

QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF THE REQUIRED LEADERSHIP SKILLS OF
ACADEMICS WORKING IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN INDIA

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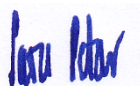
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my dearest parents, wife and to my loving son, without their love, support, patience, and understanding, the completion of this work would not have been possible.

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To my wonderful parents, **Late Shri Tara Singh and Mrs. Suman Thakur**, who have always stood by my side with unwavering support throughout my educational and life journey. Their unconditional love and blessings have been my greatest strength, inspiring me to look forward to a better tomorrow. I owe this acknowledgement to both of you, and I am proud to share this milestone in your honour.

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my son, **Kanishk Singh Thakur**. You may not yet understand the significance of the words written in these pages, and that is perfectly alright. One day, when you wish to know, I will always be there to explain and guide you.

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ABSTRACT
QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF THE REQUIRED LEADERSHIP SKILLS OF
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Anand Singh Thakur
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This dissertation examines the leadership skills, decision making styles and learning abilities needed by academic leaders in Indian Higher education. Considering a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, the study has determined five core competencies, including strategic vision and planning (85%), decision-making and problem-solving (80%), innovation and continuous learning (75%), empathy and mentorship (72%), and adaptability to change (70%). The competencies affirm the transformation of the hierarchical, authority-based models of governance into the participatory, evidence-based, and results-based leadership.

The study points out that peer consultation (26%) and stakeholder engagement as the most common practice (24%) seem to be the most acceptable decision making and the systematic evaluation (22%), evidence-based methods (14%), are the response to the increasing dependence on transparent governance. Organisational learning was also found to be important and institutions laying stress on comparative training examination, use of skills, development indicators and feedback systems to improve leadership execution.

The results add to the literature by putting the existing global leadership theories into context with the Indian higher education system and to practice by generating practical

action recommendations. Managerial implications are that it requires formalized decision protocols, mentoring architectures and capability building pathways. The relevance of policies to those of NEP 1986 and NEP 2020 (National Education Policy 2020) that highlight autonomy, inclusivity, and adoption of digital are reflected (Government of India, 2020; Government of India, 1986).

Generally, the paper offers a competency-based model of enhancing academic leadership in India, institutional sustainability, policy responsiveness, and competitiveness in a global academic environment.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Leadership development has not been considered a major aspect of higher education systems especially in underdeveloped countries. This paper discusses the extent to which an academic leadership development database can fill this gap. The general aim is to assist the academic managers in the senior ranks to acknowledge the need of developing the transformational leadership competencies. Although effective leadership is highly sought after in universities, little empirical evidence has been done on how and what leadership capacity building entails amongst high-ranking academic leaders.

This paper relies on the pertinent literature and secondary data to examine the role of leadership competencies that promote a positive institutional change. Through its leadership in the academic settings, the top managers must ensure that excellence in teaching is maintained, that collaborations cultures are promoted, and new practices are instituted to direct the teaching teams.

Settles et al. (2019) state that academic leadership implies a wide range of functions such as strategic management, administrative functions, transformational leadership, and visionary planning. The growth of universities all over the world, as well as the shift in the regulations, has made the urgency of the academics to address the issue of the bureaucratic restriction and to take the proactive leadership positions. In India, where education has been one of the main factors of economic and social growth, effective leadership has been

the key in promoting communication, cooperation, and innovation among the institutions of higher learning.

The topic of leadership remains a highly scholarly area of concern because it is applicable to various sectors which include the field of economics, politics, social systems, and education (Liu et al., 2003). Universities and colleges across the globe are becoming more aware of the necessity to support leadership processes and equip academic staff with the skills to work in change based positions. The current research is related to this expanding body of writing as it focuses on how academic leaders understand, practice, and act upon the pressures of leading an institution in a dynamic context.

1.2 Research Problem

The education system in India is rapidly transforming as a result of the demographic change, the development of technologies, and the changes in the pedagogical practices. Even though academic leaders play a central role in navigating such changes, there is no sufficient research on competencies of leadership needed in the Indian higher education context. This paper seeks to fill this gap in knowledge by looking at the finer leadership competencies required of academic leaders to react to the emerging opportunities and challenges.

Key Issues Addressed:

1) The lack of contextual leadership standards:

India does not have a well-specifically determined localized framework of how academic institutions should expect their leaders to lead. This vagueness limits hiring, education, and performance of academic leaders.

b) Cultural complexity and contextual diversity:

The immense cultural and institutional diversity in India has some distinct challenges of leadership. This paper will discuss how leadership skills should be modified to suit different learning contexts.

c) Problems in technological integration:

With the current rapid change in the teaching and administration fields due to the digital technologies, leaders should be ready to navigate the digital ecosystem and be prepared to adopt the practices enabled by technology.

d) Demographic changes and needs of inclusion:

The demographic shift among the students necessitates the leaders to develop supportive, inclusive, and learner-centred academic conditions.

e) Innovation in the teaching and institutional betterment:

To facilitate contemporary educational practices and institutional changes, academic leaders need to promote creativity, flexibility and innovativeness.

1.3 Purpose of Research

The main aim of the study is to qualitatively examine the leadership competencies that are demanded by the academic professionals in the Indian higher education sector. With this in mind, the research aims at the following objectives:

- a) To examine the present condition of the academic organisational leadership in India.
- b) To recognize the skill sets to be used in successful academic leadership.
- c) To study the effects of leadership skills in the conversion of the senior managers into good academic leaders.

1.4 Significance of the Study

a) Academic Leadership Requirement

Academic leadership is more than teaching, research, and scholarship as it incorporates academic values, institutional stewardship, and character-building (Joyce and O'Boyle, 2013). As Thorp and Goldstein (2013) point out, the dynamics of the knowledge economy require a workforce competent in dealing with high-level academic and leadership roles. Even though, academic leadership is a concept that is gaining recognition in different parts of the world, it is yet to develop further in most areas. India, the third-largest higher education system in the world is in dire need of prepared academic leaders. Academic leadership, unlike leadership within corporate or government contexts, has its own set of challenges including defending academic freedom, inculcation of research culture, and high standards of pedagogy (Al-Shuaiby, 2009).

b) Academic Leader Skillsets

Individual and institutional learning determine leadership development in academics. The influence of the official leaders is on other people in relation to their behaviours, decision-making and interaction within organizational environments.

Academic career advancement usually involves leadership roles, and most of the required competencies are usually developed through experience and not through training (Joyce and O Boyle, 2013).

Researchers are in agreement that the basis of effective academic leadership lies in conceptual knowledge, development of practical skills and reflection (Bryman, 2007; Robinson and Timperley, 2007). The main skills are strategic planning, communication, conflict resolution, mentoring and people management.

Leaders should also be in a position to handle change in the organisation and tackle emerging issues as well as inspire teams with common objectives (Krause and Semadeni, 2014). Lord and Hall (2005) underline that development of leadership is a continuum process that takes a person through the stages of a beginner, expert, and expert through a structured experience, reflection, and continuous learning. This research is likely to make the following contributions:

- a) Better decision-making, communication, and long-term planning by discovering context-specific leadership competencies of Indian HEIs.
- b) Academically improved quality by implementing evidence-based leadership practices.
- c) Improved use of resources, through matching the development programmes on leadership with the required skills (Tarbai, 2018).

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the study by describing its rationale, context, research issue, aims, and potential outcomes. Academic leadership in India's higher education sector is the focus of this study, which seeks to fill a gap in our knowledge. Leadership theories, difficulties in academic leadership, and previous studies on faculty leadership development will all be covered in the literature review that follows this chapter. This dissertation maintains a clear sight of the research questions throughout the chapters. Chapter II distils down the literature to constructs that are most pertinent to the strategic vision of Indian HEI, evidence-informed decision-making, innovativeness and continuous learning, empathy, and mentorship and adaptive change stewardship. Chapter III describes the qualitative design, purposive sampling based on the types of institutions, instruments, procedures of thematic analysis, and measures which are taken to promote credibility and dependability. Chapter IV offers themes together with the representative extracts and cross-case patterns of participants. These themes are interpreted in Chapter V in terms of transformational, distributed, and change-leadership approaches, where the points of convergence and divergence are compared with previous research. Chapter VI transforms the findings into practical advice to HEIs (governance SOPs, mentoring architecture, capability-building and performance systems) and articulates the theoretical value and the need to conduct research in the future.

CHAPTER II:

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The act of influencing people to accomplish shared objectives is usually referred to as leadership and successful leadership is usually associated with organisational performance and innovation. The complexity of the concept was further supported by earlier works like those by Shartle (1979: 127-134) as well as Stogdill and Coons (1957), which stressed the absence of a definite definition. Other researchers such as Bennis and Nanus (1985) also brought leadership into spotlights, as one of the least understood issues in social psychology, which is the most extensively written.

Later scholarship started expanding the perspective: as explained by Prentice (2004: 102-109), leadership was viewed as a process of orienting people to the goals, and identified by Mintzberg (1978: 934-948) as an essential task of management. Situational awareness has been emphasized by Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973: 162-180) and exchange base process in terms of transactions leadership has been introduced by Forester, J. and Clegg, S.R., (1991). Jago (1982: 315-336) focused on leadership as process and possession and Nicholls (1986: 27-31) focused on the correspondence between the leader, followers and situation.

Gardner (1987: 4-8) found vision and integrity to be critical and Rastogi (1987: 37-42) mentioned the alignment of personal ambition to those of the institution. According to Bass (1985), leadership was defined as communication that re-established group conditions and according to Rost (1993), leadership was a motivational relationship with the

subordinates. The importance of vision and values was supported by Jacobs and Jaques (1990: 281-295) and Richards and Engle (1986: 199-215), whereas Barge and Schlueter (1988: 116-133) emphasized the importance of positive relations in the creation of commitment.

Subsequently, these studies have been extended to culture and meaning-making: Schein (1992: 85-92) formulated leadership as a method of creating organisational culture, and Drath and Palus (1994) developed it into a sense-making process. Kahn and Katz (1952: 612-628) and House and Aditya (1997: 409-473) had highlighted influence and centrality to mobilisation of followers whereas Leong et al. (1996: 1345-1363) had associated it with organisational commitment. Kedia and Mukherji (1999: 230-251) also identified the environmental complexity as one of the determinants of the leadership practice.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Yukl et al. (2002: 15-32) criticised the application of general categories and called to the strict behavioural analysis. Adair (2002) remarked the relocation of management functions to leadership and Blanchard and Hodges (2023) restated the same as influence to goals. According to the arguments made by Emiliani and Stec (2004: 622-645), the expectations of leaders depend on the context, whereas Deschamps (2005: 31-38) emphasized the need to match abilities with roles. Subsequently, Yukl (2012: 1-42) provided evaluative criteria that are more detailed such as outcomes of the organisation, satisfaction of the followers and the quality of the process.

Further modern approaches keep on broadening the horizons: McCartney and Campbell (2006: 190-202) linked leadership to capability in management and deliverables,

and Adair (2009) emphasized the viability of a practical group awareness. Covey (2020, cited in TransformationalLeadership.net, 2007) reformulated leadership as a decision made consciously and based on respect, whereas Allio (2018) and McCallum and O’Connell (2009: 152-166) focused on the aspect of flexibility and socially directed competencies. Northouse (2025) gave a comprehensive perspective of leadership as a process of influence in a group setting in the pursuit of common interests.

Combined, the literature provides the development of leadership definitions based on traits to the multidimensional approaches that combine process, influence, vision, adaptability, and context. In this paper, leadership in higher education is said to be the process by which academic leaders can impact the vision, decision-making and organisational culture to meet a common goal.

2.2 Theory of Reasoned Action

Educational leadership has emerged to be a critical research topic due to its direct impact on institutional performance, quality of teaching and student performance. In the literature, several conceptual strands are in place, which encompass various dimensions of educational leadership, such as instructional and distributed leadership, mindful and ethical leadership, multicultural and developmental perspectives, and teacher leadership. Combined, these strategies illustrate the multifaceted nature of the demands of educational leaders, who have to integrate professional competence and ethical sensitivity and cultural sensitivity.

Instructional leadership focuses on the collaboration and influence of the leader on the curriculum and pedagogy whereas distributed leadership is a focus on shared responsibility among faculty and administrators. Mindful and ethical leadership presupposes reflection, integrity, and care in the decision-making process and multicultural leadership is concerned with the responsiveness to various student and staff populations. Most recent labor also emphasizes the emergence of educational leadership as a career, and the increased importance of teacher leadership as the key to the long-term improvement.

All these points of view come down to the fact that successful educational leadership is multidimensional, which consists of a combination of strategic vision, inclusiveness, morals, and teamwork. In the current research, these frameworks present the conceptual framework on the analysis of the most appreciated competencies among academic leaders in India (RQ1) and an understanding of the way in which leadership efficacy in higher education can be defined and measured (RQ2).

2.2.1 Educational Leadership and its understanding

Educational leadership is a complicated and dynamic notion that has a direct impact on the course and performance of educational establishments. Leadership takes a special importance in the Indian context where diversity of languages, cultures and regions are involved. Leaders need to balance competing demands in institutions and guarantee inclusivity and quality. This needs administrative competence as well as vision and responsiveness to the situation.

2.2.2 Educational Leadership: Defining Educational Leadership

Educational leadership is far beyond the administration or bureaucratic lines. It includes the ability of the leader to shape the whole learning environment through the shaping of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment as it has been noted by Leithwood (2005). Educational leadership in India requires balancing between the managerial tasks and visionary and change agent roles. Leaders should develop academically rigorous and culturally sensitive curricula that helps them to meet the needs of diverse learners through innovative teaching, which, in turn, should be assessed to be fair and inclusive. These roles indicate the multidimensional aspect of leadership in the Indian institutions.

2.2.3 Educational Leadership: The Views in History

Educational leadership in India dates back to the Gurukul system where the mentor was a teacher who influenced not only learning but also values. The colonial rule taught hierarchical designs which were characterized by control whereas the post-independence era taught access, inclusivity and the education of local languages, which fit leadership with national development and social justice ambitions. The role of the leader has been widened in the modern world due to globalisation and developments related to technology, where leaders have to be the visionaries capable of maintaining the cultural identity, yet changing curricula, teaching methods, and institutional processes to global demands (Arar and Haj-Yehia, 2018: 69-81). This development portrays that leadership has always been changing with the society.

2.2.4 Current Methodologies of Educational Leadership

A broad spectrum of approaches to educational leadership exists in the current scholarship. The article by Leithwood (2005) proved that the leadership of the schools has

a great impact on the achievement of the students, whereas in the article by Hallinger (2011: 125-142) the leadership was directly connected to learning processes. Articles by Daniëls et al. (2019: 110-125) and Dimopoulos (2020: 13-28) investigated the interaction between traits, behaviours and styles in complex educational settings. The topic of teacher perceptions of leadership (Nasution et al., 2022: 6715-6726), the formation of leadership qualities in educators (Pevzner et al., 2021: 1-8), and the concept of mindful or adaptive practices (Contreras et al., 2022: 75-83; Zoccoli, 2017) has also been covered in research. All these studies reveal that educational leadership is not tied down to formal authority but entails working together, being flexible, and creating conducive environments.

Overall, educational leadership can be explained by the multidimensional and context-sensitive practice. Its development throughout history and modern strategies outline the development of leadership functions that go beyond administration to setting of the vision, inclusiveness, and innovation. These lenses give the current study its interest in determining which competencies are most prized in Indian higher education and assessing the meaning of leadership efficacy in this case.

a) Transitional synthesis: The literature is united around a multidimensional perspective of educational leadership, which incorporates all strategic vision, inclusive practice, ethical judgment, and collaborative work with faculty and students. The following focal aims are informed by these strands in this study:

To answer (RQ1) the question on the particular competencies the Indian academic leaders are focusing on, and (RQ2) to answer how the leadership efficacy has been measured in

the context of higher education. These constructs will avoid descriptive drift and make the review scaffold the design and analysis of the study directly.

2.3 Human Society Theory

Importance of Leadership Development in Education

The effectiveness of leadership in the field of education relies on the mixture of individual traits and behaviours as well as the awareness of the situation in the environment. According to Dimopoulos (2020: 13-28), the characteristics of a leader, including experience, knowledge, and individual qualities, have a direct impact on the way he or she leads institutions. Pevzner et al. (2021: 1-8) also underline that leadership is not only defined by a leader but also by actions, so the following behaviours may inspire, motivate, and influence the learning process of students and staff professional growth.

The leadership style role is also important. Hallinger (2011: 125-142) and Lowe et al. (1996: 385-425) indicate that different styles of leadership have a variety of effects on the direction of institutions and the necessity of leaders to adapt their leadership to the needs of organisations is high. Zoccoli (2017) and Arar and Haj-Yehia (2018: 69-81) also introduce the fact that context is essential: in multicultural and diverse settings, leadership performance should be aware of cultural processes and practices that facilitate inclusiveness.

Combined, the literature suggests that all educational leadership is a product of a combination of traits, behaviours, style and context. These aspects explain why leadership development is critical in equipping individuals to address complex requirements of the

education systems. In the present study, these observations can be used to make an analysis of the competencies into which academic leaders in India place greater emphasis as well as how leadership efficacy is measured within the university context.

2.4 Principles of Leadership

Leadership has been discussed as not only based on theories but also guiding principles on which to practice it. The United States Army (1983) presented eleven principles that are applicable in industries:

1. Have good technical competence.
2. Breed responsibility amongst subordinates.
3. Transform communication into a good habit.
4. Be able to deliver timely information and updates.
5. Demonstrate sincere interest in employees.
6. Grow self-awareness, and strive towards constant self-growth.
7. Use good decision making and planning abilities.
8. Be accountable of consequences and be corrected.
9. Set a good example and be an example of organisational values.
10. Look at the organisation as a single entity and not individual units.
11. Tap group potential to accomplish goals.

Sustainability is an essential aspect in the educational dimension. The use of leadership promotes teaching and learning, continues vision of leaders and followers and balances inspiration and long-term institutional resilience (Ololube et al., 2012: 1-18;

Hargreaves and Goodson, 2006: 3-41; Mulford, 2003: 1-58). According to Hargreaves and Fink (2004: 8-13), there were seven concepts of sustainable leadership that were identified:

1. Both generate and sustain learning.
2. Secure success over time
3. Maintain the leadership of others.
4. Solve social justice problems.
5. Protect and renew resources
6. Appreciate diversity and develop capacity.
7. Get involved in the surrounding.

All these structures underscore the fact that proper leadership has to be principled and sustainable. They show that leadership is not only a matter of technical and relational competence but also long-term responsibility of the growth of the institution. This view is highly applicable in the field of higher education where the issue of leadership competencies (RQ1) and leadership efficacy (RQ2) can be considered.

2.5 Leadership Theories

The theory of leadership development has shown a process of gradually changing the orientation to lean more towards inherent traits to lend credence to behaviours, situational fit, and group processes. The perspectives on early traits (Gardner, 1987: 4-8; Rauch and Behling, 1984: 45-62; Stogdill and Coons, 1957) identified the presence of vision, persistence and integrity as characteristic of successful leaders. Task-based and people-based leadership styles were discussed in the context of behavioural approaches

(Prentice, 2004: 102-109; Mintzberg, 1978: 934-948), and contingency theorists (Jago, 1982: 315-336; Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973: 162-180) emphasized the significance that situational factors play in leadership performance. Subsequent trends were put towards transactional and transformational models (Lowe et al., 1996: 385-425; Bass, 1985; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Forester, J. and Clegg, 1991), servant leadership (Greenleaf, 2013; Covey, 2020), and distributed leadership (Leithwood et al., 2010: 671-706; Collinson and Collinson, 2009). The recent works, including Paharia and Singh (2018: 50-60), emphasize the need to contextualise the leadership theory in the context of Indian higher education.

