

Higher Education: A Case Study of Leadership at the Royal University of Bhutan

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Abstract

Effective leadership is key to any organisational success including higher education institutions. This paper assesses the different aspects of leadership in the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) using Bryman's 13 Key Behaviors of Effective Leaders. Secondary data from Organisational Behaviour Survey 2015 was used. It covered 548 respondents from eight colleges and Office of the Vice Chancellor. A simple aggregate analysis was used to draw inferences. Findings show that employees have generally rated high in the way they communicate broader direction - vision and mission, treatment of staff in a fair manner, being approachable, and building harmonious relationship with colleagues. However, ratings are lower on engagement of staff in planning processes, providing constructive feedback, delegating decision-making authority and ensuring coordinated approach to planning and implementation. Based on the assessment, the paper offers suggestions for a system of rigorous leadership training that will continue to nurture the strength of existing leadership.

Key words: Leadership, Higher Education Leadership; Royal University of Bhutan; Academic Leadership.

Introduction

Leadership is an essential part of any organization. Its influence on betterment or deterioration of the health of an organisation is uncontested. As a Chinese saying goes, "fish rots from its head", many look at leaders as central to the success or failure of an organisation. His Majesty the King of Bhutan, too, shares the belief in building strong leadership in the public service to drive the country forward. Accordingly, it has led to the establishment of the Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) in 2013, Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS) in 2018. The institution currently offer various leadership courses to public servants at different levels. The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC, 2016) captures His Majesty's Royal Vision by stating that good leadership is shown to have the single biggest impact on the performance of organisations. It, therefore, identified leadership development as one of the five major areas of civil service reforms since 2015.

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RUB was established in 2003 and operated like any other bureaucratic agency. However, in order to allow greater flexibility for effective response to changing needs, it was granted autonomy in 2011. Currently RUB has eight colleges located in different places. Altogether it has 9652 students (Royal University of Bhutan [RUB], 2018), 523 academics and 459 administrative staff (RUB, 2017). The autonomous status that RUB has gained offers a lot of flexibility to transform itself and leaves the entire fate of the organisational success to its leaders. Therefore, leadership capability at RUB needs to evolve accordingly as they are required to lead the colleges like leading any autonomous universities in the world. Hendrickson, Lane, Harris, and Dorman (2013) share that academic leaders must understand to not only manage but also to lead their institution(s). Existing literatures indicate the need to enhance leadership in RUB. For instance, the annual report of the RUB (2015) highlights the need for leadership development. In addition, the lack of college leadership to support academics has been identified as a challenge to promote research – which is one of the core mandates of RUB (Sherab & Schuelka, 2019). It, therefore, calls for assessment of leadership capacity to identify specific areas in which RUB will need to enhance its leadership skills.

It may be argued that due to overwhelming agenda for change in many other areas, significance of leadership development has been overlooked. A PhD dissertation, the only study on RUB leadership, also emphasises the need to carry out a comprehensive study on leadership phenomena (Gyeltshen, 2015). This study, therefore, becomes the first of its kind to holistically assess leadership aspects in RUB. It is an attempt to contribute to the policy deliberations and kindle academic discussions about leadership development at the RUB, which is lacking at the moment.

The study aims to assess current leadership capacity at the RUB towards enhancing organisational success. It mainly attempts to seek answers to the following questions:

1. What is the state of leadership capacity at the RUB?
2. What aspects of leadership do the employees appreciate?
3. What are the leadership aspects that employees perceive poorly?

The paper begins by discussing the literature on the significance of leadership and traits that make leaders effective. It then discusses the methodology followed by discussion on findings. The paper also suggests areas for improvement in leadership and share possible solutions for implementation.

