

AHP Leadership in Academia: Skills and Attributes



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Abstract

Introduction

The project explored the 'lived experiences' of senior leaders within academia to identify their key strengths which have enabled them to achieve their positions, and what support mechanisms they were provided with during their careers. The challenges faced by Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) within the academic sector were seen to be very different to those in the clinical sector, which is why the project focused on those working in Higher Education Institutions (HEI). Support that could be provided to AHPs working in academia to enable them to realise their potential and achieve senior leadership positions within HEIs were also explored.

Background

A research project was published in 2019 *AHP Leadership in Academia: Opportunities, challenges and current position*. (1) The aim of this research was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of key stakeholders in relation to the current extent of AHPs in leadership roles within academia.

Several themes emerged from this study, the primary ones relating to lack of confidence of AHPs to aspire, and that fewer opportunities appear to exist for AHPs in academia to progress into senior leadership roles outside of the AHP sphere. It was noted that AHPs probably have much to learn in how to move into strategic leadership roles within academia.

A number of recommendations were made to ensure that AHPs attain the ambition, the confidence, the skills and the opportunities required for them to be able to move into senior leadership roles in the future.

Following completion of this project, Health Education England (HEE) commissioned UWE Bristol to lead on a further project looking at developing AHP capacity and capability within the Higher Education sector.

The aims of this second study were:

1. To understand more about the skills and attributes required to become a successful leader in academia.
2. To explore the potential support mechanisms that can be provided for aspiring AHP leaders within academia / higher education.
3. To use the findings to maximise developmental opportunities for individuals to reach senior positions in order to realise their full potential.

Method

This qualitative research study took an appreciative enquiry approach to investigate the views of successful AHP leaders working within academia. Part of this work involved interviews with key people, to obtain as much data and as many views as possible. AHPs who had achieved senior leadership positions in academia above Head of Department level were sampled.

Purposive sampling took place to ensure the inclusion of the most appropriate participants with relevant experiences, backgrounds and roles, thereby ensuring a useful depth of insight would be obtained. A total of fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted and the data analysed using thematic analysis in order to explore the initial findings and create core themes.

Findings

Several themes emerged from the study:

1. AHP academic leaders have key inherent leadership characteristics attributable to their success.
2. AHP academic leaders have developed the soft-skills required to be an authentic and transformational leader.
3. AHP academic leaders have developed resilience from exposure to challenging opportunities that promoted growth and development.
4. AHP academic leaders' advice for aspiring leaders.

The results of the thematic analysis demonstrate that AHP academic leaders are authentic leaders and are self-directed individuals who actively seek opportunities for professional development. They are able to think strategically and are good communicators. They understand the reality of leadership positions and have developed the necessary interpersonal skills to meet the demands of the position that they are in. They are forward thinking and willing to assist others on their leadership journey.

Conclusion

Conversations with senior AHP academic leaders provided opportunities to obtain valuable insights from those who had become successful academic leaders. Using the findings from the study, a number of recommendations have been made to ensure that AHPs are provided with the support, the skills and the opportunities required for them to be able to move into senior academic leadership roles in the future.

The findings from this study will be used to apply for a subsequent grant application for a future project.

Introduction

In April 2018, Health Education England (HEE) commissioned the University of the West of England Bristol (UWE), to undertake a primary research study evaluating the current scope of Allied Health Professional (AHP) leadership within Higher Education. This was completed and the findings published in May 2019 (1).

Following publication of the results, HEE commissioned UWE in September 2019, to lead on a further primary research study looking at developing AHP capacity and capability within the Higher Education sector. This study was undertaken to investigate any support that could be provided to AHPs working in academia to enable them to realise their potential and achieve senior leadership positions within HEIs. Specifically, the project focused on exploring the 'lived experiences' of senior AHP leaders within academia to identify their key strengths which have enabled them to achieve their positions, and what support mechanisms they engaged with during their careers.

The aims of the study were:

1. To understand more about the skills and attributes required to become a successful leader in academia.
2. To explore the potential support mechanisms that can be provided for aspiring AHP leaders within academia / higher education.
3. To use the findings to maximise developmental opportunities for individuals to reach senior positions in order to realise their full potential.

Background

It is acknowledged that the total number of AHP academics is significantly smaller than many other professional areas, however, it is widely recognised anecdotally, that a lower number of AHPs are appointed to significant leadership roles within academia. This relates to leadership specifically around governance, policy and decision making, rather than research leadership, where AHPs do appear to have strong representation.

The research project published in 2019 *AHP Leadership in Academia: Opportunities, challenges and current position* (1) aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of key stakeholders in relation to the current extent of AHPs in leadership roles within academia. The researchers undertook an exploration of the potential barriers, challenges and opportunities that exist for AHPs to undertake leadership roles within higher education and used the findings to offer recommendations for the future.

Several themes emerged from this study, the primary ones relating to lack of confidence, a lack of motivation amongst AHPs to aspire to senior leadership roles, with a preference instead to

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focus on gaining clinical and research expertise rather than leadership skills. In addition, fewer opportunities appear to exist for AHPs to progress into senior leadership roles outside of the AHP sphere, due to a number of reasons which were explored in more depth in the report, but the key issue was an inability to break through existing structures within academia. This is a common issue identified not only for AHPs, but for women generally in higher education (2; 3). The value of role models and mentorship to overcome this barrier has emerged as being key both to navigate structure and to build confidence.

Contributing to this is developing a leadership identity where one is able to see and identify oneself as a senior leader (2). The privation of this identity becomes a barrier to progression and often results in a vulnerability to passive discouragement, which is commonly experienced when trying to advance. Given that there are few AHPs in senior leadership positions in UK HEIs, this becomes a natural challenge. Therefore, role models and mentors may need to be selected from other professions in an effective and significant manner to facilitate growth (3).

A number of recommendations were made arising from the study (1) to ensure that AHPs attain the ambition, the confidence, the skills and the opportunities required for them to be able to move into senior leadership roles in the future. It was acknowledged that further information is required to establish what challenges are faced by AHPs when progressing through their careers. As a result, this further study (*AHP Leadership in Academia: Skills & Attributes*) was commissioned to explore the experiences of senior AHP leaders within academia.

It is becoming increasingly important to ensure that strong AHP leadership is evident within the HEI sector. High performing teams are increasingly crucial to respond to the demands on HEIs to be innovative and drive change within the sectors (4). The increasing opportunities and challenges presenting themselves in education, all contribute to the requirement for health disciplines to work more strategically with external stakeholders at a high level. Leadership and partnership working are imperative for the sustainability of the education provision and for the allied health professions themselves (5). Creating future educational curricula that embeds a stronger culture of leadership, will also help develop confidence to actively seek new opportunities for AHPs. Formal development opportunities and early exposure to leadership experiences are considered facilitators for success in senior leadership positions (2).

Literature Review

A paucity of research was noted relating to AHP Leadership in academia. NHS Improvement has published a number of useful documents offering guidance for AHPs working in clinical practice (6). HEE has produced a resource '*Supporting the development of the AHP workforce and AHP careers*' (7) which provides guidance on a number of career pathways open to AHPs, one of which is in academia. However, these documents primarily focus on increasing leadership roles in clinical settings.

Within academia in the UK, new university lecturers with nursing, midwifery and allied health profession backgrounds are generally appointed after establishing themselves as expert clinicians with associated practices and identities. This transition mid-career to higher education

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roles is often challenging. Whilst a new academic may rise to the challenge, feel well supported and be highly motivated by nurturing new colleagues, their time and energy is focused on teaching, which becomes a priority (8). They experience underlying pressure to complete a doctorate and be research active, and often do not see strong pathways into leadership roles. In addition, they may experience reluctance to let go of their prior identity and credibility as a clinical practitioner and try to retain their clinical skills. Despite this, it appears that nursing colleagues are able to more frequently take on leadership roles. They are also more likely to have had earlier leadership experiences within their clinical role, which facilitates a leadership identity and promotes advancement (2). Studies have attempted to explore some of those factors which could contribute to this apparent discrepancy between nursing and AHPs (8; 9).

There is some historical context for the way in which the nursing profession has ensured a more robust approach to striving towards leadership positions. Since the late 1980s there has been a strong move by the Government to reduce the medical dominance and power of doctors in the clinical environment. This had a significant impact on nurses who received encouragement and incentives to move into management hierarchy away from patriarchal medical dominance (10).

