

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH GRANTING UOG EXPERIENCE AND ITS MULTIFACETED LEADERSHIP BENEFITS

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ABSTRACT: *The purpose of this study is to provide UOG staff members cogent understanding of the field of leadership in relation to interdisciplinary research granted in 2015/16 to academic staffs thereby better enable its administrators to evaluate potential merits gained from interdisciplinary work. The study traces the development of leadership theory, from trait- and process- based theories, to the emergence of transformational or charismatic theories. This study defines the requirements of leadership today by examining the Three “C” Framework of Leadership developed by Gandz et al. (2010) as cited in Daina D. et al. (2011). This framework brings together three domains – character, competencies and commitment to illustrate the true essence of leadership in application interdisciplinary research in UOG. In doing so, this research had come up with the comparisons of the value, leadership and psycho-social engagement of researchers for the last five years. Incorporating insights from historical and current trends in leadership theory, this framework postulates that effective leaders today must not only be competent in their field, they must also exhibit character strengths, such as wisdom, courage and integrity and be committed to the hard work of leadership in Daina D. et al. (2011). Because this is time that the growing emphasis on collaborative and interdisciplinary work, the shift from transactional to transformational leadership, the increasing demand among academics for opportunities beyond specialized training and the growing diversity of university scholars. So, the decision made by the management of UOG as to participate all academic staff in interdisciplinary research is leadership of the era which needs character, competence and commitment.*

1. What is leadership?

Like other terms of social sciences it is difficult to get a hard and dried definition for leadership. The field of leadership is broad and unwieldy, with just as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have attempted to define it (Daina D. et al 2011). Answering the question, “what is leadership,” Dave Ulrich and Norm Smallwood, (1999) starts by understanding what leaders are trying to accomplish and their results. Results may be inside (e.g., employee productivity, organization agility) and outside (customer share, investor confidence, or community reputation). As integrative definition Bruce E. Winston and Kathleen Patterson (2006), elucidate a leader is one or more people who selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more follower(s) who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the follower(s) to the organization’s mission and objectives causing the follower(s) to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objectives

In defining leadership there lie two fundamental difficulties. Firstly, like notions such as ‘love’, ‘freedom’ and ‘happiness’, leadership is a complex construct open to subjective interpretation. Everyone has their own instinctive understanding of what leadership is, based on a mixture of experience and learning, which is difficult to capture in a brief definition. Secondly, the way in which leadership is defined and understood is strongly influenced by one’s theoretical stance. There are those who view leadership as the consequence of a set of traits or characteristics possessed by ‘leaders’, whilst others view leadership as a social process that emerges from group relationships. Such divergent views will always result in a difference of opinion about the nature of leadership.

The trait- based approach dates back to the 1930s and 1940s and focused primarily on the key personality characteristics intrinsic in the world's greatest leaders. These early studies suggested that demographic factors such as height and gender and personality traits such as intelligence, self- confidence, integrity, sociability, determination and extraversion, are requirements for great leadership. Some of these studies also listed specific traits in the so- called "great- man" theories of leadership, which were rooted in concepts of power and status.

However, scholars like Stogdill (1948) proved that little theoretical justification to link these personality characteristics to effective leadership. This resulted in a shift to more behavioral theories of leadership, which went beyond traits to identify different leadership styles and approaches (House & Aditya, 1997). In this regard, research in the 1950s from Ohio State and the University of Michigan Daina D. et al. (2011) identified key leadership behaviors such as showing consideration for followers as opposed to organizing work, scheduling activities, and defining role responsibilities and building employee relations as opposed to orienting production.

In recounting his "Theory X" and "Theory Y" styles of management, McGregor (1967) suggested leadership behaviors based on different assumptions about employee motivation. Theory X managers see employees as either lazy or greedy and therefore implement formal control structures and systems of punishment and compensation. Theory Y managers believe employees inherently want to do well, to be creative, to seek out responsibility and to accomplish goals. As such, Theory Y managers implement processes to support the development of self- determined individuals.

Another influential behavioral approach to leadership/management is the Managerial Grid developed by Blake and Mouton (1964). This model focuses on task (production) and employee (people) orientations of managers, as well as combinations between the two extremes. A grid with concern for production on the horizontal axis and concern for people on the vertical axis plots five basic management/leadership styles (see Figure 1). The first number refers to a leader's production or task orientation and the second, to people or employee orientation. It was proposed that 'Team Management' a high concern for both employees and production is the most effective type of leadership behavior.