Literature Review

Universities play a crucial role in the development of society. Scholars argue that universities are centers of innovation in economic and social spheres (Mukan, Havrylyuk, & Stolyarchuk, 2015). It is also seen as a driver of international agenda like sustainability (Dyer & Dyer, 2017). This has led to an increased interest among stakeholders in funding and monitoring productivity and accountability in higher education institutions (Ameijde, Nelson, Billsberry & Meur, 2009; Martin & Russell, 2005). Thus, higher education institutions are increasingly expected to do more with less (Hendrickson et al., 2013), and anticipated for a continuous change and account for public fund (Ameijde et al., 2009). All these phenomena exert pressure to prepare and develop higher education leaders to address the emerging challenges more effectively.

Although some scholars like Bryman and Lilley (2009) contend that leadership capability is not the only factor to assess organisational performance due to prevalence of a number of other factors that influence performance, many still argue for leadership as key to organisational success and attaining desired organisational outcomes (Ameijde, 2006; Bimbaum & Weddington, 2012; Martin & Russell, 2005; Smith & Wolverton, 2010). It has been argued that a strong leadership is an answer to address challenges facing higher education institution (Sutjipto, 1999) including quality assurance system (Trivellas & Dargenidou, 2009). Gyamtsho, Sherab and Maxwell (2019) also identify leadership as a critical factor in promoting research culture and output at RUB. The quality of providing direction and motivating people to take actions depend on leadership style (Trivellas & Dargenidou, 2009). Therefore, significance of leadership in organisational performance cannot be overlooked.

There is a plethora of literature identifying the purpose of leadership and its traits in general. Schedlitzki and Edwards (2017) posit that leaders are generally at best when they are able to positively reflect the belief of their followers. Many research works specify ability to foster right conditions for teamwork, launch teams appropriately, and coach team members for success (Hackman, 2011). Generally, a successful leader should be able to: influence others to achieve organisational goals (Spendlove, 2007); be mission driven (Hendrickson et al., 2013); embody and exemplify the institutional mission and encourage others to do the same (Gardner, 2006); communicate the vision, plans and programmes to staff (Luthra & Dahiya, 2015); motivate staff (Buble, Jurasand & Matic, 2014; Khan, 2017; Trivellas & Dargenidou, 2009); use communications technique to manage the agenda of the less powerful (Bimbaum & Weddington, 2012); and display skills such as ability to negotiate and communicate with diverse interest groups (Spendlove, 2007). Kahneman (2011) adds to it by mentioning the need to consider outside view for informed decisions and inclusiveness.

Increasing attention has been paid to leadership in the universities (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe & Ryland, 2014). According to Burkhardt (2002), the adaptive capacity of higher education depends on a specific form of leadership. In addition, changing market conditions force universities to increase student enrollment, ensure financial sustainability and improve academic quality despite diminishing financial resources (Ameijde et al., 2009). It calls for leaders who could drive innovation, which according to Styron (2015) is the ability to demonstrate an approach of embracing new ideas. A study in higher education leadership in the United Kingdom finds that a major aspect of leadership is the ability to embrace new business models, new organisational relationships and new technological opportunities while holding on to the core purpose of higher education (Wooldridge, 2011). Such kinds of leadership traits are essential in the university that are rapidly changing. RUB, with the aim of following international best practices, will need to build its leadership capacity accordingly.

Historically, the presidents or heads of universities had absolute authority over university operations (Geiger, 2015). Over time, leaders are expected to lead along the value of shared governance (Gerber, 2014). It essentially provides the trend of transitioning from an authoritarian to democratic style of leadership with more inclusive approach and empowering colleagues.

Based on the above discussions, it is evident that the most common leadership traits required the ability to communicate, negotiate, influence, delegate, maintain a positive working environment with adequate psychological safety and an inclusive approach to decision making. Bryman (2007) published a paper that analyses leadership aspects based on publications from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. He identifies 13 forms of leader behaviours for effectiveness in academic institutions. His 13 leader behaviours encapsulate all major attributes discussed earlier, which provides the theoretical framework for this study.

