

# Leadership challenges to transformative change for quality education in public universities: A case of Wolaita Sodo University

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## ABSTRACT

The present study was designed with the purpose of examining challenges to transformative change for quality education enhancement as perceived by the university community. More importantly, attempt was made to examine extent of implementation of the intended change. Descriptive cross sectional survey type research design was used under the study. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data. Currently, WSU has eight schools; of these the present study involved four (50%) schools. The sample consisted of 14 academic leaders of the institution: the university president and two vice-presidents, two members of managing board, director of registrar, four deans of schools, four department heads, one quality officer, 78 (32.7%) senior academic staff from total of 238, and eight senior students of the institution. The sample schools were randomly selected while stratified random sampling technique was employed to select school deans, academic staff members and students. The selection of the president, vice-presidents, head of registrar and managing board members was made purposefully. In total 102 participants took part in the study. The tools used to gather relevant data were questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and relevant document analysis. The study results revealed that institutional context analysis was not well conducted, the effort to introduce change to the university community was limited and the attempt to prepare and motivate the university community towards the change was almost nonexistent. Most importantly, academic leaders rarely exhibit transformational behaviors. The study recommended that the transformational leaders should focus on strategic issues instead of wasting time in changing and re-changing structures. Moreover, stakeholders should collaborate in order to support the effort towards transformation. To this end, power should be decentralized; distributed leadership should be practiced in the institution. The Government needs to avail adequate budget and manpower to assist the transformation. On the other hand, the institution should diversify its sources of income instead of relying on Government subsidy.

**Keyword:** Leadership, transformation, transformative change, quality education.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the higher education arena institutions, administrators and academicians have to come up to grips with the complex environment in which they find themselves. De Boer et al. (1998) view the environment as being increasingly characterized by pressures for efficiency and effectiveness as a consequence of the full transition to mass higher education, and the introduction of strong competitive pressures and instruments such as

globalization and new modes of knowledge production. The desperate need for strong and effective leadership in order to obtain an effective process of transformation and change at higher education institutions is apparent.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) around the world face the growing problem of as they enter the twenty-first century. With the international economy evolving toward a global network organized around the value of

knowledge, the capacity of people and organizations to use technological developments wisely, effectively, and efficiently has emerged as a critical societal concern. People and nations are relying on colleges and universities to help shape a positive future. However, to capture the advantage of this more central focus and role, higher education institutions will need to transform their structures, missions, processes, and programs in order to be both more flexible and more responsive to changing societal needs.

Education, particularly higher education is expected to play an active role in the socio-economic and cultural transformation of a society. Higher education is crucial to a country's success in every field of individual and national endeavor. Both the available literature and experience show that higher education has immense roles to play. In the context of today's globalization in which every part of the world, as Altbach (1998) writes, is increasingly getting interdependent in many aspects, the role of higher education have become critical than ever before.

To be responsive to an ever-changing environment, HEIs are engaged in changes and reforms. The reasons for ongoing change in higher education are complex and interrelated. Green and Fischer (1991) emphasize on the following forces of change: effects of expansion and the push for greater access, the problems of declining resources and the challenges of diversifying funding resources and the expectation that higher education would make a greater contribution to economic and social development.

In the wake of the competitive era of education today, HEIs attempt to advance themselves in academic programs, research and innovation, and towards academic excellence. To this end, they need to transform to realize such aspiration for quality education enhancement. As clearly stated by Laubscher (2008), globally, higher education systems have tended to be influenced by the concept of transformation. Rapid advances in technology, demographic shifts and the globalization of markets transform higher education institutions into more open systems that have typically been open only to selected fields or environments. The topic of transformational change for quality education in higher education has become increasingly prevalent over recent years. However, attempts towards transformational changes in higher education encounter challenges that may affect the effective realization of transformational goals in general and quality of education in particular.

Cognizant of the decisive role higher education plays to speed up the overall socio-economic progress of the country, the government of Ethiopia seems to be investing more in higher education. However, the increased expansion and the changing world realities call for radical transformation of the existing governance practice in the institutions. According to UNESCO (1998),

higher education in Ethiopia is confronted with formidable challenges and must proceed to the most radical change and renewal it has ever been required to undertake. Desta (2004) on the other hand argues that the gap between the societal expectations and the actual performance of HEIs in Ethiopia became a serious concern among many people. To this end, however reforms have been made at all levels.

In support of the above view, Yizengaw (2003:1) states that, "higher education in Ethiopia is going through a decisive phase of reform and expansion". The writer further stated that, as a system it is increasingly required to respond to the development needs of the society and the country. This change is taking place through a government-led radical review of the system's status and challenges, and by devising mechanisms of consensus building as well as ownership.

One of the universities carrying out the intended change is Wolaita Sodo University. On the basis of the essence of the higher education proclamation (No. 650/2009) that granted autonomy to public Universities in the country, Wolaita Sodo University has been made 'autonomous' and is led by local academician since 2006. Its own transformational change framework leads the university on economic development and university enterprise cooperation. The framework was prepared by the current officials of the institution and is fully accepted by the government. All the necessary components and phases of the change are detailed in the framework. The change process is a five year endeavor that started in March 2008 throughout the country and in 2010 at Wolaita Sodo University.

Although transformative change at Wolaita Sodo University was implemented some three years back, a literature search on studies conducted to examine the state of implementation and challenges encountering are almost non-existent, particularly with reference to leadership challenges. Hence, this present study was designed with the purpose of examining challenges in aspiring to transformative change for quality education enhancement as perceived by the university community. More importantly, an attempt was made to examine extent of implementation of the intended change.

### **Problem statement**

In order to make any organization a better performing place, administrators' transformational leadership behaviors become more important. Academic institutions subscribe to this notion too as they are the agents of change for the society in which they operate. As clearly stated by Ivana (1998), the conditions of modern organizations functioning require undertaking some radical, transformational changes. Management of such changes, however, requires some new management qualities. One of these qualities is transformational

leadership. However, in the institution under study though transformative kind of change has been introduced the leaders lack qualities of transformational leadership.

