

The Guidelines for Improving Empowering Leadership of Administrators in Public Normal Universities Under Liaoning Province

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Abstract

In recent years, empowering leadership has received widespread attention in the field of management. With the gradual flattening of organizational structures in global education, traditional hierarchical management models are increasingly being replaced by empowering leadership, which emphasizes information sharing, autonomous decision-making, and participative decision-making. In this new era, universities face numerous challenges, such as high work pressure, poor mental health, and low job satisfaction among teachers. Therefore, empowering leadership, as an important management tool, becomes essential and significant as it can enhance the autonomy and engagement of organizational members, thereby improving their job well-being and work efficiency.

The objectives of this research were: (1) to determine the components and indicators of empowering leadership of administrators in public normal universities under Liaoning Province; (2) to develop the guidelines for improving administrators' empowering leadership in public normal universities under Liaoning Province.

The research employed qualitative research methodology. The researcher found forty-three components and fifty-seven indicators of empowering leadership through a literature review and Semi-Structured Interviews involving nine key informants. From these forty-three components, four high-frequency components and twenty-seven high-frequency indicators were extracted. Through Focus Group Discussions, seven key informants provided eight guidelines around the four components of empowering leadership to enhance administrators' empowering leadership abilities in public normal universities under Liaoning Province. The instruments used for data collection were the Document Data Record Form, the Semi-Structured Interviews Form, and the Focus Group Discussions Form. This research employed content analysis.

The research findings revealed that (1) empowering leadership of administrators in public normal universities under Liaoning Province consisted of four components: information sharing, clarity of work meaning, self-determination, and participative decision-making, and twenty-seven indicators, and (2) the guidelines for improving empowering leadership of administrators involved establishing information exchange channels, emphasizing the goals and significance of the work, cultivating a sense of ownership and initiative, making the decision-making process transparent, clarifying the contributions of each role to the organization, enhancing the sense of responsibility and establishing accountability mechanics, encouraging breakthroughs and innovation, and encouraging organization members to participate in discussions and decision-making.

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In summary, the research highlights the importance of empowering leadership in addressing the challenges faced by administrators in public normal universities under Liaoning Province. By identifying key components such as information sharing, clarity of work meaning, self-determination, and participative decision-making, and proposing practical guidelines, the study provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing administrators' leadership capabilities. This approach not only aims to improve job satisfaction and well-being among teachers but also seeks to foster a more engaged and efficient organizational environment.

Keywords: Guidelines for Empowering Leadership, Administrators, Public Normal Universities, Liaoning Province

Introduction

Organizational member empowerment has long been a subtle yet significant theme in the research of organizational dynamics and Human Resource Development. Its roots can be traced back to Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Studies. Subsequently, it appeared in research on alienation (Seeman, 1959), job involvement and job environment (Hackman, 1980), and worker participation (Lawler, 1992). Literature reviews reveal that organizations have a longstanding tradition of promoting Organizational member participation (Cacciope, 1998). This effort dates back to the 1960s when organizations began to implement job enlargement, job enrichment, management by objectives, and quality circles. Later, Manz and Sims (1987) introduced the concept of 'super leadership.' Super leadership refers to leaders who facilitate self-leadership among subordinates. Conceptually, super leadership and external leadership of self-managing teams both focus on enhancing employees' self-leadership abilities. However, super leadership is a broader concept than external leadership of self-managing teams, extending beyond team boundaries. Academically, super leadership is considered a precursor to empowering leadership. Manz and Sims categorized leaders into four types: strongman, transactional, visionary hero, and super leader. This categorization extends the mainstream transactional-transformational leadership paradigm, based on analysis of real-life leadership behaviors and theoretical deduction, without quantitative validation of the four leadership styles. Pearce et al. (2003) expanded the traditional transactional and transformational leadership types into transformational, transactional, directive, and empowering leadership through exploratory factor analysis on two independent samples and confirmatory factor analysis on a third sample, distinguishing empowering leadership as a specific leadership style distinct from others. The aforementioned studies by Manz, Sims, Pearce, and literature on empowerment (Conger and Kanungo, 1988; Thomas and Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995) gradually converge, further enriching the understanding of empowering leadership. By the 1990s, these concepts collectively evolved into what is now known as Organizational member empowerment. Researchers have extended their studies beyond traditional management practices, examining how decision-making authority is delegated from higher to lower organizational levels and how access to information and resources for lower-level Organizational members is increased (Spreitzer, 1995; Blau and Alba, 1982; Bowen and Lawler, 1992).