To provide clarity, the Table 2.1 summarises the key theories, their emphasis, strengths, limitations, and reference foundations.

Table 2.1 Discussion of competencies of key theories

Theory	Core Emphasis	Strengths	Limitations	Key References
Trait	Inherent leader qualities (vision, integrity, drive)	Provides selection cues; explains leader emergence	Ignores context; limited predictive power	Gardner (1987: 4-8); Rastogi (1987: 37-42); Nicholls (1986: 27-31); Rauch and Behling (1984: 45-62); Shartle

				(1979: 127-134); Stogdill and Coons (1957)
Behavioral	Observable leader actions (task- vs. people-orientation)	Practical application in training; measurable	Over-simplifies complex contexts	Prentice (2004: 102-109); Yukl <i>et al.</i> (2002: 15-32); Mintzberg (1978: 934-948)
Contingency / Situational	Fit between style and situation	Adaptive; explains contextual success	Diagnosis of context can be complex	Fiedler and House (1988: 73-92); Jago (1982: 315-336); Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973: 162-180)
Transactional	Exchange, compliance, control	Clarity of roles; efficient processes	Limits innovation; risks rigidity	Bass and Avolio (1997, 1994); House and Shamir

				(1993: 81-107); Forester, J. and Clegg, S.R., (1991);
Transformational	Vision, inspiration, empowerment	Drives change, innovation, motivation	Risks rhetorical or personality-led excess	Waldman and Yammarino (1999: 266-285); House and Aditya (1997: 409-473); Bass (1985); Bennis and Nanus (1985)
Servant	Service, ethics, stewardship, follower development	Builds trust; inclusive; moral legitimacy	Hard to operationalize or measure impact	Greenleaf (2013); Covey (2020); Greenleaf <i>et al.</i> (1996)
Distributed	Shared and collective responsibility across multiple leaders and staff	Encourages collaboration; draws on diverse expertise; enhances	Risks blurred accountability if roles and processes are unclear	Leithwood <i>et al.</i> (2010: 671-706); Collinson and Collinson (2009: 365-

		learning outcomes		380); Leithwood (2005); Tian <i>et al.</i> (2016)
Integrated / Contextual	Combines competencies, context, and culture	Aligns theory to higher education realities	Still developing consistent metrics	Paharia and Singh (2018: 50-60)

Source: Author

This synthesis will detail the way in which theory of leadership has evolved to be more dynamic, democratic, and situational. These attitudes give us the basis to explore the leadership styles in Section 2.6 whereby the theoretical insights are connected more to the practical behaviours in the field of higher education.

Overall, theories of leadership have changed their perspectives of inborn traits to dynamic models where people have to change and adapt, focus on behaviours and purpose. These views form the critical bases of the current research by revealing the competencies that academic leaders might need in India (RQ1), as well as giving models by which the efficacy of leadership can be evaluated (RQ2).

2.6 Leadership Styles

Leadership styles define the nature in which leaders impact, inspire, and influence followers. The most common ones are the transactional and transformational leadership

which are opposite but complementary methods. Transactional leadership is based on orderly interactions and obedience whereas transformational leadership is based on visioning, innovativeness as well as development of followers. The two views are significant in explaining how academic leaders in institutions of higher learning strike a balance between day-to-day governance and long-term institutional change (Bass et al., 2003: 207-218; Lowe et al., 1996: 385-425; House and Shamir, 1993: 81-107).

In an attempt to come up with the contrast between these two prevailing styles, the Table 2.2 summarizes the essence of behaviours, strengths, constraints, and major references of the leadership styles of transactional and transformational. This comparative framework brings out the differences in the contribution of each style to the organization of governance and leadership in higher education institutions.

Table 2.2 Leadership Styles and Traits

Style	Core Behaviors	Strengths	Limitations	Key References
Transactional	Contingent reward (clear expectations, performance-based rewards). Management by exception (active: proactive	Clarity and precision. Effective in technical, routine, or time-bound environments. Take	Can restrict creativity. Job satisfaction decreases when overused by May.	Bass <i>et al.</i> (2003: 207-218)

	monitoring). Management by exception (passive: intervene after issues arise)	accountability and compliance.		
Transformational	Transformational Idealized influence (role modelling, shared values, confidence). Inspirational motivation (powerful vision, strong expectations). Creativity, problem-solving, innovation (intelligence). One-on-one attention (mentoring,	Promotes innovation and flexibility. Develop reputation and team spirit. Increases faculty satisfaction and student/faculty interaction. Good interpersonal skills required to make strong positive impact on institutional growth.	Good interpersonal skills requirement to make strong positive impact on institutional growth. Exposure to excess reliance on visionaries. It can be irregularly implemented.	Wong <i>et al.</i> (2013: 709-724); Cummings <i>et al.</i> (2009: 363-385; 2010b: 331-339); House and Shamir (1993: 81-107)

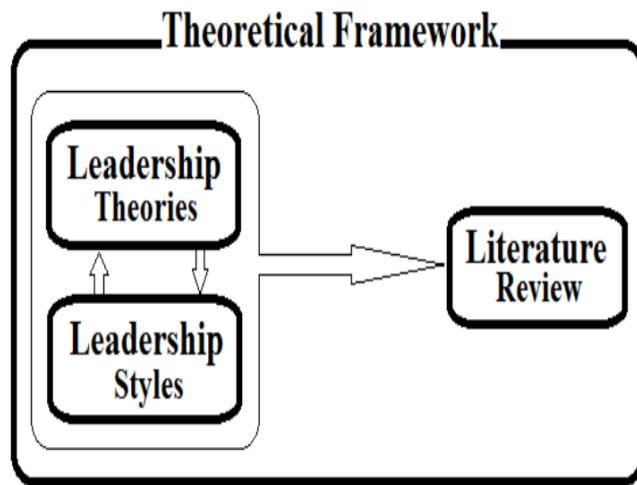
	coaching, personal support)			
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Source: Author

Transactional leadership is structured and clear and transformational leadership encourages creativity, inclusiveness and sustainability in the long term. The evidence in educational institutions of higher learning increasingly converts towards the fact that transformational practices are critical in building leadership competencies and institutional resiliency in dynamic and challenging environments.

This study is conceptually founded on the relationship between the leadership theories and leadership styles. As shown by Figure 2.1, the theories of leadership provide the concepts of the assumptions in the development and functioning of the leader, whereas the styles of leadership are the practical manifestations of the mathematical models. Collectively, they inform the literature review and inform the analysis of leadership competencies and efficacy in higher education.

Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework



Source: Author

2.7 Factors That Determine Leadership Style

The style of leadership is hardly consistent and it conforms to the institutional size, system of communication, the character of the members, the alignment of the goals and the structures of decision making. These aspects prove that leaders need to be flexible and use the approaches that are appropriate in organisational conditions.

2.7.1 Size of the Institution

Decision making becomes more centralized as institutions grow and usually leads to less involvement. Major and multifaceted organizations thus necessitate authoritarian control to keep the efficiency in check, but the possibility of the staff contribution is needed to keep the interest levels high (Naylor, 2004).

2.7.2 Communication and Interaction

Communication is the key to good leadership. Naylor (2004) emphasizes the need to maintain communication and open lines of information, share information on time and

discuss complex matters face-to-face. Organisational learning and decision making is better facilitated in institutions where there is an open communication system.

2.7.3 Personality of Members

Responses towards leadership are determined by individual characteristics. Directive leadership styles are common among members who feel a need of security whereas participatory style fits the requirements of those members who are growth-oriented and autonomy oriented. The successful leaders switch their style to meet this diversity of expectations.

2.7.4 Goal Congruence

Activities strengthen institutional priorities and purpose when organisational objectives are organized in alignment. The congruence level among the team members is what can contribute to participatory leadership, and the lack of alignment provides the need to use more directive leadership styles in order to focus the team and set its course.

2.7.5 Levels of Decision-Making

The effectiveness of leaders is directly connected to the organization of decisions and their perception. According to Weddle (2013, cited in Amanchukwu et al., 2015: 6-14), there are five levels:

1. **Autocratic:** Leader makes decisions independently; they are good during crises when it is necessary to act quickly.
2. **Consultative (individual):** Leader consults individually, makes a decision.
3. **Consultative (group):** Leader consults with the group after which the finalization is made.

4. **Consensus-based:** Leader takes part in equal participation; the group is at an agreement.

5. **Delegated:** Team is given the decision authority within limits, and control is retained.

Adaptive leaders move between these levels depending on urgency, complexity and sensitivity. The combination of efficiency and inclusivity will result in the decisions being approved and taken in the best way possible.

2.8 Leadership Skills

The success of leadership involves a range of skills that can be transferred and make a person influential, coordinated, and adaptable. These are communication and interpersonal competence, problem solving, decision-making, and higher education-specific leadership capabilities in education. These capabilities guarantee that the academic heads are able to reconcile institutional performance to the staff development and student achievement.

2.8.1 Communication and Interpersonal Skills

Communication is situational and relational and is connected to quality of interaction with organisational performance. Koprowska (2024: 132-135) also emphasizes the role of nonverbal cues and feedback, whereas Wetzlawick et al. (2011) point out that the meaning is conveyed through behavior itself. Leaders hence must be sensitive to psychology, relationships, and cultural situations in order to be able to deal with interactions positively.

2.8.2 Barriers to Communication

There are barriers-cultural, physical, perceptual, emotional, and linguistic that tend to weaken communication. These hamper clarity, teams, and motivation unless they are addressed. Research suggests that such interventions as cultural awareness training, open-door policies, perception checking, emotional intelligence, and organized second-language support should be used intentionally (Lin et al., 2024: 810-840; University of Minnesota Libraries, 2016).

2.8.3 Problem-Solving Skills

Problem solving incorporates attention, memory, imagination, and decision making process to solve problems. To maintain the performance of the institutions, leaders should be able to analyse issues, plan on how to solve them and review the results. The ability to teach structured methods will also help the administrators to transfer these skills in all settings, which will empower their professional capacity.

2.8.4 Decision-Making Skills

Decision-making involves selecting among alternatives to achieve goals without creating secondary issues (Memar, 2003: 156-178). Decision-making balances presence with clarity, supported by conviction, delegation, and involvement. Research shows positive effects of empowerment (Al-Sulami, 2020), participatory cultures (Bogler and Somech, 2005: 420-438), and problem-solving orientation (Cassidy, 2002: 325-332), while confusion may result when expectations are unclear (Scott-Ladd et al., 2006: 399-414). Trust and participatory governance also reinforce satisfaction and commitment (Muduli, 2017: 46-56; Thomas et al., 2001: 181-196).

2.8.5 Leadership in Higher Education

Academic leadership refers to the act of inspiring and steering various stakeholders as well as adjusting to the policy changes and institutional transformation. House and Aditya (1997: 409-473) lay an emphasis on influence to the common purpose, whereas the adaptability is the focus of Bass and Riggio (2006) and House and Shamir (1993: 81-107). Gmelch (2002) observes that the competitive demands are difficult to strike a balance but Bryman (2007: 693-710) mentions that the staff autonomy should not be compromised under the pressure of performance. According to Ramsdon (1998), the hallmarks include the teaching innovation, strategic vision, collegiality, and recognition. Subsequent views focus on leadership that is blended and distributed (Collinson and Collinson, 2009: 365-380; Tian et al. (2016), and the three perspectives that are described by later are integrity, consultation, and openness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These abilities combined offer the basis of evaluation of leadership capabilities in the Indian higher education.

The Table 2.3 below is a summary of the discussion after which the key leadership skills are condensed into a brief comparison. It defines their characteristic features, obstacles that can interfere with their effectiveness, applicable techniques of overcoming these obstacles, and the most important academic resources that underline every area of expertise.

Table 2.3 Leadership skills and traits

Skill Area	Core Elements	Challenges/Barriers	Recommended Strategies	Key References
Communication and Interpersonal	Exchange of information, nonverbal cues, feedback, cultural sensitivity	Cultural, physical, perceptual, emotional, and linguistic barriers	Training, open-door policies, EI practices, language support	Lin <i>et al.</i> (2024: 810-840); Koprowska (2024: 132-135); University of Minnesota Libraries (2016); Watzlawick <i>et al.</i> (2011);
Problem Solving	Analytical thinking, planning, implementing, reviewing	Complexity of academic environments	Structured methods, guided practice, reflective review	Memar (2003: 156-178); Cassidy (2002: 325-332)

Decision-making	Selecting effective alternatives, empowerment, delegation, trust	Risk of confusion, unclear expectations	Participatory approaches with clarity; evidence-based choices	Muduli (2017: 46-56); Al-Sulami (2020); Scott-Ladd <i>et al.</i> (2006: 399-414); Bogler and Somech (2005: 420-438); ; Thomas <i>et al.</i> (2001: 181-196)
Higher Education Leadership	Vision, adaptability, collegiality, recognition, integrity	Balancing autonomy with performance demands	Blended/distributed leadership; mentoring; innovation	Collinson and Collinson (2009: 365-380); Bryman (2007: 693-710); Tian <i>et al.</i>

				(2016); Ramsden (1998); House and Aditya (1997: 409-473); Lincoln and Guba (1985)
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Source: Author

Leadership capabilities in post-secondary education are no longer technical competence, but also flexibility, teamwork and honesty. These skills are the foundation of the competencies discussed in further chapters and presents a structure of assessment of the leadership efficacy in Indian higher education.

2.9 Challenges in Indian Education Sector

Leadership, Productivity, and International Competitiveness

Indian higher education is in a high-stress environment defined by the global competition, socio-cultural diversity, the pace of technological change in the field of ICT, the mobile learners and changing patterns of learning and earning. Published works and rankings are no longer considered the best in the world. It must have good leadership that incorporates teaching, learning, research, and innovation with open governance, industrial

connection, and fair performance among different stakeholders. In this section, the author summarizes the pivotal issues and leadership solutions required of Higher Education Institutions of India to produce productivity and social value on scale. It has been designed to be directly consistent with the research questions of this study in leadership competencies, governance practices, and institutional outcomes, and it makes the groundwork of the methodological decisions in Chapter III and the empirical interpretation in Chapters IV and V.

2.9.1 What leadership is now expected to deliver?

The leadership has been expanded by quality requirements of national organizations, such as accreditation by National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and National Board of Accreditation (NBA) and policy priorities announced during the Twelfth Five Year Plan (Planning Commission, 2013). Constaty faculty and staff development, reforms that esteem mentoring, peer review, students assessment of teaching, ICT enabled e-governance throughout internal / external processes, Autonomy frameworks to secure quality and facilitate innovation, have become the duty of decision makers. The leaders should also be clear and transparent in admissions, recruitment, academic progression, financial audit, and assessment in terms of statutes and regulations.

The leadership must mainstream interdisciplinary curriculums and research, solve resource bottlenecks through specific funding, introduce performance incentives such as publications and patents, and employ autonomy in a meticulously staged manner in order to increase productivity. When backed by sustainable Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Internet of Things (IoT), and AI-enhanced services, which enhance

advising and assessment and employability, Choice Based Credit System and credit mobility are enablers. The literature confirms that institutional productivity cannot achieve any significant growth unless there is long-term performance in the teaching and decision-making leadership.

2.9.2 Productivity pressures: finances, equity, and interdisciplinary

The boom in systems expansion in India has failed to be accompanied by sound funding of the system and advanced infrastructure. In places where the state is not fully supportive, banks take the place, or tuition prices increase, which will limit access. Decades-old classic commissions and policies have reiterated that the drivers of institutional productivity are faculty of high quality and professional administrative capacity. Nonetheless, the international evaluations are still indicating that research output is still skewed and is repetitive, and the domestic ranking regime has been partially focused on quantifiable quality gains.

Productivity disparities are increased by socio-cultural inequities. Gender, caste, region, and language discrimination minimize the involvement and negatively affect the campus climate. As Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) remains well short of ambitious national goals, additional growth in the absence of accompanying quality improvements will put more strain on staffing, infrastructure and student support. The desire to be autonomous is welcome yet disputed. Several employees and learners doubt responsibility and sufficiency of resources; leadership must therefore manage the freedom of the institution and protect equity, academic and student performance.

Research implication and implications of the research, these contradictory pressures imply that the concept of productivity is not a single measure in this study but rather a multidimensional construct that connects teaching quality, research performance, employability, inclusion, and integrity. The actions indicated in Chapter III are the derivatives of this framing.

2.9.3 System snapshot: scale, mix, and structural constraints

In the official survey landscape, a huge and diverse system, with a high level of concentration of the regions, the great presence of the rural population, and a high number of small colleges are observed. There is a sparse offering of Ph.D. and most institutions carry single-programmed portfolios and distance education comprises a non-trivial portion of enrolment. Gender disparity is evident in the number of administrative staffs and student-teacher ratio in normal mode is high. India does not have a high number of international students with most being their neighbors and the doctoral degrees are also distributed in few categories of institutions.

Such trends depict three structural limitations to leadership. To start with, a heavy-enrolment undergraduate level on top of thin postgraduate and research layers. Second, imbalanced staffing which puts regular pedagogical burdens on and reduces mentorship standards lowers quality. Third, less internationalization which reduces exposure to international labs, co-authorships and pedagogic innovation.

2.9.4 Entrepreneurial orientation as an institutional capability

Graduate underemployment and limited state resources call on an entrepreneurial shift of strategy and curriculum. Entrepreneurial education is not a side show, it is a vehicle

of delivery of innovation, creation of employment, and generation of wealth. The leaders ought to be entrepreneurial role models, consistent in aligning market demands with resources and policies and should also reward experimental results that are supported with evidence.

An action plan comprises cross-disciplinary and flexible curricula in both the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics, medicines, management, social sciences and humanities (STEAMMMSH), incubation hubs, industry relationships, alumni and external partnerships that would decrease reliance on the exchequer and unit-based performance contracts to convert prototypes into viable businesses. Cultural taboos that put affiliation over productivity and bureaucratic hurdles that drag approvals, are best solved through explicit rules of engagement, time limited decision-making and appreciation of practice based output.

2.9.5 Gender imbalance: leadership pipelines and institutional climate

The level of women involvement in the top-level of academic leadership is low in spite of a considerable number of women present in student groups and teaching faculty. The loss of attrition at mid-career, strict organisational designs and lack of a flexibility provision limit the advancement into the decision roles. The corporate and selected university cases evidences indicate that the policies of work-life balance, predictable progression, as well as inclusive governance reinforce productivity.

The leadership challenge is two-fold:

1. Eliminate organizational snags in staffing and workload.

2. Assessment, and nurture cultures that appreciate the use of aggressive, but cooperative styles of leadership.

This will include formal mentoring of women faculty, open search and selection policies and gender-sensitive workload standards. This is aimed at equality in decision space and not token involvement.

2.9.6 Globalization and partnership in capacity building

Internationalization incorporates curriculum change, bilingual or multilingual instruction, faculty and student mobility's, as well as combined research. It needs e-governance, interoperability of platforms and the portability of credits. Collaborations with major institutions give the opportunity to access high-end laboratories and pedagogies and may speed up the development of domestic capabilities in case the agreement implies mutual IP, supervision of doctoral activity, and performance metrics.

There should be a correspondence between policy and practice. On the policy front, leaders ought to lobby through the streamlined approvals and specific public funds towards strategic partnerships. On an institutional level, the leaders must incorporate internationalization in programme reviews, apply outcome targets in self-studies of accreditation and invest in sabbaticals or visiting appointments based on collaborative outputs.

