THE INFLUENCE OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP ON DECISION-MAKING IN TEACHING MANAGEMENT AT UNIVERSITIES—A CASE STUDY OF GUILIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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This Independent Study Has Been Approved as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Business Administration

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Title: The Influence of Distributed Leadership on Decision-Making in Teaching Management at Universities: A Case Study of Guilin University of Technology

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing complexity and need for reform in the higher education environment, traditional centralized management models struggle to meet the demands for scientific and democratic decision-making in university teaching management. This study took Guilin University of Technology as a case study, aimed to analyze the specific impact of distributed leadership on the teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology, and to provide targeted suggestions for Guilin University of Technology to optimize its distributed leadership practices and improve its teaching management decision-making.

This study was based on Spillane's "Leader-Follower-Situation" (LFS) framework. Through semi-structured interviews with 40 university-level administrators, college-level executives, academic leaders, and key faculty members, this research delved into the practical mechanisms and impacts of distributed leadership on teaching management decision-making from the perspectives of the leaders, followers, and situations. The research finds that the practice of distributed leadership at Guilin University of Technology exhibits "guided" characteristics: administrative leaders dominate decision-making, supplemented by the influence of informal academic leaders; the participation of followers, such as teachers, is limited, and their capacity development is insufficient; and the decision-making model is shaped collectively by organizational culture, institutional environment, and external policies. Specifically, Guilin University of Technology should facilitate the transformation of leadership roles, strengthen teacher incentives and capacity-building, and foster a more collaborative and open institutional culture to advance distributed leadership in teaching management. The study proposes measures to enhance the effectiveness of distributed leadership practices by transforming the roles of leaders, improving incentive mechanisms, fostering a collaborative culture, and optimizing institutional design, thereby promoting more scientific and democratic teaching

management decision-making. This research provides theoretical support and practical reference for teaching management reform in local universities. Specifically, it is recommended that leaders should shift their role positioning and build collaborative platforms; followers should strengthen incentives and empowerment to stimulate participation momentum; and a collaborative culture should be cultivated in the context of the situation to optimize the institutional environment.

Keywords: distributed leadership, university teaching management, teaching management decision-making, Guilin University of Technology, LFS framework

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CHENG FENG

DECLARATION

I, FENG CHENG, hereby declare that this Independent Study entitled “The Influence of Distributed Leadership on Decision-making in Teaching Management at Universities: A case study of Guilin University of Technology” is an original work and has never been submitted to any academic institution for a degree.

(CHENG FENG)
June 30, 2025

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1.1 Background of the Study

With the rapid development of globalization and information technology, the social environment, mission, and operational models of higher education are facing profound changes. Against this backdrop, traditional hierarchical and centralized management models are increasingly revealing their limitations, struggling to effectively respond to the complex and evolving demands of higher education development. Distributed leadership, as an emerging organizational leadership theory, emphasizes that leadership is not an individual trait but rather a dynamic interaction and practice diffused among organizational members. It provides a new theoretical perspective and practical pathway for innovation in higher education management, particularly in the decision-making mechanisms of teaching management.

The rise of distributed leadership theory is a reflection on and transcendence of traditional "heroic" and "individualized" leadership concepts. Early leadership research focused on the personal traits of leaders, their behaviors, or leadership styles in specific situations. However, since the end of the 20th century, the increasing complexity and dynamism of organizational environments have made it difficult for any single individual to possess all the information and wisdom required for organizational operation. Gronn (2000) systematically elaborated on the concept of distributed leadership in his work, arguing that leadership is the result of synergistic interaction among multiple individuals in an organization, rather than the exclusive power of senior managers. Spillane et al. (2001) further introduced distributed leadership into the field of education, proposing the "Leader-Follower-Situation" interaction framework. This framework emphasizes that leadership practice is a product of the interaction among leaders, followers, and the material and cultural context they are in, rather than merely a reflection of the leader's behavior.

Since then, distributed leadership theory has been continuously enriched and developed. Harris (2008) pointed out that distributed leadership is not simply about delegating tasks but about achieving organizational goals by cultivating the leadership capacity of members, building a cooperative culture, and promoting knowledge sharing. Recent research has focused more on the practical mechanisms, influencing factors, and applicability of distributed leadership in different cultural contexts. Leithwood & Heck (2016) explored the impact of different forms of distributed leadership on school improvement and student academic outcomes, highlighting its potential in enhancing

organizational effectiveness.

In the field of education, the application of distributed leadership is becoming increasingly prominent. From basic to higher education, a growing body of research and practice shows that distributed leadership helps to stimulate teachers' professional autonomy and work enthusiasm, promote collaboration and innovation in teaching teams, and improve teaching quality and student learning experiences (Jones et al., 2012). Particularly in the complex system of university teaching management, the introduction of the distributed leadership concept helps to break down traditional administrative barriers, promote cross-departmental and interdisciplinary cooperation, and create a positive situation where multiple stakeholders jointly participate in teaching management decision-making.

Chinese higher education is in a critical period of transitioning from massification to universal access, while also shouldering the strategic task of building "Double First-Class" (world-class universities and first-class disciplines). Against this macroscopic background, university teaching management faces unprecedented challenges and profound needs for reform. The contradiction between scale expansion and quality improvement is becoming increasingly prominent. The continuous expansion of higher education scale has placed higher demands on the allocation of teaching resources, monitoring of the teaching process, and assurance of teaching quality. The traditional teaching management model, dominated by administrative directives, often proves inadequate in dealing with large-scale and diversified teaching needs, making it difficult to achieve refined management and personalized cultivation (Cheng, 2019).

The reform of the internal governance structure of universities has put forward new requirements for the division of powers and responsibilities in teaching management. With the advancement of the modern university system, the internal governance structure of universities has become increasingly complex, with teaching management involving multiple stakeholders such as faculties, departments, teachers, and administrative departments. How to reasonably delegate teaching management authority, stimulate the vitality of grassroots teaching organizations, and form a teaching management operating mechanism with clear powers and responsibilities and efficient collaboration, while ensuring the overall direction of the university and the standards of teaching quality, is one of the core issues of teaching management reform in universities.

Faced with these challenges, university teaching management urgently needs to transform from the traditional centralized and administrative model to a more flexible,

efficient, and collaborative model, and distributed leadership provides important theoretical support for this. Teaching management decision-making is the "conductor's baton" of university teaching activities, and its level of scientific and democratic practice is directly related to the effective allocation of teaching resources, the smooth promotion of teaching reform, and the fundamental guarantee of the quality of talent cultivation.

Scientific decision-making emphasizes that the decision-making process should be based on sufficient information, data, and rational analysis, follow the laws of education and teaching, and use scientific methods and tools to achieve the optimal decision-making effect. In university teaching management, scientific decision-making means accurately diagnosing problems in teaching, rigorously demonstrating reform plans, and objectively evaluating teaching effects. For example, in key areas such as program establishment, curriculum system construction, and teaching resource investment, decisions lacking scientific demonstration may lead to wasted resources, declining teaching quality, and even deviation from talent cultivation goals (Meek & Wood, 2016). Promoting scientific decision-making helps to improve the predictability, precision, and effectiveness of teaching management.

Democratic decision-making emphasizes the openness, transparency, broad participation, and consensus-building of the decision-making process. In university teaching management, teachers are the main body of teaching activities, and students are the recipients of educational services. Their opinions and needs are crucial for improving the level of teaching management. By establishing and improving democratic decision-making mechanisms, such as faculty congresses, student forums, and teaching committees, and absorbing multiple stakeholders to participate in the formulation of teaching policies, the design of teaching plans, and the evaluation of teaching quality, the acceptability and execution of decisions can be enhanced, and the sense of ownership and work enthusiasm of teachers and students can be stimulated (Santiago & Carvalho, 2018). Democratic decision-making also helps to prevent arbitrary personal decisions and "off-the-cuff" decisions, promote the formation of collective wisdom, and optimize decision-making plans.

Organically combining scientific and democratic decision-making is the key to improving the effectiveness of university teaching management. The core principles of distributed leadership theory—power sharing, collective wisdom, and collaborative cooperation—are highly consistent with the intrinsic requirements of scientific and democratic decision-making. By building a distributed leadership model, the knowledge and experience of personnel from different levels and professional

backgrounds can be more widely absorbed, providing an information basis for scientific decision-making; at the same time, its inclusive and participatory characteristics also provide a mechanism guarantee for democratic decision-making.