At the beginning of the 21st century, the rapid development of information technology and global economic competition brought significant changes to organizational structures and environments. This complexity forced organizations to adopt more flexible and efficient management models. Forrester (2000) believes that traditional leadership techniques should be combined with empowerment, which is considered a valuable method for improving work efficiency.

In China, as universities expand in size and scope, their management complexity increases, making traditional centralized management insufficient. Empowerment can accelerate the decision-making process, reduce information lag, and delegate power closer to where the problems arise, enabling quicker resolutions.

Through a literature review, the researcher found that while extensive research has illuminated the benefits of empowerment leadership, several limitations persist. Previous studies have predominantly focused on organizational contexts in Western countries, with limited research specifically targeting Chinese organizational settings. Furthermore, studies often concentrate on specific industries or organizational backgrounds, rarely considering universities as research subjects, previous studies on empowering leadership have not provided systematic and scientific guidance for university administrators. This research aims to fill this research gap by measuring and evaluating the empowering leadership of university administrators, proposing an appropriate empowering leadership model and evaluation index system suitable for them.

Research Objectives

The research aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- (1) To determine the components and indicators of empowering leadership of administrators in public normal universities under Liaoning Province.
- (2) To develop the guidelines for improving administrators' empowering leadership in public normal universities under Liaoning Province.

Research Methodology

This research employed a qualitative research method. The qualitative research involved (1) content analysis of the literature review and Semi-Structured Interviews, to identify the important components and indicators that constitute empowering leadership. (2) Content analysis of Focus Group Discussions with key informants, aimed to gather the experts' insights on the guidelines of empowering leadership.

Source of Data

The data sources of this research include two main parts:

Literature Research: Through systematic literature review, relevant theoretical and empirical studies on empowering leadership were collected and analyzed in the field. The study extracted components and indicators of empowering leadership for administrators in public normal universities from domestic and international literature, providing a theoretical foundation for the research.

Semi-Structured Interviews: The research conducted semi-structured interviews with 9 key informants from public normal universities in Liaoning Province to further validate and refine the components and indicators of empowering leadership identified in the

deputy directors, all holding titles of Associate Professor or higher, with over 10 years of administrative experience in universities. Their insights and suggestions helped the researcher gain a deeper understanding of the key dynamics of empowering leadership in academic settings.

Through these two methods of data collection and analysis, the research identified the components and indicators of empowering leadership for administrators in public normal universities in Liaoning Province. Ultimately, the research formulated guidelines for improving administrators' empowering leadership capabilities.

Key Informants

(1) Key Informants of Semi-Structured Interviews:

Using the purposive sampling method to select key informants of Semi-Structured Interviews. They comprised nine key informants (experts) from three public normal universities under Liaoning Province. There were four deans, one vice dean, two directors, and two deputy directors, all held titles of Associate Professor, Associate Director, or higher, and had more than ten years of experience in public normal university administrative positions.

(2) Key Informants of Focus Group Discussion:

The key informants for the Focus Group Discussion consisted of seven key informants selected from the three public normal universities under Liaoning Province using the purposive sampling method. The key informants group included one dean, four associate deans, one director, and one deputy director, all with the title of Associate Professor, Associate Director, or above, and over ten years of administrative experience at public normal universities.

Data Collecting

This research employed qualitative data collection methods:

Research Phase 1:

Research Design: Utilized literature review and semi-structured interviews.

Literature Review: Gathered and analyzed relevant domestic and international literature on empowering leadership to preliminarily identify the components and indicators of empowering leadership.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Conducted with 9 key informants from three public normal universities in Liaoning Province, including deans, vice deans, directors, and deputy directors, using purposive sampling. These interviews aimed to further validate and refine the selected indicators of empowering leadership in an academic setting.

Research Phase 2:

Research Design: Focused on focus group discussions to gather expert insights on guidelines for enhancing administrators' empowering leadership.

Focus Group Discussions: Engaged 7 key informants, including deans, associate deans, and directors, through purposive sampling. Discussions were aimed at collecting insights and perspectives on the proposed empowering leadership model and developing guidelines for improvement.

Research Framework

The research framework for this research, displayed in Figure 7.1, outlined the research preparation, overall structure, and research methods. It also systematically reflected on the research process, including objectives and data collection.

