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Research
leadership
resource

What is research leadership?

Introduction to Research Leadership

This module is part of the Introduction to Research Leadership series of resources, which provides an introduction to leadership theory, skills, behaviours and attributes for researchers who aspire to a research leadership position.

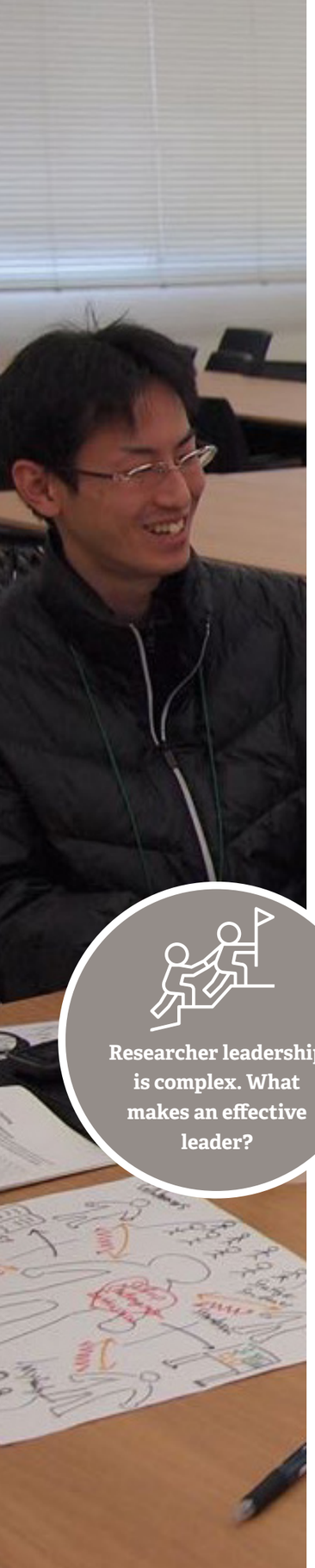
These resources were created by **Vitae**, a UK-based non-profit programme that supports the professional and career development of researchers globally. The resources are designed as a practical guide for you to use at an individual level. Depending on your preference and the amount of time you have available, you can focus on just one or two modules or work through all of the modules in the series at a pace that suits you.

What is Leadership?

To help you to get the most out of this module, we suggest you take a little time to consider what leadership means to you.

Consider the overall concept. What do (or should) leaders do? What kind of leaders do you admire? How should effective leaders behave? What distinguishes leadership from management? There can be a lot of confusion around these terms. We suggest some distinctions to help you think about how leadership and management function in your workplace.

There are many opinions on the essence of good leadership and how effective leaders should behave. Over the page are a few to stimulate your thinking.



Researcher leadership is complex. What makes an effective leader?

Read the quotations below. To what extent do you agree with these views and why? What does leadership mean to you? What do you think makes an effective leader? There is no right answer; you may find it useful to note your reasons as part of the reflection process.

'Leadership at one time meant muscles but today it means getting along with people.' *Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India*

'Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it.' *General Dwight Eisenhower, US President, 1953-61.*

'You don't lead by pointing and telling people some place to go. You lead by going to that place and making a case.' *Ken Kesey, American author*

'A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.' *Lao Tzu, ancient Chinese philosopher*

'Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others.' *Jack Welch, American business leader*

'When I give a minister an order, I leave it to him to find the means to carry it out.' *Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France*

'Find fault with thyself rather than with others.' *Tokugawa Ieyasu, Founder and first shōgun of the Tokugawa shogunate*

'Earn your leadership every day.' *Michael Jordan, former professional basketball star, USA*

What are your views on the quotations above? Which of the statements is closest to your idea of leadership and what makes an effective leader - and why? Write down your thoughts below.

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Research Leadership Resource: What is research leadership?

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The responsibilities of research leaders

Research leadership is complex. To examine what this means, this module offers different models and reflective exercises that present the views of effective and successful research leaders. It touches on multiple areas of the Researcher Development Framework (RDF) and shows that self-leadership is the foundation of research leadership.

