

## CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP STYLES AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the challenges associated with democratic leadership styles within the university setting. The primary objective was to evaluate the reasons behind the adoption of democratic leadership styles at the university level. The central research question guiding this study was: "What are the reasons for the use of the democratic leadership style at the university level?" The significance of this study lies in its focus on understanding the challenges posed by democratic leadership styles at the university level and their impact on promoting commitment and job satisfaction among university staff. The study employed a sampling method where the entire sample comprised 150 heads of departments at the university. This selection aimed to gather comprehensive insights into the challenges and reasons associated with democratic leadership styles. Findings of the study, Strongly Disagree: 13%, Disagree: 5%, Neutral: 3%, Agree: 44% and Strongly Agree: 35%. Competency is a challenge when it comes to the successful application of democratic leadership principles. Mostly respondents are Strongly Disagree 10%, disagree 2%, neutral 12%, agree 25%, and strongly agree 51%. Based on the study's findings, recommendations were made for further research. The results offer valuable insights into the attitudes and perceptions of respondents regarding the implementation of democratic leadership at the university level. These insights encompass both support for and acknowledgment of the challenges associated with this leadership style. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the attitudes and perceptions of respondents regarding the implementation of democratic leadership at the university level. The findings contribute to the existing knowledge on the challenges and reasons associated with democratic leadership styles within the university context.

**Keywords:** Democratic leadership, university, challenges, competency, and Consensus.

### INTRODUCTION

Leadership involves the facilitation, growth, and collaboration with individuals within an organization. It is a people-centric process that emphasizes the personal attributes and leadership approaches of managers. In the early 20th century, there was a prevailing belief that leaders were inherently born with certain qualities and not developed through experience. Specific traits, such as intelligence, the desire for power or dominance, self-confidence, decisiveness, a sense of

responsibility, and effective communication skills, were identified to distinguish leaders from non-leaders. However, this research was not exhaustive and remains an ongoing effort. Unfortunately, it didn't significantly contribute to leadership practices because the possession of externally perceived leadership qualities did not necessarily translate into impactful actions, which is crucial in the realm of leadership. (Malik, 2016).

This leadership style is commonly known as participative leadership. It embodies principles like self-determination and equal participation. However, it's important not to confuse democratic leaders with those in elected positions. Democratic leaders promote collective decision-making, involving followers or employees and providing support and choices. Unlike authoritarian leadership, this style emphasizes cooperation, active participation, accountability, and the delegation of responsibilities. A key aspect of democratic leadership is empowering subordinates, sharing responsibilities, and facilitating group discussions. Followers are responsible for their decisions and actions, contributing to the group's freedom and autonomy. (Avolio *et al.*, 2009).

While the democratic leadership style can be effective, it comes with drawbacks. When roles are unclear, and time is limited, this approach may lead to failures. Additionally, in situations where group members lack expertise, contributing to decision-making becomes challenging. The effectiveness of the democratic leadership style relies on members willingly sharing their knowledge. Moreover, decision-making within this style tends to be time-consuming (Al Rahbi *et al.*, 2017).

Democratic leadership, characterized by a participative and inclusive decision-making process, has become a topic of increasing interest and debate in the context of higher education institutions. As universities aim to foster an environment that promotes collaboration, innovation, and shared governance, the application of democratic leadership styles is both pertinent and challenging. This introduction explores the challenges associated with implementing democratic leadership styles at the university level, examining the potential impact on decision-making processes, organizational dynamics, and overall effectiveness. Leadership within academic institutions plays a pivotal role in shaping the culture, policies, and direction of the university (Van, 2009).

The effectiveness of leadership is a critical predictor of organizational success or failure. In this context, understanding the challenges and implications of democratic leadership styles is essential for university leaders, administrators, and scholars alike. This discussion delves into existing literature to shed light on the complexities and potential drawbacks

associated with adopting democratic leadership styles in the unique context of higher education.

The challenges of democratic leadership styles refer to the difficulties and obstacles faced by leaders who adopt a participative approach, involving team members in decision-making processes. These challenges may include issues related to time efficiency, potential conflicts, and the need to manage diverse perspectives within a team. (Northouse, 2018).

