



## Leadership within Organizations: An Educational Organization Perspective

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**Abstract :** This paper represents a review of the key leadership perspectives within organizations, particularly from an educational organization perspective. The review of literature highlights three key areas for consideration – power dynamics related to leadership, ethical leadership and strategic leadership. Practical recommendations are provided for adoption in educational organizations with areas for further research highlighted in brief.

**IndexTerms – Leadership, educational organizations, university,**

### I. INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to understand the key areas of organizational leadership from the perspective of educational organizations. The education industry is a complex industry in which leadership is exercised to guide organizations to not only profit seeking ventures but also towards the betterment of society. Visionary attitudes and the belief that educational institutions are places for learning as well as showcasing value for educational institutions' human resources are common traits exhibited by leaders to bring about educational change (Sax & Glalamas, 2017). Therefore, leadership expressed within the context of educational institutions has its own set of challenges. Leaders must not only derive power from existing power bases and influence followers to achieve organizational objectives, but must also do so in a manner that serves a higher purpose.

### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Power and influence tactics

Power is a complex topic in any organization and this is more so within the educational institution. It is a tool used in organizations daily as the absence of power relations would lead to organizations ceasing to exist (Zogjani, et al., 2014). The great management expert, Henry Mintzberg, described power as being derived from the relationships between internal and external coalitions, where influencers control the organizations without actively managing them (Mintzberg, 1984). Power and how organizational members influence each other within the organization are determinants of the power dynamics within the organization itself. The capacity of one individual to influence another has multiple sources and can originate differently depending on the structure and design of the organization (Yukl, 2013).

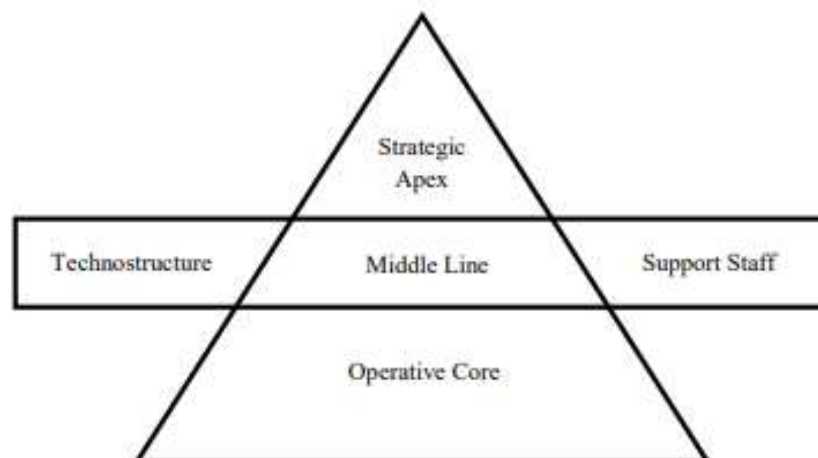


Figure 1: Mintzberg's Organizational Structure (Lunenburg, 2012)

Mintzberg highlighted the position of leadership within his model of organizational structure. The strategic apex, as shown in Figure 1 above, consists of chief executives and directors (Liu, 2009) and is the focus of leadership. The purpose of the strategic apex is to ensure that the organization consistently adheres to its mission whilst managing relationships in the environment within which the organization operates in (The Open University, 2019). The strategic apex of the organization remains the ultimate source of legitimate power within the organization. However, organizations also have complex political structures, which allow people to further their own personal interests (Zaleznik, 1970), resulting in individuals within the organization deriving power from multiple sources. Without proper management, power dynamics of the organization can shift away from legitimate sources and lead to adverse outcomes. This is more so within the educational institution environment as where expertise can be a source of power. For example, school administrators utilized legitimate power sources effectively but also utilized expert, coercive, referent and reward powers (Argon & Dilekçi, 2016).

Power Classification	Source	Description
Position Power	Legitimate Power	Broadly described as a power originating from formal authority over work matters.
	Reward Power	Reward power comes from formalized power structure to direct resources in the form of rewards to a target person within the organization.
	Coercive Power	Ability to exert power over subordinates via punishments.
	Information Power	Control of information yields power and is primarily controlled by managers, which enables them to have access to opportunities.
	Ecological Power	Referring to control over the physical environment and technology, to indirectly influence people.
Personal Power	Referent Power	Originates from a desire to please agents in the organization that are driven by feelings of loyalty, personal admiration, or affection.
	Expert Power	Derived from expertise and task-relevant knowledge. Dependencies are increased if people in the organization have no access to such expertise, relying on a particular agent instead.

