

Navigating Leadership Styles in Higher Education: Implications for Governance and Effectiveness in Chile

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Abstract

The governance and leadership of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) operate within three predominant organizational models: mechanistic, organic, and anthropological. The effectiveness of HEIs depends on the proper application of these models, as misalignments can lead to governance deficiencies and institutional inefficiencies. This study explores the leadership roles of deans and academic unit directors, focusing on their functions in aligning organizational processes with institutional goals through purpose formulation, communication, and motivation. The research questions that guide this study are:

- What leadership styles are prevalent in the governance of university organizations?
- How does the type of leadership impact on the institution's stakeholders?
- What are effective educational leader's requisite characteristics and moral attributes?

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study investigates the perspectives of mid-level university administrators in both public and private HEIs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with deans, directors, and academic leaders to examine prevalent leadership styles, their impact on institutional stakeholders, and the characteristics of effective educational leaders. Findings indicate that leadership quality significantly influences governance effectiveness, stakeholder engagement, and institutional culture. Public and private universities exhibit distinct governance models, impacting decision-making processes and leadership execution. The study also underscores the importance of adaptive leadership approaches that balance strategic objectives with operational realities. Effective leaders cultivate collaborative environments, uphold ethical principles, and foster institutional resilience. This research highlights the interconnectedness of leadership styles, governance structures, and educational outcomes, offering insights into how HEIs can enhance leadership development and institutional effectiveness. The findings contribute to academic discourse and provide practical recommendations for fostering leadership excellence in higher education, ensuring sustainable governance and positive societal impact.

Keywords: Higher Education Institutions, leadership styles, managers' development, governance, organizational models, institutional effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The organizational structures of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can be understood through three primary models: mechanistic, organic, and anthropological (Figure 1) [1], [2]. Misalignment in the application of these models often results in governance deficiencies. For instance, the mechanistic model, which operates as a technical system, fosters a structured reciprocity of actions but lacks the intrinsic personal motives necessary to sustain collaboration. In contrast, the anthropological model emphasizes human engagement and shared purpose, elements frequently absent in a mechanistic framework [2], [3].

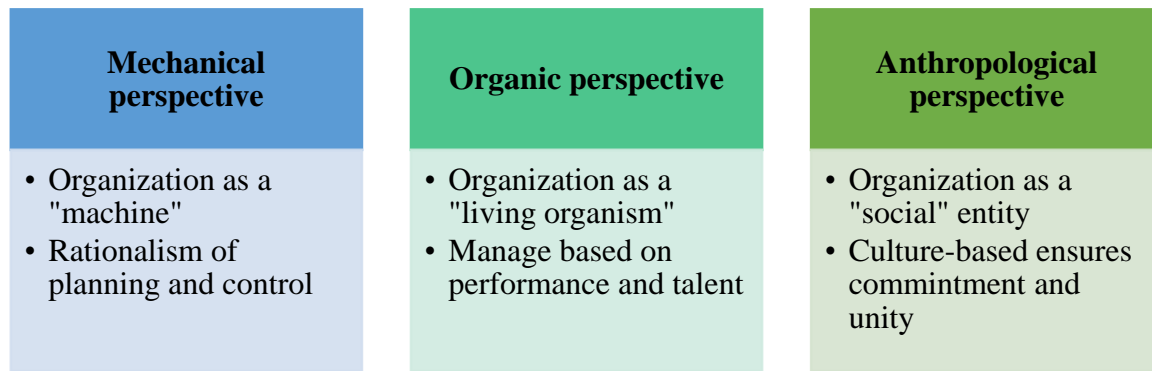


Figure 1. Organizational perspectives [1], [2].

From a management science perspective, the governance of HEIs entails three fundamental processes: purpose formulation, communication, and motivation. These processes vary in execution depending on the organizational model adopted (mechanistic, psychosociological, or anthropological). Also, an effective organizational diagnosis must consider not only economic and sociological effects but also moral implications. Therefore, managerial decision-making in HEIs should be assessed using criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, and consistency [2].

