Cultural Competency:

Effective Leadership in Practice for Key Stakeholders in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

To remain culturally competent is an essential role requirement of administrators, curriculum developers, faculty, and students who drive the mission, value, and goals at academic institutions. Their scope of influence and efficacy is thus enabled through leadership appropriateness and skill. As leadership theory remains constant in the face of an ever-changing higher education landscape, leaders have the opportunity to utilize culturally competent best practices gathered throughout education and career to solve problems and meet the needs of diverse student populations. Furthermore, students are dependent on such competencies as they are likely to model their leaders as they assume leadership roles in their academic and professional environments. The following semi-systematic review offers insight into four leadership styles, charismatic leadership, servant leadership, transformational leadership, and situational leadership. Recommendations grounded in these are included for those responsible for effective cultural competency in academic settings.

INTRODUCTION

Examining cultural issues such as diversity, cultural identity, bias, and inclusion in a scholarly setting allows the opportunity to develop leaders that are culturally proficient (Ruffin & Simon, 2022). When students have opportunities to explore these constructs through the lens of leadership, the impact can be even more powerful. "Leadership is influence" (Maxwell, 1940). Leadership thought leader John Kotter explains the importance of prioritizing diversifying teams to get optimal results (Kotter, 2012). Anytime one influences another, they are a leader (Uhl-Bien et al, 2021).

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PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

Snyder (2019) surmises that the literature review is an important process in understanding interdisciplinary intersects of knowledge, in forming important new research questions, and further notes that "building your research on and relating it to existing knowledge is the building block of all academic research activities, regardless of discipline" (p. 333). For administrators, curriculum developers, faculty, and even students, there are opportunities to see, experience, and demonstrate cultural competency through effective leadership. This semi-systematic review of the literature has identified opportunities for discussion in this area. The purpose of this article was to examine Charismatic, Servant, Transformational, and Situational Leadership through the lens of cultural competence in higher education. Upon review of pertinent and foundational literature associated with each leadership style, recommendations for practice for steakholders in higher education were synthesized. Recommendations were made for administrators, curriculum developers, faculty, and students, and implications were posed for future research initiatives.

Charismatic Leadership

Charisma is described by Uhl-bien et al (2021) as a characteristic that others are easily influenced by and find attractive. It was the working paper of Robert House (1976) that provided a compilation of the known understanding of charisma at the time as well as a working understanding of Charismatic Leadership Theory. An interesting aspect of Charismatic Leadership is the disciple-like effect the followers espouse of charismatic leaders (House, 1976) as shown below:

Houses' Charismatic Effects

- Followers are extremely motivated and passively obey the leader
- The leaders' beliefs are trusted by the followers without verification
- The followers' beliefs are the same as the leaders
- The followers do not ever question the leader, they are always obedient, and they desire to be like the leader
- The followers feel emotionally connected to the mission and feel that they are contributors
- The followers feel that they have a heightened purpose because of the leader
  (House, 1976).

Interestingly, a challenge with charismatics is how they use their leadership, whether for good - or for evil. There have been many charismatic leaders throughout history including Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Jesus Christ. Yet Adolf Hitler was also a charismatic leader as well, using his influence to drive evil initiatives. Charismatics find a way to connect with their followers on a deep emotional level, and that is why they are so effective, but it is also why their power can have damaging effects (Uhl-Bien et al, 2021).

Servant Leadership

Servant Leadership Theory is a follower-focused approach to leadership (Stauffer & Maxwell, 2020). First introduced by the name 'Servant Leadership' following reading the book '*Journey to the East*' by Herman Hess, Robert Greenleaf penned his seminal essay: *The Servant as Leader* (1970). Ten characteristics frame Greenleaf's theory: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and community building (1970).

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: "Do those served

grow as persons, do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 4).

For the servant leader, there is a stark difference in the motivation of the leader. A traditional leader will be motivated for their own self-interests or for the interests of others, while a servant leader will always be focused on others first first (1970). When it comes to the servant leader, it comes to the heart. In so doing, the servant leader provides the opportunity for his/her followers to develop into servant leaders as well. This is perhaps among the greatest legacy of the servant leader.

