

LEADERSHIP STYLES OF UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS AND THEIR IMPACT ON STUDENT-STAFF RELATIONS: CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract: Leadership within Ghana's Private Universities has a significant influence on the Institutional Climate, Good Governance and the Relationship Between Administrators, Academic Staff and Students. In addition to being competitive, with limited resources and extensive regulation, Leadership Strategies Utilized by University Administrators will have an Impact on Student/Staff Relationships, Motivation and Engagement of Staff, Job Satisfaction and Educational Achievement. The purpose of this Paper was to Examine the Effect of the Leadership Styles of the Administrative Staff of Ghana's Private Universities on Student/Staff Relationships, Organizational Culture, Job Satisfaction and Overall Performance of the Institution. This Review Relied Upon Recent Empirical Research and Theoretical Advances of 2023-2026. Transformational, Democratic, Situational, and Autocratic Leadership Styles were Identified as the Main Types of Leadership Styles with Unique Implications for Relations. It Was Found That Participatory and Transformational Leadership Styles Were Capable of Building Trust, Communication and Positive Relational Climates. Conversely, Rigid and Authoritative Approaches to Leadership Can Have Negative Consequences for Engagement and Collaboration.

Keywords: *Servant Leadership, charismatic leadership, Situational leadership, Educational management.*

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Introduction

Leadership in higher education is both very challenging and constantly changing. It is not simply about coordinating administrative functions, but is about developing and shaping a vision for an institution's future, a governance culture, how stakeholders interact, and ultimately what types of academic outcomes occur (Macfarlane et al., 2024). Higher education institutions are inherently complex social systems. Within these systems there are many different organizational elements at play including authoritative structures, autonomous professionals, collegial cultures, and bureaucracies. As such, the type of leadership that exists within these environments will determine not just the operational efficiencies of an organization, but will create the long-term identity of an institution, its ethical climate, relational dynamics and ultimately sustainability. There is currently increased attention being placed on the topic of leadership in higher education, specifically regarding the impact that effective leadership has on the resilience of an institution, the achievement of students, the engagement of employees and overall quality assurance (Macfarlane et al., 2024). Leadership plays an increasingly important role when addressing challenges specific to the Ghanaian context of private universities due to the existence of unique structural and environmental issues. Over the past 20 years, there has been rapid expansion in the number of institutions of higher education in Ghana. Private universities have emerged as a viable option for addressing the growing demand for post-secondary education. However, unlike their public counterparts,

private universities receive little to no funding from government and therefore rely heavily on tuition fees to finance themselves. This places a tremendous amount of pressure on the financial sustainability of private universities, particularly in regards to maintaining enrollment levels, controlling costs, ensuring adequate resources exist to support continued development of physical infrastructure and retaining faculty and staff (Boakye, 2024). Ultimately, the ability of private universities to survive and remain competitive is significantly impacted by the leadership decisions made by those responsible for leading these institutions.

Additionally, GTEC (the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission) oversees the regulatory framework surrounding private universities through a system of strict accountability measures. These include meeting minimum standards related to accreditation, staffing ratios, quality assurance systems and adherence to governance practices. However, private universities face intense competition for students in an extremely saturated educational marketplace. Students are often attracted to institutions based upon their reputation for producing graduates who possess strong employability skills as well as high-quality services provided during their studies. Therefore, leaders of private universities need to provide strategic, adaptive and relational competent leadership to achieve a delicate balance between prudent use of financial resources while promoting academic integrity and fostering student-centered approaches to governance.



While most private universities operating in Ghana utilize lean staffing models and relatively centralized systems of governance, decision making authority generally rests with the executive leadership positions within each institution including Vice Chancellors/Rectors, Registrars, Deans and Governing Councils. While centralized decision-making models may enhance operational efficiencies, they may also intensify the potential for relationship-related consequences of leadership actions. When organizations exhibit highly centralized institutional hierarchies and direct lines of communication exist among stakeholders, the style of leadership employed will have a profound impact on creating an organizational climate that fosters staff motivation, job assignment and perceptions of fairness/involvement (Macfarlane et al., 2024).

Student-staff relationships become a determinant factor for measuring the quality of education and legitimate existence of private universities in Ghana. Student-staff relationships involve formal academic interactions (i.e., teaching/supervising/assessing), administrative interactions (i.e., registration/student information/policy implementation/grievance processing), mentoring/advising structures, and informal daily communications. Each type of interaction contributes to a student's perception of their lived experience and influences his/her level of motivation to pursue academic work, sense of belonging to an institution and level of trust in an institution's systems (Abudetse et al., 2025). Positive working relationships between departments/faculty/staff encourage a safe psychological environment for learning/open communication/academic interest/problem-solving among students. Positive relationships lead to enhanced student satisfaction/enrollment/retention rates for an institution. Additionally, improved relationships between students and faculty contribute to staff fulfillment/conflict reduction/conducive teaching environment. Conversely, strained/hierarchical relationships characterized by inadequate communication/lack of responsiveness/perceived inequities lead to decreased student motivation/increased complaint rates/deteriorated institutional image/internal tensions/relational breakdowns. Relational breakdowns in an institution can have severe implications in the context of private universities where student satisfaction directly correlates to enrollment rates/financial viability (Boakye, 2024; Abudetse et al., 2025).

