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Article

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Opinion

Addressing the Dark Side of Leadership in the University System Using Community of Practice (CoP) Approach

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Abstract: University systems are increasingly facing the consequences of the dark side of leadership. The dark side of leadership in educational organisations is a worldwide phenomenon affecting universities, academies, and college campuses. To respond to this, this paper explores the potential of community practice as an approach to respond to the dark side of leadership in the university system. The paper is a conceptual argument and derives knowledge from argumentative and logical reasoning, located within an interpretive worldview and analysed using conceptual analysis as a tool to make sense of the arguments. The paper argues that shared commonality, collective problem solving, mutual participation, and social interactions are dimensions of remedy that can ameliorate the dark side of leadership. Based on this argument, the paper concludes that effective dimensions of remedy that could ameliorate the dark side of leadership in university contexts are shared commonality, collective problem solving, mutual participation, and social interactions, with a recommendation that they must be incorporated in university leadership dispositions.

Keywords: dark side of leadership; community of practice; university system; interpretive lens; theoretical assumptions



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1. Introduction

Leadership roles in educational institutions provide an opportunity to help cultivate the environment and shape the lives of students. However, these positions come with unique responsibilities that require careful management. From time to time, issues arise where individuals in leadership roles have abused their power for personal gain or to put certain people at a disadvantage. Living within a university system means understanding how power ebbs and flows between various stakeholders, which requires great wisdom from those in leadership roles; yet not all are able to stay true to their moral code when faced with challenges. In such cases, energy must be invested into understanding the full implications of any occurrences of abuse of power and taking necessary actions to ensure proper protocols are followed in the future (Hodson et al. 2006). This is expedient because the university system is looked upon as a place of learning and growth. However, it often falls prey to the dark side of leadership. This can mean anything from unequal treatment of faculty and staff to power dynamics, or even undermining higher levels of education via a lack of resources such as financial support for educational materials and research (Harris and Jones 2018; Mackey et al. 2021). These issues can cause high stress in members of the university system, affecting both their professional and personal well-being. This is perhaps why Ngambi (2011) argues that people in positions of authority should take responsibility for encouraging positive morale amongst employees and ensuring members receive equal opportunities to help with their development within the field.

Although the university system provides much-needed direction and guidance to its stakeholders, it can also have a dark side. This includes unethical decisions by some leaders hoping to gain influence or take advantage of their positions, resulting in the exploitation of vulnerable students or even staff. Furthermore, university systems tend to be hierarchical in nature (Hellawell and Hancock 2001) and may lead to privilege being

disproportionally awarded, with decisions sometimes being made with the welfare of senior members being given more importance than those lower down in the hierarchy. Such issues can lead to further deterioration of trust among both students and staff in university systems, which has a detrimental effect on morale and ultimately hinders growth opportunities for everyone involved (Khan and Hussain 2016). Trust is crucial in ethical behaviour, job satisfaction, and employee silence behaviour in universities (Popoola and Chinomona 2017; Akhtar and Nazarudin 2020; Abdillah et al. 2021). However, it can also have detrimental effects on moral management and leadership. Samier and Schmidt (2010) discuss the erosion of trust in higher education due to toxic leadership, which can lead to a lack of transparency and accountability. This can create an environment where unethical behaviour is more likely to occur. Therefore, while trust is important, it must be balanced with effective moral management and leadership to ensure ethical behaviour in universities.

The dark side of leadership in higher education, particularly in the context of neoliberalism and the use of metrics, is a complex and multifaceted issue. Kliewer (2019) and Waters (2018) both highlight the ways in which traditional leadership approaches in higher education reinforce neoliberal ideology, leading to a toxic work environment and the metrification of academic labour. This is further exacerbated by the displacement of public good models of governance and the imposition of individualised incentives and performance targets (Olssen 2016). The impact of these changes is explored by Warren (2017), who discusses the personal and systemic violence that can result from the adoption of neoliberal strategies. The need for a re-evaluation of leadership in higher education is emphasised by Davies et al. (2001), who suggests the use of the Excellence Model to improve leadership, and Parker (2014), who discusses the consequences of these changes for experience and self-abasement.

