

Implementation of Character-Based Leadership in Improving the Quality of Higher Education Governance in Makassar City

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explain the role of character-based leadership in improving the quality of higher education management through the development of an innovative, responsive, creative, skilled, and cooperative academic community in implementing the Tridharma (Three Pillars of Excellence). The research method used is descriptive qualitative with observation, interview, and documentation techniques, as well as qualitative data analysis. The results show that higher education leadership is capable of transforming human resources, supporting facilities, and governance, although the technical capabilities of leaders are still low and social skills are not optimal. However, transformational leadership has been proven to encourage development through inter-institutional cooperation, the formation of a work culture, academic transparency, management collaboration, and increasing institutional competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is organized based on the principle of an open system, fostering academic culture and student creativity in learning. Universities are required to develop an innovative, responsive, creative, skilled, competitive, and cooperative academic community through the implementation of the Tri Dharma (three pillars): education and teaching, research, and community service. Furthermore, developing science and technology by ensuring equitable access and equitable distribution of quality higher education relevant to the interests of society for progress, independence, and prosperity requires a planned, directed, and sustainable arrangement of higher education, in accordance with Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education.

Leadership capability is a leader's ability to carry out their duties and responsibilities to achieve goals. According to Hersey, a leader must possess at least three leadership skills: (1) technical skills, (2) social skills, and (3) conceptual skills. In addition to these three skills, another factor that determines a leader's success and/or failure in carrying out their duties is the extent to which a leader maintains a firm commitment and consistently carries out their core duties and functions. Thus, the success and/or failure of a leader, particularly a university leader, depends on their commitment and consistency in implementing the vision and mission of the higher education institution they lead.

Technical competence refers to a leader's ability to use the knowledge, methods, and equipment necessary to carry out specific tasks, acquired through education, experience, and training. In theory, a leader should possess adequate technical competence, but the reality is that recruitment for appointment to certain positions often falls short of the required standards.

Social competence refers to a leader's ability to work through others, encompassing an understanding of motivation and the application of effective leadership. This competence requires a unique understanding by each leader in motivating subordinates. Regarding social competence, several previous studies have shown that university leaders, from the highest to the lowest levels, are very weak in providing service and responsibility for campus management. In some cases, this is due to environmental factors such as cleanliness, chaotic parking, inadequate campus security, and various other factors. This situation has become a complaint among campus residents, as existing leaders are unresponsive and/or incapable of mobilizing subordinates, and there is a lack of coordination between leaders to address the problems faced.

Conceptual competence is a leader's ability to understand the complexities of an organization and utilize this ability to align the work unit's activities within the organization's overall operations. Therefore, every leader must thoroughly understand the movements of their respective work units in carrying out their core duties and functions.

Each leader has unique and distinctive traits, habits, character, and personality, which distinguish them from others. This lifestyle will undoubtedly influence their behavior and leadership style. Thus, leadership is an aspirational force, a force of enthusiasm, and a creative moral force capable of influencing members or subordinates to change their attitudes so that they align with the

leader's desires and aspirations. In essence, a leader is a role model, a role model for those they lead.

This lifestyle will undoubtedly influence their behavior and leadership style, thus giving rise to several leadership styles. For example, charismatic, paternalistic, militaristic, autocratic, laissez-faire, populist, administrative, and democratic leadership styles. In reality, the challenges faced by these leadership styles have inherent weaknesses, particularly in higher education. As is well known, leaders must consistently motivate members of higher education organizations to improve their quality. However, if they must issue orders every time and in every situation, this will create difficulties. If every job well-executed requires orders from their leaders, and if orders from their leaders are not given, continuous improvement in performance quality will be difficult to achieve.

The higher education management system has become the focus of collaboration between groups of universities within a region, with a focus on quality improvement management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on character-based leadership in the context of higher education has been widely conducted. According to Muchlas Samani (2011), character education emphasizes the formation of moral and ethical values that serve as the foundation of leadership behavior. This is in line with Zuchdi (2013), who emphasized that character education models can serve as a reference for building integrity-based leadership in academic settings.

Furthermore, Zacher and Johnson (2015) highlighted that transformational leadership in higher education plays an important role in encouraging creativity, innovation, and academic community engagement. Alok (2017) also reinforced this by introducing the concept of Sattvika Leadership, which emphasizes integrity, wisdom, and service in leadership practices.

In the Indonesian context, Thoha (2012) pointed out that effective leadership is not only determined by technical skills but also by conceptual and social abilities in managing educational organizations. Meanwhile, Usman, Mappasere, & Razak (2024) underlined the importance of dynamic governance in building the resilience of educational institutions amid global changes.

