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**DEVELOPING MIDDLE LEADERSHIP
IN A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY-
PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES:
A CASE STUDY FROM THE MEKONG DELTA**

**A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Educational Leadership**

**At
The University of Waikato**

By

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Abstract

The area of educational leadership in higher education is well documented in western literature. However, this area is largely under-researched in Vietnam, and this has inhibited the development of educational leadership in this country. Drawing on the experiences of ten middle leaders of a university in Vietnam, this study explored some important aspects of educational leadership to help provide guidance for improving the quality of leadership work for this university, and more broadly, for other universities throughout the country. These aspects included professional learning, and participants' perceptions of effective leadership and sustainable leadership. This investigation also examined participants' perceptions of the relationship between leadership and management, and some challenges in their leadership work, to provide a comprehensive picture of the research topic. This qualitative research was located within the interpretive research paradigm and used a case study method to explore human leadership experiences and perceptions. It adopted two data collection methods, semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire, and used thematic analysis as the data coding framework. The findings revealed that the particular context of Vietnam with the cultural influences of Confucianism and the political system of Socialism had significant influence upon educational leadership at this university. The study also indicated some tensions between the participants' perceptions and the literature that deserve consideration for changes to be made. Furthermore, it identified gaps in understanding in this field that necessitated further attention and investigation. In addition, this research disclosed major issues this university faces within its shifting process from a hierarchical bureaucratic model to a more shared distributed one. More broadly, it uncovered the socio-cultural, historical and political complexities of the country's transitional period. Overcoming these barriers will require effort, and awareness of the wider cultural context and the prevailing socio-political norms of Vietnamese society.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This qualitative study explores a university in Vietnam, in order to investigate some important aspects of leadership in higher education in this country. Specifically, it examines how middle leaders have learnt professionally in their leadership work, and how they perceive effective leadership and sustainable leadership. In addition, it studies their perceptions of the relationship between leadership and management, and some challenges faced by these leaders to provide a more comprehensive picture of the topic under research.

To begin with, this first chapter provides an introduction to this study. Firstly, it describes the researcher's interest in the area of research. Secondly, it presents the statement of the study and the research questions. Then it highlights the significance of the study. Finally, it outlines the structure of the thesis.

1. Personal motivation for the study

I was born and brought up in An Giang, a province of the Mekong Delta in the South of Vietnam. My family is a middle class one; my Father as an agricultural engineer, my Mother as a nurse and my younger Sister as a student of Can-Tho Medical University. My Father had been the Director of the Agricultural Extension Center of the Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for several years, and in that role was formative in the development of my ideas about leadership.

During my education at primary school, high schools and then university, I had always been involved in leadership roles in class, such as the class monitor or vice-monitor. I also took part in many community service activities, usually in positions of leadership. These experiences made me think much about leadership. I kept wondering how to perform my leading role better.

After graduation from university in 2006, with my high academic achievements and engagement in social activities, I was offered a job at this university. Having entered the workforce I became even more interested in leadership in higher education. As a young staff member, I did not assume a leadership role, but I was always interested in how leadership was practised at this university. Witnessing some leadership

dilemmas and challenges at work gave me thoughts about educational leadership generally. I realised that educational leadership was a very important issue, but it did not get enough attention, and has been under-researched in Vietnam. Therefore, I set a goal for myself: to conduct research in educational leadership in the context of Vietnam for my Masters programme to help raise awareness in this field. However, according to the regulations of postgraduate study, I was not allowed to choose educational leadership as my major for my Masters study in Vietnam, because educational leadership was not closely related to my teaching background. I did not give up. I tried to apply for scholarship programs for overseas study.

My efforts paid off when my application for the New Zealand Development Scholarship (under NZAID) was approved. When this scholarship program asked me to choose the major for my Masters study, many of my friends advised me to choose TESOL¹ majors that were more relevant to my teaching background. However, I chose educational leadership. I wanted to realise my goal.

2. Statement of the study

Educational leadership is a subject that has long provoked interest amongst members of the research community. Internationally, many authors have written about this topic (Bennett, Crawford, & Cartwright, 2003; Brundrett, Burton, & Smith, 2003; Bryman, 2007; English, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Jazzar & Algozzine, 2006; McCaffery, 2004). The close relationship between high-quality educational leadership and an institution's achievements has also been well documented (Brundrett et al., 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Silins, 1994; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). However, in Vietnam the field of educational leadership, especially at tertiary level, has been largely under-researched. This dearth has inhibited the development of educational leadership in this country. Furthermore, during Vietnam's transitional period, the Vietnamese higher education system experienced many challenges and a severe lack of depth in leadership experience and skills within tertiary institutions (Duggan, 2001; Fry, 2009; Hayden & Lam, 2007; Pham & Fry, 2002; Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008). Therefore, there was a concurrence between my interests and the dearth of

¹ TESOL stands for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages.

research into educational leadership in Vietnam necessary to identify barriers to leadership roles and, more importantly, to provide guidance to help improve the quality of educational leadership practices both in this university in particular, and in other universities throughout this country in general.

This research investigates ten middle leaders of a university in Vietnam to explore some important areas of educational leadership such as the relationship between leadership and management, professional learning activities, participants' perceptions of effective leadership, participants' perceptions of sustainable leadership, and challenges faced by the educational leaders in their leadership work. Its purpose is to raise some recommendations for the ten leaders to improve the quality of their leadership practices in this university setting, and also to indicate some implications for Vietnamese universities generally.

Data collection for this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do ten selected middle leaders at a university in Vietnam learn professionally to improve their leadership performances?
2. What are their perceptions of effective leadership and sustainable leadership?
3. What are some challenges experienced by these leaders in their leadership work?

It is important that some key terms used throughout this thesis be clearly defined and explained. Firstly, the term 'professional learning' involves the approaches or activities that the leaders have exercised to improve their leadership skills, knowledge and insights. Secondly, the term 'perceptions of effective leadership' concerns the qualities or factors that the leaders think of as contributing to effective leadership. Similarly, 'perceptions of sustainable leadership' refer to the components that the leaders think of as contributing to sustainable leadership. Thirdly, this study focuses on 'middle leaders' those at the 'middle level' of the hierarchy of this university.

3. Significance of the study

This study is valuable in the following ways. First of all, it is useful for the institution being researched. Data from the ten participants, who were carefully selected with diversity criteria including balance in gender, a wide range of age and professional experiences, and representation for different units² across the university, provided reliable findings. These findings identified tensions between participants' perceptions and the literature, which help participants to reflect on their own leadership practices. Moreover, this research provides these leaders with an understanding into the ongoing leadership situation that they are involved with everyday, so that they become more aware of ways in which their leadership could be improved. Importantly, the study's recommendations can serve as useful reference points for these leaders to learn how to develop professionally, as well as enable the university top leaders to facilitate leadership work. Further to that, the findings identify barriers and difficulties in leadership work, and provide guidance to help improve the quality of educational leadership practices within this university.

Secondly, this study is significant in that its findings and recommendations may be relevant to other Vietnamese universities. The institution in which this research was carried out is a provincial multidisciplinary university with typical features in such aspects as governance, structure, and socio-cultural influences; hence the implications may be applicable to other institutions of a like type.

Thirdly, this study raises public awareness of and attracts more attention to educational leadership in Vietnam, especially in areas of professional learning, effective leadership, and sustainable leadership. Notably, it identifies gaps in knowledge that need further examination, and creates foundations for further research within the Vietnamese context. In addition, this study adds to the existing literature of educational leadership in Vietnam, a largely undocumented subject, as previously noted.

² Units refer to the offices, divisions, departments, or centres where participants work within this university.

4. Structure of this thesis

This thesis comprises seven chapters. The first chapter presents an introduction, including the researcher's interest in the topic, the statement of the study, the research questions, the significance of this study, and its structure. The second chapter describes the research context in detail with regards to Vietnamese leadership profile, the Vietnamese higher education context, and an overview of the university where the research was carried out. The third chapter reviews the literature relevant to the research areas of this study such as educational leadership, professional learning for leaders, effective leadership, and sustainable leadership. The fourth chapter introduces the methodological aspects of this study: the theoretical framework, the research methods, significance of the study, data collection, data coding and validity, and the ethical considerations. The next chapter presents the findings and is followed by discussions of these findings. The last chapter, Chapter Seven, suggests some recommendations for improvement for this university and for further research. It also provides some implications for other universities in Vietnam.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined some key aspects of this study such as the researcher's motivation to conduct this research, the statement of the study, its research questions, the significance of the study, and its structure. These details enable readers to understand the reasons and purposes for conducting this study as well as make them aware of how this thesis is organised. The following chapter will present information on leadership and the higher education system in Vietnam, to provide a more comprehensive picture of the research context of this study.

Chapter Two: Research Context

Vietnam, the country where this research was carried out, is a developing country in Southeast Asia. It has a population of 86 million, among which women account for 50.48% (Vietnam General Statistics Office, 2009). There are 54 ethnic groups, with the majority being Kinh people. Politically, Vietnam is a socialist republic nation which is led by the Communist Party. The National Assembly, the most powerful body of the Government, serves as the country's legislative assembly.

The following sections will provide more detailed information on leadership and Vietnamese higher education. The first section presents the leadership profile of Vietnam. The second section describes the setting of Vietnamese higher education in terms of the historical and cultural context, and the contemporary higher education system. The third section provides an overview of the university that was researched.

1. Vietnamese leadership profile

With its location and cultural characteristics, Vietnam could be classified as a combination of a Confucian Asian country and a Southern Asian one, and thus demonstrates certain culture-specific dimensions of leadership. Within this cluster, the Vietnamese culture could be described as result-driven and collectivist-thinking, and the Vietnamese people as inclined to be devoted and loyal to their organisations and families. Moreover, Vietnam exhibits high human orientation which means the culture encourages fairness, altruism, generosity, consideration, and kindness to others (Northouse, 2007). In accordance with these cultural traits, the leadership profile of Vietnam could be described as self-protective, team-oriented and people-oriented. Differently stated, leaders in this country tend to care about others but they use their status and position to set goals and make decisions independently without the participation of others. In addition, autocratic leaders are believed to be more effective than those who lead by inviting others to be involved in goal setting and decision-making (Northouse, 2007).

2. The setting of Vietnamese higher education

This section presents a brief description of the higher education system in Vietnam. First, the historical and cultural setting of Vietnam is outlined, followed by an overview of the contemporary higher education system.

2.1. Historical, cultural and political context of Vietnam

In the analysis of contemporary educational issues in Vietnamese higher education, it is important to consider the historical and political context as the education sector mirrors the broader pictures of the country's historical legacy and the political system. One of the most salient historical political themes related to education concerns the external domination first by the Chinese, and then by the French.

One thousand years of Chinese rule had an indelible effect on Vietnam, its culture and values. The most noticeable consequence of the Chinese domination is the impact of Confucianism on the Vietnamese culture, especially in terms of hierarchy and power distance. (Power distance refers to the degree to which members of a group expect and agree that power should be shared unequally; it also creates levels between people based on power, authority, prestige, status, wealth and material possessions (Northouse, 2007)). Specifically, the Chinese Confucian philosophy has brought to Vietnam a highly bureaucratic and hierarchical structure in which age and seniority is accorded with wisdom and considered as an important indicator of one's social status. Moreover, influenced by Confucianism, Vietnamese society tends to accept that high power distance is a fundamental characteristic of an orderly structure (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004). These Confucian principles of hierarchical thinking and high power distance undoubtedly have historical influences on leadership in the higher education system in Vietnam.

Another Confucian influence on the Vietnamese culture concerns women's status. Confucianism has strongly influenced Vietnamese society, and accordingly shaped the lives of Vietnamese women. Along with a feudal ideology, Confucianism has traditionally allowed Vietnamese society to perceive the status of women to be inferior to that of men (Ha, 2001). This norm is well illustrated by the Confucian moral code of the "three obediences" for a woman- to obey her father before marriage,

to obey her husband when married and to obey the eldest son after the husband's death (T i gia tòng ph , xu t giá tòng phu, phu t tòng t). Women's low status is also demonstrated by an old saying: having a son means something; having ten daughters means nothing (Nh t nam vi t h u, th p n vi t vô). In addition to this low status, Vietnamese women are also expected to conform to the femininity norms of the 'heavenly mandate' (Truong, 2008, p. 19) which involves giving birth, breast feeding, teaching children, taking good care of the family and elderly relatives and a number of other unpaid unnamed jobs in addition to their full-time employment. In the mean time, their husbands are not expected to contribute to such tasks. Ironically, women who are considered as physically weak as opposed to men are expected to undertake all the household jobs; and those women who fail to fulfill these household tasks, sometimes for reasons beyond their control, will still be considered as not-desirable-standard-Vietnamese-women.

From the latter half of the nineteenth century until 1945, Vietnam was ruled by the French colonial regime that invested little in Vietnamese higher education. Consequently, Vietnam missed the move towards institutional innovation in higher education that was taking place throughout much of Asia during the early twentieth century (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008). From 1945 to 1975, Vietnam was divided into the North and the South, and there were therefore two separate systems of higher education in the country. The system in the North assisted by the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) reflected Soviet influences, while the system in the South was based on the French colonial model (Pham & Fry, 2002).

After independence and liberation in 1975, the Vietnamese higher education system was unified. However, during eleven years of adopting a centralised planned economy, Vietnam fell into a serious socio-economic crisis. Life became extremely hard and accordingly, education stagnated (Pham & Fry, 2002).

In 1986, a profound socio-economic policy change, usually referred to as ÷ i m ià was introduced. With this policy change, Vietnam became a transitional economy, in its transition from a centrally planned to a market economy. In response to such major socioeconomic reforms, Vietnam higher education has adopted important education reform policies to accommodate the new system (Fry, 2009).

2.2. Overview of the contemporary higher education system in Vietnam

At present, there are seven types of universities and colleges in Vietnam: specialised universities, a legacy of the Soviet influenced higher education system which focus on a single area of study; multidisciplinary universities which offer a wide range of academic programmes up to the doctorate; open universities which are considered as semi-public universities because they are owned by the State and run by a public authority; private universities which do not get state funding and concentrate on popular areas of study; public and private junior colleges which offer 2-3 year curricula; and international universities such as the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT).

Vietnam higher education has undergone dramatic change during the past decade and improvements have been reported. However, problems remain. Hayden and Lam (2007) point out some major problems. Firstly, only a minority of the relevant age group in Vietnam can participate in higher education because of the shortage of institutions available. Moreover, people from rural areas and impoverished backgrounds are under-represented among enrolments. Secondly, management procedures are heavily bureaucratic with excessive regulatory controls. Besides, there is a lack of leadership insight and skills within institutions. Thirdly, the quality of teaching and learning is poor with very high staff-student ratio (1:30), and teaching methods remaining traditional. University graduates are therefore poorly prepared with skills and abilities beyond those required for narrow academic pursuits. In addition, academic salaries are not sufficient to elicit strong professional commitment; and most academics are not involved in research activities (Hayden & Lam, 2007).

In addition, Vallely and Wilkinson (2008) identify other problems concerning autonomy, merit-based selection, international connections and standards, and accountability.

Autonomy: Governance of the higher education system in Vietnam is strongly centralised. The State is the source of all authority, so the educational institutions are subject to a highly centralised system of control. The central government determines most of the concerns of universities such as how many students universities might

enroll, how much lecturers are paid (in case of public universities), and even promoting faculty. This system removes from institutions the motivation to compete and innovate and leaves them with insufficient autonomy to develop.

Merit-based selection: Unhealthy practices such as corruption and nepotism are still found in the Vietnamese higher education system. University personnel systems are not transparent, and promotion is based on non-scholastic criteria such as seniority, family, political background and personal connections.

International connections and standards: Knowledge generation is borderless, but Vietnamese institutions lack meaningful international connections. Moreover, some of them are inward looking and do not evaluate themselves in accordance with international standards.

Accountability: Vietnamese institutions are not held accountable to outsiders. In the public system, funding is not associated with performance or quality of teaching and learning. Therefore, they are not motivated to innovate.

3. Overview of the university researched

The university researched³ is a public institution. This university offers undergraduate, associate degrees and certificate programmes, and mainly serves the high school graduates resident in the local province and the neighbouring provinces.

In addition to the undergraduate programmes, this institution also offers three-year programmes to train elementary school teachers and two-year programmes to train kindergarten teachers in order to provide teachers for the local and neighbouring provinces. Currently, it has a total student population of 10,695. Every year, it enrolls about 2,500 new students and this number is estimated to increase in the years to come.

With a close relationship to its original form as a teachers' training college, this university has developed a very strong School of Education that trains many graduates to work as teachers in high schools in the region. Moreover, as both the former President and the current President specialise in agriculture and rice

³ The name of the university researched is not given in order to protect the identity of this university.

production, the institution has strong agricultural programmes providing capable graduates who continue to enhance agricultural development sustainability .

In 2009-2010, this institution was involved in major undertakings, including i) moving to the New Campus; ii) shifting from the stage-based system to the credit-based system and iii) implementing the process of quality assessment. To successfully complete all these tasks requires great effort from the university's leaders, staff and students.

3.1. Organisational structure

The university is financially funded by the Provincial People's Committee and supervised by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). Like other Vietnamese universities, this university is administered by MoET in terms of enrolment quotas, curriculum frameworks, the process of appointing chair positions at the university and the national entrance examination to universities and colleges. The highest authority at this university is the President Board including one President and three Deputy Presidents.

The university is divided into six schools, five centers, nine operational offices, one library and one pedagogical practice school (Appendix 1). As a multi-disciplinary institution, this university develops academic fields greatly needed in the society such as Education, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Technology and Environment, Economics and Business Administration, Culture and Arts, and Philosophy.

New Campus: In 2009-2010, the current 10-hectare campus was used by the School of Education and the Pedagogical Practice School. In March 2010, the operational offices and other schools moved to the New Campus that was constructed on an area of more than 40 hectares, with an investment capital of USD 35 million. This New Campus is considered as the main campus of this university.

Campus II: This campus is located about 30 kilometers from the main campus. It provides education at intermediate level in agricultural fields including Crop Science, Livestock, Aqua-Culture, Aquatic Product Process, Agricultural Process, Agricultural Economy and Economic Accounting and Information Technology. It also offers in-service training courses in conjunction with neighboring institutions.

Pedagogical Practice School: This school is established in 2009 as a multi-level school that applies new teaching approaches.

3.2. Missions

This university has two important missions. The first mission is to provide academic programmes of all levels to develop the human resources of the local province and the neighbouring provinces. The second mission is to undertake research, technology application and technology transfer to promote the economic and social growth of the local province and neighbouring provinces.

3.3. Staffing

With the growing demands of learning and teaching, the number of staff and lecturers at this university has increased both in quality and quantity. The following statistics provided by the Personnel Office demonstrate this increase.

Table 1

Staffing Statistics

Year	Total number of staff	Number of Masters and Doctoral degree holders	Percentage
1999-2000	190	40	21 %
2000-2001	245	41	16.7%
2001-2002	298	52	17.4%
2002-2003	350	54	15.4%
2003-2004	406	68	16.7%
2004-2005	471	91	19.3%
2009-2010	769	371	48.2%

As indicated by Table 1, in the first academic year 1999-2000, there were only 190 staff and lecturers with 40 holders of Masters and Doctoral degrees. After ten years, in 2009-2010, this number reached 769 including almost half with Masters/Doctoral degree. This is a positive indicator of development for this institution.

To summarise, this university is a provincial multidisciplinary university with typical features in such aspects as governance, structure, and socio-cultural influences. It was therefore a good unit of analysis for my research.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has provided relevant information about the research context of this study. These context-specific features, especially in terms of cultural heritage and political system, are important to better understanding the particular research setting of this exploration. They also help to explain some phenomena in leadership that will be discussed later.

The next chapter will provide a review of the literature related to the research areas of this investigation. It will first present some important aspects of educational leadership such as leadership definitions, different models of leadership, and the relation between leadership and management. It will then examine professional learning for educational leaders including leadership training and mentoring. Next, it will address effective leadership in terms of task-oriented factors and relation-oriented factors. Finally, it will examine sustainable leadership.

Chapter Three: Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature that is relevant to research areas of this study such as educational leadership, professional learning activities, effective leadership, and sustainable leadership. All these aspects, as I will show, are helpful to further understanding this research because they provide a literature base and comprehensive background information about the topic. The first section provides an overview of educational leadership by giving definitions of leadership, different leadership models, and the relationship between leadership and management. The second section addresses professional learning for educational leaders in the light of leadership training and mentoring. The next section is concerned with effective leadership in terms of task-oriented factors and relation-oriented factors. The final section defines sustainable leadership and describes its characteristics.

1. Educational leadership

Educational leadership is a broad area with many important aspects that need research and examination. Three important elements are: the way leadership is defined; different leadership models; and the correlation between leadership and management. A comprehensive literature review of these elements is essential to a thorough understanding of this study.

1.1. Definition of leadership

As the term "leadership" could be defined in accordance with the researchers' individual perspectives, almost as many leadership definitions can be found as there are people who have tried to define it. A review of the leadership literature during the past 30 years provides varying definitions of leadership. For example, Rauch and Behling (1984) define leadership as "the process of influencing the activities of an organised group toward goal achievement" (p. 46), while Jacobs and Jaques (1990) maintain that leadership is "a process of giving purpose to collective effort, and causing willing effort to be expended to achieve purpose" (p. 281). Unlike these authors who associate leadership with a process, House, Hanges, Quintanilla, Dorfman, Javidan, and Dickson (1999) consider leadership as "the ability to

influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization (p. 184). However, the most arguably comprehensive definition of leadership is provided by Yukl (2010) who contends that leadership is, "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individuals and collective efforts to accomplish the shared objectives" (p. 26).

Although there are hundreds of different definitions of leadership, it is worth noting that leadership is most commonly described as a process that involves influences, occurs with relationships within groups of people, and includes the achievement of goals or objectives. Therefore, leadership could be defined as a process in which an individual tries to influence the other members of a group or an organisation to work together, in order to accomplish their common goals or objectives.

1.2. Models of educational leadership

A number of leadership models have been addressed in the literature. However, this section will examine the four most relevant models: the heroic leadership, distributed leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership.

1.2.1. Heroic leadership

Heroic leadership has been widely practiced in Vietnam as it suits the existing notion of power distance and hierarchical thinking of this country. Heroic leadership depends on the belief that the organisation's success is shaped by the leader's personal characteristics and attributes alone, and that individuals, as heroes, can make a difference, can change things and make things better. This model is built on the claim that leadership is about strong individuals with superior qualities as leaders, and others as less able passive objects who have no choice but follow their leaders (Koivunen, 2007). Accordingly, this model emphasises formality and opportunities for exercising leadership in accordance with hierarchical and structural positions (Oduro, 2004). With all these features, heroic leadership plays a significant role in transitional or developing societies where its features could meet the needs of both leaders and followers (Burns, 2010). Therefore, heroic leadership is commonly practiced in developing countries that are power-led and heavily hierarchical such as Vietnam.

In recent years, heroic leadership has been challenged. Researchers tend to shift from a single focus on a set of personal characteristics of leaders to an emphasis on collective achievement, social networks, and the importance of teamwork and shared responsibilities (Conger, 1989; Lipnack & Stamps, 2000; Thompson, 2000). This new model is described as the opposite of heroic leadership, and is usually referred to as distributed leadership.

1.2.2. Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership emphasises collectivism rather than individualism (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2009). Gronn (2002) describes distributed leadership as a concertive action in which the total is much more important than the sum of its parts. Similarly, Harris (2008) defines distributed leadership as "a collection of roles and behaviors that can be split apart, shared, rotated and used sequentially or concomitantly, [which] means that any one time, multiple leaders can exist in a team, with each leader assuming a complementary leadership role" (p. 174). However, it should be noted that distributed leadership does not simply mean sharing tasks among individuals who perform assigned and separate organizational responsibilities; rather it involves dynamic interactions between multiple leaders and followers (Timperley, 2005). Importantly, it is the nature of the task responsibility or the situation, rather than the people with the highest authority, that decides who should lead and who should follow (Copland, 2003).

Distributed leadership is beneficial in many ways. Firstly, it is claimed to have a positive influence on organisational performance. Graetz (2000) indicates distributed leadership as a motivation for change. Furthermore, Gold, Evans, Earley, Halpin, and Collarbone (2003) conclude that the leadership capacity development and its distribution play an important part in organisational success.

Secondly, there is evidence that distributed leadership has positive impacts on student performance (Day, Leithwood, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2007; Harris & Muijs, 2005). For example, Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) find that if a big proportion of leadership is distributed to teachers, it will have desirable influences on teacher effectiveness and student involvement. Moreover, Silins and Mulford (2002) indicate that the more leadership is distributed throughout the school community, especially to

teachers, the better the performance that can be achieved in terms of student outcomes.

Thirdly, other authors consider distributed leadership as important in capacity-building as a means of sustaining improvement (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003; Louis & Marks, 1998; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). They argue that distributed leadership with social trust and cohesion is the core of capacity building (Hopkins & Jackson, 2003). In addition, Harris (2008) points towards the potential of distributed leadership to increase the work experience and self-determination of those whom leadership is distributed to.

In summary, some examination of the concepts of heroic leadership and distributed leadership are appropriate in my study because, as I will demonstrate, the former is commonly practiced in Vietnam, and the latter is the desirable and effective model whose time has come (Gronn, 2000, p. 333) to help Vietnamese educational leaders to improve their performance. However, the notion of distributed leadership is foreign to the Vietnamese context. Educational leadership in this country still fosters a heavily hierarchical system that has prevailed for years. Accordingly, people tend to accept that power and authority should stay at the top level of leadership. Vietnamese leaders are used to the top-down approach of leading, so they are reluctant to and uncomfortable with distributing leadership to lower levels. Therefore, it is difficult to make a change from hierarchical heroic leadership to distributed leadership. In fact, such a change would challenge the wider cultural context and the prevailing socio-political norms of Vietnamese society.

1.2.3. Transactional leadership

Downton (1973) first introduced the term transactional analysis in leadership to refer to a process between the leader and follower who are attempting to improve circumstances in a mutually beneficial way. Later, Bass (1999) further clarifies the term to mean a relationship of exchange between the leader and follower to meet their own needs.

Bass (1990b) identifies four dimensions in transactional leadership. The first is contingent reward that means exchanges of compliments, increases in pay and promotion for followers' good performance. It might also involve recommendation

for public recognition and honors (Bass, 1985b). The second dimension is management-by-exception in the active form. When a leader applies this approach, he/she actively monitors the followers' work progress and gives timely corrections to help them complete their tasks. Thirdly, a transactional leader might also utilise a management-by-exception approach in the passive form; that is, he/she only takes corrections when something is wrong. The final dimension is laissez-faire when a leader fails to lead and avoids his/her responsibilities (Bass, 1990b). Because of its ineffectiveness, some authors consider laissez-faire leadership to be outside the dimensions of transactional leadership (Avolio, 1999; Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Among the four dimensions of transactional leadership, there exists a correlational hierarchy in which contingent reward is most related to job effectiveness and subordinate satisfaction; active management-by-exception is more effective than passive management-by-exception; and laissez-faire is the most negative influence on subordinates' performance (Bass, 1999).