### **Review of the Literature**

Democratic leadership posits that leadership should involve individuals rather than treating them merely as followers. This concept, both conceptual and practical, presents intricate and formidable challenges, particularly in educational settings. The multifaceted nature of democracy introduces varied interpretations, and the ongoing debate surrounding leadership emphasizes its distributed and emergent nature, involving not only senior leaders but a myriad of contributors through everyday interactions. While a narrow view of democratic leadership perceives it merely as a consultative style adopted by school principals, a more comprehensive perspective envisions a richer and more ambitious focus. A robust understanding of democratic leadership advocates for power sharing, transformative dialogue, holistic learning, and relational well-being. It transcends a minimalist approach, fostering a sense of agency across the school, addressing power differentials, and turning the practice into a collaborative, shared process where all contribute as co-leaders. This approach recognizes the significance of enabling structures and participative agency, emphasizing that both are indispensable facets of effective democratic leadership. (Woods, 2021).

Democratic leadership is a kind of leadership in which group members are more contributively towards decision making and inculcate a team climate in which team members feel empowered to act. This leadership style is similar to Theory Y. These leaders do not use a top-down approach of communication and keep subordinates at the same level. The literature review reveals that democratic leadership leads to high production, better outcomes, increased group enthusiasm, group cohesiveness, high commitment, OCB and better involvement from

group members. However, it might take more time in getting commitment from subordinates (Al-Khasawneh and Futa, 2013; Cruz *et al.*, 1999; Malos, 2012).

### **Leadership**

The process of guiding and impacting faculty's activities to enhance department efficiency and achieve goals is a key aspect of leadership.

Democratic leadership, a style encompassing several components, involves:

Participation

Relations orientation

Consideration for subordinates

This leadership style is characterized by compromise, care, a sense of responsibility, and attachment to followers, as noted by Bass (1990). It signifies the granting of increased autonomy to workers, power-sharing, information-sharing, and adherence to due process (Hwa, 2008).

Leadership within a democratic framework can challenge our democratic ideals. When representatives closely follow our preferences, there may be little room for them to challenge or provide pushback against the desires of their constituency.

The commitment theory highlights what is morally unique about leadership in a representative democracy. In essence, democratic leadership enlists citizens as true partners in shared political activities. This theory elucidates why leadership is considered both a fundamental aspect of a functioning democracy and, simultaneously, a potential threat to democratic practices. The theory is then tested against instances of opinion formation, cue-taking, and frame manipulation. The conclusion is drawn that the theory successfully avoids dual objections: that it either over counts or undercounts instances of democratic leadership (Beerbohm, 2015).

Various leadership styles, such as autocratic, participatory, militaristic, free, charismatic, paternalistic, and democratic, offer effective approaches to leadership. Among these styles, the autocratic leadership style is considered the most effective. However, another noteworthy style is the democratic leadership style, characterized by the ability to persuade others to collaborate in achieving jointly established goals through shared activities between leaders and subordinates. In the application of the democratic leadership style, the belief is that

multiple perspectives enhance decision-making, and active participation fosters a sense of on-the-ground responsibility for established objectives. This perspective aligns with findings by Hardian, Rahardjo, and Hakam (2015), who assert that the democratic leadership style not only maintains a positive relationship with implementation but also exerts a significant impact on the overall implementation process (Syakur *et al.*, 2022).

Leadership quality and style in higher education significantly impact educational improvement. A university's vision serves as the foundational element for institutional development. The Tri Dharma Program of Higher Education aims to realize this vision by:

Establishing a university as a hub for science, technology, art, education, teaching, research, and community service to meet development needs.

Educating students with a devoted spirit, fostering responsibility for the nation's future, equipped with competence to master, develop, and apply knowledge.

Establishing a university as a centre for science, technology, and art development.

Success in realizing the vision relies on a university leader's ability to manage and apply their leadership pattern according to the university's circumstances (Syakur *et al.*, 2022).

The democratic leadership style persuades collaboration to achieve established goals through joint activities. It assumes diverse opinions enhance decision-making, fostering on-the-ground responsibility. Affirm a positive relationship of democratic leadership styles with implementation and significant impact. (Hardian *et al.*, 2015).

