

The background is a solid dark blue color. Overlaid on this are several complex, white wireframe geometric shapes. These shapes resemble interconnected cubes or polyhedrons, some of which are elongated and stretched, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lines are thin and white, contrasting sharply with the dark blue background.

Breaking Down the Silo: *Professional and Administrative Staff as Enablers of Values-Led Success*

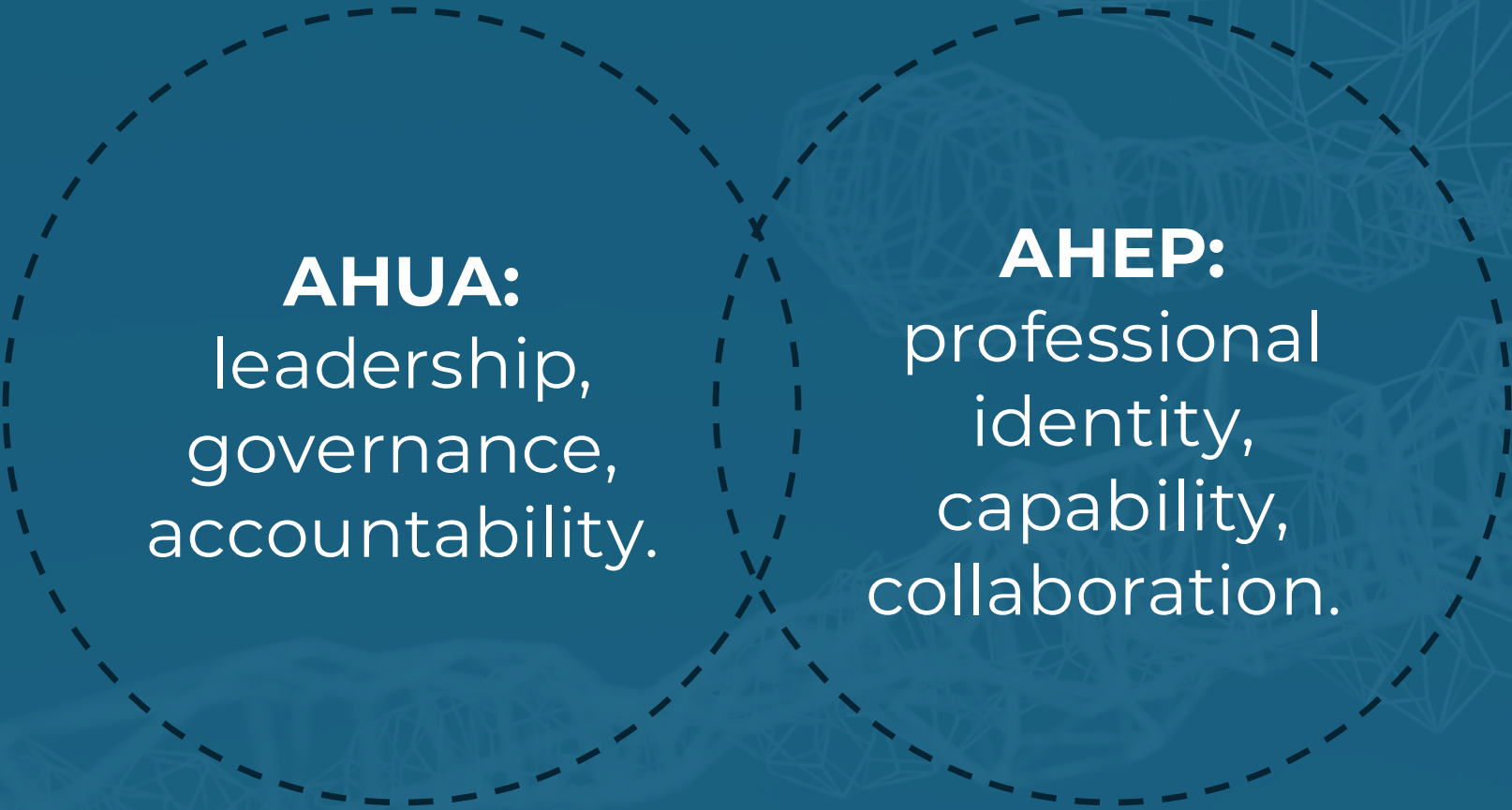
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Magna Charta Observatory Global Conference

Two Perspectives, One Purpose

Working alongside academic and student communities to enable collective leadership. Together, we strengthen whole-institution leadership.