This process however, did not extend to AHPs and, as a result, these professional areas became subsumed under nursing colleagues who were recruited to Board level leadership roles. Currently statute requires foundation trusts to have both a medical director and a director of nursing. As a result, very few AHPs have ever achieved Board level roles. This is a global issue across health services. In a systematic review observing leadership behaviours across nursing and AHPs, Gifford *et al* found that in 34 articles selected, nursing was present in all of them and AHPs only in six (11).

This mind-set appears to have transferred into the academic world with very few AHPs appointed to senior leadership roles within HEIs (1). Advance HE on their website (12) supports transformative leadership, however this website does not appear to contain any mention of advice or opportunities specifically for AHPs in their transition to academia from the healthcare setting.

AHPs are the third largest workforce in the NHS. Collectively, there are over 170,000 AHPs working in the NHS (13). They practise in most clinical pathways and work across organisational boundaries at all stages of the pathway. NHS Improvement in their document '*Leadership of allied health professions in trusts: what exists and what matters*' (14) acknowledged that 'There has never before been such a need to harness their potential for transforming healthcare'. However, their contributions to outcomes are often poorly understood, resulting in missed opportunities for their collective potential to support the transformation of health and care.

The Chief Allied Health Professions Officer in England published the results of a large national research project *AHPs into Action: Using AHPs to transform health, care and wellbeing* (15). This has had a huge impact on inspiring AHPs and clinical managers to think differently about how clinical services are offered. The work has succeeded in raising the profile of AHPs and provided the various professions with the confidence to shape new models of care. Although

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this addresses senior leadership within NHS Trust boards and Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs), it does not however, specifically relate to leadership within academia.

Recently there appears to be a growing recognition of the need for a more diverse approach to Trust Boards. AHPs undoubtedly have leadership contributions to make but, because of career structures and ceiling limits of expectations, are less able to navigate their way to strategic roles that maximise their contribution within NHS organisations (16). Simon Stevens, Chief Executive, NHS England, acknowledged this when he stated that 'We must unleash the energy, insight and brilliance of AHPs' (16).

NHS Improvement produced a Clinical leadership framework, which provides a guide for senior leaders on developing professional diversity at board level (17). The framework acknowledges the NHS Long Term Plan priority around nurturing the next generation of leaders. The paper has a particular focus on increasing the number of people with clinical backgrounds involved in strategic leadership at Board level, and explores how having more clinicians at the board can support organisations to be more effective. It remains to be seen however, whether these recommendations will have any impact on diversity of leadership within the HE sector.

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was used to investigate the perceptions of key stakeholders, which focused on AHP Academics working within higher education. As the context of the research study was leadership, the structure and design of the methodology and interview questions did not explore AHP research positioning, although it is acknowledged that this is strong across many AHP disciplines (especially Physiotherapy).

This qualitative research study took an Appreciative Enquiry approach to investigate the views of successful leaders within academia. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) (18) is a way of looking at organisational change which focuses on identifying and doing more of what is already working, rather than looking for problems and trying to fix them. It makes rapid strategic change possible by focusing on the core strengths of an organisation and then using those strengths to reshape the future (Figure One).

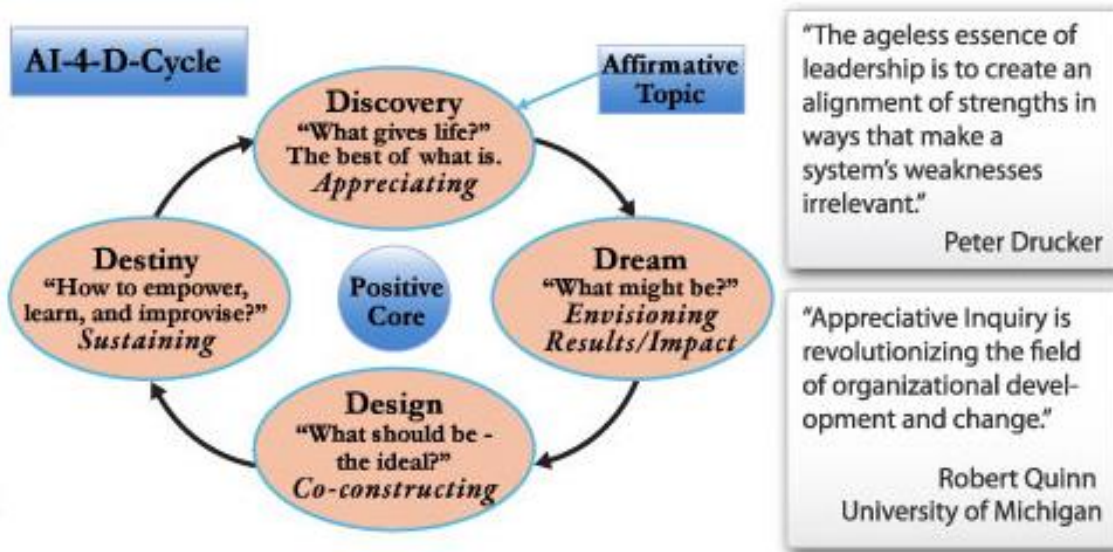


Figure One: Appreciative Enquiry (19)

Three researchers undertook this project. Part of this work involved interviews with key people, to obtain as much data and as many views as possible. AHPs who had achieved positions in academia above Head of Department level were sampled.

Purposive sampling took place to ensure a diverse sample of stakeholders, and the inclusion of the most appropriate participants with relevant experiences, backgrounds and roles, thereby ensuring a useful depth of insight would be obtained. In total, fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data analysed using thematic analysis in order to explore the initial findings and create core themes.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. The research team were guided by ethical principles, and Institutional ethical approval was obtained for the study from the UWE Ethics Committee in August 2019. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents was deemed to be crucial, and the researchers ensured that individuals could respond fully without being identified or linked to their institution. Participants were informed that quotations may be used as examples but would not be attributable to individuals. They were also informed that they would be free to withdraw from the study at any time.

The inclusion criteria for participants related to AHPs who had achieved senior leadership positions in academia, above Head of Department level, but individuals did not have to be currently working at this level. Twitter was used to send out a call for suggested names of appropriate individuals meeting these criteria. A number of responses were received, and purposive sampling took place using these contacts. Invitations were sent to 21 individuals who met the inclusion criteria, and fifteen responded positively to confirm their agreement to participate in the interview process.

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The majority of interviews were from participants based in England, however the professional experiences of some participants drew upon time spent in other parts of the United Kingdom. Interviews undertaken, spanned representation from both Russell Group Universities, and the University Alliance.

Clinical AHP practitioners were excluded from this research study from a participation perspective, however those participants with previous clinical experience did reference time spent within clinical practice. This helped to shape some of the emergent themes within the research study.

Individuals were invited to participate in the investigation via email, which included an information sheet and a consent form. The Information Sheet (Appendix 1) was made available providing details about the purpose and nature of the investigation, making it explicit that there was no compulsion for the individual to participate. A consent form (Appendix 2) was provided for all participants to sign, in order to demonstrate their agreement to take part in the study and for the interviews to be recorded.

Each interview was semi-structured, supported by a framework which acted as a guide for an informal conversation between researcher and participant, and also guided the analysis. This method of qualitative interviewing is recognised as an effective method of obtaining reliable views and information from participants (20). Semi-structured interviews were created using guidance questions (Appendix 3), designed to gain an understanding of individual experiences and views on their journey to achieving senior leadership positions within academia, and any observations on the barriers, challenges and opportunities that exist for AHPs. Closed questions were used to explore respondents' biography and professional backgrounds. Open-ended questions asked about areas such as their experiences, the support they had been given, their personal professional development, and their views on the issues. Within these broad areas they were prompted for their perspectives on formal and informal support for leadership development, and any areas for potential further development.

The interviews were conducted via telephone, using a digital audio recorder. Written consent was received for all interviews. All data was collected anonymously and stored securely. A research assistant was used to transcribe the interviews. This individual was aware of the importance of anonymity and confidentiality of the contents of the interviews and was asked to sign a confidentiality agreement before involvement. All data was stored securely on an encrypted external storage device, in accordance with the University's Data Protection policy. Once publication of the data report has occurred, all interview data will be deleted in accordance with General Data Protection Requirements (GDPR).

Representation of participants by AHP professional grouping is highlighted in figure 2, and it is acknowledged that two professions (Physiotherapy and Radiography) contribute to over fifty percent of the participants that were interviewed.