2.9.7 Accountability for quality: leadership's responsibility

The systematic issues of quality as they have always been can be seen as imbalanced policy enforcement, inadequate use of grants, and increased privatization in the absence of academic protection. Maximizing profits in the section of the private sector

undermines the quality of the faculty, culture of research and appraisal. There is a tradition of heavy teaching which restricts practical exposure even within professional oriented disciplines. The role of leadership goes further than compliance and towards active establishment of infrastructures, incentives and cultures that make practice-based learning, ethical behaviours and integrity of research normal.

Linkage to methods and findings: These facts warrant inclusion of governance and integrity indicators in the instrument and analysis of this study, in order to examine the effectiveness, in addition to access and academic outputs.

2.9.8 Bottlenecks to international readiness

The number of students and faculty ratios are also very high in most public institutions. There is a shortage of infrastructure that undermines genuine project practice, and evaluation mechanisms are frequently much more favoring recall than used to implementation. High enrolments and poor teaching systems provide the environment to academic malpractice, which is harmful in reputation and prohibits credible partnership.

These bottlenecks can be counterbalanced by the leadership through introducing clarity in workloads, increasing teaching assistantships, scaling learning projects based on projects, formalizing industry-academia projects, and integrating ethics, flexibility and ability to withstand in curricula. The credibility required by the global partnerships comes after apparent enhancement of these areas.

2.9.9 Leadership qualities that matter in a volatile and boundary less context

The operating environment is turbulent, unpredictable, complicated and ambiguous. Leaders need mission-based vision, interdepartmental orientation, willingness

to incorporate ICT, transparency and fairness, global interactions through purposeful partnerships, sustainability perspective that balances resources, equity and environmental responsibility. An escape heuristic that can aid the process is to invest heavily in emergent units, cultivate maturing units by providing a supportive learning environment, and liberate high-performing units to be in charge of their own affairs by being accountable.

2.9.10 Recruitment and appraisal reform: aligning results

The short and politicized tenures of senior leaders shrink the strategic horizons and are redirected to routine administration. The global practice enables longer terms of review that gives the leadership time to implement strategy. The reform agenda has encompassed openness, merit-based recruitment, length of terms at par with the rest of the world, separation of everyday management and strategic leadership by professional management levels and outcomes-based appraisals associated with Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI), research, employability, inclusion, and integrity. Clarity and half-year assessments ensure that focus is on the quantifiable gains as opposed to publicity.

2.9.11 AI and ICT: Augmenting, not replacing the academic judgments

AI, AIT and ICT can be used to make learning a personalized process, decrease the friction of advising and enhance analytics used in student success. There are over-reliance on automation, unequal access, vendor lock-in and loss of human capability in case practice is not done. Data, privacy, equity, adequate management of human judgment in curriculum, assessment and advising, investment in faculty growth and re-training, and sensible budgeting to maintain and protect is what this responsible adoption demands.

An effective roadmap goes through preparation, development and evaluation. Policy and infrastructure are established through preparation. Development architectures designs blended courses, hybridizes adaptive analytics and provides expansive campus-to-cloud connectivity. Learning outcomes are evaluated, recycled through evidence and the tools not proven to make productivity better are retired.

2.9.12 Building blocks for agile, outcome-oriented institutions

The short-form operating model of institutional agility can be defined as consisting of four levers:

1. **Cross-sector innovation labs:** industry and community partners, design sprints, co-supervised capstones, seed scholarships, and pointers such as prototypes directed and internships sourced.

2. **Cross-intelligence capacity building:** campus cloud workspaces, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) mapped to programmes, mobile-first access, single sign-on, storage and compute proportions, and indicators such as blended-delivery coverage and micro-credentials earned.

3. **Awareness-based action research:** dashboards Teaching and Learning Research Initiatives (TLRI), scholarly presence monitoring, action cycles, and ethics SOPs on learning analytics, indicators closed time to insight to intervention, or course improvement action.

4. **Societal needs, and scholar-practitioner faculty:** hiring of practice-experienced faculty, service learning and live projects, community partnerships, workload

model that rewards mentoring and outreach and indicator rates: employability and entrepreneurship, community outcomes, and stakeholder satisfaction.

2.9.13 Faculty shortages: workforce planning and retention

Perennial empty posts enlarge student to faculty ratio, squeeze mentoring and delay curriculum restoration. Some of the responses by the leadership are five-year employment plans linked to enrolment predictions, time-to-hire goals and standardized rubrics, visiting scholar and alumni adjunct networks, justifiable norms of workload in teaching, research, and service, early-career mentoring, seed research grants, and rural posting incentives to stabilize underserved campuses. The areas to be monitored include vacancy rates, hiring cycle time, ratio of courses taught by permanent faculty, supervision loads and retention.

2.9.14 Ethics and values as productivity infrastructure

The outcome of professional education that incorporates ethics and human values is trust, social capital, and sustainable results. The means through which teachers, staff, and students exhibit responsibility, cordiality, and integrity, academic outcomes, and employability should all be reviewed by governance. Civic identity, environmental stewardship and gender equality have been reiterated in the Indian policy. This orientation is supplemented by outcome based systems of education, which evaluate critical thinking and creativity. These values, when combined with ICT, form practicing wisdom that promotes the local relevance and global comparability.

2.9.15 Global performance and the leadership gap

The international ranking has been showing that India is still performing poorly compared to its size of the system. To increase the national footprint, the research strategies

in mission areas should be consistent, scholarship time should be guaranteed, co-authorship across borders in research, targeted pipelines to specific talents, and the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should include field-normalized citation impact, publications per faculty, share of collaborations with international researchers, and income per faculty. The leadership gap is never about charisma, it is about the operation systems which connect the inputs and the consequences through discipline and transparency.

2.9.16 An operating cycle for accountability and learning

A cycle documenting an ISO-consistent cycle offers a structure to be used:

1. Appropriateness: ensure that the goals are mission-oriented and quantifiable, that the curricula, the staffing and the budgets are all in support of them.

2. Quality of implementation: make sure planned activities are executed to standard with well-defined roles, schedules, and spending is well defined.

3. Effectiveness: test to see if outputs are on target and eliminate equity gaps. Proper and preventive actions that are recorded and fed into the subsequent planning cycle.

Three leadership moves that are complementary are highlighted in the literature:

1. Develop leadership capacity through development.
2. Find the right style of match to context based on evidence and feedback, and
3. Share leadership such that there is no concentration of problem solving at the top.

School and unit climate forms an intermediary to translating policy into practice and thus routine climate checks and follow-through publicity are important.

2.10 Summary

The conceptual frame of the current research connects the theoretical constructs of transformational leadership with themes and observable leadership behavior that contributes to achieving the productivity outcomes in teaching, research, employability, inclusion, and integrity.

The Table 2.4 below connects Theoretical construct with the respective interview theme alongside the Practical aspect of Leadership.

Table 2.4 Theoretical analysis of interactional themes

Theoretical Construct	Interview Theme	Practical Leadership Behavior
Idealized Influence	Vision-setting	Setting clear institutional goals, role modeling
Inspirational Motivation	Communication	Motivating teams with clarity and enthusiasm
Intellectual Stimulation	Strategic Planning, Adaptability	Encouraging innovation, problem-solving
Individualized Consideration	Mentorship	Personal support and professional development

Source: Author

The research development is designed in a systematic way, where every phase of the research is related to the other in a logical way. The fact that theory leads to method,

method to findings and findings to implications shows how conceptual underlings transform to empirical evidence and ultimately to practical recommendations.

1. Maximizing theory to practice: Chapter III, which measures teaching quality, research productivity, employability, inclusion, and integrity, as well as leadership behaviors and governance practices, are justified by the instrument design as a multi-dimensional perspective of productivity beyond the dimension of theory.

2. Between methods and results: The finding's coding frame is informed by the structural constraints and leadership levers that have been found in this section. Chapter IV presents results against the indicators indicated here and Chapter V presents the interpretation of these results in relation to leadership models and policy expectations mentioned in the rest of the Section 2.9.

3. Findings to implications: Chapter VI then transforms the evidence into what can be practically done to improve agility in institutions at four levers of change, including recruitment and appraisal reform and AI-governance principles that safeguard academic judgments.

CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

The methodology chapter describes research design, strategies and processes used to examine the leadership traits of the academics, which were necessary to work in the Indian education sector. Due to the complexity of academic leadership as both a social and an organisational phenomenon, a qualitative method was considered the best one to employ the lived experiences and the subtle opinions of the subjects. This chapter gives a systematic account of the study design, sampling approach, data collection and data analysis methods, and discusses the credibility and ethics issues involved that validate the study.

3.1 Overview of the Research Problem

Increased policy reforms, the growth of technological use, and the rise of expectations of institutional quality and accountability have influenced the Indian higher education sector. Even though, academic leaders have to juggle between administrative duties, faculty development as well as making strategic decisions. While leaders have long been known to be the pivotal point of institutional effectiveness, little empirical evidence is known about how academic leaders in India practice leadership, the decision making power and their involvement in organisational learning during the daily professional activities.

Majority of the existing leadership researchers are based in Western institutional settings and are largely based on a pre-determined model of leadership. In the initial phases

of the research, it was clear that not all academic leaders of Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) are necessarily represented in such models due to the reality of their practice. Formal structures are not the only ways of influencing leadership practices, where institutional culture, regulatory pressure, and resource constraints have their role to play. These dynamics could not be captured solely using research that was able to operate on abstract constructs; it had to be able to reach the existed experience.

This is why a qualitative approach toward the methodology was taken. Qualitative methodology enabled the respondents to describe leadership practices using their own language and helped the researcher to discover how leadership competencies are implemented in various institutional settings. The study did not measure the leadership qualities using preset scales but aimed at knowing the interpretation, practice, and development of leadership in Indian HEIs. Such orientation made everything to be in line with the research problem, research questions and data collection strategies employed in the study. Although the study is fundamentally qualitative in design, a structured open-ended questionnaire was employed as a supplementary data-collection instrument alongside semi-structured interviews. It is important to clarify the role this questionnaire played: it was not used as a quantitative measurement tool, nor were its responses subjected to inferential statistical analysis. Rather, the questionnaire served as a means of eliciting initial, structured accounts from participants across the full sample of forty academic leaders, ensuring that comparable prompts were used across all participants before the in-depth interview phase. Where the questionnaire included items that produced descriptive frequencies such as the percentage of respondents identifying a given competency as

essential these figures were used solely as salience indicators, illustrating the relative prominence of themes across the dataset, and were always interpreted alongside the rich qualitative accounts obtained in interviews. The study thus remains firmly grounded in an interpretivist, qualitative paradigm: the questionnaire provided entry-level structured data, while the interviews and documents provided the depth, contextual nuance, and explanatory richness on which the thematic analysis is based.

3.2 Research Paradigm and Positioning of the researcher

This research falls within interpretation of research paradigm which appreciates that leadership is a social construct and is contextually specific. In this view, the knowledge of leadership is something that arises out of the interaction between the researcher and the participants and does not exist as a goal, a fixed entity. This paradigm was suitable since the research was aimed at comprehending meanings, interpretations and experiences, and not to study causal relations.

The framing of the research questions and designing of the instruments were informed by the professional exposure of the researcher to the higher-education settings. Meanwhile, this position demanded a keen reflexivity not to foist assumptions to the responses of the participants. To manage this, reflective notes were kept during data collection and analysis to record the points of uncertainty and analytical choices. Participation was also conducted by peer discussion to question interpretations and make sure that the themes were based on accounts of the participants and not on what the researcher thought would happen.

The fact that the researcher position and reflexivity are explicitly recognized makes the study more transparent and makes sure that the interpretation is strongly grounded in empirical evidence. The strategy encourages believability, and at the same time is parallel to the interpretation of orientation that the study takes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

3.3 Operationalization of Theoretical Constructs

Operationalization of leadership constructs in this study was informed by the conceptual framework of Chapter II. Instead of using a leadership competencies as an abstract variable, the study converted them into experience-based prompts that had the capacity to yield practical descriptions of academic leaders. This made sure that theory served as a guiding reference, as opposed to a restrictive template.

The study of leadership competencies has been undertaken as independent capabilities, which enable successful academic governance. These were strategic vision, interpersonal skills and communication, decision-making ability, adaptability and emotional intelligence. These competencies have not been measured as individual traits but as practices that are institutionalized like in curriculum planning, faculty management, and policy implementation (Johari et al., 2022; Tai and Kareem, 2019).

The organisational practice of making decisions became a live one and not a process. The participants were called to explain how the actual decision-making process in their institutions is performed, the level of collaboration, hierarchy, and the stakeholder participation. The study was able to capture the differences between formal governance

structures and day to day leadership practices using this approach (Lovat, 2003; Witmer, 2005).

The organisational learning capacity was checked by the experiences of the participants of the outdoor professional development opportunities, feedback system, as well as the institutional support of the learning and innovation. The study was based on the perception of the leaders about the effectiveness of these mechanisms and the impact of leadership practices on them, instead of assessing training programmes in abstract terms (Hussain et al., 2023; Khalib et al., 2015).

The aspect of leadership preparedness to change was addressed through the analysis of responses to policy changes, digitalization, and institutional change of academic leaders. Respondents were asked to consider their ability to change, approach uncertainty and involve the stakeholders during the transition (Aziz et al., 2018; Al-Tahitah et al., 2018).

The operationalisation of these constructs was done using open-ended questions and interview prompts whereby concrete examples were sought and not theoretical descriptions. This made sure that leadership was studied as a pragmatic and situational phenomenon that is based on the professional experience of the participants.

3.4 Research Purpose and Questions

The design is in line with the qualitative case study orientation, where the emphasis is placed on the depth of comprehension and the contextual subtlety rather than generalisation provided by statistics. Based on this, the purposive sampling was used to attract participants with rich information who would be able to speak out of firsthand

experience of academic leadership in Indian higher education. This was an appropriate approach since it was not aimed at getting a random or representative cross-section, but of individuals with acute knowledge, accountability, and lived practise in leadership postures; the kind of portraits that are most likely to shed light on the competencies, decision routines, and organisational circumstances being studied (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). The implementation was done in phases; selection of who was eligible to participate in the process by identifying suitable positions in various types of institutions; outreach by way of professional networking and selection of participants who fulfilled pre-established inclusion criteria as well as agreeing to participate.

The cohort that resulted had academics at various levels of leadership; departmental heads, deans, coordinators, and senior faculty to enable strategic and day-to-day enactments of leadership to be studied. This calculated deviation was part and parcel of the design in terms of the fact that it allowed the study to capture the intersection of formal authority, informal influence, and collaborative practices in institutional settings. It further allowed making sure that the analysis would be able to follow the path of leadership qualities through contexts, as opposed to being restricted to a single administrative level. To achieve analytic sufficiency and not redundancy, the sample was calculated based on the principle of data saturation: interviews were conducted until no new themes of interest were found in the cases. This procedural ruling would be consistent with generally suggested qualitative criteria in making findings exhaustive and coherent (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

The study aims to undertake a qualitative research on the key leadership traits needed by academics in Indian education system, especially on issues of decision-making ability and organisational learning ability as facilitatory factors of institutional success in changing environment. This emphasis is justified by the fact that the technological changes, globalisation, changing policy frameworks, and pedagogical change produce pressures that are demonstrably demanding in terms of agility, strategic vision and people-centred leadership. The realisation of this purpose is operationalised by use of semi-structured interviews and an open-ended questionnaire which generates experience-near accounts of leadership practice, which are subsequently subjected to the thematic analysis which connects the experience-near accounts to the conceptual scaffolding as introduced in the preceding discussion. Under that purpose, the following research questions (RQs) will be answered in the study, and their presentation in the form of a narrative will ensure the illustrative style without losing clarity.

RQ1: Which fundamental leadership qualities and competences are needed for Indian education sector academic leaders?

RQ2: In the framework of Indian higher education institutions, how would academic leaders define and evaluate leadership efficacy?

RQ3: Which approaches and decision-making styles academic leaders typically use to handle institutional problems?

RQ4: How could organisational learning capacity affect faculty members' and academic administrators' leadership effectiveness?

RQ5: How might academic leaders modify their strategies to handle policy changes, digital revolution, and institutional change?

RQ6: How many Indian academic institutions grow and equip academic leaders to improve their capacity for leadership?

RQ7: In what ways could interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence support academic leadership success?

All these questions provide the framework of the analysis in such a way that the research would provide the consistent image of the leadership features, decision patterns, and the organisational competencies when they are applied in Indian higher education. All questions have their corresponding questions to be implemented in the interview guide and their corresponding codes in the analytic framework so that there would be a traceability of the question to evidence to theme. The choice of keeping the number of interrelated questions small was based on the fact that it is easy to be fragmented and the subsequent analysis should be closely connected to the goals of the study. On methodological grounds, the questions serve as the interface between the constructs that are established in Section 3.3 and the empirical procedures to investigate them, which strengthen internal consistency and prevent redundancy between sections.

3.5 Research Design

The research design that was used was a qualitative case-study based study design to explore the leadership practices in Indian higher education institutions. The design has been chosen due to the ability to thoroughly investigate complex organisational phenomena

in the actual environment (Yin, 2018; Stake, 1995). Higher education tends to have permeable boundaries between individual leadership and the institutional settings, which, in turn, is why a context-sensitive design is especially suitable.

The design was based on three qualitative approaches, which included the use of open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The open-ended questionnaire has been used as an initial research instrument to collect data because it allowed the participants to think independently on leadership competencies and decision-making practices. Such reactions were used in the other interviews to provide guidance on the areas that needed further investigations.

The primary source of data was the semi-structured interviews. This way enabled the researcher to be consistent among the participants, as well as allowing flexibility to enquire on the issues that revealed during discussions. The interviews were especially useful in capturing reasoning processes, leadership issues and institutional constraints that would be incomplete to capture using written responses.

The analysis of documents served as a contextualization of the participant descriptions in institutional frameworks. Strategic plans, accreditation guidelines, and policy documents were reviewed in order to comprehend the formal definition of leadership and its endorsement in institutions. This has facilitated the process of triangulation between the participant stories and organisational records and provides the findings with greater credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In designing the study, the methodological decisions were influenced by pragmatic factors like availability of participants, access to the institutions and geographic dispersion.

The mix of techniques guaranteed a certain level of depth and comparability and was at the same time manageable due to the limitations of the research setting.

3.6 Population and Sample

The target population of this study includes academic leaders serving in higher institutions of learning (HEIs) in India directly involved in the institutional governance process, academic planning and decision-making process. These are the individuals who hold roles that enable them to combine both the academic tasks and leadership roles which include faculty administration, curriculum supervision and policy enactment. The target population was critical to the research as the research inquiry sought to make meaning of leadership as practiced in actual institutional contexts as opposed to being an intangible managerial position.

Since the research was qualitative oriented, the study was not aimed at achieving statistical representativeness. Rather, the focus was put on acquiring rich experience-based accounts of the participants who had enough exposure to leadership roles. This sample was thus, planned to focus on depth, relevance and contextual diversity as opposed to breadth.

The purposive sampling plan was adopted to select the participants with well-defined inclusion criteria. The academic leaders were chosen based on their occupational statuses, leadership duties and institutional settings. The participants needed at least five years of experience in the higher education sector and should have been able to demonstrate leadership or administration-related decision-making. This criterion allowed guaranteeing that the participants had maintained active overview of the governance processes and could

reflect on the leadership competencies, organisational learning, and institutional change meaningfully.

The last sample was forty academic leaders representing various institutions of higher learning which included a mixture of higher education institutions such as public universities, private universities, autonomous colleges, and specialised or blended-learning institutions. There was a deliberate intention to create this diversity. The differences between leadership practices and constraints across the types of institutional settings in India are substantial, and the presence of the leaders across the settings enabled to enhance the analytical usefulness of the results by enabling the comparison between settings.

