

## **Leadership Practices of Department Heads: Implications for Leadership Development at Haramaya University, Ethiopia**

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### ***Abstract***

*The aim of the study was to assess the managerial leadership practices of academic department chairs and their implications for leadership development at Haramaya University. A sequential explanatory mixed research design was used to conduct the study. The researchers sampled 73 teachers from seven departments using proportional stratified random sampling based on the number of teachers, experiences and field of studies. The Leadership Behavior Dimension Questionnaire (LBDQ) was employed to assess staff perceptions of the managerial leadership behaviors of department heads. Interviews were also conducted with selected department heads, associate deans and deans. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, whereas qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The study revealed that most department staff and heads were lecturers with fewer years of experience. In addition, the department heads slanted towards being managerial-task-oriented than leadership-people-oriented. The major challenges inhibiting the head of departments' performance were role ambiguities, unnecessary interference of the deans, managing conflicts and tensions among the staff within and between the departments, and difficulty forming cohesive faculty members. Thus, given their focus on managerialism, complex challenges, and the absence of organized leadership development schemes, the mission accomplishment of the department heads would be worrisome. Therefore, it is recommendable that the department heads' routine tasks be supported with formal and informal learning (leadership development) on managerial leadership models, which greatly enhance organizational performance in higher education institutions.*

**Keywords:** *Leadership behavior, managerial leadership, department heads, effectiveness, leadership development*

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## **Introduction**

The evolution of departments goes back to the 19th century when the first academic department was rooted in the United States in 1825 at Harvard University. Departments were created to accommodate the fragmentation of coursework, the development of new disciplines, and the need to develop a manageable unit for faculty. Gradually, a pattern of departmental and institutional life was established, with much of the tension, fragmentation, and competition that remain today (Al-Karni, 2018). In Africa, departmentalization of academic disciplines goes with modern African universities' history. It can be traced back to the period between 1930 and 1960 when the few African western-educated elites who saw European education as a strong tool to fight against colonialism demanded the creation of European education systems in Africa (Alemu, 2018). In Ethiopia, the establishment of academic departments in public higher education is connected with the foundation of the university college of Addis Ababa. This secular higher education institution was initiated in the 1950s with less than 1,000 students and less than 50 teachers. In the late 1950s, the university college was organized into different specialized technical colleges to address training needs further in agriculture, engineering, public health, and teacher education (Bishaw&Melesse, 2017).

The Webometrics data gives over 28,000 universities worldwide, and one can estimate the number of academic departments in these universities (Peter, 2019). In higher education institutions, about 80 per cent of all decisions occur at the department level. Departments are crucial academic units in a higher education setting; it is the structure where change initiatives are translated into actions. Departments are the base for universities and colleges, a structure for the day-to-day activities that shape faculty members' attitudes, behaviours, and students' performances. Moreover, departments provide academic leadership and management to the students and faculty and represent the institution. Thus, qualities of the teaching-learning, research and community services are attributed to the competencies and capabilities of department heads (Gmelch, 2015).

As scholars indicated, department heads should work strongly to keep their constituencies, faculty, students, and deans satisfied with their work and keep the department visible and efficient (Massaro, 2007; Hundessa, 2019; Branson, Franken, & Penney, 2016; Gmelch, 2013; Boyko & Life, 2011; File & Shibeshi, 2016; Walter, 1991; Smith, 2007; Al-Karni, 2019). Other scholars have added that the department head position in higher education institutions is where the missions of universities are actually implemented; faculty members can be oriented, professionally evaluated and developed; faculty members' attitudes and behaviours are shaped (Normore & Brooks, 2014; Musungwini, Zhou, Zhou, & Ruvinga, 2014; Jones, 2011).

Department heads/chairs positions are essential, complex, paradoxical, and filled with unrecognized tension between being scholar and authority, temporarily accepting responsibility for administrative tasks; with no prior leadership training and experience; the metamorphic changes that occur as one transforms from a professor or a lecturer to a chair (Bryman, 2007; Lieff et al., 2013; Midkiff, 2016; Rodriguez et al., 2016; Smith, 2007b; Hundessa, 2019). In order to alleviate the challenges, department chairs must know how to manage and lead a contingency workforce of faculty's needs and motivations (Hecht, 2001). Similarly, Yukl (2010) also recommends that leaders be competent and rise above the ranks of administrative managers into the more valuable and better respected role of change agent, strategist, and visionary leader; management training must be enhanced with leadership development. Unfortunately, most higher learning institutions need to pay more attention to either the preparation of academic department leaders or their succession into the position (Gmelch, 2015). Thus, from the empirics, even at the global level, such challenges affect the effectiveness of most departments.