Physiotherapy – 40% (n=6)

Occupational Therapy – 13% (n=2)

Radiography – 27% (n=4)

SALT – 7% (n=1)

Podiatry – 13% (n=2)

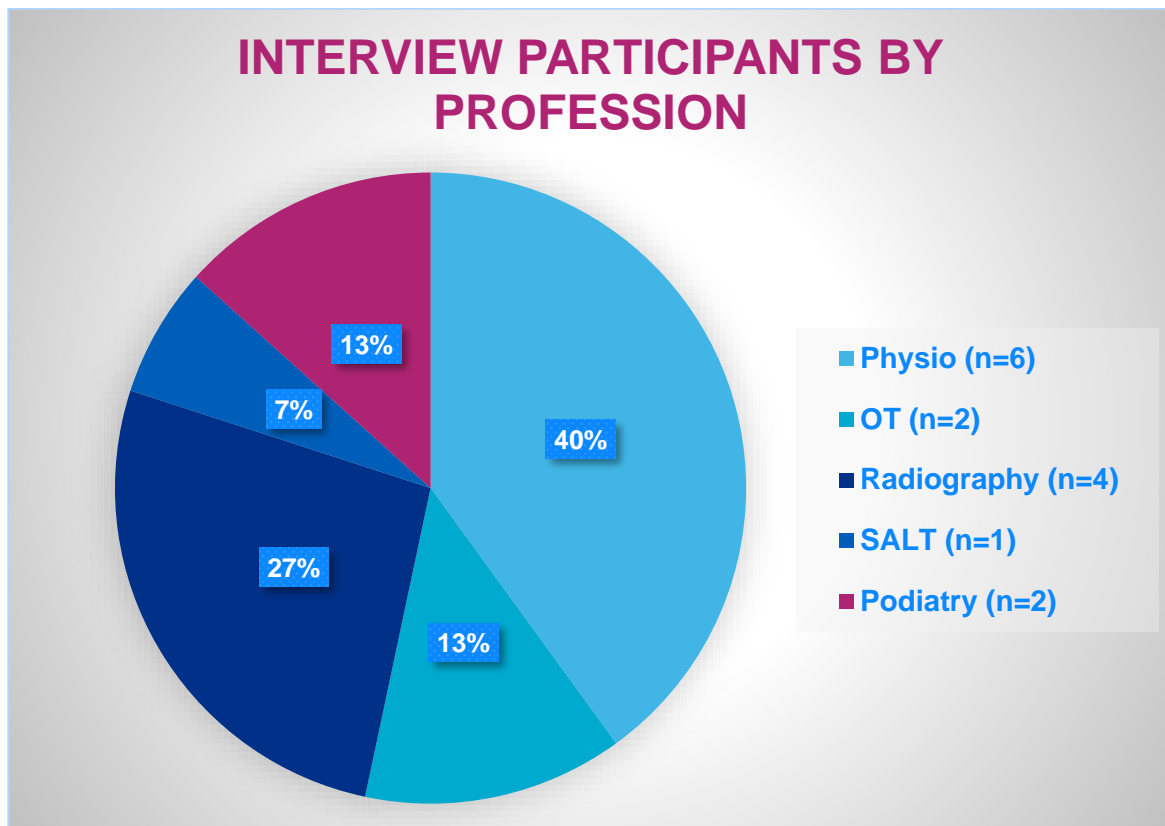


Figure 2: Representation of interview participants by professional grouping

During the research, although discussions and responses were wide-ranging, several common themes began to emerge. The broad range of comments from participants that arose from the interviews, were reviewed by the researchers by defining subject content of the data, and then coded according to their content. As the codes were accumulated, they were then sorted into themes. This resulted in a transfer of the descriptive data, summarising the responses into a more interpretative approach to help understand the data.

The data was analysed using a thematic analysis approach in order to understand the findings and a complete open coding method was used initially to identify everything of interest from the transcripts (21). These were coded with a brief phrase that captured the focus of interest and all relevant codes were assigned to each relevant point (22; 23). Focused coding was then utilised to develop tentative categories and theory testing as the research progressed. Memo writing was implemented as the intermediate stage between data coding and theoretical analysis. This took place from the early stages of the data analysis and was conducted concurrently to allow ideas and theory building to occur (24) as well as providing an audit trail. This allowed ideas, thoughts and challenges to be captured (25) as well as forcing questioning to increase the rigour and credibility of the research and emergent theory (26). The process also allowed any

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gaps to be identified which were explored in later data collection. Initial codes and associated categories were checked by a second person to ensure these were unbiased.

All the points raised by participants were finally identified as fitting into one of four themes. The comments have been synthesised and outlined in Appendix 4 of this report.

The data was analysed using the participant questions as a framework to sort the content:

- What is your current role?

All those interviewed were academic staff who had reached a senior leadership position within academia, above the level of Head of Department.

- What is your professional background and how long have you been qualified in your specific profession?

A range of professional backgrounds of the participants was noted: physiotherapist; radiographer; occupational therapist, podiatrist and speech and language therapist.

- Were you provided with any specific support to enable you to achieve your current position?

All participants stated that they were provided with support. This ranged from informal support from line managers and colleagues, to formal mentoring opportunities. Participants also described support from line managers which encouraged them to utilise opportunities for development which resulted in exposure to a wide range of activities both within and outside of their university.

- Are there other people / opportunities which have helped you achieve your role and if so can you briefly describe?

Participants identified individuals during their careers who had inspired or assisted them. These included peers and line managers who were seen to be instrumental in providing advice and encouragement over the course of their careers.

- Looking back at your career, is there anything you may have done differently on your journey towards becoming an HEI leader?

Responses to this question ranged from not wanting to do anything different, to specific examples such as completing doctoral studies sooner, and the challenges endured in balancing a clinical role with an academic role when trying to retain both career strands in the early part of their careers.

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- Can you tell me about a time when you felt enthused / empowered / motivated / excited about your role as a HEI leader?

Responses to this question centred around experiences of bringing about change or making a difference within the organisation. Many participants showed evidence of altruism as they often described putting staff and student needs first, but finding fulfillment from making a positive difference to the lives of others.

- In an ideal world, what support do you think young academics need to prepare for a role as an HEI leader?

Participants spoke of a need to identify role models/mentors early in the careers of young academics. They also advised those aspiring to be leaders to understand the reality of the position and to be willing to work hard to meet the demands of the role. They suggested that young academics look for opportunities to work outside of their current roles and to take on additional responsibilities where possible.

- Can you describe what you think your 3 key strengths are that allowed you to succeed as an HEI leader?

Many participants listed traits such as resilience, empathy, time management and persistence as being key strengths attributable to their success. They also described the importance of having good communication skills and the ability to develop relationships and build rapport with people as key to success.

- What are the 3 key things you have learnt that have enabled you to become a successful leader in HEI which would help other AHPs wanting to become HEI leaders?

A number of participants highlighted the importance of identifying role models/mentors early in an aspiring leader's career. They highlighted the importance of understanding the reality of the pressures involved in leadership roles, and described the importance of self-belief and strategic risk taking.

- Would you be willing to be a mentor for others aspiring to become HEI leaders?

All participants confirmed that they would be willing to act as mentors, apart from one who acknowledged they would be unable to guarantee an appropriate time commitment to the role.

Discussion

The thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews resulted in the development of four key themes which are discussed below:

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Theme 1: AHP academic leaders have key inherent leadership characteristics attributable to their success.

The first theme describes the finding that AHP leaders have key inherent strengths that they attribute to their success as leaders. AHP leaders describe themselves as being self-directed and have the ability to think strategically to bring about change. This can be seen in the following verbatim participant quotes:

“I'm quite proactive. I do seek out opportunities.....”

“All the opportunities that I had I had to create for myself. Nobody stood with the door open saying, "come this way xxxx"

“I mean I suppose, I really, the thing that excites me most is seeing a potential for change in an organisation. Or in a you know in a faculty or whatever, and actually stepping up and taking that forward.”

“You can't just be a leader, you have to be visionary..”

This finding would suggest that AHP leaders have strengths that have been identified as key behaviours in transformational leadership models, such as the model proposed by Kouzes and Posner (27; 28). AHP leaders seek out opportunities that test their skills and abilities and look for ways to bring about organisational change. They model the way by setting an example for others to follow, and inspire others with their vision for the organisation.

