



Managerial Experiences and Leadership Effectiveness in Nepal's Pharmaceutical Sector: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Binod Lingden Subba

Research Head, United Academy, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the experiences of managers implementing leadership strategies in Nepal's pharmaceutical sector, focusing on key leadership competencies, team collaboration and motivation strategies, and sector-specific challenges. It aims to provide contextually grounded insights into effective leadership in an emerging-market pharmaceutical environment.

Design/methodology/approach: A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to capture managers' lived experiences. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five purposively selected managers from pharmaceutical companies in Kathmandu Valley. Thematic analysis was applied to identify recurring patterns and themes.

Findings: Four primary themes emerged: strategic leadership, effective communication, industry challenges, and contextual dynamics. Key subthemes included visionary planning, adaptability, open communication, recognition and motivation, regulatory compliance, resource optimization, cultural sensitivity, and geographic diversity.

Implications: The study informs leadership development, managerial practices, and organizational strategies in Nepal's pharmaceutical sector, with potential relevance for similar emerging-market contexts globally.

Originality/value: The study provides context-specific, phenomenological insights into leadership practices, extending existing literature on managerial strategies in emerging-market pharmaceutical industries.

Keywords: Pharmaceutical sector, leadership strategies, managerial competencies, collaboration

JEL Classification: M12, M14, I11, O15

*Correspondence: binodlingden@united.edu.np.

Copyright © 2025 by the authors and Journal of Society and Management Studies (JSMS) published by MSSRN PRESS.

This is an open-access article under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

Introduction

The pharmaceutical sector occupies a strategic position within the healthcare system, serving as a critical link between medical innovation and public health outcomes (Petrova, 2013). Through the research, development, production, and distribution of medicines, the sector directly contributes to disease prevention, treatment effectiveness, and overall societal well-being. Given the industry's scientific intensity, strict regulatory oversight, and dynamic market environment, effective leadership has become indispensable for ensuring organizational sustainability and competitive performance (Dzau et al., 2010).

Unlike conventional industries, leadership in the pharmaceutical sector demands a multidimensional approach. Managers are required not only to oversee operational efficiency but also to integrate scientific knowledge, regulatory compliance, ethical responsibility, and strategic foresight into their leadership practices (Li, 2024). The complexity of pharmaceutical operations—ranging from research and development to marketing and distribution—requires leaders to balance innovation with risk management, speed with quality, and commercial objectives with patient safety (Fergnani, 2022). Consequently, leadership in this sector extends beyond traditional managerial functions and involves navigating uncertainty, aligning diverse professional expertise, and responding to evolving healthcare demands.

At the operational level, managers in the pharmaceutical sector face persistent challenges shaped by regulatory pressure, technological advancement, and global competition. Strict compliance with quality assurance standards, safety protocols, and ethical guidelines governs every stage of pharmaceutical activity (WHO, 2024). Simultaneously, managers must coordinate multidisciplinary teams comprising scientists, pharmacists, marketers, and regulatory specialists, often under tight timelines and financial constraints. These responsibilities place significant demands on leadership capabilities related to decision-making, communication, adaptability, and strategic alignment (Ogbuagu et al., 2023).

In addition to regulatory and operational demands, the pharmaceutical sector is increasingly driven by innovation and responsiveness to market dynamics. Rapid technological changes, shifting patient expectations, and intensified competition require managers to anticipate trends and foster organizational agility (Alabi, 2025). Leadership strategies that encourage collaboration, learning, and innovation are therefore essential for sustaining performance and managing change (Faden et al., 2011). Understanding how managers implement such strategies in practice is crucial for advancing leadership effectiveness within this specialized industry.

Within the Nepalese context, the pharmaceutical sector operates under a regulatory framework overseen by the Department of Drug Administration (DDA), which ensures the quality, safety, and efficacy of pharmaceutical products. While these regulations are vital for safeguarding public health, they also present managerial challenges related to compliance, documentation, and coordination (Ranjit, 2016). Managers must navigate these requirements alongside structural constraints such as limited technological infrastructure, resource scarcity, and supply chain complexities inherent in a geographically diverse country.

Nepalese pharmaceutical managers are further responsible for overseeing drug registration, production standards, ethical marketing practices, and distribution systems, while maintaining alignment with national healthcare priorities (Bastakoti et al., 2013). Engaging effectively with healthcare professionals, policymakers, and consumers adds another layer of leadership complexity. These contextual factors shape the way leadership strategies are conceived and implemented, making leadership experiences in Nepal's pharmaceutical sector distinct from those documented in more developed economies (Kc et al., 2013).

Despite the strategic importance of leadership in this sector, empirical understanding of how managers in Nepal experience and implement leadership strategies remains limited. Existing studies have largely emphasized leadership styles and performance outcomes through quantitative approaches (Subedi et al., 2021; Weintraub & McKee, 2019). While such studies contribute valuable insights, they often fail to capture the contextual depth, lived realities, and adaptive processes through which leadership strategies are enacted in practice.

