The next section presents a conceptual model that synthesises the key factors that have shaped my leadership philosophy over time. They are informed by research covered throughout this guide, and lessons learned about the enduring impact of learner-centredness and the centrality of integrity in leadership.

1.2 Becoming a multifaceted learner-centred leader with integrity: a conceptual model

Building on the seven core leadership capabilities covered thus far, leading with integrity is a foundational capability on which each builds. Leading with integrity is characterised by a mindset, a way of thinking, behaving and relating to self and others that demonstrates holistic integration of your personal and professional values. In the context of L-C HE leadership, this integrated approach is represented in Figure 8.1.

As depicted in Figure 8.1, the L-C HE leader who leads with integrity is multifaceted in their approach. They develop in multiple directions by reaching out into the system of their institution and beyond. In turn, they

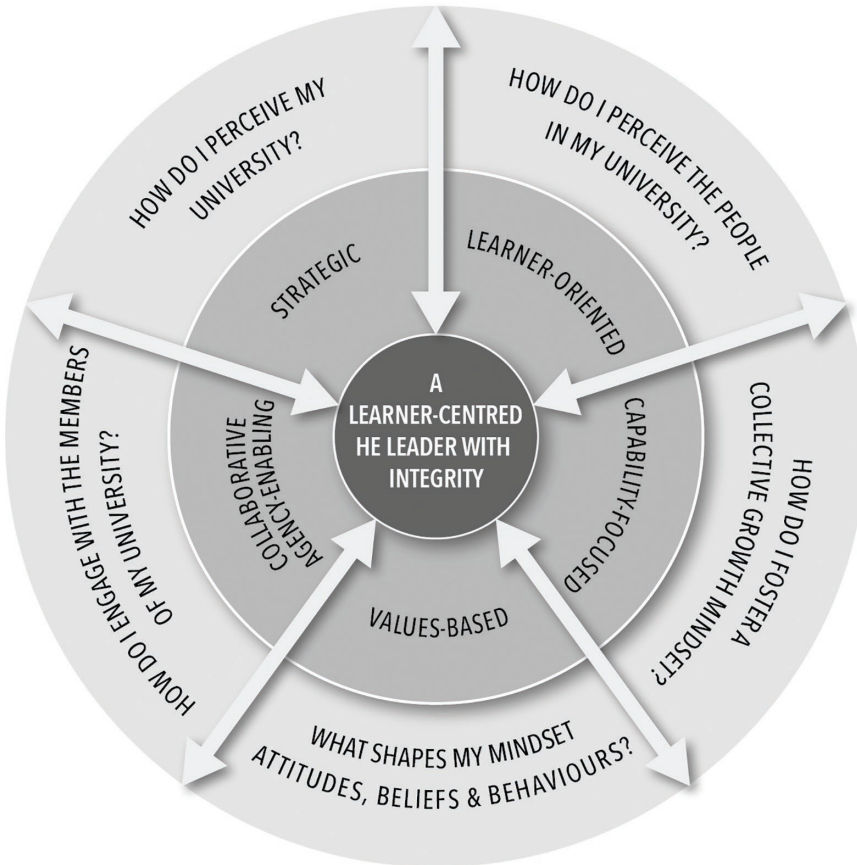

Figure 8.1 The multifaceted learner-centred leader

bring their learning back to shape their personal and professional growth as a leader. They are curious and intentional, asking probing questions of themselves and others to challenge their own perceptions and their approach to leadership. They are evidence-based, drawing on a range of theoretical frameworks and research-based approaches to inform their leadership practice. The L-C HE leader is simultaneously:

i. Values-based: They appreciate the primacy of values in their leadership. This includes aligning personal and professional values that, in turn, shape their mindset, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. It also includes being intentional about drawing out the values of the institution, making them explicit, encouraging students and staff to share stories of values in

action as part of their lived experience. The L-C HE leader understands that when stress levels are at their highest and conflict arises, collective understanding and application of values such as well-being, respect, humility, collegiality and accountability can bring a student and staff community together when other forces threaten to pull them apart.

ii. Systemic and strategic: Perceiving their HE institution as an ecological system that is interdependent and multilayered shapes their thinking, actions and relationships. They develop a keen institutional awareness by adopting a systemic outside-in-and-inside-out approach to leadership. In other words, learning about the organisational system and its people shapes the L-C HE leader's understanding and learning. In turn, they look for ways to reach out into the system to connect with others, shape culture, sensemake and sense-give collaboratively.

iii. Learner-oriented: They perceive themselves and the people of their university as learners who collectively form part of a learning organisation. While students are most often the focal point for L-C HE leaders, there is benefit in perceiving of staff, including leaders, as learners especially during times of continuous change and crisis. Developing and role modelling this learner-oriented approach simultaneously demonstrates respect for the value of expertise and the value of learning to build organisational, team and individual well-being. L-C HE leaders lead from a L-C place across the system rather than in a hierarchical fashion from top-down into the institutional system. They go out to learn from their organisational system and all its constituent parts on a regular basis. That learning plays a key role in shaping their leadership.

iv. Capability-focused: Recognising that adaptive leadership (Heifetz, Linksy & Grashow, 2009) demands a range of capabilities rather than technical skills these leaders look for ways to develop their own capability and to build the capability of the students and staff in their institution to foster a collective growth mindset. This, in turn, fosters resilience across the university community, enhancing the ability of departments, small groups and individuals to manage the waves of change, crisis, uncertainty and ambiguity that surround them daily.

v. Collaborative and agentic: The L-C HE leader has learned that their success as a leader depends on others. Even for those with positional power and leadership titles, leadership through influence and collaboration with others is fundamental. This involves looking for ways to co-develop, co-design and co-create strategy, to partner with students and to foster

agency among students, staff and peer leaders. Co-sensing (Scharmer & von Ameln, 2019) forms an important part of this leadership facet as L-C leaders collaborate with students, staff and peer leaders to sensemake and sense-give (see Chapter 7), especially when the unexpected occurs and new ways of working and interpreting the world are required.

Research Case Study 8.1 considers the multiple facets of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) leadership, drawing on the conceptual model outlined in Figure 8.1.

