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Original Article

An examination of department chairs' management philosophies and how they relate to role conflict and workload at the University of Tabriz

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Abstract
Department management can be considered the most important structure in higher education. They play a crucial role in every aspect of department activities. Their actions can fulfill goals that are beyond individual goals. This study is a survey. A questionnaire is used as the data collection tool. The research population consists of all department chairs and teachers at University of Tabriz. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict and overload. In addition, there is a significant difference between what department chairs think of their own leadership styles and what teachers think of department chair's leadership styles. Finally, no significant difference was found between department chairs' leadership styles and the importance they assign to their own five roles.

Key words: Department chairs, faculties, leadership styles, role conflict, role overload

Introduction

Educational system is a kind of organization. In fact, educational organizations are official organizations that fulfill special goals and like any other organization, their administration is associated with managerial processes like planning, organization, monitoring, control and evaluation. In addition, management and leadership philosophies, motivation, communication, and human relations control management activities within these organizations and can also influence their existence and nature. The main idea is that academic activities will improve when the organization has a competent, honest, and diligent leader who is able to influence human resources, has a positive perspective about future changes and put emphasis on staff development and learning (Sanyal, 2000: 145). Some experts believe that higher education is faced with the problem of leadership (Bensimon et al., 1989). Many studies show that the role of department chairs in universities is a key and decisive factor (Gmelch & Burns, 1994). Department management can be considered the most important structure in higher education (Gmelch & Parkay, 1999). Department chairs play a crucial role in every aspect of department activities. Their actions can fulfill goals that are beyond individual goals (Lindholm, 1999). Department chairs determine the organizational atmosphere and influence institutional members' attitudes (Conter et al., 2005: 241).

In higher education institutions, departments often provide the basis for academic and research activities and additionally, influence other types of activities within the organization (Doaei & Malekzadeh, 2012: 69). Department chairs should be competent in communication, and decision-making, motivating, encouragement and conflict resolution (Bowman, 2002).

Today, more than ever, the role of leadership and management styles in organizational performance effectiveness and improvement has been recognized and leadership styles are increasingly spreading within academic organizations. This increasing trend has doubled the

importance and significance of leadership issues in universities and institutes of higher education and in particular among department chairs since from the postmodern point of view, leadership in higher education is a vehicle for implementing organizational development and department chairs' role as a branch of leadership in inspiring and providing a perspective on the future is quite outstanding (Amin Mozaffari, 2012). Today, effective leadership is considered a development index in the world system. An efficient and competent management can utilize potential resources and talents within an organization in order to provide a suitable platform for sustainable and comprehensive development. Therefore, effective management of departments is considered one of the most important tasks of department chairs. In theory and practice, effectiveness of department chairs improves department's academic status and provides the necessary conditions for personal development of faculty members (Babolan & Rajabi, 2010: 150). Leadership is an integral part of management and if there was only one factor that could distinguish between successful and unsuccessful organizations that would be, without doubt, effective leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006: 97).

Leaders and managers of educational organizations can influence process development and individual competencies and, consequently, enhance students' learning. In addition, bringing about change in educational institutions and universities depends on the level of competence of the institute and how it is being managed and led (Hasanian, 2004: 109).

Faculty members as one of the greatest assets of any society and one of the most important elements of educational system plays a quite crucial and decisive role in training and educating expert workforce whose efforts will definitely lead to growth and development of human societies (Shahbazi et al., 2009: 71). Today, due to the tendency toward decentralization and a willingness to entrust more power and authority to lower-rank officials, paying attention to the special needs of departments and faculties has become more necessary (Mohsenpour, 2003: 79). Comprehensive development of educational organizations has doubled the need to have skilled and competent managers who are capable of utilizing professional knowledge and experience. These managers affect society's general direction by directly influencing training of other professions (Behrangi, 2002: 16). Understanding leadership culture and skills is of utmost importance because resistance to change and the methods used to deal with it can reflect organizational culture and atmosphere (Austin, 1994: 51). Today, a department chair can be considered a mediator, a connector and a facilitator who plays a significant role in the development of the department, faculty or even university (McArthur, 2002: 6). Having close relationships with different institutions and organizations, faculty members, academic and non- academic staff, students and …, department chairs should, more than any other academic administrator, be skilled in communication and have information mastery. No business, academic or non-academic unit can avoid conflict between its employees. Conflict is inherently more likely to occur within an academic department than in any other type of business unit (Ramsden, 2001:296).