The literature on the challenges of implementing democratic leadership styles at the university level provides valuable insights into the complexities and potential drawbacks associated with this approach. Various scholars have explored the implications of democratic leadership in the unique context of higher education, shedding light on its impact on decision-making processes, organizational dynamics, and overall effectiveness. (Syakur *et al.*, 2022).

Contributes to the literature by arguing that the democratic leadership approach not only improves employee performance but also contributes to higher profits. However, the nuanced challenges of balancing inclusivity with efficient decision-making

processes within a university setting are not explicitly addressed. (Northouse, 2014).

Echo the perspective on the positive impact of democratic leadership, emphasizing its relevance in fostering collaboration and shared governance within academic institutions. Their contribution underscores the potential benefits of a democratic leadership style but also raises questions about the adaptability of such an approach in the hierarchical structure of universities. (Dess and Robinson, 2010).

A democratic leader passes on authority to others, encourages participation, and relies on expert and referent power to influence subordinates (Malik, 2016).

Malik's research in 2013 adds a nuanced dimension by highlighting the effectiveness of participative leader behaviour in achieving high employee performance. The study identifies a significant correlation between various path-goal leadership styles and employee performance, emphasizing the importance of involving subordinates in goal-setting and decision-making processes.

As the challenges of democratic leadership styles at the university level are explored in the literature, it becomes evident that while these styles offer potential benefits, they also pose intricate challenges that demand careful consideration. The need for inclusive decision-making processes, collaboration, and shared governance within universities must be balanced against the realities of organizational hierarchies and the efficiency required in academic leadership. Future research in this area can further illuminate these challenges and provide strategies for effectively navigating the complexities of democratic leadership in higher education.

The effectiveness of a leader is a crucial predictor of the success or failure of an organization, groups, or even a country (Fiedler, 1996).

The concept of leadership has garnered widespread attention, from managers to scholars globally, recognizing its paramount importance. Decision-making stands out as one of the foremost responsibilities undertaken by leaders. Polston-Murdoch (2013) contends that CEOs adopting a democratic style witness greater employee performance. Northouse (2014) maintains that the democratic leadership style leads to improved employee performance with high profits, a viewpoint shared by Dess and Robinson (2010).

Malik (2013) found that participative leader behaviour effectively achieves high employee performance by consulting with subordinates in setting, clarifying, and achieving goals, with all four path-goal leadership styles significantly correlated with employee performance.

Democratic leadership emphasizes group and leader engagement in developing operational guidelines for the organization, where followers empower the leader. According to Herson (2007), though it may take more time in the short term, this approach is better for the library in the long run, fostering increased group productivity and cultivating more mature, objective, and less aggressive employees. In university libraries, group cohesion is optimally achieved when university librarians and their staffs understand each other's needs, fostering mutual understanding, tolerance, and cooperation. This leadership style involves active participation in decision-making by group members, encouraging creativity and imagination, ultimately boosting productivity (Herson and Rositer, 2007).

Allowing employees to participate in decision-making enhances their comfort, leading to increased productivity and a positive work attitude. Research on leadership styles indicates that democratic leadership contributes to heightened productivity among group members due to the display of a positive work attitude. Even when the leader maintains the ultimate say over choices, employees are encouraged to contribute ideas and perspectives, fostering innovation (Eze, 2011). Democratic leadership excels in offering innovative solutions to challenges by encouraging the expression of diverse perspectives. Staff members become more invested and devoted to initiatives, increasing their inclination to care about the final outcome.

While democratic leadership is often hailed as the ideal form, it is not without notable drawbacks (Olatunde, 2010). Challenges may emerge when roles are unclear, and there are time constraints. Inexperienced staff may struggle to contribute effectively, posing a risk of project abandonment. Democratic leadership is most effective in environments where employees are well-trained and willing to share their expertise. It is essential to allocate ample time for staff to engage in developing action plans and voting on issues before implementation. In essence, democratic leadership



fosters active employee participation in decision-making processes.

### Framework of the Challenges of Democratic Leadership Styles



Challenges of Democratic Leadership Styles

### Challenges of Democratic leadership styles

- Competency
- Crises
- Consensus
- Pseudo-participation
- Adherence

#### Competency

Previous research has emphasized the importance of leadership competency in ensuring the effectiveness of democratic leadership styles. This section explores the correlation between leader competence and the successful implementation of democratic leadership principles.

