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Leadership values, trust and negative capability : managing the uncertainties of future English higher education

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Abstract

The complex leadership attribute of 'negative capability' in managing uncertainty and engendering trust may be amongst the qualities enabling institutions to cope with multiple recent government policy challenges affecting English higher education, including significant increases in student fees. Research findings are reported on changes in leadership values, trust and organisational cultures in higher education during the current 'age of austerity'. Data from university experts, managers and academics in semi-structured interviews were informed by questionnaires (n=16), online surveys (n=121) and a focus group (n=6). Findings indicated that values-based leadership characterised by skilful 'negative capability' is now needed in English higher education. 'Negative capability' is defined as the ability to resist the 'false necessity' of deterministic solutions in building staff trust to cope proactively with ambiguity and change. This capability is needed for academic leaders to maintain their role in shaping the enduring purposes of higher education during a recession, both in England and in the wider international environment. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)