Moreover, much of the existing leadership literature in the pharmaceutical sector is concentrated in Western contexts and relies heavily on survey-based methodologies (Cavaliere et al., 2021; Trollman et al., 2024). These studies, although informative, may not adequately reflect the institutional, cultural, and regulatory realities of developing economies such as Nepal. The limited application of qualitative methodologies has further restricted the exploration of managerial experiences, decision-making rationales, and contextual leadership challenges.

This gap is particularly significant given the growing recognition that leadership effectiveness is context-dependent. Strategies that succeed in one regulatory or cultural environment may not translate seamlessly to another. Without a nuanced understanding of how leadership strategies are implemented and experienced by managers within Nepal's pharmaceutical sector, organizations risk adopting generic leadership models that are misaligned with local realities (Profile, 2011). Such misalignment can impede organizational adaptability, innovation, and long-term growth.

Addressing this gap is therefore critical for strengthening managerial practice and leadership development in the Nepalese pharmaceutical sector. Exploring managers' experiences offers the opportunity to identify context-specific leadership competencies, strategic approaches, and challenges that shape organizational outcomes. Insights derived from managers' lived experiences can inform the design of leadership development programs, organizational policies, and strategic frameworks tailored to the sector's unique demands.

Accordingly, this study seeks to explore the experiences of managers implementing leadership strategies in the pharmaceutical sector, with particular attention to the Nepalese context. By adopting a qualitative perspective, the study aims to move beyond prescriptive leadership models and instead capture the practical realities, challenges, and adaptive strategies employed by managers. Such an approach contributes to both theory and practice by enriching leadership scholarship with contextually grounded insights and supporting the development of more effective, responsive leadership practices within the pharmaceutical industry.

In doing so, the study addresses the following guiding questions: What leadership competencies are perceived as essential by managers in the pharmaceutical sector? How do managers implement leadership strategies to motivate teams and foster collaboration? What challenges do they encounter in translating leadership strategies into practice? By answering these questions, the study aims to advance understanding of leadership implementation in a critical yet underexplored sector of Nepal's economy and healthcare system.

Literature Review

Leadership Strategies in the Pharmaceutical Sector

Leadership in the pharmaceutical sector has attracted sustained scholarly attention due to the industry's regulatory intensity, innovation-driven environment, and reliance on specialized human capital. Existing research broadly agrees that effective leadership strategies are central to achieving organizational performance, employee engagement, and innovation within pharmaceutical firms.

A significant body of research has examined leadership competencies and practices required for managerial effectiveness in pharmaceutical organizations. Prior studies have emphasized the role of strategic leadership capabilities, ethical decision-making, and adaptive skills in managing complex operational and regulatory demands (Weintraub & McKee, 2019; Enang et al., 2026). These studies consistently highlight leadership as a critical determinant of employee engagement, productivity, and organizational sustainability. The emphasis on leadership competencies reflects a growing recognition that technical expertise alone is insufficient in an industry characterized by rapid change and high compliance standards.

Contextual influences on leadership practices have also received attention in the literature. Researchers have demonstrated that leadership strategies in the pharmaceutical sector are shaped by regulatory frameworks, cultural norms, market dynamics, and globalization pressures. Empirical studies conducted in emerging and developed economies alike show that cultural values and institutional environments significantly influence leadership behaviors and managerial decision-making (Ireland & Hitt, 2005; Li et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the argument that leadership effectiveness is context-dependent and cannot be fully understood without considering the institutional and socio-cultural environment in which managers operate.

Methodologically, the literature reflects a dominance of quantitative and survey-based research designs. Large-scale studies have examined the relationships between leadership styles and organizational outcomes across multiple national contexts (Abukalusa & Oosthuizen, 2025; Gauchait et al., 2023). While such approaches offer generalizable insights, they often provide limited understanding of how leadership strategies are enacted in practice. A smaller number of qualitative and mixed-methods studies have attempted to address this limitation by exploring managers' lived experiences and perceptions (Ryan et al., 2021; Alibasic, 2025). Systematic reviews have further synthesized this growing body of work, highlighting recurring leadership themes while calling for deeper contextual inquiry (Garcia et al., 2022).

Empirical findings consistently suggest that transformational leadership plays a pivotal role in the pharmaceutical sector. Studies indicate that transformational leaders foster employee creativity, innovation, and organizational commitment, thereby enhancing firm performance and adaptability (Nasir et al., 2022). At the same time, researchers have identified persistent challenges faced by managers, including regulatory compliance, competitive pressure, change management, and alignment of multidisciplinary teams (Zywiolek et al., 2022; Figuero et al., 2019). Cross-country evidence further shows that managers must continuously adapt leadership strategies to evolving healthcare systems and organizational cultures (Singh et al., 2019; Richter et al., 2020).

Despite these contributions, the literature remains skewed toward Western and quantitatively driven perspectives, with limited emphasis on context-specific managerial experiences in developing economies. This imbalance restricts a deeper understanding of how leadership strategies are implemented and adapted under diverse institutional constraints. Consequently, there is a clear need for qualitative, contextually grounded research that captures managers' experiences and strategic responses within specific pharmaceutical environments, particularly in under-researched settings.