Similarly, in Ethiopia, there are few studies conducted to understand the roles and responsibilities of department headship in Universities (Hundessa, 2019; File and Shibeshi, 2016). For example, Hundessa conducted a study entitled Academic leadership: exploring the

experiences of five department heads in one of the first generation Ethiopian Universities. The study has found that department heads perceived leadership as both rewarding and demanding and their leadership styles as democratic, transformational, participative, and laissez-faire. In contrast, the finding indicated that the department heads were inclined towards task-oriented behaviour rather than having a good rapport with the people they lead. However, the study could have depicted the whole image of what department headship looks like in the study area; how much the heads feel effective and perceived by their respective staff. Besides, File and Shibeshi (2016) study assessed the leadership style of department heads and found instead managerial that need to be familiarized with different leadership styles to fit into different departmental contexts. Besides, the researchers have also assessed the policy base of the hierarchy in university leadership. Accordingly, the Ethiopian Higher Education Proclamations (HEP 1156/19) emphasized departments as fundamental to the success of a university. However, when we critically look at the policy base of this managerial level, the former and the current HEP 1156/2019 Article 18: 1,2,3 mentioned that the autonomy of academic units of public institutions shall have the minimum necessary hierarchical governance structures and with appropriate nomenclature.

The Senate Legislation of Haramaya University (HUSL, 2013) also says that the department heads carry out their responsibilities in consultation with the college deans and the council. Moreover, the Senate Legislation listed roles and responsibilities of department heads that are a high burden and extended. At the same time, despite the huge tasks enshrined to this level on the institutional and national higher education policies and empirical findings in other countries context, no study was conducted on the managerial leadership effectiveness of department heads which includes both the teachers, the heads and immediate leader of the department heads, the deans and associate deans. Thus, the present study envisages answering the following key questions: (1) What managerial leadership approaches are used by the department heads as perceived by the respective department staff, deans and the heads themselves? (2) Are there any significant differences among the departments in their use of managerial and leadership functions? (3) What are the challenges department heads encounter

as perceived by teachers? (4) What are the leadership development areas suggested by the teachers and department heads of the university?

### **Research Design**

A sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used to conduct the study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2014). The design was selected because it helped the researchers to collect quantitative data regarding staff's opinions, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, and demographic composition regarding departmental leadership in the first phase, analyzed the results, and then follow by qualitative data collection based on the findings from the quantitative results and the latter supports the former.

### **Sources of Data**

The data for the study were both primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected from selected teachers working in the sampled departments. Seven department heads were selected for the interview based on quantitative data and respective associate deans for proper triangulation and clarification. Besides, Higher Education Proclamations and respective University Legislations on the emphasis given to the department headship were consulted.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from teachers. The questionnaire consists of the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) - form XII for measuring department heads' leadership behaviour as perceived by the subordinates, potential challenges department heads face (Part II) and leadership development areas suggested for department heads (Part III). The items of the tools were pilot tested at Dire Dawa University for reliability, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.86, which is good and acceptable for proceeding with data collection (Creswell, 2014). Inter-item correlations were also computed, and items which are not correlated with one another were removed. Finally, proper contextualization and cultural fits were done, and those which fit were administered. In addition, to the primary data, secondary data sources like Haramaya University's Senate

Legislation (HUSL, 2013) and the Higher Education Proclamation was consulted regarding the focus given to department headship, roles and responsibility

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected through quantitative means were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation. In addition, inferential statistics (One sample t-test and one-way ANOVA) were also employed to assess if there is any statistically significant perception differences among the different departments regarding the managerial and leadership roles exhibited by the heads. This was followed by the qualitative data analysis in which the interview data were transcribed, coded, and thematically arranged. Then, the discussion was made in such a way that the qualitative results helped provide more depth and insight into the quantitative results for interpretations to draw conclusions and implications for the study.

