



# Shared Leadership and Transformational Leadership in higher Education Institutions

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**Abstract**— From a global perspective, shared governance and transformational leadership represent two distinct yet impactful approaches to leadership in higher education institutions, each shaping the way academic communities engage in decision-making and institutional development. Shared governance emphasizes collaborative decision-making, inclusivity, and collective responsibility, ensuring that faculty, administrators, and stakeholders contribute equitably to institutional policies and practices. In contrast, transformational leadership focuses on visionary leadership, motivation, and fostering innovation to achieve institutional goals. This journal explores the similarities and differences between these leadership styles, examining their structures, decision-making processes, and impacts on higher education. Additionally, this study provides insights into how these approaches shape institutional culture, influence decision-making, and address contemporary challenges in academia. Furthermore, it proposes a potential synthesis of these styles to create a balanced leadership model that integrates inclusivity with visionary progress, offering a pathway for more effective governance in higher education.

**Keywords**— Academic leadership, collaborative decision-making, governance models, higher education, inclusivity, institutional culture, leadership styles, shared governance, transformational leadership, visionary leadership.

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership in higher education institutions plays a critical role in shaping their direction, culture, and overall effectiveness (Akanji et al., 2020; Emma, 2024). Among the various leadership approaches, shared governance and transformational leadership stand out as two distinct models with profound implications for institutional success. Both styles address key issues in higher education, such as fostering collaboration, driving innovation, and responding to the complexities of academic environments (Ahmad & Ahmed, 2023). However, their philosophies, structures, and applications differ significantly, offering unique perspectives on leadership and governance. Shared governance is a leadership approach rooted in the principles of collaboration, inclusivity, and collective decision-making (Burke, 2010; Raza et al., 2024). It is designed to empower faculty, administrators, and occasionally students to contribute equitably to institutional policies and practices. This model reflects the academic values of shared responsibility and mutual respect, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered in shaping institutional outcomes. However, (Karim et al., 2024) mentions that while shared governance promotes transparency and inclusivity, it often encounters challenges such as prolonged decision-making processes and conflicts among stakeholders. On the other hand, transformational leadership emphasizes visionary thinking, motivation, and the empowerment of individuals to achieve shared goals (Adole, 2024). Transformational leaders



inspire and guide their teams toward innovation and institutional growth, fostering a sense of purpose and commitment among stakeholders. This approach is particularly effective in times of change (Agwoje, 2023) where decisive leadership and a unified vision are required. Yet, the model can also face limitations, such as potential overreliance on a single leader and difficulties in sustaining long-term momentum. This journal seeks to explore the similarities and differences between shared governance and transformational leadership, with a particular focus on their application in higher education institutions. By examining their respective strengths and challenges, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how these leadership styles influence institutional decision-making, culture, and effectiveness. Furthermore, the analysis will consider whether integrating elements of both approaches can yield a more balanced and effective leadership model, capable of addressing the dynamic needs of contemporary higher education.

## **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Burns' 1978 theory of transformational leadership revolutionized leadership thinking by introducing the concept of leadership as a process that not only motivates followers but also uplifts leaders themselves, creating a dynamic and reciprocal relationship (Khanin, 2007). According to Burns, transformational leadership is driven by a shared vision and a moral purpose, where both the leader and followers strive toward common goals, fostering mutual growth and development. This model emphasizes collective achievement and ethical conduct over individual success, promoting a culture of collaboration and shared responsibility. In this framework, leaders and followers inspire one another to reach higher levels of motivation, creativity, and morality (Gu et al., 2024). Building on Burns' foundation, Bass' Transformational Leadership Model (1985) further developed the concept by identifying four key components that define transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Zivkovic, 2024). These elements emphasize how transformational leaders act as role models, inspire and encourage innovative thinking, foster a supportive environment for personal development, and address the individual needs of team members, thus deepening the impact of transformational leadership in both personal and organizational contexts. Together, Burns' and Bass' contributions laid the groundwork for a leadership model that transcends traditional top-down approaches, focusing on empowering followers and creating a shared commitment to achieving high-level goals.