As Saint (2004) discusses the reform in public higher learning institutes of Ethiopia face a formidable challenge in that many of them will require substantial changes in the existing institutional culture of 'command and control' that characterizes the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the government in general. Moreover, the writer added that, centralized internal governance and weak management system characterize most of the institutions.

Yizengaw (2003) on his part pointed out that, although encouraging and significant reforms have taken place in public higher education institutions, the weak consensus building efforts and participation of stake holders are few of the challenges to the change process. Some members of Wolaita Sodo University also questioned the success of the change. In some cases pessimism has been expressed as quoted by one, staff member, leave alone bringing change it becomes difficult to maintain the status quo in the institution,"

Few individuals and the current officials of the institution initiated the change at Wolaita Sodo University. Such a change, according to some writers, is characterized by less sense of ownership of the implementers, less commitment and greater resistance to the change. On the other hand, the attempt to introduce the change to the University community was taken as a formality and thus had little impact. This, as some people argue results in failure to understand the essence and purpose of the change. This has been observed when academic leaders at faculty, department and school level seek approval of the few officials before making a decision, even on issues under their jurisdiction.

Therefore, in light of the above perspectives, this study was intended to examine leadership challenges in aspiring to transformative change for quality education enhancement at Wolaita Sodo University as perceived by the university community. To achieve its purpose the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the degree of preparedness of academic leaders and staff toward transformative change?
2. To what extent has transformational change succeeded for quality education at Wolaita Sodo University?
3. To what extent do academic leaders exhibit transformational leadership behaviors?
4. What major leadership challenges face the transformative change process for quality education enhancement?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Transformation and change in higher education for quality education: Concept and nature

Mankind appears to be locked in an ambivalent relationship with change. Despite evident resistance to

the unsettling consequences of change (Senge, 1990; Gerard, 1994 cited in Niekerk, 2005) the desire for change characterizes much of human endeavor. Owen (cited in Niekerk, 2005:5) describes transformation as, "the organizational search for a better way to be". Owen argues that it is when the environment alters in such a way that the old way of doing business is no longer appropriate or possible, that a new way becomes essential in order to survive. The central idea of the word transformation is movement across or through forms. Owen (as cited in Niekerk, 2005) states the following in this regard:

"Transformation is a process of transmutation of one form in to another. In the educational milieu this refers, in part, to changes in the knowledge and abilities of students, the development of domain of expertise" (pp.27)

According to Raubenheimer et al, (1996) transformation and change are not synonymous processes. In this view transformation is a pre-condition for change to take place.

Similarly, Goss (1996) explains the distinction between transformation and change as follows: transformation is the function of altering our being, that is, of creating something that is currently not possible in our reality; change is a function of altering what we are doing, that is, of improving something that is already possible in our reality.

According to Kleiner et al. cited in Viljoen and Rothmann (2002), the word "transformation" is derived from the Latin "transformare", which means, "to change shape". Viljoen and Rothmann (2002) go on to point out that transformation is a specific type of change, which can be distinguished from other types of change in the sense that it implies not only change of form but also the creation of something new. The writers point out that, transformation may be thought of as, "Drastic changes triggered by external environmental factors" (pp. 2). The above relates to transformation in general. "Organizational transformation", in particular, "can therefore be seen as a process whereby an organization changes its form, structure and culture in order to adapt to environmental changes" (pp.3).

### Transformational leadership and behaviors

Sullivan and Decker (2001) define transformational leadership as a leadership style that focused on effecting revolutionary change in organizations through a commitment to the organization's vision. Transformational leadership redefines people's missions and visions, renews their commitments, and restructures their systems for goal accomplishment through a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. Hay (2007) contends that transformational

leadership appears to be a form of leadership well-suited to these current times characterized by uncertainty, global turbulence and organizational instability.

Burns cited in Othman et al, (2009) introduced the concept of transformational leadership, describing it as not a set of specific behaviors but rather a process by which leaders and followers encourage one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. Transformational leadership has been found to be consistently related to organizational and leadership effectiveness (Bryman et al. cited in Othman, 2009). Transformational leaders believe in the need for a change. They, then, articulate a vision of the future and provide a model that is consistent with the vision.

As clearly stated by Othman et al. (2009), in order for a particular university to be at the forefront of international educational institutions, the university needs to implement transformational leadership at the three levels of the university administrative hierarchy: namely, the university, the faculties and each individual staff.

Bass (1997) has four interrelated behaviors that he views as essential for leaders to move followers in to the transformational style: Idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Idealized influence constitutes the charismatic factor of transformational leadership in which leaders become role models for ethical behavior by their followers (Avolio and Bass, 2004). As a result of the leaders' behaviors, followers are expected to have faith and trust in them and in their actions and decisions. Inspirational motivation is a behavior that describes leaders who motivate followers and encourage them to good behaviors inspirationally. Raising the consciousness of followers about the organization's mission and vision is a key facet of the transformational leadership style of inspirational motivation.

Intellectual stimulation is a behavior in which leaders provide learning and training for their followers and develop innovative and creative climate in organization. Leaders who intellectually stimulate subordinates encourage creativity and accept challenges as part of their job (Sarros and Santora in Judeh, 2010). Individualized consideration refers to the transformational leadership behaviors of dealing with followers as important contributors to the organization. Transformational leaders help their subordinates in fulfilling their potential talents and increasing their responsibilities in the organization (Jandaghi, cited in Judeh, 2010).