Guilin University of Technology was chosen as the case study mainly based on the following considerations: representativeness and typicality. As a regional high-level university with a focus on engineering, the challenges faced and explorations made by Guilin University of Technology in teaching management can, to a certain extent, reflect the common situation of local engineering universities in China. In recent years, the university has made a series of beneficial attempts in reforming the talent cultivation model and building a teaching quality assurance system, which provides a specific context for studying the practical application of distributed leadership in teaching management decision-making.

1.2 Questions of the Study

Based on the foregoing research background, distributed leadership theory provides new ideas for solving the current difficulties in university teaching management. However, its practical form and mechanism of action in specific contexts still need to be explored in depth. To reveal the actual operation and impact of distributed leadership in the teaching management decision-making of Guilin University of Technology, this study focuses on the core issue of "the impact of distributed leadership on teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology," which is further broken down into the following two sub-questions:

1. How does distributed leadership affect the teaching management decisions at Guilin University of Technology?

2. How can Guilin University of Technology optimize its distributed leadership practices to improve the level of teaching management decision-making?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

To answer the above research questions, this study sets the following specific research objectives. These objectives aim to examine the application of distributed leadership in the teaching management decision-making of Guilin University of Technology and ultimately form policy recommendations with practical guiding significance:

1. To examine the specific impact of distributed leadership on the teaching

management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology.

2. To provide targeted suggestions for Guilin University of Technology to optimize its distributed leadership practices and improve its teaching management decision-making.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study took Guilin University of Technology as a single case, focusing on the practical mechanism and impact of distributed leadership theory on university teaching management decision-making. Through an in-depth analysis of management practices under a specific organizational culture, the study focuses on revealing the specific operational form and effectiveness of this theory in teaching management decision-making.

This study adopted a qualitative research method, selecting 40 individuals from four core groups as research subjects: university-level teaching managers, college-level executives, academic leaders, and key faculty members. Through semi-structured interviews, multi-dimensional perspective data were obtained on the practical experience and cognitive feedback of personnel at different levels in teaching management decision-making, focusing on capturing the current status, process, and results of distributed leadership in practice, and how it works through the three variables, ultimately forming a theoretical framework with practical guiding value.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study is committed to enriching and deepening the application research of distributed leadership theory in the context of university teaching management decision-making. Although distributed leadership theory has received widespread attention in the field of education, its specific operating model, impact mechanism, and situational adaptability at the higher education level, especially in the core and complex decision-making context of teaching management, still require a large amount of empirical research to be revealed and confirmed. Through in-depth interviews and detailed analysis of the specific case of Guilin University of Technology, this study can go beyond general theoretical discussions to specifically present the practical status of the three variables of “leader, follower, and situation” in distributed leadership theory in university teaching management decision-making. This provides vivid case support

for the localized application of distributed leadership theory in the field of higher education management, and expand the explanatory power and application boundaries of the theory in specific organizational contexts.

2. Practical Significance

This study provides an important reference for Guilin University of Technology to understand the current status and effectiveness of leadership in its teaching management decision-making. Through systematic investigation and analysis, this study can help Guilin University of Technology identify the actual application degree of distributed leadership in its teaching management decision-making process, its main forms of expression, its existing advantages, and the challenges it may face. This evidence-based "diagnosis" can provide a mirror for the university's management, allowing for a clearer insight into the actual operation of the current teaching management decision-making mechanism and laying the foundation for subsequent precise improvements.

The results of this study can also provide useful reference for other local universities facing similar development stages or having similar organizational characteristics.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To ensure the standardization and clarity of the study, the following definitions are given for some key concepts involved in this study:

Distributed Leadership: Specific to educational management decision-making in universities, distributed leadership refers to the transformation of the traditional top-down single leadership model into a shared leadership model with multi-stakeholder collaborative participation in the university teaching management system.

University Teaching Management Decision-Making: This refers to the process by which managers of higher education institutions, when faced with problems or opportunities in the teaching management process, analyze and judge the internal and external environment, use scientific decision-making methods and procedures, and select the optimal solution from multiple alternative plans.

Leaders: Leaders in this study are divided into two main categories: Formal Leaders, who are administrative managers with clear management authority and decision-making power within the school's organizational structure; and Informal

Leaders, who are experts who do not hold major administrative leadership positions but exert significant influence in specific teaching matters due to their profound professional knowledge, academic reputation, or practical experience.

Followers: Followers are active participants and co-constructors in leadership practice, rather than passive implementers. They actively participate in the leadership process through their knowledge, skills, experience, and values, and jointly shape the direction and results of the organization with the leaders.

Situation: The situation is the most complex and multi-dimensional component of the LFS framework, covering all environmental factors that affect leadership practice, including multiple levels: internal organizational context, task context, material and symbolic tool context, and external environmental context.

Guilin University of Technology: Guilin University of Technology is a multi-disciplinary university located in Guilin, Guangxi. Founded in 1956, it was formerly the Guilin School of Geology. The university focuses on engineering, with coordinated development in science, management, literature, economics, law, and arts.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter systematically reviews the theoretical literature related to distributed leadership and university teaching management decision-making, aiming to lay a solid theoretical foundation for this study. It focuses on the development, core concepts, and the "Leader-Follower-Situation" (LFS) interaction framework of distributed leadership theory. It deeply analyzes the characteristics, influencing factors, and specific processes of university management decision-making, and introduces the basic situation and teaching management system characteristics of the research subject, Guilin University of Technology. Finally, this chapter constructs a theoretical analysis framework based on previous research results. Through the theoretical review and analysis in this chapter, it is hoped that a theoretical support for a deep understanding of the role of distributed leadership in university teaching management decision-making can be provided, and scientific theoretical guidance for subsequent empirical research and practical improvement can be offered.

2.2 Distributed Leadership Theory

As the internal and external environments of organizations in the 21st century become increasingly complex and volatile, the traditional leadership model that relies on a few "heroic" individuals is facing significant challenges. In this context, distributed leadership, as a more inclusive, adaptive, and dynamic leadership paradigm, has gradually attracted widespread attention from both academia and practice. The core of distributed leadership theory is to view leadership as a social practice process. It is not simply equivalent to the delegation of power or the division of tasks, but emphasizes the dynamic generation of leadership practice in the interaction and collective action of organizational members.

The formation and development of distributed leadership theory have condensed the wisdom and contributions of many scholars. Peter Gronn was one of the first scholars to systematically elaborate on distributed leadership, viewing it as a "synergistic action," which laid the theoretical foundation for understanding how leadership operates in a non-hierarchical manner within an organization (Gronn, 2000). Alma Harris has long focused on the impact of distributed leadership on school improvement and organizational effectiveness, believing that distributed leadership is

a key strategy for promoting school change, stimulating teachers' potential, and improving educational quality (Harris, 2008).

Among the many distributed leadership theories, the "Leader-Follower-Situation" (LFS) interaction framework proposed by James P. Spillane and his colleagues is undoubtedly the most influential classic theory in this field. This framework profoundly reveals that leadership practice is a dynamic phenomenon produced in the process of mutual interaction and co-construction among leaders, followers, and the situation (Spillane et al., 2001). This theoretical perspective shifts the focus from "who the leader is" to "how leadership practice occurs," providing a powerful analytical framework for understanding and analyzing complex leadership phenomena in modern organizations.

2.2.1 Leaders

The leader variable is a core component of distributed leadership theory, demonstrating unique theoretical connotations and practical value in the dimensions of role distribution, leadership behavior characteristics, and power sharing.

Role Distribution: In the distributed leadership framework, the leader variable breaks through the focus on single, formal leaders in traditional leadership theory and instead recognizes the existence of diverse sources of leadership in an organization. These leaders include not only senior managers with formal authorization and management positions, such as principals, deans, and department heads, but also informal leaders with professional knowledge, experience, or influence in specific fields, such as senior teachers, academic leaders, and technical experts (Spillane et al., 2001). In the context of higher education, the distribution of leader roles reflects the complex interweaving of academic power and administrative power. Administrative leaders play a leading role through formal organizational structures and institutional arrangements, while academic leaders assume leadership functions in core activities such as teaching and research by virtue of their professional reputation, academic influence, and knowledge authority (Tao, 2018). Importantly, under the distributed leadership framework, the role of the leader is dynamic. The same person may play different roles in different task contexts—they may be the leader of one project and a follower in another professional field. This flexible role transformation reflects the openness and inclusivity of distributed leadership, effectively mobilizing the enthusiasm and creativity of members from different levels and professional backgrounds within the organization.