Relational dynamics within an institution are influenced by the leadership styles employed by university administrators. For example, transformational leadership fosters inclusive/collective visions/respect; democratic leadership promotes participatory governance/transparency; situational leadership exhibits adaptable responses; authoritarian/bureaucratic leadership creates relational distances/prevents open communication (Macfarlane et al., 2024; Abudetse et al., 2025). Leadership decisions relative to communicating with stakeholders/power-holding/conflict resolution/participation directly determine the quality of student-staff interactions.

Transformational Leadership Style

Transformative leadership is characterized as a style of leadership where leaders stimulate and inspire their followers to embrace new ideas, strategies and approaches that transform them into what they aspire to be. Transformational leadership style emphasizes the development of high levels of motivation among employees and their desire to perform and contribute to the organization's performance and achievements. This type of leadership encourages employee participation, promotes

innovation, creativity, and encourages continuous learning and self-improvement. Transformational leadership leads to increased employee commitment, job satisfaction, productivity and loyalty.

Transactional Leadership Style

Transactional leadership is characterized as a style of leadership that focuses on achieving results through the use of rewards, punishments, and recognition. Transactional leadership is based on the idea that employees respond positively when rewarded for good behavior. Employees expect a reward for meeting expectations. Leaders using this approach emphasize that people should earn rewards by producing positive results. Employee performance is expected to improve significantly under transactional leadership because employees are motivated by tangible incentives such as pay raises and bonuses.

Servant Leadership Style

Servant leadership is a philosophy of leading from the back. Servant leaders serve first, then lead. They put the needs of others before their own and seek to grow and develop those who follow them. Servant leaders believe that everyone benefits when individuals succeed. They focus on empowering team members and helping them achieve their full potential. Servant leadership creates a culture of cooperation, respect, and teamwork. It builds strong relationships between the leader and followers. Servant leaders see themselves as stewards of the organization rather than owners.

Transformational, Transactional, Servant & Charismatic Leadership Behaviours

Transformational, Transactional, Servant & Charismatic leadership behaviors are four types of leadership behaviors studied extensively in the field of management. While each type has its unique characteristics, all are used to influence the behavior of followers. These four types of behaviors are commonly referred to as the "Big Four" leadership theories.

Transformational Leadership Behavior

Transformational leadership behavior motivates followers to transcend their self-interests for the greater good. Transformational leaders engage in activities that promote personal and professional growth in their followers. They motivate followers to become committed to their organizations' missions. Transformational leaders foster an environment of trust, openness, and two-way communication. Followers feel valued and empowered under transformational leaders. Transformational leaders tend to exhibit charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Transactional Leadership Behavior

Transactionally oriented leaders focus primarily on exchange-based motivations. Transactionally-oriented leaders provide rewards and sanctions to motivate follower behavior. Leaders using this orientation expect followers to meet specific job requirements in order to receive rewards. Followers under transactionally-oriented leaders behave in accordance with rules and expectations. Rewards and punishment are directly tied to performance. Transactionally-oriented leaders do not usually demonstrate charisma or concern for developing their followers.

Servant Leadership Behavior

Servant-oriented leaders prioritize serving others over seeking power or status. Servants make sure their teams have the

necessary resources and support to complete tasks successfully. They act with integrity, transparency, accountability, empathy, humility, trustworthiness, and dedication. Servant-oriented leaders empower their followers to take ownership of projects and initiatives. Servant-oriented leaders are known for building trust with their followers. Trust develops due to open lines of communication and an emphasis on serving others.

Charismatic Leadership Behavior

A charismatic leader exudes confidence and inspires enthusiasm in his/her followers. Charismatic leaders motivate followers by being confident, inspiring, enthusiastic, optimistic, authentic, genuine, sincere, trustworthy, consistent and visionary. Charisma is defined as "the ability to attract and hold attention." Charismatic leaders are able to persuade followers to accept their vision through effective verbal skills and body language. Transformational leadership is based upon the idea that leaders should inspire their team members to work together toward a common goal. A leader who uses this type of leadership is known for his ability to create a clear and compelling vision, stimulate ideas and creativity, and empower individuals to take charge of their own success. By doing so, he builds an environment where individuals feel valued, challenged and motivated to perform their best. When a leader effectively demonstrates these behaviors, it can lead to improved employee morale, increased motivation and ultimately a more productive work place (Harris, 2008). In addition to transforming employees into a team, transformational leaders are able to build relationships with people across levels of an organization. They are seen as fair and open-minded while still being firm and confident. This helps to foster an environment of trust which allows for honest feedback and open dialogue. Ultimately, a transformational leader's ability to motivate and inspire others creates a more positive and supportive organizational culture. A number of researchers believe that transformational leadership may be particularly beneficial in educational organizations due to its emphasis on helping others grow professionally and personally (Nguyen et al., 2023). One study found that teachers' attitudes about themselves were positively affected by working for a school administrator who was perceived as a transformational leader. The teacher felt supported and encouraged by the administrator which resulted in an increase in self-efficacy and job satisfaction.