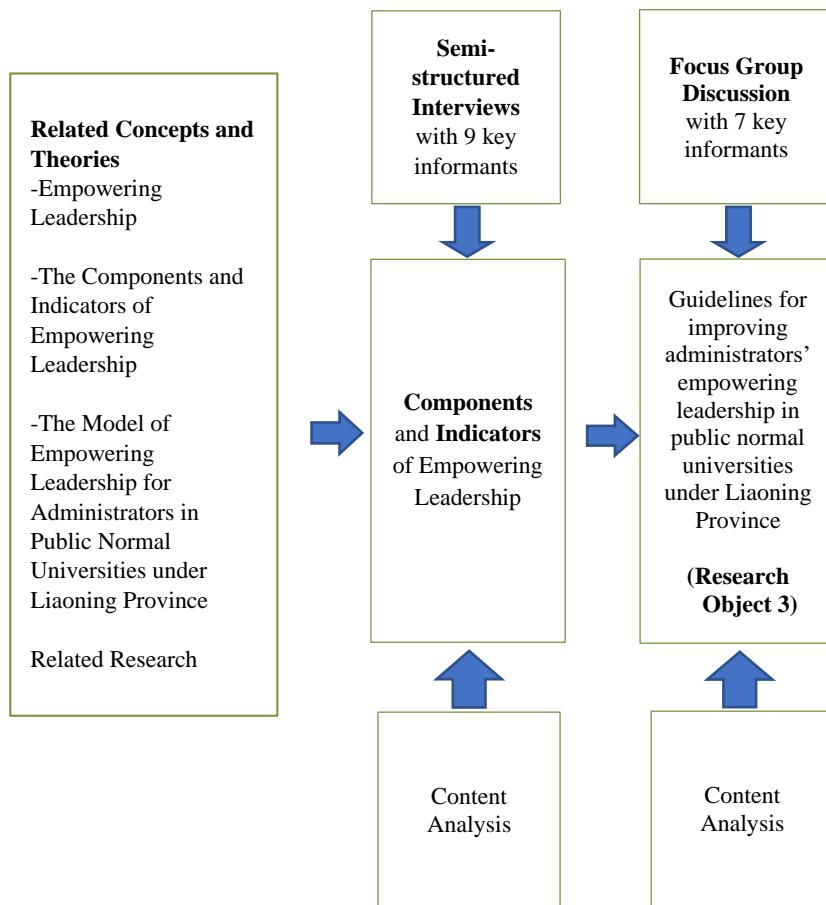


Figure 1 Research Framework

Conclusion

1. Conclusion of Research Objective 1

Through literature review and Semi-Structured Interviews, the research identified four components and fifty-seven indicators of empowering leadership. By analyzing the frequency of components and indicators, identify four high-frequency components and twenty-seven high-frequency indicators.

2. Conclusion of Research Objective 2

By organizing a Focus Group Discussion around the four components of the empowering leadership model with seven key informants, the key informants provided a total of eight guidelines for improving the empowering leadership abilities of administrators in public normal universities under Liaoning Province, as follows:

- (1) Establishing information exchange channels.
- (2) Emphasizing the goals and significance of the work.

- (3) Cultivating a sense of ownership and initiative.
- (4) Making the decision-making process transparent.
- (5) Clarifying the contributions of each role to the organization.
- (6) Enhancing the sense of responsibility and establishing accountability mechanics.
- (7) Encouraging breakthroughs and innovation.
- (8) Encouraging organization members to participate in discussions and decision-making.

Discussion

1. Major Findings of Research Objective1: Identified four key components and twenty-seven indicators of the empowering leadership model for administrators in public normal universities under Liaoning Province.

The four components were (1) information sharing, (2) clarity of work meaning, (3) self-determination, and (4) participative decision-making. These components were derived from a comprehensive literature review and semi-structured interviews. The indicators were: enable organizational members to decide on how to do their work, encourage organization members to seek intrinsic motivation, find the drive and passion for their work to strengthen autonomy, etc.

Information sharing built trust and encouraged cooperative innovation. Clarity of work meaning ensured that members understood their roles and aligned with the university's goals, enhancing job satisfaction and motivation. Self-determination empowered individuals by granting autonomy and decision-making authority, fostering creativity and ownership. Participative decision-making involved members in decision processes, strengthening commitment and reducing resistance to change.

