

Recognition & Rewards – Leadership

Introduction

This narrative describes the vision on leadership, including its assessment, as developed by the UM Leadership Committee of the recognition and rewards programme. This narrative is a dynamic vision document, aimed at serving as a basis for further discussion.

How an organisation defines and assesses the quality of leadership contains important messages about its culture. Is there a one-size-fits-all approach in which a predefined set of leader characteristics and behaviours is laid down in a standardised assessment checklist? Or does the organisation value diverse perspectives and, within an overarching leadership vision, encourage people to define their leader roles themselves through meaningful conversations with colleagues and direct reports? We believe UM should aspire to the latter.

Given the diversity of the UM community, we believe there is no single way to define effective leadership. What is perceived as effective depends on the context and type of interaction between the leader and others. However, a vision on leadership that serves as a starting point for a range of definitions is necessary. Our committee has therefore concentrated on developing a leadership vision in a narrative. This narrative defines the playing field and captures the essence of what leadership at UM should be about; it describes the leadership culture that we at UM aspire to. Within the boundaries of this playing field, people shape their leadership through their actions and define in meaningful conversations with those around them to what extent they succeed in embodying the UM vision on leadership.

The recognition and rewarding of leadership is a process of culture change. Sustainable culture change cannot be realised in a top-down manner or through checklists. It is hard work and should include all those involved to make sure that recognition and reward of effective leadership at UM rises above eloquently written statements and becomes visible through the behaviour of all employees.

Recognition and rewarding of leadership should be developed through a number of steps:

1. A UM vision on leadership describing the leadership culture that UM aspires is created (i.e., this narrative).
2. A UM vision on leadership should be supported by its community, so the next step is to invite the UM community to discuss and contribute to this vision.
3. Operationalisation does not take place via standardised assessment checklists, but follows the notion of leadership as a culture-shaping, context-specific process. As different skills are required in different situations and in different leadership roles, there is diversification within leadership. To that end, conversation templates will be developed that enable meaningful conversations on the relevant characteristics and behaviours of the UM vision on leadership (very much in line with the new UM approach to annual appraisals). Assessment of effectiveness takes place during those conversations based on mutual experiences or other evidence brought to the conversation by any of the participants. A very preliminary example of what this could look like is included in the appendix. This approach also allows for development starting early in one's career, when personal leadership is needed but little managerial or interpersonal leadership is requested, and continues over time.

IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP IN ACADEMIA

At Maastricht University, we aspire to leadership that is inspirational and at the forefront of positive change. Within our organisation and beyond, we strive to create an environment in which people can excel and grow into leaders with a clear vision. Leaders are empowered, and in turn they empower, inspire and facilitate those around them. Within our community, leadership is relevant at all career levels and in all phases of one's career. In its different aspects, it pervades everything that we do, as individuals and collectively. In any leadership role, people become role models.

At the most fundamental level, everyone engages in *personal* leadership. This means everyone needs to be willing and able to explore their own aspirations and limitations, is aware of their own ability to deal with different situations, understands when to take responsibility and recognises the impact of their actions. Moreover, personal leadership involves discovering and developing values and ethical standards on a personal, institutional and societal level, and acting in line with these. Personal leadership is at the core of everyone's effective functioning. Additionally, we all engage in *managerial* leadership. This refers to all the tasks we carry out to structure and control our work such as time management, planning, budgeting and governance.

Finally, many members of our community are involved in leading other people and are thus engaged in *interpersonal* leadership. For example, a PhD student who supervises a master's student's thesis, a programme director who collaborates with colleagues in an education programme, a head of department who manages a large research group or a staff member who activates networks or consortia. Being an effective leader in academia thus involves personal, managerial and interpersonal leadership. Leaders create the best possible conditions for other employees and students to realise UM's mission in research, education and societal impact. They are inspirational guides and ensure a safe and open atmosphere in which members of the community thrive, feel challenged and confident to develop their talents and skills.

ENACTING LEADERSHIP IN ACADEMIA

The role of the leader

The role of the leader is twofold. First, leaders *set direction*. They are aware of the organisational, societal and academic context. They have vision and a strategy, and provide guidance and set boundaries accordingly. Thus, leaders formulate goals and set the context within which these goals can be reached.

Second, leaders *empower and enable* other people, such as students and colleagues, to meet their goals. They join and create relevant networks inside and outside UM to help increase the effectiveness and impact of others. They do not operate in isolation but are aware that everyone is part of a larger community.

Expertise and intellectual curiosity as a prerequisite

Every academic leader has at least a fundamental level of expertise in the domains of research, education and impact (and patient care, if relevant) that is needed to lead effectively. Likewise, leaders who facilitate the administrative and support staff need sufficient understanding of their work as well. A leader's level of expertise needs to be credible, accepted and respected, but it is not necessary to excel in a certain area in order to be a successful leader. With respect to expertise, UM leaders show intellectual openness and sincere interest, which allows them to also direct and empower people working in fields different from their own and to guide working across disciplines.