Another researcher discovered that transformational leadership was associated with a more positive organizational climate. Specifically, the research found that schools run by transformational leaders had a stronger sense of community among faculty and staff, as well as a stronger connection to the school mission. There is some evidence that transformational leadership has a relationship with student achievement. For example, one study conducted in Taiwan found that transformational leadership was positively related to mathematics achievement. Additionally, a meta-analysis examined the relationship between transformational leadership and student achievement worldwide and found moderate support for a positive relationship. One limitation of prior research on transformational leadership is that many of the studies have been conducted in large public school districts. Therefore, there needs to be additional research examining the effects of transformational leadership in smaller schools. Also, future studies need to investigate whether transformational leadership affects student outcomes such as attendance and social behavior. Overall, however, the literature suggests that transformational leadership has potential benefits for schools and educators.

Laissez-faire Leadership

Laissez-faire leadership refers to the style of leadership in which little direction is given from the manager or supervisor. Employees are left to manage their own time and workload with minimal supervision or input from superiors. Employees who work under laissez-faire managers are often described as having more freedom to work independently, but they also report feeling less secure in their jobs and receiving less guidance than they would like. Managers who use this type of leadership style tend to avoid giving orders or taking control over what employees do. Instead, they give employees complete autonomy to decide how to complete tasks and projects. Laissez-faire leadership is also referred to as delegative leadership or "hands-off" management. Research shows that employees working for managers who are laissez-faire generally report lower levels of job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment than employees working for managers who use other types of leadership styles. One reason for this is that employees need structure and guidance to be successful. Without adequate supervision, employees may become confused about their roles or struggle with completing assigned tasks. Another possible explanation is that employees prefer to know exactly what is expected of them. When employees receive few instructions or directions from their supervisors, they may perceive their lack of guidance as a sign that they are not needed or valued within the organization.

Some employees thrive under laissez-faire leadership. Those who enjoy independence and flexibility tend to appreciate the freedom to manage their time and assignments with minimal oversight. Transformational leadership is especially relevant for Ghanaian private universities because they experience chronic funding shortages, need to develop their infrastructure, face competition from other institutions over enrollments and need to comply with regulatory bodies (Abudetse et al., 2025; Boakye, 2024). Without careful management, these situations can lead to employee burnout, disorientation and demotivation. However, transformational managers are uniquely equipped to alleviate these stresses through clear articulation of the institutional vision, strengthening of mission-driven identity, and creation of optimism concerning the future possibilities (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Transformational leaders provide a continuous message regarding the purpose of the organization through academic excellence, student-centered learning, accreditation successes, and transforming graduates into employed individuals and unite academic and administrative divisions (Macfarlane et al., 2024) in order to achieve their stated goals. One of the defining characteristics of transformational leadership is intellectual stimulation. It generates new ideas, innovation and encourages creativity. For example, due to resource scarcity at Ghanaian private universities, it enables creative innovations in leadership that allow employees to submit proposals of innovative teaching approaches, digital courses or student supporting programs to ensure flexibility in organizations. As employees perceive their submissions are valued, they are more likely to demonstrate engaged behavior professionally and collaboratively.

Secondly, individualized consideration allows leaders to support employees through mentoring, providing opportunities for personal and professional growth and offering emotional support based on employee's specific needs. There is considerable empirical evidence indicating that transformational leadership influences positively job satisfaction of academic staff, their organizational commitment, and professional involvement

(Daramola, 2025; Kasalak et al., 2022). When employees are appreciated and motivated, they become more self-motivated and more willing to take on additional responsibilities. Such an increase in involvement can influence the relationship between students and staff. Scholars who received supportive leadership from their supervisors are more likely to engage in mentoring activities, academic advising, research supervision and provide unplanned counseling to students compared to those who did not receive such leadership (Kasalak et al., 2022). Moreover, these scholars are more adaptable to addressing students' concerns and committed to helping students grow. Therefore, transformational leadership contributes to enhanced student satisfaction, retention and reputation of the institution indirectly through the provision of a supportive academic environment for building relationships. To summarize, transformational leadership aids in establishing a cohesive relationship among members of private universities by developing trust, enhancing a shared identity and encouraging staff to work together toward creating a comprehensive approach to student success (Macfarlane et al., 2024).

