

## Influence of Leadership Commitment on Innovative Work Behavior of Academic Staffs in Nepalese Higher Education Institutions

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### Abstract

The paper examines how the commitment of the leader influences the innovative work behavior of academic staffs in higher education institutions in Nepal. The leadership commitment is conceptualized as the extent to which institutional leaders provide support in terms of resources committed, and maintenance of quality in order to create innovation. The study used a cross-sectional quantitative research design and instrument to gather data on 150 faculty members in five higher education institutes in Nepal through stratified random sampling. It was a structured questionnaire using validated scales of leadership commitment and innovative work behavior. They were analyzed by descriptive statistics, reliability through Cronbach alpha, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression. Findings indicate that leadership commitment has strong positive impact on innovative work behaviour (0.62,  $p < 0.01$ ), when the control variables are removed, including years of experience, academic rank, and institutional type. Leader involvement and resource support were found to be the most powerful predictors of implementation and promotion of idea among leader commitment elements. The instrument was very reliable (Cronbach alpha of leadership commitment = 0.88; innovative work behavior = 0.84). Descriptive findings showed that faculty members report moderate rates of leadership commitment (Mean = 3.45 on a 5-point scale) and a rather higher rate of innovative behaviors in idea generation (Mean = 3.60) and lower in idea implementation (Mean = 3.10). The research is relevant to the study of the role of committed leadership in influencing innovation in the academic sphere and specifically in the Nepalese setting where in terms of resources of the institutions and the quality of leadership, there is a high degree of dispersion. It suggests that universities should invest in leadership development, provide regular resource provisions to innovation and keep the leadership practices transparent and participative in order to increase invention tendencies among the faculty. Such practices may result in better teaching, research and performance of the institution.

**Keywords:** *Leadership Commitment, Innovative Work Behavior, Academic Staff, Higher Education, Nepal*

### Introduction

Innovation has become a pillar of sustainability of academic performance and institutional competitiveness in institutions of higher learning. The dynamic issues of globalization, technological transformation and digital pedagogy over the past years have restructured the functioning of the universities and the academic leaders have been forced to build an environment that inspires creativity and innovation in faculty (Jong & Hartog, 2010). Leadership commitment the enduring expression of commitment, moral accountability, and investment of a strategy by institutional leaders contributes significantly to facilitating such innovation. In the case of higher education, this pledge is manifested in the form of research granting activities, experimentation in teaching, and recognition of creative input.

The sector of higher education of Nepal is under a multidimensional restraint and the lack of financial means, bureaucratic rigidity and irregular governance. Such systemic problems typically suppress the innovative work behavior (IWB) of the faculty members, without which there can be no institutional growth and pedagogical progress (Basnet, 2022). Although policies have been made by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Education to promote innovation capacity, most universities still work in hierarchical cultures with

little leader-staff interaction (Adhikari and Sharma, 2021). It is therefore important to know the role played by leadership commitment in the innovative work behavior in order to revamp the academic ecosystem in Nepal.

Previous studies have defined leadership as a predictor of innovativeness in organizations of any type (Amabile and Pratt, 2016; Mumford and Licuanan, 2004). The models of transformational and participative leadership are associated with encouraging employees to be creative and risk-averse (Scott and Bruce, 1994). Nevertheless, empirical investigations with specific focus on the construct of leadership commitment that highlight the long-term involvement of leaders, resource distribution, and value endorsement are limited among the developing countries universities. In addition, the majority of new researches in the field of higher education have been undertaken in Western settings, where the autonomous nature of the institutions and funding structures vary significantly (Tierney, 2014). Therefore, the research fills this gap by investigating the impact of leadership commitment on innovative work behavior among the academic employees of higher education institutions in Nepal.

