

A DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP MODEL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract. Academic leadership is one of the major factors that can address the challenges of 21st century and subsequently enhance the quality of higher education. The aim of this study is to develop a model of academic leadership for higher education in India for which it has employed a sequential mixed methods strategy. Qualitative data gathered from the research literature is analyzed by recursive interim content analysis to explore academic leadership. The findings of content analysis are used to develop research instruments. The survey questionnaires collect quantitative data to identify expected and current academic leadership practices in India. Qualitative data is collected through semi-structured interviews. A mix of quantitative and qualitative data is arranged sequentially with the help of Priority Need Index (PNI) technique to determine the criticality and urgency of each component. A model has been developed as an output of the study. It has 14 academic leadership constructs presented under three major facets. The constructs are the key enablers to effective academic leadership. (1) organizational leadership: institutionalizing environmental sustainability, ensuring accountability, setting direction, building networks and relationships, managing diversity and promoting collaboration; (2) leading academics: faculty development, teaching and learning, academic freedom; (3) personal attributes: emotional competencies, knowledge, academic credibility and cognitive capabilities. The model is expected to be a stronghold for the existing and guideline for aspiring academic leaders to handle complex and challenging 21st century higher education institutes.

Keywords: Academic leadership, Higher education, Indian higher education

Introduction

For most of its history academia has considered itself somewhat transcendent of the cultural, political and economic forces that influence and shape the rest of society and its institutions. The higher education institutions today are open spaces and perceived to be “more egalitarian than meritocratic” (Bryan & Hughley, 2006, p.161). To put it simply, they are viewed as a right rather than a privilege. The inevitable forces of globalization, demographic shifts in student population, increased competition, rapidly diminishing resources and continually changing technology are some of the “received changes” that directly impact them in several ways. (Buller, 2014, p.29). Higher education is becoming an international service, and thus, there are growing concerns over quality, about its laxity to create a relevant workforce and about 21st century skills and the values needed (Prasad & Stella, 2004). The public as well as private higher education operate within the same precincts and face the similar challenges of 21st century. Higher education has a long and established tradition of emphasizing academic leadership. The perspectives on academic leaders that limits them as mere coordinators or coalition builders have undergone transformations internationally, and have a wide impact on education (Askling & Bjorn, 2002). Today, academic leaders influence the academic institutions, direct and promote scientific and technological progress as well as socio-economic growth and cultural identity (Rowley & Sherman, 2003; Yeilder & Codling, 2004).

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Amongst the developing nations, India is the fastest growing economies and one of the largest systems of higher education. It possesses a substantially developed higher education system and has a potential and facility for training, research and development for most of the possible knowledge creation and dissemination endeavors. The statistics published by the Indian chamber of commerce and industry, claim that India would be the youngest nations of the world by 2030 with nearly 140 million population of eligible age for higher education; and will have produced as many as graduates to constitute about 1/4th of the graduates of the world (Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry & Ernst & Young, 2011). As there is a wide interest due to quantum growth of higher education in India and the academic leadership being one of the major pillars of success, it becomes imperative to take a pragmatic view of academic leadership and its practices in the Indian higher education context.

The objectives of the research that navigate this study are: (1) To explore the academic leadership for higher education institutions. (2) To identify the expected academic leadership practices for higher education in India. (3) To identify the current academic leadership practices for higher education in India. (4) To develop a model of academic leadership for higher education in India. Leadership theories pertaining to academic leadership studies constitute the theoretical framework. Leadership theories that underpin this study are academic leadership (Ramsden, 1998); transformational leadership (Bass 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 2002); and distributed leadership (Spillane et.al., 2004; Bennet et. Al, 2003). Ramsden (1998), defines academic leadership as “a practical and everyday process of supporting, managing, developing and inspiring academic colleagues” and considers that effective academic leaders are “academically inclined” characterized by the common values of academics (p.4).

Ramsden’s theory strongly supports the idea of transformational leadership in academic settings. Transformational leadership theory states four essential components, such as, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and idealized consideration. The morality is the mainstay of the concept. Transformational leadership without ethical considerations can create pseudo-transformational leaders. Spillane et al. (2004), conceptualize distributed leadership in educational setting and state that it “is constituted through the interaction of leaders, teachers, and the situation as they influence instructional practice” (p.6). In distributed leadership, especially in educational setting, formal leaders take the responsibility of offering opportunity to lead even to the informal leaders.

