

# Relationship between the Existing and Ideal Academic Leadership Styles in Maldivian Higher Education Institutes

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## Abstract

This current study identified whether there is significant relationship between academic leaders existing leadership styles and ideal leadership style as perceived by academic leaders and lecturers in Maldivian Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). A total population sampling was used to collect survey data from deans (N=20) and lecturers (N=170) from nine different HEIs. SPSS version 23 was used to analyze the data using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. The relationship between practiced leadership styles and idealised leadership style was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. It was found that there is a strong, positive correlation between the existing and ideal leadership styles, with high scores of existing leadership styles associated with high scores of ideal leadership styles. Hence, this study calls for academic deans to maintain the humanistic and collaborative leadership with their subordinates. Likewise, this study recommends autocratic and laissez-faire leaders to adjust their leadership approach to a more transformative and distributed approach, so that the subordinates can strive for something better, enabling them to translate vision and moral values into action, through strategic capability development and setting direction for subordinates.

This study is part of a research project on leadership in Maldivian higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** academic leadership; existing leadership styles; ideal leadership styles; higher education in the Maldives

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## Introduction

Academic deans play a significant role in the governance of higher education institutions. Through their roles, which require direct relationship with teaching staff and students, they directly influence the success of the institution (Usunier & Squires, 2019). Academic deans play a pivotal role by occupying a central position in the academia, which lies between the faculty and the higher administration (Gonaim, 2016; Thornton, Walton, Wilson, & Jones, 2018). Hence, given the important roles that academic deans play, this study focused on the leadership styles of the academic leaders such as deans at middle management level in higher education. Existing literature suggests that one of the most crucial factors that affect academic leaders' effectiveness at the middle management level is their leadership style (Sudha, Shahnawaz, & Farhat, 2014).

With the appropriate leadership style, academic leaders have the power to bring effective improvement and create a high performing culture of productivity at middle management level. This can directly contribute to the success of the institution, through direction setting, developing strategic capabilities, and translating strategy into action. Although many distinctive styles of leadership such as autocratic, democratic, participative, authentic, servant, charismatic, transactional, and transformational leadership style exist, research shows that no one style of leadership is ideal for every situation (Mosadeghrad & Yarmohammadian, 2006). It has been shown that the knowledge and skills required to perform successfully in one situation may not emerge effectively in another situation (Mosadeghrad & Yarmohammadian, 2006). Furthermore, effective leader behaviour or leadership style is also determined by the socio-cultural context in which they work (Bhagat & Steers, 2009). Therefore, it is deemed necessary to study this phenomenon in different contexts to identify which leadership style will work best within a given context. Hence, in this study, I explored the relationship between the existing and ideal leadership styles among academic leaders in Maldivian HEIs.

Although academic leaders are necessary for the operation of the HEI, it has been understudied in higher education leadership (Usunier & Squires, 2019). Majority of research on higher education leadership has focused on the top management level. There is limited research in relation to leadership at the middle management level (i.e., departmental/ faculty level) in HEIs. When it comes to the leadership of academic deans, the existing research is limited, and narrowly focused on specific disciplines and leadership aspects like leadership roles.

While effective leadership styles are visible internationally, there is a sizeable gap in the understanding of deans existing and ideal leadership styles in a singular context. This shortcoming may cause practitioners and scholars to homogenise and generalise effective leadership styles in daily practice and research. Hence, this study aims to create an understanding of the relationship between existing and ideal leadership styles of academic deans in the Maldivian HEIs.

## Literature Review

### Leadership Styles

The definition of leadership has evolved with time, with a current emphasis on the process of leadership whereby an individual influences another person or group to achieve a common goal. Forms of leadership described in literature is extensive, including terms such as symbolic leadership, strategic leadership, ethical leadership, spiritual leadership, emotional leadership, charismatic leadership, authentic leadership, discursive leadership, adaptive leadership, invitational leadership, and sustainable leadership (Northouse, 2018). For this study, I focused on five leadership styles: transformational, transactional, autocratic, laissez faire and distributed leadership styles, which were previously identified as commonly practiced in Maldivian HEIs (Waheeda & Shaheeda, 2018).