Institutional strategic planning is a critical component of HEI governance, as it establishes pathways for achieving organizational objectives. However, operational-level errors, unlike strategic miscalculations, often stem from the diverse interpretations of these plans by middle management. This variability in decision-making approaches can result in misunderstandings, diluted responsibilities, and ineffective delegation of authority. When managers misinterpret delegation as relinquishing responsibility, decision-making inertia ensues, weakening institutional governance. Consequently, understanding HEI governance not only contributes to the broader discourse on organizational studies but also enhances leadership effectiveness [4-6].

Effective leadership in HEIs requires individuals with intellectual and moral capacities who embody university values such as mental flexibility, judgment, credibility, and fairness. These traits are essential for mitigating inherent biases and ensuring principled decision-making. Integrity, as a core value, shapes institutional reputation, which is a critical asset in university governance. University leaders must, therefore, consider the reputational impact of their decisions, recognizing that organizational unity is strengthened when stakeholders identify with the institution's mission and values [7].

Organizational models—mechanistic, psychosociological, or anthropological—provide different operational strategies for engaging and motivating members. Universities, as institutions, function within these frameworks, and their leaders must balance productivity, stakeholder satisfaction, and personal development. The extent to which these factors are integrated into managerial decisions determines whether an institution operates as a technical system, an organization, or a consolidated institution [2].

University governance involves both management and leadership, each playing a distinct yet interconnected role. Governance pertains to institutional legitimacy, the frameworks and policies

that enable internal capacities to align with external relationships and institutional missions. Management, in contrast, focuses on operational effectiveness—ensuring that strategic and administrative tasks are executed efficiently to support organizational sustainability [8]. As Harvey [9] asserts, governance structures must align internal organization with external partnerships to achieve the broader objectives of higher education.

The effectiveness of university leadership is contingent on the strategic direction provided by managers. Mismanagement at the executive level results in operational inefficiencies, miscommunication, and an erosion of institutional credibility. Effective management involves balancing strategic, executive, and leadership activities. The mechanistic model positions the manager as a strategist, the psychosociological model adds executive functions, and the anthropological model integrates leadership as a core competency [2].

Leadership, as a critical component of university governance, entails the ability to influence, inspire, and align institutional stakeholders toward shared goals [10]. While power enables decision-making authority, leadership effectiveness is determined by intellectual acumen, strategic vision, and interpersonal skills. Weber [11] describes power as the ability to assert one's will despite resistance, yet effective leadership extends beyond mere authority—it requires judgment, determination, and empathy [12], [13].

The challenge in HEI leadership is ensuring that individuals not only possess knowledge and expertise but also demonstrate managerial competence. Universities attract intellectually capable individuals. However, effectiveness in leadership roles requires more than expertise, demands the ability to inspire, coordinate, and implement strategic decisions. As Drucker notes, effective managers integrate knowledge with action, ensuring both institutional efficiency and long-term sustainability [14-16].

Historically, universities have evolved from medieval institutions to contemporary organizations with diverse governance structures. The early university was deeply influenced by religious institutions, whereas modern universities have adapted to new socio-political and economic realities [17], [18]. Today, HEIs operate within a globalized context that demands efficiency, inclusivity, and adaptability. The debate on what constitutes an effective university persists, but regardless of the model adopted, effective leadership remains central to institutional success [8], [19].

Governance frameworks in HEIs are categorized into various models based on legitimacy and decision-making structures. Birnbaum [20] identifies collegiate, bureaucratic, political, and anarchic governance models, while Brunner [8] categorizes them as bureaucratic, collegial, stakeholder-oriented, and entrepreneurial. Bernasconi and Clasing [4] consolidate these classifications into four primary types: collegial (academic-led governance), corporate (strategic management-driven), bureaucratic (administrative hierarchy), and political (interest-group negotiations). Each model presents distinct leadership challenges and opportunities.

The literature on university leadership underscores the significance of governance structures in shaping managerial decisions and stakeholder engagement. While much has been written about governance models and their implications, there remains a need to explore the internal

motivations of university managers, particularly those at the middle-management level. This research aims to investigate the leadership styles prevalent in HEIs and their impact on institutional stakeholders. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

- What leadership styles dominate university governance?
- How does leadership influence institutional stakeholders?
- What intellectual and moral attributes define an effective educational leader?

By addressing these questions, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how leadership styles interact with organizational culture, governance models, and institutional effectiveness. Moreover, it provides insights into the competencies and strategic approaches necessary for fostering leadership excellence in HEIs. Ultimately, this research seeks to inform best practices for university governance, ensuring that leadership decisions align with institutional goals and stakeholder expectations.