Leadership Behavior Characteristics: The behavior of leaders in the context of

distributed leadership exhibits distinct characteristics of collaboration, empowerment, and situational adaptability. Collaboration is reflected in the fact that leaders are no longer authoritative figures who make decisions and command alone, but actively seek cooperation with other members to solve complex problems through collective wisdom (Harris, 2013). Empowerment is demonstrated by leaders proactively sharing power and responsibility with members who have corresponding capabilities, providing them with opportunities and platforms to play a leading role. Situational adaptability requires leaders to be able to flexibly adjust their leadership styles and behaviors according to different task requirements and environmental conditions (Leithwood et al., 2007). In higher education teaching management decision-making, the behavioral characteristics of distributed leaders also manifest as a high degree of emphasis on professionalism. Due to the professionalism and complexity of teaching activities, effective teaching management decisions require leaders to have a profound theoretical foundation in education and teaching and rich practical experience, to be able to accurately grasp the laws of teaching, and to scientifically formulate teaching policies and measures (Liu & Zhang, 2023).

Power Sharing: Power sharing is the core principle of distributed leadership theory, which emphasizes that power should not be concentrated in the hands of a few individuals, but should be reasonably distributed among organizational members according to task needs and individual capabilities. This power sharing is not a simple delegation of power, but a dynamic allocation based on professional capabilities and task characteristics (Gronn, 2002). In higher education institutions, power sharing is reflected in the coordinated unity of administrative power and academic power, mutual respect and cooperation between managers and teachers, and democratic participation and the play of collective wisdom in the decision-making process. The realization of power sharing requires the establishment of corresponding institutional guarantees and cultural atmosphere. At the institutional level, it is necessary to improve the mechanisms and procedures for participating in decision-making and to clarify the boundaries of powers and responsibilities of members from different levels and professional backgrounds. At the cultural level, it is necessary to create an open, inclusive, and mutually trusting organizational atmosphere that encourages members to actively participate and bravely assume responsibilities (Harris, 2022).

2.2.2 Followers

The follower variable holds an equally important position in distributed leadership theory. Its performance in dimensions such as participation status, capability level, and interaction patterns directly affects the effectiveness of distributed leadership practice.

Participation Status: Followers in distributed leadership are not passive implementers, but active participants and co-constructors of leadership practice. Traditional leadership theories often view followers as objects of the leader's influence, whereas distributed leadership theory believes that followers actively participate in the leadership process through their knowledge, skills, experience, and values, jointly shaping the organization's direction and outcomes with the leader (Spillane, 2005). In higher education teaching management decision-making, the participation of followers is characterized by multiple levels and forms. Teachers, as the main group of followers, not only implement the decisions of the management but, more importantly, provide feedback, suggestions, and improvement plans for policy implementation based on their professional judgment and teaching experience. Students may also become followers in certain contexts, contributing their perspectives and suggestions for educational improvement by participating in activities such as course evaluation and teaching reform. Administrative staff, as followers, support the smooth progress of various educational activities through their professional services and management experience (Gong, 2023).

Capability Level: The capability level of followers is a key factor affecting the effectiveness of distributed leadership practice. Followers with high capability levels can better understand the leader's intentions, provide valuable suggestions and support, and assume leadership responsibilities when necessary. The capabilities of followers include multiple dimensions such as professional skills, communication and coordination skills, critical thinking skills, and learning and adaptation skills (Wang, 2017). In the context of teaching management decision-making, the professional teaching ability, curriculum development ability, and student management ability of teacher-followers directly affect the implementation effect of teaching policies. The organizational coordination ability, data analysis ability, and communication and expression ability of management staff-followers affect the quality of information collection, processing, and transmission for decision-making. Therefore, improving the capability level of followers is an important prerequisite for implementing effective distributed leadership (Ma, 2023).

Interaction Patterns: The interaction patterns between followers and leaders, and among followers, determine the dynamic characteristics of distributed leadership practice. An effective interaction pattern should be a two-way, multi-level, trust-based cooperative relationship. Followers should not only be able to accept and understand the guidance of leaders but also be able to proactively provide feedback and suggestions, achieving mutual learning and common growth in interaction (López-Martínez et al.,

2023). In higher education institutions, the interaction patterns of followers are characterized by professionalism and equality. Due to the professionalism of educational work, teacher-followers often have strong professional autonomy. Their interaction with managers is more of a dialogue and negotiation between equal professionals, rather than a simple superior-subordinate relationship. This interaction pattern requires managers to have high professional literacy and communication skills to establish cooperative relationships with teachers based on professional recognition (Zhang, 2017).

2.2.3 Situation

The situation variable is the most complex and multidimensional component of distributed leadership theory, encompassing all environmental factors that influence leadership practice. In dimensions such as organizational culture, institutional environment, and external policies, situational factors profoundly affect the implementation effect of distributed leadership.

Organizational Culture: As an important component of situational factors, organizational culture provides the deep-seated value foundation and behavioral norms for the implementation of distributed leadership. In higher education institutions, the tradition of academic freedom, the culture of peer review, and the value pursuit of truth are all important elements of organizational culture. These cultural characteristics not only provide favorable conditions for the implementation of distributed leadership but also place special demands on it (Vuori, 2019). A positive organizational culture can promote the effective implementation of distributed leadership. An open and inclusive cultural atmosphere encourages members to actively participate in the decision-making process and to bravely express different opinions. A collaborative and mutually supportive cultural tradition promote mutual support and knowledge sharing among members. An innovative and enterprising cultural orientation stimulates members' creative thinking and enthusiasm for reform. Conversely, a hierarchical and closed organizational culture will hinder the promotion of distributed leadership (Chen & Liu, 2018).

Institutional Environment: The institutional environment provides the formal rule framework and operating mechanism for the implementation of distributed leadership. Institutional arrangements, including organizational structure design, power allocation mechanisms, decision-making participation procedures, and incentive and restraint systems, directly affect whether distributed leadership can operate effectively (Spillane et al., 2004). In higher education teaching management decision-making, the

role of the institutional environment is particularly important. A sound academic committee system provides institutional guarantees for teachers to participate in academic decision-making. A standardized teaching quality monitoring system provides information support for teaching management decision-making. A flexible personnel management system creates conditions for the rational allocation and flow of talent. At the same time, imperfections in the institutional environment may also become obstacles to the implementation of distributed leadership, such as an overly rigid hierarchical management system and a lack of effective communication and coordination mechanisms (Li, 2022).

External Policies: The external policy environment sets the boundary conditions and development direction for the implementation of distributed leadership. External factors such as government education policies, laws and regulations, and resource allocation policies have an important impact on the leadership practices of higher education institutions (Bennett et al., 2003). In the context of Chinese higher education, national education policies, the "Double First-Class" construction requirements, and the new era undergraduate education reform and other external policy orientations provide clear goal guidance and value standards for university teaching management decision-making. These policies not only provide opportunities for the implementation of distributed leadership, such as encouraging the expansion of university autonomy and supporting teaching reform and innovation, but also pose challenges, such as how to find a balance between policy requirements and the actual situation of the university, and how to exert the advantages of distributed leadership while ensuring policy implementation (Yan, 2021).

Through the organic combination of the three variables—leader, follower, and situation—distributed leadership theory provides important theoretical guidance for understanding and improving higher education teaching management decision-making. This theory emphasizes that effective teaching management decision-making cannot rely solely on the personal judgment of a few managers, but needs to fully mobilize the wisdom and experience of multiple stakeholders such as teachers, students, and administrative staff, and to form a more scientific, democratic, and effective decision-making mechanism through collaborative interaction on the basis of fully considering the specific situational conditions (Tian et al., 2015).

2.3 University Teaching Management Decision-Making

Decision-making is the core of management, running through all activities of a university. The quality of university management decisions directly affects the university's direction, resource allocation efficiency, talent cultivation quality, and even its overall development level. Therefore, understanding the basic theories of decision-making, grasping the uniqueness of university management decisions, and clarifying the specific process of teaching management decision-making are crucial for enhancing university governance capabilities.

Organizational decision-making theory provides multiple perspectives for understanding the complex decision-making phenomena in universities. The traditional rational decision-making model assumes that decision-makers have complete information, clear and consistent goals, and can select the optimal solution through logical operations. However, Herbert Simon's bounded rationality model is closer to reality. He argued that individuals and organizations are constrained in decision-making by cognitive limitations, incomplete information, and time and cost constraints, thus pursuing "satisficing rather than optimizing" solutions (Hieu, 2021). In the environment of a university, where intellectuals are gathered and stakeholders are diverse, the political model also has strong explanatory power. It views decision-making as a process of negotiation, consultation, alliance, and even conflict among different power subjects or interest groups to reach consensus or compromise, with the decision outcome often being the product of a power struggle. The garbage can model proposed by Cohen, March, and Olsen provides a unique perspective for understanding organizations like universities, which are seen as "organized anarchies." This model suggests that decision-making does not follow a strict linear logic but is the result of four relatively independent "streams"—problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities—accidentally meeting in a "garbage can" (i.e., a decision-making opportunity) (Yang & Liu, 2018). These theories collectively reveal the complexity and diversity of the university decision-making process.