1.2.4. Transformational leadership

Burns (1978) describe a transformational leader as the one who not only recognises his/her subordinates' existing needs but also motivates and satisfies higher needs to develop individually. According to Bass (1990a), "the transformational leader asks followers to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the group, organization, or society; to consider their long-term needs to develop themselves, rather than their needs at the moment" (p. 53). Whereas, transactional leaders satisfy their subordinates' self-interest, transformational leaders raise the motivation and morals of their subordinates (Bass, 1999). The transactional leaders emphasise, "what your country can do for you" (Bass, 1999, p. 9); the transformational leaders are concerned with, "what you can do for the country" (p. 9).

Bass (1999) identifies four dimensions of transformational leadership: idealised influence (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Firstly, idealised influence means leaders exhibiting confidence, highlighting trust, taking stands on challenges, showing their values, and stressing the importance of the purpose, commitment, and ethical issues of the decisions. The second dimension is inspirational motivation; that is, leaders envision a promising future; set high standards for subordinates; and provide meaning of what

needs to be done. Another dimension is intellectual stimulation that involves leaders challenging old assumptions, traditions and beliefs; encouraging innovativeness and creativeness; and stimulating the expression of ideas and reasons. The last dimension is individualised consideration; leaders pay individual attention to their subordinates and inspire developmental growth by coaching and giving advice (Bass, 1999).

In addressing transactional and transformational leadership, it would be helpful to examine the relationship between the two. There have been different ideas about this in the literature. For example, Burns (1978) and Den Hartog, House, Hanges, and Ruiz-Quintanilla (1999) suggest that transactional and transformational leadership are contrasting ideas. However, there is also evidence of a close correlation between them. Harter and Bass (1988) claim that although there are differences between the two approaches, it does not mean they are not related, and in fact, transformational leadership can be considered as a special form of transactional leadership. Also, transformational leadership makes transactional leadership more effective but does not replace it, and the best leaders are those who apply effectively both transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1999). In support of this idea, Bass (1985a) and Gardiner (2006) suggest that leaders display both transactional and transformational characteristics but with different frequency and in different situations. Good leaders should know how to combine the appropriate behaviours of transactional and transformational leadership for specific situations (Gardiner, 2006). Moreover, Bass (1990b) has emphasised that the application of transactional or transformational approaches should depend on the context. In stable organisations, transactional leadership is usually effective, while in case of crisis, transformational leadership should be utilised.

It is my belief that reviews of literature on transactional leadership and transformational leadership are helpful and relevant to my study, because the relationship between these two models is similar to the relationship between management and leadership, which is one of the research areas of my study. In analysing characteristics of transactional leadership and transformational leadership, I noted that transactional leadership is more like managing, while transformational leadership is more like leading. Transactional leaders, like managers, are more concerned about the process, managerial tasks and efficiency, and they are more

interested in what will work than in what is true (Bass, 1985a, p. 122).

Transformational leaders, on the other hand, focus more on substantive ideas and do the right thing rather than do things right as managers do (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 21). The following section further explores management, leadership, and their relationship.

1.3. Educational leadership versus educational management

There has been continuing controversy about the two terms of leadership and management. Some researchers consider leading and managing as similar concepts as both involve deciding what needs to be done, building relationships to do it, and making sure that it happens (Yukl, 2002). Others, however, including Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Zaleznik (1977), argue that leadership and management are completely different and mutually exclusive concepts, and that leadership and management cannot, therefore, be exercised by the same individual. Leaders and managers have different values. Leaders value flexibility, innovation and adaptation, while managers value stability, order and efficiency (Yukl, 2002). In other words, managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing (Bennis & Nanus, 1985, p. 21). Moreover, Yukl (2002) also identified a number of incompatible factors in the two processes: strong leadership might destroy order and efficiency, and strong management might hinder risk taking and innovation. Interestingly, some writers (Bass, 1990; Kotter, 1990) consider leading and managing as different processes but they do not imply that leaders and managers are different categories of people.

In this regard, it would be helpful if Vietnamese educational leaders were aware of the similarities and differences between leadership and management, so that they could apply them effectively. In my opinion, however, whether or not leadership differs from management by definition should not matter too much. What matters more is how the leaders learn to combine the functions of leading and managing effectively in order to achieve the goals and objectives of their organisations. This would also require them to engage in continuous professional learning.

2. Professional learning for educational leaders

Professional learning for leaders is one of the areas in the educational leadership literature that attracts the most attention and efforts from researchers. Amongst the components of professional learning, leadership training and mentoring are most important.

2.1. Leadership training programmes

It is undeniable that leadership training is important to leaders' professional learning. However, traditional leadership programmes have come under criticism. Some critics insist that these programmes are often overly theoretic and didactic and incompatible with leadership theories. They also fail to link theory and practice and fail to respond to the real-world complexities and demands of educational leadership (Copland, 1999; Elmore, 2000; McCarthy, 1999; Murphy & Vriesenga, 2004). Further to that, Coffin (1997) identifies within these programmes a mismatch between programme content and learners' needs; a failure to link these programmes with values and missions of the school or district; a failure to enhance job embedded learning opportunities; and an imbalanced use of learning technologies. Moreover, Sparks and Hirsh (1997) add that the traditional professional development activities are usually organised into one-day to one-week seminars and delivered in a residential context that is separate from the setting of the job. These activities are short of time and rarely related to the realities of the job, and thus hardly lead to changes in learners' behaviours. In response to these critiques, concerted efforts have been made to identify effective characteristics of leadership training programmes.

In the literature, a sizeable body of research suggesting effective features of leadership programmes could be found. However, the most common aspects of effective leadership learning programmes include a research-based programme content with curriculum coherence; use of a variety of methods such as field-based experiences, problem-based learning, cohort structures, and mentoring; and appropriate structural arrangements in terms of collaboration, mission and purpose, and length and time structure; and other contextual factors. These effective programmes features that are initially intended for principals' leadership development

have been adapted to developing leadership programmes for educational leaders in general.

2.1.1. Programme content

Research-based content. The content of leadership programmes should be research-based; that is, it should reflect the current research in educational leadership. Specifically, Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2005) suggest that the programme content should incorporate such important areas as knowledge of instruction, organisational development, change management and leadership skills. Along with this research-based content, programmes also focus on promoting learners' habits of reflection and critical thinking. Reflective practice could be used throughout these programmes as a means to provoke and challenge the learners' presuppositions, to enable them to surface theories-in-use which impact on leadership behaviours, and to help them to try to apply different aspects of leadership development (Osterman, 1990). Reflection work is, therefore, an integral factor of effective leadership programmes with formal reflections usually incorporated into final portfolios (Young & Grogan, 2008).

Curricular coherence. In addition to research-based content, it is important to structure the programme content in a way so that it has coherence and in alignment with the curriculum. Knapp, Copland, and Talbert (2003) define a coherent programme as the one that links objectives, learning activities and learners' assessment to a set of shared values and knowledge about effective leadership practice. A coherent programme could offer a logical array of coursework, learning activities and programme structures that link theory and practice (Davis et al., 2005). Peterson (2002) supports this point, recommending that within and across programmes, curricula should have a set of integrated and carefully planned topics, skills and conceptualisations based on well-prepared learning goals. He adds that more successful learning may take place if consistent views of leadership and management and a consistent language for the programme are embedded in the curricula (Peterson, 2002).

2.1.2. Methods of programme delivery

The programme content should be delivered through a variety of methods to best respond to the learners' needs and enable them to apply the knowledge into practical situations. These methods include field-based experiences, problem-based learning, cohort structure, mentoring and the use of varying instructional strategies.

Field-based experiences. It has been argued in the literature that adult learners could learn most effectively when they are exposed to situations that require them to apply the acquired knowledge, skills and problem-solving strategies into practical settings (Davis et al., 2005). Further to that, interdisciplinary research on experiential learning reveals that exposure to aspects of real-world practice could promote leaders' ability to contemplate, analyse and plan strategies for action (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999). Therefore, field-based experiences such as internships and practica are a crucial part of leadership development programmes. These experiences offer the learners opportunities to grapple with the day-to-day demands of educational leadership under the guidance of an expert practitioner, with reflection closely incorporated to theoretical insights (Daresh, 2001), which make these programmes meaningful learning experiences for the learners.

Problem-based learning. Problem-based learning activities such as case methods, action research and projects that promote effective problem-solving capacity and reflection are also an essential feature of successful leadership programmes. Specifically, these activities simulate complicated real-world leadership challenges and dilemmas, enhance the blending of theory and practice, develop problem-solving ability and help to promote learners' self-concepts as educational leaders. Participating in these relevant simulations, learners could develop new knowledge and skills, experiment with a variety of leadership roles and practice self-reflection (Davis et al., 2005).

Cohort structure. The use of cohort structure within leadership programmes is beneficial in many ways. First, cohort structure promotes a strong collaborative culture and group development such as teambuilding, mutual support and collaboration among learners. Second, cohort experiences offer an opportunity for learners to gain skills and knowledge that might be more useful than and different

from what would be achieved in non-cohort programmes (Barnett et al., 2000). In addition, learning experiences with a cohort structure can enhance a sense of group affiliation and acceptance, social and emotional support, motivation, and group learning. Furthermore, there is some evidence that cohort structure can help improve programme completion rates among learners (Davis et al., 2005).

Mentoring. There is a large body of research discussing the benefits of mentoring to leadership development (Daresh, 2004; Hopson & Sharp, 2005; Rhodes, Stokes, & Hampton, 2004; Southworth, 1995). Mentoring involves the mentor and mentee making a mutual commitment to working together to achieve some set objectives (Daresh, 2001). The mentor plays a multi-role as model, an acculturator, a sponsor, a provider of support, and an educator, to foster the professional development of the mentee. Mentoring helps learners to feel more self-confident, to see how educational theories are applied into practice, to improve their communication skills, and to learn from their senior colleagues (Hopson & Sharp, 2005). Therefore, mentoring should be an integral aspect of leadership development programmes.

2.1.3. Structural arrangements

Collaboration. Leadership development programmes need to seek interdisciplinary connections within the university, as well as potential outside resources from other organisations. This close collaboration between universities and school districts would help to enhance coherence between training and practice and support pipelines for recruitment, preparation, hiring, and induction (Davis et al., 2005).

Clear mission and purpose. Some of the current programmes are ineffective because they lack a clear focus. It is, therefore, important that the programmes have a clear mission and purpose to drive decision-making and design. Also, the purpose of the programme should be clearly articulated to ensure coherence to offerings (Peterson, 2002).

Length and time structure. Length and time structure is also a central aspect of successful leadership development programmes. Although many current programmes for educational leaders are delivered as one-shot workshops, a more successful approach would include organising long-term multiple-session meetings over the

entire year. The more exposure learners have to these programmes, the better they can develop professionally (Peterson, 2002).

2.1.4. Contextual factors

Several elements of the context also affect the effectiveness of leadership development programmes. These elements include the university policies that provide resources and direction for the programmes, and the infrastructures that support specific programmes. Of critical importance is the financial support to allow the learners to undertake an intensive programme with a full-time internship (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

In short, such aspects as programme content, method of delivery, structural arrangements, and contextual factors, are very important to ensure the quality of leadership programmes. Therefore, the literature above is relevant to my research because it can serve as a good source of reference for Vietnamese leadership centers and institutions, so that they can design and organise more effective and successful leadership training programmes for educational leaders in Vietnam.

2.2. Mentoring

It is evident in the educational leadership literature that mentoring is an important aspect of professional development in many countries, including Australia (Brady, 1993), the United Kingdom (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1995) and the United States (Playko, 1995). Although most research addresses mentoring at the principal level, it is believed that its findings could also be applied and adapted to educational leaders in general.

Essentially, mentoring involves a more experienced colleague facilitating the professional development of a new leader in a relationship of mutual trust. Mentoring might include coaching, facilitating, counselling, and networking (Clutterbuck, 1991) or peer support, counselling, socialising and coaching (Bush, Coleman, Wall, & West-Burnham, 1996). Speculating on work by Malderez and Bodoczky (1999), Hobson and Sharp (2005) identified five specific roles and corresponding functions that mentors could potentially play: mentor as model who inspires the mentee; mentor as acculturator who helps the mentee to become familiar with the particular

professional context; mentor as sponsor who introduces the mentee to the right people; mentor as provider of support who provides with a safe place to let off emotions; and mentor as educator who listens to the mentee and creates opportunities for the mentee to learn professionally.

2.2.1. Benefits of mentoring

Research in the field suggests mentoring offers a number of benefits, not only for the mentees but for the mentors and the institution as well.

It is obvious that mentoring produces many benefits to the mentees. Firstly, the most frequently reported benefit of mentoring for mentees concerns the psychological well-being of the mentee (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). Mentoring is claimed to bring about decreased feelings of isolation and increased self-confidence and self-esteem for the new leaders (Bolam et al., 1995; Daresh, 2004; Monsour, 1998). Moreover, mentoring helps to reduce stress and frustration (Grover, 1994) and assists the mentees to let go their previous professional identities (Southworth, 1995).

Secondly, the professional skills of the mentees are also reported to be enhanced through mentoring. Some research, including work by Grover (1994) and Bush and Coleman (1995) suggests that there have been improvements in the mentees' technical expertise and problem analysis. Further to that, the mentees' communication skills can be improved through mentoring (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Monsour, 1998). Regular interactions between experienced and inexperienced colleagues lead to exchanges of views and perspectives which would not take place in settings where new leaders work separately from their experienced colleagues. In addition, mentoring enables the mentees to reflect on their new roles (Southworth, 1995) and to learn to act with consideration rather than in haste (Bush & Coleman, 1995).

Thirdly, mentoring allows the new leaders to learn how educational theories are translated into daily practice. Having the mentor as the guide who already speaks the language of the organisational culture enables the novice to start understanding the subtle relationships between what has been learned from books and what must be learned through daily application (Daresh, 2004).

Finally, mentoring makes the newcomers feel as if they are involved with the new setting. The fact that a more experienced colleague takes care of a less experienced colleague's personal and professional well-being is a powerful message suggesting that the newcomers are welcome and well taken care of in this new environment (Daresh, 2004).

Also, the mentors can benefit from the two-way process of professional development. Firstly, the greatest reward for the mentors includes increased job satisfaction. It has been claimed that the mentoring experiences are rewarding and stimulating to the mentors, especially to those who have lost their earlier excitement for their job. Mentors also feel satisfied seeing the values and culture of the institution being handed on to a new generation (Daresh, 2004). Secondly, there is evidence that mentors enhance their own professional development through mentoring. Specifically, they have acquired improved knowledge and insights into current practice and a greater awareness of different approaches to leadership (Bush & Coleman, 1995). Additionally, their reflection practice and self-esteem are enriched by their being mentors (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). Thirdly, through mentoring the mentors get more recognition from their colleagues (Daresh & Playko, 1992). This is because the mentors who identify promising colleagues likely to take future key positions are likely to be recognised as having insight into the needs of the institution (Daresh, 2004).

In addition, the institution may also benefit from having more effective and capable leaders with improved leadership and management skills. Mentoring benefits the institution by helping the new leaders to be more effective at an early stage of their new leadership career, and by fostering a culture of mutual help and development among a wider community of the staff and leaders of the institution (Bush & Coleman, 1995).

2.2.2. Factors influencing the success of the mentoring process

Some factors have been proven to influence whether or not the mentoring process is successful. These factors include the availability of time, mentor-mentee matching, and training of mentor and mentee. Firstly, it is common that the mentors and mentees have insufficient time to participate in the mentoring process (Bush &

Coleman, 1995). One of the strategies to overcome this involves assigning one mentor to a group of mentees who can also provide mutual support to each other (Grover, 1994). Another strategy involves greater use of reflective logs and technology such as email, chat room, discussion forums and video conferencing rather than frequent meetings (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). The second factor concerns the match between the mentor and mentee. This factor is critical. It is, therefore, recommended that mentoring programmes include systems for the effective selection of mentors and mentees (Bolam, McMahon, Pocklington, & Weindling, 1993). Importantly, the mentees should be allowed to change their mentors if the initial pairing has been proven to be unsuccessful (Monsour, 1998). In this connection, some studies suggest that the new leaders should be paired with mentors from the same geographical location who can provide insights into local and national issues (Blandford & Squire, 2000; Monsour, 1998). Other authors, however, argue that selecting the mentor and mentee from the same locality might lead to local rivalries that might hinder the success of the mentoring process (Daresh & Male, 2000; Draper & McMichael, 2000). Thirdly, both the mentors and mentees should be provided with training to help prepare them for their involvement in the mentoring process. These training sessions will also enable the two parties to be more aware of the purpose of the mentoring process and of their roles and responsibilities, as well as the benefits they expect to derive from mentoring (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000).

In brief, mentoring offers many benefits to leadership professional learning and has been well documented in the literature. However, the term of mentoring is new in Vietnam. The educational leaders in this country have not been exposed to mentoring, so there is some confusion about this term. Therefore, the literature on mentoring cited above is helpful to my study because it will help raise awareness of Vietnamese educational leaders regarding mentoring, so that they can improve their leadership performance.

3. Effective leadership

Different approaches have been adopted in addressing effective leadership. These include a trait approach, skills approach, style approach, and situational approach (Northouse, 2007), and factors of consideration and initiating structure (Yukl, 2002).

In this study, effective leadership is examined in the light of task-oriented factors and relation-oriented factors.

3.1. Task-oriented factors

Task-oriented factors are concerned with accomplishing the task, and maintaining an organisation's order and efficiency (Yukl, 2010). These factors comprise two aspects: task-oriented behaviours and leadership skills.

3.1.1. Task-oriented behaviours

Different authors have suggested different task-oriented behaviours that are associated with effective leadership. Notably, Yukl (2010) provides a general description of effective task-oriented behaviours in terms of planning work activities, clarifying roles and objectives, and monitoring operations and performances.

The first category involves planning work activities. The significance of planning to effective leadership has long been recognised in the literature (Boyatzis, 1982; Carroll & Gillen, 1987; Shipper & Wilson, 1992; Yukl, Wall, & Lepsinger, 1990). Planning means deciding what to do, how to do the task, who will do it and when it will be completed. Broadly defined, planning includes making decisions, about objectives, priorities, strategies, and organisation of tasks; assigning responsibilities; scheduling activities; and allocating resources among different tasks in accordance with their relative importance. The purpose is to ensure efficient and orderly organisation of the unit, coordination of activities and effective allocation of resources (Yukl, 2010).

The second category of task behaviours is concerned with clarifying roles and objectives. Evidence from the literature indicates the positive relationship between clarification of roles and objectives and leadership effectiveness (Bauer & Green, 1998; Kim & Yukl, 1995; Wilson, O'Hare, & Shipper, 1990). Clarifying roles and objectives means clearly communicating plans, policies and role expectations. Specifically, it includes defining responsibilities and requirements; setting performance goals; and assigning specific tasks. The purpose is to ensure that everyone knows what to do, how to do it and what results are expected.

The third category is monitoring operations and performance. Some studies have found that monitoring behaviours are related to effective leadership (Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004; Komaki & Minnich, 2002). Monitoring involves gathering information about the operations of the unit. Monitoring can take many forms: observing work operations; reading written reports; inspecting the quality of work samples; and organising progress review meetings with an individual or group. The extent of monitoring depends on the competence of the subordinates and the nature of the tasks. More frequent monitoring is needed when the subordinates are inexperienced, when the tasks are highly interdependent, and when mistakes might result in serious consequences (Yukl, 2010).

3.1.2. Leadership skills

Another aspect of task-oriented factors concerns the skills needed for effective leadership. It is worth noting that skills are different from traits or qualities of leaders. Skills are what leaders can accomplish whereas traits are who leaders are. Leadership skills are defined by Northouse (2007) as the ability to utilise one's knowledge and competencies to achieve set goals or objectives. Elaborating on the three-skill approach recommended by Katz (1974), Northouse (2007) has suggested three kinds of skill that effective leaders need to demonstrate and develop: technical, human and conceptual skill.

Firstly, technical skill, the type of skill that deals with things, involves the knowledge of, and expertise in a specific area of work or activity. It includes competencies in a specialised field, analytical ability, and the ability to utilise suitable tools and techniques. Technical skill is most important at lower and middle levels of leadership and less important at the upper level (Northouse, 2007). In other words, middle and lower leaders need this technical skill more than top leaders who depend on skilled subordinates to handle technical issues.

Secondly, human skill concerns the knowledge and ability to work with people. Human skill helps the leaders to work effectively and with subordinates, peers, and superiors, as well as to assist others to work collaboratively as a group to achieve common goals and objectives. Human skill also involves the ability to create a working environment of mutual trust where members feel comfortable, secure and

encouraged to engage with making decisions about issues that influence them.

Leaders with human skill are those who are sensitive and considerate towards others' needs and motivations in making decisions (Northouse, 2007). As leadership is about relationships, human skill is important at all three levels of lower, middle, and upper leadership.

Thirdly, conceptual skill includes the ability to work with ideas and concepts. Unlike technical skill, which deals with things and human skill, which deals with people, conceptual skill deals with ideas. Conceptual skill allows the leaders to put the organisation's goals into words and to understand and express its principles and tendencies. Conceptual skill is critical in creating vision and strategic direction for the organisation. Conceptual skill is most important at the top leadership level, and also important to middle leadership, but less important at the lower level (Northouse, 2007). In brief, effective leaders need to have all these three skills, but the extent of importance of each skill might vary depending on where these leaders are in the leadership hierarchy.

Unlike Yukl (2010) and Northouse (2007) who present general task-oriented leadership factors, other scholars have suggested more specific task-oriented factors that are associated with effective leadership. For example, Bryman (2007) identifies behaviours related to effectiveness such as demonstrating clear sense of direction and strategic vision; preparing arrangements to facilitate the direction; allowing participation in decision-making process; communicating about the direction; and providing feedback on performance. Although a number of different perspectives are possible on task-oriented factors that are associated with effective leadership, the most commonly agreed on ones are demonstrating a clear vision, and possessing profound knowledge and expertise.

3.2. Relation-oriented factors

Relation-oriented factors are concerned with improving relationships and promoting mutual trust; enhancing collaboration; increasing job satisfaction; and building identification with the organisation (Yukl, 2010). These factors involve relation-oriented behaviours and dimensions of the personalities of the leaders.

3.2.1. Relation-oriented behaviours

A large body of research concerning relation-oriented behaviours associated with effective leadership can be found in the literature. However, the most comprehensive work is conducted by Yukl (2010) who concludes that supporting and developing behaviours are relevant to effective leadership.

Firstly, supporting behaviours involve demonstrating consideration, acceptance and concerns for others' needs and feelings. Supportive leaders can build and maintain effective interpersonal relationships with others. They can also create emotional ties that make it easier for them to obtain cooperation and support from those whom they rely on to get work done. Leading with supporting behaviours might help enhance subordinates' self-confidence, stress resistance, acceptance of the leader, trust of the leader, and willingness to do extra for the leader (Yukl, 2010).

Secondly, developing behaviours which aim at enhancing one's skills and promoting career advancement might include coaching, mentoring, and career counselling.

Developing behaviours offer many benefits to the leaders, the subordinates and also the organisation. The benefits for subordinates include the acquisition of more skills, greater self-confidence and better career advancement. The leaders could obtain a sense of satisfaction from assisting others to develop professionally. The organisation could benefit from a culture of mutually cooperative relationships, higher commitment, and higher performance (Yukl, 2010).

3.2.2. Dimensions of personality

Research has indicated the close relationship between some traits of the big five personality model and effective leadership (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002). There have been different ideas about what the five personality dimensions include; however, it is commonly agreed that the big five dimensions of personality include surgency, emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness and intellectance (Goldberg, 1990; Hogan et al., 1994).

Firstly, the dimension of surgency refers to the extent to which people are sociable, assertive and leader-like versus quiet, reserved, mannerly and withdrawn (Hogan et al., 1994). Specific traits of this dimension associated with effective leadership are dominance, assertiveness, energy or activity level, speech fluency, sociability, social

participation, and readiness to make decisions (Bray & Howard, 1983; Hogan et al., 1994; Stogdill, 1974).

Secondly, emotional stability means the degree to which people are calm, steady, and cool versus anxious, insecure, worried and emotional (Hogan et al., 1994). Specific traits of emotional stability that are related to effective leadership include adjustment, emotional balance, independence, self-confidence, resistance to stress and tolerance for uncertainty (Bray & Howard, 1983; Hogan et al., 1994; Stogdill, 1974).

Thirdly, conscientiousness measures the degree to which people are hard-working, persevering, organised and responsible versus impulsive, irresponsible, undependable and lazy (Hogan et al., 1994). Specific conscientiousness-related traits associated with effective leadership are responsibility, integrity, ethical conduct, and inner work standards (Bray & Howard, 1983; Judge et al., 2002; Northouse, 2007).

Fourthly, agreeableness concerns the extent to which individuals are sympathetic, cooperative, good-natured and warm versus grumpy, unpleasant, disagreeable and cold (Hogan et al., 1994). Specific traits associated with effective leadership are friendliness, social nearness and support (Hogan et al., 1994; Northouse, 2007; Stogdill, 1974). It is, however, worth noting here that this dimension of agreeableness is also found to be weakly associated with leadership in some other studies (Judge et al., 2002; Northouse, 2007).

Finally, intellectance, also referred to as openness, describes the degree to which people are imaginative, cultured, broad-minded and curious versus concrete minded, practical and having narrow interests (Hogan et al., 1994). Specific traits related to effective leadership are divergent thinking and creativity (Judge et al., 2002; McCrae, 1987).

In addition, a review of the qualitative research into traits of effective leaders suggests that the traits most commonly found to be associated with effective leadership include integrity (Bass, 1990; Daft, 1999; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991; Northouse, 1997; Yukl & Van Fleet, 1992) and self-confidence (Bass, 1990; Daft, 1999; House & Aditya, 1997; Northouse, 1997).

In summary, there are two important aspects that construct effective leadership. The first concerns task-oriented factors including task-oriented behaviours (planning work

activities, clarifying roles and objectives, and monitoring operations and performances) and leadership skills (technical skill, human skill and conceptual skill). The second is about relation-oriented factors. These involve relation-oriented behaviours (behaviours of supporting and developing) and dimensions of personality (urgency, emotional stability, conscientiousness, agreeableness and intellectance). These two aspects are equally important to effective leadership, and leaders need to develop and perform both to achieve effectiveness in their leadership practices.