Democratic Leadership

Democratic leadership emphasizes participation in decision-making processes, consultation, transparency and cooperation in governance (Shattock, 2022). Given that the traditional collegiate norms are still present today in the university context, democratic leadership presents itself as a natural fit to academic culture. Even though many private universities in Ghana follow a relatively centralized framework for governance, democratic leadership promotes dialogue and inclusion of its stakeholders (Boakye, 2024). For instance, the invitations to consult can be a platform established by democratic administrators by organizing faculty meetings, senate discussion sessions, student representative councils, quality assurance committees and participatory policy forums (Holl & Ali, 2025). By promoting a sense of collective responsibility towards both the staff and students through their engagement in curriculum development, strategic planning initiatives, quality assessment projects and reform efforts related to student support services, democratic leaders build the institutional legitimacy and psychological ownership among stakeholders (Holl & Ali, 2025). A certain level of trust is built when stakeholders believe their voice was heard and respected. Studies have demonstrated that democratic leadership has a positive effect on factors like organizational commitment, cooperative behavior and willingness to communicate openly. Participative leadership in academia has a positive correlation with high levels of student participation in educational activities and better outcomes academically as these are directly influenced by successful student-lecturer interactions and open organizational structures (Holl & Ali, 2025).

Democratic leadership is also a tool used in reducing perceived power distance in private universities in Ghana. Since the majority of African institutions are characterized by strict hierarchical standards which limit free flow of communication between administrators/students/employees (Macfarlane et al., 2024), democratic leaders lower hierarchical barriers and promote open communication by actively soliciting input and comments. The implication of this type of communication is substantial since the institutional culture becomes more open when it accepts the premise of open communications among the staff/administrators/student representatives. Consequently, students will be more apt to seek assistance from lecturers/administrators with problems. Staff will also be more likely to collaborate with

each other across departments and interact favorably with student representatives. In addition to establishing a sense of community among the members of the institution, the democratic leadership fosters a communicative climate that enhances the development of positive interpersonal relations between students and staff (Holl & Ali, 2025)

Authoritative and Autocratic Leadership

Authoritarianism and autocratic types of leadership involve centralized authority, one-way decision making, little employee input in matters related to policy, and adherence to a rigid hierarchical organizational structure (Bass, 1990; Daramola, 2025). The influence of founders, the governance model of ownership of the private universities in Ghana, or the need for rapid and decisive administrative action are some of the factors responsible for the persistence of these forms of leadership (Boakye, 2024).

Autocratic leadership is able to produce immediate results. A centralized decision-making process can foster both efficiency and direction in situations in which a regulatory framework or emergency procedures need to be executed quickly (Nguyen et al., 2023). Authority can limit ambiguity and ensure that policies are implemented immediately.

However, there are relational dangers inherent in the continuing reliance on autocratic forms of leadership. Research consistently shows that autocratic leadership tends to negatively impact the morale and professional autonomy of employees as well as the degree of collegial trust (Kasalak et al., 2022). When employees perceive that decisions are being made independently of their input, it may result in reduced motivation, commitment and desire to go above-and-beyond normal responsibilities.

Additionally, evidence exists in West African higher education regarding the effects of autocratic leadership on reducing collaboration, stifling innovation, and damaging the viability of institutions (Daramola, 2025). Over-centralization can also cause emotional detachment between managers and employees in higher-education institutions where private universities play a vital role in maintaining vibrancy in institutions through embracing academic freedom and trade of ideas (Macfarlane et al., 2024).

Student-staff relations are affected significantly as well. Employees who feel disempowered may become limited in their roles to perform only at minimal requirements and reduce mentoring and advisory interactions with students. Students may see the institution as restrictive and closed off from interaction. High levels of power distance exist, thus preventing students from expressing opinions or engaging in discussions about the institution, which reduces relational trust (Shattock, 2022).

Contextual complexity is necessary. In periods of crisis such as regulatory fines, financial turmoil or reputational risk, temporary authoritative leadership can help establish a sense of stability and comfort. The challenge lies in ensuring that directive leadership does not become institutionalized. Long term autocratic levels will generally damage organizational commitment, deplete collaborative spirit, and deteriorate the quality of relationships between students and staff (Boakye, 2024). From a situational perspective the reaction of the leader to the situation exemplifies situational and facilitative leadership.

Situational leadership is built upon the idea that no single form of leadership is universally effective; a leader must adapt their behaviors relative to their organization's maturity level, their employees' competencies, the complexities of the situation(s), and

the environmental uncertainty (Hersey et al., 2022). Flexibility is particularly important in managing universities due to changing enrollment trends, regulatory expectations, technological changes, and multiple stakeholders involved (Nguyen et al., 2023). Facilitative leadership is similar to situational leadership; facilitative leadership focuses on empowering employees, creating capacity-building opportunities for employees, facilitating collaborative problem-solving, eliminating obstacles to productivity, promoting communication within organizations and providing frameworks for employees to execute their jobs effectively by training and mentoring them.

Situational and facilitative leadership provides strategic flexibility in Ghana's private university institutions' different sizes, missions, governance development stages and resource accessibility levels. Examples include:

- Administrators using an authoritative approach during accreditation reviews to comply with regulations.
- Participatory leadership is emphasized when curricula are revised.