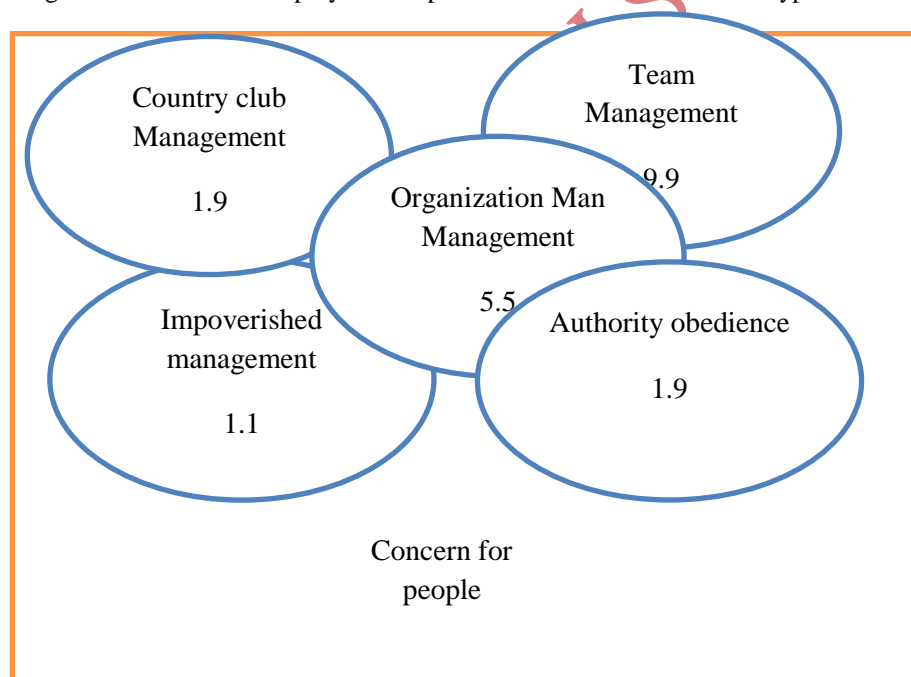


Fig 1. The leadership grid(Blake and Mouton, 1964)

In 1970s, however, researchers embarked on to suggest that theories of leadership should not only be about traits or behaviors but should also comprise situational moderators and contingency factors. In other words, what defines an effective leader or effective leadership behavior in one context may be completely different from what defines an effective leader in another setting (Fielder & Chemers, 1974). Mosley et al (1993) portray three factors that affect the choice of leadership styles. These are the managers' management philosophy, the followers maturity level, and the situation faced by managers. He explained more that these factors are interrelated. (See figure 2)

