Leadership at the University of Groningen

Why is leadership important?

Taking responsibility, working together, and being open to other perspectives. These are the things we value at the University of Groningen. We are committed to the wellbeing and development of staff and students. This requires leadership. Leadership is one of the key 'enablers' of our strategic principles and our core tasks (research, teaching, and impact). It is not a goal in and of itself, but rather a means to achieve excellence and to create a safe working environment.

What is leadership?

Leadership is a social process of setting and achieving goals with others. It can be both formal and informal. There is no such thing as the 'best leadership style'; it is heavily dependent on the context. That said, there are certain specific behaviours that are indicative of good leadership. Some of these, such as inspiring people, we associate more with leadership, and others, such as monitoring results and budgets, more with management. At the UG, we consider both aspects to be two sides of the same coin; good leadership is also good management. And you cannot have good management without good leadership. In practice, when we talk about leadership, we often talk about the individual. However, this memorandum is about leadership behaviour. This affects us all.

What do we expect from our leadership?

We do not expect everyone to be a leadership rockstar. But we do expect everyone to have at least personal leadership skills (see below) and to be willing to further develop their own leadership. We want to recognize and reward good leadership. Conversely, we want to engage in dialogue if someone's leadership is inadequate in a particular situation or role. We are also prepared to impose consequences if necessary.

Leadership takes time as well as skill. It is not something you can do 'on the side' in the evenings or as an extra exercise alongside your regular work activities. Recognizing leadership as an important role also means recognizing the amount of time investment needed and the amount of functional support required from, for example, HR, IT, and Finance.

Leadership: position or role?

We think of leadership as a role. A role is a combination of related activities that a person temporarily undertakes based on current needs and circumstances. A position is a fixed set of tasks and responsibilities. A leadership role may coincide with a position, for example if you are a formal manager. But even if you do not hold a leadership position, we expect everyone to demonstrate leadership behaviour appropriate to the leadership role(s) you are currently fulfilling.

What types of leadership are there?

We recognize four types of leadership: personal leadership, individual leadership, group leadership, and organizational leadership. The boundaries between these roles are not hard and fast. You can also take on several roles at the same time.

Personal leadership: focus on yourself

Everyone at this University provides leadership – for themselves, their own work, their own development, and their career. This happens in research, teaching, and support, regardless of a person's age or stage in their career. Personal leadership is at the heart of our work. It includes behaviours such as setting goals, working on your own development, showing commitment, working together, keeping to agreements, asking for help, and offering help to colleagues. Personal leadership also means being able to deal with the organizational context in which you work and being able to adapt to developments in your field and in the organization.

Individual leadership: focus on others

Some people hold a formal or informal leadership role towards other colleagues. In this role, you are expected to have motivational conversations and R&O interviews with others, to understand what they need, in all their diversity, to perform and grow, and to provide personalized guidance and support. It also means having the courage and ability to hold people to account if their performance or behaviour is inadequate. This role involves behaviours such as showing interest in someone's work and development, giving autonomy and trust, encouraging development, and, where necessary, holding people to account for undesirable behaviour and underperformance.

Group leadership: focus on a group

You can also lead a group of interdependent people, such as a working group, an alliance, a network, a programme, a department, or a team. As a group leader, you ensure that people work together to achieve common results in a safe and inclusive working environment. This role also requires the individual leadership behaviours mentioned above.

Group leadership is also about setting the course and group goals, providing clarity, setting the framework, monitoring boundaries, and resolving conflicts. These conflicts may arise within your group, but they may also relate to your group's position in the wider organizational context. You are your group's point of contact for the rest of the organization. Organizational sensitivity is therefore crucial for this role.

Organizational leadership: focus on the organization

Leading an organizational entity, such as a university, a faculty, or an institute, requires organizational leadership. This leadership role requires managerial skills, such as having a long-term perspective and the ability to formulate strategy, to take and explain (difficult) decisions, and to be a figurehead within and outside the UG. Political sensitivity and being able to operate in different (administrative) networks are also important skills here.

Renewed focus on leadership?