The findings of the current study are supported by Snodgrass and Shachar (29) who suggested that combining a transformational and transactional leadership style may be an effective approach for AHPs within an academic setting. The proactive approach described by AHP leaders in this study is also consistent with current literature that describes healthcare professionals as having an autonomous motivation that is attributable to their proactive behaviour, and this ultimately drives their performance (30). This suggests that identifying individual AHP's level of intrinsic motivation could predict their ability to engage with self-directed career progression, and may assist in identifying potential AHP leaders at an early stage when their skills can be nurtured.

Possessing the ability to take a strategic view within the workplace was referred to by several participants, and was described by some as having a 'vision'. Leading change or 'making a difference' were statements made, demonstrating the ability to steer a direction of travel within an organisation for individuals or teams. This also extended to taking a strategic visionary approach to their own career trajectory, which helped them map a route to progress into senior leadership roles.

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Alongside this, AHP leaders have the ability to adapt to the work-life conflict that exists in academia. Their strategic vision enabled them to take the long-term view, and see they would have to make sacrifices in some aspects of their life in order to be able to focus on developing their careers. Quotes supporting this included:

“I was willing to work unbelievably hard. And I remember on several occasions my husband either appearing in my office or he rang the Dean to say "she's married to me, not to you".

“If we've got young, highly capable female academics who aspire to be head of department, they really have to know the commitment that is required. They would say, so some of the generations they will say well I'm not going to do that. But that may be why they then will wonder why they're not successful.”

“I think that if somebody wants to become a senior leader in higher education, you have to really question what is it, and know, why they're doing it, because that'll be key to how successful they are, because if you're not altruistic, if you don't actually understand what's involved in this, then you're making a mistake.”

Although possessing the ability to take a strategic view appears to be an inherent trait in successful AHP leaders, it became apparent from the participants in this study that a clear career pathway in academic leadership was not available or visible to them at the start of their journey.

“There wasn't, there's never been a big master plan. I think the next step was always informed by the previous experience and an opportunity that exists. So, as I say, there wasn't any massive career plan that this is a direction of travel I would go. I have been fortunate to have one, well, I would say two or three quite influential mentors that have guided and supported me in terms of direction of travel.”

“I've not really ever had a, kind of, plan as such, a career plan that I have doggedly or determinedly followed. So, I think, I've taken the opportunities that have been in front of me and I've taken some risks with that, so I've, kind of, you know, exposed myself a little bit by, kind of, seeking opportunities and sometimes the answers been, 'No.' And, sometimes it's been, 'Yes'”

This finding is consistent with AHP literature which suggests that career progression for AHPs into leadership positions is challenged by a lack of a clear progression pathway, and relies on individuals to take responsibility for their own career development (31). Strategies to ensure that leadership positions are made more accessible and appealing to AHP academics, should therefore be explored. Zimmerman, *et al.* (32) suggest that it may be worthwhile for universities to consider recruiting academics who show an interest in leadership roles, rather than using

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succession planning strategies that consider seniority and experience within current roles. Furthermore, the authors highlight the need for guidance and development for those academics who display an interest in leadership roles.

In addition, however, there is a more fundamental need to broaden the horizons of AHPs to raise their awareness of career opportunities outside of the clinical sphere, that they could aspire to. Individuals will also need to be given the awareness of the responsibility to take ownership of their career progression, rather than adopting a more passive approach.

In addition to their inherent leadership skills, several participants commented on the need to possess excellent management skills. This includes abilities such as decision-making, time management, planning, problem-solving, abstract thinking and idea formulation. It was felt that, without these fundamental attributes, there would not be the necessary underpinning required to take on a senior leadership role.

“I would never have survived in my role if I wasn’t super-organised’
‘The sheer volume of work I have to process on a daily basis means I need to be able to manage, not just my time, but fairly basic tasks such as a good email filing system”

Theme 2: AHP academic leaders have developed the soft-skills required to be an authentic and transformational leader.

The second study theme describes AHP leaders as having developed the soft-skills required to be an authentic leader. The participants of the study described the importance of building relationships with colleagues and stakeholders, and highlighted the importance of developing good interpersonal skills as a requirement for successful leadership. They also described the need for empathy as a key skill inherent to successful leadership in higher education. This can be seen in the following verbatim participant quotes:

‘It’s about being sincere, having empathy with people, seeing things through their eyes, and understanding the impact of your decisions on their lives”

“Building up rapport with people, having empathy....”

“And I think another strength is, I suppose it's a form of emotional intelligence really, it's trying to understand things from other people’s perspectives, which sometimes helps to unpack and understand why you may not be making the progress as quickly as you wish to make or a particular problem is more complex than it appears or it should be.”

“I think it's about having, recognising that leadership is around relations and it's a relational thing to be a successful leader, so to pay a lot of attention to networks

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and relationships.”

“If I’ve clearly messed up then I prefer to own up rather than cover up. I think the team respects me more for that.”

“The people we manage need to see that we’re only human”

The term ‘authentic leaders’ occurred frequently during interviews across the majority of the participants. Authentic leaders are observed to inspire others with their positive attitude and sense of moral-compass, which creates a relationship of trust amongst employees. As part of creating that trust, several participants emphasised the need to only say what they really meant, and to uphold promises, in order to gain the respect of those they worked with. They would then be viewed as honest leaders, possessing integrity. Alongside this, participants often exhibited signs of altruism, and described putting staff and student needs first, and finding fulfillment from making a positive difference in the lives of others.

An ability to develop relationships and build rapport with different types of people, was seen by the majority of participants as key to success. Some had worked hard to develop this skill, acknowledging that this was not something that was inherent to their personality, but rather they had developed this along their journey, often by modeling themselves on others seen to possess this ability. Some participants acknowledged they had only developed this ability by reflecting on outcomes of their interactions with others, and observing what had resulted in positive or negative outcomes. They felt, however, this was a skill which could perhaps have been developed or enhanced by incorporating the topic into appropriate leadership programmes.

A strong self-identity and a clear awareness of self is key to authentic leadership (33; 34). The need to know their own strengths and weaknesses was important to many participants, and they acknowledged that they were then able to work on their weaknesses whilst maximising their strengths. The participants in this study appear to consider that they have developed the skills needed for authentic leadership, and were able to identify these skills as key drivers in their success.

As part of the discussions with participants, emotional intelligence was often mentioned as an important trait to develop. Emotional intelligence is the capacity to be aware of one's emotions, and to control and express them appropriately (35). It also incorporates the ability to handle interpersonal relationships effectively and empathetically. It is a set of skills that anyone can acquire, and many participants felt they had worked to develop this. It has been linked with successful workplace performance (35) and it is therefore not surprising that leaders need to display this. Academic staff who feel valued and trusted by their leader are more likely to buy into the vision of their leader, which makes the concept of emotionally intelligent leaders an important part of leadership in higher education (36).

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Several participants expressed a need to be honest with their teams when a mistake had occurred, rather than trying to cover up, and were aware that people respected them for this. Along with this was the insight that they needed to be seen as 'only human' by the people they managed, rather than trying to create the impression of being a 'perfect' leader.

“But again, that ability to say I'm flawed, is the only way I can get on with it, because if I had to pretend I was perfect, I would fail. And for me, the only way to fail safely is to tell people - I'm going to let you down sometimes, therefore, please, please don't feel embarrassed to nudge me back again, and say you're letting me down please come and get this and then I'll do it.”

Theme 3: AHP academic leaders have developed resilience from exposure to challenging opportunities that promoted growth and development.

Resilience is a trait that the participants in this study rated highly. A number of different aspects of resilience were raised relating the role of a leader, ranging from physical resilience (to cope with the long hours and sacrifices to personal life involved with any leadership role), to mental resilience (to cope with the inevitable setbacks, challenging scenarios and individuals frequently encountered). Arguably, the ability to bounce back from a crisis is ever increasingly important in higher education, which may explain why the study participants place a large emphasis on the importance of resilience.

“I think resilience is one thing. You really have to keep going even though, you know, you get knocked back or you take one step back, etc...”

“I am very resilient, which you know, I think you just have to be.”

“I've always been able to bounce back when things go wrong – think I was just made that way.”

“I realised early on when I became a manager that I would need to develop a thick skin if I was going to survive.”