Leadership Implementation in the Pharmaceutical Industry: Contextual Dynamics and Managerial Perspectives

The pharmaceutical industry occupies a strategic position within the global healthcare system, operating at the intersection of science, regulation, ethics, and market competition. As the sector continues to evolve in response to technological innovation, regulatory reform, and shifting healthcare demands, leadership has emerged as a decisive factor shaping organizational resilience and performance. Scholars increasingly recognize that effective leadership is not merely a managerial function but a strategic capability that enables pharmaceutical organizations to navigate uncertainty, foster innovation, and maintain ethical integrity (Sfantou et al., 2017).

Leadership in the pharmaceutical sector is uniquely complex due to the industry's highly regulated nature and strong ethical orientation. Leaders are required to balance compliance with stringent regulatory frameworks while simultaneously encouraging innovation and ensuring timely market access for essential medicines. This dual responsibility demands adaptive leadership approaches capable of integrating scientific rigor with strategic foresight and moral accountability (Chatterjee & Srinivasan, 2013). Ethical considerations related to drug pricing, access to medicines, and patient safety further intensify leadership challenges, positioning ethics as a central pillar of leadership decision-making in the pharmaceutical context (Nair & Adetayo, 2019).

Comparative evidence suggests that leadership practices vary significantly across developed and developing economies. In advanced pharmaceutical markets such as the United States and the European Union, leadership strategies are often shaped by mature regulatory institutions, advanced research infrastructure, and competitive innovation ecosystems. Managers in these contexts tend to emphasize strategic planning, evidence-based decision-making, and structured leadership development practices to sustain organizational growth and global competitiveness (Rasa, 2020). Case-based learning and the institutionalization of best practices further support leadership effectiveness in these settings.

In contrast, pharmaceutical leadership in developing economies is influenced by a different constellation of economic, regulatory, and cultural constraints. Managers often operate under resource limitations, evolving regulatory systems, and fragmented healthcare infrastructures. Leadership strategies in these contexts are therefore more situational and adaptive, shaped by the need to respond to institutional uncertainty and market volatility (Figueroa et al., 2019). This divergence highlights the inadequacy of universal leadership models and underscores the importance of contextualized leadership frameworks within the pharmaceutical sector.

Despite contextual variation, several leadership challenges appear to be universal across the industry. Regulatory complexity, ethical dilemmas, barriers to market entry, and pressure for continuous innovation persist regardless of geographic location. The globalized nature of pharmaceutical operations further necessitates cross-cultural leadership competence, particularly for multinational firms managing diverse workforces and stakeholder expectations. Leaders must reconcile cultural differences to promote collaboration, organizational cohesion, and shared strategic vision (Chatterjee & Srinivasan, 2013). Increasingly, digital transformation has added another layer of complexity, requiring leaders to leverage technology while rethinking traditional leadership paradigms and organizational structures.

Empirical research on managerial experiences provides valuable insight into how leadership strategies are operationalized within pharmaceutical organizations. Quantitative studies consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between strategic leadership implementation and organizational performance outcomes, including innovation capacity and operational efficiency (Smith et al., 2018; Westover, 2010). These studies establish leadership as a measurable contributor to organizational success but often fall short in explaining the underlying processes through which leadership strategies are enacted.

To address this limitation, qualitative and mixed-methods research has increasingly focused on managers' lived experiences. Studies employing in-depth interviews reveal that implementing leadership strategies involves not only rational planning but also emotional labor, ethical judgment, and continuous negotiation with internal and external stakeholders (Johnson & Patel, 2020; Schaedler et al., 2022). Such findings suggest that leadership implementation is an iterative and socially embedded process rather than a linear application of predefined models.

Case-based research further enriches understanding by illustrating how leadership strategies are adapted in practice. For example, Garcia and Wang (2019) demonstrate that leadership transformation within pharmaceutical firms often emerges through incremental adjustments shaped by organizational culture and regulatory pressure. Similarly, survey-based studies drawing on diverse managerial populations identify recurring leadership challenges—such as resistance to change and coordination across functions—while also revealing effective coping strategies that transcend organizational boundaries (Chang & Lee, 2021).

Synthesizing evidence across studies reveals several consistent patterns. Adaptability emerges as a defining feature of effective pharmaceutical leadership, with managers continuously adjusting their leadership approaches in response to regulatory shifts,

technological change, and market uncertainty (Brown & Chen, 2017). Ethical decision-making also remains a cross-cutting concern, reflecting the industry's societal responsibility and the moral complexity of pharmaceutical operations (Jones et al., 2019; World Bank, 2020). At the same time, cross-national studies highlight meaningful differences in leadership implementation driven by cultural norms and institutional environments, reinforcing the need for region-specific leadership strategies (Kim et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2020).

