

# Narrative Analysis Regarding Vision of Executive Leadership at University Level

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## Abstract

Vision is one of the necessary dimensions of executive leadership which provides a direction for future. This study investigated the difference in the vision that is narrated by four executive leaders of old established universities of the region. Narrative research method was selected in which cross case comparison design was followed. Population of the study was all the Vice Chancellors of Public sector universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Four Vice Chancellors of old established Universities were taken as sample of the study. Narrative story was interviewed in the form of structured questions, transcript and tabulated with interpretation. For trustworthiness of study, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, peer review and member checking was the part of study. There was significant difference among the views of four executive leaders, having different situation, backgrounds and it affected the University progress. Leadership is inborn but without proper situation analysis and resources, it can't be successful.

**Keywords:** Executive leader, Leadership, Vision, University

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Vision as Dimension

Developing a vision needs commitment for major change from many diverse stakeholders. Judgment, analytical ability, intuition and creativity play important role to synthesize the vision for an organization. (Tichy & Devenna, 1986)

The main steps for formulating a vision:

- Involvement of key stakeholders.
- Identification of strategic objectives with wide range.
- Identification of core elements already present in the basic ideology.
- Linkage of vision with core elements.
- Creditability of the vision is evaluated.
- Continuous assessment and refinement of vision.

Key stakeholders of the University are administration, faculty, students, parents, investors, joint venture of partners and supporting staff etc. Strategic objectives give insight about values and ideals. The first step is to select such objectives of specific performance which are challenging and relevant to the mission of the organization. Then importance of objectives will be discussed and reason to give importance to various objectives. When you feel that there should be drastic change, some worthy elements of the basic ideology may be preserved. Those ideas and values which are relevant for foreseeable future of the organization will be continued.

Vision is more credible if the core competence of the organization and the skills of its members are relevant for these activities designed. The formulation of a vision is a continuous, dynamic process, interactive, in linear form i.e. from vision to action strategy. A detail study of strategy may provide new ideas for a new vision.

### 1.2 Perspectives of Leadership regarding Vision

According to Bennis & Nanus (1985) Leadership Model, Leader needs a comprehensible, persuasive, realistic and attractive vision for the future of the organization. Then for shaping the vision, leader directs co-workers to follow new principles and a new identity which is shared by organization. Trust is inculcated and through positive self-regard, creative deployment of self is applied. Leader must know his strong and weak points and concentrate on his strong point, not his weaknesses. It creates self-confidence and positive outlook among his followers and inculcates a learning attitude within his organization.

According to Kouzes & Posner (2002), first, leader needs to know the way to convince and express his voice or vision to his followers, colleagues, and superiors through his own behaviors and verbal communication. Second, leader inspires and needs to formulate a shared vision that motivates his co-workers to take action or perform with respect to the vision. With inspired and joint vision, co-workers and colleagues are self-motivated to achieve something that challenges the status quo. Third, leader needs to try the new course of action which is innovative, experimental and to take risks to improve their organization. Fourth, leader needs to enable others to act with develop mutual trust, collaboration, cooperation and emphasizing team work. Fifth, leader needs to encourage the heart by support, praising, recognition and appreciation is practical celebrated when some good work is done by others.

### 1.3 Leader as a Social Architect

For vision, mission, strategy and the execution, leader is responsible for the relationship to choices the external environment.