The scope of this study is to explore academic leadership that would contribute to the improvement in the higher education institutions in India. The primary and secondary data was collected contribute to the final findings of this study that is, Model of Academic Leadership for Higher Education in India. The source of secondary data that served the objective one of the study, i.e. exploration of academic leadership, was scholarly literature on academic leadership, published in English language between 2000 to 2016. The primary data was collected from the academic administrators i.e. heads of departments/college/institutes and full-time faculty members working in universities in India. Pune district in Maharashtra state was selected as a sample for the quantitative survey.

Pune is University Grants Commission’s (UGC, India), one of the seven regional centers. It is a metro city and is the educational hub of India (Tiwari & Yeravdekar, 2014). For qualitative data collection, the interview participants who contributed to the model development were selected by purposive criteria sampling and represented top university leaders from public and private universities from across India. To make the model operationally viable, focus group experts validated and contributed to the final model development.

Research Methodology

The study has employed mixed method strategy with a sequential design where both the approaches have been given equal priority. Mixed method supports advantages that are considered as weaknesses in both quantitative and qualitative research and they provide answers for questions that cannot be obtained by qualitative or quantitative methods alone (Cresswell & Clark, 2011). The advocates of mixed research believe that a well-thought combination of quantitative and qualitative methods strengthen the research. The research was conducted in five phases.

Phase I. Content analysis of the literature on academic leadership for higher education institutes. The population considered was the research literature published on academic leadership. Key words such as academic leadership and leadership in/for higher education were used to locate the pertinent resources. The sampling of the resources was done based on the following: The research literature that was published (i) Between January 2000 till January 2016 (ii) Only in English language.

Total 131 documents were selected deemed for conducting content analysis. The research instrument used to investigate and analyze data from the selected documents was coding sheets. The coding sheets were created with the help of a qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA12. Though software assisted the researcher in organizing and performing statistical analysis, the coding process was done manually. Recursive interim content analysis technique was used for data analysis. A six-step model by Christensen & Johnson (2014) was used for the purpose.

- Step 1: Data Collection: Collecting relevant documents. 131 documents were the sample of the study. Step 2: Data entry and storage: All documents were entered to the software and assigned a unique code. Articles as A, books as B and dissertations/thesis as D.
- Step 3: Segmenting, Coding and developing category system: Segments are the meaningful units of a text relevant to the research that researcher thinks should be documented. The segmenting was done after reading and rereading of the texts line by line. The meaningful segments were assigned appropriate word codes.
- Each segment and its code was enumerated for its number of occurrences in each document. It was done to decipher the emerging prominent themes and ideas in the data.
- Step 4: Identifying relationships: All the themes were reexamined to identify relationships among them. Themes were grouped into meaningful categories.
- Step 5: Constructing diagrams, tables, matrices, & graphs: The results were generated in form of tables, graphs and a matrix. A matrix representing each code and its weightage was created to map out recurring key words and phrases for their relative significance.
- Step 6: Corroboration and validating results: Validity of the results was conducted in two steps. In the first step researcher used the technique called intra-coder validity where researcher reread and recoded the documents. Both the results were concurred on the software and reconciled as a final coding system. In the next stage, a strategy called external audit was used to validate the results.

The results were presented to the five experts. As recommend by Rodgers (2008) in the encyclopedia of qualitative research methods, that an external auditor needs to be a researcher, with no vested interests in the research undertaken. Considering the criteria and based on the qualifications i.e. PhD holders with minimum 20 years' experience in higher education in India, five experts were selected. After the expert review, the output of content analysis was concluded. The findings of the content analysis were used to develop three research instruments to collect data for objective two and three. The following section will describe the instrument development and their reliability & validity process.

Phase II. Developing research instruments from the data obtained from phase I. Three instruments were designed based on constructs identified from content analysis. Two questionnaires: - Instrument 1. Expected academic leadership practices for higher education in India. Instrument 2. Current academic leadership practices of higher education in India. Instrument 3. An interview protocol. While designing research instrument 1 and 2, open ended and closed ended questions were used. In closed ended questions, 5-point Likert's rating scale was used.