Transformational Leadership

Budur (2020) describes Transformational Leadership as having been born from the work of Burns in 1978, and further developed in the late 1980s by Bass, noting that Transformational Leadership is effective across differing cultures. Ly (2019) defines Transformational Leadership through the role of empowerment and motivation, whereby such leaders instill a sense of confidence in their followers while simultaneously cultivating a vision grounded in "desirable attitudes, values, and beliefs which affect the culture" (p. 3). Thus, the transformation begins on an individual level and drives the development and proliferation of an overall organizational mission through methods of positive reinforcement.

It can be assumed that most colleges and universities maintain a mission statement followed by core values or dispositions congruent with their established mission. Thus, students enrolled at such institutions may be led to demonstrate or address such values at many points throughout their matriculation. According to Wang (2022), "transformational leadership plays an increasingly important role in the construction and management of universities" (p. 224). Furthermore, "transformational leadership can assist higher education institutions to attain their purpose, focusing on integrated learning, collective goals, community-oriented objectives, and collective wellbeing" (Sharma & Jain, 2022, p. 243). The vision of academic institutions typically presents in a hierarchical fashion, beginning with the institution as an entity, then with the president and administrators, followed by curriculum development personnel, faculty, and students who then carry their experience out into the world. The transformation may seem exclusive, like a top-down approach, but the transformation also occurs from within the individual level out, or from the bottom-up, thereby enabling transformation to proliferate both the individual's and the organization's success.
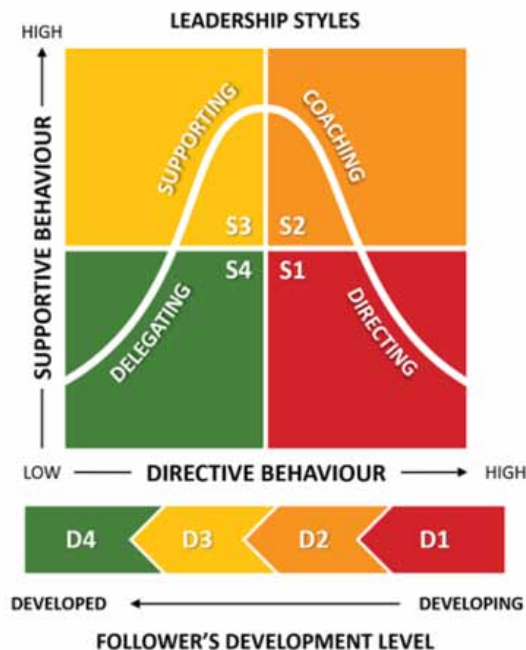
Situational Leadership

Situational Leadership Theory was founded by Hersey and Blanchard and features a dependency on the connectivity between leadership and those considered to be followers (Vidyakala, 2020, p. 79) and function as a follower-focused approach, as seen in Figure One.

Ly (2019) describes Situational Leadership through the lens of context, meaning that the variables of a given environment or situation will influence the leadership styles and strategies to be deployed by such leaders, generating behavioral changes through a supportive, directive, or delegative approach. Furthermore, this style considers presenting variance regarding "religious, personal, and psychological maturity" (p. 2) of those under such leadership. Religious, personal, and psychological variance exists within academic structures, and thus require consideration pertaining to methods of leadership as they relate to organizational success and student outcomes.

Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) Situational Leadership Theory was tested by Raza et al (2018) through the context of teaching faculty and associated impact against student performance. They discovered that student readiness and performance is mitigated by the leadership style demonstrated through teaching faculty. Findings lead to the formal suggestion that administrative staff and teaching faculty ought to deploy a Situational Leadership methodology to address and accommodate the different styles of learning with the goal of improving student outcomes (Raza et al., 2018). Thus, it

Figure 1.

can be said that Transformational, Servant, and Charismatic Leadership are best deployed through the goodness-of-fit approach to education for this theory.