As discussed above, academic institutions are now required to operate on a shared governance model. In such a system, the competing and diverse interest groups such as alumni, academics, administrators, administrative staff and students should be taken into account (Kerr, 2001). This creates a hierarchy of leaders at various levels and categories. From the highest level, such as the vice chancellor or presidents to college deans, department heads and programme coordinators, leaders at all levels play an enormous role in motivating their staff to achieve new levels of performance standards and to liaise with stakeholders to garner external support. Middle-level managers are also becoming increasingly critical, as they can either act as active strategic alliances of the top executives or as strong forces of resistance for any new changes within shared governance model (Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009). Effective departmental leaders are

able to provide clear guidance on the routes that the department should consider taking (Bryman, 2007). Thus, middle-level managers like department heads, programme leaders and other section heads are also seen as movers and shakers in the university.

Methodology

The study is primarily based on the secondary data obtained from the Organisational Behaviour Survey (OBS) 2015. The survey questionnaire was designed with closed-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale for response options namely Strongly Agree, Agree, Don't Know, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire was developed based on generally applied standard format used for OBS by the Royal Civil Service Commission and applied in all government agencies during the Organisational Development (OD) Exercises carried out in 2014. Some minor customisation of the survey questions was done through a meeting of executives and OD team members. There were 21 items related to assessment of leadership aspects such as ability to communicate direction, value team work, be approachable and give constructive feedback to name a few.

Sampling was based on census method and covered all 763 eligible staff in the eight colleges² (excluding the two new colleges established only in July 2017) and the Office of the Vice Chancellor. Respondents rated their respective supervisors. There were 107 leaders including heads of the University, colleges, departments and officers in administrative sections. All supervisors broadly fall within the leadership category identified by Furtek (2012), who specified presidents, vice presidents, department heads, programme leaders and section heads as leaders in higher education, as they were crucial to organisational success (Branson, Franken & Penney, 2016). Table 1 (given below) provides details of leaders by positions and number included for in the OBS.

²College of Language and Culture Studies, College of Natural Resources, College of Science and Technology, Gedu College of Business Studies, Jigme Namgyel Engineering College, Paro College of Education, Samtse College of Education and Sherubtse College.

Table 1: Number of staff holding leadership positions in RUB

| Leadership Positions | Numbers | Details |
|-----------------------------|----------------|--|
| Executives | 13 | Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Directors, and Presidents of colleges |
| Deans | 23 | Dean of academic affairs, dean of research and dean of student affairs |
| Heads of Departments | 20 | Some colleges have heads of departments taking up the roles of programme leaders |
| Programme Leaders | 31 | |
| Administrative Heads | 20 | Administrative officers and finance officers |
| Total | 107 | |

A simple and direct aggregate of participants' responses on the questions was used to draw inferences. The unit of analysis was at the college level as surveys were conducted for each college for their respective leaders. For analysis, the relevant OBS questions were mapped with Bryman's 13 key leader behaviours. However, some small adjustments were made. Firstly, the thirteenth behaviour that discussed academic appointment for departments was determined to be irrelevant as recruitment was carried out centrally and no question pertaining to this was asked. Secondly, some of the behaviours that overlap the questions in OBS were clubbed to avoid duplication. The Table 2 maps the OBS questions to Bryman's key leader behaviours.

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Table 2: Mapping Bryman’s 13 key aspects of effective leaders with OBS questions

| Bryman’s 13 key behaviours of effective leaders | Specific areas of questions from OBS 2015 |
|--|---|
| Clear sense of direction/strategic vision and communicating well about the direction the department is going (<i>two separate behaviours clubbed together as level of understanding of VMOs measures both these behaviours</i>) | Level of understanding of University/College vision and mission, KRAs and KPIs |
| Preparing arrangements to facilitate the set direction | Staff involvement in planning process Academics’ time attending to ad-hoc tasks |
| Advancing the cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so | Mechanisms to facilitate interaction with other department/faculty/school within my college |
| Being considerate | Ensuring health and safety at workplace Taking care of the well-being of staff |
| Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity | Fairness in treatment of staff by the supervisor |
| Being trustworthy and having personal integrity and acting as a role model (<i>The two separate behaviours clubbed together as the question pertaining to supervisors’ demonstration as a good role model and promoting right values measure both these behaviours</i>). | Supervisor’s demonstration as a good role model in promoting right values |
| Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/open communication | Encouragement of staff to initiate/share ideas towards improving performance Decision-making is sufficiently decentralised in the colleges |
| Creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere | Supervisor being approachable Harmonious relationship with supervisor Supervisors valuing teamwork |
| Providing feedback on performance | Supervisor giving constructive feedback about work |
| Providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research | Resources are allocated as per the work plan in the colleges Whether the colleges have clearly defined roles for its staff that are flexible enough to adapt to changing needs |
| Making academic appointments that enhance department’s reputation | Not applicable. |

