



Developing Managers' Leadership Skills through A Person-Centered Approach in Vocational Education Institutions

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how managers' leadership skills can be developed through a person-centered approach in vocational education institutions. The research used a qualitative design involving semi-structured interviews with 15 managers and educators, supported by institutional document analysis. Empathy, individual support, open communication, reflective practice, and continuous professional learning are central to effective leadership development. The study also identifies several implementation challenges, including resistance to change, limited resources, time constraints, and soft-skill gaps. Person-centered leadership development requires structured training, supportive organizational culture, mentoring, and institutional commitment to inclusive and adaptive management practices.

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 14 Nov 2025

First Revised 19 Jan 2026

Accepted 18 Feb 2026

First Available online 18 Feb 2026

Publication Date 01 Mar 2026

Keyword:

Educational management;

Leadership development;

Managerial skills;

Person-centered leadership;

Vocational education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership plays an important role in determining the quality of management in vocational education institutions [1-4]. Vocational education institutions have specific management challenges because they are closely connected with professional training, practical skills, labor market needs, and institutional partnerships. Many reports regarding vocational education have been well-documented [5-13]. In this context, managers are responsible not only for administrative tasks but also for creating a supportive environment for teachers, staff, and students. Effective management requires leaders who are able to communicate clearly, understand individual needs, motivate employees, and guide institutional development in a flexible and responsible manner. Managers in these institutions must be able to coordinate educational programs, support teacher development, respond to changing workplace demands, and maintain collaboration among different stakeholders. These responsibilities require leadership skills that go beyond routine supervision or formal authority. Traditional leadership practices often emphasize control, hierarchy, and instruction. Although such practices may help maintain organizational order, they may not be sufficient for developing motivation, initiative, and professional growth among employees.

In modern educational management, leaders are expected to recognize the potential of each individual and create conditions that allow teachers and staff to contribute actively to institutional improvement. For this reason, a person-centered approach is relevant to the development of managerial leadership skills. A person-centered approach focuses on the needs, abilities, motivation, and professional potential of individuals within an organization. In leadership practice, this approach encourages managers to listen to employees, respect their experiences, provide individual support, and involve them in decision-making processes. Such an approach can help create a more positive organizational climate because employees feel valued and supported in their professional roles. Developing leadership skills through a person-centered approach requires a clear and systematic mechanism.

This mechanism may include continuous professional development, mentoring, reflective practice, communication training, peer collaboration, and institutional support. Without a structured mechanism, leadership development may remain informal and inconsistent. As a result, managers may find it difficult to apply inclusive, adaptive, and supportive leadership practices in their daily work.

This paper examines how the mechanism for developing leadership skills among managers can be improved through a person-centered approach in vocational education institutions. It focuses on the importance of empathy, communication, individual support, reflective practice, and organizational culture as key elements of leadership development. The paper also discusses challenges in implementing person-centered leadership and proposes practical directions for improving managerial effectiveness in vocational education settings.

2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative research design to examine how the mechanism for developing managers' leadership skills can be improved through a person-centered approach in vocational education institutions. The qualitative design was selected because the study focused on understanding leadership practices, institutional experiences, and the perceptions of managers and educators rather than measuring leadership through numerical indicators. The participants consisted of several managers and educators from vocational education institutions. They were selected through purposive sampling because they had direct

experience with educational management, staff coordination, professional development, and institutional leadership practices. The selection of participants was intended to obtain relevant information from individuals who understood the practical challenges of leadership development in vocational education settings.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and institutional document analysis. The interviews explored participants' views on leadership skills, communication practices, individual support, professional development, organizational culture, and challenges in applying person-centered leadership. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to explain their experiences in detail while still keeping the discussion focused on the research topic. Institutional documents were also reviewed to support the interview data. These documents included available training materials, management guidelines, professional development plans, and institutional programs related to leadership or staff development. The document analysis helped identify whether leadership development mechanisms were formally supported by institutional policies and practices. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview responses and document findings were reviewed repeatedly to identify recurring themes related to person-centered leadership development.

The analysis focused on several key indicators, including empathy, open communication, individual support, reflective practice, organizational culture, resistance to change, resource limitations, time constraints, and soft-skill gaps. These themes were then organized into broader categories to explain the main components and challenges of leadership development. To improve the trustworthiness of the study, data from interviews and institutional documents were compared during the analysis process. This comparison helped confirm whether participants' statements were supported by institutional practices and written documents. The study did not include full interview transcripts or complete institutional documents in the body of the article. Instead, the main findings are presented through narrative explanation and summary tables in the Results and Discussion section. Ethical consideration was maintained by keeping participants' identities confidential and using the collected information only for academic purposes. Participants' responses were reported in summarized form to protect privacy and avoid identifying specific individuals or institutions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A person-centered approach can improve the mechanism for developing leadership skills among managers in vocational education institutions. The data from interviews and institutional document analysis indicate that leadership development becomes more effective when it focuses not only on administrative competence but also on empathy, communication, individual support, reflective practice, and continuous professional learning. Participants emphasized that managers in vocational education institutions need to understand the individual needs and professional capacities of teachers and staff. Managers who listen to employees, provide guidance, and support professional growth are more likely to create trust within the institution. This trust helps employees participate more actively in institutional activities and respond more positively to management decisions.

