

LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES FACED BY UNIVERSITIES IN PAKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This paper reports on a quantitative descriptive analysis exploring major challenges being faced by higher education leadership in private and public sector universities in Pakistan. The emphasis is on both the 'what' and the 'how much' of these challenges affect the performance. Out of the total population of 262 teachers, 200 were selected on random basis for the sample of the study – 100 from public and 100 from private institutions. The findings are presented in comparison between two types of universities and seek to provide an integrative account and a framework for further study. The findings suggest that the centralized systems create obstacles for efficient flow of information and affect decision making processes which in turn affect the performance of employees in both private and public universities. Based on research findings, we suggest reviewing prevailing structures and systems to help improve communication flow, efficient decision making process and professional development opportunities in higher education sector.

Key Words: Challenges, Higher education, leadership, performance

Introduction

Over the last decade the institutional framework within which most universities operate has undergone a major transformation due to changing international trends. Higher education sector is not an exception which is seen as one of the central players in influencing the change and therefore it is facing continuous pressures of change (Ameijde, Billsberry, Meurs, Nelson, 2009). In the present context of competitiveness and globalization the role of a university is further enhanced thus putting additional pressure on university leadership to sustain the institution in a competitive environment.

The discourse on higher education leadership has not been very old as higher education was considered to be more of research and teaching. However, after 1920 definitional and conceptual uncertainty about higher education leadership started getting attention (Stogdill, 1974). Synthesis and analysis of enormous literature on leadership from

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1920 to 1970s and Middlehurst's (1993) synthesis of the literature up to the 1990s proved that this term has been used in a myriad of ways, to mean a variety of different things to different people in a variety of contexts. For some, leadership is found in the particular traits or personal qualities of the individuals who assume leadership positions (Stogdill, 1948). Another common approach to conceptualizing leadership associates leadership with behaviour or style (Stogdill & Coons, 1957). According to this approach, leadership can be understood by examining the behaviours of those in leadership positions. Thus, the task of developing leadership capacity involves (a) identifying those specific behaviours (tasks and actions) associated with the type of leadership that we value or desire, (b) identifying the particular style (or styles) adopted by such leaders when they perform these behaviours, and (c) designing opportunities for others to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to adopt these behaviours and styles in their own work. The conceptual leadership style and behaviours have been studied and discussed during late 1950s and 1960s. Studies including the Ohio State Leadership Studies, the Michigan Studies, and others conducted by Cartwright and Zander (1960); Likert, (1961), and Blake and Mouton, (1964) were carried out to explore the nature of leadership behaviour.

The increased complexity of the leadership role in the higher education environment has gained attention as a subject for study for almost past fifteen years (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998, 1999; Cohen, 2004; Knight & Trowler, 2001; Mead, Morgan & Heath, 1999; Ramsden, 1998). The list of challenges grows longer in developing or under developed countries and university core business increases in complexity (Barnett, 2004; Drew, 2006; Hanna, 2003; Marshall, Adams, Cameron, & Sullivan, 2000; Marshall, 2007; Middlehurst, 2007; Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008; Snyder, Marginson & Lewis, 2007).

Higher education in Pakistan has already entered the process of change (Ali, 1997). The situation began to reverse in the early 2000s, through establishment of university grants commission and then higher education in 2002. With an evolving higher education sector in Pakistan, there is a need to assess the impact and efficacy of leadership styles and challenges faced by leaders within university systems. Majority of the research has been conducted around evolution of higher education in

Pakistan (Ali, 2001, Nadeem, 2005, Hamid, 2005, Aleem 2004). Researchers and workers in the field have explored a canvass of intersecting and potentially competing challenges impacting academic staff and academic administrators and eventually the standard of education. Although the leadership challenges attract attention of researchers, no research has been carried out so far specifically on the leadership issues and challenges being faced by the members of Academic Councils, Boards of Studies and Selection Boards.

