

# Leadership Development in Higher Education Institutions: How Universities are training their leaders

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## INTRODUCTION

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) spend large amounts of money every year on leadership development (LD) programmes, hoping that the investment will return through effective outstanding leadership. Workshops like ‘How to be an effective leader?’, ‘Communication techniques for leading people through change’, ‘Coaching and mentoring skills’, to list only a few, are mandatory for HE managers. More extended programmes, such as *Aspiring Leaders* or *AURORA*, are also part of the variety of leadership development opportunities that HEIs offer their staff.

In response to scholars who believe that the positive effects of leadership development practices on leadership performance in organisations remain mostly unexplored (Collins and Holton, 2004; Richards, Holton, and Katsioloudes, 2014), this study aims to fill in a gap in scholarship by evaluating the perceived effectiveness of LD programmes.

## AIMS

This study aims to find an answer to the following research questions: How interested are HE employees in leadership development programmes and what is their perceived usefulness of the structure and content of these programmes? How easy and under what conditions do employees have access to leadership development programmes?

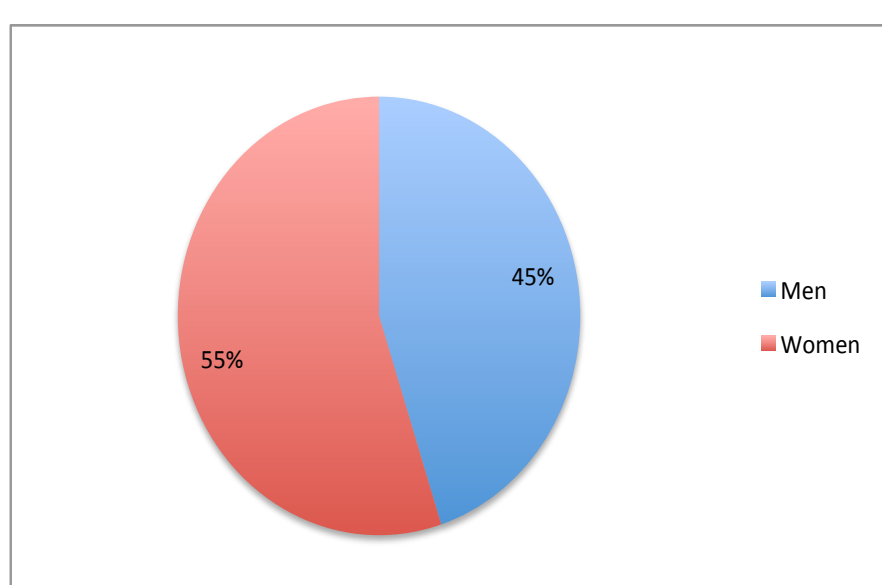
## METHOD & DATA ANALYSIS

By employing a large questionnaire, this study explores HE employees’ attitudes towards and access to leadership development opportunities.

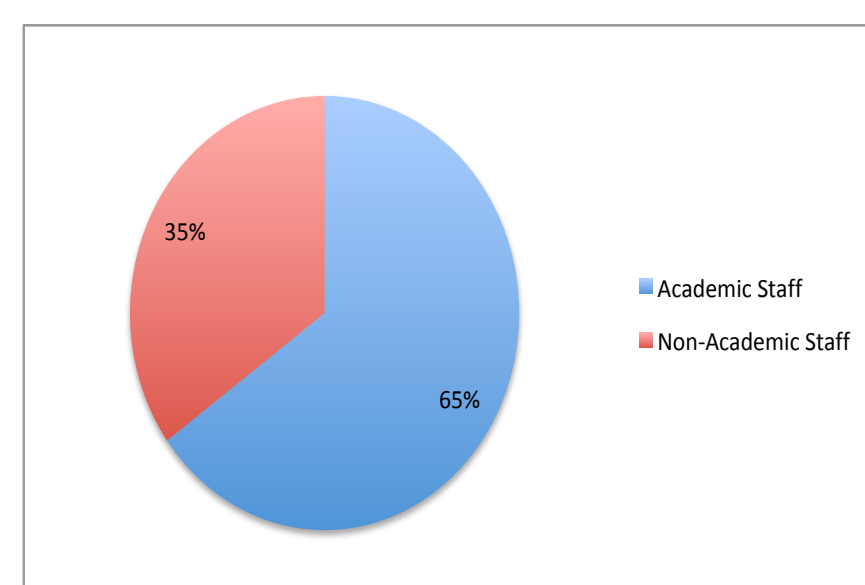
The questionnaire was distributed online, via email, and used a sample of 500 people, academics and non-academic working in British HEIs.