### **Results**

This section deals with presenting both the quantitative and qualitative data and discussing the major findings. As per the demographic data collected, age-wise, the majority of the respondents, 36 (48.6 %), fall within 21-29 years, whereas 34 (45.9 %) were 30-34 years of age, and the remaining 3(4.1) were found above 40 years. As seen from age distribution, 70 (94.5%) of the respondents were 21-40 years old, almost an average young even though there is also the senior staff. This implies that most of the teaching staff of sampled departments were dominated by younger staff. Similarly, the data collected also depicts that most respondents fall within the first and second categories of years of services, i.e. 1-5 and 6-10 years, with 43(58.3%) and 21 (31.3%), respectively.

In contrast, only 6 (8.2 %) and 1 (1.4%) were within 11-15 and above 15 years, respectively. Therefore, it is difficult to set minimum or maximum years to rate the department heads' managerial leadership effectiveness. In this study, because most of them were young and there were also instabilities in the appointment of department heads, the study used one year

as the minimum year to rate their heads because the department is expected to serve also two years. A teacher may not be familiar below that year stated. However, more experienced staff members can better understand the department's roles, expectations and dynamics from their experiences. The data also depicts that the number of respondents decreases as years of service increase. Regarding the academic ranks of respondents, of the total 73 respondents who participated in the study, 47(63.5 %) were lecturers, and 13 (17.6 %) were assistant lecturers. In comparison, a small proportion of the staff, 7(9.55%) and 1 (1.45%), were Assistant professors and professors, respectively. Similarly, the academic rank data of Haramaya University (HU) in (2019) also showed that 75% of the department heads were lecturers, 20 of them were assistant lecturers, and only 5 % of the heads were PhD holders (assistant professors to a professorship).

**Table 1: Major Managerial Functions**

<b>Managerial Functions</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Planning	3.71	1.12
Establishing rules and policies and enforce them	3.32	0.83
Organizing functions	3.41	1.45
Supportive role	2.23	1.31
Daily routines	3.12	1.85
Monitoring	2.61	0.88
Liaison role	2.93	1.61
Managing differences	3.57	1.53
Evaluation	3.36	1.29
<b>Grand Average Mean</b>	<b>3.14</b>	<b>-</b>

In the study, teachers were asked to rate the department heads on some items of managerial functions, as depicted in Table 1. Accordingly, how the department heads are good at carrying out participatory planning was rated above the mean average of 3.71 with SD 1.12. The second managerial function expected of department heads was establishing rules and policies and enforcing them. Respondents rated (mean, 3.32, SD, 0.83) for this function. The value is almost close to the average mean. As to Kotter (1990), in the organizing functions,

the head is expected to provide activities to be done, providing structure for the tasks under the department to be performed. The respondents rated the items of organizing functions above average with a mean value of 3.41 and SD 1.45, implying the organizing function is moderately performed. The extent to which department heads play supportive roles, the respondents rated with a mean value of 2.23 and SD 1.31, which is below the average. The department heads were supposed to handle problems at the grassroots level; such managerial tasks require experienced and better-informed ones. Dealing with daily routines, department heads were rated average with a mean value of 3.12 and SD 1.85.

The effectiveness of department heads in monitoring was rated with a mean value of 2.61 and SD of 0.88, below average. The department heads need to monitor and evaluate the staff to the expected level, and this would take more work to check progress and improve the practice. The department head position is found between the staff and the college, and the department heads are expected to play a mediatory role; regarding this, the respondents rated with a magnitude as liaison role mean, 2.93 and SD, 1.61, below the average. A department is where there are individuals with various backgrounds, ages, sex, ability, values, interests and traditions. To what extent department heads manage differences was rated above average by the respondent with a mean value of 3.57 and SD 1.53. Department heads in conducting evaluation functions (periodic staff evaluation based on date, presenting evaluation results and using that data for later decisions) were rated with a mean value of 3.36 and SD 1.29 by respondents. Although the heads were rated better and above average, the performance effectiveness was not profound.

**Table 2: Major Leadership functions**

<b>Items of leadership functions</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Participatory and democratic	3.89	0.73
Staff development	3.12	0.61
Motivating and inspiring the staff	2.56	1.23
Establishing direction	2.82	0.54
Emphasizes change and innovation	2.45	0.48
<b>Grand Average Mean</b>	<b>2.94</b>	<b>-</b>



Department heads assessed their leadership practices as depicted in Table 2. As can be seen from Table 2, the extent to which department heads practiced participatory and democratic leadership styles, open to critics and suggestions by the faculty, was rated good, above average (mean, 3.89, SD, 0.73).

