

Exploring Strategic Management of Head of Departments: A Case Study of Public Universities in Lahore

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ABSTRACT

Departments under auspices of university leadership are expected to contribute in embracing academic and market needs. The management of departments has always been challenged in result of emerging trends, issues, and academic development. The experiences of the heads of department (HoDs) in strategizing their departments can assist them to comprehend how they carry out the departmental managerial functions. It is assumed that HoDs do not feel adequately prepared for the challenges they face in managing the departments. This study aimed to explore that what type of challenges HoDs face and what type of the strategies they use to manage the departmental activities. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews following qualitative case study research design. Thematic analysis was used to reach the findings of the study. The analysis produced major themes: academic work pressure, managerial pressure, administrative hindrances, proactive approach, motivation, and progressive teamwork. Findings show that challenges provide opportunities with the HoDs to adapt themselves and devise new strategies in making efforts to run the departments smoothly. The study implied that if HoDs focus on devising strategies to

manage the departments they can bring about positive developments in the departments.

Introduction

Strategy making is a judgmental process and based on thinking and making decisions. Strategic management is a process to judge, decide, implement, and evaluate the functions of an organization to achieve its goals (Malik, 2018). It includes cognitive efforts of individuals through social interaction to make innovative and adaptable decisions in response to the demanding environment in organizations (Hunger, 2020). Thus, under strategic management, a number of tasks and activities are designed and a line of action is determined moving towards the vision of an organization to make it distinguished and sustainable (Hayter & Cahoy, 2018). This process is meant to strategically transform an organization.

Higher education institutions (HEIs) in general and universities in particular rely heavily on the strategy of academic managers with regard to organize and utilize the resources for academic, administrative, and financial tasks (Ritson, 2013). Head of the departments (HoDs) work at middle level of an organization and are generally considered as the custodians of academic excellence (Holstein, Starkey, & Wright, 2018). They are connected with the complex and high-level organizational problems. They set a mandate for faculty members and play a bridging role between their colleagues and top management to bring about excellence in the organization (Bukhari, Gul, Bashir, Zakir, & Javed, 2021). Thus, these academic managers (HoDs) devise strategies to put departments on the path of sustainable success employing cutting-edge and innovative ideas in line with the vision and mission of universities.

Departments are the basic units of universities. Smith (2005) reported that the development of a department is the development of a university. To oversee and transform the departments, HoDs work with their senior colleagues to make new and effective policies and strategies. Thus, heads considered as the most suitable and relevant personalities for departments by virtue of their control over departmental activities. Potgieter, Coetzee, and Basson (2011) stated that the HoDs manage a particular set of skills and play their roles effectively. Though it is difficult to cover HoDs' all responsibilities and roles; however, they are expected to perform duties and play roles in the domain of academic (learning theories, teaching methods, classroom management, students engagement, faculty members, guides and counselors), administration (examination department, admission staff, clerical, technical and supportive staff), management (as per the demand of the need, situation and context such as the role of modifier, administrator, communicator, issue handler/conflict resolver, planner, controller, decision-maker, time manager and financial manager), and leadership (the role of an advisor, mentor and guide) (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006; Holstein et al., 2018). The management of HoDs is more challenged than ever before in the pandemic of COVID-19 (Tuckett, 2020). It halted the departmental activities, consequently suspended the conventional learning style and required HoDs to explore the potential avenues to regulate departments (Galloway, Bowra, Butsang, & Mashford-Pringle, 2020).

They perform a number of activities such as engaging faculty in ways to enhance their skills in teaching methodologies, assessment and classroom management, ensuring students' academic success, empowering administrators to maintain conducive teaching and learning environment, resolving the conflicts, if any, emerging among departmental stakeholders, guiding curriculum revision, overseeing the timetable and syllabus, and assigning tasks to non-academic staff to support overall departmental activities (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006; Ghavifekr, Hoon, Ling, & Ching, 2017). Thus, HoDs are responsible to engage every stakeholder in the departmental efficiency and

success. Moreover, in present age, HEIs are stressed due to unprecedented challenges such as marketization, competition, massification, globalization, and the use of latest Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Allui & Sahni, 2016; Leskaj, 2017). Successive use of ICTs also demands adoption of innovative ideas that can be accommodated and institutionalized using strategic management (Kundu & Bairi, 2016).