Research Methods

This study adopts an interpretivist qualitative methodology to explore how managers in the pharmaceutical sector experience and implement leadership strategies. Interpretivism is appropriate for this inquiry as leadership is understood as a socially constructed and context-dependent phenomenon, shaped by individual meanings, interactions, and organizational settings rather than objective, measurable realities. This philosophical stance allows the study to capture managers' subjective interpretations of leadership practices within the regulatory, cultural, and operational realities of pharmaceutical organizations.

Guided by this philosophy, the study employs a phenomenological research design, specifically Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology. This approach is suitable as it emphasizes understanding lived experiences while acknowledging the influence of socio-historical and organizational contexts on participants' interpretations. Rather than merely describing leadership practices, the design enables an in-depth exploration of how managers make sense of leadership strategy implementation in their everyday professional roles. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) underpins the study, facilitating a nuanced examination of both what managers experience and how they interpret those experiences.

The study was conducted among pharmaceutical manufacturing companies operating in Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Kathmandu Valley was purposively selected due to its high concentration of pharmaceutical firms and its role as the administrative and commercial hub of the country. The diversity of pharmaceutical organizations in terms of size, structure, and market presence within the valley provided a rich context for capturing varied managerial experiences, thereby enhancing analytical depth.

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify information-rich participants who could meaningfully contribute to the research objectives. Participants were required to have a minimum of three years' experience as Medical Representatives and at least two years' experience in managerial or marketing leadership roles within pharmaceutical companies. This criterion ensured that participants possessed both field-level exposure and leadership responsibility. Five marketing managers (four males and one female) consented to participate, aligning with methodological recommendations for phenomenological studies that prioritize depth over sample size (Smith et al., 2009; Sim et al., 2019). Organizations were selected based on established market presence, including a minimum of ten years of operation, annual turnover exceeding NPR 250 million, and a workforce of at least fifty employees.

Primary data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in person during November. An interview guide developed from relevant literature was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences. Open-ended questions encouraged reflection on leadership strategies, challenges, ethical considerations, and contextual influences. Interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, resulting in approximately 205 minutes of recorded data. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent and conducted in settings chosen by participants to ensure comfort and confidentiality.

Data analysis followed a phenomenological analytical process involving transcription, coding, and thematic interpretation (Benner, 1994). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to capture meaning and nuance. Significant statements were identified, coded manually, and organized into themes reflecting shared and divergent experiences. The analysis emphasized both convergence and variation across cases, with representative quotations used to substantiate emergent themes.

Trustworthiness was ensured through established qualitative rigor criteria. Credibility was enhanced via prolonged engagement, reflective memo-writing, and careful attention to participants' meanings. Transferability was supported through a thick description of context and participants. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through systematic documentation of analytical decisions and peer debriefing. Ethical integrity was maintained through informed consent, anonymity, secure data storage, and respectful engagement throughout the research process.

Findings

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the participants involved in the study. The sample comprises five professionals from the pharmaceutical sector, representing both managerial and operational roles. The inclusion of participants across hierarchical positions—ranging from Marketing Manager and Area Sales Managers to Medical Representatives—provides a balanced perspective on leadership implementation from both strategic and field-level viewpoints.

Gender representation includes four males and one female participant, reflecting the prevailing gender composition of managerial roles within the Nepalese pharmaceutical industry while still incorporating diverse perspectives. Participants are drawn from multiple operational locations within Kathmandu Valley, including Satdobato, Kathmandu, Lalitpur, Maharajgunj, and Kalanki, enhancing contextual variation and minimizing location-specific bias.

The participants' professional experience ranges from 2 to 9 years, ensuring both early-career and experienced managerial insights are captured. This variation in tenure enables a nuanced exploration of leadership strategies as experienced across different career stages. Overall, the diversity in roles, experience, and work locations strengthens the depth and credibility of the qualitative inquiry into leadership practices within the pharmaceutical sector.

Table 1

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

S. No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Position	Work Location	Years of Experience
1	P1	Male	Marketing Manager	Satdobato	5 Years
2	P2	Male	Area Sales Manager	Kathmandu	9 Years
3	P3	Female	Area Sales Manager	Lalitpur	6 Years
4	P4	Male	Medical Representative	Maharajgunj	2 Years
5	P5	Male	Medical Representative	Kalanki	3 Years

Themes and Sub-themes

The interview transcripts from all five participants were read repeatedly to ensure immersion in the data. An inductive thematic analysis was conducted, whereby meaning units were coded using concise phrases that reflected participants' experiences. Related codes were subsequently clustered into subthemes, which were further synthesized into broader analytical themes. This process resulted in four interrelated main themes with clearly defined subthemes that collectively explain how managers experience and implement leadership strategies in the pharmaceutical sector.

Table 2

Themes and Sub-themes

Main Themes	Subthemes
Strategic Leadership Orientation	Vision-Driven Direction Adaptive Leadership Practice
Communicative Leadership Practices	Transparent Dialogue Motivational Reinforcement
Industry-Specific Operational Challenges	Regulatory Navigation Strategic Resource Utilization
Contextual Leadership Realities	Cultural Embeddedness Geographical Responsiveness

Theme 1: Strategic Leadership Orientation: Strategic leadership emerged as a foundational theme shaping managerial effectiveness in the pharmaceutical sector. Participants described leadership as a forward-looking and dynamic process that

integrates long-term vision with situational responsiveness. Rather than focusing solely on short-term targets, managers emphasized aligning organizational objectives with industry evolution, healthcare needs, and ethical responsibility.