### Dimensions of transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is thought to provide a more powerful way for thinking about school leadership than competing approaches because it leads to an investigation of all workplace conditions that contribute to

all school outcomes, not just instructional strategies. The essence of transformational leadership is the growth of staff and enhancing their commitment by elevating their goals. The roots of transformational leadership can be attributed to Burnes (1996) Pulitzer-winning book entitled simply *Leadership*. Burnes argued for leadership that engaged with others to raise intrinsic motivation, rather than the more common view of the day which involved an exchange relationship (transactional leadership) based on followers' individual, typically monetary, extrinsic interests. As forwarded by Yukl (1989), transformational leadership builds commitment to the organization objective's and empowers followers to achieve these objectives

Following Burnes' lead, Bass' (1997) formulation and survey-based measure of transformational leadership became the focus of attention over several decades. For Bass, transformational leadership consisted of the four dimensions of charisma, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. Building on this historical generic leadership base, Leithwood (Leithwood, in press; Leithwood et al., 1999, 2004, 2006; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2000, 2005; Leithwood and Riehl, 2003) has done the most to conceptualize and collect research evidence on transformational leadership in schools.

Leithwood's early conceptualization in the area (Leithwood et al., 1999) identified six dimensions of transformational leadership: vision and goals, culture, structure, intellectual stimulation, individual support, performance expectation.

In recent times, Leithwood redesigned his work to include four major dimensions of transformational leadership in schools, each of which includes three or four more specific sets of practices as follows:

**A) Setting directions:** Building a shared vision, fostering acceptance of group goals, high performance expectations.

**B) Developing people:** Providing individual support and consideration, intellectual stimulation, providing an appropriate model, redesigning the organization.

**C) Building collaborative cultures:** Restructuring, building productive relationships with families and communities, connecting the school to its wider environment, managing the instructional program

**D) Staffing the program:** Providing instructional support, monitoring school activity, buffering staff from distractions to their work.

Transformational leaders are those who transform their followers into becoming leaders themselves. A transformational leader focuses on "transforming" others to help each other, to look out for each other, to be encouraging and harmonious, and to look out for the organization as a whole. In this leadership, the leader enhances the motivation, morale and performance of his

follower group." From Bass and Riggio (2006:3), transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity. Transformational leader's help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization. Evidence has accumulated to demonstrate that transformational leadership can move followers to exceed expected performance, as well as lead to high levels of follower satisfaction and commitment to the group and organization.

There are four components of transformational leadership (Bass and Riggio, 2006):

**A) Idealized influence** (also known as Charismatic Leadership) - Transformational leaders act in ways that make them role models. They are respected, admired and trusted. Followers identify with them and describe them in terms that imply extraordinary capabilities, persistence and determination. These leaders are willing to take risk. They can consistently be relied upon to do the right thing, displaying high moral and ethical standards.

**B) Inspirational motivation** - These leaders embody the term "team spirit". They show enthusiasm and optimism, providing both meaning and challenge to the work at hand. They create an atmosphere of commitment to goals and a shared vision.

**C) Intellectual stimulation** - A transformational leader encourages creativity and fosters an atmosphere in which followers feel compelled to think about old problems in a new way. Public criticism is avoided.

**D) Individualized consideration** - Transformational leaders act as mentors and coaches. Individual desires and needs are respected. Differences are accepted and two-way communication is common. These leaders are considered to be good listeners, and along with this come personalized interaction. Followers of these leaders move continually toward development of higher levels of potential.

### **Transformational challenges in higher education for quality education**

Transformational leaders have to take the Higher Education Institutions to which they are assigned from their present situation to some future condition that would bring about the expected change under quality education. This, however, brings about various transformational challenges.

The failure of transformational leaders to build trust among their followers is one of the challenges widely mentioned. Regarding this, Kouzes and Posner (cited in Kelli, 2010) contend that the more people trust their leader, and each other, the more they take risks, make changes and keep organizations and movements alive. Kelli on his part stated that, "change often begins in trust" (pp.3). If stakeholders do not have some sense of trust then an organization cannot transform itself. Trust begins with leaders who communicate effectively, consistently, and honorably. By creating an environment based on communication, collaboration, inspiration, and integrity, leaders can build trust. People will not change if they cannot trust the person who instigates the change.

### **Transformational change at Wolaita Sodo University: Objectives and status**

Currently, higher learning institutions in Ethiopia are in the process of change. The change in public higher learning institutions in Ethiopia is supported by the provision of academic freedom and autonomy as clearly stated in higher education proclamation No. 650/2009:

"Every public institution is granted the necessary autonomy in pursuit of its mission... Every public institution shall exercise autonomy in ways that ensure lawfulness, efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, fairness and accountability." (Article 17, No. p1-2)

Parallel to the massive expansions of Ethiopian higher learning institutions and development of policy instruments, capacity building of the existing universities has been given due emphasis. One of the universities carrying out the transformation is Wolaita Sodo University (WSU).

The detailed transformation concept was drafted by the management of the institution and fully accepted by the government. "Setting up WSU – A Framework", prepared by the current officials, is declared as the binding document widely recognized by the University officials. All the necessary components and phases of the change are detailed in the framework. The transformation process is a five year endeavor and started in March, 2010, and thus is on-going. This study focuses on the three years processes of the change.

### **Fundamental objectives of WSU transformation**

In 2008 the government of Ethiopia planned to transform one of the universities, namely WSU, to a center of excellence renowned throughout the world. The fundamental objectives set by the governmental authorities together form the basis of the WSU

transformation framework (WSU, 2010):

1. WSU shall become a model university for Ethiopia emphasizing economic development and university-enterprise cooperation according to the country paradigm.
2. WSU shall become a model university for excellence in teaching, learning and applied research.
3. WSU shall be attractive in international university partnerships and networks.
4. WSU shall be the Research and Community centre of education in Ethiopia.

This framework was endorsed by the government of Ethiopia and guides the transformation. The transformational activities are executed according to the framework's change action plan of the WSU.

## METHODOLOGY

Descriptive cross sectional survey type research design were instrumental to assess leadership challenges facing transformative change for quality education enhancement at WSU. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data.

