Leadership styles in higher education, challenges and the impact on the overall achievements

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Abstract

Modern leadership styles, in contrast to traditional leadership styles, focus on bringing positive changes to an organization by encouraging followers through positive feedback. As leadership is vital for any organization's survival, the leadership style exhibited by a leader in higher education is very important in bringing holistic development to a particular educational organization. Thus, it is rather important to look at leadership styles in higher education organizations and the challenges these styles encounter on a day-to-day basis. This paper analyzes the leadership styles commonly found among leaders in higher education, namely transactional, transformational, authoritarian, democratic, and servant leadership, and it looks at the causal relationship between the leadership styles and the overall achievement of the organization. The paper also analyzes the major challenges encountered by educational leaders in a higher education context. Due to a rapid change in information technology that has also changed the educational setting, the emergence of new leadership styles and selecting the right leadership style for sustainable development seem to be the major challenges for higher education leaders. Conclusions are drawn based on the analysis of relevant documents, and recommendations are provided for educational leaders who may want to bring about positive changes for their organizations.

Keywords: Leadership Styles in, Higher Education, Challenges, Impact

1. Introduction

Educational leadership is a systematic process in which a leader engages in the activities of all personnel who are related to improving educational outcomes and activities at an educational organization. Recently, there has been a growing interest among policymakers in how higher education leaders can influence stakeholders to have a positive impact on their organizations. The debate on how higher educational leadership affects faculty members' performance and overall achievement has steadily gained traction due to the desire of policymakers to reduce disparities in educational achievement between various ethnic and social groups (Kaso et al., 2021). Research has shown that academic leaders have a significant influence on student outcomes, and it applies to higher educational leaders, especially university presidents and deans. However, the higher education leaders need to adopt certain leadership skills in order to bring positive changes to the organization. Therefore, with the right leadership approach, higher education leaders will have the ability to transform an average-performing organization into a successful one.

There are many external and internal factors that affect the overall achievement at a particular higher educational organization, and one of the key factors that determine the outcome depends on the faculty members' job satisfaction. However, the role of higher education leaders is not merely to improve faculty members' job satisfaction but to promote the holistic development of the organization, and that holistic development includes all aspects and members of the organization (Smith & Hughey, 2008). The success of any educational institution greatly depends on the work finished by the management team effectively, and the institutions' continuous improvement depends on an effective management system (Pàmies-Rovira, Jordi; Senent-Sánchez, Joan María & Essomba-Gelabert, Miquel Angel, 2016).

1

In today's climate of heightened expectations in the education area, higher education leaders are in the hot seat to improve the teaching and learning of faculty members and the holistic development of higher educational organizations. According to Sebastian and Allensworth (2012), leadership has a more effective indirect impact on students' achievement than the influence of lecturers in the classroom.

2. Leadership Styles in Higher Education
2.1 Transactional Leadership and Transformational Leadership

Transactional leadership works best within a structured setup where there are defined roles and a few deviations from the already established guidelines meant to achieve a specific task (Erdel & TakkaÃ, 2020). This leadership style is based on transaction or exchange, and those who perform optimally or as expected end up being rewarded, while those who perform dismally end up being punished. The leadership style is based on the assumption that the subordinates are not self-motivated and that there is a need to establish a structure, issue detailed instructions, and supervise the workers to achieve specific results that are articulate and measurable. According to Erdel and TakkaÃ (2020), there are four main approaches to transactional leadership: conditional reward, where the leader motivates followers through rewards and promises, active management by exception, which involves monitoring the performance of the followers while anticipating issues that may arise; and passive management by exception, where the leader stays out of the followers' way and intervenes only when necessary (Hyseni, Zamira and Linda, 2021).

Arguably, the transformational leadership style is exactly the opposite of the transactional leadership style. While transactional leadership emphasizes working within a structured environment with specific guidelines and procedures, transformational leadership is focused on implementing change through effective communication, adaptability, charisma, and empathetic support (Cherry, 2022). Transformational leaders can adapt their leadership management to accommodate most of their followers. Instead of using rewards and punitive actions to motivate followers, like in the case of the transactional leadership style, a transformational leader will focus on articulating a unified vision that will encourage their followers to exceed expectations (James, 2021). A transformational leader understands that when people have a strong sense of purpose in what they are doing, they are more likely to stay motivated. For this reason, transformational leaders are skilled at giving meaning to the tasks at hand, thereby remaining optimistic about future goals.

2.2 Authoritarian Leadership and Democratic Leadership in Higher Education

Authoritarian leadership is also commonly referred to as autocratic leadership, and it is a type of leadership where a leader calls for absolute obedience from followers. An authoritarian leader holds a more traditional approach to leadership, which emphasizes loyalty and submission from the junior staff and students. According to Chukwusa (2018), autocratic leaders are not easily accessible since their focus is always on policy-making instead of the staff and students. While submission can be misconstrued as respect, autocratic leaders are feared for their harsh stances and strict adherence to policies and guidelines. Those under an authoritarian leader do not expect much in the way of appreciation or acknowledgment from the top leadership. Followers are subjected to unexpected criticism whenever they underperform or breach the existing policies. An autocratic or authoritative leader makes all the major decisions that are always final.