Subtheme 1: Vision-Driven Direction: Vision-driven direction refers to leaders' ability to articulate and operationalize a future-oriented purpose that transcends immediate commercial outcomes. Participants highlighted that effective leadership involves anticipating industry trends, aligning organizational values, and motivating teams toward a shared mission.

As one participant explained: *"Our leadership vision is not just about numbers. It is about understanding where healthcare is heading and preparing the organization to contribute meaningfully to that future."* (P1)

This subtheme highlights visionary leadership as a deliberate and values-based process that anchors strategic decisions and guides collective action.

Subtheme 2: Adaptive Leadership Practice: Adaptive leadership reflects managers' capacity to respond proactively to regulatory changes, market volatility, and operational uncertainty. Participants emphasized flexibility, learning orientation, and resilience as essential leadership attributes.

One manager noted: *"Change is constant in this industry. Leadership means adjusting quickly, learning continuously, and keeping the team confident even when policies or markets shift."* (P2)

Adaptability was therefore not viewed as a reactive adjustment but as an intentional leadership stance that sustains organizational stability in a dynamic environment.

Theme 2: Communicative Leadership Practices: Communication emerged as a critical mechanism through which leadership strategies are enacted and reinforced. Participants consistently emphasized that effective leadership is grounded in open interaction, mutual trust, and motivational engagement.

Subtheme 1: Transparent Dialogue: Transparent dialogue refers to creating an environment where information flows openly and employees feel safe to express ideas and concerns. Managers highlighted that transparency enhances collaboration, reduces uncertainty, and strengthens team cohesion.

As one participant stated: *"When communication is open, people feel involved. Ideas come out freely, and teamwork improves naturally."* (P3)

This subtheme highlights communication as a relational process that enables shared understanding and collective problem-solving.

Subtheme 2: Motivational Reinforcement: Motivational reinforcement involves recognizing individual and team contributions while aligning personal growth with organizational goals. Participants described recognition as both a communication tool and a leadership strategy.

One manager explained: *"Acknowledging effort motivates people. When employees feel valued, they commit more strongly to shared goals."* (P2)

This finding suggests that leadership communication extends beyond instruction to emotional and motivational engagement.

Theme 3: Industry-Specific Operational Challenges: Managers identified sector-specific challenges that significantly shape leadership experiences in the pharmaceutical industry. These challenges require leaders to balance compliance demands with operational efficiency.

Subtheme 1: Regulatory Navigation: Regulatory navigation refers to managing strict and evolving compliance requirements without disrupting operational effectiveness. Participants described regulatory adherence as a continuous leadership responsibility rather than a procedural task.

As one participant noted: *“Compliance is not a checklist. It affects daily decisions and requires constant alignment with changing rules.”* (P3)

This subtheme highlights regulation as a dynamic leadership challenge requiring vigilance and adaptability.

Subtheme 2: Strategic Resource Utilization: Strategic resource utilization involves maximizing outcomes despite constraints in manpower, time, and finances. Managers emphasized creativity and prioritization in achieving organizational objectives.

One participant remarked: *“Limited resources push us to think differently. Leadership means finding smarter ways to reach our goals.”* (P2)

Resource optimization was thus framed as an opportunity for innovation rather than a limitation.

Theme 4: Contextual Leadership Realities: Leadership experiences were deeply embedded within Nepal’s socio-cultural and geographical context, shaping how strategies were implemented.

Subtheme 1: Cultural Embeddedness: Cultural embeddedness reflects leaders’ sensitivity to values, norms, and interpersonal dynamics influencing organizational behavior. Participants emphasized that effective leadership requires cultural awareness and inclusivity.

As articulated by one manager: *“Understanding people’s background and values helps leadership connect better with teams.”* (P1)

Subtheme 2: Geographical Responsiveness: Geographical responsiveness refers to adapting leadership and operational strategies to Nepal’s diverse terrain and distribution challenges.

One participant explained: *“Different regions need different approaches. Leadership means planning, delivery, and coordination based on geography.”* (P4)

This subtheme highlights the importance of context-responsive leadership in ensuring operational effectiveness across diverse locations.

Discussion

The findings of this study corroborate and extend existing leadership literature by demonstrating that effective leadership in the pharmaceutical sector is grounded in a combination of strategic foresight, adaptive capability, and context-sensitive practice. Consistent with prior studies, visionary leadership in this setting extends beyond conventional goal-setting to encompass anticipation of industry shifts, regulatory evolution, and alignment with organizational values (Smith et al., 2018). Leaders' emphasis on adaptability further reinforces earlier evidence that flexibility and responsiveness are essential in navigating the sector's highly regulated and uncertain environment (O'Brien et al., 2020). These findings underscore that strategic leadership in pharmaceuticals is not static but requires continuous adjustment to external pressures and internal organizational needs.