Transformational leadership is the most effective leadership style in terms of the highest level of activity and leader effectiveness (Farahnak, Ehrhart, Torres, & Aarons, 2020). One of the main differences between transformational leadership and other traditional leadership is that in transformational leadership style, the leader leads in a way to develop the followers to lead. They empower their followers by catering for the individual needs and development, hence, enhancing subordinates' leadership potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Instead of simply addressing follower compliance, a transformational leader goes beyond their staff expectations by instilling better values, beliefs, and attitudes (Bass, 1985). They inspire subordinates to commit to the shared goals and visions of the organisation, challenges them to be innovative problem solvers and improve their capability through mentoring, coaching, and giving support, thereby, raising leadership to the next level (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leaders are observed to be deeply trusted and morally uplifting and help followers achieve extraordinary goals (Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Farahnak, Ehrhart, Torres, & Aarons, 2020). These leaders are known to be proactive and raise follower awareness

for transcendent collective interests. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leaders sacrifice for the greater good of the team and help the subordinates to achieve higher levels of job satisfaction by catering to the needs and development of the followers.

Transactional leadership, also known as managerial leadership, is based on transactions between the leader and his subordinates. In this type of leadership, the leader and follower influence one another through exchanging something to derive something of value (Yukl, 1989). In such transactions there are obvious exchanges (e.g., promotions for exceptional performance; bonuses to base salary for additional responsibilities) and less obvious exchanges, such as exchanges of respect, commitment, and trust (Burns, 1978).

According to Bass (1998) transactional leaders identify followers' needs and wants to recognise how these needs will be fulfilled in exchange for enhanced work performance. They are directive, make the goals and objectives clear and have a clear reward system for achieving the expectations (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transactional leaders promote compliance of followers through contingent reinforcements. They use either positive contingent reward (CR) or the more negative form, which are management-by-exception (active) or management-by-exception (passive).

Autocratic leadership was originally known during the behavioural leadership era from research led by Kurt Lewin (1939). According to Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) this is one of the three behaviours displayed by a leader. This approach can also be referred as power influence leadership approach. It is an extreme form of transactional leadership where the leader displays complete power over the subordinates by directing and manipulating staff to complete the delegated tasks. They are socially distant with subordinates, are power oriented and arbitrarily control their staff (Chukwusa, 2018). In this style of leadership, subordinates have few or almost no opportunity to make suggestions, even if it is for the betterment of the team (Lewin et al., 1939). It is believed that the leader knows best in achieving the organisational objectives and does so by controlling the people and event.

Laissez-faire leadership represents the non-leadership or the absence of a transaction of sorts with respect to leadership (Idowu, 2020). Laissez-faire leaders are the most inactive, passive, and this is considered the most ineffective style of leadership (Avolio, 2011; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Lewin et al., 1939). Laissez-faire leaders avoid disagreements with their subordinates that could jeopardise their relationship. They are comfortable to leave their subordinates

to move in their own pace and do not illuminate a path for subordinates to move towards a desired objective (Day, Zaccaro & Halpin, 2014). Laissez-faire leaders refrain from getting involved when issues arise, or to take a stand on issues and to get involved in decision making. They fail to follow up, delay actions and are often absent when needed. They do not exercise their authority and avoid taking responsibilities and are deemed active only to the level that they prefer to refrain from taking actions (Idowu, 2020). These leaders do not develop themselves nor assist in developing their subordinates. Such leaders offer little in terms of support or direction and are considered as non-leader (Idowu, 2020).

Sharing and distribution of leadership practices is known as distributed leadership (Malloy, 2012). According to Spillane (2006), leaders and subordinates play a key role in this leadership style. In distributed leadership, it is not the position of the staff which makes the person a leader. In fact, it is the expertise of the employees and their interaction and dependence on each other that form leadership in the institution (Malloy, 2012). Hence, in distributed leadership, individuals initiate and contribute their expertise towards the collective goals of the organisation, whilst helping each other to grow their capacities (Lumby, 2019). Therefore, distributed leadership introduced a new aspect to the leadership literature, claiming that leadership is not based on a single individual hero; leadership is a collective model where leadership positions are allocated among all individuals and the situations of the institutions (Lumby, 2019; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001).

