

# Mediated Leading Experiences in Higher Learning Institutions with Special Reference to Ethiopian Civil Service University Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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## Abstract

*Due to the dynamic nature of global transformation, waves of reform move from one corner to the other in an instant way. To be victorious in the global competition, domestication of the results of the waves helps public sectors to design their own context based development strategies. The main objective of this study, thus, was to look into the possible advantages of Mediated Leading Experiences (MLE) and adapt it to developing leadership skills that help to develop succession plan for emerging leaders. To this end, the researcher randomly considered some leaders from the Ethiopian Civil Service University, and assessed their beliefs about the role of the parameters of MLE and their current practices of helping their followers to replace them. The survey revealed that the participants mainly held positive beliefs about the application of the parameters. However, they reported that they did not have focused and consistent practices in making use of the parameters. From this finding, the researcher has got an insight that when what people believe is not escorted by a support from an expert; it is like a slogan. Deepening on the key findings, the researcher recommends that MLE has to be adapted to the country's succession plan development program, Ministry of Education has to design programs on MLE at all levels to consistently establish a system and manage challenges, universities should design training programs that equip leaders with the skills of MLE, and other researchers have to undertake MLE based studies in other contexts, or replicate the same study on universities in different contexts.*

**Key Issues:** *MLE, dynamic, parameters, succession, beliefs*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

MLE is a source of effective thinking, operation, and effective leadership. Due to this, it is taken as a basis for the contemporary leadership practices. Because of its far reaching purpose in dealing with the system, individual and team, MLE can be accepted as mediated leading experiences. Playing the role of mediator means intentionally setting self between followers and their encounters to assist them develop the skills of managing them creatively. Mediated leading plays an interplay role between followers and successors. If successors are not created, the future of any institution is dark. It is because of this that leaders in different contexts have to understand the skill to apply. Most educators and educational leaders are familiar with the work of Vygotsky (1978), who has created the theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Similarly, Feuerstein & Feuerstein (1991) introduced Mediated Learning Experiences (MLE) to fill the gap between what is known and what has to be known. Both Feuerstein and Vygotsky agree in that mediation necessitates someone, who is better able and is ready to set himself or herself between the person she or he leads, an important other in the language of Vygotsky, and a mediator in the language of Feuerstein, and his or her challenges and create conducive environment to independently operate. In the language of Vygotsky the one, who assists the less able or the person with something to be abridged is an important person, where as Feuerstein describes the person, who is set between a person and his or her concern is a mediator.

Mediation, a cornerstone of Feuerstein's theory of intellectual, social, emotional and moral development, has played a central role in all social interactionist theories. Feuerstein tested his MLE and registered significant changes on individuals who lack readiness to manage their problems independently. In the fields of economics, education, and individual development the MLE of Feuerstein have roles in that it has initiated important changes (Abiy, 2005; Girma, 2008; and Alemayehu, 2010).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The world of today needs leaders that grow with their followers and move together to the highest level leadership with them. However, this cannot take place with the current level of thinking. It is through the mediation skills that leaders align themselves with their followers and develop other creative thinking leaders. This is the major gap of the today's leaders; mainly leaders of today lack the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to mediate. Feuerstein applied MLE to help immigrant Ethiopian Jewish students to integrate them with other Israel students and become effective in their learning and its effectiveness has been tested. However, its use has not been widely introduced to the leadership of education in general and higher education in particular.

There are some Ethiopian researchers like researchers like Abiy (2005), Girma (2008), and Alemayehu (2010) reported that MLE has important roles in introducing changes to personal development, learning impairments, disabilities, and emotional development. The key findings of these studies indicated that individuals and organizations in general should learn how to learn and help themselves grow. Besides, the studies recommended that other researchers should work on MLE and show directions to manage personal and social problems. This study is, thus, an attempt to contribute to manage problems being experienced in leading higher learning institutions.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to examine leaders' perceptions and practices of MLE parameters in leading instructors to achieve better results and follow their footsteps.

Specifically, this study attempted to:

- assess how leaders at different levels in the university perceive MLE's role in leading;
- examine the current practices of leaders at different levels in the university in terms of leading instructors to register effective results; and
- generate information to help teachers become effective learning leaders.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

In this study, the following questions have been answered.

