Original Article

University Excellence with Level 5 Leadership Approach: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Introduction: Universities are the driving engines of countries in the knowledge age. The excellence of universities depends on the success of the faculty. One of the success models for organizations is Level 5 Leadership. The purpose of this research was to identify the characteristics of the 5th level leaders from the viewpoint of faculty members.

Methods: This research was a kind of qualitative research that was done using content analysis approach. The statistical population consisted of faculty members of Guilan University of Medical Sciences in 2017. With targeted sampling method, 19 people were selected as participants in the study. In order to obtain validity and validity reliability of the data, two methods of reviewing the participants and reviewing non-participating experts in the research were used.

Results: After data analysis, 66 primary and 4 main categories were classified. Main categories included attributes, solutions, barriers and achievements. Sub-themes included management abilities, moral excellence, compliance with law and management principles, necessary incentives, meritocracy, structural barriers, individual and motivational barriers, individual and structural excellence, economic, educational and research, political and social factors.

Conclusion: Considering the importance of educational, health and medical activities of Medical Universities, Level 5 leadership can be a good model for organizational excellence. The dimensions identified in Level 5 leadership should also be considered in the selection of corporate executives

Keywords: University Excellence, Level 5 Leadership, Content Analysis

Introduction

The present era is called the period of dramatic and accelerating changes. Organizations as social units are not immune from the effects of these developments. In order to survive, they have to adapt to the fast-paced and unprecedented changes and upgrade their human resources as well as hardware changes (1). There is no doubt that organizations need leadership skills beyond their own survival, which is organizational success. Successful leaders always strive to seize opportunities and motivate their employees to improve productivity, correct mistakes and push the organization toward its goals (2). Leaders choose their leadership style with accordance to the goals of the organization that can be most effective in their organization (3). Leadership

literally means guidance. Successful organizations need leaders who deliberately identify the right direction for the future of the organization, guide people on the right path and motivate and transform employees (4).

Transformational leaders with new perspectives bring a new path of growth and prosperity to organizations and enhance the performance of organizations (5). One of the most important centers of research activities in all countries of the world is an organization called University (6). Higher education must be able to adapt to current conditions and get rid of educational inactivity. Managers must provide new approaches to creating a transcendent and dynamic education system. Human resources will be a very excellent output of this system, and will lead to comprehensive progress (7).

Faculty members are one of the main and important factors of the educational system of a country and their capability has a direct impact on the performance of higher education. In universities, the quality of academic work, including research, teaching and service delivery depends more on faculty dynamics, thus, the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education institutions can be said to depend on the quality of their faculty (8).

Faculty members are the most important asset of universities, and the superiority of any university depends on their performance (9). The development of faculty member has been of particular importance as a result of the changes taking place in higher education. The advent of advanced technologies, higher education information and communications, the rapid growth of knowledge and its changes, the need for universities to respond to society, universal higher education systems and the globalization of higher education and the competitiveness of higher education institutions have all led universities and higher education systems to pay particular attention to the continuous growth and development of their faculty members (10).

The importance of faculty member comes from the fact that if faculty members have a good growth, one can expect that other resources of the university will be well used. Some experts believe that the university or college can be summarized in the faculty members. Therefore, it can be briefly stated that faculty members are the key to the progress of universities and communities (11). Evidence from some researches shows that despite the qualitative and quantitative growth of health organizations in our country and the internal needs of Iranian society in the past few years, the quality and efficiency of health centers are still not satisfactory and their various aspects, especially in management and leadership, need renovation and rebuilding (12). Collins' level 5 leadership model, as one of the new and innovative models of organizational leadership with all the qualifications of a personal and professional qualification aiming to benefit the organization, selecting the right people and dreaming with unexpected bitter realities leads to the success of the organization in various dimensions. In fact, the term Level 5 refers to the highest category in the hierarchy of executives and includes all the qualifications necessary for effective leadership. The most important finding of Collins et al.'s research was that the great secret of the leading organizations was their management of the level 5 leadership, a layer that, according to Bailey Graham, few people reach, and if they were in that category, a fine example of the managers of these organizations were effective managers whose whole concern is the success of their organization. On the other hand, there are successful managers who all strive for success and expanding and pursuing the ladder of personal growth and reputation. Collins has summarized the classification of level 5 leaders as follows:

Level one (highly capable person): In this level, the leader's influence is limited to the realm of title and position. This layer is also called the status layer in which the followers obey the leader because of the power of office.

