

## UNVEILING THE BRILLIANCE: EXPLORING THE REFLECTIVE THINKING OF ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

In the complex and rapidly evolving landscape of higher education, the role of academic administrators has become increasingly demanding. Academic administrators are tasked with making critical decisions that impact various stakeholders, including faculty, students, and the institution as a whole. To navigate these challenges successfully, it is paramount for academic administrators to possess strong reflective thinking. The objectives of this research are to explore the engagement of academic administrators in reflective thinking in higher education institutions and to find out the experiences of academic administrators regarding reflective thinking while performing their duties in higher education institutions. Qualitative research design was used to achieve the objectives of the study. The subjects of the study consist of Academic Administrators working in the 26 Universities (17 public and 9 private) of Islamabad. Data has been collected from 13 academic administrators with the help of semi structured interviews. Thematic analysis was done to identify recurring themes and patterns which helps in enhancing the richness of the qualitative findings. The themes of open-mindedness, self-awareness, critical thinking, continuous learning, curiosity, meta-cognition, decision-making, and problem-solving as discussed by academic administrators underscore the multifaceted nature of leadership in higher education. Open-mindedness enhances institutional adaptability and innovation, while self-awareness boosts leadership capabilities and fosters a reflective academic culture. Critical thinking is crucial for informed decision-making and addressing educational challenges effectively. Continuous learning and curiosity are pivotal for personal and institutional growth, ensuring that educational leaders and their organizations remain dynamic and responsive to changes. Meta-cognition and personal beliefs influence how decisions align with institutional values, emphasizing the need for leaders to be self-aware and reflective. Strategic and inclusive decision-making practices are vital for achieving educational objectives, and adept problem-solving is essential for navigating the complexities of the educational landscape. Together, these themes highlight the interconnectedness of personal development and professional efficacy in fostering successful educational environments.

Keyword: Reflective Thinking, Academic Administrators, Higher Education.

### INTRODUCTION

Reflective thinking is all about understanding a situation, event, or piece of information so you can better solve the problem. It's about making claims, solving problems, making assumptions, thinking, and testing. The process of reflective thinking involves the individual's examination and assessment of their past and present life experiences, self-reflection, and consideration of potential solutions to

the issues (Özdemir, 2018). Reflective thinking is a process of meaning-making that enables a person to progress from one experience to another with a better understanding of how it interacts with and relates to other practices and ideas (Rani, 2022). Reflective thinking involves deep thinking processes, self-discovery and problem-solving (Elmalı & Kıyıcı, 2018). Reflective thinking helps to build strength

while looking for a solution to the problems (Kholid et al., 2020).

Dewey first introduced the concept of reflective thinking and its implications for teaching in his book "How We Think" (1933). He argued that nothing stays the same, and that if you are not reflective, you cannot change with them. To be effective, you must be open-minded, full-willing, and responsible (Kotzee, 2018). Open-mindedness means being able to look at problems from different perspectives and new angles. Full willingness is when you are fully engaged with a concept. Responsibility is taking responsibility for your actions (Priest, 2021).

In the dynamic environment of higher education, academic administrators frequently encounter complex problems that require careful analysis and innovative solutions. Reflective thinking equips administrators with the capacity to consider multiple perspectives, identify patterns, and discern underlying causes of issues. By engaging in critical reflection, they can uncover new insights, challenge existing assumptions, and explore alternative approaches to problem-solving. This iterative process not only enables better decision-making but also contributes to the continuous improvement of administrative processes within the institution. The ability to think reflectively empowers academic administrators to communicate and collaborate effectively with various stakeholders. By engaging in self-reflection, administrators become more aware of their communication styles, biases, and potential blind spots. This awareness allows them to adapt their communication strategies to cater to different individuals and situations. Furthermore, reflective thinking fosters empathy and understanding, enabling administrators to establish meaningful connections with faculty, staff, and students. This empathetic approach, combined with effective communication, helps build trust, enhance collaboration, and promote a positive institutional culture.

