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Developing Academic Leaders in Higher Education: Significance of the Context for Effective Leadership Development

Formación de líderes académicos en la educación superior. La importancia del contexto para el desarrollo eficaz del liderazgo

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Resumen

Dada la naturaleza cambiante de la enseñanza superior, cabe preguntarse cómo pueden tener éxito y prosperar los líderes de las instituciones de enseñanza superior (IES) en los entornos actuales, cargados de gran incertidumbre. Este estudio de caso cualitativo examinó los factores, las prácticas y las competencias que contribuyeron al desarrollo eficaz del liderazgo de los líderes académicos en una universidad canadiense. Mediante el análisis de documentos y entrevistas cualitativas con líderes académicos, se exploró el contexto organizativo y las estrategias y competencias individuales que apoyaron a los líderes en sus funciones en la enseñanza superior (ES). El análisis mostró la importancia del contexto como factor crucial para la eficacia del desarrollo del liderazgo. Los resultados apoyan la continuación de la labor de desarrollo de un enfoque diferente del desarrollo del liderazgo en el mundo académico, basado en la comprensión de lo que los líderes académicos y sus instituciones necesitan para tener éxito y prosperar en esta época de cambios sin precedentes.

Palabras clave: líderes académicos; desarrollo del liderazgo; educación superior; Canadá.

Keywords: academic leaders; leadership development; higher education; Canada.

Abstract

Amidst the changing nature of higher education, one may wonder how leaders of higher education institutions [HEIs] can succeed and thrive in today's highly uncertain environments. This qualitative case study examined the factors, practices, and

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competencies that contributed to effective leadership development of academic leaders at one Canadian university. Through the document analysis and qualitative interviews with academic leaders, it explored the organizational context and individual strategies and competencies that supported leaders in their roles in higher education [HE]. The analysis showed the significance of context as a crucial factor in the effectiveness of leadership development. The findings support further work on developing a different approach to leadership development for academia; one that is founded on an understanding of what academic leaders and their institutions require to succeed and flourish during this time of unprecedented change.

Introduction

There has been a lot of focus on the changing nature of higher education, especially in relation to the VUCA (volatile-uncertain-complex-ambiguous) environment (LeBlanc, 2018). Studies have been conducted to explore these changes and their effects on the ability of higher education institutions [HEIs] to succeed and thrive in highly uncertain environments. Given the importance of leadership in this process, scholars highlighted the need to understand the impact of these changes on leadership development in higher education (Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Fullan & Scott, 2009; Mrig & Sanaghan, 2017). Whereas the bulk of the leadership research has focused on corporate, military, health care, and government sectors (Barling, 2014; Cameron, 2013; Collins, 2001; Hill, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2006; Lencioni, 2010; Northouse, 2016), there is a need to examine what leadership approaches are of significance for the distinct structure, culture, and

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purpose that is the higher education context. Much of the past research has focused on individual leadership theories; however, studies have shown the distinction between individual and organizational capacities for leadership (McCauley & Van Veslor, 2004). This broadened perspective looks at the individual leadership capacity as only one aspect of leadership development. As a result, there is a need for the advancement of a comprehensive and sustainable organizational leadership development framework and approach for higher education. In particular, more research is necessary on how to develop sustainable leadership structures to support the learning of individual leaders that aligns with the goals of the institution they work for and make the connections between practice and theory within the HEI contexts.

The tensions arising from the changing nature of organizational leadership in higher education are numerous and varied. There is evidence that the current leadership models are inadequate in the context of a rapidly changing higher education setting. There is pressure for universities to adopt business practices to increase their own efficiency, but this pressure has been met with resistance from faculty who are "sensitive to the differences between the values and conventions of academe and those of business" (Clark et al., 2009, p. 19) or do not see the relevance nor applicability to academia. In particular, these tensions highlight the essential need for a strategic, organization-wide approach that aligns with institutional goals that will support academic leaders throughout their careers. The changing workplace context affects the way higher education institution's function in the knowledge society (Bolívar & Ruano, 2014). The world is

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increasingly interconnected, and the internationalization of education is just one of several drivers affecting higher education. This has created a new reality that academic leaders need to address in order to compete with the growing trend of education without borders (Anthony & Antony, 2016).