This paper attempts to compare the challenges faced by employees of private and public universities of Pakistan who work as members of Academic Council, Board of Studies and Selection Board that bring them to leadership roles. This descriptive study compares the leadership challenges faced by private and public institution through quantitative data. The findings of the study would inform policy makers to suggest practical measures that result in minimizing these challenges and thus help improve the standard of higher education.

Methodology

Participants

The target population was the employees practicing as members of Academic Councils, Boards of Studies and Selection Boards of all the public and private universities in Pakistan. The sample was 200 members in leading roles having the designation of Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor and Lecturers working in the public or private universities in various parts of Pakistan. The quota sampling technique which is a type of purposive sampling is used with the intention of collecting data according to the specifically predefined groups (100 from each private and public institutions) and the sample was selected non-randomly according to the fixed quota. The criteria for inclusion in the study were employees of public and private universities practicing as members of members of Academic Councils, Boards of Studies and Selection Boards for at least two years. The employees who had less than two years of experience have been excluded from the study.

Measures

Professional Status Questionnaire

The questionnaire explored the professional status of the respondents with the help of three items. The following

information was obtained from every respondent in which they were supposed to tick one option.

- a. Category of the Institution: Public or Private
- b. Designation: Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Lecturer
- c. Membership: Academic Council, Board of Studies, Selection Board

Leadership Challenges Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed to explore three aspects of leadership challenges such as bureaucracy, flow of communication and professional development. The instructions for completing the questionnaire were given on the top of the questionnaire. The first four items attempt to explore bureaucracy. The items numbering 5 to 9 measured the flow of communication and the last five explored the challenges to professional development. The five point Likert Scale is used to take responses on a five point scale. Each item is analysed separately.

Research Design and Procedure

The research is quantitative in nature. It is a descriptive research study which explores the leadership challenges faced by the employees practicing as members of Academic Councils, Boards of Studies and Selection Boards of institutions in Pakistan. The study design of this research is cross-sectional.

A pilot survey was conducted in six private and nine public universities in order to identify the major challenges being faced by academic councils, board of academics and selection boards. The majority of the respondents reported bureaucracy, flow of information and capacity building as the main challenges for leadership. On the basis of the results of this survey, a questionnaire containing 14 items have been developed to explore the three main leadership challenges.

The sample was approached through survey monkey which is a web based survey tool. The respondents were first introduced to the researcher as well the topic and purpose of research through an introductory Email sent to all the potential respondents. The consent for participation in the study has been taken from the respondents by an automatic email generated by clicking on the option for expressing intention to participate in the study on their own free will. A total of 488 potential respondents were contacted out of which only 262 gave their

consent to participate in the study. However, the first 200 who completed the survey questionnaire on time have been taken as sample.

After the completion of the first 200 questionnaires, the data was catalogued in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The results of the study were analyzed with the help of SPSS 20.0 version software package. The total responses on each item/variable were obtained by adding the number of various answer options selected on that item. Descriptive statistics (percentage) were calculated for the variables with an intention to compare and study the leadership challenges in private and public institutions.

Results

During the study, out of 262 respondents who gave their consent to participate in the study, only the first 200 who completed the survey questionnaire on time have been taken as sample according to the fixed quota for predefined groups (100 each from private and public institutions) as the data was gathered till the required sample size was reached. The following tables are organised on the basis of the data taken during the period of 10th of November, 2012 to 7th of January, 2013 which was the deadline for data collection.

Table 1 Respondents by Designation- Percentage

	Category of Institution		Total
	Private	Public	

Table 2: Respondents by Management Role-Percentage

	Management Role	Category of Institution		Total
		Private	Public	
	Academic Council	49	26	75
	Board of studies	37	49	86
	Selection Board	14	25	39
	Total	100	100	200