Stukalina (2014) stated that HEIs are working under high competitive environment which involves information-based community having challenges in managerial, innovation, and academic aspects. This is by virtue of HEIs' role in students' lives as well as in societies. The unprecedented challenges due to Covid-19, advancing technologies, and time and budget constraints have called for innovative managerial techniques such as strategic management (Education, 2021; Leskaj, 2017; Shaw, Kim, & Hua, 2020). Amoli and Aghashahi (2016) argued that, thus, departments need to consider sustainable behavior and tools to improve the current departmental performance and deal with the future complexity. Moldovan (2012) is of the view that strategic management of departments has made efficiency and improvement possible in educational systems. However, to what extent HoDs have been able to cope with the emerging challenges is questionable.

Visualizing futuristic approach for the betterment of HEIs and creating an enabling environment, HoDs are more challenged than ever before (Hunger, 2020; Yureva, Yureva, & Burganova, 2016). Under strategic management, HEIs can face the challenges, adopt innovative techniques and tools, and devise strategies to increase the performance at micro, meso and macro level of the organization (Söderhjelm, Björklund, Sandahl, & Bolander-Laksov, 2018). Thus, to focus on efficiency, be accountable, and deal with the challenges, HoDs use strategic management as a tool in challenging and changing scenarios where every minute issue can be construed efficiently for organizational success (Doyle & Brady, 2018; Eftimov, Trpeski, Gockov, & Vasileva, 2016).

According to Clegg and McAuley (2005), HoDs are at the heart of the physical and emotional affairs in an organization. Being in the middle of organization, they protect and present organizational values and work as agent of organizational control by managing their knowledge and applying their wisdom for its sustainability (Clegg & McAuley, 2005). Thus, HoDs, employing their powers to realize their visions work on culture, communication and corporation of HEIs. The discussion raises a question that how HoDs deal with the various stakeholders that directly or indirectly influence the success of departments.

It is established that departments are the building blocks of HEIs where strategic management of HoDs engages every stakeholder in a viable work environment (Creaton & Heard-Lauréote, 2021a). External challenges such as budget constraints and policy constraints are dealt by HoDs' effective strategic management to regulate and facilitate teaching, learning, and research activities (Klofsten et al., 2019). Academic management, administration, and leadership approves that strategic management of HoDs is an indispensable tool for them. Without this tool HoDs cannot transform the basic unit of universities. Thus, it requires from HoDs to devise strategies to deal with the gamut of complex behavioral, technical, managerial, and leadership issues (Qualter & Willis, 2012; Roopchund, 2019). It also raises a general question that how HoDs plan strategically to face challenges, marshal and allocate resources, monitor the progress, engage human resources, establish and maintain academic excellence, and weigh the outcomes in a tangible form (Shokhakimovich, 2020). Thus, this study intends to explore the status of strategic management of HoDs and the way they deal with the challenges to run their department. The following section discusses the literature on the subject under investigation.

Literature Review

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are considered human organizations where essential portion inside the instruction enables the graduates to solve the problems and lead the work in an efficient manner (Wang, 2021). The tasks and

responsibilities performed by the departments of HEIs have an impact straightforwardly on all the stakeholders who are affiliated with these organizations. Batool and Rehman (2014) stated that strategic management of HEIs' departments implies an implicit connection between governments, common services of instruction, colleges, national level ministries and other social institutions. Simply, there is a connection between the HEIs/academia, industry and society. However, in such complex connection, the quality of the HEIs is compromised and thus, the debate raises a question that how the basic unit of HEIs that is the department perform their functions and how can their strategy address the challenging and emerging issues.

Hoodbhoy (2009) explained that each nation needs universities, and the more they have, the better they can deal with the global challenges. There is a clear utilitarian objective behind the claim that HEIs have gotten to be the motors of advancement for knowledge-driven economies within the age of fast globalization. They are the fountainheads of cutting-edge technologies and science that have brought about a paradigm shift universally. More specifically, Martin, Polly, Coles, and Wang (2020) explained that technology continues to penetrate in the functions, practices, and day to day work of teaching and learning process. Such as faculty can use the technologies not only to perform their teaching and learning activities but also to make them more effective.