Reflect

- What are the values that underpin your leadership?
- Looking at Figure 8.1 are there any leadership facets you would add, remove or augment?
- Which leadership facet(s) do you want to develop further in the year ahead?
- Would you describe yourself as an intellectually curious leader? What sorts of challenging questions do you ask yourself about your leadership and its effectiveness? Who supports you as a trustworthy 'sounding board' as you explore ways to grow as a leader?

Research Case Study 8.1 Multifaceted leadership for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

(Simmons & Taylor, 2019)

Simmons and Taylor (2019) examine the leadership characteristics of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) leadership. Their exploratory study uncovers some of the enablers and challenges encountered by SoTL leaders in HE. As illustrated below, the multifaceted model of L-C HE leaders (see Figure 8.1) is a useful way to analyse key SoTL leadership issues and to identify gaps to be addressed.

The five facets of L-C HE leadership are illustrated in this research case study as follows:

i. Values-based: a number of values underpin the leadership of participants in this study. These include the scholarly values of SoTL leaders with respect to the scholarship of learning and teaching. The researchers reflect their own values, noting respect for the collective leadership roles of students and staff: 'Faculty, educational developers, administrators, and students can all act as leaders in promoting, sustaining, and providing leadership for SoTL' (p.1).
ii. Systemic and strategic: the authors acknowledge that academic work and SoTL practices take place in an ecological system. Their conceptual framework reflects multiple systemic layers from micro individual classrooms to macro institutional and mega disciplinary and national systemic levels.
iii. Learner-oriented: SoTL prioritises deep understanding of the quality of students' learning through research and practice designed to enhance SoTL inquiry. How academic faculty learn about good practice in teaching and assessment is another dimension of SoTL.
iv. Capability-focused: this study found building personal SoTL leadership capability was a key theme identified by academic faculty respondents, while educational developers prioritise colleagues' professional learning and capability development.
v. Collaborative and agentic: the importance of building community and support for networks of colleagues is identified as an enabler of fostering a culture that values SoTL. The study found evidence of agency and SoTL leadership at the micro classroom level, but many respondents felt unsupported in relation to SoTL activities at the department and institutional levels. They did not feel they were part of a SoTL community; nor did they perceive they had managers to support them. There was little evidence of agency in shaping a SoTL culture among respondents.

The authors conclude that there is merit in considering distributed leadership and networks of colleagues who bridge the divide between departments across the institution. This would help to promote SoTL practices and to shape institutional cultures that value and recognise SoTL.

Apply the case study: what would you do?

- ✓ If you are a SoTL leader, how do the challenges identified in this research case study resonate with your experience?
- ✓ How can you use the five facets of L-C HE leadership to critically examine your own leadership approaches?
- ✓ When leading a significant change initiative, such as embedding SoTL in your university, which leadership facets (see Figure 8.1) are most important for you?

Leading with integrity in HE contexts encompasses the capabilities of strategic sensemaking, adaptive leadership practices, a focus on agency and a leadership growth mindset. These leadership facets are not siloed within the leader. They are integrated. They co-exist and are mutually strengthened in the L-C HE leader who looks for ways to develop and grow. At times, one facet may be more prominent and others more tacit, but they operate simultaneously and interdependently to nourish you as a leader and to enhance your effectiveness.

2 More about leader integrity and leading with integrity

Some describe leader integrity as a virtue, others as a value, yet others as a quality that adds meaning to values (Christie, 2014). Suffice to say there is a strong link between your values as a HE leader and your integrity. This section explores research on selected dimensions of leader integrity and the connections between your values and your identity as a leader.

2.1 Research on leader integrity

Research on leader integrity points to the important role played by the perceptions of those with whom the leader works, be they peers, students, colleagues or community members observing from a distance. A short-hand definition of leader integrity is perceived alignment between a leader's words and actions. In fact, perceptions of a leader's integrity are multidimensional (Moorman, Blakely & Darnold, 2018). They include perceptions of a leader's behavioural integrity, as well as perceptions of their moral integrity and values (Tomlinson et al., 2014).

Following are some of the leader integrity dimensions that Moorman and colleagues (2013) explored in HE contexts. These researchers surveyed a group of undergraduate business students in three US universities. The students were asked to think about a leader whom they had followed recently and to respond to questions about perceptions of that leader's integrity. The dimensions of leader integrity investigated were (p.434):

- moral integrity: the leader acts to benefit the greater good, treats people fairly, treats people with care and respect, is honest;
- behavioural integrity: the leader does what they say they will do, delivers on promises; and
- leader consistency: the leader does the right thing even when unpopular, stands by principles whatever the price, acts on values no matter the cost, isn't afraid to stand up for their beliefs.

The researchers found that perceptions of a leader's moral integrity and the consistency between their words and behaviours shape judgements about their integrity and, in turn, predict levels of trust in the leader.

Integrity, often equated with honesty, is considered a hallmark of effective leaders (Kouzes & Posner, 2023). It is a multi-level construct (Palanski & Yammarino, 2009) that is connected to trust and a perception of alignment

Reflect

- Thinking about a leader with whom you have worked, how would you describe their integrity as a leader, applying the measures used in this research?
- How would you rate your own leadership integrity against these dimensions? Is there a time when you have failed to deliver on a leadership commitment or promise? How did you handle the situation? Did you communicate the reason for this outcome?
- Do you have a trusted colleague, mentor or advisor with whom to discuss some of the challenges of standing by your principles and aligning your words, values and actions as a leader with integrity?
- Do you think the interpretation of these leader integrity dimensions (e.g., the leader does the right thing) varies across social and cultural or institutional contexts?

between the leader's words and actions. Leader integrity manifests itself when there is consistency and alignment between a leader's values, societal values and a leader's behaviour over time and across contexts (Dunn, 2009). It's worth noting here that there are times when alignment between leadership values and behaviours results not in ethical leadership but in destructive, narcissistic leadership. For example, some leaders may be driven by values like power, status, wealth and prestige. This is likely to result in toxic and self-absorbed leadership behaviours. Their values and leadership behaviours do indeed align, but their values run counter to prevailing social values of justice and democracy (Bauman, 2013).

As a L-C HE leader, the peers, senior executive leaders, students and staff of your institution will perceive your leadership in a range of ways. Your connections with them involve establishing affective ties as you work together to build trust-based relationships in your work. Your day-to-day leadership will also result in their cognitive judgements about whether you are reliable, dependable and trustworthy (Moorman, Blakely & Darnold, 2018). These judgements and perceptions of how you lead will shape the views that your colleagues and students have of your integrity as a leader.