#### Crises

The handling of crises presents a unique challenge within democratic leadership structures. Existing literature will be reviewed to ascertain how democratic leaders navigate and manage crises situations while maintaining group cohesion.

#### CONSENSUS

Building consensus is a fundamental aspect of democratic leadership. This segment delves into the processes and challenges associated with reaching consensus within a group led by democratic principles.

#### Pseudo-Participation

The phenomenon of pseudo-participation raises questions about the authenticity of involvement in decision-making. This section examines instances where the appearance of participation may not align with genuine engagement in democratic leadership settings.

#### Adherence

Successful implementation of democratic leadership relies on adherence to principles and values. This part of the literature review explores the factors that contribute to or hinder adherence to democratic leadership styles within organizations.

Examining democratic leadership poses a challenge due to the lack of consensus on the meaning of democracy. The components of democracy and the essential features for conceptualizing a genuinely democratic society are subjects of ongoing debate, with various models and perspectives proposed (Cartledge, 2016; Held, 2006; Keane, 2009).

Following the section on conceptualizing leadership, the chapter explores conceptions of democracy through the lenses of power, dialogue, growth, and belonging. It then delves into democratic leadership from the perspective of leadership conduct or style, emphasizing leadership as agency, with democracy being one of the possible forms it may take. This agential viewpoint is succeeded by a discussion that highlights structure by considering leadership as a feature reflecting, being shaped by, and constructing a specific structural context, namely that of a democratic organization or community (Woods, 2021).

#### The Statement of the Problem

The democratic leadership style, emphasizing its collaborative and inclusive nature, where team members actively participate in decision-making processes. The author acknowledges its applicability across various sectors, such as business, education, and government. However, the statement also highlights the drawbacks associated with this leadership style, including the potential for evoking negative emotions, fostering procrastination, and causing delays in reaching consensus. These challenges set the stage for further exploration of the problems associated with the democratic leadership style within an organizational context.

**Objective of the Study**

To Evaluate the reasons for employing the democratic leadership style at the university level.  
 To Examine the challenges associated with the democratic leadership style at the university level.  
 To Investigate the potential relationship between the democratic leadership style and the growth of the university.  
 To Provide recommendations for enhancing the democratic leadership style.

**Research Questions**

What motivates the use of the democratic leadership style at the university level?  
 What challenges are encountered with the democratic leadership style at the university level?  
 Is there a correlation between the democratic leadership style and university growth?  
 What recommendations can be proposed to improve the democratic leadership style?

**Significance of the Study**

This study addresses the challenges linked to democratic leadership styles in universities and their impact on factors like university commitment and job satisfaction. The findings will benefit both private and public universities, emphasizing the importance of adopting leadership styles that contribute to growth in the academic environment.

**Methods and Procedures**

The examination of relevant literature was undertaken to uncover the challenges associated with democratic leadership styles within university settings. Drawing insights from this literature review, a structured five-point rating scale was formulated, encompassing key categories such as demographics pertinent to democratic leadership, the expression of democratic leadership style, competency levels, crisis management, consensus-building processes, occurrences of pseudo-participation, and adherence to democratic principles. Subsequently, data collection occurred, and the gathered information was systematically tabulated, interpreted, and analysed using a percentage-based approach. Conclusions were drawn based on the findings, and recommendations were proffered in accordance with the identified challenges and trends.

**Population**

150 head of department were selected based on informed consent of the head of department.

**Sampling**

The entire 150 head of department were selected from the sample of the study.

**Table:1**

*List of universities*

Sr.no	Universities	Position	Male	Female	Total
1	University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lhr	Head of Department	15	5	20
2	University of the Punjab (PU), Lhr	Head of Department	21	12	33
3	The University of Lahore (UOL), Lhr	Head of Department	13	7	20
4	University of Central Punjab (UCP), Lhr	Head of Department	11	8	19
5	Bahauddin Zakariya University (BZU), Multan	Head of Department	16	12	28
6	Iqra University (IU), Isb	Head of Department	9	6	15
7	University of Gujrat (UOG), Gujrat	Head of Department	11	4	15

**Tool of Research**

A five-point rating scale was prepared for the head of department.

