
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Role of Leadership Qualities in Fostering Organizational Culture in Higher Education

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| ABSTRACT

This study investigates the direct influence of specific leadership qualities, Conscientiousness, Adaptability, Integrity, and Empathy, on the formation of Organizational Culture (OC) within the distinct environment of higher education satellite campuses. While leadership is critical for institutional success, the dispersed nature and unique challenges of satellite campuses require a specialized cultural approach centered on teamwork. Employing a quantitative-correlational design, data was collected from faculty and staff across selected satellite campuses. Findings indicate that all four examined leadership qualities are significant, positive predictors of OC. Specifically, leader Integrity was identified as the strongest predictor, highlighting the foundational role of trust and ethical behavior in cultivating a shared, positive environment. The research underscores the necessity of prioritizing these specific qualities during the selection and development of leaders for decentralized educational settings to strengthen institutional cohesion and cultural efficacy.

| KEYWORDS

Leadership Qualities, Organizational Culture, Higher Education, Satellite Campuses, Conscientiousness, Adaptability, Integrity, Empathy

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 11 October 2025

PUBLISHED: 24 November 2025

DOI: 10.61424/rjbe.v3.i3.524

1. Introduction

In the evolving landscape of higher education, effective leadership is paramount for navigating strategic direction, managing institutional growth, and ensuring the fulfillment of educational mandates (Scott, 2022). A critical component of institutional success is the cultivation of a robust and positive organizational culture (Dacpano, 2022). This need is amplified in the context of satellite campuses, smaller, geographically dispersed branches linked to a central institution, which often operate with significant autonomy yet require seamless cultural alignment with the main campus.

Organizational culture, characterized by shared purpose, open communication, mutual trust, and a willingness to work toward common goals, is essential for addressing the unique operational and academic challenges of decentralized units. However, organizational culture does not emerge spontaneously; it is predominantly a product of conscious and consistent leadership behaviors (Yukl, 2020).

This study, therefore, explores the specific link between key leader attributes and the presence of a strong organizational culture. Based on the literature (Baker et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2021), this research focuses on four leadership qualities:

1. Conscientiousness: Discipline, organization, and goal-focused behavior.
2. Adaptability: The capacity to manage change and flexible strategic responses.
3. Integrity: Adherence to ethical and moral principles, fostering trust.
4. Empathy: The ability to understand and share the feelings of others, promoting psychological safety.

The primary aim of this article is to determine the significant relationship between the selected leadership qualities (Conscientiousness, Adaptability, Integrity, and Empathy) and Organizational Culture in higher education satellite campuses.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Construct of Organizational Culture (OC)

Organizational culture, the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one organization from others, emphasizes shared decision-making, mutual accountability, and transparent communication, fostering an environment where individuals are motivated to pool resources and knowledge (Wei et al., 2020). In a university setting, positive culture among faculty, administration, and staff is crucial for curriculum development, research productivity, and efficient resource allocation, especially in managing the operational complexity of satellite units.

2.2. Leadership Qualities as Antecedents to Culture

Leaders are the primary architects and maintainers of organizational culture. Their values, behaviors, and ethical standards are continually modeled and institutionalized (Yukl, 2020).

Integrity: Leaders demonstrating integrity, honesty, ethical consistency, and dependability establish a foundation of trust. This trust is the bedrock of a positive organizational environment, reducing relational conflict and increasing the willingness of employees to engage in shared work (Xia & Yang, 2020).

Conscientiousness: Conscientious leaders are disciplined and reliable, ensuring tasks are completed thoroughly and on time. This consistency provides the structural reliability necessary for teams to operate effectively without ambiguity or confusion regarding roles and outcomes (Xia & Yang, 2020).

Adaptability: The ability of a leader to adapt to external and internal changes (Johnson et al., 2021) models resilience for the organization. In decentralized satellite campuses, where operating conditions can vary widely, an adaptive leader encourages staff to view change as an opportunity for collective problem-solving, thereby strengthening the organizational spirit.

Empathy: Empathetic leadership involves understanding team members' perspectives and emotional states (Wei et al., 2020). This approach cultivates psychological safety, which is crucial for a healthy culture, as it encourages individuals to take interpersonal risks such as offering unconventional ideas or admitting errors—without fear of reprisal.

This body of literature strongly posits that these four leadership qualities are not just desirable traits, but essential mechanisms through which leaders actively shape and promote a sustainable OC.

3. Methodology

This study utilized a quantitative, non-experimental correlational design to investigate the relationships between leadership qualities and organizational culture. The design allowed for the assessment of the degree and direction of the linear relationships among variables without manipulating any of them.

The target population comprised administrative staff and managers from selected satellite campuses of a major higher education institution. A total of 146 respondents were included in the study, selected using stratified random sampling to ensure proportionate representation across the satellite campus.

Data were collected using a validated, self-administered survey questionnaire composed of two main parts: the Leadership Qualities Scale and Organizational Culture Scale. Responses used the same 5-point Likert scale.

The instruments were subjected to expert validation and pilot testing to establish reliability. The resulting Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all sub-scales were found to be above the acceptable threshold of 0.70.