Level two (Team Assistant): In this level which is also called the authority level, there is a two-way communication between the leader and the

subordinates. The leader uses his/her ability to involve people in the work.

Level three: (Skilled Manager): This layer is also called construction. In this level, the profit of the organization increases. Staff morale is strong and their mobility is low. The leader in this organization makes useful changes and takes the lead in creating and accepting responsibility and growing the organization.

Level four (Effective Leader): This layer is called employee growth or reproduction. At this level, followers attribute their growth to the guidance and training of the leader and follow the leader because of the positive actions he/she has taken for them.

Level five (Creative Manager or Leader): With a blend of personal humility and professional courage, leaders make excellent and lasting achievements. At this level, although leaders are humble, they are resolute. With the aim of lasting success and greatness, they nurture a worthy successor so that after their departure, success in the organization will continue to be cultured and maintained. The advanced level five leaders possess all the characteristics of the other four lower level managers and are in fact a combination of humility and will (13).

In the study by Chamasemani, Sabaghian and Sadeghpour, the level five leadership among the faculties of Shahid Beheshti University and Tarbiat Modares University was studied by selecting 152 faculty members and 13 faculty deans in 2009. A researcher-made leadership effectiveness questionnaire was used in this study. The results indicated that the faculty deans had personality characteristics of level five leaders. The faculty deans lacked the professional qualities of top-level leaders. There was a significant relationship between personality and professional characteristics of the level five leaders. From the faculty members' point of view, leaders with layer five ability were more effective than other leaders (14).

Ahmadi and Ebrahimi examined leadership style of the deans of technical and vocational institutes and job satisfaction of staff in Tehran based on Collin's level 5 leadership model. The results showed that the deans of technical and vocational institutes had the professional characteristics of top-level leaders, but the level of personality traits was very low. Given the job satisfaction of staff under level 5 leaders compared to non-level 5 coordinate leaders, the level 5 pattern can be considered to advance the goals of technical and vocational institutes (15).

In addition to teaching and research, universities of medical sciences are also involved in the field of healthcare administration and face their own challenges. Evidence from some researches shows that despite the quantitative and qualitative growth of health organizations in the country and the internal needs of Iranian society, the quality and efficiency of health centers are still not satisfactory and various aspects of renovation and reconstruction are needed (7,8,16).

Given that in the structure of the Ministry of Health and consequently in the universities of medical sciences as the executive arm of the Ministry, most senior management and organizational positions are held by faculty members, it is necessary to measure their top-level management skills in order to enhance the country's health system. Due to the lack of appropriate studies in this field in Iran and the lack of a comprehensive and systematic framework to organize the level 5 leadership efforts in the country's universities and with taking into account the importance of the subject, this research seeks to identify, explain and prioritize a successful academic leader with level 5 items from the perspective of faculty members. One of the most profound ways of understanding a problem is conducting qualitative research that accurately identifies the problem and extracts solutions in a small area. Considering the need for a careful understanding of the problems in order to understand the hidden angles of the research from the perspective of the participants, a qualitative content analysis method was used in the study.

Methods

This study was carried out using a qualitative content analysis method which is utilized to

discover hidden meaning units in written content. In this approach, it is believed that many words are classified into smaller content groups. During the systematic classification process, the main class codes are identified (17). The study population included 19 faculty members of Guilan University of Medical Sciences in 2019. The participants were interviewed until the data were saturated. Inclusion criteria were work experience in management and executive positions at the university and work experience of more than 5 years. Purposeful sampling as well as snowball method were used in the present study. Thus, the research tool was a semi-structured interview whose questions were selected from reputable internal and external papers by examining the theoretical and research background of the research subject. Documentation was searched in Iranian and foreign scientific databases and was designed and arranged for the purpose of examining Level 5 leadership coordinates to guide the interview. Some questions included, "What are the characteristics of a level 5 leader?" "What are the top level 5 leadership solutions, obstacles and achievements?" The questions were then reviewed by five faculty members.

