



TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP; AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE NON-STATE HIGHER EDUCATION INDUSTRY IN SRI LANKA. WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ABC COMPANY PVT LTD

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ABSTRACT

Transformational leadership is aspired to implement change and novelty which is important to focus on service innovation. The study was focused on three key research objectives 1) to explore the practice of transformational leadership, 2) to identify features of transformational leaders and 3) to provide suitable suggestions and recommendations for improvement. In order to conduct the study an analytical framework was developed using key dimensions identified by former studies, the study was conducted using inductive reasoning through a qualitative research approach taking a case-study of a selected non-state higher education institution. A sample of the study 12 interviewees have been chosen and thematic analysis was conducted. Based on the analysis it was identified that majority of the interviewees perceive that transformational leadership is practiced at their organization as idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration are accepted by all to be practiced in work setting. Further, making effort to align with its timely relevance the ability of the leaders to be visionary and effectively communicate has been emphasized. As the features of transformational leaders' intrapersonal features such as; innovation, creativity, challenge-orientation, visionary, optimism and productivity and interpersonal features such as; mentorship, emotional intelligence, harmony, walk the talk, enthusiasm and inclusion were identified. Further as key areas of suggestions organizational, managerial and leadership level improvements were provided. The study concludes that in order to assure successful transformational leadership in non-state higher education sector in Sri Lanka the effective internal practices, comprehensive policy measures and continuous improvement is important.

KEYWORDS- Education service, Non-state higher education, Transformational leadership

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Higher education industry is considered as one of the leading service industries in the economy of Sri Lanka. Being equipped by educational professionals, think tanks and industrialists who contribute to the development of the human capital it is one of the most influential industries for an economy. At present the higher education industry has today become one of the key industries that the global economies consider to be vital and is invested on. 'Over 235 million students were enrolled in higher education in the world in 2020, more than doubling the 100 million students enrolled in 2000' (UNESCO, 2022). As global statistics provided the industries cater to the higher education service facilitation bridging the right to education and access to all. Hence, the present role of academic leaders in the higher education setting is considered as an important area of concern which enhances the overall industry and the workforce.

Problem Identification

The higher education institutions are perceived to be complex organizations operating under mandate policies with regular changes that create a need for perceptive leaders at each level to sustain their continuity and growth (Mews, 2019). Hence, the role of leadership to help organizations deal with such changing contexts is considered to be of timely importance. The nature of leadership in higher education have been seen to be somewhat sparse dealing with the competitive scenarios (Smith, B.L. & Hughey, A.W., 2006). While Braun et al, (2016) argued that as leaders in the academic context challenges such as autonomy, change and uncertainty constantly prevailed for which the creativity and innovation is needed. Transformational leadership is considered as the leadership that seek to create new ideas and novel perspectives to set a new path of growth and prosperity in their organization (Korejan, M.M. & Shahbazi, H., 2016). Hence, the study identified the existing knowledge gap that prevail in the context of transformational leadership in the non-state higher education institutions in Sri Lanka and adopted the exploratory study on identification of the importance of the leadership and the key features of a transformational leader as a knowledge contribution towards the field.



Research Objectives

- RO1- To explore the importance of transformational leadership in non-state higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.
- RO2- To identify the key features of a transformational leader in the non-state higher education institutions in Sri Lanka.
- RO3- To provide suggestions and recommendations for future improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership and transformational leadership

Leadership is fundamentally the ability to form and change the perspectives and attitudes of the individuals, whether informal or formal situation Leadership is the process of influencing others to achieve a common goal or objective. Yukl (2021) defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives". Further, as Hemakumar (2011) provided the need for proper awareness of the availability of different leadership styles and selection of the most suitable style is an important decision in the context of Sri Lanka.

Transformational leadership; is a leadership style coined by Burns (1978) which focused on taking an inspirational focus that inspire, empower and aim to develop others. As Deng et al, (2022) stated transformational leadership is identified to have different positive outcomes such as performance, psychological empowerment creativity and overall satisfaction. As Manu (2022) provided transformational leadership does not limit to a style but it is considered in achieving the overall success as a tool to master. Further, other studies conducted on the transformational leadership calls for the need of successful change initiation at personal levels. As the study conducted by Baker et al, (2023) provided the success of work engagement and job performance depend on the transformational leadership behaviors such as intellectual stimulation and individual consideration.

Dimensions and features of Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership refers to the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration (Bass, 1999). According to Rafferty & Griffin (2004) there are five dimensions identified namely; vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, and personal recognition. Tregor, et al (2023) provided that transformational leadership has a significant positive impact on the company's competitiveness. Transformational leadership can help increase productivity, drive innovation, increase employee satisfaction, and improve company reputation and competitiveness. It is also about creating a vision, setting goals, and providing direction for individuals or groups to follow. As noted by Almonawer (2021), "leadership is about relationships, and it's about taking the time to build those relationships". Transformational leadership is characterized by certain qualities such as integrity, vision, and empathy.

