

"Academia Under Pressure: Can New Forms of Leadership Help?", Manos Tsakiris

Session aim

The session aimed to be forward-looking and career-relevant by reaching a shared understanding of how good leadership can remain open to challenges and create conditions where disagreement does not become polarization, silence, or reputational fear.

Leadership here does not mean only formal authority. It means the everyday practices through which people make it possible for others to think, question, disagree, and belong.

The guiding question

What kinds of leadership allow scientific communities to remain intellectually open without becoming polarized, and inclusive without becoming silent or conformist?

Our aim was to come up with a few perspectives on “What forms of leadership foster inclusive and intellectually open scientific communities?”

What fellows shared

Having agreed on this framework, I proceeded by asking the fellows to share a moment when they were intellectually uncertain, challenged, excluded, or in conflict. What did a good leader do, or what do they wish a leader had done?

All fellows spoke and gave examples, many of which were negative:

- Lack of transparency in decision-making (e.g. authorship of papers),
- Lack of cohesion within research group
- Lack of regular contact
- Lack of a research culture

Many had similar experiences. Also, many of the fellows did not have a mentor.

Key observations

We agreed that leadership in academia is mostly learned informally. Most fellows would have had one or two examples of leadership styles (e.g. from their PhD supervisor and PI during the post-doc) and these are limiting.

We discussed the idea that leadership does not mean only formal authority. It means the everyday practices through which people make it possible for others to think, question, disagree, and belong.

We questioned the very use of the term leadership and proposed instead **to think not of academic leaders, but of enablers.**

What fellows aspire to be

When the fellows were asked to tell us the first word that comes to my mind when they think about the kind of academic leaders that they aspire to be in the future they said:

collaborative, transparent, generous, supportive, inspiring, pedagogical, with integrity.

What good leadership requires

We agreed that **psychological safety plus intellectual challenge** are important.

Inclusive leadership is not just making everyone comfortable. It is creating enough trust that people can tolerate discomfort, critique, and uncertainty.

We agreed on the importance **of intellectual humility** and of the PIs being responsible for setting norms explicitly: many conflicts escalate because the rules are implicit.

Leaders can make norms explicit.