### **Role of Academic Leaders**

Deans/academic leaders are referred to as the heart of the managerial structure in HEIs (Bolden, 2011; Gonaim, 2017; Thornton et al., 2018). Literature has tried to identify the multiple roles of higher education leaders at the faculty level. Usunier, & Squires (2019) highlights that the role of the dean has changed over time from being exclusively student focused to include a multifaceted array of roles, such a budgeting and fundraising, personnel and work environment management, programme oversight, and external public relations.

According to Marshall, Orrell, Cameron, Bosanquet and Thomas (2011) there are two key responsibilities of an academic leader; (1) to develop institutional cultures and (2) to maintain close relation among team members and to guide the curriculum operations. Similarly, Knight and Trowler (2001) argue four domains of academic leadership as curriculum, students, staff, and organizational machinery. Ramsden (1998) identified leadership in teaching, leadership in research, strategic vision and networking, collaborative and

motivational leadership, fair and efficient management, development and recognition of performance and interpersonal skills as effective academic leadership characteristics.

In Bryman's (2007) review on departmental leaders' leadership characteristics, he found that setting direction, communicating set directions to staff, being thoughtful and trustworthy, treating employees fairly, encouraging open communication and involving staff in key decision making, having credibility and personal integrity, being a role model, promoting positivity at work, giving performance feedback, managing adequate resources, managing workload to promote research accomplishments and making reputable academic appointments that nurture good value to the departments are kinds of behaviours exercised by effective leaders. However, he suggests that the behaviours must be regarded with caution as some of the behaviours may not be valid in diverse contexts.

The most widespread description of the role of academic dean is put forth by Tucker and Bryan (1988). They described the role of academic dean in threefold, (1) as a dove that reconcile fighting groups and factions; (2) as a diplomat that control and encourage lecturers and researchers working at the faculty; and (3) as a dragon that protect the faculty against external and internal threats. Similar attention has been given by recent researchers on the complex yet crucial role of academic leaders in various contexts (Chilvers et al., 2018; Dani & Mhunpiew, 2019; Thornton, et al., 2018; Usunier & Squires, 2019). This research focus on complex nature of academic leaders and suggests that one must have various skills to fulfil their roles.

### **Existing Academic Leadership Styles**

Turning the focus to studies that explored leadership styles exclusively at faculty level in HEIs, it is worth mentioning that majority of the studies reviewed investigated leadership from followers' perspective, i.e., how followers perceived the leadership style of their leaders (see Adjei, 2014; Bateh & Heylinger, 2014) and few investigated leadership style as perceived by themselves (for e.g., Al-Omari, 2012; Thrash, 2009). In addition, the studies that used the perspective of both the follower and the leader were rare (e.g., Alonderience & Majauskaite, 2016; Thu, Pillay & Mergler, 2017).

When looking at the types of leadership styles that were investigated, it was found that a range of theoretical orientations were used to explore leadership styles in HE such as the situational leadership, servant leadership, authentic

leadership, Blake and Mouton's managerial grid and the transformational-transactional theory. However, notably, the majority of the recent studies reviewed used the Full Range Leadership Model to explore the leadership style of leaders at departmental level (for e.g., Adjei, 2014; Bateh & Heylinger, 2014; Nawaz & Bodla, 2010; Ngwama, & Ogaga-Oghene, 2022; Zeleke, 2013) possibly due to the fact that this model covers a range of leadership behaviours from the most ideal types of leadership (transformational) to least effective type (Laissez-faire leadership style).

Existing literature indicates that transformational leadership style is the most common, followed by transactional leadership style (Gozukara, 2016; Jones & Rudd, 2008; Kuslina & Widjaja, 2018; Wahab, Rahmat, Yusof & Mohamed, 2016). At this point it is important to highlight that majority of the higher education leadership was studied using Bass and Avolio's Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), which consist of three main leadership styles namely, transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles (Bucic, Robinson & Ramburuth, 2010; Ngwama, & Ogaga-Oghene, 2022; Wahab et al., 2016). Hence, these studies are limited only to these leadership styles.