To collect data, 19 interviews were conducted in a confidential environment with the coordination of the participants. Data were analyzed using content analysis in MAXQDA software. The license and code of ethics were obtained for the interview and the investigation. Prior to the interview, participants were informed of the objectives of the study and they participated in this study with full knowledge and consent.

Concerning the research ethics, necessary permits were obtained for recording interviews and the participants were assured that the information obtained was used for study purposes only. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage they wished and that their data would be kept confidential. Each interview lasted about an hour. In the present study, the qualitative data analysis process was based on Graneheim and Lundman's proposed steps, which were conducted simultaneously with the data obtained from the interviews. Data analysis was performed during data collection so that the interviews were first typed and then repeatedly studied by the research team and the main concepts were identified in the form of initial codes. Due to the similarities and differences identified, similar codes were merged and subcategories were formed and re-classified by examining the similarities and differences of the identified classes in separate classes.

In the qualitative studies, 4 criteria including credibility, authenticity, transferability and confirmability are used to measure validity and reliability. The acceptability of the data in this study was evaluated using maximum diversity in the samples in terms of gender, field of study, age, work experience and scientific group. To increase the portability and suitability of the data, all the research process and the work done along the study path were clearly and precisely written to allow others to follow the research path and the characteristics of the study population. In order to increase the consistency of the findings, the interviews were reviewed. That is, the extracted codes and classes were provided by three experts in qualitative research who monitored all stages of the study and there was high agreement among the extracted results. Moreover, to assure verifiability, the researchers attempted not to interfere their assumptions as much as possible in the data collection and analysis process using MAXQDA software and group collaboration (18,19).

Results

The present study was conducted to determine the coordinates of level 5 leadership in faculty members at Guilan University of Medical Sciences. This study was a qualitative one with content analysis approach. In this study, 19 faculty members of Guilan University of Medical Sciences were purposefully interviewed in 2019. Based on data analysis, 66 primary concepts were derived from 4 main themes and 11 sub-themes. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the interviewees.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the interviewees

Row	Gender	Age	Management experience	Row	Gender	Age	Management experience
1	Male	42	University President for 4 years	11	Female	47	Head of Hospital for 5 years
2	Male	43	Deputy Dean of Faculty for 10 years	12	Female	38	Head of Hospital for 3 years
3	Male	35	College Assistant for 2 years	13	Male	35	Head of University Department for 2 years
4	Female	55	Deputy Dean of Faculty for 4 years	14	Male	29	Staff Manager for 3 years
5	Male	39	Head of Research Center for 5 years	15	Male	30	Staff Manager for 2 years
6	Female	33	Head of University Department for 2 years	16	Male	54	Deputy Dean of Faculty for 8 years
7	Female	34	Staff Manager for 3 years	17	Female	60	Dean of Medical Faculty for 10 years
8	Female	34	Head of Hospital for 10 years	18	Male	64	Head of Hospital for 12 years
9	Male	60	University President for 8 years	19	Male	41	Staff Manager for 12 years
10	Male	58	Dean of Faculty of Dentistry for 7 years				

Table 2 gives an overview of the main themes of the study. The main themes included attributes, solutions, barriers and achievements. Sub-themes included management abilities, moral excellence, compliance with law and management principles, necessary incentives, meritocracy, structural barriers, individual and motivational barriers, individual and structural excellence, economic, educational and research, political and social factors. This section describes how concepts and themes are formed by quoting the interviewee.

