



Leadership In Ethiopian Public Universities; Capacity And Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Literature is evidently characterized by a plethora of definitions and correspondingly the actual practice of leadership is characterized by complexity. This applies to the leadership of higher education too. But it is the public universities that has to contend more with competing needs and expectations of diverse stakeholders. This paper thus examines leadership capacity and challenges in Ethiopian public universities. To this end a mixed approach was utilized. The result shows that leaders of the study area lacks the ability to manage complexity and change, and a knowledge of the technical and quantitative skills necessary , and the managing of diversity, the ability to work as a team were also lacking. Furthermore, Leaders have a propensity to concentrate on known issues and known solutions. The Study also suggested that leaders with a full range of traits on personal, organizational, performance and social mastery are needed to lead and fully engage in the process of achieving sustainable performance outcomes. Empowerment must play a role in developing 'the best qualities' of our people. Finally, providing a training link between all levels of the hierarchy were deemed vital for leadership excellence to flourish

Introduction

Leadership in public universities has become a critical issue that requires attention. While the role of leadership

in achieving academic excellence and institutional growth cannot be overstated, there seems to be a gap in effective leadership practices in many public

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universities. This problem is further compounded by the fact that many leaders in public universities are appointed based on political considerations, rather than merit or leadership abilities. As a result, there is a growing concern about the quality of leadership and its impact on the overall performance and reputation of public universities. Additionally, with the increasing competition among universities globally, there is a need for effective leadership to position public universities as centers of excellence in research, innovation, and teaching. Therefore, the problem is how to enhance leadership practices in public universities to achieve academic excellence, institutional growth, and global competitiveness.

Leadership is a critical factor in the success and growth of public universities. However, effective leadership practices are often lacking in many public universities, leading to concerns about the quality of leadership and its impact on institutional performance and reputation.

According to a study by Bess and Dee (2012), leadership in higher education institutions has become a crucial factor in achieving institutional goals, such as improving student learning, faculty development, and research productivity. Yet, the authors note that there is a gap in leadership practices, which hinders the ability of public universities to meet these goals. One significant issue is the appointment of leaders in public universities based on political considerations rather than merit or leadership abilities. According to a report by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) (2015), political interference in university leadership appointments can lead to conflicts of interest, inadequate leadership, and reduced institutional performance. This problem is further compounded by the lack of adequate leadership training and development programs for public university leaders, as noted by Pearce and Conger (2003). Another significant challenge is the need for effective leadership to position public universities as centers of excellence in research, innovation, and teaching, which is critical for their global competitiveness. According to a report by the World Economic Forum (2019), universities play a vital role in shaping the global innovation ecosystem, but their success depends on effective leadership that can foster

collaboration, entrepreneurship, and innovation. Therefore, the problem is how to enhance leadership practices in public universities to achieve academic excellence, institutional growth, and global competitiveness. Addressing this problem requires addressing the challenges of political interference in leadership appointments, providing adequate leadership training and development programs, and fostering a culture of collaboration, entrepreneurship, and innovation in public universities.

Statement of the Problem

Any institution must have effective leadership to succeed, but public universities are especially in need of it because they are crucial in determining the course of the country's destiny (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). However, due to issues including tight budgets, escalating competitiveness, shifting demographics, and the need to balance academic and administrative obligations, leadership in public institutions is facing considerable difficulties (Baldrige, Curtis, & Ecker, 2017). The absence of comprehensive studies and empirical evidence hinders our understanding of how leadership impacts universities' performance and the development of its members. This knowledge gap limits the ability of university leaders to make well-informed decisions and implement effective strategies to address the challenges they face. Without a clear understanding of the capacities, and effective practices required for leadership in public universities, it becomes increasingly difficult to foster a culture of accountability, collaboration, and innovation. However, despite the significant role of leadership in public universities, there is a lack of understanding of what constitutes effective leadership, and what factors contribute to the capacity of leadership in these institutions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the challenges and capacity of leadership in public universities and examine the factors that contribute to or hinder effective leadership

Literature review

Theoretical framework

The study utilizes the frame of complexity leadership proposition, which has been developed to understand complex adaptive systems. Complex adaptive systems

are places for actors to engage in knowledge-ferocious cooperation in a cooperative network that has a common thing (Marion & McKelvey, 2007)

Complexity Leadership

A theoretical framework called Complexity Leadership Theory (CLT) examines how leaders can function well in complicated and dynamic contexts. CLT, which was created by Mary Uhl-Bien and Russ Marion in 2008, draws on ideas from complexity research and systems thinking to give leaders in complex systems a more in-depth understanding of their role.