Across the world, educational organisations are increasingly facing the consequences of the dark side of leadership or management. That is, the dark side of management or leadership in educational organisations is a worldwide phenomenon, affecting universities, academies, and college campuses in nearly every corner of the planet. In the university system, troubling examples of leaders who have taken advantage of their authority for personal gain or negative influence have been documented repeatedly. From the United States to Europe and Africa to Asia, school systems around the globe have encountered instances of malpractice in management (Sporn 2003; Omonijo et al. 2014; Clawson 2015). The United Kingdom is no exception; recently, there have been reports of unsuitable conduct from prominent leaders in institutions based in the country. It is more concerning that this issue extends beyond a particular culture or continent; it has transcended national boundaries and become a pandemic problem in many educational organisations. The implications are alarming: a corrupt hierarchy can impede learners from reaching their full academic potential and derail an entire school's educational mission (Aniodoh et al. 2017). Thankfully, many governments and institutions are working to better ameliorate this issue and create solutions that protect against unethical leadership. Contrary to this, it has a potentially catastrophic effect on academic progress on an international scale.

In other words, this paper suggests that the harmful consequences for a university resulting from its leader's poor interactions with followers and the environment are what defines the dark side of leadership in universities. Since poor leadership can have detrimental effects on the university system (Gerashchenko 2022), the literature confirmed that there are many solutions to address this issue, ranging from revamping organisational hierarchies to emphasising a more flattened structure with greater accountability and transparency in decision making (Jordan and Bilimoria 2007; O'Mahony 2020; Al-Zoubi et al. 2021). Other potential remedies include investing in professional development and training with more emphasis placed on leadership capacity building, implementing continuous performance management strategies, and forming a carefully designed code of conduct that outlines expected standards for all university community members (Ndambakuwa and Mufunda 2006; Palchoudhury 2016; Zhu and Zayim-Kurtay 2018; Brandt et al. 2021). Although there is no one-size-fits-all solution, some potential steps that universities could

take include instituting more rigorous screening processes for potential leaders, creating a system that encourages transparency and collaboration among different departments, and providing support and guidance to those currently working in leadership roles. Combating the negative effects of bad leadership requires a comprehensive strategy that includes both preventative measures and reactive responses.

Addressing the leadership problem in university systems requires a multifaceted approach, and one core element that cannot be overlooked is the importance of the community of practice. This involves all stakeholders and faculty alike in dynamic and collaborative engagement that fosters powerful discourse and encourages the thoughtful selection of leadership positions. It is a proven method to instil a sense of collaboration, ownership, and camaraderie among individuals, which, in combination with the right team and a strong vision, can help mould an organisation and its leaders into something truly remarkable (Bruce and Easley 2000; McLoughlin et al. 2018). Not only does this provide a direct gateway for underprivileged stakeholders to break into positions of power, but it also creates sustainable pathways for systemic change by cultivating university members who understand the nuances of leading with fairness and efficacy (Kislov et al. 2011). Therefore, community of practice is presented in this paper as an approach to respond to the dark side of leadership in the university system.

Research Questions

Based on the above analysis, the following research questions are raised to present the argument:

- What are the potentials of community of practice as an approach to respond to the dark side of leadership in universities?
- How can the potentials/assumptions of the community of practice assist in responding to the dark side of leadership in universities?

2. Methodology

This paper is a conceptual argument that derives knowledge from argumentative and logical reasoning based on two concepts: the dark side of leadership and the community of practice approach. Drawing on argumentative and logical reasoning, this paper aims to present community of practice as an approach to responding to leadership deficiencies in the university system. By delving deeper into this, greater insight can be gained into how both leaders and groups interact within their own environments. It is hoped that the paper will further enhance understanding of the potential connectedness that exists between leadership dynamics and communal action that can exist when they come together. In order to make sense of the argument, conceptual analysis was used to resonate the argument with meaning-making. That is, all arguments on what and how the community of practice approach can enhance leadership prowess in universities are made using conceptual analysis. Conceptual analysis is a process used to uncover the meaning of words, phrases, and definitions (Risjord 2009).

This type of analysis is important because it involves studying language (Racine 2015) through careful observation, looking for implicit assumptions, counterexamples, and classifications that can modify or even completely change the conventional understanding of something. That is, this method enables the researcher to form connections between elements within an idea and between ideas from different areas to reach a deeper understanding. Since a conceptually sound argument is based on formal logic that makes the argument cogent and persuasive, this method of analysing the two concepts allows the researcher to synthesise multiple perspectives that may exist in relation to the topic, allowing for a holistic understanding of potential implications of the community of practice on the dark side of leadership.