AHUA:
leadership,
governance,
accountability.

AHEP:
professional
identity,
capability,
collaboration.

The Challenge

Universities operate in a VUCA world – volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Responding to financial, social and political pressures demands decisions that are trusted, values-led and shared.

Adapted from Bennis & Nanus (1985); Bennett & Lemoine (2014)



The Core Question

How can shared, values-led decision-making build trust and organisational confidence?

In this environment, the quality of our relationships is as critical as the quality of our decisions.

Your perspective

1. Where is your institution based?
2. What best describes your role?
3. One word you most value in a university.
4. Honestly, what one word describes the role of professional services and administrators in your institution's critical decision-making?

Use the QR code to access the mentimeter, or join at [menti.com](https://menti.com/53314963) using the code 5331 4963



Leadership Within a Hierarchical System

- Universities depend on hierarchy for clarity, accountability and governance.
- Yet, leadership does not only happen at the top.
- It is strengthened when influence and insight flow across every layer.

Leadership is strongest when academic, professional and student voices connect across the structure. When that happens, hierarchy becomes a framework for collaboration rather than a boundary to it.



When Leadership is Tested

In recent years, leadership in universities has been tested repeatedly.

Global events have brought volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity into sharp focus:

- COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath
- Geopolitical conflict and war
- Climate emergency and sustainability crises
- Digital disruption and shifting mobility
- Political polarisation and, in the UK, Brexit

When everything is changing, leadership is not about command. It is about what we do together – constructing meaning and direction with others.

Leadership is the social process through which people influence and enable one another to make sense of shared purpose and act on it in ways that create collective value.

Adapted from Uhl-Bien (2006); Grint (2005); Bolden et al. (2011)



Three Lenses for Collective Leadership

Understanding and responding to volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity with vision, understanding, clarity and agility. It reframes disruption as a space for purposeful, values-led action.



Distributed Leadership – shared responsibility across boundaries. Leadership is strongest when influence is distributed, and insight flows across every layer of the institution.

Reflection and dialogue across functions. Leadership grows through openness, feedback and continuous learning that links strategy to lived experience.

From Lenses to Models

- The three lenses show how leadership feels when it is shared and values-led.
- Our values set the tone; our decision-making brings them to life.
- Together, they create the conditions for trust and collective confidence.



From seeing differently to doing differently.

Decision-Making Models

Model	Essence	How to Use It
Scientific Management	Process efficiency	Focus on structure, data and clear task ownership. Ask: <i>What process will make this work best?</i>
Human Relations	Motivation and belonging	Prioritise communication, morale and inclusion. Ask: <i>How do people feel about this decision?</i>
Devil's Advocate	Constructive challenge	Assign someone to test assumptions. Ask: <i>What might we be missing?</i>
Carnegie Model	Coalition and negotiation	Balance competing interests. Ask: <i>What outcome will satisfy enough people to move forward?</i>

When used well, these models help translate shared values into practical action under pressure.



From Perspective to Outcome

You have been assigned a real-life scenario – one that mirrors the challenges faced across higher education.

Work together using the Three Lenses and Decision-Making Models to guide your approach.

1. Understand the scenario

Clarify what is happening, who is affected, and what decision or action is required.

2. Apply a leadership lens

Use one of the Three Lenses – Distributed Leadership, Organisational Learning, or VUCA Awareness – to frame how you view the challenge.

3. Use a decision-making model

Choose a model (for example, Human Relations for inclusion, or Devil's Advocate for challenge) to guide how you approach the decision.

Discuss: Who should be involved, and how will you work together to decide?

4. Agree the outcome

Decide what you will do, how you will communicate it, and what a whole-institution approach might look like in practice.

5. Reflect

Note one insight and one tension or question that remains. Be ready to share these in the next stage.

