Universiteit van Amsterdam

Adaptive leadership at the UvA

The success of our teaching and research and the impact we make depend on the people who work for us, their knowledge, talents and motivation. We are proud of that and want to cherish it. Leaders play an essential role in this: they create a challenging, safe and professional working environment in which everyone can be themselves and make progress. We treasure that and invest in it.

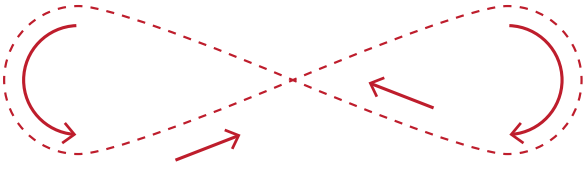
Providing leadership at a university is not easy. It is a profession in its own right. Moreover, it requires a lot of attention and time, two aspects that – especially in the academic domain – are usually reserved for teaching, research and impact. Moreover, the UvA's environment is complex and dynamic, with various internal and external challenges finding their way into the workplace on a daily basis.

We believe in leadership that connects people, gives them space and encourages them to take professional and moral responsibility. We expect our leaders to set the course, recognise the diversity, knowledge, expertise and talents within their team, encourage employee growth, have the courage to challenge where necessary, and take responsibility for a socially safe working environment for all. Completing these diverse tasks within a challenging context entails areas of tension. Resolving these areas of tension calls for **adaptive leadership:** the ability to embrace the complexity of areas of tension and consciously seeking the right balance within them.

The objective of the leadership philosophy in front of you is to give direction and guidance to all leaders. It shows what we expect from our leaders, thereby contributing to shaping the culture and working environment that suits the UvA best.

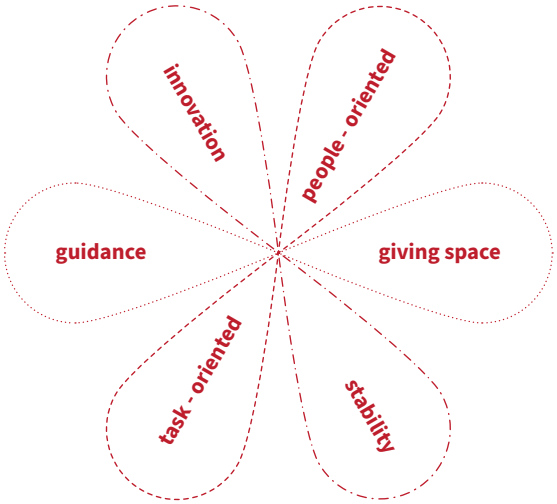
Seeking the right balance within various areas of tension

On this page, we describe some areas of tension that leaders at the UvA have to deal with, relate to and develop in. The two poles at opposite ends of each area of tension may seem to be contradictory, but are in fact two sides of the same coin that are inextricably linked, evoking and balancing each other.



Adaptive leadership is about the flexibility and ability to switch between different styles and behaviours depending on the context you find yourself in: which style or approach best suits this situation or person at this moment? At the same time, you are challenged as a leader to look for ways to connect the two poles, so that they can reinforce each other: how, by focusing on one, can you also achieve the other?

In both cases, it comes down to engaging with both poles of the area of tension and consciously seeking the right balance between them, from either/or to and/and. This balancing act may be complicated at times, but it is also crucial.



The following three areas of tension characterise leadership at the UvA:



providing guidance and **giving space**
How do I guide professionals towards achieving our goals and results AND give them maximum space for their own initiative and interpretation?
pe



task - oriented and **people - oriented**
How can I complete the challenging tasks required of us AND create a climate of safety, well-being and development?



innovation and **stability**
How can I encourage innovation and creativity AND at the same time create calm to ensure stability and continuity on a daily basis?

Leadership at the UvA

The UvA has a wide diversity of leadership roles and positions. Some employees have formal supervisory responsibilities and management duties. Others lead informally, for example as project leaders or supervisors of PhD candidates.

Depending on your role or position, you lead an individual, team and/or organisational unit. Good leadership requires attention to all levels, always requiring different emphases and skills.

Leading an individual

You provide formal or informal leadership to one or more individuals

Leading a team

You lead a group, team, department or unit

Leading the organisation

You lead an organisational unit and have a strategic and/or supervisory role, taking responsibility for the bigger picture

Personal leadership

Personal leadership is the foundation for every leader. It means taking responsibility for your own behaviour, choices and development. You act on the basis of integrity and authenticity and set a good example for others.

Qualities

Seeking an effective balance within areas of tension requires a variety of complementary qualities. Some qualities come naturally, others are developed during your career. We believe it is important to support leaders in this as best we can, for example with training, peer review and coaching.



Empathy
You have an eye for employees' feelings and needs and are able to empathise with their circumstances and position. By actively listening, you translate these insights into behaviours that support, motivate and guide them.



Decisiveness
You have the courage to make decisions, even in difficult or uncertain situations. You are transparent about your choices and act purposefully. You set clear boundaries and remind people about them if necessary.



Taking responsibility
You take responsibility for your decisions and their consequences, both positive and negative. You ensure that your choices are in line with the values and goals of the team and the organisation, with an eye on the bigger picture and the long term.



Connection
You are a linking pin who brings individuals, teams and initiatives together, both inside and outside the organisation, and promotes cooperation to achieve shared goals. You foster an environment where everyone feels welcome and valued.



Self–reflection
You are aware of your own choices and behaviour and its impact on others. You are open to feedback and attentive to your continued development as a leader. You dare to be vulnerable and are aware of the fact that you are a role model.



Vision
You can look at day-to-day operations with detachment and focus on outlines and the long term. You communicate your chosen direction in an inspiring way and motivate others to embrace it.

Determined by the Executive Board on February 25, 2025