Teachers who possess a strong level of preparedness for learning and reflective thinking demonstrate success in effectively managing the teaching and learning process. They skillfully utilize various sources of knowledge, maintain motivation, exhibit proficient problem-solving abilities, and serve as positive role models for their students (Gencel & Saracaloglu, 2018). Consequently, reflective thinking serves as the foundation for improving implementation, skill development, and

organizational learning (Dohn, 2011). In a rapidly changing higher education landscape, academic administrators must possess innovative leadership skills to navigate and adapt to new challenges. Reflective thinking plays a pivotal role in cultivating innovative leadership by encouraging administrators to question established practices, embrace experimentation, and seek novel solutions. Through continuous self-reflection, administrators can identify and address personal biases, adapt their leadership styles, and create an environment that fosters creativity and innovation. This reflective approach not only empowers administrators to lead with resilience but also inspires faculty and staff to embrace a culture of innovation within the institution. According to a study by Pocklington and Weidling (1996), it is not possible to fully prepare a candidate for the role of a administrator prior to assuming the position. The tendency of academic administrators to rely on their past experiences emphasizes the significance of developing reflective thinking skills. These skills enable administrators to critically analyze their experiences and make informed decisions. In a similar study, Dalgıç (2011) also highlighted the importance of reflective thinking skills for school administrators in Turkey. By actively learning and reflecting on their experiences, administrators can effectively convert their experiences into valuable learning opportunities.

A manager should systematically evaluate their own managerial actions and practices and make the necessary adjustments accordingly (Dana, 2009). Administrators should begin by assessing their own competencies, implementing changes in their actions, and then anticipate a transformation in the education system (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Additionally, administrators acknowledge that the media plays a significant role in scrutinizing their competencies and actions in today's technological era. In her study, Dalgıç (2011) suggests that academic administrators should actively participate in communication networks that connect administrators from different institutions to foster continuous learning. It is also recommended that the communication network activities of academic administrators (such as annual meetings, seminars, conferences, etc. be supplemented by online forums. In current circumstances, administrators are expected to incorporate specific social networks into their communication networks and engage with internal and external academics, administrators, and students

to find solutions to present challenges. According to Pocklington and Weidling (1996), administrators should be directed towards in-service training to enhance their administrative knowledge. This is because administrators who question themselves and engage in reflective thinking, focusing primarily on communication and problem-solving skills, believe that it will enable them to fulfill their responsibilities in faculty administration more effectively. Reflective thinking allows administrators to examine an event from various perspectives, thereby enhancing their problem-solving abilities (Dalgıç, 2011).

Unbiased, objective, fair, problem-solving, constructive, strong in human relations and communication, open-minded, constantly thinking with purpose, and accessible are the expected competencies of a reflective-thinking academic administrator. These specified characteristics demonstrate the qualities of both a reflective thinker and an administrator. According to Dewey (1933), reflective thinking skills involve thinking with an open mind about a wide range of new ideas, considering the consequences and impacts of a particular situation from multiple dimensions, and sincerely questioning oneself and one's actions in every situation. Therefore, reflective individuals exhibit the traits of an administrator who possesses a critical perspective, is receptive to growth, and takes responsibility for their own learning (York-Barr et al. 2006).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the engagement of academic administrators in reflective thinking in higher education institutions.
2. To find out the experiences of academic administrators regarding reflective thinking while performing their duties in higher education institutions.

### **Research Questions**

1. How frequently do academic administrators engage in reflective thinking practices within higher education settings?
2. What types of reflective thinking practices are most commonly used by academic administrators in higher education?
3. How do academic administrators describe the benefits of reflective thinking in managing their responsibilities?