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In addition, RUB annual reports were studied to explore for discussions and information related to leadership and leadership development. Finally, literature on best practices for leadership development was explored to discuss possible solutions to address issues facing leadership at RUB.

Results and Discussions

Demography of Respondents

The OBS covered a total of 763 employees out of which 548 employees responded, making the response rate to 72%. Table 3 breaks down the response rate by college/office.

Table 3: Distribution of OBS respondents by colleges/office

| College/Office | Number of respondents | % of respondents |
|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| College of Language and Culture Studies | 53 | 70 |
| College of Natural Resources | 35 | 59 |
| College of Science and Technology | 59 | 58 |
| Gedu College of Business Studies | 93 | 82 |
| Jigme Namgyel Engineering College | 64 | 80 |
| Paro College of Education | 74 | 80 |
| Samtse College of Education | 53 | 72 |
| Sherubtse College | 93 | 68 |
| Office of the Vice Chancellor | 24 | 77 |
| Total | 548 | 72% |

Respondents were given the option to provide details of their position levels. There were three options namely Position Level 9 and below, position level 8 to 5, and position level 4 and above. About 89% of the respondents revealed their position levels. It was found that, of the total respondents who revealed their position level, 34% were from position level 9 and below, 45% from position level 5-8, and 27% from position level 4 and above. Details of the position levels of respondents are as given in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by position level

| College/Office | Below S1 | P5-P3 | P2 and above | Missing |
|---|----------|-------|--------------|---------|
| College of Language and Culture Studies | 17 | 25 | 5 | 6 |
| College of Natural Resources | 13 | 11 | 9 | 2 |
| College of Science and Technology | 26 | 20 | 11 | 2 |
| Gedu College of Business Studies | 32 | 25 | 33 | 3 |
| Jigme Namgyal Engineering College | 24 | 32 | 5 | 3 |

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| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|----|----|----|----|
| Paro College of Education | 15 | 25 | 29 | 5 |
| Sherubtse College | 24 | 39 | 22 | 8 |
| Samtse College of Education | 13 | 17 | 16 | 7 |
| Office of the Vice Chancellor | | | | 24 |

Similarly, respondents were given the option to reveal their employee category. Employees provided their information either as academics or administrative and technical staff. About 70% of the respondents revealed to which category they belonged. Of the total respondents who revealed their employee category, 64% were academics and 34% were administrative and technical staff. The details of respondents on the employee category by colleges are as given in Table 5 below:

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by employee category

| College/Office | Administrative & Technical | | |
|---|----------------------------|-------------|---------|
| | Academic | & Technical | Missing |
| College of Language and Culture Studies | 32 | 8 | 13 |
| College of Natural Resources | 14 | 8 | 13 |
| College of Science and Technology | 22 | 15 | 22 |
| Gedu College of Business Studies | 47 | 26 | 20 |
| Jigme Namgyal Engineering College | 30 | 15 | 19 |
| Paro College of Education | 31 | 9 | 34 |
| Sherubtse College | 52 | 23 | 18 |
| Samtse College of Education | 17 | 11 | 25 |
| Office of the Vice Chancellor | 0 | 24 | 0 |