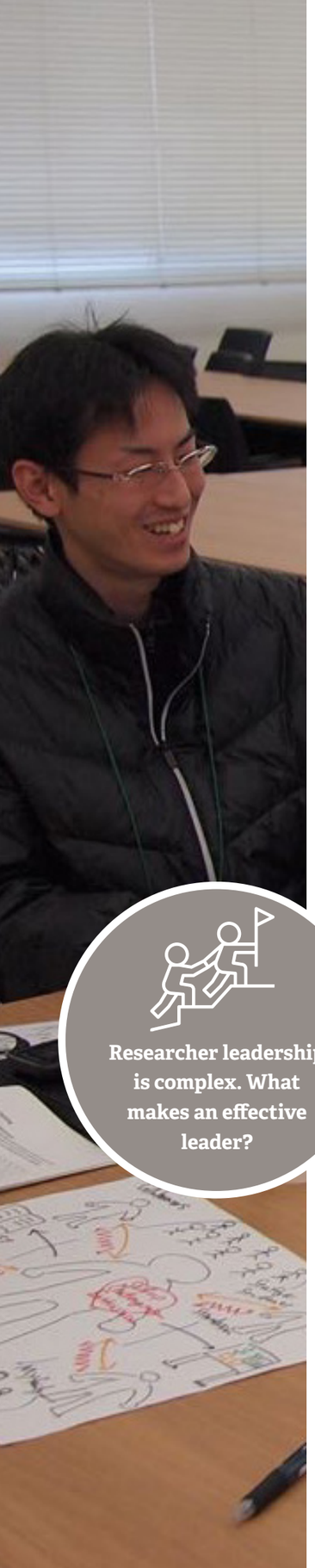
Below is a visual representation of the multi-faceted responsibilities of research leaders.[1] As the diagram shows, the responsibilities may be grouped into four areas:



If you would like to further explore these different areas in detail, you may like to hear the thoughts of current academic and research leaders, gathered as part of a Vitae research project on preparation for research leadership.[2]

1. Adapted Source: Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey 2017
2. Denney, F., Mitchell, A., & Wheat, K. (2015). 'Developing the next generation: Guidance and good practice in the development of early career researchers and academics'. The Careers Research and Advisory Centre (CRAC) Limited.

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Thinking about how to develop your capabilities to meet these many responsibilities can be a daunting prospect! One way to start is to think: what areas should you prioritise for your professional development from where you stand now in your career?

Reflection

Which aspects of research leadership are you most keen to develop?

And which aspects are less appealing to you? Why is that?

For further insight into managing multiple priorities as a research leader see Leading a research team.

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Self-leadership as preparation for research leadership

Openness to continuing professional development is the cornerstone of the self-leadership approach that will help you in your path towards leading others.

Good time management is an obvious example of self-leadership. Poor time management can hamper your research performance now and impede career progression. In a research leadership role, which has so many different aspects, time management becomes even more critical.

A less obvious example may be self-management in the area of research strategy. Most organisations have a mission, which is an expression of where they want to be in a few years' time. A strategy is the chosen route to deliver this. Strategy comes from a clear understanding of the context, and strategic leadership is about making decisions within this context.

When you are not in an official leadership role, recognising the strategic context within which you are working is an important starting point for successful self-leadership. It's worth finding out about the mission and strategies set in place by leaders in your institution. Even though you may be indirectly involved in reaching the goals set out in the mission, developing your awareness will support good self-leadership and success. For example, researchers applying for grant funding need to be aware of the overall strategic direction in their research field, of the government, of potential sponsors and of their university and department. They should ensure that their funding application is aligned with all of these if it is to be successful.

Reflection

The Vitae Researcher Development Framework identifies the following descriptors in B2 self-management as critical for self-leadership: preparation and prioritisation (including strategic thinking); commitment to research; time management; responsiveness to change; work-life balance.

Read the statements on the next page that describe what successful self-management looks like at your current career phase. How well do you think are you achieving these? If you are unsure, trust your instinct - don't think too long about your answers at this stage. Write down what you think you need to do to improve. Then try to set yourself some clear goals and time scales.

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www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/guides-briefings-and-information/developing-the-next-generation-vitae-brunel-lfhe-2015.pdf

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Self-management descriptor	Statement (phase 2)	What am I doing well?	Areas of Improvement?	Goal: What I will do differently?	Action I will take to achieve my goal (and by when)
B2.1 Preparation and prioritisation	Takes strategic view of project; prioritises, plans and is forward thinking; deals with the unexpected				
B2.2 Commitment to research	Evaluates and manages potential distractions. Dedicated: has purposeful and determined focus on developing own research and research credentials				
B2.3 Time management	Is establishing own time management systems: delivers projects on schedule, responds flexibly.				
B2.4 Responsiveness to change	Adapts to changes; balances risk and opportunity. Knows when to seek advice and reassurance.				
B2.5 Work-life balance	Maintains an acceptable work-life balance and manages pressure. Notices and helps manage the pressure on colleagues and less experienced researchers.				

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To explore research leadership further, www.vitae.ac.uk/vitae-publications/rdf-related/leadership-lens-on-the-vitae-researcher-development-framework-rdf-april-2012.pdf