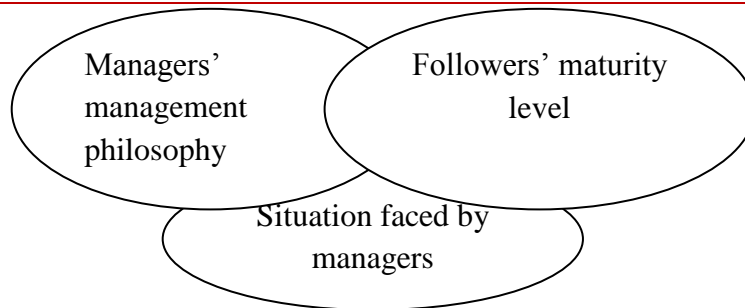


Figure2 Factors affecting the choice of leadership style

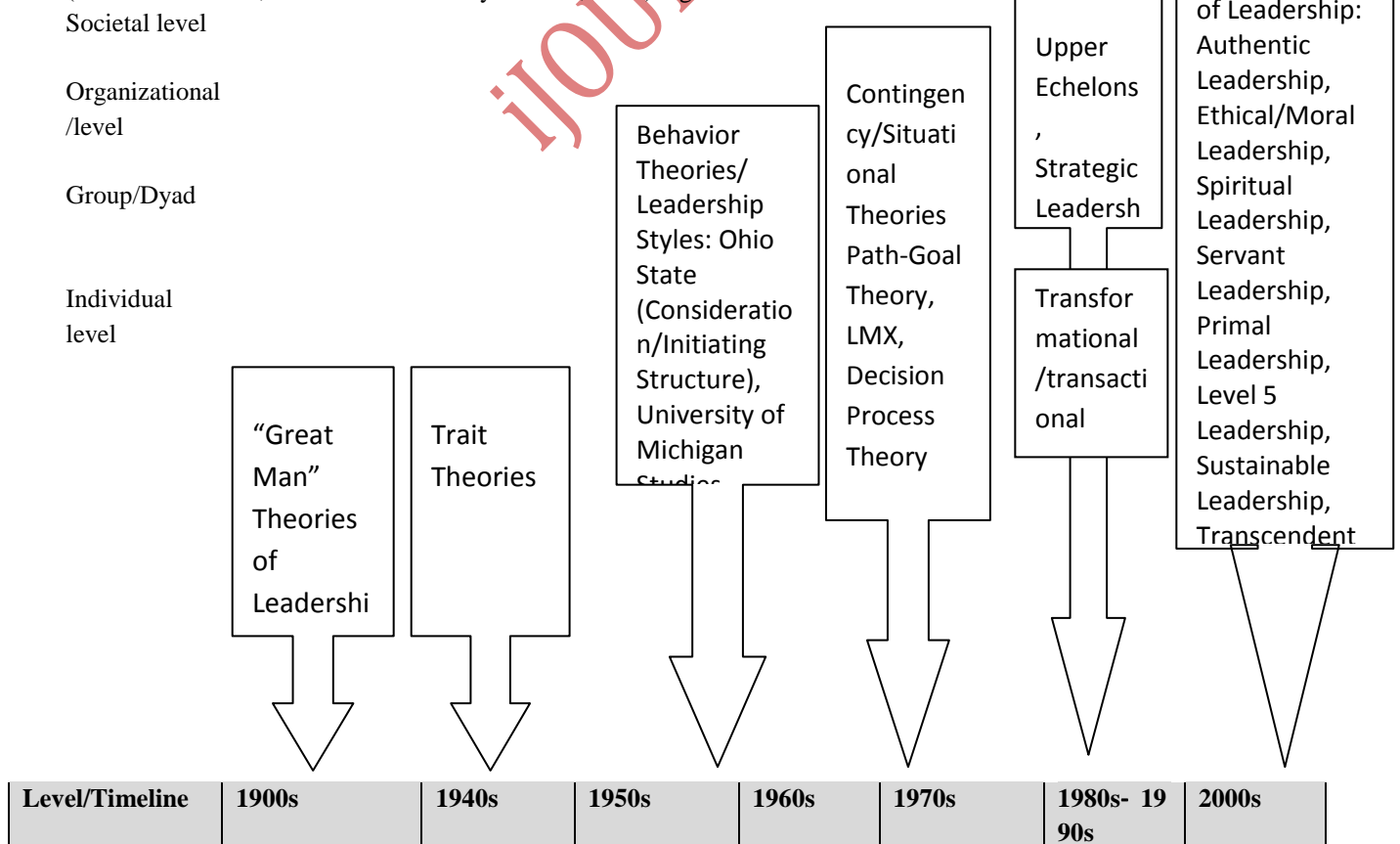
Similarly, Leader- Member Exchange (LMX) theory spotlights on the interaction between leaders and followers at the dyad level and puts that leaders tend to adjust their styles differently to each individual follower, creating in- groups and out- groups among their followers in the process (Graen& Cashman, 1975).

End of the 1970s, (Burns, 1978) and in organizational behavior (House, 1977) began to suggest that this full potential in leadership could be understood as transformational or charismatic leadership. Incorporating both the trait- based and process- based perspectives, together with a focus on the leader- follower relationship, transformational leaders were described as “inspirational, intellectually stimulating, challenging, visionary, development oriented and determined to maximize performance” (Avolio& Bass, 2004). This leadership style was seen as an extension of transactional leadership, which focuses more on the exchange between managers and associates through constructive and corrective behaviours, described as contingent reward, and management by exception, respectively (Avolio& Bass, 2002,).

The coming out of transformational/charismatic leadership theories has been described as a paradigm shift away from the so- called “traditional” or “classical” (trait- based, behavioural and situational) models of leadership (Hunt, 1999) to more current forms of leadership (Yammarino et al., 2005). Several researches and meta- analyses of charismatic and transformational leadership have confirmed positive relationships of these leadership processes with numerous organizational outcome variables (Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

Figure 3.Evolutionary Timeline and Levels of Analysis of Major Leadership Theories

(Daina D. Mazutis, Zoe Morris and KarynOnlsen, 2011)Page 7



2. Research cite (University of Gondar) and its research history

The University of Gondar, until 2003 known as the Gondar College of Medical Sciences, is the oldest medical school in Ethiopia. Established as the Public Health College in 1954, it is located in Gondar, the former capital of Ethiopia.