Some participants felt they had always had an inner resilience, whereas others realised they have developed this trait along their journey as a leader. Several confirmed that the presence of a coach or mentor had not only helped to support them through challenging situations, but also enabled them to see the importance of developing resilience if they were to survive and succeed in their roles. Discussions with participants exploring this in more detail, demonstrated that the ability to talk through a problematic scenario with an external person not connected directly with the situation, enabled them to feel supported, and this provided them with an inner strength or 'grit', to help them to find an effective way forward.

Interestingly, transformational leadership, a style which may lend itself to AHP leaders, has been positively associated with the ability to drive teams to higher levels of organisational

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effectiveness, as this leadership style encourages the development of team resilience (37). This concept is further supported by Schimschal & Lomas (38) who report that leaders who exhibit signs of perseverance or 'grit' are more likely to succeed in leadership positions than those that do not. In addition, the teams they lead will become more successful if they have also become resilient. Leaders with 'grit' are considered to perform consistently, despite facing challenges, setbacks and adversity. The authors suggest that aspiring leaders should be given opportunities to allow for the development of grit in order to promote the resilience required for successful leadership. This would include exposing aspiring leaders to opportunities to develop resilience that incorporate elements of interest, practice, purpose and hope.

Alongside resilience, several participants described themselves as 'risk-takers' and 'stepping out of their 'comfort zone' was frequently mentioned.

"I've taken risks by taking on challenges...sometimes these were uncomfortable but I knew it was the only way to get experience and recognition"

"if I'd only stayed doing things I felt comfortable with I would never have progressed in my career as a leader. I've had to take risks which at the time I wasn't happy about, but I stuck with it"

"I'm not afraid of failing either."

"I'm not a risk taker. I'm naturally risk averse. But I think over the years I've become; I have become braver about calculated risks."

In order to progress in their careers, participants acknowledged that they had been required to take risks with the roles they applied for, as well as the decisions they made once in a role. A desire for safety was not an attribute that featured in their development as a leader. This linked in very much with the resilience trait, because they needed the inner strength to ensure they were able to survive the challenges faced when working outside of their safe comfort zone.

Theme 4: AHP academic leaders' advice for aspiring leaders.

The study participants shared reflections on their journey which provide valuable advice for academics who aspire to take on leadership roles with HE. All participants identified individuals during their careers who had inspired or assisted them. These included peers and line managers who were seen to be instrumental in providing advice and encouragement over the course of their careers.

The call to identify a role model or mentor early in an academic's career, and the need to identify opportunities for development, were recommendations shared by many of the participants.

"And the third bit of advice would be to identify your role models, and really think about what you can learn from them, and I say a few role models. I don't think one's enough."

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This is not surprising given that most participants recognised the role of mentoring and engaging with developmental opportunities which they had benefited from during their own leadership pathway. All except one participant expressed a willingness to act as a mentor for aspiring leaders.

The importance of selecting a mentor who is well-connected, and able to share those connections, also featured in discussions with participants. This relates to the importance of networking, which was mentioned on several occasions during discussions. The process of interacting with others to exchange information and develop professional contacts who could potentially help further them in their career, was seen as crucial to opening doors along the path of a leader.

Participants strongly encouraged young academics to believe in their own ability, and this relates to the lack of confidence experienced by many AHPs. The role of a mentor was often seen to be one of boosting that confidence. The following verbatim quotes support the development of this theme:

“I think the second thing would be that imposter syndrome is completely normal. I don't probably need to explain that, but I think we all go through kind of anxiety as you move up into more responsible positions, that kind of fear of being a fraud and that you probably shouldn't have been appointed to this job, but I think the higher up you go, the more you realise that whatever level you get to, people have those same experiences.”

The call for young academics to ‘believe in themselves’ could be partially explained in the literature. Many studies have described a medical dominance experienced by allied health care professionals which may impact on their sense of self-worth (39). Furthermore, a feeling of ‘imposter syndrome’ has been identified in healthcare professionals when they feel as if they do not have the abilities to perform in their new role, which leaves them feeling as though they may be exposed as being a fraud. A clear professional identity and a mentor may help to mitigate this feeling (40; 41).

The role of mentoring on career development within higher education in the nursing field is well established (42) with support growing for the role of mentoring within AHP academics. Cross *et al.*, (42) stress the importance of providing female academics with mentors who are experienced and well-connected. They stress that this is critical to creating a supportive working environment which in turn promotes productivity and retention. An improvement in research output, interpersonal skills and career development skills has been reported when formal mentorship programmes are initiated among junior academics (43).

Participants urged aspiring leaders to be realistic about the demands that leadership roles will have on their personal and professional lives:

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“So know yourself, know why you're doing it, know what you're going to have to give up, and of course what's going to have to give to allow you to be successful.”

Balancing work demands with family responsibilities is a challenge that aspiring leaders will need to overcome as academic work has become increasingly demanding in recent years (44). Academics who are able to achieve a work-life balance are more likely to remain in academia, and this therefore leads to the need for this skill to become an important consideration for succession planning within Universities (45).

The need to look for developmental opportunities within the workplace, by perhaps moving into other disciplines, was a recommendation provided by participants.

“look at other areas, look at other disciplines, look at other disciplines within health themselves and across the university.”

“...and I said looking back I would have looked for more diverse opportunities earlier I think.”

Participants also described support from line managers which encouraged them to utilise opportunities for development, and resulted in exposure to a wide range of activities both within and outside of their University. Looking for secondments opportunities was seen as valuable experience for those working within higher education. This could be either working within health-related areas, or could involve looking at other roles in perhaps areas such as business. This then provides not just new learning experiences for individuals, but also demonstrates a record of transferable skills for moving into future roles.

Key recommendations

1. Develop a context specific academic AHP leadership programme that incorporates transformational and authentic leadership theory as a theoretical framework. This would be a holistic developmental programme, with tailored coaching and mentorship, to benefit those identified as having the talent and desire to succeed. Opportunities to simulate real-world interactions within a leadership programme, would help to provide safe spaces to practise development of emotional intelligence and effective interpersonal skills when dealing with challenging situations or individuals.
2. Establish a formal mentorship programme for those on AHP academic leadership programmes, utilising those individuals with a proven track record as a successful senior leader in HE. The role of the mentor would be one of creating opportunities for exposure to challenging opportunities, and encouraging aspiring leaders to step up to these opportunities to promote growth and development.
3. Provide aspiring AHP academic leaders with opportunities for exposure and networking to enable growth and connections within a diverse environment.

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4. Establish mechanisms or processes to identify future academic leaders who have inherent leadership characteristics, such as emotional intelligence, strong intrinsic motivation to lead, resilience, and effective interpersonal skills.
5. Produce case studies of those AHPs who have established successful senior academic leadership roles, to inspire others and provide signposting for those wishing to follow a similar journey. These could also take the form of on-line webinars, with opportunities for question and answer sessions with the successful leaders, to share their experiences and provide advice.
6. Promote academic leadership to AHPs as a career option to enable AHPs to focus on an academic career trajectory at an early stage of their career. This could perhaps be embedded at undergraduate level, to raise the awareness of students of the opportunities available.

Conclusion

Conversations with senior AHP academic leaders provided opportunities to obtain valuable insights from those who had become successful leaders. Discussions were wide-ranging, but findings focused around four distinct themes: highlighting those qualities which the individuals thought were inherent to their own personalities; areas which the individuals had worked hard to develop because they had observed these as successful traits in others or had learnt from trial and error themselves; resilience and determination to succeed despite the inevitable challenges and sacrifices their journey would incur; and advice for others aspiring to become successful leaders.

These findings help to provide an insight into the skills and attributes required to become a successful leader in academia. A number of recommendations have been made to ensure that AHPs are provided with the support mechanisms, the skills and the opportunities required for them to be able to move into senior leadership roles in the future.

The findings from this study will be used to apply for a subsequent grant application for a future project to design leadership developmental opportunities for individuals, to support them to reach senior positions in order to realise their full potential.

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Appendices

Appendix 1



Research Project: AHP Leadership in Academia: Skills & Attributes

Information Sheet for participant interviews

You are invited to take part in research taking place at the University of the West of England, Bristol, commissioned by Health Education England (HEE). Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the study is being done and what it will involve. Please read the following information carefully and if you have any queries or would like more information please contact Dr Vivien Gibbs, Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol by email: Vivien.gibbs@uwe.ac.uk or phone 0117 3288412.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part in this project because of your experience as an Allied Health Professional who has achieved a senior leadership role in Higher Education. You were identified as a possible participant by utilising information from Council of Deans of Health (CoDH) members list, Professional Body representatives and individuals working in Higher Education Institutes. The purpose of the questions will be to gain information about your experience as a leader in academia.

