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**COUNCIL OF AUSTRALASIAN UNIVERSITY
LEADERS IN LEARNING AND TEACHING**

CAULLT Grant Final Report

**A values-framework and self-assessment tool to improve tertiary academic
leadership**

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Project overview

Title of project

A values-framework and self-assessment tool to improve tertiary academic leadership

Project Aims

This project aimed to develop through collegial consultation an online resource for practitioners in higher education to support ethical, values-based decision-making, sustain collaborative learning and develop metacognition of affective domain constructs, most specifically, values.

The focus of the project was on Australian higher education, but it has direct relevance to higher education more generally.

Project Rationale

Universities increasingly aim through their graduate attributes to ensure graduates are ethically informed and enabled, thereby addressing employer calls for honest and ethical workers (Association of Business Schools (ABS) 2014). This project shifted the focus from the affective knowledge and skills of graduates to address the affective, values-based awareness and competence of leaders in learning and teaching in higher education who model through their decision-making, the application of affective learning to university practices. This project asked the questions: how often do we *consciously* interrogate and utilise our values to inform our professional decisions or judgements as leaders in higher education? And how much professional development or training overtly surfaces these values to empower us to make morally coherent and defensible professional decisions or judgements? There is considerable scholarly and research evidence, together with the evidence of our daily experience, which strongly suggests that it is not only desirable for us to integrate values into our practice decisions, it is *necessary*. However, there is little emphasis in professional development programs and resources to encourage leaders in learning and teaching to interrogate and integrate their own personal values in their practice. One unfortunate consequence of this, among others, is that leaders can find they make decisions at odds with their values, leading to considerable feelings of discomfort. This project sought to develop, through consultation with leaders in teaching and learning in higher education, an open, online professional resource supporting the development of awareness of personal values in scenario-based decision making in the higher education context. This resource is now completed and publicly available (see: <https://www.vblinhe.net> *Values-based leadership in higher education*).

Contextualising literature

Affective learning involves the development, organisation and internalisation of values, and both personal and professional commitment to ethical practice on a daily basis (Krathwohl et. al., 1964). Personal values are an important component of the affective domain and provide principles for behaviours that may be judged as ethical or unethical in a social context. It has been argued that affective views “may not be accessible through cognitive strategies such as critical evaluation or logical review,” (Nespor, 1987, p. 320). If so, it cannot be assumed that discipline experts (or novices), including expert leaders in learning and teaching, consciously use values to guide their professional behaviours. Professional development that integrates values in professional practice is therefore necessary.

The 'self' is a central concept in the development of values and values-based leaders. Kraemer (2011), as well as Frost (2014) and Freeman and Auster (2011) consider understanding of self and identity as essential to the development of values-based, responsible leadership. Frost (2014, p.125) builds a model of leadership that starts with self-understanding through 'leading self'. Leading self centres on self-awareness and knowing one's personal values (Frost, 2014). This understanding is then extended to 'leading others' and 'leading the organisation'. Freeman and Auster (2011) posited a differently constructed model, but draw on similar conceptual understandings of leadership. Authenticity and the

poetic self are at the centre of this model. The poetic self is “the intersection of our values, our past, our set of connections to others, and our aspirations” (Freeman, & Auster, 2011, p. 21). Values-based leadership from this perspective places the authentic, values-aware self at the centre of a larger framework that incorporates connections and relationships. Tuana’s (2014) conceptualisation of ethical leadership places one’s moral literacy at the centre of decision making. Ethical leadership requires the ability to identify ethical issues (Ethical Sensitivity), as well as the related consequences and potential options (Ethical Decision Making), and the desire to engage with ethical issues – that is an Ethical Disposition. Moral literacy is at the centre of good leadership. In particular, this is so that the decisions taken by leaders do not lead either themselves or others into a space where actions are in conflict with values. Creating opportunities to identify and rehearse the personal values of each ‘self’ can therefore contribute to more assured leadership of self and others.

Literature on leadership and values demonstrates at multiple levels that values, beliefs and attitudes are relevant to the development of effective leadership. Leadership can be conceptualised from an organisational level (Calder, 2014; Jamieson, Church, & Vogelsang, 2018; Kerr, Morgan, & Norgate, 2015; Mohanna, 2017; Oh, Cho, & Lim, 2018), through values frameworks (Fernandez, & Hogan, 2002; Melo et al., 2014; Tuulik, et al. 2016; Vitale, 2018; Vitale, & Cull, 2018) or through conceptualisations of self and relationships (Freeman, & Auster, 2011; Frost, 2014; Kraemer, 2011). At each level it is evident that values have a role to play in effective leadership. Much of the literature focusing on values and leadership in education is focused on school leadership. School leadership and the role of school Principals in the success of a school and achievement of learning outcomes has been the focus of numerous studies (e.g. Al-Ani, & Al-Harhi, 2017; Begley 1999; Campbell, Gold, & Lunt, 2003; Gold, Evans, Earley, Haplin, & Collarbone, 2003; Huber, 2004; Lance, 2010; Notman, 2008; Warwas, 2015). Values-based leadership at the level of tertiary, or higher education is less extensively investigated. Those studies that do focus on the university context indicate that leadership values have significant impact on the university culture, its values, employee values and the stakeholder values (see, for example Ab Hamid (2015)). Minimal empirical investigation exists in the literature into tertiary education leaders’ perceptions of how they apply values to decision making in practice.