METHOD

Research design

This study employs a qualitative, inductive research design to explore the perspectives of academic leaders in Chilean Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). By adopting a case study approach, the research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the leadership dynamics within HEIs, considering both public and private institutions. The selection of four universities, encompassing both categories, allows for a nuanced exploration of the governance challenges and leadership styles observed in academic settings.

Participants

The study participants comprised Chilean academics from both public and private universities, all of whom have extensive experience in higher education and have held leadership positions at various stages of their professional careers. Their insights offer a valuable reflection on governance and leadership practices within the academic sector.

Participant selection was based on their current administrative roles within HEIs, specifically at the faculty and directorate levels of academic units. These institutions are located in well-established university regions, ensuring that the study captures perspectives from diverse institutional and geographical contexts. Data collection was conducted through direct conversations, with each interview lasting approximately one hour.

Data collection and data analysis

To facilitate thoughtful responses, interview questions were shared with participants in advance, allowing them to reflect on their personal experiences and perspectives. The interviews, conducted in December 2024, followed a semi-structured format guided by a predefined protocol. They focused on how academic leaders exercise their roles, aligning with the university's core values of mental flexibility, judgment, credibility, and fairness, and navigating the broader organizational culture.

The interviews were conducted online during office hours of the participants, they were in their work offices. They consent to participating and on the session being recorded. The video recording was later transcribed for analysis. Each session lasted between 60 and 80 minutes.

The primary objective of the interviews was to gain deeper insights into the organizational culture of HEIs and the mechanisms by which academic leaders foster corporate relationships within their institutions' internal and external environments. The questions addressed leadership styles and the moral attributes defining an effective educational leader.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis, focusing on the testimonials provided by the participants. The study examined the internal motivations of mid-level academic leaders, such as deans and directors of academic units, assessing the factors that influence their decision-making processes in university governance. By evaluating these perspectives, the research aims to contribute to a broader understanding of leadership effectiveness within HEIs and its impact on institutional governance.

RESULTS

The findings of this study encompass various aspects of university leadership and governance. However, the primary focus is on the leadership characteristics of mid-level managers (deans or academic unit directors) in HEIs. These individuals play a crucial role in formulating institutional purpose, facilitating communication, and fostering motivation. Their leadership approaches differ depending on the organizational model (mechanistic, organic, or anthropological) adopted within their institutions.



Figure 2. Categorization of the findings into four key themes.

The results are presented using a narrative approach, integrating direct excerpts from interviews to provide a deeper contextual understanding.

1. Leadership Styles, Approaches, and Quality

The study reveals significant diversity in leadership styles within HEIs, with varying impacts on governance, operational effectiveness, and institutional culture. Leadership quality is largely linked to academic qualifications and professional experience, as one participant emphasized:

“The quality of leadership is closely linked to the professional experience of the incumbent and the seniority of the position. For example, for a person to lead a university work team, they must have a minimum level of experience and academic degrees. Nowadays, members of any university must have at least two academic degrees. At the same time, they must have substantial experience—measured in years—working within the university. Sometimes, leadership can falter if the person doesn’t have experience.”

Mid-level academic managers play a fundamental role in executing curricula and ensuring students’ success. One participant underscored their importance:

“The middle-level leader is the one who executes the curricula and ensures the implementation of institutional policies. This role is fundamental, particularly in public universities, where leadership facilitates social mobility for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. [...] The career head is a key player. Not only does he or she manage the curriculum of his or her career, he/she also manages the possibility that the students achieve the objectives in a certain period. [...] He/she gives the seal, the differentiation of the professionals who are going to come out of that career.”

On the other hand, several types of leadership are identified, considering the importance of managerial action. The very personal responsibility of those who carry out specific tasks to achieve organizational effectiveness. The ways to make collaborators assume responsible behaviors in the tasks they are responsible for. One of the academics observed:

"Leadership in the HEI, such as the dean downwards, is a key factor. In some ways, those leaders generate the possibility for the teams to participate in defining procedures, objectives, innovations, and everything that may imply the quality of the product or service they deliver. In short, the quality of the student's education."

