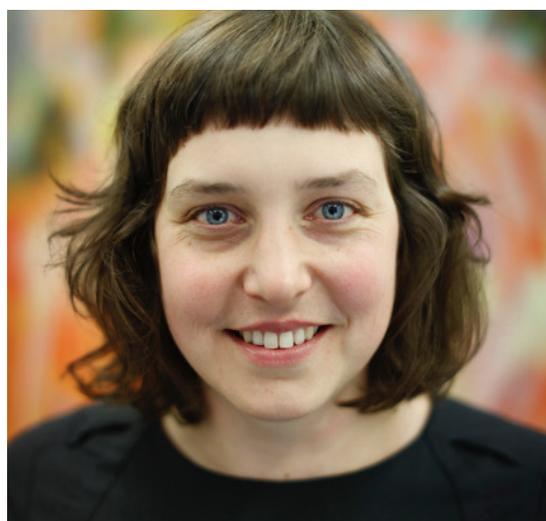


IN THE SPOTLIGHT 焦点

YOUNG ACADEMIC LEADERS: LEADERSHIP STYLES, CHALLENGES & DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

青年学术领导者：领导风格、挑战与发展策略



Prof. Liesbeth De Donder, Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Liesbeth De Donder has been working at Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB) for 13 years teaching courses about civil participation, community development, research methodology and supervising master's and Ph.D. students. She has also been part of several research projects about social inclusion and participation of prisoners and older people, which are her two main areas of interest when it comes to research. She has previously functioned as the head of the Department of Educational Science at VUB, been a member of the Board of the faculty of Educational Sciences and Psychology and currently represents her faculty at the University's Research Council. Recently, De Donder has won the VUB's award for the best supervisor in the year of 2020, for which she was nominated by her Ph.D. students. In this article, De Donder shares the leadership styles, challenges as well as development strategies that she applies as a young academic leader.

Liesbeth De Donder教授, 布鲁塞尔自由大学

Liesbeth De Donder在布鲁塞尔自由大学(VUB)工作了十三年, 讲授有关公民参与、社区发展、研究方法的课程, 并指导硕士和博士生。她还参与了几个有关囚犯和老年人的社会包容与参与的研究项目, 这是她研究的两个主要领域。她曾担任VUB教育学系主任一职, 也曾任教育学与心理学学院委员会成员, 并作为学院代表参与大学研究理事会。最近, De Donder被其博士生们提名推举赢得了VUB的2020年最佳导师奖。在本文中, De Donde分享了她作为青年学术领导者所采用的领导风格、面临的挑战以及发展策略。

What are your responsibilities as a/an (young) academic leader?

As a supervisor, my role includes operational tasks, such as helping and guiding my Ph.D. students on how to develop a research design, conduct the data collection, write research articles, etc. However, for me, my role also includes other tasks, like widening my students' horizons and making them consider other perspectives and angles of the topic in question. Ph.D. students usually come with specific questions regarding their research as they are focused on what they are doing, and my task is to help them develop their thinking by widening their perspectives and letting them think about other ideas, options and possibilities. Therefore, it is when they say "ah, I didn't look at it that way" when I am satisfied. My role also includes giving them the freedom and independence to choose their own trajectory and establish their own network.

Besides, being a professor, I have different responsibilities, in addition to teaching through which I contribute to my faculty and the university as a whole. For instance, I was the head of the Department of Education Sciences at VUB and I have also been on the faculty board and a member of the University Research Council. Additionally, I am currently part of a Think Tank consisting of two members of each faculty in the university working on coming up with a vision for the future of the education at the university and how it will look like in 20 years from now.

作为一名(青年)学术领导者的职责是什么?

