

# The Characteristics of University Principal Leadership and the Path of Improvement—Based on Sergiovanni's "Five Forces Model" Leadership Theory

Yue Yang\*

*School of Public Policy and Management, Nanchang University, Nanchang, Jiangxi, 330036, China*  
*\*Corresponding author: jxcusuwy@163.com*

**Abstract:** *The research context of leadership, which is subservient to the leadership of the university principal, is crucial to the advancement of higher education and the innovation of universities. In this study, the function of the university principal and the elements of his or her leadership are defined in terms of what leadership entails. The "Five Forces Model" leadership theory, developed by Thomas J. Sergiovanni, is then used to assess the characteristics of the excellence university principal as well as the growth of the principal's leadership. To improve the leadership of the university principal, the five dimensions of educational leadership, interpersonal leadership, technical leadership, cultural leadership, and symbolic leadership are examined in this study.*

**Keywords:** *university principal; principal leadership; instructional leadership; five forces model*

## 1. Introduction

Beginning in the 1950s, corporate leadership theories, such as the leadership behavior theory, leadership trait theory, and transformational leadership theory, had a significant impact on academic study on principal leadership. Different academics' interpretations of the examination of key leadership attributes and differences in model settings and research methodologies are due to the shifting theoretical research background. In recent years, the concept of principal leadership and the leadership role of principals in school development have drawn more and more scholarly attentions.

## 2. University Principal Leadership

There is a strong link between the leadership of university principal and the development of the university and student learning, and it has an impact on the quality of teaching and learning, the general competence of faculty, and teaching resources, especially in the areas of faculty professional development and university campus development.

### 2.1. Leadership and Principal Leadership

Leadership is a complex combination of art and science. Leadership is the sum of the characteristics of the skills required to assume a specific role as an effective influence. Specifically, it involves the sum of a leader's personal qualities, practical experience, mindset, and the psychological characteristics and behavioral processes of the art of leadership, independent of the actual position the leader holds in the organization. Principal leadership entails more than just the principal's leadership and management activities, it also includes professional development, motivation, and a range of additional situations. Thus, principal leadership refers to a principal's ability to influence others. Principal leadership can be defined as the comprehensive ability to influence and lead a group to achieve a common goal, specifically the principal's ability to influence the entire school community and other stakeholders in the process of setting, implementing, and achieving school goals. The principal's ability to influence the school and its members to continually move toward innovation and to coordinate the process of relationships among subjects is the realization of his or her leadership.<sup>[1]</sup> Specifically, principal leadership involves external prescriptiveness and self-endogenousness. External prescriptiveness refers to the developmental process of principal leadership education, including the selection, training, evaluation, and career planning of

principal. Self-regulation refers to the ability of principal to develop and nurture themselves in an environment shaped by the wisdom of their teams.

## ***2.2. Role of the University Principal***

In terms of curriculum and instructional design, resource management, and decision-making, China has given schools a tremendous level of freedom. The implementation of school autonomy requires leadership, especially the leadership of the principal. In education, it is widely accepted that "an excellence principal is a good school". Therefore, there can never be an excellence principal without effective principal leadership. The university principal is the highest person in charge of administration, representing the university externally and presiding over the university's overall affairs internally, and is appointed or delegated by educational administrative departments at all levels, relevant school sponsoring bodies, or individuals, or elected through specific procedures. In the university's pursuit of greatness, the principal is a crucial player. The principal also contributes significantly to the growth of students and the encouragement of innovation inside the institution. Higher demands are placed on the leadership of the university principal because university schools are made up of multiple departments joined together, and the size and membership of the organization is much larger than in secondary and elementary school. This makes it more important for the university principal to help the members of the school establish the proper values and motivate them to work and learn, as well as to give them the opportunity to grow and find fulfillment in the university. The university principal is both a manager and a leader, however in the study of the university principal's leadership, the focus is primarily on the role of a leader rather than on the overlap between "leadership" and "management".

## **3. The Explanatory Framework of Sergiovanni's "Five Forces Model" Leadership Theory**

The leadership of a university principal can be seen as a combination of forces, and the "Five Forces Model" leadership theory of the American educational administrator Thomas J. Sergiovanni's summarizes the characteristics of excellence principal leadership in a comprehensive and detailed manner. Therefore, this theory is used as a perspective for the study of the characteristics of university principal's leadership and the process of shaping them.