Transformational leadership in higher education institutions

As Meepage (2024) provided between all types of non-state higher education institutes in Sri Lanka, they have the capacity to enroll 50,000 to 60,000 GCE A/L qualifying students per year. This is 42 per cent more than the students that find admission in the state universities. Transformational leadership helps young people to connect their individual experiences with the bigger picture, which facilitates their understanding of the world, their place in it, and their responsibilities to it (Alanti et al, 2023). Therefore, it is evident that there is a need for transformational leadership as it is considered as an important area in education industry.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts interpretivism as the research philosophy to undertake and inductive research approach adopted through the qualitative research. Accordingly, the study developed an analytical framework to attain the research objectives using the mono-method adopted. According to the context of non-state higher education sector there are 28 non-state higher education institutions recognized as degree-awarding bodies. The purposive sampling technique is adopted to conduct the overall study and selected 12 participants from the ABC Company Pvt Ltd to conduct the research. The first-hand information, primary data will be identified through the semi-structured interviews and observations. Based on the key areas identified by the review of literature the semi-structured interview has been designed. In order to perform the data analysis focused on the qualitative research a thematic analysis is followed.



DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Sample Description

Interviewee	Gender	Age category	Position	Highest Educational Qualification	No. of years of experience
Interviewee 1	Female	20-30 years	Academic	Masters	1-3 years
Interviewee 2	Male	30-40 years	Administration/ Management	PhD	5-9 years
Interviewee 3	Female	30-40 years	Administration/ Management	Masters	1-3 years
Interviewee 4	Female	20-30 years	Academic	Masters	1-3 years
Interviewee 5	Female	20-30 years	Academic	Bachelors	Less than 1 year
Interviewee 6	Female	40-50 years	Administration/ Management	PhD	3-5 years
Interviewee 7	Male	40-50 years	Academic	Masters	3-5 years
Interviewee 8	Female	20-30 years	Administration/ Management	Masters	3-5 years
Interviewee 9	Female	20-30 years	Administration/ Management	Bachelors	1-3 years
Interviewee 10	Male	30-40 years	Academic	Masters	1-3 years
Interviewee 11	Female	20-30 years	Administration/ Management	Masters	1-3 years
Interviewee 12	Male	20-30 years	Academic	Masters	1-3 years

Table 1 Demographic details of the sample (Source: Author, 2024)

From the 12 selected interviewees; there 4 males (33% of the sample) and 8 females (67% of the sample). Under age classification 7 participants (58%) are between 20-30 years, 3 participants (25%) are between 30-40 years and 2 participants (17%) are between 40-50 years. A combination of 6 academic staff and 6 staff from the administration/ management have been selected to ensure a balance on the sample selected. Based on the educational qualifications there are 2 PhD holders (17%), 8 (66%) with Master’s degree qualification and 2 (17%) with Bachelor’s degree qualifications. Based on the no. of years of experience there is 1 (8%) with 5-9 years of experience, 3 (25%) with 3-5 years of experience and 7 (58%) with 1- 3 years of experience and 1 (8%) with less than 1 year experience.

Importance of transformational leadership in non-state higher education institution

Transformational leadership is considered as the leadership that allows change, innovation and novelty emerge from its followers (Almonawer, 2021). To make the transformational leap in the work setting a success a proper understanding of the transformational leadership and the manner in which it is practiced is important. According to Burns (1978) & Bass (1999) there are four key dimensions of transformational leadership idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration. The thematic analysis is conducted based on the interviewee views and opinions expressed. These provide a clear overview of the interviewee point of view focused on the four dimensions.

Idealized influence

The belief of leaders to be mentors and friendly towards the subordinate whom they admire respect and trust is focused here. Majority of the interviewees 11 out of 12 interviewees confirm the need for a supportive leadership that walk the talk and enhance the overall work environment.

“My idea of a leader is a person who bring about change, he who can’t handle change can’t do greater things’ (Interviewee, Administration/ Management)

The perception of a leader specially in the higher education context is to enhance the overall service delivery as it is a responsible and high-quality service necessity that is being provided. In such a sense, handling change is an important part that the leadership need to be successful in.

Inspiration

The inspirational ability a leader has to allow followers to take a goal-oriented approach at work to allow positive challenge emerge is important. All interviewees 12 of 12 interviewee sample consider leader’s ability to inspire and deliver positive change is important.



“I prefer to have a leader who I can look at and feel inspired! We shape lives of our learners we can’t make a mistake we need a proper leadership to keep us on track!” (Interviewee, Academic) In the higher education institutions, the ability to be inspiration and as the interviewee state to shape the lives of the learner is important.