Do I have to take part?

No. Your participation is entirely voluntary. If you do decide to take part in the project you will still be able to withdraw at any time up to three weeks after completion of the interview, by which time the interview data will have been anonymised. If you would like to withdraw from the study during this time, please send an email to Vivien Gibbs at Vivien.gibbs@uwe.ac.uk. You may also withdraw from the project at any time during the interview. Deciding not to take part or to withdraw from the study does not have any penalty.

What will taking part involve?

If you decide to participate in the study, Dr Vivien Gibbs or Dr Alex Palombi or Dr Heather Lawrence (co-researchers) will contact you to invite you to take part in an interview. You will be sent a consent form via email which you will be asked to complete and return. You will also be asked to confirm consent at the start of the interview. The interview can be set up to be either talking to the researcher face-to-face, or over the telephone, whichever is more convenient to you. The interview will take about 30 minutes and may be audio-recorded so the interviewer can concentrate on listening to you, and also have a record of what you said so that nothing is missed.

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The audio-recording will not contain your name but a unique identifier will be used to re-identify you if you choose to withdraw from the study within the withdrawal period. At the point of transcription, your voice recording will be deleted. Your data will be anonymised at this point and will be analysed with interview data from other anonymised participants.

During the interview, the researcher will ask you a series of open-ended questions relating to the research. The focus of the questions will be supporting the aims of the research which are:

1. To understand more about the skills and attributes required to become a successful leader in academia;
2. To explore the potential support mechanisms that can be provided for aspiring AHP leaders within academia / higher education;
3. To use the findings to maximise developmental opportunities for individuals to help them reach senior positions in order to realise their full potential.

The interviewer will also ask you for personal data relevant to the study such as your current role within your institution, your professional background and the length of time spent in your profession.

Is the information I provide confidential?

We are interested in creating a general understanding of participants' experiences. Individuals will not be named in any presentation of the data. The researcher will remove any identifiable material from the data. Quotations may be used as examples but will not be attributable to individuals. The Privacy Notice for Research Participants has been given to you with this Information Sheet to explain how UWE collects, manages and uses your personal data before, during and after you participate in this research.

How long will the interview take?

About 45 minutes.

What will happen to the findings from the project?

The findings will be presented in a report to HEE who have commissioned us to undertake this project. It is anticipated that the results will be used to help shape future mentorship and development opportunities for AHPs.

It is planned that the final report and findings will be published in a professional journal to share the results more widely, and presented at a future national conference. A hard copy of the report will be made available to all research participants if you would like to see it.

What will happen if I agree to participate in the research?

You will receive an email from Vivien, Alex or Heather. They will arrange a time to meet with you, or telephone you, to carry out the interview.

What should I do if I want to take part in the project?

If you wish to take part in the project, please complete the consent form and email it to Vivien Gibbs at Vivien.gibbs@uwe.ac.uk

Can I agree to the interview, but refuse to be taped?

Yes, written notes will be taken during the interview.

Who has ethically approved this research?

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This project has been reviewed and approved by the ethics sub-committee of the Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences, UWE. Any comments, questions or complaints about the ethical conduct of this study can be addressed to the Research Ethics Committee at the University of the West of England at: Researchethics@uwe.ac.uk.

What are the benefits of taking part?

If you take part, you will be helping us to better understand the skills and attributes needed to become a successful leader in academia. This understanding will enable us to design support and development opportunities for aspiring AHP to become leaders in academia.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

We do not foresee or anticipate any significant risk to you in taking part in this study. If, however, you feel uncomfortable at any time you can ask for the interview to be stopped. If you need any support during or after the interview, the researchers will be able to put you in touch with suitable support agencies. The research team are experienced in conducting interviews and are sensitive to the subject area. The interview questions have been designed with these considerations in mind.

Can I talk to someone afterwards about the issues raised by the interviewer?

If you would like to talk further about any of the issues raised in your interview, you can contact Vivien.gibbs@uwe.ac.uk at any time.

What will happen to your information?

All the information that you give will be kept confidential and anonymised within three weeks after completion of your interview. Hard copy research material will be kept in a locked and secure setting to which only the researchers will have access in accordance with the University's and the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation requirements. Voice recordings will be destroyed securely immediately after anonymised transcription. Your anonymised data will be analysed together with other interview and file data, and we will ensure that there is no possibility of identification or re-identification from this point. All personal data and copies of the transcriptions will be deleted on completion of the final project report.

Thank you for your time and support of this important project. You will be sent an electronic copy of this Participant Information Sheet, the Privacy Notice for Research Participants and your signed Consent Form to keep.

Dr Vivien Gibbs Principal Investigator

Tel: 0117 3288412

Email: Vivien.gibbs@uwe.ac.uk

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Appendix 2



Participant Consent Form

Project title: AHP Leadership in Academia: Skills & Attributes

This consent form will have been given to you with the Participant Information Sheet and the Privacy Notice for Research Participants. Please ensure that you have read and understood the information contained in both forms and asked any questions before you sign this form. If you have any questions please contact Dr Vivien Gibbs, Faculty of Health and Applied Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol by email: Vivien.gibbs@uwe.ac.uk or phone 0117 3288412.

If you are happy to take part in the interview as described in the Participant Information Sheet, please sign and date the form. You will be given a copy to keep for your records.

- I have read and understood the information in the Participant Information Sheet and the Privacy Notice which I have been given to read before being asked to sign this form;
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study;
- I have had my questions answered satisfactorily by the research team;
- I give consent for the interview to be recorded. I understand that the information will be stored securely on an encrypted external storage device in accordance with the University's Data Protection policy, and that all interview data will be deleted in accordance with GDPR requirements once publication of the data report has occurred;
- I agree that anonymised quotes may be used in presentations, publications and in the final Report of this study;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time until the data has been anonymised, without giving a reason;
- I agree to take part in the research.

Name (Printed).....

Signature..... Date.....

Researcher's signature..... Date.....

Appendix 3



Research Project: AHP Leadership in Academia: Skills & Attributes

Interview questions:

- What is your current role?
- What is your professional background and how long have you been qualified in your specific profession?
- Were you provided with any specific support to enable you to achieve your current position?
- Are there other people / opportunities which have helped you achieve your role and if so can you briefly describe?
- Looking back at your career, is there anything you may have done differently on your journey towards becoming an HEI leader?
- Can you tell me about a time when you felt enthused / empowered / motivated / excited about your role as a HEI leader?
- In an ideal world, what support do you think young academics need to prepare for a role as an HEI leader?
- Can you describe what you think your 3 key strengths are that allowed you to succeed as an HEI leader?
- What are the 3 key things you have learnt that have enabled you to become a successful leader in HEI which would help other AHPs wanting to become HEI leaders?
- Would you be willing to be a mentor for others aspiring to become HEI leaders?
- Any other comments / opinions?

Appendix 4

Project themes and categories

Theme

1. AHP academic leaders have key inherent leadership characteristics attributable to their success.
2. AHP academic leaders have developed the soft-skills required to be an authentic and transformational leader.
3. AHP academic leaders have developed resilience from exposure to challenging opportunities that promoted growth and development.
4. AHP academic leaders' advice for aspiring leaders.

Category

- 1.1 AHP leaders are self-directed.
 - 1.2 AHP leaders have the ability to bring about change and think strategically.
 - 1.3 AHP leaders adapt to the work/life conflict that exists in academia.
-
- 2.1 AHP leaders are empathetic.
 - 2.2 AHP leaders have good interpersonal skills required to build relationships.
 - 2.3 AHP leaders are not afraid to admit when they may have made an error
-
- 3.1 AHP leaders need resilience to be an effective leader
 - 3.2 Resilience is a trait that further develops during their journey.
 - 3.3 Not afraid to take risks
-
- 4.1 Role models/ mentors provide guidance and direction
 - 4.2 Believe in yourself
 - 4.3 Understand the reality of leadership positions
 - 4.4 Find opportunities for development

Supporting verbatim quotes

Theme 1: AHP academic leaders have key inherent leadership characteristics attributable to their success.