- How do you perceive the application of MLE in leading higher learning institutions?
- Do you have practices of using MLE in leading your institute?
- What do you recommend to make teachers effective learning leaders?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study are very important for education policy makers, universities, followers and the country at large to initiate changes to the leadership of higher learning institutions of the country and ensure their global competitiveness.

### **1.6 Scope and Limitation of the Study**

This study is delimited to the assessment of the Ethiopian Civil Service University (ECSU) leaders' perceptions and practices of Mediated Learning Experiences (MLE). It does not deal with the effects of the parameters of MLE as it is not put into practice as a system.

The study had some limitations in securing empirical review that has direct bearing with the current study as researches on the MLE is at an infant stage in Ethiopian higher learning institutions. However, the researcher has managed the limitation by indirectly relating with the studies done in similar contexts.

### 1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

**Mediated Learning/ Leading Experiences:** Planned interaction between leaders and their followers.

**Parameters:** Skills needed to mediate between followers and their activities to help them manage their problems independently.

**Social Interactionist:** Scholars who advocate that interaction is the major cause for learning.

**Important Others:** Capable leaders that assist followers to become independent problem solvers.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter discusses theories of mediation and leading, analytical framework, and some study findings in connection with mediation and transformation in performance.

### 2.1 Some Theories of Mediated Learning Experiences

#### 2.1.1 Important Other

Important other or mediator is someone who is more able than the other is there to assist someone who is less able or not able to perform a certain business or lead. The important other is not just a passive person who listens to the one who needs support; he/ she is a person who is in need of mediation to become able and achieve the set objectives (Greenberg, 2005).

The theories of Vygotsky (1978) and Feuerstein & Feuerstein (1991) support each other. Vygotsky describes the area of human development that can be symbolized with a bud as Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) or a distance between the actual development and the needed level of development, which needs a mediator.

#### (A) Mediator as an Effective Leader

According to Yukl (1994), leadership is the process of influencing followers. Leaders play an important role in the achievement of organizational goals by creating a climate that influences followers' attitudes, motivation, and behaviors. However, as noted by Aldoory and Toth (2004), despite the extensive research on leadership, a strong scholarly discourse on leadership is lacking, and leaders should develop mediation skills.

#### (B) Leadership Styles

Bass (1998) has divided leadership styles into two broad areas: transformational and transactional. Transformation, as he defined, is a comprehensive style, which motivates followers appealing to their emotions, ideals, and moral values by creating an inspiring vision. Whereas transactional motivates followers by appealing to their personal desires based on instrumental economic transactions. Transactional leaders generally use organizational bureaucracy, policy, power, and authority to maintain control.

#### (C) Institutional Change and Mediators in the Public Sector

Hood (1995) has discussed the role of mediators as internal actors to create links among the different tiers of organizations so that they achieve organizational goals introducing shifts to the practices of serving customers in this globalized era. This shows that the wave of strong link creation has become a reality of the day with the advancement of globalization and the aspiration of New Public Management (NPM) moves beyond the traditional ways of thinking and it gives attention to the mutuality between leaders and followers, and public organizations and their customers (Weick, 1995). According to Weick, mediators are in charge of two things: they make sense of the leaders' ideas and translate, and intercede between followers and their actions.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

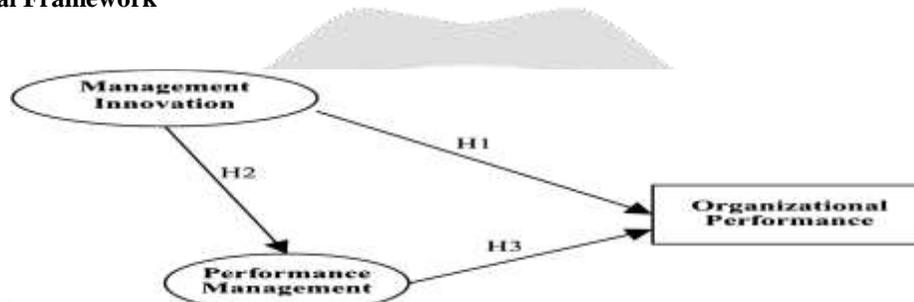
Even though studies are scant in this area, as it is a current philosophy of personal and social, and organizational development, the researcher has identified some local and foreign studies to relate this study with other findings so as to learn from their findings and adopt the MLE parameters. In Ethiopian context, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, very few studies were done on MLE parameters and their application in learning and assisting students with hearing impaired.

