Horizon J. Hum. & Soc. Sci. Res. 7 (2): 1 – 4 (2025)

Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research
www.horizon-JHSSR.com

INVITED ARTICLE
Peer-reviewed | Open Access

Designing Human-Centered Excellence: Ethics, Leadership, and Strategic Planning for a Global Academic Organization

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history

RECEIVED: 12-Jun-25
REVISED: 24-Jun-25
ACCEPTED: 08-Sep-25
PUBLISHED: 15-Nov-25

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Citation: Vijay K. Arora (2025). Designing Human-Centered Excellence: Ethics, Leadership, and Strategic Planning for a Global Academic Organization. Horizon J. Hum. Soc. Sci. Res. 7 (2), 1–4. https://doi.org/10.37534/bp.jhssr.2025.v7.n2.id1311.p1-4

ABSTRACT

In a rapidly globalizing academic landscape, institutions face the dual challenge of achieving operational efficiency and fostering ethical, human-centered environments. This paper explores the integration of ethics, leadership, and strategic planning in the design of a quality-driven global academic organization. This reflective and analytical study draws upon the author's cross-continental academic and administrative experiences, integrating theoretical frameworks—such as Total Quality Management (TQM), the Theory of Constraints, and the Whole Brain Model—with organizational practices observed in institutions across Asia, the Middle East, and North America. The synthesis reveals that effective academic organizations are characterized by three core dynamics: ethical leadership, structured strategic planning at all institutional levels, and the cultivation of human-centered learning environments. Emphasis on values-driven decision-making, interdisciplinary curriculum development, and faculty empowerment contributes to institutional excellence. By aligning institutional goals with ethical responsibility and human development, universities can transcend conventional performance metrics and foster a sustainable, inclusive academic culture. The paper advocates a shift from siloed operations to synergistic models of planning that embrace diversity, innovation, and continuous improvement [MEI, the Merit, Excellence and Intelligence in addition to DEI the Diversity, Excellence and Inclusion. MEI is top of any human enterprise and must be valued much more than DEI] Designing human-centered academic excellence requires reimagining leadership and planning through an ethical, interdisciplinary lens. This approach enables global institutions to remain responsive, relevant, and resilient in a rapidly changing world.

Keywords: Academic leadership, Curriculum development, Ethics, Globalization, Higher education, Human-centered design, Strategic planning, Total Quality Management

[1]**Note:**This condensed article is based on the Final Word Lecture delivered by Professor Vijay K. Arora at Wilkes University. The original, full-length article titled "Life-Long Education for the Global Workforce in theSocio-Engineering Age" was published in the Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vol. 23(1), March 2015. Interested readers may access the original version through the journal's website http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/pjssh/browse/regular-issue?article=JSSH-ED01-2015. DOI: http://www.pertanika.upm.edu.my/resources/files/Pertanika%20PAPERS/JSSH%20Vol.%2023%20(1)%20Mar.%202015/00%20Invited%20Article%20-%20Namita%20Aurora%20and%20Vijay%20Aurora.pdf.

The current version has been adapted with the author's approval to suit the scope, readership, and editorial format of the Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research (JHSSR) under the revised title, "Designing Human-Centered Excellence: Ethics, Leadership, and Strategic Planning for a Global Academic Organization."

1. Introduction: Innovate or Evaporate

Reflecting on life's impermanence—triggered by the death of the author's father—this article explores the enduring value of intellectual and ethical legacy over material wealth. It calls for deliberate planning and disciplined freedom in building a sustainable, quality-focused, global organization. Planning for success must be grounded in an understanding of constraints and driven by intelligent self-restraint.

2. A Life's Journey: From Refugee to Global Educator

The author traces his journey from a refugee during India's Partition to a global academic professional. This rich personal narrative underscores how education, ethics, and cross-cultural understanding shaped his worldview. Experiences in India, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia reveal that intellectual capital, not material resources alone, drives organizational excellence. Institutions that value trust, discipline, and inclusive growth thrive. The author highlights transformative lessons from diverse educational cultures and their implications for building quality academic organizations.

3. Why Plan for Success?

True success combines material wealth with inner satisfaction and meaningful human relationships. The failure to plan equates to planning to fail. The 'engineering mindset' offers a structured algorithm to reimagine and re-engineer organizations for future success.

Strategic, tactical, and operational plans—aligned with mission and resource optimization—are essential. The process must involve data-driven decisions, consideration of constraints, market awareness, and targeted communication. Planning should incorporate feedback mechanisms, diversity of meritorious ideas, and adaptability for future growth, drawing lessons from successful practices in places like Singapore and Australia.

4. Total Quality Management (TQM): The Heart of the Matter

Quality is in the eye of the beholder and must be stressed. Quality is not merely specification compliance but a dynamic, forward-thinking commitment to excellence. The article outlines principles adapted from Dr. W. Edwards Deming, advocating a cultural transformation focused on:

- Leadership and communication
- Innovation and customer-centricity
- Elimination of barriers to pride in work
- Lifelong learning and continuous improvement

The PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle exemplifies this engineering process applied to organizational excellence. TQM is not just systems management—it is a human-centric model that prioritizes purpose, pride, and process. Deming was disparaged by his own colleagues at MIT, but the Land of the Rising Sun the Nippon welcomed his ideas that are based on the wisdom (*bodh* or *Bodha* in Sanskrit) that made Siddhartha a Buddha, following Sanskrit grammar. There are many Buddhas we see in real life, but do not give credit. Jesus became a Buddha, first not recognized by Romans, then after his cruciferous treatment open a vista that is now known as Vatican City. Protestants and other faiths love Jesus as a Spiritual Leader, but they do not think Pope should be the King of all Christians and hence the French Massacre of September 1792 for which there was a grand celebration by pope in the Vatican. Jihad is another form of Massacre. Sufis are on top of that as enunciated by Sufis like Kabir. That is Sanatan Dharma. Massacres are Stalin Dharma (killed the infidel!).

