



Leadership Profiles

Profiles in Action

Leadership Profiles and Aspiring Principals



The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) was formed to provide national leadership for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching with funding provided by the Australian Government.

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ISBN 978-1-925192-41-4

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Introduction

In December 2014, AITSL launched the Leadership Profiles (the Profiles), which provide support for, and elaborate on, the Australian Professional Standard for Principals (the Standard). The Profiles consist of a set of 80 statements showing a pathway for the development of the characteristics and activities of highly-effective principals.

Following the launch, AITSL supported the conduct of five trials as one means to monitor the uptake and impact of the Profiles. This report summarises the outcomes of those trials as they apply to aspiring principals and members of school leadership teams.

Throughout the trial process, and in all of the trials, participants offered consistently strong endorsement of the Profiles, the Interactive Leadership Profiles and their linked resources. Among the comments made most frequently in discussing the value of the Profiles were references to:

- their coherence and explicitness
- the clarity they provide around the leadership role of principals
- their value as a reference point both for current and future leadership roles
- the common language they provide about leadership
- their ease of use
- their role in providing additional detail on the Standard
- their role as a developmental continuum and progression pathway for principals
- their national status, which enables principals to place their leadership behaviours in a national framework, and to self-assess with increased rigour and consistency
- the quality of the resources linked to the statements in the interactive version
- the division into three lenses that provide a clear understanding of school leadership.

For more detail about the evaluation of the trials and their outcomes, see 'Profiles in Action: Trials of the Leadership Profiles' available at www.aitsl.edu.au/leadership-profiles/profiles-in-action



How can aspiring principals use the Profiles?

For aspiring principals, the Leadership Profiles provide an explicit and clear orientation to the range of roles played by principals. They also offer a map of the capabilities that aspirants need to develop if they are to take up a principal position with confidence. Participants in the trials noted that the Profiles would have significant value for members of school leadership teams and those intending to seek principal positions. Where principals used the Profiles in their workplaces, they reported that this was a valuable exercise, and that it generated benefits both for them and for those they worked with.

Self-evaluation

Principals taking part in the trials noted the value of the Profiles in identifying their capabilities and pointing to areas for further development. One participant said:

“The most useful element is the clear and explicit nature of the Leadership Profiles and the fact it is easy to self-reflect on what your strengths and weaknesses are and where you potentially need to allocate more time for development.”

Another suggested:

“The Leadership Profiles have also helped support my work and guide me on a road to higher proficiency. It provides a tool for reflection on my work, reviewing my progress and where the next steps are to being highly proficient.”

For aspiring principals, this function of the Profiles is especially relevant. The Profiles point to the skills and capabilities that are expected in the role, including those appropriate to beginning and aspirant principals because they set out a developmental pathway. Aspiring principals can use the Profiles to identify areas of strength and those requiring further development.

Guide to professional learning

Trial participants consistently argued that the Profiles provided a roadmap for professional learning. The clear articulation of the developmental pathway is central to career planning for aspirants. The Profiles show the steps that a member of a school leadership team can take in planning for career progression. The resources provided in association with the Interactive Leadership Profiles were seen as providing support in planning and initiating professional learning.

One new principal involved in an induction program saw the Profiles in this way:

“I find the development pathways continuum the most useful and valuable tool and have used this to plan my professional learning needs.”

Other recently-appointed principals agreed that the Profiles could be used:

“...[for] self-reflection, keeping focus on the core work of a principal, identifying my development needs and planning my professional learning.”

“...as a reference to ensure I am improving the areas I am less competent in.”

A principal network leader recognised that the three lenses provide support for thinking about professional development, in a way that is especially appropriate to aspiring principals:

“The way the set of statements are arranged through three leadership lenses is a useful element. It enables principals to focus on an aspect of their leadership that reflects their career stage, capability and context.”

Aspirant principals can use the Profiles both to plan a professional learning program designed to prepare for their next career step, and to monitor their progress in those areas needing further development. Because the developmental continuum is sequenced, the early stages are appropriate for the skill levels of many aspirants and members of school leadership teams.

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Preparation for the principalship

For aspirant and new principals, it is helpful to know what it is like to be a principal and how to balance the multitude of responsibilities and pressures that come with the job. The Profiles can be a tool to inform those looking forward, or new to the position, about what really matters. Participants in the trials suggested that the Profiles would help aspirant and new principals to reflect on the leadership qualities required to be a successful principal. One of the trial participants referred to “the enormity of the job and the limited number of hours in a day that a principal can devote to so many diverse issues” and noted that the Profiles were helpful in reflecting on the role. Another pointed out that “the Leadership Profiles create a great reference point to define the roles of leaders”.

As one new principal said:

“Being new in my principalship I felt pulled in all directions in the early months. I use the Leadership Profiles as a guide to my ‘real work’ as principal.”

Another recognised that the different ‘lenses’ for viewing the Profiles provide a balancing mechanism, especially applicable to aspirant and new principals:

“The framing of the Leadership Profiles through the three Leadership lenses gives greater clarity and definition in differentiating between the practices, requirements and qualities, and acknowledges the art of balancing the complexities of the role.”