This study will attempt to: 1) Determine the degree of leadership commitment as perceived by the academic staff in the Nepal higher education. 2) Determine the degree of innovative work behavior. 3) Determine the relationship and predictive impact of the leadership commitment to the innovative work behavior, in the control of the demographic and institutional factors. Through these dimensions, the study will be able to present empirical evidence to guide leadership development, innovation policy and institutional reform strategies in the higher education sector in Nepal.

### **Methodology**

The research design used in this study was a quantitative cross-sectional research design to investigate the validity of the hypothesis on how leadership commitment affects innovative work behavior among Nepal higher education institutions academic staff. The quantitative approach was considered as appropriate due to the ability to measure objectively the relationships between predetermined variables and make generalizations about the whole population (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional design allowed collecting data about respondents at one point in time, which gives a picture of the role of leadership commitment in influencing the innovation-related behaviors of respondents in the academic setting (Bryman, 2016). The target sample involved full-time faculty members of five universities that were representative of the higher education of Nepal in terms of public, privately, and community-managed universities. To limit sampling bias and enhance external validity, a stratified random sampling method was used to provide sufficient representation of the sample by institutional type and academic rank (Etikan and Bala, 2017). A total of 180 questionnaires were issued, 150 valid responses were sent back, which gave an effective response rate of 83.3. The Institutional Review Board of Makawanpur Multiple Campus was approached in order to receive ethical approval and informed consent was obtained by all the participants.

A structured questionnaire with 2 validated scales modified to form two standardized scales was used to gather data by administering a questionnaire to participants. The measurement of leadership commitment employed the items modified based on the Organizational commitment model developed by Meyer and Herscovitch (2001) with the subsets concentrating on the involvement of the leader, continuity of the support, and supporting resources. The innovation work behavior was measured through the ten-item scale designed by Janssen (2000), which reflected three dimensions, which are idea generation, idea promotion and idea implementation. The two scales used a five-point Likert response scale with 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The pilot test yielded a 20-faculty pilot test to check the clarity of the items and the construct validity before the main survey, which is in line with the recommendations of instrument pretest in organizational research (DeVellis, 2016). Cronbach alpha values calculated the reliability of leadership commitment and innovative work behavior were 0.88 and 0.84 respectively, which is higher than the acceptable level of internal consistency which is 0.70 (Hair et al., 2020). JAMOWI statistical software was used to analyze the data as it was analyzed through a series of descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression analysis. The regression enabled the estimation of the predictive power of the leadership commitment on innovative work behavior with the factors of the demography (academic rank, years of experience, and type of the institution) controlled. Analysis was conducted according to the general rules of regression, one of them being normality, linearity, and homoscedasticity

(Tabachnick and Fidell, 2019). This critical analysis process guaranteed the findings to be not only statistically valid but also practically significant to the explanation of the effect of leadership in promoting innovation in the Nepalese academia.

## Results

### Descriptive Findings

Table 1 provides an overview of the descriptive statistics of the key research variables. The findings indicated that the average of the overall leadership commitment was 3.45 (SD =.68) which indicates that perceived leader commitment and support of resources are moderate among academic staff. The dimensions of involvement of leaders (3.55), resource support (3.40) had the highest mean whereas consistency in leadership practices had the lowest mean (3.30). The trend suggests that although leaders are perceived participative in the activities by the faculty, institutional consistency in facilitating innovation is minimal.

In terms of the innovative work behavior, the mean was 3.35 (SD = 0.71). The respondents claimed to have been more engaged in idea generating (Mean = 3.60, SD = 0.72) as opposed to idea promotion (Mean = 3.35, SD = 0.75) and idea implementation (Mean = 3.10, SD = 0.70).