Zusman (2005) is of the view that HEIs in the twenty-first century are facing unprecedented challenges of social demanding and public needs. These changes have become the rules for institutes instead of expectations. HEIs rise the funds and reward the system when the results are good and drops in bad situations; but it can maintain funds and governance if its strategy is workable. Additionally, some HEIs are unaware of the resources due to low quality of human resource and unable to meet the challenges (Creaton & Heard-Lauréote, 2021b). Thus, it is established that if HEIs have a proactive approach in dealing with the

issues at departmental level then it is hoped that the entire HEI can grow in a desirable way.

Shah, Balasingam, and Dhanapal (2018) are of the view that an assessment of the lawful instruction in Pakistan appears to have a decay within the quality of legitimate education within the past few decades. In this regard, heads' behavior can influence the level of engagement among stakeholders. If heads behave accurately and satisfy the staff, there are possibilities that the staff members will be more satisfied with the heads and organizational environment will be pleasant to work. Heads with the energy, vision, and boldness to teach the groups ought to get to be the catalysts and construct the situations that will motivate and discharge the problem of staff members (Bhana, 2019).

Pakistan got independence on 14th August, 1947. At that time, Pakistan was an unused state with powerless structures of administration and exceptionally constrained assets of British. Changes in governance and administration in Pakistan can be classified into three to four time-periods from 1947 to 2010 (Bengali, 1999). To begin with, status of governance was improved from 1947 to 1970 where at first the colonial bequest was the whole improvement plan and improvement or change programs were state-driven named this period as "development administration". The movement time period within the governance history of Pakistan was from 1972-1977 and it was called the "time of improvement endeavor". This was one of kind periods in Pakistan where the center of administration and commerce moved completely to the state. The third period can be named from 1977 to 1999, and it was called the "time of improvement administration". Moving onto the final period beneath the classification being considered in this regard was the administration period from 1999 to 2010 or till date is called "great administration". Integration of national objectives with the objectives for HEIs can offer assistance in accomplishing long term economic advancement. It is unfortunate that Pakistan has "failed

changes” and the changes took place had political commitment rather than visionary prioritized areas of HEIs for economic development.

McCowan (2018) concluded that the quality of instruction depends on competence and judgment skills of workforce working at HEIs nationally. Mubarak, Rana, Zaira, and Naveed (2012) stated that higher education in Pakistan had been genuinely ignored until the foundation of Higher Education Commission (HEC), in 2002 to create and advance the higher instruction framework of Pakistan. It goes without any question that for quality at HEIs the faculty is the foremost important human capital that can be a source of competitive advantage. Developing and maintaining competent faculty has been a challenge in Pakistan. To deal with this challenge of quality education, HEC devised a number of councils. The purpose of establishment of accreditation councils at HEC was and is to ensure and maintain the quality standards of the relevant disciplines. Among them, National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE) is to maintain and ensure teachers’ education at Pakistan HEIs. Practically, NACTE requires that each department at Pakistan HEIs has capable, qualified, and talented faculty, along with efficient strategic management, infrastructure, and appropriate student-teacher ratio (Akhtar, Aamir, Khurshid, Abro, & Hussain, 2015). This discussion shows that strategy at national level in Pakistan could not make the desired progress in promoting higher education.

Dharma and Darwin (2019) stated that key administration is the thing that must be considered to bring about quality at departmental level. Wells (1998) concluded that strategic management implies that a staff of key organizers more or less thought up strategic program. Inga, Cárdenas, and Cárdenas (2021) expressed that strategic management can play a role in maintaining a quality at HEIs with reference to guaranteeing survival and long-term development, such as colleges within the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, and China have effectively actualized strategic management to construct solid universal brands

and reliably keep up best worldwide rankings. Considering the concept of strategic management in more detail, Latorre-Medina and Blanco-Encomienda (2013) stated that the administration is to realize the objectives set for the development of the organization. Thus, strategic management is the successful and effective tool to accomplish educational objectives through arranging, organizing, inspiring, and controlling over educational assets.

Falqueto, Hoffmann, Gomes, and Onoyama Mori (2020) explained that the strategic management at HEIs is a continuous exertion of effort to fulfil distinctive and conflictive roles such as financial, administrative and teaching and learning in complex network of stakeholders. Additionally, higher education is exceptionally touchy to the social systems where a huge number of players included in the nexus (Etzkowitz, 1998). All these components make the university-stakeholder relationship vital but more troublesome to oversee. In these scenarios, stakeholders' relationships and their functions influence the choice of procedures to be executed.