Employee development through training and capacity development are examples of when facilitative leadership would be used when implementing digital transformations. Research indicates that adaptive leadership styles contribute to increased organizational resilience, improved communications and enhanced institutional climates. Situational leaders avoid relational stress caused by changes because situational leaders respond appropriately to context-driven demands. Employees don't feel micromanaged; instead they feel empowered and supported. Additionally students find it less difficult to navigate through reforms when situational approaches are taken (Holl & Ali, 2025).

Student-staff relations were strengthened through facilitative leadership, as this type of leadership facilitates the collective problem-solving approach. As long as the administrators provide departments with the freedom to develop their own student-supporting structures, mentoring processes, digital interaction platforms etc., the greater the department's feeling of ownership. The existence of responsive services and improved communication platforms can help the students (Bolden et al., 2024). Situationally and facilitatively oriented leadership create relational consistency in volatile environments. They allow managers to be both strong and empathetic, structured and adaptable, strategic and cooperative, all being characteristics that may maintain positive student-staff relations in the ever-changing environment of private higher education in Ghana (Nguyen et al., 2023).

Job Satisfaction of Staff as an Intermediary Variable

Job satisfaction of staff represents one intermediary variable for how leadership behavior affects student-staff relational outcomes (Kasalak et al., 2022). It is academic and administrative personnel in institutions of higher education who represent the primary linkages between organizational structure of institutions and daily life experience of the students. Morale and fulfillment of professional requirements from staff determine quality of student support, academic advising, mentoring, assessment feedback and response by administration.

Leadership styles contribute positively to employee satisfaction through perceived organizational support, autonomy of professionals, frameworks for recognition and reward, workload management, transparency in communications, and participation in

decision-making (Daramola, 2025). Transformational leadership increases job satisfaction based upon a common vision, personal contribution, and cognitive development. Democratic leadership provides feelings of satisfaction based upon inclusiveness and procedural justice. However, autocratic leadership decreases job satisfaction due to limited professional autonomy and voice (Bass, 1990; Boakye, 2024).

Meta-analysis data confirm that there are positive associations between transformational/democratic leadership styles and job satisfaction/organizational commitment among faculty members. Conversely, there are negative correlations between autocratic leadership style and morale, engagement, and trust (Kasalak et al., 2022). Employees are more disposed to exhibit discretionary behaviors and relational commitments when they perceive that their leaders are supportive, ethical, and inclusive.

Moreover, in private Ghanaian universities the mediation function of job satisfaction is particularly evident. Such schools are usually characterized by a lean staffing ratio, high teaching loads, short-term contracts, and lower levels of funding for research activities. Thus, the provision of leadership support represents an essential stabilizing factor. In addition to the above-mentioned factors, universities could also establish an atmosphere conducive to professional development, open communication, and performance incentives (Nguyen et al., 2023), thus leading to a contented workforce. Employees who are happy will provide academic support to students in a positive manner including through providing timely, encouraging feedback to learners. They also may conduct informal mentoring/career advising. Employees who are happy also may exhibit more empathetic behaviors toward students who struggle. Employees who are happy will be more willing to take part in other student service activities. Employees who are unhappy will meet the minimum requirements of their employment contracts. Thus, employees who are unhappy will have lower levels of receptivity and warmth for students. As such, the nature of how leaders treat their employees ultimately affects the relationships between staff members and students (Macfarlane et al., 2024).

Student-Staff Interactions

Student-staff interactions occur in the form of interaction between students and staff that relate to academic issues and advisory services. The quality of interactions that exist among students and staff significantly affect whether a learner remains enrolled, achieves academically, feels a sense of belonging/commitment to an institution, etc.

Thus, leadership methods that emphasize employee health/wellness, inclusiveness/open communication, create institutional environments conducive to relational interactions among students/students (Daramola, 2025). Leaders who promote collaborative governance and open communication reduce bureaucratic constraints and allow employees to engage in meaningful ways with students. Furthermore, in institutional settings where there exists a design to foster psychological safety/mutual respect, employees will be more willing to expend time/effort in assisting learners (Boakye, 2024).

Although most of the literature regarding leadership is focused at the organizational level (staff), the implications for students further down in the system are significant. Positive leadership creates better climates in institutions and increases clarity of communication networks while decreasing hierarchical distance (Shattock, 2022). All of these factors lead to:

- More active participation by students in academic discussions.
- Greater accessibility of lecturers/administrators.
- Improved grievance resolution practices.
- Increases the likelihood of building trust in institutional processes (Holl & Ali, 2025).

Given the importance of relational outcomes from student satisfaction strategies in Ghanaian private universities, because student satisfaction is an important factor affecting enrollment sustainability, relational strategies that create welcoming/listening atmospheres have been shown to improve retention rates/alumni loyalty/enhanced institutional reputation (Abudetse et al., 2025). Additionally, leadership behaviors establish the symbolic meanings that students assign to their institutions. When a leader demonstrates fairness/transparency/responds positively to student needs, then students are more likely to perceive the university as caring/student centered. This perception enhances academic commitment and improves institutional performance (Bolden et al., 2024).