In addition, particularly among the academics, respondents were asked about their number of years of teaching experience. They were grouped in three categories namely less than 5 years, 5 to 10 years, and more than 10 years. Of the total respondents, 27% had less than 5 years of teaching experience, 37% between 5 to 10 years and 36% with more than 10 years of teaching experience. The distribution of respondents with teaching experience segregated by the college is given in Table 6:

Table 6: Distribution of respondents (academics) by teaching experience at tertiary level of education

| College/Office | % of respondents | | |
|---|------------------|------------|----------|
| | >10 years | 5-10 years | 5> years |
| College of Language and Culture Studies | 9.4 | 34.3 | 56.3 |
| College of Natural Resources | 52.2 | 21.7 | 26.1 |
| College of Science and Technology | 28.6 | 42.8 | 28.6 |
| Gedu College of Business Studies | 40.3 | 32.3 | 27.4 |
| Jigme Namgyel Engineering College | 33.3 | 33.4 | 33.3 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Paro College of Education | 49.1 | 40.0 | 10.9 |
| Samtse College of Education | 44.4 | 41.7 | 13.9 |
| Sherubtse College | 27.0 | 52.4 | 20.6 |
| Average (RUB) | 35.54 | 37.33 | 27.14 |

Overall, there was a good representation from different colleges, position level of staff, category of staff, and age groups in terms of teaching experience. However, there were some variations on the composition of respondents across the colleges. For instance, College of Language and Culture Studies had 56% of respondents with less than 5 years of teaching experience while College of Natural Resources had 52.2% of respondents with more than 10 years of teaching experience. Despite some variations in the demography of respondents, there were still good representation from all categories discussed above.

Comparative Analysis of Findings

The overall rating among the colleges was quite comparable and there were no significant differences among the colleges. All the values were within two standard deviations from the mean. It depicted a common pattern amongst colleges, mostly very close to the overall mean, as given in the graph (Figure 1):

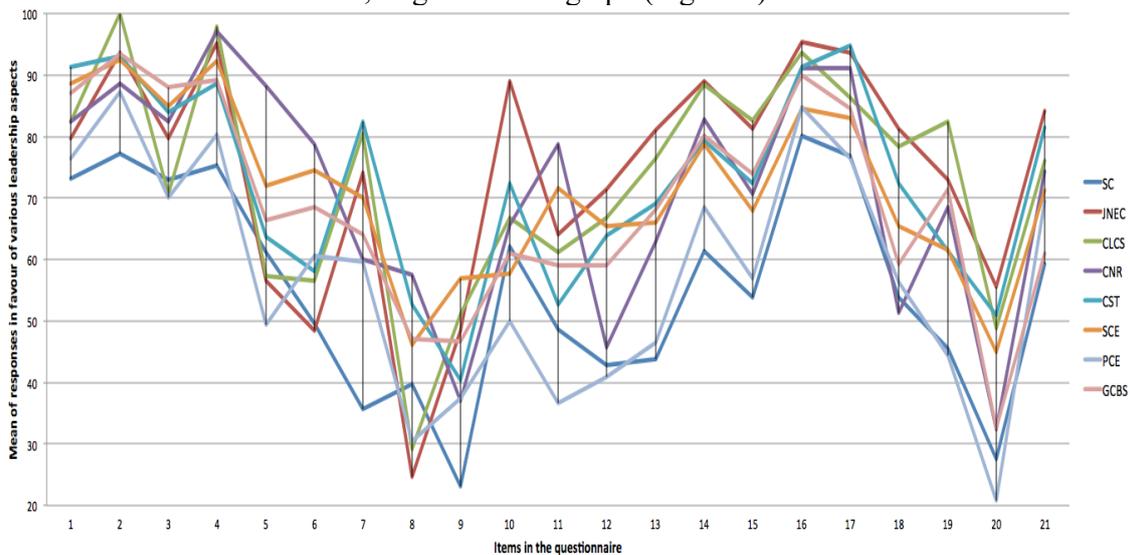


Figure 1: Comparison of means of colleges for 21 items of OBS questionnaire

Note: Sherubtse College (SC), Jigme Namgyal Engineering College (JNEC), College of Language and Culture Studies (CLCS), College of Natural Resources (CNR), College of Science and Technology (CST), Samtse College of Education (SCE), Paro College of Education (PCE) and Gedu College of Business Studies (GCBS).