Poister (2010) explained that strategic management is concerned with defining methodology to run the department effectively. Thus, strategic planning looks into every minute detail of the activities performed various stakeholders. Strategic manager, here, the academic managers need to be mindful of coercive openings in their orders as they design methodology and execute plans (Bradshaw & Fredette, 2009). Being open and having an out of the box solution such as 'top-down radical methodologies and the work out of political clout' and bottom-up approach with a few degree of worker interest can ensure the achievement of strategic management (Beer, Voelpel, Leibold, & Tekie, 2005).

Ofori and Atiogbe (2012) stated that the productivity of HEIs can endure in dealing with the challenges that universities can confront. Central to strategic management is the assurance of long-term objectives and targets of an organization serving as a system inside which choices are made concerning the

nature and direction that stem from the organizational structure, culture, and practices. Parakhina, Godina, Boris, and Ushvitsky (2017) explained that formulating modern strategies and approaches have driven to a diversification of the frameworks as an endeavor to adjust to the specific characteristics of the organizations in line with the competitive environment.

Leskaj (2017) concluded that strategy supports organizational survival by foreseeing and managing with challenges from competitors, regardless these are from public or private side. Strategic planning is an action-oriented sort of arranging activities for organizational survival and success. Ghavifekr et al. (2017) stated that when HoDs use strategic management, they oversee and create work force in such a way that the vision and mission of HEIs are accomplished.

Smith (2005) concluded that HoDs in a university plays a key part on the basis of scholastic administration and representation of the institution being on the designated and changeless managerial position. Creaton and Heard-Lauréote (2021b) found that in UK universities, the scholarly division refers to the work that HoDs oversee and deal with via strategic administration in the department. Potgieter et al. (2011) argued that the changes of higher education organizations such as major changes within the higher instructional field and strategic work can be met by HoDs. Stukalina (2014) clarified that the universities make unused strategies for the coming developments, budgets, and advances. Methodology making is the central portion of management since strategies are to improve of instruction. Managing strategy is the foremost critical thing that HoDs use for all fundamental exercises such as instructional management, promoting research and other departmental activities. This discussion shows that how academic managers perform their strategic work of the department, especially in Pakistan needs further exploration.

Sterling (2004) explained that there have been principal changes within the learning process as well as within the parts and duties of the HoDs since the use of devices and innovations has reduced impediments of the classroom and enhanced the performance. The head is the on-screen character whose central part is to assist understudies teaching and learning process, and create their mechanical capabilities (Ghavifekr & Ibrahim, 2014). Thus, HoDs need to have managerial mastery, conceptual understanding, and capacity to oversee learning exercises as well as other departmental activities.

The excessive use of ICTs has revolutionized higher education in performing almost all kinds of its functions and operations. Nawaz, Awan, and Ahmad (2011) stated that ICTs assist HoDs to use different softwares in order to recover, change over, store, organize, control, and display information and data. The use of softwares related to Learning Management System is of paramount importance. Teaching and learning process is not only expedited but also conceptualized in a variety of ways. This exponential advancement of progressively advanced communication advances has put HEIs and universities on the path of competition. In line with the ICTs, lately the literacy of digitalization of higher education has also opened up new avenues for the relevant stakeholders. Cabaleiro-Cerviño and Vera (2020) stated that technologization is an action that permits organizing instructive forms to realize particular tasks.

Issues such as managing research publications, the promotion of research among Master and M.Phil. levels, teaching and learning issues, and other managerial issues at departmental level demand that HoDs use an effective strategy package that can address all the known and unknown issues (Bukhari et al., 2021). According to Vaganova (2019) HoDs' professional preparation enables them to be competent to discharge their responsibilities efficiently. Above review establishes that to what extent HoDs can address, enlist, create, and propel the

proper workforce for the efficiency and quality of higher education. Moreover, to what extent HoDs are efficient enough in dealing with and persuading the staff for effective performance of the departments needs to be explored further.

1. Research Methods

Researchers used qualitative approach to explore the heads' perspectives/viewpoints in running their departments. As the study aimed to explore their views on headship, inductive approach directed us to use the case study research design to understand how they ascribe their challenges to the situations in the natural setting. Contextually, case study design helps in exposing hidden phenomenon and unheard voices in actual setting. It is also used to better understand the developing, challenging, and contextual situations (Yin, 2009) such as the problems of students and interactions of teachers with heads, teachers and students in departmental activities.

