



Turnaround Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education

Key Recommendations & Findings

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Turnaround Leadership for Sustainability in Higher Education

About the TLSHE Study

- 1. 188 experienced leaders of ESD from all disciplinary backgrounds - online survey & targeted interviews**
- 1. At Universities & Colleges in Australia, NZ, Canada, USA, UK, a range of European countries & South Africa**
- 1. Participant roles ranged from VC, Rector, DVC, Dean, Head of Department/School, Director to Program Head, Course Coordinator, Curriculum Committee member, Sustainability Manager and Professor**
- 1. An additional 300 HE leaders from around the world have reviewed the results of the empirical phase**
- 1. Funded by the Australian Government**



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Why Bother?

- **This is a turnaround moment for both the world and universities & addressing this challenge requires turnaround leadership**
- **Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas**
- **Change doesn't just happen but must be led**
- **We need graduates (and leaders) who are not just work ready for today but work ready *plus* for tomorrow**



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TLSHE's key findings

- 1. Acknowledge the distinctive challenges & complexity of ESD leadership**
- 2. Sharpen the focus & understanding of ESD in higher education**
- 3. Context counts: ensure organisational integration and system alignment to support ESD & its leaders**
- 4. Track & improve ESD program quality more systematically**
- 5. Put in place the right incentives**



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- 6. Engage the disengaged**
- 7. Apply the key lessons on successful change management in higher education**
- 8. Focus on the change leadership capabilities identified in this study**
- 9. Review ESD leadership position descriptions, selection processes and succession strategies in the light of the study's findings**
- 10. Apply the most productive approaches to leadership learning identified in the study to the professional development of ESD leaders**



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1. Acknowledge the distinctive challenges & complexity of ESD leadership

- **Transformation not adaptation**
- **Future not present**
- **Inter-disciplinary and inter-portfolio**



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Typical ESD leader analogies

For me, being an EfS leader in my university or college is like:

'herding cats'

'swimming against the tide'

'building a plane whilst you are flying it'

'waving a flag from the back of the crowd'

'conducting an orchestra'

'quilting'

'learning Spanish but finding myself in China'

'being a competitor on *American Idol*'

'being Stephen Bradbury winning gold at the Winter Olympics'

'trying to pin jelly to the wall'

'being asked to make trifle with no bowl or ingredients and a constantly changing recipe.'



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2. Sharpen the focus & understanding of ESD in higher education

Check everyone is using key terms in the same way

These include terms like:

‘sustainability’, ‘education for sustainability’, ‘education for sustainable development’, ‘engaged learning’, ‘leadership’, ‘management’, ‘competence’, ‘capability’, ‘change’, ‘progress’ and ‘implementation’.

Underpinning the use of these terms are different ways of knowing, engaging and responding to the EfS challenge:
rarely are words used with identical meaning.



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3. Context counts: ensure organisational integration and system alignment to support ESD & its leaders

- **Engagement of all players not just enthusiasts**
- **Alignment between vision, structure, rewards, resourcing, KPIs, accountabilities, PD & SD**
- **Governance & Management – a specific senior leader of ESD**
- **Efficiency – especially in administration & meetings**
- **Collaborative culture**



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4. Track & improve ESD program quality more systematically

- **Quality of inputs**

consistency, leadership, resources, embedded in policy, rewards, embedded in the curriculum, capstones etc

- **Quality of outcomes & impact –**

- assessment, employability, further study, +ve student feedback & media , retention, subsequent demand

- **System for ensuring areas for improvement are addressed promptly and wisely**



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5. Put in place the right incentives

- **Extrinsic**
 - Active support from VC, relevant awards, focus in staff selection & promotion, rewards for transdisciplinary research & teaching, nested leadership, right resourcing & assistance, peer support.
- **Intrinsic**
 - Moral purpose, seeing students develop & hearing about their subsequent success, new students asking to enrol in your class, creating a legacy.



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6. Engage the disengaged, especially senior leaders

- **Potential to attract/retain students - income**
- **Link to mission, 'moral purpose' & alignment with external drivers**
- **Leveraging peer pressure of other VCs**
- **Winning funding & UN Endorsement**
- **Positive media and external awards**
- **Board engagement – e.g. chair of a Task Force**
- **Stocktake of current initiatives to show potential**
- **Showing the current & emerging careers**



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7. Apply the key lessons on successful change management in higher education

- **Identify & acknowledge what is already happening – undertake a stocktake & locate what is uncovered into a comprehensive HESD framework early on**
- **Learn by doing – via steered engagement & a spiral staircase of pilots & mutual adaptation**
- **Focus on evidence-based decision making – consensus around the data not around the table**
- **Institute & leverage incentives for engagement & collaboration**
- **Build & train linked leadership networks**



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8. Highest ranking ESD change leadership capabilities

- Having energy, passion and enthusiasm for EfS (P – commitment)
- Being willing to give credit to others (IP – empathising)
- Empathising & working productively with diversity (IP –empathising)
- Being transparent and honest in dealings with others (IP empathising)
- Thinking laterally and creatively (C – strategy)
- Being true to one’s values and ethics (P - decisiveness)
- Listening to different points of view before coming to a decision (IP - empathising)
- Understanding personal strengths & limitations (P – self-awareness)
- Time management skills (GSK)
- Persevering (P – commitment)
- Learning from errors (P – self-awareness)
- Learning from experience (C - responsiveness)
- Remaining calm when under pressure or the unexpected happens (P – self-awareness)
- Being able to make effective presentations to different groups (GSK)
- Identifying from a mass of information the core issue/opportunity (C – diagnosis)

Code: P– Personal Capability domain; IP – Interpersonal Capability domain; C– Cognitive Capability domain; GSK– Generic Skills & Knowledge domain



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9. Review ESD leadership position descriptions, selection processes and succession strategies in the light of the study's findings

- **Align PDs x role against the findings on role focus, effectiveness criteria & capabilities with importance ratings > 4.3/5**
- **Review selection & promotion processes for validity of focus and assessment**
- **Identify potential leaders early & prepare them via mentoring, secondments, exchanges and other practice-based learning opportunities**



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10. Apply the most productive approaches to leadership learning identified to ESD leadership development

- **RATED CLASS A – how students like to learn is how staff like to learn**
- **Situated learning, just in time & just for me**
- **Skinnies from successful travellers**
- **Use of the validated frameworks to assist mentoring, identification of learning gaps and self-learning**
- **Targeted leadership learning opportunities**
- **Networked learning & ESD Leadership Conferences**
- **Sustainable Futures Leadership Academy**



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What next?

- **One key step you would like to take**
- **One key area for action you believe your university could feasibly take**
- **What research now needs to be undertaken on leadership for sustainability in Higher Education?**
- **One key insight/area for follow-up in the panel discussion**