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There were however few noticeable findings. For instance, College of Natural Resources had very large proportion of respondents responding positively (about 88% against the overall aggregate mean of 66%) on their level of understanding of key result areas. It is the college that had the largest group of respondents among academics with more than 10 years of teaching experience. Jigme Namgyal Engineering College had about 89% (against the overall aggregate mean of 61%) responding positively on leaders' ability to encourage on sharing of ideas for improvement. This college consistently had a huge proportion of staff rating very high on aspects such as staff wellbeing, health and safety, fairness, approachable supervisor and harmonious relationship with supervisor. It had the highest average mean (74% against the overall aggregate mean of 69%) for all 21 aspects, which was followed by College of Language and Culture Studies with average mean of 73%. Sherubtse College and Paro College of Education, generally had most of their respondents rating comparatively lower than other colleges in most of the leadership aspects. The average mean of all 21 items for Sherubtse College was 55% (against the overall aggregate mean of 69%), which was followed by Paro College of Education with average mean of 57%. However, in general, it was found that most colleges were comparable in their assessment of various leadership aspects.

OBS Items with Higher Rating

Specifically analysing along details on each of the items based on the survey questionnaire, it was seen that the leaders were best in communicating vision and mission, being approachable, developing harmonious relationship with colleagues, and ensuring fairness in the treatment of staff. The findings are outlined in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Results for each OBS questions

| Key Attributes | % of respondents agreeing |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Level of understanding of University/College vision and mission | 90% |
| Supervisor being approachable | 89% |
| Harmonious relationship with supervisor | 86% |
| Fairness in treatment of staff by the supervisor | 79% |
| Supervisors valuing teamwork | 72% |
| Supervisor's demonstration as a good role model in promoting right values | 70% |
| Encouragement of staff to initiate/share ideas towards improving performance | 66% |
| Supervisor giving constructive feedback about work | 65% |
| Resources are allocated as per the work plan in the colleges | 65% |
| Taking care of the well-being of staff | 64% |

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| | |
|---|-----|
| Whether the colleges have clearly defined roles for its staff that are flexible enough to adapt to changing needs | 64% |
| Level of understanding of KRAs and KPIs | 60% |
| Mechanisms to facilitate interaction with other department/faculty within college | 59% |
| Ensuring health and safety at workplace | 57% |
| Staff involvement in planning process | 43% |
| Academics' time attending to ad hoc tasks | 41% |
| Decision-making is sufficiently decentralised in the colleges | 39% |

The proportion declined slightly to 60% to 70% of respondents being positive about the ability of leaders valuing teamwork, demonstrating good role model, encouraging staff to initiate ideas towards improving performance, providing constructive feedback about work, allocating resources as per the work plan, looking after staff wellbeing, and ensuring clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

OBS Items with Lower Rating

The survey rating was much poorer in areas of communicating details of plans like key result areas, performance indicators, facilitating interactions with other departments, ensuring health and safety at workplace, engaging staff in planning process, and

decentralisation of decision-making processes. RUB (2015) also highlights that leadership at various levels needs to be improved for more inclusive approach, which is conducive for ensuring systems thinking. A study shows that autocratic leadership is detrimental to positive affectivity in higher education institutions (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). It indicates the need to change its leadership style.

It was also found that 41% of respondents feel that they mostly attend to ad hoc (unplanned) works. Leaders are expected to be sensitive to unplanned activities as it can bring about undesirable outcome (Birnbaum, 1985). It can cause implementation problem because a solution to an issue can be a problem for another. Wildavsky (1979) justifies that "each program bumps into others and sets off consequences down the line" (p. 4). Having a big proportion of staff spending most of their time on ad hoc works could offset planned activities.