Regarding leadership styles, participants identified a range of approaches, from authoritarian to participative and democratic leadership. One interviewee described the presence of absentee leadership, where a prominent figure serves as dean but remains disengaged from internal affairs:

“Some leaders use their position as a brand—like having ‘Steve Jobs’ as dean of Technology. but “Steve Jobs” doesn't know much about my context. He is not here. It's absentee leadership that brings reputation and brand but brings little to internal management. And sometimes, when he wants to contribute, it is a decontextualized contribution, which does not recognize the reality in which he is giving his opinion, he is not well informed.”

Another academic acknowledged that no single leadership style is universally effective:

“There is no one-size-fits-all leadership style. A mix of authoritarian, participative, and democratic leadership is necessary, depending on the context. Sometimes, strict

adherence to regulations is required, while in other cases, engaging the entire academic community in decision-making is essential.

Participants stressed that operational leadership influences strategic planning. The operational level serves as an information source, guiding institutional improvements. However, weak leadership at this level can have severe consequences. One academic warned:

“When we have a leader, for example, a career head, who does not know the profession, the effect on students is severe. A leader who easily gives in to pressure lowers the quality of professionals being trained.”

Some interviewees advocated adaptive leadership, emphasizing collaboration and shared decision-making. However, they also highlighted challenges in dealing with non-collaborative team members:

“My leadership style is not authoritarian—I prefer to ask for cooperation and support. But the problem arises when certain individuals lack the ability to collaborate effectively. The collaborative style is to know how to listen to what the other wants, how I adapt to their needs, and how I take advantage of any opportunity to exploit it internally. These more adaptive leaderships align with the model sought, at least by this academic unit.

In hierarchical organizations, where having an opinion and being wrong is punished, no one makes decisions or avoids this task.

Participants agreed that the most effective leadership is process-oriented and focused on improving research, teaching, and community engagement. Leaders who integrate authoritarian and participative elements while also mentoring future leaders tend to have the most sustainable impact.

2. Organizational Governance and Regulatory Frameworks

Leadership styles in HEIs are often shaped by governance structures. In public universities, authorities are typically elected by faculty and staff, while private universities appoint leaders through a board of trustees. These differing governance models impact decision-making autonomy and institutional effectiveness.

One participant contrasted these structures:

“Some public universities have politically driven leadership with agendas that do not always align with academic objectives. In contrast, private universities tend to have a more hierarchical structure, where leadership appointments are made based on strategic alignment.”

Higher education institutions, whether public or private, operate within regulatory frameworks that guide decision-making and ensure institutional accountability. This set of rules strengthens the quality of the corporate structure in the collegiate bodies' decision-making in their strategic and administrative work. One participant explained:

“There is a clear definition of positions, both state and private [...] I have never seen a university that does not have regulations [...] they tend to be quite organized in terms of the definition of positions and regulations [...] they have been getting more complex, new

regulations have been incorporated [...] there are hierarchical decision-making processes [...] if it has gray points like any organization, it is likely [...] there are institutions that are a little more exhaustive in control.”

However, public institutions often face additional oversight from external bodies, such as the Ministry of Education, the Comptroller General of the Republic, and the Administrative Statute.

Another interviewee emphasized the role of institutional accreditation in promoting governance practices:

“Accreditation processes help standardize practices, promote self-regulation, and ensure adherence to institutional quality standards. Universities must demonstrate that they are meeting their declared objectives over time.”

There is also a trend toward decentralization, where authority is increasingly distributed among faculty and department heads, fostering more inclusive decision-making. There is an emphasis on the distribution of authority. For instance, for strategic planning, rather than top-down planning, it is by theme:

“A vice-chancellor takes that (the issue or theme), has his team, and sees whom he convenes. There is a key executive. But in the end, these key executives are the ones who have to do and mobilize things. Every so often, the committee meets to evaluate how the plan is going, what corrective actions are being taken, and [...] they report to the deans' council and the university's board of trustees.” It is understood as a way of distributing authority: “decisions begin to be made at lower levels, not all decisions are made by the dean, not all decisions are made by the Rector. But they go to the top level for a solution when there are doubts.”

The managerial functions of deans and directors of academic units will depend on institutional regulations. However, one interviewee raises the question about intellectual or moral challenges and the difficulty of addressing those issues. Intellectual challenges that the university addresses, and the moral behavior and ethical principles that every academic member is committed to conducting with respect and community service, “our job is to be a formative reference for both our students and society.”