As a special type of social organization, university management decision-making exhibits significant characteristics. Multiple and ambiguous goals: Universities typically pursue multiple goals simultaneously, such as teaching, research, and social service. These goals may have tensions or even conflicts, making it difficult to clearly define and prioritize decision-making objectives. Coexistence of "professional bureaucracy" and "dual control systems": Universities have both a hierarchical system of administrative management and a tradition of professional autonomy and peer review oriented towards academics. The interaction and balance between administrative power

and academic power profoundly affect the decision-making model (Duan & Shen, 2022). Complexity of stakeholders and wide participation: University decision-making involves the interests of multiple stakeholders, including faculty and staff, students, administrators, alumni, government, funders, and the public. Their expectations and demands vary, which increases the difficulty of coordinating decisions. In addition, university decisions often exhibit gradualism and prudence, especially when involving academic affairs and major reforms, often requiring a long process of deliberation, discussion, and argumentation. As Toma (2020) pointed out, university decision-making is often driven by multiple logics, including bureaucratic, market, professional, and community logics, the interweaving of which makes the decision-making context more complex.

Numerous factors jointly influence the formulation and implementation of university management decisions. Internal factors mainly include: the university's mission and development strategy, which provide the basic direction for decisions; the organizational structure and governance system, such as power distribution, committee settings, and communication channels, which directly shape the decision-making process and participation; campus culture and tradition, such as a preference for democratic consultation or a habit of administrative directives, which profoundly affect the decision-making style; the cognitive level, decision-making style, and leadership ability of leaders; and available resources, including financial, human, informational, and technological resources. External factors mainly cover: national macro policies and regulations, such as higher education system reforms and evaluation and accreditation standards; the demands of economic and social development for talent cultivation and technological innovation; funding sources and allocation mechanisms; and the competitive landscape with other universities and the expectations and supervision of the public. These internal and external factors are intertwined, jointly constituting the complex ecosystem of university management decision-making.

Among the various management decisions in universities, teaching management decisions are particularly important because they are directly related to the core mission of talent cultivation. Their specific process and links usually manifest as a dynamic cycle. First is problem identification and agenda setting. Problems in teaching management may arise from internal quality monitoring (e.g., student academic warnings, course evaluation feedback), changes in the external environment (e.g., new requirements for talent specifications due to industrial structure adjustments, new opportunities brought by the development of educational technology), or policy drivers (e.g., professional accreditation requirements, teaching reform projects). Once a problem is considered important, it enters the decision-making agenda. Second is

information collection and analysis. Around a specific teaching problem, it is necessary to collect relevant data (e.g., student learning data, teacher teaching feedback, graduate employment situation, experience of domestic and foreign benchmark institutions) and conduct in-depth analysis to accurately diagnose the cause of the problem and grasp the reform needs. Third is the formulation and evaluation of alternative solutions. For the problem, multiple possible solutions need to be designed (e.g., revising talent cultivation plans, developing new courses, reforming teaching methods, adjusting the allocation of teaching resources), and the feasibility, expected effects, potential risks, and resource requirements of each solution need to be comprehensively evaluated. Then comes the solution selection and decision-making stage. This stage often involves the participation of multiple subjects (e.g., vice president for teaching, academic affairs office, college, teaching guidance committee, professor committee, and even student representatives). Through meetings, voting, and consultation, the adopted solution is finally determined. Once a decision is made, it enters the organization and implementation stage, which includes formulating detailed action plans, allocating resources, clarifying responsibilities, and conducting mobilization and training. Finally is effect monitoring and feedback evaluation. The implementation process and results of the decision are tracked and monitored to assess whether the expected goals have been achieved, to summarize experiences and lessons learned, and to use the evaluation results as a basis for improving the next round of decision-making. The research by Li and Luo (2021) pointed out that the key factors affecting university teaching management decisions include the cognition and ability of the decision-making subjects, the adequacy and authenticity of decision-making information, the scientific and democratic nature of the decision-making mechanism, and the support of the organizational culture. They also emphasized the importance of optimizing information communication, improving participation mechanisms, and strengthening process monitoring. The entire teaching management decision-making process reflects the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, aiming to continuously improve teaching quality and management level.

2.4 Background of Guilin University of Technology

Guilin University of Technology is a multi-disciplinary university co-founded by the central and local governments, established in 1956. The university currently has 19 secondary teaching units, 3 postdoctoral research stations, 3 first-level discipline doctoral degree authorization points, 21 first-level discipline master's degree authorization points, and 14 professional master's degree categories. The university offers 82 undergraduate majors and 50 vocational and technical majors, with a total

full-time student population of over 45,000. The university has four campuses, and this multi-campus structure brings complexity and multi-level characteristics to its teaching management decision-making system. This organizational structure provides a rich sample for studying the application of distributed leadership in university teaching management.

As the research subject of this study, the university has typical representativeness in its teaching management system and decision-making mechanism. In terms of teaching management organizational structure, Guilin University of Technology has established a two-level management system of university-college. At the university level, the Undergraduate School serves as the core department of teaching management, responsible for the overall planning and quality monitoring of undergraduate teaching throughout the university. Each secondary college bears important responsibilities in teaching management, forming a hierarchical management and decision-making model.

In terms of discipline construction and professional development, the university has formed a pattern of coordinated development of multiple disciplines, with engineering as the mainstay, and coordinated development in science, management, humanities, economics, law, and arts. Teaching management in a multi-disciplinary context involves the special needs of different professional fields, requiring more flexible and professional decision-making mechanisms, which provides a realistic basis for exploring the role of distributed leadership in interdisciplinary teaching management decision-making.

In terms of the teaching quality assurance system, the university has established a relatively complete teaching quality monitoring and evaluation mechanism, covering the entire process of management from teaching plan formulation, curriculum construction, practical teaching to teaching evaluation. The effective operation of this system requires the collaborative participation of management departments at all levels, teaching units, and teacher groups, which reflects the distributed characteristics of teaching management decision-making.

As a representative of local high-level engineering universities, the management experience accumulated by Guilin University of Technology in promoting teaching reform and improving the quality of talent cultivation provides a typical case for studying the specific application of distributed leadership theory in university teaching management decision-making, which has important research value.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

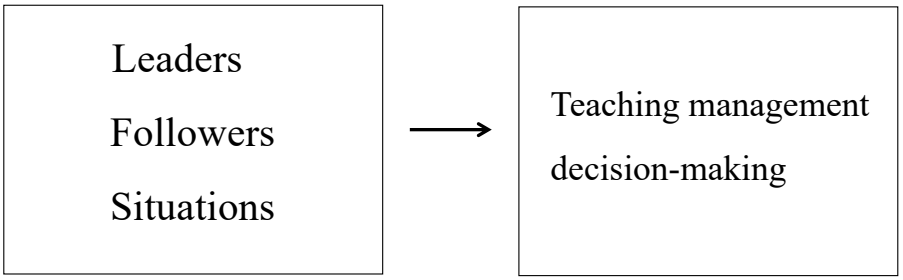


Figure 2. 1 Conceptual Framework

This study constructs an integrated analytical framework aimed at revealing the impact of distributed leadership on the teaching management decision-making of Guilin University of Technology. The study starts from the practice of distributed leadership, focusing on the performance and actual effects of the three variables of the Leader-Follower-Situation (LFS) interaction framework in the practice of teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology. Through in-depth investigation of the three variables, the study outlines the full picture of distributed leadership practice at Guilin University of Technology, revealing the challenges and shortcomings faced at the current practice level.

Chapter 3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative analysis method, selecting four types of groups closely related to teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology, with a total of 40 interviewees. The interviews use a semi-structured interview outline. The interview guide is divided into three parts, corresponding to the three variables in the LFS theoretical framework, with each part including 8 questions.

3.2 Interview Design

The design of the interview outline aims to systematically and multi-dimensionally explore the specific manifestations and impacts of distributed leadership in the teaching management decision-making of Guilin University of Technology. The outline is divided into three parts, corresponding to the three variables in the LFS theoretical framework, with each part including 8 questions. During the interview process, the order and depth of the questions can be flexibly adjusted according to the specific identity and responses of the interviewees, and appropriate follow-up questions can be added to obtain richer information.