These contextual factors demonstrate the importance of analyzing the environment in an effort to understand its potential impact. Fullan and Scott (2009) suggested a new agenda where instead of tackling change directly, institutions focus on their issues and use the existing change knowledge to "shape and leverage the strengths of existing cultures and their leaders" (p. 41). An awareness and recognition of the existing strengths in addition to learning from both research and the lived experiences of academic leaders may be the force needed to overcome the challenges. As LeBlanc (2018) noted, institutional leadership has the important and daunting challenge of shifting culture in the VUCA world. Moreover, LeBlanc argued, leadership can be instrumental in changing the narrative on many campuses from a "change or die" story, which begets anxiety and a resistance to change, to "change and thrive" narrative that is equally valid but too rarely told.

To support institutions of higher education in implementing imminent changes, a clearer understanding of leadership development in academia as well as a review of existing programs can ensure the theoretical framework aligns with the contextual needs. The literature regarding academic leadership is limited, particularly in Canadian universities (Wright et al., 2014). The American Council on Education (2008) reported that "in general,

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higher education has been negligent in formally developing its own leadership talent in strategic and deliberate ways" (p. 5). The operational independence of higher education institutions has also led to very different approaches to leadership development and appears inconsistent and variable from one institution to another.

This article draws on a larger research study (Hill, 2022), the purpose of which was to examine the factors, practices, and competencies that contribute to the effective leadership development of academic leaders within one Canadian university setting. Specifically, we examine the significance of context as a key contributor to effective leadership development of academic leaders in a university setting. Upon describing the pertinent literature and methodology, we discuss the findings and offer implications for theory, practice, and further research.

Literature Review

The higher education environment has a unique structure and purpose, and universities represent some of the oldest organizations both in North America and globally. This longevity is a testament to their tenacity; however, change is occurring at an incomparable scale, both locally and globally. Due to the unique features of higher education and the ever-increasing forces of change, there is a need for research specifically on leadership in the sector. In Canada, as noted by Karram Stephenson et al. (2017), "the higher education landscape … continues to shift and evolve as institutions and stakeholders respond to societal change and government policy" (p. 6). Financially, colleges and

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universities operate on a hybrid or funding-assisted system with a core mandate of education. They also experience an enormous pressure from drivers like globalization that are challenging the status quo. If higher education is going to be successful in adapting to these changes, identifying relevant factors, and incorporating effective practices into an organizational leadership framework is crucial.

Academic Leadership in Higher Education

Bitzer and Koen (2010) concluded that while there is no specific recipe for successful leadership in higher education, the role is expanding in response to tremendous challenges such as globalization and reduced government funding. Consequently, they acknowledge that "leadership in higher education is a multidimensional concept and that its interpretation will legitimately differ among different observers and different institutions" (p. 11). Joyce and O'Boyle (2013) also discuss the changing nature of higher education and the tensions created by the need to meet industry requirements versus academic requirements, and conclude that a sustainable, relevant approach is distributed academic leadership that "involves working across boundaries with multiple stakeholders dealing with complex bureaucracies and policies" (p. 13).

Specific to this study, academic leaders are defined as faculty members who have assumed formal administrative roles such as department head, associate dean, dean, or provost. These administrators may have consciously chosen these roles, or as Bolman and Gallos (2001) describe, may be one of many "accidental leaders for whom an administrative career just seems to happen" (p. xi). This inconsistent approach is one

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example that speaks to how the context influences how leadership is perceived in higher education and the importance of recognizing those differences. The literature reflects the need to understand why universities are different and which leadership strategies will be effective. Black (2015) reviewed leadership models in other sectors and acknowledged that an understanding of the intricacies and complexity of the roles or its transitory and multi-faceted nature is necessary to determine which principles can be applied to higher education. Buller (2013) grounded his approach for successful academic leadership in an understanding of the challenges higher education faces as well as its higher purpose and described positive academic leaders as placing "a premium on hope, resilience, joy, appreciation of others, positive change, and a commitment to service" (p. 40).