This development of this paper is arranged by discussing the concept of community of practice, identifying the assumptions or the potentials of the community of practice, and presenting the relationship between the assumptions of the community of practice

and its remedial implication for the dark side of leadership. The findings, conclusion, and recommendations are also presented.

3. Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the concept of community of practice as an approach. This is done by exploring concepts relevant to university leadership management. The assumptions and potential of the community of practice are also argued and identified. The relationship between the assumptions and their implication on the dark side of leadership in universities is also discussed.

3.1. *Concept of Community of Practice as an Approach*

Community of practice (CoP) is a concept taken from Activity Theory and was developed by Lave and Wenger in 1991 (Lave and Wenger 1991; Schwen and Hara 2003; Levine 2010). A CoP encompasses a group of individuals who come together to share ideas, experiences, knowledge, and best practices with one another (Langley et al. 2017). It brings together people with similar interests, backgrounds, or goals while creating an environment that fosters learning and provides an opportunity for personal or professional growth (Tremblay and Psyché 2012; Mathezer-Bence 2017). The CoP serves as a platform that enables members to interact, exchange information, and deepen their understanding of the field they represent (Agrifoglio 2015). Additionally, any new ideas that arise through discussions conducted in the CoP can be explored, tested, and incorporated into daily practices to bring about change and improvement. Ultimately, this shared approach to problem solving creates greater value for everyone involved.

The socio-cultural view behind CoPs is based on collective activity that focuses on the transfer and construction of specialist knowledge as well as important skills, values, and beliefs. CoPs can involve members from non-affiliations or share with already established networks such as online communities, collections of geographically dispersed people, formal groups from business organisations, small-scale research projects, or any other situated interaction (Hoadley 2012). In essence, CoPs ultimately lead to better collaboration, which helps the members achieve common goals. Collaborative teams, or communities of practice (CoPs), work together to establish a connection and create an environment that facilitates collaboration. CoPs promote cohesion among members and foster a sense of mutual responsibility for achieving common goals (Hou 2015). The practice of open sharing, networking, and knowledge building serves as the cornerstone for successful collaboration within a CoP. As all members come to the table with different experiences and areas of expertise, they strive to gain new understanding and create shared objectives, enabling achievement beyond what would have been possible had each member worked independently. The effective utilisation of available resources through collaborative efforts may lead to increased collective productivity and inventive solutions that support both individual and team aims.

The idea of moral management is closely related to the concept of community of practice, which suggests that knowledge and skills are learned by engaging in shared activities within a community (Wenger 2004). This implies that the cooperative development and exchange of ideas between members is essential to foster mutual understanding, as well as to share resources, improve strategies, and make decisions in an interactive manner. Research has shown that a community of practice can be used to manage morally complex issues such as racism, sexism, or ableism in the workplace (Delgado et al. 2021). Through shared experiences within the collective, members may engage in vibrant dialogues to recognise opportunities for organisational learning and improvement. It is this potential that social learning brings to moral management, which helps build a more ethical work environment.

3.2. *CoP and University Leadership Management*

University leadership management is best structured when organised as a community of practice. This model emphasises collaborative engagement among participants, allowing

for the natural emergence of convincing arguments and shared wisdom. Through this style of dialogue, certain problems and challenges become priority areas for research. The collective inquiry in a community of practice facilitates experienced practitioners to create new knowledge by building on the expertise already held in their organisation (Soubhi et al. 2010). Lasting relationships are established through collective sharing among members enrolled in the community, thus substantially enhancing knowledge that may lead to advocacy. By engaging members as active instructors rather than recipients of instruction, there is a higher potential for further increased learning and assurance in understanding within an academic setting.

Based on the introduction presented above, universities face numerous challenges in managing their leadership constituents, often calling for creative and innovative approaches. A community of practice (CoP) offers a unique opportunity to develop an environment where university leaders can interact, engage in meaningful dialogue, and gain insight into best practices in various aspects of university life. CoPs provide members with a forum to collaborate, discuss, and share experiences in order to create a sense of camaraderie and foster a shared commitment towards achieving the organisational objectives of the group. By encouraging transparent conversations, active participation from all stakeholders, and open-ended dialogue, universities are able to successfully identify areas for improvement and develop targeted goals beneficial for the entire university system. The potential for benefiting from creating CoPs is extraordinary for universities, providing fruitful opportunities for developing effective management strategies at all levels of the organisation.