As study by Alemayehu (2010) on MLE for Psychosocial Functioning of Hearing and Hard of Hearing Children recorded key findings that MLE parameters can create an opportunity for people with some kind of disability to be themselves and transform their challenges into possibility to think and do new things, which can assist them to be

competent. In his recommendation, Alemayehu underlined that all concerned citizens and Ministry of Education should plant MLE as a system in learning institutions in order to manage different needs of students.

Similarly, the research undertaken by Girma (2008) revealed similar findings on students with hearing impaired in Alpha School for Hearing Impaired students in Addis Ababa. This study also showed that MLE has a significant advantage in assisting students with hearing impairment to develop their vocabulary skills. Abiy (2005) also applied the MLE parameters to see whether it helps high school students in improving their vocabulary development skills and reported that the application of the parameters of the MLE helped the experimental students to significantly improve their vocabulary learning skills. Tirussew, and Lakew (1996) in the study they carried out on students' with learning problems indicated that the MLE has a capacity to help students with learning challenges to develop the skills of managing and competing with their fellows.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1: Mediate among organizational innovation, performance, and management**

**Source: Researcher's own based on his reading and experiences**

From Figure 1, one can infer that organizational development is dependent on the integration of organizational innovation, organizational performance, and performance management. When these are mediated by effective leaders, public organizations are believed to achieve their goals, and hence contribute towards achieving the country's mission/ vision. H1, H2, and H3 stand for human mediators that help the development of organizations. As discussed by the theory of mediation, when effective human mediator interposes himself or herself between the challenges of organizations and the implementers, interactions become active.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, research design and approaches, sampling Techniques, data gathering tools, data sources, and data analysis techniques.

### 3.1 Research Design and Approaches

Descriptive research design has been used to describe what leaders at different levels say about the parameters of the MLE and their practices in mediating their followers. In addition, the study was done qualitatively to generate information with better depth.

### 3.2 Sampling Techniques

The ECSU has been purposively selected to examine how MLE parameters are perceived and utilized in leading and replicate in the context of other higher learning institutions. The reason for considering the university is that the researcher has some insights about leadership practices and challenges of leaders of the university as he was also one of the directors.

In addition to the president of the university, seven leaders were purposively selected from the major educational sections, because they have departments under them and are believed to have better experiences in sharing their experiences with the researcher, because they were with better experiences as well. The institutes include the Institute of Federalism and Legal Studies, Institute of Public Management Development Studies, Institute of Continuing and Distance Education, Institute of Tax and Customs Administration, University Registrar Office, Admission Office, and Public Relations Office. Besides, a thorough discussion was held with the president of the

university to examine whether an alignment or a gap exists between what was said about the roles of the MLE parameters, and their actual practices.

### **3.3 Data Gathering Tools**

The MLE parameters were used to examine what the leaders think about them and their current practices in leading their divisions. In- depth interview was utilized to gather information from the directors. The rationale to use interview is to give a better chance for the researcher to closely listen to the respondents and secure information that has better depth. In interview, there is also an opportunity to learn from the emotions and body language of the respondents about the issue in focus.

### **3.4 Data Sources**

Data were secured from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from directors of the ECSU leading at different levels, whereas the secondary data were collected from books, journals, websites, studies, and documents of the target institutes.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

For ethical reasons, the researcher made prior discussions with the participants of the study. Following, the parameters utilized for data gathering were discussed to help them have the required information. They were also given all the liberty to resign from the research process if they feel discomfort.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the results and their discussions aligning with different theories and empirical studies.

### **4.1 Demographic Factors**

Saving one, all of the respondents were males, and with the age of above 35 years. They had 4 and above service years, were from different nations and nationalities, and Christians.

### **4.2 Leaders Perceptions and Their Actual Practices**

The respondents rated the importance of the 12 MLE parameters (significance, transcendence, shared intention, sense competence, control of own behavior, goal- setting, challenge, awareness of change, belief in positive outcomes, sharing, individuality, and sense of belonging). The parameters are broadly categorized as discussed hereunder.