Leadership Development in Higher Education

Literature regarding leadership development in higher education is limited with little consensus regarding which models, approaches, and methods are relevant in the context, despite the recognition of the importance of effective leadership (Arsenault, 2007; Bryman, 2007; Castle & Schutz, 2002). Dopson et al. (2018) international study found that, in addition to a limited research base, "the literature also suggested few promising leadership interventions in the sector that have a reliable evidence base and/or are theoretically well-informed" (p. 3). Their recommendations included consideration and reflection regarding purpose as a way to create a supportive, embedded model design specific to the needs of each institution "rather than promoting a single model of leadership and LD" (Dopson et al., 2018, p. 12).

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Regardless of the approach, research supports the concept that effective academic leadership development takes into account the unique higher education context, and ideally occurs within the context. As Gonaim (2016) stated, "Leadership effectiveness is informed and shaped by the context in which it is exercised" (p. 275). The literature also recognizes the relevance of aspects of traditional leadership development for higher education. Gmelch (2013) noted in his study regarding developing campus academic leaders, the importance of embedding the framework in the institution's goals and values, including garnering support from senior leadership. He stated this embedded approach fosters leadership development because "nourishing flourishes best within a context among trusted colleagues acting as mentors, partners, and coaches, while acknowledging that elements of traditional leadership development are applicable for higher education" (p. 33). Amey (2010) stressed the importance of a "deep understanding of organizational culture and values" to effective leadership stating, "These leaders see their own development as paramount to their ability to create environments that serve the learning needs of others" (p. 58).

Tensions remain between academia and the corporate world (Clark et al., 2009), although university leaders are recognizing that the world is changing and there is a necessity to adapt. The pressure for universities to adopt business practices to increase their own efficiency has been met with resistance from faculty who do not see the relevance nor applicability to academia. Metcalfe's (2010) research pointed to the impact of policy decisions by Canadian universities to unite with industry leaders that has resulted in

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"increasing funding competitions while determining knowledge priorities and decreasing the involvement of professors in decision making (p. 38). Research validates these concerns and argues for change-oriented approaches that recognize the complex structure, the highly specialized nature of faculty, and societal impact of higher education (Anderson & Johnson, 2005; Harvey et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2007; Marshall, 2012).

Complicating this issue is the fact that academics are often recruited for their research and teaching ability, not their leadership competencies. A study of 2000 academic leaders in the United States found that only 3% had received any type of leadership training or preparation (Gmelch, 2002). Adding to this challenge is that many academic leaders, particularly the middle-management roles like department heads, accept the job reluctantly and are often ambivalent about assuming the role. The role itself is often characterized by a lack of understanding from faculty on what the role entails (Hill, 2003; Kezer & Lester, 2011). M'Gonigle and Starke (2006) recognized the opposition from faculty to corporate models but nonetheless suggested that learning from such models may ironically be the best way to address the need for system innovation.

Changes in the workplace are connected to, and influenced by, globalization. Some of the more prominent are diversity and inclusion, an aging workforce, and generational differences (Statistics Canada, 2011). These demographic and policy changes require leaders to have knowledge of these issues, be aware of the resources available to them, and know how to navigate an evolving workplace. Moreover, it is not acceptable, ethically

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or legally, for leaders to ignore their responsibilities and obligations. As Fullan and Scott (2009) noted, institutions of higher education need to take a strategic approach to identifying, training, and supporting their leaders. Lynch (2007) found that universities fell short of business in developing their own talent and pointed to the irony that universities develop their students but do not invest in their own professional development. These factors demand flexible leadership that transcends internal silos and requires an intentional approach to leadership development.

Research shows that business organizations and the military invest heavily in leadership development programs (Stone & Major, 2014). These programs are seen as an investment with both tangible and intangible benefits that drive performance and increase competitiveness. The same study found that higher education's investment in leadership development has not been a priority and that most institutions do not have sustained, institution-wide supported programs. The responsibility for most academic leadership development lies with the individual who must often turn to outside providers, versus the development of customized, in-house programs (Gurdjian et al., 2014; Stone & Major, 2014).

Related to these factors is the complex culture of academia and the complications that arise when faculty move into administrative roles and must balance the often-competing interests of many stakeholders (Smith & Wolverton, 2010). Most administrative roles do not have clear job descriptions (Buller, 2013), nor do the incumbents receive formal

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training or have any prior administrative experience (Gmelch, 2000). The skills that make a faculty member successful do not necessarily prepare them for a leadership role. Training and support are needed to help them transfer and adapt their existing skills to the new context. Gunsalus (2007) puzzled over the fact that administrators, as front-line leaders, are chosen for qualities that do not necessarily include the ability to cope in a complex organization, especially the ability to navigate personnel and legal issues.