Research also points to a strong link between your leadership values and your identity, that is, whom you believe yourself to be and whom you want to become (Bauman, 2013). As you deepen your awareness of integrity and how it manifests itself in your leadership, it is helpful to remind yourself that leadership is as much about self-knowledge, self-awareness and self-care as it is about engaging with others and sensemaking in the system in which you lead. Making time to articulate your personal and professional values, while becoming more aware of how you engage with others affectively and behaviourally through your leadership, is time well spent. Leading with integrity is about bringing the whole person to the work of leadership. Integrity incorporates your daily leadership practices and how you conduct yourself in all situations and over time. It's about how you live your values and, in turn, how you foster trust.

2.2 Leading with integrity across cultures and contexts

Martin and colleagues (2013) examined perceptions of what it means to lead with integrity across six nations, namely Austria, China (PRC), Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland and the US. The following leadership integrity characteristics emerged most prominently across all six nations: consistency

between values and behaviour; consistency between words and actions; fair and just behaviour; honesty; and being guided by a strong personal moral code and values. The researchers found strong links among these qualities. In other words, it wasn't sufficient to demonstrate just one of these characteristics. Instead, leading with integrity involves alignment between the leader's values, behaviours and moral convictions (p.456).

Some national differences also emerged in this study of what it means to lead with integrity across cultural contexts. For example, while sense of responsibility for and towards others was deemed important by more than half of respondents in Germany, Austria, China and Hong Kong, it was not mentioned by respondents in the US or Ireland. Openness and transparency was identified as an important leadership value by almost half of the respondents from Ireland, but it did not appear in responses from Germany, China or Austria.

Leading in the area of sustainability education in HE provides a useful illustration of what it means to lead with integrity. Leaders in this field have the opportunity to make connections between institutional values and their own leadership values in educating leaders of the future. Research Case Study 8.2 explores the characteristics of academic leaders in Malaysian and Japanese universities with a strategic commitment to the values underpinning the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Case Study 8.2 Learner-centred leaders educating for sustainability across cultures

(Source: Ghasemy, Elwood & Scott, 2023)

Ghasemy and colleagues (2023) examined the characteristics of Education for Sustainability academic leadership (EfS) among 664 leaders in Malaysian and Japanese public and private universities. EfS leaders are those committed to embedding the United Nations SDGs in universities and colleges in order to develop 'change capable, sustainability literate, inventive and morally robust graduates' (p.603). The case study applied the academic leadership capability framework of Scott and colleagues (2008, see Chapter 1) in the context of EfS leadership across several domains, including: personal,

interpersonal and intellectual leadership capabilities, managerial skills and knowledge.

Findings reveal that:

- leadership capabilities are more important than managerial skills and knowledge in this sample;
- just-in-time, just-for-me learning from fellow leaders who have a little more experience and can share lessons learned is valued;
- among the highest-ranked EfS leadership capabilities were: self-awareness, empathy, flexibility and responsiveness;
- some differences emerged from the comparative analysis of Malaysian and Japanese respondents, highlighting the importance of context-appropriate approaches to appointing and supporting EfS change leaders through professional learning and development.

This case study illustrates well the multiple facets of learner-centred leaders (see Figure 8.1) with a commitment to Education for Sustainability (EfS), as illustrated below:

i. Values-based: commitment to leadership, passion for learning and teaching, transparency and honesty are highly regarded values in EfS leaders (p.629).
ii. Systemic and strategic: EfS leaders need to be strategic in their approach to embedding the SDGs at local and institutional levels (p.630).
iii. Learner-oriented: effective EfS leaders are first and foremost committed to equipping graduates with sustainability capabilities to enable them to thrive in a rapidly changing world (p.603).
iv. Capability-focused: these learning leaders adopt a growth mindset by learning from others, learning through practice, are self-motivated (p.626) and equip their colleagues to learn effectively through change processes (p.618).
v. Collaborative and agentic: empathising, engaging with and empowering colleagues through change processes to embed the SDGs is highly rated among this sample of EfS leaders (p.610).

Apply: What Would You Do?

- ✓ This study highlights the importance of self-awareness, empathy, flexibility and responsiveness in EfS leaders. How well do these capabilities align with those you would expect to see in one who leads with integrity in your university?
- ✓ In this study, leading with integrity is illustrated through the highly rated values of transparency and honesty among EfS leaders. In what ways can you apply these principles in your L-C HE leadership?

2.3 Leading with integrity and courage in higher education – what's the connection?

A further dimension of leading with integrity is that of courage in leadership. Leadership perseverance and resilience in the face of adversity is a particularly timely leadership quality to reflect on in a post-global pandemic context. Courage is conceived as a virtue and a behaviour (Palanski, Cullen, Gentry & Nichols, 2015). These researchers contend that behavioural integrity – that is, alignment of words and actions – is an antecedent to behavioural courage, arguing that this is particularly pertinent in times of adversity, crisis and challenge.

In an analysis of leadership in UK universities, Denney (2021) contends that the leadership values that we had before the global pandemic are not the values that will take us into the future. Denney calls for compassionate leadership, resilience and courage in resisting the pressure to prioritise league-table performance over systemic inequity and the tendency to revert to pre-pandemic business models that prioritise competition for students and financial challenges.

The post-pandemic environment calls for new ways of approaching leadership in HE. We face new challenges and a working and learning environment that we haven't encountered before. Lieberman (2023) reflects on the experience of leading the University of La Verne, California, during and post-pandemic, outlining several leadership lessons revolving around courage, including:

- Anticipate the unexpected, plan for the worst-case scenario with courage, and be prepared for the unexpected.

- Communicate clearly, simply and frequently: Lieberman used the analogy 'wearing bifocals' to describe the dual task of addressing short-term threats while ensuring medium- to long-term sustainability. He repeated the 'we must wear bifocals' phrase in nearly every communication. It became a mantra that reminded students, staff and community of the need to focus on the present and the future simultaneously.
- First things first – prioritise health and safety for all, student retention and success, and the quality of education, along with support of all types including financial, equity principles and institutional sustainability.
- Build a strong team around you. It is impossible for one leader to implement a bifocal strategy.
- Be courageous in the face of public scepticism about the value of HE.
- Continue to innovate to build future sustainability.
- Connect with all members of the university community and the broader community.
- Be strategic, communicate with honesty and make the most of the opportunity to create 'something exciting and fresh…Embrace the challenge – with eyes wide open and bifocals in place' (p.29).