4. Sustainable leadership

The notion of sustainability was first introduced in the environmental field in the early 1980s by Lester Brown, founder of the Worldwatch Institute. Since then, this concept has become popular in many other areas (Cantlie, 2008). In education, Fullan (2005) defines sustainability as 'the capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose' (p. ix). Sustainability does not simply mean whether or not something will last. Rather, sustainability concerns how certain initiatives could be developed without damaging the development of other factors in the surrounding environment, in the present as well as in the future (Hargreaves & Fink, 2000). Moreover, sustainability is not the same as maintainability which means keeping the current state of something; in fact, sustainability is the ability of individuals or organizations to continue to improve in order to respond well to challenges and intricacies in a way that does not damage others or the wider community, but builds further competence to be successful in the new settings (Davies, 2007). In brief, sustainable leadership could be understood as the type of leadership that promotes effectiveness and development of organisations without causing any harm to other factors in the surrounding environment. Importantly, sustainable leadership does not simply mean that effectiveness and accomplishments are maintained. Rather, it also means further effectiveness and accomplishments are obtained with time; that is, today's outcomes should be better than yesterday's ones, and tomorrow's outcomes should be better than today's.

Seminal scholars have ascribed different characteristics to sustainability of leadership. Arguably the most comprehensive work on the topic was conducted by

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) who identified seven principles of sustainability in educational leadership: depth, length, breadth, justice, diversity, resourcefulness, and conservation.

The first principle concerns the depth of sustainable leadership. Sustainable leadership preserves, protects and promotes deep and broad learning for everyone. The second principle responds to the question of how sustainable leadership lasts. Sustainable leadership preserves and enhances the most significant spheres of learning over time, year after year, from one leader to the next. The third principle means that sustainable leadership spreads by sustaining and depending on the leadership of others. The fourth principle, justice, conveys the notion that sustainable leadership does no damage to and actively promotes the surrounding context by trying to share knowledge and resources with other neighbouring organizations and the local community. The fifth principle addresses diversity in sustainable leadership. Sustainable leadership avoids aligned standardization, but promotes and learns from diversity, and builds cohesion and networking among its elements. The sixth principle, resourcefulness, implies that sustainable leadership does not deplete material and human resources. Rather, it develops these resources and renews people's energy. The last principle deals with conservation. Sustainable leadership respects and learns from the past to build a better future (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

After an extensive review of literature in sustainable leadership, I notice that although different researchers might hold different opinions about this topic, sustainable educational leadership can be said to have some common fundamental principles. They include deep learning, commitment to short-term and long-term objectives, leadership succession, and moral purpose.

4.1. Deep learning

The first principle is deep learning. Davies (2007) recommends a model of deep learning that involves three stages. The first stage is shallow learning, which involves replication and information. The second stage is complex learning, including understanding and knowledge. The third stage, also the most advanced stage, is deep learning implying meaning and wisdom, and this is what education needs the most. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) explain that leaders in general and educational leaders in

particular should preserve, protect and promote the central educational purpose of deep learning rather than the shallow learning of superficial testing practice and expediency of immediate achievement. Deep learning is learning that involves people's feelings and has connections to their lives. It is not so much concerned with performance and achievement; it highlights "critical, penetrative, thoughtful, and ruminative" learning (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 53). Sustainable educational leadership creates and nourishes a practice of well-prepared and deep learning that is opposite to fast schools that emphasize quantity more than quality. Educational leaders need this principle to be effective leaders who, while meeting accountability demands, focus on deep learning (Davies, 2007). Fullan (2005) adds that deep learning should be for all levels of the system, including students, teachers, schools, districts and governments, if sustainability to be achieved. In brief, deep learning is indeed a very important principle for leaders in general and educational leaders in particular. Different scholars might describe sustainable leadership in different ways, but they all consider deep learning as a crucial quality for those in educational leadership (Cantlie, 2008; Davies, 2007; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

I am in agreement with these scholars about the importance of deep learning in achieving sustainability in educational leadership. However, of additional relevance is the matter of learning for leaders themselves; in my opinion, this is also a very important element of sustainable leadership. Educational leaders themselves must keep learning to advance their leadership knowledge and understanding, and to lead more effectively and sustainably.

It could be argued that Vietnamese leaders are insufficiently aware of the importance of deep learning. Most leaders emphasise students' immediate results and achievement and fail to pay attention to the real meaning of learning. Furthermore, while some educational leaders in Vietnam are concerned with students learning and staff learning, they do not focus on their own leadership learning, perhaps using the excuse that leaders at universities are always very busy with management work, meetings, and problem-solving issues. In addition, Vietnam still adheres to a hierarchical leadership model that implies that leaders are always right and that subordinates should follow what the leaders say. This assumption hinders some Vietnamese educational leaders from deep learning as it inclines them to believe that

they do not need to learn further to be able to lead. Therefore, further research on deep learning in particular and on sustainable leadership in general is badly needed in Vietnam.

4.2. Balancing short-term and long-term objectives

The second principle is to balance short-term and long-term objectives. Some argue that short-term achievement targets and long-term sustainability can never be compatible with each other (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), so educational leaders have to compromise one of them. Moreover, at some universities and schools, it is usually assumed that short-term benchmarks are the final outcomes instead of indicators of ongoing success (Davies, 2007). For these two reasons, institutions can become primarily concerned with short-term objectives. The situation is even worse in a context like Vietnam where universities are usually oriented to a culture of superficial short-term achievement targets. They tend to believe that reports and figures of superficial performances are indicators of success and strive for them without recognising that they are not making any sustained improvement despite superficial achievement. This is not the purpose of education. Short-term results are necessary to build trust for longer investment (Fullan, 2005), but by themselves do not mean success. In fact, both short-term and long-term objectives are needed for a sustainable success. Davies (2007) has indicated that schools and universities need to balance the short-term and long-term perspective, because if they fail to achieve either of them, they will become ineffective. Only institutions that can ensure both short-term operational processes and long-term strategic processes are likely to sustain their success. He also relates the challenge of short-term and long-term to the management-leadership challenge. He claims that short-term operational processes involve managing, and long-term strategic processes involve leading (Davies, 2007). I am in agreement with him because management is about short-term results and efficiency, and leadership is about long-term vision and effectiveness. This idea, once again, emphasises that educational leaders at universities need both management and leadership, just as they need both short-term results and long-term approach.

4.3. Leadership succession

The third principle of sustainable educational leadership is leadership succession, which is one of the major challenges faced by the profession, but also plays a crucial role in developing sustainable leadership. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) argue that successful succession does not mean enduring improvement; rather, it goes a long way toward doing so. It also means that leadership should not be considered as heroic and everlasting; instead, we should see leadership as "something that stretches far beyond any one leader's professional and even physical lifetime" (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p. 93). This is something which leaders must consider carefully if they should propose initiatives that are dependent on them and not able to survive their departure. They must also consider how to secure successful succession.

Other studies about leadership succession (Fink & Brayman, 2006; Southworth, 2007), although conducted at the level of school principals have also revealed practical and relevant implications for university leaders. Fink and Brayman (2006) have identified a number of barriers to effective leadership succession. These are: growing turnover of leaders resulting from administrative rotation/mobility; early retirements or promotion to higher levels; and the lack of mentoring and coaching for new leaders.

The new leaders, in these cases, are left to proceed on their own without sufficient transition time and conditions to become insiders; "instead of leading from the center, they are left to manage from the edge" (Fink & Brayman, 2006, p. 85). To overcome this, universities should increase support for new leaders by providing mentoring and coaching, and universities should commit funding for this. Mentoring and coaching help new leaders to reflect on their performance, to discover their development needs and to unburden their concerns and doubts about their leadership practices (Southworth, 2007). Another implication suggested by Fink and Brayman (2006) is that universities should develop thoughtful leadership succession plans which provide sufficient lead time, and promote understanding and commitment among staff via meaningful communication. These plans will help to integrate the incoming leaders' knowledge with the outgoing leaders' knowledge and to maintain and develop what has already obtained at the university. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) support this idea,

saying that effective succession involves making plans to create positive improvement across many years and numerous individuals, not a single leader. They also recommend that to achieve successful succession, leadership needs to be stretched and spread across people, not one individual, by distributing leadership. Leadership distributed to others will help to promote their leadership capacity and make them ready for leading. This dimension of leadership is introduced by Hargreaves and Fink (2006) as the third principle of sustainable leadership in education: the principle of breadth.

Leadership succession is, in my opinion, also an important issue that needs to be taken seriously among universities in Vietnam. However, it is still problematic in Vietnam. The turnover of educational leaders at Vietnamese universities is getting higher and higher for two main reasons. Firstly, some experienced and qualified leaders get promoted to higher positions in the system and accordingly, they have to leave all initiatives that are being implemented at the current university. These departing leaders are usually not allowed sufficient time to pass their initiatives to the new leaders. Secondly, some educational leaders leave their current leading positions at small low-paying universities, for better positions in higher-paying universities with more conditions for further professional, academic and financial improvement. How to retain educational leaders' long-term commitment is a very challenging question for the Vietnamese Government. Another obstacle to leadership succession at Vietnamese universities is the absence of coaching and mentoring programmes for new developing leaders. Although coaching and mentoring have been proven to be of great help to new developing leaders in western universities (Daresh, 2004; Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Playko, 1995), the notion is still foreign in Vietnam, and many universities tend to ignore their importance and influence on new leaders. Therefore, it is necessary that further consideration of coaching and mentoring programmes for emerging leaders should be taken in the Vietnamese university setting, in order to achieve leadership succession first and then sustainable leadership.

4.4. Moral purpose

Sustainable educational leadership also requires moral purpose, a very basic and fundamental quality that is needed not only for sustainable educational leadership but

for education in general as well. Education, whose main goal involves educating people, must have a moral basis, so those who work in this profession need to always act in a moral manner. Gardner (2006) also mentions this moral aspect as one of the five minds for the future, and he calls it "the ethical mind". Kedian and West-Burnham (2010) emphasise the importance of morality in education in the future: "Education is undoubtedly a moral and ethical endeavour that is inextricably interwoven with the fabric of the future, the perceived needs of learners, and that which society holds dear" (p. 11). Moral purpose in education includes closing the achievement gap between high-performing and low-performing students; treating people with respect; helping other schools to succeed; and contributing to the local community (Fullan, 2005). In other words, moral purpose means "social responsibility to others and the environment" (Fullan, 2002, p. 17). Hargreaves and Fink (2006) claim that "sustainable leadership, like sustainable improvement, begins with a strong and unswerving sense of moral purpose" (p. 23) because moral characteristics, including confidence, commitment, and a sense of purpose, can sustain people during times of difficulty and challenge. This principle of moral purpose, in my opinion, relates to Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) principle of justice where sustainable leadership does not harm, but actively promotes the surrounding environment by trying to share knowledge and resources with other local schools and the community. Moreover, Day and Schmidt (2007) believe that it is also associated with Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) principle of resourcefulness, in that sustainable leadership promotes and does not exhaust material and human resource; in fact, sustainable leadership renews people's energy.

In Vietnam, educational leaders demonstrate a sense of moral purpose by striving to reduce the achievement differences between the good and poor students, and through care and respect to others. However, they seem less concerned about the neighboring institutions and the local community. There is not yet enough connection, cooperation and collaboration between universities. Educational leaders of universities in the community, especially principals, do not usually have meetings with each other to discuss the local needs and to reach an agreement among universities for mutual development of the local community. This might lead to a mismatch between the local demands and the universities' supply of human resources. Therefore, it is really

necessary for universities to seriously consider shared moral purpose that is their contribution to the other local institutions as well as the local community.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed some important aspects of the literature that are relevant to my study. These aspects include educational leadership, professional learning, effective leadership, and sustainable leadership. Throughout the review, key concepts, ideas and recommendations of these aspects have been presented. Specifically, this chapter has explored important areas of educational leadership, including definitions of leadership, different leadership models, and the relationship between leadership and management. It has also examined professional learning with an emphasis on leadership training and mentoring. In addition, it has highlighted factors of effective leadership suggested in the literature. These factors include task-oriented factors and relation-oriented factors. The chapter has also investigated definitions and principles of sustainable leadership in education. All these elements are very relevant to my study because they provide a literature base and comprehensive background insights to further understand this research.

The next chapter will present the research design of this study. It will respectively address such aspects as the theoretical framework, the research method, significance of the study, data collection, data coding and validity, and the ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: Research Design

This chapter introduces the research design of this study. The first section outlines the theoretical framework, and includes discussion of the relevance of the interpretive research paradigm and qualitative research. The second section examines the case study research method. The third section explains the significance of this research. The fourth section presents the two data collection methods used that were interviews and an online questionnaire. It also describes the process of selecting the participants, accessing the institution and the participants, and conducting data collection. The next section addresses aspects of data coding and validity. These include the data coding framework of thematic analysis, measures of validity and reliability, triangulation, and the process of transcribing and analysing the data. The final section concerns the ethical considerations of this study. They include informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality and anonymity.

1. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework is located within the interpretive research paradigm and uses qualitative research methods. This section first presents the definition of a paradigm and then the definition of the interpretive research paradigm. It next describes the qualitative research methods used.

1.1. The interpretive research paradigm

A paradigm is òa collection of logically related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that orient thinking and researchö (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 22) and it determines the criteria for the researcher to define inquiry problems and to approach them theoretically and methodologically (Husen, 1997). A paradigm involves a community of researchers who share the same ontology, epistemology and methodology (Bell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ontology raises the question of what the form and nature of reality is and what there is that can be known about it; epistemology involves the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known; and methodology is concerned with how the researcher finds out what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Punch, 2009).

Interpretive research emphasises social interactions and practices, and its main purpose is to understand human experiences. This is also the purpose of my research. I am in agreement with interpretive researchers who state that "all human action is meaningful and hence has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices" (Usher, 1996, p. 18). Interpretive approaches are consistent with my study as I am concerned with the meanings that people bring to situations and which they use to understand their world. With an interpretive perspective, I believe that reality is not "out there" to be discovered, but rather it is subjective and largely based on how people perceive it (Neuman, 2006). In other words, interpretive research implies "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens, 2005, p. 12). These characteristics, in my belief, best correspond with my study because my research is also about exploring human experiences and human perceptions in a socially constructed reality. I believe that using interpretive research approaches will help me to achieve the most reliable findings about the leadership experiences at the university under study.

1.2. Qualitative research methods

Consistent with interpretive approaches, I have used qualitative methods for my study. Qualitative methods are used to explore "the unique lived experiences of the participants to enhance understanding of particular phenomena" (Mutch, 2005, p. 19). They allow researchers to explore small areas in great depth, so are suitable for educational purposes like the purposes of my study. Like other qualitative researchers, I believe that people are conscious of their behaviours, so their feelings, thoughts and perspectives are vital. Metaphorically, Shank and Vilella (2004) liken qualitative research to a lantern used to illuminate dark areas, so that we could see and understand things which were previously obscure. This is consistent with the purpose of my study: to unveil unexplored areas in educational leadership, so that people can see and understand why things work as they do. Unlike quantitative research that uses deductive logic, qualitative research uses inductive logic; that is, the key ideas emerge from the data collected (Mutch, 2005). With these characteristics, it is my belief that qualitative research worked best for my study that examines human leadership experiences and perceptions of the middle leaders at a

university in Vietnam. I believe that qualitative research was best suited to help me to obtain reliable and valid data to find answers to my research questions.

2. Research method: the case study method

The case study method, an in-depth examination of an extensive amount of information about very few units or cases for one period or across multiple periods of time (Neuman, 2006, p. 40), has been widely used in social research for many different disciplines, including education. Case studies allow researchers to explore an inquiry in depth, and to cope with the intricacies and subtlety of real-life contexts (Denscombe, 2007). Case study research also focuses on relationships and processes rather than outcomes and final products; on holistic understanding more than isolated elements; and on natural occurrences rather than artificial situations. A case study helps to answer how and why certain occurrences may happen, rather than just say what those occurrences are (Denscombe, 2007). Therefore, the case study method is believed to work best in qualitative research which explores experiences and real life accounts.

After carefully considering the characteristics of the case study method, I decided to use case studies for my research. Specifically, I used an instrumental explanatory case study method. I believed that it would offer me the best opportunity to examine things in detail and to accumulate sufficient information to discover the complexities of my participants' leadership experiences.

The case study approach has salient strengths that made me more certain about my choice of using it as the method for my study. First of all, it enables researchers to investigate the inquiry in some detail and to cope with the subtleties and complexities of real life situations. Specifically, it engages researchers with the relationships and social processes of the occurrences to achieve holistic understanding (Denscombe, 2007). Therefore, it is desirable in social qualitative research and thus consistent with my study. Secondly, it works well in contexts where the researchers have little control over circumstances. As this method addresses phenomena as natural occurrences, there is no pressure on researchers to control, to intervene in, nor to change situations. Thirdly, the case study method is suitable for small-scale research like mine that focuses efforts on one, or a few, research sites. In addition, it allows the

use of multiple methods of data collection, which encourages the exercise of triangulation - a process used to improve the reliability and validity of data and findings (Burns, 2000; Denscombe, 2007).

Beside the strengths, the case study method also has a few limitations that researchers should attend to. The first limitation concerns ethical difficulties. The case study method requires the participants to talk or to write about their experiences, some of which might draw them back to undesirable thoughts and feelings (Willig, 2001). Secondly, the question of generalisability from the findings makes case studies vulnerable to criticism (Burns, 2000; Denscombe, 2007; Wellington, 2000). Critics claim that the findings from a small number of case studies can hardly provide sufficient insights and understanding of a more general phenomenon. As a result, findings from case studies cannot be generalised to other cases (Willig, 2001). There have been, however, arguments against these criticisms including Wolcott (1995) claim that "each case study is unique, but not so unique that we cannot learn from it and apply its lessons more generally" (p. 175) and Walker (1980) suggestion that "an instance is likely to be as typical and as atypical as any other" (p. 34).

When I decided to use the case study method for my study, I was fully aware of the issue of generalisability. However, as my study focused on a single university, and aimed at exploring the leadership experiences and perceptions at this particular university, I believed the case study methods were still suited to my research. In addition, triangulation with the use of two methods of data collection was adopted to increase the internal validity and reliability of data for this study. The methods used were interviews and an online questionnaire. I do believe that these two methods helped me collect complete, valid and reliable data, so that the findings of my research could contribute some insight and understanding to the under-researched domain of educational leadership in Vietnam.

3. Significance of the study

As mentioned in the first chapter, this study is significant in a number of ways. First of all, it is useful for the institution being researched. Data from the ten participants, who were carefully selected with diversity criteria including balance in gender, a wide range of age and professional experiences, and representation for different units

across the university, provided reliable findings. These findings identified tensions between participants' perceptions and the literature, which may help the participants to reflect on their own leadership practices. Moreover, this research provides these leaders with an understanding into the on-going leadership situation that they are involved with every day, so that they become more aware of ways in which their leadership could be improved. Importantly, the recommendations of this study serve as good sources of reference for these leaders to learn how to develop professionally, as well as for the university's top leaders to facilitate leadership work. In addition, the findings identified barriers and difficulties in leadership work, and provided guidance to help improve the quality of educational leadership practices within this university.

Secondly, this study is significant in that it holds some implications for other Vietnamese universities. The institution researched in this study is a provincial multidisciplinary university with typical features in such aspects as governance, structure, and socio-cultural influences; hence the implications may be applicable to some other institutions of a like type.

Thirdly, this research raises public awareness of and attracts more attention to the area of educational leadership in Vietnam, especially in areas of professional learning, effective leadership, and sustainable leadership. Noticeably, it identifies some gaps in knowledge that need further examination, and creates foundations for further research within the Vietnamese context. In addition, this study adds some insight to the existing literature of educational leadership in Vietnam, a largely undocumented subject in this country.

4. Data collection

Successful case studies require data collection methods to be carefully selected and well conducted. This section presents the two methods of data collection used in my study: interviewing and an online questionnaire.

4.1. Interviewing

Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007) define an interview as a conversation with a specific purpose while Kvale (1996) describes it as an exchange of opinions or ideas between two people discussing an issue of interest. As interviews can reach the parts

which other methods cannot reach (Wellington, 2000, p. 71), many qualitative researchers employ interviewing in their research.

Different approaches to classifying interviews can be found in the literature. However, interviews are most commonly categorised into three types: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviewing (Burns, 2000; Dyer, 1995; Fontana & Frey, 1994; Mutch, 2005; Wellington, 2000).

In a structured interview the precise form and direction of questioning are determined in advance before the actual interview. The respondent is asked a prepared list of questions and all respondents are asked the same questions in the same order. Structured interviewing is inflexible, but it offers a quick and easy way of collecting data and saves the interviewer's time (Dyer, 1995).

At the other end of the continuum is the unstructured interview that Burns (2000) describes as a 'free-flowing conversation, relying heavily on the quality of the social interaction between the investigator and informant' (p. 425). This approach does not use a prepared list of questions, with the researcher instead deciding what questions to ask depending on the flow of ideas. The researcher might start by posing an initial question and explaining the topics to be addressed in the interview (Dyer, 1995). The unstructured interview is useful for exploring the respondent's experiences and life history.

The combination of these two approaches forms the semi-structured interview, the most frequently used approach to interviewing. A semi-structured format means the interview still has some key questions, and is conducted in a more open-ended way (Mutch, 2005); that is, the interviewer allows the respondent to expand their answers, and it gives room for 'individual lines of thought' (Dyer, 1995, p. 59). The interviewer might have an interview guide to ensure that the interview focuses on important research issues, but the wording and ordering of questions are not fixed (Burns, 2000). Semi-structured interviews are useful for exploring respondents' perspectives, opinions and ideas about a chosen topic.

Of the three types of interviews, I believe that the semi-structured interview was most suitable to my study as it allows the participants to express additional thoughts and

feelings about the questions asked. This helps to enrich data and findings, and thus enhances the quality of the research.

As with any other method, it is necessary for researchers, to be aware of the strengths and limitations of interviewing, so that they can achieve the best results and data.

Burns (2000) identifies many benefits of interviewing. First, the flexibility of interviewing allows the researcher to explain the questions to the respondents or ask for further clarification from them in case of misunderstanding or confusion. Secondly, the response rate is much higher for interviews than for questionnaires because people are usually more motivated and willing to express their ideas orally than in written form. In addition, the presence of the researcher also encourages the respondents to give more comprehensive responses (Burns, 2000). Thirdly, during the interviews, the researcher can observe non-verbal expressions in the communication of the respondents, and this might provide additional information for data collection (Bell, 2005; Burns, 2000).

Interviewing, however, has some limitations. One disadvantage is that interviews are time-consuming (Bell, 2005; Burns, 2000). Also, as interviewing is a highly subjective technique (Bell, 2005, p. 157), it is possible for there to be bias (Hyman et al., 1954). For example, Burns (2000) has identified the researcher's personal characteristics - age, gender, educational level, or interviewing experience - as one factor that might bias the interview. These limitations of interviewing, however, can be significantly minimised if the researchers are well-prepared, cautious, skillful and professional in the way they organise and conduct the interviews.

To make sure not to miss out on any details and information provided by the participants, a recorder was used during all of the interviews. Before the interviews, I carefully checked the recorder, interview questions, and notebook. I wanted to make sure that I would gain good quality data. During the interviews, I tried not to use leading questions because this could bias my participants' answers (Appendix 4). I also avoided going into personal issues. My good preparation and caution in interviewing helped me to achieve professionalism in conducting the interviews.

As a junior staff member interviewing senior leaders, I was aware that there might be a power differential during the interviews, which might influence the way the

participants responded. However, the participants, most of whom had been my lecturers, were now my colleagues, so professional relationships were good. Therefore, I believed that they were honest in their answers. In addition, Dyer (1995) and Fontana and Prokos (2007) suggest that in order to motivate and encourage the participants to give honest answers, researchers should try to build rapport with and gain trust from the participants. Rapport and trust could be achieved by the researchers trying to maximise communication with the participants, and by explaining the research clearly. Therefore, I explained my research as fully, clearly and honestly as I could to my participants, so that they could understand my research motives and integrity. In this way, I was able to build rapport with the participants, and thus gain trust from them. I believe that, with my existing trustworthy relationships with the participants and a good rapport with and trust from them, I was able to gather honest and reliable data for my research.

In addition to using interviews as the main method of data collection, I also used an online questionnaire as a secondary method to achieve more detailed and accurate data.

4.2. Online surveys: online questionnaire

The use of online surveys as a data collection method in research is increasing, as it is fast and inexpensive (Couper, 2000; Dillman, 2007). Among different types of online surveys, the most common is an online survey as a web-based questionnaire which is designed as a web page and works as a host website accessible to visitors. This type of questionnaire offers some benefits.

First, it allows for the use of graphic power that makes the surveys more interesting and inviting to the respondents (Denscombe, 2007). Second, it can generate a high response rate (Kehoe & Pitkow, 1996). Third, the researchers can collect the responses very quickly in a very inexpensive way (McCullough, 1998). Moreover, this type allows for anonymity in responses, which has a positive influence on the response rate (Kiesler & Sproull, 1986) because the respondents can answer the questions without worrying that their answers can be traced back to them. Also, the absence of the researchers in an online survey will help eliminate any subjective bias that their presence might bring about (McCullough, 1998).

Being aware of the benefits of web-based online surveys, I exercised it as a supplementary data collection method. I used SurveyGizmo[®] which offers free student accounts. Using SurveyGizmo[®] means the respondents of the survey are anonymous to me. Therefore, I named the survey respondents as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, etc. Within the online survey method, I used the online questionnaire tool, which is an effective component of survey method. The questionnaire comprised seven questions related to the topic (Appendix 5). It is my belief that the online questionnaire helped to draw out further information from the participants to enrich the data.

4.3. Selecting the participants

The participants of my study were ten middle leaders of a university in Vietnam. They were selected according to criteria that included balance in gender, a wide range of age and professional experiences, and representation for different units across the university. With my existing good professional relationships with the participants, I could access them personally. I explained to them the purposes of my research and all the ethical issues to achieve their consent.

Choosing suitable participants is very important to the quality of any study, so I chose these participants very carefully. I wanted to ensure diversity and representation to make my data more valid and reliable. I read through the organisational structure of the university and made a list of ten potential participants. I selected five male and five female departmental leaders with a wide range of age and professional experiences. In addition, they were from different units across the university. Another important criterion was that I selected those with good relationships with me because they would be more open and willing to share their innermost thoughts and feelings. This criterion, mentioned by Denscombe (2007) as a practical consideration- a matter of convenience- is necessary because leadership is a sensitive topic in Vietnam; people who do not know me well might have felt reluctant to talk about it. In addition to these ten leaders, I also had another two more on my list in case some of the ten were unable to participate in my research.