作为导师, 我的职责包括执行性任务, 例如帮助和指导我的博士生们, 指导学生们如何进行研究设计、数据收集以及撰写研究论文等。但是, 对我来说, 我的职责还包括其他任务, 例如拓宽学生的视野并让他们考虑该问题主题的其他观点和角度。博士生们专注于正在做的研究时, 他们通常会对研究提出一些具体的问题, 而我的任务是通过扩大视野并让他们思考其他想法、选择和可能性来帮助他们拓展思维。因此, 当他们说“啊, 我没那样想过”我会感到比较满足。我的角色还包括给予他们自由和独立的权利, 以选择他们自己的轨道并建立自己的学术网络。此外, 作为一名教授, 我除了通过教学可以为学院和大学整体做出一些贡献之外, 我还承担着其他职责。例如, 我曾担任VUB教育学系主任, 也曾担任学院委员会成员和大学研究理事会成员。此外, 目前, 我是一个智库的成员, 该智库由大学中每个系的两名成员组成, 并致力于提出关于大学教育的未来以及大学教育未来20年的愿景。

You have recently won the VUB award for the best supervisor. Tell us more about it and why you think you deserved this award.

The VUB award for the best supervisor is given annually to a supervisor from the university who is nominated for this award by his/her Ph.D. students. Based on students' nominations, which are an explanation of why this professor deserves the award, a jury then selects the winner of the award. If you ask me about the reason I won the award for this year, then it's because my students are really stubborn and know how to write good applications (laughs). Last year, my students nominated me for the same award and I won second place. Nonetheless, clearly, they were not satisfied with the results, so they nominated me again this year and apparently put more effort into why I was worthy of this award to make me win. However, in my perspective, I also knew why I didn't win the award last year. During last year's ceremony in which the winner was announced, it attracted my attention that one of the reasons this winner deserved the award was because she had a structured plan for supervising her Ph.D. students, this is something that I wasn't doing up until last year as I had a more informal coaching style which didn't set a specific schedule for meetings with the students, for instance, but rather meetings were dependent on students' needs. Thus, one of the things that I started doing is to have a more organized plan for supervising my Ph.D. students. Hence, I began to have regular meetings with all of my students in which we gather up and discuss several issues related to work and academia in general. It is important to note, however, that my plan for supervision is never rigid, as the purpose of this plan is to add more structure to our workflow, not to limit students' autonomy or freedom, which some favor over thorough guidance in their work.

您最近获得了VUB最佳导师奖。请您谈谈有关获得这个奖项更多的信息，以及为什么您认为您获得该奖项。

VUB最佳导师奖是颁发给每年由导师的博士生们推举的大学导师，基于学生的推举。这就解释了该教授为什么应获得该奖项，然后由陪审团选择该奖项的获奖者。如果您问我今年获得该奖项的原因，那是因为我的学生确实很执着，并且知道如何写出好的申请（此处有笑声）。去年，我的学生推举了我同样的奖项，我获得了第二名。但是，很显然，他们对结果并不满意，所以他们今年再次推举了我，并且显然加大了我值得获得该奖项，让我获胜。但是，以我的观点，我也知道为什么我去年没有获得该奖项。在去年宣布获奖者颁奖典礼上，引起我注意的是，这位获奖者获得奖项原因之一是因为她制定了监督博士生的结构化计划，这是我直到去年才开始做的事情，因为我的非正式辅导风格更强。例如我并没有为学生制定具体的时间表，但是会议取决于学生的需求。因此，我开始做的一件事就是制定一个更有条理的计划来监督我的博士生们。因此，我开始与所有博士生定期开会，我们聚会并讨论与工作学术界有关的若干问题。但是，重要的是要注意，我的监督计划从来都不是一成不变的，因为这个计划的目的是在我们的工作流程中增加更多的组织性，而不是限制学生的自主性或自由性，这是一些博士生不愿其工作被完全指导的原因。



What do you think are the pros and cons of your leadership style?