Calder (2018) considered the impact leadership values have on academic institutions: equating values with an education institution’s identity. Positive results are the outcome of alignment between values and actions. Calder (2018) encourages academic institutions to engage in values discovery, and highlights common values in higher education: respect, transparency, equity, and integrity. The focus is on identifying leadership values and understanding how these values relate to actions. There are organisations and standards available to guide educational institutions through this process of values identification. The *UK Professional Standards Framework* (AdvanceHE, 2011) provides higher education institutions with a framework for integrating ‘Core Knowledge’ with ‘Professional Values’ and ‘Areas of Activity’ to enhance teaching and learning in higher education. While these standards are useful in providing a holistic framework, they do not directly engage with helping leaders become aware of their values and how they apply them in practice. Branson and Gross (2014, p.3) in their introduction to *The Handbook of Educational Leadership* assert that educational leaders make choices based on “values that are either known or unknown, acknowledged or unacknowledged, by them”. They contend that if these values remain unknown and unacknowledged the likelihood of the resulting decision being unethical is greater (Branson, & Gross, 2014). The aim of this project is to help develop university leaders’ awareness and engagement with their own values, as well as how they identify and utilise these values in practice.

As affective knowledge is thought to be stored in episodic memory and developed through memorable personal experiences that lead to values development, awareness and values-based actions (Grootenboer 2010), it was assumed that for this project an ‘episodic’ or scenario-based development tool would be most effective for participants. Additionally, these scenarios should resonate with

common experiences that leaders in higher education encounter and need to resolve through decisions that require consultation with the values each individual most closely recognises and endorses. To achieve this, leaders in higher education were consulted through qualitative surveys to establish a series of scenarios and linked values. These scenarios were de-identified, edited and reproduced through what is now available as the *Values Based Leadership in Higher Education* (VBLinHE) webpage.

Project methods and outcomes

1. A **literature scan** was completed to ensure that the arguments underscoring the project are appropriately embedded in, and informed by, extant scholarly literature. This literature review informs (in part) this report but also scholarly publication (the authors have submitted a book chapter proposal for a HETL publication: *Worldviews and Values in Higher Education*).
2. ACU Ethics Approval was achieved (2020-18E) in May 2020.
3. Informal **peer exploration** of the project's ideas was conducted internally within the Australian Catholic University (ACU) through discussions among its Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC) academic staff and also as a topic discussed at the ACU Community of Practice SoTL. Further exploration of the topic was conducted externally at the AARE Conference in 2019 where the project team presented the paper: *A Values-based Framework to Improve Tertiary Academic Leadership*, and led a discussion with attendees on the relevance of the topic in their university contexts.
4. A **survey** of CAULLT members was developed and implemented to ascertain what scenarios may capture typical contemporary ethical challenges in decision making for leaders in higher education and also the most common values associated with such scenarios. These scenarios were further developed and edited by the project team, and a series of "values position statements" were developed to help identify the values reflected by specific decisions made by respondents to each scenario. Each scenario offered two possible decisions/responses reflecting different values or different interpretations of values – that is, different values positions. This newly developed scenario-based survey with two possible responses was piloted with the Academic Development (ADs) staff at the ACU LTC (n:8). Some clarifications were implemented on the basis of this feedback. Interestingly, the ADs scenario responses were almost evenly split across the two possible decisions for each scenario (which aligned with the AARE conference attendants' responses to two earlier sample scenarios). This is consistent with the idea that when making values-based leadership decisions, there is not necessarily a "right answer" or prevailing consensus among leaders – the path chosen depends on the values position of each respondent.
5. Phase 4 involved developing an **on-line 'self-assessment tool'** for use by leaders in higher education. The tool is in the form of a self-assessment quiz presenting leadership challenges through scenarios. Using this tool promotes reflection and increased self-awareness of values used when making leadership decisions. This increased self-awareness is further enhanced by the tool inviting users to write their own personal responses and guiding users to identify values that are implicit in each scenario. As data is established through responses, the authors intend to develop a display of the survey responses per scenario to allow respondents to position themselves in the context of the responses of others and thereby gain not only even greater awareness of their own values, but also increased awareness of the range of value-positions existing in higher education decision-making. It was intended that the authors could develop an aggregate profile of the values-based decisions of established leaders in Higher Education. As yet, however, there is not broad agreement established by those who have taken the survey. As noted earlier, there is no judgement of a person's responses as "right" or "wrong" involved in this self-assessment tool. Rather, the process enhances a person's metacognition as part of a learning journey leading to more mindful application of values to inform better judgements. In particular, the authors intent is that the tool will lead to an increase in leadership decisions that are made with conscious reference to a person's values, and will therefore be increasingly in alignment with those values.

- The authors now wish to promote the online tool as broadly as possible through the higher education sector and will be attending conferences and linking the website to relevant bodies such as Advance Higher Education.

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ATTACHMENT 1 - Team member signatures

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