Intellectual Stimulation

The ability to influence the manner in which subordinates make their decisions that allow them to look beyond the horizon and think in a strategic manner is considered. 10 out of 12 interviewees are in the notion that their leaders facilitate them to think beyond the existing situation which facilitate them to perform in a better manner. *‘My boss makes quick & witty decisions. But they turn out to be the exact solution. She always advises to think far ahead!’ (Interviewee, Administration/Management)*

The statement provide evidence of the existence of leaders that challenge the existing status quo; it is imperative to have such kind of leaders that allow to think outside the box, create innovative disruptions and make change a part of their overall process of leading.

Individualized Consideration

As the final dimension the individualized consideration is taken it focus on the practice of guiding and supporting each individual member in the team or organization. 12 out of 12 interviewees are on the perception that their leaders focus on the individuals and move forward.

‘The capacity to stay in the higher education industry comes from the support of the respective leaders. It makes one confident to be competitive in all endeavors’ (Interviewee, Academic)

Those leaders who think of the subordinate in an individual level identify the manner in which they need to be kept engaged and empowered. The faith the particular leader has allow the individual subordinate to perform well and leaders to fine-tune the manner in which the individuals are managed.

Hence, as the study identified majority of the interviewees have considered idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual simulation and individual considered to be key dimensions that are available and need to be practice simultaneously in the non-state higher education setting. This aligns with the research findings of former studies done on the transformational leadership (Almonawer, 2021; Bass, 1999; Burns, 1978). Moreover, it facilitate the understanding that the need to be visionary and effective communication (Rafferty, A.E. & Griffin, M., 2004) has also been considered to be important in such setting. This clearly provide evidence that transformational leadership is practiced at non-state higher education industry in Sri Lanka and the need for such transformational leaders to enhance the overall industry.

Features of a transformational leader

Intrapersonal level features	Intrapersonal level features
- Innovation	- Mentorship
- Creativity	- Emotional intelligence
- Challenge-orientation	- Harmony
- Visionary	- Walk the talk
- Optimism	- Enthusiasm
- Productivity	- Inclusion

Table 2 Features of transformational leaders (Source: Author,2024)

As the former area of discussion provided that the transformational leadership exists in the non-state higher education industry taking the case study. The leaders who focus on promoting transformational leadership are different from other leadership styles as they focus on key areas; as the study has identified innovation, creativity, challenge-orientation, visionary, optimism and productivity are key intrapersonal features. According to Deng et al, (2022) the focus on visionary and challenge-orientation has been considered as key features of importance while Braun et al, (2016) discussed its importance in different organizational settings. These clearly aligned the findings with the former studies.

As the next set of features; the interpersonal level features has been identified these features provide a clear overview on the manner in which the transformational leaders need to work with others. Accordingly, mentorship -to guide and support the team, emotional intelligence- to be empathetic and understanding, harmony- to resolve conflicts and ensure mutual understanding, walk the talk- to be exemplary and transparent, enthusiasm- to be self-driven and motivated and inclusion- to work with everyone. Transformational leaders are identified to be important and change-driven whilst making the team contributions stable and engaged (Tregor, T., Johannes, J.R.,



Jaya, R.I.K. and Thasimmim, S.N., (2023). Further to facilitate such it is important to ensure that the employees are seen, recognized and heard. These features which enable the such are considered important in the higher education setting to allow continuous development.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The need for transformational leadership in non-state higher education industry has been considered important as it allow to create innovative change towards excellence in overall quality education service delivery. However, as the problem statement identified the ability to tackle change and move forward is a key challenge that affect the competitive advantage of the non-state higher education industry which in the context of Sri Lanka has as existing knowledge and evidence gap. Therefore, to fill this existing research gap the formulation of a qualitative study based on a leading education provider was thus done. As per the findings of the study it has been identified that majority of the interviewees consider the transformational leadership to be important in the context of the higher education industry, while as key dimensions of transformational leaders they have identified idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation, or individualized consideration and supportive leadership to be key dimensions of the non-state higher education industry of Sri Lanka. focus on the organizational, managerial and individual level.

Recommendations

Organizational level

Promote a learning culture which allow progression and continuous improvement a part of the overall organization at each level. Enable cross-functional interactions to identify and explore beneficial future orientations through effective bottom-up leadership.

Managerial level

Streamline best practices to allow change as a key factor of culture which will avoid the fear of unknown. Allow quality cells, information management systems to enable the free flow of full information which will enhance the manner in which the overall work is to be implemented.

Individual level

Focus on the interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions and environmental explorations to identify the key change agents as well as to develop futuristic insights to achieve intended development.

Future research

In order to enhance and establish a more generalized focus on these areas it is important to take a quantitative assessment to identify its impact on future research. Further, the assessment was carried out taking the subordinates to assess the nature of leadership that is required in their leaders and be transformational leaders in future studies focus on leaders themselves and the other stakeholders of the non-state higher education industry will be important.

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