1.1 AHP leaders are self-directed

".....someone came and did a presentation on employability, and it was at that point that I came back and went to see the head of school and asked what we were doing around employability, and things developed from there really." (P1)

"So I followed a similar path I suppose for the academia, starting as a lecturer and then taking on additional roles that have then provided me with some sort of leadership opportunity." (P1)

"I'm quite proactive. I do seek out opportunities....." (P1)

"Because in the end you've just got to kind of get on with it and make your way and seek out your own opportunities I think too." (P2)

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“You step up and you lead things and you take it forward. Whether it's because you're pushing on the door quite hard, or actually the doors half open anyway, I'm never quite sure. “ (P2)

“Well you either wait for people to give the authority to do it, or I guess you're knocking on a door saying hang on we'd like to do this, any reason why we can't? It is not going to cost you anything, this is here. And generally, I found, I found generally you know doors are sort of, I suppose relatively open if you keep pushing hard enough maybe. “ (P2)

“All the opportunities that I had I had to create for myself. Nobody stood with the door open saying, "come this way xxxx" (P3)

“I've always gotten involved in a wide range of activities that fall under that arena, so I actively sought opportunities to do something a bit interesting, a bit different, and to develop myself. “ (P4)

“There wasn't, there's never been a big master plan. I think the next step was always informed by the previous experience and an opportunity that exists. So, as I say, there wasn't any massive career plan that this is a direction of travel I would go. I have been fortunate to have one, well, I would say two or three quite influential mentors that have guided and supported me in terms of direction of travel.” (P5)

“And also, to weigh up, because when I took my first leadership role, I was concerned about the impact on my research and whether that was what I wanted. I sort of had my arm twisted to do some of the roles, and then I had to decide, you know, that if it was worth the risks to the other parts of my career or not. “ (P6)

“I would never have survived in my role if I wasn't super-organised“ (P7)

“I'm not sure whether you'd call it specific support or not, but I have been very fortunate to work for bosses and managers who have taken an interest in my career, and provided me with the space and the opportunity to pursue things as I saw fit. I think most of the time, I've fallen into the roles that I've had if I'm truthful. There's never been any great career plan. I never really envisaged that I'd end up in a senior leadership role in higher education, but I have had line managers, as I've said, who have taken an interest in my career and supported me to do the things that I've wanted to do. “ (P8)

“And because I've always been fairly, I suppose, proactive in sharing ideas about how we can improve things. So, I suppose I've been seen as someone that is committed to what I do and interested in improving things and bosses who have given me the space to run with some of my ideas, see whether they worked or not and that inevitably has developed and helped me to develop my career over time. “ (P8)

“So I'm somebody who's developed into a leadership role that isn't necessarily professionally specific.” (P9)

“The sheer volume of work I have to process on a daily basis means I need to be able to manage, not just my time, but fairly basic tasks, such as a good email filing system“ (P9)

“I don't think there was any sort of active or individual encouragement or support, but there were opportunities and I always took opportunities if I could.” (P11)

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“I think that's been the story of my career all the way through. Taking opportunities, a door close and if you keep if you're on the lookout for opportunities, another one opens and often too much opens at the same time.” (P11)

“I've not really ever had a, kind of, plan as such, a career plan that I have doggedly or determinedly followed. So, I think, I've taken the opportunities that have been in front of me and I've taken some risks with that, so I've, kind of, you know, exposed myself a little bit by, kind of, seeking opportunities and sometimes the answers been, 'No.' And, sometimes it's been, 'Yes.' “ (P8)

“And so, at that time I was going between clinical work and academia several times, and a couple of my bosses at the time sort of sat me down and said, you know, this isn't going to look good on your CV. You need to do one or the other. But of course, now it'sOr I would say when I got my first head of department job, having that clinical background, having done the job, having clinical leadership to then take on academic leadership, it was a positive advantage. But it happened accidentally. It wasn't planned.” (P12)

“So, from that point of view of anybody, a mentor or anybody supporting me, no, I'm afraid it was everyone for themselves. “ (P13)

1.2 AHP leaders have the ability to bring about change and think strategically.

“ I think it's thinking outside the box, so don't always just be thinking about your own profession. It's looking outside the box as well and thinking about what you as an individual can offer, rather than what you come back from a professional background.” (P1)

“I mean I suppose, I really, the thing that excites me most is seeing a potential for change in an organisation. Or in a you know in a faculty or whatever, and actually stepping up and taking that forward.” (P2)

“You can't just be a leader, you have to be visionary..” (P3)

“I was particularly proud of the innovative education models that we developed and we had one of the very early foundation degrees in AHP. We had some quite early deliverables of professional doctorates and, you know, securing large, large international research grants was very exciting. I never realised quite how hard it was going be to deliver, but that doesn't matter” (P3)

“I feel most excited in relation to the strategic opportunities that present themselves..” (P4)

“I think that the times when I have been most excited is where I've actually seen that there are situations that have meant I have had the opportunity to shape developments, to think about the way that we work with others..” (P4)

“And I think the most rewarding thing is that I'm still in touch with colleagues in xxx and actually they're running the leadership programme in xxx themselves. So it has left a legacy and continues, which is super.” (P5)

“For me, for me, it's about developing.... It's about spotting problems and often the problems are around the way people are, people in systems are delivering things. And when you start to see change happening.” (P6)

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“So a strength that I've been told I have, was the ability to be both strategic and operational. “ (P6)

“And also really exciting because I had a boss that, you know, gave me the freedom to shape that and develop that how I believed it should be, including having a new building and all those kinds of things. That was really exciting, that was a good time. “ (P8)

“I think it's the ability to...I think it's vision. It's the ability to see the bigger picture and to read, kind of, the context in which I'm in. I've got an enormous amount of self-drive and determination.” (P8)

“So probably my greatest pleasure is to see this school move up the league tables and move up in terms of NSS scores. So that's given me a lot of pleasure and it's giving me the freedom to appoint people, for people to flourish, so that followed kind of a regular basis. “ (P9)

“I think I'm a strategic thinker. So, you have to be very aware of what the vision and mission and strategic direction of your organisation is, and to know where the power lies and how you can influence that.” (P10)

“I think I'm quite good at seeing opportunities where others don't necessarily. And I think I can put things; I've put things together in my head in a different way sometimes to other people. So, I probably am a big picture person.” (P11)

“And I think, you know, we've got to do something to, you know, to make a change and move forward. And I was happy to be involved in that.” (P13)

1.3 AHP leaders adapt to the work/life conflict that exists in academia.

“I've got a family and stuff, so I've got no desire practically to move to anywhere else.’ (P1)

“I was willing to work unbelievably hard. And I remember on several occasions my husband either appearing in my office or he rang the Dean to say "she's married to me, not to you". (P3)

“If we've got young, highly capable female academics who aspire to be head of department, they really have to know the commitment that is required. They would say, so some of the generations they will say well I'm not going to do that. But that may be why they then will wonder why they're not successful.” (P3)

“So I think that balancing work and life is a challenge, and requires some careful management. I think I have a contract with myself that I know there are periods of the year when I'm going to be very busy, and there are periods where I'll get that balance back a wee bit, and I need to work to try and maintain that. “ (P4)

“I think that if somebody wants to become a senior leader in higher education, you have to really question what is it, and know why they're doing it, because that'll be key to how successful they are, because if you're not altruistic, if you don't actually understand what's involved in this, then you're making a mistake. “ (P4)

“There's been some very, very challenging elements of my career where I've thought, yes, well, I've sort of challenged myself as to whether my work life balance has been right or whether I have been competent enough to be successful in roles, etcetera. So there are times where, as I

say, they've been extremely challenging. The reaction to some of those questions I've asked myself sometimes led to seeking development in certain areas, but also sometimes actually informed the career change." (P5)

"Yeah, I get it. I understand the challenges and I also sometimes posed the challenges back, so for instance things like part time working and, Athena Swan and all those things. And there's a sense where I sometimes feel challenged about this in the sense if you're part time, you should still be able to make progress. And I have this thought, slight tension. So, I have worked part time for a long time, but I do think there is a minimum you can do and still be able to make the progress.." (P6)

"..I suppose I am an ambitious individual; I've juggled family and career and all of those things at the same time. " (P8)

"I think the other thing that's really important is that I worked pretty well full time and with a family, so I have two children and so my husband and I have both mutually supported each other's careers, so we've both been able to bring up a family together and both pursue our careers and that's been an important factor for me as well. " (P9)

"I know it's different times it's tricky when you've got other external commitments, but I brought up my three kids and I didn't actually have a nanny. I swapped a lot with friends and went part time when they were a bit younger and did my PhD kind of outside work. I think you have to be quite reliable and quite ready to muck- in and be a can-do person. I think if you aren't, people won't look to you for... People give you opportunities because you're the kind of person they know will step up. If you want to be successful, you have to be prepared to step up." (P10)

Theme 2: AHP academic leaders have developed the soft-skills required to be an authentic and transformational leader.