This example of courageous institutional leadership mirrors the countless similar examples of courage in crisis that we witnessed in HE institutions across the globe. I encourage you to think about the examples of courageous leadership that you witnessed as a way to remember and learn from this time of global crisis and resilience in action.

Reflect

- In what ways do these crisis leadership lessons reflect the experience of your institution during and post-pandemic?
- What examples of courageous leadership did you see during the global pandemic?
- Think of a time when you were called on to lead with courage. What did you learn from that experience?

3 Leading with integrity in higher education: the role of self-care in your leadership journey

Let's take a moment to look beyond your day-to-day leadership activities, surrounded by people, conversing with students, responding to emails, chairing meetings, making tough decisions, preparing communications or drafting documents that will shape institutional strategy. My interest in this chapter is the personal dimension of leadership – who you are as person and how you are when you're travelling home at the end of a long day, when you wake in the morning or spend time reflecting on the purpose of your leadership.

3.1 Mindful leadership

While much of your leadership activity is outward-facing, self-care is an important leadership capability that is core to your integrity and relatively rarely discussed. For HE leaders this is particularly the case as you spend time focusing on the many needs of students and staff and the expectations that peer and senior leaders have of you and your leadership.

Some years ago, I came across Sinclair's (2016) work on mindfulness and leadership. No doubt you have similar go-to authors or favourite thought leaders who stop you in your leadership tracks and encourage you to take time out to reflect, read and renew. I appreciated Sinclair's perspective on leadership as a practice that involves the whole person, cultivating awareness, being compassionate to self and others, and taking time to think about what brings you fulfilment as a leader. Mindfulness is by no means a new concept or practice. Most instructive for my approach to leadership are the principles of living in the present, stepping out of complexity and seeming chaos to observe what is happening around you, being aware of your emotional and physical responses as you observe, and being intentional about time to care for your own well-being and your professional learning as a HE leader.

Mindfulness and sensemaking are closely connected (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). The mental frameworks that you develop and adapt to make sense of complex, unexpected and sometimes unprecedented changes in your university context require clear thinking, focus and presence. Before being able to lead others to make sense of the seemingly constant flux in which they find themselves, you need to be equipped to make sense of the puzzle

pieces in calm, mindful ways. Paying attention to various dimensions of self-care will make a substantial positive difference to who you are as a leader.

3.2 Dimensions of leadership self-care

Self-care involves preserving, maintaining and enhancing your physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health. These dimensions are unique to each leader, shaping who you are and how you lead. Unfortunately, many leaders downplay these self-care dimensions of their leadership. The prevailing thought patterns go something like this: *if I just keep pushing on I'll be ok; I need to finish these emails; the deadline for that paper is tomorrow so I'll stay up late tonight; I'll skip the gym session tomorrow morning to read the papers for my meeting first thing in the morning; and I'll need to cancel my dinner plans to attend that cyber-security webinar on Wednesday.*

While these work commitments and deadlines apply to all, leaders contend with added layers of complexity arising from the responsibilities of their role. This guide is not intended to be a self-help book but it is a reminder that leading with integrity starts with who you are and how you are as a person first and foremost. From a position of personal strength, you will be better able to maintain your own well-being as a L-C HE leader committed to enabling and empowering students, staff, peers and senior leaders in your institution.

Some key dimensions of self-care include carving out time for family, friends, creative pursuits, hobbies, sport or personal fitness. Often these are the first casualties during intense times of stress, anxiety and crisis in your leadership journey. You may be able to manage for a time under these conditions, but ultimately one pays the price for failing to attend to self-care priorities. Again, this applies to all but it is particularly relevant to leaders in educational contexts who have a duty of care to students, who are people-centred and who juggle competing priorities of academic, well-being and financial sustainability imperatives in their HE setting.

The three Rs of leadership self-care are a useful reminder of ways to strengthen the personal dimensions underpinning your leadership:

i. Rest: make time for physical, mental and emotional rest away from your work context, your mobile devices, emails and social media. Rest may come in various forms, including taking a holiday, cycling with friends, prioritising time for personal reading or recalibrating your sleep patterns.

You are a role model to those around you. Your ability to manage your own well-being is a powerful example for others to follow.

ii. Regenerate: be intentional about replenishing your physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional reserves. Regeneration is a very personal process. You need to determine what this looks like for you and your leadership over time. Some leaders are replenished by prioritising creative pursuits like music or reading, outdoor walks, recalibrating their diet and exercise routine or prioritising time with family and friends. As a leader in HE, regenerating intellectually may include scholarly reading or writing or investing in professional learning programmes. Each year I make a plan for the areas of professional development I want to pursue. During COVID, for example, I completed an online short course on crisis leadership. Look for ways to replenish your stock of leadership ideas and resources. Some of the most rewarding professional development may come from learning about leadership theories and practices in other industries. This has been my experience and it has challenged me to think differently about my role, particularly in relation to strategy and change leadership.

iii. Reach out: prioritise connections that will add to your growth and development as a leader. This may include networking with peers within and beyond your university and, indeed, beyond the HE sector. Learn from others, and ask them to hold you accountable for your own learning and development as a leader. Four ways to reach out include:

    a. seek out a mentor who guides, advises, shares their experience and knowledge, listens to you in a confidential setting, and extends your leadership capabilities through wise and challenging questions. Typically, mentors are selected because of their longevity and leadership experience. I have also experienced insightful mentoring from younger thought leaders – often students- who have challenged my thinking, advised me and shared their generational experience and knowledge;
    b. consider a leadership or executive coach who takes on a more formal client-coach relationship, often funded by your institution, to invest in developing your leadership capabilities through structured sessions that usually focus on specific performance goals;
    c. identify a career sponsor. This is a person with professional standing, influence and networks who is willing to advocate and vouch for

Reflect

- What forms of 'rest' do you prioritise as part of your leadership self-care plan?
- When did you last invest in your own leadership regeneration? What form did that take and what impact did it have on your leadership effectiveness?
- Thinking about the importance of reaching out to a mentor, networks of fellow leaders, a coach or a sponsor, have you tried any of these strategies? What works best in your experience? Would you consider inviting a younger mentor to challenge your thinking and leadership practice?

you as a leader, creating new and expanded leadership opportunities, including more advanced leadership roles or extending your networks through membership of external governing boards and the like; and

d. invest time in your own personal leadership journey. This includes reaching out to those who can suggest appropriate professional learning and career development opportunities.