The key components of person-centered leadership development identified in this study are presented in **Table 1**. In vocational education institutions, teachers and staff may face various responsibilities related to practical training, curriculum implementation, student guidance, and institutional administration. When managers pay attention to these conditions,

employees feel that their work and challenges are recognized. Some teachers may need pedagogical training, while others may need mentoring, communication support, or opportunities to participate in institutional projects. A person-centered mechanism allows managers to identify these differences and provide more relevant support.

Table 1. Key components of person-centered leadership development.

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION	IMPACT ON LEADERSHIP
Empathy	Understanding employees' needs	Builds trust
Individual support	Tailored professional development	Increases motivation
Open communication	Transparent dialogue	Enhances teamwork
Reflective practice	Self-assessment and learning	Improves competence

Empathy appeared as one of the most important components of person-centered leadership. Managers who understand employees' difficulties can respond to workplace problems more constructively. Individual support also contributed to leadership effectiveness. Professional development is more meaningful when it is adjusted to the needs of employees. Open communication was another important finding. Participants indicated that transparent dialogue between managers and employees helps reduce misunderstanding and improve teamwork. When employees have opportunities to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss institutional problems, they become more involved in decision-making. This involvement can strengthen cooperation and increase commitment to institutional goals. Reflective practice helped managers improve their own leadership competence. Through self-assessment, managers can evaluate how their decisions, communication style, and problem-solving methods affect employees. Reflection also encourages managers to learn from experience and adjust their leadership practices according to institutional needs. Leadership development should not be treated as a single training event but as a continuous process. Organizational culture strongly influences the success of person-centered leadership development. Institutions that support openness, cooperation, and professional learning provide better conditions for managers to apply person-centered practices. In contrast, institutions with rigid hierarchy and limited participation may make it difficult for managers to involve employees in decision-making and professional growth. At the same time, several challenges were identified in the implementation of person-centered leadership.

The main challenges and suggested solutions are summarized in **Table 2**. Resistance to change was one of the most visible challenges. Some managers and employees were more familiar with traditional leadership practices based on hierarchy, instruction, and control. This made it difficult to introduce more participatory and supportive leadership practices. Training programs are therefore needed to help managers understand the value of person-centered leadership and apply it in daily institutional work. Limited resources also affected leadership development. Some institutions did not have enough access to training materials, mentoring systems, or structured professional development programs. Without institutional support, leadership development may depend only on individual initiative. This condition can make the process inconsistent and less sustainable. Time constraints were another challenge. Managers in vocational education institutions often deal with heavy administrative responsibilities, reporting duties, staff coordination, and program supervision. These responsibilities may limit their time for mentoring, reflection, and individual support. Workload redistribution can help managers create more space for leadership development activities. Soft-skill gaps also influenced the implementation of person-centered leadership.

Some managers may have strong administrative skills but limited ability in communication, emotional awareness, conflict management, or team development. Continuous learning is necessary to improve these interpersonal competencies. Without soft skills, person-centered leadership may remain only a formal concept and may not be reflected in actual management practice.

Table 2. Challenges in implementing person-centered leadership.

CHALLENGE	DESCRIPTION	SUGGESTED SOLUTION
Resistance to change	Preference for traditional leadership styles	Training programs
Lack of resources	Limited access to development tools	Institutional support
Time constraints	Heavy administrative workload	Workload redistribution
Skill gaps	Lack of soft skills	Continuous learning

An improved leadership development mechanism should combine individual development and institutional support. At the individual level, managers need training in empathy, communication, reflective practice, and staff support. At the institutional level, vocational education institutions need clear programs, supportive policies, mentoring systems, and a culture of collaboration. These two levels should work together. Thus, leadership development becomes systematic rather than occasional. Person-centered leadership can strengthen managerial effectiveness by improving trust, motivation, teamwork, and professional growth. In vocational education institutions, this approach is especially relevant because managers must work with teachers, staff, students, and external partners. A leadership mechanism that values individual potential can help institutions become more adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to educational change. This study adds new information regarding educational institutions, especially relating to leadership [14, 15].

4. CONCLUSION

The mechanism for developing managers' leadership skills in vocational education institutions can be improved through a person-centered approach. Effective leadership development should not focus only on administrative ability, but also on empathy, communication, individual support, reflective practice, and continuous professional learning. These elements help managers build trust, motivate employees, strengthen teamwork, and create a more supportive institutional environment. The person-centered leadership requires both individual commitment and institutional support. Managers need opportunities to improve their interpersonal and reflective skills, while institutions need to provide structured training, mentoring, workload balance, and a collaborative organizational culture. Without these supports, the implementation of person-centered leadership may remain limited and inconsistent. Several challenges were identified, including resistance to change, lack of resources, time constraints, and soft-skill gaps. These challenges can be addressed through continuous training, institutional policy support, and practical leadership development programs. Future research may examine the effectiveness of person-centered leadership mechanisms using broader samples, comparative institutional studies, or quantitative assessment of leadership outcomes.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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