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 150)**

| Variable                           | Mean | SD   | Cronbach's $\alpha$ | Interpretation |
|------------------------------------|------|------|---------------------|----------------|
| Leadership Commitment              | 3.45 | 0.68 | 0.88                | Moderate       |
| Leader Involvement                 | 3.55 | 0.70 | —                   | Moderate–High  |
| Resource Support                   | 3.40 | 0.73 | —                   | Moderate       |
| Consistency in Leadership          | 3.30 | 0.67 | —                   | Moderate       |
| Innovative Work Behavior (Overall) | 3.35 | 0.71 | 0.84                | Moderate       |
| Idea Generation                    | 3.60 | 0.72 | —                   | High           |
| Idea Promotion                     | 3.35 | 0.75 | —                   | Moderate       |
| Idea Implementation                | 3.10 | 0.70 | —                   | Moderate–Low   |

Source: Field Survey, 2024

### Correlation Analysis

Table 2 shows that Pearson correlation coefficients is a strong and positive relationship between leadership commitment and innovative work behavior ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and is statistically significant. This observation indicates that the greater the leadership commitment, the more the faculty will be involved in innovation-related

activities. Every sub-dimension of leadership commitment leader involvement ( $r = 0.59$ ), consistency ( $r = 0.55$ ), and resource support ( $r = 0.63$ ) positively related with IWB.

**Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Main Study Variables**

| Variables                    | 1      | 2      | 3      | 4      | 5 |
|------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---|
| 1. Leadership Commitment     | 1      |        |        |        |   |
| 2. Leader Involvement        | 0.84** | 1      |        |        |   |
| 3. Consistency in Leadership | 0.79** | 0.70** | 1      |        |   |
| 4. Resource Support          | 0.86** | 0.72** | 0.68** | 1      |   |
| 5. Innovative Work Behavior  | 0.68** | 0.59** | 0.55** | 0.63** | 1 |

Note:  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

### Regression Analysis

To determine the predictive strength of leadership commitment on innovative work behavior under the control of the demographics, a multiple linear regression model was used. The model was found to be statistically significant  $F(4,145) = 31.82$ ,  $p < 0.001$  with adjusted  $R^2 = 0.47$ , which shows that 47 percent of the variance in innovative work behavior is described by the leadership commitment and the control variables.

The standardized beta coefficient  $r(\text{leadership commitment})$  was positive ( $= 0.62$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) which confirms that it is a strong factor in innovative work behavior. The strongest predictors of leadership commitment included leader involvement ( $0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and resource support ( $0.36$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), and consistency in terms of leadership was not observed ( $0.12$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The control variables (years of experience, academic rank) showed nonsignificant and weak effects ( $0.08$ ).

**Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of Leadership Commitment on Innovative Work Behavior**

| Predictor                 | $\beta$ | t    | Sig. (p) | Interpretation  |
|---------------------------|---------|------|----------|-----------------|
| Leadership Commitment     | 0.62    | 8.38 | 0.000    | Significant     |
| Leader Involvement        | 0.41    | 5.47 | 0.001    | Significant     |
| Resource Support          | 0.36    | 4.96 | 0.002    | Significant     |
| Consistency in Leadership | 0.12    | 1.32 | 0.19     | Not Significant |
| Academic Rank             | 0.05    | 0.69 | 0.49     | Not Significant |

|                     |      |      |      |                 |
|---------------------|------|------|------|-----------------|
| Years of Experience | 0.08 | 1.10 | 0.27 | Not Significant |
| Institution Type    | 0.04 | 0.55 | 0.59 | Not Significant |

Note: Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.47$ ,  $F(4,145) = 31.82$ ,  $p < 0.001$

### Discussion

This research paper has evidently shown that leadership commitment significantly and positively influences innovative work behavior (IWB) among academic employees at Nepalese higher learning institutions. The high level of correlation ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and the high regression coefficient ( $\beta = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) show that the leadership commitment contributes a significant amount to the faculty innovation and highlights its role as one of the most important organizational aspects. This fits in the Componential Theory of Creativity by Amabile and Pratt (2016) that focuses on the importance of enabling environments and motivation to promote innovation. When the members of the faculty think about the leaders as active and resourceful, they are more likely to talk about their creativity and initiative. In particular, the participation of leaders ( $\beta = 0.41$ ) and resource support ( $\beta = 0.36$ ) turned out to be the most predictive factors, which demonstrates that participative and facilitative leadership practices promote experimentation, collaboration, and sharing knowledge. The results are in line with previous research that demonstrated that leaders that encourage trust, empowerment, and open communication lead to the increase in innovation among the employees (Pieterse et al., 2010; Mumford and Licuanan, 2004). The findings also confirm the theory of Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) faculty members make a reciprocal commitment to leadership that is associated with more discretionary and creative actions.