Department chairs' job position in higher education is a unique one as it is full of conflict. . In higher education unlike many other organizations whose structure requires that decisions are made by managers and transferred to other employees for execution, teachers have major authority and the upper hand in decision-makings (Young, 2007: 1). Department chairs form a significant and essential link between teachers and university's central administrative office and are always confines by a set of conflicting values, responsibilities and roles (Young,

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2001:1).). Many research studies have listed inherent conflict and tension as the characteristics of department chairs' job. Tucker is one of the first researchers who have comprehensively studied the position of department chairs or heads of academic groups. He considers this job as a conflicting one (Tucker, 1981: 4). The nature of this job has led some researchers including Gmelch and Miskin to consider it as job that results in burnout, fatigue and stress (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Young, 2007: 3). Department chairs might also experience role overload. Role overload is a condition in which holders of a certain job position are expected to accomplish many different tasks within an inadequate timeframe. Department chairs are trapped between faculty members and other executive managers. Many scholars have pointed to this job stress and its root causes (Gmelch & Burns, 1994; Gmelch & Gates, 1995; Hubbell & Homer, 1997; Moses & Roe, 1990; and Roach, 1967). Many researchers have also tried to identify challenges faced by department chairs through determining their roles (Young, 2007: 3).

Today, modern organizations have gained a rich and interesting human context through covering a fairly wide range of individual differences. On the other hand, individual differences and

organizational diversity have made managers' work more challenging than begore (Kreitner &Kinicki, 2005: 165).

Theoretical Principles

According to knowledge structuration theory, universities have group structures and groups should be involved in management. Therefore, group structure is associated with professional features of academic society. Parsons emphasizes the difference between official authority derived from status and position and competence and eligibility derived from personal capabilities. He argues that a teacher's authority depends on his knowledge and skills rather than his status. Knowledge structure is compatible with educational process rather than with administrative process. Therefore, an increasing dissatisfaction is seen with

impersonalizing relationships. In such structure, the department chair has a high degree of expertise and considerable experience. His leadership status and role is derived fromhis academic competence. He is accepted and respected by all teachers, experts and executives in the university. In this structure, the management network (at all levels) is freely selected by or from among faculty members. Management is responsible for coordination and evaluation of colleagues so that they can contribute to organization's goals and missions (Khodaverdi, 1996: 63).

Adizes believes that effective management of an organization requires its manager's dedication to take on four distinct roles as a producer, administrator, entrepreneur, and integrator. As a producer, the manager should produce results equal or better than the competitors. As an administrator, the manager should prepare schedules, provide coordination, exercise control and enforce discipline. As an entrepreneur, the manager acts within the framework of an information – decision-making subsystem. As an integrator, the manager transforms individual strategies to group strategies, individual risks to group risks, individual goals to group goals, and individual initiatives to group initiatives (Rezaeian: 1997: 20-21).

Path-goal theory points out that leaders' fundamental duty is to clarify goals for the subordinates. Leaders help subordinates find the best path to the goals and remove any obstacles along the path. This theory makes it possible for the leaders to adjust to different situations. According to this model, the factors influencing leaders' success include: (1) subordinates' characteristics: needs, confidence, abilities and (2) nature of workplace: type and nature of tasks and relationships between colleagues (Asghari, 2007: 156).

Fiedler's contingency model of leadership focuses on two basic concepts relationship- oriented leadership style and task-oriented leadership style. Relationship-oriented leaders emphasize on different aspects of their work relationships. They see every employee as someone important and accordingly, pay attention to them as well as their needs. Task-oriented leaders emphasize on work and duty and consider employees as means to achieve organizational goals (Shaban, 2008: 46).

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Mintzberg concluded that managers are almost similar in what they do. He considers several roles for managers. Interpersonal roles include figurehead, leader and liaison and decisional roles include entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator (Robbins & DeCenzo, 2000: 23).

Methodology

The present study is a survey and extensive research regarding its depth. The research population consists of all department chairs and teachers at University of Tabriz. The questionnaire was distributed among all 66 department chairs. 51 of completed questionnaires were considered acceptable. The total number of teachers was 634. Random sampling method was used to determine this part of research sample. 200 of completed questionnaires were considered acceptable.