Table 3. 1 Interview Outline

Part 1: Leader Variable **This part aims to understand the role distribution, leadership behavior characteristics, and power-sharing situation of leaders in the teaching management of Guilin University of Technology.**
Q1. Please describe which levels of personnel participate in leadership and decision-making in the teaching management process at Guilin University of Technology. What roles do they play respectively? Q2. In your work experience, what is the power distribution among managers at different levels, such as university-level leaders, department leaders, and teaching and research section heads, in teaching management decision-making? Is there a situation of power delegation or sharing? Q3. Do you think the current teaching management decision-making in the university reflects more of a “centralized leadership” or “distributed leadership” characteristic? Can you explain with specific examples?

Q4. In the process of important teaching reforms or policy formulation, how do leaders at different levels coordinate and cooperate? What are the effective collaboration mechanisms?

Q5. What qualities do you observe in excellent teaching management leaders? How do they balance authority and inclusiveness?

Q6. In your opinion, what problems exist in the current leadership distribution in university teaching management? How do these problems affect decision-making effectiveness?

Q7. What kind of leadership behavior or management style do you think is more conducive to mobilizing the enthusiasm of all parties to participate in teaching management decision-making?

Q8. What suggestions do you have for cultivating and developing more distributed leaders? How should the university identify and cultivate potential teaching management leadership talents?

Part 2: Follower Variable

This part aims to understand the participation status, capability level, and interaction patterns of followers including teachers and administrative staff.

Q9. What is the degree of participation of different groups, such as general teachers and administrative staff, in the teaching management decision-making process? Through what channels do they express their opinions and suggestions?

Q10. What do you think of the initiative of the teacher group to participate in teaching management decision-making? What are the main factors affecting their participation enthusiasm?

Q11. In your observation, which types of teachers or administrative staff are more likely to play a leading role in teaching management? What characteristics do they usually have?

Q12. What are the current deficiencies in the professional and management capabilities of teachers and administrative staff when participating in teaching management decision-making?

Q13. Does the university have leadership training or capacity-building programs for teachers and administrative staff? How effective are they?

Q14. In the implementation process of teaching management decisions, is the feedback mechanism for grassroots teachers and administrative staff sound? Can their opinions be effectively conveyed upwards?

Q15. What kind of incentive mechanism do you think can better encourage teachers and administrative staff to participate in teaching management decision-making? How is the university doing in this regard?

Q16. In the practice of distributed leadership, what is the cooperation effect between different groups (such as teachers and administrative staff, senior teachers and young teachers, etc.)? What are the obstacles to collaboration?

Part 3: Situation Variable

This part aims to understand the impact of situational factors including organizational culture, institutional environment, and external policies on the practice of distributed leadership at Guilin University of Technology.

Q17. Please describe the characteristics of the organizational culture of Guilin University of Technology. What impact does this cultural atmosphere have on the teaching management decision-making model?

Q18. To what extent does the university's existing teaching management system (such as decision-making processes, division of powers and responsibilities, assessment and evaluation, etc.) support or constrain the practice of distributed leadership?

Q19. As a local university of science and technology, how does the external environment faced by Guilin University of Technology (such as government policies, industry needs, competitive pressures, etc.) affect its teaching management decision-making model?

Q20. What role have the university's informatization construction and technology platforms played in supporting distributed leadership and multi-party participation in decision-making?

Q21. Are there differences in the participation models of teaching management decision-making in different disciplines (such as engineering, science, humanities, etc.)? How are these differences reflected?

Q22. What impact has the university's resource allocation situation (human, financial, material, etc.) had on the implementation of distributed leadership?

Q23. What impact do you think the current external evaluation system (such as teaching evaluation, discipline evaluation, etc.) has on the university's internal teaching management decision-making model?

Q24. In your opinion, what improvements are needed in institutional design, cultural construction, and environmental creation for Guilin University of Technology to better implement distributed leadership?

3.3 Population and Sampling

To ensure that the research can comprehensively reflect the practical characteristics and impacts of distributed leadership on the teaching management decision-making of Guilin University of Technology, this study determined the interviewees based on the following criteria: the interviewees must be directly or indirectly involved in the teaching management decision-making process, covering the links of decision-making formulation, implementation, and feedback, to ensure the acquisition of multi-perspective data; the interviewees must be typical at the university-level management, college-level execution, discipline leadership, or teaching implementation level, and be able to reflect the experience and views of different levels and different responsibility groups; the interviewees must have worked at Guilin University of Technology for at least three years, with in-depth understanding and rich experience in the university's teaching management practice, to ensure the reliability and depth of the feedback.

This study used the purposive sampling method to select 40 interviewees from four types of groups closely related to teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology. The specific composition is as follows:

University-level teaching managers (8 people, 20%): Including heads of the Academic Affairs Office, vice presidents (in charge of teaching), responsible for the

formulation and macro-coordination of the university's teaching management policies. College-level executives (10 people, 25%): Including associate deans for teaching, directors of teaching offices, responsible for the implementation and execution of college-level teaching management decisions. Academic leaders (8 people, 20%): Including discipline heads, directors of key laboratories, who play a leading role in professional construction and curriculum reform. Key faculty members (14 people, 35%): Including famous teaching masters, course coordinators, who are directly involved in classroom teaching and course design, representing the perspective of front-line teaching practitioners.

The sample composition considers the upper, middle, and lower-level participants in the decision-making chain, ensuring the diversity and representativeness of the data. The interviewees were selected from different colleges and functional departments of Guilin University of Technology, covering multiple disciplines such as science, engineering, humanities, and management, to enhance the universality of the research conclusions.

3.4 Data Collection

This study collected relevant data from a total of 40 university-level teaching managers, college-level executives, academic leaders, and key faculty members who have worked at Guilin University of Technology for three years, through interviews. Interviews were conducted from April to May 2025 to obtain relevant data, each interview was limited to 30 minutes, and the collected answers were analyzed and summarized according to the interview outline.

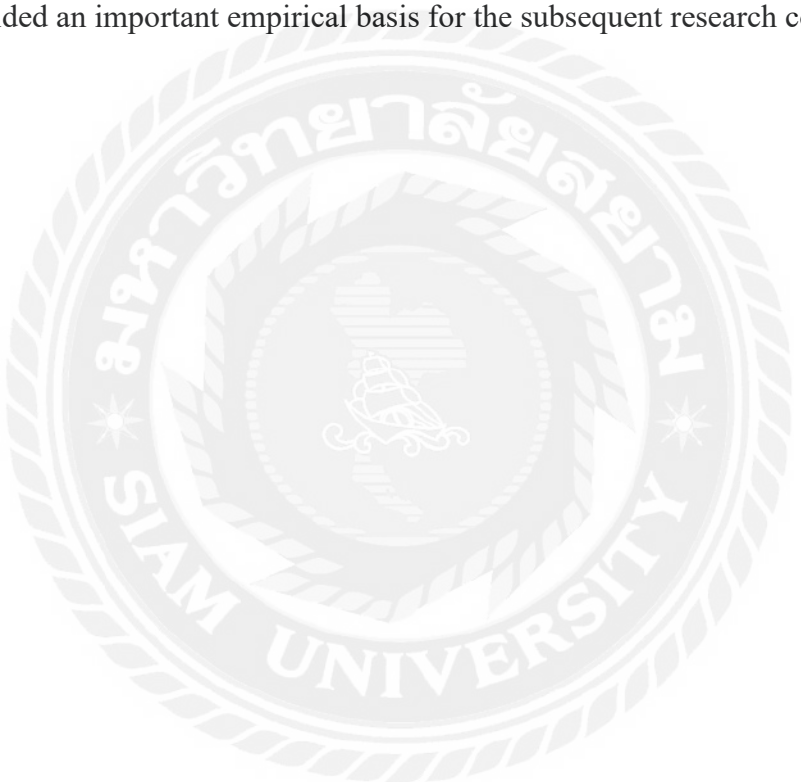
3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis used content analysis to systematically sort and summarize the information obtained from the interviews. First, all interview recordings were transcribed into written materials. Then, according to the structural framework of the interview outline, the interview content was classified and sorted, and the interviewees' answers were categorized according to different question themes.

On this basis, the researcher conducted an in-depth analysis of the interview data under each theme, extracted key information and viewpoints, and identified the

commonalities and differences in the interviewees' answers. By comparing and analyzing the views and experiences of different interviewees, representative findings and conclusions were summarized. At the same time, important viewpoints and typical cases that appeared in the interviews were analyzed in detail to support the formation of the research conclusions.