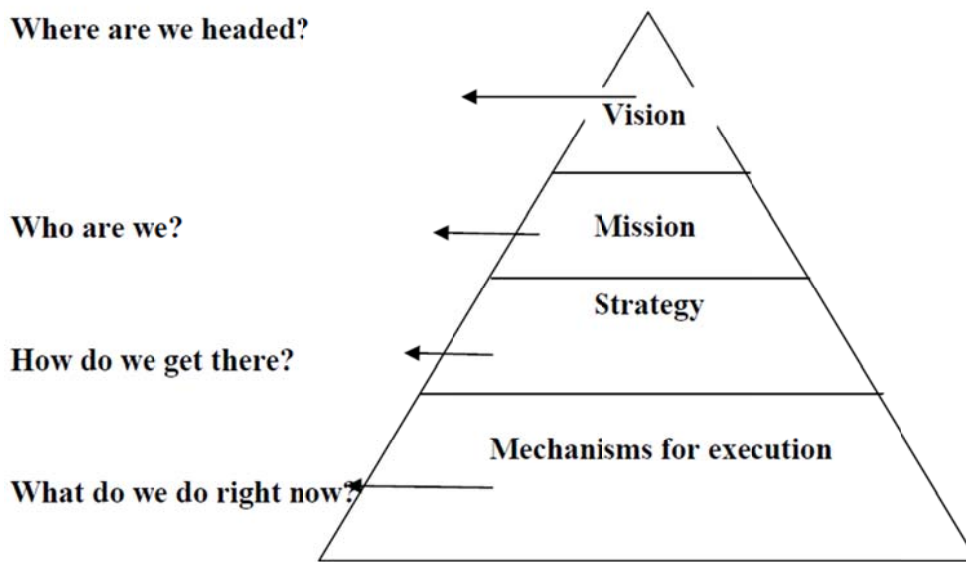


Figure 1. The Domain of the Strategic Leadership

Source: Richard L. Daft, Leadership, 5th Edition, Cengage, Learning. (2014)

Vision is an ambitious view of the future which involves everyone and be realistic to be achieved. Strong, inspiring visions have been associated with higher organizational performance and greater employee motivation and satisfaction.

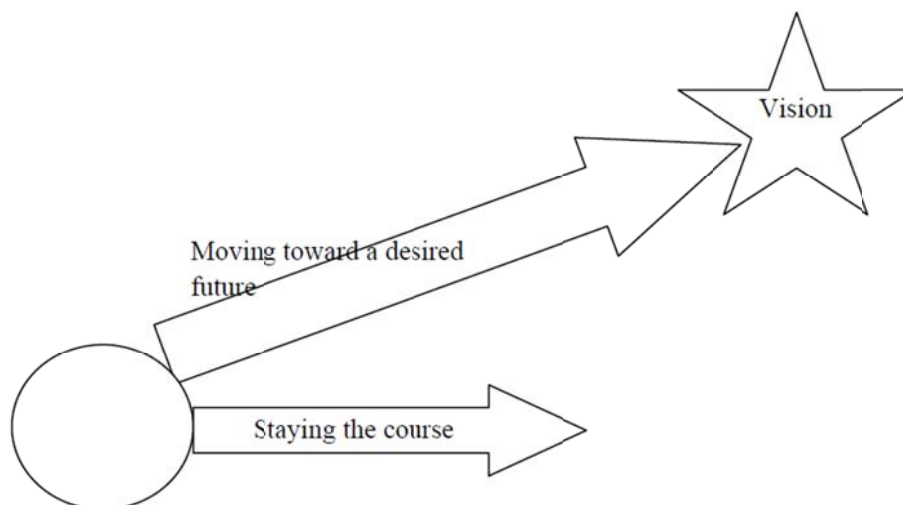


Figure 2. The Nature of the Vision

Source: William D. Hitt, *The Leader-Manager: Guidelines for Action* (Columbus, OH: Battelle Press, 1988).

Effective vision provides a link between today and tomorrow serve to energize and motivate employees toward the future, provides meaning for people work and set a standard of excellence and integrity in the organization.

#### 1.4 Current Study

Basically it is a narrative study regarding vision of executive leadership at old established universities of the region.

University1 was established in 1950 as a first public research university located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. HEC ranked it as 8th best University in 2016. VC1 was the current Vice Chancellor since January, 2013 to 2017. He has done PhD in Analytical Chemistry from University College Cork, Ireland in 1982 followed by three year Post Doctoral studies from University College Dublin, Ireland.