#### **4.2.1 Universal Factors to Enroll Followers**

##### **(A) Intentionality and Reciprocity for Organizational Mission**

All of the respondents reflected that this parameter is very important and it helps followers to have clear road map and undertake the tasks they are entrusted to effectively do relating to the big picture of the organization. Practice wise, however, all of them revealed that they do not emphasize the mission of their organization.

One of the respondents said “I believe that I have to mirror the mission of my organization in all the activities I perform; however, I do not know what disables me to put into practice.” From this quote it is possible to infer that this respondent is self aware. He is not in a position to put belief into action, however. In terms of success, what can be learnt from this quote is that the stretched objectives of Higher Learning Institutions (HLI) may suffer if there are gaps between words and actions.

##### **(B) Meaning Making**

All the respondents explained that helping their followers know the meaning of what they implement motivates them, and if they do not know they perform their works in fussy way. They also disclosed that they practice this parameter in telling their followers the meaning of their action relating with the mission of their organizations. If this is the case, it is possible to say that the leaders are adding fuel to the heart and mind of their followers to register the results as per their plans.

### **(C) Transcendence/ Implications to Future Life**

To this item, saving one, all the leaders revealed that it is difficult to forecast what followers will do in the future that the future is unpredictable. What these respondents reflected may indicate that they have a deficit of understanding the extension of leading followers to perform looking into the future. If the leaders have this skill, they can help followers to develop intrinsic motivation and move themselves into the future. Leaders with this skill can also inspire followers to be proactive, transformational, and develop developmental mindset. In brief, transcendence is a bridge that transforms knowledge, skills, and attitudes of leaders.

#### **4.2.2 Managing Independent Learning**

##### **(A) Mediation of Feeling of Competence**

If leaders have to assess their learning and growth, they have to ask a question, “Am I competent in what I do?” This helps leaders to grow to the direction they want to. To the item that was presented to the respondents to describe their perceptions and actual practices, all of them said that telling followers they are competent may lead them to develop wrong self image and they may refrain from learning. They reported that the appreciation has to be made systematically in the way it does not lead the followers to the belief of “I have all what I need.” They also uncovered that this is not a tradition in many of the Ethiopian public organizations, because it can have a negative effect on the self image of followers.

##### **(B) Mediation of Goal Setting and Goal Achieving Behavior**

All of the respondents emphasized that planning is an indispensable skill and that they strongly believe in the relevance of it, and they also are practicing and assisting their followers in setting goals. Some of the respondents, however, said that setting goal may mean very little because in developing countries like Ethiopia resources are so scarce and goals are not achievable. What can be deduced from this finding is that the leaders seem to be short-sighted in looking at the other side of challenges that can lead to create new ways of doing the existing business.

##### **(C) Mediation of Challenge and Search for Innovation**

All respondents were of the opinion that challenging tasks may prevent followers from creating new things and they suggested that tasks to be assigned to their followers should not be either easy or difficult. Adding, most of them said institutes should have standards to evaluate tasks to be given to their followers. One of the respondents particularly said, “If we want to have our employees to do tough jobs, we have to train them first.” What this quote shows could limit the employees’ freedom to independently learn and try to approach challenging tasks. If leaders do not require their followers to pass in challenging situations, the followers may develop dependency syndrome.

##### **(D) Mediation of Regulation of Behavior**

This parameter helps the followers to boost the belief of “I can manage my behavior to do tasks.” Some of the respondents reported that it is unimportant to help followers to develop this skill because it is an artificial to expect them to rely on their thinking and the results of their action. This kind of thinking impairs self management. Others, differently put that requiring followers to manage their own behavior may give them an opportunity to examine their ability to perform tasks and measure.

##### **(E) Mediation of Feeling of Competence**

To this parameter, some leaders in the university reflected that they are conscious of the roles of leaders in helping their followers to be conscious of what they know, and what they do not know. Most of the leaders however, discussed that their followers have to develop knowledge of self incompetence other than the knowledge of self competence. This response underscores the traditional thinking that gives attention to failure analysis. This type of

thinking underestimates the possibility to learn thinking positively. If people are given a responsibility to look at themselves positively and believe they have a capability to grow, they learn in a better way.