Thus, this study enriches the existing literature by focusing on the implementation of character-based leadership in improving the governance quality of higher education in Makassar City, which is expected to provide both empirical and practical contributions to the development of university management in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

The approach used was qualitative, with a case study research design through descriptive analysis. Informants were determined using purposive sampling, which involves selecting key informants in advance and using a snowball technique (where the researcher selects one informant, then this informant refers to the next informant until the data is considered sufficient). Informants in this study were leaders at the top level (rectors and vice-rectors)

and mid-level (Deans, Bureau Heads, and Heads of Institutions) selected using purposive sampling.

This research focused on three universities in Makassar City: (1) Muhammadiyah University (Unismuh) Makassar; (2) Paulus Christian University (UKI) Makassar; and Makassar Islamic University (UIM). Based on this focus, the informants selected using purposive sampling primarily included leadership elements from the three universities involved in the decision-making and policy-making processes related to the quality of higher education management.

The data analysis technique used is inductive to the data obtained (data analysis from the field), namely the researcher went directly to the field to study the transformational leadership pattern in academic guidance and services at Unismuh, UIM and UKIP Paulus in accordance with applicable procedures and laws and regulations. The results of this study are not intended to compare the leadership pattern of one university with another, but merely to find out the character-based leadership of each university in an effort to increase its advantages and strengths in facing increasingly tight situations and competition, both nationally and internationally.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Technical Leadership Skills: Character-Based Leadership in Improving the Quality of Higher Education Management.

Technical skills are an element of maturity, related to knowledge or skills acquired through education, training, and experience. Consequently, management and academic services are inadequate, resulting in delays in the service process and administrative reporting, both in quality and quantity. The aforementioned problems result from university leaders' failure to adhere to the principles of needs assessment (job analysis) in the selection and recruitment of officials for specific positions or jobs. Consequently, officials recruited for certain positions lack a thorough understanding of their core duties and functions within the positions and jobs they hold.

Technical leadership skills are necessary and must be demonstrated, both for technical and professional work, functional positions, and managerial positions. It is a grave mistake for an organization, particularly a university, to ignore technical skills in a specific job. Technical skills, in this context, are essentially job analysis; the significant time required to teach all employees and organizational members to understand and carry out their core duties and responsibilities effectively and efficiently. A leader placed in a particular position or job should possess at least two technical abilities/skills, namely technical skills and managerial skills, as stated by Siagian that every leader, regardless of their level of work, always requires two types of skills, namely technical skills and managerial skills. According to Zacher and Johnson (2015), transformational leadership in higher education involves leaders who motivate their followers (e.g., employees or students) by acting as positive role models (idealized influence), communicating an attractive vision of the future (inspirational motivation), encouraging independent and creative thinking (intellectual stimulation), and being caring and nurturing (individualized consideration).

According to Banks (2008), conventionally, leaders play a role in showing the way, as well as their place at the forefront, guiding and directing, innovating, and having a vision for change and realizing it into reality. Based on the facts and data, research findings indicate that ethical leadership is positively related to moral voice, and moral efficacy mediates the relationship. This is important because the relationship between ethical leadership and moral efficacy depends on the congruence of leader-follower values. This mediated relationship is only effective under high leader-follower congruence. Demonstrating appropriate normative behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and promoting such behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making, is crucial.

- a. The increasing demand for ethical decisions and actions imposed at all levels of an organization suggests that ethical leadership can play a significant role in motivating employees to engage in morally sound behavior regarding ethical issues.
- b. Moral efficacy acts as an important cognitive mechanism in moral voice, indicating a more proximal target for moral behavior that can be promoted by ethical leadership training. Such training can focus on ways to increase employee beliefs about ethical behavior.
- c. Ethical leadership becomes more salient and more effective for employees whose values are consistent with those of their leaders. To facilitate followers' moral decisions and actions, organizations need to pay attention not only to the leader's ethics but also to the congruence between leaders and followers. The concept of creativity demands that leaders pay attention to creating a climate in the workplace that recognizes employee creativity.

2. Social Skills: Character-Based Leadership in Improving the Quality of Higher Education Management.

Regarding the social skills possessed by university leaders, from the rector level down to lower-level leaders, there is a lack of responsiveness, supervision, and coordination regarding organizational issues, and a lack of ability to mobilize subordinates to address existing problems. Indeed, the service role and responsibilities of leaders at universities are not functioning well, as mentioned above. This is inseparable from the very weak role and responsibility of leadership. Leaders are in a position to control their subordinates and are unable to respond to every problem. This is due to university leaders' inability to formulate policies and make decisions, and their unwillingness to take risks with policies and decisions to resolve organizational issues.

Based on interviews with key informants at the three universities discussed, few leaders are willing to take responsibility because responsibility is associated with risk. This is why many leaders often avoid it. However, this does not mean that responsibility should be avoided or that others should be made to take responsibility. This is what is meant by social skills, because after all, a leader's strength and authority lie in their responsibility, not their rhetoric. Therefore, anyone who dares to take responsibility must be able to formulate policies and make decisions for the benefit of the organization. A leader should

respond quickly to any problems that arise so that leadership tasks can be carried out more effectively.