The second item department heads practiced is staff development, a task that heads of departments carry out through job training, off-job training, seminars and continuous workshops. This leadership function was rated average (mean, 3.12, SD, 0.61). The third major leadership function is motivating and inspiring the staff to perform their best. The department heads rated below the average on this function (mean, 2.56, SD, 1.23). The interview result with the department heads also shows that they strive throughout the day for routine tasks. As a result, the time spent to strategically work on inspiring academic staff was limited. Concerning this, one of the department heads (P1) mentioned his days as follows:

*“ ..., you know the days of department heads are so clear, obvious, and repetitive by the way you come in the morning like anybody, but you don't know when you have to go to home, but you did nothing, nothing for me by the way, but tired. For example, when you come in the morning students wait for you at the gate, by the way the students could be BA, MA or PhD majority of them were in different modalities, or responding to urgent letters, unplanned meeting from top, teaching classes you were assigned, producing periodic reports and filling forms.”*

The fourth item is that leaders establish direction by creating a vision, clarifying the big picture for the staff and setting strategies for the staff to reach the required level. This leadership function of the heads was rated with a mean of 2.82 and an SD of 0.54. This implies that the department heads as leaders in establishing the direction through which the department grows and flourishes is poor and minimal. One of the department heads (P3) further stated,

*“throughout the day, I will be like a pendulum the whole day; no time for focusing on strategic issues, innovative things, inspiring the staff, writing competitive grants and developing departmental system”.*

The extent to which department heads emphasize change and innovation as one of the major leadership functions, such as challenging the status quo, working towards creating new things and being unsatisfied with existing things, was rated below average (mean, 2.45 and SD, 0.48), which is poor. The deans explained in the interview about the department heads in this regard as there are heads with good wills, positive thinking, cooperatives, and work to perform their duties. However, their leadership competence and capability are not at the expected level.

**Table 3: One Way ANOVA Result of comparison between managerial and leadership functions across department**

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	P
<b>Lead. Mean</b>	Between Groups	.790	7	.113	.141	0.88
	Within Groups	51.989	65	.800		
	Total	52.779	72			
<b>Mgmt. Mean</b>	Between Groups	.801	7	.114	.161	.992
	Within Groups	46.269	65	.712		
	Total	47.070	72			

The respondents' responses on how much the group of respondents' responses vary from one another regarding the mean of leadership and managerial functions, Table 3. One Way ANOVA result, the group of respondents, leadership function,  $F(7, 65) = 0.141$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and for management function  $F(7, 65) = 0.161$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The results were not statistically significant.

**Table 4: One-Sample t-test result of leadership and management function as perceived by teachers only**

	Test Value = 3					
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
<b>Mgmt. Mean</b>	.752	73	.455	.070	-.11	.25
<b>Lead. Mean</b>	-4.171	73	.04	-.41	-.60	-.21

\*Mean results are checked against-test value 3

One sample t test was conducted to compare the mean of management functions (mean, 3.15,  $t = 0.752$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ) and the leadership function (mean, 2.97,  $t = -4.171$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), as depicted in Table 4. From this, it can be concluded that there is a significant mean difference between the department heads' functions as perceived by the teachers. That means the department heads were more tilted to one managerial function per the mean test value of 3. The interview data from the department heads' also revealed that few of the heads want to be people-oriented and focus on the needs of the staff, but most of them spent much of their time on routine department matters.

**Table 5: Challenges heads face as perceived by the academic staff**

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Role ambiguity between being managerial leader, academic colleague and researcher.	4.14	1.41	2
Mismatch of number of students and available Qualified staff.	3.85	1.40	5
Working with senior administration of the University.	3.19	1.37	11
Dealing properly with my respective dean.	4.10	1.34	3
Working with senior staff members in the department.	3.64	1.34	8
The power distances people in higher administration	3.75	1.21	7
High workloads for department heads and their staff.	2.12	1.19	12
Complexity of dealing with people of odd personalities.	3.47	1.26	10
Managing conflicts and tensions and balancing conflicting demands among the staff members.	3.88	1.25	4
Difficulty of forming a cohesive faculty member.	3.85	1.12	5
Unable to Change any of undesirable departmental culture.	3.47	1.50	9
Unnecessary interference of immediate leader in departmental affairs.	4.20	1.83	1

There are several challenges that affect the managerial leadership effectiveness of department heads. Table 5 depicts the major challenges that could potentially affect the managerial leadership effectiveness as perceived by academic staff by ranking the magnitude.