Universities are usually highly decentralized. As explained by Bush and Middlefield (2013), decentralized organizations tend to be self-managed and have the potential to be more effective given adequate internal management. Universities operate similarly to schools in general. Weick (1976) described schools as loosely coupled because they operate independently, have indeterminate goals, and few effective methods to disseminate information. In institutions of higher education, this loosely coupled structure can be effective by providing individual departments the freedom to operate independently, which allows for flexibility and quicker corrective actions. It can become a disadvantage when the administration within those individual units do not seek assistance or communicate when a problem occurs, and they do not have the necessary skills to effectively deal with it. Related to these matters, organizational efficiencies like succession planning policies and a focus on university-wide training can be very effective. Calareso (2013) argued that succession planning is as important as strategic planning and governance but is less commonly practiced in the higher education context. Some of the benefits of a comprehensive succession plan include financial gains because of

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efficient hiring and training practices, as well as reducing costly employee turnover. These benefits highlight the need for leadership that can create a competitive yet supportive and collaborative environment within the current structure. This could be another benefit of increased leadership capacity because the university sector is not likely to change its decentralized nature, it is even more important to advocate for leadership development designed for this type of structure.

Methodology

This qualitative study utilized a case study approach to examine the factors, practices, and competencies that contribute to effective leadership development of academic leaders within one Canadian university setting. In this paper, we discuss select findings related to how organizational context is perceived to influence the development of effective leadership practices in the higher education context. This research adopted an instrumental case direction (Stake, 1995) and sought an in-depth understanding of a specific issue: the leadership experiences of academic leaders in a single Canadian university in southern Ontario. In order to gain an understanding of the participants' interpretation of their context and culture, an interpretivist research paradigm guided this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
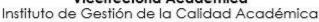
To this end, the data collection methods featured document analysis, primary interviews, and secondary interviews. The purpose of the document analysis was to aid in answering the research questions, specifically how the organizational context influences the

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effectiveness and application of leadership practices. The publicly available documents were sourced and collected from the university that employed the academic leaders being studied. The documents were produced between 2011and 2019, and collectively represent changes in leadership as well as changes in the priorities of the institution that had an impact on the content and context analysis. Documents were analyzed following a formal, systematic approach adapted from Bowen (2009), using both content and context analysis approach. In addition, in the primary semi-structured interviews, participants were asked about their document use in order to understand whether and how they used documents, following Connell et al.'s, (2001) use of document analysis to supplement data from other sources.

Subsequently, the semi-structured primary and secondary interviews were used to gather in-depth information from the participants' perspective. The primary interviews served as a source of individual insight about issues stemming from the literature and conceptual framework and were part of an inductive approach to discover common findings to inform practice. The sample consisted of 12 academic leaders (or faculty members that moved into leadership roles), such as the principal[3], dean, associate dean, and department head, from different areas and at different career stages from a cross-section of the institution. Each of the interviews were face-to-face and lasted 33 minutes to 1 hour in length. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to prepare by mapping out their personal
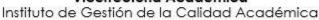
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[3] This role is called "president" in some HEIs.

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pathway to leadership and then to bring this information to the interview. The secondary interviews provided opportunity to develop further emerging themes as well as expose previously undiscovered topics. The secondary interview sample consisted of five academic leaders from the same institution, different than the leaders interviewed for the primary interviews. The roles ranged from department head to associate dean, and there was a range of areas of research. The format for the secondary interviews were semi-formal and 30 minutes in length.

Data collection occurred in two stages. In the summer and fall of 2019, the first set of semi-structured interviews took place. Transcription and coding of the interview data was completed prior to the secondary interviews and the themes that emerged formed the basis of the discussion items for the secondary interviews. The secondary interviews were conducted in the winter of 2020. Data analysis utilized an emic perspective. This perspective aligns with the interpretive framework and is relevant for a case study where an understanding of the cultural experiences within a particular group is being sought (Yin, 2010). Data analysis approach was inductive and allowed research themes to emerge from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). Raw data were analyzed according to strict procedures, including close reading of the text, the identification of categories or themes, and continuing refinement of the categories (Thomas, 2006). The findings are presented below in a synthetic way, demonstrating the aggregate experiences of the leaders and being compared and contrasted with the extant literature.