Alonderiene and Majauskaite (2016) who studied leadership behaviour in Lithuanian public and private universities found human resource specialist leadership as the most common leadership style demonstrated while inspirational motivation was less often demonstrated. As parallel to this finding, Thrash (2009) explored leadership styles among deans as perceived by themselves using Black and Mouton's managerial grid and found that the most predominant styles exhibited are team leader style and middle of the road style. Their study also revealed that 85% of the academic deans had equal concern for people and tasks (Thrash, 2009). Similarly, studies conducted using the Bolman and Deals (1984) four frame model of leadership frames shows that most academic leaders use the human resource frame and suggests the development of their leadership skills pertaining to political and symbolic frame orientations (Sypawka, 2008).

In contrast to the high frequency of individualized consideration and human relations in these studies, there are several other studies that revealed the lack of participative leadership style and the dominance of authoritative leadership styles in HE (Beattie, Thornton, Laden, & Brackett, 2013; Kiplangat, 2017; Khetarpal & Srivastava, 2000). Kiplangat (2017) in his convergent parallel mixed method study employing 605 participants from higher learning institutions in Kenya found that leadership styles adopted by the university management as perceived by the lecturers is exploitative benevolent authoritarian style (50%),

consultative style (43%), authoritarian style (4%), and participative style (2%), with benevolent authoritarian style being the most prevalent. On the other hand, deans perceive that the most dominant leadership style is consultative leadership style (70%), benevolent authoritarian style (22%), exploitative authoritarian style (4%) and the least common as the participative style (2%). Likewise, Khetarpal and Srivastava (2000) in their study done in some of the Malaysian public and research universities found the predominance of directive and authoritative leadership styles.

Even though the studies in the developing countries found authoritative leadership styles as dominant, Zulfqar et al. (2016) in their qualitative study to examine the differences in leadership and decision-making practices in public and private universities in Pakistan using forty-six deans and heads of department from two public and two private universities found that collaborative approach is employed in the public universities. Similar findings were revealed by Gonaim (2017), Karadang (2017), Mapesela and Hay (2006), and Pihie, Sadeghi and Elias (2011). Likewise, in a study using situational leadership model to explore leadership style and style adaptability among Deans and Department chairs at three public universities in Northwest region of USA, Al-Omari (2005) found that both Deans and Department Chairs adopted 'selling style' as their main leadership style, which is suitable if followers are confident and willing to take responsibility but are unable to do so because of lack of expertise.

### **Ideal Academic Leadership Styles**

Higher education leadership studies have found that leadership styles, skills, or competencies which are favourable or effective represent characteristics of transformational leadership styles. For instance, Bryman (2007) found that setting direction, communicating set directions to staff, being thoughtful and trustworthy, treating employees fairly, encouraging open communication and involving staff in key decision making, having credibility and personal integrity, being a role model, promoting positivity at work, giving performance feedback, managing adequate resources, managing workload to promote research accomplishments and making reputable academic appointments that nurture good value to the departments are kinds of behaviours exercised by effective leaders.

Moreover, in studies that used other effective leadership theories, which emphasized various aspects of leadership, were found to have common elements with transformational leadership theory. For instance, according to Bass (2000) transformational leadership shares common elements with empowering, participative leadership, democratic, leader-member exchange,



servant leadership, strategic leadership, and leadership based on communication competence. Likewise, ineffective leadership style or characteristics, skills, or behaviour falls into autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles. Hence, these leadership styles are the least preferred.

Similarly, studies continue to encourage collaborative and distributed leadership style in HEI. Mrig and Sanaghan (2017) in their longitudinal study suggest that to lead successfully or collaboratively the leaders need to practice influence, not to control, as in autocratic leadership style. They further elaborate that the leader's natural direction is to trust others and to relinquish some authority of the ultimate outcome because they genuinely believe in the value that others bring to the table.