Table 2. Formation of Research Concepts and Themes

Main themes	Sub-themes	Codes
Attributes	Management ability	Professional knowledge - Communication skills – Support of subordinate managers - Collaboration with top executives – Use of relevant training - Substitution - Futurism - Attention to family origin - Pragmatism
	Moral excellence	Mental and moral health - Respect for opinions – Preventing unhealthy competition – Avoiding personal abuse - Humility - Realism - Justice - Full time commitment - Complete supervision - Accountability - Patience - Judgment accuracy - Lack of bias - Perseverance and Effort
Solutions	Compliance with law and management principles	Customer relationship excellence - Managers career definition - Creating systemic thinking in managers - Teamwork - Youthfulness - Tension and stress relief - Individual courage - Temporary positions - Attention to all academic degrees
	Necessary incentives	Practical training - Using suggestions and opinions - Meeting financial and welfare needs – Providing educational and research grants
	Meritocracy	Electing Managers Scientifically - Not interfering and lobbying for appointments - Paying attention to bureaucratic principles - Benchmarking and modeling - Elite networking - cultivation
barriers	Structural	Lack of proper training - Lack of teamwork – Enmity instead of constructive competition - Lobbying and discrimination - Lack of talent bank - Lack of national manager training program - Defective organizational chart of the Ministry of Health
	Individual and motivational	Conflicts of personal and organizational interests - Expansion of daily practice - One-dimensional faculty member - Lack of conscience - Lack of criticism
Achievements	Individual and structural excellence	Blossoming individual talents - Achieving organizational goals - Improving the quality of service provided to students
	Economic	Economic productivity - Industry closeness to university
	Educational and Research	Increasing student capacities - Elitism - Educational excellence - Research excellence
	political and social	Preventing brain drain - Creating empathy and consensus - Political benefits

Attributes

This theme consisted of two dimensions of managerial ability and moral excellence. In the managerial ability, the interviewees referred to concepts such as specialized knowledge and mastery of some management tools. "*Succession planning should be implemented. You can't just work with a blank letter.Managers are afraid of the powerful people under their control because they think they are taking their place. In fact, we need to nurture them to be better every day (participant 3)*".

In moral excellence dimension, ethical factors, self-health and compliance with law and management principles were identified as characteristics of a level five leader. "*The level 5 manager must be the most diligent himself in the effort to cultivate. The leader must be a perfect role model for others in all aspects, otherwise, nothing will be done to the personnel under the command (participant 1)*".

Solutions

This dimension consisted of three sub-themes including compliance with law and management principles, necessary incentives and meritocracy. In this research, faculty members referred to the law as a framework for guiding and preventing organizational diversion . "*Compliance with law and management principles was a good way to avoid personal interests for appointment of the level 5 leaders. One way to avoid management bias is the principle of meritocracy and the creation of temporary posts for managers. When a manager is appointed, it looks like he/she has a legal inheritance and can't cut it at all. Unfortunately, our managers are not replaced due to bad performance, they just move from one unit to another (participant 17)*".

"*We must put aside the conflict and think about the excellence of the system and the country. Many newly appointed managers replace one another and take a personal stand. There is no standard for promoting people in the organization The main criterion is friendship (participant 4)*".

Providing the necessary material and spiritual incentives to level 5 leaders will maintain sustainability, stability and health in the administrative system.

Special attention should be paid to the top managers of the organization. They have to be physically and spiritually comfortable in order to be able to do the important work. "*We must give material and spiritual incentives to leaders to work honestly and ensure the health of the organization. We are now engaged in the acquisition of research privileges for promotion, which is our main concern. That's why we ignore the main factors. Leaders must be free to think, and that's why they have to have special privileges (participant 2)*".

Moreover, proper modeling and finding successful examples accelerated the work and prevented mistakes made by the interviewees. "*We need to form specialized teams and send them to other countries to emulate their successful organizations in various fields (participant 10)*".

"*An elite network must be set up to foster leadership at the level five between the managers of the organizations and exchange experiences. I mean all managers must exchange experiences with their peers (participant 14)*".

Barriers

It included two sub-themes, structural and individual-motivational factors. In the structural dimension, some of the institutionalized problems in administrative systems, such as lack of long-term vision, proper training and teamwork in government agencies, were identified as the most important foundations in training level 5 leaders. There was also considerable criticism of the Ministry of Health's chart. The reason for this was to assign senior management positions to clinical physicians unilaterally. "*There are major flaws in the Ministry of Health's chart because the top organizational management positions are reserved for clinicians only. This means that if we have qualified managers with an acceptable level of education, they will not be able to grow in terms of organizational charts (participant 18)*".