There are some difficulties which arise from applying such a style, including the fact that it is time-consuming. As each Ph.D. student has his/her own plan, I have to coach and follow-up with every one of them on a different basis, the thing that requires a lot of time. Similarly, as I mentioned, since I put a lot of emphasis on building a community and the development of this community, this also takes time. We plan to implement fun activities through which we get to enjoy our time and also strengthen our bond as a team; however, it is not always easy to implement such activities, especially with the big workload that we all have. Hence, although investing in team building is definitely worthwhile and one of the biggest pros for such a style, it still comes with the disadvantage of requiring extra time. In addition to building a cohesive team where there is social and peer support, another advantage of my style is the result of cooperation among the team members which raises the overall quality of our work, whether in terms of the research articles that are written or any other work outputs. Additionally, I believe that my style enables my students to enjoy a great degree of autonomy in their work; I never set the direction for them, but rather give the freedom to choose their path, whether in getting specific expertise, building their own network, etc. The final end of such a style is that I see content Ph.D. students. In my ten years of supervision, despite having some difficult moments, no one of my students has ever given up and they all have eventually succeeded in obtaining their Ph.D.

您认为您的领导风格的利弊是什么？

采用这样的风格会带来一些困难，比如，很耗时。作为每个博士生有自己的计划，我必须在不同的基础上指导和跟进每个人，这需要很多时间。同样，正如我提到的那样，由于我非常重视构建团体和这个团体发展，因此这也需要时间。我们计划实施一些有趣的活动，让我们度过快乐的时光，并加强我们作为团队的纽带；但是，实施这样的活动并不总是那么容易，尤其是在我们所有人都有很大工作量的情况下。因此，尽管投入于团队建设绝对是值得的，并且是这种风格的最大优点之一，但它仍然具有需要额外时间的缺点。除了建立一个有社会和同伴支持的有凝聚力的团队之外，我的风格的另一个优势是团队成员之间合作的结果，无论是书面研究论文还是任何其他方面的工作成果，这都提高了我们工作的整体质量。另外，我相信我的风格使我的学生在工作享有很大的自主权。我从不为他们设定方向，而是给他们自由选择道路的机会，无论是获得特定专业知识，还是建立自己的网络等。这种风格的最终目的是让我看到心满意足的博士生们。在我的十年指导经历中，尽管遇到了一些困难，但我的学生中没有一个人放弃过，他们最终都成功取得了他们的博士学位。

"...not only do they learn to be self-reliant and reflective but also responsible; I don't lead the path for them but help them lead their own."

How would you describe your leadership style?

It is quite difficult to put a word on it. However, first, I would say very coaching and flexible in the sense that this coaching style is not fixed but rather is adapted to meet my students' varying needs. For instance, I have around ten Ph.D. students, and I am aware that I need to approach them differently starting from the frequency of our meetings to the jokes that I tell to each one of them. I also believe that group work is important and try to create this community environment among my students. Therefore, with my students, it is not me alone who is leading the whole group and coaching them. Instead, we work as a cohesive group in which they also coach and support each other, making sure that they get peer support, which is vital for their progress and cooperation. I also reject the traditional idea of leadership where a leader is perceived as a person on the top of a hierarchy, as I prefer to be one who is standing and working among the researchers (I also prefer the word researcher than student in referring to them). Thus, my aim is always to create a research community where we all work together and support each other, and as I happen to be the one with more experience in research, I do my best to transfer that know-how for them to help them grow and develop. Additionally, I never aim to command my students what to do or give them ready answers but to ask them questions that can help them find the answers themselves. In this way, not only do they learn to be self-reliant and reflective but also responsible; I don't lead the path for them but help them lead their own.

"...他们不仅学会自立和反思，同时也变得具有责任感。我不是为他们领路，而是帮助他们自己领自己的路。"