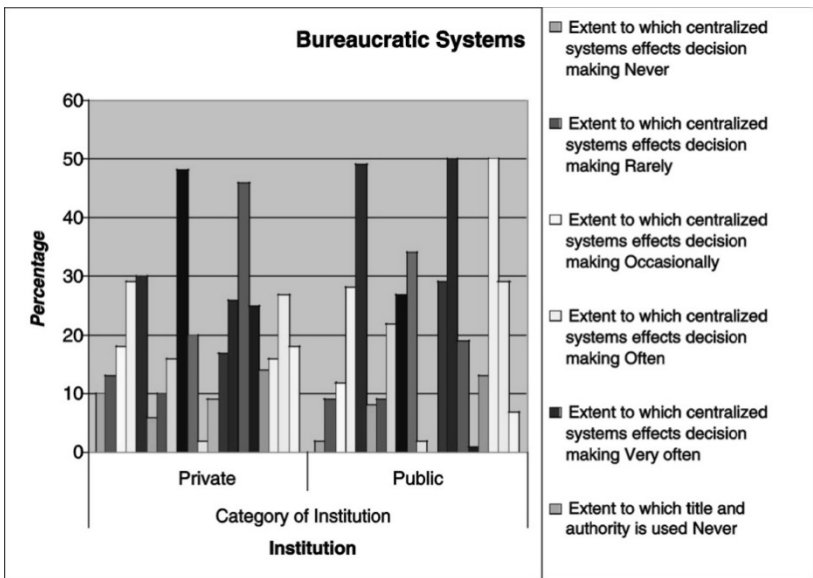
Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents from private institutions were Professors (42 per cent) and Associate Professors (39 percent). However, the most of the respondents from public institutions were working as Associate Professor (40 percent) and Assistant Professor (35 percent). The majority of the respondents from private institutions were Professors and Associate Professors. On the other hand, most of the respondents from public institutions were positioned as Associate Professor (40 percent) and Assistant Professor (35 percent).

The table 2 illustrates that the majority of the respondents from

private institutions were members of Academic Council (49 percent) and Board of Studies (37 percent) and only 14 percent were working as members in Selection Boards. Almost half of the respondents from public institutions (49 percent) were member of Board of Studies and 26 percent and 25 per cent were members of Academic Council and Selection Board respectively.

The majority of the respondents from private institutions were members of Academic Council and Board of Studies. Almost half of the respondents from public institutions were member of Board of Studies. Moreover, the number of respondents working as members of Academic Council and Selection Board was around 25 percent each.

Graph 1: Effect of Centralised Systems on Decision Making



Graph 1 suggests that the centralized systems in private institutions affect the decision making of leaders to a greater extent as 29 percent reported that the centralized systems *often* and 30percent reported that it *very often* affects the decision making. A similar trend has also been found in the public institutes where 28 percent reported that the centralized systems *often* and 49 percent reported that it *very often* affects the decision making.

Extent of the Use of Title and Authority

The graph 1 points towards the fact that in private institutes the title and authority is used to a large extent as 48 percent reported that title and authority is used *often* and 20 percent reported that it is used *very often*. Likewise, in public institutions the title and authority is used to a greater extent as 27 percent reported it *often* and 34 percent reported that it is *very often* used.

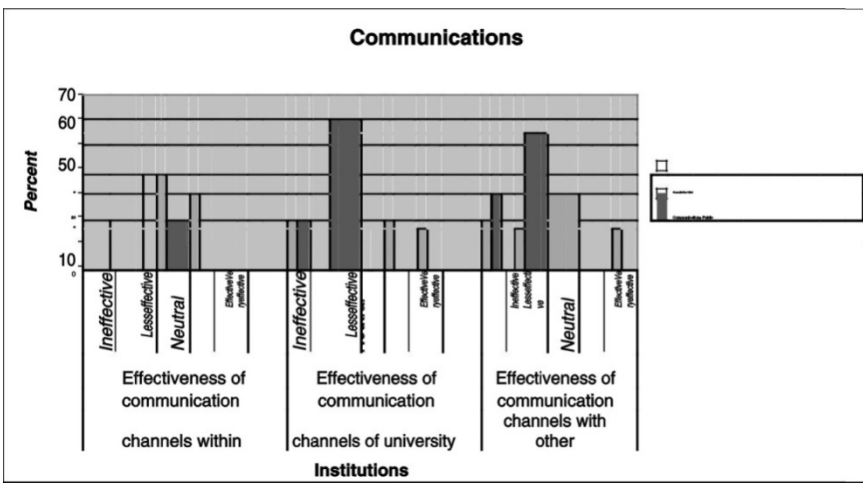
Effect of Centralized Processes and Procedures on Performance