Results based on Bryman's Framework

The overall findings from the OBS were clubbed based on the 13 key aspects of leadership provided by Bryman. Aspects with more than one component were shown with aggregate rating of its relevant sub-components. Results of responses that relate to each of Bryman's behaviours of effective leaders were analysed as given in Table 8 below:

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Table 8: Aggregate points for Bryman’s each key behaviour of leaders

| Bryman’s 13 key aspects of effective leadership in higher education | Aggregates (Agree + Strongly Agree) |
|--|--|
| Creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere | 82% |
| Treating academic staff fairly and with integrity | 79% |
| Clear sense of direction and strategic vision and communicating well about the direction | 75% |
| Being trustworthy, having personal integrity and acting as a role model | 70% |
| Providing feedback on performance | 65% |
| Providing resources for and adjusting workloads to stimulate scholarship and research | 65% |
| Being considerate | 61% |
| Advancing the cause with respect to constituencies internal and external to the university and being proactive in doing so | 59% |
| Allowing the opportunity to participate in key decisions/open communication | 53% |
| Preparing arrangements to facilitate the direction set | 42% |

Broadly grouping and aggregating the ratings, it can be inferred that RUB’s leadership strengths include creating a positive/collegial work atmosphere, treating academic staff fairly and with integrity, conveying clear sense of direction and strategic vision, being trustworthy, having personal integrity and acting as a role model. In each of these areas, there were at least 70% positive respondents.

Rating on leadership was moderate in areas of providing feedback to staff, providing resources and making necessary adjustment, and being considerate. Each of these had about 60% of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing that their leaders were able to display these attributes. However, the proportion of respondents responding positively dropped to about 50% in advancing cause with respect to internal and external constituencies (mainly in the context of inter departmental/college collaboration), allowing staff to participate in key decision-making processes, and preparing arrangements to facilitate the set direction, thus, pointing out the possible areas for improvement.

In short, it can be concluded that there is a need to improve leadership in the University. Using Byrman's 13 key aspects of leadership, it was seen that of the 12 relevant key aspects, only 4 key aspects had the average rating of 70% and above while the remaining 8 key aspects were rated 65% or below. Even from the total items in OBS on leadership, only 6 items were rated with 70% and above while the remaining 11 items were rated less than 70%. Thus, on many of the parameters, respondents rated lower for various leadership traits. Therefore, it can be inferred that leadership development is crucial for RUB.

Recommendations

The study revealed that respondents generally rated high on creating positive work atmosphere, treating staff fairly, communicating visions clearly and being trustworthy. However, rating was lower on providing feedback on performance, being considerate, adjusting workload, providing opportunities to participate in key decision-making processes. It therefore calls for a system of continuous grooming and development to improve on leadership. To this end, learning from the best practices, the following recommendations are offered:

First, there is an urgent need to recognise the importance of leadership development. Australia has identified the need for leadership development training programmes in higher education for building capable leaders since 1990s (Drew, 2010). The American Association of Community Colleges established Future Leaders Institute with the objective of instilling skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for successful leaders (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). The UK has developed a Leadership Foundation for Higher Education to offer leadership development programmes (Middlehurst, Goreham & Woodfield, 2009). Therefore, need was raised to identify leadership expectations at all levels and to provide environment to nurture and develop future leaders from the very beginning of their careers (Inman, 2011; Gmelch, 2004). To this end, Day and Bakioglu (1996) provide a notable framework based on the four-stage model of leadership development "initiation, development, autonomy and disenchantment" (cited in Inman, 2011, p. 231). Similarly, the RIGSS in Bhutan offers a month long leadership programmes at three different levels namely foundational leadership programme, young professionals leadership programme and senior executive leadership programme (RIGSS, 2018). RUB may replicate this idea and offer them for its employees at various levels to ensure that employees progress through formally guided leadership development phases.

According to Mukan et al. (2015), another style of leadership development program identified in a recent study of leadership in universities in England and Wales is making the manager-leader responsible for succession planning. Potential leaders-subordinates are identified by the manager-leaders and provided with certain skills and knowledge.