On the individual dimension, some problems such as one-dimensionality of faculty members due to a specialized approach to scientific issues, lack of mastery in management and executive affairs, as well as lack of criticism due

to scientific self-esteem were identified as the most important personal barriers.

"We (faculty members) are unfortunately very one-dimensional. Most of us have specialized knowledge and have never sought management training. Management training is not planned for us, so we operate in a very one-sided way (participant 11)".

Achievements

It included four sub-themes, personal and structural excellence, economic, educational and research and political and social factors. The individual dimension included reaching the peak of self-actualization, and improving the quality of services provided to external and internal customers, the economic dimension included the closeness of industry to the university and the production of wealth, educational and research dimension included increasing the use of student potential, elitism and growth and excellence, the education and research dimension included balanced growth of education along with research and application of scientific teachings, and the political and social dimension included preventing the brain drain, creating a friendly atmosphere instead of unhealthy competition, as well as political calm and the general satisfaction of society.

"If the general atmosphere is appropriate, we will really have the talents that can flourish inside the country rather than migrate abroad and promote the country's cultural, social and political development (participant 5)".

It is no longer the case in the old days for a teacher to come to class with only personal thought and taste. Now you have to see what the community needs and what the problem is.

"There must be a real link between industry and the university and this tragic separation must be ended. This would not be possible without full leaders of level five on both the university and industry fronts (participant 6)".

"Find out how many problems there are at work right now that unintentionally infiltrate your home and family and deprive them of social and psychological comfort. Even some mismanagement at the macro level, has political implications.

Really, the role of the full manager mentioned in the discussion as the leader of level five is crucial (participant 14)".

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate and identify the concept of level 5 leadership among faculty members at Guilan University of Medical Sciences in 2019.

Surveys have shown that although Iranian universities were not in a position of excellence, some of the universities in the country have grown more than others due to the successful skills and strategies adopted by the leaders of these centers. Therefore, an important issue identified in these studies is the significant role of academic leadership to strive for excellence in the Iranian higher education system. One of the characteristics of successful academic leadership is the development of a culture of partnership and accountability among faculty members and students. Focusing on training and preparing the space for learning and professional development of staff and faculty members to make rapid and correct changes is also a key element of successful academic leadership. Offering creativity away from traditional practices, rewarding new ideas, outlining perspectives and aspirations for staff are important characteristics of successful academic leadership that is in line with the results of the current research (20).

In their research, Pourkarimi and Mirkamali showed that observing the behaviors and role models of organizational leaders can increase the empowerment of the followers. Adequacy, meritocracy and the provision of managerial posts to competent individuals far from any relationship are the key to successful leadership in transcendent organizations (21). Saatchi and Azizpour designed a conceptual model of effective Iranian academic leadership through a variety of studies, including team building, empowering individuals, self-assessment, having a vision, tremendous charisma, striving for continuous improvement of the university. Also included in this model are items such as honesty and integrity, scientific competence,

use of suggestion systems, helping colleagues, eliminating discrimination between colleagues and respecting justice in managerial decisions, overseeing all matters, granting authority, welcoming criticism for improving the organization, personal attraction, focusing on values and goals, team building, staff empowerment, inspiration and ontology, and firm belief in the goals of the university (22) which are consistent with the results of this study.

In the study by Shakour et al., the leadership styles and the effectiveness of administrators at Isfahan University of Medical Sciences were evaluated. In this study, the importance of training managers was emphasized. The majority of middle level managers of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences were of high academic level and had good management background but lacked the necessary management training and their dominant style was task-oriented. It was recommended, therefore, that formal and informal management courses should be offered to increase their effectiveness and that management posts should not be assigned solely on the basis of high and unrelated scientific evidence (23). People are in two categories. The first includes those who do not have the talent to lead the level five. The second consists of those who have the necessary ability and potential, and with the right training, their innate talent can flourish (14).

