CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP

The PROPEL program is underpinned by original research into academic leadership. The developers of the Program aimed to identify those skills and personal characteristics found in excellent university leaders, and particularly those which are specific to the academic environment. The research also aimed to identify which of those skills and characteristics are able to be taught. These questions were examined both from the perspective of current academic leaders and academics who are not in leadership roles.

The results of this research directly informed development of the PROPEL Program content and structure, as well as the participant selection criteria.

Characteristics of Leadership

PROPEL research identified certain characteristics as necessary to excellent university leadership but difficult to teach. These characteristics were included in the PROPEL participant selection criteria.

- Direction, vision, originality.
- Role model who demonstrates a quality of excellence and is passionate about their discipline (in either teaching, research or both).
- Genuine interest in people and the ability to connect with staff on a personal level.
- Genuine regard for diversity and seeing difference as positive.
- Personal traits including drive, energy, enthusiasm, positive attitude, conviction, cooperativeness, patience, consideration.
- Maturity, self-understanding, self-motivation, being true to own personal values.
- Comfortable working in complex situations of ambiguity and incomplete information.

PROPEL Leadership Development

PROPEL research has provided insight into a range of teachable leadership skills and attributes which are highly valued by academic staff. These form the basis of the PROPEL Program and are summarised in the PROPEL Leadership Attribute Domains:

POSITION  Think and work strategically to position yourself, your staff and your unit within your university and the wider context.

REFLECT  Reflect on yourself as a leader and be prepared to make changes.

OPEN  Open out to your staff on both the professional and personal level.

PROVIDE  Provide a supportive environment in which your staff will thrive.

ENABLE  Enable your unit to always move forward.

LINK  Create links and connections with other staff, faculties and institutions which will strengthen your unit and your discipline.
### PROPEL Leadership Attribute Domains

- **Think and work strategically to position yourself, your staff and your unit within the university and the wider context**
  - Understand the higher education context and environment
  - Seek opportunities and be proactive
  - Convert vision into strategy then into operational plans
  - Assess and manage risk
  - Develop political awareness
  - Take a big-picture view of the organisation
  - Balance demands from above and below, but always be a strong advocate for your Unit
  - Know how the system works
  - Drive initiatives, gain alignment and commitment
  - Develop external networks for advice

- **Reflect on yourself as a leader and be prepared to make changes**
  - Move from self-focused academic role to people-focused leadership role
  - Commit to ongoing personal and professional development
  - Make sense of and learn from experience
  - Understand personal strengths and limitations
  - Admit to and learn from errors
  - Develop resilience
  - Develop strategic, creative and lateral thinking abilities
  - Practice remaining calm under pressure

- **Open out to your staff on both the professional and personal level**
  - Be accessible, visible and approachable
  - Listen without prejudging
  - Communicate clearly, openly and honestly
  - Be consistent
  - Give positive and negative feedback
  - Be prepared to hear and act on feedback about yourself
  - Have strategies in place to find out about staff needs
  - Demonstrate integrity and develop trust
  - Value diversity
  - Be able to say no to staff if necessary without undermining working relationships.

- **Provide a supporting environment in which your staff will thrive**
  - Be of service to staff, help them achieve
  - Identify development opportunities to empower staff and advance their career
  - Balance academic leadership role with administrative leadership demands.
  - Appreciate the breadth of academic work and the multifaceted nature of the organisation.
  - Lead academic staff in ways which suit their needs and styles.
  - Respect staff and be professional in dealings with them.
  - Understand rules and apply them appropriately.
  - Foster team collegiality
  - Demonstrate academic integrity and leadership in teaching, research and community engagement
  - Treat staff with fairness and consistency.

- **Enable your unit to always move forward**
  - Make decisions quickly and with confidence
  - Provide structures for consultation and reflection which include staff in decision making process
  - Don’t leave things to chance.
  - Identify and solve problems early and guide staff away from negative behaviours.
  - Look positively at ways to move forward.
  - Initiate change responsibly and manage it sensitively
  - Be well organised, have good time management and delegation skills.
  - Engage staff
  - Make strategic use of resources
  - Motivate staff and convey a sense of progress by celebrating successes and ensuring tangible outcomes from meetings and forums.
  - Take a ‘can do’ attitude
  - Build culture of success, responsibility

- **Create links and connections with other staff, faculties and institutions which will strengthen your unit and your discipline**
  - Consult and share views and ideas with others.
  - Don’t become isolated either as an individual or Unit.
  - Put genuine structures in place to promote and reward collaboration.
  - Maintain a constructive climate with management peers in which disagreements can be tolerated without always being resolved.