University2 was the second public research university established in 1974 located in KP, Pakistan. VC2 was a physician, previously worked as Principal of Medical College and selected as Vice Chancellor at University2, by a search committee but now resigned after completing about one and a half year service due to personal reasons.

University3 was the first public research university for the development of science and engineering, established in 1980 at KP, Pakistan. VC3 is a civil engineer and did MS from Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok, Thailand. He remained Provincial Minister for Education and Information and served as VC for 12 years.

University4 was initiated at 1913 as first higher education institute but it was upgraded in 2008 as University. VC4 started his career as lecturer in Economics. He remained Provost and Registrar at University1 and remained VC in University2. He is considered as first VC as Institute is upgraded to University. He served university for approximately two and half years.

Keeping in view the above points, the researcher is interested to narrate the vision of these four executive leaders and their impact on their respective universities. Narrative study is new concept emerged in 1990 and it is still developing. Till now only 5% work has been specified on executive leadership among the total literature on leadership in the world. My work is novel and innovative in this regard that no one worked on topic in Pakistan. Data was collected by structured interview questions were asked to elicit their point of view regarding vision. At the end, after getting conclusions, suggestions were given and paved way to further conduct research in different situations or contexts.

#### 1.5 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To explore the narrative view of executive leaders of old established universities at KP.
- To compare the vision of executive leaders of old established universities of KP in narrative form.
- To suggest recommendations for betterment.

### 1.6 Research Questions

The qualitative study was guided by following research questions:

- What do we explore in the narrative view of executive leaders of old established universities of KP?
- Is there any difference in the views of executive leaders regarding vision in old established universities?

## 2. Method

Narrative research method was used to follow cross case comparison design.

### 2.1 Participants

Vice Chancellors, VC1, VC2, VC3 and VC4 of old established Universities of KP, Pakistan.

### 2.2 Procedure

There were nineteen public sector universities in KP, Pakistan in which fifteen VCs were working on regular basis. This narrative study had been delimited to only four VCs of old established Universities of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa among seven selected VCs for intensive study. Sample size is justified from case study as 3-5 participants (Creswell, 2002).

Structured interview questions were coded in vision theme. It was recorded, transcript in narrated form.

As narrative study is qualitative in nature that is why for trustworthiness of study, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, peer review and member checking was the part of study.

Data was collected personally from the above mentioned executive leaders. Data was interpreted in form of matrix.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

On the basis of the objective of the study, the collected data was analyzed by using transcript in narrative form and by drawing matrix to interpret vision of four leaders at university level.

Narrative views of four VCs regarding Mentor,

"There are many personalities who have contributed in shaping my life and it will not be fair if it is attributed to one person." (VC1)

As VC2 said, "Quaid -e-Azam (father of the nation), is my mentor because he was man of principle, disciplined, spent his life for justice, not for sake of money."

"Principal, Cadet College was my mentor because of his principles, ethics, moral values and always preaching high values." (VC3)

"Two personalities within my family were my mentor. My Grand -father Dr. Khan because my father was telling his stories and second one is A. A. Khan, being Educationist and Academician." (VC4)

Further they expressed their views as follows,

"These are of little importance from the practical point of view as our priorities changes and there is no persistence in our policies. However from my point of view, core values are important. Leader should possess integrity and ownership. Selflessness and commitment to their duties are the biggest challenges faced by leaders today. Ego and personal interest is the mistake, leaders make more frequently and derail their careers. Leaders are in born and they can't be created but resources can help to polish and groom them. My advice for upcoming leader is that he should be honest and truthful. Learning is continuous process, by interaction, with leaders of same cadre and reading can also help to grow and develop as a leader." (VC1)

"These qualities i.e. Vision, mission and core values are interlinked. Every leader should be Sadiq-wa-Ameen. Practicing justice is the biggest challenge facing leaders today. One mistake, leaders making more frequently is 'not doing justice'. Behavior of selfishness and self-centeredness derails more leaders' careers. Leaders grooming starts at home, school, from personal experiences through environment. My advice for future leader will be to practice justice and abide by law. For growth and development of a leader, he must be honest to myself and Allah Almighty." (VC2)