The Challenge: Preparing Culturally Competent Graduates

To effectively prepare culturally competent graduates, it is important to first identify what cultural competency means. The social and behavioral sciences (psychology, anthropology, political science, economics, and sociology), maintain that individuals from different cultures see and do things differently (Uhl-Bien et al, 2021), and that cultural competence is defined as the ability for individuals from different cultures to interact effectively with others from different cultures (Phillips, & Gully, 2021). Griffin et al (2021) note cultural competence as having four components: awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

1. **Awareness** of our own cultural worldview as well as our own reactions to those who are different from us.
2. Our own **attitudes** toward cultural differences.
3. **Knowledge** of different worldviews and cultural practices of others.
4. Cross-cultural **skills**.
   (Griffin et al, 2021).

Students will face changes to the workforce as new graduates that will impact many aspects of what they currently view as 'normal' including basic human resource functions such as onboarding, benefits, work arrangements, and compensation (Griffin et al, 2021) that can be considered, discussed, and explored right now in the online classroom through case study, class discussion, curriculum and assignment so that students are equipped to appropriately address the changing environment. Likewise, administrators, curriculum developers, and faculty, through the ongoing development of resources, tools, and best practices, can appropriately prepare and be prepared to educate themselves and their students.

Cultural Competency

Cultural competency is a core requirement of many differing schools of thought, avenues of practice, and in nearly all educational organizations and institutions across the United States and beyond. Ly (2019) differentiates between leadership methods considered effective in both Western and Non-Western understandings, suggesting that it is quite "likely that the meaning and importance of leadership also varies across cultures" (p. 2) as culturally determined traits may differ in importance. Furthermore, American-specific leadership traits of high importance include "intelligence, honesty, understanding, verbal skills, and determination" (p. 2). However, non-Western leadership methodologies are slightly more attuned to cultural specifics, with two major leadership theories emerging out of Japan and India, founded by Misumi (Japan) and Sinha (India). Misumi's approach is grounded in performance and maintenance variables, while Sinha's approach is grounded in nurturance and tasks. Other styles of leadership consider things like military influence and moral standing (Ly, 2019). It is important to note that one individual is not limited to a single cultural influence but may have developed their learning style through several cultures and leadership approaches over the course of their lifetime.

As cultures and groups of people continue to diversify, evolve, and grow over time, attainment of competencies in all aspects of the diversity realm is unreachable. However, through the lens of four fundamental leadership styles, cultural competency can be improved upon and grown, especially in online graduate learning environments where diversity can sometimes be hidden behind a student name in a virtual classroom. Capturing the essence of true cultural diversity and multicultural competency exceeds hiring diverse faculty members or educating diverse students. True cultural competence may be demonstrated through transformation, service, charisma, and is situational in nature. The unique needs of culturally diverse students are deserving of effective leadership equipped with competency in multiculturalism, especially in online/distance learning platforms where social input may be limited. Thus, sensitivity, collaboration, and on-going training is necessary to satisfy such needs in graduate education, specifically through the leadership of administration, curriculum development personnel, instructional faculty, and students who are likely to model their leaders as they assume leadership roles in their academic and professional environments.

Intersect: Cultural Competency and Effective Leadership

As leaders navigate what at times may seem uncharted waters, it is important to recognize that in fact while time continues to move forward, leadership theory remains the same. Leaders in a sense, have the opportunity throughout education and career to 'collect' theories and best practices and store them for the appropriate time and place. This allows leaders to 'choose' so to speak from their toolkit the appropriate leadership solution based on appropriate need. Trolian and Park (2022) suggest that faculty can effectively model cultural competency for students and further report,

Scholars have advocated for further investigation of the campus climate for diversity and students' attitudes and behaviors surrounding diversity, and there appears to be an increasing responsibility for higher education professionals to consider ways to encourage students' awareness and acceptance of difference. (Trolian & Parker, 2022, p. 849)

The following recommends best practices for four key stakeholder groups identified in this manuscript in which opportunities for cultural competency and effective leadership intersect in this online higher education equation: Administration, Curriculum Developers, Faculty, and of course most importantly, Students. The recommendations made are grounded in each of the four leadership theories addressed.