Unlike the authoritarian kind of leadership where leaders have the final say, democratic leaders can come up with an idea, however, the new policy will not be embraced until all the stakeholders agree with that particular idea. (Nedelko & Potocan, 2021). In other words, leaders embrace consensus or dialogue in an organization that practices democratic leadership.

2

More so, such leaders often delegate powers to their juniors, for instance, by creating a department with assigned roles and responsibilities. Bringing everyone on board to contribute to the affairs or programs within the organization is often worth it in the end. This type of leadership is often perceived as inclusive and creates an environment where everyone is given a chance to express their theoretical thoughts and feelings on particular issues. Lastly, everyone is more engaged, thus giving them a chance to exploit their potential fully while striving to deliver on their roles and responsibilities in their area of jurisdiction (Makoelle, 2021).

2.3 Servant Leadership

This is one of the most widely adopted leadership styles in several organizations across the world. Leaders who adopt this leadership style often support, empower, and motivate their followers to succeed in their careers. They often organize workshops, seminars, and training to hone the skills of their staff. Servant leadership is known to promote a decentralized approach to leadership. In most cases, those who engage directly with clients, such as salespeople and marketers, are often encouraged to take part in the decision-making process, as contended by (Kenton, 2022). These individuals have a personal touch and experience with the clients, and hence can offer some tips or opinions that are key to strengthening performance and a competitive edge of a company. Following this, a servant leadership approach often strives to modify other types of leadership from just issuing direction and control to cultivating a symbiotic relationship that is key to the production of desirable results. Servant leaders often utilize a collaborative approach when attending to issues of different magnitudes, thus motivating the junior staff to participate in making decisions and policies that propel the organization to success (Tucci, 2018). Concisely, a leader in servant leadership often strives to encourage creativity, nurture leadership traits, motivate their juniors, and prioritize their welfare (Abbas et al., 2020).

3. Impact of Higher Education Leadership Styles on the Overall Achievements

Transactional leadership is based on the leader-follower relationship, which explains why it is commonly used in education, particularly in establishing a relationship between educational leaders and faculty members. For transactional leadership, there is the assumption that the leader has the skills and knowledge to accomplish his or her role in assigning tasks while the faculty members have the knowledge and skills to complete the tasks assigned to them (Lutkevich, 2022). Unfortunately, a transactional leader only rewards performances that exceed or fall below expectations. For instance, in a higher education context, faculty members get rewarded if they complete their tasks or if they perform well. The transactional leadership style implies that the followers end up being motivated only by external factors, or else they risk punitive actions. However, when educational leaders strictly adhere to transactional leadership, it prevents the followers from being creative and innovative since they are all working on a strict set of rules, guidelines, or policies (Potter & Starke, 2022).

On the other hand, there are various reasons why transformational leadership has positive effects on followers. First, it encourages and appreciates faculty members' and students' differences in a learning institution. Rather than limiting faculty members to a certain curriculum, like in the case of transactional leadership, transformational leadership does not ignore the diverse skills and abilities possessed by them. Instead, it encourages faculty members to bring their diverse skills and abilities on board to improve student outcomes (Hyseni, Zamira & Linda, 2021). Also, educational leaders using a transformational leadership style in a university setting tend to consider each follower's unique skills and abilities. An educational organization with transformational leadership fosters participation in higher education decisions and policies. This enables relevant stakeholders to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions on ways to improve student outcomes (Potter and Starke, 2022).

Transformational leadership can easily facilitate changes by listening to stakeholders and providing suggestion boxes where faculty members, university personnel, and stakeholders can anonymously share their experiences. Just listening and responding to the concerns raised by them helps educational facilities with transformational leadership foster authenticity since they will be practicing what they are preaching (White, 2022).

Under authoritarian leadership, learners and educators often feel the pressure to work beyond the requisite time to deliver what their authoritative leaders demand. Even though universities may run under authoritarian leadership, it may seem that they are organized since they strictly conform to certain policies and guidelines, but they also attract a fair share of criticism. For instance, educators lack self-motivation because they are not involved in the decision-making process, while the learners are not accorded the freedom to innovate. This is one way authoritative leadership may negatively impact student performance in universities (Engin, 2020).

Nevertheless, authoritative leaders also share a significant number of positive attributes. They tend to be warm, responsive, and supportive since the burden of making decisions lies with them. They have to be sensitive to diversity as well as the collective needs of their followers. According to Engin (2020), authoritative leaders tend to be good networkers, especially beyond their educational institutions. Despite their demanding nature, they are always clear about what is expected of both learners and educators. They know when to consult and when to be decisive since they have mastered the art of exercising their authority appropriately and in a timely fashion.

Servant leadership is commonly applied in many types of educational institutions, especially in universities around the world. In these institutions, the education leadership is committed to empowering staff through training, seminars, and workshops. All these programs are centered on how to make them effective in ensuring that students perform according to their expectations. Also, when a leader appreciates their followers through promotion and delegation, their performance rate is always positive.