Apart from identifying the dominant existing leadership style and effective leadership style in HE, studies that explored HE leadership at departmental level also tried to identify whether relationships exist between leadership style and demographic factors. However, majority of the studies revealed that there are no relationships between leadership style and demographic factors like age, year of experience, types of institution (private/public) and academic title (see Al-Omari, 2005; Alonderience & Majauskaite, 2016; Bodla & Nawaz, 2010; Thrash, 2009). However, Al-Omari (2005) found that 'telling' and 'delegating' style of leadership is more prominent among male deans and department heads and that 'Participative' style of leadership is more common among female leaders. This finding is in line with previous research that suggested transformational leadership behaviours are more prevalent amongst female leaders and therefore is considered more feminine while male leaders demonstrate transaction leadership style (Jones & Rudd, 2008). A study by Mohamed and Saeed (2022) in the Maldivian health care context showed that physicians preferred transformational and democratic styles of leadership, over autocratic, laissez-faire, and transactional leadership styles, irrespective of age, gender, and educational level of the physicians and that transformational leadership had the highest positive impact on the physicians' job satisfaction measures.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the full range of leaderships proposed by Bass and Avolio (2004), autocratic leadership by Lewin, Lippitt and White (1939) and distributed leadership theory by Gronn (2000). According to Fiore (2009), no single theory can provide leaders with specific ways to determine how to lead or inspire people; however, effective leaders realize that theory can help provide insight into what individuals find inspiring to

achieve institutes vision. A range of leadership theories are adopted to help the researcher better understand the prevalent and ideal leadership styles adopted by academic leaders in Maldivian HEI. It provides to identify and explore the attributes of transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, autocratic and distributed leadership practiced by the academic deans as perceived by academics and academic deans. As the notion of range of leadership theory suggests, this leadership theory is an ideal lens through which a full or broad range of leadership behaviors can be examined by breaking down the concept of leadership into not only five broad categories, but various subcategories as well. These five leadership styles and their subcategories form the analytical framework for this research.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual foundation and framework of this study is grounded on the ultimate relationship between existing leadership and ideal leadership style of academic leaders as perceived by themselves and their subordinates (academics). The conceptual framework designed is informed by review of relevant literature and examining the purpose of the study. A diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework that guides this study is presented in Figure 1. It is presented to understand the study in a precise manner.

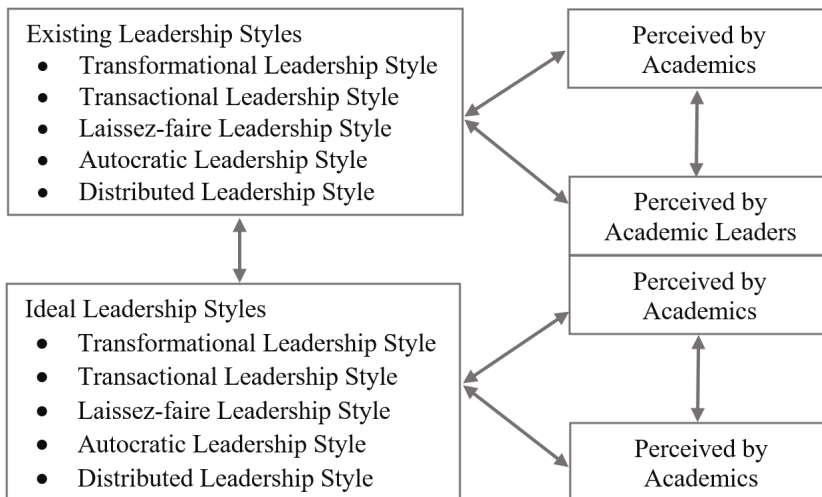


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

The 'existing leadership style' and 'ideal leadership style' were explored using a questionnaire designed by the researcher based on theoretical underpinnings of literature on leadership styles (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Northouse, 2018; Hulpia, Devos & Rosseel, 2009). The questionnaire was designed to measure leaders' perceptions of their leadership style and the lecturers' perception of how they prefer to be led. The arrow indicates the presumed relationship between the existing and ideal leadership style of the academic leaders. The current study purposely focused on transformational, transactional, laissez-faire, autocratic, and distributed leadership style to provide the theoretical background and context for understanding the analytical framework. From the preliminary qualitative data collection, these leadership styles were prevalent in Maldivian HEIs, hence, a saturation point was reached to allow the researcher to reach a conclusion and these theories were used to design the questionnaires.