Lenses → Models → Outcome
(Perspective) (Method) (Result)

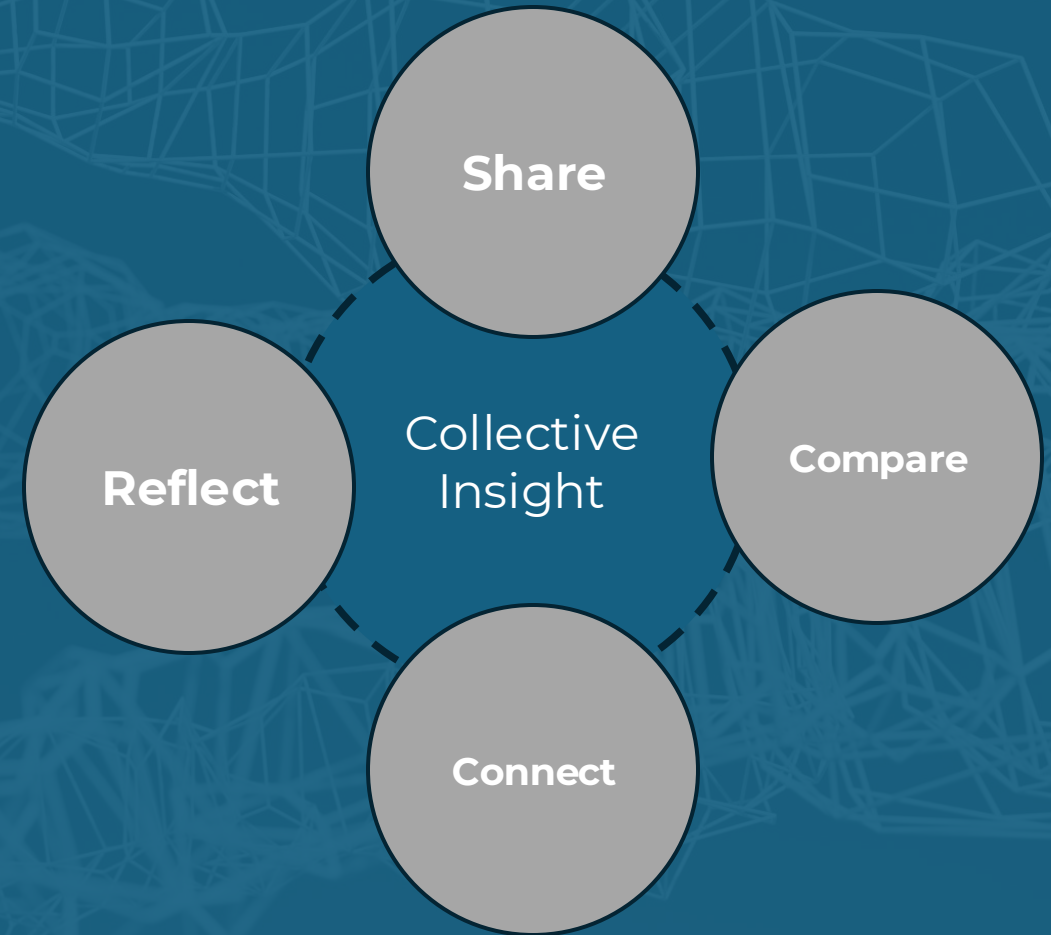
Insight from Groups

Each group to share in one minute:

- Which *lens* and *model* they used.
- The *outcome* they reached.
- One *challenge* or *tension* that remains.

As a whole group:

- Notice recurring themes and patterns.
- Reflect on what this reveals about leadership, learning and trust across boundaries.



Key Messages

Across every scenario, one pattern stands out...

- Decisions are stronger when shared.
- The quality of process builds confidence.
- Trust sustains leadership through volatility.
- Shared purpose unites academic, professional and student leaders.

Leading Forward

Think and take forward:

- How do you build confidence in decisions under uncertainty?
- How do you ensure colleagues see themselves as part of the decision, not the audience for it?
- What does values-led leadership look like in your context?

Key take-aways:

- Practical tools for shared decision-making.
- Strengthened learning and confidence in a VUCA world.
- Transferable principles for values-led, whole-institution leadership.



Let's continue the conversation...



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