As aforementioned, servant leadership often engages staff, who are in constant touch with the students, in the decision-making process. It is arguable that teachers are the first people who interact with students and thus have a thorough understanding of the issues they face. Henceforth, the faculty members, who are often assigned duties based on their subject department, can figure out these problems, report them to the top leadership, and then contribute to a design framework that is critical to addressing them. Henceforth, this will have a positive impact on the performance of the students, and those performing poorly are often assisted in catching up with their classmates.

4. Challenges Faced by Leaders in Higher Education

Based on what has been mentioned above, it is clear that there are various frameworks and theories designed by scholars to create a leadership style that will support a collaborative decision-making process that endorses facilitation. However, due to a rapid change in educational context, there are many challenges that lie ahead for leaders in higher education.

4.1 Emergence of New Leadership Styles

Eddy and Vanderlinden (2006) reported that different types of leadership styles are slowly emerging and are replacing the traditional styles. Modern leadership styles seem to be superior to those of traditional leadership styles, where emphasis was given to the outcome and not the procedure. However, due to the advancement in technology, the information gap has been greatly reduced, which gives more advantages to leaders in promptly communicating with their followers. As technology has become more mainstream, it is inevitable that there will be a huge demand for leaders who are tech savvy (Sterrett & Richardson, 2020). It is evident that

4

a tech-savvy leader has an advantage in leading an organization, as the world witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The shift to online learning presents more opportunities and challenges to leaders. One of the challenges lies in the fact that higher education leaders have to adjust and become technologically savvy to support both educators and learners while learning online (Abdul, 2015). This also calls for the re-adjustment of leadership styles, retraining educators, restructuring the curriculum, and improving its digital infrastructure. Therefore, leaders in higher education should have an open mind to observe emerging leadership styles that would benefit the organization. However, it is also important to note that the main aim of any leadership style is to have a vision that can inspire the followers and ways to instill the vision among the followers. (Sakornnawin, N., Chayanon, S., & Srisorn, W., 2019)

4.2 Leadership Styles for Sustainable Development

Each leadership style emphasizes the need to identify every educator and learner's preferences and design a system that can be conducive to their divergent needs (Tan, 2018). Also, most of these leadership styles are designed to support teamwork, hands-on activities, and discussion-based learning activities. However, most educational leaders often resort to traditional leadership methods where only good results are rewarded and undesirable outcomes are punished. Therefore, selecting the right leadership style remains a big hurdle for many higher education leaders. As the educational context is changing rapidly, educational leaders should be aware of their surroundings and draft quality policies that could be easily implemented organization-wide. Thus, educational leaders should pay more attention to sustainable development through good leadership styles (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Ololube, 2015).

4.3 Strategic Leadership and Academic Quality

In addition to the challenges mentioned earlier, there are other challenges associated with choosing the right leadership in a higher education context. Drew (2010) reported that the most significant challenges faced by educational leaders in a higher education context are: strategic leadership, flexibility, creativity, change capability, maintaining academic quality, and remaining relevant. Therefore, higher education leaders should keep in mind the positive impact they can make at their organization while maintaining academic quality. Aung and Hallinger (2022) reported that there is indeed a great need for strategic leadership to transform universities and improve the commitment of stakeholders. Therefore, higher education leaders should focus on bringing positive changes to their organizations through strategic change management that would help them increase the desired results.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The objective of the paper was to discuss leadership styles in higher education. The paper began by giving an explicit review of each leadership style and how each one of them impacts overall achievement. The paper establishes that each leadership style has a direct or indirect impact on overall achievement. The decision made by leaders in their capacities has a direct influence on the performance of the faculty members, which eventually affects the students. In most cases, an efficient leadership style delivers good performance and inspires faculty members to work towards delivering better results. Scholars affirm that educational leaders who display exceptional qualities of good leadership tend to produce good results for both the organization and the members. As there is both a direct and indirect effect of leadership on the overall achievement of a higher education organization, educational leaders should be exceptionally careful in drafting policies and implementing them as they can have greater impacts on the organization.

As mentioned earlier in the paper, the major challenges encountered by educational leaders in higher education are choosing the right leadership styles, strategic leadership for

academic quality, and having a good vision. Therefore, higher education leaders should carefully lay out a plan on how to bring positive changes to the organization. Leadership style, which is accepted by key personnel, plays a major role in bringing better achievement for the organization because of the followers' influence on other variables that would have a greater impact on the organization's growth. Strategic leadership places importance on how leaders can strategically bring about positive changes for academic quality.

Due to the rapid change in society, higher education leaders must keep in mind that leadership is about encouraging the followers through a positive feedback system, and by encouraging the followers, the leaders can easily bring about positive changes. Having the right vision laid out for stakeholders is another important aspect for the leaders. Having the right vision and instilling that vision in the followers takes a greater risk; however, it will be rewarded with positive changes for the organization. They should create a conducive environment where teachers and learners feel motivated and ready to deliver results. Leaders should blend their leadership approach to ensure that all positive aspects are brought on board. For instance, though autocratic leadership creates an organized environment, the authoritarian leader should always welcome decisions from their junior staff. Lastly, school leadership must create programs that inspire teachers to adopt a more productive approach that ultimately improves student achievement.

6. References

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