4. Potentials/Assumptions of Community of Practice

This section discusses the assumptions or the potential of community of practice as an approach. These assumptions are based on the knowledge deduced from the conceptual presentation of community of practice above. They are shared commonality, collective problem solving, mutual participation, and social interactions.

4.1. Shared Commonality as an Assumption of CoP

Based on the above conceptual exploration, one can argue that shared commonality is one of the assumptions or potentials of CoP. The shared commonality assumption emphasises the importance of assuming similarities among members. This assumption is based on the notion that relationships among members can be strengthened when they focus on values and ideas they have in common rather than areas of disagreement. Consequently, it is argued that individuals with diverse backgrounds should be encouraged to share their experiences, values, and perspectives to inform problem-solving and decision-making processes. By considering each individual's level of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours, a better understanding may be gained of their daily practices and preferences within a given group. Long-term success is often more attainable when leveraging this information to improve collaboration and discuss shared objectives.

Shared commonality can be a useful assumption from which to begin a community of practice approach in any organisation. By looking for shared interests and experiences, individuals within the same space are better able to connect with one another, creating an open atmosphere of discussion and learning (Jimenez-Silva and Olson 2012). Different areas of knowledge or expertise may stand side-by-side rather than being siloed into individual specialisation. This approach not only breaks down barriers between different cultures or interests, but also provides fertile ground for innovation and collaboration. With a shared commonality as its foundation, a community of practice can develop a collective identity that merges leadership with actionable outcomes.

4.2. Collective Problem-Solving as an Assumption of CoP

Collective problem solving can be seen as one of the central principles of the community of practice theory. This form of collaborative problem solving enables individuals

to work together to find solutions to complex issues, tapping into the knowledge and resources that each person brings with them in order to gain insight into different approaches and techniques (Andrews-Todd et al. 2019). Taking this approach has been demonstrated to be more effective and efficient than traditional forms of problem solving that rely predominantly on a single individual who is able to bring their own resources rather than leverage those available in a collective (Care et al. 2016; Andrews-Todd and Forsyth 2020). One can then argue that shared problem solving provides an opportunity for members of the community of practice to get to know each other better, allowing new relationships and collaborations that can then lead toward achieving even bigger goals. The central assumption underlying collective problem solving in the community of practice theory is that members can discover solutions alongside one another through discussion and collaboration involving joint engagement with tasks related to certain practices. This value placed on collaborative problem solving in a given social context positions the community of practice as demonstrative of the potential for people working together to find effective solutions to shared issues.

4.3. Mutual Participation as an Assumption of CoP

Mutual participation is a fundamental assumption of the community of practice as an organisational approach. This term loosely refers to a group of people in an organisation who, through interacting over extended periods of time, share knowledge and learn from each other (Chang and Chuang 2011). The members contribute to the collective goals while developing interpersonal relationships, skills, and abilities. These communities hone craftsmanship by having their members become competent in what they do, and this creates an environment where knowledge can grow and spread without defaulting on expertise or quality. Especially in today's leadership landscape, it is evident that mutual participation has a central role in creating efficient operations that drive both innovation and productivity.

Mutual participation has been shown to be beneficial for organisations, as it provides an avenue for knowledge sharing, aiding team cohesion and creating a collective learning environment (Van den Bossche et al. 2006). There are both formal and informal approaches to CoPs. Formal CoPs are typically structured and organised under specific terms and conditions with a set purpose in mind (Bowen and Breuer 2022). On the other hand, informal CoPs are usually organic networks of individuals united by their shared interests but without any particular goal or structure (Schulte et al. 2020). Established formal CoPs may have greater potential to share, create, and exchange knowledge due to their clear structure; however, they can be vulnerable to external pressures that could impact the overall operation of the network. On the contrary, due to its lack of rules and boundaries, an informal CoP could provide a much more autonomous environment that is less concerned with frameworks and objectives, empowering members to pursue their own interests. Regardless of the mode taken, mutual participation encourages the flow of ideas within the organisation. Consequently, this can lead to improved practices, increased efficiency in decision making, and heightened innovation due to interrelated streams of thought emerging from multiple perspectives on any given situation. Investment in mutually participative CoPs has thus been found to yield beneficial organisational outcomes (Lesser and Storck 2001).