3. Impact of Leadership on Institutional Mission and Social Mobility

Higher education plays a crucial role in fostering social mobility, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Participants emphasized the responsibility of academic leaders in supporting this mission. One academic noted:

“Over the past two decades, higher education has become more accessible. However, this has also led to challenges in ensuring incoming students have the necessary academic foundations. Universities must now invest in remedial education and support programs to bridge these gaps. We have had to work a lot on previous learning to level up. Leveling is a very strong activity in the university, and we apply it in the first year of the course. In this way, they achieve a sufficient base to access higher courses. We take advantage that today's students have never had so many elements and tools to develop their professional careers.”

The role of mid-level leaders in facilitating student success was underscored by another participant:

“The career head plays a fundamental role—not only in managing academic programs but also in ensuring that students achieve their learning objectives within the expected timeframe. We need to help students to become more responsible and self-regulated about their learning and development. In the end, it will be them who will go out into the job market.”

Consistence between the manager's performance and the institutional regulations is paramount. If the internal regulation states "that he or she is a role model for the students." At the university, there are minimum standards of university behavior. Managers are asked to respect institutional rules. An addendum to the employment contract is regularly signed for each new national legislation that comes into force (harassment, crime prevention, among others) "and people who are not consistent with this should step aside or have their contracts terminated in the organization." A manager assures that organizational control is necessary.

4. Personal Development and Reflection

Successful leadership in HEIs requires continuous professional development. Some academic leaders transition from managerial backgrounds, while others emerge from within academia. However, those without formal governance training often struggle in administrative roles. One respondent highlighted this challenge:

“Brilliant academics often struggle in administrative roles because they lack experience in governance and management. Technical expertise alone is insufficient for effective leadership.”

To address this issue, universities have introduced leadership training programs. However, formal training alone does not prevent toxic leadership behaviors, which can severely impact on institutional culture.

One participant remarked:

“An educational leader should undergo psychological assessments to ensure they possess the necessary interpersonal and ethical qualities. Narcissistic leadership can be highly detrimental to organizational well-being. A manager who is mistreated at work by his leader ends up mistreating his professors, and those professors pass the bill on to the students.”

Ethical leadership was a recurring theme, with one academic stress:

“Ethics is the foundation of leadership; the ethical principles that should govern a leader are those that should govern any professional: integrity, transparency, honesty, setting an example. Without ethical principles, all other competencies become irrelevant.

Participants also discussed the need for strategic alignment between institutional values and leadership approaches. One interviewee explained:

“Authorities, deans, career directors, and unit directors must understand the university’s strategic objectives. If a leader does not align with the institution’s values, they must either adapt or reconsider their role.”

Ultimately, the findings suggest that effective leadership in HEIs is not solely dependent on time served or professional background, but on strategic alignment, ethical behavior, and adaptability to institutional challenges [21]. Leaders who foster collaboration, uphold academic integrity, synergize relationships, and invest in professional growth contribute most significantly to institutional success [22].

DISCUSSION

The four identified categories share a common foundation, meaning they are interconnected and cannot be examined in isolation (Figure 3). Leadership styles, governance structures, institutional missions, and personal development are interwoven elements shaping the effectiveness of higher education institutions (HEIs). The interviews highlight how these dimensions influence academic administration, student success, and institutional sustainability, reinforcing the need for adaptive leadership approaches that align with institutional structures and educational goals.