Results indicate that in private institutions the centralized processes and procedures affect performance to a greater level as 26 percent reported that these processes and procedures *often* and 46 percent reported that these *very often* effects the performance. Almost a similar tendency has been found in the public institutions as 50 percent reported that these processes and procedures *often* and 19 percent reported that these *very often* affect the performance.

Challenge to Centralized System

Findings demonstrate that in private institutions 18 percent reported that they *very often* challenge the centralized system. In comparison to this, only 7 percent from public institutions reported that they *very often* challenge the system. Moreover, 25 percent from private and only 1 percent from public institutions reported that they *never* challenge the centralized system. The 50 percent from public institutions and only 16 percent from private institutions reported that they *occasionally* challenge the centralized system.

Graph 2: Effectiveness of Communication Channels**Intra-University Communication**



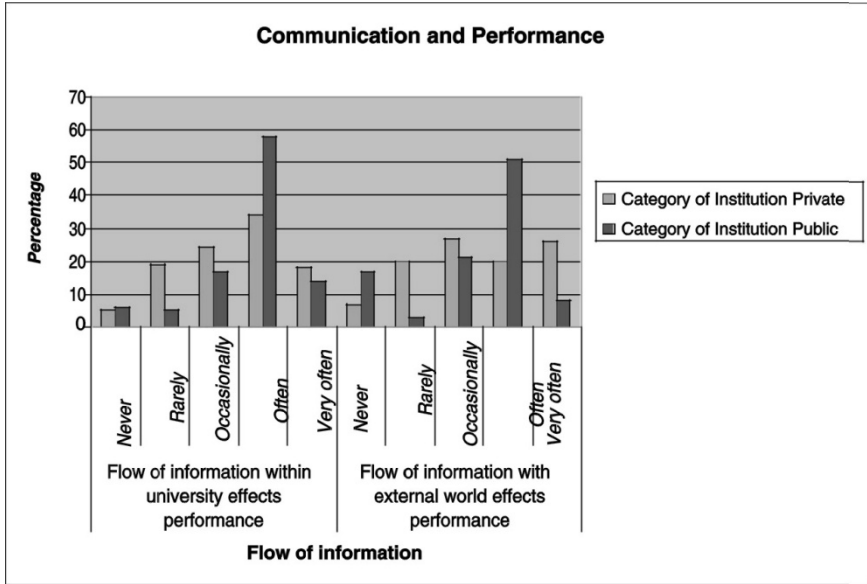
The graph 2 7 shows that only 5 percent and 33 percent from private institutions and 0 percent and 9 percent from public institutions reported that the communication channels within university departments are *very effective* and *effective* respectively. However, 12 percent from private institutions and 20 percent from public institutions reported that the communication channels within university departments are *ineffective*.

Effectiveness of Inter-University Communication Channels

The findings depict that 17 % and 21 % from private institutions and only 2 % and 3 % from public institutions reported that the communication channels of their university with other universities are *very effective* and *effective* in that order. The 22 % from private and 21percent from public institutions reported that the communication channels of their university with other universities are *ineffective*. Graph 2 illustrates that 18 percent and 6 percent from private and only 2 percent and 2 percent from public universities reported that the communication channels with other universities around the world are *very effective* and *effective* correspondingly. The 25 % from private and 35 % from public institutions reported that the communication channels with other universities around the world are *ineffective*.