The researchers used questionnaires as their data collection tool. The questionnaire developed according to the role conflict seven-item scale (Rizzo et al., 1970) was distributed among department chairs. The questionnaire developed based on a role overload three-item scale (Netemeyer et al., 1995) and another role overload one-item scale (Young, 2007) was distributed among department chairs. A questionnaire based on Salzman's 35-item leadership scale was distributed among department chairs so that they could determine their own leadership style. The same questionnaire was distributed among teachers so that they could determine department chairs' leadership style. A modified version of department chair duty questionnaire developed by Carroll and Gmelch (1992) was distributed among department chairs and teachers (it consists of 21 duties categorized under five

roles (department leader, resource manager, faculty leader, instructional manager, and teacher and student advisor)).

Content validity or more specifically face validity was used to determine research's validity. Accordingly, prior to implementation, the questionnaire was given to a group of teachers in social sciences and management departments. Upon approval, the data was collected through this approved questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure reliability. Cronbach's alpha

coefficients for importance assigned to duties questionnaire, leadership style questionnaire, role conflict questionnaire, and role overload questionnaire were 0.766, 0.723, 0.89, and 0.88, respectively. Since estimated Cronbach's alpha coefficients were greater than the standard value (0.7), it can be concluded that the questionnaires have good internal reliability

Findings

The research hypotheses are as follows:

1) There is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict.
2) There is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role overload.
3) There is a significant difference between leadership styles of department chairs from their own point of view and teachers' point of view.
4) There is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership style and the level of importance they assign to their own roles.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict.

One-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was used to test this hypothesis. The null hypothesis in ANOVA suggests that the mean value of the dependent variable is equal at all levels of the independent variable (leadership style). If the level of significance is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected. Under such conditions, there is a relationship between the variables.

The test results show that the level of significance is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 meaning null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, there is significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict. LSD post hoc test's results indicate that the level of role conflict is significantly lower in department chairs with a liberal leadership style than in department chairs with authoritarian and mixed leadership styles.

Table 1

ANOVA Results for Analysis of Relationship between Role Conflict and Leadership Style

	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	F	Level of significance
Authoritarian leadership style	10	4.2690	1.46041	9.562	0.000
Mixed leadership style	17	3.9412	1.27981		
Liberal leadership style	24	2.5833	1.06491		

Table 2

LSD Post Hoc Test Results for Role Conflict

Leadership Style (I)	Leadership style (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Mean Difference Error	Level of Significance
Authoritarian leadership style	Mixed leadership style	0.32787	0.48634	0.503
	Liberal leadership style	1.68571	0.45932	0.001
Liberal leadership style	Liberal leadership style	1.35784	0.38685	0.001

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their

role overload.

One-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was used to test this hypothesis. The null hypothesis in ANOVA suggests that the mean value of the dependent variable is equal at all levels of the independent variable (leadership style). If the level of significance is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected. Under such conditions, there is a relationship between the variables.

The test results show that the level of significance is 0.000 which is less than 0.05 meaning null hypothesis is rejected. As a result, there is significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role overload. LSD post hoc test's results indicate that the level of role overload is significantly lower in department chairs with a liberal leadership style than in department chairs with authoritarian and mixed leadership styles.

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Table 3
ANOVA Results for Analysis of Relationship between Role Overload and Leadership Style

	Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	F	Level of significance
Authoritarian leadership style	10	4.6750	1.32314	18.537	0.000
Mixed leadership style	17	4.7647	1.022115		
Liberal leadership style	24	2.7083	1.23285		

Table 4
LSD Post Hoc Test Results for Role Overload

Leadership Style (I)	Leadership style (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Mean Difference Error	Level of Significance
Authoritarian leadership style	Mixed leadership style	-0.08971	0.47224	0.850
	Liberal leadership style	1.96667	0.44600	0.000
Liberal leadership style	Liberal leadership style	2.05637	0.37563	0.000

Hypothesis   3:
There is a significant difference between leadership styles of department chairs from their own point of view and teachers' point of view. Chi-square test was used to investigate this hypothesis. A contingency table is drawn first. The observed values and column and row percentages are calculated. The null hypothesis suggests that the variables are independent. If the level of significance is less than0.05, the null hypothesis will be rejected. The chi-square value, degree of freedom and level of significance are 119.18, 2 and 0.000, respectively. Since the level of significance is less than 0.05, the hypothesis that suggests the variables are independent is rejected. In other words, there is a significant difference between leadership styles of department chairs from their own point of view and teachers' point of view.