For instrument 1 – a Likert Scale of endorsement expressing the degree of agreement with statements that present a position. Instrument 2- a Likert scale of frequency determining the extent of practice. In both the instruments demographic data questions were added as a variable. Open ended questions were added to get additional perspective that might have been missed while designing the questionnaire. To collect qualitative data, open-ended interview protocol was designed.

The questions were based on the same constructs that were used for the questionnaires. Content Validity of the instrument was done with the help of Item Object Congruence (IOC) Form for screening the qualified items. IOC Index for each item is the mean of experts' scores. The desirable IOC for each item should be **0.50** or higher (Brown, 1996). The IOC index for the instruments was calculated as **0.88**. The experts' comments were collated into a single sheet and the necessary changes were made to make an unalterable version of the instruments.

To determine reliability of the instruments, a pilot test was conducted on 60 faculty members. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (α) was applied to determine the reliability of the constructs. The overall reliability of the 14 constructs was calculated as **0.86**. The scores of each construct were in the range of Excellent to Good, representing overall steady internal consistency. As a guideline, the range of alpha coefficient was used as follows: ≥ 0.9 (Excellent), ≥ 0.8 (Good), ≥ 0.7 (Acceptable), ≥ 0.6 (Questionable), ≥ 0.5 (Poor) and less than 0.5 is unacceptable (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Phase III. Data collection for current and expected leadership practices. The researcher collected two types of data – Quantitative and Qualitative. The instruments were administered on three different sets of participants to collect data and subsequently meet the research objectives two and three. Total seven universities from Pune were selected as a sample for the study. It included a combination of public and private universities. To identify expected academic leadership practices, academic administrators were considered as a sample. Total 190 Questionnaires were sent, out of which 144 were returned duly filled. That means the rate of response was 76 percent. To identify current academic leadership practices, 425 questionnaires were sent to full-time faculty members out of which 389 were included for the final analysis. To collect qualitative data senior academic leaders working at different universities in India were interviewed. A technique of semi-structured interviews was employed to collect high quality data. The criterion sampling was used as a strategy to choose the senior leaders working in various higher education institutes in India. Total 20 interviews of university leaders i.e. vice-chancellors, presidents, institution builders, were conducted. An interview protocol covering all the identified constructs was used to collect the data. Phase IV. Data analysis. Quantitative data collected from the academic administrators and faculty was entered in a quantitative data analysis software. The criteria used for mean scale interpretation is presented in table 1. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the collected data for its Frequency, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviation. The Priority Need Index (PNI) was computed by using the data obtained from objective two and three i.e. expected and current leadership practices.

Table 1: Interpretation of Scale Scores

Scale Score	Meaning	
	Expected Leadership Practices	Current Leadership Practices
4.50 – 5.00	Strongly Agree	Always
3.50 – 4.49	Agree	Often
2.50 – 3.49	Neutral	Sometime
1.50 – 2.49	Disagree	Rarely
1.00 – 1.49	Strongly Disagree	Never

Qualitative data collected through interview protocol was audio-taped. Interviews were transcribed as clean read or smooth verbatim transcript. After the transcription, the data was analyzed using the method of thematic content analysis. Phase V. Development of academic leadership model using data analyzed in phase IV and focus groups' validation of the model. Quantitative and qualitative data was used for model development. The qualitative data confirmed and added pointers to the quantitative data analysis. A proposed model of academic leadership for higher education in India was developed and presented to the experts for validation. A validation was done with a focus group, a connoisseurship model was used. An evaluation form was developed to be filled by the experts to help the researcher understand modification areas in the model. The comment section was there for the experts to write remarks and views. All the comments from the experts were combined and used to develop the final model.

Research Findings

Research findings are organized into three parts and presented here.

Part One. An extensive reading of the selected 131 resources on academic leadership was done to find recurring themes and key ideas. The coding sheets were prepared for the segmentation process. Each segment was given a code representing the idea. The occurrence of each code was enumerated for its

relative significance to the overall exploration of academic leadership. They were narrowed down into meaningful clusters using eliminations and frequencies which led to 14 analytical constructs divided into three major themes. Theme I- Organisational leadership – 1. Decision making 2. Promoting collaboration 3. Accountability 4. Setting direction 5. Developing networks and relationships 6. Managing diversity 7. Environmental sustainability. Theme II. 8. Teaching & Learning 9. Academic freedom 10. Developing faculty. Theme III. 11. Emotional competencies 12. Academic credibility 13. Cognitive capabilities 14. Knowledge. The output of content analysis was used to develop research instruments: - two questionnaires and one interview protocol to collect the data.