Table 1: Different Power Sources (adapted from Yukl, 2013)

Sources of power, as observed from Table 1 above, are not exclusive to one another and may not always be contained within formal power structures. Hence, power, over other factors, is intertwined with the leadership process (Patrick, 2012) as the usage of power sources are able to influence followers to achieve organizational objectives. Differing organizational structures could result in power being distributed in different ways which in turn also may affect the leadership process. For example, vertical hierarchies are typically associated with more power but leaders require a variety of power sources to conduct themselves well (Zogjani, et al., 2014). For an organization to produce successful outcomes, there needs to be a balance between the utilization of power, politics and employee empowerment (Somoye, 2016). As such, power and influence may follow social exchange theory in this sense. Individuals within the organization may increase cooperation within a group to achieve a goal in exchange for support from the leadership (Zou, et al., 2015). The generic model of social exchange to explain this is in Figure 2 below:

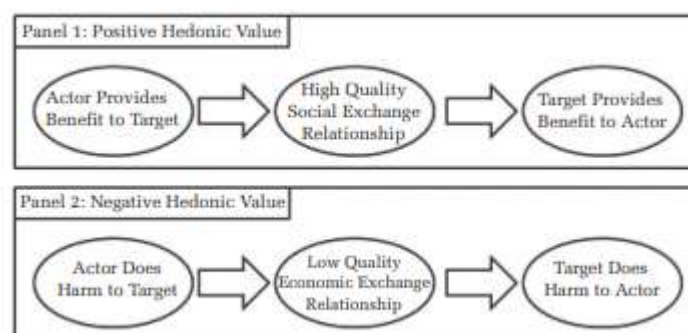


Figure 2: Model for Social Exchange (Cropanzano, et al., 2017)

Social exchange theory posits a cost benefit analysis in any exchange between two persons (Tulane University, 2018) where resources will continue to flow if something of value is continuously being exchanged (Emerson, 1976). The model emphasizes sources of power such as expert power and authority which may drive social exchange between leaders and followers instead over other sources of power (Yukl, 2013). As such, power and influence are highly relevant factors that warrant investigation in any organizational situation involving educational institutions. The power dynamics within the organization would have an impact on the leadership approach adopted in order to achieve intended objectives of the organization.

## 2.2 Ethical leadership

Leadership in any organization in the absence of ethical considerations can be detrimental to stakeholders (Ahmad, et al., 2017). In recent history, failures in ethical leadership have been pushed to the forefront. Such failures can deeply hurt an organization and may negatively impact the perception of the corporation resulting employees feeling uneasy about the organization they work for (Western Governors University, 2019). Leaders need to overcome ethical challenges by adopting ethical leadership practices in their execution of their preferred leadership style. Ethical leadership in organizational management balances the relationship between moral values, leaders' obligations and other leadership factors (Alshammari, et al., 2015).

This is reflected in results of previous research where 71% of professionals would be willing to reduce their compensation to be employed by organizations that better reflect their values whilst 39% of professionals stated that they would leave their roles if requested to perform anything unethical (Western Governors University, 2019). The adoption of ethical leadership seems to be a precursor to maintaining stakeholder wellbeing and ensuring the organization benefits from the best talent. As stakeholders rely on management to address moral concerns, ethical leaders need to use their role to encourage a shared responsibility as well as appropriate behaviour among organizational members (Stouten, et al., 2012). The failure to do so could result in ethical failures in leadership that may yield negative results. Ethical failures in leadership have been traced to a preoccupation with the self (Knights & O'Leary, 2005). When faced with pressures to remain competitive, it is easier for the lines of ethical behaviour to become frayed (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). Such external pressures may motivate leaders to perform unethical actions for short term gains.