4.4. Social Interactions as an Assumption of CoP

The notion of communities of Practice (CoPs) is dependent on the assumption that members interact with each other to develop shared understandings, norms, or procedures. By engaging in activities such as group discussions, information sharing, and collective problem solving, members shape the identity and goals of the CoP, as well as its collective learning practices. Although digital technologies have been making tremendous leaps in recent years, so that online interactions can serve similar functions, social interaction remains at the core of any CoP (Wenger 2010). Researchers have shown that face-to-face

interactions have a greater impact than virtual ones when it comes to developing a shared sense of community and building trust between members (Sacco and Ismail 2014). The exchange between members through their dialogue, activities, and experiences builds the foundations for the shared knowledge that emerges from their interactions within the CoP. That is, social interaction constitutes an important tool to understand how communities of practice function and is a foundational assumption necessary for successful community building. Therefore, it is crucial for any successful CoP to incorporate both virtual and physical social spaces into its design and operations.

5. Assumptions of CoP as Remedies for the Dark Side of Leadership in Universities

In this section, the assumptions of the CoP are correlated with the dark side of leadership, with an argument on how each assumption can respond to the dark side of leadership in the university system. This is presented under the following sub-headings: shared commonality as a remedy for the dark side of leadership; collective problem solving as a remedy for the dark side of leadership; mutual participation as a remedy for the dark side of leadership; and social interaction as a remedy for the dark side of leadership.

- **Shared commonality as a remedy for the dark side of leadership:** It is increasingly evident that shared commonality can serve as an effective remedy for the dark side of leadership in the university system. To begin with, greater collaboration between academic staff, management and, senior leaders could help to ensure that decision-making processes are fair and equitable. At a more basic level, creating opportunities for dialogues between all members of a university environment creates a platform for discussion of challenges and ideas as opposed to individual initiatives. Furthermore, recognising the impact of our heterogeneity within a university setting—such as gender, ethnicity, and cultural diversities—can allow space for students to self-advocate without fear of discrimination or isolation. Moreover, developing an empathic awareness among colleagues serves to strengthen respect and understanding of differences while pursuing collective aims in the interest of collective well-being. In sum, shared commonalities offer constructive means by which to mitigate conflicts and dissolve perceived opposition when confronting the dark forces of leadership in a university context. Shared leadership, a phenomenon where leadership roles and influence are distributed among team members, has been a topic of extensive research. While it has been associated with positive outcomes such as team performance and satisfaction (Drescher and Garbers 2016), it also has potential negative impacts, including power struggles and role stress (Chen and Zhang 2023). The success of shared leadership is contingent on factors such as intragroup trust and task interdependence (Wu et al. 2018), and it is particularly important in commercial organisations (Sweeney et al. 2019). The concept of shared leadership is closely linked to responsible leadership, with the former potentially supporting the latter (Pearce et al. 2014). However, this is consistent with the argument that the transition to shared leadership is not without its challenges, as it requires a shift from traditional, hierarchical leadership (O'Toole et al. 2002). Furthermore, by identifying shared goals and ambitions for all parties, universities can craft leadership strategies that empower individuals around their own aspirations. For example, increasing student input when creating university policies and initiatives can provide a sense of ownership and ensure that decisions are made with knowledge of how they may affect those they most impact. Not only does this foster trust among stakeholders in academia, but it can also create a more conducive positivity among the leaders. Thus, building ties through collaboration is one way that universities can continue to refine their operations to promote an atmosphere of growth and success for all.
- **Collective problem solving as a remedy for the dark side of leadership:** While the university system has done much to shape and improve learning across cultures, it is notably not without its dark side. Specifically, the unchecked imposition of leadership can lead to unfair power dynamics and even unchecked aggression in some cases. In