Behaviours of leaders in academia

Leaders acquire and develop certain behaviours to optimally fulfil their role and navigate between providing direction and empowering and enabling. These behaviours can be organised into six clusters.

1. *Inspirational appeal*: Leaders have vision, passion and inspiration and know how to pass this on to other people and encourage participation. Leaders know how to influence and convince people inside and outside their domain. They attract and retain talent.

2. *Focus oriented*: Leaders focus on content, set boundaries and are decisive. They are aware of the larger context of others' work and output.
3. *Inclusive collaboration*: Leaders enable people to cooperate in teams, share skills and knowledge and to take an interest in the work of others. They create an open, intellectual atmosphere. They strengthen the inclusive environment by finding a common ground in values that is shared among people. They cherish the talent of others, appreciate their different qualities and diverse backgrounds.
4. *Trusting coach*: Leaders are coaches. They understand that people in the academia are driven by intellectual curiosity and they give them space and academic freedom. They guide, activate, challenge, motivate and provide honest feedback. They trust others and create a safe environment.
5. *Ethical*: Leaders act according to established values and are role models in many ways. They promote professional accountability.
6. *Self-reflective learner*: Leaders are aware of their own impact. They display honesty, transparency and authenticity. They are not egocentric, and non-conformist when needed. They reveal courage, demonstrate firmness and are not afraid to take unpopular decisions. They have proper communication skills. They reflect on their own behaviour and actively seek out for feedback to change or improve their leadership skills.

It's the compilation of these behavioural building blocks combined with certain personality traits that makes someone a good leader.

Flexibility in leader behaviours

Leaders are aware they are part of a larger academic structure and do not operate in isolation. The way in which a leader leads (or should lead) depends on the varying circumstances and fluctuating needs of others. At UM, we value diversity and embrace different styles of leadership. Leadership is not a matter of one size fits all. Leaders are aware and appreciate that staff members vary in personal situations, seniority, temperaments, interests, talents and backgrounds (e.g., cultural). They facilitate others to grow. They detect if and when someone needs more guidance. Besides sensitivity to the differences and needs of individuals, leaders also adjust their leadership to the developmental stage and needs of their team. Which behaviours leaders employ is situationally dependent; leaders put different emphasis on different things depending on the context. It is the conversation on the leadership that one displays that is crucial.

APPENDIX: example of a potential conversation template

The UM Leadership Vision provides the point of reference for this conversation template. This template should function as inspiration to engage in a conversation about leadership that is open enough to make people think about their own leadership. The template provides examples of how a conversation about leadership could be conducted. The template is not meant as a prescriptive or exhaustive checklist.

A summary of the conversation can be kept on file as input for future conversation (very similar to the annual appraisal process).

Personal Leadership

- What were the most important insights I gained regarding my own functioning and how did I act upon those insights by steering/directing my functioning in the past year?
 - o _____
 - o _____
 - o _____
- What would I like feedback on or help with?
 - o _____
 - o _____

Managerial Leadership

- Which managerial leadership tasks did I carry out/ did I need to carry out?
 - o _____
 - o _____
- How would you evaluate me on these tasks in light of the goals that I set?
 - o _____
 - o _____

Interpersonal leadership

- I know my role as a leader is to set direction as well as empower and enable people.
 - o What did I do to enact this in practice?
 - _____
 - _____
 - o How effective was I in doing this, in my own opinion and what do others think?
 - _____
 - _____

Six clusters of behaviours guide the ability to navigate between providing direction and empowering and enabling at UM. The following questions invite you to reflect on which behaviours you displayed in practice and how effective these were. In preparing for your conversation look for specific examples to support your point of view and, where possible, seek input from different stakeholders that you have worked with. If quantitative measures are available to provide further input, please include these also.

- Inspirational appeal
 - o What do I do in my leader role(s) to enact inspirational appeal in practice?
 - _____
 - _____
 - o How do I know that the behaviours I listed above are effective?
 - _____
 - _____
 - o What do I need to increase my impact in this domain?
 - _____
 - _____
- Focus oriented
 - o What do I do in my leader role(s) to be focus oriented in practice?
 - _____
 - _____
 - o How do I know that the behaviours I listed above are effective?

- _____
 - _____
 - What do I need to increase my impact in this domain?
 - _____
 - _____
- Inclusive collaboration
 - What do I do in my leader role(s) to enact inclusive collaboration in practice?
 - _____
 - _____
 - How do I know that the behaviours I listed above are effective?
 - _____
 - _____
 - What do I need to increase my impact in this domain?
 - _____
 - _____
- Etc. etc.