### ***3.1. Characteristics of University Principal Leadership***

The technical, interpersonal, educational, symbolic, and cultural components of the "Five Forces Model" leadership theory collectively make up the characteristics of a superb senior leader. The role metaphors, meanings, and effects of each of these five dimensions are elaborated on in the sections that follow. The first aspect is educational leadership. It uses the metaphor of a clinical practitioner for its role. These leaders have a plethora of knowledge and are highly excellent educators. They are able to identify educational issues and offer suggestions for supervision and assessment through the creation of instructional programs. The second aspect is interpersonal leadership. Its metaphorical job is that of a social engineer. These leaders are more adept at handling conflict and have great interpersonal and group cohesion skills. Building and maintaining morale supports corporate growth and creativity. The third aspect is technical leadership. Its metaphorical role is that of a management engineer. Leaders who possess this leadership quality have excellent time management abilities as well as the capacity to handle emergencies by planning, organizing, and coordinating in a way that captures strategy to maximize the efficacy of decisions. The fourth aspect of leadership is cultural leadership. Its metaphorical role is that of a senior pastor. Leaders in this area have a high level of ideological awareness, mastery of both strict collective sexual ideals and loose structural systems, and play a critical role in promoting the school's goal and commenting on campus culture. The fifth aspect is symbolic leadership. Its role metaphor is that of a leader. Leaders who possess this leadership focus on establishing goals and setting examples, emphasize displaying and strengthening symbolic systems, and enhance their symbolic power by touring the school and directing ceremonies.

Specifically, technical leadership and interpersonal leadership are essential competencies for excellence university principal leadership, representing the university principal's ability to organize, to respond and manage in times of crisis, and to be open and honest in relationships and build a cohesive team through effective communication. Educational leadership, symbolic leadership, and cultural leadership are leadership competencies that add unique value to the development of the university. In particular, symbolic leadership and cultural leadership help facilitate the formation of a new cultural value system and effectively contribute to deep change in the university by setting long-term strategic

development goals for the university and strengthening shared cultural values and cultural consensus among staff and students.<sup>[2]</sup>

### ***3.2. Shaping the Leadership of University Principal***

Describe the process of implementing principal leadership, which includes creating goals, supporting human development, restructuring the organization, administering the instructional program, and fostering collaboration. The leadership development process is divided into five stages. The first step is to set goals, identify a shared vision and objectives for the group, set and constantly raise the bar, and create development plans based on various scenarios. A core set of values should also be articulated by the leaders. The second step is to encourage human growth by providing individuals with support and care, providing feedback on competences, and gradually building value-oriented activities. The third step is to redesign the organization to not only create a safe and secure environment, but also to encourage collaborative decision-making, teamwork, and distributed leadership, and to build a campus culture that is highly engageable. The fourth step is to administer the instructional program by hiring suitable employees for the campus and providing sufficient resources, suggesting efficient teaching methods to teachers, and providing incentives or discipline for teachers to manage teaching projects. The fifth step is to establish solid working connections with staff members on campus and actively participate in professional organizations outside of school in order to construct a professional network of relationships that belong to the leader.

## **4. The Path to Improve the Leadership of University Principal Under the "Five Forces Model" Leadership Theory**

The path of leadership improvement for university principal is explored, and the path is elaborated in the order of educational leadership, interpersonal leadership, technical leadership, cultural leadership, and symbolic leadership through a point-to-point approach. The path is based on the leadership characteristics and leadership model contained in the "Five Power Model" leadership theory.

### ***4.1. Educational Leadership: Enhancing Knowledge Base, General Competence and Moral Character***

The university principal is the organizer and administrator of university operations as the core of directing university development. In the current context of knowledge diversification, university principal should focus on theoretical knowledge learning, continuously update their knowledge reserves, and optimize their administrative capabilities and strategies in order to meet the requirements of cultivating a high-quality and highly efficient faculty. First of all, university principal should build the concept of lifelong learning, increase their self-learning ability, and continuously enrich and expand their expertise through the ongoing enrichment and improvement of theoretical materials of principal leadership. As a result, the university principal should see principal leadership as a learning objective and implement scientific learning planning to attain the learning goal step by step.<sup>[3]</sup> Secondly, university principal should constantly improve their leadership techniques. The university principal should have a passion for education and a dedication to leading with innovation and consideration as a leader of educators. As a result, improving the principal's leadership merely through learning and reserving theoretical knowledge is ineffective. Instead, innovation at the practical level of leadership is required. Finally, the university principal should constantly develop and mold ethical leadership. Long-term advancement of the university will be aided by the development of moral convictions and ideals, the use of moral imagination in complicated situations, and the transformation and innovation of the organization in response to current issues.<sup>[4]</sup>

### ***4.2. Interpersonal Leadership: Maintaining Good Interpersonal Relationships and Promoting Members' Development***

First, the university principal should build good interpersonal relationships with the members of the university and motivate them. In terms of faculty development, it is important to mobilize the enthusiasm and initiative of the faculty. Create top-notch discipline construction, focus on forming academic research teams, and train research-oriented teachers. With a full understanding of the development needs of the faculty, the university should stimulate the intrinsic needs of the faculty in their careers and provide them with the necessary resources to ensure their efficient teaching quality.<sup>[5]</sup> In terms of students' development, university principal should pay attention to students' physical and mental health, and improve students'

quality through rich thematic educational activities and competitions. Secondly, university principal should actively establish a long-term communication mechanism. Second, the university principal should make a concerted effort to create a long-term communication system. They should uphold the notion of "people-oriented", foster interpersonal leadership that is cooperation-oriented, and create an effective and streamlined operating system at the organizational level. The principal should work with all university departments to resolve problems within the organization and ensure harmonious interpersonal relationships in addition to being accountable to the higher education department in terms of educational practice and innovation.