您如何形容您的领导风格？

一句话很难说。但是，首先，我要说的是我非常具有指导性而且比较灵活，因为这种指导风格不是固定的，可以适应我的学生不断变化的需求。例如，我有大约十个博士生，我知道从会议的频率到讲给每个人的笑话，我需要以不同的方式对待他们。我也相信小组合作很重要，并尝试与我的学生一起创造这种团体环境。因此，与我的学生，不是我在独自领导整个团队并指导他们。相反，我们是一个团结的团队，他们在团队中也互相指导和相互支持，以确保他们得到同伴的支持，这对于他们的进步与合作至关重要。我也拒绝接受传统的领导观念，即领导者被视为一个处于最高层的人，因为我更愿意成为在研究者中与他们一起工作的人（比起“学生”，我也更倾向于用“研究者”称呼他们）。因此，我的目标始终是创建一个我们共同合作并互相支持的研究团体，而当我碰巧是一个拥有更多研究经验的人时，我会尽我所能为他们提供专业知识帮助他们成长和发展。此外，我从来不控制学生做什么或给他们准备好的答案，而是问他们可以帮助他们自己找到答案的问题。这样，他们不仅学会自立和反思，同时也变得具有责任感。我不是为他们领路，而是帮助他们自己领自己的路。

What are the challenges that you face as a young academic leader?

One of the challenges that I faced at the beginning of my career as a supervisor was the little coaching provided to supervisors. Back then, I attended a training week on teaching that was given to new professors, but we didn't have something like that for supervisors with regard to how to coach, apply for funding, start a research group, and other tasks that are not related to teaching. They have recently started, however, giving training at our university for starting professors on supervising, which must be helpful, but since this was not the case for me, I had to figure out the "how-to" for such tasks myself. Thus, for me, the beginning was actually the hardest.

Another challenge that I face is funding; to do more projects, you need to apply for more funding. Consequently, you get immersed in this constant search for money to be able to start or sustain your projects. This was also a big challenge at the beginning of my career, as funding was required for starting my research group. Thus, at that point, it wasn't leading the group that was challenging, but it was having a group to lead in the first place. Currently, applying for funding is still a time-consuming process that takes from the time that I plan to dedicate for supervision.

Additionally, the administrative work associated with the research projects yet poses another challenge for me. This includes handling Ph.D. students' applications, bills, and other paperwork that all have to be done by the professor him/herself. This also takes a lot of my time and deprives me of the chance to give more time and effort to supervision and research. And as I mentioned, you have to figure this out yourself as no one will guide or coach you on how to be a supervisor, the thing that I still miss, as I believe leaders need to be coached as well.

"I felt that I needed a coach myself. Thus, I started reaching out to other researchers and research groups in other faculties and universities...Sometimes, also, talking with friends who are in a similar situation might help."

What are the strategies that you apply for dealing with these challenges?

About two years ago, I felt that I needed a coach myself. Thus, I started reaching out to other researchers and research groups in other faculties and universities. My purpose was to benefit from their experience and try to learn from the way they are functioning in their groups. For example, to retain my Ph.D. students who just leave the group once their study is done, I wanted to hire more postdoctoral researchers in my team, which is also beneficial for the continuity of the research group. However, this is a big challenge due to financial issues. Therefore, I wanted to learn from other groups who have different structures from mine with more postdoctoral researchers on board to be able to do this myself. Now I do contact such groups asking about their group structures and the way they manage it to be able to craft our own plan for doing something similar with our team.

Sometimes, also, talking with friends who are in a similar situation might help. I have a good friend whose job is similar to mine and is currently working in the United Kingdom. At least, once a year, I like to go there for a week, which can be both a way for learning about how research groups function in the UK and also for relaxing, sharing stresses as well as having fun. Hence, I like not just to reach out to people in other faculties and universities but also those abroad. For handling team-related issues, such as lack of motivation, we have started to organize meetings where we gather up to talk about our feelings towards work, quality of work, work-life balance, and the things we want to change, etc., but not operational aspects, such as research articles. We did this for the first time in March-May this year, and following the positive feedback that we got from the team members, we are going to hold it once a year. In addition to this, we yearly plan team days in which we rent a place and spend the day together and discuss issues related to the progress and future of the whole team and what the members want to achieve with their group. This is also crucial for consolidating the team bond and community feeling among the group members.