4. What challenges do academic administrators face when implementing reflective thinking in their daily duties?

### **Significance and scope**

Reflective thinking skills are crucial for academic administrators in higher education as they navigate the complex and ever-changing landscape of educational institutions. These skills enable administrators to critically analyze their own actions, decisions, and strategies, leading to continuous improvement and effective leadership. Reflective thinking allows administrators to assess their own strengths and weaknesses. By reflecting on past experiences and outcomes, they can identify areas where they excel and areas that require further development. This self-awareness is essential for effective decision-making and resource allocation. Reflective thinking enables administrators to evaluate the impact of their decisions on various stakeholders. They can consider the perspectives of faculty members, students, parents, and community members when making important choices. This empathetic approach fosters a sense of inclusivity and collaboration within the institution. Furthermore, reflective thinking encourages administrators to seek feedback from others. By actively listening to different viewpoints, they can gain valuable insights that may challenge their assumptions or provide alternative solutions. This openness to feedback promotes a culture of continuous learning within the organization. Reflective thinking skills are vital for academic administrators in higher education as they strive for excellence in leadership. By assessing their own strengths and weaknesses, considering multiple perspectives, and seeking feedback from others, these administrators can make informed decisions that positively impact their institutions' success. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the importance of reflective thinking in educational leadership and inform strategies for enhancing administrative decision-making and organizational improvement in higher education institutions.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of the topic, facilitating a richer understanding of the participant's perspectives and experiences. The objectives of the study are achieved by gathering insights from faculty members

engaged in higher education administration (HOD's/Chairmans, Associate Deans and Deans).

**Population of the study**

The research study is comprised of faculty members who hold administrative roles (such as Head of Departments, Chairpersons and Deans) in different faculties of a universities of Islamabad. The participants are selected using criterion sampling, which is a purposive sampling method commonly employed in qualitative research. The aim of participant selection in qualitative research is to identify individuals who can provide the best insights into the research problem being investigated (Cresswell, 2017). Four criteria are considered when selecting the study group: (a) active engagement in administrative responsibilities at a higher education institution, (b) representation of diverse disciplines (Social Sciences, Management Sciences, Linguistics, Engineering), (c) engaged in both academic and administrative tasks and (d) voluntary participation in the research.

**Data Collection Instrument**

In this study, data were collected through a semi-structured individual interview form. Individual interview form consists of three parts: (i) introduction, (ii) personal information form and (iii) reflective thinking of academic administrator in higher education. In the explanation part of the form, information regarding to the purpose, method, and process of the research, what is expected from the participant, voluntary participation in the research and the permission for voice recording were provided. In the personal information part of the form, there were six questions directed for collecting the identity information of the participants.

Reflective thinking of academic administrators in higher education consist of individual interview form, literature review, expert opinions, and eight basic questions and probe questions prepared by the researcher for the purposes of the research based on the pilot application. The initial draft of personal interview form was submitted to the expert opinion of five experts in the field and experienced in the qualitative research area. Initial trial interviews were conducted with two academic administrators at higher education institutions. The final version of the interview form was shaped by keeping in view the expert feedback and outcomes from the trial interview. The interview aimed to capture academic administrators' views on the following facets of reflective thinking: "Open-mindedness," "Self-awareness," "Critical thinking," "Curiosity," "Metacognition," "Decision making," "Problem solving," and "Continuous learning." Twelve of thirteen participants consented to record the interviews, while one opted for a written transcription. Interviews, lasting between 20 and 35 minutes, were held in the participants' offices and were all conducted by the researcher within a two-month period.

**Data Analysis**

Content analysis technique is utilized for the analysis of the data, which involves systematically and repeatedly summarizing words from a text into smaller content categories based on specific coding rules (Büyüköztürk et al. 2018). The data is coded according to the expressions and words that represent the fundamental perspectives aligned with the research objectives. Themes are established by consolidating the data after coding process (Glesne, 2013; Cresswell, 2017).

