



Enhancing the Professional Curricula Management in Art Universities in the Era of Education 4.0 through Transformational and Democratic Leadership: A Case Study Analysis

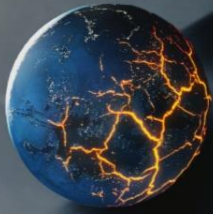
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ABSTRACT

This study explores how transformational and democratic leadership synergistically drive professional curriculum reform in art universities within Education 4.0 - how the top-level design of transformational leadership and the co-creation of democratic leadership can synergize to promote the upgrading of teaching and learning under the wave of Education 4.0. Art universities that emphasize freedom, visionary thinking, and cross-cultural communication encounter distinct challenges. Among various leadership styles, transformational and democratic approaches are the most suitable for the academic environment of art universities. This research mainly uses the cross-cultural comparative case study methodology (CCSM) and systematic qualitative analysis. By referring to existing literature and analyzing cases of LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore and Musashino Art University in Japan, the study reveals that art universities adopting a transformational model can enhance interdisciplinary innovation, while those implementing democratic leadership can boost the engagement of teachers and students. This research offers substantial empirical support for these leadership methods and proposes a newly integrated leadership framework for art education, presenting practical strategies for management improvement in diverse cultural contexts.



Keywords: education 4.0, art universities, transformational leadership, democratic leadership, professional curricula management

1. Introduction

The core of Education 4.0 lies in the dissemination of knowledge and technology (Hussin, 2018). Art universities face unique challenges as they need to balance adherence to academic standards and the stimulation of individual creative motivation (Cooper & Maxwell, 2009). Faculty members in art universities focus on cultivating forward-looking thinking, cross-cultural communication skills, and innovative abilities. These requirements call for art universities to adopt distinctive leadership and management methods.

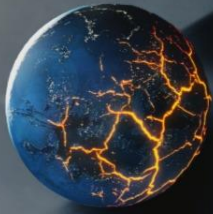
Transformational and democratic leadership styles are highly applicable in art universities. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring people, stimulating intellectual growth, providing personalized care (Akinpelu, 2024), and prioritizing long-term vision over short-term self-interest to achieve extraordinary results. On the other hand, democratic leadership aims to create an environment that is dynamic, inclusive, and empowering (Woods, 2021). The combination of these two leadership styles helps to build an academic atmosphere conducive to the cultivation of students' individuality, interdisciplinary innovation and creativity, and in-depth teacher-student interaction.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Leadership Theories in Higher Education

Leadership theories in education often highlight transactional, servant, and autocratic leadership styles. However, these approaches may not align well with the creative and flexible nature of art education: Transactional Leadership: Focuses on order, structure, and reward-based performance (STU, 2014), which may limit creative exploration. Servant Leadership: Prioritizes serving others (Canavesi & Minelli, 2022), but its bottom-up decision-making model may conflict with the need for structured academic leadership. Autocratic Leadership: Centralizes decision-making (Verywell Mind, 2010), which may stifle innovation and collaborative learning in art universities.

In recent years, educational leadership research has continued to emphasize the important role that transformational leadership play in driving innovation and change in the



field of education, particularly in the era of Education 4.0. Burns (1978) was the first to propose this concept, and subsequent studies by Bass and Avolio (1994) research further elucidated how to cultivate excellence in effectual output by encouraging vision and stimulating intellect. As demonstrated by Prestiadi, Gunawan, and Sumarsono (2020), transformational leadership plays a crucial part in Education 4.0. In order to really make good use of technological innovation in the field of education, it is crucial to do two things: first, to encourage innovation and breakthroughs, and second, to mobilize all parties to participate actively. Transformational leadership is no longer a paper concept, but rather a perpetual motion machine for education reform. This type of leadership emphasizes two things in particular - a clear blueprint for development and the ability to execute as a team, both of which are like the invisible engine of educational innovation in the digital age, forcing schools to remain flexible and “ready to change”. However, there is a new topic worth studying: how should art colleges customize this management model? After all, the training of art students requires unique adaptability.

Recently, academics have begun to promote “democratic leadership”, which is quite different from traditional top-down management. As an example, one study found that the most obvious feature of this model is full brainstorming - everyone from professors to student assistants can participate in decision-making (DeBell, 2019). More than transformational leadership, which focuses on top-level design, the democratic style emphasizes equal collaboration, which is particularly good for sparking creativity and team trust. Now that art schools are facing the challenges of Education 4.0, this flexible and open management model is simply tailor-made: it can keep the professional construction innovative and dynamic, as well as continuously improve teaching and learning through multiple perspectives, which is especially suitable for the cultivation of artistic talents who need to break through constantly.