5. Ethics, Values, and Organizational Integrity

Quality and ethics are interlinked. Contrary to the belief that individuals need to be taught ethics, the article argues that most people enter organizations with good intentions but are often stifled by poor leadership or toxic cultures. That is where DEI fails, requiring MEI of TQM to be stressed.

The correlation between organizational quality and ethical leadership is strong. Historical figures like Mahatma Gandhi exemplify ethical resistance and moral leadership. The article also critiques trends such as the 'Dilbert Principle,' where incompetent individuals are promoted, leading to institutional decay.

To address ethical dilemmas, the VCR Paradigm (Values, Consequences, Responsibilities) from Carnegie Mellon University is suggested as a structured, engineering-like framework. This allows professionals to analyze actions through:

- V – Community-aligned Values and Virtues
- C – Consequences and Contingency planning
- R – Rights linked to Responsibility

6. The Human Brain: A Model for Organizational Design

The article then transitions into cognitive and behavioral diversity using Ned Herrmann's Whole Brain Model, mapping organizational roles onto four brain quadrants:

- Quadrant A (Logical, Analytical)
- Quadrant B (Organized, Sequential)

- Quadrant C (Emotional, Interpersonal)
- Quadrant D (Creative, Conceptual)

Effective organizations require whole-brain thinking, balancing creativity, execution, emotion, and analysis. Leadership emerges from synergy, not dominance. Such teams thrive on complementarity and mutual respect, forming the basis of a true 'knowledge organization.'

7. Wilkes University: Curriculum Innovation and Educational Outcomes

As part of its transformation into a quality global institution, Wilkes University is revisiting its curricular strategies. The goal is to develop graduates with both liberal arts foundations and market-driven competencies.

The author proposes a set of 'Ability Attributes' to guide program outcomes, including:

- Interdisciplinary thinking
- Data analysis
- Teamwork and multicultural engagement
- Ethical responsibility and global impact
- Lifelong learning and use of modern tools

These attributes aim to build versatile graduates. The curriculum should be mapped against these competencies to identify and address gaps through continuous improvement.

8. Faculty and Leadership Development: The Knowledge Bank Model

A university is a 'knowledge company,' and its faculty are scholars, educators, and entrepreneurs. Using Ernest Boyer's framework, faculty roles are categorized as:

- Discovery
- Integration
- Application
- Teaching

All revolve around a central 'Knowledge Bank.' This model emphasizes the importance of rewarding leadership, innovation, and teaching excellence. Leadership isn't about hierarchy—it's about contribution.

9. Vision for the Future: Engineering a Quality Person and Organization

The article concludes by emphasizing personal accountability and self-mastery. Drawing from Indian philosophy and modern leadership theory, it presents a compelling vision for transformative leadership. Individuals must:

- Contribute beyond their roles
- Communicate across differences
- Harness brain power to create and innovate

Invoking the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva as metaphors for organizational life cycles, the author urges proactive, courageous leadership. Success, he argues, depends on our willingness to challenge convention, embrace interdependence, and lead with ethics and vision.

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Academic Biography: Professor Vijay K. Arora

VIJAY K. ARORA
IEEE-EDS DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR

Professor Vijay K. Arora's intellectual and professional journey traces a remarkable path across continents and cultures. Born in the agrarian heartland of Punjab during the era of British India, his formative education was completed in Kurukshetra (Haryana, India)—a city revered in Indian philosophy as the site where Lord Krishna is believed to have delivered the final discourse of the Bhagavad Gita. He earned both his Bachelor of Science (Honours) and Master of Science degrees from Kurukshetra University.

Following a brief tenure teaching at a Regional College of Engineering in India, Professor Arora transitioned from East to West to pursue doctoral research at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

His academic pursuits then led him to Saudi Arabia, where he was part of the pioneering cohort of expatriate faculty tasked with developing the curriculum across disciplines—including medicine, dentistry, science, engineering, and graduate studies—at the University of Riyadh (now King Saud University).

In 1981–1982, he undertook a sabbatical at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign before returning permanently to the United States in 1985 to join Wilkes University as a Professor of Electrical Engineering. He later made Mountain Top, Pennsylvania, his home. After achieving tenure, Professor Arora continued his international academic engagement as a foreign expert on the Quantum Wave Project (1990–1991) under the Japan Research and Development Corporation, shuttling between Tokyo and Wilkes-Barre.

Between 1991 and 1993, he served as a Visiting Professor and Consultant at the National University of Singapore, embracing a scholarly life that integrated Eastern and Western traditions. He returned to Singapore at the turn of the millennium to serve at Nanyang Technological University. In recognition of his distinguished contributions, he was appointed the Sir Gledden Visiting Fellow at the University of Western Australia for the academic year 2000–2001.

Professor Arora has received numerous honors and has been featured in several prestigious biographical compendia. His scholarly work spans scientific research, educational innovation, and organizational leadership, with publications appearing in highly regarded international journals. He is a sought-after speaker, frequently invited to deliver keynote addresses and public lectures at universities, research institutions, and professional conferences across the globe.