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Research Findings: Significance of Context

Data analysis revealed the significance of context, as a crucial factor to the effectiveness of leadership development. Participants identified context, both on an individual level and an institutional level, as a major factor in the way academic leadership was perceived and approached, especially early in their careers. They identified the complexity of academia and independent nature of the faculty role as central factors in influencing the way they viewed themselves as leaders and affected their readiness or lack of readiness experienced once assuming administrative roles.

Context at the Individual Level

Because identities of academics form early, long before they take on administrative roles, the result is an attitude towards leadership highly influenced by their individual career goals as scholars, researchers, and teachers. Subsequently, many academic leaders do not aspire to leadership roles. They do not see themselves as leaders. They see themselves, first and foremost, as scholars. That is their identity. In fact, they are sometimes discouraged to taking on leadership roles. They view their academic role as a vocation. They strive to remain student-focused because, as scholars, they play an important role in shaping our thinking about the future. Faculty are deeply connected to this core sense of self. The result is that most academics do not participate in formal leadership development opportunities prior to assuming leadership roles, nor do they engage in intentional career planning. Despite the fact many of the participants in this study did not plan to undertake leadership roles, the pride in their accomplishments and
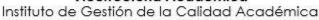
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the gratification they receive from giving back to their sector was evident throughout their responses.

Most participants in this study did not intentionally seek formal leadership roles nor did they see themselves as leaders. This supports the belief that academic leaders first and foremost identify with scholarship and with the higher purpose of academia. Sidle (2019) described how, in his own career path, he did not intentionally seek leadership roles. It was his conviction and commitment as a scholar that was rooted in a journey, which he described as "stumbling into a role where my avocation turned into my vocation" (p. 2). Respondents also did not plan for or receive training before assuming leadership roles. This finding is supported by the literature. A study of 2000 academic leaders found that only three percent received any type of leadership training or preparation (Gmelch, 2002). Similarly, results of this study revealed that faculty reported focusing on acquiring tenure, producing research, and teaching in their early years. As Ruben et al. (2017) observed, this results in faculty entering leadership roles "with little familiarity with the issues in higher education beyond their own areas" of discipline (p. 172).

The fact is that academics are recruited for their research and teaching abilities, not their leadership competencies (Gmelch, 2002). The study's findings indicated that faculty see themselves as scholars who are passionate about their area of study and get personal and professional satisfaction from their individual contributions to the field. As Cannon (2020) noted, "many academics generally operate quite independently" (p. 27), and the

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number of people with whom they interact regularly is limited. It was not until they were prompted by a colleague or acquaintance who encouraged them to take on a leadership role that such a role was even considered. Another complicating factor was that, because of the isolated nature of their faculty role, they had no clear idea about what an administrative position entailed (Kezer & Lester, 2011).

Examples of colleagues discouraging peers from taking on leadership roles was identified in the findings of this study and supported by the literature. One department head was contacted by several previous heads very soon after his appointment was announced. They had called to commiserate with him. He admitted accepting the role hesitantly and being unprepared for what the role involved. Similarly, another respondent in the study shared that several of his colleagues, who had held administrative positions, expressed how much they disliked the leadership role and actively dissuaded him from ever pursuing such a position. As Hill (2003) noted, there is a prevalence of this feeling of unpreparedness and reluctance, particularly in the experiences of department heads she studied. Gunsalus (2006) stated that it is a major transition from professor, "where one largely controls one's own intellectual agenda," to an administrative position where the demands of others and priorities of the department or faculty become your focus (p. 12).