Furtek (2012) also suggests similar approach of identifying internal candidates with high potentials for leadership and develop them for successorship. Similarly, RUB may develop a system of recognizing young individuals by all senior academics and provide mentorship. One of the three leaders of tertiary education institutions in Australia involved in a leadership study is quoted “I help them plan their future and keep the staff informed about goals and developments” (Sathye, 2004, p. 8). This could improve on communication of key performance indicators and key result areas, and engagement of staff in RUB - areas that were rated poorly in the OBS.

Leadership development efforts must be supported with dedicated yearly budget. Some colleges and universities are now devoting substantial resources to engage leaders in various workshops and training programmes on leadership (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006). “Investing current resources and building leadership and organisational effectiveness will build resilience in colleges and universities and thereby prepare them for the future” (Furtek, 2012, p. 62). It must be noted that development of leadership should not be one-time activity. It is a constant sharpening of skills over a long period of time. As Gmelch (2004) explains, if it takes seven to fourteen years to establish academic expertise in academic disciplines in America, logically, it will take the same amount of time to develop leadership capability. Therefore, leadership development initiative has to begin urgently and its efforts sustained over a long period of time with dedicated funding.

Second, a system of continuous interaction and discussion needs to be created for two reasons. The first is for exchange of constructive feedback between leaders and staff. It will help leaders become more self-aware and develop better skills to lead. Drew (2010) supports for an environment of trust where feedback on leadership becomes important for monitoring and continuous improvement. A study of 14 education deans in the US shows the need for constant self-evaluation on how their decisions impact faculty, students, college administrators and staff, and adjust accordingly to ensure quality of life within the organisation (Wepner, D’Onofrio & Wilhite, 2008). The second reason is to provide a platform to discuss various issues together for an inclusive approach to maximise the efforts of their staff. Close to 40% of the respondents feel that decision-making is not well decentralised, suggesting lack of inclusive leadership approach. A recent study finds that autocratic leadership has lowest positive affectivity in higher educational institutions (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). On the other hand, successful implementation of any plan requires ‘buy-in’ and support of various constituents (Julius, Baldrige & Pfeffer, 1999), and leaders should make effort to negotiate and take their staff on board. A constant effort from the leaders to create a forum for continuous interaction and discussion could address this leadership gap.

Conclusion

Leadership is considered an effective means for organisational success. Effective leaders will be able to form a positive opinion of their colleagues and have them motivated to work towards common goal. Therefore, it is crucial to have leadership assessed and enhanced in the best possible manner. However, as shown by this study, the initiative is found lacking in RUB.

The study finds that most of the employees are satisfied with the way leaders communicate boarder direction such as vision and mission, treatment of staff in a fair manner, being more approachable, and building harmonious relationship with the colleagues. However, much more needs to be done for enhancement of leadership skills on engagement of staff in planning processes, providing constructive feedback, delegating decision making authority and ensuring more coordinated approach to planning and implementation.

Possible solutions to improve leadership include identification of leadership development as an important area, which is backed by dedicated funding. Continuous grooming of leaders from the very beginning would enhance leadership capacity. At the same time, a platform for exchange of feedback is required to support learning leaders to be more self-aware and consciously improve their leadership skills. It is also suggested to foster frequent interaction between leaders and staff so that they remain more informed on issues, broader strategic direction, key performance indicators and key result areas. It will also allow them to take ownership of various decisions for effective implementation.

Since it takes a long time to develop leadership attributes, it is proposed that initiatives to develop leadership capabilities are taken up urgently and in earnest.

Acknowledgement

My deep gratitude to the Department of Planning and Resources, Office of the Vice Chancellor for consenting on the use of OBS data for this study, Changa Dorji for technical guidance, the anonymous reviewers for valuable feedback, and Jaclyn Butler, Dorji Lhamo and Tshering Choden for your diligent proofreading of the article.

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