#### ***4.3. Technical Leadership: Strengthening Systems and Coordinating Organizational Management***

First of all, the system is the basis to ensure the orderly development of the work of the university. Institutional innovation is an important measure to deepen the connotation of the university, improve the level of school operation and promote the development of university characteristics. For the institutional arrangement of university management, it should adhere to the concept of people-oriented, with institutional norms as the guarantee and overall design as the logic, coordinate the interests among multiple subjects, and guide and motivate the whole university to achieve the common vision of the university. As a result, the university principal should promote the characteristic development of the university through institutional innovation, such as developing a teacher observer system and a competitive recruitment system for middle-level cadres to promote the innovative development of the university. Secondly, the principal of the university should strengthen the awareness of system management, establish a scientific supervision and assessment mechanism, improve and perfect the rules and regulations of the university, use the system to regulate the behavior of teachers, students and staff, make the school according to law and reason, so that teachers, students and staff can have rules and regulations to follow, and can consciously use discipline and system to restrain their own behavior. Finally, on the basis of the institutional guarantee, the principal of the university should plan, organize and coordinate to grasp the strategy to maximize the effectiveness of decision-making. Principal should also make full use of the human, material and financial resources available to him to create a favorable external and internal environment for the university and to create a harmonious and consistent atmosphere. At the same time, the principal can actively promote communication and collaboration between departments to ensure that the organization's internal decision-making, communication, motivation, hiring, and change processes run smoothly.

#### ***4.4. Cultural Leadership: Strengthening School Spirit and Cultivating Campus Culture***

True education is education with cultural development as its soul. The development of university needs the soft power of campus culture as support, among which university values are the core of campus culture, penetrating into the daily routine of university campus and playing a subtle role. First of all, as the builder and leader of campus culture, the university principal should lead the construction of campus culture and also establish the internal culture of the organization, guide the staff's excavation of campus values, make the university characteristics based on cultural roots, and effectively stimulate the staff's internal drive and enthusiasm for work. Second, the development of campus culture needs to be strengthened in order to establish a distinctive campus culture and foster cultural rivalry. Students' cultural literacy will be improved, along with their knowledge of the institution's history, their feeling of identity, and their sense of belonging to the university campus, through the organization of campus cultural activities, the promotion of the university motto, and campus festivities. In other words, the university's principal should begin by fostering an organizational culture of identification, encouraging the development of a campus culture, and fostering more cohesion among the university's teachers, staff, and students.<sup>[6]</sup>

#### ***4.5. Symbolic Leadership: Innovating School Philosophy and Clarifying Future Development Goals***

On the one hand, scientific and reasonable development goals are the direction of university development, a source of motivation to unite people, and a concentrated expression of the university principal's understanding of education and educational thinking. Therefore, it is especially important to put forward goals and ideas that are in line with the actual development of the university, realistic, with distinctive characteristics and sustainable development. At the same time, the formulation of goals should not only be based on the present, but also focus on the future. The establishment of short-term goals, milestones, and long-term development goals, so that scientific and reasonable development goals lead the work of teachers, students' learning, and school work, so that the school and the entire heart think in

one place, to make efforts to achieve the common ideal, and to make continuous efforts. The university philosophy, on the other hand, should be in step with the evolution of the times and continual innovation. Take advantage of the information dividend by combining the Internet and intelligent information technology with the improvement of the principal's leadership. In keeping with the educational development trend and the professionalization of university school management, the emphasis is on the transformation of information technology leadership of university principal in the context of new media technology.<sup>[7]</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the excellence university principal is developed through a process that involves the contact, reciprocity, and continual development of many participants, a process that is influenced by their environment as well as the environment in which they live. The leadership development and enhancement of university principal is a dynamic process. While managing schools in a more scientific and effective way, university principal also need to have a certain degree of humanism and maintain the warmth of cultural construction in the process of leadership. Taking the "Five Forces Model" leadership theory proposed by Thomas J. Sergiovanni as the starting point, this study is dedicated to exploring the path of cultivating and improving the leadership of university principal, enhancing the management capacity of university campuses, and further improving the quality of higher education in China, taking into account the direction and philosophy of higher education development in China.

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