### Participants

Currently, WSU has eight schools in each of its two campuses: Main and Ottona campus. Of these the present study involved four (50%) schools. The sample consisted of 14 academic leaders of the institution ( $n = 14$ ): the university president and two vice-presidents, two members of managing board, one academic program officer, one quality officer, one director of registrar and four school deans who are responsible for the core entities within the institution. Further the sample included 86 (86%) of academic staff, and eight senior students of the institution. The sampled schools were randomly selected while stratified random sampling technique was employed to select school deans, academic staff members and students. The selection of the president, vice-presidents, academic program officer, quality assurance officer, head of registrar and managing board members was based on availability sampling. The study employed two groups of participants: 86 (86%) senior academic staff and 14 (14%) academic leaders at various levels who are immediate co-workers of the university president, 8 senior students for FGD. In total of 100 participants took part in the study.

### Instruments

The tools used to gather data from the research participants were questionnaire, focus group discussion (FGD) guide, and relevant document analysis. The survey instrument used to gather data was a standardized Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ form 5X), which was designed and developed by Bass and Avolio (1997), and a self developed questionnaire. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire that consisted of 20 items was used to collect data from academic staff rating school deans, academic leaders, rating transformational behaviors of the university president, and the self-rating of the president. All the questionnaires were prepared in English language and consisted of both open and close-ended items. The items of the standard questionnaire were arranged based on a 5 point Likert type scale (that is, 0 = not at all; 1 = once in a while; 2 = sometimes; 3 = fairly often; 4 = frequently, if not always). The self developed questionnaire was used to gather

data on issues of change introduction and challenges to transformational change at the institution. The items were individually measured on 5 point Likert type scale (that is, 1 = Not a challenge to 5 = Very High challenge).

However, the study results may be affected by the following limitations brought about by the instrument and subjects involved. While the study employed the third edition of Bass and Avolio standard questionnaire to examine transformational behaviors of academic leaders, there are many more tools used to examine transformational behaviors.

The questionnaire consisted of two main parts. The first part contained a demographic data while the second part presented issues related to change introduction, transformational behaviors, extent implementation of the transformation and challenges encountered. To ensure the reliability of the instrument and establish its validity, the questionnaire was pilot tested with a small sample of randomly selected subjects, 10 academic staff and two school deans of the institution which is out of the sampled university. In assessing the reliability of scales used in the questionnaire a coefficient of internal consistency was calculated using Cronbach's alpha methodology and the reliability coefficient is 0.87. Moreover, to substantiate the survey responses Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were held. The discussion was chaired by the researcher for about 45 min in a class room of the university. Eight graduating senior students selected from the four sample schools involved in the discussion.

### Procedure

Firstly, the instruments of data collection were prepared on the basis of the review of the related literature and research questions designed. The questionnaires were pilot tested to make sure all questions were clear and easily understood. Then, the survey instruments were distributed to the study population who were requested to complete the questionnaire. Then, data were collected from academic leaders and staff. The two groups of participants filled out the same questionnaire with different approach. Finally, the responses obtained via the survey instrument were checked for accuracy prior to the statistical analysis, and then data were analyzed and interpreted.

### Data analysis

The data collected through standard and self-developed survey instrument were first tallied. Then, presented on a table and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequency and percentage, means and standard deviations t-test, correlation. A quantitative analysis was performed to study the perception of the university community about transformational behaviors of academic leaders and leadership challenges to the inspired transformation. The qualitative data collected from the FGD and relevant documents of the institution were first read from field notes by the researcher and categorized. Then, data were analyzed with the help of themes to view a clear picture of the issue under study. On the other hand, the survey instrument provided to few university officials was not returned.

The qualitative data generated FGD from student participants were first categorized and then analyzed using thematic approach. The data obtained from reports of the institution were used as a major source of analysis for examining extent of compliance to transformation implementation framework

### Ethical consideration

Participants were granted confidentiality and encouraged to

develop keen interest to take part in the survey. All respondents remained anonymous. The researcher assured them of the confidentiality of their responses at all times and explained that information and research results would only be disclosed to interested respondents on their request. The researcher acknowledged the responsibilities involved in undertaking the research and affirmed that conclusions would be drawn and recommendations made in accordance with the understanding of the data collected.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part of the research report presents background of Wolaita Sodo University (WSU), participants' demographic characteristics, major findings of the study and discussions made.

### Background information of WSU

Wolaita Sodo University was established in September 2006. It is known by the name of WSU. Wolaita Sodo University was the first public institution to offer degree programs for different specialties under the Zone (province). It is a university with main campus in Sodo town and a branch campus in Ottona. Eight schools constitute Woliata Sodo University: College of Agriculture; School of Business and Economics; School of Engineering and Information Technologies; School of Health; College of Social Science and Humanities, School of Education and Behavioral Science, College of Natural Sciences; and School of Law. The University has a total of 735 academic staff and 12,000 students currently enrolled in the regular, postgraduate and extension, and summer programs in both campuses.

### Demographic characteristics of respondents

Here, we deal with demographic characteristics of the research participants. Frequency and percentage of demographics variables are related to gender, age, academic qualification and service years of the participants.

Out of the total academic staff respondents, 79 (93.5%) were males while the rest 7 (6.5%) were females. All academic leader participants were males. This implies that males occupy almost all the university's leadership positions. More than half (77.8%) of student participants sampled for FGD were males while the rest were females. On the other hand, while 52 (61.3%) academic staff were in the age category 30 to 40, the rest were aged 40 years and above. Similarly, 4 (29%) academic leaders were aged 30 to 40 years while the rest were 45 years and above. This shows that the majority of both groups of respondents are in their young and productive age which contributes more to the betterment of the organization transformational change.

