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LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE LENS OF RESEARCH PRODUCTIVITY

By

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ABSTRACT

Academic leadership in higher education in the 21st century is very different and more multifaceted than it was just a decade ago. Thus, given the multilayered, dynamic nature of higher education leadership at individual, group and organisational levels, a more nuanced understanding of its role in driving excellent research performance remains paramount. Hence, this study explores the professional and personal nature of research leadership that enables and stimulates high quality research performance.

The research explores the research career pathways of ten researchers from various disciplinary fields who had been rated by the National Research Foundation (NRF) of South Africa and who were recommended by their education institutions as research leaders. The ten leaders were each interviewed about their research careers. Postgraduate students (47 in total) whom they had supervised were invited to answer an email questionnaire about their personal experiences of the leaders' mentorship and leadership. In addition, information about the leaders and mentees was obtained from various documents such as curriculums vitae, research training records, institutional annual reports and web sites. The data collected and analysed in the study showed that the research career pathways of the research leaders were highly diverse and were affected in various ways by the historical-political and social context of South Africa. However, across the career pathways, the research leaders had the following features in common: 1) the presence of strong research-centeredness throughout all career phases; 2) they lead by example of personal scholarship and intellectual leadership; 3) their research is locally relevant and globally competitive; and 4) their personal dynamics influence a confident and dynamic people-centred leadership approach. The most notable differences in research leadership across the sample could be traced to disciplinary contexts which ranged from distributed leadership across large teams and entrepreneurial networks to the more prevalent one-on-one mentor-mentee relationships. Leaders who were most influential in driving research performance were highly regarded

scholars with extensive academic experience, had served a variety of leadership roles, confidently embraced the complexity of academic leadership and created stimulating research environments.

The research also reveals a number of challenges that still remain for research leadership in addressing the human resource transformation requirements of the South African higher education research context. These include issues of 1) individualism and competition; 2) equity and excellence; 3) race and gender; and 4) research career exit and entry paths. The South African higher education system is characterised by pockets of scientific excellence in some disciplinary fields, as illustrated by the career trajectories of leaders in this study, but much work remains to be done in order to build a fully representative research-performing professoriate for South Africa.

KEY WORDS

- Academic leadership
- Scholarship
- Research Leadership
- Research Performance
- Research Culture in higher education
- Research Capacity Development
- Research Career Development
- Mentoring and supervision
- Leadership attributes and behaviours
- Leadership development

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ASSAF	Academy of Science of South Africa
CHE	Council for Higher Education
CSIR	Council for Scientific and Industrial Research
DOE	Department of Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DST	Department of Science and Technology
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
EOC	Education Opportunities Council
FTE	Full time Equivalent
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth Economic Acceleration and Redistribution
HEQF	Higher Education Qualification Framework
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
IIE	Institute of International Education
ISI	International Scientific Index
NACI	National Advisory Council on Innovation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRDS	National Research and Development Strategy
NRF	National Research Foundation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAEP	South African Education Program
SARC	South African Research Chairs
SARCHI	South African Research Chairs Initiative
SPII	Support Programme for Industrial Innovation
THRIP	Technology and Human Resources for Industry Programme
TIA	Technology Innovation Agency
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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