Coming to the practice issue, most of the leaders disclosed that they do not have experiences to help others to develop self awareness that makes them think they have what they can expand and bring changes in their leading. One leader surprisingly said, "In our culture, it is uncommon to tell people they are able, because they may manipulate and act against what they are told to do." From this quote, one can understand that cultural factors inhibit people to appreciate others so that they accept themselves positively and develop their competence. Another leader said, "This kind of positive reinforcement is not for grownups. It has to be done with children." This quote has an implication that children are inferior to grownups, and they need a different input to develop self awareness about what they need to develop. This should not be taken for grant always that only children need direction to awareness about what they need to develop.

#### **4.2.3 Fostering Working with Others and Grow**

Mediation of working with others can help followers to develop the spirit of working with other people for common goals. In this category of MLE, mediation of sharing, individuation, and belonging have been discussed based on the information from the leaders of the university leaders with different capacities.

##### **(A) Mediation of Sharing Behaviors**

It was presented to the leaders if they know the role of sharing in achieving organizational goals. By all the leaders, sharing is understood in a shallow manner, because they understood it as idea sharing in meetings. In this context, leaders cannot establish teams that can collaborate and register effective results. This is consistent with what has been reported by (Greenberg, 2005) showing that sharing is a system in which both the leader and followers converse to bring changes influencing each other, and that it is not telling followers to expect everything from the leader.

One of the respondents replied "telling people is more advisable rather than helping people learn from each other, because sharing takes longer time and many people are not open to share what they know." From this quote one can say that the sharing practice is uncommon in the institute led by a leader who has this kind of conviction. This practice could be due to the influence of coercive type of leadership.

##### **(B) Mediation of Individuation and Psychological Differentiation**

To this parameter, the responses of all of the participants indicated that no one is the same and this should be nurtured in people so that they have their own boundary and live in peace with others. Surprisingly one of the participants said that he should not be worried to assess the psychology of individuals as it is abstract and cannot be known. This trend may lead people to alienate themselves from others and also challenges their efforts to understand and work collaboratively to achieve common goals.

##### **(C) Mediation of Feeling of Belonging to the Community**

This parameter was brought to the attention of leaders of the university to understand their beliefs and practices in terms of this parameter. It was learnt from the responses of all that the traditional thinking influences the way they perceive the role of team work in the university. Many of them said that it is possible to think that team is important to produce effective results. They, however, expressed their reservations that people who claim to be with team spirit may not act the way they say, because mostly people say this being in their restricted 'boundary of thinking.'

One of the respondents surprisingly said, "In this selfish world, it is unthinkable that people develop perfect team spirit that can sustain the system; people are like chameleon due to their hidden interest which may engulf that of others if it finds a favorable condition." The respondent seems to think that human behavior is static and changes cannot happen in their behavior. Besides, he has shown a tendency of placing all people in one category of thinking

and doing. Another respondent replied saying: “these days, there are no effective trainings that can help people to develop skills of working with other people. Many trainers do training in the form of preaching.” From this response, it is clear that the respondent seems to put his belief in what is to be brought from others.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

The major conclusions drawn from the key findings include the following.

#### **Universal Factors to Enroll Followers**

The leaders of the University have narrowly understand the role of the holding the big picture while leading, because they do not have traditions in practicing the parameters and at the same time do not purposefully encourage their followers.

#### **Managing Independent Learning**

The leaders seem to have some understanding of this skill in leading. However, in the case of practice, they are found to have limitations. This practice can lead followers to expect ready-made things from the leaders.

#### **Fostering Working with Others and Grow**

In this regard, the leaders have limitations in accepting diverse ways to achieve the intended results. It was due to this that they fail to understand the different patterns in thinking as opposite and causes of fragmentation.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

#### **Policy Makers**

It is very essential for, particularly, education policy makers to include the mediated leading experiences to train leaders of higher learning institutions.

#### **The Country at Large**

As the mediated leading experiences have an advantage in helping leaders develop creative leadership skills, at the country level, it has to be a part of leadership training programs.

#### **Universities**

To have out of the box thinking and mediating leaders, universities should introduce the mediated leading experiences as one of the leadership training programs at MA or PhD level.

#### **Researchers**

This study can serve as one of the spring boards to have new insights and undertake another study on other organizations or replicate the same on another university and find out other factors that impair the implementation of the mediated leading experiences.

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