The data revealed that the majority, 71 (83.9%) of academic staff participants were master's degree holders and only 2 (3.2%) had a doctoral degree qualification. The rest were holders of bachelor's degree. All of the academic leaders had master's degrees. The minimum academic qualification of the participants was bachelor degree. Only 12.9% of the respondents fall in this category. The data implies that in terms of academic preparation much difference is not observed between academic staff and academic leaders of the institution. However, relatively academic staff was better qualified than the academic leaders.

Out of the total participants while 27 (27%) served 0 to 5 years, the majority 73 (73%) fall within the range of 5 to 10 years of experience in the present institution. This shows that the academic staff and leaders of the institution have a good understanding of the institution and are well experienced to contribute to the effective implementation of the transformative change process for quality education enhancement.

### Major findings and discussion

A total of 100 survey participants were involved in the present study. The analysis and report made is based on the responses obtained from 91 participants. The participants were categorized into two groups: academic leaders and academic staff. Data solicited from the participants via questionnaire, focused- group discussion and document analysis were analyzed along the research questions as follows:

**Q<sub>1</sub>:** What is the degree of preparedness of academic leaders and staff toward transformative change?

In order to examine views of the participants towards the kind and level of preparation made in implementing the change, participants were first asked to identify forces that initiate the change. Accordingly, their responses were summarized in Table 1.

Regarding driving forces of change, Branch (2002) argued that, even if nothing changes within an organization, many changes, which affect the organizations' function and performance, are entailed from the outside of the business environment. These changes are influenced by political, social, financial, and technological factors and they certainly cannot be ignored. This shows that external forces such as government policies and priorities and competition are major forces for HEIs to transform.

Similarly, the data in Table 2 reveals that, a higher percentage 7 (58.3%) of academic leaders and 56 (65.1%) academic staff replied that the transformation at WSU was initiated by both internal and external forces. The rest of the participants, 26 (30.2%) of academic staff and 5 (41.7%) of academic leaders responded that external forces were the causes for the change at WSU.

**Table 1.** Responses on extent of institutional context analysis made.

| Institutional context analysis | Academic leaders |      | Academic staff |      |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------|----------------|------|
|                                | Frequency        | %    | Frequency      | %    |
| Very well                      | 4                | 33.3 | 6              | 7    |
| To some extent                 | 6                | 50   | 24             | 27.9 |
| To a lesser extent             | 2                | 16.6 | 24             | 27.9 |
| None at all                    | -                | -    | 32             | 37.2 |
| Total                          | 12               | 100  | 86             | 100  |

Source: Own Survey (2013).

**Table 2.** Responses on forces that initiate the change.

| Change at WSU was initiated by: | Academic leaders |      | Academic staff |      |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------|----------------|------|
|                                 | Frequency        | %    | Frequency      | %    |
| External forces                 | 5                | 41.7 | 26             | 30.2 |
| Internal forces                 | -                | -    | -              | -    |
| Both                            | 7                | 58.3 | 56             | 65.1 |
| No response                     | -                | -    | 4              | 4.7  |
| Total                           | 12               | 100  | 86             | 100  |

Source: Own Survey (2013).

**Table 3.** Responses on level of adequacy of change introduction.

| Adequacy of change introduction | Academic leaders |      | Academic staff |      |
|---------------------------------|------------------|------|----------------|------|
|                                 | Frequency        | %    | Frequency      | %    |
| Very adequate                   | 2                | 16.7 | 6              | 6.9  |
| Adequate                        | 2                | 16.7 | 12             | 13.9 |
| Less adequate                   | 8                | 66.6 | 48             | 55.8 |
| Not adequate                    | -                | -    | 24             | 27.9 |
| Total                           | 12               | 100  | 86             | 100  |

Source: Own Survey (2013).

For effective implementation of transformative change for quality education enhancement in HEIs, adequate knowledge of a change agent about the context of the institution under transformation is very important. Regarding this, Vinger (2008) developed the contextual model that would help to realize organizational transformation. The model has three broad elements: understanding the context of transformation, both inner and outer context analysis; the content of the change and the process.

However, according to the responses of the majority, 32 (37.2%) of academic staff participants context analysis was made to none at all. 6 (50%) academic leaders contend that institutional context analysis was made to some extent on some issues. This implies that the framework prepared by the university officials did not consider the realities in the institution and lack of awareness to the issue of institutional transformation

affects the preparedness to implement the change process of the academic staff. One of the participants commented that, "Since the change framework was prepared in light of developed countries paradigm no need to conduct context analysis."

Change introduction is a critical stage in transformation process as it helps to create awareness of the change implementers and scale up their level of motivation. It should therefore, deal with changing individuals and the system as a whole. Data in Table 3 reveals that the efforts made to introduce the change to the University community were inadequate as confirmed by 8 (66.6%) academic leaders and 48 (55.8%) academic staff participants.

The amount of readiness and preparation made is a precondition for effective implementation of a change for quality education enhancement (Table 4). Adequate preparation and readiness may lead to strong motivation

**Table 4.** Responses on extent of readiness and preparation made.

| Readiness and preparation made | Academic leaders |      | Academic staff |      |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------|----------------|------|
|                                | Frequency        | %    | Frequency      | %    |
| Very well                      | 3                | 25   | -              | -    |
| To some extent                 | 2                | 16.7 | 12             | 13.9 |
| To a lesser extent             | 6                | 50   | 48             | 55.8 |
| Never at all                   | -                | -    | 26             | 30.2 |
| Missing                        | 1                | 8.3  | -              | -    |
| Total                          | 12               | 100  | 86             | 100  |

Source: Own Survey (2013).