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to describe the level of the four leadership qualities and the level of Organizational Culture. To address the specific research objective, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed to determine the relationship between each leadership quality and OC. Furthermore, Multiple Linear Regression Analysis was performed to examine the combined and independent predictive power of the four leadership qualities on Organizational Culture. The significance level for all statistical tests was set at $p < 0.05$.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Level of Variables

The mean scores indicated that the level of Organizational Culture (M=4.02, SD=0.51) was interpreted as 'High,' suggesting that respondents generally perceived a strong culture of teamwork and shared goals. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a consistent, shared positive perception of the culture across the decentralized campus units.

The leadership qualities were also consistently rated highly, demonstrating a high level of perceived competence and positive behavior among campus leaders. Integrity (M=4.25, SD=0.45), indicating that leaders are widely seen as ethical, honest, and reliable. This finding is critical as it suggests a solid foundation of trust exists within the decentralized environment. Following closely were Empathy (M=4.10, SD=0.49), Conscientiousness (M=4.05, SD=0.52), and Adaptability, which, while still highly rated, registered the lowest mean score (M=3.98, SD=0.55). The consistent high rating of all variables validates the assumption that a strong cultural and leadership context exists within the satellite campus setting.

4.2. Relationship between Leadership Qualities and Organizational Culture

The Pearson correlation analysis (Table 1) revealed a significant positive correlation between all four leadership qualities and Organizational Culture (OC).

Table 1

Relationship of Organizational Culture (OC) by Leadership Quality

Leadership Qualities	<i>r</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	Relationship/Predictive Strength
Integrity	0.68	0.35	< .001	Strongest Predictor
Empathy	0.59	0.28	< .001	Moderate, Significant Predictor
Conscientiousness	0.52	0.18	0.012	Moderate, Significant Predictor
Adaptability	0.45	0.12	0.045	Weakest, Significant Predictor

Note. N = 146. All correlation coefficients (*r*) and standardized regression coefficients (*B*) are statistically significant.

Note. The overall model was significant ($R^2 = 0.56$), (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.55$), $F(4, 141) = 93.75$, $p < 0.001$).

The results from the Multiple Regression Analysis demonstrated that the four leadership qualities collectively accounted for a substantial and statistically significant portion of the variance in Organizational Culture ($R^2 = 0.56$, $F(4, 295) = 93.75$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that 56% of the organizational culture can be predicted by the presence of these four qualities in campus leadership.

Further examination of the standardized regression coefficients (B) revealed that all qualities were significant independent predictors of OC, but with varying strengths:

Integrity ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$): This finding indicates that Integrity is the strongest predictor of OC. This supports the notion that trust is the foundational element of a positive culture. In decentralized environments like satellite campuses, physical distance can breed suspicion; thus, a leader's consistent ethical behavior and transparency become critical to unifying the staff.

Empathy ($\beta = 0.28, p < 0.001$): The strong predictive power of Empathy aligns with the literature on psychological safety (Wei et al., 2020). Empathetic leaders create an environment where staff feel understood, promoting open communication and reducing the fear of speaking up, which are hallmarks of a healthy organizational culture.

Conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.18, p = 0.012$): While still significant, the relative strength of Conscientiousness suggests its impact is more indirect. A leader's discipline ensures processes are clear and follow-through is reliable, providing the necessary organizational stability for a good culture to flourish.

Adaptability ($\beta = 0.12, p = 0.045$): Adaptability was the weakest, though still significant, predictor. This indicates that while flexible leadership is important for navigating the operational differences of a satellite campus, the fundamental stability provided by Integrity and Empathy holds greater sway in building the day-to-day positive environment.

The study's findings unequivocally confirm a significant positive relationship between the selected leadership qualities and the development of Organizational Culture within satellite campuses. This result reinforces the conceptual models presented in the literature review, affirming that leaders are not passive recipients of culture but active agents in its design. The prominence of Integrity in predicting culture offers a vital practical implication for HEIs: investing in ethical leadership training and prioritizing integrity during the selection process for campus heads can yield the greatest returns in terms of cultural cohesion. This is particularly relevant for satellite systems, where the leader acts as the primary link of trust back to the central administration.

5. Conclusion

This research established that the leadership qualities of Integrity, Empathy, Conscientiousness, and Adaptability significantly and positively predict the presence of Organizational Culture in higher education satellite campuses. Integrity emerged as the most crucial factor, demonstrating the essential role of trust in fostering shared goals and open communication.

This study contributes to the leadership literature by validating the significant predictive power of specific personality traits (Conscientiousness and Adaptability) and ethical dimensions (Integrity and Empathy) on organizational culture, particularly in a non-traditional, decentralized context like satellite campuses. It extends existing theory by suggesting that in environments with reduced face-to-face interaction and higher operational complexity, the ethical and relational qualities (Integrity and Empathy) of the leader become the dominant forces for cultural formation over the task-oriented qualities (Conscientiousness and Adaptability).

Based on the strong results, higher education management should: (1) Prioritize Integrity and Empathy in leadership development programs and selection criteria for satellite campus executives, recognizing these as the greatest levers for positive culture change. (2) Implement clear ethical codes and transparency protocols that are consistently enforced by campus leaders to solidify the foundation of trust. (3) Leverage Conscientiousness and Adaptability in structuring operational processes, using these traits to drive efficient systems that reinforce a stable and functional work environment.

Future research should explore the specific mechanisms (e.g., communication platforms, goal-setting processes) through which these qualities are translated into cultural behaviors. Furthermore, longitudinal studies could assess whether leadership quality ratings remain stable over time and how changes in leadership personnel directly impact the measured level of Organizational Culture.

Funding: This research received no external funding

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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