The dynamic interactions between leaders and their surroundings are highlighted by CLT, according to Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008), who recognize that leadership is not just about individuals but also about interactions between persons and their environment. This means that in order for leaders to be effective, they must be able to negotiate the intricate and frequently unpredictable dynamics of their surroundings. The idea of emergence, which denotes the notion that new patterns and behaviors might develop from interactions between many components of a complex system, is also acknowledged by CLT. Uhl-Bien and Marion (2008) claim that by fostering environments that support experimentation and creativity, leaders who are aware of this principle can promote emergence.

The idea of adaptable capacity is a key component of CLT. Effective leaders in complex systems must be able to react to shifting conditions and modify their leadership posture as necessary. This necessitates a certain amount of adaptability and the readiness to try out novel ideas in order to determine what functions best in a certain situation. Self-organization is yet another crucial CLT tenet. Complex systems have the ability to self-organize, which allows them to change and grow through time without outside assistance. By fostering self-organization and decentralized decision-making, effective leaders can take use of this capability (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008).

Finally, CLT acknowledges the significance of decentralised leadership. In complex systems, effective leadership is frequently distributed, i.e., shared across many different people as opposed to being concen-

trated in one person or group. This necessitates a certain level of teamwork and trust, as well as the capacity to identify and capitalize on the specific skills of various team members (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2008).

Method

Source of Data and Population of the Study

Due to their close ties to the study's subject, teachers, college deans, members of the management team, and board members provided the primary data. In order to make accurate conclusions, the researcher needs to have firsthand experience of the situation being examined. The poll primarily targets those who are in charge of regulating instruction and learning in Ethiopian colleges. While studying and teaching are important aspects of all Ethiopian colleges, it might be difficult to pinpoint who is directly in charge of them. Presidents (Learning and Teaching) and Associate Deans (Learning and Teaching) are two examples.

However, a role that encompasses a variety of other research, engagement, and administrative functions frequently includes leadership of teaching and learning as part of its obligations. Although it may be possible to exclude specific university leaders based on their formal position, such as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) or Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research), this is one of the challenges the current study faced in defining those aspects of a broader portfolio that are particularly relevant to its focus. This problem is addressed by the study by identifying the situations, jobs, and skills that are particularly pertinent to teaching and learning. These differ amongst individuals, faculties, schools, and institutions, and the study shows that they are difficult to categorize under a single portfolio or position name.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Four case universities—Addis Abeba, Civil Service, Hawassa, and Dilla universities—were chosen due to their extensive histories of teaching and learning practices, proximity to one another, financial constraints, and the short amount of time available for conducting

the research and reporting its results to the funding university, Dilla university. Deans, department heads, directors, and position holders are the different kinds of people who made up the population of this study. In proportion to the availability and the previously specified cause, 820 samples are chosen.

Measurements

It is crucial to stress once more how challenging it is to determine whether a leader is effective. The evidentiary foundation is weak, and when it is, it frequently supports the opinions of the leaders themselves, which can lead to self-fulfillment through their own social construction and justifications. In order to provide a realistic evidence base, which has been elusive so far, it is thought that this study must move beyond this and demonstrate how leadership can be evaluated and how its efficacy can be quantified. The following measures are thus presented in this study in order to capture valid results.

Survey questionnaire on leadership skills and requirements is the instrument, it comprises of items/questions forming three and five scales. Construct validity of this instrument will be established based on a comprehensive review of the literature.

In using the instrument, leaders will be instructed to choose one option that corresponds the most to their perception on each statement that portrays their leadership capacity. Options for each statement include 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. All items will be constructed positively so that a higher response demonstrates a stronger leadership capacity.

Analysis

Following data entry and clearing, analysis was done using SPSS statistical packages. Editing and clearing data was done together with computer assistance. Frequency distributions were printed and unusually extreme values checked. Cross tabulations of related variables were examined and unexpected results checked.