an effort to remedy this problem, collective problem-solving initiatives can seek to diffuse the power imbalance between individuals while promoting shared decision-making and collaborative processes. While still in its nascent stages, this form of leadership holds significant potential as both a proactive approach to addressing a noted issue in universities worldwide and a form of facilitation that could help ease tensions and encourage active engagement. Ultimately, by fostering awareness of group dynamics while promoting open dialogue and discussion, collective problem solving has the potential to be an effective way to counteract risks associated with autocratic university leadership structures (Nzimakwe 2014; Alt et al. 2023). A range of studies have explored the role of collective problem solving in addressing the challenges of leadership. Maupin et al. (2020) highlights the need to consider power dynamics and methodological challenges in this context. Yahosseini (2020) introduces a novel approach to aggregating judgments, the transmission chain, which has shown promise in fostering collective intelligence. These studies collectively underscore the potential of collective problem solving as a remedy for the dark side of leadership, particularly in small-scale societies where leadership can help overcome collective action problems (Glowacki and von Rueden 2015). University leadership is tasked with making decisions that are beneficial to the greater community in the academic context; however, there are times when a less-than-optimal situation arises due to decisions made by those in positions of power. In order to combat this dark side of university leadership, collective problem solving may be a viable remedy. By providing a platform for collaboration amongst leaders, faculty, and students, issues related to inefficient decision making can largely be addressed and potentially resolved in an amicable way. Through this process of collective problem solving, interactions between key players in the university system can become more constructive and result in better outcomes overall.

- **Mutual participation as a remedy for the dark side of leadership:** Inside universities, leadership is essential to the successful operation of academic and administrative teams. The dark side of this manifests itself in initiatives that may promote job insecurity, resistance to collaboration, and silencing of constructive dissent on administrative decisions. As such, mutual participation strategies can be useful remedies in responding to these issues. By increasing the collective sense of ownership among university leadership teams and giving members a sense of investment in decision-making processes, all stakeholders can have their voices heard and collaborate toward a shared vision for the university system. Open dialogue involving all levels of staff, faculty, and student participants in decision making aims for pluralistic and legitimate solutions that actively seek to resolve any challenges incurred within the system. Mutual participation thus provides benefits beyond a single “leader” and creates an environment of positive change in a university’s structure by utilising diverse perspectives from its participants. Mutual participation in leadership has been explored in various contexts, with a focus on the role of followers in educational organisations (Owens 2013) and the potential for community participation to improve society (Redondo 2016). However, the effectiveness of leadership in culturally heterogeneous groups is questioned, with poor leadership and uncertainty about reciprocity hindering cooperation (Keuschnigg and Schikora 2014). Despite these challenges, participatory leadership is seen as a valuable tool for social and organisational development (Magzan 2011), particularly when a political approach is taken (Hickey 2004).
- **Social interaction as a remedy for the dark side of leadership:** The argument so far has shed light on the importance of social interaction as a viable remedy for the dark side of leadership within the university system. A growing body of research indicates that fostering meaningful interpersonal relationships across various departments and student groups can help reduce conflict (Butt and Ahmad 2019). Social interaction can also serve as a remedy for the dark side of leadership by providing a platform for constructive feedback and support. Simonet et al. (2018) highlight the potential for

subclinical personality interactions and psychological pressures to accelerate leader derailment, suggesting that social interaction can help mitigate these risks. [Clements and Washbush \(1999\)](#) further emphasise the importance of considering the role of followers and the potential negative outcomes of leadership, which can be addressed through open communication and collaboration. [Clifton et al. \(2020\)](#) advocate for a focus on leadership as a practice and interaction, which can foster a more inclusive and supportive environment. [Naseer et al. \(2016\)](#) provide empirical evidence of the impact of despotic leadership and leadership status on social interaction, underscoring the need for positive and constructive interactions to counteract these negative influences. Therefore, creating shared experiences, not only among senior administrators but also among faculty and staff, allows members of a university to relate to one another on a more humane level, thus improving communication and understanding. Additionally, collaborative activities within curricula offer opportunities for individuals to interact outside traditional hierarchical roles, strengthening connections among academics and improving morale. This is important to consider when seeking positive transformations in university systems.

6. Discussion of Major Arguments

This section presents the remedies for the dark side of leadership and confirms these with assisting literature. In the below discussion, each paragraph contains each finding and its discussion.

The paper argues that the spirit or practice of shared commonality among stakeholders in the university system increases effectiveness and leadership prowess, reducing the dark side of leadership in university operations. This paper also argues that a shared commonality among stakeholders in the university system can be incredibly beneficial, increasing the overall effectiveness and leadership prowess while diminishing the dark side of leadership. By promoting unity and cooperation between stakeholders, universities are able to achieve long-term objectives more harmoniously ([Johnson 1991](#); [Lakitan et al. 2012](#)). This echoes the findings suggesting that this collaborative environment is essential for optimising university operations ([Bikard et al. 2019](#)), which can positively impact institutional public perception.