## **SHARED GOVERNANCE LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Shared governance leadership in higher education emphasizes collaborative decision-making, where faculty, staff, administrators, and sometimes students, work together to shape policies, set institutional goals, and address challenges (Burnight et al., 2022). This leadership model values diverse perspectives, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability among all members of the academic community. It promotes transparency, inclusivity, and the shared responsibility of guiding the institution's direction. Effective shared governance leadership empowers individuals at all levels, enhancing trust, communication, and institutional cohesion, which ultimately contributes to a more dynamic and responsive educational environment. The implications of shared leadership in higher education are profound, as it can significantly transform the culture and functioning of academic institutions (Holcombe et al., 2023). By distributing leadership responsibilities across various stakeholders, shared leadership fosters a sense of collective ownership and accountability, enhancing



collaboration and promoting more inclusive decision-making. This can lead to improved communication, trust, and transparency within the institution, as diverse perspectives are valued and integrated into the decision-making process. Shared leadership also empowers faculty, staff, and administrators, giving them greater influence over institutional policies, practices, and strategic directions.

However, the decentralized nature of shared leadership can pose challenges, particularly when consensus is difficult to reach or when there is ambiguity about roles and responsibilities. Additionally, the collaborative nature of this model requires a significant commitment to effective communication and coordination, which can be time-consuming and may slow decision-making. Despite these challenges, the implications of shared leadership are generally positive, as it encourages a more democratic, engaged, and responsive academic community, contributing to a more resilient and adaptable institution. However, the challenges of shared governance leadership in higher education often stem from balancing diverse interests and ensuring effective collaboration across various stakeholder groups (Castro, 2024; Hamdan & Jaafar, 2024). Faculty, staff, and administrators may have differing priorities, leading to conflicts over decision-making processes or resource allocation. Additionally, (Bingab et al., 2016) the hierarchical structure of many institutions can sometimes create power imbalances, with certain groups feeling marginalized or excluded from key discussions. The complexity of shared governance can also slow down decision-making, as it requires extensive consultation and consensus-building, which may not be efficient in responding to urgent issues (Mohammed & Nandy, 2024). Furthermore, the lack of clear communication, institutional support, or understanding of the governance model can hinder its effectiveness, leading to frustration and disengagement from those involved.

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Transformational leadership in higher education is a style that inspires and motivates faculty, staff, and students to work together toward a shared vision, fostering a culture of innovation (Klaray, 2024), change, and continuous improvement. Leaders who embrace this approach focus on inspiring commitment through a compelling vision, setting high expectations, and encouraging personal and professional growth (Kilag et al., 2024). They prioritize collaboration, open communication, and empowerment, aiming to create a dynamic environment where individuals are motivated to exceed their potential (Sweet, 2023). Transformational leaders in higher education often drive institutional change, promote inclusivity, and encourage critical thinking, ultimately enhancing the academic experience and contributing to the long-term success of the institution (Vera, 2024). (Father Bobby Thadathil, 2024) the implications of transformational leadership in higher education are profound, as it can lead to significant positive changes within academic institutions in fostering a culture of trust, empowerment, and innovation. Transformational leaders can enhance faculty and student engagement, leading to improved academic outcomes and a more vibrant learning environment (Kiplangat, 2024). This leadership style encourages collaboration across departments, which can break down silos and stimulate interdisciplinary work. Additionally, transformational leadership can inspire institutional change, guiding universities to adapt to evolving educational needs and societal demands (Mpuangnan & Roboji, 2024). However, its success depends on the leader's ability to maintain a balance between motivating individuals and addressing the practical challenges of managing complex



institutions. If executed effectively, transformational leadership can elevate the overall academic experience and drive institutional progress.