4.4. Accessing the institution and the participants

As my unit of analysis was the university where I had been working, I did not have to go through any formal paperwork to get access to the potential participants. Instead, I first talked to the President of my university about the topic, purposes and questions of my study. Then I arranged meetings with the potential participants and carefully explained to them my research including the purposes and ethical issues. I also had them read the participant information sheet (Appendix 2). Fortunately, all the ten people asked to participate agreed to do so. When they agreed to take part in my research, I had them read and sign the consent form (Appendix 3). I expected that they would ask me more about signing the consent form because this is not a common practice in doing research in Vietnam; but in fact, they were all happy to sign it, saying that they understood this procedure as they had previously done research in a western university. After that, I sent copies of the interview questions to their email two weeks before the interview dates, for their reference. I believed this would help to keep them focused in their answers. Moreover, I was aware that the participants also needed some time to reflect on those questions, especially those about sustainable leadership, because this term might be a new to them.

4.5. Conducting the data collection methods: interviewing and the online questionnaire

There were ten participants in my research. The interviews were conducted at the most convenient times and venues for the participants. In most cases, the interviews took place in participants' offices at the university. In other cases, we met in a cafeteria or a local restaurant. Although the interview questions were designed in English, they were translated into Vietnamese to make it easier for the participants, especially those without good comprehension of English. Before the interviews, we started with some small friendly talk about work, study and family to create a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere. During the interviews, I was recording and taking note of what they were saying and of what I could observe. First, I asked them the interview questions. Then based on the flow of the answers, I also asked them some follow-up questions. For the female participants, I also asked them about their difficulties as female leaders. All ten participants were open and friendly. Some of

them, however, refused to answer one or two questions because they felt they had nothing to contribute on that topic, or they did not feel comfortable answering them. Each interview lasted for no longer than 40 minutes. After the interview, I thanked the interviewee and informed them that I would send them the transcription for their verification, and that an online questionnaire would also reach them in a month's time. During and after each interview, I made some notes about what had happened in the interview and about the issues mentioned. It is worth noting that the interviewees' names that are used later in the findings and discussions are pseudonymous, in order to ensure the principle of anonymity.

The online questionnaire was used as a supplementary data source to interviewing. It was a web-based questionnaire that comprised seven questions. It helped to elaborate some of the issues indicated in the interview data, and it was designed using SurveyGizmo[®]. Although the online questionnaire was sent to the same ten participants, only eight out of ten got back to me. Therefore, the data from the questionnaire came from just eight respondents who were named as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, etc.

5. Data coding and validity

This section presents the data coding and the validity measures used in this study. Firstly, it describes the thematic analysis used as the data coding framework. Secondly, it addresses triangulation. Then, it examines aspects of the validity and reliability of this research. Finally, it describes the process of transcribing and analysing the data.

5.1. Data coding framework: thematic analysis

There are many approaches to analysing data in qualitative research including thematic analysis, content analysis, and semiotic analysis. However, the most common strategy is thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Mutch, 2005).

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). This strategy helps scholars to organise qualitative data in a manner that enables them to communicate with a

broader community of other scholars and researchers (Boyatzis, 1998). The thematic analysis involves a six-phase process where movement is back and forth as needed, throughout the phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). Firstly, researchers familiarise themselves with the data by reading them carefully and actively. They also take note and highlight ideas for coding when reading; interview data need to be transcribed into written form (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Secondly, researchers code interesting aspects of the data systematically and meaningfully (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Tuckett, 2005) by writing notes on the texts being analysed, highlighting potential items with coloured pens or using post-it notes to mark interesting features of the data. Next, researchers continue to analyse data but at a wider level of themes, rather than codes. They classify different codes into potential themes by using visual tools. They also need to think of the relationships between codes, themes and different levels of themes. Interestingly, there will probably be some codes that fail to fit in any of the main themes. The researcher then should put them into a 'miscellaneous theme' because they might be helpful later (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Fourthly, researchers review themes and check if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and also in relation to the entire set of data before working on a thematic map of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). They then consider how each theme relates to the research questions and to the others. Moreover, they need to think about naming the themes. Names should be concise, meaningful and directly related to the content of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Last, the thematic analysis should be presented concisely, coherently, logically and interestingly with vivid examples or extracts that clearly demonstrate the main points. Importantly, the report needs to go 'beyond description of the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93) and present an argument related to the research questions.

With its clear and elaborate steps, thematic analysis was undoubtedly the best choice of data analysis for my study. I followed these six steps carefully to ensure effective presentation and organisation of data.

5.2. Triangulation

Triangulation is defined by Neuman (2006) as 'the idea [of] looking at something from multiple points of view' (p. 149). Denscombe (2007) identifies four different

types of triangulation: methodological triangulation, data triangulation, investigator triangulation and theory triangulation. Of these the most common type is methodological triangulation- the use of multiple methods of data collection to provide a more complete picture of the inquiry investigated. Methodological triangulation was also used in my study through the use of two different methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews and an online questionnaire. These two methods undoubtedly definitely enhance the reliability and validity of the data and findings of this study.

5.3. Validity and reliability

In any research, researchers need to prove to the research community that quality is achieved in their research. In quantitative research, quality involves validity, reliability and generalisability (Morrow, 2007); in qualitative research, a new term for quality has been recently adopted - that is, trustworthiness or rigour (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). As my study used qualitative research, it was important that it keep to standards of trustworthiness to achieve validity and reliability. Williams and Morrow (2009) suggest that there are three aspects of trustworthiness that all qualitative researchers must attend to. They are integrity of the data, balance between reflexivity and subjectivity, and clear communication of findings.

5.3.1. Integrity of data

Integrity of the data means the adequacy or the dependability of the data. Williams and Morrow (2009) claim that qualitative researchers can achieve integrity of the data by articulating their methods and analysis strategies clearly. Moreover, they also need to prove they have collected a sufficient quality and quantity of data. This matter of 'adequacy of data' (Morrow, 2005, p. 255) is usually thought of as a sample size issue, but the trustworthiness of the data means more than the size of the sample (Sandelowski, 1995; Yeh & Inman, 2007). Researchers, instead, should try to collect rich data by ensuring a diversity of demographics and perspectives in the sample of participants.

To ensure integrity of data in my study, I adopted methodological triangulation through the use of interviews and an online questionnaire, both of which were clearly

described and articulated. Moreover, the participants in my study were selected according to criteria in terms of gender, age, professional experiences and representation for units across the university, to ensure diversity in the sample of participants. Therefore, I believe that my research was able to achieve integrity of data.

5.3.2. A balance between reflexivity and subjectivity

Balancing reflexivity and subjectivity means the balance needed between what the participants say and the ways in which the researchers interpret the meaning of the words (Williams & Morrow, 2009, p. 579). This balance can be achieved by using a bracketing strategy, the process of becoming aware of one's implicit assumptions and predispositions and setting them aside to avoid having them unduly influence the research (Morrow, 2005, p. 254). Thus, the researchers are able to keep their own perspectives separate from the participants' stories. Alternatively, they could also use the strategy of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), or having a group of researchers with at least one external auditor (Hill et. al, 2005) to ensure this balance.

A balance between reflexivity and subjectivity was achieved in my study by the use of participant verification. This means that after I transcribed the data word for word, I sent these transcriptions to the participants for verification. The participants then revised the transcriptions and corrected any mistaken ideas. This technique helped to avoid any potential bias from my own perspectives.

5.3.3. Clear communication of findings

Another critical standard of the trustworthiness of a study is whether researchers clearly communicate what has been found and why it matters. In addition to clear writing and presentation of the study, the researchers also need to show that their research has achieved social validity (Morrow, 2005, p. 253), meaning that their research makes some potential contribution to the development of society and community in certain ways. Moreover, the researchers need to prove that they have answered the research questions proposed from the beginning, and, equally importantly, they need to tie the findings to the existing literature (Williams & Morrow, 2009).

As my study focused on educational leadership, which is well under-researched in Vietnam, I believe that its findings add fundamental knowledge and understanding to the existing literature in the field. These insights will contribute to enhancing the quality of educational leadership within this university and beyond. Moreover, during the study process, every methodological choice (research paradigm, research methods, and data collection methods) was made with great caution and consideration to ensure that the research questions would be appropriately addressed. This has ensured that the data and findings of this study are valid and reliable.

5.4. Transcribing and analysing the data

The process of transcribing the data was time-consuming. Each interview took me almost two hours of transcribing; however, this also allowed me to become thoroughly familiar the data. After transcribing an interview, I sent the transcription to the participant for verification. Then I translated it into English.

I followed the thematic analysis process recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, I read the data many times and took note of initial ideas. After coding interesting characteristics in a systematic manner, I searched for themes by putting relevant codes into potential themes. There were some ideas that did not seem to fit any theme, so I put them into a miscellaneous theme. I then reviewed the themes, making sure that they were appropriate. I also developed thematic maps (maps with different levels or hierarchies of themes). Next, I developed descriptions and names for the themes. Finally, I reported the findings from this analysis.

6. Ethical considerations

As my study involved direct and interpersonal interaction with humans, there were ethical considerations. Therefore, I carefully considered ethical issues and conducted my research in accordance with ethical norms. The following section presents the three most important ethical concerns that any researcher must attend to. They are informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality and anonymity.

6.1. Informed consent

Informed consent involves the researchers informing the research participants about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 70). Cohen et al. (2007) suggest that informed consent implies four factors: competence, voluntarism, full information and comprehension.

Competence requires researchers to ensure that consent has been obtained from mature, responsible and psychologically capable people after they have been given relevant information. If participants are children, researchers need to obtain consent from their parents or guardians (Finch, 2005). Voluntarism means that participants can choose whether or not to take part in the research (Cohen et al., 2007) and they can withdraw from the research at any stage (Mutch, 2005). Full information entails the researcher providing the participants with full relevant information in writing, in a simple and clear manner. Comprehension implies that participants fully understand the research study including its procedure, purpose, conduct and even potential risks.

In my study, the issue of informed consent was carefully addressed. All participants selected were mature, responsible and psychologically capable. Firstly, I provided them with full relevant information on my study by giving them the information sheet and ethics proposal. Then I carefully explained the research to them with a focus on the procedure, purposes, conduct and potential risks. I also emphasised that they could choose not to participate in my research or that they could withdraw at any stage at their will. If they agreed to participate in my research, I had them read and sign in the consent form for participants (Appendix 3).

6.2. Protection from harm

According to the Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations (University of Waikato, 2008), researchers must try their best to identify and minimise any potential harm to the participants in physical, psychological, social, economic or cultural sense (p. 4). Researchers, therefore, must be very sensitive and cautious in order not to harm the participants.

In my research, I observed the principle of protection from harm by asking my participants to choose the interview venue and time which they felt most comfortable with. Additionally, I tried to be sensitive and avoid personal and emotional issues that could make them feel uncomfortable.

6.3. Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality means not disclosing the participants' personal information nor any of the information they provide, without their permission (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The issue of confidentiality is very important, especially in research on a sensitive topic, because it is a privacy issue and it might also lead the participants into undesirable situations. Assurances of confidentiality can influence the participants' decision to participate in the research. In addition to confidentiality, the principle of anonymity should also be observed. Researchers have to make sure that their participants' real identity cannot be revealed, which might require researchers to change the names of the participants (Mutch, 2005). If the promise of confidentiality and anonymity is not sufficiently strong and clear, the participants might refuse to cooperate with the researchers.

In my study, I observed principles of confidentiality and anonymity very strictly because my topic was leadership, a topic of some considerable sensitivity in Vietnam. I ensured that all the information and data provided by the participants were kept confidential and only accessible to myself and my supervisor. I never discussed data with anyone else except my supervisor. Moreover, the name of the university under study was not given. In addition, I used pseudonyms for the ten interviewees, and referred to the eight questionnaire respondents as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, etc., to ensure anonymity. Furthermore, I clearly explained the rule of confidentiality and anonymity to the participants, so that they could freely answer my questions without fear of professional reprisals.

7. Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research design of the study. This research was positioned within the interpretive research paradigm, and used qualitative research approaches. It adopted the research method of the case study with two data collection

methods, namely, interviews and an online questionnaire. Further to that, this chapter has addressed aspects of data coding and validity such as thematic analysis, standards of validity and reliability, and triangulation. In addition, it has examined the ethical principles applicable to this study. These principles include informed consent, protection from harm, and confidentiality and anonymity.

The next chapter will report the findings of this study in terms of five aspects that respond to the research questions. These aspects are: the understanding of the participants about management and leadership; professional learning activities; perceptions of effective leadership; perceptions of sustainable leadership, and some challenges experienced by the participants in their leadership work.

Chapter Five: Findings

This chapter reports the findings from data generated from the interviews and the online questionnaire. It is divided into five sections. The first section describes the understanding of the participants about leadership and management. The second outlines different activities adopted by the participants for professional learning. These professional learning activities included modelling, pre-service and in-service learning opportunities, professional reading, reflective practice, and engagement in Youth Union. The next section presents the participants' perceptions of effective leadership in terms of vision, knowledge and expertise, communication, collegiality, integrity and equity, and recognition of contribution and accomplishment. The chapter then examines the participants' perceptions of sustainable leadership in education. Finally, it outlines some common challenges experienced by the participants in their leadership work.

The interviewees' names used in this chapter are pseudonymous, and the eight questionnaire respondents are referred to as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, Respondent 3, etc., in order to ensure the principle of anonymity.

1. Understanding leadership and management

When asked about the differences between leadership and management, the participants indicated that management was specific and involved short-term objectives with many clearly defined steps. Therefore, managers needed to have knowledge and expertise in specific areas and to develop specific measures to manage their job. Leadership, on the contrary, was considered as to be more general with long-term goals and hence required general knowledge and visions. Thao-Huong shared her ideas:

Both leadership and management are needed in my job, but leadership is more general than management. Leadership focuses on strategic objectives for long-term development, and it involves influencing others to work towards the set goals. Therefore, leaders need wide knowledge and good visions. Management is more about short-term objectives. It might involve specific management tasks

such as setting the immediate goals, planning, monitoring, etc. (Thao-Huong, interview data, May 20, 2011)

Bao-Chanh added:

Management concerns staff running, financial management and other management tasks of daily operations. On the other hand, leadership involves directing the subordinates towards the set objectives. (Bao-Chanh, interview data, May 6, 2011)

Tam-Nguyen elaborated:

Management is more specific, and it aims at solving specific problems. Leadership is more general; it is about proposing development objectives. We need both of them to obtain good outcomes. (Tam-Nguyen, interview data, June 23, 2011)

Some participants described leadership as an art of influencing, encouraging and motivating people towards defined goals. It was also reported that management involved maintaining daily operations, or efficiency, while leadership involved creating changes within the unit. Ha-Diep elaborated on her definition of leadership:

Leadership entails great responsibilities at the general level, so it requires the leaders to acquire a comprehensive knowledge of the unit, its surrounding and also the social growing tendencies that might influence the unit. Importantly, the leaders need visions to develop the unit within the next five to ten years, using strategic developmental policies. Therefore, they too need the abilities and skills to be able to propose initiatives and to achieve consensus within the unit. Also, they need consultations from external networks. In addition, leadership implies creating changes- an indicator of ongoing developments of the unit. Equally importantly, leadership means influencing people rather than giving orders to people, so leaders should be careful in how they communicate with their subordinates. (Ha-Diep, interview data, May 13, 2011)

Similarly, Thuy-Hoa stated:

We need both management and leadership to achieve desirable outcomes. However, they are different in that management is more concerned with order, regulations and assignments while leadership is more about influencing and encouraging people to work to obtain the objectives. (Thuy-Hoa, interview data, June 6, 2011)

One of the participants, Xuyen-Phong, emphasised that we manage things, and we lead people. This meant, he explained, that management dealt more with things such

as planning, budgeting or monitoring; by contrast, leadership addressed human-related issues such as subordinates' motivation, job satisfaction or communication. Furthermore, Moc-Tuan related management to efficiency and leadership to effectiveness. He also differentiated managers as those who do things right and leaders as those who do the right things. Another participant, Thu-Ha, pointed out that a good leader was also a good manager, but a good manager was not always a good leader. She said:

Leadership means influencing others to work towards certain goals without forcing them. In my opinion, a good leader is also a good manager, but a good manager is not necessarily a good leader.
(Thu-Ha, interview data, May 12, 2011)

It was noted that some of the participants considered themselves more as managers than leaders, although they acknowledged their leadership roles. They defined leaders as people at the top of the university like the President and the three Vice-Presidents, and they saw themselves rather as managers. Moc-Tuan reported:

As far as I am concerned, leaders are people with the highest position in an organisation. For example, at this university, leaders include the President and Vice-Presidents. I do not really think I am a leader, but rather a manager although I am the Head of an office.
(Moc-Tuan, interview data, June 23, 2011)

However, all participants agreed that they needed to combine both leadership and management in their job. For example, Mai-Tuyen said: "To work effectively, we need to combine management and leadership in our job. The more we coordinate the two of them, the better outcomes we can achieve." Likewise, Thu-Ha commented:

People in higher positions are more likely to be considered as leaders and thus expected to demonstrate more leadership skills; those in middle or junior positions, on the other hand, are more often called managers and hence need to exercise more management skills. It is, however, critical that management and leadership should be combined with each other. Whether you consider yourself as a manager or a leader, you still need to combine management skills and leadership skills in your job to achieve desirable outcomes. (Thu-Ha, interview data, May 12, 2011)

The section above has explored how the participants understood leadership and management. The next section will examine what activities they had adopted to learn professionally in their leadership work.

2. Professional learning

To become good leaders, all participants showed strong commitment to learning professionally. It was discovered that they developed many different activities for professional learning, among which the most preferred ones included modelling; pre-service and in-service learning; professional reading; reflective practice; and participating in Youth Union activities. It should be noted in this section that the participants adopted more than one activity to develop professionally. Each participant used approximately three or four activities for professional learning.

2.1. Modelling and mentoring

Modelling in this study is defined as the action of observing how others lead to draw lessons for self-reflection, and it could include both positive and negative modelling. Data indicated that most participants adopted modelling as a professional learning activity. They modelled themselves upon former leaders, and senior leaders or colleagues, who they considered as good leaders. Thu-Ha stated:

I have learnt a lot from my colleagues and other leaders when I worked with them. Particularly, I learnt from the President Board and leaders of other units. I observed the ways they lead and drew lessons for myself. I have noticed some desirable leadership characteristics from them such as being considerate and supportive to subordinates, being sensible in communication with colleagues especially with older ones, having integrity, etc. I try to model myself upon them. Sometimes, of course, some undesirable leadership behaviours are shown too, such as favouritism, gender inequality or lack of integrity. I noted them down for self-reflection and tried to avoid these. (Thu-Ha, interview data, May 12, 2011)

Thao-Huong agreed with Thu-Ha's comment:

I learn professionally from different sources, but the most important is modelling. I observed how other leaders lead and reflected on their leadership behaviours. I have learnt some good qualities from them such as treating subordinates with respect, showing consideration towards subordinates, demonstrating visions,

fostering fondness for learning further, etc. I then modelled myself on these qualities. (Thao-Huong, interview data, May 20, 2011)

Most participants had good models that they admired and respected. These models inspired them to become a leader and influenced them to a certain extent. In some cases, the model was the former President of the university. In other cases, the model was a senior leader of the university or a well-known historical figure. These models worked as professional lodestars for these participants. Bao-Chanh explained:

I admire some leaders at this university and I consider them as models for me to follow and to reflect upon. They are Ms. P, Ms. T and Mr. X., whom I find very effective leaders. They are visionary leaders with profound knowledge and understanding, and they are also considerate to their subordinates. I would like to become such a good leader like them. It can be said that they are the inspiration and motivation for me in my leadership. (Bao-Chanh, interview data, May 6, 2011)

Questionnaire data revealed similar findings to interview data in terms of modelling. As illustrated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6), six out of the eight respondents chose modelling as one of the professional learning activities that they considered valuable to their leadership work.

With regards to mentoring, some participants stated that they had no mentors to guide them to learn professionally. Others misunderstood the term ‘mentors’ assuming that their mentors were their senior leaders such as the Presidents and Vice-Presidents. Xuyen-Phong said:

I was not provided with anyone to help guide me to learn professionally. I just work out my own way. When I have difficulties, I come to talk to the higher leaders such as the Presidents and Vice-Presidents to ask for instruction. (Xuyen-Phong, interview data, June 21, 2011)

Despite poor knowledge of mentoring as indicated by the interviews, questionnaire data showed that some respondents believed coaching and mentoring for leaders would be valuable to them. As demonstrated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6), three out of the eight respondents chose coaching and mentoring programs as one of the activities that would benefit them in their professional learning.

2.2. Pre-service and in-service professional learning opportunities

In addition to modelling, many participants developed their leadership skills through pre-service and in-service learning opportunities such as leadership workshops, conferences, training, etc. and in some cases, through their Master's study. According to them, these formal training activities were very necessary for their leadership role because they offered opportunities for knowledge acquisition and for widening their professional contacts with other colleagues in the field. A few participants had had the opportunity to attend international conferences, and they found them very enriching. Ha-Diep, once invited to attend the Pacific Young Leaders Conference organised by the United Nations, commented:

It was a very enriching experience for me. In addition to the insight and understanding on leadership, this conference also gave me the opportunity to get to know more like-minded friends with whom I could share my interests and concerns about leadership. I do not need more formal qualifications, but I do need opportunities like this to improve and to share my knowledge. (Ha-Diep, interview data, May 13, 2011)

Similarly, Mai-Tuyen, who has undergone many formal training activities within and outside Vietnam, reported:

It is good to attend these activities because they provide you with theories and insights and opportunities to discuss leadership issues with experts and professors in the field. Yet, this is just the first part; the second part, even more critical, is how to apply these theories and insights into the reality. Anyway, these formal training activities are helpful. (Mai-Tuyen, interview data, May 27, 2011)

Not all participants, however, were lucky enough to attend many leadership workshops, training and conferences. As indicated by responses to question 2 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data showed that there was a lack of pre-service and in-service training. Moreover, half of the interviewees complained that they had been to very few workshops. Thuy-Hoa said: 'I have been to only one leadership workshop so far. If I had been to more one-shot workshops and conferences, I believe, I would be better at my leading job'. Bao-Chanh added:

The university should send the departmental leaders to practice-based training courses, workshops or seminars to develop their leadership skills. So far the opportunities just came to higher leaders such as the President or Vice-Presidents. The departmental leaders like me also need these opportunities. Leadership work is challenging, so we leaders need to be properly trained and educated. I find leading difficult without formal education and training in leadership. (Bao-Chanh, interview data, May 6, 2011)

Thu-Ha revealed that before she was assigned to this position, she had not had any pre-service learning or training in leadership or induction programs, so at the beginning she had felt very lost. She had felt as though she was thrown into the water before she was taught how to swim. Many participants commented that lack of pre-service and in-service learning opportunities was a barrier to their leadership work.

Thu-Ha elaborated:

If we leaders were sent to training in leadership before we were assigned to be leaders, it would be much better for ourselves and also for their leadership work. Of course, we can learn from other sources, but formal training like pre-service and in-service learning opportunities still play a very important role. (Thu-Ha, interview data, May 12, 2011)

It was also noteworthy that there had been a two-week training course about leadership for leaders in this university the previous year. This course was organised by the university in cooperation with a leadership centre of the Ministry of Education and Training. All ten participants attended this course. In the participants' view, the course was a good idea, but there was still room for further improvement. Tam-Nguyen thought that it was useful, but too theoretical for him. He suggested there should have been more practical scenarios within the course for the learners to reflect on. Similarly, Thao-Huong found the course was too crowded and thus distracting. In addition, different learners had different needs that the lecturers could not respond to. Although this course was not perfect, all participants insisted that there should be more courses organised like this for the leaders to develop professionally. They all were very keen to attend more formal training activities, despite having busy working schedules.

In this regard, the questionnaire data were in accordance with interview data. As indicated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6), many respondents believed that

pre-service and in-service learning opportunities in leadership such as short-term and long-term training would be of great help to them in their work as leaders. Moreover, as illustrated by responses to question 7 (Appendix 6), Respondent 1 asserted that there should be more international training sessions and workshops organised for the middle leaders of this university so that they could learn professionally through meetings and exchanges of ideas with international colleagues. Similarly, as demonstrated by responses to question 7 (Appendix 6), two respondents (Respondent 3 and Respondent 5) insisted that this university should send its leaders overseas for visitations of well-known effective institutions, in order that they could observe how leadership has been practiced in other countries, which would help their professional learning.

It was noted that, however, short-term training activities such as workshops or conferences were preferred to long-term training activities with degrees. The questionnaire data suggested that eight respondents believed short-term training activities would be valuable to them, while only four respondents believed long-term training activities would help their professional learning, as indicated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6), which allows respondents to choose more than one options. It was also noticed during interviews that when the participants mentioned learning opportunities, they mainly meant short-time activities such as workshops, training sessions, and etc., rather than long-time activities such as postgraduate study with degrees.

2.3. Professional reading

Another finding revealed that many participants exercised the traditional method of professional learning; that is, learning through reading books, journal articles or the internet, etc. As demonstrated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data showed that four respondents insisted that they learnt enormously from reading professional materials. Professional reading provided participants with extensive knowledge and understanding about leadership. Thanh-Nhu stated:

I enjoyed reading books or articles to acquire knowledge of leadership. Reading benefits me professionally. Reading always gives me pleasure and food for thought. I read many books and

articles and then compare and contrast the literature to the reality to develop professionally. I would also apply some of the literature into my leading. Leaders do not need to go to any workshop or training to learn, just read to learn. In this technological age, we can also read from the internet from which we can find whatever kind of information in any area. (Thanh-Nhu, interview data, June 28, 2011)

However, not all participants could afford time for professional reading. Bao-Chanh said that he was always so busy with his overloaded schedule that he could not spend much time reading professional materials. Occasionally he read, but he just read at surface level or skimmed materials quickly.

Other participants raised another issue in professional reading. Thu-Ha acknowledged the significance of reading as a professional learning activity but was cautious about applying these insights to everyday reality. Thu-Ha commented:

I have been spending a lot of time reading books and articles about leadership. I find them a good source of knowledge, but I just cannot apply this knowledge into the reality because the reality is changing and complicated. The reality goes beyond what is written in the literature. Moreover, some of the books and articles are written within the western setting and undoubtedly are very different to the Vietnamese setting. Therefore, we should be selective. We should consider if the knowledge from western literature suits the Vietnamese context. (Thu-Ha, interview data, May 12, 2011)

Thu-Ha's claim was consistent with that of Thuy-Hoa, who emphasised the importance of contextual differences. Thuy-Hoa believed that professional reading is helpful, but contextual differences should also be taken into consideration. Thuy-Hoa said:

It is helpful reading professional materials. However, the reality might turn out to be quite different from what is written in papers. It is even worse when the literature and knowledge are from a different context with different culture and social conventions. Therefore, we should take contextual differences into account. (Thuy-Hoa, interview data, June 6, 2011)

In short, some participants believed that leaders could benefit from professional reading, but that the matter of contextual differences should also be attended to.