The size of the sample was informed by the concept of data saturation according to which the data collection process was initiated until a repetitive pattern emerged and no additional component of the narrative was arising in response to the questions raised by the researchers (Fusch and Ness, 2015). Forty participants offered enough diversity of the opinions, but not too much, so the qualitative data could be analyzed thoroughly without too much redundancy. According to the qualitative research principles, the results are, thus, meant to aid in the analytic generalisation, but not inference (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

The population and sample design in this study demonstrates a purposive, information-rich approach personalized to qualitative survey. By clearly defining the target population, carefully justifying the sample size, and systematically implementing a purposive selection strategy, the study fully explains the research design, its justification, and its implementation. This methodological strengthens the dependability of the findings and ensures the voices most relevant to the research questions.

Table 3.1 Participant Selection Criteria and Roles

Selection Criteria	Description	Examples of Roles
Experience	Minimum 10 years in academia; demonstrated leadership exposure	Senior faculty, department heads
Field of Specialization	Representation from diverse disciplines (STEM, Humanities, Social Sciences, Management)	Dean of Science, Dean of Arts
Leadership Engagements	Prior or current responsibility in governance, policy-making, or institutional reforms	Heads of Departments, Academic Council members
Decision-making Authority	Active involvement in staff management, resource allocation, and academic planning	Vice-Deans, Senior Professors with admin duties
Institutional Diversity	Participation across government, private, and autonomous universities	Faculty from Central, State, and Private HEIs

Source: Compiled by the author and based on Creswell and Poth (2016); University Grant Commission (2018); Merriam and Tisdell (2016); Patton (2015).

As it is reflected in Table 3.1 the purposive sampling strategy also made sure that the sample consisted of participants representing a variety of roles, disciplines, and institutional settings. This conscious integration of diverse leadership samples enhanced the validity of the results by encompassing the views at diverse administrative duties and education settings. This diversity helps to achieve the purpose of the study to provide a more comprehensive and believable picture of academic leadership in the Indian higher education.

3.7 Participant Selection

The recruitment of participants is a decisive aspect of the current research since it defines the extent to which the information represents the real-life practices and issues of academic leadership in Indian institutions of higher learning. As per the qualitative case-study orientation that was set out earlier, the recruitment process was carried out systematically in a manner that only individuals who fit the specific criteria required to qualify as participants were invited. This discipline of procedure also guaranteed that the evidence base would portray the realities of the leadership work in a clear-cut and specific manner as opposed to providing generalities that were not grounded in practice (Ramsden, 1998). In keeping with qualitative logic, the focus was not in statistical representation but rather in evoking rich and experience-near descriptions by the leaders who actively participated in making decisions, implementing policies, as well as in governing institutions. The purposive sampling approach state above thus informed all recruitment

activities in the sense that the study was informed by the people with the most relevant expertise as opposed to a random cross-section.

Given that academic leadership is not uniform across different situations, the recruitment process was aimed at heterogeneity and not uniformity. The approaches to leaders were made diverse in terms of the higher-education environment to ensure that the differences in leadership style, decision routines, and the role within the institution may appear in the analysis. Diversity of views was regarded as strength since this way it is possible to detect cross-case regularities and also retain the particularity of every institutional situation. To maintain validity and increase credibility, recruitment went on despite rigid eligibility rules that favored substantive leadership experience, direct experience in governance, and ability to address the competencies and issues that were the main focus of this investigation.

Thresholds of experience were put in place to give depth of perspective. Potential respondents had to have at least five years of experience in a leadership role in an academic institution. This criterion acknowledged that leadership competencies are developed with experience and that experienced leaders are better placed to describe the dynamic character of academic work, the pressures it causes and strategies involved to negotiate it. It was anticipated that the prolonged exposure to the institutional governance and authority of decision-making would produce accounts that can bring to light the routine and inflection-point decisions that are experienced in the field of higher education.

Besides the experience, someone had to be in actual or former positions of formal leadership in institutions of higher learning. The roles that were eligible were lecturers

having portfolios in administration, department heads, deans and vice-deans, principals, academic directors, and policy level players. Both active and former leaders were invited, which is why the data was likely to include paths to leadership, role-to-role transitions, and the long-term outcomes of the decisions on the institutional systems. Such historical richness was significant in the sense that it could help comprehend not only how leadership is practiced nowadays, but the past decisions that are still affecting structures and cultures in the long term. It also enabled the research to follow the tracks of leadership development and to reflect the competency transportability across roles and environments.

Another criterion was related to direct involvement in institutional decision-making. Higher education leadership goes beyond the supervision responsibilities to include policy formulation and execution of policies in education, administration of faculty, curriculum restructuring, accreditation processes, and organization of reforms. The embarkation hence gave priority to those who could talk based on first-hand participation within these fields. This focus brought the data in line with the constructs studied in the research i.e. leadership competencies, decision processes, and organisational learning capacity such that the analysis was closely pegged on the research questions as opposed to going off course to marginal commentaries.

To increase the range of coverage of the diversity in the sector, participants were attracted to a diverse range of types of institutions, such as private universities, autonomous and affiliated colleges, specialised training institutions, and online or hybrid environments. This cross-section was deliberate: leadership structures, limitations and opportunities vary with the types of institutions, and the research attempt was made to have findings that

would be applicable in the various contexts. The distance and hybrid models also enabled the inclusion of leaders into the research, which enabled the research to access the organisational implication of the digital turn in Indian higher education, which is a development that is increasingly becoming significant in the leadership duties of individuals.

Since the rate of policy and technological change is rapidly shifting, traces of knowledge concerning the current changes in education and provable flexibility were also taken into account. Preference was also given to those leaders who had led or been part of important institutional change including the integration of online learning, curriculum redesign, and going through accreditation cycles or responding to changes in government policy to allow the study to tap into instances where leaders had exercised their power in different changing circumstances. This criterion made the data more practical and contribute to making sure that the resultant findings would address not only the past arrangements but also current issues.

Qualitative inquiry is based on active involvement, the desire to take part in its entirety was another prerequisite. Applicants were supposed to fill a questionnaire that was open-ended and where necessary, participate in subsequent semi-structured interviews so that explanations would be sought and clear out. The procedures of participation were established and applied based on the ethical good practice. Data collection was done by obtaining informed consent and the participants were given understandable information about the study objectives, confidentiality measures and their rights such as the right to withdraw at any stage of the research without repercussions. These protections fostered

confidence, fostered openness and safeguarded the interests of the participants thus enhancing the plausibility of the data obtained.

Recruitment was done in a progressive way operationally. Using professional networks, institutional directories, the potential participants were identified as per the above criteria; their eligibility was checked with the above criteria, invitations regarding the nature of the study and expectations were made and scheduling was made to suit the institutional calendars. *Rationale of each criterion; experience level, role relatedness, involvement in decision-making, institutional heterogeneity, exposure to reform, and willingness to consent* were clearly related to study questions in such a way that sampling choices could be interpreted as constituents of the analytic goals as opposed to administrative comforts.

The result of this recruitment strategy was a heterogeneous but purposefully constrained set of participants whose professional roles was staff development, curriculum and policy processes and institutional governance. The study ensured a continuum of leadership practices and challenges by ensuring the capture of leaders of different institutional types and career stages without losing the focus on the constructs that were central to the inquiry. The outcome is a participant corpus that is sufficiently subject to thematic analysis, diverse to determine whether emergent themes can be found in a wide range of contexts, and consistent to provide a coherent analytic story.

Overall, the participant selection in the current study was planned to be the most relevant, deep, and ethically sound. The purposive process and the criteria based ensured that only knowledgeable and experienced academic leaders provided evidence, and the

sequence of the recruitment afforded procedural transparency. All these make the findings more credible and the choice of participants in accordance with the general methodological framework of the thesis (Ramsden, 1998).

3.8 Instrumentation

Instrumentation in the research means the qualitative tools that should be applied to bring the detailed accounts of academic leadership practice among participants. Since the research was interpretivist in nature, the instruments of the research were chosen due to the fact that they were able to record experience-based narratives as opposed to standardized responses. Three supplementary tools were used, including: an open-ended survey, semi-structured interview and document review.

The questionnaire with open-ended questions was created as the first step of interaction with the participants. It was composed of questions that were in line with the research questions and leadership constructs in Chapter II. Questions were worded in easy language to make them reflective to respond to base on personal experiences of the participants as opposed to theoretical terms. The application of the same prompts in the participants allowed some levels of comparability without restricting the flexibility of the way the responses were expressed. The questionnaire was filled electronically, meaning that a respondent was given the freedom to fill the form at their own convenience and not in a hurry. The treatment of responses was a qualitative information that was not subjected to a statistical test.

Data-collection instrument was mainly semi-structured interviews. A guide on the interview was created to cover the leadership competencies, decision-making practices, organisational learning capacity, and change propensity. Although the guide offered a coherent format, the interviews were conducted in a flexible way to allow the respondents the opportunity to discuss the questions on issues that were especially relevant to their institutional settings. Selectively, probing questions were utilized to uncover responses, discuss examples and enlighten more on leadership practices narrated by participants. Such a blend of the structure and flexibility allowed the researcher to record the shared patterns and the context-dependent nuances (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009).

Analysis of documents was involved as an additional tool to place the accounts of participants within institutional and policy frames of reference. Strategic plans, accreditation guidelines, leadership development policies, and quality assurance manuals were reviewed to give some background to the context and to support or dispute narratives of the participants. Document analysis was not a separate dataset but was used to reinforce interpretation by means of triangulation (Tang, 2005).

The development of the instruments was guided by the literature review and helped with expert feedback and pilot testing. The interview guide and the questionnaire were tested by two scholars having experience in qualitative research and leadership in higher education. Minor changes were done to enhance clarity and order. A pilot exercise was carried out on a few academic leaders to make sure that the questions were comprehensible and achieved their responses. The final analysis did not use data of the pilot phase.

The use of these instruments combined was what made sure that leadership was analyzed in different perspectives: personal experience, interactive reflection, and institutional circumstances. This triple methodology increased the validity even though it did not contradict the qualitative nature of the research (Zohrabi, 2013).

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

The data was collected in a structured but flexible manner, which is in line with the principles of the qualitative case study. These processes were developed so as to provide ethical conformity, methodological clarity, and gathering of rich and experience based data.

After identifying the participants by purposive sampling, the eligible individuals were contacted and an information sheet was given to them explaining the aim of the study, the type of involvement, and the confidentiality of their information. Informed consent was done in writing before the data collection. The process was voluntary and the participants knew that they could pull out anywhere along the way.

The process of data collection commenced with the administration of open ended questionnaire. The step enabled the participants to think individually about the leadership competencies, decision-making practices, and institutional challenges. The responses of questionnaires were analyzed before the interview and served as a source of conducting interviews probes and areas to clarify or explore further. Such a sequential application of tools enhanced consistency in the sources of data and provided the fact that interviews were based on the prior thoughts of participants.

The semi-structured interviews were undertaken in face to face and secure online platforms, depending on the availability and location of the participants. Interviews were held in the range of 45 to 75 minutes. Participant consent was recorded on audio so that there is accuracy during the interviews. To retain the language and meaning of the participants, verbatim transcription was done. The researcher kept field notes during and right after interviews in order to provide contextual observations and initial reflections on analysis.

The collection of document was done simultaneously with primary data collection. There was a collection of institutional documents and policy materials, which are publicly available and relate to leadership, governance and professional development. These sources were consulted to learn about formal anticipations and frameworks of leadership practice and would be compared with participant description in the analysis.

All data were effectively saved in form of password-protected digital files and only the researcher was allowed to access such data. All the identifying information was taken out in the transcription process and the participants were given pseudonyms in order to preserve their privacy. Data was saved in similar way related to a naming and filing system which enabled tracing of material collected through the analysis.

During data-collection process, real limitations like availability of participants and institute schedules were controlled by flexible schedule and follow-ups. In case of interviews done over the internet, there were backup plans in case of technological interruptions. These procedural judgments were able to provide continuity of data collection without jeopardizing on ethical or methodological standards.

The combination of questionnaires, interviews, and documents made it a coherent and triangulated data. The information provided by each data source informed the other one, allowing the researcher to cross-examine results and retain the depth of analysis. The given method enhanced the authority and reliability of the research and provided the assurance that the results were strongly based on the empirical evidence (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

3.10 Data Analysis

The analysis of data was done in a systematic manner to ensure that the interpretations would be based on the accounts of the participants but also be analytically transparent. In keeping with the qualitative nature of the research, the aim of analysis was to find common types of meaning that define the way academic leadership is exercised, construed, and sustained in Indian institutions of higher learning.

The analysis was initiated by repeatedly reading all the interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaires answers in order to familiarize with the data. In this stage, they focused on the language, examples and focus of the participants instead of focusing on the theoretical categories that were designed in advance. This immersion allowed the researcher to define experience-proximate concepts to do with leadership competencies, decision-making behaviours, organisational learning and institutional change.

Manual generation of initial codes was done at the next stage. Coding was aimed at the text that included substantial units, which denoted actions, perceptions or difficulties as narrated by the respondents. The assignment of codes was inductive, as it was conducted

according to what was said by participants, but the conceptual constructs described in Chapter II were kept in mind. It was enough to make sure that the analysis was factual and theoretically based without having to push the stories of the participants into a strict category.

After analyzing the initial codes, similar ones were tested and then formed into higher-order categories. These categories were common patterns among the participants and they were narrowed down using constant comparison. Conceptually ambiguous categories were combined and those with insufficient backing on the dataset were redefined or stored as contextual notes. The themes that would emerge in this process of iteration were more comprehensive themes that were able to encompass the manner in which leadership competencies and practices would be practiced in various institutional contexts.

Thematic analysis was conducted following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). The process proceeded as follows. Phase 1 — Familiarisation: All interview transcripts and open-ended questionnaire responses were read repeatedly in full, and initial impressions were noted in analytic memos. Phase 2 — Initial Coding: Meaningful segments of text were identified and labelled inductively, producing an initial set of codes anchored in participants' own language and accounts. Coding was performed manually, using iterative reading and constant comparison. Phase 3 — Searching for Themes: Codes were clustered into candidate themes by grouping those that shared conceptual similarity or captured the same underlying pattern of meaning. Phase 4 — Reviewing Themes: Candidate themes were tested against the full dataset to ensure they were coherent internally and distinct from one another. Themes with insufficient evidential support were

collapsed or reclassified as contextual notes. Phase 5 — Defining and Naming Themes: Each retained theme was given a clear, analytically specific name and a concise definition capturing its essence and its relationship to the research questions. Phase 6 — Writing Up: The analytical narrative was constructed by weaving together the themes with supporting participant extracts, documentary evidence, and connections to the theoretical framework established in Chapter II. Only themes that had the backing of several participants, and are present in more than one source of data, such as in interviews and questionnaire responses, were deemed to be robust. This criterion played the role in making sure that results represented common trends as opposed to individual opinions.

Despite the qualitative nature of the study, the open-ended questionnaire results provided the option of the descriptive summarization. When the coding was done, responses were then categorized based on the areas of major competencies, and the simple counts and percentages were then determined to show the relative significance of particular leadership qualities. As an illustration, percentages provided on strategic vision, decision-making ability, and innovation indicate the percentage of respondents who indicated the competencies as key to successful leadership. These numbers were interpreted and not statistical tests and were always interpreted along with qualitative explanations by the participants. Those percentages were more of salience indicators of themes than causation gauges.

The analysis of documentary materials was done simultaneously with the analysis of participant accounts by contextualizing them in formal institutional and policy contexts. The reviewed strategic plans, accreditation guidelines, leadership development policies

and governance documents were used to determine how leadership expectations are expressed at the organisational level. Further screening of secondary sources was done according to source quality criteria (currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose) to make them credible in terms of currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose. Only the documents meeting minimum thresholds in terms of authority and accuracy were put under the analysis. Decisions on screening were recorded and the inclusion criteria was done using transparent and consistent criteria as summarised in Tables 3.2 and 3.3.

During the analysis triangulation was used. Interpretations found during the interview data were triangulated with the data obtained through questionnaires and documentation. In instances where there was convergence of the sources, the interpretation was reinforced by the confidence. Where inconsistencies were found, they were discussed instead of being rejected because in many cases, they were indicative of contradictions between official institutional policies and practical leadership. These divergences were regarded as analytically meaningful and were used in the interpretation of findings.

In order to demonstrate reliability and reflexivity, analytic memos were kept throughout the coding and theme development process. Such memos documented decisions on the refinement of codes, scope on themes, and other possible interpretations. Codebook was edited repeatedly, as definitions were defined as analysis continued. Inter-rater review was done on a small sample of material coded to verify consistency of interpretation, and any differences were argued out and eliminated by consensus.

The coding to theme shift was informed by specific standards. A theme was determined as a recurring reaction noticeable among numerous respondents that provided

explanatory worth with respect to the study inquiries. Themes were kept as far as they added value to the comprehension of leadership competences, decision-making, organisational learning capacity, or change preparedness among Indian higher educational institutions.

Lastly, organizing themes was done in a way that answers the research questions and conceptual framework. This gave consistency in data analysis and presentation of findings in Chapter IV. The study adopted a clear, iterative, and reflexive analytic process that both gave the findings a solid basis in the form of empirical evidence when coupled with a conceptually significant and practically useful implications.

The limitations of the research design can be effectively addressed by modifying the research design (Lewis, 2018).

Each research design has methodological limits that define the implementation and meaning of results. The recognition of these limitations is necessary in the context of transparency and scholarly integrity especially when qualitative inquiry is concerned where the emphasis is made on depth and context rather than statistical generalisation. The limitations that have been mentioned in this study do not contradict this contribution but on the contrary, explain the situations where the findings may be interpreted.

To begin with, the research used purposive sampling and covered forty academic leaders in various institutions of higher learning in India. Although this method helped to make the participants information-rich and directly engaged with the leadership practice, it also restricts the possibility to generalise the results to the whole higher education sector. Smaller, rural, or highly resource constrained institutions may not have their leadership

practices fully represented. As is typical of qualitative research, the findings do not therefore imply inference on a population level but instead, analytic generalisation (Creswell and Poth, 2016).

Second, the research was mainly based on self-reported data that was gathered using open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. These are suitable in terms of capturing lived experience and personal interpretation although they can be subject or surveyed to selective recalling or to social desirability. Whereas these risks were addressed through triangulation and reflexive memo-keeping, there is no denying that interpretivist research is somewhat subjective (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Third, there was some difference in access of internal institutional documents by participants and institutions. In other instances, this was restricted to policy documents and accreditation material that was publicly available. Although this gave fundamental contextual background, it might not be the best way to define informal decision-making processes or internal leadership dynamics. Also the data were gathered at one instance in time and this provides cross-sectional picture of the leadership practice. Longitudinal designs may shed more light on time-lapsing leadership competencies development because leadership development is a transformative process.

Lastly, thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that entails interpretation by the researcher. Despite the fact that systematic coding, reflexive documentation and peer review were used to facilitate dependability, the interpretation judgment is central in analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). These are also inherent characteristics of qualitative research and can be considered as methodological trade-offs as opposed to weaknesses.