Selection of public universities in this study is rationalized based on three reasons. Firstly, their homogenous administrative structure. All public universities follow the same modus operandi in running their departments. Secondly, contribution they aimed to in the field of higher education. Finally, number of students who are trained in the public universities. In this regard, the purposive sampling technique was used where those participants were selected who were dealing with the headship activities of the department. Thus, the total population of six public universities in city Lahore was 150 heads. Out of this number 10 heads were interviewed in-depth. The sample size was kept small intentionally on the basis of tenets of qualitative research to deeply understand the issue.

Data for this study were collected using semi-structured interviews of the heads to gain in-depth understanding on the departmental activities. The interview protocol guide was developed to conduct the interviews. For this, the selected participants (heads) were approached through email and telephone. They were

briefed that their participation was volunteer, and they were updated that they could withdraw it at any time. We also sought their permission to record the audio-interviews on electronic gadgets. We follow the time and place of their convenience to make the data collection process as transparent as possible. We followed these steps so that data could be collected in natural setting minimizing subjectivity and enhancing the reliability of the findings. Thus, audio-interviews lasted from twenty to twenty-five minutes on the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges that HoDs face in running the department?
2. What are the strategies that head of departments use to manage the departmental activities?

Thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the data. Following this framework, we reached the findings by transcription, coding and recoding, and extracting themes. Thus, we reached the following themes from the voices of participants through inductive method.

2. Findings

The collected data was transcribed and coded. Following thematic analysis relevant codes were organized. To make the themes codes were rechecked and reorganized as a concept/theme. Thus, the findings of this study shows the actual voices of respondents and reflexivity of the researchers to reach to the conclusions. These findings are given question wise in thematic form.

Challenges that HoDs Face in Running the Departments

Under the challenges that HoDs face to regulate the academic activities—research question one, the data produced three themes: academic work pressure, managerial pressure, and administrative hindrances. These themes are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Academic Work Pressure

Participants express that academic work pressure is a multi-pronged challenge. Managerially, academic work can include assignments, paperwork, monitoring, and performance. In this regard, on the one hand they have to assign the assignments to supporting staff and academics on daily, weekly, and monthly basis as and when needed. On the other hand they have to “clear their table” get accomplished the work that is assigned to them from the top management. This can be called as the paper work that is difficult but very important to regulate the academic activities of the department. This work also includes, teaching, learning and research activities. The main characteristic of this work is that it needs the approval, disapproval, and referral of the heads. Therefore, this work needs thorough attention of the heads and it connects the top management with academics. The following exemplary quote highlights these aspects,

“As a head of department, I have to face many challenges. For example, the first and most important challenge is the day to day activities or assignments along with your teaching work, research supervision work like completion of urgent task from the vice chancellor office...So it’s a big challenge. Moreover, at university level, the tasks are not same type, they are repeated, they are new and unforeseen task so these are challenges.”

The quote shows the challenges that heads face in the day to day departmental activities and procedures. Resultantly, heads in the paper work aspect work as the result producers of different tasks. The next aspect of academic work is the monitoring of on-going work/assignments in the departments. Heads under monitoring aspect evaluate that to what degree assigned tasks to the relevant personnel/staff (students, faculty, and supporting staff) are completed. The final aspect of this theme is concerned with performance. It is meant that heads ensure that all faculty members and supporting staff are performing their duties at their level best. Thus, if some of them feel less energy or not motivated then

heads encourage them to fulfill their duties. The challenge of academic work pressure sheds light that heads face the work pressure to regulate departmental activities.

Managerial Pressure

Second theme is of managerial pressure that heads face in the departments. Participants expressed that less cooperation from the colleagues, their lazy behavior, and the conflicts create hurdle in fulfilling the managerial departmental activities. As heads have to look into the management of the department, they face managerial pressure to deal with the staff members and their issues. The below exemplary quote expresses the aspects of this theme:

“Here I would mention that usually HOD’s assign tasks to their faculty members. They assign different responsibilities to every faculty member. Sometimes faculty members do not fulfil their given tasks. Sometimes they ignore the instructions, and sometimes they perform their duties well. One of the important duties is to ask them to take classes on time.Then we have our examination system and preparation of exams, the faculty members must do that. These are the basic points which a HOD has to face in terms of faculty members.”