Contrary to the general impression left by the literature, and despite these potential contextual barriers to their leadership journey, the respondents in this study were overwhelmingly positive about their academic leadership experiences. They were humble

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and surprised when asked to take on leadership roles. They did not view their move into leadership as a betrayal of their vocation nor did they view their colleagues with the distain that was noted by researchers such as Gunsalus (2006). Respondents openly spoke of their successes as well as their mistakes, reflecting on these experiences and learning from them. Mistakes were seen as opportunities to improve, both as individuals and as an institution. Positive leadership approaches view resilience (Buller, 2013; Cherkowski et al., 2020; Kezar & Lester, 2011) as an outcome of an individual's overall emotional intelligence, a concept that is gaining acceptance in the wider field of leadership studies (Stein, 2017). As Lorenzo Delgado et al. (2013) found, the prominent features of a resilient leader include open-mindedness, adaptability, humility, flexibility, creativity, divergence, and strategic skills. Buller (2013) analyzed the role of resilience in positive leadership approaches in higher education, where the challenges are different from those in other types of organizations, in particular the many things outside academic leaders' control and their lack of formal authority. He described what he calls "administrative resilience: the awareness that our programs have the ability to bounce back even when they've encountered what may seem like overwhelming challenges" (p. 29). The leaders in this study demonstrated resilience and modeled how it contributes to effective leadership.

The findings of this study illustrated how enthusiastic and proud the respondents were about their accomplishments and how grateful they were to their departments and faculties for the opportunity to serve. These positive experiences have resulted in the desire to correct in the case of their colleagues their own lack of support for professional

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development. On reflection, they recognize they can now assert their leadership by helping create positive change for the next generation of leaders. According to Cannon (2020), providing guidance and social support is a leader's responsibility, and allows individuals "to develop and harness their leadership capacities," which "will bring out their best to the benefit of the institution" (p. 29). Positive leaders promoting change initiatives need to act as "champions who can influence the opinions of others and serve as role models" (p. 45). My research findings support this assertion, with respondents viewing themselves as advocates for their teams. They saw that it was their responsibility as change agents to offer regular guidance regarding professional development.

Another finding in this study that differed with the literature concerned the resistance of faculty to adopting business models of leadership development. Clark et al. (2009) noted that, despite university leaders recognizing that the world is increasingly interconnected, there remains tension between academia and the corporate world. Respondents in this study had mixed reviews about the effectiveness of some of the training they attended, but there was no mention of business models or their inapplicability to academia. The participants expressed appreciation for being chosen and reported the positive aspects of the training as well as the limitations. Data analysis indicated the perceived limitations of the training were related to individual participants' readiness and its limited applicability to certain roles. In the case of external training, some concepts were too generic and high level to be applied at the institutional level. Thus, while there was benefit to the training

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respondents' personal growth, the lack of application and scalability to their roles in the HE context made the experience of limited value.

Context at the Institutional Level

At the institutional level, the significance of context was evident. The participants expressed how policies regarding tenure, resistance to change, and the decentralized nature of the university environment all contributed to how leadership is viewed in the higher education context. For example, the focus required to gain tenure leaves little time for early career faculty to consider leadership development. There was a general lack of awareness regarding what faculty need to succeed in administrative roles or preparatory training for future leaders. There was an absence of an institution-wide approach to developing and supporting potential leaders, though some respondents identified this need and were attempting to bring this to the attention of senior leadership.

The leadership experiences of the participants in this study reflected the lack of institution-wide approaches to developing and supporting faculty moving into academic leadership roles observed in the literature. As noted by Wright (2014), strategic approaches to academic leadership development that are intentional, sustainable, and aligned with institutional missions are particularly limited in Canadian universities. The American Council on Education (2008) reported that "in general, higher education has been negligent in formally developing its own leadership talent in strategic and deliberate ways" (p. 5). A few respondents reported attending leadership training, but it was either external,

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with the attendant problems noted above, or limited to the faculty or departmental level and not part of a comprehensive, university-wide framework. This study's mixed evaluation of the effectiveness of the training offered reflects its ad-hoc nature. Ruben (2005) concluded that higher education programs failed because they "adopted rather than carefully adapted programs from other places and/or times that were not well matched to their own institutional traditions and culture." (p. 385). As Oc (2018) noted, context is important and "there is evidence for the contextual factors on leadership" (p. 230) stressing that both what he calls omnibus (culture, demographics, economic conditions) and discrete (tasks, social network, time pressure) level factors significantly influence leadership effectiveness and outcomes. The respondents in this study did not find the content of the training they received particularly relevant or offered at an appropriate time in their career, but they did find value in expanding their professional networks, learning from each other, and sharing resources. This finding supports the literature regarding the influence collaborating with peers can have on creating positive relationships and a flourishing environment where leaders succeed (Collis et al, 2021: Day, 2007).