Accordingly, when the mean of difficulties perceived by academic staff of the department was ranked, the 1st was unnecessary interference by the immediate leader in departmental affairs (Mean, 4.20, SD, 1.83), the 2nd was role ambiguity between being a managerial

leader, academic colleague and researcher (Mean, 4.14, SD, 1.41). As a result indicated, the department heads show the highest magnitude of challenge mentioned; the 3rd was managing conflicts and tensions and balancing conflicting demands among the staff members (Mean, 3.88, SD, 1.25); the 4th was a mismatch of a number of students in the department and available qualified staff (Mean, 3.85, SD, 1.40). This is also much reported as a more than average challenge. The department flourishes and excels when the whole staff works as one. However, the department heads face the difficulty of forming a cohesive faculty member (Mean, 3.85, SD, 1.12), stood the 4th overlapping rank as above; the 6th was the power distances people in higher administration created (including the immediate leaders) (Mean, 3.75, SD, 1.21), the 7th comes working with senior staff members in the department (Mean, 3.64, SD, 1.33), the complexity of dealing with people of odd personalities (Mean, 3.47, SD, 1.26), the 8th, change any of undesirable departmental culture becomes the 9th with (Mean, 3.47, SD, 1.50), while the 10th was working with senior administration of the University (Mean, 3.19, SD, 1.37). Moreover, department heads are directly accountable to the deans and work in consultation with the deans (HU, SL, 2013). The least ranked challenge is high teaching workloads for the department heads (Mean, 2.12, SD, 1.18), which implies there is no high work/teaching load from the side of the heads, as staff members replied.

The interview data also reveals that the position is special in a university structure where the head leads up and down. The upward leadership indicates the deal the head makes with the dean, directors, vice presidents, and sometimes the president.

Table 6 below, over twenty leadership development areas were identified from the literature and presented for the teachers to suggest which of these potential leadership development areas help to alleviate the factors impeding department heads' managerial leadership effectiveness.

**Table 6: Suggested leadership development areas for department heads by teachers**

<b>Leadership development areas</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Leading academic staffs to work like one (Team Leadership)	56	76.71	1
Initiating and change leadership knowledge and Skills	54	73.67	2
Conducting departmental meetings among diversified interest groups	51	69.86	3
Sharing experiences through observation visits (Leadership Exchanges),	48	65.75	4
Carrying out effective communication with leaders, peers and others.	45	64.65	5
Managing oneself and others emotion	43	58.90	6
Creating a conducive environment for peer learning	40	54.42	7
Providing professional supports for department staff	39	54.79	8
Resolving of conflicts of different types	37	50.6	9
Balancing the role of academics and administration	36	49.32	10

As seen from Table 6, most of the respondents lead academic staff to work like one (Team Leadership), as replied by 56 (76.71%) respondents, and ranked first. Initiating and changing leadership knowledge and skills ranked second with 54 (73.97 %) votes, and conducting departmental meetings among diversified interest groups members of the department ranked third as reported by 51 (69.86%). The fourth is sharing experiences through observation or visits (Leadership Exchanges) with 48 (65.75%) respondents. Carrying out effective communication with leaders, peers, and others for department success ranked fifth, 45 (64.65%). The sixth is managing oneself and others' emotions (Emotional intelligence) 43 (58.90%). The seventh is creating a conducive environment where academic staff learn from each other, rated by 40 respondents (54.79%), providing professional support for department staff 39 (53.42%), the eighth. The ninth is how department heads can resolve conflicts of different types, 37 (50.68%). Finally, balancing the role of academics and administration is ranked tenth, 36 (49.32%).

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to assess the department heads' managerial leadership practices, identify the challenges they face in their leadership, and identify potential leadership development areas. Thus, the finding indicates that department heads' function at the sampled University was more managerial than leadership as perceived by the teachers. This implies that the heads are more task-oriented. However, Hundessa's (2019) study describes the leadership style at the same University as democratic and transformational, participative and laissez-faire. Of course, the researcher himself criticized the finding as self-rating and should be crosschecked with a study of the views of the people they lead (Hundessa, 2019). Therefore, in this particular study, what was done was to get the subordinates' version.