"Vision is more important to an organization. Integrity is the one characteristic that every leader should possess. The biggest challenge faced today by leaders is that there is dissolution, disenfranchise and core values of society has been changed and leader feel difficult to uplift the society. Leaders do mistake or derail in their career when they make wrong judgment about the close people and laid down by their own close people. For example: Julius Caesar was killed by his own parliamentarian, Brutus. Leader is in born, deliberate and stand on Pedestal

to show high values. My advice for future leader will be that he first earns the trust of people and then you lead. You can grow and develop a leader by giving opportunities to the people." (VC3)

"Vision, mission and core values, all three are important and valuable. Leader should be honesty and truthfulness. Leaders, facing challenge today is that there is no patience and tolerance to accept others. When leaders feel other inferior, it is their biggest mistake. Proudness derails more leaders' careers. Self-respect and respect for others make a person a better leader. My advice for future leader is be honest in dealing and whatever he say, he should act upon it. For growth and development as a leader, create trust in others that people respect you. Always consider that you are learning all the time." (VC4)

The narrative view of four executive leaders of old established universities are compared qualitatively. There were a few similarities as well as differences in opinion with reference to their difference in situation.

Success of Institute highly depends on the vision and direction given by executive leader. These leaders have positive approach, they believe in integrity, truthfulness and in born leadership.

VC2 believed that Justice should be practiced and injustice was considered as the main cause of financial crisis faced by University2. Being Army officer, he has great love with nation and father of the nation. He believes that selfishness, grouping, over employment on political basis, over expenditure on POL charges are the causes of financial crisis. Secondly, the leader had no previous experience to work in research based organization. Funding was required but he couldn't get it instead he was ordered to cut down illegal over-employment. His SOPs were appreciated by the higher authority but he couldn't implement it, as he resigned due to personal reasons.

VC1 believed in ownership, honesty, straight forwardness and main focus of concern on research. He has plenty of publications at his credit and he abolished evening shift with the aim that teachers should concentrate and give more time to research. He encouraged the faculty to visit, observe and bring new creative ideas. He believed in challenging the status quo for further improvement. His academic and financial reforms are his biggest success. According to him, "The difficult part being leader is implementation of decision across the board uniformly" (VC1). For KP universities, HEC provides funding annually which is lump sum amount on the basis of enrolment of students and it doesn't fulfill the requirements. As new universities established in every division, enrolment of students decreased/ distributed. VC1 put his great effort to bring funds from foreign countries and donor agencies which enhanced the research capabilities of faculty as well as students. Even students get the internship opportunity in University under various projects. Exchange of foreign faculty enhanced the academic skills. Due to his more emphasis on research, HEC ranked University1 at 8th best university in Pakistan and No. 1 at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As he said at the end, "The most important decision was 'No compromise on academic quality'. I saved university from financial disaster."(VC1)

VC3 believed in high values, earning trust and giving opportunities to grow. Due to his strategic planning, he said, "This institute is earning 20 billion profits, enrolment goes from 700 to 7000. There were only 15 PhDs and now 150 PhDs in which 83 PhDs studied from abroad. Now there are 6 campuses, 16 departments. There is strong linkage with Industry and also take part in policy formulation. UET is on 5th ranking position among all Pakistan universities." (VC3)

VC4 believed in gaining commitment and cohesion with praise and discussing issues in meeting in democratic way. He brought funds for infra-structure, academic block and regularized academic life.

