

Concurrent Session K
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1:30pm – 2:20pm



Session 5
Leadership, Energy Management and Motivation as a Lens for
Understanding Tertiary Education Management Practice

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Heather's background is in research management, knowledge work, adult education, librarianship and professional development. Her research interests include university leadership and management, distributed leadership, qualitative inquiry, social complexity theories and e-learning.

Heather teaches in the Institute's Graduate Certificate programs and Master of Tertiary Education Management. She is also Program Manager for the Emerging Leaders and Managers Program (eLAMP).

This presentation considers the contexts for leadership and work in tertiary education at a time described as volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) and where, more than ever, the creative energies of all who work in knowledge-intensive enterprises like ours are called upon to meet these challenges.

Professional staff leadership and practice for these times is usefully captured by the idea that 'leaders are in the business of energy management' (Kets de Vries, 2003, p. 111). This lens allows us to focus upon the capacities to work with complex, turbulent and fast moving contexts of professional staff work today. It allows us to consider our preparedness to increase the levels and depth of learning necessary to fuel innovation—not only for the nation but also within our own institutions—as we embark upon necessary service improvement.

The idea that energy management is now a key leadership responsibility may be novel but it nevertheless provides a useful lens to consider whether we are ready for the significant changes ahead. Taking this frame, we can locate leadership studies and practice for professional staff that move from "the 'the leader' as control agent, to 'leading' which opens up spaces to consider more creative, shared and collaborative approaches in the field" (Davis & Jones, 2014, p. 367). These are less invested in rationalist modes of thinking that have their roots in the industrial era (i.e. efficiency models and reductionist standpoints that expect certainty) and are more attuned to frames of mind that realistically and humanely address the complexities of roles undertaken by professional staff. Key to what motivates professional staff in these contexts is the main focus of this presentation.

The time has well passed, if it ever existed, where professional staff employed as knowledge workers, managers and leaders in the sector can get by on technical ability alone. In other words, whilst hard won technical abilities in chosen professions or niche knowledge area in higher education are necessary, they are not sufficient.

Today the professional staff repertoire includes these softer skills and behaviours which themselves rely heavily on knowing the self well. The idea of the T-Shaped professional ties together and defines

many of the strands necessary to undertake knowledge work. The term provides a way for professional staff to have more meaningful conversations about their work and professional selves. Here soft skills are located within the horizontal part of the 'T' and the technical requirements of roles are captured in the vertical part of the 'T' (Hansen & von Oetinger, 2001). In turn, this standpoint encourages conversations about how to best harness the creative energies of all to "not merely produce the reliable result [but rather] reliably produce the desired result" (Martin, 2009, p. 156).

The presentation will discuss motivational drivers for professional staff who work in the contemporary university. The tertiary education sector is not impervious to disruptive change and we need to be able to quickly harness the knowledge, ideas and creativity of all to support the necessary and ongoing service innovation and improvement agenda. The presentation will be supported by findings from one main project, a study of the lived experiences of work and leadership of 226 professional staff from Australian universities. Which explored 'leadership literacies for professional staff in universities' (Davis, 2012) in times of discontinuous change. Two further studies from the United Kingdom with data about professional staff motivations will also be drawn upon for comparison.