2.2 The Collaborative Leadership Model (CLM) for Art Universities

This study reveals synergistic mechanisms in the management of arts education, suggesting that the strategic vision inherent in transformational leadership combined with the collective dynamism fostered by democratic management has a multiplier effect on curricular innovation. The Co-Creative Leadership Model (CLM) proposed in this paper is an adaptive framework that harmonizes the relationship between resource integration and decentralized decision-making. Distributed leadership (Spillane & Camburn, 2006) emphasizes distributed



management and leadership of universities but fails to consider the unique needs of arts education in cross-cutting disciplines. Unlike distributed leadership, which advocates decentralization and does not demonstrate strategic intent, CLM combines hierarchical goal-setting with participatory management, making it more responsive to the cross-disciplinary nature of arts education. Specifically, the CLM operates three interdependent mechanisms: (1) hierarchical goal-setting aligned with Education 4.0 competencies, shared leadership (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003) focuses on teams working together but lacks the goal-oriented leadership approach of CLM, (2) a participatory governance structure that allows for real-time stakeholder input, and (3) the translation of program-level practices into systematic feedback adjustments. This configuration addresses a critical gap identified in arts education - the need for rich creative experience and personal attainment and the need to focus on diversity in arts education (Xu, Zheng, & Ye, 2009).

The fit of the CLM model in cross-cultural contexts shows significant differences: in Chinese or Korean educational settings, the participatory management of the CLM model needs to fit in with the traditional centralized system. In contrast, in Western institutions where distributed management is more common, CLM participation can be well integrated. Future research could explore how cultural differences in different regions affect the implementation of collaborative leadership models in universities.

3. Methodology

This study utilizes the Cross-cultural comparative case study methodology (CCSM) to explore the leadership mechanisms of art colleges in the context of Education 4.0, using the LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore and the Musashino Art University in Japan as the research subjects.

A systematic qualitative analysis was then used to identify four leadership paradigms: vision-driven resource integration, distributed decision-making architecture, technology-embedded pedagogical innovation, and stakeholder empowerment through shared governance logic. These findings not only confirm the universality of transformational leadership in enhancing organizational resilience (Prestiadi, Gunawan, & Sumarsono, 2020) but also shed light on the uniqueness of arts education environments and the need to construct systems of interdisciplinarity while preserving the subjectivity of the arts.



It also reveals the specificity of arts education - the need to balance adherence to academic standards with the stimulation of individual potential. In order to fill the research gap of implicit leadership behaviors, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 30 administrators, teachers, and student representatives from the two case study schools in the subsequent phase to deepen the empirical dimensions. Thematic analysis coding of data collected from school reports and interviews with curriculum administrators identified patterns that emerged in relation to transformational and democratic leadership practices.

4. Case Study Analysis

This research utilizes a qualitative case study method to analyze the leadership practices at LASALLE College of the Arts in Singapore and Musashino Art University in Japan. Because of its immigrant culture, Singapore is a “cultural camp” where the best of the East and the West are blended. Japan is the only non-Western country among the world's major design countries, and it is the only country in the world where Eastern philosophy and Western boldness are blended with skill, so art universities in the most representative countries were chosen for the study. The data collection process included document analysis of institutional policies, leadership reports, and student feedback surveys, which will be supplemented in the future with semi-structured interviews with faculty and administrators. Through thematic analysis, key leadership practices affecting curriculum management in the context of Education 4.0 were identified.

LASALLE College of the Arts, founded by the late Brother Joseph McNally, is dedicated to promoting the importance of the arts for personal, social and economic change (LASALLE College of the Arts, n.d.). The LASALLE College of the Arts press release titled “Mediacorp LASALLE 40: LASALLE College of the Arts Produces Multidisciplinary Artists with X-Factor” (BERITA Mediacorp, 2024) exemplifies how art universities implement innovative leadership practices to nurture interdisciplinary creativity in line with Education 4.0. The values of LASALLE College of the Arts are courage, agility, excellence, collaboration and engagement. Students are encouraged to speak up, enabling students to add to the arts community with their own unique style. “Become a more empathetic person”, the motto of LASALLE College of the Arts: “Has It” also shapes the students and makes each student “different!”. This means expressing oneself “louder, friendlier, and braver.” The event



highlights a transformational leadership approach by articulating a compelling vision that encourages students to explore diverse creative disciplines and push traditional boundaries.