2.4. Reflective practice

The next professional learning approach reported on was reflective practice.

Reflective practice, in this study, refers to self-reflection and learning from one's own leadership experiences and mistakes. Five participants claimed that they acquired their leadership understanding from their own experiences and reflections. After years of leading, they learnt from experience which leadership behaviours worked well for their unit, and which did not:

Well, it is important for you to reflect on your leadership behaviours to find out what is good and what is not good enough. I reflect upon my past experiences and also on my mistakes and learn from these reflections. You know, no one is perfect and we all make mistakes. Learning from experiences and mistakes is just as important as any other methods of professional learning. (Mai-Tuyen, interview data, May 27, 2011)

Thao-Huong expressed a similar idea:

I usually learn from myself. As you know, there are not many materials about leadership in Vietnam, so I find it more helpful learning from my experiences and mistakes. For some people, learning from mistakes does not work, but it works for me. Of course it is not easy. I believe many other leaders at this university find this approach helpful, too. (Thao-Huong, interview data, May 20, 2011)

Questionnaire data also indicated that reflective practice was of great value to the participants. As illustrated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6), six out of the eight questionnaire respondents found that learning from their own experiences and mistakes helped them to develop professionally.

2.5. Participating in Youth Union activities

Youth Union, short for Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, is a social-political organisation of Vietnamese youth, and is lead by the Communist Party of Vietnam. This union has millions of members and branches throughout the country. Its purpose is to help Vietnamese youth to enhance a healthy lifestyle amongst them.

Four participants mentioned that their leadership skills were developed during their involvement in Youth Union activities. These four leaders had been involved in these activities from an early age, and this allowed them the opportunity to practise being a leader among students, and later to develop professionally as a leader. Thuy-Hoa commented:

My involvement in the Youth Union activities at high school and university as a leader did have an impact on me and inspire me to become a leader at work later on. These activities gave me opportunities to practise leadership skills with other classmates and students. These experiences built my self-confidence, communication and organisation skills, which are very helpful to my current job as a Head of a department now. (Thuy-Hoa, interview data, June 6, 2011)

Thanh-Nhu made similar observations:

Learning through the Youth Union activities is another way that helped me to develop professionally. When I was engaged with these activities, I was provided with training which turned out to be valuable to my leading job now. (Thanh-Nhu, interview data, June 28, 2011)

In brief, the leaders at this university exercised a wide range of professional learning activities such as modelling, pre-service and in-service learning, professional reading, reflective practice, and engagement with Youth Union. Although different participants had different experiences with each activity - some had more opportunities to attend workshops and training, while others had the opportunities to be engaged in Youth Union - data indicated that all these activities were considered to be very important to the participants in their professional learning. Professional learning, moreover, was perceived to be closely related to effective leadership, perceptions of which will be presented in the following section.

3. Perceptions of effective leadership

In response to the questions about effective leadership, the participants indicated that an effective leader needed both *ƒ* mø qualities and *ƒ*âmø qualities (please note the little mark as the difference between these two terms *ƒ* mø and *ƒ*âmø). To be able to understand these data, it is important to clearly understand these two terms. Literally,

Trăm means vision and Tâm means heart. As demonstrated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data showed that the respondents defined Trăm as task-oriented leadership behaviours that were concerned with task accomplishment and efficiency. On the other hand, Tâm qualities were defined by the respondents as moral and relation-oriented leadership behaviours that were concerned with building relationships and cooperation within the unit.

3.1. 'Tâm' qualities

The qualitative and quantitative data showed that while the participants defined Trăm qualities differently, most commonly, they identified Trăm as vision, knowledge, and good communication skills.

3.1.1. *Vision*

Vision was perceived to be a leader's most important quality. As indicated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data showed that vision was important to effective leadership. Moreover, eight out of ten interviewees emphasised that effective leaders first needed to demonstrate a strategic vision for the development of the unit. They needed to decide which direction they were taking the unit, and to ensure that it was the right direction. This quality, according to the participants, required of a leader the ability to recognise the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the unit and then the ability to develop a strategic vision that could respond to the organisational demands and the social demands on a larger scale. Also, they needed to anticipate the trends to adjust the direction to achieve the best outcome. Thanh-Nhu elaborated:

A good leader, in my opinion, must have a good and right vision to lead the unit. He/she first needs to study the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of his/her unit. He/she must know for sure how he/she wants the unit to be like in ten years and then know how to develop long-term objectives for the unit to achieve. Importantly, this vision must be right and suitable to the setting. Otherwise, it would be a disaster. A leader without a vision is like a ship lost in the ocean with no direction towards the future. However, it is not easy to develop a good vision, and disappointedly, not all of us leaders could develop a good one. (Thanh-Nhu, interview data, June 28, 2011)

Thao-Huong also emphasised the importance of leaders demonstrating vision, saying:

For me, vision is the most important quality to a leader. My previous leader did not have a good vision which made it very hard for him and also for us. Therefore, since I got this position, I have always been trying to develop a suitable direction by investigating the present reality of my unit to identify advantages and limitations for further improvement. I also try to direct the operations of my unit in a way that could respond the best to the social demands and developing trends. (Thao-Huong, interview data, May 20, 2011)

Tam-Nguyen agreed with Thao-Huong:

Vision is the foremost quality that leaders need to have. Especially in this transitional time with many changes taking place in the society, leading with a vision is even more important. Leaders with vision will be able to lead their units to achieve good results. They would know the best way to develop their organisations. Without having a vision, leaders would easily get lost and confused about how to lead their units to achieve desirable outcomes. (Tam-Nguyen, interview data, June 23, 2011)

Xuyen-Phong agreed with the above participants that vision was critical to leaders. He also stressed the equal importance of making subordinates aware of these visions and directions in order to achieve higher motivation and involvement:

Leaders must have the ability to visualise the direction which their unit is following and, even more importantly, to ensure that this direction is good for the development of the unit. People usually associate visions to long-term meaning, but personally, I suppose that visions could possibly entail both long-term and short-term meaning. Leaders need to make sure that the vision they make for their unit is in accordance with the vision set for the larger organisation. They need to be able to have a vision as to how to develop their unit at least in the next two years. Equally importantly, leaders must ensure that their subordinates know and understand the vision/direction of the unit. Once the vision/direction is shared among the subordinates, they will be motivated and more involved in the unit's work, which will help increase the unit's performances. (Xuyen-Phong, interview data, June 21, 2011)

Similarly, Moc-Tuan explained:

In addition to developing a vision, leaders should also ensure that his subordinates be aware of the vision too. The latter should also be able to visualise the way they are going because leadership

involves team efforts. Therefore, vision sharing is just as important as vision development. (Moc-Tuan, interview data, June 23, 2011)

In brief, vision is very important to effective leaders. It is the foremost quality that effective leaders need to develop. Equally importantly, vision also needs to be understood and widely shared among members of the unit.

3.1.2. Knowledge

Questionnaire data showed that knowledge, supposedly associated with the professional learning mentioned above, was also very crucial to leaders, as indicated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6). In addition, many interviewees insisted that a good leader must have a profound insight, knowledge and expertise in his/her major as well as in leadership work. Thao-Huong said:

It is important that leaders be knowledgeable and capable because only knowledgeable and capable leaders can lead their unit to achieve good and positive outcomes. Moreover, leaders with knowledge and expertise can solve the problems at work in the best way possible. In whatever job, including leading jobs, knowledge always plays an important role. (Thao-Huong, interview data, May 20, 2011)

In addition to the above-mentioned formal knowledge, it was also reported that leaders needed a wide general comprehension of how this culture worked and how the units operated. This is called informal knowledge. Effective leaders need both formal knowledge and informal knowledge. Tam-Nguyen said:

Knowledge and expertise are important to me and, I believe, to all leaders, too. Knowledge here includes both academic meaning and life meaning. Beside good knowledge in his/her major, a good leader also needs an understanding of how things work in this culture and this university so that he/she can behave most appropriately and effectively in his/her particular context. (Tam-Nguyen, interview data, June 23, 2011)

To be able to have profound knowledge, it was mentioned that leaders needed to keep learning for their own self-improvement. Some participants called this the significance of self-study. They claimed that profound knowledge should accompany a thirst for further knowledge and efforts to improve knowledge to keep up with the changing world. Leaders should not be satisfied with their existing knowledge and

expertise; rather, they should never stop learning more and more. If a leader could foster a sense of non-stop self-study, he/she could set a good exemplar for his/her subordinates, which was of great help to the development of the unit. Moc-Tuan asserted:

As a leader, I always try to study more and more for my self-improvement. Knowledge is never enough for me and, I believe, for the other leaders, either. The world is developing very fast, so if we do not learn, we will be left behind. Leaders even need self-study more because they are like the captain of a ship, and if they are not updated with recent knowledge and insights, they would put their crew into jeopardy. Moreover, if a leader demonstrates a thirst for knowledge and endeavours to study further and further, he/she will encourage and motivate his/her subordinates to study more, too. (Moc-Tuan, interview data, June 23, 2011)

In short, as in any other aspects in society, knowledge and expertise play an important role in educational leadership. Therefore, leaders in this study perceived they should never stop widening and broadening their understanding, including both formal and informal knowledge.

3.1.3. Communication

Another crucial quality, according to the participants, was good communication skills. Half of the participants stated that leaders needed good communication skills so that they could communicate well about the unit's activities and the direction that the unit was going. Thu-Ha asserted that it was important that everyone in the unit be aware of what was going on within the unit and the direction they were following. She likened people working together in the same unit to people paddling together on the same boat towards set goals; if any of them failed to understand what they were doing and which direction they were taking, the whole team might fail. Therefore, Thu-Ha believed that in leadership work, along with a clear sense of strategic vision, a leader also needed to ensure that information sharing and good communication about the vision/direction be maintained within the unit:

I think that effective leaders need good communications skills to be able to communicate well with their subordinates about the unit's operations and the directions. Some leaders do not like to share information with their subordinates, which is not good. For me,

after each meeting every Monday afternoon with the President Board and other leaders, I inform my staff with updated information. Moreover, I try to communicate with my staff about the direction that I am leading my unit. I would like them to understand and work with me towards that vision/direction. And to be able to do this successfully, you need good communication skills. (Thu-Ha, interview data, May 12, 2011)

In addition, Ha-Diep pointed out that leaders also needed good communication skills to be able to persuade, motivate and inspire their subordinates towards set goals. Leaders needed to communicate well enough to provoke commitment, devotion and enthusiasm among their subordinates. Ha-Diep elaborated:

If a leader does not have good communication skills, it is hard for him/her to encourage participation and convince his/her subordinates to work together towards the set objectives. Therefore, leaders also need to learn to communicate well. (Ha-Diep, interview data, May 13, 2011)

All the above- mentioned $\neg T$ møqualities were claimed to be very important to leaders as they helped the leaders to improve professional performances and efficiency. It was noteworthy, however, that all of the participants emphasised that $\neg T$ âmøqualities were even more critical to leaders.

3.2. 'Tâm' qualities

Unlike $\neg T$ møqualities, which were task-oriented, $\neg T$ âmøqualities were described as moral and relation-oriented, and hence to include behaviours such as fostering a positive collegial work atmosphere, having integrity, demonstrating equity, and recognising contributions and accomplishments.

3.2.1. Fostering a positive collegial work atmosphere

The first quality is collegiality. Questionnaire data showed that collegiality was important to effective leadership, as indicated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6). Furthermore, all interviewees agreed that it was very important for the leaders to foster a positive collegial climate within the unit. They found that their subordinates were more committed and devoted working in a collegial atmosphere and thus their performances were significantly improved. The participants developed different ways of fostering a healthy collegial atmosphere. Some participants built collegial harmony

by being considerate towards their subordinates and by offering professional and even personal support. Bao-Chanh said:

I think that showing consideration toward my subordinates is very crucial. I learnt this from my own experience. My previous leader was very considerate to me and other colleagues, which made us more involved and committed to the job. I also notice similar positive influences on my subordinates when I show them that I care about them and their families. For example, every morning, I say hello to them and ask how they are doing in a smiling manner. When they need some support or guidance at work, I try to help them in a tactful manner so they don't feel they lose face. When they have some health problems or family issues, I ask after them, comfort them and try to help them. I want to make them feel warm working in the unit, like in their own family. To me, collegial harmony is really important. (Bao-Chanh, interview data, May 6, 2011)

Thao-Huong was in agreement with Bao-Chanh:

It is important that the leaders be considerate towards their subordinates because consideration from the leader will help improve their relationship with the subordinates. As a leader, it is crucial for me to develop a good relationship with my subordinates and to maintain a positive collegial work atmosphere. Collegiality will help improve the subordinates' satisfaction and hence promote their performances. (Thao-Huong, interview data, May 20, 2011)

Similarly, Mai-Tuyen expressed her ideas:

To do well at leading, leaders need to be considerate towards their subordinates. The subordinates and the leaders work together to fulfil the tasks, so it is important that they show consideration towards each other. Leadership is not just about giving orders; it is also about caring and showing consideration towards others. (Mai-Tuyen, interview data, May 27, 2011)

Other participants referred to collegiality as mutual respect between the leader and the subordinates. Thanh-Nhu elaborated on mutual respect:

If the subordinates respect the leaders, the leaders should respect the subordinate too. In my opinion, good leaders are those who respect their subordinates. It is such a shame that some leaders look down on their subordinates. I believe that mutual respect will help create a collegial working environment where everyone feels comfortable and committed to their job. (Thanh-Nhu, interview data, June 28, 2011)

Xuyen-Phong shared his opinion:

Mutual respect means being straightforward with each other. If the leader is not happy with one of the subordinates, the leader should organise a private conversation with that subordinate in which they can both discuss their opinions and explain themselves to understand each other. Similarly, if a subordinate feels upset with his/her leader, he/she should also talk to the leader. (Xuyen-Phong, interview data, June 21, 2011)

Importantly, Xuyen-Phong emphasised that there should be no talk behind someone's back because this unhealthy practice would result in a sense of distrust and disrespect and then a reduction in solidarity within the unit.

3.2.2. Having integrity

As demonstrated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data found that integrity was another important quality. Moreover, half of the interviewees considered it crucial. They commented:

Leaders need to be honest and have moral principles. In other words, they need to have integrity. A leader with integrity will get trust from their colleagues, and hence will do his/her leading job better. (Moc-Tuan, interview data, June 23, 2011)

I believe integrity is also important to leaders. Good leaders first need to be honest people with moral principles. Integrity will help leaders gain confidence from their colleagues and subordinates, which plays an important role in leadership. (Thanh-Nhu, interview data, June 28, 2011)

Integrity is important because it concerns morality. A leader without moral principles cannot do well in his/her job. If all the leaders could lead with integrity, there would be fewer unhealthy practices. (Tam-Nguyen, interview data, June 23, 2011)

Similarly, Ha-Diep asserted that integrity was important to effective leaders, either in their personal life or professional life. Integrity would make the leaders more trustworthy and reliable to colleagues, which would help the leaders to lead more effectively.

3.2.3. Having equity

Several participants perceived equity as crucial to effective leadership. Equity was defined as the leader's being fair and transparent in the way they treated their subordinates. Thuy-Hoa and Mai-Tuyen explained:

Leading with equity means viewing everyone equally without any preferences towards or bias against some subordinates at a personal level. Leaders should be aware that a subordinate should not be considered as more special than others because of his/her extraordinary family background. In Vietnam, the practice of favouritism and nepotism is still common, which is saddening. This quality of equity is very important, and without it the subordinates would lose trust in the leaders. (Thuy-Hoa, interview data, June 22, 2011)

As a leader, I always try to make sure that I treat my subordinates with equity because I think this quality is important. If I don't treat them fair, it might result in conflicts among them, which is not good for their job involvement and satisfaction. Moreover, a leader without equity cannot gain trust from their colleagues and subordinates. (Mai-Tuyen, interview data, May 27, 2011)

Thao-Huong also believed that equity was important. She added that treating subordinates with equity would encourage them to work harder and to perform better.

Questionnaire data revealed similar findings. As illustrated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6), equity was one of the important characteristics of effective leadership.

3.2.4. Recognising contributions and accomplishment

Recognition of contributions and accomplishment was listed as another relation-oriented quality. Some participants believed that leaders should recognise and acknowledge the contributions made by their subordinates. They suggested that subordinates would feel much more encouraged, motivated and self-confident if their leader appreciated their efforts and contributions. Thuy-Hoa reported:

I usually recognise my subordinates' efforts by giving praise, notes of thank-you and sometimes rewards to them. Though this is just a mental encouragement to the subordinates, it helps to significantly increase their job involvement and satisfaction. I find this works very well for me. (Thuy-Hoa, interview data, June 22, 2011)

In support of Thuy-Hoa, Thao-Huong also thought of this quality as important. Thao-Huong said:

When mistakes are made, some leaders usually criticise their subordinates, but when the subordinates do a good job, some leaders tend to forget to recognise the contribution and accomplishment of the subordinates, which is not fair. I believe everyone needs to be recognised for their efforts and contributions. This recognition does not need to include expensive rewards or financial gains; but rather, some good comments and appreciation to encourage the subordinates. I think leaders need to be more aware of this important quality. (Thao-Huong, interview data, May 20, 2011)

Data from the interviews identified the most important *Æ* qualities as including vision, knowledge, and communication, as well as *Æ* qualities, which included collegiality, integrity, equity, and praise and reward. Additionally, questionnaire data revealed how the respondents developed these qualities. As indicated by responses to question 6 (Appendix 6), the respondents developed these qualities through a variety of professional learning methods such as modelling, reflective practice, professional reading, and attending long-term and short-term training courses. More specifically, Respondent 1, Respondent 6 and Respondent 7 developed *Æ* and *Æ* qualities by continuously observing and learning from senior colleagues; Respondent 2, Respondent 3, Respondent 5 and Respondent 8 developed *Æ* and *Æ* qualities by reflecting upon their own leadership experiences; Respondent 3 and Respondent 5 developed these qualities by reading professional materials in educational leadership; and Respondent 4 and Respondent 8 developed them through long-term and short-term training courses.

Along with perceptions of effective leadership, views of sustainable leadership were another focus of this research. The following section will outline the perceptions of sustainable leadership in education held by participants.

4. Perceptions of sustainable leadership

Data indicated that the term *Æ* was very new to my research participants. Most participants admitted that they had never heard of the term before. They were uncertain and unconfident in the way they responded to questions

related to sustainable leadership. For example, some participants hesitated for a long time; some others seemed to be confused; and others even refused to give answers about sustainable leadership. Some of the participants, however, provided some general ideas about sustainable leadership:

I find this term very new, but sustainable leadership means to me leading with a strategic vision suitable to the social demands. Also, it involves long-term developments without ruining the existing resources such as the material, human and financial resources. (Ha-Diep, interview data, May 13, 2011)

I think sustainable leadership in education is similar to sustainable leadership in other areas. It simply means what is achieved today should be better than what was achieved yesterday. Similarly, what will be achieved tomorrow should be better than what is achieved today. (Moc-Tuan, interview data, June 23, 2011)

This is the first time I have heard of this term. However, I think sustainable leadership implies bringing long-term and sustainable benefits to the community. (Mai-Tuyen, interview data, May 27, 2011)

Several participants believed that sustainable leadership had a close relationship with effective leadership. Thao-Huong stated that to be sustainable, leadership first needed to be effective. In other words, sustainable leadership meant effective leadership developing over an extended time. Xuyen-Phong added that effective leadership was the necessary condition for sustainable leadership, and that sustainable leadership was the sufficient condition for effective leadership. This meant that sustainable leadership needed effective leadership as the foremost factor; and effective leadership needed sustainable leadership to make the former more effective and well-grounded. Both effective leadership and sustainable leadership complemented each other.

Some participants indicated that in order to develop sustainable leadership in education the leaders needed to acquire a wide knowledge of the current setting of the unit, as well as the influential factors (Thuy-Hoa). Moreover, the leaders also needed to be aware of the developing tendencies or trends of the society to adjust their vision suitable to the social demands (Bao-Chanh). In addition, the leaders needed the ability to recognise opportunities and more importantly, the ability to seize the right opportunities (Moc-Tuan). Furthermore, the leaders needed to know how to explore

and conserve human, material and financial resources (Ha-Diep). Additionally, the leaders always needed to keep learning to improve their knowledge and understanding, and not be left behind in the moving world (Thanh-Nhu).

In addition to perceptions of effective leadership and sustainable leadership, challenges faced by the participants in their leadership work also emerged as one of the important themes in the findings.

5. Challenges in leadership work

With respect to challenges faced in leadership work, data indicated that the participants were undergoing some challenges, amongst which the most salient included lack of collaboration across the university; difficulties as female leaders; and lack of autonomy.

5.1. Lack of collaboration across the university

One of the biggest challenges reported was the absence of effective collaboration among different units across the university. As indicated by responses to question 2 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data found that the leaders were not happy with the lack of collaboration among units across the university. Specifically, Respondent 3, Respondent 5, and Respondent 6 found the lack of collaboration frustrating to their leadership work. Eight interviewees considered it as a barrier to effective leadership. Tam-Nguyen expressed his frustration:

Working at this university requires cooperation and mutual support from different units. However, some units are not willing enough to collaborate with others in issues that are not directly related to them. Specifically, when they receive the request for support from my unit, they usually either do it very slowly or keep delaying doing it, which is very frustrating for me. This is not about each unit working individually, but rather, about all the units supporting each other as a whole for the benefit of the university. I would suggest that closer and more efficient collaboration be enhanced to achieve effective leadership. Take one example, more collaboration from the Property office is needed in accommodating lecturers with teaching equipment. (Tam-Nguyen, interview data, June 23, 2011)

Thao-Huong shared similar concerns:

One of the biggest challenges for me is the unwillingness to collaborate of some units. This university works as a human body with all the units interdependent of each other, but some of them just do not understand that. Quite often, I have proposed a request and had to wait for a very long time. I came to talk to them and they asked me to wait. Finally, I came to talk with the President Board to ask for support. Only then could I get what I requested for. It would be good if there were more collaboration among units at this university. It would make my leadership work, and also theirs, more efficient and effective. (Thao-Huong, interview data, May 20, 2011)

Thanh-Nhu stated that one of the possible reasons for this lack of collaboration was the ambiguity of the operational regulations. Ambiguous and unclear regulations led to confusion and overlapping responsibilities among units, which resulted in lack of collaboration. Thanh-Nhu suggested:

The operational regulations should be presented in a clear and straightforward manner to avoid confusion and overlap of responsibilities. Clear and straightforward operational regulations would also help leaders of different units know which responsibilities are theirs, which would help promote collaboration among units. (Thanh-Nhu, interview data, June 28, 2011)

In response to this issue, questionnaire data suggested that further collaboration could be achieved by forced collaboration. This point was illustrated by responses to question 7 (Appendix 6). Specifically, Respondent 1, Respondent 3, and Respondent 7 stated that the President Board should issue an act of collaboration across the university. This act could clearly specify terms and regulations of collaboration among units as well as punishments for unnecessary postponements of collaboration. Moreover, Respondent 2 and Respondent 4 emphasised that there should be clear and straightforward operational regulations which specify the defined responsibilities of each unit, in order to prevent the practices of 'passing the ball' among units.

5.2. Difficulties as female leaders

Amongst five female participants, only Thanh-Nhu said that she did not have difficulties as a female leader because her senior leaders and her family were very sensitive and supportive of her. However, not many female participants were that lucky. In fact, the other four female participants indicated that they had extra difficulties being female leaders. Mai-Tuyen said that she felt under-valued being a

female leader, and that her voice was not acknowledged as frequently as those of her male counterparts:

In a meeting, my opinions got ignored more often than the male leaders' opinions. I noticed that some male leaders still looked down on female leaders' ability. In this culture, especially in a small city like here, men still tend to think that men are better at work and that women are better in the kitchen. This is so unfair. (Mai-Tuyen, interview data, May 27, 2011)

In addition, the female participants complained that they are always under time pressure. They were expected to perform the multiple tasks of teaching, leading, doing research and family care at the same time and equally well, which was far beyond their ability. Many of them found themselves under pressure all the time. Thu-Ha reported that she was feeling very tired and stressed with her overloaded schedule. Sometimes, she even had to bring work home and worked over the weekend. This ruined her health and affected her family atmosphere. In a similar situation, Mai-Tuyen was feeling overwhelmed with work, even at weekends:

As the Head of a division, a lecturer and a researcher, I have been undergoing big work pressure. Sometimes I feel so exhausted. I hardly have time to rest. There are always things to solve and due dates to meet at work. I even bring things home to work at weekends. I don't have much time for my family. Moreover, as the Head I also need to go meet visitors; have lunch, dinner with them after work hours and at weekends. This is also tiring because I do not have enough time to rest. (Mai-Tuyen, interview data, May 27, 2011)

Ha-Diep identified another difficulty:

Some leaders in this culture tend to prefer solving work things when they hang out for dinner or drinking. And it is easier for male leaders to build relationships with each other than because they can talk about work issues in a more relaxed environment. Female leaders like me, however, are too busy with family after work to go for a drink like male leaders, so the distance between me and the other male leaders just gets bigger. (Ha-Diep, interview data, May 13, 2011)

Thu-Ha claimed that in Vietnamese culture, women were expected to take care of the children and housework in the family, which put another pressure on their shoulders in addition to the already overloaded responsibilities at work. Thu-Ha complained

that she felt stressed and exhausted with all these responsibilities. These female participants implied that they had to work much harder than their male counterparts to be able to achieve the same efficiency and effectiveness. Thuy-Hoa reported:

Leadership is not an easy job, and it is even more challenging for female leaders. As female leaders, we have to try very hard to meet all the duties, both at home and at work. In fact, to be as effective as male leaders, we women have to work much harder. (Thuy-Hoa, interview data, June 22, 2011)

In short, most female participants faced difficulties being female leaders in their leadership work. These difficulties included being considered inferior to men, and balancing between work and family.

5.3. Lack of autonomy

The research data indicated a lack of autonomy at this university. The participants suggested that they needed more autonomy in their leadership work. This autonomy included financial and staffing decisions.

Leaders like me should be allowed more autonomy in terms of financial and personnel management. We need more power in enrolling staff that we find capable. We need able people to develop the university. Similarly, we need more power with money to carry out the initiatives we have for our units. (Xuyen-Phong, interview data, June 21, 2011)

Questionnaire data corroborated the interview data. As indicated by responses to question 2 (Appendix 6), three respondents felt frustrated with restricted autonomy, particularly in terms of financial control and staffing decisions.