The more senior your HE leadership role, the more responsibility you have, the greater the need to prioritise a self-care programme, whatever that means for you. The key is being mindful and intentional about this priority in order to be present, well and focused in your leadership of others. In times of stress and crisis situations, it is unlikely that you will have time to think about these three Rs, so now is the time to create positive self-care habits as a L-C HE leader that will sustain you and those you lead in challenging times.

4 Implications and tips for your leadership toolkit

I was recently asked what I would include in a letter to my younger leader self. This guide captures the substance of such a letter which would conclude with the following tips.

i. Articulate, align and enact values:

- combine leadership integrity with leadership courage;
- prioritise consistency between words and actions, build trust into each interaction;
- be sure of the alignment of your values with those of your institution – if there's a disconnect, don't ignore it; and
- you play an important role in articulating and shaping the values of your institution, making them a reality in the lives of your university community.

ii. Shape systems not siloes:

- cultivate your helicopter perspective – make time to step outside your day-to-day schedule to observe your institutional system regularly;
- examine your university's ecosystem through multiple lenses, seek out different viewpoints and be sure to listen to the often absent voices;
- there will be many siloes in your institution – individuals, teams and departments working in siloed ways; and
- be aware of the siloes and focus on ways to strengthen the system by cultivating an ecosystem of networks and connections within your university.

iii. Focus on learners:

- the people in your university community will bring some of the greatest challenges and the greatest joys in your leadership. They will shape your leadership purpose and give you a reason for getting up in the morning to do it all again;
- lead with a focus on students as learners who have an insatiable curiosity and capabilities that will exceed your greatest expectations;
- create and co-create opportunities for them to learn well beyond the familiar curriculum content, for this will be the strongest launching pad for life, learning and work;
- your colleagues are simultaneously experts and learners – respect and learn from their expertise and invest in a culture of learning together in times of exponential change; and
- be a learner leader who listens with humility; learns from students, colleagues, mentors and others; and leads with conviction and confidence while admitting to not knowing all the answers.

iv. Connect collaboratively

- recognise the primacy of strategy co-design coupled with collaborative implementation;
- connect with members of your university through collaborative sensemaking and sense-giving (see Chapter 1); and
- sustain one another as you encounter rapidly changing social environments, new technologies, uncertain career prospects, global and environmental crises and so much more.

v. Expand capabilities

- foster a challenging growth mindset in your own leadership and across your organisation;
- invest in capability development among students and colleagues in all parts of your university;
- set the example as a learner leader. Read widely, listen intently and learn purposefully;
- take a scholarly, research-informed approach to your L-C HE leadership practice; and
- make time for creative pursuits beyond work to care for your mental health and well-being.

5 Bringing it all together

This chapter addresses the eighth and final L-C HE leadership capability – leading with integrity. As illustrated in Figure 8.2, integrity is the lode star of L-C leadership. It guides your sensemaking and reminds you of your true north as a leader committed to learners and learning. Values keep you afloat, they provide the ballast that improves your stability as a leader. Each of the six capabilities addressed in Parts 1–3 of this guide equips you for the leadership journey while developing your culture-shaping capability is the organisational spinnaker that defines your progress, momentum and direction.

No doubt you will develop bespoke leadership metaphors that best suit your context. I encourage you to do so as you craft your leadership story and thrive on the leadership journey.

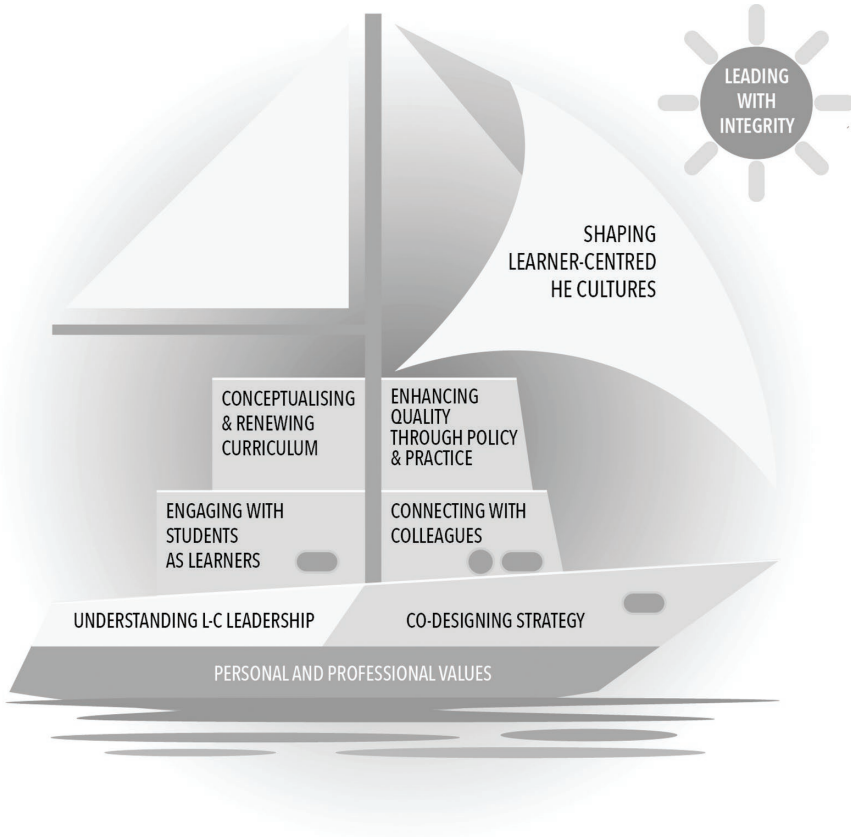

Figure 8.2 Learner-centred leadership capabilities: putting it all together

Apply – discuss these ideas with peers, supervisors and mentors

- ✓ As Provost, I'd like to start a conversation among my leadership group about what it means to each of them to be a L-C HE leader who leads with integrity. I'm keen to share what I have learned and to talk about how we can support one another in our respective leadership journeys. How do I start this conversation, knowing that the leaders in this group are at various stages of career maturity – some are experienced Faculty Deans, others are leading professional staff portfolios and may not be keen to speak up?