The challenges of transformational leadership in higher education are multifaceted and can impact the effectiveness of this leadership style. One primary challenge is the reliance on a single leader to drive institutional change, which can create dependency and limit the development of leadership capacity across the organization (Karami & Barkhoda, 2023). Additionally, transformational leaders must strike a delicate balance between inspiring and motivating individuals while managing the practical demands and administrative responsibilities of the institution. This can lead to burnout if the leader is overburdened or lacks sufficient support. Another challenge is the potential resistance to change, particularly in institutions with deeply ingrained traditions or established ways of functioning. Faculty, staff, or administrators who are hesitant to embrace new ideas may resist the transformative efforts, undermining the leader's vision. Furthermore, transformational leadership demands continuous communication, emotional intelligence, and adaptability, which can be difficult to maintain in complex, large-scale institutions (Ferreira et al., 2020). If not executed thoughtfully, it may also risk creating a disconnect between the leader's vision and the practical realities of those on the ground. These challenges require careful navigation to ensure that transformational leadership is implemented effectively and does not inadvertently alienate or overwhelm stakeholders.

### **SHARED LEADERSHIP VS TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Shared leadership and transformational leadership in higher education both aim to enhance institutional effectiveness, but they differ in their approach and focus. Shared leadership is a collaborative model that distributes decision-making across various levels of the institution, involving faculty, staff, administrators, and sometimes students in shaping policies and strategic direction (Van Nguyen et al., 2025). This model emphasizes inclusivity, transparency, and collective responsibility, with leadership responsibilities shared among multiple stakeholders rather than being concentrated in a single individual. In contrast, transformational leadership focuses on a single leader who inspires and motivates others by fostering a shared vision, setting high expectations, and encouraging personal growth and innovation (Kulchottananon & Waikhuntod, 2024). While both models encourage engagement and collaboration, shared leadership emphasizes the power of distributed authority and collective decision-making, whereas transformational leadership centers on a visionary leader who influences and empowers others to achieve institutional goals. The choice between these models depends on the institution's culture, needs, and leadership philosophy (Alabi, 2024), with shared leadership offering a more horizontal approach and transformational leadership providing top-down inspiration for change.

### **APPLICATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Shared leadership model promotes transparency (Bonet & Rykkja, 2023), builds trust, and aligns institutional goals with the needs and aspirations of stakeholders, ultimately improving organizational effectiveness and adaptability in an ever-changing educational landscape. The application of shared leadership in higher education can be seen in practices such as collaborative governance, interdisciplinary project teams, and faculty-student partnerships. For example, faculty senates and committees, student guild leadership often serve as platforms for



shared decision-making, where representatives deliberate on critical matters such as curriculum design, budgeting, and strategic planning. Similarly, initiatives like cross-departmental research projects and teaching innovations benefit from shared leadership as they leverage the expertise of diverse participants to achieve a common objective. Therefore, empowering individuals at all levels to contribute to leadership processes, higher education institutions can foster a culture of mutual respect, innovation, and collective responsibility.

Transformational leaders in higher education often articulate a compelling vision for the institution encouraging stakeholders to align their efforts toward a similar objective. Through open communication and support, these leaders create an environment where individuals feel valued and empowered to take initiative, ultimately enhancing institutional performance and fostering a sense of community (Bohlens, 2025). Therefore, the application of transformational leadership in higher education is evident in initiatives such as fostering innovation in teaching and research, implementing strategic changes, and promoting diversity and inclusion. For instance, transformational leaders may spearhead efforts to adopt cutting-edge technologies or design interdisciplinary programs that address global challenges, inspiring faculty and students to think creatively and collaborate. Additionally, these leaders are adept at recognizing and nurturing talent, offering mentorship and professional development opportunities to support growth. By emphasizing a shared sense of purpose and cultivating a culture of trust and collaboration, transformational leadership helps institutions adapt to changing demands while maintaining a focus on long-term success and sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both shared leadership and transformational leadership offer valuable frameworks for navigating the complexities of higher education institutions. Shared leadership promotes collaboration, inclusivity, and collective responsibility, ensuring that decision-making reflects the diverse perspectives and expertise of the academic community. Transformational leadership, in turn, inspires individuals to engage with a compelling vision, encouraging innovation, personal growth, and institutional change (Darwish, 2024). While each model has its distinct advantages, their integration can create a synergistic leadership environment that empowers all stakeholders, fosters a sense of ownership, and drives institutional success. Therefore, by embracing both approaches, higher education institutions can cultivate a more dynamic, responsive, and forward-thinking environment, better equipped to meet the challenges of an ever-evolving educational landscape.

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