Graph 3: Flow of Information and Performance

Effect of Intra-University Information as Seen by Respondents



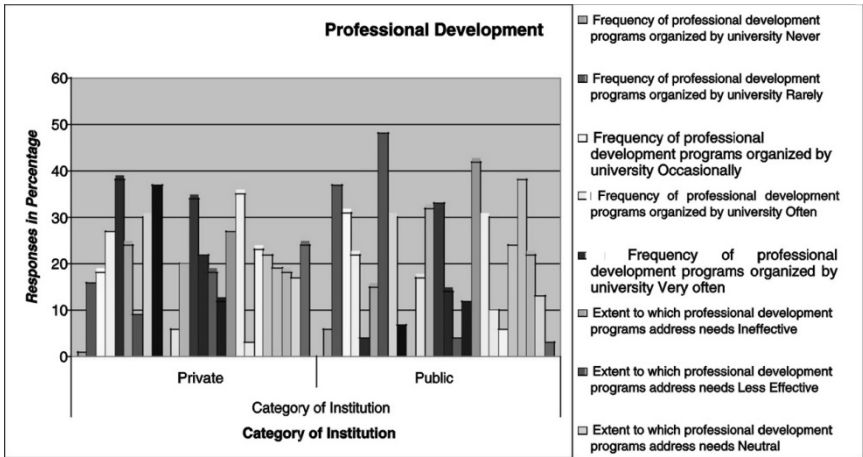
Graph 3 demonstrates that in private institutions the flow of information within university effects performance to a certain level as 18 percent and 34 percent reported that it *very often* and *often* affects performance in that order. A similar inclination has also been found in the public institutes where 14 percent and 58 percent reported that the flow of information *very often* and *often* affects the performance.

Effect of the Flow of Information with External World on the Performance as Seen by Respondents

The above graph explains the point that in private institutions 26 percent reported that the flow of information with external world *very often* effects performance to a certain level. In comparison to this, only 8 percent reported the flow of information with external world *very often* effects performance. A total of 20 percent from private institutions and 51 percent from public institutions reported that the flow of information with external world *often* affects performance. Moreover, a total of 27 percent from private institutions 21 percent from public institutions reported that the flow of information with external world *occasionally* affects performance. The percentage depicts that the flow of information with the external world affects performance to a greater extent.

Graph 4: Professional Development Programs and Their Efficacy Frequency of Professional Development Programs Organized by

University



Graph 4 implies that in private institutions the professional development programs are *very often* organized as 38 percent reported it. In contrast to this, only 4 percent from public institutions reported that such professional development programs are organized.

Professional Development Programmes Address Needs

Findings indicate that the professional development programs address the needs of private institutions more *effectively* (37 percent) as compared to the needs of public institutions as only 7 percent reported that professional development programs *effectively* address their needs.

Frequency of Efficacy Assessment of These Programs

The graph entails that private institutions *very often* assess the efficacy of assessment of professional development programs as 18 percent reported it. In contrast to this, in public institutions only 4 percent reported that the efficacy of professional development programs is assessed.

Frequency of Performance Feedback Provided

Responses depict that in comparison with public institutions, the performance feedback is very often provided (23%) in private and only 6 % in public institutions.

Frequency of Performance Evaluation Report Reflecting Actual Performance

The findings provide evidence for the fact that in private institutions the performance evaluation report *very often* reflects the actual performance as 24 percent reported it. However, in public institutions only 3percent

reported that the performance evaluation report *very often* reflects the actual performance.

Discussion

The mechanisms which many higher education institutions have implemented to deal with these pressures seem to have created an interesting paradox (Ameijde, Nelson, Billsberry, & Meurs, 2009). The introduction of procedures around performance measurement, quality control, and audit aimed at improving the effectiveness and accountability of institutions have at the same time contributed to the creation of additional bureaucratic layers of control which have often been experienced as inhibiting organisational effectiveness and responsiveness. Also, several commentators have pointed out the negative effects of these measures through the pressures they have created on academic as well as non-academic staff, and the resulting tensions between management and staff in higher education institutions (i.e., Chandler et al. 2002; Parker and Jary 1995; Huisman and Currie 2004).

The analysis of data gathered from 200 respondents (100 each from private and public institutions) suggests that bureaucratic and centralised institutional systems exhibit significant impact on decision making in both private and public institutions. However, the intensity and therefore the resulting impact of centralized systems vary in these two sectors. It is evident that leaders in private universities tend to challenge the bureaucracy quite often while this trend is observed to be comparatively less in public institutions.

