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Abstract

UK higher education is undergoing a period of significant change that generates a series of tensions and difficulties for universities and university leaders. This paper explores these tensions through analysis of findings from a study comprising 152 semi-structured face-to-face interviews in 12 UK universities. Building on from theories of 'distributed leadership' in schools, five main constituent elements of leadership practice in higher education are identified (personal, social, structural, contextual and developmental) and explored to show how they shape perceptions and experiences of leadership. The paper concludes with a refined model that teases apart the multilayered nature of higher education leadership at individual, group and organisational levels. In particular, it is argued that 'social capital' and 'social identity' act as important bridges between individual agency and organisational structure and that although widely distributed, higher education leadership may be best regarded as 'hybrid'. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)