Leaders are the spearhead that determines the success of an organization. The role of those subordinate to them is also important. However, it is the leader's command that will guide the organization's direction and goals. This is also true in higher education. The role of the rector and vice-rectors is seemingly key to the success of a university, in accordance with their respective fields of duties and responsibilities, so that the output, whether graduates, research, and innovation, can provide added value to the development of the nation and state through the university.

The Vice Rector II of UIM further explained that, as a lecturer, one might work eight hours a day, but as a rector, one must work up to a minimum of 12 hours a day. Even at home, one must be prepared to work. This means that, in essence, it's not an additional task. However, it involves benefits and incentives. For example, if a university leader becomes a professor, they will lose the honorary professorship allowance. Therefore, the impression that arises is that, from an administrative perspective, the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (Kemenpan-RB) refers to this as an additional task, given his primary role as a professor.

Effective leadership is currently essential for all organizations, especially universities. Leaders must not only influence their subordinates but also motivate them to work with all their abilities and potential to achieve organizational (university) goals, thereby creating a positive work atmosphere and culture. The secret to effective leadership is that a leader's greatest strength lies not in their power, nor in their intelligence, but in their inner strength or personality. Therefore, according to researchers, a leader's intelligence can be seen, among other things, in their human resource management. Human resource management can be achieved by empowering them. Human resources are the energy or power of an organization, and if managed well, will impact the quality of education in universities. Leaders in universities must be able to manage human resources effectively. One way to do this is by empowering human resources to improve the quality and quantity of the university. In reality, in some universities, leaders are still overwhelmed by the lack of human resources that are difficult to develop and develop.

3. Conceptual Capabilities of Character-Based Leadership in Improving the Quality of Higher Education Management.

Conceptual capabilities related to character-based leadership in improving the quality of higher education management, particularly at the three universities discussed: UIM, UKI Paulus, and Unismuh Makassar, demonstrate a variety of highly complex and intricate issues. This was acknowledged by the vice-chancellors interviewed by the researchers. These included listening to the concerns of campus residents, including academic, management, household, facilities and infrastructure, and the campus environment.

Agreed-upon work programs or activities, outlined in the university work plan, were subject to changes, and agreements reached in coordination meetings were not communicated to faculties and other work units. The primary cause of

this is the inability of university leaders to demonstrate exemplary leadership qualities, with their commitment being weak and their implementation poor. This is indicated by leaders acting dishonestly in carrying out their leadership duties, exemplifying the values they have built together.

In line with this, according to Surbakti, university leaders who exhibit poor commitment to their leadership duties are those who avoid responsibility and frequently neglect their duties. Therefore, this poor leadership commitment is evident in the chaotic leadership system and the lack of sound and thorough planning, as reflected in the work program or activity plans for the university, faculties, and other work units produced by the aforementioned coordination meeting.

Leadership requires not only a collection of tutorials but also an understanding of personality, personal attitudes, and reflective experiential learning. The Head of Human Resources at UIM further emphasized that to become a good leader and be desired by everyone, both within the organization and externally, leaders must do the following four things:

- a. Learn: Leaders must be open and willing to learn from subordinates, previous leaders, and parties outside the organization.
- b. Dialogue: Communication both internally and externally, creating a model of equal communication.
- c. Support: Always demonstrate a desire to support and assist everyone, both within and outside the organization.
- d. Innovate: Encourage and develop innovativeness within the organization and outside.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Higher education institutions can transform all areas, including human resources, supporting facilities, and university governance, to meet regulatory demands and societal needs. Facts and data show that university leaders' technical capabilities in carrying out their core duties and functions are still very low. This is because university leaders' selection and recruitment processes are not based on needs assessments (job analysis).
2. Transformational leaders are able to positively influence their environment, encourage subordinates to be creative and innovative, implement change quickly and with quality, and transform to become future leaders. However, in terms of social skills, service duties, and responsibilities, university leaders have not been optimal in carrying out their core duties and functions.
3. Transformational leadership in higher education can encourage development efforts through several strategies, namely building inter-institutional cooperation, establishing a work culture, fostering academic transparency, fostering collaboration in institutional management, and creating and enhancing competitiveness. In this regard, university leaders are unable to resolve the problems they face due to their low conceptual capabilities and weak ability to carry out their core duties and functions.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

This study has several limitations that need to be considered for future research. First, the research scope only covered three universities in Makassar City, so the findings cannot be generalized to all higher education institutions in Indonesia. Second, the method used was qualitative, which means that data interpretation is highly dependent on the subjectivity of the researcher and the informants. Third, this study did not explore in-depth quantitative aspects regarding the influence of character-based leadership on institutional performance indicators, such as accreditation, publications, and graduate competitiveness.

Therefore, future research is expected to expand the scope of the objects, apply a mixed-methods approach, and measure more specifically the impact of character-based leadership on the quality indicators of higher education.

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