Result and Discussion Background of Respondents

Table 1 makes clear that the bulk of respondents (43.8%) are in the 31–35 year age range. Therefore, it may be said that the responders likely have a wide range

Table 1: characteristics of the respondents
Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage	
Age in years	20-25	135	16.5
	26-30	277	33.8
	31-35	359	43.8
	Above 35	49	6.0
Sex	Male	508	62.0
	Female	312	38.0
Service	0-1 year	241	29.4
	2-5 years	159	19.4
	5-7 years	150	18.3
	8-10 years	270	32.9
Educational Qualification	PhD and above	180	22.0
	Masters degree	410	50.0
	First degree	230	28.0
	Diploma	0	

Source: Primary data
Source: field survey

of experience. According to the respondents' gender distribution, men make up the majority of respondents (62%). According to the research, there aren't many female leaders in the four universities that were chosen. Therefore, based on these demographic findings, it was possible to draw the conclusion that the chosen colleges had a male-dominated leadership structure. In order to balance the proportion of female and male leader educators in the coming years, it was also stated that there was a need to hire more female leaders.

The bulk of respondents, or 32.9 percent, had 8 to 10 years of service experience, followed by 29.4 percent who had less than a year's worth, 19.4 percent who had between two and five years, and 18.3 percent who had between seven and seven years. The data typically shows that the majority of respondents had been in their positions for more than eight years and also had extensive experience leading in higher education. The majority of respondents, or 50%, had a master's degree; 28% had a first degree; and 22% had a Ph.D. or higher educational qualification, according to a classification of the respondents' educational standing. Therefore, it could be said that the leaders' profiles were good, if not great. The majority of the leaders in the chosen universities had sufficient experience and level of qualification to transform the institutions and to deal with many of the problems facing the institutions on a daily basis if they were empowered, according to the demographic data regarding qualifications and work experience.

Leadership capacity

For every nation to grow and carry out initiatives meant to bring about change and progress, it is essential to have strong leadership and sufficient human resources in the public universities. In actuality, the effectiveness of political leadership has a significant influence on the effectiveness of governance, which is frequently directly tied to the degree of development of a region. Creating an environment that is conducive to growth and economic competitiveness also requires strong public universities. The challenges that must be solved are numerous, and it is not a simple undertaking to strengthen the human resource capacities of public universities. Although upgrading public institutions is a challenge for all nations, these challenges are particularly onerous for developing nations because of a variety of variables. The capacity of leaders in the study region is thus shown in the following table using a five-point Likert scale. As a result, the Likert scale's highest score indicates a great aptitude for leadership.

In relation to Leadership capacity, mean, and SD were 97.58 and 8.97 are in that order. The value of skewness was -0.13, which depicts that the distribution is negatively skewed and is less than ± 1 . This value is within the acceptable limit of normality and may be acceptable as having skewness of moderate degree. The value of Kurtosis was -0.37; which indicated that the curve was leptokurtic. Thus, it may indicate the fact

Source: Primary data

	N	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Leadership capacity	820	97.58	98.00	8.97	-0.13	-0.37	72.00	121.00

Figure-3.10: Leadership capacity

Table 2: distribution of respondent based on their leadership capacity

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
To propose a goal and a direction (by creating and communicating a vision for the future);	123 (15.0)	234 (28.5)	254 (31.0)	118 (14.4)	91 (11.1)
Intellectual competencies, including cognitive capacity, creativity and the ability to shape the future (vision);	121 (14.8)	214 (26.1)	259 (31.6)	123 (15.0)	103 (12.6)
The capacity to innovate, comprising flexibility, imagination, foresight, and risk-taking	104 (12.7)	237 (28.9)	269 (32.8)	113 (13.8)	97 (11.8)
The ability to manage projects, to organize, to follow up results, and to correct the course of action when needed;	127 (15.5)	229 (27.9)	251 (30.6)	123 (15.0)	90 (10.9)

Source: field survey

that distribution of Leadership capacity/potential is approximated to normal distribution.