**Results**

**Table. 1: Summary Table of Themes**

S. No	Themes	Summary
1.	Open-mindedness	Importance of open-mindedness in fostering a collaborative and inclusive environment.
2.	Self-awareness	Recognition of one's strengths and weaknesses affecting personal and professional growth.
3.	Critical Thinking	Essential for decision-making and problem-solving, encouraging a methodical approach to challenges.
4.	Continuous Learning and Professional Development	Ongoing education and self-improvement as central to adapting to changes in the educational landscape.

5.	Curiosity and Innovation	The role of curiosity in driving innovation and the adoption of new ideas or technologies.
6.	Meta-cognition and Personal Beliefs	Influence of personal beliefs and values on decision-making and interactions within the institution.
7.	Decision Making	Consideration of multiple factors and stakeholders in the decision-making process, ensuring decisions align with institutional policies and values.
8.	Problem Solving	Strategies employed to address and resolve workplace challenges effectively.

After reviewing and analyzing the collective responses from the 13 academic administrators, above mentioned themes in Table 1 has been identified concerning reflective thinking in their administrative roles. These themes collectively emphasize the complex interplay of knowledge,

personality, and administrative responsibilities in shaping the actions and decisions of academic administrators. They highlight the need for a reflective approach that incorporates both personal growth and organizational objectives in higher education settings.

**Table 2: Frequency Table of Themes**

S. No	Themes	Frequency
1.	Open-mindedness	11
2.	Self-awareness	10
3.	Critical Thinking	13
4.	Continuous Learning and Professional Development	13
5.	Curiosity and Innovation	12
6.	Meta-cognition and Personal Beliefs	9
7.	Decision Making	13
8.	Problem Solving	12

Table 2 above indicate how often each theme appeared across the interviews. It illustrates that themes like Critical Thinking, Continuous Learning, and Decision Making were present in all participants' responses, reflecting their universal importance in the context of academic administration. Themes like Meta-cognition and Personal Beliefs, while slightly less frequent, still played a significant role in how administrators view their impact and approach to their duties. These themes collectively emphasize the complex interplay of knowledge, personality, and administrative responsibilities in shaping the actions and decisions of academic leaders. They highlight the need for a reflective approach that incorporates both personal growth and organizational objectives in higher education settings.

**Theme 1: Open-mindedness**

Open-mindedness and dialogue in academic settings are crucial for fostering an environment that encourages growth, learning, and effective decision-making. This theme emerged prominently across the responses from academic administrators,

highlighting its integral role in managing and leading in higher education institutions.

Academic administrators emphasized the importance of open-mindedness as a key attribute for facilitating effective communication and collaboration among staff and students. One administrator expressed, *"Open-mindedness is very much important for better advice and competent work environment. If there is a bureaucratic style of administrator, then it will be unsuccessful"* (Participant 8). This statement underscores the belief that rigid administrative practices hinder progress and that embracing diverse perspectives can lead to more effective governance. Another administrator from a different institution reflected similar sentiments, stating, *"In fact it's a very important aspect as far as academic environments are concerned. It provides an opportunity for freedom of thought connectivity personal growth as well as conducive environment where people can freely share their ideas"* (Participant 12). This highlights how open-mindedness not only supports personal development

but also enhances collective output through shared ideas.

### Theme 2: Self-awareness

Self-awareness is a critical theme identified in the responses from academic administrators, emphasizing its importance in their professional roles within higher education. This theme revolves around the understanding of one's capabilities, limitations, and the impact of one's actions within the administrative context.

The value of self-awareness for academic administrator is repeatedly highlighted by the respondents, who believe that understanding oneself is crucial to effectively managing others and making informed decisions. One administrator noted, "*Self-awareness is very much important to understand your own self. If you will not understand yourself, it will not be possible to understand others...*" (Participant 10). This statement underscores the belief that self-awareness is foundational to interpersonal understanding and effective administration.

### Theme 3: Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is a central theme extracted from the interviews with academic administrators, emphasizing its importance in their roles within higher education institutions. This theme revolves around the application of analytical skills, thoughtful questioning, and evidence-based decision-making in academic leadership.