- ✓ This chapter highlights the importance of carving out time for my own leadership development and for self-care as a leader. I'm really struggling to find time to do this with all the emails and meetings I have to attend. Do you have any suggestions to guide me?
- ✓ I've drafted my leadership philosophy and it's been useful to articulate my guiding leadership values. I'd like to talk this over with a couple of colleagues to share what I've learned and hear their perspective. Some of my peers have told me they don't see much point in discussing leadership values. It's not a conversation topic that arises very often in our department. Do you have any advice for me?

Grow as a leader

- Tip 1. Write down your leadership philosophy as a reminder of your leadership purpose; revisit it at least once a year, update it and observe your growth and development as a leader.
- Tip 2. Rest, regenerate and reach out to mentors, sponsors, coaches and fellow traveller leaders to sustain yourself physically, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally.
- Tip 3. Nurture the many facets of your leadership, anchored in the integrity and values that will carry you through your leadership journey.

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Index

Note: **Bold** page numbers refer to tables and *italic* page numbers refer to figures.

academic: citizenship 102; developer 118, 205, 206; development 167, 205, 207; leadership 11, 12, 225; microcultures 95, 188, 198–200, 210; progression 100–103
academic leaders 23, 26, 118, 123, 127, 133, 153; characteristics of 11–12
academic promotion 101, 103, 177; policies 88, 100, 102, 166
academy 202
administrative staff 12, 49, 88–90, 110, 188
Adonis, A. 200
agency 8, 11, 19, 35, 43, 48, 59, 61, 62, 66, 68, 81, 85, 86, 106, 108, 111, 112, 153, 154, 156, 157, 200, 202, 220–222; critical 121; human 16, 173; individual 16, 193; and learner-centredness, link between 16–17; staff 16, 77, 105, 133; student 16, 77; through strengths-based leadership, developing 100–102
agentic co-creation 18–20
Agusdinata, D. 51, 53
alignment 32, 222–227, 233
Ancona, D. 7
anthropologist 86, 186, 187, 212
assessed curriculum **124**
assumptions 75, 95, 184, 185, 201, 208
Astin, A. 64
Australian Catholic University: staff capability framework 103

Barnett, R. 6
behavioural norms 185
beliefs 13, 157, 184, 185, 206, 208, 209, 218, 223
block model 136, 137, 146, 147
Bols, A. 66
boundary spanners 106
Bowden, J. 65

capability frameworks 88, 100, 103, 104, 112, 225
cartography metaphor 7
change leader 50, 54, 137, 149, 214, 216, 217, 226, 231
coaching 104, 105
co-curriculum 124–126, 152
co-design 15, 19, 26, 61, 69–71, 73, 76, 80, 85, 113, 117, 132, 133, 138, 163, 171, 178, 180, 193, 194, 196, 200, 202, 208, 209, 219, 234; learner-centred strategy, in higher education 28–55; making sense of quality through 167–168

co-implementation 17, 28, 30, 35, 46–54, **47**, 69, 76, 78, 85
colleagues, as learner-centred higher education leader 54–55, 73, 88–113; academic progression 100–103; academic tribes 94–96; capability frameworks 103–104; complexity 88–94; leadership principles 110–111; microcultures 94–96; nomads 94–96; professional workforce 96–97; promotion 100–103; strengths-based leadership 104–106; third space professionals 97–99; well-being, prioritising 106–110
collegial 99, 104, 110–113, 158, 193, 199, 219; complexity, in higher education 88–94
communication 8, 10, 46, 51, 67, 68, 77, 84, 86, 106, 109, 111, 112, 126, 142, 157, 158, 165, 167, 175, 179, 184, 190, 193, 204, 205, 228, 229
community led 129
connected culture 193
consensus 50, 139, 144, 185, 186
constructive disagreement 40, 50, 51
contemporary higher education student characteristics 60–61
contested curriculum 117, 118, 133, 143, 148
co-production 59, 72, 80, 85
courageous leadership 129, 209–210, 228
crowded curriculum 143
culturally sensitive curriculum 130–132
culture/cultural: boundaries 98, 186–188, 205–206, 211; clash 204; connected 193; disciplinary 33, 89, 95, 133, 143, 145, 188; ecosystem 207–208, 211; healthy 187, 190, 203; learner-centred 8, 16, 94, 192–197, 207–210; learning 193; microcultures 22, 89, 94, 95, 100, 112, 113, 183–189, 192, 193, 198–200, 205, 207–212; norms 43, 209; practices 187, 188, 201; purposeful 193; safety 193; sensemaking 7, 193; shaper 50, 54; shift 196, 203–206, 209, 212; siloed 144; sustainable 193, 206; toxic 200, 224; transformation 200; vector(s) 191, *191*, 192, 197, 210; well-being 202–203; work 205–206
culture-shaping 183, 186, 187, 189, 192–197, *197*, 202–212, 234; common purpose of 200–201; leaders, practical implications for 206–210; partnering with student learners and colleagues in 202–206; recursive journey of 194–197, *197*; respect and build on institutional microcultures 198–200; unifying power of learner-centred values to shape culture, harnessing 201–202
currere 118, 121, 148
curriculum: assessed **124**; change leadership 135–137, *135*, 149–151, **149–150**; coherence and connectedness, fostering 147–148; contested 117, 118, 133, 143, 148; crowded 143; culturally sensitive 130–132; definitions of 123–128; design 69, 118, 120, 121, 125, 132, *135*, 137, 141, 146, 147, 208; designed **124**; dimensions of 123–128, **124**; ecosystem 128–129; educational relevance, enhancing 148–149; as enabler of holistic perspectives 120–121; encouraging innovation through 148–149; engaging with industry and community 134; as ever for enhancement 146–149; experienced **124**; extra-curriculum 125, 127, 144, 151, 152; hidden **124**; implemented **124**; inclusive 129–130; as journey 121; as learner-centred leader 117–128; as lens 121;