**Table 5.** Responses on the role of implementers and stakeholders.

| Clear identification of the roles of implementers and stakeholders | Academic leaders |      | Academic staff |      |
|--|------------------|------|----------------|------|
|  | Frequency        | %    | Frequency      | %    |
| Yes, very well   | 4                | 33.3 | -              | -    |
| Yes, to some extent  | 7                | 58.3 | 30             | 34.9 |
| Never at all   | 1                | 8.3  | 40             | 46.5 |
| Missing  | -                | -    | 16             | 18.6 |
| Total  | 12               | 100  | 86             | 100  |

Source: Own Survey (2013).

of change implementers. Regarding this, Kotter (cited in Kelli, 2010:2) stated that, "people must have motivation to change". This could be achieved if people are made ready for the change. In this regard, study participants were required to rate the extent to which the change agents initiated the readiness of the University community and preparations made for the change. Accordingly, 6 (50%) academic leaders and 48 (55.8%) academic staff members contend that readiness and preparation was made only to a lesser extent, or never at all. On the other side 3 (25%) academic leaders revealed that the level of readiness and preparedness of the change agents was made very well while 26 (30.2%) of academic staff claimed that never at all (Table 5). This implies that the university community has a limited awareness about the change. Some of the participants contend that they lack understanding about the goals and direction of the transformative change. Only few individuals know where to go and what to change.

Any transformational process requires the identification and specification of the roles of implementers and stakeholders. Clear roles and responsibilities may develop a sense of ownership towards a change. With this regard transformational leaders help their subordinates in fulfilling their potential talents and increasing their responsibilities in the organization (Jandaghi, cited in Judeh, 2010). However, in the transformational process at WSU, role identification was made to some extent as responded by 7 (58.3%) of academic leaders. On the other hand, the majority, 40

(46.5%) academic staff participants claimed that the role identification was never made by the transformational leaders. Consequently, it leads the implementer become reluctant to play their roles to change the university as a change agent.

Regarding the role of implementers and stakeholders, participants who replied "yes very well, or to some extent" were requested to mention the extent to which change implementers, mainly teachers and other academic leaders are empowered in making decisions. Accordingly, the majority 78 (90.9%) of academic staff and 6 (50%) of academic leaders revealed that the level of empowerment is "less" or "none at all". Power is highly centralized in the institution, resultantly, the leaders rarely engage the academic staff in dealing with the change. They failed to develop a sense of team spirit among the university community.

**Q<sub>2</sub>:** To what extent has transformational change succeeded for quality education at Wolaita Sodo University?

To answer this research question attempts were made to review various documents of the University dealing with the transformative change. It involved a review of reports, bulletins and achievement reports released by the president of the institution.

Regarding areas of concern in transforming institutions, Lewin (cited in Branch, 2002) identified three ways that organizational change could be accomplished: changing

the individuals who work in the organization, changing various organizational structures and systems, and directly changing the organizational climate or interpersonal style. Robertson and Seneviratne (cited in Branch, 2002) added changes in technology and physical setting to the ways change can be accomplished.

The data, however, reveals that most (66.7%) of the areas of transformation focuses on structural change. The attempt to transform the skill and competence of academic staff and students' learning is found to be insignificant. More importantly, the academic leaders focus on routine and administrative issues at the expense of emphasis on strategic matters, and changing the prevailed institutional culture.

In order to answer this research question participants were required to rate transformational behaviors of leaders. Some academic leaders and co-workers of the president were required to rate transformational behaviors of themselves while academic staff were asked to rate the behaviors of their respective academic leaders.

From the key behaviors of transformational leadership were listed, the first eight items refers to idealized influence, the next four items are behavior items in inspirational motivation, and the next four and the last four items describe intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration respectively. Using a five point Likert scale participants were asked to rate the extent to which the academic leaders exhibit the behaviors in managing the change at WSU. Accordingly, the responses were summarized in Table 6.

The data in Table 7 reveals that, almost all academic staff participants responded that school deans never exhibit individualized consideration behavior ( $M = 0.87$ ) though they demonstrate idealized influence ( $M = 1.34$ ), inspirational motivation ( $M = 1.96$ ) and intellectual stimulation ( $M = 1.01$ ) behaviors once in a while. Of the four transformational behaviors, inspirational motivation was relatively better practiced ( $M = 1.96$ ;  $SD = 0.29$ ) by school deans as perceived by academic staff.

The majority of academic leader participants reported relatively high score in inspirational motivation behavior ( $M = 3.40$ ;  $SD = 0.25$ ) showing that the president exhibits the behavior fairly often. The participants reported a medium score in idealized influence ( $M = 3.09$ ) and intellectual stimulation ( $M = 2.62$ ) behaviors respectively and a low score ( $M = 2.55$ ;  $SD = 0.19$ ) in individualized consideration. The transformational behavior that was better exhibited both by the president and school deans was inspirational motivation. Individualized consideration was the least practiced behavior by the leaders as reported by all the participants. Variation was not observed in the responses of the participants in rating the behaviors in their occurrence except the difference observed on the frequency of occurrence of the behaviors. This implies that the transformational leaders give less concern for the contribution of individuals.

As to the correlation results, here we present the result of a correlation analysis computed to find impacts of leadership on transformative change at WSU.

To analyze the relationship between a set of predictor variables and a dependent variables correlation Pearson Correlations were employed. As revealed in Table 8, idealized influence showed correlation with inspirational motivation ( $r = .426$ ;  $P < 0.01$ ), intellectual simulation ( $r = .351$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), individualized consideration ( $r = .327$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), for institution functional leadership in turn to assure quality of education.

Inspirational motivation indicated interrelationship with idealized influence ( $r = .30$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), intellectual simulation ( $r = .510$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), individualized consideration ( $r = .451$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). Therefore one can infer that compelling this work place variable yield positively perceived institution inspirational motivation as remedy for unhealthy transformative change of Wolaita Sodo University.

Intellectual simulation correlated with idealized influence ( $r = .182$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), inspirational motivation ( $r = .543$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), individualized consideration ( $r = .567$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). Therefore existence of these factors may result implementation of transformative change without any resistance in the institution.