The respondents frequently discussed how critical thinking influences their decision-making processes and the overall management of academic departments. One administrator highlighted the necessity of a skeptical and questioning approach: "*Being a critical thinker you don't take or accept things right away but you think about its pros and cons. It is not always to follow your seniors blindly; never accept things easily and in hurry without any research or knowledge.*" (Participant 5). This statement underscores the belief that critical thinking prevents hasty decisions and promotes a more thorough understanding of complex issues.

Another administrator shared their approach to fostering a culture of critical analysis, stating, "*Critical thinking is not only an administrative aspect; it's for everybody. You have an issue right in front of you and you are going to apply the fundamental principle of critical thinking. What it*

*has what it offers what are its nuts and bolts.*" (Participant 12). This reflects an understanding that critical thinking should permeate all levels of the institution, influencing both strategic decisions and daily interactions.

### Theme 4: Continuous Learning and Professional Development

Continuous Learning and Professional Development emerged as a key theme across the responses of academic administrators, underscoring its essential role in maintaining and enhancing their competencies and adapting to the rapidly changing educational environment.

The administrators emphasized the necessity of ongoing professional development to stay relevant and effective in their roles. One respondent illustrated their commitment to continuous learning by stating, "*Periodically I analyze my mistakes and weaknesses and I document my areas and weaknesses in excel files then I do brainstorming and watch videos on YouTube for improvement all this is important for my personal growth no one told me to do so.*" (Participant 8). This proactive approach highlights the individual responsibility toward self-improvement and staying updated with new educational trends and techniques.

Another administrator discussed the broader impact of continuous learning on their institution, mentioning, "*Knowledge is power through information we know about different situations. I believe that whenever I enter in my classroom the process of reflection started at that moment because my learning started as well along with the students.*" (Participant 4). This reflects an understanding that learning is a shared journey between educators and students, enhancing the educational experience for all involved.

### Theme 5: Curiosity and Innovation

Curiosity and Innovation emerged as a central theme from the responses of academic administrators, highlighting its pivotal role in driving forward-thinking practices and fostering an environment conducive to growth and advancement in higher education.

The administrators underscored the importance of curiosity as a driving force for both personal development and institutional innovation. One participant emphasized the proactive pursuit of knowledge, stating, "*Well if someone wants to*

*survive and enter into the future with the aim of facing the future then he will be curious all times to learn new things.*" (Participant 1). This highlights the understanding that curiosity is not merely about seeking knowledge but is a necessary condition for adaptation and advancement in a rapidly evolving educational landscape.

Another administrator pointed out the practical implications of fostering curiosity within the academic setting: *"Curiosity is important for professional development. One has to lay down the boundaries of that curiosity..."* (Participant 12). This perspective illustrates that while curiosity is encouraged, it must be directed and managed to ensure it aligns with professional goals and organizational objectives.

### **Theme 6: Meta-cognition and Personal Beliefs**

Meta-cognition and Personal Beliefs is a profound theme identified from the interviews with academic administrators, underscoring its influence on decision-making processes and interactions within higher education settings. Academic administrators emphasized how their personal beliefs and meta-cognitive abilities impact their professional roles and decisions. One administrator pointed out the importance of self-reflection in alignment with institutional values: *"It definitely affects us. In working style because the environment of our university, their mission, their vision, they talk about Islamic values. We keep that touch in our management in teaching and in the overall environment we keep all those things."* (Participant 13). This statement highlights how personal and institutional values are interwoven, affecting leadership styles and policies.

Another administrator discussed the critical role of self-reflection in enhancing job performance: *"Self-awareness is very much important to understand your own self. If you will not understand yourself, it will not be possible to understand others without self-awareness not only job but matters of personal life will also be disturbed."* (Participant 8). This reflects an understanding that meta-cognition, or thinking about one's own thinking, is crucial for effective interpersonal interactions and leadership.

### **Theme 7: Decision Making**

Decision Making was identified as a critical theme across the responses from academic administrators, highlighting its significance in the strategic and

operational aspects of managing higher education institutions.