The excerpt shows that considering cooperation, participants expressed that they found their staff members less cooperative. The staff members cannot work on the assigned time because they are unable to understand the tasks, or the way they are done. Or sometimes staff members are less cooperative with the head because they are not serious about their jobs. Sometimes, they become egoistic just because they know that their jobs are permanent. Second aspect in managing the department is the laziness of staff members because they ignore the work and busy in doing their own work. Thus, they become unable to complete their work in time. The third aspect of the departmental management is

the challenge of conflicts. In the voice of participants, staff members have many conflicts with their colleagues, so heads have to deal with their issues to sort out the problems. Managerial pressure found in this theme shows that heads face behavioral challenges in the management of department. Thus, heads were unsatisfied with their behaviors.

Administrative Hindrances

Third theme sheds light on the challenge of administrative hindrances. In the voice of participants, these hindrances can consist of communication issues, financial issues, and technical issues. These hurdles are faced by the heads while working in the department. The below exemplary quote shows these hindrances:

“Most common challenges that Head of Departments faces in running the department are: lack of communication and sometimes poor teamwork... With top management, most of the issues what we HODs have to face are financial terms. Financial terms in a sense that we have to get some essentials for the department which are not available, it might take time as well to provide the essentials, the basic need of departments.”

The quote is the representation of the heads' voices and shows that three types of the issues create a challenging environment for them. Regarding communication, heads have to communicate with many people like top management, staff members, students and non-teaching staff. Now this is considered up-ward and down-ward communication. Conceptually, there are greater communication gaps in the down-ward than in the up-ward level because people at this level show less seriousness and understanding in fulfilling their duties. Financial issues are the most critical hindrances in running the departments in Pakistan perspectives. Quality needs finance and its effective use by the heads. Technical issues are the second where heads face issues to manage them. This theme has shown that administrative issues affect the performance of the departments and undermine their quality.

HoDs face three types of challenges in the form of academic work pressure, managerial pressure, and administrative hindrances. These challenges create an environment where HoDs need to create a collegial and enabling environment to run academic and administrative activities smoothly. It concludes that if HoDs use strategic management, departments can perform well.

Strategies that HoDs Use in Managing Departmental Activities

Strategies that HoDs use to manage departmental activities respond to the research question two of this study. This research question produced three themes: proactive approach, futuristic approach, and sharing and collaborating approach. Following paragraphs shed light on these themes.

Proactive Approach

Participants' proactive approach was considered any **self-initiated action that prepares them to handle the future appropriately**. Proactive technique is the plan made for the future to control unexpected situation. This is already made to overcome the problems if come in future. We can call this approach a Plan B too because it is the planning of future. The exemplary quote highlights this approach as:

“Mostly in our department, here in electrical engineering, we have students and they are better performer in stress conditions. So, we are trying to implement all the digital news that help organizing everything. In government sector, several departments have the several information. If you have kept everything in a digital form, then you are better able to execute certain queries, certain routines, and you expect the required information.

It is expressed in the voice of the participants that relevant potential departments and students are kept in the loop to perform the activities effectively. It was also found that digital information resources in the form of internet, magazines, journals, and articles helped the participants as a strategy to deal with unseen

and emerging issues. Thus, participants' mental preparedness expressed proactive approach to run departmental activities smoothly, timely, and effectively.

Futuristic Approach

Under this theme, participants expressed that they visualized the future meaningfully and planned for it. They arranged few plans for the betterment of department, faculty, and students. Considering the future, they tried to include new technology, workshops, conferences, and seminars for teaching, learning and research. Moreover, leadership role, trainings, and motivation for students and academics were kept in the heart of the future planning of the heads. Exemplary quotes highlight its importance.

“I want to improve and make a strategic plan for next 5 years. These are my main features: to add regular feature in my department according to the research activities and forum... to arrange or organize monthly workshop in leadership management skills... we have already decided some good incentives for our staff members. Obviously, encouragement and motivation are something which always helps persons to make themselves better in their jobs... we are looking forward to introduce different plans, different programs to increase number of students...We are planning to introduce 5 to 6 new programs. So public can be benefitted. It will be beneficial for poor people as well as in public sectors.

The above quotes highlight main aspects of the futuristic approach. For example, encouragement and motivational factors motivates the faculty members to gain interest towards their job and work. Another aspect that was highlighted was planning to run many programs. It was expressed that the prime role of heads is to provide the strong academic leadership. Leading, managing, and developing of departments to bring them at the highest possible standards of excellence are the main responsibilities of heads who futuristically do this.