Administration

Administrators have a unique and tasking role as they oversee all those faculty and staff members who are required to be competent professionally as well as culturally. They are responsible for facilitating difficult conversations surrounding culture with the goal of capturing the needs of their staff, students,

and institution. According to Schares (2017), "Educators may shy away from these important conversations, fearing that they will offend someone or raise sensitive issues; yet educational leaders must have the courage to engage in the conversation and seek the knowledge to support others" (p. 23). To restate Griffin et al (2021), cultural competence brings four components; awareness, attitudes, knowledge, and skills, all of which are quintessential aspects of administrative duties. Furthermore, Williams (2018) suggested that culturally competent leadership involves changing the ways in which individuals are supplied/trained to engage in work pertaining to equity and social justice. Below are recommendations for how to engage in such practices for administrators:

1. Collaborative Learning Assignments (CLC's): Ensure benchmark assignments include collaborative learning assignments (CLC)/group work to foster collaboration. For example, many universities now require group assignments as part of graduation requirements. The integration of groupwork to collaborate on cultural competence topics can assist students in building vital leadership attributes as well as other important team skills (García-Pérez, 2021).
2. Cultural Competence Requirement: Require the inclusion of a cultural competence requirement in the capstone projects of all programs of study. This is one such recommendation made by Kathy Oullette in her argument in support of the inclusion of area studies in all undergraduate curriculum positing the value it provides to prepare students to students to engage and work in multicultural settings (Ouellette, 2021).
3. Global Awareness, Diversity, and Worldview Critical Competencies: Include global awareness, diversity, and worldview for program critical competencies. This is one such recommendation made by Edwards and Ritchie in their manuscript on the preparedness of undergraduates with the inclusion of Humanities (Edwards, & Ritchie, 2022).
4. Technology Mastery: Ensure that graduates have mastered technology, which may be accomplished through building into the curriculum technology proficiency requirements. With globalization being one of the management skills necessary in the 21st Century graduate, the ability to operate in a digital world is key. García-Pérez et al (2021) goes on highlight the importance of technology mastery.

Curriculum Developers

According to Rajukar and colleagues (2019), "curriculum may be defined as the sum of the learning activities and experiences that a student has under the auspices or direction of the school" (p. 3), assigning the curriculum developer to subscribe to the notion that the student is the focal point of the curriculum, and that the student does the learning through experience and activity given through the curriculum. Furthermore, curriculum development attends to the development of the whole person, extended beyond interpersonal aspects of learning and engagement, and through an international level of learning (Rajukar, 2019). Curriculum developers have a unique opportunity to support faculty and administrators in preparing culturally competent students through curriculum design in which assignments, discussion, and course materials work in tandem. Here are a few examples:

1. Study Abroad: Develop study abroad course options into the curriculum. Grounded in constructivism, in many cases this allows the opportunity for growth and opportunity for overall leadership efficacy and cultural competency to be realized (Beatty, & Manning-Ouellette, 2022).
2. Case Analysis: Provide case analysis opportunities within the curriculum. These may be offered for cross course collaboration (Pedersen & Hammond, 2021) or for individual assignment. Case analysis topics may include content related to cultural competence, diversity, global business or inclusivity and application of one of the leadership theories.
3. Self-Assessments: Introduce self-assessments such as the Myers-Briggs (based on the typology of Carl Jung and the Rokeach Values Survey (1973) for students to better understand their MBTI personality type, and their instrumental and terminal values. One such example is that of an

application activity in an online language and culture course by a faculty member at Purdue, that involved students using the MBTI to make connections with each other after discovering they had the same MBTI during a time when they had felt lost and alone or overwhelmed (Fehrman, 2022).

4. Create a Cultural Assessment to Incorporate in Curriculum: Incorporate a cultural assessment into the curriculum of each program of study. There are several available online. Merlot.org is an excellent resource available for examples. It is recommended curriculum developers consider partnering with their faculty, administrators, and subject matter experts to develop a resource together and meet regularly to update resources to keep them current.