## Methodology

This study identified the relationship between academic leaders' perceptions of their leadership styles as perceived by academic leaders and lecturers in Maldivian HEIs. A total population sampling was used to collect survey data from deans (N=20) and lecturers (N=170) from nine HEIs, with eight in Male' and one in the South of the Maldives.

Section A of the survey questionnaire was constructed to collect various demographic information of the respondents and Section B comprised of 30 closed-ended items on leadership styles on a five-point Likert scale with choices of not at all, occasionally, sometimes, often, and frequently if not always. The questions in Section B were slightly modified for each survey.

To enhance the validity of the survey questionnaire, it was checked by two experts and a senior staff in one of the HEIs.

A sample of a survey questionnaire is given in Figure 2.

PLEASE SHADE ONE CIRCLE FOR EACH STATEMENT THAT COMES CLOSEST TO REFLECTING YOUR OPINION ABOUT YOUR FACULTY DEAN (LEADER)		Not at all	Once in a while	Sometimes	Fairly often	Frequently, if not always
1	My leader articulates a compelling vision of the future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2	I would like my leader to provide me with assistance in exchange for my efforts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3	I prefer it when my leader avoids getting involved when important issues arise and gives me authority to deal with it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4	I prefer my leader to give orders and clarify procedures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5	My leader makes sure that we work in the same strain on the institution's core objectives.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6	I would like my leader to know my full potential.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7	My leader discusses in specific terms who is responsible for achieving performance targets.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8	My leader is absent when needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9	My leader supervises me closely fearing that I may not do my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10	I would like my leader to make sure that the right man sits on the right place, taken the competencies into account.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11	My leader shows by example that he/she live by the values he/she advocates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12	I prefer it when my leader makes it clear on what I can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13	My leader avoids making decisions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14	I look forward for my leader to give me clear direction when he/she is insecure about my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15	My leader makes sure that we have clear goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16	I would like my leader to initiate in changing the status quo.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17	My leader expresses satisfaction when I meet expectations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18	I prefer it when my leader delays responding to urgent questions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19	My leader is the chief judge of the achievements of the members of the group.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
20	I would like my leader to be sure that we are clear of the authorities we have.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
21	My leader helps me to develop my strengths.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
22	I prefer it when my leader directs his/her attention towards failure to meet standards.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
23	My leader does not interfere until problems become serious.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24	I would like my leader to hold the final decision-making authority within my faculty.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25	My leader is willing to execute a good idea.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26	I would like to feel proud for being associated with my leader.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27	My leader keeps tracks of mistakes, complaints and failures.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28	I prefer it when my leader shows that he is a firm believer in "if ain't broke don't fix it".	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29	My leader tells me what to do and how to do it.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30	I would like my leader to evaluate the performance of the staffs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Source: Adapted from Bass and Avolio, 2004; Northouse, 2011; Hulpia, Devos & Rossel, 2009

Figure 2. Sample questionnaire used in the study, to explore perceptions of leadership by the lecturers

Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was conducted to analyze the subscales to strengthen the questionnaire. The thirty items of leadership style scale were subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS Version 12. Prior to performing PCA, the suitability of data for factor analysis was assessed. Inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of coefficients of .3 and above. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was used to test linear relationships among the leadership variables in the factor solution. As shown in Table 1, the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin value was .692, exceeding the recommended value of .6 (Kaiser,

1970), which indicated that the leadership variables were linearly related. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1954) reached statistical significance  $t$  ( $p < 0.001$ ), supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix.

*Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test*

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.692
	Approx. Chi-Square	995.634
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	435
	Sig.	.000

The Rotated Component Matrix depicted the loadings of each of the variables on the five factors that were selected. The highest loading variables on each of the components were used to identify the nature of the underlying latent variable represented by each component. The reliability test was performed to verify the measurement of items in the Likert scale using Cronbach's alpha measurements. The overall Cronbach alpha of the scale was .77. SPSS version 23 was used to analyze the data using descriptive and inferential statistics such as means, percentages, standard deviations, and Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.