Part Two. To identify expected and current academic leadership practices for higher education in India, the researcher launched two survey questionnaires, designed in the first part of the research, specifically for university academic administrators and faculty members. Total 141 academic administrators and 389 faculty members participated in the study. The data was analysed for frequency, mean and standard deviation. To find out the gap and prioritise the needs of each construct, Priority Needs Index (PNI) was calculated with the formula:

$$PNI = \frac{\{Expected(I) - Current (D)\}}{Expected(I)}$$

The findings of the needs assessment were 49otmail49ed49 and numbered as Rank. Higher the rank, higher is the need/ urgency of the development. The highest rank assigned was to the environmental sustainability, indicating the most urgent need. The lowest priority need reported is that of academic freedom with a rank 11. Some of the constructs have similar gap scores and hence they have been assigned common ranks, e. g. setting direction and teaching-learning have same PNI scores as 0.257 and hence, assigned a common rank 5. The overall rank of all 14 constructs and the priority of development was used for the model development process. A theme-wise analysis of each construct and its ranks are presented in the table 2.

Table 2: Analysis of Each Construct and Its Rank

Construct –Code	Expected (I)	Current (D)	PNI	Overall Rank
Theme I- Organisational Leadership	4.46	3.30	0.259	I.
Environmental Sustainability	4.53	3.25	0.283	1
Accountability	4.43	3.23	0.272	3
Setting Direction	4.54	3.37	0.257	5
Building Networks & Relationships	4.43	3.31	0.252	6
Managing Diversity	4.48	3.35	0.252	6
Promoting Collaboration	4.52	3.39	0.250	7
Decision Making	4.37	3.29	0.246	8
Theme II. Leading Academics	4.5	3.38	0.24	II.
Developing Faculty	4.47	3.24	0.275	2
Teaching & Learning	4.53	3.36	0.257	5
Academic Freedom	4.49	3.57	0.205	11
Theme III. Personal Attributes	4.53	3.42	0.238	III.
Emotional Competencies	4.55	3.34	0.267	4
Knowledge	4.61	3.47	0.246	8
Cognitive Capabilities	4.44	3.42	0.230	9
Academic Credibility	4.50	3.57	0.208	11

To further strengthen the understanding of academic leadership for higher education in India, a series of semi-structured interviews was conducted. Total 20 interviews of the university leaders were interpreted with thematic analysis and ranked as per the PNI table 2. The quantitative and qualitative data was mixed by keeping it side by side and finalized findings were used for the model development. Part 3. As there is no precedence in the context of higher education in India to map similarity or contrasts

of the academic leadership model the preliminary model developed by the researcher needed an extensive process of validation, which was done with the help of a connoisseurship model. An expert review form was sent with a separate section for the comments. A panel of 20 experts took efforts and made valuable comments and gave suggestions for the model's operational viability and feasibility. From both the sets of experts, the response was positive, and they expressed hope and optimism about the application of the said model. The suggestions from the experts that were considered for modifications to bring in more clarity to the model diagram and consistency of language to the model. Considering all the comments, the final model was developed as displayed in Figure 1. It exhibits all the necessary components identified through this study as required for the academic leadership for higher education in India.

Explanation of the model. The context in which the model will operate and the mission, vision is explained in the following discussion.

Context. Trends impacting higher education scenario across the world have become the reality for the Indian context too. Moreover, India's diversified milieu adds multiple layers of complexity to it. Currently, higher education in India appeals globally owing to its sheer quantity and as predicted by many studies about its share of students, which will contribute to the major pool of graduates across the world. In such scenario, academic leadership is expected to be instrumental in the growth journey and quality enhancement of higher education institutes. Leader's role demands him to be an emissary to the external world and a facilitator of the internal context. Keeping an eye on the global trends and managing the realities and expectations of the local context take academic leaders to leverage their leadership as well as management capabilities to the fullest. The model of academic leadership developed in this study, will serve as a guideline and framework, if implemented well, will yield enhanced organisational efficiency, academic quality and will help academic leaders exercise their leadership effectively.