Qualitative research is all about ensuring trustworthiness since the findings in qualitative research are based on interpretation and not a statistic test. The criteria used by this research were suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To operationalise these criteria rigorously, the following strategies were implemented. Credibility was strengthened through methodological triangulation: data from the open-ended questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and documentary sources were systematically cross-checked, and only those themes supported by convergent evidence across multiple data sources were retained as robust findings. Member reflection was also conducted with a small number of participants to verify that interpretations accurately reflected their intended meanings. Transferability was addressed through thick description: the study provides detailed accounts of participant roles, institutional types, and leadership contexts so that readers can make informed judgements about the applicability of findings to comparable settings in Indian higher education. Dependability was assured through a transparent audit trail. All methodological decisions including sampling rationale, data collection sequencing, coding procedures, and theme development were documented systematically, enabling the research process to be tracked and evaluated by an independent reviewer. Confirmability was secured through reflexive practices. The researcher maintained analytic memos throughout the coding and interpretation phases, explicitly recording interpretive choices, surfacing underlying assumptions, and considering alternative explanations. The documentary evidence and participant accounts provided an external evidential anchor, reducing the risk that findings reflected researcher preconceptions rather than empirical data. Researcher positionality

was declared openly, and peer debriefing sessions were conducted to challenge emerging interpretations.

Methodological triangulation was used to enhance credibility. There were several sources of data such as open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and documentary materials. Only those themes that were supported by over one source were made themes. Also, short member reflection was done and very few members were involved in it to ensure that the interpretations were reasonable in as far as the experiences of the members were concerned.

The issue of transferability was incorporated by having a contextual detailing. The research identifies the roles of participants, types of institutions, and leadership roles at the level of depth that enables readers to determine the applicability of the research to other higher learning settings. Instead of stating that it is universal, the study can be used to make informed decisions on the similarity of contexts.

Reliability was facilitated by the rigorous reporting of the research procedure. The decisions made with regards to sampling, data collection, coding and theme development were documented, which formed an audit trail through which the research study could be tracked and evaluated. Inter-rater checking of material coded was limited which contributed to consistency.

The reflexive practices and triangulation were used to check conformability. Analytic memos recorded interpretive choices, assumptions and other explanations. The documentary evidence and the accounts of the participants offered another point of

reference, and it was less likely that the results were based on the preference of the researcher instead of the empirical results.

Table 3.2 Source Quality Evaluation Rubric for Secondary Sources

Criterion	Operational definition	Key indicators / checks	Evidence sources used in this study	Scoring (0-2)	Decision rule / application
Currentcy	Decency of leadership, governance and policy cycles as compared to evidence.	Published in 5 years or less empirical/policy items; seminal sources published more than 10 years permitted theory and were identified as context. There are	NAAC/NBA manuals, UGC/All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)/NEP/GER reports, recent journal articles on academic leadership.	0 = obsolete, broken links; 1 = borderline (5-10 yrs) yet relevant; 2 = up-to-date or valid seminal.	Include if score ≥ 1 . If 0, discard or seek new version; seminal theory older over 10 years retained but marked “histori

		URLs and versions that are resolved; a clear indication of version.			cal context” .
Relevance	Direct correlation with RQs on leadership competencies, governance, decision-making, productivity.	Too broad Topic overlap with constructs used in Ch. II 2.9; context is Indian HE or generalizable HE; methods informative for our design.	Studies on HE leadership, governance frameworks, leadership development; institutional policies impacting TLRI.	0 = off-topic; 1 = peripheral; 2 = central to RQs/constructs.	Include only if ≥ 1 ; if 1, use for background notes, not core claims.
Authority	Credibility of	Peer-reviewed	GoI/UGC/AICTE/NAAC/NBA; universities;	0 = unknown/unvent	Must be ≥ 1 . If 0,

	source of authority and expertise of source.	articles; government /accredited agencies reports; respected universities ; author affiliation and track record; clear methodology.	Scopus/Web of Science journals; recognized think-tanks.	ed; 1 = credible but not peer-reviewed; 2 = peer-reviewed or official agency.	exclude. For 1, corroborate with at least one Level-2 source.
Accuracy	Factcorrectness and methodological soundness.	Triangulation with primary data; similarity with comparable researches; precise methods; statistics	Cross-checked against interview themes, descriptive summaries, and high-quality reviews.	0 = unverified/contradicted; 1 = partly verified; 2 = verified and methodologically sound.	Must be ≥ 1 . If 0, exclude. If 1, label “use with caution” and corroborate.

		verifiable; quotations page-cited. Inter-rater review notes agree.			
Purpose	Intent of the source and bias appraisal .	Intention to the research/po licy; discloses funding/co nflicts; does not make advocacy/p romotion; has limitations that are balanced.	Academic articles, white papers with disclosures, policy briefs; exclude marketing pieces.	0 = promotional/opa que; 1 = mixed intent; 2 = research/policy- driven, transparent.	Prefer 2. If 1, use only for descript ive context. If 0, exclude.

Source: Author

Practically, the rating was carried out on the five source quality dimensions namely currency, relevance, authority, accuracy and purpose. Each dimension had a scale consisting of three points (0 = weak, 1 = acceptable, 2 = strong) and the scores were added

to make a total of 10. Those with high scores in terms of authority and accuracy and having an overall score of about 7 or higher were proceeded with. Items with a very strong value (8-10) were included directly, the middle value items (5-7) were re-examined together with other sources, and those that scored low were put aside (see Table 3.3).

To maintain transparency, the documents were filtered at the time when they have been gathered, revisited shortly before the analysis, and stored with brief notes on the rationale of a source inclusion or exclusion. Another researcher also reviewed a small proportion of the screened items in order to identify any differences in scoring and eliminate them.

Table 3.3 Secondary-source screening log

Source (short ref)	Year	C	R	Auth	Acc	P	Total	Decision	Notes
UGC Quality Mandate	2019	2	2	2	2	2	10	Include	Policy benchmark for governance indicators
NAAC Manual HEIs	2020	2	2	2	2	2	10	Include	Aligns with accreditation criteria for TLRI

Blog post on “Educational leadership”	2017	0	1	0	0	0	1	Exclude	Non- authoritative; unverified claims
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Source: Author

The qualitative data analysis process is characterized by such issues as handling of massive qualitative data, consistency of themes, and the problem of biasing the researcher. To overcome these difficulties, coding packages are used in coding the themes, which allows to more effectively and structure the data analysis (Munawar et al., 2024: 230-240). In order to determine that themes are consistent in their interpretation, inter-rater reliability tests are conducted, in which different researchers confirm and validate the process of coding. To prevent the influence of a researcher, the results are externally reviewed by academic experts so that the inferences are objective and evidenced-based. Furthermore, using the systematic quality screening ensures that any secondary data sources with little or no credibility and relevance are removed, ensuring the validity of the research findings.

3.11 Research Design Limitations

No research design no matter how well designed has its constraints. The recognition of these limitations is essential since it will show the transparency, improve the credibility of the work, and will enable future researchers to continue the investigation, being more aware of its limitations (Yin, 2018; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In the current research study, the rigor and coherence were obtained by use of deliberate methodological decisions, still,

a range of limitations need to be identified. These do not discard the contribution made by the research but rather place the scope of the research in context under which the findings of the research should be well interpreted. In line with the qualitative inquiry logic, the results are thus to be viewed as making analytic generalisations to theory and practice as opposed to making statistical generalisations to populations (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Patton, 2015).

The study design was based on purposive sampling which was used to select the forty academic leaders of different types of institutions. Although this sample size was rich and varied, it could only be a tiny fraction of the leadership practice in the large Indian higher education sector. Academic leadership has a strong contextual nature which is determined by the institutional mission, governance systems, cultural processes, and regional policy environments. Even though purposive sampling made it relevant and deep, it prevents generalisability outside the sampled cases. The leaders of smaller and/or rural and/or resource-constrained institutions may have been underrepresented in their voices. Similarly, the opinions of international allied or highly elitist based institutions were not the centre-stage and might not be exhaustively recorded.

There was also the risk of non-response as well as the withdrawal of the participants in the sample. In spite of all these efforts, there is always a possibility that these contingencies did not allow considering all perspectives, and the balance of experiences will be distorted. These constraints are typical of qualitative research of education, in which the purpose is to bring to the fore variation and subtlety, but not statistical

representativeness. However, the richness of the information enables having plausible themes, as long as the readers take them as being context-specific as opposed to universal.

The researchers mainly used self-reported information that was gathered via open ended questionnaires and semi structured interviews. These approaches cannot be done without when it comes to solicitation of personal stories and personal experiences but come with some bias. The participants might have selectively remembered events, minimised difficulties, or focused on achievements in accordance with the socially desirable self-presentation (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). To prevent these risks, reflexive memo keeping and triangulation were used but chances of overemphasizing or underemphasizing in individual accounts cannot be completely avoided.

The documentary analysis provided another aspect yet had its own problems. Some internal institutional reports were only limited by confidentiality and governance, thus limiting the available evidence. In other instances, publicly available documents including policy briefs or accreditation guidelines were the only available sources, and this restricted the degree to which internal decision-making might be triangulated with the testimony of the participants. In cases where interviews were virtual, technical issues led to less richness of interaction where non-verbal meanings were distorted. These contingencies were reduced by such measures as backup plans and meticulous field notes but they still influenced the quality and richness of certain data points.

Thematic analysis was selected as the main tool of analysis due to its ability to generalised the various accounts into patterned knowledge. Systematic, thematic analysis, however, is interpretive. Researcher judgement is used to define the meanings of a

meaningful code, grouping of categories and the patterns that are regarded as a theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 77-101). Reflexivity, peer debriefing, and audit trails were utilized to guarantee reliability, but full removal of subjectivity is not possible and desirable in the interpretivist inquiry (Yin, 2018).

Also, some conflicts were found between self-reports and the institutional records that were audited. Practices were sometimes presented by leaders as more of a vision than an operation, and documents gave an idealised view of how governance processes should be, which might not be in full agreement with realities in everyday life. Such discrepancies would have to be resolved with due interpretation but not everything was resolved. This highlights the difficulty of analysis of leadership when perceptions, intentions and reported policies do not always fall into place.

The other scope and contextual orientation issue in the study. The design was designed with the intentional focus on depth over breadth, which is in line with qualitative principles, which, in its turn, limits the potential of large-scale verification. Measurements were made at one time and they were in the form of a snapshot, not a longitudinal course. The development of leadership is a dynamic process, which is determined by the changing policy reforms, technology changes and institutional changes. Cross-sectional design could not be capable of describing the dynamics of the evolution of leadership competencies through time or how leaders would react to crises and reforms and go through several cycles.

Moreover, the research is placed under the cultural, policy and educational context of India, which is unique. The aspects influencing academic leadership here are UGC

Quality Mandate, NEP 2020, and various forms of institutions like state-owned universities, as well as colleges owned by the private sector. These characteristics are not similar to the Western or other Asian ones. In this regard though, although the conceptual contributions can be globally appealing, the direct transferability to other systems of higher education should be done with a care.

The study was also influenced by practical time and resource limitation. In-depth qualitative studies are cumbersome, taking long interaction with the participants, transcription and repetitive analysis. Since resources were limited, the research design minimized the study to a single data collection wave and forty participants. A larger sample, several studies of cases of institutions, or longitudinal follow up might have produced some further information regarding the dynamics of leadership. In a similar manner, the level of resource constraints also meant that it was not possible to have several coders working across the entire dataset, but inter-rater checks were implemented on a subsample to enhance consistency.

These limitations do not nullify the results but only indicate some of the ways in which future research may elaborate or supplement this study. Indicatively, a mixed-methods study with surveys conducted among the wider populace would help to increase representativeness and longitudinal case-studies would help to shed light on the time aspect of leadership development.

Notably, these limitations are not just weaknesses as, in fact, they are results of methodological trade-offs. The purposive sampling favored the depth of experience, rather than breadth of coverage. The interviews and questionnaires made it possible to access

lived experiences that would not have been captured by quantitative measures despite the introduction of self-report bias. The one-point data collection made the data collection viable but limited the longitudinal understanding. Being aware of these limits is an indicator of methodological reflexivity, which is a crucial aspect of a credible qualitative enquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Overall, the limitations in this study focus on the problem of representativeness, self-report, interpretive subjectivity, the specificity of the context, and the limitation of resources. Most of them are inseparable to the qualitative educational research and should be understood as limitations within which the results should be framed (Creswell and Poth, 2016). Through these limitations, the study is able to not only show its strengths but also cuts its lines. This is a starting point of the future research, which could be developed as either a bigger mixed-methods survey, cross-national work, or longitudinal studies.

A) Trustworthiness of the Study

Ensuring that a qualitative study is trustworthy is the main way to show that its findings can be taken seriously. Because this kind of research deals with people's experiences and with meanings that depend on context, it cannot rely only on statistical tests the way a survey would. For that reason, this study followed the four tests set out by Lincoln and Guba (1985): *credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability*. Using all four together a single coherent quality frame for the full project.

Credibility was treated first because it answers the basic question of whether the results sound true to the people who took part. To strengthen this, the study drew on three different sources of evidence: open questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and relevant

documents. A short form of member checking was also used. Three participants received a brief summary of the themes and were asked if these matched what they had said. Their agreement reduced the chance that the researcher had imposed a meaning that was not there. One more safeguard was a peer look at the coded material by another qualitative researcher who checked whether the grouping of codes made sense.

Transferability concerns whether someone in another institution can make use of the findings. Since qualitative work does not claim statistical generalisation, this study instead supplied thick description. Background on the kind of institutions involved, the roles of the participants and the kinds of leadership work they handled was written out in some detail. A reader of Indian higher education locale, or even outside India, can judge similarity or difference and decide how far the acumens foldaway.

Dependability was addressed through careful record keeping. Every step was written down. This included how participants were recruited, which versions of the interview guide were used, how data were stored, how codes were created and how themes were named. Inter rater checks were applied to a small portion of the material to see whether the coding system was being used in the same way. This process was traceable and showed that the findings did not depend on coincident in which the data were declaim.

Confirmability dealt with the risk that the findings might reflect the researcher's preferences rather than the data. Throughout data collection and analysis the researcher kept reflexive notes that recorded assumptions, points of uncertainty and reasons for choosing one interpretation over another. Triangulation and the external review of the

coding also acted as controls. An institutional document material was used as an additional reference point, at least to allow an interview claim to be juxtaposed with a formal text.

Taken combined all four measures provide the reassurance that what the study concludes was backed by the evidence, that the researcher can replicate the study, and that the reader can view the context well enough to determine relevance on his or her own.

Notably, these measures are not introduced as the mechanical processes but as deliberate strategies in line with the philosophical basis of qualitative researches. Since the study is an interpretivist position, knowledge is perceived as being co-created by the process of interaction between the researcher and the participant. Trustworthiness is thus attainable not by attempting to be objective in the positivist meaning of the term, but by ensuring that the operation of interpretation is transparent, through basing conclusions on various sources of evidence and by leaving the participants themselves to authenticate the resonance of findings.

More protective measures were used to ensure further trustworthiness. Interviews were recorded on field notes, which included non-verbal behavior and contextual details, which enhanced interpretation. The coding decisions were being tracked in version controlled documents, thus allowing audit of how raw excerpts were converted to categories and themes. Where the themes were disputed or vague, they were clearly brought to the table and debated in analytic memos as opposed to just being filtered out, so that the complexity of the data was not ignored. The study makes apparent the reflexive interaction of the researcher with the material and thus makes it more transparent and gives more credibility to its statements.

Overall, this study shows a strict adherence to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, which makes them trustworthy. The combination of triangulation, thick description, systematic documentation, reflexivity, member reflections, and peer review will allow the study to be sure that its findings are based on the voices of the participants, supported by the various forms of evidence and clearly drawn. All these steps will help to ensure that the findings are not only meaningful in terms of context, but also have strong methodological underpinning.

B) Ethical Consideration

The research was carried out in response to the existing ethical principles of qualitative research. Their involvement was voluntary and all those who took part were well informed about the study and their participation and rights as respondents. Informed consent was taken before data collection and the participants had the right not to withdraw without any penalty.

The research process was conducted with the concepts of confidentiality and anonymity. The identities of participants were cloaked using pseudonyms and wherever institutional details were required, generalisation was undertaken. Raw data was saved in audio files, transcripts and questionnaire replies were saved in secure place available to the researcher.

These were only documentary analysis using institutional documents that were publicly available or authorized. A lot of caution was ensured that no sensitive or confidential organisational information is included. Information will be stored temporarily within the institutional parameters and then safely disposed. The study complied with the

international ethical standards, including the ones described by the British Educational Research Association (2018).

3.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research approach taken to discuss leadership competencies among scholars in Indian institutions of higher learning has been stated. Qualitative design was used to describe the context-dependent and practitative phenomenon of leadership. The chapter outlined the research paradigm, sampling plan, data collection tools and analysis plans and procedures with particular focus on transparency and consistent research questions.

By incorporating the open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, the study developed a strong and triangulated evidence base. Thematic analysis was conducted systematically to make sure that the results were based on the participant description and conceptually sound.

The methodological choices outlined in this chapter give a very clear background to how the findings will be presented in Chapter IV where the themes found in the analysis are discussed.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative dataset that was used in this study. The main evidence used is the responses to open-ended questions (N = 50) and they are backed up by the institutional and policy documents that have been reviewed in the course of the study. Research question is categorised into results using themes that were generated during coding and thematic analysis.

According to the criteria of qualitative reporting, every theme is supported by the direct participant statements (presented as the anonymised respondent identifiers, e.g. R01, R02) and by a clear illustration of how the themes were derived by the means of the raw text. Basic descriptive frequencies and percentages are provided where necessary to show the frequency of occurrence of a theme in responses; these numbers can be described as merely indicative of salience and interpreted in conjunction with participant texts and will not be interpreted as statistical analysis.

The research questions are aligned with the emerging themes and evidence as shown in Table 4.1. The next sections then provide each of the themes with its excerpts in support and then a concise interpretation which is based on the description of the participants. Chapter V develops the theoretical interpretation and further extended comparison with the previous literature.

Table 4.1 Framework Linking Research Questions, Themes, Evidence, and Theoretical Links

Research Question	Emergent Themes	Supporting Evidence	Theoretical Links
RQ1: Which fundamental leadership qualities and competences are needed for Indian education sector academic leaders?	Vision, Adaptability, Empathy, Collaboration, Ethical Conduct, Communication, Innovation	Participant excerpts describing the need for visionary trend, adaptability to changes, empathy for faculty, collaborative culture, and integrity. Institutional documents reinforcing emphasis on ethics and innovation.	Transformational Leadership (vision, inspiration), Authentic Leadership (ethics, empathy), Distributed Leadership (collaboration), Situational Leadership (adaptability)
RQ2: In the framework of Indian higher education institutions, how would academic leaders define and	Decision-making effectiveness, Governance practices, Trust-building, Faculty Engagement,	Statements from participants on transparent governance, faculty involvement, and responsiveness to globalized	Situational Leadership (context-based decisions), Authentic Leadership (trust, integrity),

evaluate leadership efficacy?	Responsiveness to Change	educational demands. Documents highlighting institutional reforms and evaluation metrics.	Transformational Leadership (faculty motivation, innovation)
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Source: Author

The subsequent fragments construct upon this framework by examining each theme in facet, beginning with the leadership competencies the participants identified as vital for effective academic leadership in the Indian higher education context.

Table 4.1a Theme Development and Evidence Convention

Item	How it is presented in this chapter
Respondent quotations	Verbatim statements from open-ended responses, labelled R01–R50
Initial codes	Short labels assigned to meaning units in participant statements
Themes	Higher-order categories formed by grouping related codes
Percentages	Frequency of theme occurrence across N = 50 responses (salience only)

Source: Author

4.2 Research Question One

RQ1: Which fundamental leadership qualities and competences are needed for Indian education sector academic leaders?