The administrators discussed various aspects of their decision-making processes, emphasizing the importance of careful consideration and strategic thinking. One respondent described their approach to handling complex situations: *"Sometimes it happens that you have to deal with the situation very tactfully... I always solve my issue by using my diplomacy..."* (Participant 2). This highlights the necessity of tact and strategic thinking in decision-making, especially in sensitive or complex scenarios. Another administrator detailed their method for incorporating broad perspectives: *"It's not dependent on a particular situation... I have got to apply my mind in these circumstances how I need to respond to that..."* (Participant 12). This statement underscores the importance of adaptability and responsiveness in decision-making, traits essential for leaders in dynamic educational environments.

### **Theme 8: Problem Solving**

Problem Solving was consistently highlighted by academic administrators as a crucial aspect of their roles, underscoring the necessity for effective strategies to address and manage challenges within higher education institutions.

The administrators shared their approaches to problem-solving, emphasizing both the procedural and interpersonal aspects involved. One administrator described their approach, stating, *"Well, I always solve my issue by using my diplomacy; there are different examples and incidents of this which I have resolved..."* (Participant 11). This reflects the understanding that problem-solving often requires a diplomatic approach, particularly in complex academic environments where multiple stakeholders are involved.

Another respondent illustrated the proactive and reflective nature of their problem-solving strategy: *"When you face a challenge, it is always new. If you don't bring creativity into it, don't evaluate it critically, don't break it, don't evaluate every component separately, we can never bring a creative and new solution to it."* (Participant 7). This statement highlights the importance of a detailed and analytical approach to problem-solving, ensuring that solutions are both innovative and effective.

### **Discussion**

The significance of open-mindedness in academic administration aligns with broader educational theories that advocate for transformative leadership and participatory decision-making processes. According to Mezirow (1997), transformative learning involves critical reflection, which can be facilitated through open dialogue and the exchange of ideas. This theoretical perspective supports the administrators' views by suggesting that open-mindedness can lead to significant organizational and personal transformations.

Further, literature on organizational behavior often discusses the benefits of open communication climates in fostering innovation and adaptability (Argyris & Schön, 1978). These climates encourage individuals to express their thoughts without fear of retribution, leading to more dynamic and responsive educational institutions.

The concept of self-awareness is widely supported in psychological and educational literature as essential for effective leadership and management. According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence, which includes self-awareness, is a key predictor of leadership success. Self-aware leaders are more likely to be empathetic, maintain better relationships with their staff and students, and create a positive work environment.

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy also relates closely to self-awareness, suggesting that individuals who accurately understand their capabilities are better equipped to take on challenges and achieve their goals. This ties back to the administrators' emphasis on self-awareness as essential for navigating the complexities of academic environments.

The significance of critical thinking in educational leadership aligns with broader educational theories that advocate for transformative and reflective practices in management. Paul and Elder (2006) define critical thinking as the disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information gathered from observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication. This definition supports the administrators' views by suggesting that critical thinking is fundamental to effective governance and problem-solving in educational settings.

Further, the literature on higher education leadership suggests that critical thinking is essential for

navigating the complexities and challenges of modern educational environments (Scriven & Paul, 1987). Leaders who think critically are better equipped to handle policy issues, ethical dilemmas, and the diverse needs of stakeholders.

The importance of continuous learning in the realm of educational administration is supported by various educational theories and research. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2015) discuss the principles of andragogy, which suggest that adult learners, including academic leaders, benefit from self-directed, experiential learning opportunities that are immediately relevant to their work. These principles affirm the administrators' focus on applying new knowledge directly to their professional roles.

Moreover, research on professional development in higher education highlights the necessity for administrators to engage in lifelong learning to effectively respond to technological advancements and changes in educational policy and student needs (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). This ongoing learning is not only about personal growth but also about enhancing the institution's ability to fulfill its educational mission.