To reduce the instances of ethical failure, leaders should look to continually develop themselves. This includes viewing all business decisions through an ethical lens, increasing awareness of how leadership decisions affect others, displaying high virtue and maintaining a consistent sense of worth whilst making decisions (Nikoi, 2008). They may also choose to play the role of an ethical leader, as shown in Table 2:

Key Characteristic of Leadership	Ethical Role of Leader
Raising awareness of values and ethics	Mentioning common values regularly and making sure that these are internalized
Sharing responsibility	Supervising himself and others with whom he shares responsibility so that they all act ethically
Being a role model	Being honest and admirable
Regarding values while making a decision	In all procedures regarding ethical values
Training about ethics and values	Helping colleagues to acquire trust and necessary skills
Give an opportunity to ethical people	Give priority to the people with a high ethical perception

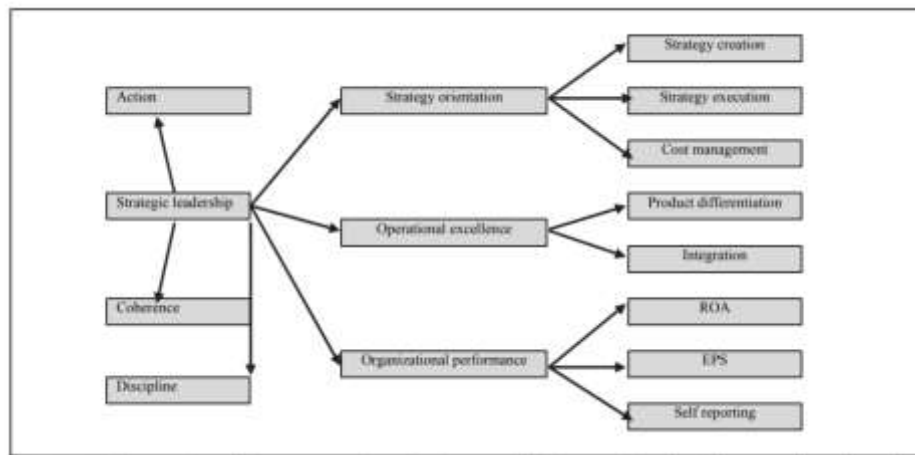
**Table 2:** Key Characteristics of Ethical Leadership Roles (Özan, et al., 2017)

In an educational setting, leaders can opt to use leadership styles that can provide ethical outcomes. For example, universities expect ethical leadership to be portrayed. However, leaders may be motivated to adopt unethical practices to maintain legitimacy within the organization due to pre-existing beliefs and pressures from the external environment (Hanson, 2009). Styles of leadership such as servant leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership and ethical leadership may be developed through formal training and role modelling to achieve ethical leadership objectives (Bhargavi & Omar, 2016), which can in turn lead to better outcomes.

## 2.3 Strategic leadership role

Organizational strategy is a key focus of organizational leaders (Rahman, 2019). The strategic aspect of leadership does not easily manifest in organizations, as statistics show that less than 10% of leaders exhibit strategic skills (Kabetu & Iravo, 2018). As organizations encounter changing circumstances in the external environment, leaders must be accepted as strategic leaders to influence organizational members and enact change (Chanpoom & Intrawong, 2019). The strategic leadership role is significant and is carried out by the organization's senior members. The organization's success is determined by its strategies and how much senior leadership can effect necessary changes in the organization to implement organizational strategies (Yukl, 2013). Strategic leadership has been shown to be directly and positively associated with organizational performance, operational strategy and strategic orientation (Rahman, et al., 2018). The associations are shown in the Figure 3 below:





**Figure 3:** Strategic Leadership Associations (Rahman, et al., 2018)

Strategic leadership is a key factor as to why firms are competitive and profitable (Kabetu & Iravo, 2018). The effectiveness of the firm's strategic leadership is a significant element of firm success. Whilst this may be the case, strategic leaders must be aware of the external environment the organization operates in, as it may impact organizational performance (Jaleha & Machuki, 2018). Strategy within the context of education leadership has often been overlooked despite the fact that strategic leadership is gaining relevance with regard to school improvement (Carvalho, et al., 2021). In the past, school effectiveness has been positively correlated with the deployment of strategic leadership (Deeboonmee & Ariratana, 2014). Hence, strategic leadership can be used within the education setting by adopting a strategic leadership program to provide a leadership framework that builds capacity within an educational institution such as schools (Cherian, 2015).