Simultaneously, the initiative reflects democratic leadership by actively involving faculty, students, and industry partners in collaborative decision-making and creative processes, inspiring pure values, shaping cultural artists, thereby fostering an inclusive learning environment, for example, a student's work has been included in the Ministry of Education's art syllabus, giving the student the opportunity to share his knowledge in universities, secondary schools and elementary school. This integrated leadership model not only enhances professional curricula management but also prepares students to thrive in a technology-driven, cross-cultural educational landscape.

Musashino Art University is located in Tokyo, Japan. Currently, Musashino Art University is one of the leading art education institutions in Japan (Musashino Art University, n.d.) and is renowned globally for its long history and excellence in art education. In the era of Education 4.0, Musashino Art University has inherited the traditional values of art while embracing the balanced model of contemporary innovation. For example, the Department of Visual Communication Design advocates the wisdom and culture of reinterpreting and reconstructing information from a social perspective (Musashino Art University, Department of Visual Communication Design, n.d.), while possessing an advanced technological and aesthetic sense to create new visual expressions that resonate with people's emotions. The school has created a visionary culture through transformational leadership strategies that inspire faculty and students to explore the convergence of digital media and traditional aesthetics.

Musashino Art University demonstrates its commitment to democratic leadership by engaging in public events that foster collaborative learning and community involvement. An illuminating instance is the "Future School Festival" staged at Tokyo Midtown Design Hub (Musashino Art University, Department of Visual Communication Design, no date specified). The highlight of this event is that it breaks down the boundaries between alumni and current students, mixing and matching everyone's work into a crossover exhibition. Visitors, regardless of their professional backgrounds, can find a way to interact with each other - they may see installation art in the exhibition hall in the morning, and then go to the workshop next door to



experience dance improvisation in the afternoon. The whole festival is like a large-scale creative laboratory, where exhibitions, performances, workshops and dialogues are interlinked to create a platform for free dialog, allowing creative sparks to erupt during exchanges. This mode of “universal participation” is a vivid portrayal of democratic leadership: from the exhibition line to the flow of activities, the planning team includes professors as well as student assistants, and even the participating artists are able to make suggestions. This kind of operation mechanism is especially in line with the requirements for professional construction in the era of Education 4.0 - not only maintaining the professionalism of the curriculum system, but also continuously injecting innovative genes through multiple collisions.

This study hits the key to art universities management - in the era of Education 4.0, transformational and democratic leadership are like the “twin engines” of professional curriculum development. The team dissected the practical cases of LASALLE in Singapore and Musashino in Japan and found an interesting pattern: transformational leadership is like the glue of professional linkage, which can break down the “disciplinary wall” of the oil painting department and the new media majors; and democratic leadership allows teachers and students to become “partners” from the stage of curriculum design, and even the syllabus of elective courses may come from the students' proposals. When these two models are superimposed, the classroom evolves into a dynamic creative scene, the kind of teaching ecology needed for the future of art education.

5. Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The CLM model reconfigures the power structure of the curriculum in art colleges through a dual-track mechanism: the top-level design end maintains strategic strength (transformational leadership), the executive level establishes a resilient and responsive network (democratic governance), and the two are coupled through a digital platform for decision-making. Although CLM has proven effective in arts universities, further research is needed to test its applicability in non-arts disciplines. In comprehensive universities with solidified internal structures, adaptations to the participatory management model may need to be adapted.

The highlight of the study is the creation of the first “combined leadership model” for art colleges. Unlike the “principal's say” model of the past, the new model has three major assets: affirmative voting by students and faculty at decision-making meetings, mixing and



matching of teaching teams across national boundaries, and real-time monitoring of teaching effectiveness with digital tools. For example, Musashino's meta-cosmic curation class was developed by an Italian professor with a mix of programming students and oil painting students (NetEase. 2022), this management thinking not only overturns tradition but also opens up new ideas for educational management research.

In terms of practical application, the study found that art colleges and universities can take the following specific measures: 1) school leaders organize regular faculty-student exchange meetings to jointly plan the direction of curricular reform; 2) establish interdisciplinary studios to encourage faculty members in different fields to collaborate on the development of new classes; and 3) collaborate with companies to develop hands-on training programs to expose students to the latest technology in the industry (Zhu, 2020). For example, Musashino Art University has significantly accelerated the technological adaptability of its digital media courses through mobile labs and interdisciplinary workshops (AD Scientific Index, n.d.).

Follow-up research could go deeper in two areas: first, investigating art universities in more countries to compare differences in leadership styles across cultures, and second, future research could explore quantitative validation of CLM through faculty and student sampling surveys. Additionally, exploring the role of digitally-driven AI tools in enhancing democratic leadership management in art universities is a promising direction.

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