



Leadership Profiles

Profiles in Action

Leadership Profiles and Principals



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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 principals already in positions.

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 principals use the Profiles?

For current principals, the Profiles provide a powerful means of understanding their roles and taking action to improve their skills and capacities. They provide a map of the capabilities needed in the job and guidance about the development path principals can follow to achieve high-quality performance. The clarity and explicitness of the Profiles support both self-evaluation and reflection. Principals saw their value in supporting and working with leadership teams, and in facilitating effective school planning processes.

Where principals used the Profiles in their workplaces, they reported that this was a valuable exercise and that it generated benefits for them and those they worked with.

Understanding the role

Principals involved in the trials, especially those relatively newly appointed, saw the Profiles as a guide to understanding the role. One participant in the trials suggested that the Profiles were “a guide to my ‘real work’ as principal”.

Another pointed out that “the Leadership Profiles create a great reference point to define the roles of leaders”.

One principal recognised that the different ‘lenses’ for viewing the Profiles provide a balancing mechanism:

“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.”

Another argued that clarity about leadership was a key benefit of the initiative. This function of the Profiles was regarded as especially useful in the period soon after appointment; one participant described the experience of the first year of appointment as “being pulled in all directions” and saw the Profiles as a guide to achieving higher proficiency.

Focusing the principal's work

A number of participants saw the Profiles providing a direct practical benefit in ensuring that they addressed all of the key focus areas of the role. One participant described the Profiles as “a visual reminder of where my focus should be”.

Others noted that the range of areas of emphasis in the Profiles was a reminder not to be distracted by the constant flow of detail, but to pay attention to the broader, longer-term elements of the role. One participant said that the Profiles were a reminder to focus on strategic thinking rather than becoming absorbed in the operational side of the work, noting:

“It has been good to take time to reflect and work out exactly what I need to do. I have been thinking more strategically about what we do now, what is working well and what to work on to improve student outcomes. The big picture thinking is happening!”

Several participants made similar comments; one planned to use the Profiles to “inform and direct my work” while another saw them as “keeping focus on the core work of a principal”.

A key issue for principals is knowing how to balance the multitude of responsibilities and pressures that come with the job. The Profiles can be a tool to remind principals about what really matters.

Self-evaluation and self-reflection

Principals taking part in the trials noted the value of the Profiles in helping them reflect on their work and evaluate their readiness to take on all aspects of the role. One principal 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.”

Another recognised that:

“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.”

This principal's words mirrored the views of many participants:

“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.”

A number of participants noted that the Profiles are helpful in acknowledging strengths as well as areas for improvement. One network leader argued that some principals underestimate the extent to which they are achieving high performance in some areas, and the Profiles would be helpful in focusing their attention on those areas of strength.





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Guide to professional learning

Trial participants understood that the Profiles provided a roadmap for professional learning. Participants saw the explicit skills framework provided by the Profiles as helping to identify specific areas in which they needed to strengthen their understanding. The resources provided in association with the Interactive Leadership Profiles were seen as providing support in planning and initiating professional learning.

One principal saw the value of the Profiles in “reviewing my progress and where the next steps are to being highly proficient”. A recently-appointed 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 participants agreed that the Profiles could be used in “identifying my development needs and planning my professional learning”, and “as a reference to ensure I am improving the areas I am less competent in”.

The trials found that the Profiles helped participants to understand each area of practice, locate their current practice on the developmental continuum, understand what is next in their professional development and personalise their professional growth planning.

Working with leadership team members

Many trial participants were looking forward to using the Profiles with the leadership teams in their school. Participants 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 and their related resources with the school’s executive staff as a group.

One trial participant 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 recognised the role of the Profiles in helping principals support members of their leadership teams in understanding 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.”

Feedback also referred to the role of the Profiles in supporting succession planning through:

“...developing the talent that exists within my staff so that opportunities are created for aspiring principals and a culture of continuous improvement is embedded.”



A tool for coaching

The Profiles provide targeted assistance to principals in coaching other school leaders as a key strategy for performance improvement. The two trials concerning coaching made extensive use of the Profiles. They helped in framing coaching questions and sharpened the focus of coaching conversations.

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. Another trial noted that the use of the Profiles brought additional independence and objectivity to the coaching and mentoring process, since the Profiles provided a common language for discussing progress and mapping skills.

The Profiles can provide specific support to principals in coaching and mentoring aspirant principals and other school leaders. 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.



School planning

Beyond their focus on the capacity and work of the principal and leadership team, participants saw the Profiles as a tool for school planning. One trial participant noted that they are not just about the work of principals, but also about the broader performance of schools and those who work in them:

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

One participant hoped the Profiles would “support my leadership and directly influence the work at this primary school.”

Similarly, members of the trial group said they would use the Profiles to support school improvement plans. One participant suggested 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 to align school goals to Profiles for a relevant Professional Practice:

“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.”

The Profiles can also provide a new perspective on the leadership of school improvement and can inform the role of school leaders in the process; the need to be strategic, to take account of relational matters and to initiate and support change.

Performance improvement

An ACT trial highlighted the 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 largely concentrating on school data to questions of leadership. As several principals agreed, for the first time ‘the conversation was about my leadership’.

Principals involved in the trial argued 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. The language of the Profiles facilitated a richer range of conversations, and ‘more authentic, honest and targeted’ discussions.

Both network leaders and principals involved in this ACT trial found that the inclusion of the Profiles generated substantial change in the performance improvement process. While discussion of such matters as student achievement and the outcomes of strategic plans remains important, the Profiles added an explicit focus on the skills, behaviours and orientations of the principal. For both principals and network leaders this was a welcome change.



Job application tool


The Profiles can also have immediate practical uses for a principal seeking a new position. 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 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. The trial participants noted the potential value of the Profiles for selection panels.

Participants in the trial 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.”

For principals and others 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 bring to the role, which should be reflected in their applications.





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Conclusion

The trials showed that the Profiles make a rich and varied contribution to the work of principals. They assist occupants of positions to both understand the role and focus their work. They provide an independent basis for reflection and self-evaluation and for planning professional learning. Principals find them useful in working with their leadership teams, and in strategic planning within the school. Their inclusion in performance improvement processes adds clarity and focuses specifically on the work of the principal. Finally, they offer practical support to a principal seeking a new position.

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