CHAPTER 3
Academic Leadership Beyond Theories and Principles

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

Academic leaders are frequently forced to assume posts such as department heads, school chairs, faculty deans even though they may have had no administrative experience. This requires them to engage in extensive training, activities, and seminars in leadership development to master the leadership fundamentals, for instance, strategic planning, budgeting, making policy, alliance building, staffing, and more, and use those for the betterment of the institutions that they head up.

Academic leadership is, in fact, very different to what has been viewed as being ideal in the established leadership theories and principles, as leading an institution is a complex and situational process. Even accomplished business executives who focus on moving themselves into academic leadership encounter difficulties in heading up academic institutions. This is because in contrast to a business, universities are not developed to allow stakeholders to make money and the services they deliver are not merely temporary. In addition, the leadership style commonly modelled by academic leaders tends to be heavily focused on a hierarchical approach. Decision making is reserved only for those in formal positions of academic leadership. This, in turn,

can be both problematic and frustrating especially when certain visions and decisions imposed by the top leaders do not align with the views the rest of the academics hold; it is thus difficult to influence colleagues and work collaboratively to achieve the same institutional goals and outcomes.

Based on the observations and experiences of this situation, it is believed that this occurs because none other than academic leaders are not ready for their demanding leadership roles. This raises the issue of negligence regarding the selection process of academic leaders. The leadership appointment is an awkward process, as research performance and senior ranks are often hyped as a basis for the individual involved to lead an institution when in fact what makes a university a university also depends on the aspect of teaching and learning, and other administrative services, rather than pure commitment to producing research. So, generally, presenting individuals' success in proven research as solid evidence that they will be successful in leading an institution is questionable, as they might not be equipped with holistic academic leadership function may lack the qualities necessary to deal with the challenges that come with a leading position to make a university to function well. Therefore, improving academic leaders' leadership skills is essential to prevent the existing leadership crisis from worsening. In today's higher education leadership situations, an effective academic leader is one who can lead him/herself to others. Also, academic leaders should first understand themselves as leaders in all three facets of teaching and learning, research, and administration services. Only through such understanding can they execute strategic plans to help other peer leaders and leaders-under-consideration to prepare and convey aspirations for the complexities of leadership associated with such positions. Hence, this suggests the need to emphasize the concept of peer

leadership. Though peer leadership has the potential for leadership development, this area is still under-developed, especially in the context of higher education. To this end, a leadership framework, which is known as *"Peer-led Teaching-Learning-Research-Administration Leadership",* is proposed. The next section will describe the existing theories of leadership, followed by the proposed peer leadership framework.

3.2   BACKGROUND OF LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND PRINCIPLES

Rost (1993), had found 221 definitions and conceptions of leadership, and the number may have increased by now. Above all, leadership is about influencing people. It is often said that *"leaders are born not made"* due to personality traits like confidence, extroversion etc., when in fact it is a process and can be learned. Leadership theories, which show a wide range of principles, are important in directing positive change. In universities, the three commonly recognized and accepted leadership theories, namely, situational, transactional, and transformational leadership, are the opposite of the trait theory of leadership (Galton, 1869), which completely ignores the influence of the context. It is this facet that will be described next.

3.2.1   Situational Leadership

Situational leadership theory was published by Hersey (1969). In this theory, leadership is stimulated based on environmental (i.e., followers) and situational (i.e., tasks) factors. In this sense, leaders need to suit the leadership action to the maturity/readiness level of the staff. Apart from that, leaders must use their judgement to