The five areas of leadership competencies that were identified by the participants as the most consistent ones throughout the open-ended responses. Table 4.2 is a summary of the frequency at which each competency was specifically highlighted. The following sub-sections introduce the themes based on the excerpts of participants and how the themes were constructed out of the raw statements.

Table 4.2 Leadership Competencies Identified by Participants from qualitative responses, (N = 50)

Competency and Theme	% of Participants	Source
Innovation and Continuous Learning	30%	Open-ended responses
Integrity and Ethical Leadership	30%	Open-ended responses
Empathy and Mentorship	24%	Open-ended responses
Visionary Thinking and Strategic Planning	10%	Open-ended responses
Communication and Adaptability	6%	Open-ended responses

Source: Author

Table 4.2a Coding Transparency

Verbatim participant statement (raw data)	Initial code	Theme
“Visionary thinking and strategic planning are important.” (R05)	Strategic planning	Visionary thinking & planning
“Trust is created when there is integrity and ethical leadership.” (R08)	Integrity	Ethical leadership
“Empathy and mentorship are the success factors of leadership.” (R02)	Mentorship	Empathy & mentorship
“It is based on innovation and constant learning that creates academic leaders.”(R01)	Continuous learning	Innovation & learning
“Keeping up with digital transformation is not an easy task.” (R01)	Digital pressure	Communication/adaptability
“Rapid changes in the policy pose adaptation difficulties.” (R06)	Policy volatility	Communication/adaptability

Source: Author

The respondents were also known to provide several separate units of meaning in several different ways as they provided open-ended answers; hence, the same respondent identifier can be encountered on more than one code or theme when their statements reflected conceptually different dimensions of leadership. This method is in line with the qualitative coding practice.

a) Innovation and Continuous Learning (30%)

A significant number of participants contextualized the effective leadership as learning orientation and innovation. They were not just focused on the aspect of technology adoption, but they were also indicative of the anticipation that academic leaders should be professionally up to date and be able to lead institutions through change.

- i. “It is based on innovation and constant learning that creates academic leaders.” (R01)
- ii. “Academic leaders are shaped by innovation and constant learning.” (R03)
- iii. “Academic leaders are shaped by innovation and constant learning.” (R04)

When viewed together with the remarks of the participants on the adaptation pressures, it can be seen that the competency is an implication that the leaders should constantly renew their knowledge and governance practices as the needs of the institutions keep changing.

b) Integrity and Ethical Leadership (30%)

Ethical behavior and honesty became one of the leadership requirements. The participants linked effectiveness in leadership to trust, fairness and principled behaviour that occur especially in the institutional decision making.

- i. “Trust is created when there is integrity and ethical leadership.” (R08)
- ii. “Integrity, ethical leadership: integrity develops trust.” (R09)
- iii. “Integrity and ethical leadership build trust.” (R18)

This theme is an indication that credibility is not perceived as the soft side; rather, it is a necessity to the confidence of the faculty and institutional legitimacy.

c) Empathy and Mentorship (24%)

Almost a quarter of the respondents described leadership competence in relation and developmental practices. Support of colleagues and empathetic engagement or mentorship was mentioned by participants as being at the core of leadership in academic contexts.

- i. “Empathy and mentorship are the success factors of leadership.” (R02)
- ii. “Empathy and mentorship are the success factors of leadership.” (R07)
- iii. “Empathy and mentorship drive leadership success.” (R10)

This theme shows that the participants appreciate leadership which enhances academic culture by providing guidance and support and not just by policy implementation.

d) Visionary Thinking and Strategic Planning (10%)

A smaller and more comprehensible group of respondents gave strategic planning and long-term vision a greater role as a characteristic competency of academic leaders.

- i. “Visionary thinking and strategic planning are important.” (R05)
- ii. “Summary Visionary thinking and strategic planning are important.” (R11)

Vision, according to the terms of participants, can be connected to the establishment of direction and a foresight of issues of the institution instead of responding to immediate needs.

e) Communication and Adaptability (6%)

A small subsample directly described communication and adjustability as the greatest leadership qualities, yet when the larger dataset is viewed, the pressure of adaptability is rather high in the answers to technology and change of policies.

- i. “Effective communication and adaptability are essential.” (R14)
- ii. “Keeping up with digital transformation is not an easy task.” (R01)
- iii. “Rapid changes in the policy pose adaptation difficulties.” (R06)

This helps to substantiate a situational sense of interpretation: although not mentioned as the most crucial attribute, adaptability is something that leaders go through as a practical issue with daily leadership performance.

Overall, the results of the RQ1 indicate that (i) innovation/continuous learning and (ii) integrity/ethical leadership were the most ordinarily stated by the participants, with (iii) empathy/mentorship coming in the third place. Visionary planning was not more

commonly stated precedence as a category and communication/adaptability was the least commonly indicated priority but the adaptive compressions were mentioned repeatedly in the data set.

4.3 Research Question Two

RQ2: In the framework of Indian higher education institutions, how would academic leaders define and evaluate leadership efficacy?

Leadership efficacy, as described by participants, was reflected in three interlinked areas: (i) how institutional decisions are made, (ii) how leaders evaluate their effectiveness, and (iii) how leadership development outcomes are assessed over time. The results presented below are derived primarily from open-ended participant responses and are reported using verbatim excerpts (labelled R01–R50) to make the qualitative evidence visible. Percentages are included only to indicate the salience of each response pattern across the dataset.

To keep the structure consistent with the literature review, brief links to established leadership perspectives are provided where relevant; however, the deeper interpretive comparison with the literature is developed in Chapter V.

Table 4.3 Decision-Making Approach

Decision-Making Approach	Percentage (%)
Consultation with peers and experts	26%
Stakeholder discussions	24%

Structured evaluation of pros and cons	22%
Consensus-based decision-making	14%
Data-driven approaches	14%

Source: Author

A) Decision-Making Approaches

Table 4.3 displays that participants frequently described decision-making as consultative, with a strong preference for peer/expert consultation and stakeholder discussion.

Participants' statements described these approaches directly:

“The advice of peers and professionals helps me in my decision making” (R01)

“There is a prelude to decision-making in stakeholder discourses”. (R02)

“It should be a well-organized analysis of strengths and weaknesses”. (R03)

“My favorite process is a consensus-based decision making”. (R04)

The following strategies are directly depicted by the statements of the participants:

“My decisions are facilitated by consulting with peers and experts”. (R01)

“Stakeholder consultations come before making a decision”. (R02)

“It is vital to have a systematic search of advantages and disadvantages”. (R03)

“My favorite process is the consensus-based decision-making”. (R04)

“I am guided by data-driven approaches and institutional needs”. (R05)

Table 4.3a Coding Snapshot for Decision-Making

Verbatim response (raw data)	Initial code	Category	Theme
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“My decisions are facilitated by consulting with peers and experts”. (R01)	Peer consultation	Consultation	Collaborative process
“Stakeholder consultations come before making a decision”. (R02)	Stakeholder dialogue	Participation	Inclusive input
“It is vital to have a systematic search of advantages and disadvantages”. (R03)	Options appraisal	Analysis	Formal evaluation
“My favorite process is the consensus-based decision-making”. (R04)	Consensus	Governance	Collective agreement
“I am guided by data-driven approaches and institutional needs”. (R05)	Evidence use	Analytics	Data-informed choice

Source: Author

The prevalence of consultative and stakeholder-based approach is in line with previous findings pointing to the fact that academic governance tends to be based on collegiality and joint legitimacy in decision-making within the higher education context (e.g., Kaur, 2024: 76-86). The availability of systematic assessment and the development of evidence-based decision-making does not oppose the augmented focus on accountability and evidence-based governance (Kapur, 2022; Aggarwal et al., 2023).

B) Evaluating Leadership Effectiveness

In case participants were asked about how they assess their leadership efficacy, they did not pay much attention to the theoretical models of leadership, but rather practical cues:

inclusion, problem-solving, acceptance of stakeholders, and congruity with the institutional goals and reforms. The following are some of the evaluative criteria based on the responses of the participants:

- i. “The policy is practical because it is informed by faculty and student feedbacks”. (R06)
- ii. “Monitoring institutional development and student achievement indicates the influence of leadership”. (R07)
- iii. “When people implement reforms with minimum opposition, it means that the success has taken place”. (R08)
- iv. “Leadership initiatives and performance review are guided by institutional goals”. (R09)

These standards are comparable to known leadership views that consider effectiveness as a trust-building, engaging, and aligning people, and systems to institutional goals (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Judge and Piccolo, 2004: 755–768). The focus on stakeholder acceptability and feasibility of implementation is also aligned with the arguments of participatory governance in the sphere of higher education (Kaur, 2024: 76-86; Mishra, 2024).

C) Organisational Learning Capacity

Table 4.4 Organisational Learning Capacity

Organisational Learning Approaches	Percentage (%)
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Comparative analysis with past training outcomes	24%
Assessment based on practical application of learned skills	22%
Success metrics including institutional impact and growth	22%
Tracking post-training performance changes	18%
Continuous feedback from participants and stakeholders	14%

Source: Author

According to Table 4.4, the participants measure the leadership development and organisational learning on the basis of comparative review, practical application, and institutional impact measures. The following evaluation logics are reflected in statements of the participants:

“It helps when compared with previous training results.” (R10)

“Evaluation is based on the practice of acquired skills”. (R11)

“Institutional impact and retention are considered to be the success metrics”. (R12)

“It is important to monitor the change of post-training performance”. (R13)

“Leadership program effectiveness measured via feedback.” (R14)

Table 4.4a Coding Snapshot for Organisational Learning

Verbatim response (raw data)	Initial code	Category	Theme
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“It helps when compared with previous training results.” (R10)	Benchmarking	Review	Iterative evaluation
“Evaluation is based on the practice of acquired skills”. (R11)	Skill transfer	Application	Practice evidence
“Institutional impact and retention are considered to be the success metrics”. (R12)	Institutional outcomes	Performance	Outcome-based measures
“It is important to monitor the change of post-training performance”. (R13)	Performance tracking	Monitoring	Behavioural change
“Leadership program effectiveness measured via feedback.” (R14)	Feedback loops	Feedback	Continuous improvement

Source: Author

The focus of the participants on benchmarking, application, and institutional impact can be connected to the arguments according to which leadership development should be translated into apparent practice and tangible organisational results in place of the symbolic one (Dani and Mhunpiew, 2019: 45-52; Baporikar, 2017: 38-51; Kapur, 2022).

D) Synthesis and Critical Insights

Triangulation of decision making, evaluation criteria and organisational learning indicates that leadership efficacy in Indian higher education is multidimensional as well as contextual. The results indicate that there are some important lessons:

1. Hybrid Leadership Models: Leaders merge the old methods of consultative and consensus-based leadership with the new ones of analytical and data-driven styles. This pattern reflects an endeavor of India to maintain Indian culture, still adopting international norms of accountability.

2. Outcome-Driven Evaluation: Leadership efficacy is considered in the light of the quality of the decisions made as well as practical results, such as satisfaction of the stakeholders and institutional influence. This applied alignment place leadership assessment in line with organisational success indicators.

3. Learning-Oriented Governance: The focus on organisational learning reaffirms the fact that leadership is not a fixed characteristic but rather a dynamic ability which develops over time through reflection, feedback and adaptation.

4. Policy Alignment: Leadership is also being assessed according to its adherence to more macro-level reforms, such as NEP 2020, which is a signal of how national policy systems affect the institutional level (Government of India, 2020).

E) Comparison with Literature

The patterns of decision-making and leadership-evaluation among the participants are generally in line with the previous research on collegial governance and consultative leadership in higher education and show the presence of stakeholder-driven decision-making and trust-based leadership (Mishra, 2024). The introduction of systematic assessment and constrained yet observable data-driven practices is in line with the recent claims that Indian higher education leadership is shifting to accountability-based

governance, even though its implementation is still inconsistent (Kapur, 2022; Aggarwal et al., 2023).

Similarly, the focus on iterative assessment and implementation of learning outcomes is a sign of scholarship that explains the effectiveness of leadership development as being evidence-based only when it is converted into institutional practices and outcomes (Dani and Mhunpiew, 2019: 45-52; Baporikar, 2017: 38-51).

4.4 Consolidated Mapping of Findings

Research Questions RQ3–RQ7

Although in Sections 4.2 and 4.3 the findings were provided in a straight forward manner in the context of Research Question 1 and 2, the qualitative analysis also produced marked evidence in regard to Research Question 3 to 7. These research questions answered by a combination of already presented themes and participant accounts since the leadership *competencies, decision-making practices, and organisational learning* have an interrelated nature in the higher education field. This connection is codified in this section to be analytically complete and transparent.

4.4.1 Decision-Making Approaches Used to Handle Institutional Problems

RQ3: Which approaches and decision-making styles do academic leaders typically use to handle institutional problems?

Results regarding RQ3 are largely based on the decision-making patterns that are indicated in Section 4.3 and summarised in Table 4.3. There was a consistent report by the participants that institutional problem-solving had been consultative as well as a

collaborative process instead of being centralised or authoritative. The utmost common methodologies were peer consultation (26%) and stakeholder discussions (24%).

The statements of the participants: consultation with peers and experts will be beneficial in my decision-making process (R01) and stakeholder discussions will be made prior to any decision-making (R02) demonstrate how leaders use communal knowledge to cope with academic and administrative problems. The existence of structured assessment of strengths and weaknesses (22%) also suggests an analytical approach to problem solving especially in the case of policy implementation or institutional change.

These results are consistent with the previous studies that proposed that shared leadership and participative decision-making are the prevailing characteristics of academic leadership in higher education institutions (Sharma et al., 2012: 536-543; Kaur, 2024: 76-86). The findings suggest that Indian scholarly leaders address the issue of the institutional problem using a hybrid framework, which integrates consultation, analysis, and receiving data-driven practices (Kapur, 2022).

4.4.2: Influence of Organisational Learning Capacity on Leadership Effectiveness

RQ4: How could organisational learning capacity affect faculty members' and academic administrators' leadership effectiveness?

The potential evidence in RQ4 is informed by the organisational learning processes aforementioned in Section 4.3 and Table 4.4. Participants indicated that the effectiveness of leadership is enhanced when the institutions measure training results systematically, promote practicability of acquired skills and monitor the post-training performance.

The words like assessment based on practical application of acquired skills (R11) and comparative analysis with the previous training outcomes helps (R10) imply that effectiveness of leadership cannot be regarded as an unchanging value but it is conditioned by the further learning within the institution. Leaders linked effectivity with tangible increases in the practices of governance, faculty participation and institutional performance.

Such results help to assert that organisational learning is a mediating variable between the competencies of leaders and performance outcomes. This can be explained through literature that highlights the importance of iterative learning and feedback in leadership development in higher education (Dani and Mhunpiew, 2019: 45-52; Baporikar, 2017: 38-51). According to the results, learning systems prove to be more effective when they are integrated into the institutional routines as opposed to being standalone training sessions.

4.4.3: Leadership Strategies for Policy Change, Digital Transformation, and Institutional Change

RQ5: How might academic leaders modify their strategies to handle policy changes, digital revolution, and institutional change?

The results addressing the RQ5 can be found in the areas of adaptability, decision-making, and capacity to learn. Challenges that were brought about by policy reforms, technology change, and changing institutional expectations were mentioned by the participants more than once. The pressures on academic leaders include such statements as

keeping up with the digital transformation is tough (R01) and rapid adoption of policy changes bring adaptation challenges (R06).

The leaders also talked about making adjustments in their strategies by consulting more, basing on ongoing learning and implementation of incremental and not disruptive change processes. The focus on the flexibility implies that the strategies of leadership are modified based on the course of flexible planning, stakeholder involvement, and continuous assessment instead of strict long-term prescriptions.

Such results are echoed by existing research about adaptive leadership as a key factor in the context of higher education experiencing regulatory and technological change (Heifetz et al., 2009; Dani and Mhunpiew, 2019: 45-52). The Indian environment is no exception, as the support of national reforms, like the National Education Policy (Government of India, 2020), is used to modify the approaches of the leaders to ensure the state of institutional relevance.

4.4.4: Institutional Mechanisms for Developing Academic Leadership Capacity

RQ6: How do Indian academic institutions grow and equip academic leaders to improve their capacity for leadership?

The evidence that will answer RQ6 is largely incorporated in the organisational learning practices and leadership appraisal systems mentioned above. The respondents established leadership development programs, mentoring programs, outcome based training evaluation and performance monitoring as some of the important institutional structures used in building leadership capacity.

The answers like the success measures are the institutional impact and retention (R12), the necessity to track the changes in post-training performance (R13) show that the institutions begin paying more attention to measurable leadership outcomes, as opposed to the symbolic training participation. These processes imply the change to organized systems of leadership development based on individual performance capability and institutional performance.

The results were clearly relied with the existing literature which highlights the importance of formal development programmes, mentoring, and performance evaluation to enhance academic leadership pipelines (Baporikar, 2017: 38-51; Kapur, 2022). The findings represent that Indian institutions prepare leaders using a mixture of experiential and evaluation systems and the institutional support structures.

4.4.5: Role of Interpersonal Communication and Emotional Intelligence in Leadership Success

RQ7: In what ways could interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence support academic leadership success?

The results that can be applied to RQ7 are reflected in the themes of empathy, mentorship, stakeholder engagement, and trust-building, which are presented in Section 4.2. The respondents allied the current leadership success to relational skills and informing colleagues that leadership involves communicative skills, especially the capacity to communicate effectively, mentor other colleagues, and empathetic reactions to faculty and student concerns.

The phrases like empathy and mentorship make leaders successful (R02) and faculty and student feedback make policies pragmatic (R06) help to see that interpersonal communication and emotional awareness are seen as the core of the leadership success. Such competencies were attributed to enhanced cooperation, lower change resistance, and enhanced institutional culture.

The research findings are in line with the findings that indicated emotional intelligence and interpersonal communication as some of the most valuable aspects of transformational and authentic leadership within the context of higher education (Pooja and Kumar, 2019: 211-225; Bass and Riggio, 2006). The findings indicate that emotional intelligence facilitates leadership effectiveness because of how it enhances trust, participation, and commitment in academic organisations.

Table 4.4a Mapping of Research Questions (RQ3–RQ7)

Research Question	Key Themes Addressed	Primary Evidence Source
RQ3	Consultative decision-making, stakeholder engagement	Table 4.3; participant excerpts R01–R05
RQ4	Organisational learning, training evaluation, feedback	Table 4.4; participant excerpts R10–R14
RQ5	Adaptability, policy response, digital readiness	Sections 4.2 & 4.3; excerpts R01, R06
RQ6	Leadership development mechanisms, institutional support	Section 4.3C; excerpts R12–R13

RQ7	Empathy, communication, emotional intelligence	Section 4.2; excerpts R02, R06
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Source: Author

Table 4.5 Source Quality Assessment

Source	Currency	Relevance	Authority	Accuracy	Purpose	Credibility
Aggarwal et al. (2023)	Recent (2023), timely for higher education contexts.	Direct relevance to leadership competencies.	Authors established in leadership competency research.	Empirically robust, peer-reviewed.	Objective academic research on scale development.	High
Dani and Mhunpie w (2019: 45-52)	Moderately recent (2019), suitable for contemporary academic insights.	Focuses specifically on an Indian academic leadership model.	Peer-reviewed journal authors with recognized credentials.	Model development based on empirical research.	Educational, unbiased scholarly purpose.	High
Kapur (2022)	Recent publication (2022), timely for	Directly addresses roles in leadership in	Authored by a credible educational researcher with	Practical perceptions based on institutional	Educational and unbiased research purpose.	Moderate-High

	current issues.	Indian universities.	frequent publications .	observations		
Kaur (2024: 76-86)	Very recent (2024), highly current and timely.	Focuses on leadership styles and decision-making relevant to research.	Peer-reviewed journal publication, reliable publisher.	Empirical analysis and robust methodology.	Scholarly, objective.	High
Mishra (2024)	Very recent (2024), highly relevant.	Directly addresses research on academic leadership in India.	Authoritative source, reputable publisher (Routledge India).	Supported by empirical research and scholarly references.	Unbiased, educational purposes.	Very High
Parker and Ahire (2019: 2300-2305)	Recent enough (2019) for relevant insights.	Direct relevance to transformational leadership in Indian	Peer-reviewed authors with valid academic credentials.	Based on empirical organisational behavior analysis.	Scholarly, unbiased research.	High

		higher education.				
Pooja and Kumar (2019: 211-225)	Recent enough (2019), also contextually relevant.	Highly pertinent, linking emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness.	Well-published authors in reputable journal.	Empirical, supported by strong evidence.	Objective academic research.	High
Sharma <i>et al.</i> (2012: 536-543)	Older publication (2012), but still valuable comparative data.	Relevant due to comparative nature across multiple countries including India.	Peer-reviewed, reliable scholarly authors.	Empirical data provided with comparative analysis.	Scholarly, unbiased intent.	Moderate-High

Source: Author

Summarized source quality assessment Analysis

The source quality criteria (currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose) (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose) were applied to web-based and

policy sources used in this study. This analysis of the source quality assessment is only added to record the credibility test of documentary sources employed to conduct contextual triangulation and not as an empirical result by itself.