Secondly, this paper argues that collective problem-solving practice in the university system is one of the ways to remediate the dark side of leadership. That is, one key insight drawn from this paper is how collective problem-solving strategies can act as a critical avenue for remedying dark aspects of leadership. This finding is entirely consistent with the earlier literature highlighting the advantageous role collective problem-solving methods can take towards positive leadership outcomes ([Puccio et al. 2020](#)). Such evidence further underscores the importance of developing robust initiatives that make use of collaborative approaches grounded in education and research.

Thirdly, this paper argues the importance of amplified mutual participation in university organisations to uphold productivity efficiency and deter undesirable or oppressive leadership roles. The argument is that when multiple personnel are actively engaged to drive professional outcomes, the conducive environment empowers decision makers to create trustful relationships with peers. When this is facilitated, the authority holders can prioritise individual shortcomings and remove boundaries that may originate from isolated leadership roles. Involving multiple people also promotes accountability through which the prevention of irresponsible decisions is made possible. Furthermore, mutual participation puts followers in a position where they are able to identify problems and narrow down potential solutions through collective dialogue ([Cole-Lewis et al. 2016](#)). This reinforces greater cooperation among organisational members, all leading to effective production goals.

Lastly, this paper argues that social interaction can also address the issue around the dark side of leadership in the university system. That is, this paper reaffirms existing research that suggests social interaction can be an effective strategy to address the dark aspects of leadership within universities ([Hu et al. 2022](#)). Such interaction could assist

in creating a more transparent environment in which to manage organisational change within these systems. This form of leadership is key to fostering diversity and providing equal opportunities for stakeholders while promoting a sense of engagement from staff and students alike. Although this exploration can provide the basis for further exploration in this area, future research will be needed to validate its conclusions and suggest effective implementation.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper presented community of practice as an approach to address the dark side of university leadership. Using an interpretive worldview that disrupted traditional argumentative and conceptual viewpoints, the research identified that shared commonality, collective problem solving, mutual participation, and social interactions are effective dimensions of remedies that could ameliorate the dark side of leadership in university contexts. Thus, this paper recommends specifically employing communities of practice as an avenue through which universities can seek a positive transformation to their leadership culture and practices. Such a shift would result in improved collaboration across internal teams, greater employee satisfaction from being heard, and heightened trust among all levels. Ultimately, a community of practice framework offers a possibility for creating healthier structures within academic institutions that lead to inspired learning environments for faculty and students alike.

8. Implication for Practice

To effectively implement solutions for mitigating the dark side of leadership in universities, specific, actionable steps include establishing cross-functional committees involving faculty, administration, and students to ensure diverse perspectives in decision making. For instance, a policy review board with members from different departments and student representatives can work collaboratively on university policies, ensuring inclusivity and fairness. Regular, structured dialogues or forums should be organised, fostering open communication and empathy among all university members. These forums can address topics such as cultural diversity, mental health, and academic challenges, promoting a culture of understanding and shared responsibility. Additionally, leadership training programs emphasising shared and responsible leadership principles can be integrated into professional development for staff and faculty, equipping them with skills for collaborative and empathetic leadership. Implementing mentorship programs where senior faculty guides junior staff and students can also help in building a supportive and inclusive academic environment. When consistently applied, these steps can transform university leadership dynamics, promoting a more inclusive, collaborative, and effective academic community.

Establishing cross-disciplinary problem-solving groups that include faculty, administration, and students is also important. These groups should regularly meet to discuss and address current university challenges, ensuring that decision making is a shared process. Implementing structured methodologies such as the “transmission chain” can help aggregate judgments and foster collective intelligence. Workshops or training sessions on understanding power dynamics within groups, as highlighted by [Maupin et al. \(2020\)](#), can be beneficial. Additionally, creating a platform for anonymous feedback can encourage participation from those who may feel intimidated in face-to-face settings.