One of the trial participants recognised the role of the Profiles in helping aspirants understand the role:

“They provide a reference point and clarity around the role of a leader. They have influenced me on the difference between leadership and management, especially when assisting aspirational leaders that think management is good leadership.”

For aspirant principals, preparation for the principalship will be strengthened by becoming familiar with the range and balance of responsibilities of the role, and reminding themselves that there are strategic and relational elements to the role as well as the sometimes overwhelming operational responsibilities. The organisation of the Profiles in levels of increasing proficiency also makes clear what the starting point for an aspirant could be and minimises the sense that an applicant should already be fully conversant with the highest expectations of the role.

School planning

Many trial participants were looking forward to using the Profiles with the leadership teams in their schools, noting that the Profiles are not just about the work of principals, but also about the broader performance of schools and those who work in them.

One principal set a goal:

“...to use the Leadership Profiles to seek feedback on my own leadership, but to also focus the work of our leadership team.”

Another noted that:

“These are used mainly as a reflection tool to gauge the extent to which each of the standards is being addressed in the school.”

Aspirant principals, equally, can use the Profiles as a tool for school planning and professional learning so that, as one participant hoped, the Profiles would “support my leadership and directly influence the work at this primary school”.

One member of the trial group who said they would use the Profiles to support school improvement plans argued that:

“The Leadership Profiles would be very useful to use with the leadership team at the school to reflect on the school’s progress and identifying strengths and weaknesses.”

Another principal was more explicit about the areas in which the Profiles could be used by aligning school goals with the profile for a relevant Professional Practice. Aspirants and members of leadership teams could benefit from the approach outlined:

“Our school focus for 2016 is looking at 21st Century Learning Design and Building a Feedback Culture. There will be a clear focus on ‘Leading improvement, innovation and change’ and I will continue to use the Leadership Profiles to inform and direct my work.”

For aspiring principals, the Profiles can provide a new perspective on the leadership of school improvement and can inform their role in the process. It is not only principals who need to be strategic, to take account of relational matters and to initiate and support change. For aspirants the Profiles provide another source of ideas and guidance in carrying out their leadership roles.



Performance improvement

An ACT trial made extensive use of the Profiles in a mid-cycle performance improvement process conducted with principals by network leaders. Participants felt that the Profiles shifted the focus of the conversation from discussion of school data to questions of leadership. As several principals agreed, for the first time ‘the conversation was about my leadership’. Aspirant principals could aim to improve their own performance against elements of the Profiles through formal performance improvement processes. The Profiles have been strongly endorsed by system leaders as a direct tool for use in supporting principals and aspirants. They helped in framing coaching questions and sharpened the focus of coaching conversations.

Principals involved in the trial argued that the inclusion of the Profiles established a new structure and focus to the performance process. Conversations stayed more on track and there was an increased sense of joint accountability to talk specifically about leadership actions. The language of the Profiles facilitated a richer range of conversations, and ‘more authentic, honest and targeted’ discussions.

Participants also planned to use the Profiles in their own schools ‘to support the learning of the emerging school leaders on their staff’. Others noted the value of the Profiles in informing and directing the development of the leadership team. One principal indicated an intention to use the Interactive Leadership Profiles with the school’s executive staff as a group.

There are clear potential benefits to aspirant principals arising from the use of the Profiles in their own performance improvement processes. They will help focus the discussion on leadership and management skills and capabilities, and on opportunities for professional learning. This will assist aspirants in planning for the development of those aspects of the role that they need to develop if they are to achieve their career goals.



A tool for coaching

The Profiles will also assist mentors and coaches in supporting aspirants as a key strategy for performance improvement.

One trial involved the mentoring of a deputy principal seeking promotion. The aspirant felt that using the interactive version of the Profiles was:

“like having an online coach”

providing an expanded understanding of the role as well as professional confidence and capacity. The coach used them to steer a developmental pathway, and saw the resources linked to statements in the Interactive Leadership Profiles as an essential complement to the Profiles. The client in this case noted that this process drew attention to the linked resources. The coach argued that the power of the Profiles was most evident when the participants stepped away from their daily work and used the Profiles to engage in disciplined reflection on their actions.

So in addition to review and general performance improvement processes, the Profiles can provide specific support in coaching and mentoring aspirant principals. The Profiles were seen as an aid to the provision of personalised support in coaching because of the capacity to map performance and development goals across the full range of practice.



Job application tool

The Profiles can also have immediate practical uses for job applicants. They provide a template for the kinds of skills and experience an applicant should consider in preparing for a selection process. Because they articulate a comprehensive view of the work of principals, they can be a reminder to aspirants of the range of areas that could be referred to in an application, or used to brief a referee on the scope that a reference could cover.