The significance of curiosity in educational leadership is well-supported in the literature. Kashdan and Fincham (2004) define curiosity as the desire to acquire new knowledge and experiences that motivates individuals to engage in exploratory behaviors. This definition aligns with the administrators' views that curiosity is essential for driving innovation and keeping pace with changes in the field of education.

Furthermore, research by Engel (2011) in the context of educational settings suggests that curiosity leads to higher academic achievement, increased problem-solving ability, and greater innovation. The study underscores the value of fostering a culture where curiosity is nurtured among students and staff alike, leading to richer educational experiences and outcomes.

The concept of meta-cognition is well-supported in psychological and educational literature as essential for effective leadership. Flavell (1979) introduced the term meta-cognition to describe the knowledge and regulation of one's cognitive activities in learning processes. This theoretical framework supports the notion that leaders who are aware of their thinking processes can better manage their cognitive resources to solve problems and make decisions.



Additionally, research by Schraw and Moshman (1995) suggests that meta-cognitive awareness enhances the ability to reason and reflect critically, aligning with the administrators' emphasis on the importance of self-reflection for professional development and effective decision-making.

Decision-making in educational leadership is a well-explored topic in the literature, often discussed in the context of ethical considerations and leadership styles. According to Bush and Glover (2014), effective decision-making in educational settings involves not only the application of logical and strategic thinking but also ethical considerations and the impact on the institutional community. This aligns with the administrators' emphasis on thoughtful and community-oriented decision-making processes.

Furthermore, research by Leithwood et al. (2010) explores the relationship between leadership decisions and school effectiveness, suggesting that decisions made by educational leaders directly influence the quality of education and institutional success. These findings support the notion that decision-making is a critical component of effective leadership in education.

Problem-solving in educational leadership is supported by extensive research, particularly in the fields of cognitive psychology and educational administration. According to Jonassen (2000), problem-solving involves cognitive processes used to handle complex problems that are typically ill-structured and require novel solutions. This aligns with the administrators' descriptions of facing new and unique challenges in their roles.

Further, Mumford et al. (2000) discuss the role of creative problem-solving in leadership, suggesting that effective leaders distinguish themselves by their ability to solve complex problems creatively and effectively. This supports the notion that creativity and critical thinking are essential components of problem-solving in educational leadership.

### **Conclusion**

The theme of open-mindedness is not only a recurrent motif in the responses of academic administrators but also a well-supported concept in educational literature. By fostering an environment where dialogue is encouraged and diverse perspectives are welcomed, institutions can enhance their adaptability, innovation, and overall effectiveness. These findings underscore the

importance of maintaining open lines of communication and a willingness to consider various viewpoints in the complex ecosystem of higher education.

Self-awareness as discussed by the academic administrators reflects a broader understanding recognized in both educational and psychological research. By fostering self-awareness, administrators not only enhance their own leadership capabilities but also contribute to the development of a reflective and responsive academic culture. This theme highlights the intrinsic link between personal insight and professional efficacy, suggesting that the journey of self-awareness is continuous and vital in the realm of higher education administration.

The discussions on critical thinking by academic administrators highlight its indispensable role in fostering a reflective and responsive academic culture. By employing critical thinking, administrators enhance their ability to make informed and practical decisions, contribute to the intellectual growth of their institutions, and handle the ever-evolving challenges of the educational landscape. This theme not only echoes the practical experiences of the respondents but also resonates with established theoretical frameworks that emphasize the importance of critical thinking in educational administration.

Continuous learning and professional development as discussed by academic administrators is crucial for navigating the complexities of modern higher education. By fostering an environment where learning is continuous, leaders not only improve their own capabilities but also enhance the overall quality of education their institutions can provide. This theme underscores the reciprocal relationship between personal development and institutional success, suggesting that the growth of academic leaders directly influences the progress of their organizations. This alignment with educational theory and practice highlights the universal recognition of the critical role of lifelong learning in educational leadership.