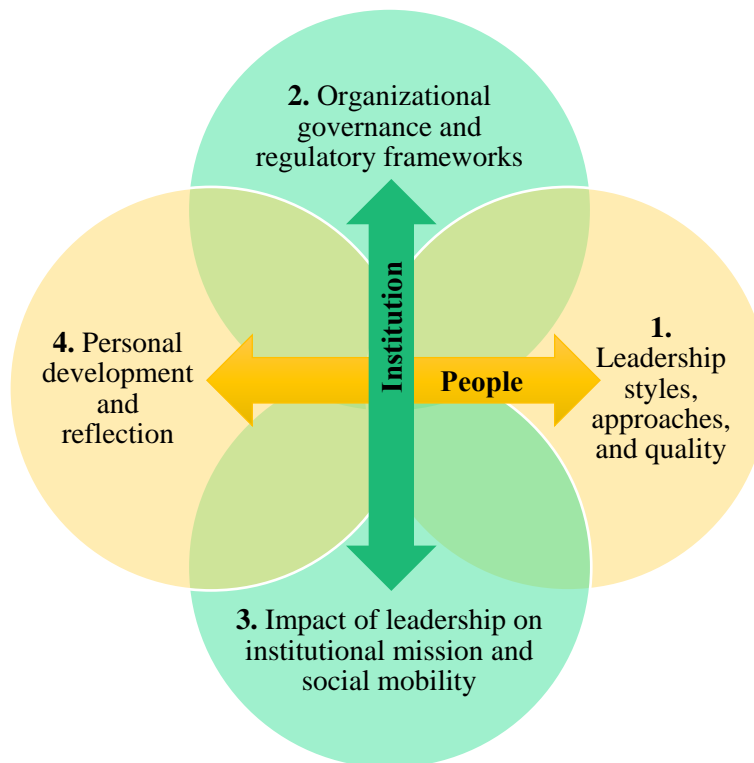


Figure 3. Defined categories to group the interview results.

The first category underscores the critical influence of leadership on both governance and operational effectiveness within HEIs. The diverse leadership styles observed in the study reveal that different approaches are suited to different aspects of academic administration. Some leaders adopt a participative style, emphasizing collaboration and inclusive decision-making,

while others lean toward authoritarian leadership, ensuring adherence to institutional policies and academic standards.

The findings suggest that adaptability in leadership is essential for promoting institutional resilience and achieving progressive educational outcomes. HEIs operate in an increasingly complex landscape characterized by evolving student demographics, policy shifts, and changing societal expectations. Leaders must balance the preservation of academic standards with efforts to enhance social mobility for students, thereby reinforcing their institution's broader societal impact.

The interplay between leadership effectiveness and personal development is evident, as successful academic leaders are those who continually refine their strategies, reflect on their practices, and align their leadership approach with institutional goals. This aspect links closely with the fourth category, which emphasizes the role of continuous learning and ethical governance in leadership development.

The second category highlights how institutional structures and governance models shape leadership dynamics. The study identified significant differences in the governance frameworks of public and private universities, each with distinct implications for leadership execution. In public universities, governance is influenced by democratic processes and political agendas, requiring leaders to navigate bureaucratic complexities while upholding academic integrity. The collegial decision-making structures common in public HEIs allow for broad participation but may also slow down the implementation of necessary reforms. Leaders in these institutions must, therefore, develop political acumen, negotiation skills, and the ability to build consensus. Conversely, private universities tend to have more hierarchical and streamlined governance models, enabling faster decision-making but potentially limiting the involvement of faculty and staff in shaping institutional policies. This structure allows for a clearer strategic direction, though it may also concentrate power at the executive level, creating a different set of leadership challenges.

Both governance models influence the strategic and operational capacities of HEIs, and leaders must be prepared to adapt their leadership approach to these frameworks. As institutions evolve, governance reforms will be crucial in determining how HEIs respond to policy changes, financial constraints, and global educational trends. Leaders must be prepared for institutional transformation, ensuring that governance models remain effective in a rapidly changing world.

The third category highlights the transformative role of academic leaders in addressing the challenges of increased accessibility to higher education. As universities admit students from more diverse backgrounds, educational leaders must adapt to ensure that all students receive the necessary academic support.

The study emphasizes the pivotal role of middle managers—such as heads of programs and department directors—in bridging gaps in student preparedness. These leaders implement leveling programs, uphold academic standards, and ensure that students graduate with the required competencies. Their actions directly influence not only the quality of education but also the institution's mission of fostering social mobility. Academic leadership, particularly at the

middle-management level, must focus on creating inclusive learning environments that accommodate students from different socio-economic backgrounds. Universities must also prioritize student retention and success, with academic leaders playing a key role in ensuring continuity in learning and professional development opportunities.