### III. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 3.1 Power and influence tactics

The usage of power to exert influence is an importance part of leadership. There exists many sources of power within an organization that can be used by higher levels of leadership to allow to leaders to exert their influence (Nikoloski, 2015). The literature review reveals that sources of power are diverse but originate from the strategic apex of the organization. Educational institutions may have formalized organizational structures that result in legitimate power being distributed throughout the organization. However, as highly educated members of society, other sources of power are may distort this distribution.

To overcome this, educational institutions such as schools and universities could implement policies to encourage the development of expert power among organizational members. Tapping onto the strength of expertise could yield better organizational outcomes as such potential may be hidden in the labyrinth of complex organization structures. Expert power sources that do not recognize their position over subordinates may become mere followers and fail to provide any leadership to positively impact the behaviours of others (Goncalves, 2013). Further, expertise is non-coercive in nature and may induce cooperative behaviours among team members (Sahadev, 2005). Research has shown that expert power has a positive influence on satisfaction among employees and could result in more acceptance of decisions among staff (Kim & Guan, 2008). Therefore, from a managerial perspective, educational organizations could look into developing policies that will encourage participation from expertise in the leadership process instead of purely relying on existing formal power structures.

#### 3.2 Ethical leadership practices

Ethical leadership can make or break an organization. Leadership practices affect organizational performance and usage of this style can improve employee performance (Alshammari, et al., 2015). As such, in striving for more ethical leadership, educational institutions should consider the adoption of authentic leadership as this style of leadership focuses on the leader being true to their core beliefs by acting in a manner that is rooted in good ethical intent (Nikolic & Halvorsen, 2017). Authentic leadership practices can be promoted by embedding a culture of ethics into the educational institution through a formalized ethics program. Research has provided evidence that formalized ethics programs within organizations actively prevent unethical actions (Sekerka, 2009). Formal policies and ethical programs can be sequenced in manner of priority to result in a better outcome. The proposed sequence of implementation should focus on implementing an ethical code followed by training, communication, accountability policies, monitoring and auditing policies, investigation and corrective policies, establishing an ethics officer role as well as an ethics reporting line and finally incentive policies (Kaptein, 2014). Educational institutions may look to adopt the suggested sequence to promote ethical leadership through authentic practices to drive the organization forward. Ethical competency criteria should also be appropriately outlined to ensure leaders develop the right competencies in the future (SHRM Foundation, 2013).

#### 3.3 Strategic leadership practices

Strategic leaders need to constantly assess the external environment if they want to drive organizational performance. This can be difficult to achieve in practice. In addition, the internal environment also plays a key role. Organizations are not able to survive without meeting the needs of stakeholders and this can only be attained by ensuring that the organization's existing mission is aligned to the external environment (Maghroori & Rolland, 1997). In this sense, strategic leadership is absolutely vital. Formalized structures within educational institutions may imply a distribution of power dynamics that is centralized where power is derived from legitimate sources. Literature has also revealed that strategic leadership is often centralized at the strategic apex of the

organization. In order to move educational institutions to the next level, a distributed leadership model may be considered to empower other members within the organization to lead strategic objectives. In a university setting, mobilizing shared wisdom and common sense among academic and non-academic members of the institution can create synergy (Göksoy, 2015). This empowerment of expertise within the educational institution could be of great benefit as distributed leadership styles have been shown effective within this context (Sibanda, 2018). Therefore, by distributing the burden of strategic leadership away from the strategic apex of the organization, it may lessen the burden of top management and senior leaders and encourage ownership of strategic goals at all levels.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The concept of leadership within organizations remains a topic of much debate. Within educational organizations, there exists unique power structures, ethical considerations and strategic issues that will continue to take place as the years go by. However, through proper planning, educational institutions can utilize leadership concepts to encourage better outcomes for their business. Through the deployment of expert power, educational organizations can create synergy among their well educated members to propel the business forward. Meanwhile, ethical leadership programs can be implemented to drive the organization's altruistic motives as well as enhance business performance. Finally, the distribution of the strategic leadership duties among organizational members is a recommendation that could yield significant benefits in the long term. Further research should be undertaken to explore the relationship between these factors and determine the what extent they would impact educational organizations in different forms (e.g., universities, schools, colleges, tuition centers etc.).

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