Like Xuyen-Phong, Ha-Diep was also concerned about the limited autonomy at this university. Ha-Diep, however, addressed autonomy in terms of personnel management and curriculum design. She argued that more autonomy in designing curriculum would also make the leaders become more self-confident, and hence more effective in their leadership work:

I believe this university in particular and other Vietnamese universities in general need more autonomy in terms of personnel management and curriculum design. More autonomy in personnel management would allow leaders to recruit capable people to work

for their units. With respect to curriculum design, we should not apply the same curriculum year after year because it might become backward and fail to respond to the social demands. Moreover, each university should be given more autonomy in designing their own curriculum which suits the local setting, such as the demands of the local labour market. (Ha-Diep, interview data, May 13, 2011)

To sum up, the leaders at this university experienced some challenges in their leadership work such as lack of collaboration across the university, difficulties as female leaders and lack of autonomy. These are the barriers that inhibit effective leadership practices.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has reported the findings of the data of the study. It has addressed five important areas of educational leadership. These areas are: understanding leadership and management, professional learning, perceptions of effective leadership, perceptions of sustainable leadership, and challenges in leadership work experienced by the research participants. The first section explored the participants' understanding of management and leadership. The findings revealed that the participants thought of management and leadership as distinct aspects, but considered that leaders needed both of them in their leadership work. The second section concerned professional learning. The data showed that the participants adopted a wide range of professional learning activities such as modelling, pre-service and in-service learning opportunities, professional reading, reflective practice, and engagement in Youth Union. The third section examined the participants' perceptions of effective leadership. According to the findings, the qualities that made effective leadership included *Technical* qualities and *Human* qualities. *Technical* qualities consisted of vision, knowledge and expertise, and communication, while *Human* qualities involved collegiality, integrity, equity, and recognition of contribution and accomplishment. The fourth section investigated the participants' perceptions of sustainable leadership. These perceptions included areas such as understanding the term *sustainable leadership*, the relationship between effective leadership and sustainable leadership, and how to develop sustainable leadership. The findings indicated poor knowledge of sustainable leadership at this university. Findings also suggested leaders at this university faced many challenges in their leadership work. These challenges included

lack of collaboration across the university, difficulties as female leaders, and lack of autonomy. All the aspects examined in this chapter provided answers to the research questions. The next chapter will discuss the findings of this study in relation to these questions and the literature review. It will also discuss probable reasons for these findings with reference to the particular context of Vietnam.

Chapter Six: Discussions of Findings

This chapter discusses the findings of the study. It comprises five sections and compares and contrasts the findings in relation to the research questions and the literature. It also provides probable reasons for these findings with reference to the context of Vietnam. The first section focuses on participants' perceptions of the relationship between leadership and management. The second discusses the professional learning activities adopted by the participants in their leadership work. Perceptions of qualities of effective leadership are then examined, followed by discussion of sustainable leadership. Finally, salient challenges to leadership are highlighted.

1. Understanding leadership and management

Findings from this study suggested that participants differentiated between leadership and management. Their definitions of these two terms showed that they, like many scholars in the literature, viewed leading and managing as distinct processes (Hickman, 1990; Kotter, 1988; Mintzberg, 1973; Rost, 1991). Specifically, they shared similar points of view with Kotter (1990) in that leadership was associated with longer time frames and management with shorter time frames. Furthermore, some participants such as Moc-Tuan were in agreement with Bennis and Nanus (1985) who said that leaders were those who did the right things as opposed to managers who did things right. With an emphasis on leadership, these leaders indicated that leadership involved an influence process, which is an idea widely agreed upon in empirical research (House et al., 1999; Northouse, 2007; Rauch & Behling, 1984; Yukl, 2010). Moreover, as stated by Ha-Diep, leadership was associated with creating changes. Ha-Diep's claim is supported by Kotter (1990) who argued that "an effective leadership process can help produce the changes necessary to bring a chaotic situation under control" (p. 7). Although the participants saw leading and management as different, they all agreed that both were needed to achieve desirable outcomes. In fact, Mai-Tuyen and Thu-Ha emphasised that educational leaders needed to exercise both management and leadership in their job to be effective. This finding is consistent with those of other studies in the literature, for example the work of Kotter (1990) and Yukl (2010).

It is surprising and encouraging to learn that the participants appeared to have acquired a comprehensive understanding of leadership and management, despite limited literature in this field in Vietnam. It is believed that these insights have been acquired from reading Western literature. This is a positive indicator of their practices of professional reading for self-improvement.

Evidence from this study also indicated an application of managerial models within leadership at this university. Their concept of leadership is found to be managerial in two respects. Firstly, data showed that some leaders had a managerial conceptualisation in that they considered themselves as managers rather than leaders, although they acknowledged their leadership roles in the organisation. For example, Moc-Tuan claimed that only those who stayed at the top like the Presidents and Vice-Presidents were leaders, and those at the middle level like himself were more like managers. However, according to Goffee and Jones (2002) whose business ideas have been adapted for an educational context, this claim is a misconception as top leaders might have got to their top positions because of political reasons; in fact, real leaders are found throughout an institution. With this managerial conceptualisation in mind, these participants tended to act more like managers who were concerned about efficiency and about how things got done, rather than like leaders who focused on effectiveness and on what things meant to people. Secondly, their managerial conceptualisation was also revealed by their word choice throughout the data; that is, their use of *direction/directing* to refer to *leadership/leading* or *subordinates* to refer to *colleagues* in their quotes. Such terms revealed their managerial thinking and that they were functioning as hierarchical managers, although they were assuming leadership positions. This thinking would undoubtedly frame their leadership practices in managerial ways.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that these leaders had good insight of the theoretical differences between leading and managing, and that they had acquired clear and full perceptions of their leading roles. However, their theoretical perceptions were found to contrast with their actual practices in that they were leading by applying a more managerial model in practice, shown, as noted, by their viewing themselves as managers and referring to their colleagues as subordinates. A probable explanation

for this contrast is that Vietnamese cultural context in general, and the organisational culture at this university in particular, fosters a managerial hierarchical system that has dominated for centuries. Under this culture, leaders, as passive ambassadors of culture (Lumby & Foskett, 2008, p. 52), are prepared, assigned and expected to act in accordance with a certain set of beliefs and values and to convey those imposed and inherited values to staff and students within their institution. This rooted practice of hierarchy in Vietnam, like elsewhere in eastern culture, cannot be changed overnight. In essence, what is being required in making such changes is placing this university at conflict with the wider cultural context and the prevailing socio-political norms of Vietnamese society. With the influence of globalisation as well as western literature, these Vietnamese leaders were becoming more aware of and exposed to the modern and less hierarchical leadership models of the western contexts. This is a positive start. However, it will take time before the Vietnamese hierarchical managerial model can be shifted to a more distributed leadership model.

2. Professional learning

It is stimulating to learn that the participants in this study adopted a wide range of activities for their professional learning. These included modelling and mentoring; pre-service and in-service learning opportunities; professional reading; reflective practice; and engagement in the Vietnam Youth Union. The following section will detail and discuss each activity.

2.1. Modelling and mentoring

Modelling, considered as one of the potential roles and corresponding functions of mentoring (Carter, 1999), in this study is defined as the action of observing the ways in which others lead to draw lessons for self-reflection, and it could include both positive and negative modelling. Although modelling is not well documented in the published research literature of educational leadership in the Vietnamese context, the power of modelling as a professional learning activity is undeniable. In fact, this study found that modelling was the most frequently mentioned learning activity reported by the leaders at this university. This point was illustrated by Thu-Ha, Thao-Huong, and Bao-Chanh who insisted that they learnt professionally from observing

the ways their colleagues and senior leaders led. Further to that, questionnaire data indicated that modelling was valuable to leadership professional learning, as illustrated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6). This finding is consistent with Roberts (2007) who notes that modelling is a powerful force for new educational leaders. Similarly, some research concludes that "through the modelling, guidance, and support of one another, teachers and principals can transfer theories into practice, exercise leadership, and critically examine and reflect on their educational beliefs, values, and practices" (Strachan et al., 2003, p. 38).

It is worth noting here that at this university, while modelling is recognised as a powerful professional learning activity, mentoring is ignored, although these two concepts are mutually inclusive, because modelling can be one of the roles or strategies employed in mentoring. The participants appeared to be not yet aware of the positive influences of mentoring on leadership professional learning, although these have been well researched in the literature (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Daresh, 2004; Fagan & Walter, 1982; Playko, 1995; Stott & Walker, 1992). Some participants said that they had no mentors; others assumed that their mentors were their higher leaders such as those in the President Board, who they turned to for professional instructions in times of difficulty. This suggests that there exists uncertainty and confusion about the concept of "mentoring" in this institution. Malderez (2001) defines mentoring as the "support given by one (usually more experienced) person for the growth and learning of another, and for their integration into and acceptance by a specific community" (p. 57). In other research, D'Abate, Eddy and Tannenbaum (2003) describe mentoring as "modelling, counseling, supporting, advocating, introducing and sheltering as exhibited behaviours" (p. 376) with a general development objective being met over a long timeframe. Mentoring could take either the informal form of colleagues providing advice, opinions and support, or the formal form of people specifically designated to perform mentoring work in a mentoring scheme (Hobson & Sharp, 2005). In other words, mentoring is not professional instructions from higher leadership authority, as some participants assumed.

One possible reason for the poor knowledge of mentoring in this institution is that these leaders are not exposed to this concept due to limited literature on educational leadership in Vietnam. Also, though the area of mentoring has been well written about, most of the literature in this field is presented in the English language and in Western settings, which might create the barriers of language comprehension and contextual differences and difficulties for these leaders. This limited knowledge of mentoring could also be due to the cultural and historical setting of Vietnam where these leaders have never been exposed to mentoring in their professional lives, and have therefore never had the opportunity to experience it themselves. This finding about the lack of theoretical knowledge and practical application of mentoring in Vietnamese universities identifies a gap in the literature that requires further investigation and research.

Despite the sketchy knowledge of mentoring indicated in the interviews, questionnaire data suggested that some leaders believed mentoring and coaching programmes would be valuable to them, as indicated by their responses to question 4 (Appendix 6). This is an interesting finding. It shows some leaders at this university are becoming aware of the benefits of mentoring and coaching programmes.

2.2. Pre-service and in-service professional learning opportunities

Unsurprisingly, evidence from this study identified a lack of preparedness for leadership, and of pre-service learning opportunities. For example, Thu-Ha asserted that she was not provided with any pre-service programme before assuming her leadership role, which made her feel lost and confused early in her leadership work. This finding is consistent with those of another study conducted in Greece by Gkolia and Brundrett (2008) who also noticed a shortage of leadership training for school leaders prior to appointment due to the centralisation of the educational system. Most participants examined in the present study had not traditionally received any compulsory training prior to assuming their position as leaders, and thus they felt unprepared for the job. Notably, they did have postgraduate study at Masters level before appointment, but in most cases, their study did not specialise in educational leadership or educational management, a lack which presented certain challenges to them at an early stage. They were appointed to leadership positions probably because

they were good teachers or because they were knowledgeable in their field, such as pedagogy, TESOL or philosophy, rather than in leadership or management. This practice may seem unreasonable; however, it is exercised commonly in Vietnam where issues of educational leadership and management are still under researched and where it is traditionally believed that leaders do not need pre-service learning and prior knowledge in leadership before their assumption of leadership roles. Therefore, this finding which highlights the significance of pre-service learning challenges a traditional belief held by this university leadership, and more broadly, by the wider Vietnamese society.

In-service professional learning opportunities in this study are defined as the opportunities offered to the leaders during the time they hold their leadership positions, to attend long-term or short-term training courses in leadership within Vietnam or overseas to improve their leadership knowledge, understanding and skills. The findings indicated an insufficient provision of in-service professional learning opportunities for these middle leaders that hindered the effectiveness of their leadership practices. As shown by Bao-Chanh's comments, the leaders at this university did not have enough in-service learning opportunities during their assuming of leadership roles, which had made their leadership work more difficult. Moreover, questionnaire data identified the lack of in-service learning opportunities as frustrating to leadership work, as illustrated by responses to question 2 (Appendix 6). This finding is aligned with other studies in the Solomon Islands including Malasa (2007) and Akao (2008) that identify this issue as one of the factors inhibiting educational leadership at secondary school level. This is an issue confronted not only by educational leaders in developing countries like Vietnam, but also by those in developed countries including the United Kingdom (Paterson & West-Burnham, 2005) and Australia (Anderson, Kleinhenz, Mulford & Gurr, 2008).

There are several possible reasons why the middle leaders at this university had not had enough opportunities for in-service professional learning, as indicated in my study. The first explanation, noted by Bao-Chanh, is that leadership training programmes in Vietnam tend to concentrate on top leaders and pay little attention to the middle leaders. Consequently, few training opportunities are offered to these

middle leaders. Further to that, this institution as a young provincial university with limited funding cannot afford to send all of its leaders to leadership centres in the region or overseas for professional learning as requested. This disadvantage requires the leaders, if they are to get training in leadership, take an active role in looking for opportunities from external leadership organisations or scholarship programmes, rather than wait for opportunities to come to them from within the university.

According to interview data and questionnaire data, many participants insisted that traditional training activities such as short workshops, seminars, and training courses were very beneficial to them in that these activities helped them to gain knowledge and skills that could be applied to practical settings. For example, Thuy-Hoa commented that she would have led better if she had been attended more 'one-shot' workshops and seminars in leadership. This claim is, however, based on the participants' perceptions and is not necessarily what may be best for them. In fact, the literature suggests that leaders can gain little more than superficial information through traditional types of short-term training activities such as 'one-shot' workshops, seminars, and training courses (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991; Lieberman & Miller, 1999; Little, 1989; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Speck & Knipe, 2001). This finding thus indicates a tension between the participants' perceptions and the literature. This finding is related to another finding which revealed that short-term non-degree training courses such as workshops, seminars, or conferences were preferred to longer-term courses with degrees such as postgraduate study in leadership. As demonstrated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6), which allows respondents to choose more than one options, questionnaire data showed that eight respondents believed short-term training activities would be valuable to them, while only four respondents believed long-term training activities would help their professional learning. Moreover, it was noted that when the participants mentioned learning opportunities, they mainly meant short-time activities such as 'one-shot' workshops, seminars, training sessions, and the like, rather than long-time activities such as postgraduate study with degrees. This indicates a tension between their preference and some research in the literature which suggests that longer-term deep learning is more beneficial than short-term immediate learning (Davies, 2007; Fullan,

2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006), and that longer more intensive programmes and qualifications are more effective than short ones.

Another question that has emerged from data concerns the quality of leadership training courses. It is encouraging to learn that a two-week training course in leadership was organised at this university last year for senior and middle leaders. However, the quality of the course was brought into question. Some participants such as Tam-Nguyen complained that the course was too theoretical and failed to link theory with practice. This happens not only in Vietnam; a failure to link theory with practice in leadership programmes is also reported in developed countries like the United States (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010). In the context of Vietnam, this finding is not surprising. The education system in Vietnam still fosters a theoretic learning approach, so most programmes, including leadership training programmes in the participant's view, tend to concentrate too much on theory and lack practical application of new knowledge. This problem has been long identified as a weakness of the Vietnamese education system, and concerted efforts have been made to improve it. However, it takes time before this theoretic approach can be shifted to a more balanced one.

Recognising the limitations of the above-mentioned course, some participants including Tam-Nguyen and Thao-Huong, suggested that this course should have been more practical rather than theoretical and should have been organised in a way that best met the different needs of adult learners. This finding is aligned with the empirical literature about effective design of professional development programmes for leaders. Specifically, Davis et al. (2005) suggest that these programmes should be coherent in that they offer a logical and sequential arrangement of coursework, learning activities, and programme structures that link theory and practice. These learning activities should also be organised in a way that connects past experiences to newly acquired knowledge, and provides different approaches for applying new insights in practical settings (Granott, 1998; Lave, 1991). Davis et al. (2005) have argued that these programmes need to include a variety of methods such as field-based internships, problem-based learning approaches, cohort groups and mentoring, to best respond to the different needs of adult learners. These studies with their

implications and recommendations could serve as useful reference points for the Vietnamese leadership centres and institutions, so that they could design and organise more effective and successful leadership training programmes for educational leaders in Vietnam.

2.3. Professional reading

This study indicated that professional reading was another learning activity reported by the participants. As shown by Thanh-Nhu's comment, leaders felt could benefit greatly from reading professional materials in educational leadership. In support of this claim, the questionnaire data revealed that four respondents learnt substantially from professional reading, as illustrated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6). This finding is also compatible with the literature. In a study conducted in the Netherlands by Kwakman (2003), professional reading is noted as a frequently mentioned learning activity used to achieve new knowledge and information. Similarly, this finding is congruent with Md-Nor's (1996) research in New Zealand in that professional reading is considered as an important source of information for leaders. It is believed that this professional learning activity is favoured because it offers the leaders 'food for thought' and the flexibility to choose where and when to read at their convenience. Professional reading is important because it helps leaders to strengthen and deepen their existing knowledge. Additionally, reading professional materials also helps leaders to keep up with most recent knowledge, insights, and developments in their professional field. In addition, Bloom and Krovetz (2009) emphasise that professional reading is important because educational leaders as part of an academic profession have 'a fundamental obligation to ground our daily work in the history, theory, research and current thinking' (p. 95). However, it should be noted that professional reading should not just mean discussing at surface level or skimming materials due to lack of time, as suggested by Bao-Chanh's comment. Rather, it should move beyond that superficial reading and involve professionally focused reading practices to achieve a foundation of content knowledge (Scribner, 1999).

In reference to professional reading, an interesting finding from the data raised the question of how to apply the knowledge and insights acquired from professional

reading to the daily reality of leaders at this university. A few participants such as Thu-Ha expressed their concern about the suitability of the literature to their context. It should be taken into account that most of the existing literature in educational leadership available and accessible in Vietnam is written in the western context which is different from the eastern context of Vietnam. Consequently, the unquestioning application of these insights without reference to the particular context of Vietnam in general and of this university in particular would have little prospect of success. Indeed, some leadership theories proven to be effective in western countries do not always work well in Asian countries like Vietnam because of cultural, historical and political differences such as hierarchical thinking and the centralised mechanism of governance. In other words, context matters, and thus should be taken into consideration in educational leadership studies. The influence of context on leadership is referred to as 'the sensitivity to context' of leadership (Bryman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996, p. 353). Hallinger and Heck (1996) make a similar point when they conclude that it is virtually meaningless to investigate leadership without reference to the institutional context. Hallinger (2003) defines the context of an institution as constraints, resources and opportunities that the leaders must be aware of in order to lead. All these concerns require the leaders at this Vietnamese university be selective and cautious in applying what they have read in the literature to their actual practices of leadership. As indicated by Thu-Ha's comment, the leaders should be selective and thoroughly consider the suitability and appropriateness of the western literature in educational leadership before realising it. They also need, as Hallinger (2003) suggests, to link the appropriate model of leadership to the needs of their institution context.

2.4. Reflective practice

Reflective practice, in this study, refers to self-reflection and learning from one's own leadership experiences and mistakes. Reflective practice has been argued to have positive influences on teachers' professional learning (Calderhead & Gates, 1993; Day, 1993; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Evidence from this study suggests that reflective practice also benefits educational leaders professionally. In fact, several participants in this research including Mai-Tuyen and Thao-Huong asserted that they

learnt best by reflecting upon their own experiences and mistakes. Moreover, questionnaire data suggested that many leaders have learnt professionally from their own experiences and mistakes through reflective practice, as demonstrated by responses to question 4 (Appendix 6). This finding is consistent with Day (2000), who concludes that engagement in reflective practice helps educational leaders to develop their critical thinking and emotional intelligence and thus helps them learn to become better at leading.

It has been argued that reflective practice has a close correlation with critical thinking. Specifically, Brookfield (1995) suggests that critical thinking can be considered as a deeper, more intense, and more probing form of reflection. More recently, Roffey-Barensten and Malthouse (2008) contend that reflective practice can improve critical thinking skills. Therefore, it could be inferred from the participants' engagement in reflective practice that they have started to think critically, or at least they have developed an early stage of thinking critically. This finding is important given that Vietnamese culture does not foster a practice of critical thinking. In fact, since early education, Vietnamese children are taught and expected to observe social conventions without questioning. As a result, most Vietnamese people tend to become uncritical. This uncritical thinking is threatening to any profession and discipline in Vietnam, including educational leadership. In this sense, this finding is exciting as it discloses a shift towards more critical reflection amongst professionals in education. However, further examination and research are needed in this area to help the educational leaders at Vietnamese universities to be aware of the importance of critical thinking and also to learn to think more critically throughout their time in leadership. Equally importantly, further effort and attention is needed in this area to help leaders develop confidence and capability to put some of the initiatives into action to bring about change. This will require significant cultural change from top university leadership as well.

2.5. Engagement with the Vietnam Youth Union activities

Data indicated that leadership knowledge and skills could also be acquired through engagement in the Youth Union activities. Youth Union, short for Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, is a social-political organisation of Vietnamese youth, and

is led by the Communist Party of Vietnam. This union has millions of members and branches throughout the country. The Youth Union works with the police, the military, the Vietnam Fatherland Front, the Vietnam Women's Association, the education sector and other social and political unions and associations to support Vietnamese youth, and to encourage them in a healthy lifestyle. In Vietnam, within each tertiary institution, there is a branch of Youth Union that organises a wide range of community service and development activities for students and staff that offer good opportunities to learn to be active and to work with others. As noted by Thanh-Nhu and Thuy-Hoa, engagement in these activities could have positive influences on leadership development in such areas as self-confidence, communication and organisation skills. This finding is revealing in that it links another professional learning activity for educational leaders in Vietnam to the existing literature; that is, learning through engagement in the development activities of a social-political organisation.

3. Perceptions of effective leadership

Consistent with research by Yukl (2010) who addresses effective leadership in terms of task-oriented and relation-related categories, evidence from this study revealed that qualities of effective leadership, in participants' perceptions, were divided into *-T m* and *-Tâm* categories. They were considered to be correlational, with each unable to work well without the other. Although these two terms seem to be similar in spelling—with only a little mark as the difference, they are very different in meaning. *-T m* qualities refer to task accomplishment and abilities, while *-Tâm* qualities refer to consideration and relationships. It is worth noting here that the definitions of these two terms are interpreted relative to this study, and different disciplines might interpret them in different ways. As illustrated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data indicated that the respondents defined *-T m* as task-oriented leadership behaviours that were concerned with task accomplishment and efficiency. On the other hand, *-Tâm* qualities were defined by the respondents as moral and relation-oriented leadership behaviours which were concerned with building relationships and cooperation within the unit. In this research, *-T m* qualities were

interpreted as vision, knowledge and communication and *Tâm* qualities as collegiality, integrity, equity and recognition of contribution and accomplishments.

3.1. 'Tâm' qualities

Literally, *Tâm* means vision. As indicated by questionnaire data, *Tâm* qualities were defined by the respondents as associated with task accomplishment and thus concerned primarily with the leaders' abilities to achieve effective leadership. In this study, these abilities are reported to include a clear sense of vision, a profound knowledge base and effective communication skills. This section will discuss these qualities in depth, respectively.

3.1.1. Vision

Vision, simply defined, is a mental image or future orientation that provides guidance for an organisation toward what it wishes to accomplish (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory [SEDL], 1993). In this study, the majority of the participants highlighted the significance of vision for effective educational leadership. For example, Thao-Huong stated that vision was a highly important quality for an effective leader. This finding is supported by Nanus (1992) who asserts that "vision is [the] key to leadership, and leadership is the key to organisational success" (p. 7). Similarly, Lashway (1997) considers vision as "a make-or-break task" (p. 1) for the leaders who strive to achieve effective leadership. More recently, Bryman (2007) finds that effective departmental leaders are those who provide a clear sense of strategic vision concerning the routes their units should be taking. In the context of a developing country like Vietnam, vision is also a very important component of effective leadership, as illustrated by Tam-Nguyen who viewed vision as the foremost quality of an effective leader. At the same time, unfortunately, lack of vision can also be identified as one of the commonly found weaknesses amongst leaders in education in Vietnam. As shown by Thanh-Nhu's comment, not all educational leaders in Vietnam had a vision for their units or organisations. This may be because Vietnam is undergoing a transition period from thousand-year conservative feudalist thinking to more modern western thinking, and therefore, there are many changes going on in the society and much confusion resulting. Within this transition period, educational

leaders are faced with conflicting ideas between the old and the new; between the traditional and the modern; and between Western and Asian thinking. These conflicts which mirror broader social changes in Vietnam resulting from globalisation, challenge educational leaders to make good choices and to develop a good vision, ða signpost pointing the way for all who need to understand what the organisation is and where it intends to goö (Nanus, 1992, p. 9). Vision development is, undoubtedly, not an easy or straightforward task for leaders. Thanh-Nhu suggested that developing a vision required the leaders to consider four elements of the SWOT analysis theory (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the organisation) to best respond to the organisational and social demands. In addition, Lashway (1997) contends that vision development is an evolutionary process rather than a one-time event, and hence requires continuous reflection, action, and reevaluation.

As important as it is to be aware of the significance of vision development, it is equally important to note that vision development alone is not enough. The study data indicated that a shared vision was just as important as vision development. This was supported by Xuyen-Phong and Moc-Tuan who emphasised that it was important that the vision be widely shared amongst all members if the university is to advance. This finding is aligned with many other studies in the literature. Nanus (1992) contends that a vision is no more than an empty dream until it is widely shared and accepted. In support of this point, Fritz (1996) indicates that organisations improve with a clear and widely shared vision that motivates people to work together to reduce the gap between the real and the ideal. This finding is revealing as it demonstrates an awareness of distributed leadership, in which vision, beliefs and values are widely understood and shared amongst the leaders and other members of the university.

3.1.2. Knowledge/ expertise

As indicated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data showed that effective educational leaders, in participantsøperceptions, also needed to be knowledgeable in their content areas. This was also illustrated by Thao-Huongø insistence on the connection between the leadersøstrong knowledge base and their superior problem-solving ability through which they could lead more effectively, and achieve positive outcomes. This finding is not surprising as Vietnam is a knowledge-

centred society where knowledge and expertise are highly regarded in every discipline. Correspondingly, leaders are expected to possess and demonstrate wide knowledge and expertise. In addition to an expectation of this formal academic knowledge of curriculum and research in the content areas, data also indicated an emphasis on informal knowledge that included an understanding and comprehension of how things work and how to get things done in this culture. For example, Tam-Nguyen insisted that informal knowledge was of equal importance to formal knowledge as the former helped leaders to behave most appropriately and effectively in their particular context. This finding is consistent with research in the existing literature. In a study about personal attributes of leaders, Bass (1990) concludes that one of the most important abilities of effective leaders is practical knowledge about the contexts in which they were selected as leaders. Similarly, in an effort to examine dimensions of effective leadership at high school level in the United States, informal knowledge is also indicated as important to effective leadership (Blase, 1987).