Implication for Educational Management

The implications from this study's findings relating to the relational and organizational impacts of various leadership styles have significant implications for the restructuring of governance and for increasing institutional sustainability, improving quality assurance, and enhancing strategic positioning in the private universities of Ghana. Effective leadership extends beyond operational coordination and has a significant impact on the institutional climate/professional identity/morale of staff/stakeholder trust/student engagement/resilience of organizations over time (Kasalak et al., 2022; Macfarlane et al., 2024).

Therefore, effective leadership is a key variable for the quality of leadership in tuition-based institutions operating in competitive markets for higher education (Nguyen et al., 2023). In contrast to publically funded universities, tuition based private universities face threats of damaged reputations and loss of students/employees. Enrollment stability, institutional branding, and financial sustainability all depend upon effective leadership.

These findings suggest that leadership should be considered as a function that operates above and beyond a traditional administrative function. Rather than being seen solely as a central unit within the institutional planning framework/governance systems/performance evaluation systems, it should be seen as a strategic core asset in developing an organizational culture (Boakye, 2024; Daramola, 2025). Thus, rather than seeing leadership simply as power at the top, we see it as a systemic capacity that defines relational dynamics throughout the entire university ecosystem.

Policy and Practice

Restructuring Leadership as an Institutional Strategy

As such, the role of leadership in a private university can no longer be viewed solely as an individual positioning role of senior administrators working independently but should be viewed as an institutional capacity embedded in governance systems and institutional culture as well as strategic planning initiatives (Shattock, 2022). Thus, rebranding leadership as an institutional

strategy includes purposeful structuring of leadership development into policy-making/governance structures/accountability systems.

Therefore, when considering a foundation for leadership reform, there must be unity in three interdependent areas:

- Capacity Development - Developing a leadership capacity at each level of the organization (Bolden et al. 2024).
- Governance Structures - Developing collaborative and open and transparent institutional governance structures (Holl and Ali 2025).
- Performance Accountability Systems that do not dehumanize - Including relational and ethical measures to existing accountability systems (Macfarlane et al. 2024).

While each area can provide separate benefits to reform development, no single area can implement sustainable reform independently. For example, while training programs and governance reforms may limit opportunity for implementation of new leadership practices or governance reforms without performance accountability mechanisms result in symbolic demonstration of compliance rather than actual change (Nguyen et al. 2023).

Developing Institutionalized Leadership Growth Programs in Higher Education

Private universities need to develop holistic, ongoing and situational leadership growth programs for their higher education governance. Unlike corporate settings, universities operate within a collegiate culture, norms of professional autonomy, and academic systems of values. Therefore, leadership programs should integrate both managerial effectiveness with scholarly ethics and freedom from scholarly ideology as well as student centered ideology.

The process of developing leadership capacity needs to be implemented across three levels:

- Level 1: Executive Level - Vice-Chancellors, Registrars, Pro-Vice-Chancellors.
- Level 2: Middle Leadership Level - Deans, Directors and Heads of Department.
- Level 3: Emerging Academic Leadership Level - Program Coordinators of Levels, Senior Lecturer/Administrators.

By implementing the tiered approach, the leadership capacity becomes decentralized as opposed to centralized. Core Competency Areas for Leadership Development. Transformational Leadership Competencies.

Transformational leadership builds cohesiveness throughout an organization and fosters group commitment (Bass 1990; Kasalak et al. 2022). Therefore, the developed programs should foster:

- Strategic Vision articulation that aligns with institutional missions, accreditation requirements and national development objectives. Inspirational Communication to build a sense of community and institutional pride.
- Intellectual stimulation to encourage innovative approaches to teaching, research and digitalization. Mentoring abilities to develop academic talent

particularly early career lecturers/administrative professionals.

Transformational leadership would be especially useful in Ghana, where resources are often limited to support the infrastructure of small-scale privately-owned universities however transformational leadership can motivate employees and build institutional loyalty (Daramola 2025) and this is important because in Ghana there are many limitations to supporting large scale university expansion.

Participative/Democratic Governance Practices. The purpose of leadership development is to improve the ability of administrators to lead participatory systems (Holl and Ali 2025). This includes competency such as:

- Designing systemic stakeholder consultations.
- Establishing shared decision-making models.
- Equality and transparency.
- Improving committee-based governance.
- Promoting joint policy making.

Institutional legitimacy, power distance and relational trust are reduced by participative governance. While leaders need to enable participation, they must also demonstrate the capability to positively and productively manage participation (Boakye 2024; Bolden et al. 2024).

Empathy/Emotional Intelligence

- Relational leadership requires high levels of emotional competence. Universities are complex social systems that include people of different ages, disciplines and cultural backgrounds (Goleman 2020; Mayer et al. 2023). Therefore, the focus for development of programs regarding leadership should be placed on:
 - Self-Awareness/Self-Regulation.
 - Reflection of self-practices of leadership.
 - Intergenerational awareness/cultural awareness.
 - Ability to handle diversity amongst academics/vulnerability of students.