Developing a framework for decision making that mandates the inclusion of representatives from all university sectors, including junior staff and student bodies, is also relevant. This could involve setting up advisory panels or committees where diverse groups are represented and have equal voting rights on key decisions. Regular town hall meetings where all university members can voice their opinions and concerns can also be effective. Leadership training programs that emphasise the importance of inclusive and participatory leadership styles can help inculcate these values within the university leadership.

The last step is to create and promote inter-departmental and inter-group events that encourage social interaction among different university members. This could include

academic conferences, social events, and collaborative projects that require cross-functional teams. Mentorship programs can be implemented in which senior leaders and faculty members are paired with junior staff and students, fostering relationships and open communication channels. Encourage and support can be given for the formation of diverse interest groups or clubs within the university, which can serve as informal platforms for social interaction and support.

9. Implication for Multi-Cultural Nature of the University

In today's multi-cultural university environments, recognising and valuing diversity within communities of practice is not just important, it is essential. This goes beyond simply acknowledging different cultural backgrounds; it involves a deep understanding of how these backgrounds influence perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving approaches. Inclusive decision making is key in such settings, requiring active engagement of representatives from various cultural backgrounds in communities of practice. This inclusivity ensures that decisions reflect the community's diversity, enriched by many perspectives. Cross-cultural training and awareness become crucial to support this, enabling members to understand cultural nuances and create an environment in which everyone feels respected and heard. Addressing cultural barriers, such as language differences and varied communication styles, is also vital for effective collaboration and communication within these diverse groups.

Leveraging the diverse cultural backgrounds present in universities can significantly enhance collective problem solving, leading to more creative and comprehensive solutions, especially in addressing the dark side of university leadership. When developing and implementing policies, it is important to consider their impact on different cultural groups to ensure equity and avoid inadvertent disadvantages. Building trust across different cultural groups is fundamental, requiring consistent, transparent communication and respect for diverse viewpoints. This trust is the cornerstone of effective communities of practice. Finally, universities must continually evaluate and adapt their practices to remain effective and relevant in a multi-cultural context, involving regular feedback from community members and adapting strategies to better meet a diverse population's needs. This dynamic approach ensures that the practices within communities of practice are inclusive and continually evolving to meet the changing needs of the university community.

10. Limitations

CoPs within universities, while beneficial for fostering collaboration, are not without limitations and potential criticisms. One significant challenge is the risk of creating echo chambers or insular groups. CoPs, by their nature, tend to bring together individuals with similar interests or areas of expertise, which can inadvertently lead to a homogenisation of ideas and perspectives. This uniformity can stifle innovation and critical thinking, as members may reinforce existing biases and resist alternative viewpoints. Additionally, the informal and self-organised structure of CoPs, often seen as a strength, can also be a weakness. Without clear leadership or governance, these communities may struggle with direction and purpose, leading to inefficiencies or a lack of tangible outcomes. Furthermore, voluntary participation in CoPs might result in a lack of engagement from a broader range of university members, particularly those who may feel marginalised or less inclined to participate in such groups.

Another potential drawback is integrating CoPs within the existing hierarchical structures of universities. Traditional academic institutions are often characterised by rigid hierarchies and departmental silos, which can be at odds with the collaborative and cross-disciplinary nature of the CoP. This misalignment can lead to resistance from established authorities, who may view CoPs as a threat to their power or as irrelevant to the university's core functions. Moreover, the emphasis on shared practice and collaborative practices in CoPs might inadvertently overlook the need for expert leadership or guidance, particularly in complex or specialised fields. This could lead to a dilution of expertise or a lack of

accountability in decision-making processes. In addressing the dark side of leadership, such as autocratic tendencies or power imbalances, CoPs must navigate these institutional barriers and cultural challenges, which can be daunting, especially in well-entrenched academic environments.

11. Contributions to Knowledge

This paper significantly adds to the existing knowledge surrounding leadership within academic institutions. While prior research has explored the manifestations and impacts of the dark side of leadership, this paper presents a nuanced understanding by introducing effective remedies and their underpinning rationale. Specifically, the emphasis on shared commonality, collective problem solving, mutual participation, and social interactions provides a more holistic approach to tackling leadership challenges. Furthermore, the research's proposition of employing communities of practice rooted in an interpretive worldview disrupts traditional thought patterns in leadership studies. This innovative perspective broadens the scope of academic discourse on leadership and provides practical insights for universities seeking to foster a healthier, more collaborative, and inclusive environment.

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