It is also significant that participants associated the importance of knowledge to a thirst for further knowledge, or fondness for further learning. This was indicated by Moc-Tuan's comment that effective leaders were those who were not satisfied with their existing knowledge base and were keen on learning further to keep up with the developing society and educational changes. This finding is encouraging and well matched with the Vietnamese tradition of fondness for learning that reflects the broader social and cultural conventions affected by Confucian thinking. In a more political sense, this fondness for learning is, to some extent, also inspired by the well known Communist thinker, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. His quote of "Học, học nữa, học mãi" (Learn, learn and once again learn) which demonstrates a great thirst for further knowledge has been an important guiding principle for Vietnamese people. Moreover, this spirit of non-stop learning is embodied Ho Chi Minh, the Former President of Vietnam, who represented an important role model as a continual learner for Vietnam's students.

3.1.3. Communication

Good communication has been argued in the literature to be a crucial quality that effective leaders need (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Bass, 1990, Bryman,

2007). This claim is consistent with findings of this study. Data revealed that these participants considered communication important to effective leadership in two ways. Firstly, some participants including Thu-Ha stated that an effective leader needed to have the ability to communicate well about the vision or the direction that the unit was following. In other words, an effective leader should ensure that information sharing and effective communication about the vision be maintained amongst all the members of the unit. This claim is associated with the notion of shared vision that has been discussed earlier in this chapter, and is consistent with Ruqebatu (2008) research in the Solomon Islands about elements of effective leadership at high school level, which suggests that good communication is a crucial element. Moreover, Bryman (2007) finds that effective leaders need good communication to make sure that their staffs are aware of the direction of the unit.

Secondly, Ha-Diep said that an effective leader needed good communication skills to encourage participation from others, to convince others about the quality of his/her ideas, and to motivate them to work together towards these ideas. Ha-Diep's comment is supported by Bass (1990) who contends that effective leadership requires the ability to communicate persuasively to others to enlist their support.

It is undeniable that 'T' qualities including vision, knowledge, and communication are crucial to effective leadership. However, 'T' qualities alone are not sufficient. Effective leadership also needs consideration-related qualities that help build positive relationships, collaboration and a collegial working environment. These qualities are known as 'Tâm' qualities.

3.2. 'Tâm' qualities

Literally, 'Tâm' means heart. Within this general meaning, 'Tâm' might mean different things to different people. However, 'Tâm' qualities in this study were understood as including collegiality, integrity, equity, and recognition of contribution and accomplishments.

3.2.1. Collegiality

As illustrated by responses to question 5 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data indicated that a positive collegial work atmosphere was crucial to effective leadership. Moreover, all interviewees emphasised that collegiality was of great importance to effective leadership. This finding corresponds to ideas widely recognised in the literature on effective leadership (Ambrose et al., 2005; Benoit & Graham, 2005; Gomes & Knowles, 1999; Mitchell, 1987; Moses & Roe, 1990; Trocchia & Andrus, 2003). Bryman (2007) concludes that collegiality is an important aspect of leadership effectiveness in Western settings. In the context of a university in Vietnam, this finding of collegiality perceived as an important quality of effective leadership is intriguing, given the existing adherence to a hierarchical structure at this university and more broadly, in this country. Vietnam has been influenced by Confucianism and thus a very hierarchical and bureaucratic structure with high power distance is accepted as a fundamental characteristic of the society (House et al., 2004). As explained earlier in chapter 2, power distance refers to the degree to which members of a group expect and agree that power should be shared unequally; it also creates levels between people based on power, authority, prestige, status, wealth and material possessions (Northouse, 2007). With this high power distance in mind, the likely assumption is that collegiality between the leader and the led is something out of the question, not only in education but in other societal aspects as well. However, and surprisingly, this finding is indicative of an awareness of the importance of collegial harmony as part of effective leadership. One probable reason for this awareness is that most participants in this study, as indicated by the interviews data, completed their postgraduate study in western countries, so they are perhaps more inclined to accept and perceive a collegial relationship with their subordinate colleagues as a significant contributor to effective leadership.

Participants also suggested that a sense of collegiality could be achieved through the leaders demonstrating consideration towards others. Bao-Chanh emphasised that effective leaders were considerate people who cared about how others felt, and who were willing to give professional and even personal support. Consideration from the leader is important in that it helps enhance job involvement and commitment. This

finding is consistent with those of many other studies in the literature (Bass, 1990; Bryman, 2007; Winter, Taylor, & Sarros, 2000).

In addition to consideration, data revealed that mutual respect also helps to build collegiality and contributes to effective leadership; this was shown by Xuyen-Phong's comments. This point is well documented in the literature (Gomes & Knowles, 1999; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Murry & Stauffacher, 2001; Trocchia & Andrus, 2003). In an investigation of effective leadership in schools facing challenging circumstances, Harris and Chapman (2002) report that effective leaders are those who respect others and treat each person as an individual. In support of this claim, research by Trocchia and Andrus (2003) reveals that treating faculty with respect is ranked as one of the most crucial behaviours for effective leaders. The finding concerning mutual respect in this study was interesting. It contrasts with the normative thinking of a power-driven society like Vietnam where junior colleagues are expected to respect their seniors without question, and without an expectation of respect in return. The finding of this awareness of the need for mutual respect is, therefore, intriguing, as it indicates a change in how the educational leaders at this university think about the relationship between themselves, as the leaders, and their junior colleagues.

3.2.2. Integrity

A large body of research has drawn attention to the significance of integrity to effective leadership (Ambrose et al, 2005; Bryman, 2007; Gomes & Knowles, 1999; Harris & Chapman, 2002; Trocchia & Andrus, 2003). In a review of research on traits of effective leaders conducted by Judge et al. (2002), integrity appears in multiple studies. Similar findings were reported in my study, with half of the participants considering this quality important to effective leadership. Ha-Diep explained that integrity would make the leaders more trustworthy to their staff, which was important to effective leadership. This point of integrity is also crucial to a broader scope of Vietnamese society where there still exists an inextricable problem of corruption. Culturally, Vietnam accepts high power distance between the leaders and the led as a characteristic of an orderly structure. This high power distance society that lacks trust and cooperation provides a fertile ground for corruption (Davis & Ruhe, 2003). Moreover, the extremely low salaries in Vietnam open the door for potential corrupt

practices (Fry, 2006). Therefore, integrity is not only a key to effective leadership in the education sector, but also a solution to the problem of corruption in other sectors in Vietnam.

3.2.3. Equity

Another aspect commented upon was equity, or fairness. Equity in this study means leaders treating everyone the same with neither preference towards nor bias against junior colleagues. The participants believed that equity would help the leaders gain trust from others and hence enhance their leadership effectiveness. For example, Thuy-Hoa stressed that a leader should never treat a member in a more special way than others just because of his/her better family background. Thuy-Hoa's comment is related to the cultural characteristic of favouritism in Vietnam. The Vietnamese culture still adopts a practice in which people are usually professionally evaluated based on their family background and contacts, rather than on their own merit. Differently stated, a person whose parents are occupying important public positions with a large circle of influential contacts will be favoured over those from an ordinary family. Such a practice of favouritism, supposedly related to nepotism, is common in Asian countries, and has also been reported in the Melanesian context (Warsal, 2009). Favouritism is, undoubtedly, an impediment to leadership effectiveness as it discourages people from improving their professional competence, and it fosters the misleading perception that leaders are born, not made. It is, nonetheless, still widely adopted in Vietnam. Bearing this in mind, the study's finding concerning equity is encouraging. It shows that the educational leaders interviewed were becoming critical of some of the unfair practices traditionally been believed to be the social and cultural norms in Vietnam.

3.2.4. Recognition of contributions and accomplishments: praise and rewards

As illustrated by Thao-Huong's comment on the significance of praise and reward on staff motivation, data suggested that the participants perceived effective leaders as those who knew to use praise and rewards as a way of recognising contributions and accomplishments made by their subordinate colleagues. Thuy-Hoa clarified that rewards did not mean expense or monetary gains, rather it is more like a mental encouragement and appreciation for effort and good performance. The participants

considered praise and rewards helped to increase job involvement and satisfaction amongst faculty. This point about praise and rewards is described by Bass (1990) as contingent reward, one of the four dimensions of transactional leadership, which was addressed earlier in Chapter 3. This claim, however, is just the participants' perceptions and is not necessarily what is most helpful to effective leadership. In fact, the literature suggests that rewards can have negative effects on intrinsic motivation (Cameron, Banko, Pierce, 2001; Carton, 1996; Lepper & Green 1978). Therefore, this finding indicates a tension between the participants' perceptions and what is indicated as effective in the literature.

It is important to identify *intrinsic* qualities and *extrinsic* qualities. It is, however, equally important to study how to develop them. As illustrated by responses to question 6 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data revealed how these leaders developed these qualities. The respondents claimed that this was achieved through professional development approaches such as modelling, reflective practice, professional reading, and pre-service and in-service training opportunities, all of which have been presented in the previous sections.

4. Perceptions of sustainable leadership

Data showed that most participants were unfamiliar with the notion of sustainable leadership in education. They claimed that sustainability was more commonly addressed in environmental and economic development disciplines, and that this was the first time they had heard of the term *sustainable leadership* as applied in education. Most participants were uncertain and unconfident in the way they responded to questions related to sustainable leadership. For example, some participants hesitated for a long time; others seemed to be confused; and others even refused to give answers about sustainable leadership. This poor knowledge of sustainable leadership is probably because these leaders have not been exposed to this term through their professional lives. Moreover, it could possibly result from the dearth of literature concerning educational leadership in general and sustainable leadership in particular in Vietnam. In fact, little effort to date has gone into understanding what sustainable leadership is and why it matters in Vietnamese education, although a relatively large body of work in this area can be found in the

existing literature regarding western settings, for example, Cantlie (2008), Davies (2007), Fullan (2005), and Hargreaves and Fink (2006). This presents a gap in the literature related to the Vietnamese context that needs more investigation and attention from the research community.

Although participants claimed that they had weak views of sustainable leadership in education, data showed that some of them had developed some general ideas about sustainable leadership. Ha-Diep suggested that sustainable leadership meant that leadership developed without ruining existing material, human and financial resources. Ha-Diep's claim corresponds to the principle of resourcefulness, one of the seven principles of sustainable leadership proposed by Hargreaves and Fink (2006). They contend that sustainable leadership is resourceful leadership that develops without depleting material and human resources. In addition, Thanh-Nhu claimed that sustainable leadership also involved continuous learning. This claim, too, is supported by Hargreaves and Fink (2006), who conclude that sustainable leadership in education "preserves, protects, and promotes deep and broad learning for all in relationships of care for others" (p. 23). This point is referred to as their principle of depth or deep learning. Notably, it was mentioned in this study that learning here meant something beyond formal knowledge. In fact, Thuy-Hoa, Bao-Chanh and Moc-Tuan insisted this knowledge should also include an understanding of the current context of the institution; a comprehension of the developing societal trends that might affect the institution; and ability to recognise opportunities and to seize them. In other words, as was elaborated on in the previous section, learning should include the acquisition of both formal and informal knowledge. Additionally, Mai-Tuyen associated sustainability with long-term development. She argued that sustainability meant bringing long-term benefits to the community. This is consistent with Hargreaves and Fink (2006), but they add that sustainable leadership needs to promote both long-term and short-term development. This is because short-term results also have their own strength; they are needed to build trust for longer investment (Fullan, 2005).

In addressing the relationship between effectiveness and sustainability of educational leadership, the findings revealed most participants believed that sustainable leadership had a close relationship with effective leadership and that one could not

develop without the other. This claim is supported by Xuyen-Phong who commented that effective leadership was a necessary condition for sustainable leadership, and sustainable leadership was a sufficient condition for effective leadership. This means that sustainable leadership needs effective leadership as a foremost factor; and effective leadership needs sustainable leadership to make the former more effective and durable. This finding indicates that participants' perceptions and understanding of the relationship between effective leadership and sustainable leadership are critical to developing sound leadership practices in Vietnam.

5. Salient challenges to leadership performance

In addition to the important aspects mentioned above, this study also identified some of the challenges faced by participants that inhibited the effectiveness of their leadership practices. These challenges included lack of collaboration, the particular dilemmas experienced by female leaders, and lack of autonomy. The following section will discuss each challenge in detail.

5.1. Lack of collaboration across of the university

Collaboration is defined by Friend and Cook (2003) as the "direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 5). A strong culture of collaboration could function as the common thread within this university, which connects everyone to work together, and conversely, lack of collaboration could result in challenges for educational leaders. Data from this study revealed that poor collaboration amongst units across the university was a primary factor inhibiting effective leadership. This point was demonstrated by Thao-Huong and Tam-Nguyen, who viewed the unwillingness to collaborate of some other units as one of the biggest challenges in their leadership work. Moreover, as illustrated by responses to question 2 (Appendix 6), questionnaire data indicated that lack of collaboration was frustrating to leaders. One probable reason for this lack of collaboration could be the traditional academic approach of individual work that has been exercised for years in the Vietnamese culture. In addition, Vietnamese people are not exposed to teamwork approaches, so they are new to interactions with others, and hence not yet familiar with

collaboration. Another reason for this poor collaboration might come from the particular structure of this university, in which the three main campuses are located separately. This physical separation might, to some extent, hinder collaborative relationships amongst units. To assist with that, this university has highlighted the significance of using Internet as a tool to promote a stronger sense of collaboration. Furthermore, regular meetings with all leaders of the university that offer a good opportunity for collaboration are organised every Monday afternoon. However, the use of Internet and regular meetings can do no more than provide fora through which collaborative relationships may develop; what matters more is whether or not the leaders are committed to developing collaboration. In addressing the issue of how to promote a strong culture of collaboration, questionnaire data also suggested that the President Board should issue an act of collaboration across the university to make people collaborate more in their work, as indicated by responses to question 7 (Appendix 6). This recommendation of forced collaboration is not tenable because collaboration definitely cannot be forced. In fact, enforcement goes against the very notion of collaboration. Collaboration is not about authority or forced legislation; rather, it is about a willingness and commitment to working with others, and it should be promoted in a culture of trust and mutual respect. This claim of forced collaboration indicates a tension between the participants' perceptions and the literature in this field (Friend, 2000; Friend & Cook, 2003; Ross & Gray, 2006; Rowan, 1990; Van-Meter & Stevens, 2000). For example, Friend and Cook (2003) emphasise that collaboration should be voluntary and come from personal commitment, rather than the use of forced legislation. They continue that personal commitment towards collaboration could be achieved by raising leaders' awareness of the benefits of collaborating with colleagues.

5.2. Female leaders' dilemmas

Although Vietnam has been claimed to surpass most other developing countries in exercising a legal framework in support of gender equity and in delivering programmes conducive to women's advancement (Schuler et al., 2006), there is still a gap between those verbal commitments and actual practices. In fact, most female participants of this study reported a number of challenges specific to being female

leaders. The participants identified gender inequity in terms of being attributed status inferior to that of their male counterparts, and bearing the double burden of work and family. Mai-Tuyen commented that she had been looked down upon, and her voice been ignored by her male counterparts while Ha-Diep experienced overloaded burdens of family care and leadership work. The problem of women being considered as inferior faced by female leaders at this university mirrors the wider socio-cultural norms of Vietnamese society. These norms are difficult to change, and is a much bigger issue than in this university alone. This gender inequity problem is common not only amongst Vietnamese female leaders (Ha, 2001; Le, 2011; Truong, 2008), but also amongst those elsewhere in the world (Akao, 2008; Qiang, Hang, & Niu, 2009; Vali, 2010; Warsal, 2009). In the context of Vietnam, this finding is unsurprising given the socio-cultural influence of Confucianism. Culturally, Confucianism has strongly influenced Vietnamese society, and has accordingly shaped the lives of Vietnamese women. Along with a feudal ideology, Confucianism has traditionally allowed Vietnamese society to perceive the status of women to be inferior to that of men (Ha, 2001), and female leaders like Mai-Tuyen are, unfortunately, not exempt from this norm.

In addition to inferior status, Vietnamese women are also expected to conform to the femininity norms of the *heavenly mandate* (Truong, 2008, p. 19) which involves giving birth, breast feeding, teaching children, and taking good care of the family and elderly relatives, along with a number of other unpaid unnamed jobs in addition to their full-time professional employment. This point was illustrated by Thu-Ha when she stated that she was always very busy balancing her family life and professional life, and this made her stressed and exhausted. All these factors including inferiority, prevailing femininity norms and the double burden of work and family have, undoubtedly, put tremendous pressure on women in Vietnam. In the case of those in leadership positions such as those at this university, some might expect that they could be exempt from these traditional demands to concentrate on their leadership work. They are not, unfortunately. In fact, the female leaders in this study claimed that they had to work even harder to meet socio-cultural expectations and at the same time fulfill their job as leaders at work.

5.3. Lack of autonomy

Autonomy allows professionals to make unique contributions and to respond better to societal demands, so it is important that professional autonomy be maintained and promoted in every discipline (Esdaile & Roth, 2000). This study's findings suggested that the participants, however, had restricted autonomy. As indicated by responses to question 2 (Appendix 6), these leaders felt frustrated by not being permitted enough autonomy. This lack of autonomy was also considered one of the factors that inhibited effective leadership. As reported by Xuyen-Phong, leaders at this university lacked professional autonomy in terms of financial control and staffing decisions; that is, leaders did not have enough autonomy to recruit suitable people for their units, or to control expenditure as they wished. Every decision regarding staffing management and financial control was decided by the President Board, and then arranged by the Personnel Office and Financing Office. This procedure reflects the deeply rooted culture of central planning and bureaucratic decision-making in Vietnam, in which the ultimate power stays with those at the top, and every final decision must be made by the highest authority.

At an institutional level, a similar situation was described. Ha-Diep expressed her concerns about the lack of institutional autonomy in light of curriculum design at Vietnamese universities. Her claim is supported by Hayden and Lam (2007) who find that Vietnamese tertiary institutions do not have much institutional autonomy. These two scholars explain the reason by reference to the political system of Vietnam. With the influences of Communism and Socialism, Vietnam has exercised a strongly centralised governance over higher education, in which the State is the source of all authority (Hayden & Lam, 2007). Most universities and colleges are, therefore, managed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET). MoET's responsibilities include allocating enrolment quota, student loads, and grant and scholarship support for universities and colleges (Hayden & Lam, 2007). MoET is also responsible for approving curriculum frameworks for all study programmes across the system. All Vietnamese universities and colleges have to follow this common curriculum structure that sometimes fails to respond to the local demands of different higher education institutions. Seen in this light, the lack of institutional

autonomy is a hindrance to the development of the institutions and also to leadership effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter has discussed the study's findings against the literature, and has analysed these findings with reference to the particular setting of Vietnam. Specifically, it has discussed five prominent issues. These are the relationship between leadership and management, professional learning activities, participants' perceptions of effective leadership, participants' perceptions of sustainable leadership, and dilemmas confronted by educational leaders. The first section concerned the relationship between leadership and management. It was found that although participants had good knowledge of the theoretical differences between leadership and management, their theoretical perceptions contrasted with their actual leadership practices; that was, they were leading by applying a managerial model. The second section explored different professional learning activities adopted by the participants. These activities include modelling, pre-service and in-service learning, professional reading, reflective practice, and engagement in Vietnam Youth Union. The third section discussed participants' perceptions of qualities of effective leadership such as vision, knowledge, communication, collegiality, integrity, equity, and recognition of contributions and accomplishments. The fourth section investigated participants' perceptions of sustainable leadership. It was found that participants had undeveloped views of the term 'sustainable leadership' in education. The final section examined the challenges faced by the participants. They were lack of collaboration across the university, female leaders' difficulties, and lack of autonomy.

In general, the findings aligned those of other research in the area. There were, however, several findings that made some additional contributions. Notably, in the specific cultural, historical and political context of Vietnam, some of the findings pointed out issues for further examination and research in such areas as mentoring, contextual differences, critical thinking, and sustainable leadership. This investigation also indicated some tensions between what the participants preferred and what is indicated as best in the literature. These tensions require further thinking and

consideration from the participants, and more broadly, from the wider social cultural scope. The next chapter will provide some recommendations for further leadership development for this university, and some possible implications for other tertiary institutions in Vietnam. It will also address some limitations of this study and suggest some recommendations for further research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions, Recommendations and Implications

This chapter presents recommendations and implications from the study. It begins with a brief summary of the study. Recommendations for this university are then suggested, and followed by implications more generally for universities in Vietnam. Next, limitations of the study and recommendations for further research are addressed. The chapter ends with a conclusion to the study as a whole.

1. Summary of the study

This qualitative research, located within the interpretive research paradigm, used the case study of a university in Vietnam to study how middle leaders learn professionally, and to explore their perceptions of effective leadership and sustainable leadership in their leadership practices. Specifically, this study aimed to find answers to the research questions:

1. How do ten selected middle leaders at a university in Vietnam learn professionally to improve their leadership performances?
2. What are their perceptions of effective leadership and sustainable leadership?
3. What are some challenges experienced by these leaders in their leadership work?

To increase validity, two data collection methods were adopted. These were semi-structured interviews, and an online questionnaire. Personal interviews were conducted in Vietnamese, followed by an online questionnaire to clarify and elaborate on interview data. Data were then translated into English and analysed using the thematic analysis. The findings concerned five important components: the relationship between leadership and management, professional learning, perceptions of effective leadership, perceptions of sustainable leadership, and some prominent factors which inhibited leadership work. While some findings from the study were consistent with other research and published literature, others were found to be unique to the particular context of Vietnam, with the cultural influences of

Confucianism and the political system of Socialism impacting upon them. This study also indicated some tensions between the participants' perceptions and the literature that will require consideration. Furthermore, the study also identified some gaps in understanding in this field that need further attention and investigation. Differently stated, this study has provided fresh insights to the existing literature in the area of educational leadership in light of professional learning activities, effective leadership and sustainable leadership within the Vietnamese context. In addition, findings from this study suggested a number of significant recommendations to improve educational leadership practices in this university. On a larger scale, the current study also entailed a number of implications for improvement in these areas for other universities in Vietnam.

2. Recommendations for further leadership development for this university

In order to improve the leadership practices of the middle leaders at this university, concerted efforts are needed not only from these middle leaders themselves, but from top university leadership as well. This section will address salient issues emerging from the findings and then make corresponding recommendations. These recommendations will help promote further improvement in this university.

Firstly, the findings indicated an existing practice representing a hierarchical managerial model of leadership. This is illustrated by the leaders considering themselves as managers rather than leaders, and by their referring to their colleagues as subordinates. This model of managerial leadership with a focus on strong management can result in a bureaucratic and stifling atmosphere that produces order for order's sake (Kotter, 1990). It is, therefore, recommended that this hierarchical managerial model be gradually shifted to a more balanced and distributed leadership model. To promote this shift, it is important that an awareness of the significance of leadership distribution be developed among leaders from top to middle level, across the university. This could be achieved by comprehensive reading of the contemporary literature concerning distributed leadership, among which key authors include Gronn (2000), Harris (2008), Leithwood and Jantzi (2000), and Timperley (2005). In addition, workshops, discussion sessions and forums focused on distributed leadership would help make the concept more acceptable to the institutional culture,

and to these leaders. In addition, the President Board should also encourage the faculty to write articles about distributed leadership and have them published in local, national and international journals. These articles would bring the concept closer to the university staff and faculty and make them more aware of it.

It is, however, worth noting that all of these activities would simply enhance awareness of the university staff and leaders about the concept of distributed leadership, rather than result in its actual implementation. Such implementation would require further effort from ministerial authority and a dramatic change in the hierarchical-thinking culture that has long been inherent in many aspects of Vietnamese society, including education. Differently put, in order to realise the distribution of leadership in education, it is highly important to address the tension between the socio-political culture of the country and the expectation around this transition period at university level. This is, by any measure, a challenging process. To achieve it would necessitate endless effort and determination from all levels of all aspects of the society.

It should be noted that alongside the predominant practice of a hierarchical managerial leadership model, the study also revealed a few early indicators of shared distributed leadership. These indicators included an awareness of a shared vision and a consciousness of the significance of collegial harmony and mutual respect. Although it is a long way from the first awareness of an idea to putting it into practice, these indicators are encouraging and should be further enhanced. A number of approaches have been suggested for the actual development of a shared vision (Blokker, 1989; Nanus, 1992; Rogus, 1990). It is, however, my belief that the four-step approach suggested by SEDL (1993) would be most practicable in this university. These steps include knowing the organisation; involving critical individuals; exploring the possibilities; and putting the vision in writing (SEDL, 1993). This means the university first should identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, and existing material, financial and human resources. Then the institution should involve key individuals to work together to develop a shared vision. Next, the university should explore all the possibilities and consider potential future developments and trends. The final step involves writing a clear and concise vision statement. In order to promote a sense of collegiality and mutual respect, the

leaders at this university should try to change their hierarchical thinking and choose to be approachable to their junior colleagues. They should also eliminate the notion that junior colleagues should look up to their seniors but that senior colleagues are not expected to respect juniors in return. Rather, these leaders should think of each junior colleague as an individual with strengths and weaknesses who also needs respect for further development.

Secondly, the current study indicates a considerable gap in understanding the term *mentoring*. Some participants claimed that they had no mentors; others confused *mentors* with higher leaders who provided professional instructions. The university, therefore, should try to introduce this concept to its leaders and staff by promoting the practice of professional reading of literature concerned with this area; by organising workshops and discussion sessions about *mentoring*, and by encouraging the faculty to write articles about this topic. These activities would help the university's staff and faculty to acquire further knowledge of this concept. Then the university should encourage them to use this knowledge to develop a mentoring programme of their own.

Another gap in understanding evident in this study concerns sustainable leadership. Most participants claimed that they were unfamiliar with this concept, and that this was the first time they had heard of it. This gap could be filled by leaders' efforts to read more literature about this topic and to discuss it with other colleagues to find out what sustainable leadership comprises, why it matters, and how it should be applied in the context of this university. Moreover, it would be useful if the university were to arrange for its staff and faculty to visit other institutions exercising principles of sustainable leadership, so that they could learn and draw lessons for themselves.

Fourthly, a lack of preparatory training for middle leaders at this university is evident. Preparatory training matters to any professional, and even more to those in leadership, a demanding and challenging job. Some leaders at this university, however, had been appointed to leadership positions without prior knowledge or experience in leadership and management, and this resulted in confusion and lack of confidence in their leadership work. It is, therefore, recommended that preparatory leadership courses be organised for new emerging leaders as an induction programme. These courses could be undertaken by current experienced leaders and

delivered right on campus, where the new leaders could also familiarise themselves with the working culture of the institution.