The reasons for these findings were primarily as follows: Firstly, empowering leadership emphasized transparency and information sharing, which built trust and encouraged collaboration. Literature indicated that this significantly enhanced members' involvement and job satisfaction. Secondly, clarity of work meaning helped members understand their roles and align personal goals with university objectives, increasing motivation and identification with the organization. Thirdly, granting self-determination allowed individuals to be more creative and responsible, improving organizational efficiency. Lastly, participative decision-making strengthened commitment and reduced resistance to change, making decisions more comprehensive and enhancing team cohesion.

These findings were consistent with Arnold et al. (2000) "The Empowering Leadership Questionnaire: The Construction and Validation of a New Scale for Measuring Leader Behaviors" that empowerment leadership significantly enhances employee job satisfaction and performance, fostering organizational innovation and development. The research findings of A Kirkman's (1999) "Beyond self-management: Antecedents and Consequences of Team Empowerment" indicate that empowering leadership helps reduce employee job stress and anxiety, enhancing organizational adaptability and flexibility, consistent with the findings of this research. Spreitzer (1995) "Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace: Dimensions, Measurement and Validation" believed empowering leadership enhances employee autonomy and self-efficacy, thereby boosting job motivation and quality; Konczak et al. (2000) "Defining and measuring empowering leader behaviors: Development of an upward feedback instrument" believed empowering leadership is an effective

management approach that drives innovation and change in diverse and complex organizational environments, Wang Hui, Wu Zhaoyan, Zhang Yan, and Chen Zhaoquan (2008) "Dimensional Confirmation and Measurement of Leadership Empowerment Behavior" studied empowerment leadership practices in the Chinese context, emphasizing its importance in enhancing organizational performance and employee satisfaction. Tsui et al. (2004) "Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom: Variation of Leadership Styles among Chinese CEOs" Investigated the applicability and effects of empowerment leadership in multinational corporations and across different cultural contexts, exploring its interaction with cultural factors; Zhang et al. (2010) "Linking Empowering Leadership and Employee Creativity: The Influence of Psychological Empowerment" explored the impact of empowerment leadership on organizational innovation capability and employee engagement, proposing implementation strategies and recommendations in the specific cultural and social context of China. These studies' findings are consistent with the conclusions of this research.

2. Major Findings of Research Objective 2: Develop guidelines for improving administrators' empowering leadership in public normal universities under Liaoning Province.

The second research objective was to develop guidelines for improving administrators' empowering leadership in public normal universities under Liaoning Province. Focus Group Discussions with seven key informants led to the following conclusions:

(1) Strengthen Communication and Information Sharing: Administrators should establish effective communication channels, encourage a culture of knowledge-sharing, and ensure transparent decision-making to build trust and alignment toward common goals.

(2) Clarify Work Meaning and Importance: Administrators should help organizational members understand how their work contributes to the university's broader goals, thereby enhancing motivation and a sense of purpose.

(3) Foster Self-Determination: Administrators should delegate appropriate powers, allowing organizational members to make decisions, set goals, and take initiative. This includes fostering a culture of responsibility and supporting innovative approaches.

(4) Promote Participative Decision-Making: Administrators should involve organizational members in decision-making processes through regular meetings, committees, and surveys. Collaborative decision-making and transparent processes are essential to build trust in leadership.

The findings of research objective 3 aligned with existing literature. Zhang's (2010) "Linking Empowering Leadership and Employee Creativity: The Influence of Psychological Empowerment" highlighted the importance of information sharing for fostering trust and collaborative innovation. Arnold's (2000) "The Empowering Leadership Questionnaire: The Construction and Validation of a New Scale for Measuring Leader Behaviors" emphasized enhancing work meaningfulness as a key behavior of empowering leadership, supported by Spreitzer's (1995) "Psychological Empowerment in the Workplace: Dimensions, Measurement and Validation" concept of psychological empowerment. Kirkman's (1999) "Beyond Self-Management: Antecedents and Consequences of Team Empowerment" reinforced the need for fostering self-determination by promoting personal influence and control over work. Additionally, Pearce et al. (2003) "A multi-method development of a theoretical typology of leadership" and Konczak et al. (2000) "Defining and Measuring Empowering Leader Behaviors: Development of an Upward Feedback Instrument" advocated for involving

organizational members in decision-making to enhance commitment and reduce resistance to change.