Leadership has always existed. Over the centuries, there have been formal and informal leaders in all kinds of organizations. In the world of academia, including at our own University, the role of leadership has not always been seen as necessary to achieve good results in research, teaching, and impact. Those days are over. In fact, poor leadership can have serious consequences for people's wellbeing, development, and performance. Furthermore, staff expect us to provide a positive and safe working environment, in which leadership is a key factor.

So, although leadership is not a new phenomenon, the explicit recognition of it as a key driver of professional success and wellbeing is. From now on, we will be giving leadership the attention it deserves, based on a pragmatic approach to leadership. And by setting up a Leadership Academy (see below) to strengthen leadership skills, we are putting our money where our mouth is. This does not mean that we will be swept along by all manner of leadership hypes; we will continue to take a down-to-earth approach to the concept as a necessary requirement for learning and performing in the academic world.

How do we approach leadership and leadership development?

Leadership is not always something that comes naturally if you are, for example, a brilliant researcher, lecturer, or support professional. But it can be learnt. Developing leadership behaviours and skills is more than just theory. Compare it to learning to play tennis or any other sport. You master it mainly through training, practice, and just doing it. But also by regularly reflecting on your own actions and learning from inspiring colleagues who lead by example.

For the UG, continuous leadership development is such an important issue that we have decided to stimulate and monitor it in a number of ways. First, we will identify the changes needed to give leadership the place it deserves in our organization. We will also set up an internal Leadership Academy, which will help staff to develop their leadership skills, both in theory and in practice. We will do this at different levels. Everyone will start with the basics; developing personal leadership skills. From there, they can move on to other leadership roles if they wish. As mentioned previously, not everyone needs to master all leadership roles, but we will actively support people to reach the level of competence that their role requires. Finally, we will make leadership development part of the onboarding and re-boarding process. Leadership will also be part of the assessment framework when we appraise staff through the R&O and when assessing them for their next position.

Leadership roles

	Individual leadership (IL)	Group leadership (GL)	Organizational leadership (OL)
Role description	In this leadership role, you guide, direct, and support another person (or others) to develop their talents and be able to perform.	In this leadership role, you get a formal or informal group of people (e.g., in a team, project, network, or programme) to work together to achieve common goals.	In this leadership role, you lead an organizational entity, e.g., the university, a faculty, or an institute, and you are the face of it both internally and externally.
What behaviour do we expect?	Conduct motivational interviews, including R&O interviews; call people to account when necessary; provide personalized support; guide people in their development; recognize and reward colleagues (PLUS PL)	Set the course and group goals; stimulate cooperation (connection); manage conflicts; monitor staffing and budgets; organize opportunities for people to participate and air conflicting opinions; create a safe and inclusive working climate; take the organizational context into account (PLUS PL + IL)	Formulate a strategic plan; ensure its implementation within budget; represent the UG externally to stakeholders; take crisis decisions; manage managers; organize compliance (PLUS PL + IL + GL)
Which skills are involved?	- *Dialogue skills* - *Being alert to signals* - *Providing trust* - *Understanding differences between people (diversity)* - *Acting based on the situation*	- *Taking and explaining decisions* - *Being able to read figures* - *Showing organizational sensitivity* - *Taking action in case of undesirable behaviour* - *Setting an example*	- *Having a long-term vision* - *Understanding group dynamics* - *Acting in the interest of the bigger picture* - *Engaging with stakeholders* - *Showing political sensitivity*
Basic role	**Personal leadership (PL)** **In this leadership role, you manage your own work, development, and career (self-regulation)** This involves behaviours such as: Setting goals; doing your own work; keeping to agreements; working together; dealing with hierarchy and the organizational context; working on your development and career; speaking up *And skills such as: Planning and organizing; listening; asking questions; taking initiative; receiving guidance and feedback; adapting*		
Basic skills	Acting with integrity | Being able to reflect | Being committed | Communicating well | Showing empathy		

Framework

- Recognize leadership as an important role and responsibility
- Allocate time and quality to leadership
- Test and evaluate (basic) leadership behaviour from start to end of career
- (Have the courage) to take action when leadership is inadequate
- Set an example across all leadership roles
- Functional support for leadership from HR, ICT, Finance, etc.
- Provide continuous, personalized leadership development, including training, coaching, mentoring, and peer support
- Conduct conversations about leadership