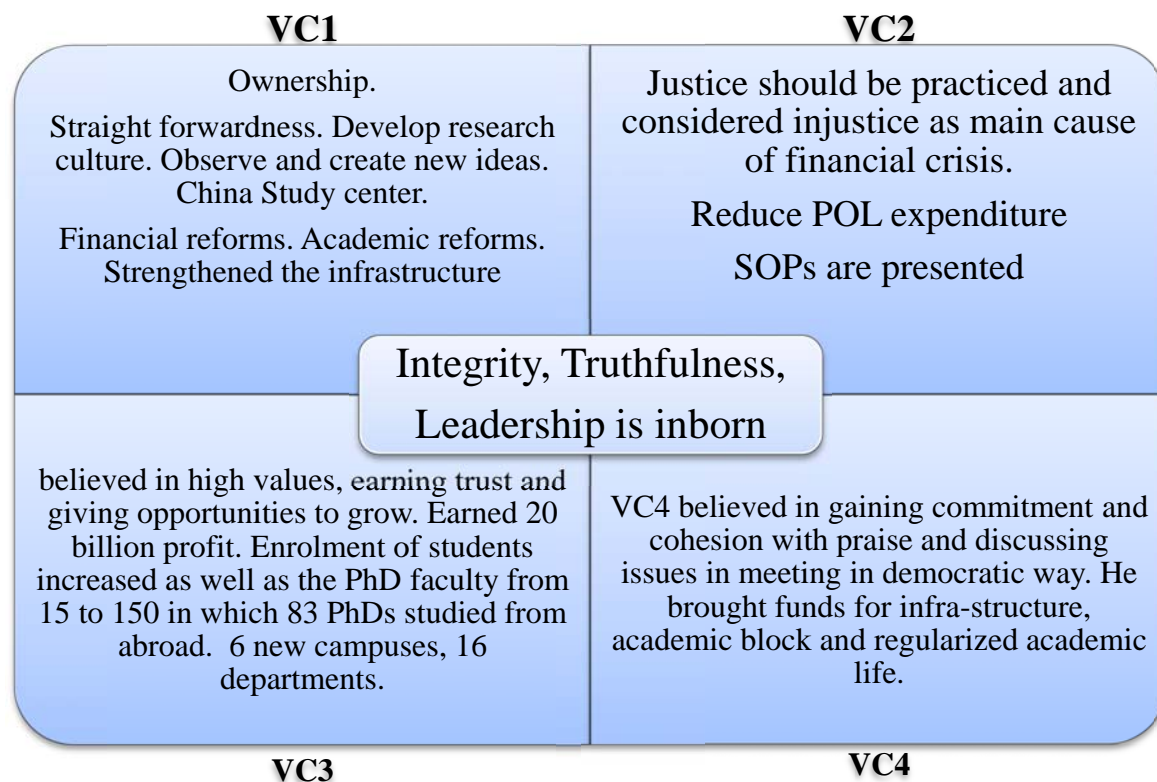


Figure 3. Narrative view of Executive Leaders

According to Larwood, L. (et al.) (1995), chief executives are clustered in three groups to study the content and structure of organizational vision and found that is important to be formulated, implemented and have innovation realism.

O'Connell, D. (et al.) (2010) mentioned vision has great impact on individuals, groups and organization.

Mayfield, J. (et al.) (2015) emphasized that top leaders can construct and transmit strategic vision communication and related values messages to improve organizational performance.

In the above citations, vision of top leader and organization is emphasized for the better performance of the organization and vision should be communicated uniformly across the broad.

#### 4. Conclusions

From the analysis and interpretation, it is concluded that:

- There is a few things common as well as there is difference in views regarding vision of three executive leaders at old established university level in narration.
- There are different ways of influencing the people and high-ups to save their respective universities from financial crisis.
- There is difference of priorities for improvement in university according to their personal experiences and background.

#### 5. Recommendations

On the basis of the conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

- Communication regarding vision and motivating decisions from executive leader to co-workers may be transmitted across the board uniformly for implementation accordingly. Frequent meetings with co-workers can play vital role.
- Political influence may help to bring funds for University progress and funds should be used in enhancing quality of research. It is only possible if leader has vision and develop plan with discussion/ frequent meetings with co-workers as well as high-ups.

- Executive Leaders having research and university experience at various cadre within any university can understand the problems and make strategic decisions for improvement at university level.
- Further researches can be conducted in different situations and contexts to compare the results.

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