A similar trend is reported in usage of authority and title to encounter centralised institutional systems while on the other hand this attitude itself supports and encourages bureaucracy. For example, senior positions like Professors and Associate Professors in both types of institutions tend to use their seniority for doing things their own way. However, quite surprisingly the use of designation and title is more frequent in private institutions than in public ones.

UNESCO (1983) advocates the need to diffuse the decision making power in universities. It argues that the basic production processes in universities and colleges are knowledge-intensive and that there is need to decentralize. It is now realized that today's world is

interconnected and we work in an increasingly team-based environment and no single person can hold all relevant knowledge and make right decisions. The concept of distributed leadership (Ameijde et al., 2009) is emerging in higher education sector.

Findings show that work performance of respondents from both categories is affected due to bureaucratic systems. Presence of centralized processes and procedures influence working performance of mentioned group in a similar way with almost similar frequency in both type of universities. These results are aligned with the findings of a PhD thesis (Anwar, Nadeem) conducted in 2005 that university bodies generally tend to face delays in decision making process due to centralized and bureaucratic structures.

Although both groups agree that their work performance is being affected due to bureaucratic practices and procedures. It is interesting to note that these systems are comparatively less challenged in private universities as a significant 25 per cent of the sample reported that they never challenge the existing system. Lack of communication and information flow within the university and outside world limits innovation and ability to grow as the systems lack the ability to listen and see the changes around them. Many individuals in leadership roles are unprepared to lead change and are not knowledgeable about the models that exist, the research on innovation and their own role in the process (Diamond, 2006). While absence of efficient and effective communication channels restrict innovation and learning from external environments it also dilutes implementation of university mission and ambition as it flows through the long ladders of leadership hierarchies. Institutional mission, vision and priorities need to be clearly stated and understood by every staff member, every board member, each faculty member and administrator, key political leaders and the public being served. The communication of these statements must be deliberated, well designed, reinforced and ongoing (Diamond, 2006). With respect to communication systems and flow of information Intra-University, inter-university and with external world, public universities present lack of efficient and effective channels of communication. Moreover, the tendency to recognize the ineffectiveness of the swift flow of information is more realized in public institutions than in the private ones. In public

institutions the flow of information within university and with external world affects performance to a greater extent. A similar inclination has also been found in the private institutions.

The findings imply that in private institutions the professional development programs are very often organized (as 38 per cent reported). In contrast to this, only 4 percent from public institutions reported that such professional development programs are organized. Despite the much desired need, the public universities seem to pay less attention to offering professional development opportunities and even if they are available, most of them appear to be less relevant to their profession. Quite expectedly, public universities seem to pay little or no attention in assessing the impact of these professional development programs.

In comparison with public institutions, the performance feedback is very often provided as in private institutions. The respondents representing public universities describe the feedback on their performance not being a true reflection of their actual performance. In contrary to public sector, the group from private universities report that the annual performance reports tend to represent their performance.

Conclusions

This research explores major issues that pose challenges to higher education leaders in conducting their jobs. Bureaucracy is an impediment to encouraging efficient flow of information thus delaying decision making processes which in turn affect the performance of employees in both private and public universities. Although public and private sector universities realize the challenges created by centralized system, in contrast to private sector institutions where bureaucracy is challenged, there is a tendency to maintain the status quo by not challenging it in public ones. Private institutions pay more attention to offering professional development programs and assess their efficacy quite often. However, in public institutions the frequency of professional development programs as well as the assessment of these programs is low. Private institutions very efficiently provide performance feedback which reflects the actual performance of the employees. Conversely, the public institutions are not efficient in providing performance feedback and if feedback given to employees, it does not show their actual

performance. It reveals that efficient flow of information decentralized processes through academic freedom, substantive autonomy and procedural autonomy and customized professional development opportunities could help minimise the prevailing challenges.

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