Firstly, finding an effective leader for every organisation at the right time is not always easy. A leader in the organisation is the one who is willing to take responsibility for leading any organisational change initiatives and achieving performance excellence (Michalska 2008). The first important role of the strategic leader is to determine clearly the organisation’s vision and develop strategic direction involving the whole component of organisation (Hamel & Prahalad, 1989; Ireland & Hitt, 2005). Contrary to these findings, the score calculated from the above data with regard to leaders’ ability to innovate, manage project and propose and shape mission, depicts that the capacity of the leaders as measured by the above indicator was found low. This implies that leaders in the Ethiopian public universities are less trained and lacks personal traits needed from effective leader.

In general, capacity like knowing how to share the power to administer and to govern, being open to the participation of citizens, being able to manage decentralization and devolution are absent. That can be explained in at least two ways. First, it is possible

that the respondents consider that it has to do with collective, rather than individual, capacity. Second, they might think that capacity relating to governance is a matter for the political domain.

Key Challenges Facing Leadership in Public universities Leadership

Colleges, universities, and management development institutions all play crucial roles in the process of developing leadership capacity at public universities. They make up the infrastructure for management development in their respective nations; they have people resources qualified to conduct management research, train management professionals, and offer technical consulting and advisory services. They must be trusted by governments to lead innovative efforts. These institutions ought to assume a leadership position in all areas, including training need assessments, human resource policy design, personnel development, program planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It is acknowledged that some of them—possibly the majority of them—will require capacity enhancement, but this in no way lessens the importance of the

	N	Meann	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Leadershp challenges	820	32.11	32.00	3.76	-0.15	-0.03	21.00	44.00

Source: Primary data

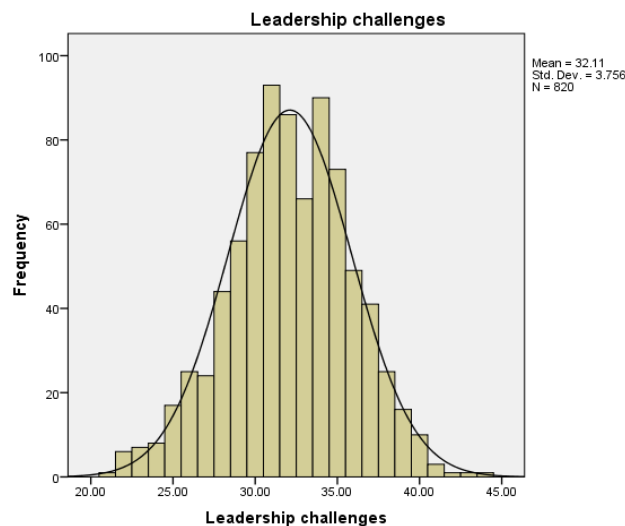


Fig. 3.11: Leadership challenges

Table 3: Distribution of respondent based on challenges

Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
Implementing new technology and methods	165 (20.1)	157 (19.5)	244 (29.5)	142 (17.3)	112 (13.7)
External influence	118 (14.4)	251 (30.6)	248 (30.2)	105 (12.8)	98 (12.0)
Changing the culture	128 (15.6)	192 (23.4)	279 (34.0)	121 (14.8)	100 (12.2)
Developing appropriate management and leadership styles	123 (15.0)	234 (28.5)	254 (31.0)	118 (14.4)	91 (11.1)

Source: field survey

role they must perform. The major difficulties that administrators at Ethiopian public universities must overcome are shown in the following table.

With regard to the matter of Leadership challenges, mean and SD were 32.11 and 3.76 respectively. The value of skewness was -0.15 which depicts that the distribution is negatively skewed and is less than ± 1 . This value is within the acceptable limit of normality and may be acceptable as having skewness of moderate degree and the value of Kurtosis was -0.03; which indicated that the curve was leptokurtic. Thus, it may indicate towards the fact that distribution of leadership challenges is approximated to normal distribution.

The above table singled out the major challenges facing leaders in Ethiopian public universities. Accordingly, the majority of the respondent 20.1% strongly agree and 19.1% agreed that they lacks the ability to Implementing new technology and methods besides again majority portion of the respondents (14.4% strongly agree and 30.6% agreed) confirms that External influence is the major challenge they are facing. The third item of the above table depicts that majority of the respondent 15.6% strongly agree and 23.4% agree culture i.e increasing diversity of the staff and students are the major challenge. The last item of the above data also depicts leaders' ability to develop appropriate management and leadership styles. Accordingly majority of the respondents 15.0% strongly agreed and 28.5% agreed that their capacity to lead effectively is one of their biggest concerns. This implies that the respondents lacks the cognitive competences to develop strategic approach, to lead with contradiction, diversity and changes due to inadequacy of continuous training and skill development.