The study also reinforces the centrality of effective communication in shaping leadership outcomes. Open and transparent communication emerged as a key mechanism for fostering collaboration, trust, and employee engagement, aligning with previous research on communication-driven organizational cultures (Hsieh et al., 2020). Similarly, recognition and motivational practices were found to strengthen employee commitment and performance, echoing earlier findings that link acknowledgment and support with positive organizational outcomes (Wang et al., 2019). By situating these communication practices within the pharmaceutical context, the study highlights how leadership communication functions not only as an informational tool but also as a motivational and relational strategy.

Industry-specific challenges, particularly regulatory compliance and resource constraints, remain defining features of pharmaceutical leadership. In line with existing literature, regulatory compliance was identified as an ongoing leadership responsibility rather than a procedural requirement (Smith et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2020). Leaders' experiences suggest that compliance demands shape daily decision-making and strategic priorities. Resource optimization likewise emerged as a dynamic leadership challenge, requiring innovation, prioritization, and problem-solving to achieve organizational objectives under constraints. This study advances prior work by illustrating how these challenges are managed in practice within Nepal's pharmaceutical sector.

Finally, the findings emphasize the importance of contextual dynamics in leadership effectiveness. Cultural sensitivity was shown to influence leadership approaches, reinforcing earlier research that highlights the role of cultural values in shaping leadership behaviors and employee relationships (Cavalcanti et al., 2017). Additionally, geographical diversity was found to necessitate flexible and context-specific leadership strategies, supporting existing evidence on the need for geographically responsive organizational practices (Zhang et al., 2018). By grounding these insights in the Nepalese pharmaceutical context, the study contributes contextually rich evidence that leadership effectiveness is deeply embedded in socio-cultural and geographical realities rather than universally transferable models.

Conclusion and Implications

This study provides an in-depth understanding of how leadership strategies are enacted by managers within Nepal's pharmaceutical sector, a context characterized by regulatory intensity, resource constraints, and socio-cultural diversity. Drawing on Benner's phenomenological approach, the findings reveal that effective leadership in this sector is anchored in visionary planning, adaptability, purposeful communication, and sensitivity to contextual realities. By situating managerial experiences within existing leadership scholarship, the study not only confirms established theoretical insights but also extends them by demonstrating how leadership practices are shaped and reconfigured in an emerging economy context.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to leadership and management literature in three significant ways. First, it advances phenomenological inquiry in leadership research by capturing the lived experiences of managers, thereby moving beyond abstract leadership models toward practice-based understanding. Second, the findings refine existing leadership theories by highlighting adaptability and ethical responsiveness as central capabilities in highly regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals. Third, the strong emphasis on cultural sensitivity as a leadership imperative extends prevailing leadership frameworks, which often underplay the role of localized cultural dynamics, particularly in non-Western contexts. By foregrounding culture as an active component of leadership practice rather than a peripheral influence, the study offers a more contextually grounded and inclusive conceptualization of leadership.

The study also generates meaningful practical implications for organizational leaders and policymakers in Nepal's pharmaceutical industry. The findings suggest that leadership development initiatives should move beyond generic competency-based training and instead focus on cultivating strategic foresight, regulatory agility, open communication, and cultural awareness. Organizations may benefit from embedding these competencies into managerial training programs, performance evaluation systems, and succession planning processes. Furthermore, the insights offer guidance for multinational pharmaceutical firms operating in similar emerging-market contexts, emphasizing the need to balance global compliance standards with local responsiveness, optimize resources creatively, and manage geographically dispersed teams effectively.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. As a qualitative investigation, the findings are based on self-reported managerial experiences, which may be influenced by social desirability or subjective interpretation. Additionally, the context-specific focus on Nepal's pharmaceutical sector limits the direct generalizability of the results to other industries or regions. The relatively small sample size, while appropriate for phenomenological inquiry, may not capture the full diversity of leadership experiences across the sector.

Future research could address these limitations and build upon the present findings in several ways. Longitudinal studies may offer deeper insights into how leadership strategies evolve in response to regulatory changes, market dynamics, and organizational growth. Incorporating perspectives from multiple organizational levels, such as frontline

employees, senior executives, and regulators, would provide a more holistic understanding of leadership processes. Comparative studies across countries and industries could further distinguish context-specific leadership practices from universally applicable principles. Finally, exploring the role of digital transformation and technological integration in shaping contemporary leadership practices within the pharmaceutical sector presents a promising avenue for future inquiry.

Thus, this study enriches both theory and practice by offering a nuanced, contextually grounded understanding of leadership in Nepal's pharmaceutical industry, while also contributing insights of broader relevance to leadership scholarship and practice in regulated and emerging-market environments.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank stakeholders who took advantage of the chance to voluntarily participate in this study. The authors would also like to thank everyone and all sources that have contributed in various ways and improved the work.

Conflict of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Funding

There was no external source of funding for the research.