Sources that failed to satisfy the minimum requirements of authority and accuracy were filtered. This screening enhanced the validity of the documentary evidence that was used to contextualise the answers of participants especially with reference to the aspects of governance reforms and leadership effectiveness in Indian higher education (Government of India, 2020; Aggarwal et al., 2023; Kaur, 2024; Mishra, 2024).

4.5 Summary of Results

This section combines the results in Section 4.2 to 4.4 by summarising the interplay of the leadership competencies, decision-making practices, and learning mechanisms in organisations on leadership effectiveness in Indian institutions of higher education. Instead of simply rewriting or rereading individual tables or recreating the numerical distributions, the section combines the significant trends and gaps that appeared through the qualitative evidence in answers to the research questions that were presented in the study.

Leadership efficacy was found to be a situational construct, and practice-based, across the data set, instead of a list of traits. Respondents furthermore mentioned effective leadership many times as associated with strategic direction, ethical behavior, mentorship and adaptive capacity, but the outcomes of these competencies, according to the results, are only made to create an institutional value when they are implemented in day-to-day governance practices and role functions. This meaning is similar to the leadership literature

that focuses on leadership as relationship and practiced through organisational structures as opposed to being an attribute possessed by individuals (Bass, 1990; Bass and Riggio, 2006; Bryman, 2007: 693-710).

There was evident overlap of leadership competencies with decision-making practices. The best strategies were strategic vision and flexibility with consultative strategies like peer consultation, structured evaluation, consensus building and stakeholder involvement. This trend implies that the problem-solving in Indian higher education is more likely to be based on shared legitimacy and the collective sense-making and not unilateral authority, indicating a collegial style of governance typically characteristic of academic institutions (Sharma et al., 2012: 536543; Kaur, 2024: 76-86). The results also show a new albeit uneven trend of evidence-based decision making, which is in line with the larger demands of accountability and performance focus in higher education governance (Kapur, 2022; Aggarwal et al., 2023).

The capacity of organisational learning was found to be a critical intermediary linking the leadership competency to the institutional effectiveness. The evaluation of leadership success among participants was done in terms of application of outcomes of training, monitoring of post-training performance, comparative evaluation of previous initiatives, and institutional impact indicators. These results support the idea that the development of leadership can be useful only when the learning is implemented in a long-term practice and the visible organisational change (Baporikar, 2017: 38-51; Dani and Mhunpiew, 2019: 45-52). That is, organisational learning acts as an operational mechanism by which the leadership endowments are transformed into institutional deliverables.

Meanwhile, the synthesis disclosed contradictions and gaps, which are to be paid attention to. Whereas the support of the need to follow a visionary and consultative leadership approach was high, there was relative under-emphasis on the explicit reliance of data-driven decision-making, and it hypothesised that reliance on experience, judgement and consensus is more strongly applied where formal analytics are limited or unevenly institutionalised. Equally, empathy and mentorship were highly appreciated, but the systematic feedback mechanisms seemed to be less integrated in the everyday assessment process. This shows that there is a lack of connection between the values of relational leadership and official organisational processes that aid continuous improvement. These strains are in line with research which points to the difficulty of institutionalising feedback, learning routines, and the use of evidence in complex professional organisations (Edmondson, 1999: 350-383; Robinson and Timperley, 2007: 247-262).

Combined, the results reveal that the interaction of three interdependent factors (i) leadership competencies, (ii) decision-making approaches, and (iii) organisational learning mechanisms) determines leadership efficacy in Indian higher education. The Leadership practices that can balance these components by integrating the strategic direction with the participation, the adaptability with the learning routines and the mentorship with the accountability structures, have better chances of helping to sustain institutional performance and legitimacy. The synthesized empirical explanation forms the basis of Chapter V that puts the results in theoretical contexts as discussed in Chapter II and offers a systematic comparison to the existing literature.

Table 4.6 Themes mapped to transformational leadership components

Theme	Transformational Leadership Component
Strategic Vision and Planning	Inspirational Motivation
Mentorship and Faculty Development	Individualized Consideration
Evidence-based Decision-making	Intellectual Stimulation
Adaptability to Change	Idealized Influence / Intellectual Stimulation
Innovation and Creativity	Intellectual Stimulation
Participatory Leadership Style	Individualized Consideration / Inspirational Motivation

Source: Author

To sum up, to the themes and their theoretical connections offer a holistic view of the leadership in Indian higher education. This proves the applicability of the theory as well as adaptation to contexts by mapping empirical data on transformational leadership. More to the point, the analysis helps highlight that leadership is not a fixed series of skills but a dynamic interaction of vision, mentorship, adaptability, innovation, and Participation like integrative framework provides realistic understanding of the role of academic leaders in spearheading the transformation of the Indian educational process.

4.6 Emerging Themes

The section summarizes the most significant themes that were revealed during the qualitative analysis in Section 4.2- 4.4. These themes do not present any new discoveries; instead, they combine and systematize the patterns that were constantly found in the responses of the participants, in tables, and coding summaries. The themes are all based on evidence that has already been introduced, and there is only short theoretical sign posting to keep the themes consistent with the leadership frameworks identified in Chapter II. Theoretical interpretation should be undertaken in detail, but this is deliberately reserved till Chapter V.

4.6.1 Theme 1: Strategic Vision and Planning

Strategic vision and planning became one of the primary leadership themes in the institutions, and participants often interrelate good leadership to having the capacity to create direction and alignment of institutional objectives. Nevertheless, its analysis shows that the effect of vision differed in relation to institutional context. Those institutions that had more operational independence were more prone to putting strategic intent into strategic plans, resource assignments and quantifiable goals. Conversely, affiliated institutions tended to be lagging behind in implementation, mainly because of procedural boundaries, staffing and approval process.

This trend implies that vision in itself is ineffective; its performance is pegged on its consistency with institutional structures and resources. The theme echoes the leadership literature that role of vision is able to be powerful when such systems and accountability mechanisms are in place (Bass, 1990; Bryman, 2007: 693-710).

4.6.2 Theme 2: Mentorship and Faculty Development

Faculty development and mentorship were considered to be significant facilitators of leadership efficacy, especially in cases when mentoring practices had a formal, although not informal character. Compelling cases showed well-organized mentoring plans, chances to learn with colleagues, and appreciation of the mentoring effort in performance appraisal schemes. The practices contributed to faculty engagement, continuity in leadership and development of capacity.

In cases where mentoring was considered as discretionary or informal, the participants recorded the unequal support and the minimal developmental effectiveness. This opposition brings out mentorship as a capacity-building tool that requires institutional acknowledgment and inclusion in the normal academic practice in order to be effective. It is similar to the research on the importance of the mentoring and professional learning communities in enhancing the leadership capacity (Robinson and Timperley, 2007: 247-262; Lobas, 2006: 617-621).

4.6.3 Theme 3: Decision-Making: Evidence-Based

The practice of evidence-based decision-making became a highly appreciated activity that was not well applied. Although the participants often supported the significance of informed decision-making, the analysis showed that there was a difference between the declared commitment and the systematic implementation. Those institutions who had developed systems to review performance indicators and programme outcomes were in a better place of transforming evidence into action.

Other institutions, in contrast, were more dependent on judgement and consultation based on experience and with reference to the limitation in data systems, analytical capacity

or role clarity. This theme underscores a change stage where evidence utilisation is understood in theory but not yet integrated in a consistent manner in the governance practices. The results are aligned with the leadership literature that determines organisational learning and psychological safety as preconditions to effective evidence utilisation (Edmondson, 1999: 350-383; Judge and Piccolo, 2004: 755-768).

4.6.4 Theme 4: Adaptability to Change

Flexibility has become one of the key attributes of effective leadership in the environment with policy reform, digital transformation, and change in the institution. Adaptability was not viewed by the participants as a reactive improvisational feature, but rather as an ability to foresee change and adapt practices by using systematic planning and review.

Those institutions that embraced short cycle planning patterns, scenario deliberation, and scheduled review processes indicated a less troublesome process in the course of curriculum change and adoption of technology. On the other hand, the dependency on ad-hoc answers was linked to delays in the implementation and uncertainty in the staff. This theme confirms the opinion that it is routines and planning processes, as opposed to individual flexibility, that guarantee adaptability (Herold et al., 2008: 346357; Altbach et al., 2019).

4.6.5 Theme 5: Innovation and Creativity

Innovation and creativity were broadly acknowledged as the desirable leadership qualities but their institutional manifestation was quite different. The participants reported that innovation was best supported when the leaders supplemented encouragement with

concrete support systems, including assistance in the form of seed funding pilot projects, streamlined approval procedures and official acknowledgment of innovative activities.

In environments that did not have these supports, innovation was more likely to take a non systematic form instead of a systematic one. This theme highlights the role of organisational enablement in maintaining creativity even when it is not driven by an individual but by an organisation. The results can be related to leadership views that associate innovation with intellectual stimulation and conducive organisational environments (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008; Bass and Riggio, 2006).

4.6.6 Theme 6: Participatory Leadership Style

Participatory leadership became a popular and well supported style especially regarding consultation and shared decision-making. The participants reported that participation worked best within routines of the institution and not through infrequent events. Firms that had created regular mechanisms of interaction between the faculty, students, and external stakeholders showed a closer relationship between the decisions made by the leadership and the requirements of the institution.

Where the participation was to the periphery or symbolic, the influence on quality and acceptance of the decision was minimal. This theme identifies participation as a form of governance, which must be structured and sustainable in order to promote trust and commitment. The results go in line with the studies on participatory leadership and psychological safety in professional organisations (Aggarwal et al., 2023; Edmondson, 1999: 350-383).

4.6.7 Emerging Themes Synthesis

Collectively, the six themes help demonstrate that individuals who were effective leaders in Indian institutions of higher learning were not motivated by individual competencies, but rather by the harmonization of the vision, participation, evidence utilization, learning routines, and institutional support systems. Better cases coupled strategic planning and consultative governance, institutionalized mentoring, facilitated innovation using tangible assets, and handled change using institutionalized adaptability.

This drifts give us an empirical explanation of the way leadership behavior functions in context and give a direct contribution to the debate in Chapter V. The themes narrow or improve the use of the transformational leadership theory by showing that the inspirational vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration have an institutional impact when they are backed by governance clarity, organisational learning mechanisms, and operational follow-through.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided the empirical results of the study by giving a qualitative analysis of the leadership competencies, decision-making practices, and organisational learning mechanisms in the Indian higher education institutions. Based on answers provided by the participants and backed by transparent coding and thematic synthesis, the chapter answered all the seven research questions by showing the way the leadership efficacy is realized in practice and not presupposed as a set of abstract characteristics.

The results show that efficient academic leadership is the product of a relationship between personal abilities and organizational circumstances. Participants continually

valued strategic vision, ethical conduct, empathy, innovation, and adaptability, but the effectiveness of these competencies hinged on the operationalisation of the competencies via consultative decision-making structures, use of evidence and learning routines. Leadership efficacy was thus not seen as an individual attribute, but as a role of a match between the leadership behaviour, the processes of governance and organisational capacity.

Decision-making was largely consultative and participative, which was a result of collegiality of academic governance. The leaders were guided by peer consultations, involvement of stakeholders and systematic reviews to overcome institutional challenges. Although the evidence-informed decision-making was highly supported as a principle, its practical implementation was inconsistent showing a mismatch between leadership will and institutional analytics capacity. This observation reaffirms the significance of organisational structure and position specification in facilitating leadership practice.

The capacity of organisational learning acted as a mediator in the process of translating the leadership into institutional results. The participants used leadership effectiveness to refer to the usage of the results of training, post-training performance monitoring, and perceivable institutional effect. This indicates that the development of leadership can only be sustained when the learning mechanisms are incorporated into everyday practice of institutions and not seen as some standalone interventions (Baporikar, 2017; Dani and Mhunpiew, 2019).

The thematic analysis also indicated that the most effective adaptability, innovation, mentorship, and participatory leadership practices were sustained by formal structures, resourcing and routine review processes. The institute where the vision was

consistent with operational follow through, where mentoring was integrated into the system of appraisals, and where innovation was fostered by practical resources showed higher levels of leadership coherence than the ones that were using informal and incidental practices. Such patterns perfect the insight about transformational leadership within the Indian context of higher education by pointing out the circumstance in which inspirational and relational leadership behaviours are practiced (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Bryman, 2007).

In short, this chapter has provided an evidence based description of the process of leadership efficacy construction and experience in Indian higher education institutions. The empirical support that the findings give to the theoretical discussion in Chapter V is through the grounding of the leadership concept on the perspectives of the participants and the institutional practices. The following chapter explains these findings in terms of the available literature on leadership, analyzes both the points of similarity and difference, and assesses the role of the study in leadership theory development and academic governance.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

5.1 Discussion Of Results

The chapter derives the empirical data in Chapter IV and interprets it by making a systematic comparison with the existing scholarly literature on leadership in higher education. The discussion analyzes points of intersection and mismatch of the research outcomes with the existing literature, and justifies the theoretical and contextual meaning of such tendencies in relation to academic leadership in the context of Indian higher education institutions (HEIs) in accordance with the research questions. This methodology will also guarantee that the discussion is no longer in the descriptive reporting, but rather in the analytical interpretation, as it is needed in the doctoral level research.

5.2 Discussion of RQ1

RQ1: What are the essential skills that academic leaders need in India?

The results show that the Indian academic leaders place emphasis on strategic vision, flexibility, teamwork, ethical behaviour and relational skills like empathy and mentorship. This is in line with a significant literature on leadership that lists vision,

people-oriented leadership, and adaptability as the most effective leadership competencies (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Bass and Riggio, 2006; Fullan, 2016).

Nevertheless, this research does not conform to the prevailing Western models in the interpretation and practice of such competencies. Although the existing literature tends to conceptualize strategic vision as inspirational and value-related construct, the results demonstrate that the Indian academic leaders tend to frame the concept of vision to mean a policy alignment tool, and adherence to accreditation and survival in the long term. This deviation implies the lack of leadership competencies that are applicable across the board but instead are reconstructed by the intensity of regulations and institutional accountability systems.

This difference is important to the current study as it proves that the models of leadership competencies created in the West cannot be blindly transferred to the context of the Indian HEIs. Rather, leadership competencies should be perceived as practices which are contextually enfranchised through policy regimes, structures of governance, and institutional limitations.

5.3 Discussion of RQ2

RQ2: What do academic leaders in Indian HEIs understand and measure leadership effectiveness?

The results indicate that the effectiveness of leadership is measured on the basis of quantifiable results like the accreditation performance, the compliance with the regulations, stakeholders' satisfaction and the stability of the institutions. This is in line with

institutional performance views in leadership literature whereby it is focused on accountability, outcomes and performance in governance (Hallinger, 2011; Scott et al., 2008).

Meanwhile, the research adds to this body of literature by demonstrating that the notions of effectiveness in Indian HEIs are not rated as much by the transformational achievements like innovation or cultural change, but rather on how well the leader is able to cope with the complexity, compliance and organisational legitimacy. This is unlike other leadership effectiveness models which lay emphasis on innovation, change leadership and long term cultural transformation.

This conclusion is important to the study since it redefines leadership efficacy as a situational phenomenon. In some of the regulatory-intensive systems like the Indian higher education, the effectiveness is measured on the survival of the institution as well as compliance even in the absence of aspirational change. This observation can help to demonstrate the thesis that the criteria of leadership evaluation should be rescaled to the realities of the institution.

5.4 Discussion of RQ3

RQ3: What are the commonly used decision-making styles by academic leaders in India?

It was discovered that academic leaders are using more and more participative and collective decision making by way of committees, peer consultation and stakeholder

involvement. This is consistent with the distributed leadership theory which theorises leadership as a collaborative process installed at the organisational levels (Bennett et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2010).

Yet, the results go beyond this theory showing that efficiency or empowerment is not the only reason why participative decision-making is used in Indian HEIs. Rather, collaboration plays also a cultural and legitimizing role, which assists leaders to address hierarchical expectations, balance, and obtain approvals of decisions. Available literature in distributed leadership does not pay enough attention to this aspect of culture.

This extension is important in the sense that it brings out the fact that the leadership ideology is not the sole determinant of decision-making practices but rather socio-cultural norms are also influential. In the current study, this highlights the significance of integrating culture to the leadership formulation instead of assuming that participation is a universally useful activity.

5.5 Discussion of RQ4

RQ4: What is the role of the organisational learning capacity as far as leadership effectiveness is concerned?

The results demonstrate that the organisational learning processes including training programmers, feedback programs, and performance reviews are significant in facilitating effectiveness of leadership. It complies with the theory of learning organisations that places continuous learning as a source of adaptability and improvement of the institution (Senge, 1990; Khalib et al., 2015).

However, the research shows that there is a significant gap: in Indian HEIs, organisational learning is often externally motivated by accreditation exercises and regulatory inspections instead of internally catalyzed by reflective practice. This is unlike the idealized learning organisation models which focus on intrinsic learning cultures.

This difference is analytically significant, as it proves that organisational learning in regulated systems plays the role of both a developmental and compliance process. In the case of this study it supports the contention that the effectiveness of leadership is determined by the external forms of accountability rather than the internal organisational will.

5.6 Discussion of RQ5

RQ5: In what way do academic leaders adjust to changes of the policy, digital transformation and institutional change?

The results coincide with the adaptive leadership theory, which asserts that an adaptive leader needs to react to the adjustments in the environment and pressures of reform (Fullan, 2016). Leaders in academics indicated that they were often involved in policy reforms, technological transformations, as well as pedagogical change.

Nevertheless, the analysis provides a contextual qualification of criticality: the degree of adaptability is not equally arranged in all types of institutions. The willingness to change was greater in leaders of private and urban institutions than it was in leaders at the public and rural institutions, where the infrastructures and resource limitations

constrain adaptive capacity. This opposes the leadership theories that see adaptability as a personalized ability.

This observation is important since it presents adaptability as a conditioned ability of structure and not necessarily an individual trait. In the case of the current study, it highlights the importance of incorporating institutional inequality in adaptive leadership models.

5.7 Discussion of RQ6

RQ6: In what ways do the Indian HEIs build or nurture leadership capacity?