The decentralized nature of higher education can be viewed as either a potential barrier or advantage to effective academic leadership, depending on how it is managed. My research supported this idea and noted a disconnect between the department level and institution level led to a lack of communication and subsequent misalignment with the goals of the institution. Conversely, respondents shared stories where strong lines of

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communication and cooperation allowed work at the department level to align with institutional priorities while still allowing departments to operate with a certain level of autonomy. As Bush and Middlefield (2013) found, decentralized organizations have the potential to be more effective, but this depends on the quality of internal management. Weick (1976) described this structure as loosely coupled and stated it can provide individual departments with flexibility and independence but becomes problematic when individual departments do not seek assistance or communicate as well as they could with their faculty when issues arise.

This study has found that the complexity of academia is a factor in the way leadership is viewed in higher education. Cannon (2020) has observed that "inherently complex environments" (p. 2) such as institutions of higher education can make effective leadership challenging and "it is no wonder that many academics gladly defer to others to take up the gauntlet" (p. 2). This complexity can be a barrier to making academic leadership development a priority. This is evident in the lack of clear job descriptions (Buller, 2013) as well as the fact that most incumbents do not receive formal training or are required to have any prior administrative experience (Gmelch, 2000). The findings of this study, from the document analysis to the interviews, support these conclusions. Analysis of the job postings revealed a wide range of formats and content, with some containing very little or even information regarding job tasks or requirements. Particularly striking was the approach to hiring department heads. There was no standard job description and the brief relevant paragraph in the collective agreement contained no

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specific details regarding the expectations for the role. This lack of clarity, combined with the fact that a significant number of respondents did not have previous training or preparation illustrated a disconnect between what was contained in the job descriptions and what the role looked like in reality. This displayed a lack of insight about how important these roles are to the functioning of the university and the effect these practices have on the faculty who assume this role. The problem extends upwards in the university. Lavigne's (2019) study of job advertisements for Canadian deans described the tendency "to overly focus on self-aggrandizing descriptions of their institutions, at the expense of complete and accurate role descriptions" (p. 12) and cautioned against relying on the convenience of using recruiting firms that lack in-depth understanding of each institution. He concluded, "Canadian universities would do well to review their depictions of leadership and keep in mind that deans' leadership is multifaceted, situated, and learned through experience." (p. 12)

The significance of an institution's culture for the ability for academic leaders to implement and sustain change was consistent among the respondent's experiences and is supported by the literature. Hrabowski (2019) described how important it is for leaders to step back and think about organizational culture before attempting to lead substantive change because if the change undermines the culture or is viewed as top-down it will not be successful. Hrabowski suggested facilitating a change in the culture by "clearly articulating a vision for the future through a collaborative process" (p. 37) and noted the importance of selecting and developing colleagues who align with the culture and mission.
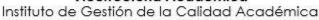
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A prevalent theme among this study's findings was how important a clear understanding of the policies, practices, and processes of the institution — in other words, how things get done —is to being successful. Respondents shared stories about watching others and observing how leaders navigated situations in an effort to be effective within the existing culture. As Ruben et al. (2017) found, "organizational cultures and climates exert a powerful and pervasive influence, for better or worse," (p. 344) on leaders and have their own unspoken practices that need to be learned. Findings from this study supported the literature, with respondents emphasizing how essential focusing on a shifting culture is to influencing change.