References

- Abukalusa, K., & Oosthuizen, R. (2025). An adaptive organisational leadership framework through systems thinking. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*.
- Abukalusa, K., & Oosthuizen, R. (2025). An adaptive organisational leadership framework through systems thinking. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*.
- Alabi, M. (2025). Organizational Culture and Its Impact on Technology Adoption and Business Agility.
- Alibašić, H. (2025). Advancing disaster resilience: The ethical dimensions of adaptability and adaptive leadership in public service organizations. *Public Integrity*, 27(3), 209-221.
- Bastakoti, S., Khanal, S., Dahal, B., & Pun, N. T. (2013). Adherence and non-adherence to treatments: focus on pharmacy practice in Nepal. *Journal of clinical and diagnostic research*. 7(4), 754.
- Bhuvan, K. C., Alrasheedy, A. A., & Ibrahim, M. I. M. (2013). Do community pharmacists in Nepal have a role in adverse drug reaction reporting systems?. *The Australasian medical journal*, 6(2), 100.
- Brown, P., & Chen, Y. (2017). Leadership adaptability and organizational performance in regulated industries. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 11(2), 45–59. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21502>

- Cahyono, Y., Jihadi, M., Arifin, Z., Purnamasari, W., Wijoyo, H., Putra, R. S., ... & Purwanto, A. (2020). Do servant leadership influence market performance? Evidence from Indonesian pharmacy industries. *Systematic Reviews in Pharmacy*, 11(9), 439-451.
- Cavaliere, L. P. L., Lourens, M. E., Chowdhury, A. R., Balasudarsun, N. L., Soundararajan, L. R. A., Thankappan, S. M., ... & Regin, R. (2021). Impact of leadership on organizational performance at pharmaceutical companies. *Turkish Journal of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation*.
- Chang, W., & Lee, C. (2021). Leadership challenges and coping strategies in complex organizational environments. *Management Decision*, 59(6), 1367–1384. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-09-2019-1256>
- Chatterjee, C., & Srinivasan, V. (2013). Ethical issues in health care sector in India. *IIMB Management Review*, 25(1), 49-62.
- Faden, L., Vialle-Valentin, C., Ross-Degnan, D., & Wagner, A. (2011). Active pharmaceutical management strategies of health insurance systems to improve cost-effective use of medicines in low-and middle-income countries: a systematic review of current evidence. *Health Policy*, 100(2-3), 134-143.
- Chatterjee, S., & Srinivasan, V. (2013). Ethical leadership in pharmaceutical organizations: Balancing innovation and regulation. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 117(2), 365–378. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-012-1525-3>
- Dzau, V. J., Ackerly, D. C., Sutton-Wallace, P., Merson, M. H., Williams, R. S., Krishnan, K. R., ... & Califf, R. M. (2010). The role of academic health science systems in the transformation of medicine. *The Lancet*, 375(9718), 949-953.
- Enang, I., Omeihe, K. O., Omeihe, I., Enang, I., & Enang, U. (2026). Integrative leadership in complex adaptive systems: a multi-modal analysis of strategic decision-making processes. *Strategy & Leadership*, 54(1), 88-119.
- Fernani, A. (2022). Corporate foresight: A new frontier for strategy and management. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 36(2), 820-844.
- Figueroa, C. A., Harrison, R., Chauhan, A., & Meyer, L. (2019). Priorities and challenges for health leadership and workforce management globally: A rapid review. *BMC Health Services Research*, 19, Article 239. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-019-4080-7>
- Figueroa, C. A., Harrison, R., Chauhan, A., & Meyer, L. (2019). Priorities and challenges for health leadership and workforce management globally: a rapid review. *BMC Health Services Research*, 19(1), 1-11.
- FRIJA, L., & BARZI, R. (2022). When Ethical Leadership Triggers Followers' Gratitude: Focus on Medical Representatives in Moroccan Pharmaceutical Industry. *International Journal of Accounting, Finance, Auditing, Management and Economics*, 3(4-3), 42-61.
- Garcia, F., & Wang, J. (2019). Leadership transformation in pharmaceutical firms: A case-based perspective. *Journal of Business Research*, 98, 352–361. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.01.048>
- García, J. A. C., Pino, J. M. R., Elkhwesky, Z., & Salem, I. E. (2022). Identifying core “responsible leadership” practices for SME restaurants. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Girma, S. (2016). The relationship between leadership style, job satisfaction and culture of the organization. *International Journal of Applied Research*, 2(4), 35-45.