### Characteristics of the sample:

Figure 1 Gender



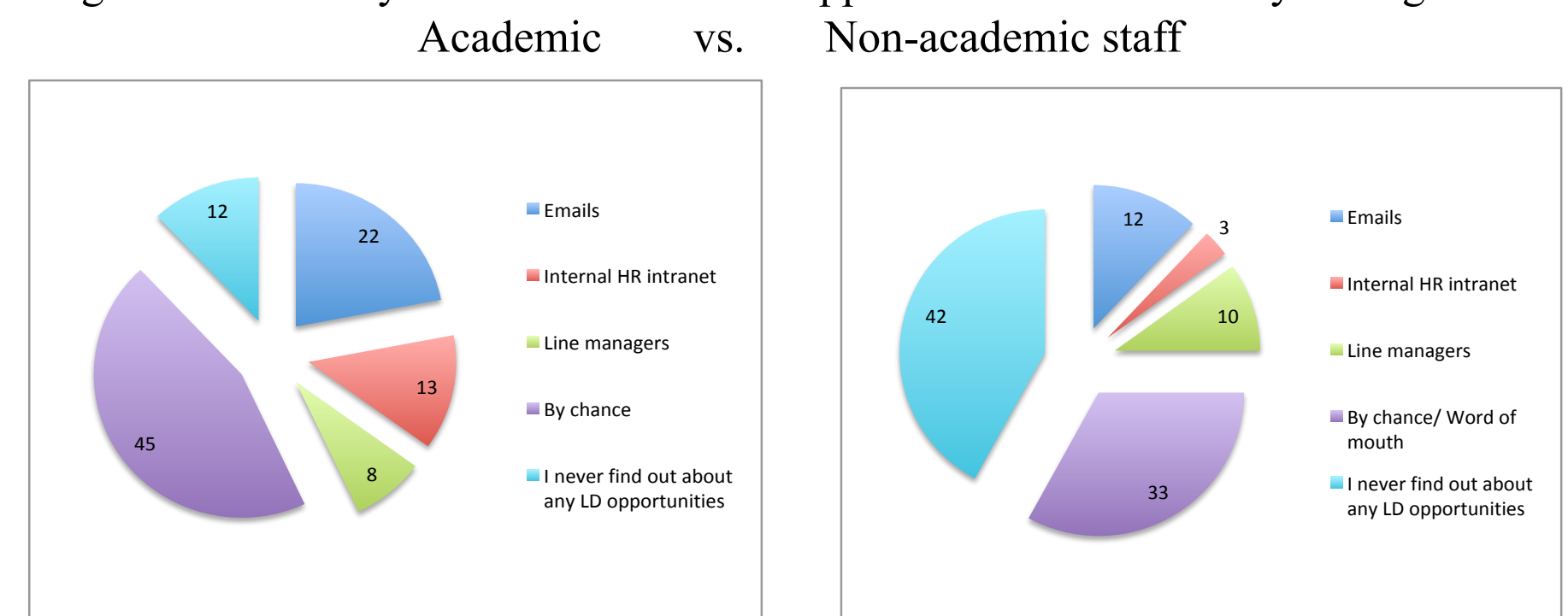
Academic/Non-academic staff split



## SUMMARY RESULTS

- The general attitude of most employees towards leadership development opportunities was overwhelmingly positive; 93.2% of the respondents reported that leadership development is essential for the advancing their career and the future of their institution.
- Almost all the respondents considered that they were well-informed about the leadership development programmes available within their University. 76.92% of the respondents considered themselves aware of any leadership development opportunity and only 23.08% reported to have difficulties in finding out about any leadership development opportunity in their department.
- Respondents also reported that they found out about leadership development programmes by chance or by word of mouth, while 10% never found out about any leadership development opportunities, and this was particularly evident for non-academic members of staff (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: How do you find out about LD opportunities available in your organization?



- Most of the respondents (see Figure 2) felt that they were not encouraged to participate in any leadership development training because ‘they never found out about any’, ‘their department would have to pay for leadership development programmes and there was no budget for this’ or ‘these programmes are very competitive and line manager approval/recommendation is required to be able to participate’.

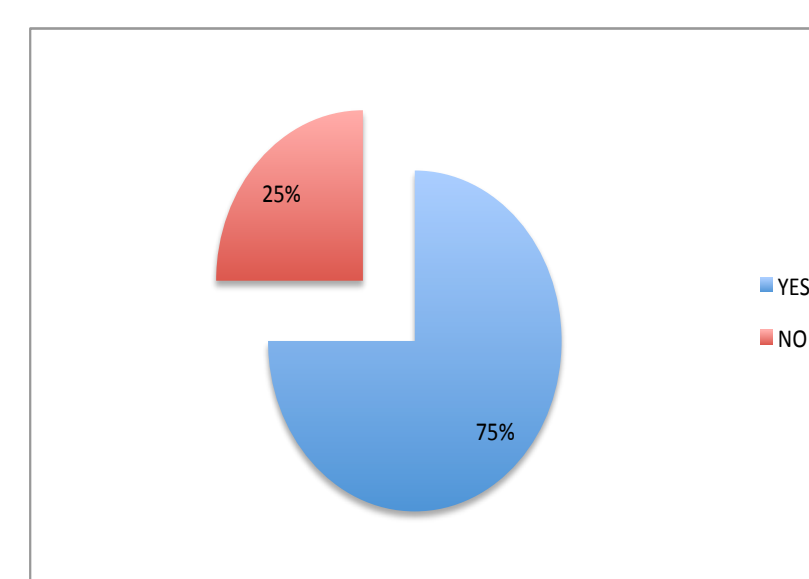


Figure 3: Access to leadership development training

- 90% of the employees who have attended a LD programme were left disappointed with the content and structure of the programme. Current LD training was considered too theoretical with no focus on solving real problems.

## CONCLUSION

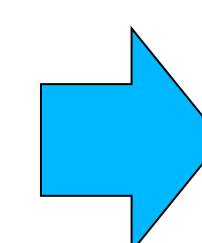
This is an ongoing project and like any other quantitative research project, it has its limits. To be statistically relevant more responses have to be collected and analysed. Further research should consider comparing British HEI employees’ responses to the responses of other employees working in universities across Europe. However, this preliminary research highlights a lack of internal communication about leadership development opportunities. Overall, more attention needs to be dedicated to identifying the right leadership development opportunities for academic and non-academic staff and LD programmes must focus more on the development of a certain skillset and mindset and less on theory.

## References

- Collins, D., Holton, E. (2004). The effectiveness of managerial leadership development programs: A meta-analysis of studies from 1982 to 2001. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 15, pp. 217–248.
- Richard, B. W., Holton, E. F., Katsioloudes, V. (2014). The use of discrete computer simulation modeling to estimate return on leadership development investment. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 25, pp. 1054–1068.

**Have any comments or suggestions?**

**For feedback**



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