Sharing and Collaborating

This theme shows that heads share the agendas with faculty, take the criticism positively, and collaborate with each other in order to enhance the quality of departmental activities. Data have shown that heads monitor every aspect of the department. Resultantly, they face the problems of the management, staff and students. Therefore, heads share the relevant things with the faculty and try to fix that how the needs of the faculty members, non-teaching staff, supporting staff, and students are met, and how they can best be guided in dealing with the problems so that they can fulfill their responsibilities effectively. As it was stated:

“Most often I always monitor the progress and work of my staff and taking reports from them, and if they feel comfortable in sharing problems I try to fix it....So I tried to solve it by taking the help from IT department. This way I try to run my department smoothly....My faculty members always cooperate with me.”

The above quotes show that sharing and collaboration are among top strategies that heads use to run the departmental activities. Withholding is the opposite of sharing. Heads work in the teamwork. When team members share their problems and collaborate with each other their problems can be fixed and organizational objectives can be met. On the other hand, if collaboration is missed even then teamwork is shattered and departmental efficiency is compromised.

Research question two asked about the strategies that HoDs use for effective performance of the department. Three themes emerged from this question which are three strategies: proactive approach, futuristic approach, and sharing and collaboration. Through proactive approach heads can foresee the future planning and prepare themselves and staff to cope with the challenges and achieve organizational objectives. Leadership is realized under futuristic approach where they orient their energies to visualize the future tasks. Apart from these, sharing and collaboration is the third strategy that heads utilized in the department.

Thus, it is concluded that strategies help heads in running the department effectively.

3. Discussion

Findings of this study show that heads face a number of challenges. The most important of them need heads to cope with day to day challenges of department. They also face behavioural and administrative issues in running the departments. Weak and ineffective teamwork are the major concerns like the managerial issues. Findings also show that some issues are out of the control of heads such as financial and some technical issues where heads are dependent on the top management. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Martin et al. (2020) and Zusman (2005). These findings imply that poor teamwork results in the underperformance of the department where managerial and administrative challenges are of great need to be addressed. It also implies that heads need to communicate to the top management with reference to the approval of sufficient finance to regulate and maintain teaching and learning activities of the department. Considering technical challenges, they also need to put up the proposal to provide appropriate technical assistance to run the department at par.

Considering the strategies heads' proactive and futuristic approach, and collaboration were the most significant with respect to managing the people (motivational factors) effectively. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Bukhari et al. (2021). These findings imply that the absence of strategy can result in the failure of achieving the organizational objectives. Moreover, it is also implied that if strategy works well then emerging technologies and digital tools can be incorporated in the departments. Another implication is that heads have to set an example of an inspirational leader where he/she has to start first from himself/herself being punctual, flexible, role model, and an instructional leader for staff members. It also implies that heads need to

equip themselves with human and conflict resolution skills. Study conducted by Falqueto et al. (2020) are consistent with these findings.

Heads' strategies determine the direction of departments and put them on the path of success. Apart from this if at times the faculty and non-teaching staff face problems to deal with that responsibilities then heads need to guide them. Additionally, when faculty members are busy and feel difficulties and problems to complete the assignments along with daily routine tasks then the colleagues have to work collaboratively and get the work done. These findings are contextually in Pakistani perspectives. It implies that if heads do not have cooperative and like-minded colleagues then challenges become problems that can only be addressed with provision of relevant training. Moreover, if appropriate resources and facilities are provided with heads then academic performance can be improved.

4. Conclusion

The study explored the “challenges and strategies faced by Head of departments in managing departments”. Challenges such as of administration and finance are more dominant than strategies that heads used in dealing with departmental activities and processes. This study drew heads' attention towards the use of strategic management to deal with their issues and for the betterment of the needs and future of the students and management. It also enabled them to solve their issues and create new innovative ideas for the members of faculty to deal with the problems. Thus, strategic management was considered as the best source of understanding the tasks, attaining new skills, knowledge, and behavior of the faculty members. Qualitative approach in inquiring the subject gave an opportunity to understand heads' strategic management in depth. These findings guided to further explore the relationship of middle managers and top management. These findings cannot be generalized but transferable to the public sector universities in Pakistan.

5. References

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