as lever for engagement 128–134; null **124**; perspectives of 119–123, **122**; purposes of 119–123, **122**, *123*; quality of learner experiences and outcomes, enhancing 146–147; reform 136; refresh 136; renewal (*see* curriculum renewal); review 136; staff to engage students in 133–134; students as learners in 132–133; transformation 136–137
curriculum renewal 17, 18, 69, 117–152; capability gaps 141–142; challenges to 138–146; competing priorities 140–141; crowded curriculum 143; external regulatory forces 145–146; fragmentation 143; hierarchical power structures 143–147; purposeful, with learners in mind 138; resistance 144–145; resources for 141; risks associated with 138–146; siloed cultures 144; university-wide 139–140; weak processes 142
curriculum transformation programme 136, 137
customs 135, 159, 184

deep listening 130
designed curriculum **124**
design thinking 36, 52, 125, 126; application to co-design learning and teaching strategy 37–41; strategy 37–41
differentiation 185, 187, 192
disciplinary culture 33, 89, 95, 133, 143, 145, 188
discipline 4, 10, 11, 39, 49, 52, 62, 63, 76, 89–91, 95, 119, 125, 131, 133, 136, 139, 144, 187, 209, 216
distributed leadership 9, 110, 121
diversity 6, 31, 48, 60, 66, 74, 79, 89, 92, 168, 170, 177
Dollinger, M. 70
Dweck, C. 9

ecological university 6
ecosystem: HE leadership in 5–6; mapping 23–26, *25*
Educator Track 102
Embrace HE programme 80
Emmanuel, T. 80
empathy 52, 111, 226, 227
evidence-based 3, 5, 64, 80, 140, 165, 166, 170, 216, 218
experienced curriculum **124**
extra-curricular 20, 118, 125, 128, 147
extra-curriculum 125, 127, 144, 151, 152

flotilla 198, 201, 202
formal leadership 190, 191
fragmentation 95, 96, 143, 186, 187, 192

Gao, Z. 66
Ghasemy, M. 225
Gigliotti, R. 10
graduate learners 202–203, 211
growth mindset 5, 9, 20–21, 26, 27, 184, 219, 222, 226, 234

Healey, M. 69, 74
healthy culture 187, 190, 203
hidden curriculum **124**
higher education student constructs 61–64
Hildesheim, C. 157
human-centred design 36, 39, 51

identity 31, 60–62, 79, 93, 96, 126, 132, 186, 189, 198, 199, 205, 222, 224
implemented curriculum **124**
inclusion 31, 66, 104, 125, 127, 168, 170
inclusive curriculum 129–130
influence 5, 9, 10, 15, 16, 18, 20, 31–33, 49, 54, 65, 84, 88, 89, 93, 111, 112, 119, 168, 171, 180, 186, 188, 189, 192, 197, 207, 209, 211, 213, 217, 219, 231

informal leadership 26
innovation 4, 14, 15, 38, 79, 80, 93, 99, 120, 126, 133, 145, 148–149, 152, 161, 179
inside-out leadership 207
inside-out-outside-in leadership 208, 211
institutional readiness 209
integration 147, 185, 187, 192, 217
intentional leadership 4, 67, 75, 209–210

Kandiko-Howson, C. 147
Kinchin, I. 6, 16
King, E. 126
Kingsbury, M. 147
Krause, K. 84

leader-as-coach approach 105
leader integrity 222–224
leadership: courageous 129, 228; definition of 9–10; distributed 6, 110, 121; formal 190, 191; informal 26; inside-out 207; inside-out-outside-in 208, 211; intentional 4, 67, 75, 209–210; journey of newly appointed leaders 23; learner-centred, in higher education 3–27; mindful 229–230; patient 209–210; qualities of 13; relational 111; self-care, dimensions of 230–232; strengths-based 104–106; turnaround 144, 196, 214
leading with integrity 213–236, *235*; across cultures and contexts 224–227; and courage, in higher education 227–228; implications of 232–234; leadership self-care, dimensions of 230–232; mindful leadership 229–230
learner-centred culture 8, 16, 94, 192–197, 207–210; characteristics of 193–194
learner-centred leadership, in higher education 3–27; action 17–18; adapting 15–16; definition of 17–21; dimensions of 21–23, *22*; implications of 14–17; mindset 9; planning 17–18; strategising 17–18; in systemic context 4–9; threshold concept 14–15; understanding 9–13
learner-centredness, as threshold concept 14–15
learner-centred strategy co-design, in higher education 28–55; 5 Ps of 41–46; approaches 30–33; benefits of 48–50; characteristics of 33–34; co-implementation 46–48, **47**; core principles 34–36; design thinking 37–41; leadership capability, development of 36–46; limitations of 48–50; sample planning tool **45**; tips for 50–53
learner-centred strategy leadership, core principles for 34–36
learner-centred values 201–202
learner engagement 64–68; communication 67–68; paradigm, critiques of 66; role of 67
learning: culture 193; and teaching 14, 16, 24, 30, 32, 37–41, 69, 76, 77, 89, 101, 123, 148, 169, 215, 221, 226
Le Grange, L. 148
Lowe, T. 66

Martensson, K. 95
Martin, J. 187, 224
Matthews, K. 75
'McDonaldisation' of HE 61
Melbourne Plus digital credential 125–127
mental health 29, 38, 59, 78–82, 85, 106–110, 112, 113, 174, 202, 230, 234
microcultures 22, 89, 94, 95, 100, 112, 113, 183–189, 192, 193, 205,

207–212; academic, to enhance quality 198–200; institutional, respect and build on 198
mindful leadership 229–230
mindset 7, 46, 49, 69, 83, 98, 106, 129, 187, 208, 213, 217, 218; fixed 9; growth 5, 9, 20–21, 26, 27, 184, 219, 222, 226, 234; learner-centred leader's 9; systemic leadership 16
'mini-public' approach 171
mission 3, 10, 21, 31, 32, 91, 92, 100, 102, 119, 126, 147, 188–191, 194, 210, 215
modularisation 136, 137
Moorman, R. 223
Mpofu-Hamadziripi, N. 148
Muddiman, E. 62
multifaceted learner-centred leader with integrity 217–222, *218*

nomads 94–96
null curriculum **124**

Ohio State University: Wellness App 80
organisational culture 183–192; definition of 183–184; differentiation perspective 185–186; distinctive elements of 188–192, *191*; fragmentation perspective 186; integration perspective 185; and learner-centred culture, linking 192–197
organisational sustainability 14