The literature also identifies external drivers that are changing the way HE functions, including pressures on universities to increase efficiency by adopting business practices to increase efficiencies. The necessity of adapting to these changes is recognized, but there is tension between academia and the corporate sectors and pressure to adopt these models has been met with resistance from faculty who do not see their applicability to higher education (Clark et al., 2009). Studies (Anderson & Johnson, 2005; Harvey et al., 2014; Macfarlane, 2007; Marshall, 2012) have advocated for change-oriented approaches that recognize the complex structure and societal impact of academia. Marshall (2019) described higher education as a hybrid space where "the push for institutions to operate in the marketplace, whilst maintaining traditions of collegiality, academic freedom and autonomy" (p. 23) creates unique challenges, because of frequently competing priorities. Research findings confirmed the need for context-relevant

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approaches to the challenges of leading change. External drivers, however, were not specifically identified by the respondents as affecting how they manage their roles. The self-governance of higher education and lack of training provided to faculty promoted into administrative roles, may be factors to the insular way in which institutions operate. The principal and vice-principal roles aside, most academic leadership roles operate at the faculty and departmental level. As Sedivy-Benton and Wang (2016) observed, administrative job descriptions that advertised for visionary leaders "committed to a shared governance model" (p. 2) but found a disconnect between what was required and the qualities and qualifications of the incumbents. Faculty members spend years acquiring a depth of expertise in their individual area of study and are not accustomed to working at an institutional level.

Research Implications

This study's findings provide a rich source of discoveries for further discussions about the impact of academic leadership development on theory, practice, policy, and further research.

Implications for Theory

The study's findings clearly demonstrated that consideration for and learning to navigate within the existing context were essential to influencing change, overcoming systemic challenges, and maintaining a strategic perspective in order to identity opportunities. A focus on strengths and capabilities rather than deficiencies, has direct applicability given

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the wealth of knowledge and strong sense of identity evident of faculty. An approach that leverages and recognizes the dedication and the depth of expertise of faculty holds potential. There is opportunity to explore further the intersection of context with individuals' identity as scholars and how that influences how leadership is viewed in higher education.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this research can provide a rich source of information for practitioners designing academic leadership development programs. The results of this research highlight the need to distinguish between individual leader development and developing effective leadership processes, given that individual leader development occurs in the context of ongoing adult development. This is particularly relevant in light of the challenges and opportunities facing higher education, including how leadership development efforts could support building leadership capacity through succession planning and recruiting efforts. The significance that informal learning had for the respondents' development suggests it would be important to incorporate these components into a comprehensive framework for all faculty at various stages of their careers.

Implications for Policy

The study's findings clearly pointed out that a feeling of belonging and acknowledgment of one's leadership qualities is essential to building a culture where leadership is valued.

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The key to achieving this culture change is support from all levels of the institution. Essential to the sustainability of any framework is how senior leadership frame any leadership initiatives — they must themselves model the concept of ongoing learning and embrace and endorse the initiatives as an essential endeavor. Leaders who identify high potential candidates and provide them with the support and resources they need to succeed will contribute to the legacy of their institutions and leave them stronger and more resilient.

Implications for Further Research

The implications for research include opportunities to build on the experiences recounted in this study in order to support and evaluate leadership theories more broadly within the higher education sectors. The findings revealed common challenges faced by academic leaders as well as practices and approaches that have the potential to increase effectiveness for all academic leaders.

There is limited research on how academic leadership development can be effectively aligned with the strategic priorities of institutions, or what valuable specific outcomes this alignment can produce. For instance, research is needed to determine the appropriate balance between developmental experiences that align directly with an institution's goals or strategy and developmental experiences that do not clearly do so, but which may bring new insights and broaden an individual's perspective on academic leadership. Consideration of the various mechanisms by which academic leadership development

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efforts can be shaped to both support and broaden organizational strategies will contribute significantly to the field's understanding of the organizational-level impact of leadership development.

Conclusions

Context, both individual and institutional, clearly emerged as a significant factor in the effectiveness of leadership development. At the individual level, the study's findings revealed how the respondents' identity as academics formed long before they took on administrative roles. As a result, their attitudes and approaches to leadership were highly influenced by their individual career goals as researchers and teachers. Most did not aspire to leadership roles: they did not see themselves as leaders--first and foremost, they viewed themselves as scholars. In fact, they were sometimes discouraged from taking on leadership roles. They viewed their role as faculty members as a vocation, and remaining student-focused played a central role in shaping their thinking about the future. This perspective was deeply part of their core sense of self. As a result, most did not engage in formal professional development opportunities prior to assuming leadership roles. At the institutional level, the significance of context was apparent through the participants' stories, from their views on the role of academic leadership, and their descriptions of universities' complexity and resistance to change. These factors contributed to how leadership was perceived in the higher education context.

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