In addition to pre-service preparation, in-service opportunities are also claimed to be important to middle leaders. However, findings showed that most in-service opportunities focused on principalship and hence were unsuitable for these middle leaders at a university. One participant suggested that the President Board should pay more attention and effort to enhancing the leadership performance of middle leaders by sending them to regional leadership centres or overseas for leadership development. This recommendation might not be practicable, given the limited funding of this provincial-level university. Instead, it seems more feasible that the middle leaders at this university should actively seek professional learning opportunities from external leadership fellowship programmes rather than passively waiting for opportunities to be offered. Alternatively, they could apply for postgraduate study in leadership and management from bilateral scholarship programmes funded by the government of a developed country such as the Australian Leadership Awards, Endeavours Awards, Australian Development Scholarships, New Zealand Development Scholarships, and the Belgium Bilateral Scholarship Programme. These programmes usually prioritise those working in higher education institutions, thus improving the possibility of being selected and benefiting from programmes of greater relevance.

The study indicated that the participants preferred attending short-term non-degree training courses such as one-shot workshops, seminars, or conferences rather than longer-term degree programmes such as postgraduate study in leadership. It has been, however, well proven in the literature that longer-term deep learning is more useful than short-term immediate learning for promoting change (Davies, 2007; Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). This reveals a disparity between the participants' preference and what is indicated in the literature as being most effective. Therefore, it is recommended that the leaders at this university should reconsider their appraisal about the relative benefits of short-term and long-term learning. They should learn to recognise the significance of long-term study more, and try to look for opportunities for long-term study rather than short-term study. This change is important to their self-improvement; however, it might be problematic within the context of this

country. In Vietnam, the short-term model of learning has prevailed for years, and the long-term learning concept is foreign to the society. Such a change would therefore take time and require a change to the societal structure and the cultural norms as well.

Another issue related to professional learning concerns the quality of leadership training courses. The study's findings found that the leadership course that was held last year at this university was overly theoretical and short of practical methods. This course was organised by a leadership centre of the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and was based on a centrally-set curriculum. There was, therefore, no other choice for this university but to accept the provided curriculum. However, things could be improved by the development of practical follow-up programmes after this course. The leaders at this university, especially those who had attended some leadership workshops and training, could work together to develop a follow-up leadership course that balances theory and practice, and is compatible with the different leadership concepts discussed above. Importantly, the new design should be more reflective of the concepts of distributed leadership and sustainable leadership that have been addressed earlier. Additionally, the President Board should be more determined in requesting from the course organiser a balanced curriculum that uses a wide range of methods and explores concepts that meet learners' needs, if another leadership course were to be organised by the MoET for this university.

This study also addressed the matter of contextual differences. With limited literature concerning educational leadership in Vietnam, some participants said they had acquired their leadership knowledge and understanding from reading western literature instead. In their efforts to apply knowledge to practice, some were concerned with the contextual differences between the western literature and the particular context of this Vietnamese university. Their concerns are reasonable as the Vietnamese context differs greatly from the western setting historically, politically and culturally. However, the benefits of professional reading are undeniable, and have been well established in the literature (Bloom & Krovetz, 2009; Kwakman, 2003; Md-Nor, 1996). Therefore, the recommendation here would be that these leaders should read professional literature to widen their knowledge and understanding, and then reflect upon these insights carefully before applying them. In other words, they should read professionally and critically.

Another finding from this study pointed towards the issue of critical thinking. It should be noted that critical thinking connotes not only the negative meaning of 'criticising' but also the ability to analyse multiple perspectives, critiquing each for sense and meaning. It was reported that several participants developed professionally through reflective practice, which is an early indicator of critical thinking. This is encouraging, but further efforts are needed to promote the practice of thinking critically more widely at this university. One recommendation could involve organising informal meetings between leaders where they are encouraged to provide constructive critical analysis of ideas and issues related to the university. Importantly, these leaders should be made aware that critiques in this meeting are not to be taken personally, but rather as 'food for thought' and a way of making room for further improvement. These meetings could be held regularly, perhaps on a monthly basis. In addition, the leaders should pay attention to eliminating the long tradition of uncritical thinking in which people tend to jump to conclusions, or too easily accept some claim, decision, or evidence at face value, without carefully thinking about it.

As mentioned by participants, engagement in the Youth Union activities could help develop skills and abilities such as self-confidence, communication and organisational skills that are highly beneficial to leadership work. It is, therefore, recommended that this university work with the local Youth Union branch to organise more developmental activities for students and staff. Equally importantly, it should also encourage and facilitate its students and staff including middle leaders, especially emerging ones, to take part in those activities. This could be considered as a valuable opportunity for pre-service and in-service leadership learning of leadership. Some might argue that the middle leaders are too busy to participate in these activities. Thus, a regulation issued by the President Board specifying the middle leaders' right and responsibility to take part in these activities with time given to them to do so would be most beneficial. It is also important that these activities should be followed up on in the university with additional opportunities for staff development in order to ensure that the skills and knowledge acquired are put into practice in a way which reflects models of distributed leadership and sustainable leadership.

In addition to formal knowledge, informal knowledge is also crucial to effective leadership, according to the findings. In this study, informal knowledge is defined as a comprehension of how things work and how to get things done effectively in the local culture. Accordingly, it is essential that the leaders at this university pay attention to developing their informal knowledge in addition to their formal knowledge. This could be obtained by the practice of reflection and critical thinking that has been raised earlier. Informal knowledge should also be included in the curriculum of the induction programmes mentioned above. Specifically, the curriculum of the induction programmes for new leaders should have one section that provides the learners with information about and understanding of this university, including its organisational culture, statistics, and other specific characteristics. Equally importantly, the thirst for further education or fondness for learning, reported in the findings as an important quality of effective leadership, should be enhanced across the university. The leaders should demonstrate a thirst for knowledge by looking for opportunities to pursue higher education. They should also encourage and facilitate their staff to do likewise.

Praise and rewards as a means of recognising contributions and accomplishments was perceived by the participants as a strategy used by effective leaders. This claim, however, indicates a divergence between the participants' perceptions and the literature which suggests that rewards have negative effects on intrinsic motivation (Cameron, Banko, Pierce, 2001; Carton, 1996; Lepper & Green 1978). Therefore, it is recommended that this perception could warrant re-examination.

One impediment to leadership work reported in this study was the practice of favouritism and nepotism. Favouritism is the practice of the leaders favouring those from influential families; nepotism means the leaders favouring their own family members or relatives. These practices hinder the development of integrity and equity, and result in a culture of distrust within the university. It is, therefore, recommended that these practices be eliminated. The university should issue transparent policies regarding appointment procedures, and make sure that every decision relating to rewards and promotion be made with integrity and based on merit. Additionally, there should be regulations specifying disciplinary measures for those who practise favouritism or nepotism. On a larger scale, further efforts from all societal aspects are

needed to eliminate these unfair practices. It is, however, easier said than done; it is conceded that such a change would require wider societal and cultural change as a context.

It was evident from this study that a lack of collaboration across the university inhibits leadership work. It is, therefore, necessary that a sense of collaboration be promoted. Data showed that a few leaders believed that collaboration could be achieved through authority and forced legislation. This is a misapprehension. In fact, collaborative relationships are only possible in a culture of trust and mutual respect, and no power or authority could enforce them. The following recommendations inspired by Friend and Cook (2003) could encourage the development of collaborative relationships at this university. First, a sense of collaboration could be obtained by raising the awareness of the leaders about the significance of collaborating with other colleagues to increase their personal commitment to collaborative relationships. Second, these leaders could also pay attention to enhancing their communication skills, because communication skills are the basic building blocks of collaborative interactions (Friend & Cook, 2003, p. 21). Some might argue that most educational professionals already have relatively good communication skills in order to be in their professions; in fact, the skills needed for collaboration are more technical and best developed with extended practice. Third, it is important that a culture that facilitates collaborative relationships be enhanced. This culture helps to promote trust and mutual respect within the institution. The university's top leaders could foster this collaborative culture by holding informal relaxed meetings where the leaders could communicate freely to better understand each other. Moreover, as this university has three campuses located separately, staff meetings and intensive use of the Internet would be of great help to promote collaboration.

Another impediment to leadership work at this university concerns gender inequity faced by the female leaders. These women leaders claimed that their status had been considered as inferior to that of male leaders, and that their voices had been undervalued and sometimes ignored. This problem of women being considered inferior reflects the wider cultural norms and societal environment of the country, which are difficult to change. However, action needs to be taken in order to improve

gender equity for women in general, and for female leaders in particular. To tackle this problem, first a support network for women leaders at this university could be established. This network could be run by women and serve as a forum where female leaders and staff could discuss their difficulties at work, and share opinions concerning how to improve the situation so as to encourage each other to move forward in their professions. Second, it is necessary that the university initiate formal policies specifying gender equity and clarifying the important role of women's representation. Further to that, the university should consider developing a cadre of female leaders to balance the gender representation in leadership. This target should be clearly specified in the university's development strategies, and be assessed regularly. Third, on a broader scale, Vietnamese society should abandon the backward traditional thinking defined by socio-cultural norms about women's inferior status to their male counterparts. This traditional thinking is the mental obstacle that prevents women from enjoying self-confidence and gender equity. In addition to inferior status, women leaders in this study also had difficulties balancing the double burden of work and family. To help address this problem, gender role expectations should be challenged. Housework and family care should be shared equally between women and men. Importantly, men should learn to understand their wives' multiple burdens and support them physically and mentally.

In addition to a lack of collaboration and the problem of gender inequity, lack of autonomy is also reported to be inhibiting to effective work at this university. Several leaders complained that they did not have enough autonomy to carry out their leadership work effectively, especially in terms of financial control and staffing decisions. It is thus recommended that the university's top leaders should allow more autonomy to the middle leaders, so that the latter could lead more effectively. This would require significant cultural change from top university leadership. Specifically, it would require the top leaders to learn to have trust and confidence in the middle leaders and to distribute authority down to lower levels. At an institutional level, a lack of institutional autonomy in respect to curriculum impedes the development of this university. Like other higher educational institutions in Vietnam, this university has to adopt a common curriculum structure developed by the MoET. This curriculum structure, though carefully written by experts at ministerial level, fails to

respond to the local needs of this university. It is, therefore, necessary that the President Board of this university work with those of other Vietnamese universities to request further autonomy in terms of designing curriculum, so as to meet the specific local demands of each institution. More autonomy in designing the appropriate curriculum for the local context would also give the leaders more confidence in their leadership work.

In brief, this study has highlighted prominent issues at this university, and provided a number of recommendations that challenge existing practices. It is believed that enacting these recommendations would help the leaders of this institution to improve their leadership performance. Although this study investigated only one case of a Vietnamese university, it nonetheless provides some useful messages for a wider picture of educational leadership in Vietnamese universities generally.

3. Implications

This university is a typical public-sector university in Vietnam. It shares common features with other Vietnamese tertiary institutions in terms of governance, structure, and socio-cultural influences. Consequently, although the above-mentioned recommendations aim at enhancing the quality of leadership work at this university, implications concerning similar issues could also be made for other universities in Vietnam.

Firstly, concerted efforts are needed to raise awareness of distributed leadership, mentoring and sustainable leadership, all of which are largely undocumented in Vietnamese literature and thus ignored in Vietnamese universities. Secondly, new emerging leaders should be provided with an induction programme during which they could gain some leadership knowledge and familiarise themselves with the working culture of their institutions. Importantly, informal knowledge such as a comprehension of how things work and how to get things done in this culture should also be included in these induction programmes. Moreover, the middle leaders in Vietnamese universities should never stop looking for opportunities for further professional learning, especially from external scholarship programmes. Thirdly, it is important that unhealthy practices and thinking existing in Vietnamese tertiary institutions, such as favouritism, nepotism and gender inequity, be challenged in

order to ensure a healthy equitable working environment. Fourthly, Vietnamese universities should also encourage their students and staff to participate in development activities organised by the Youth Union, as these activities provide an environment for developing leadership abilities such as confidence and communication skills. Fifthly, Vietnamese universities should intensify efforts to promote a culture of collaboration in which professionals can work closely together to achieve the best outcomes. Finally, Vietnamese universities should permit their leaders more autonomy, especially in terms of financial control and staffing decisions, so that they can lead more effectively.

To sum up, in addition to providing practical recommendations for this university, the present study also highlights implications for other universities in Vietnam. On a larger scale, universities in other Asian countries that share similar historical, cultural and social features as Vietnam, could also benefit from the findings of this study.

4. Limitations of this study

This study has some limitations. First of all, due to time constraints and the Masters-level scope of this research, only a relatively small sample of ten participants was studied. This representation might not capture a full picture of educational leadership in this university. Nevertheless, efforts were been made to ensure diversity in participant representation, and to achieve the most comprehensive picture possible; five females and five males were selected with a wide range of ages and professional experiences and from different units across the university. Secondly, the current study examined only one university in Vietnam, so its findings might not be generalisable to other Vietnamese universities. However, a number of data collection methods including interviews and an online questionnaire were adopted to increase the internal validity and reliability of this study. In addition, it should be noted that although this study is a case of one, due to contextual similarities in terms of social and cultural setting, it might still be reasonable to claim some level of applicability to other Vietnamese universities. Thirdly, the area of educational leadership is largely under-researched in Vietnam; hence the current study does not have a broad literature base related to Vietnamese context to draw from.

5. Recommendations for further research

This study has identified a number of areas where further research could be useful. Firstly, it is recommended that larger scale studies on the same topic be conducted to provide a more detailed and comprehensive picture of educational leadership in higher education in Vietnam. These studies could be carried out with a larger sample and at a number of universities throughout the country. Secondly, more research concerned with educational leadership in the Vietnamese context, especially in terms of distributed leadership, mentoring and sustainable leadership, is needed. These are identified in the present study as areas where knowledge gaps exist. Thirdly, as educational leadership is affected by the Socialist political system and the Confucian philosophy, it would be interesting to further explore in what other ways the political system of Socialism and the socio-cultural thinking of Confucianism in Vietnam has influenced the area of educational leadership.

6. Conclusion

This study explored how middle leaders at a university in Vietnam have learnt professionally in their leadership work, and how they perceived effective and sustainable leadership in education. Furthermore, such aspects as the relationship between leadership and management, and salient challenges faced in their leadership work were examined to provide a more comprehensive picture of the topic. The research made a number of interesting findings, some of which are compatible with the existing published literature; others were specific to the context. It also indicated some tensions between the participants' perceptions and the literature that need challenging. In addition, the study made practical recommendations for further leadership development in this university, and noted relevant implications for other Vietnamese universities. Additionally, the study identified areas that necessitated further attention and research. In the context of Vietnam where the topic of educational leadership is still largely undocumented, it is believed that this study made significant contributions in revealing the reality of leadership practices in higher education. It also disclosed major issues this university faces within its shifting process from a hierarchical bureaucratic model to a more shared distributed one. More broadly, this research identified the socio-cultural, historical and political

barriers to the transitional period of the country, which makes this transition process longer and more challenging. To overcome these barriers and to promote further development of leadership in the Vietnamese education system, concerted efforts and attention are needed from every echelon of Vietnamese society.

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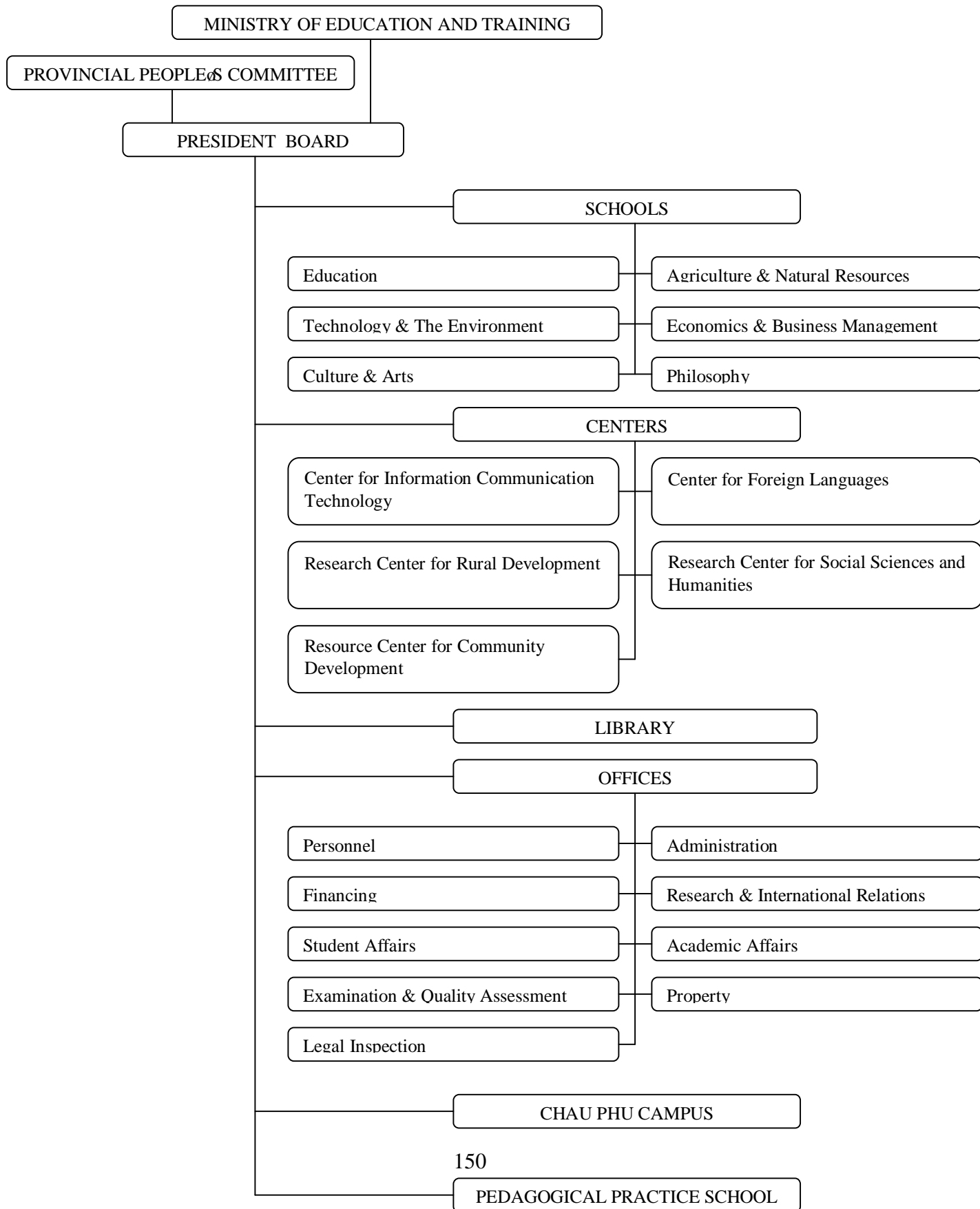
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Organisational structure of the university researched



Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

(This information sheet will be translated into Vietnamese)

Participant Information Sheet



Dear participants,

I am Tr ng Th M Dung (Annie Truong), a student of the University of Waikato, New Zealand. This research study is part of my programme for my Master's Degree. The research explores how middle leaders learn professionally in their leadership work. It will also examine perceptions of effective leadership and sustainable leadership. Moreover, it will identify challenges which impact upon leadership practices. The purpose is to provide insights and recommendations for this university and, more broadly, for other universities in the Vietnamese context.

I would like to listen to your perceptions, understanding and experiences as a leader within the university. I would like you to share your professional learning activities and your perceptions of effective leadership and sustainable leadership in a university setting. Also, I would also like you to indicate the difficulties which impact upon your leadership practices.

If you agree to participate in my research, I will interview you for about one hour. I would like to record the interview with your permission, and I will ask you to give consent and sign a written form prior to the interview. The interview will last approximately one hour. In addition to the interviews, you will also answer some questions for my online questionnaire. This will take you no longer than 20 minutes. It is estimated that you will be involved in my research for about one month.

The information collected will be used to write a research report for my thesis and an electronic copy of the thesis will be lodged in the Australasian Digital Thesis (ADT) database. It is also possible that articles and presentations may be outcomes of the

study. All the information about you and your responses will be kept confidential and only me and my supervisor can access it. The findings will be presented in such a way that you cannot be identified. Also, the university will be anonymous. The notes, documents and recordings will be stored for a period of 5 years before they are destroyed.

If you take part in the study, you have the right to refuse to answer any particular question, and to withdraw from the study before data analysis has commenced. You can ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation and you will be given access to a summary of findings from the research when it is concluded.

Please read through this information sheet carefully. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me at annietruong.vn@gmail.com or contact my supervisor at the address below:

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The University of Waikato

Private Bag 3105

Hamilton, New Zealand.

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Email: falloong@waikato.ac.nz

Thank you very much for your help.

Tr ng Th M Dung- Annie Truong

Appendix 3: Consent Form for Participants

(This consent form will be translated into Vietnamese)

Consent Form for Participants



Developing Middle Leadership in a Vietnamese University

Perceptions and Practices: A Case Study from the Mekong Delta

Consent Form for Participants

I have read the **Participant Information Sheet** for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study before analysis has commenced on the data or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I agree to provide information to the researcher under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the **Participant Information Sheet**.

I agree to participate in the research conducted by Ms. Tr ng Th M Dung (Annie Truong). I also agree for the information to be used for the writing of the thesis, the publication of the articles and conference presentations.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Additional Consent as Required

I agree / do not agree to my responses to be tape recorded.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's name and contact information:

Ms. Tr ng Th M Dung (Annie Truong)

Tel: + 84 919 545 681 (in Vietnam) and +64 210 495835 (in New Zealand)

Email: annietruong.vn@gmail.com or mdt10@waikato.ac.nz

Supervisor's name and contact information:

Dr. Garry Falloon

Email: falloong@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix 4: Guiding Questions for the Interviews

(These questions will be translated into Vietnamese)

1. Please share with me some of your background information (age, education and professional experience)
2. Please describe your role at work with a specific emphasis on your leadership responsibilities.
3. What was your job before this current leading role? (teaching, leading, doing research, studying, etc.)
4. How would you define the term "leadership" within university setting?
5. What is your understanding of the similarities and differences between leadership and management?
6. How have you learnt professionally to improve your leadership performance?
7. Do you have a mentor who helps you learn professionally in your leadership work? If yes, who are they?
8. What qualities do you believe make an effective leader? What qualities are really important to you as a leader? Why?
9. What is your understanding of sustainable leadership within the university setting? What do you do to make your leadership sustainable?
10. How is sustainable leadership related to effective leadership? Are they complementary? How?
11. What are some of the challenges that you have experienced when undertaking your leadership responsibilities? What have you done to overcome them?
12. What are some difficulties being a female leader? (for female participants only)
13. Do you get any support when you face challenges in your leading? If yes, what kind of support do you get?
14. In the context of your work at this university, what would enable you to undertake your responsibilities more effectively?

Thank you very much for participating in my research.

Appendix 5: Questionnaire- Online Survey

(These questions will be translated into Vietnamese)

1. What do you enjoy the most in your leadership work?
2. What do you feel frustrated about in your leadership work?
3. The interview data indicated that collaboration across the university is very important. In your opinion, how might it be improved?
4. The interview data showed that professional learning of leadership is very important. Which of the following activities of professional learning would be valuable to you? Please choose all that apply.
 - short-term training about leadership and management skills (conferences, workshop, etc.)
 - long-term training with degrees (more than one year)
 - coaching and mentoring programs
 - learning from books
 - learning from the Internet
 - self-reflection (learning from past experiences)
 - learning from other people at work (colleagues, higher leaders, etc.)
 - Others: please indicate
5. The interview data revealed that *đT mö* and *đTâmö* are very important qualities of an effective leader. In your opinion, what does *đT mö* mean? What does *đTâmö* mean?
6. How would you develop *đT mö* and *đTâmö*?
7. If you could propose some recommendations to the Rector Board, what would you recommend to improve the leadership performances of this university?

Appendix 6: Summary tables of the questionnaire

Table 2

Open Text Fields Summary Table

Questions	Samples of responses	Number of respondents
1. What do you enjoy the most in your leadership work?	- have followers;	1
	- attend important meetings to get information;	1
	- have a voice in decision making of important issues at the university;	2
	- have power to do what necessary;	1
	- have opportunities to work with and learn from colleagues from Vietnam and abroad;	2
	- have opportunities to widen knowledge;	4
	- get trust from colleagues	1
2. What do you feel frustrated about in your leadership work?	- restricted autonomy particularly in terms of financial control and staffing decisions;	3
	- overloaded schedule, big pressure;	2
	- solving internal conflicts;	1
	- difficulties in staff management;	1
	- too much time for meetings;	1
	- bureaucratic paper work;	2
	- lack of collaboration among units across the university;	3
	- lack of support from higher leaders;	1
	- incapable subordinates	1
- lack of pre-service and in-service training opportunities	4	
3. The interview data indicated that collaboration across the university is very	- President Board issue regulations forcing collaboration	4
	- the organisational structure should be rearranged to avoid overlapping	1

important. In your opinion, how might it be improved?	- need strict monitoring - integrity and mutual trust will help - organise meetings every week - select able and committed individuals for leading positions	1 1 1 1
5. The interview data revealed that ƒT mø and ƒTâmø are very important qualities of an effective leader. In your opinion, what does ƒT mø mean? What does ƒTâmø mean?	- ƒT mø concerned with task accomplishment and efficiency, means: + visions; + task-oriented + wide knowledge; + proposing development strategies; + gain trust from others; + creativity - ƒTâmø concerned with building relationships and cooperation, means: + morality in leadership work; + relation-oriented + collegiality; + professional relationships and communication at work; + devotion and commitment; + equity and integrity	7 6 5 1 1 1 6 5 6 2 2 4
6. How would you develop øT mö and øTâmö?	- modelling (learn from other leaders); - reflective practice; - professional reading; - attend long-term and short-term training courses	3 4 2 2
7. If you could propose some recommendations to the President Board, what would you recommend to	- should empower more autonomy especially in terms of financial control and staffing decisions; - should issue an act of collaboration; - should check and change ineffective management structures; - should organise more international training	3 3 1 1

improve the leadership performances of this university?	sessions and workshops through which leaders could learn professionally through meetings and exchanges of ideas with international colleagues;	
	- should send leaders overseas for visitations of well-known effective institutions to observe and learn how leadership has been practiced in other countries	2
	- should issue clear and straightforward operational regulations which specify the defined responsibilities of each unit to avoid passing the balløpractice.	2

Table 3*Multiple Choice Checkbox Summary Table*

Questions	Samples of responses	Number of respondents
4. The interview data showed that professional learning of leadership is very important. Which of the following activities of professional learning would be valuable to you? Please choose all that apply.	- short-term training about leadership and management skills (conferences, workshop, etc.)	8
	- long-term training with degrees (more than one year)	4
	- coaching and mentoring programs	3
	- professional reading	4
	- reflective practices (learning from one's own leadership experiences and mistakes)	6
	- modelling (learning from others at work such as colleagues, higher leaders, etc.)	6
	- Others: please indicate	