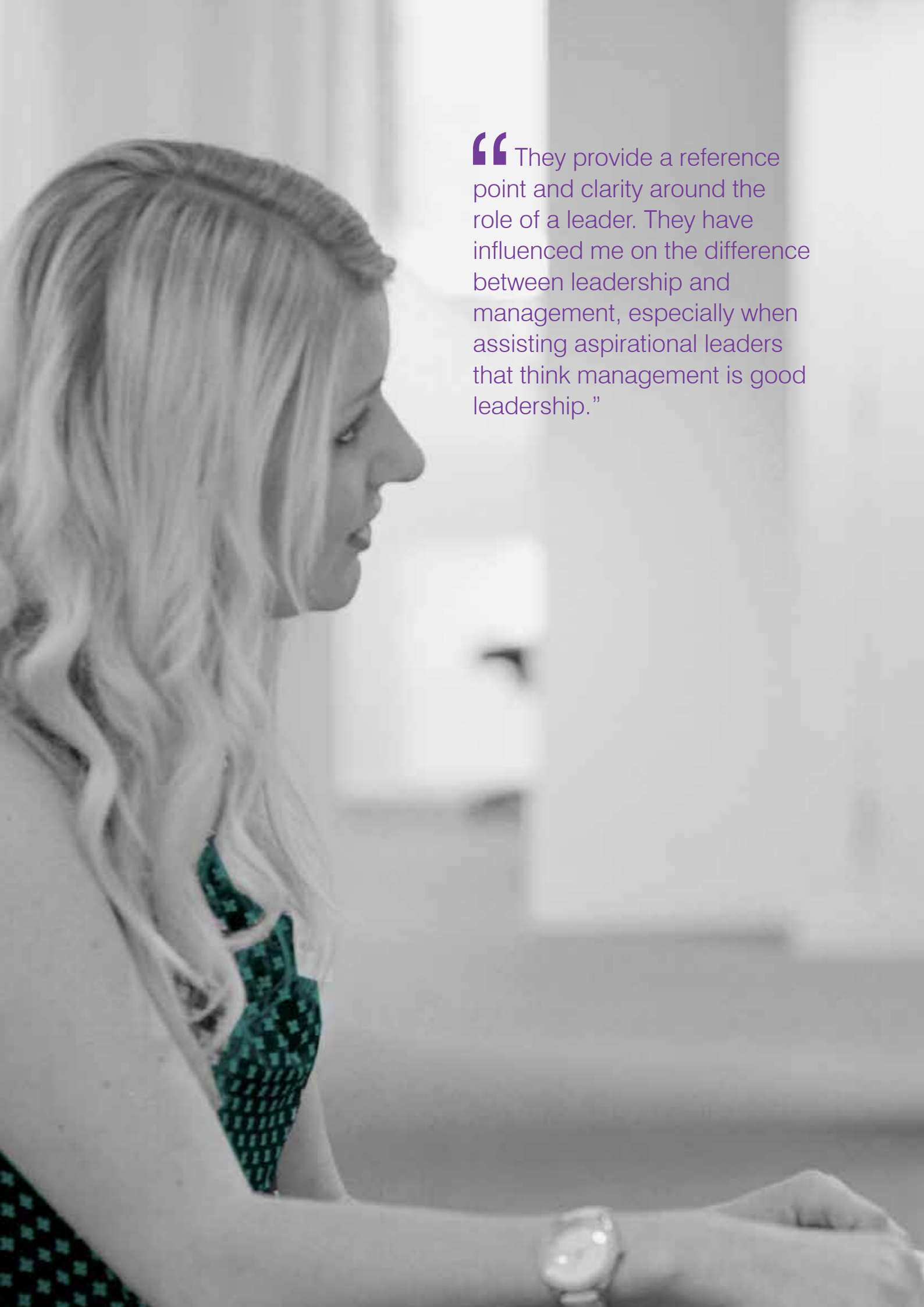
Principals had already used the Profiles in preparing applications, with one noting “they provide a great reference when writing applications”. One participant felt that using the Profiles in considering career options would provide:

“...[a] positive benefit...as a reminder about the full breadth of the principal role, not only to ensure job applications cover all aspects of the role, but also to expand professional understanding and capacity.”

The trial participants also noted the potential value of the Profiles for selection panels, and for recruitment and succession planning. One was conscious of the role in noting:

“It is also essential to have a succession plan in place that covers several possibilities. Underpinning this will be developing the talent that exists within my staff so that opportunities are created for aspiring principals and a culture of continuous improvement is embedded.”

For aspirant principals planning to apply for positions, the Profiles provide guidance on the range and level of skills and capabilities that selection panels will expect. For some, they will be a reality check. For others, they will act as a reminder of the capacities they can already bring to the role, which should be reflected in their applications.



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“ The way the set of statements are arranged through three leadership lenses is a useful element. It enables principals to focus on an aspect of their leadership that reflects their career stage, capability and context. “





Conclusion

While the Profiles have a clear role for principals, they are also a valuable resource for those aspiring to the position. They will assist members of leadership teams in evaluating their own current skill level, and in planning professional development opportunities to build their capacity. Profiles can assist aspirants in understanding the principal's role and responsibilities better. School leaders will use them to provide another perspective on the leadership of change and to strengthen school planning processes. They can be a powerful tool for performance review and to underpin coaching and mentoring for aspirants. Importantly, they can also support aspiring principals in applying for positions.

The Leadership Profiles and their supporting materials will support aspirants both in improving their current performance and in strengthening their case for promotion.

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AITSL is funded by the Australian Government

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Updated May 2016