The last category emphasizes personal development and ethical governance as fundamental components of effective leadership. Leadership in HEIs is not merely about managing academic programs, it requires self-reflection, ethical decision-making, and continuous professional growth. The study highlights how ethical lapses, and poor judgment can lead to institutional instability. Dishonest conduct and mismanagement erode trust, weaken governance structures, and compromise the institution's ability to fulfill its educational mission. As a safeguard, collegial academic oversight serves as an institutional mechanism to enhance leadership accountability and improve managerial effectiveness.

Participants in the study stressed the need for academic leaders to possess both intellectual and moral integrity. The best leaders are those who balance technical expertise with ethical responsibility, ensuring that governance aligns with institutional values. To this end, HEIs should invest in leadership development programs that emphasize ethical training, governance principles, and strategic thinking.

Furthermore, weak leadership in academic institutions is often linked to a lack of preparedness in governance and administrative responsibilities. Many university leaders are appointed based on academic achievements rather than managerial expertise, which can lead to governance inefficiencies. To address this, institutions should consider structured leadership training, mentorship programs, and workshops to better equip future leaders with the necessary skills.

Although this study focuses on the Chilean context, the findings resonate with broader global discussions on higher education governance. HEIs worldwide face similar challenges, including changing student demographics, funding pressures, and evolving policy landscapes [23]. These factors necessitate adaptive leadership strategies that align with institutional structures and cultures to meet educational goals effectively.

Universities are historically recognized as cosmopolitan institutions shaped by centuries of academic traditions [24]. Historical events have influenced their evolution, from medieval academic cloisters to modern world-class universities. Given this long-standing legacy, HEIs must remain open to organizational change, ensuring that governance models reflect contemporary challenges and opportunities. Modern organizational theories have been significantly informed by the study of universities, positioning HEIs as models for governance research and institutional management [5]. University governance refers to the structures that allow HEIs to function effectively both internally and in relation to their external environment [9]. Effective governance ensures that universities can identify priorities, allocate resources strategically, and establish adaptive structures to navigate change [8], [25].

At an international level, higher education policies have been extensively studied to understand governance trends, financial sustainability, quality assurance, and institutional effectiveness. The OECD's 2004-2008 review of higher education policies in 24 countries underscores the

importance of governance, research, academic career development, and internationalization in shaping institutional performance [26]. The global insights gained from this study align with ongoing academic conversations on the challenges and opportunities facing HEIs in diverse contexts.

This analysis highlights the importance of adaptive leadership in HEIs to enhance governance structures, improve student success, and uphold ethical decision-making. Leadership effectiveness in academia is directly tied to an institution's ability to fulfill its educational mission, maintain academic excellence, and contribute to societal development. The findings indicate the need for professional development, ethical leadership, and governance reform. As institutions face growing complexities, leaders must be equipped with the skills, knowledge, and ethical foundations to successfully navigate organizational challenges.

Ultimately, the study demonstrates that higher education leadership is not static—it evolves in response to institutional needs, societal expectations, and global trends. HEIs must continue fostering leadership training, governance improvements, and ethical responsibility to remain effective, resilient, and impactful in the ever-changing landscape of higher education.

CONCLUSIONS

This study underscores the challenges faced by leaders in higher education institutions (HEIs) as they navigate the reconciliation of strategic and operational functions, balancing long-term institutional goals with short-term operational demands. Drawing from the experiences of university managers, we examined the leadership approaches that influence the implementation of the organizational purpose and how these relate to the three core research questions.

- Prevalent leadership styles in university governance, which are primarily linked to leadership styles, approaches, quality and organizational governance and regulatory frameworks.
- The impact of leadership on institutional stakeholders, which connects to the influence of leadership on institutional mission and social mobility.
- The characteristics of an effective educational leader, which relate to personal development and reflection in leadership practice.

We recognized that management decisions affect university operations. Apart from the economic ones that support the corporation, we appreciate the sociological and moral ones. The degree of identification of the collaborators with their organization creates an institutional corpus whose value legitimizes its existence: essential corporate merit in leadership quality. Thus, academic experience, unity of purpose, influence over peers, empathy, and alignment, among other administrative elements, contribute to the effectiveness of universities. The operational quality of the intermediate levels in university management affects the operational processes to achieve the mission of HEIs. Incompetence in job performance, lack of control, vanity, or simple carelessness, and even the lack of training in the administration and management of organizations have unintended consequences. Poorly managed institutions suffer from a lack of clear direction, improper delegation of responsibilities, and leadership vacuum, all of which contribute to institutional stagnation or failure [12]. In contrast, capable leaders

contribute to institutional sustainability by fostering collaboration, maintaining academic rigor, and supporting organizational development.