Faculty

While administration and curriculum developers may not ever see students face-to-face, faculty are the points-of-contact for demonstrating cultural competence in both word and action. Hutchins and colleagues (2021) sought to examine how the interactions of faculty and staff members dialoging and sharing stories regarding beliefs about other races and ethnic groups contributes to the development of cultural competency. Their findings demonstrated that "faculty and staff reported having a better understanding of unconscious bias, microaggressions, and privilege, as well as a desire to take action to help ensure a more inclusive environment in their professional and personal spheres of influence" (p. 468). Faculty may promote cultural competency through the lens of the four proposed leadership styles by the following methods:

1. Cultivate an on-going practice of self-awareness and self-evaluation and seek training and professional development pertaining to cultural competencies to better serve the needs of students (Fernandez & Shaw, 2020).
2. Evaluate and address student performance through a culturally informed lens (Raca et al., 2018).
3. Model cultural inclusivity through encouraging academic dialogue regarding diversity from an experiential approach, empowering students to share their thoughts and life experiences (Tansey & Parks, 2022).
4. Conduct regular needs assessments within the current social climate to facilitate or support faculty meetings and trainings pertaining to issues related to diversity while fostering competency growth.
5. Continually develop partnership with professional peers through cross-course collaboration (Pedersen & Hammond, 2021).

Students

Students outnumber administrators, curriculum developers, and faculty at colleges and universities, suggesting significant influence from their cultural disposition. Patterson and colleagues (2018) sought to explore how one psychology course may influence the cultural competency of enrolled students. Findings from their study revealed "key aspects of multicultural competence, namely ethnocultural empathy, colorblind racial attitudes, and multicultural experiences can and do change over the course of a semester-long class" (p. 81), suggesting the impressionable nature of college and university students as well as the influence their competency may have on an institution.

Students may promote cultural competency through the four proposed leadership styles by the following methods:

1. Evaluate and address faculty performance through a culturally informed lens in End-of-Course Surveys (Raca et al., 2018).
2. Model cultural inclusivity through encouraging academic dialogue regarding diversity from an experiential approach, empowering academic peers and instructors to share individual thoughts and life experiences (Tansey & Parks, 2022).
3. Develop and facilitate student clubs that specifically promote cultural diversity and inclusion in the college/university setting (Trolian & Parker, 2022).

4. Take advantage of study-abroad and missional opportunities to grow in knowledge and understanding of differing cultures through a global perspective (Trolian & Parker, 2022).

Implications for Future Research

While Leadership Theory remains constant, the social, political, and cultural climate at colleges and universities continues to change and evolve with each current event, national and international conflict, and global fears and anxieties. Thus, the stakeholders addressed in this article bear responsibilities of valor.

Future research ought to include more in-depth examinations of the cultural competence, equipment, and effectiveness of administrators, curriculum developers, faculty, and students, on a more individualized basis. Research questions may include: How did cultural competence present in academic leadership in decades past compared to now? How do students help shape the cultural competence climate at their institutions? How do stakeholders identify, adjust to, and address issues relates to cultural competency at colleges and universities? With implementation of best practices comes the responsibility of identifying emergent issues and concerns.

It is important to also consider limitations to cultural competency. Beagan (2018) identified cultural competence as a limited goal, suggesting that it prioritizes dominant cultures, suppressing minority people's visibility in the professional realm, and suggests an attainment that is simply unobtainable. They note that confidence and comfort are the units of measurement for cultural competency, which in turn do not translate into effective practice. They proposed the ethical approach of what are termed cultural humility and cultural reflexivity, which call for an understanding of how one's practice relates to arrangements of power (Beagan, 2018). Thus, future research endeavors may also view cultural humility and cultural reflexivity through the leadership styles addressed in this review.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this semi-systematic literature review was to examine four leadership theories through the lens of cultural competence for stakeholders in higher education. This review has addressed the potential challenges of preparing culturally competent graduates in higher education via four effective leadership styles: Charismatic Leadership, Servant Leadership, Transformational Leadership, and Situational Leadership. Recommendations were made based on prior research to promote cultural competence among administrators, curriculum developers, faculty, and students.

The organization of the future will operate in an environment even more diverse than can be imagined today. Educators today bear the responsibility to equip the next generation of leaders for that future. How they lead, encourage, guide, and develop them today through comprehensive and focused efforts to encourage diversity, foster organizational culture, and leverage the unique characteristics of the individual, will ultimately lead to success for both employees and the organization. As academic communities continue to progress and become more culturally enriched, stakeholders at academic institutions are thus called to evolve with this positive change in a way that is inclusive, competent, and powerful in action.

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