Individualized consideration correlation with idealized influence ( $r = .413$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), inspirational motivation ( $r = .576$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ), intellectual simulation ( $r = .567$ ,  $P < 0.01$ ). Individualized influence is highly intertwined with these factors. Thus, support for individualized influence may be cause for leaders' balanced orientation in fair allocation of benefits and care for instructors' future progress. Thus, the study implies that there is interrelationship between leadership and transformative change at Wolaita Sodo University.

**Q<sub>3</sub>:** What major leadership challenges face the transformative change process for quality education enhancement?

Participants were required to identify major challenges facing the transformational change at WSU. The challenges were listed along a rating scale ranging from 5 = very high challenge to 1 = not a challenge. Accordingly, the responses are summarized in Table 9.

Effective leadership is a key tool to speeding up of transformational efforts. The processes of initiating, planning, implementing and monitoring transformative change requires effective leadership. In this regard, data in Table 9 portrays that due the following challenges identified by the participants. Given the range and severity of the challenges the respondents' opinion is that leaders of the transformation in the institution exhibit inadequate leadership.

Expressed explicitly, the data in Table 9 shows that lack of resources ( $M = 4.57$ ), less commitment of followers, or the university community ( $M = 4.14$ ) and

**Table 6.** Responses on transformational behaviors of academic leaders and academic staff.

| Transformational leadership behaviors  | Responses                    |      |                            |      |
|--|------------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|
|  | Academic leaders<br>(N = 12) |      | Academic staff<br>(N = 86) |      |
|  | M                            | SD   | M                          | SD   |
| Makes others feel good to be around him  | 2.67                         | 0.17 | 0.88                       | 0.08 |
| Goes beyond his self-interest for the good of the group                                | 2.79                         | 0.06 | 0.74                       | 0.07 |
| Acts in ways that build respect  | 2.67                         | 0.17 | 1.03                       | 0.03 |
| Displays a sense of power and confidence   | 3.49                         | 0.15 | 1.97                       | 0.07 |
| Talks about his most important values and beliefs                                      | 3.39                         | 0.10 | 2.13                       | 0.09 |
| Specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose                           | 3.73                         | 0.26 | 1.78                       | 0.07 |
| Considers the moral and ethical consequences of decisions                              | 3.24                         | 0.04 | 0.90                       | 0.05 |
| Emphasizes importance of having a collective sense of mission                          | 2.77                         | 0.17 | 1.29                       | 0.01 |
| Average mean score & SD  | 3.09                         |      | 1.34                       |      |
| Talks optimistically about the future  | 3.49                         | 0.04 | 2.18                       | 0.04 |
| Talks enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished                             | 3.39                         | 0.01 | 1.68                       | 0.05 |
| Articulates a compelling vision of the future  | 3.48                         | 0.04 | 1.89                       | 0.01 |
| Expresses confidence that goals will be achieved                                       | 3.24                         | 0.07 | 2.10                       | 0.02 |
| Average mean score & SD  | 3.40                         |      | 1.96                       |      |
| Re-examines critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate              | 2.48                         | 0.08 | 1.03                       | 0.00 |
| Seeks differing perspectives when solving problems                                     | 2.87                         | 0.13 | 0.93                       | 0.02 |
| Looks at problems from many different angles   | 2.53                         | 0.03 | 1.00                       | 0.00 |
| Suggests new ways of looking at how to complete assignments                            | 2.63                         | 0.03 | 1.06                       | 0.02 |
| Average mean score & SD  | 2.62                         |      | 1.01                       |      |
| Spends time teaching and coaching others   | 1.57                         | 0.32 | 0.52                       | 0.04 |
| Treats each person as an individual rather than just as a member of a group            | 2.63                         | 0.00 | 1.39                       | 0.07 |
| Considers each member as having different needs, abilities and aspirations from others | 2.77                         | 0.05 | 0.80                       | 0.00 |
| Helps each person to develop their strengths   | 3.24                         | 0.27 | 0.77                       | 0.01 |
| Average mean score & SD  | 2.55                         |      | 0.87                       |      |

Source: Own Survey (2013). Note: (0.00-0.99 not at all; 1.00-1.99 once in a while; 2.00-2.99 sometimes; 3.00-3.99 fairly often; 4.00 frequently, if not always).

**Table 7.** T-test group statistics mean comparison of academic leaders and academic staff on the transformational behaviors.

| Behaviors                    | Responses        |        |                |        |
|------------------------------|------------------|--------|----------------|--------|
|                              | Academic leaders |        | Academic staff |        |
|                              | Av. mean         | Av. SD | Av. Mean       | Av. SD |
| Idealized influence          | 3.09             | 0.10   | 1.34           | 0.00   |
| Inspirational motivation     | 3.40             | 0.25   | 1.96           | 0.29   |
| Intellectual stimulation     | 2.62             | 0.16   | 1.01           | 0.10   |
| Individualized consideration | 2.55             | 0.19   | 0.87           | 0.20   |

Source: Own survey (2013).

limited collaboration of different stakeholders (M = 4.00) are serious challenges that encounter the transformation at WSU as perceived by academic leaders of the institution. The majority of academic staff members rated

the following as “high” challenges encountering in realizing the objectives of the transformation: failure of the university leadership to build trust among followers (M = 4.29), limited collaboration of different stakeholders (M

**Table 8.** Mean, SD, and inter-correlation matrix of selected study variables.

| KTLI | Mean | SD    |                     | II     | IM     | IS     | IC      |
|------|------|-------|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| II   | 3.19 | 0.544 | Pearson correlation | 1      | .426** | .351** | 0.327** |
|      |      |       | sig.(2-tailed)      | -      | 0      | 0      | 0       |
|      |      |       | N                   | 98     | 98     | 98     | 98      |
| IM   | 2.75 | 0.577 | Pearson correlation | 0.3**  | 1      | 0.51** | .451**  |
|      |      |       | sig.(2-tailed)      | 0      | -      | 0      | 0       |
|      |      |       | N                   | 98     | 98     | 98     | 98      |
| IS   | 2.81 | 0.655 | Pearson correlation | 1.82** | .543** | 1      | .567**  |
|      |      |       | sig.(2-tailed)      | 0.006  | 0      | -      | 0       |
|      |      |       | N                   | 98     | 98     | 98     | 98      |
| IC   | 2.75 | 0.477 | Pearson correlation | .413** | .576** | .567** | 1       |
|      |      |       | sig.(2-tailed)      | 0      | 0      | 0      | -       |
|      |      |       | N                   | 98     | 98     | 98     | 98      |

Source: Own Survey (2013). \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). Key: II –Idealized Influence, IM-Inspirational Motivation, IS – Intellectual Simulation, IC- Individualized Consideration.