Besides, the qualitative findings from discussions conducted with the department head in this study also reflected that they are busy with routines and do not focus on strategic issues, busy with getting the work done than creating relationships and change-oriented in the department. This indicates that the department heads were of managerial than people-oriented leadership. However, in Higher education institutions where much collegiality is more encouraged, literature is also pro the exercise of the leadership function without disregarding the managerial aspects. For example, Akbulut, NevraSeggie&Börkan (2015); Yukl (2010);

Hundessa (2019); and Gemechis&Ayalew (2016) recommend that if the leadership function is implemented, it strengthens the internal environment by distributing ownership and provides a foundation for collective accomplishments in the external environment; or advocacy or' championing the cause of staff both internally and externally, advances the department using relationships with external constituencies was a significant feature which contributes to departmental leadership. In addition, there are no statistically significant differences among the department heads in their use of managerial and leadership functions on the continuum across departments, as found in the Way ANOVA. This was inconsistent with the associate deans' and deans' reflection that few department heads were good at communicating and creating rapport with their staff, students and the deans. In contrast, the

majority were not on the opposite. This might be for various reasons, among others, experience on the position and the nature of the position or work reflected in the qualitative as having implications. However, respondents' background, age, experience and nature of the discipline were not answered and regressed with managerial leadership effectiveness of the heads.

The major challenges that could potentially affect the managerial leadership effectiveness were presented to the staff members, which academic staff observed. These were a lack of departmental autonomy and power distance between heads, immediate leaders, and subordinates. These findings seem related to the countries' power relations orientations which indicated that people approach each other based on their social class and hierarchy, as supported by Hofstede's study (2010). This will definitely create the heads not working in close cooperation with the deans. In turn, department members disassociated from their immediate leaders will not be committed and will not do in a team for the success of organizational objectives. This finding conforms with a study by which within an organization, Durán-Brizuela, Brenes-Leiva, Solís-Salazar, & Torres-Carballo (2017) states as *'people that differ from the majority are more susceptible to depart, to feel unsatisfied, less psychologically committed, less like the group majority, might propose a different point of view, and more likely to end up being excluded and out group'*.

Moreover, Hofstede et al. (2010) explained the likely adverse impact vast power distance between managers and subordinates creates as *"the more the power between the subordinates and bosses go far apart, the more the subordinates refrain from approaching their bosses, feel highly dependent, less involved in decisions and less abide managers instructions and vividly contradict their bosses" (p.61)*.

The empirical findings were also in line with the statements the selected department heads remarked that their immediate leaders created groups and served those close to them. In contrast, those who did not approach them were far on every benefit and related service.

The other issues found as challenging were 'working with senior staff members in the department, the complexity of dealing with people of odd personalities, and changing any undesirable departmental culture. The qualitative data finding also supports that most department heads were very young, and experienced staff were teachers. Those teachers in some departments were also the ones who were in top leadership; staff with different interests raised different arguments. Sometimes, the teachers know the legislation, but your predecessors must cooperate with the successors. As a result, when a fresh graduate leads a department with more experienced staff, the experienced teacher does not cooperate with him/her. These are some of the reasons for being a department head was low. The senior academic staff with proper managerial and leadership experiences, research knowledge and skills, good academic reputations, and who have approached the higher echelons of academics will not aspire to the department head position. These things could have happened because the rewards associated with the position were insignificant and unattractive for the seniors to apply. Again, this could be because it is a position without many responsibilities but low vivid benefits.

The other challenges mentioned were the capacity of the heads to manage conflict, execute tasks as planned and communicate. This was verified in the deans' responses that most department heads could not manage their internal problems independently, could not utilize even the low-level budget allocated, and could not make healthy interactions with upper bosses and with some department staff members. As the data from one of the experienced interview participants (P4) raised an opposing view to the experience view as 'the immediate leaders will not welcome you even with the experienced deans and others above, and if you insist on pushing things against their will, it costs you a lot, pays back and affects the smooth relationship of the head with them. The data indicated that the resistance from the management is beyond expectations and not what they were prepared for, especially from experienced leaders. The nature of the position itself was also identified as a challenge. This is good evidence that the position is special in a university structure where the head leads up and down. The upward leadership indicates the deal the head makes with the dean, directors,



vice presidents, and sometimes up to the president. The paradox is that all these top leaders are members of one of the departments that the head leads. This makes leading a department very smooth and rewarding but, at the same time, most challenging. The downward leadership refers to the activities related to staff, students and curricula. This finding also goes with what Scott et al. (2008) have explained as leaders whose role is to manage both up and down face challenges to analogies like *"being the meat in the sandwich; 'running a balancing act' – having to keep budget, staff, students, industry requirements, research and senior management in some sort of balance; 'being the captain of a small ship in stormy weather' or 'being a spider building'-which is so complex; and 'being a mother – always at someone's burn and call'*. Thus, the nature of the position brings some special pressure which was explained differently.