To ensure the objectivity and accuracy of the analysis results, the researcher strictly followed the logical structure of the interview outline during the analysis process to avoid the influence of subjective bias. For sensitive information involved in the interviews, the principle of confidentiality was strictly followed, and the identities of the interviewees were anonymized when analyzing and quoting. The final analysis results provided an important empirical basis for the subsequent research conclusions.



Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present and analyze the data collected to answer the research questions. Following the research methodology described in Chapter 3, this study conducted semi-structured interviews with 40 subjects from four categories at Guilin University of Technology: university-level teaching managers, college-level executives, academic leaders, and key faculty members. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and organized.

4.2 Findings

Through content analysis of the 40 interview transcripts, this study distilled the main characteristics of distributed leadership practice in the teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology from the three dimensions of leader, follower, and situation.

4.2.1 Leaders: The Interweaving of Formal and Informal Power

The interview results show that leadership in the teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology presents a mixed model characterized by "formal hierarchy as the primary, with informal influence as supplementary."

1. Leadership Role Distribution: Administrative Power Dominates, Academic Influence Coexists

In the decision-making process, university-level and college-level administrative leaders (such as the vice president for teaching, the dean of academic affairs, and college deans) act as formal leaders, holding the final decision-making power and resource allocation authority. This dominant role of administrative leadership is particularly prominent in major matters such as the formulation of university-wide teaching policies, adjustments to professional program settings, and budget allocation.

However, the interviews also revealed the significant influence of informal leaders in specific decision-making areas. Academic leaders, renowned teachers, and senior professors, by virtue of their profound professional knowledge and academic prestige, play the roles of "opinion leaders" and "academic authorities" in highly professional decision-making processes, such as curriculum system construction, teaching content

reform, and textbook selection.

This coexistence of formal and informal leadership constitutes the basic landscape of leaders in the university's teaching management decision-making. Administrative leadership ensures the efficiency and standardization of decisions, while academic leadership guarantees their professionalism and scientific basis.

2. Power Sharing: Limited Delegation of Power and Task Delegation

Regarding power sharing, most interviewees believe that the university has made attempts to delegate power in recent years, but it is essentially closer to "task delegation" rather than "power sharing." The university level will delegate specific teaching reform tasks and curriculum construction projects to the colleges, but the core approval power and resource control remain centralized in the university's functional departments.

The degree of power sharing also varies among different colleges and for different matters. Engineering and science colleges, due to their strong professionalism and close ties with industry, seem to have greater autonomy in areas like curriculum setting and practical teaching arrangements. In contrast, colleges with basic disciplines or humanities face more constraints in their decision-making.

3. Leadership Behavior: A Contest between Collaborative Intent and Traditional Inertia

In terms of leadership behavior, most interviewees acknowledge that the university leadership has shown a stronger willingness to collaborate in recent years. For example, before drafting important teaching documents, opinions are solicited from various parties through forums and demonstration meetings.

However, the traditional "top-down" management inertia still persists. Some managers are accustomed to issuing directives directly, lacking sufficient communication and consultation, which to some extent weakens the effect of distributed leadership. The collaborative nature of decision-making is more evident in the "deliberation stage"; once it enters the formal "decision-making stage," it often reverts to a model where a few leaders make the final call.

4.2.2 Followers: Passive Participation and Expectations for Competency

In the practice of distributed leadership, the role of followers is equally crucial. The interviews found that the majority of teachers and front-line administrative staff, as "followers," have their participation status and competency levels directly affecting

the quality and implementation of decisions.

1. Participation Status: Limited Channels, Insufficient Initiative

Although the university provides some channels for participation (such as the faculty and staff representative congress, teaching committees, and online opinion solicitation), most teachers feel their level of participation is limited and rather passive. The main factors affecting their enthusiasm for participation are threefold: first, a heavy workload, leaving them with insufficient time and energy to engage in teaching management affairs; second, a feeling of being "insignificant," believing that their personal opinions are unlikely to change the final decision, leading to a low sense of efficacy in participation; and third, information asymmetry, with a lack of full understanding of the decision-making background and relevant information, making it difficult to put forward high-quality suggestions.

2. Competency Level: Professionally Profound but with Limited Managerial Vision

Interviewees generally recognize the professional competence of the faculty at Guilin University of Technology. However, they also pointed out that when participating in teaching management decision-making, some teachers lack systematic thinking, data analysis skills, and management knowledge. They can accurately identify problems from the perspective of their own courses or disciplines but find it difficult to think about solutions from the overall perspective of the college or the university. Furthermore, there is a relative lack of leadership or management competency training for teachers and administrative staff, which limits their potential to transition from "followers" to "leaders."

3. Interaction Patterns: Predominantly Vertical Communication, Insufficient Horizontal Collaboration

The interaction between followers and leaders mainly occurs through the vertical channel of "teacher -> department head -> college leadership -> university functional department." Information transmitted from the bottom up is prone to attenuation or filtering. Horizontal communication and collaboration among teachers from different disciplines and departments are relatively scarce, making it difficult to form an interdisciplinary force to jointly address complex teaching issues.

4.2.3 Situation: The Multiple Shaping Forces of Culture, Institution, and External Pressure

Situational factors provide the stage and background for the practice of distributed

leadership. The interviews show that the organizational culture, institutional environment, and external policies of Guilin University of Technology collectively shape its teaching management decision-making model.

1. Organizational Culture: Coexistence of a Pragmatic Engineering Culture and Hierarchical Concepts

As a university with distinct engineering characteristics, Guilin University of Technology has formed a pragmatic culture of "results-oriented and data-driven." In teaching management decision-making, analysis and argumentation based on data are more easily accepted. This cultural atmosphere provides fertile ground for the scientific basis of decisions.

However, coexisting with this pragmatic culture is a respect for administrative hierarchy that is common in traditional universities. This hierarchical concept to some extent solidifies the role positioning of leaders and followers, hindering deeper power sharing and flattened communication.

2. Institutional Environment: The Framework of University-College Two-Level Management and the Lack of Incentive Mechanisms

The "university-college two-level management" system implemented by the university provides an institutional framework for the practice of distributed leadership. Colleges have a certain degree of autonomy in terms of personnel, finance, and materials, enabling them to carry out teaching management innovation within a certain range. But at the same time, the current performance appraisal system (KPI) and incentive mechanisms invisibly constrain the deepening of distributed leadership.

3. External Policies: Passive Adaptation Driven by Evaluations

National macro-educational policies, especially various evaluation and accreditation processes (such as engineering education professional accreditation and undergraduate teaching work review and evaluation), are the main external forces driving the university's teaching management decision-making. These external evaluations clarify the standards and directions for the university's teaching reform but also cause many decisions to exhibit characteristics of being "evaluation-driven" and "passively adaptive." To pass these evaluations, the university often has to adopt a top-down, forceful implementation model to ensure that all indicators are met, which, in the short term, compresses the space for the practice of distributed leadership.

4.3 Discussion

Synthesizing the above findings, this study finds that the teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology exhibits a "guided" distributed leadership characteristic. That is, leadership practice is not completely monopolized by the top level, nor is it completely dispersed among organizational members, but rather, it involves the limited absorption of multiple actors' participation under the guidance and framework set by formal leaders. This practical model is the result of the university's adaptation and improvement of the traditional hierarchical management model under specific circumstances. The following is an in-depth discussion of this phenomenon in conjunction with theory.

1. Dynamic Interaction of Leaders, Followers, and Situation

The findings of this study confirm the explanatory power of LFS interaction framework (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004) . At Guilin University of Technology, teaching management decision-making is not an isolated act of leaders but a product of the interaction of the three. The external evaluation pressures and internal institutional constraints in the situation strengthen the dominant position of leaders (especially formal administrative leaders) and their control over the direction of decision-making. At the same time, the engineering cultural background requires leaders to rely on the wisdom of informal leaders (experts and scholars) on professional issues. In this context, the participation space and role positioning of followers (the majority of teachers) are dually affected: on the one hand, their professional opinions are valued in specific links; on the other hand, their participation is often limited to the framework set by the leaders, and their agency is not not fully stimulated, showing a feature of "passive participation." As Harris (2013) pointed out, without corresponding cultural and institutional support, distributed leadership can easily become a mere formality.

2. Imbalanced Manifestation of Scientific and Democratic Decision-Making

From the perspective of scientific and democratic decision-making, the practice at Guilin University of Technology also shows an imbalance. Thanks to the university's engineering culture and respect for experts, the scientific nature of decision-making is well guaranteed at the professional and technical level. For example, in curriculum reform and professional construction, the absorption of expert opinions ensures the professional rationality of decisions. However, the democratic nature of decision-making is relatively insufficient. The participation of the majority of followers is more at the level of "information providers" and "opinion-solicitation objects," rather than becoming "co-decision-makers" in the sense of power sharing. This imbalance may

lead to resistance at the implementation level of decisions because followers lack a strong sense of identification and ownership of the decisions.