作为一名青年学术领导者，您都会面临哪些挑战？

在我担任导师的职业生涯开始时面临的挑战之一是为导师提供的培训很少。当时，我参加了一项针对新教授的为期一周的教学培训，但是对于导师来说，我们在指导，申请经费，成立研究小组以及其他与教学无关的工作方面没有类似的培训。但是，他们最近开始在我们的大学进行针对新教授指导学生的培训，这很有帮助。但是由于我的情况并非如此，因此我不得不自己弄清楚这些任务的“方法”。因此，对我而言，起步阶段实际上是最艰难的。

我面临的另一个挑战是经费；要进行更多的项目，你就需要申请更多的资金。因此，你会全身心投入在不断寻找经费，从而能够启动或维持你的项目。这也是我职业生涯初期的一个巨大挑战，因为成立我的研究小组需要经费。因此，在这一点上，带来挑战的并不是领导和领导团队，而是首先要有团队可以领导。目前，申请经费仍然是一个耗时的过程，花掉了我计划专门用于学生指导的时间。

此外，与研究项目相关的行政工作对我来说还构成了另一个挑战。这包括处理博士学生的申请，账单和其他文书工作都必须由教授本人完成。这也花费了我很多时间，并且使我失去了更多的时间和精力进行指导和研究的机会。而且，正如我提到的那样，我们必须自己弄清楚这一点，因为我相信，没人会辅导或指导你如何成为导师，这是我仍然觉得有必要的，因为我相信领导者也需要接受培训辅导。

“我觉得我自己需要一名辅导员。因此，我开始接触其他学院和大学中的其他研究人员和研究小组……有时，与处于类似情况的朋友交谈可能也会有所帮助。”

您采用哪些策略应对这些挑战？

大约两年前，我觉得我自己需要一名辅导员。因此，我开始接触其他学院和大学中的其他研究人员和研究小组。我的目的是从他们的经验中受益，并尝试学习他们团队的运作方式。例如，如何雇用毕业的博士生们，我想在我的团队中雇用更多的博士后研究人员，这也对研究小组的连续性有益。但是，由于财务问题，这是一个巨大的挑战。因此，我想向其他研究小组学习，他们有更多的博士后研究人员，我想了解自己如何能够完成这项工作。现在，我确实联系了这样的研究小组，询问他们的研究组组织结构及其管理方式，以便能够制定我们自己的计划，并与我们团队开展类似的工作。

有时，与处于类似情况的朋友交谈可能也会有所帮助。我有一个好朋友，他的工作与我类似，目前在英国工作。我喜欢去那里呆一个星期，至少每年一次，这既可以用来自了解研究小组在英国的运作方式，又可以除了娱乐以外，也用来放松，互相“诉苦”。因此，我不仅喜欢与其他学院和大学的人接触，而且也喜欢与国外的人接触。为了应对团队中的挑战，例如缺乏动力，我们已经开始开会，开会讨论我们对工作的感受，工作质量，工作与生活的平衡以及我们想要改变的事情等，但不是操作性内容，例如研究论文。我们是在今年3月至5月首次召开这样的会议。在获得团队成员的积极反馈后，我们会每年组织一次。除此之外，我们还计划了每年的团队日，在该日我们要租一个地方并一起度过一天，并讨论与整个团队的进步和未来以及成员希望在团队中取得的成就有关的问题。这对于巩固团队成员之间的团队联系和团体感情也至关重要。

Do you think female academic leaders face challenges that are specific to women?

Although there are several pro-women mechanisms in academia, such as offering incentives for hiring women (in the past), I believe, there are still some challenges. For instance, there are many women working at VUB, certainly in the social and human sciences.

Nevertheless, at the moment in general they often occupy the lower levels of academia. Therefore, it is not just about whether women are present in academia or not, but also about where they are present and what contributions they are making. In other words, it is about the quality rather than the quantity as there are many women working in academia, but they still, generally, occupy less important positions compared to men. Although our chancellor is a woman who is a great example, and there are many notable exceptions in general we see that the higher we go up in ranking, the fewer women we find. There is progress to be made.