Leadership leaves a lasting imprint on HEIs. Decisions made at the governance level significantly impact corporate reputation and operational effectiveness. Whether positive or negative, these effects shape the long-term trajectory of an institution [8], [19]. Importantly, the study suggests that public and private HEIs exhibit governance distinctions that influence leadership selection and execution. In public universities, leadership appointments are often made through elections within the academic community, emphasizing democratic decision-making and collective responsibility. This collegial selection process holds the institution accountable yet also introduces complexities and delays in decision-making. In contrast, private universities operate under a hierarchical governance model, where boards of trustees appoint leaders based on strategic objectives. While this model streamlines governance, it also centralizes authority, potentially limiting stakeholder participation.

Precisely, the nature of the director shifts between models that privilege academic ascension, strategic management, or the power of organizational interest groups. In this way, the interviewees see the political leadership style as more focused on the agenda and less on the university mission. The academic leadership is more focused on the hierarchy of academic degrees. However, there is a conviction that participative leadership or coaching is appropriate to improve the internal processes of undergraduate, graduate, research or any other university service. Decision-making in public universities is often a slow and consensus-driven process, requiring extensive negotiations among stakeholders. As one participant noted, objectives that could be achieved in one year often take three or more years due to the need for broad institutional agreement. This reality complicates strategic execution, highlighting the importance of leadership that can effectively navigate bureaucratic constraints while maintaining institutional momentum.

The study underscores the importance of identifying weak or inexperienced leaders in operational management and providing them with targeted support and development opportunities. Mid-level leaders play a critical role in translating strategic goals into actionable plans, and their input is essential for long-term institutional success.

Effective leaders prioritize talent development, fostering an environment in which faculty and administrators thrive both personally and professionally. In this regard, we identify two leadership archetypes: multipliers and diminishers. The former highlights people's contributions to the organization, enhances their corporate talents, engages them, and helps them achieve unimaginable results. On the other hand, diminished leaders are characterized by having their agenda, and the participation of others is to take over their ideas and impose their points of view [12]. Unfortunately, diminishing leadership appears more common in HEIs, presenting a significant challenge to sustainable governance. Institutions must work to identify, counteract, and replace detrimental leadership practices to ensure organizational resilience and long-term effectiveness.

Organizational culture deeply influences how leaders execute their roles, shaping decision-making processes, institutional priorities, and stakeholder engagement. HEIs develop corporate

identities that internalize philosophical principles and educational models, aligning managerial action with institutional values. University leadership must operate within regulatory frameworks that govern institutional performance, balancing ethical considerations with operational constraints. The study highlights differences in decision-making speed and regulatory oversight between public and private institutions, even though ethical duties are common. In general, there is coherence between the performance of the manager and the regulations associated with their functions. In public HEI, governance is bound by collegiality, requiring leaders to uphold transparency and meritocratic values. However, institutional politics can sometimes hinder objectivity, leading to internal tensions when dissident voices challenge the status quo. Whereas in the private HEIs, decision-making structures grant managers greater authority, allowing for quicker strategic execution and disciplinary enforcement. However, this model risks concentrating power in ways that limit participatory governance.

Effectiveness in management action is essential in the leadership of HEIs and is directly related to implementing the university's public or private purpose. Personal management decisions have consequences in the institutional unit. Ethical leadership extends beyond professional competency, requiring commitment to fairness, transparency, and institutional integrity. Human motivations in leadership can be categorized into extrinsic motives (material needs), intrinsic motives (knowledge needs), and transcendent motives (affective needs) [27-29]. Affective needs allow us to achieve appropriate relationships with other people. Other people are not indifferent to us. We appreciate them as human beings that they are. "Their satisfaction is manifested through the certainty that the other is affected by what affects us and why it affects us" [2]. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, ethical responsibility, and strategic foresight contribute to realizing the university's educational mission and advancing society. Ultimately, the success of HEIs depends on the integrity and capability of their leaders. As educational landscapes evolve, HEIs must continue cultivating, supporting, and sustaining leadership excellence to maintain academic rigor, institutional reputation, and societal impact.

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