3. The Challenge of Transitioning from "Task Allocation" to "Capacity Building"

The interview results clearly reveal a core challenge in the current practice of distributed leadership: the university understands distributed leadership more as a strategy of "delegation" rather than a philosophy of "capacity building." Leaders tend to delegate specific tasks but invest less in resources and energy to systematically improve the management and decision-making capabilities of followers. This leads to a cycle: followers' participation is not deep enough due to limited capabilities, and leaders are more inclined to centralize decision-making because the quality of follower participation is not high. To break this cycle and achieve the transition from "task allocation" to "capacity building," the university needs to make systematic changes in organizational culture, institutional design, and resource investment. This is the key to optimizing distributed leadership practice to improve the level of teaching management decision-making.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

5.1.1 The Impact of Distributed Leadership on Teaching Management Decision-Making

Based on the research findings, the practice of distributed leadership at Guilin University of Technology exhibits a typical “guided” or “transitional” characteristic. That is, leadership practice is neither completely monopolized by the top-level management nor fully dispersed among organizational members. Instead, it involves the limited participation of multiple stakeholders under the guidance and framework set by formal leaders. This model is a product of the university’s adaptation and improvement of the traditional hierarchical management model under its specific organizational culture, institutional environment, and external pressures. The specific conclusions can be elaborated from the three dimensions of leader, follower, and situation.

At the leader level, the study found that the leadership structure in teaching management decision-making at Guilin University of Technology presents a mixed model of “formal hierarchy as the primary, with informal influence as supplementary.” University-level and college-level administrative leaders, as formal leaders, hold the final decision-making power in major decisions, ensuring the efficiency and standardization of the decisions. At the same time, informal leaders such as academic leaders and renowned teachers, by virtue of their professional authority, play a key “opinion leader” role in areas like curriculum reform and professional construction. However, the practice of power sharing is essentially closer to “task delegation” rather than true “power sharing,” with core approval power and resource control remaining highly centralized. Although the leadership shows a willingness to collaborate, the traditional “top-down” management inertia still exists, causing collaboration to be mostly confined to the pre-decision opinion solicitation stage rather than running through the entire decision-making process.

At the follower level, the participation of the majority of teachers and front-line administrative staff is characterized by “limited channels and insufficient initiative.” Although channels for participation exist, their involvement is mostly passive rather than proactive due to factors such as heavy workload, low sense of efficacy, and information asymmetry. In terms of capability, followers generally possess profound

professional skills, but when participating in teaching management decision-making, they lack systematic management thinking, data analysis skills, and a holistic perspective. Furthermore, the university has shortcomings in providing systematic training to enhance the management and decision-making capabilities of followers, which limits their potential to transform from passive implementers to active co-constructors and even potential leaders. In terms of interaction patterns, vertical hierarchical communication remains the mainstream, while horizontal collaboration across departments and disciplines is insufficient, making it difficult to form collective wisdom to address complex teaching issues.

At the situational level, the practice of distributed leadership at Guilin University of Technology is deeply influenced by its unique organizational culture, institutional environment, and external pressures. The university's distinct engineering background has shaped a pragmatic culture of "results-oriented and data-driven," providing a foundation for the scientific nature of decision-making. However, the coexisting traditional hierarchical concept, to some extent, solidifies the role positioning of leaders and followers. Institutionally, the "university-college two-level management" system provides a framework for distributed leadership, but the current indicator-oriented assessment and evaluation system and the lack of incentive mechanisms constrain the motivation for deep collaboration and proactive innovation. In terms of the external environment, external pressures represented by professional accreditation and review evaluations have become the main driving force for teaching management decision-making. While this promotes reform, it also causes many decisions to exhibit a feature of "evaluation-driven" passive adaptation, which compresses the space for bottom-up, fully consultative distributed leadership practice.

5.1.2 Optimization Strategies for Distributed Leadership and Teaching Management Decision-Making

This study conducted an in-depth analysis of the current status and issues surrounding distributed leadership practices at Guilin University of Technology, revealing the key pathways for optimizing such practices. The study found that the current distributed leadership practices at the university exhibit a "guiding-type" characteristic, where while multiple stakeholders are formally involved, the practices are fundamentally dominated by administrative power. The depth of participation and capacity development of teachers and other followers are insufficient, and the organizational culture and institutional environment within the contextual factors impose dual constraints on the further development of distributed leadership. Based on this, the study proposes the following optimization directions:

Currently, school-level and department-level administrative leaders dominate

decision-making processes, with power sharing primarily manifesting as task delegation rather than genuine empowerment. In the future, leaders should be encouraged to transition from "directors" to "enablers." Through institutionalized collaborative platforms (such as cross-level teaching management roundtable meetings), power should be delegated to specialized teaching affairs. Simultaneously, the decision-making participation of informal leaders (such as subject leaders) in areas like curriculum reform and professional development should be strengthened to achieve a dynamic balance between administrative and academic power.

Teachers' willingness to participate is constrained by heavy workloads, low efficacy, and information asymmetry, while their limited management perspective and systemic thinking capabilities further restrict the feasibility of deep engagement. Therefore, optimizing practices requires a two-pronged approach: first, improving incentive mechanisms by incorporating teaching management contributions into the evaluation system to enhance teachers' willingness to participate; second, designing systematic capacity-building plans through specialized workshops, cross-departmental practical projects, and other means to cultivate teachers' management and decision-making capabilities, laying the foundation for their transformation from "passive executors" to "active co-builders."

Although Guilin University of Technology's engineering culture supports data-driven scientific decision-making, hierarchical notions and external evaluation pressures have compressed the space for democratic consultation. It is recommended that the university adjust its evaluation system at the institutional level, increase the weighting of collaboration and innovation, and internalize external evaluation requirements as autonomous development needs to reduce passive adaptation in decision-making. Additionally, cultural development should be used to mitigate hierarchical notions and promote an open and trusting collaborative atmosphere, providing sustainable ground for distributed leadership.

Guilin University of Technology must advance distributed leadership from "formal participation" to "substantive co-creation" through the synergistic improvement of three areas: leadership role transformation, follower capability empowerment, and situational optimization. This optimization pathway not only provides Guilin University of Technology with specific improvement directions but also offers a reference framework for governance reforms at similar local universities.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the above conclusion, to further optimize the practice of distributed leadership and enhance the scientific rigor and democratic engagement of teaching management decision-making, this study proposes the following targeted recommendations for higher education institutions. These suggestions are structured around three key dimensions-leader, follower, and situation – to provide actionable guidance for optimizing distributed leadership in a broader university context.

5.2.1 Recommendation for Leaders: Transform Role Positioning, Build Collaborative Platforms

1. Promote the transformation of leader roles to "enablers" and "servants": It is recommended that university-level and college-level leaders gradually change their mindset from traditional "commanders" and "approvers" to "enablers" and "servants." This means that the core work of leaders is no longer to make all decisions personally, but to be committed to creating an environment where more people can exert their talents and contribute their wisdom. Leaders should proactively delegate power, especially in highly professional teaching affairs, trust and authorize academic leaders and front-line teachers, and focus their work on providing resource support, clearing collaborative obstacles, and providing macro guidance.

2. Build institutionalized collaborative and communication platforms: Current collaboration mostly relies on temporary meetings. It is recommended to establish regular, institutionalized cross-level and cross-departmental communication and collaboration platforms. For example, "teaching management roundtables" could be held regularly, inviting teachers, administrative staff, and student representatives from different levels and disciplines to jointly discuss specific issues. At the same time, informatization tools should be used to build online decision-making discussion platforms to make the decision-making process more transparent and to facilitate the participation and feedback of a wider range of stakeholders, extending collaboration from the "deliberation stage" to the entire process of "decision-making and evaluation."

5.2.2 Recommendation for Followers: Strengthen Incentives and Empowerment, Stimulate Participation Momentum

1. Improve incentive and recognition mechanisms for participation: To solve the problem of insufficient follower participation initiative, the university needs to establish an effective incentive mechanism. This incentive should not be limited to material rewards but should also include recognition at the spiritual level. For example, contributions to teaching management and public service can be explicitly included in

the annual performance appraisal, professional title evaluation, and award systems for teachers, so that their "hidden contributions" receive "explicit rewards." At the same time, public commendation should be given to teachers or teams who propose constructive opinions that are adopted, creating a positive atmosphere where "participation is valuable, and contributions are respected."