Discussion

Accordingly, the major findings of the study are listed below.

1. According to the analysis of the study, intellectual competencies, such as cognitive ability, creativity, and the ability to shape the future (vision), were found to be lacking in leaders' ability to propose a goal and a direction by creating and communicating a vision for the future. They might not have the necessary abilities or training, or they might not want to go above and beyond the call of duty. Leadership in higher education therefore calls for creativity, dedication, and respect. Furthermore, a good leader must possess a strong sense of moral character, and one of their main duties is to instill morality and integrity throughout all of the colleges. Major difficulties affecting African leaders were also noted to include strong management, strategic thinking, and the necessity to identify efficient methods of training leaders.
2. In this study the capacity of leaders in Ethiopian public universities were measured through their capacity for innovation, which includes their capacity for open-mindedness, inventiveness, strategic vision, and risk-taking. and the ability to manage projects, to organize, to follow up results, and to correct the course of action when needed. Accordingly the result indicated that the managerial competences of the study subject were low. This may be due to lack of experience and insufficient funding support from concerned body.
3. The finding also shows that the most important leadership challenges faced by leaders in Ethiopian public universities were Implementing new tech-

nology and methods, external influence, changing culture, developing appropriate management and leadership styles and the inability to prepare individuals for the complex and unpredictable world. Furthermore, lack of training and inability to lead in increasing diversity and contradiction were among the challenges that leaders in the study area face.

This outcome is in line with the overwhelmingly acknowledged challenges of leadership in Ethiopian public universities across the globe. From their review of the literature (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2001; Bass & Avolio, 1995; Bennis, 1989; Goffee & Jones, 2000; Goleman et al., 2002; Kotter, 1990; Kouzes & Posner, 1998) and from their own work, Dulewicz and Higgs (2003) have highlighted the need to address the issue of complexity in their respective public service environments. It was noted that there is a dichotomy between the need for consistency in public service, and the simultaneous need for continuous change and improvement. Furthermore, they noted that leaders in the public universities will be required to find a balance between the “new” and the “old” and will need to develop the capacity to address the complexity of networked and interconnected states.

Conclusion

The study’s findings demonstrated that capable leaders must have the technical and quantitative skills necessary to evaluate policy formulation, evaluation, and management, as well as a thorough understanding of the financial, political, and economic environments in which universities operate. Lacking, which has a bad effect on their capacity to lead to the necessary level. Additionally, it was discovered that there was a lack of organizational management, which entails understanding both individual and organizational behavior as well as matters like the organization’s relationships to client groups, the managing of diversity, the capacity for teamwork, and the development of effective and appropriate leadership capacity.

Generally speaking, leaders in Ethiopia’s public universities struggle with a demanding and change-focused workplace. Leaders have a propensity to concentrate on “known” issues and “known” solutions.

The reality of higher education is that issues are frequently more complicated and intractable, necessitating a leadership style that is innovative, adaptable to the situation, and thorough in addressing the intractable nature of these kinds of issues.

Developing fresh abilities, viewpoints, and information that both complement and go beyond what has been learned in the past is necessary for service that goes above what is anticipated. These are essential for assisting with planning, innovation, and adaptation on the part of governments and the societies in which they live.

Recommendation

- To lead and actively participate in the process of achieving sustainable performance results, leaders must possess a whole range of personal, organizational, performance, and social mastery attributes. This will foster the growth of excellent leadership in public institutions.
- Developing “the best qualities” in our staff members calls for empowerment. Fundamentally, creating leaders with the traits and tenacity of character is the most pressing demand and requirement in our educational sectors.
- Taking into account the current political environment in an increasingly globalized world, it is necessary to strengthen new areas of leadership competency, such as diversity management, knowledge management, horizontal management, resource and information management, partnerships, negotiation skills, and communication.
- Other measures in fostering leadership potential include identifying cultural and attitudinal change and establishing a training link between all levels of the institution hierarchy. Leaders would be better equipped to respond to new concepts and strategies as well as govern and lead effectively as a result.

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