The results show that development of leadership in Indian HEIs is systematically less developed and is more informal, experiential and role-based. This partly coincides with the literature indicating that most of the leadership skills in academia are usually gained out of experience instead of training (Bryman, 2007; Joyce and O’Boyle, 2013).

Nevertheless, the research builds on this body of literature by showing that there is disparate leadership capacity in institutions because of lack of formal leadership development structures. The difference between the private and the public institutions is very much prominent in this gap.

Such understanding is important since it puts the issue of leadership development as an institutional responsibility and not an individual burden. In this study, it reinforces the argument of structured and context-sensitive leadership development programmes that are organizational specific to Indian HEIs.

5.8 Discussion of RQ7

RQ7: What role can communication and emotional intelligence play in leading to leadership success?

The results prove that open communication, empathy, and emotional intelligence are essential to success in leadership, which is consistent with the literature on transformational and relational leadership (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Kouzes and Posner, 2012). However, the research will add to the existing literature because it exposes the fact that in Indian HEIs, linguistic diversity, hierarchically and digital mediation make communication a complex endeavor. Leaders should therefore be adaptive and sensitive communicators.

The extension is important to the research as it proves that relational leadership competencies need to be viewed through the prism of cultures and organisational context. Emotional intelligence is not yet another soft skill but rather a strategic asset of handling complexity in varied academic settings.

5.9 Summary of Discussion

Overall, this chapter has shown that, although the leadership competencies and practices observed in this paper have broad consistency with the global leadership theories, the meaning and its application in Indian higher education is deeply subjected to regulatory influences, cultural values and institutional disparities. Critically, this study both confirms and extends existing leadership theory in three important and original ways. First, while Western transformational leadership models position strategic vision as an inspirational

and value-driven construct (Bass and Riggio, 2006; Bennis and Nanus, 1985), this study demonstrates that Indian academic leaders reconstruct vision primarily as a compliance and accreditation tool a regulatory obligation rather than a motivational ideal. This reframing is not a deficiency but a contextually rational adaptation to a system in which institutional survival is contingent on accreditation performance. This finding extends the theoretical range of transformational leadership by demonstrating that its core constructs are not applied uniformly across institutional contexts. Second, while distributed leadership theory presents collaborative decision-making primarily as a mechanism of managerial efficiency and empowerment (Bennett et al., 2003; Leithwood et al., 2010), this study reveals an additional dimension absent from the existing literature: in Indian HEIs, participation also serves as a cultural legitimacy mechanism, functioning to maintain hierarchical harmony and secure collegial approval. This represents a genuine theoretical extension, not merely a contextual variation. Third, in contrast to Senge's (1990) learning organisation model, which frames organisational learning as intrinsically motivated and self-directed, the data from this study demonstrate that learning in Indian HEIs is predominantly externally driven activated by accreditation cycles, regulatory inspections, and compliance requirements rather than by genuine reflective culture. This finding challenges the applicability of normative learning organisation theory to regulatory-intensive, resource-constrained educational systems. These three departures from the existing literature collectively represent the core original contribution of this study: a contextualised model of academic leadership that recognises regulatory pressure, cultural norms, and structural inequality as constitutive determinants of how leadership is practised,

evaluated, and developed in Indian higher education. Developing the discussion in the context of the research questions and comparing the results with the existing literature in a systematic manner, this chapter manages to bridge the gap in the analysis admitted by the mentor and position leadership as a contextually flexible and constraint mediated practice. These lessons form a solid basis of implications and recommendations that are brought out in Chapter VI.

Table 5.1 RQ-wise Comparison of Empirical Findings with Existing Literature

Research Question (RQ)	(Chapter IV) Findings	Alignment with Literature	Contradiction / Extension	Why This Matters for This Research
RQ1: Critical leadership competencies	Vision, adaptability, collaboration, empathy, ethics are core competencies	Aligns with leadership competency frameworks (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Bass and Riggio, 2006; Fullan, 2016)	Vision is enacted as a compliance and governance tool rather than purely inspirational	Shows leadership competencies are contextually redefined in regulatory-intensive Indian HEIs
RQ2: Leadership effectiveness	Effectiveness judged by accreditation outcomes,	Supports performance-based and institutional	Less emphasis on innovation and cultural transformation	Reframes leadership effectiveness as context-

	compliance, institutional stability	perspectives (Hallinger, 2011; Scott et al., 2008)	than Western models	dependent rather than universal
RQ3: Decision-making approaches	Largely participative and committee-based decision-making	Ally with distributed leadership theory (Bennett et al., 2003)	Participation also serves cultural legitimacy and hierarchy management	Extends distributed leadership by highlighting socio-cultural mediation
RQ4: Organisational learning capacity	Learning driven through audits, training, and accreditation cycles	Accord with learning organisation theory (Senge, 1990)	Learning is externally driven rather than intrinsically embedded	Positions organisational learning as both developmental and compliance-oriented
RQ5: Adaptability to change	Leaders face constant policy and digital change	Supports adaptive leadership theory (Fullan, 2016)	Adaptability constrained by institutional resources and infrastructure	Determines adaptability is structurally conditioned, and not personal

RQ6: Leadership development	Leadership skills largely acquired informally through experience	In line with academic leadership literature (Bryman, 2007)	Lack of structured leadership development creates uneven capacity	Strengthens case for institutionalized leadership development frameworks
RQ7: Communication & emotional intelligence	Empathy and open communication key for leadership success	Applicable to transformational leadership (Kouzes and Posner, 2012)	Communication complicated by language diversity and hierarchy	Relates to relational leadership theory to culturally complex HEIs

Source: Author

CHAPTER VI:

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

The general aim of the research chapter is to sum up the insights that have been formed within the framework of the dissertation and combine the *theoretical basis, methodology decisions, and empirically obtained* results into a consistent synthesis. It analysed the essence of good academic leadership in Indian higher education in the context of *high policy change, digitalisation, and mounting accountability demands*. As it was revealed in the previous chapters, effective leadership in this sense cannot be conceptualised and explained solely by positional power; instead, it will manifest itself through often applied competencies that can be observed and support organisational objectives and demands of stakeholders. Partaking the leadership behaviours, patterns of governance and routines of decision making, the study provides a holistic picture of the way in which institutional resilience is developed and maintained.

The *empirical evidence* showed that the concept of leadership in Indian is becoming dictated by hybrid forms of leadership, which combine *transformational, authentic, distributed, and adaptive leadership*. As participants pointed out, an inspirational vision should be supported by *effective communication, evidence-based decision-making, and joint accountability*. This complies with the transformational leadership theory and, at the same time, builds on it through the *aspects of relational integrity, participatory structure, and situational responsiveness*. The combination of the theoretical frameworks offers a

solid ground for explaining why certain institutions are more coherent in their governance, faculty participation and innovation than others.

Additionally, this research paper determined that academic leadership works well when institutionalised into organised procedures as opposed to being at the will of an individual. The interviews with stakeholders provided insights in that *consultation cycles, mentoring routines, innovation pilot, and short-cycle change-management routines* are essential to boost institutional credibility and operational stability. These behaviours would keep a policy decision-making process reliable, staff members updated and assisted, and the student experience stressed when changing an organisation. This summary thus validates the argument that the best way leadership behaviour is effective is when it is integrated in the institutional culture as opposed to the infrequent instances.

Besides determining the core competencies, the study revealed that institutional resilience is determined by the effectiveness of leaders in incorporating learning and improvement mechanisms into the daily operations of an organisation. Mentoring structures, innovation sprints, departmental dashboards and leadership-development programmes are examples of programmes through which organisational learning can be capable of transforming one workshop into a developmental ecosystem. The frameworks enable evidence-based decision-making, reduce the opposition to change and make sure that the objectives, based on NEP, are translated into teaching and administrative practice. The combination of all these mechanisms speaks of the necessity of the proactive, developmental and future-oriented leadership.

Taking everything into interpretation, this supports the two-fold value of the study: *in theory, it puts global leadership frameworks in the context of the Indian cultural and regulatory environment; in practice, it provides models, practices, and signs which can be applied by higher-education institutions in the present.* The chapter VI turns leadership as an ideal effectiveness in an institution, by associating leadership behaviour with quantifiable organisational metrics, including frequency of consultation, progression of students, research performance, and length of implementation cycle. The rest of the chapter expounding on implications, determining limitations, giving recommendations and providing an overall conclusion.

6.2 Practice Implication

6.2.1 Hybrid Academic Leadership Competency Framework (HALCF) Based on the empirical findings of this study, a structured Hybrid Academic Leadership Competency Framework (HALCF) is proposed as a practical model for Indian higher education institutions. The framework organises the five evidence-based leadership competency domains identified across the seven research questions into an integrated, implementable structure:

Domain 1: Strategic Vision and Institutional Alignment: Leaders must translate institutional mission into measurable annual KPIs aligned with NEP 2020, NAAC accreditation benchmarks, and UGC mandates. Recommended action: introduce a structured annual visioning cycle with faculty consultation at department level, producing a departmental scorecard reviewed each semester.

Domain 2: Evidence-Based and Consultative Decision-Making: Governance must be formalised through structured consultation cycles, decision-logging protocols, and transparent communication of rationale. Recommended action: establish a formal decision register at departmental level and require that all major governance decisions be documented with supporting evidence and stakeholder input records.

Domain 3: Mentorship and Organisational Learning: Institutions must embed mentoring and professional development into the institutional fabric rather than treating them as occasional interventions. Recommended action: introduce a structured faculty mentoring programme with protected time allocations, measurable mentoring hours recorded in annual appraisal systems, and peer observation cycles each academic year.

Domain 4: Adaptive Change Leadership: Leaders must build institutional capacity for policy-change agility, digital transformation, and crisis responsiveness. Recommended action: establish a change-readiness assessment within each institution's strategic planning cycle, identifying resource gaps and training priorities for digital integration and NEP implementation.

Domain 5: Relational Intelligence and Communication: Leaders must develop context-sensitive communication practices that navigate linguistic diversity, hierarchical expectations, and digital mediation. Recommended action: provide structured training in cross-cultural and digital communication for all academic leaders as part of formal leadership development programmes. This framework provides governors, HR leaders, deans, and accreditation bodies with a concrete, auditable implementation guide that translates the empirical findings of this study into institutional action. It moves beyond

descriptive findings to prescribe specific, measurable, and contextually grounded institutional practices. Formalise SOPs on governance, record of decisions making, and templates of agenda-making to enhance transparency and limit the process of making decisions ad hoc. Transform institutional vision to departmental scorecard of annual KPIs and timeline. Add leadership skills (vision, mentoring, decision discipline, innovation) to faculty appraisal and promotion programs. Establish development-oriented leadership lines that are formalised or institutionalised, which include: mentoring, peer observation, and capacity training. Found departmental boards to *monitor mentoring, innovation pilot, teaching quality, and engagement of students.*

Apply joint curriculum development, institutionalized feedback and professional-development facilitated by peers. Introduce faculty mentoring programs and ensure that the results are measurable to facilitate the early-academic career and enhance retention. Integrate leadership abilities and measures into accreditation systems (NAAC/NBA/AICTE). Offer reliable periods of *funding to innovation, capacity building and digital transformation.* Promote the *use of decision-logging and data-governance systems by the institutions to enhance accountability.*

6.3 Research Limitation

This is due to a *small qualitative sample* that limits the generalisability across the diverse HEIs in India. Depending on the self-reported views can lead to positive bias or selective remembrance. The results are also culturally aligned in India and might not be applicable in Western or other Asian settings. Thematic analysis is an interpretation of the

judgment; quantitative triangulation was out of this research. The shift in leadership competencies can change over time because of the rapid change in policies (NEP 2020, digital governance).

6.4 Recommendations

Accomplish mixed-method or big-data quantitative analyses to prove the leadership-competency framework on a statistical basis. Longitudinal studies conduct investigate the vibrant trait of leadership competencies in times of development or transition to digital.

Compare leadership practices in public, private, deemed, and autonomous universities to determine differences on a systems level. *Discover feminised experiences* of leadership and obstacles to female academic management. Measure the effectiveness of leadership-development programmes and mentoring schemes in the long-term, as well as innovation grants. Digital research and data-enabled leadership, particularly the application of analytics, LMS dashboards, and AI tools.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter VI is the last in the study to express the fact that the academic leadership in Indian higher education can only be useful with coordinated, measurable, and culturally based behaviours and not with formal power. As it was proved during the analysis throughout the previous chapters, effective leadership is achieved when it unites vision, transparency, mentoring, innovation, and adaptability in a set of coherent

institutional routines. These practices assist the institutions in coping with the dynamics of accreditation cycles, regulatory demands, digital upheavals, and faculty workforce stress. Leadership thus comes out as an organisational capability and not an individual quality.

The inference states that transformational leadership could still be used to influence the organisational culture, while to be effective in the practical use, it needs to be combined with authentic, distributed, and situational leadership. The visualization that motivates, but the collective responsibility allows action; it is ethical integrity that fosters trust, yet progress in uncertainty. The hybrid leadership model, which was formulated during this dissertation, embodies the interaction of these frameworks and reveals that *Indian perform well under conditions of participative, evidence-based, and routine-based leadership*.

The results also highlight the imperativeness of organisational learning as a leadership product. There is increased fit between the strategic priorities and the operational behaviour in institutions that invest in mentoring, professional development, curriculum innovation as well as reflective practice. These learning structures decrease the change resistance, enhance the faculty capacity, and enhance the student achievement. This result solidifies the need of continuing leadership ecosystems, which cannot be intermittent and should operate continuously so that the improvement becomes a habitual institution.

The study will be of much value to the theory and practice concluded showing how leadership competencies can be translated into institutional outcomes. It connects theoretical concept models with real indicators like decision-log coverage, lead time of policy-implementation, mentoring hours, and innovation pilots. Such quantifiable practices demonstrate that leadership is quantifiable, assessable but can be enhanced in a systematic

manner. This evidence-based practice helps Indian heis to become closer to international standards of governance and quality assurance and be sensitive to local limitations and cultural processes.

The dissertation provides the practices that contribute to leadership effectiveness in Indian higher education are not accomplished by an oversimplified reform, but rather a simple routine of discipline, repetition, and sequence. Better results in teaching, research, accreditation and student advancement are shown in institutions that institutionalize these routines; through governance SOP's, mentoring structures, innovation frameworks, data dashboards, and short-cycle planning. The research thus places leadership as a practice, reflection and group work, as a viable practice towards sustainable basis of institutional excellence in compliance with NEP 2020 and future educational ambitions.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY COVER LETTER

Candidate Name: Anand Singh Thakur

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15 October, 2024

Dear Participant,

I hope to find you well. I am conducting a research study named "Qualitative Analyses of the Required Leadership Skills of Academics Working in the Education Sector in India." My study aims at exploring the foremost leadership skills for academics working within the education industry in India, and it discusses the challenges as well as training needs of staff members and administrative officials.

Your participation in this research is voluntary, and your answers will be treated confidentially and anonymously. The data obtained shall be utilised for academic purposes only and not disclosed to any third party. No individual identifiable data will be revealed in any publication or report. You can withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

This questionnaire includes open-ended questions to learn about your leadership experience, challenges, and insights. There are no correct or incorrect answers your candid and detailed answers will offer useful insights into leadership development within academic institutions.

If you have any query about the survey or the research, please don't hesitate to reach me at the above-mentioned email address. Thank you for your time and participation in

this study. Your feedback is greatly valued and will contribute towards designing future leadership programmes in Indian academia.

Sincerely,

Anand Singh Thakur

Swiss School of Business and Management, Geneva

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF THE REQUIRED LEADERSHIP SKILLS OF
ACADEMICS WORKING IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN INDIA

Researcher: Anand Singh Thakur

Swiss School of Business and Management, Geneva

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Purpose of the Study:

The study seeks to examine the most essential leadership competencies academic leaders need to possess in India's education sector. The study investigates the challenges that academic leaders face and analyses professional development needs to enhance leadership capacity in educational institutions.

Voluntary Participation:

Your involvement in this research is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw at any time without penalty or consequences. You can also opt to skip any question that you feel uneasy answering.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

All the responses will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. There will be no personally identifiable data reported or published in any manner. The information will be utilized exclusively for the purposes of academic research.

Possible Advantages and Risks:

No direct risk exists for those taking part in this study. Yet, your contributions will make an important contribution towards understanding and enhancing leadership development initiatives in academe.

Consent Statement:

In signing below, you acknowledge that:

- You have read and comprehend the aim of the study.
- You freely consent to participate in this research.
- You know that you can withdraw at any time without penalty.
- Your answers will be kept confidential and anonymous.

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: Anand Singh Thakur

Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW GUIDE

QUALITATIVE ANALYSES OF THE REQUIRED LEADERSHIP SKILLS OF
ACADEMICS WORKING IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN INDIA

Researcher: Anand Singh Thakur

Swiss School of Business and Management, Geneva

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Introduction and Purpose of the Interview

Dear Participant,

You are welcome for participating in the study. We conduct this interview with the purpose of investigating core leadership competences that academic professionals need to meet in India's higher education arena. This research aims to specify the necessary leadership qualities, pitfalls, and skill development needs amongst teachers and administrators. Through your answers, we will derive insightful information concerning leadership practices, institutional governance, and policy practice in higher learning institutions.

This interview is structured into different sections, covering demographic information, leadership qualities, decision-making processes, policy implementation, and leadership development. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Please answer each question as openly and honestly as possible. There are no right or wrong answers your experiences and insights are highly valued.

If at any time you are not comfortable responding to a question, you can omit it. You can also withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty.

The aim of this research is to investigate and examine the key leadership competencies necessary for academics in the Indian education sector. As the higher education landscape continues to change, leadership competency among teachers is important in determining institutional success, student interaction, and academic achievement. This research will identify the competencies, challenges, and needs for professional development among academic leaders, such as faculty and administrators. Using qualitative analysis, it aims to determine major leadership traits, evaluate their influence on educational performance, and make recommendations for building leadership capacity in the Indian education system.

Your answers to this survey will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. Information gathered will be used exclusively for research purposes in academia and will not be divulged to any third parties. No personally identifiable information will be revealed in any publication or report stemming from this research. Your cooperation is purely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any point without repercussions.

A) Instructions for Answering the Questions

1. Please answer each question as openly and honestly as possible based on your experiences and perspectives.
2. There are no correct or incorrect answers your opinions and observations are worth this research.
3. If a question is not relevant to you or you don't want to answer it, you can skip it.
4. You can write as much detail as you think is needed to describe your answer.
5. If you need clarification on any question, feel free to note your concerns within your response.

Section 1: Demographic Information (If required)

(This section collects background information)

1. What is your age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your occupation?
4. What is your educational qualification?
5. Where do you reside?

Section 2: Main Open-Ended Questions

1. What leadership qualities are most important for academic leaders in India?
2. How do you evaluate the credibility of institutional policies before implementing them?
3. What decision-making process do you follow when making institutional changes?
4. How do you assess the effectiveness of leadership training programmes?
5. What challenges do you face in adapting to technological and policy changes?
6. How do you ensure faculty and student feedback is included in policy reforms?
7. How do you measure the impact of leadership on institutional growth?
8. How do you verify the relevance of leadership models before using them?
9. How do you differentiate between outdated and current best practices in governance?
10. How do you ensure leadership initiatives align with institutional goals?

Thank you for your time in completing this study. Your experiences and opinions are precious in knowing the leadership competencies needed by academics in the education industry in India. Your feedback will be used to conduct valuable research that will help improve leadership development in the academic profession.

If you have any additional questions or would like to be informed of the study's results, please do not hesitate to contact.

Your participation is greatly appreciated!