After all, there are a number of challenges listed down and ranked by the teachers and the ones which were thought they have a relationship with the department heads, and the associate deans and deans were discussed in this paper. This finding was also in line with Ali Saad M. Al-Karni's (2019) study, which stated that deans and chairs/heads share a common interest in the department and University's welfare. The department heads and deans need to involve in preservice and in-service training programs focusing on managerial leadership knowledge and skills before coming to higher education administration and departmental positions.

Leadership development, in general, is an underrepresented area of scholarly study (Wei, 2018). Little is known about how traditional training interventions, and planned and unplanned life experiences affect the development of leaders (Zagorsek, Dimovski, & Skerlavaj, 2020). Complex challenges face higher education today, including a public call to reform. Most change efforts within higher education institutions occur at the department level, requiring academic department heads to lead change. At last, there were over twenty leadership development areas identified from the literature. They were summarized into ten following the program areas thematically and presented for the teachers to suggest which of

these potential leadership development areas. Leading academic staff to work together was the main leadership gap. Following this, the inability to lead the staff to work together arose from the inability to team leadership knowledge and skills. Team leadership was among the powerful leadership models that encouraged department heads to lead teachers with different interests and skills. This finding was explained despite evidence that a team approach can be successful for innovation in different contexts; more than bringing together university teachers in teams with an innovative task may be needed to bring about desired performance in higher education. However, it was claimed in empirical works of (Koeslag-Kreunen, Van der Klink, Van den Bossche, & Gijsselaers, 2017) the readiness and organizing university teachers as teams to become engaged in collaborative learning depends heavily on how this is encouraged and facilitated by team leadership.

In addition, from the challenges the heads observed and heads' self-reflection and deans' suggestions, the heads were more observed as managers. They should have worked on promoting the staff, department and the performance of the University. Therefore, the transformational leadership model was suggested in the rank as a panacea for the problem. This recommendation is in line with any transformational change that intends to promote an institution from where it is to where it should be. To this end, Anne Massaro (2007) has put transformational department chairs to serve as a catalyst to change and enhance the departmental culture, knock into the talents of faculty, believe in participative decision-making, and facilitate discussions to devise departmental goals and establish new directions. Thus, training and educating the department heads with a transformational leadership model, which has many different dimensions that affect staff morale, become pro to change and performance positively.

### **Conclusion**

The findings and the discussion indicate that the department heads at the sampled university function more in managerial than leadership practice. Therefore, it can be concluded that the department heads were more inclined to be managerial, focused on tasks and less on the people. In addition, there are significant differences among the department heads' leadership

practices on the continuum across departments. The individual's background, age, experience and nature of the discipline accounted for the variation in leadership practices. Regarding the challenges the department heads face, most of the challenges were related to the attention given to these level leaders by their immediate leaders, the nature of the job hierarchy lacks departmental autonomy and how the heads, deans and staff perceive department heads have created a gap. At last, the department heads had no training and development to build their leadership competence and capability to efficiently and effectively lead and serve the position.

### **Implications**

The findings imply that the University should give due attention to the department headship position if proper change and excellence in the core missions of a university are sought. This is because departments are the basic academic units, the largest agents of change– the academicians of various qualifications engaged in the University's core functions are found and constituted. Besides, the university senate, council and different higher-level organizations of a university need to capacitate the department headship with proper managerial leadership arrangements and work on empowering the department heads through various pre-assignment training, job training and development so that the heads can lead and manage the complexities that are faced in the department headship positions. Thus, from the demands of the position for organizational success in the future, department headship needs to be studied at a large scale with state-of-the-art methodologies to identify pertinent and appropriate leadership models.

Finally, the findings imply the necessity that the University should develop the department heads to make, on the one hand balance the managerial and leadership and, on the other hand, focus more on leadership functions. The other is the leadership development center which develops the academic leaders as per the specific contexts of the hierarchical nature by assigning proper manpower and finance to develop the organization and respond to the

national demand on the University's efficiency and effectiveness and building sustainable development basis for national development.

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