The reason for these findings was that empowering leadership enhanced the autonomy and responsibility of organizational members, which was crucial in educational environments. Administrators faced diverse tasks, requiring flexibility and the ability to motivate team members. Strengthened communication and information sharing ensured alignment in goals and methods, improving efficiency and collaboration. Clarifying the importance of work boosted members' sense of mission and enthusiasm, enhancing overall performance. Additionally, fostering self-determination and participative decision-making increased members' sense of belonging and innovation, promoting sustainable development. These findings reflected theoretical research and were validated through field surveys and focus group discussions.

Recommendation

1. Recommendation for Policies Formulation

Based on the research's findings, the following recommendations were proposed for policy formulation:

(1) Regarding the component of 'Information Sharing', the researcher provided the following recommendations:

(a) Structured Monthly Meetings: To ensure all administrators are informed about the university's activities and strategies, enhancing coordination and alignment across departments.

(b) Internal Digital Platform: To foster a culture of openness and collaboration, enhancing operational effectiveness and real-time communication.

(c) Training on Open Communication: To equip administrators with the skills to champion open communication, fostering innovation and effective problem-solving.

(2) Regarding the component of 'Clarity of Work Meaning', the researcher provided the following recommendations:

(a) Workshops to Align Personal and Strategic Goals: To enhance engagement and satisfaction by helping members understand their role in the university's success.

(b) Clear Job Descriptions and Mentorship Programs: To promote a sense of purpose and commitment, aiding in retaining talent and ensuring effective administrative functions.

(3) Regarding the component of 'Self-Determination', the researcher provided the following recommendations:

(a) Professional Development Support: To empower administrators to take ownership of their career advancement, aligning personal growth with university needs.

(b) Policy for Proposing and Leading Projects: To increase innovation, allowing members to pursue areas of passion and create a culture of ownership and creativity.

(c) Regular Feedback Sessions: To foster a participative culture, valuing input and actively seeking to improve working conditions.

(4) Regarding the component of 'Participative Decision-Making', the researcher provided the following recommendations:

(a) Establishing Committees: To foster a democratic approach to policy-making, ensuring robust and widely supported decisions.

(b) Surveys and Polls for Gathering Input: To collect diverse perspectives, ensuring balanced and inclusive decision-making.

2. Recommendation for Practical Application

To implement the empowering leadership model effectively, the following practical applications were recommended:

(1) Regarding the component of 'Information Sharing', the researcher proposed the following recommendations:

(a) Implement structured monthly meetings for administrators to share updates on university initiatives and operational changes.

(b) Develop an internal digital platform for centralized document and resource sharing, enhancing transparency and accessibility.

(c) Provide training to administrators on the importance of open communication to foster innovation and collaborative problem-solving.

(2) Regarding the component of 'Clarity of Work Meaning', the researcher proposed the following recommendations:

(a) Articulate and communicate clear and achievable goals for individuals and teams.

(b) Offer constructive feedback that emphasizes the importance of employees' work and provides guidance on further contributions to the organization's mission.

(c) Recognize organizational members' contributions to reinforce the value of their work and foster a positive work environment.

(3) Regarding the component of 'Self-Determination', the researcher proposed the following recommendations:

(a) Encourage administrators to set their own professional development goals and support them through funding and time allocations for activities like conferences and further education.

(b) Develop a policy that allows organization members to propose and lead new projects or initiatives aligned with the university's mission and goals.

(c) Implement regular feedback sessions to promote a sense of ownership and control over their work life.

(4) Regarding the component of 'Participative Decision-Making', the researcher proposed the following recommendations:

(a) Establish committees with representatives from all levels of university administration to discuss and decide on key institutional policies.

(b) Use surveys and polls to gather input from all organization members before making significant changes to university policies or practices.

(c) Hold open forums where staff can present their ideas and concerns to top management, ensuring inclusive and diverse perspectives in decision-making processes.

The schematic diagram of the correspondence between components and guidelines was shown in Figure 10.1.



In summary, these recommendations collectively aimed to create a more dynamic, responsive, and engaged administrative structure. By promoting transparency, aligning goals, empowering autonomy, and fostering inclusive decision-making, the universities improved their operational efficiency, adaptability, and overall institutional effectiveness. These improvements not only enhanced the working environment for administrators but also contributed to the university's ability to meet external challenges and internal growth demands more effectively.

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