**Table 9.** Challenges to the transformative change.

| Potential challenges   | Responses                 |                         |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|  | Academic leaders (N = 12) | Academic staff (N = 86) |
|  | Mean                      | Mean                    |
| Inadequate position power of the presidency/ School Dean position    | 3.28                      | 3.19                    |
| Low competence level of followers, mainly teachers                   | 3.00                      | 2.29                    |
| Low competence level of academic leaders at various levels           | 3.28                      | 2.90                    |
| Incompatibility of the change with institutional/societal values     | 3.42                      | 3.16                    |
| Limited institutional autonomy                                       | 3.85                      | 3.03                    |
| Lack of resource (better trained manpower, financial, equipment etc) | 3.31                      | 2.68                    |
| Limited collaboration of different stake holders                     | 4.00                      | 3.39                    |
| Failure of the university community to understand the change         | 3.85                      | 3.19                    |
| Less commitment of followers, or the university community            | 4.14                      | 3.45                    |
| Failure of the university leadership to build trust among followers  | 3.85                      | 4.29                    |
| Language barrier (optional)  | 2.28                      | 2.16                    |
| Cultural barrier (optional)  | 3.71                      | 3.13                    |

Source: Own survey (2013).

= 3.39) and less commitment of followers (M = 3.45).

The above analysis of data implies that, although the two groups of respondents nearly identify similar challenges they disagree on the main challenge. The failure of the university leadership to build trust among the university community is the serious challenge that hinders the commitment of followers as perceived by academic staff respondents. Moreover, most of the respondents commented that the leaders, especially the university higher officials failed to mobilize followers and effectively communicate the essence of the change. The leaders are running alone by their own principle of

“management by walk around” as quoted by one of the respondent.

## CONCLUSION

Higher education institutions are clearly in the midst of rapid change in response to environmental, social, economic, technological, and political transformations sweeping the globe. As a result higher institutions face numerous broad-based challenges. New institutional strategies and decision making processes must be

created, articulated and adopted to enable institutions to survive and prosper. Based on the ongoing discussion and empirical data, the researcher could reach the following conclusions.

Any transformational change intends to promote an institution from where it is to where it should be. To this end the transformational leaders need to play roles. The study results, however, revealed that institutional context analysis was not well conducted, the effort to introduce the change to the University community was limited and the attempt to prepare and motivate the university community towards the change was almost none. On the other hand, the major areas of transformation under way in the institution are more of structural and technological to some extent. Most importantly, academic leaders exhibited transformational behaviors rarely and once in a while. Failure of the university leadership to build trust among the university community, lack of resource, absence of commitment and collaboration among implementers and stakeholders were the major challenges that encounter the transformative change.

Therefore, due to inadequate preparation and readiness for the change, inadequate transformational qualities of the leaders, structure oriented concern of the change and the challenges identified, it is safe to infer that the change at Wolaita Sodo University lacks transformational dimension and hence the change may not achieve its intended objectives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the study results, discussions made and conclusions drawn the following potential suggestions were forwarded: For effective implementation of any change, the university leadership must aim towards a better understanding of the implementers of the change. Regarding this, Burke (2010) stated that, it is not easy to change something in an effective way if there is no understandings of what it is that is refine it clearly. However, the study revealed the lack of understanding of the change implementers about what is changing. Therefore, continuous awareness creation activities should be made by academic leaders at the various levels on the essence and objectives of the change.

Transformational change is a process whereby an organization changes in its form, structure and culture in order to adapt to environmental changes (Viljoen and Rothmann, 2002). It is a fundamental change that requires exhibiting effective transformational leadership behaviors. However, the study results showed that the academic leaders less practiced transformational leadership qualities. Therefore, the leaders should be aware of transformational qualities and exhibit the behaviors accordingly. The role of leadership is crucial in the management of transformational change in higher education. Leaders should also in turn need to be transformed in order to exhibit the behaviors in this

respect.

In any change process leaders are expected to build trust among followers. Regarding this, Kelli (2010) contends that, “change often begins in trust” (pp.3). However, lack of trust was found to be one of the challenges to the change process. Therefore, the university leadership should build trust among the university community, especially the academic staff.

Transformational change in higher education focuses on changing people, structure and technological aspects of an institution. However, results of the study showed that the transformational change process of the institution gives greater concern to changing organizational structure. Therefore, the transformation should primarily focus on developing people through empowering them and giving them responsibilities. The transformational leaders should focus on strategic issues instead of wasting time in changing and re-changing structures.

On the other hand, change implementers should be committed. To this effect their roles and responsibilities of implementers should be clearly specified instead of considering them as passive recipients of the transformative change. Moreover, stakeholders should collaborate in order to assist the effort of transformation. To this end power should be decentralized. Distributed leadership should be practiced in the institution. The realization of transformational objectives requires mobilization of all the necessary resources including human and non-human resources. However, the study revealed lack of resource as one of the challenges that encounter the transformational change process. Therefore, the government needs to avail adequate budget and manpower to assist the transformation. On the other hand, the institution should diversify its sources of income instead of relying on government subsidy. Bridge the communication gaps to address the very sharp differences in perceptions between leaders and staff on transformational change.

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