



Leadership Profiles

Profiles in Action

Leadership Profiles and System Leaders



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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 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 system and network leaders and system personnel who support school leaders.

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 system leaders use the Profiles?

For system leaders and system personnel, the Leadership Profiles provide a foundation for focusing and strengthening their support for principals and members of leadership teams in schools. They underpin interactions between system leaders and principals, strengthen their professional conversations and help identify opportunities for professional growth. The trials also showed that the Profiles can form the basis for system-level support and play a role in recruitment and selection.

Profiles as a basis for professional conversations

For system leaders, the Profiles provide an additional basis for their performance improvement work with principals. In the ACT trial, each network leader asked participating principals to identify and highlight statements of leadership behaviour on the Leadership Profiles that either reflected their current leadership practice, or where they would like their leadership to be, prior to the mid-cycle review. The highlighted statements formed the basis of the professional conversation during the mid-cycle review.

Where these conversations had usually focused on school data, including student achievement and the outcomes of strategic plans, the use of the Profiles added a new dimension; they provided a basis for discussing the skills, behaviours and orientations of the principal. As several principals agreed, for the first time:

“the conversation was about my leadership”.

Participants felt that this provided both a richer range of conversations and a more personal and authentic basis to the interaction.

Principals involved in the trial agreed that the inclusion of the Profiles established a new structure and focus to the performance improvement process. They felt that the process revealed new aspects and understandings of their leadership, leading to better quality or different conversations.

Both system leaders and principals found that the inclusion of the Profiles generated substantial change in the performance improvement process. While discussion of matters such as student achievement and the outcomes of strategic plans remained important, the Profiles provided a new basis for explicit discussion of the principal's leadership.

Greater clarity and objectivity

For both principals and network leaders the change in professional conversations was welcome. It improved the quality of the conversation and offered greater clarity and objectivity.

Both parties felt that the conversations stayed more on track. There was also an increased joint accountability to talk specifically about the principal's leadership actions. For the principals, the Profiles offered a new way to convey their leadership skills. For the network leaders, use of the Profiles gave them a much clearer picture of the principal's capability; they felt they knew the principal's leadership at a deeper level.

A key feature of the Profiles that contributed to these outcomes was the common language they provided for talking about leadership. Because the statements in the Profiles are clear and explicit, both network leader and principal could be confident that they were talking about the same thing. The clarity of the language enabled the participants to add substance and evidence to the discussion. Participants felt that this would assist in making conversations:

“more objective and less idiosyncratic”.

The net benefit of this process was that the network leader and principal came to a common understanding of where the principal's practice was located on the Profiles. Network leaders also saw a broader gain, as the Profiles would support increased consistency across the education system in principal development and provision of feedback.

Challenge and feedback

One significant outcome of the trials was that the use of the Profiles provided improved opportunities for network leaders to challenge and provide feedback to principals, because the common language offered a shared basis for the discussion. The Leadership Profiles brought the principal's leadership strengths, challenges and aspirations into sharper focus and facilitated a richer range of conversations, and discussions were seen to be:

“more authentic, honest and targeted”.

Participants noted that the Profiles enabled principals to gain a more accurate understanding of their stage of development. The presence of an objective statement of capacity enabled network leaders to provide feedback based on evidence of progress, and to challenge the principal's assessment of their own skills, recognising that principals had sometimes either over-estimated or under-estimated their degree of progress. Principals welcomed the fact that the Profiles could 'force' network leaders to provide constructive feedback.

More broadly, network leaders felt that the Profiles would enable them to challenge the thinking of both individual principals and networks.



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Support for professional growth

Participants agreed that these factors contributed to greater opportunities for leadership growth. Network leaders felt that the Profiles would assist in identifying growth points and pathways for support. They would also guide conversations with principals concerning their professional development plans. The resources provided in association with the Interactive Leadership Profiles were seen as providing support in planning and initiating professional learning.

They would assist principals to reflect on their practice and identify how they might become more strategic and systematic in their work. For newer principals, they would provide a basis for reflection on the leadership qualities required to be a successful principal.

System leaders felt that the Profiles would offer a valuable reference point for supporting principals. The Profiles were a framework that would enable system leaders to work with principals to identify areas for improvement.



A tool for coaching

The Profiles were seen as particularly useful in supporting coaching and mentoring. The two trials that had a strong coaching emphasis made extensive use of the Profiles, which helped in framing coaching questions and sharpened the focus of coaching conversations. They were strongly endorsed by system leaders as a direct tool for use in supporting principals and aspirants.

In the ACEL trial, the Profiles were used as a resource in coaching conversations. 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 resources linked to the Interactive Leadership Profiles. 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.

The Profiles can provide specific support to system personnel in coaching and mentoring aspirant principals. They were seen by participants in the trials 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.

A foundation for system support

A broader benefit of the Profiles lies in their use as a basis for the work of those providing support to principals. The trials revealed examples of their potential to provide a content and conceptual framework for system-level professional learning initiatives.

The South Australian trial saw a new Graduate Diploma of Strategic Leadership developed by the University of South Australia for the Department for Education and Child Development. The diploma is grounded in the Standard and the Profiles and has been designed in ten modules guided by the Professional Practices. The Profiles are embedded throughout the course and included in assessment tasks.

The Tasmanian trial similarly involved the use of the five Professional Practices of the Standard to frame the delivery of the THRIVE Principal Induction Program for new principals. The Profiles were used to elaborate each practice and show the developmental profile that leads to high performance. The program was developed by the Tasmanian Department of Education's Professional Learning Institute, which uses the Profiles in programs for emerging, aspiring, established and high-performing principals.

Because the Profiles offer a strong conceptual framework and are articulated over levels of increasing proficiency, they can provide a foundation for a wide range of formal and informal professional learning and system support for principals as they gain increasing capacity in the role.

Recruitment and selection

For system leaders, there are ancillary benefits in the use of the Profiles beyond direct support for the improvement of principal performance. Participants in the trials noted the potential value of the Profiles in recruitment and selection processes for principal positions. They would be useful to selection panels in identifying the range of skills and experience needed for appointment. They could also be helpful for applicants in briefing referees and preparing job applications.

Network leaders can also play a role in supporting the development of aspirant principals. The Profiles provide a checklist of the range and level of skills and capabilities that selection panels will expect, and a basis for principals and system leaders to work with aspirants in planning their professional learning to maximise their skills and opportunities to gain positions.



Conclusion

For system leaders, the trials demonstrated the value that the Profiles can add to their work. They provide a stronger basis for professional conversations with the principals they support, bringing greater clarity, consistency and objectivity to those conversations. They support the provision of constructive feedback to principals, and planning for their professional growth. The Profiles also offer a foundation for system-level support initiatives, as well as for recruitment and selection.

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