As of 2016, the University offers 56 undergraduate and 64 postgraduate and 15 doctoral programs. These are organized under the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, College of Business and Economics, College of Natural and Computational Sciences, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, and Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Faculty of Agriculture, and three schools (School of Law, School of Technology and School of Education).

Since its establishment the university works on research and community service aggressively. Research is at the core of the work at the University of Gondar endeavors and it is among prior transformation agenda. University of Gondar has longstanding tradition of undertaking problem based research activities as its one of pillars of the mission. Every year the university provides funding to encourage problem solving research projects selected based on technical merits and relevance to wider community.

All academic staffs are encouraged to conduct research in country wise in general and in the catchment area in particular. The experience of UOG in research makes one of the prominent institute in the country. Though it has countless experience in research and publication, it was very much fragmented when we see the paradigm shift that a research practice thought to give leadership skills to the researchers. Of course it is not the problem attributed only to University of Gondar. Most Universities gave grant to individual instructors which he/she supposed to struggle only with the given problem with no gaining or sharing experience from and to the other respectively. The knowledge, experience societal interaction and development of friendship inter and intra discipline in research work was neglected or ignored. To understand how leadership and leadership skills are developed at the institution level today, it is vital to understand the extraordinary changes that have affected higher education over the last few decades.

Illustrating this, Daina D. et al. (2011) have stated four major trends in North American universities have had a tremendous impact on the culture of academic institutions. These include:

- I. An increasing emphasis on collaborative and interdisciplinary work within universities and with external community or industry partners.
- II. A shift from transactional to transformational leadership within institutions.
- III. A swelling demand among graduate students for opportunities beyond specialized academic training.
- IV. A growing diversity among graduate students, which has not only changed the profile of graduate student leaders, but has also resulted in the emergence of non- traditional

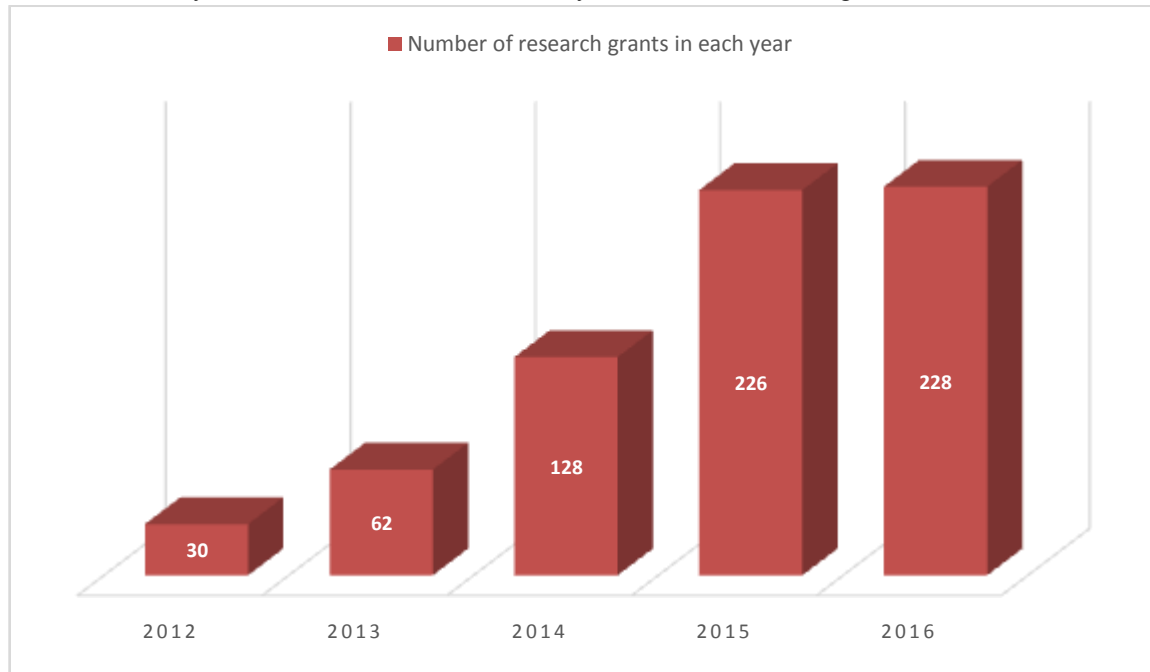
In this regard, University of Gondar has broken the silence and immersed into the current paradigm by giving research grant inter and intra disciplinary research works in 2016. As to the researcher what UoG decided on interdisciplinary research has two fold of merits in leadership perspective. Firstly, it demands the commitment, character and competence from the management body of the university i.e we call it the three “C” Framework of Leadership developed by Gandz et al. (2010) as cited in Daina D. et al (2011).