- Gloet, M., & Terziovski, M. (2004). Exploring the relationship between knowledge management practices and innovation performance. *Journal of Manufacturing Technology Management*, 15(5), 402-409.
- Guchait, P., Peyton, T., Madera, J. M., Gip, H., & Molina-Collado, A. (2023). 21st century leadership research in hospitality management: a state-of-the-art systematic literature review. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*.
- Hurst, K. M. (2010). Experiences of new physiotherapy lecturers making the shift from clinical practice into academia. *Physiotherapy*, 96(3), 240-247.
- Ireland, R. D., & Hitt, M. A. (2005). Achieving and maintaining strategic competitiveness in the 21st century: The role of strategic leadership. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 19(4), 63-77.
- Johnson, R., & Patel, T. (2020). Managerial lived experiences and leadership enactment in highly regulated industries. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, 15(3), 305–322. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QROM-04-2019-1756>
- Jones, T. M., Parker, M., & ten Bos, R. (2019). *For business ethics: A critical text* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Khan, H., Rehmat, M., Butt, T. H., Farooqi, S., & Asim, J. (2020). Impact of transformational leadership on work performance, burnout and social loafing: A mediation model. *Future Business Journal*, 6, 1-13.
- Khan, M. A., Ali, A., & Ahmed, S. (2020). Institutional environments and leadership practices in emerging economies. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 31(18), 2301–2323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2018.1457557>
- Kim, S., Vandenabeele, W., Wright, B. E., Andersen, L. B., Cerase, F. P., Christensen, R. K., Desmarais, C., Koumenta, M., Leisink, P., Liu, B., Pedersen, L. H., & van Loon, N. (2018). Investigating the structure and meaning of public service motivation across populations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(3), 361–381. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muy020>
- Li, H. (2024, May). Integrative Approaches in Global Corporate Governance: Strategic Management, Sustainability Reporting, and Effective Management. In *2024 International Conference on Applied Economics, Management Science and Social Development (AEMSS 2024)* (pp. 455-461). Atlantis Press.
- Nair, S. R., & Adetayo, O. (2019). Ethics, leadership, and accountability in pharmaceutical organizations. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 45(6), 403–409. <https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2018-105119>
- Nasir, J., Ibrahim, R. M., Sarwar, M. A., Sarwar, B., Al-Rahmi, W. M., Alturise, F., ... & Uddin, M. (2022). The effects of transformational leadership, organizational innovation, work stressors, and creativity on employee performance in SMEs. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 772104.
- Ogbuagu, O. O., Mbata, A. O., Balogun, O. D., Oladapo, O., Ojo, O. O., & Muonde, M. (2023). Quality assurance in pharmaceutical manufacturing: Bridging the gap between regulations, supply chain, and innovations. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation*, 4(1), 823-831.

- Petrova, E. (2013). Innovation in the pharmaceutical industry: The process of drug discovery and development. In *Innovation and marketing in the pharmaceutical industry: emerging practices, research, and policies* (pp. 19-81). New York, NY: Springer New York.
- Priorities and challenges for health leadership and workforce management globally: a rapid review. *BMC Health Services Research*, 19(1), 1-11.
- Rasa, R. (2020). Strategic leadership and innovation management in pharmaceutical industries of developed economies. *International Journal of Innovation Management*, 24(4), 2050031. <https://doi.org/10.1142/S1363919620500315>
- Schaedler, J., Pless, N. M., & Maak, T. (2022). Responsible leadership and the lived experience of managers. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 176(3), 487–503. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04903-1>
- Sfantou, D. F., Laliotis, A., Patelarou, A. E., Sifaki-Pistolla, D., Matalliotakis, M., & Patelarou, E. (2017). Importance of leadership style towards quality of care measures in healthcare settings: A systematic review. *Healthcare*, 5(4), Article 73. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare5040073>
- Smith, J. A., Brown, K., & Lee, H. (2018). Strategic leadership and firm performance: Evidence from healthcare and pharmaceutical sectors. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 39(6), 730–744. <https://doi.org/10.1108/LODJ-02-2018-0064>
- Trollman, H., Tetteh, M. G., Jagtap, S., Gupta, S., Kumar, M., & Salonitis, K. (2024). Pharma 4.0: A Deep Dive Top Management Commitment to Successful Lean 4.0 Implementation in Ghanaian Pharma Manufacturing Sector.
- Trollman, H., Tetteh, M. G., Jagtap, S., Gupta, S., Kumar, M., & Salonitis, K. (2024). Pharma 4.0: A Deep Dive Top Management Commitment to Successful Lean 4.0 Implementation in Ghanaian Pharma Manufacturing Sector.
- Westover, J. H. (2010). Managing organizational performance: An examination of leadership and performance outcomes. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 59(4), 316–331. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17410401011038948>
- World Bank. (2020). *Enhancing government effectiveness and transparency: The fight against corruption*. World Bank Publications.
- World Health Organization. (2024). *Quality assurance of pharmaceuticals: a compendium of guidelines and related materials, Volume 1. Good practices and related regulatory guidance*. World Health Organization.
- Żywiołek, J., Tucmeanu, E. R., Tucmeanu, A. I., Isac, N., & Yousaf, Z. (2022). Nexus of transformational leadership, employee adaptiveness, knowledge sharing, and employee

Author's BIO

Dr. Lingden Subba is Executive Editor for the Research Management Cell at United College, Kumaripati, Lalitpur. Email: binodlingden@united.edu.np.

Note: The authors acknowledge the use of AI-assisted tools (such as Quillbot and ChatGPT) strictly for editing language, improving readability, and grammar checking. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or the creation of original scientific content. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.