2.1 AHP leaders are empathetic

"It's about being sincere, having empathy with people, seeing things through their eyes, and understanding the impact of your decisions on their lives"(P14)

"Building up rapport with people, having empathy.... " (P1)

"And I think another strength is, I suppose it's a form of emotional intelligence really, it's trying to understand things from other people's perspectives, which sometimes helps to unpack and understand why you may not be making the progress as quickly as you wish to make or a particular problem is more complex than it appears or it should be." (P5)

"I think an empathetic style of leadership, and an authentic one, I don't know if those are the same or different. I very much believe in trying to be human, to admit my mistakes, as well as my successes. To tell people about the struggles I've had on my journey and how I've overcome them." (P6)

"It's actually just being honest and saying, "You know what, I've made so many mistakes. These are things that I ..." You can share with them. I enjoy doing that, and I valued others who supported me on that. " (P7)

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"I've gradually realised what emotional intelligence is because I realise over the years I've become quite good at reading other people and adjusting my emotions to theirs. Suppose this has just been experience of working with others because no one ever taught me this" (P9)

2.2 AHP leaders have good interpersonal skills required to build relationships.

"You have to be a people person, you have to be able to get on with people, to bring them along with you, rather than just go off at a tangent and not have anybody actually supporting you or doing what you're needing them to do." (P1)

"So I just, I don't know, I sort of I suppose I actually do care about the individuals I work with quite deeply, and you know, I'm a motivation interviewing practitioner and trainer. So, I actually think that being person centred and student centred, employer centred and employee centred is actually very important." (P2)

"I think that I'm good at stakeholder engagement. I think that I recognise the value built, is good as the way we interact with others, and the way of being able to respond to different agendas." (P4)

"You need to listen to people. But in the process, somewhere, you have to stick to your own views. And, you know, you can't afford to be neutral on everything, otherwise you don't get anything done" (P13)

"There's relationship building, stakeholders' innovation, creativity in that kind of second category. And the third thing, the third thing,..... I think that I give freely of myself.' (P4)

"It's not being able to do some brilliant paper. It's being able to develop relationships, and in order to influence change, whether it's to set up contracts that are going to lead to a collaboration for research or enterprise or secure teaching contracts. It comes down to establishing really good relationships and maintaining good relationships. So they take a long time to build, but it's realising, and I mean, anybody working in business will tell you, it's about developing relationships and doing that well and sincerely as well. Kind of what goes with that is behaving in an ethical and professional way where you're working with people." (P7)

"I think it's about having, recognising that leadership is around relations and it's a relational thing to be a successful leader, so to pay a lot of attention to networks and relationships." (P8)

"I would say that I've got very good communication skills" (P12)

"Developing a good rapport with people outside your institution as well as inside." (P13)

2.3 AHP leaders are not afraid to admit when they may have made an error

"But again, that ability to say I'm flawed, is the only way I can get on with it, because I if I had to pretend I was perfect, I would fail. And for me, the only way to fail safely is to tell people - I'm going to let you down sometimes, therefore, please, please don't feel embarrassed to nudge me back again, and say you're letting me down please come and get this and then I'll do it." (P6)

“It's actually just being honest and saying, "You know what, I've made so many mistakes. These are things that I ..." You can share with them. I enjoy doing that, and I valued others who supported me on that. “ (P7)

If I've clearly messed up then I prefer to own up rather than cover up. I think the team respects me more for that. “ (P9)

The people we manage need to see that we're only human“ (P12)

Theme 3: AHP academic leaders have developed resilience from exposure to challenging opportunities that promoted growth and development.

3.1 AHP leaders need resilience to be an effective leader.

“I am very resilient, which you know, I think you just have to be.” (P2)

I think resilience is one thing. You really have to keep going even though, you know, you get knocked back or you take one step back, etc...' (P5)

“I've always been able to bounce back when things go wrong – think I was just made that way.” (P10)

“Probably, I don't know if you call it personality, but I think being emotionally resilient, which I would say I am, and being a positive risk taker. You don't get anywhere in research for that being a positive risk taker because you're always researching something people haven't done before and you have to expect to get a lot of rejections and bank back. You have to know which battles to pick and which ones not to pick, because it's a small world and you have to recognise that you've got to work in partnership with people.” (P10)

“I think the other thing is I can be quite persistent.” (P11)

3.2 Resilience is a trait that further develops during their journey.

“I had a really helpful coach who talked me through challenges I faced; this kind of gave me that external view that I needed to toughen up to get through it.” (P6)

“Early on I realized if I was going to survive I had to not take things personally, but become less emotional about things and more resilient.” (P9)

“I realised early on when I became a manager that I would need to develop a thick skin if I was going to survive.” (P12)

3.3 Not afraid to take risks

"I've taken risks by taking on challenges...sometimes these were uncomfortable but I knew it was the only way to get experience and recognition" (P5)

"if I'd only stayed doing things I felt comfortable with I would never have progressed in my career as a leader. I've had to take risks which at the time I wasn't happy about, but I stuck with it". (P9)

"I'm not afraid of failing either." (P11)

"I'm not a risk taker. I'm naturally risk averse. But I think over the years I've become; I have become braver about calculated risks." (P12)

Theme 4: AHP leaders' advice for aspiring leaders.

4.1 Role models/ mentors provide guidance and direction

"I think the opportunity to shadow people who are in those roles is useful." (P1)

"And the third bit of advice would be to identify your role models, and really think about what you can learn from them, and I say a few role models. I don't think one's enough. " (P4)

"...having a good mentor and sponsor that you're able to actually talk things through. Talk challenges through, create solutions and problems and issues, some space - some safe space that you can actually trust somebody, that you can actually be open and honest with the challenges. I think that is invaluable." (P5)

"Yeah, I think at various times I've had mentors who's been very helpful. So, I think targeted mentorship is very helpful." (P12)

"Well, I have a coach and I have, I suppose I have some peer-mentors, so that I think for me, that's really important. " (P8)

"So I think I can see at times it would have been useful to sort of, I don't know, be able to approach someone and say, "what do you think, this is where I am at, I'm at a bit of a crossroads". (P2)

4.2 Believe in yourself

'I think the second thing would be that imposter syndrome is completely normal. I don't probably need to explain that, but I think we all go through kind of anxiety as you move up into more responsible positions, that kind of fear of being a fraud and that you probably shouldn't have been appointed to this job, but I think the higher up you go, the more you realise that whatever level you get to, people have those same experiences. " (P7)

"So I think it's getting a younger academic to understand that they can have more influence than they think they can. Supporting them, as I say, in terms of an informal basis, having a safe, a confidante, a mentor, but then also being able to have access to a range of more formal development opportunities. But that's contextualised to the work in which they're doing, rather than generic leadership programs that you may come across." (P5)

4.2 Understand the reality of leadership positions

"I think that if somebody wants to become a senior leader in higher education, you have to really question what is it, and know, why they're doing it, because that'll be key to how successful they

are, because if you're not altruistic, if you don't actually understand what's involved in this, then you're making a mistake. " (P4)

"I think in academia, I'd say on the whole, you can't really be a nine to fiver." (P10)

I think they need to recognise that they're going into a highly competitive business..' (P3)

'They need to understand that they're going to have to keep performing.' (P3)

"So know yourself, know why you're doing it, know what you're going to have to give up, and of course what's going to have to give to allow you to be successful." (P4)

4.4 Find opportunities for development

'...to step outside their comfort zone and look at other areas, look at other disciplines, look at other disciplines within health themselves and across the university. " (P13)

"...and I said looking back I would have looked for more diverse opportunities earlier I think. " (P9)

"So I suppose one thing I would recommend is secondments are valuable, secondment opportunities. And there are lots of opportunities in higher education, either working with organisation and development or whatever, or to look at some of the other roles. So you know, look at other areas outside of your discipline like psychology or business indeed." (P9)