Table 5
*Department*Leadership Style Contingency Table*

			Leadership Style			Total
			Authoritarian	Mixed	Liberal	
Department	Department chairs	Observed frequency	10	17	24	51
		Row percentage	19.6	33.3	47.1	100
		Column percentage	5.9	29.8	100	20.3
	Professors	Observed frequency	160	40	0	200
		Low percentage	80.0	20.0	0.0	100
		Column percentage	94.1	70.2	0.0	79.7
Total		Observed frequency	170	57	24	251
		Row percentage	67.7	22.7	9.6	100
		Column percentage	100	100	100	100

Table 6
*Department*Leadership Style Chi-Square Test Results*

	Statistic value	Degree of freedom	Level of significance
Pearson's Chi-square	119.182	2	0.000

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Hypothesis   4:
There is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership style and the level of importance they assign to their own roles.

        One-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was used to test this hypothesis. The levels of significance for the importance assigned to the roles, student advisor role, resource manager role, department leader role, instructional manager role, and faculty leader role are 0.674, 0.169, 0.594, 0.492, 0.261, and 0.879, respectively. As the level of significance is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is not rejected. As a result, there is no significant relationship between department chairs' leadership style and the level of importance they assign to their own roles.

Table 7
ANOVA Results for Analysis of Relationship between Leadership Style and the Importance Assigned to Roles

	Leadership style	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation	F Value	Level of significance
Importance assigned to roles	Authoritarian	10	5.0238	0.49398	0.398	0.674
	Mixed	17	4.9580	0.43379		
	Liberal	24	4.8829	0.41797		
Student Advisor Role	Authoritarian	10	4.2000	0.63246	1.843	0.169
	Mixed	17	4.3529	0.78591		
	Liberal	24	4.7500	0.98907		
Resource manager rol	Authoritarian	10	5.0200	0.88167	0.527	0.594
	Mixed	17	4.8824	0.81871		
	Liberal	24	4.7333	0.68694		
Department leadership role	Authoritarian	10	5.1667	0.42953	0.721	0.492
	Mixed	17	5.1895	0.40969		
	Liberal	24	5.0139	0.57438		
Instructional manager role	Authoritarian	10	5.4000	0.46614	0.383	0.261
	Mixed	17	4.9804	0.73097		
	Liberal	24	4.0556	0.66425		
Faculty leader role	Authoritarian	10	4.8333	0.59317	0.130	0.879
	Mixed	17	4.7059	0.61104		
	Liberal	24	4.7500	0.65386		

Discussion and Conclusion

The results show that there is a significant relationship between department chairs' leadership styles and their role conflict and overload (hypotheses 1 and 2). In other words, department chairs who follow a liberal leadership style experience significantly lower levels of role conflict and overload compared to those with a mixed or authoritarian leadership style. Thus, hypotheses 1 and 2 are confirmed. These hypotheses can be explained according Fiedler's contingency model of leadership. This model suggests that relationship-oriented and liberal leaders emphasize on different aspects of their work relationships and pay attention to each and every subordinate. Therefore, it seems quite natural that in departments where chairs follow a liberal leadership style, faculty members have a better feeling about their departments. And since work relationships are of a positive nature, faculty members feel more valued and committed and get more involved in department activities. Under such conditions, department chairs encounter less problems and conflicts.

The test results also show that there is a significant difference between leadership styles of department chairs from their own point of view and teachers' point of view (hypothesis 3). In other words, department chairs consider their own leadership styles as more liberal (humanistic) while teachers consider leadership styles of the same department chairs as more authoritarian (task- oriented). Thus, hypothesis 3 is confirmed.

Finally, the results show that there is no significant relationship between department chairs' leadership style and the level of importance they assign to their own five roles (resource manager, instructional manager, department leader, faculty leader, and student advisor). Therefore, hypothesis 4 is rejected.

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