Mission statement. To accelerate the progress of Higher Education Institutions to be more sustained and advanced education system.

Vision. To make academic leaders of India a force to reckon with.

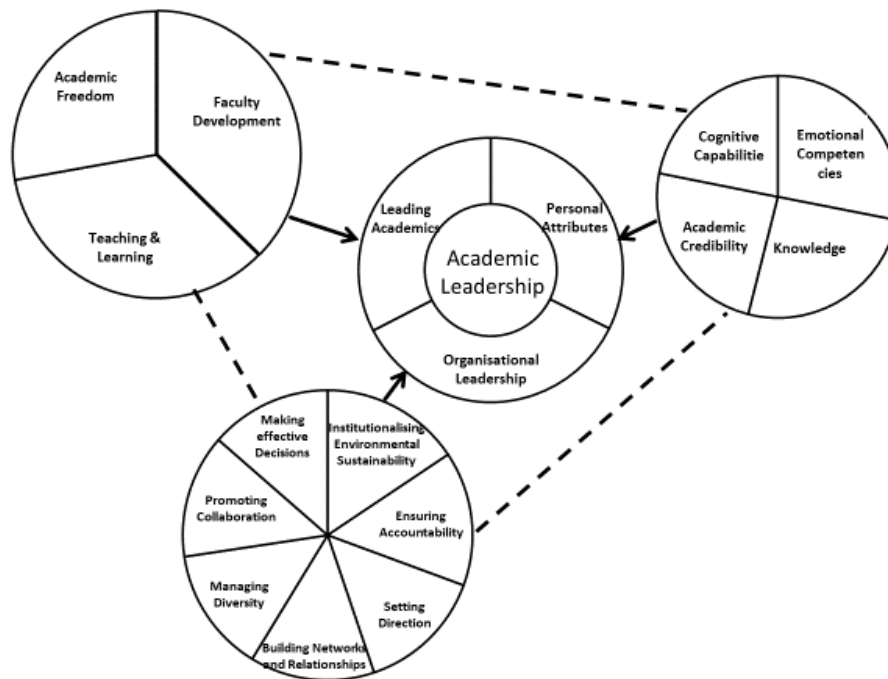


Figure 1. Academic Leadership Model for Higher Education in India.

The model displays three important facets of academic leadership viz. Organizational, Academics and Personal attributes. The organizational facet expects leader to institutionalize environmental sustainability as a core value, to ensure accountability by balancing its various aspects that help ensure

performance and transparency of the system; set the direction so that organization can achieve the intended goals; build networks and relationships, manage diversity and turn into an asset, promote collaboration and make effective decisions to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the academic organization. The second facet, expects academic leaders to lead academics effectively for which he needs to pay attention to faculty development as faculty is the major pillar on which education rests and therefore needs to strengthen, teaching learning to enhance educational effectiveness and academic freedom of the faculty help advance knowledge creation within an intellectual environment. The third facet, focuses on personal attributes of an academic leader to develop being emotionally competent, academically credible, knowledgeable and cognitively capable to be an effective leader. The model figure aims to give an illustration that captures the complete picture of all the aspects identified to be significant for academic leadership in India; and shows their association with each other.

Conclusion

A model is designed and developed through the synthesis of findings from content analysis, survey, and interviews. The model encompasses three major facets and their corresponding 14 constructs that are said to contribute to academic leadership for higher education in India. In the model, the three major facets are indicated in the inner pie diagram, while each of their respective constructs are placed in three pie diagrams connected by the dotted lines. The concentric circle in the middle represents the ultimate output, which is to achieve goals of education by academic leadership for higher education in India.

The academic leadership for the 21st century needs reconceptualization of certain aspects of their domain that they have been following. They are being presented as constructs in the model. The constructs that have already been placed as high should come as an advantage to the academic leaders to develop the ones that need urgent attention. The academic leaders can start with the most critical construct from each facet independently i.e. from organizational leadership, academic leaders can begin with institutionalizing environmental sustainability and go on to the next in a circular manner rather than linear, it should be a reiterative process to sustain the rigor that 21st century higher education demands.

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