In relation to this Gandz et al. (2010) suggest that “good leaders will be committed to the good of the organization they serve and the people who follow them rather than solely to their own self- benefit”. The aspiration to lead must be distinguished from the mere desire to occupy a leadership position for its power, status or rewards. Commitment requires engagement in the mission and vision of the organization, going beyond personal preferences to what is in the best interests of the organization. It requires personal sacrifice, shared credit for achievement and a willingness to take responsibility for failures (Gandz et al., 2010). As such, commitment is the critical third domain of leadership. Thus, the aspiration, commitment to decide interdisciplinary research grant which is new trend to the academic staff and the university as well consumes the integrity, honesty and visionary leadership skill from the management side. And again the administration of the huge research budget demands the competence and commitment of all who participated in administration. Hence, the researcher believed that the management body well practiced what is stipulated in ETP article 3.8.4 Educational institutions will be autonomous in their internal administration and in the designing and implementing of education and training programmers, with an overall coordination and democratic leadership by boards or committees, consisting of members from the community (society), development and research institutions, teachers and students

Secondly, this new trend has a tremendous advantage to individual researchers who are working in teams. Instead of concentrating on individual achievements, researchers from different fields and specializations are partnering on research projects. Collaborative work offers new leadership opportunities and demands new communication and

teamwork skills from the researchers. Leaders are able and willing to “invest in building relationships” (Zimmerman 2008, p. 89), which are essential in an interdisciplinary environment. Komives, Lucas and McMahon (1998, p. 28) note that in a collaborative environment, empowerment at all levels is equally necessary for successful outcomes. In the last two decades, the importance and academic legitimacy of collaborative and interdisciplinary work has been recognized by the academy (Damrosch, 1995). Today, academic leaders must be able to demonstrate teamwork and communication capabilities beyond the confines of their own faculty or academic discipline (Daina D. et al, 2011).

As to the bird’s eye view we can look at UOG’s five years research trend in figure 4



NB. Here our focus is not investigating the number of researches’ and researchers in the above graph. In the year 2016 the researcher have been granting research budget from different departments for a single research which was an interdisciplinary we call it “Mega Research.” It is not only the amount of money granted, but also the number of individuals work together in a single project makes the project mega. Of course megaprojects are large-scale, complex ventures that typically cost US\$1 billion or more, take many years to develop and build, involve multiple public and private stakeholders, are transformational, and impact millions of people Hirschman (1995). In this calculation however, UoGrsearch grant is not mega project but the leadership experience gained in the communication of the given research work forced us to call it megaproject. In this regard, (Aaltonen&Kujala, 2010), megaprojects, therefore, are not just magnified versions of smaller projects. Megaprojects are a completely different breed of project in terms of their level of aspiration, lead times, complexity, and stakeholder involvement. Consequently, they are also a very different type of project to manage.

3. Conclusion

Mega research participants can demonstrate leadership skills by taking an active role in interdisciplinary research, workshops, and teaching; by working with an interdisciplinary team (e.g., lab groups, reading groups), or by demonstrating knowledge outside their own discipline (e.g., publication or conference presentations). The ability to communicate within an interdisciplinary audience is equally important across university boundaries. In fact, it is now considered essential expertise in today’s global environment (Hirshman& Freeman, 2011; Pitt, 2008).

By including an assessment of an individual’s character strengths and measures that gauge one’s commitment to the hard work of leadership, true leadership potential can be revealed. Again the management body who administrated this huge research budget has improved their wider leadership skill..

4. Recommendation

1. Besides allotment of budgets to researchers, the top managements should follow its practicality. Some who are participating in mega research are running only for the decision of money they granted. Therefore appropriate

leadership skill from top management of the university is need how the money is spent and evaluation mechanism should have to develop like publication of the mega research and presenting the research in annual research national conference.

2. Since the main aim of the mega research grant is to develop the leadership skill of each individual who are taking part, the university need to devise a means so as to participate some students with respected instructors.
3. Research and publication Directorate (RPD) has to take responsibility to initiate, facilitate, and manage research endeavors and disseminate outputs. The directorate office manages all research and publication activities in collaboration with research centers, colleges, institutes and academic units

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