The descriptive findings indicated that there was a significant difference between the idea generation and the idea implementation. Academic employees are more actively involved in idea generation and sharing (Mean = 3.60), but not in their implementation (Mean = 3.10). De Jong and Den Hartog (2010) indicated that organization support and empowerment conditions are high in the implementation stage of innovation, which is usually lacking in the resource-strained education facilities. Correspondingly, Choi et al. (2016), in their study, identified transformational leaders who ensured psychological safety and intellectual stimulation to bridge this gap and foster risk-taking and experimental activities. These findings are consistent with strong predictive effects of the involvement and resource provision of the leader identified in the study and imply that tangible institutionalization support provided in the form of research funding, mentoring, and recognition has a more determinant role in motivating innovation as compared to hierarchical consistency and formality. This is in line with the Theory of Planned Behavior introduced by Ajzen (1991) that argues that perceived control and available resources play a critical role in the determination of the behavioral outcomes.

Interestingly, consistency in leadership practices did not have any significant effect on innovative behavior ( $\beta = 0.12$ ,  $p = 0.05$ ) and it can be inferred that being strictly followed by their procedures or old routine administrative practices is not always a way to innovate. Quite to the contrary, the type of leadership behaviors that are dynamic and adaptive are able to balance the structure with the flexibility, which are more favorable to the creative performance (Yukl, 2013; García-Morales et al., 2012). The unimportance of such demographic variables like academic rank and experience additionally indicates that the impact of institutional climate and leadership style are more critical in the development of innovative engagement than the individual one. This supports another study by Carmeli et al. (2014) who find that tenure or seniority is not a good predictor of organizational innovation but instead relational leadership and psychological safety. Theoretically, the findings can be used to apply the results of the study to a developing country setting because they indicate that even in a resource-constrained setting, leadership dedication can organize human resources in a directed way, targeted at generating creative levels of results. In practice, the research suggests that the higher education institutions in Nepal require investing in leadership development initiatives that put more emphasis on participatory management, open communication, and resource allocation strategies. University leaders can positively impact the institution through the promotion of an inclusive, empowering and well-resourced culture, where latent faculty creativity is converted into actionable innovation, to improve performance and excellence in institutions.

**Conclusion**

This paper attests to the fact that the leadership commitment is a critical predictor of innovative work behavior (IWB) among academic employees in the institutions of higher learning within Nepal. It was found that the greatest impact on the faculty innovation is created by leader involvement and resource support and consistency in leadership did not have any significant effect. These results suggest that innovation thrives most well in an environment where the leadership is participative, facilitates, and embraces to redistribute resources as opposed to one that is characterized by inflexible administrative behaviors. The findings also revealed a significant gap between the ideas generation and the idea implementation that indicated that faculty members have a high propensity to creativity but their potential is inhibited by structural and institutional factors.

Hypothetically, this research serves as a contribution to the academic innovation discourse, as it uses Social Exchange Theory and Componential Theory of Creativity to develop nations. It shows that dedicated leadership is a motivational and structural force in the innovative behavior because it promotes trust, empowerment, and work environment. In a practical sense, the results are used in the interpretation of the leadership behaviors that influence the innovation results in resource-limited education systems such as Nepal. All in all, the research highlights the fact that instructional, active, and resourceful leadership is at the heart of developing innovation, improving institutional performance, and boosting the academic prowess of institutions of higher learning.

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