The research conducted by Izadi et al. showed that there is a negative relationship between leadership score and the level of interpersonal and intergroup conflict in the organization, meaning that with increasing quality of intergroup conflict, leadership quality decreases in some way. Overall, relationship-oriented leadership can be very helpful in reducing these conflicts (24).

In assessing the competency of the faculty in Islamic Azad University, Mashinchi et al identified the competencies of faculty members in competence skill parameters, ethical values, role, and personal and favorable statuses. Motivation and creativity, innovation, self-

management talent and adaptability in the personal dimension, perceptual, human and technical skills, problem solving and targeting in the skill dimension, and Islamic behavior, curriculum enhancement plan, educational evaluation, planning and counseling in the value dimension were all influential factors in faculty competency assessment model (25). The results of this study are also consistent with those of the present study.

In the research by Ghurunneh et al., the conceptual framework of faculty member development at Tehran University was investigated. Interpersonal communication, time management and punctuation, socializing, scientific and managerial skills, teamwork skills and helping colleagues were identified as organizational skills of faculty members (26). Managing support creates a relaxed environment for the staff. Having a creative and innovative leader provides a role model for subordinates to disseminate innovation within the organization. Studies have shown that in organizations with supportive atmosphere, open communication, partnership and open-mindedness, staff are more motivated and perform better (27).

Increasing creativity and innovation will improve the quality and quantity of services, reduce costs, avoid waste of resources, reduce bureaucracy, increase competition, efficiency and productivity and motivate employees and job satisfaction. Innovation in the healthcare sector is very important .Therefore, the existence of an appropriate platform for the growth of ideas is necessary (28). Unfortunately, the lack of suitable space for the creation and growth of innovation in Iran is wasting creative and innovative capabilities (29).

People who are more risk-averse and have higher ambiguity tolerance also show greater creativity and innovation (30) which confirms the present findings. Roberts et al showed that delegating authority and autonomy in decision-making to employees improves and enhances quality in organizational performance (31).

Factors such as mutual respect, creating an attractive work environment, employee

participation in affairs, direct communication between managers and employees, delegating affairs to subordinates, increasing motivation and providing quality services were identified. (32).

Conclusion

In the new age and in the struggle for competitiveness among societies, countries are striving to take into account the role of education, especially higher education, in national development and the promotion of knowledge and technology. The universities of medical sciences in each province are the executive arms of the Ministry of Health and are highly sophisticated in vertical, horizontal and geographical spheres due to geographical expansion and diversification of skills and jobs and qualifications of the personnel. Therefore, controlling this super organization for optimal and proper performance in Iranian society with Islamic values requires serious consideration in management affairs and the most important factor in the success of any organization is the leadership. Therefore, in order to improve this organization leadership, we need managers who are in tune with today's management models. From the faculty members' point of view, level five management should have special characteristics including managerial and ethical ability.

Given the individual and organizational barriers identified, it is necessary for senior managers in the Ministry of Health and other planners to provide the appropriate platform to train top level 5 managers in order to create excellence in the individual, economic, educational, research and political dimensions. The following suggestions are also given to train leaders at level five, Holding workshops and management courses for faculty members, Establishing a succession plan and a talent bank in all medical universities of the country, Paying attention to the selection of managers based on tangible scientific and personality criteria of Level 5 , Creating a national and provincial elite network to exchange experience, Encouraging top executives and modeling for others, Modifying the Ministry of Health's chart of meritocracy in

managing and preventing the unilateral appointment of managers. One of the limitations of this research is the impossibility of generalizing it to the whole country. Qualitative research does not claim to be generalizable, however, it is important for people who want to apply the results of the research because different provinces have different cultural, social and political conditions and different criteria for effective leadership can be identified and explained. Other limitations of this study included the high number of faculty members and the difficulty of planning for the interviews. It also seemed that some of these faculty members were doing self-censorship for some reason in transferring some of their experiences. However, it has been tried to overcome this problem by repeated questions and follow-up. The lack of studies on level 5 leadership in Iranian organizations was also one of the most important limitations.

Acknowledgments

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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