Relational Listening

Increased empathy leads to increased conflict resolution, improved employee motivation and strengthened student support services (Boyatzis 2022; Boakye 2024). High levels of emotional intelligence amongst administrators create trust amongst staff members, strengthen relationships and improve institutional climates.

Ethical Decision Making

An institutions' credibility is based upon an ethical leadership. Proprietary based private universities must protect academic integrity and transparency in their governing processes (Brown and Trevino 2023). An ethical based leadership development model must support responsibility for resource distribution. Whether recruitment/promotion/appraisal systems are free of corruption. Institutional policies should be enforced in a transparent manner. Responsible stewardship of institutional resources. Conflict of Interest avoidance

A. To what extent do ethical governance practices support stakeholders' perceptions of the organization's integrity?

Ethical governance increases stakeholders' confidence in the organization, reduces the risk of reputation damage and improves its overall legitimacy (Daramola, 2025) .

B. What are some ways that scholars can manage disputes?

Negotiation and arbitration. Scholars will inevitably have disagreements resulting from differences of opinion and competing priorities. They must therefore develop skills in managing these disagreements and:

- Responding to legitimate complaints from students, fairly and transparently.
- Establishing restorative dialogue processes.
- Preventing the formation of inter-personal difficulties.
- Promoting institutional harmony and reconciliation.

Conflict resolution is a proactive method for achieving institutional peace and avoiding an adversarial culture (Nguyen et al., 2023; Holl & Ali, 2025).

C. What are the flexible and reactive leadership capabilities required for a rapidly evolving university environment?

Private universities are operating in an increasingly unstable regulatory and economic environment. Therefore, administrators must develop adaptable capabilities such as:

- Leading the development and implementation of organizational change
- Successfully responding to GTEC accreditation and audit compliance
- Navigating the challenges of digital transformation
- Managing fluctuations in enrollment and financial resources
- Crisis management

Adaptive leadership ensures the resilience of institutions during periods of uncertainty and change (Bolden et al., 2024; Shattock, 2022).

D. How should successional leadership planning include leadership development?

Successional leadership planning should also establish programs of leadership development within the framework of succession planning so as to minimize the dangers arising from centralization of authority in one person and the potential instability created when there is a change in leadership (Macfarlane et al., 2024).

Universities should:

- Recruit young, talented academic and administrative leaders.
- Offer mentorship programs and coaching.
- Create shadowing programs for leadership.
- Introduce multi departmental rotations of leadership.

Leadership pipelines create greater institutional continuities, diminishes dependence on single, charismatic leader(s), and promotes distributed leadership (Boakye, 2024).

A. How does poor management of the succession process at universities result in institutional instability?

Poor succession process at universities could be a source of institutional instability. Succession plans formally established by the institution are designed to reduce the risks associated with rapid changes in leadership styles, governing philosophy, or strategic directions. Continuity planning is essential to ensure:

- Continuation of institutional memory.
- Maintenance of relational trust among members of the university community.
- Permanence of relationships between staff and students.
- Alignment of administrative cycle strategies.

Including leadership development in the long term planning helps to mature governance and sustain the organization (Daramola, 2025).

B. Drawing a conclusion about perspective on policy and practice

Redesigning the role of leadership as an institutional strategy requires a systemic change rather than symbolic change. Leadership capacity must be developed strategically, governance systems must enable participation and accountability, and performance systems must provide incentives for both relational excellence and financial performance (Bolden et al., 2024; Kasalak et al., 2022).

Investing in leadership development in the private universities in Ghana will help them to maintain their institutional legitimacy, strengthen the relationship between students and faculty/staff and gain sustainable competitive advantages (Abudetse et al., 2025).

C. Enhancing shared governance

Participatory governance is not merely a normative idealized theoretical concept but a practical mechanism for developing institutional legitimacy and enhancing relational trust (Holl & Ali, 2025; Nguyen et al., 2023).

Private universities must institutionalize participatory governance structures that provide regular participation opportunities for all members of the institution.

D. Empowering shared governance and participatory structures

Empowering Faculty Senate Systems of Academic Discussion. Faculty senates represent important components of intellectual autonomy and self governance in higher education institutions. Empowering faculty senate systems requires establishing formal requirements, procedural independence, and recognition of decision making authority to foster greater collegiality and student involvement (Macfarlane et al., 2024).

1. Institutionalizing Departmental Consultation Mechanisms

Departments form the core operational structure of the university. Departmental consultations represent a powerful instrument of bottom-up governance mechanisms, reduced miscommunications and enhanced relational accountability (Boakye, 2024).

2. Increasing Student Engagement in Quality Assurance Committees and Curricular Decision Making.

Student participation must be authentic, organized, consultative, and based on constructive feedbacks to ensure alignment between curriculum developments and changing academic/labor market expectations (Kuh et al., 2019; Abudetse et al., 2025).