## Findings and Discussion

To explore the existing leadership styles of academic leaders in Maldivian HEIs, participants were separated by participant type (dean/leader or lecturer). Then, mean scores were calculated for each leadership style dimension in the existing leadership style scale. Table 2 below shows the mean score of the existing leadership style as perceived by leaders. Faculty leaders, on average, perceived the existing leadership style as more distributed and to a lesser laissez-faire leadership style. The mean score (M) shows that most of the leaders perceived themselves as having distributed leadership style ( $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=.574$ ), whereas the least number of leaders perceived themselves as laissez-faire leaders ( $M=2.02$ ,  $SD=.769$ ). The mean score of transformational leadership ( $M=4.08$ ,  $SD=.567$ ) and transactional leadership style ( $M=3.95$ ,  $SD=.424$ ) were ranked as the 2nd and 3rd most prevalent leadership style as perceived by leaders themselves. The mean score of autocratic leadership style was  $M=2.10$  and the standard deviation was .675.

*Table 2. Total mean scores of existing leadership styles as perceived by leaders (n=20).*

Rank	Existing Leadership Styles	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Distributed Leadership	4.15	.574
2	Transformational Leadership	4.08	.567
3	Transactional Leadership	3.95	.424
4	Autocratic Leadership	2.70	.675
5	Laissez-faire Leadership	2.02	.769

The ranking by both deans and lecturers were identical, as shown in Table 3. Lecturers also perceived distributed leadership style as the most practiced leadership style, with transformational and transactional leadership style ranked as the 2nd and 3rd most prevalent leadership style as perceived by lecturers and the deans. The least common leadership style perceived by lecturers also was laissez-faire leadership style. However, the mean score (M) shows that the lecturers rated their leaders' practice of distributed, transformational, and transactional leadership styles lower than the deans thought they practiced these styles. Lecturers perceived their leaders as showing distributed leadership style (M=3.72, SD=.896) in comparison to deans' rating of 4.15 (S.D =.574). A significant higher number of lecturers perceived their leaders practiced Laissez Faire Leadership than their supervisors said they practiced it. Mean score for Laissez Faire leadership style rated by lecturers was 2.76, (SD=.803), while the deans rating was 2.02 (SD .769).

The mean score of autocratic leadership style was M=2.80 by lecturers (SD = .803) and 2.70 (S.D. .675), indicating deans were equally aware of instances when they practiced autocratic leadership style as their subordinated did.

*Table 3. Total mean scores of existing leadership styles as perceived by lecturers (n=170).*

Rank	Existing Leadership Styles	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Distributed Leadership	3.72	.896
2	Transformational Leadership	3.46	.957
3	Transactional Leadership	3.39	.810
4	Autocratic Leadership	2.80	.714
5	Laissez-faire Leadership	2.76	.803

To explore the ideal leadership styles of academic leaders in Maldivian HEI, participants were separated by participant type (leader or lecturer). Then, mean scores were calculated for each leadership style dimension in the ideal leadership style scale. Table 4 shows the mean score of the ideal leadership style as perceived by leaders themselves. Faculty leaders, on average, prefer leadership styles of distributed, transformational, and transactional leadership styles. Autocratic and laissez-faire leadership style is least preferred by academic leaders themselves.

*Table 4. Total mean scores of ideal leadership styles as perceived by leaders (n=20).*

Rank	Ideal Leadership Styles	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Distributed Leadership	3.90	.623
2	Transformational Leadership	3.82	.535
3	Transactional Leadership	3.63	.572
4	Autocratic Leadership	2.99	.940
5	Laissez-faire Leadership	1.95	.603

The mean score (M) shows that most of the leaders prefer distributed leadership style (M=3.90, SD=.623), whereas laissez-faire leadership style (M=1.95, SD=.603) is least favoured. The mean score of transformational leadership (M=3.82, SD=.535) and transactional leadership style (M=3.63, SD=.572) were ranked as the 2nd and 3rd most ideal leadership style as perceived by leaders. The mean score of autocratic leadership style is M=2.99 and the standard deviation were .940.