What is an effective leader in your opinion?

When I hear the word effective, what comes to my mind is a leader that can get the work done. In my case, this means that I have to help my students do the requirements of their Ph.D. to be able to get the degree. This is both true and important. Nonetheless, an effective leader should also give importance to the quality of what is being done, not just the work outputs but also students' whole Ph.D. journey. Hence, for me, it is vital that students succeed and finish their Ph.D., but I also care about the meaning of that Ph.D. and its contribution to the society. Similarly, I care about how my students are doing on their way towards this Ph.D. by making sure that they are feeling good and satisfied with their work. Therefore, in my perspective, the effectiveness of the leaders should not only have quantitative measurements or indicators in terms of the numbers of students or research papers, etc., but also qualitative indicators that pay attention to other crucial factors.



Do you participate in the strategic planning of your institution?

The VUB Education 2040 Plan is an example of my participation in planning a vision for the future of the education of the university. The purpose of this plan is to think about how education will be in 20 years from now, which addresses the university's goals in education and also makes us rethink about the whole concept of education and teaching and if it will be the same in 2040. However, I also participate in the official strategic planning of the university which takes place every three years. This is done in two levels as, first, there is the planning at the faculty level and then at the university level. The last planning I took part in was quite participatory as we had several meetings in which we discussed a variety of topics related to education, and professors had the choice to participate in the topics they felt they could contribute to the most. Thus, we are involved in the development of the planning at the faculty level, but not the strategic planning for the whole university. However, sometimes I also wonder about the realization of such planning, which I think it would be good if we are informed about it and kept abreast of its result.

您是否认为女性学术领导者面临着特定的挑战？

我认为，尽管学术界有多种支持女性的机制，例如在过去提供激励措施以聘用女性，但我认为，仍然存在一些挑战。例如，我们有很多女性在VUB工作，尤其是在社会和人文学科。但是，目前总体来说她们经常在学术届担任较低的职位。因此，这不仅关乎女性是否在学术界存在，而且关乎她们在何处以及她们正在做什么样的贡献。换句话说，这是关于质量而不是数量的，因为许多女性在学术界工作。但与男性相比，她们通常还是没有担任那么重要的职位。虽然我们的校长是一位女性，她是一个特别棒的例子。但总体上讲，很明显有很多例外，我们可以看到级别越往上，我们能看到的女性领导就越少。这方面还有提升空间。

您认为什么是有效的领导者？

当我听到有效这个词时，我想到的是可以完成工作的领导者。就我而言，这意味着我必须帮助我的学生达到博士学位的要求才能获得学位。这一点既正确又重要。尽管如此，有效的领导者也应该重视工作质量，不仅要重视工作成果，还要重视学生的整体博士求学旅程。因此，对我来说，让学生取得成功并完成博士学位至关重要，但我也很关心博士学位的含义，及其对社会的贡献。同样，我也很关心我的学生在攻读博士学位期间的表现，确保他们对工作感觉良好并满意。因此，在我看来，领导者的效能不仅应根据学生的表现或研究论文的数量等进行定量衡量或作为指标，而且还应考虑其他关键因素的定性指标。

您是否参与您机构的战略规划？

VUB 2040年教育计划就是我参与规划大学教育未来愿景的一个例子。该计划的目的是考虑从现在起20年后的教育状况，将提出大学的教育目标，并使我们重新思考整个教育和教学概念，以及2040年是否会保持不变。我还参加了每三年进行一次的大学战略规划。这项工作分为两个级别，首先是在院系级别制定计划，然后在大学级别制定计划。我参加的最近一次规划非常具有参与性，因为我们召开了几次会议，讨论了与教育有关的各种主题，教授可以选择参加他们认为可以为之做出最大的贡献的主题。因此，我们参与了院系级别规划的制定，而没有参与整个大学的战略规划。但是，有时我也想知道这种规划的实现。我认为，如果我们了解这一规划并及时了解其结果，那样会更好。