

Principles of Effective Leadership

One of the goals of the Leibniz Leadership Academy is to further develop the leadership culture of the Leibniz Association and thereby create a supportive environment for researchers as well as employees in infrastructure and administration. Part of a professional leadership culture is to document its essential principles so that everyone can share a common ground.

These 'Principles of Effective Leadership' were developed in 2025 together with participants and alumni of the Academy and have been formulated as a set of recommendations.

In this sense, they not only provide individual leaders with guidance regarding expectations placed on them (time commitment, expectations of employees, required soft skills and management competencies), but can also serve as a resource for developing institute-specific leadership mission statements.¹ Especially in the context of organisational development, it is advantageous to refer to a binding and action-oriented document that clearly describes the understanding of leadership, expectations, and roles.

1. Leading by Example and Integrity

Guiding principle: Leaders act consistently, with integrity, and are aware of their function as role models.

Behaviours:

- They stand by their actions, take responsibility, and do not take advantage of existing dependencies or power dynamics.
- They make decisions in a transparent, comprehensible, and well-reasoned manner.
- They are present, approachable, and keep their promises.
- Leaders are authentic role models for good research practice.

¹ [1] Reference documents for developing institute-specific leadership mission statements include the '[Guiding Principles for our Actions in the Leibniz Association](#)' and the '[Empfehlungen für die Zusammenarbeit auf Vorstandsebene in Leibniz-Einrichtungen](#)' (in German) / 'Recommendations for Collaboration at Executive Board Level in Leibniz Institutes'.

2. Orientation and Structure

Guiding principle: Leaders provide strategic orientation, set clear frameworks, and foster structured working..

Behaviours:

- Leadership is understood and perceived as a professional responsibility.
- Leaders create clarity about roles, processes, goals, and expectations. In cases of shared leadership, roles and responsibilities are clearly distributed, with a shared understanding of joint responsibility within the team.
- They communicate meaning and context ('Why?') for tasks and changes, also when balancing institutional goals with the needs of individual employees.
- Binding policies or guidelines exist for key aspects of collaboration; essential processes are described and actively practiced.

3. Transparency, Communication, and Feedback Culture

Guiding principle: Leadership is characterised by honest, clear, and appreciative communication at eye level.

Behaviours:

- Leaders communicate information, goals, and decisions openly and regularly.
- They establish and support various communication and networking formats.
- Feedback is institutionally anchored and actively both given and received.
- Achievements and successes are recognised; criticism is expressed and received constructively — both top-down and bottom-up.

4. Participation and Involvement

Guiding principle: Leaders actively promote the participation of all employees and involve them in decision-making processes.

Behaviours:

- Strategies, mission statements, and goals are developed together with employees.
- Leaders take into account the interests of scientific, administrative, and technical staff.
- They create opportunities for employees to help shape structures, contribute ideas, and experience their own impact.
- Decision-making authority and areas of responsibility are clearly defined.

5. Trust, Empowerment, and Delegation

Guiding principle: Leaders build trust, empower their team members, and encourage responsibility.

Behaviours:

- Tasks are delegated transparently, with clear expectations and requirements, and with space scope to implement them.
- Outcomes are evaluated together.
- Mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities — a culture of openness regarding errors is actively supported.
- Leaders accompany and coach team members as needed, especially when these take on new tasks.

6. Personnel Development and Continuous Learning

Guiding principle: Leadership aims for long-term personnel development and continuous qualification.

Behaviours:

- Personnel development starts with professional onboarding, especially for international employees.
- Employees are supported at all career stages (e.g. through coaching, mentoring, and continuing education).
- Development meetings and potential analyses are held regularly and are binding; development paths are agreed upon together.
- Leaders themselves take opportunities to further their own ongoing professional development.

7. Diversity, Appreciation, and Psychological Safety

Guiding principle: Leadership fosters an inclusive, respectful working environment in which diversity is regarded as a strength.

Behaviours:

- Leaders systematically include different perspectives and backgrounds in decision-making processes.
- A discrimination-free environment, appreciative communication, and recognition of achievement are self-evident.
- Leaders pay attention to the mental well-being of employees.
- Emerging conflicts are addressed early; established processes for conflict resolution are in place.