Table 5 shows the mean score of the ideal leadership style as perceived by lecturers. Lecturers, on average, perceived leadership style ranging from transformational to distributed to transactional leadership styles. Like academic leaders, lecturers also least prefer autocratic and laissez-faire leadership style.

The mean scores (M) shows that most of the lecturers prefer transformational leadership style (M=3.93, SD=.707), whereas laissez-faire leadership style (M=2.27, SD=.812) is least favoured. Distributed leadership style (M=3.83, SD=.793), transactional leadership style (M=3.55, SD=.752) and autocratic leadership (M=3.52, SD=.865) were ranked as the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th most ideal leadership style, respectively.

*Table 5. Total mean scores of ideal leadership styles as perceived by lecturers (n=170).*

Rank	Ideal Leadership Styles	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Distributed Leadership	3.93	.707
2	Transformational Leadership	3.83	.793
3	Transactional Leadership	3.55	.752
4	Autocratic Leadership	3.52	.865
5	Laissez-faire Leadership	2.27	.812

The relationship between existing leadership styles and ideal leadership was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables [ $r=.53$ ,  $n=190$ ,  $p<.0005$ ], with high scores of existing leadership style associated with high scores of ideal leadership style.

The strong and positive relationship between the existing and ideal leadership styles indicate that as scores for the existing leadership styles increased, there was a large and statistically significant increase in the scores of the ideal leadership styles. This meant that existing leadership styles are well-regarded and preferred by academic leaders themselves as well as by the lecturers of the institutions. This finding is consistent with the findings of Dani and Mhunpiew (2019), who developed an academic leadership model for higher education in India. In their study the scores for the current leadership constructs increases with the expected leadership constructs.

Similar to these findings, Mrig and Sanaghan (2017), in their longitudinal study, which looked deeply into the skill set needed for academic leadership using open space and round table meetings with more than 60 senior managers of HEIs in the United States found that HEIs need leaders who are forward looking; able to take risk, foster creativity and innovation; enhance facilitations; able to take challenging decisions; remain resilient and remain strong after a downfall. These attributes of leadership align with the characteristics of transformational, distributed, and transactional leaders.

Hence, based on the evidence from the current study, which found a strong positive correlation between the existing and idea leadership styles, it could be concluded that most of the deans and lecturers idealize the existing leadership style practiced by academic leaders in the Maldivian HEIs. This was also



evident, in qualitative structured interview data, from Maldivian HEI lecturers, in research the author had published earlier (Waheeda & Shaheeda, 2018).

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify whether there is a significant relationship between academic leaders existing leadership styles and ideal leadership styles as perceived by academic leaders and lecturers in Maldivian HEI. Survey data was obtained from deans (N=20) and lecturers (N=170) in nine different HEIs. The relationship between existing leadership styles and ideal leadership style was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. The analysis showed that there is a strong, positive correlation between the existing and ideal leadership styles, with high scores of existing leadership styles associated with high scores of ideal leadership styles. This indicates that existing leadership styles are well-regarded by both academic leaders and the lecturers at the institutes. More specifically, deans and lecturers idealized and preferred distributed and transformative leadership styles the most. Attributes of distributed leadership like collaborative work and delegation of work were practiced and valued. The autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles were not valued even by the deans to the extent it is practiced by themselves, indicating their practice is dependent on lack of capability.

Therefore, this study calls for academic deans to maintain the humanistic and collaborative leadership with their subordinates. Leaders whose leadership practice is autocratic and laissez faire style need to develop their own capability to adjust their leadership approach to a more transformative and distributed approach. Similarly, this study recommends governing boards and management to recognize and appreciate the commitment of deans who demonstrate attributes of transformative and distributive leadership styles and to emphasize on the recruitment and hiring of deans who prove positive transformational and distributed leadership styles.

Maldivian HEIs are in their infancy stage of growth. Hence, avenues to explore new directions in leadership such as strategic, entrepreneurial, invitational, and sustainable leadership, can support them, to keep growing in leadership roles, and enable them to demonstrate good leadership strategies and skills to their students.

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