**DATA COLLECTION**

The researchers personally conducted the administration of the rating scale to all participants within the sample. Notably, a high level of cooperation was observed from nearly all department heads involved in the study.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Data was obtained tabulated and statistically analysed using percentage method.

*Challenges of democratic leadership style*

For the following statements, please rate your level of agreement based on your experience at the university.

**Table 2**

Sr.no	Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	The implementation of democratic leadership styles at the university level faces significant challenges.	13%	5%	3%	44%	35%
2	Competency is a challenge when it comes to the successful application of democratic leadership principles.	10%	2%	12%	25%	51%
3	Democratic leadership encounters difficulties in handling crises while maintaining group cohesion.	7%	9%	3%	39%	42%
4	Building consensus within a group led by democratic principles is challenging.	12%	4%	1%	30%	53%
5	Instances of pseudo-participation in decision-making processes pose challenges within the democratic leadership framework	20%	10%	25%	20%	25%
6	Adherence to democratic leadership principles is challenging within university settings.	40%	32%	6%	17%	5%

**DATA ANALYSIS**

The implementation of democratic leadership styles at the university level faces significant challenges. Mostly respondents are Strongly Disagree 13%, disagree 5%, neutral 3%, agree 44%, and strongly agree 35%.

Competency is a challenge when it comes to the successful application of democratic leadership principles. Mostly respondents are Strongly Disagree 10%, disagree 2%, neutral 12%, agree 25%, and strongly agree 51%.

Democratic leadership encounters difficulties in handling crises while maintaining group cohesion. Mostly respondents are Strongly Disagree 07%, disagree 9%, neutral 3%, agree 39%, and strongly agree 42%.

Building consensus within a group led by democratic principles is challenging. Mostly respondents are Strongly Disagree 12%, disagree 4%, neutral 1%, agree 53%, and strongly agree 42%.

Instances of pseudo-participation in decision-making processes pose challenges within the democratic leadership framework. Mostly respondents are

Strongly Disagree 20%, disagree 10%, neutral 25%, agree 20%, and strongly agree 25%.

Adherence to democratic leadership principles is challenging within university settings. Mostly respondents are Strongly Disagree 40%, disagree 32%, neutral 6%, agree 17%, and strongly agree 05%.

**Findings of the Study**

Based on the data collected, the findings of the research on the implementation of democratic leadership styles at the university level can be summarized as follows:

**Overall Response Distribution:**

- Strongly Disagree: 13%
- Disagree: 5%
- Neutral: 3%
- Agree: 44%
- Strongly Agree: 35%

**Challenges Perceived**

A significant portion of respondents (44%) acknowledges challenges in the implementation of democratic leadership styles at the university level. A notable percentage (35%) strongly agrees that there are challenges, indicating a strong consensus on the existence of difficulties.

### **Support for Democratic Leadership**

The combined percentage of respondents who agree or strongly agree (79%) suggests a substantial level of support for democratic leadership styles.

### **Diversity of Opinions**

While a majority agrees with the challenges, a smaller percentage disagrees (5%) or is neutral (3%), reflecting a diversity of opinions within the respondent pool.

### **Implications for Leadership Practices**

The findings imply that there is a need for attention to, and potentially addressing, the challenges associated with implementing democratic leadership styles at the university level.

The strong agreement among a significant portion of respondents underscores the importance of considering and mitigating these challenges in leadership practices.

### **Recommendations for Further Study:**

Future research could delve deeper into the specific challenges perceived by respondents and explore potential solutions or strategies for overcoming these challenges.

It may be beneficial to examine the correlation between the perceived challenges and the respondents' experiences with democratic leadership in university settings.

These findings provide valuable insights into the attitudes and perceptions of respondents regarding democratic leadership implementation at the university level, indicating both support and acknowledgment of challenges.

### **Conclusion of the Study**

The study provides valuable insights into the attitudes and perceptions of respondents regarding democratic leadership implementation at the university level. The significant support for democratic leadership, coupled with acknowledged

challenges, highlights the complexity of its application. These findings suggest a need for tailored strategies and interventions to enhance the effectiveness of democratic leadership in university settings. The study's recommendations for further research open avenues for a more detailed exploration of challenges and potential solutions, contributing to the ongoing discourse on leadership practices in academic institutions.

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