Curiosity and innovation as discussed by academic administrators are essential for ensuring that higher education institutions remain vibrant and responsive to new challenges and opportunities. By cultivating an environment where curiosity is encouraged and channeled effectively, institutions can enhance their capacity for innovation and adaptability. This theme not only reflects the practical experiences of the

respondents but also resonates with established theoretical frameworks that emphasize the importance of curiosity in driving educational success and organizational growth. The exploration and integration of new ideas facilitated by curiosity are crucial for maintaining relevance and achieving excellence in the ever-changing landscape of higher education.

The theme of meta-cognition and personal beliefs underscores the complexity of leadership in higher education, where administrators must navigate their personal values while making decisions that impact their institutions. This analysis reveals that effective leaders are those who are not only aware of their cognitive processes but are also capable of aligning their actions with the broader goals and values of their institutions. By fostering a culture of self-awareness and reflective practice, educational leaders can enhance their ability to lead thoughtfully and with integrity, ultimately contributing to the development of more dynamic and responsive educational environments. This theme highlights the intrinsic link between personal growth and professional efficacy, suggesting that the journey of self-awareness and the exploration of personal beliefs are continuous and vital in the realm of higher education leadership.

The theme of decision-making as discussed by academic administrators is central to the effectiveness and efficiency of educational administration. The insights provided by the respondents reflect a deep understanding of the complexities involved in making decisions that affect a wide range of stakeholders. By emphasizing strategic, ethical, and inclusive decision-making practices, these leaders demonstrate a commitment to fostering environments that are conducive to learning and growth. This theme not only highlights the practical experiences of the administrators but also resonates with theoretical frameworks that emphasize the importance of thoughtful and informed decision-making in achieving educational and organizational objectives.

The theme of problem-solving as discussed by academic administrators is essential for the maintenance and growth of educational institutions. It encompasses a range of strategies from diplomacy and creativity to critical analysis and systematic breakdown of issues. The insights provided by the administrators demonstrate a comprehensive approach to addressing challenges that affect

students, faculty, and the broader institutional environment. This theme underscores the importance of adaptive and innovative leadership in education, where leaders are not only problem solvers but also agents of change. Through a blend of practical experience and support from theoretical frameworks, it is evident that effective problem-solving is a cornerstone of successful educational leadership.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, several actionable recommendations can be offered to enhance the reflective thinking capabilities of academic administrators:

1. **Training and Development Programs:** Institutions may develop targeted training programs that focus on cultivating reflective thinking skills. These programs should include workshops on critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making processes. Case studies and real-life scenario analyses can be used to enhance these skills actively.
2. **Reflective Practice Workshops:** Regular workshops may be conducted to encourage the sharing of experiences and reflective practices among administrators. These sessions can facilitate open dialogue, allowing participants to explore different perspectives and reflect on their own decision-making processes.
3. **Mentorship and Peer Support Groups:** Establish mentorship programs pairing experienced administrators with newer ones to foster an environment of learning and reflection. Additionally, peer support groups can provide a platform for administrators to discuss challenges and strategies in a supportive setting.
4. **Incorporation of Technology:** Leverage technology to create digital forums where administrators can engage in reflective practice. Online platforms can host virtual discussions, webinars, and shared resources to aid continuous learning and reflection.
5. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Implement structured feedback mechanisms where administrators can receive constructive feedback on their performance from peers, subordinates, and superiors. This feedback

should be used as a basis for reflection and professional growth.

6. Research and Innovation Encouragement: Encourage administrators to engage in research activities related to educational administration. Supporting such initiatives can help administrators apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, promoting a culture of innovation and reflective thinking.
7. Policy Development: Develop policies that explicitly recognize and reward the application of reflective thinking in administrative practices. Recognition can motivate administrators to consistently engage in reflective practices.
8. Continuous Professional Development: Implement continuous professional development (CPD) requirements that include components of reflective practice. CPD activities should be diverse, allowing administrators to choose paths that best fit their personal growth and professional needs.

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