participatory approaches 77, 80, 81, 85
patient leadership 209–210
peer learning 133
persistence 64, 124
Peterson, C. 104
Pinar, W. F. 118, 121, 129, 148
Piper, R. 80
policy spine: analogy, leadership implications of 162–163; in university 159–162, *160*
Posselt, J. 202
principles 8, 10, 17–20, 28, 30–32, 34–37, 39, 46–49, 51, 53, 55, 64, 65, 69, 74, 75, 78, 79, 82–84, 100, 104, 108, 110–112, 128, 130, 132, 133, 145, 163, 168, 170, 173, 176, 179, 180, 183, 193, 197–202, 206–210, 212, 223, 227–229
professional learning 9, 27, 37, **45**, 61, 99–106, 110, 112, 142, 175, 221, 226, 229, 231
professional staff 10, 13, 19, 26, **45**, 67, 71, 77, 88–90, 94, 97–99, 101–106, 108, 112, 118, 133, 143, 175, 177, 189, 205, 210, 211, 216, 235
professional workforce 96–97
programme leader 105, **149**, 207
promotion 100–103
psychological safety 40, 49, 83, 107
purpose 41–42, **45**
purposeful culture 193

Quality Culture Inventory (QCI) 157
quality, through policy and practice 153–180; academic microcultures 198–200; co-design 167–168; culture, measurement of 157–158; culture in university, appreciating value of 156; learner experiences and outcomes 146–147; 'mini-public' approach 171; navigation 168–170, *169*; opportunities 165–166; partnership with students and staff as co-learners 172–176; policy leadership 158–164; sensemaking 158–164, 177–178; student learner voices in governance and decision-making 170–172; student participation 171; work, policy and governance in leadership, linking 164–172
Queen Mary University of London: 'mini-public' approach 171; School of Law 171

RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) Matrix 3, 44, **44**, **47**
relational leadership 111
research-informed 3, 76, 147, 213, 234
resilience 15, 38, 59, 79, 93, 207, 211, 219, 227, 228; community 14
respect 10, 48, 52, 73, 83–85, 106, 111, 151, 178, 186, 190, 198–200, 211, 219, 221, 223, 233
Rhoades, G. 90
Roxa, T. 95
Ruben, B. 10

SaP *see* Students as Partners (SaP)
Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) leadership 220–221
Schudde, L. 164
Scott, G. 12, 225
SDGs *see* UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Seligman, M. E. P. 104
sense-giving 7, 8, 165, 166, 168, 176, 180, 193, 234
sensemaking 5, 17, 89, 138, 147, 151, 153–156, 158–164, 170, 173, 175–177, 179, 180, 186, 201, 209–211, 216, 222, 224, 229, 234; agentic 16; collective 16; culture 7, 193; curriculum renewal 139; organisational 18; principles 8; student, of university transfer policies in times of change 164; in supercomplexity 6–9; systemic 20–21
shared-action learning 51, 53
Silinda, F. 200
siloed cultures 144
Simmons, N. 220
Sinclair, A. 229
situated cognition 18
socialisation 190
Sonntag, K. 157
SoTL *see* Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) leadership
Southern Cross University: leadership capability framework 104
SSPs *see* student–staff partnerships (SSPs)
staff well-being 74, 88, 112, 113; during COVID-19 106; as learner-centred higher education leader, prioritising 106–110; patterns, in UK HE 107–108; as University of British Columbia 108–110
standards 4, 141, 145, 154, 155, 160, 165, 172, 179
Stellenbosch University: curriculum relevance and innovation 148
strategy: approaches to 30–33; definition of 28–30; execution 46; learner-centered co-design 28–55; learning and teaching 14, 16, 24, 30, 32, 37–41, 69, 76, 77, 89, 101, 123, 148, 169, 215, 221, 226
strengths-based leadership 104–106
student engagement 13, 17, 32, 59, 64, 65, 85, 99, 167, 214; paradigm, critiques of 66
student experience 16, 33, 66, 70–73, 101, 121, 159, 166, 174, 178
students as learners 59–87; contemporary higher education student characteristics 60–61; in curriculum contexts, engaging 132–133; engagement 64–68; higher education student constructs 61–64; implications of 82–85
Students as Partners (SaP) 59, 60, 66, 69–82, 85; challenges to 73–74; core values of 73–74; in education-space design 76–77; implications of 75–78; learner-centred approaches to 69–73; mental health 78–80; opportunities of 73–74; well-being 78–82
StudentShapers 76
student–staff partnerships (SSPs) *see* Students as Partners (SaP)

supercomplexity 3, 5, 15, 26; sensemaking in 6–9
sustainable culture 193, 206
systemic cultural transformation 201

Taylor, K. 220
Technological University Dublin: *Our Student Voice* project 167–168, 170
territories 89, 95, 96, 130
third space professionals 12, 97–99, 102, 103, 112, 205
Tierney, W. G. 186
toxic culture 200, 224
tribes 89, 94–95
trust 52, 74, 75, 84, 85, 129, 190, 193, 199, 200, 223, 224, 233
turnaround leadership 146, 196, 214

UBC *see* University of British Columbia (UBC)
UK HE institutions, staff well-being patterns in 107–108
unbundled curriculum 143
universities: characteristics of 31; context and organisational structure of 91–93, *92*; cultural ecosystem 207–208; culture, dimensions of 190; curriculum renewal 139–140; leader's reflection 214–217; policy spine of 159–163, *160*; quality culture, appreciating value of 156; transfer policies in times of change, student sensemaking of 164
University of Birmingham, staff capability framework 103
University of British Columbia (UBC), faculty and staff well-being at 108–110
University of Cape Town (UCT), 'Rhodes Must Fall' decolonisation movement 201
University of Edinburgh 137
University of Manchester, leadership capability framework 104
University of Melbourne, Melbourne Plus digital credential 125–127
University of Otago, staff capability framework 103
University of Valencia, curriculum relevance and innovation 148
UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 51–53, 120, 133, 148, 225, 226

values 31; of systemic sensemaking 20–21
Vanderlelie, J. 70
Veles, N. 98, 99
Victoria University: curriculum renewal 146–147
Vygotsky, L. 18

Weick, K. 7, 18
well-being: culture 202–203; digital student 80–82; individual 14; staff 74, 88, 106–110, 112, 113; of university students 78–79
Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe (WISE) 80
Whitchurch, C. 12–13, 95–97