2. Systematically strengthen the capability building of followers: To address the shortcomings of followers in management vision and decision-making ability, it is recommended that the university design and implement a systematic capability-building plan. Special workshops or training courses on higher education management, decision science, data analysis, and cross-departmental communication can be held regularly, with experts from inside and outside the university invited for guidance. At the same time, the establishment of teacher-initiated "teaching innovation communities" or "learning communities" should be encouraged to enhance their comprehensive ability to participate in teaching management decision-making through peer assistance and project-based learning, thereby cultivating future distributed leadership talent for the university.

5.2.3 Recommendation for Situation: Foster a Collaborative Culture, Optimize the Institutional Environment

1. Cultivate a culture of trust and collaboration: Culture is the soil for distributed leadership. It is recommended that the university management actively advocate and cultivate an open, inclusive, trusting, and collaborative organizational culture through various channels. This can be done by publicizing successful cases of distributed leadership, commending outstanding collaborative teams, and repeatedly emphasizing the importance of collective wisdom at university-level meetings to gradually dilute traditional hierarchical concepts and encourage the expression of different opinions and constructive debate. Deep collaboration can only occur when trial and error are tolerated and sharing is encouraged.

2. Optimize systems and processes that support collaboration: At the institutional level, the existing assessment and evaluation system needs to be moderately adjusted to increase the weight of evaluation for teamwork, interdisciplinary cooperation, and public service contributions, to balance the current overemphasis on individual research output. In the decision-making process, the powers and responsibilities of different subjects in the decision-making process should be further clarified, and a clear mechanism for handling dissent and providing feedback should be established to ensure that grassroots opinions can be effectively heard and responded to. At the same time, when dealing with external evaluations, efforts should

be made to internalize external standards into the university's own development needs, transforming "passive coping" into "active construction," and preserving and creating space for distributed leadership practice while meeting external requirements.

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Appendix

Interview Outline

THE INFLUENCE OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP ON DECISION-MAKING IN TEACHING MANAGEMENT AT UNIVERSITIES

Dear Leaders and Teachers:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in our survey. We highly value your honest opinions, and your responses will be used solely for academic research purposes. We assure you that all personal information will be kept strictly confidential.

Part 1

1. Gender

□ Male □ Female

2. Age

□ 25-30 □ 31-40

□ 41-50 □ 51 and above

3. Education

□ Bachelor □ Master

□ Doctor and above

4. Position and Responsibilities

□ School-level teaching administrator □ College-level executive

□ Discipline leader □ Core teacher

Part 2

Leader Variable **This part aims to understand the role distribution, leadership behavior characteristics, and power-sharing situation of leaders in the teaching management of Guilin University of Technology.**
Q1. Please describe which levels of personnel participate in leadership and decision-making in the teaching management process at Guilin University of Technology. What roles do they play respectively? Q2. In your work experience, what is the power distribution among managers at different levels, such as university-level leaders, department leaders, and teaching and research section heads, in teaching management decision-making? Is there a situation of power delegation or sharing? Q3. Do you think the current teaching management decision-making in the university reflects more of a “centralized leadership” or “distributed leadership” characteristic? Can you explain with specific examples? Q4. In the process of important teaching reforms or policy formulation, how do leaders at different levels coordinate and cooperate? What are the effective collaboration mechanisms? Q5. What qualities do you observe in excellent teaching management leaders? How do they balance authority and inclusiveness? Q6. In your opinion, what problems exist in the current leadership distribution in university teaching management? How do these problems affect decision-making effectiveness? Q7. What kind of leadership behavior or management style do you think is more conducive to mobilizing the enthusiasm of all parties to participate in teaching management decision-making? Q8. What suggestions do you have for cultivating and developing more distributed leaders? How should the university identify and cultivate potential teaching management leadership talents?
Follower Variable **This part aims to understand the participation status, capability level, and interaction patterns of followers such as teachers and administrative staff.**

Q9. What is the degree of participation of different groups, such as general teachers and administrative staff, in the teaching management decision-making process? Through what channels do they express their opinions and suggestions?

Q10. What do you think of the initiative of the teacher group to participate in teaching management decision-making? What are the main factors affecting their participation enthusiasm?

Q11. In your observation, which types of teachers or administrative staff are more likely to play a leading role in teaching management? What characteristics do they usually have?

Q12. What are the current deficiencies in the professional and management capabilities of teachers and administrative staff when participating in teaching management decision-making?

Q13. Does the university have leadership training or capacity-building programs for teachers and administrative staff? How effective are they?

Q14. In the implementation process of teaching management decisions, is the feedback mechanism for grassroots teachers and administrative staff sound? Can their opinions be effectively conveyed upwards?

Q15. What kind of incentive mechanism do you think can better encourage teachers and administrative staff to participate in teaching management decision-making? How is the university doing in this regard?

Q16. In the practice of distributed leadership, what is the cooperation effect between different groups (such as teachers and administrative staff, senior teachers and young teachers, etc.)? What are the obstacles to collaboration?

Situation Variable

This part aims to understand the impact of situational factors such as organizational culture, institutional environment, and external policies on the practice of distributed leadership at Guilin University of Technology.

Q17. Please describe the characteristics of the organizational culture of Guilin University of Technology. What impact does this cultural atmosphere have on the teaching management decision-making model?

Q18. To what extent does the university's existing teaching management system (such as decision-making processes, division of powers and responsibilities, assessment and evaluation, etc.) support or constrain the practice of distributed leadership?

Q19. As a local university of science and technology, how does the external environment faced by Guilin University of Technology (such as government policies, industry needs, competitive pressures, etc.) affect its teaching management decision-making model?

Q20. What role have the university's informatization construction and technology platforms played in supporting distributed leadership and multi-party participation in decision-making?

Q21. Are there differences in the participation models of teaching management decision-making in different disciplines (such as engineering, science, humanities, etc.)? How are these differences reflected?

Q22. What impact has the university's resource allocation situation (human, financial, material, etc.) had on the implementation of distributed leadership?

Q23. What impact do you think the current external evaluation system (such as teaching evaluation, discipline evaluation, etc.) has on the university's internal teaching management decision-making model?

Q24. In your opinion, what improvements are needed in institutional design, cultural construction, and environmental creation for Guilin University of Technology to better implement distributed leadership?

บันทึกข้อความ

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เรื่อง ขออนุมัติสำเร็จการศึกษาประจำปีการศึกษา 2567

เรียน ท่านอธิการบดี

<u>เรื่องเดิม</u> นักศึกษาหลักสูตรบริหารธุรกิจมหาบัณฑิต MR. CHENG FENG รหัสนักศึกษา 6617195716 ได้ศึกษารายวิชาครบถ้วนสมบูรณ์ และได้ปฏิบัติตามเกณฑ์สำเร็จการศึกษาตามที่มหาวิทยาลัยสยาม กำหนดเรียบร้อยแล้ว ทั้งนี้พร้อมยื่นเรื่องขออนุมัติสำเร็จการศึกษา โดยมีรายละเอียดดังต่อไปนี้

1. ผ่านการตรวจสอบความซ้ำซ้อนด้วยโปรแกรม Grammarly เมื่อวันที่ 22 กรกฎคม 2568
2. ผ่านการสอบประมวลความรู้ข้อเขียน เมื่อวันที่ 26 กรกฎาคม 2568
3. ผ่านการสอบปากเปล่าขั้นสุดท้ายวิชาการค้นคว้าอิสระ เมื่อวันที่ 18 กรกฎาคม 2568
4. ผ่านเกณฑ์มาตรฐานความรู้ภาษาอังกฤษ Oxford Placement Test score 52 CEFR B1 เมื่อวันที่ 6 มิถุนายน 2567
5. ผ่านการประชุมวิชาการระดับนานาชาติ at the International Institute of Academic Research & Publications In association with : Glovento Conference on " Social Sciences Research & Business Management" Subject: "The Impact of Distributed Leadership on Instructional Management Decisions in Higher Education Institutions: Taking Guilin University of Technology as an Example" on May 27, 2025 at , Tokyo , Japan

<u>เรื่องพิจารณา</u> เพื่อพิจารณาเข้าประชุมสภามหาวิทยาลัย และอนุมัตินักศึกษาสำเร็จการศึกษา ประจำปีการศึกษา 2567 ดังรายละเอียดเอกสารประกอบการสำเร็จการศึกษาตามที่แนบมา

จึงเรียนมาเพื่อพิจารณาอนุมัติ และให้ดำเนินการต่อไป

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(รศ.ดร.จอมพงศ์ มงคลวนิช)
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ตรวจสอบแผนงาน IS เรียบร้อยแล้ว
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