3. Creating Structured Digital Response Time Lines/Feedback Systems using Documentation

Digital governance tools contribute to transparency and open communication. Documented timelines/escalation procedures contribute to institutional credibility (Bolden et al., 2024).

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Institutions that encourage participation and shared responsibility create legitimate institutions, reduce the risk of relationship disconnection, build participatory and accountable cultures. Participation as well as relational trust, increased student-employee interaction and longer term institutional viability in Ghana's private universities are encouraged by strong participatory systems (Ali and Holl, 2025; Boakye, 2024).

Re-Establishing Measures of Evaluating Leadership

Traditional methods of evaluating leaders primarily evaluate how well the leader performs financially, whether enrollment is increasing and if the institution is in compliance. Relational/cultural measures such as employee involvement, student satisfaction, timeliness of resolving grievances and degree of mentorship engagement must be included to provide a complete view of how the leader evaluates the organization (Bolden et al., 2024; Kasalak et al., 2022). Institutional culture is an accumulation of how leadership behaves – i.e. What it models through its decisions, and what is communicated throughout the organization – that provides the direction for all other institutional behaviors and decision making. A leader serves as a cultural architect that demonstrates to employees and students what will be rewarded or discouraged based upon their own behavior (Schein & Schein, 2022; Bolden et al., 2024). Consistency of leadership action also develops institutional norms which outline the relationship between employees and students, and establishes organizational climates (Daramola, 2025).

Types of cultures found in educational institutions

There are Two primary types of cultures found in educational institutions: relational and participatory-oriented. Relational-focused leadership is characterized by:

- Trust/mutual respect
- Psychological safety
- Communication (Two-way/open)
- Problem solving/Collaboration
- Alignment with institutional mission

Because there are many critical debates and inquiries present in academia, Universities provide one of the best environments for developing psychological safety. As long as employees do not fear negative consequences for expressing their differing opinions, and feel safe to share ideas and create, the university learns from their creative thinking and experiences

(Boakye, 2024; Edmondson, 2019). The same is true for students. When students have confidence in their ability to impact their college experience, they are much more likely to become involved. Autocratic leaders, however, can foster "silence" cultures where employees are compliant but committed to nothing. Employees become less inclined to take initiative or come up with innovative solutions in such environments. This type of environment has been described as having a "low-level of innovation" (Brown & Trevino, 2023).

Organizational performance / outcomes

Relationships formed in positive relational cultures create specific performance/outcome measures in organizations including:

- Employee commitment to the organization
- Voluntary contributions to the organization (i.e. Organizational citizenship behaviors)
- Lower employee turnover and higher employee retention
- More opportunities for creative learning
- Interdisciplinary Collaboration increases
- Increased student success/persistence

At tuition-dependent colleges, maintaining qualified staff is a strategic priority. Recruiting new employees, training them about your college's culture, and helping them become productive members of your team costs money. High employee turnover leads to disruption in service delivery (e.g. Advising), instructional program continuity (kasalak et al., 2022). The stability created by effective leadership styles that satisfy professionals' needs leads to decreased disruption at an institution.

Student perceptions/experience & institution reputation

Students' perceptions of whether an institution responds positively to them and treats them fairly contribute significantly to the extent to which students engage in academic activities at the institution and demonstrate loyalty to their institution. Students show this by demonstrating when they believe their institutions:

- Provide academic motivation
- Create a strong sense of belonging to the institution
- Develop a stronger sense of institutional identity
- Demonstrate increased retention and graduation
- Serve as advocates for the institution

The reputation of an institution influences the number of students that enroll at the institution in a highly competitive private higher education marketplace like Ghana. Positive faculty-student interactions caused by relational leadership directly correlates with sustained demand for enrollment and brand recognition (Abudetse et al., 2025; Ali & Holl, 2025). Therefore, institutional reputation is a relational construct based on the actions taken by institutional leaders.

Strategic resilience / ability to adapt

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Private Universities in Ghana face uncertainty due to:

- Changes to regulatory frameworks within GTEC
- Transformation in technology
- Variations in required labor market skills
- Business cycle fluctuations affecting student enrollment

Adaptive relational capable leadership enables private Universities to strategically respond to these environmental uncertainties. Trust-based cultures enable collective problem-solving. Hence, relational cohesive decision-making facilitates acceptance of institutional reforms and strategic initiatives by institutional stakeholders (Boakye, 2024). Therefore, relational cohesion may serve as a resiliency factor enabling institutions to develop sustainable innovations and exhibit consistent performance overtime.

Conclusion

Thus, the implications for educational administrators at private Universities in Ghana are evident. Leadership is both relational and strategic. Strategic leadership affects organizational climate, stakeholder trust, professional identity and organizational sustainability. Administrators should intentionally design systems of governance and culturally supportive environments that value:

- Participative administration
- Stewardship (ethical)
- Relational trust
- Psychological safety
- Adaptable responses

By applying relational leadership constructs into formal policies, governance structures, and evaluation methods, private Universities can effectively achieve goals related to: Building positive student-faculty relationships.

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