

Academic Leadership: Prospects and Challenges in India

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Abstract

The twin approaches of high quality leadership and appropriate governance structure are major ways of improving the quality of higher education. Hence there is a need for professionalizing academic administration by building the competencies in the domains of leadership, and strategy, developing relevant systems and processes, and inculcating appropriate skills and attitude at all levels in the administration.(RUSA, 2013).

The paper mainly focuses on the Academic leadership in Higher Education. It's models, literature review and implications of the same. The paper also talks about the administrative positions of academic leadership in India and challenges faced by them.

Introduction

Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower. – Steve Jobs

The twin approaches of high quality leadership and appropriate governance structure are major ways of improving the quality of higher education. Hence there is a need for professionalizing academic administration by building the competencies in the domains of leadership, and strategy, developing relevant systems and processes, and inculcating appropriate skills and attitude at all levels in the administration.(RUSA, 2013) In Higher Education Benchmarking of standards and the academic growth of an emerging institution are dependent upon the kind of leadership they receive. In 21st century the great leader comes down to a combination of strategic agility, incredible attention to detail, great people skills and a real flair for understanding markets and connecting with clients.

Shri Ashok Thakur, Secretary Higher Education from Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, stated that The Ministry has initiated key reforms recently around mandatory accreditation and incentivizing state governments through RUSA; which can only succeed with good leadership. He reiterated that any reform will only succeed with good leadership and by educating the faculty to be a part of this change. He stressed that vision, communication and creating genuine action are key attributes for effective leaders. He emphasized communication lies at the heart of transformational leadership, and development of communication competencies in leaders should be at the heart of any leadership development programme. He reiterated the UK's commitment in partnering with India on their vision of the Indian Higher Education sector with increased focus on quality, access and expansion.

What is academic leadership?

In the first place, what does *leadership* mean? It is the action of leading a group or organization or the ability to do so. It is all about enhancing human potential and creating a space for others to develop as leaders. Academic leadership also subsumes the essentials of general leadership but the space it applies to is an academic setting or an academic institution. And this space is quite different from the space for leadership in a corporate body or a public sector company.

In academic leadership the stakeholders are the students, teachers, funding agencies, administrative staff and society sans frontiers. So in the Indian context, academic leadership is accountable to the country's constitution and to the democratic set-up, in which it functions.

No wonder we consider academic leadership as one of the pillars of a strong democracy. "Committed academic leadership is dwindling across the length and breadth of our country. The quality of leadership is reflected on the well being of any higher learning educational institution. The future generation is in very much need of inspiring leadership," bemoans Dr N. Sundararajan, Vice Chancellor, Jain University, Bangalore. Academic leaders need to stay close to teaching, learning, research and scholarship to bring out the best among academics.

Who are the people managing Academic leadership?

In Higher education the management mainly looks after the Quality of institution in terms of teaching – learning, co-curricular activities, sports, infrastructure, inter and intra university or institute level activities and so on. The Management delegates the work to the Principals or Head of the Departments. It is also the job of Academic Directors to see that the things are streamlined. The Head of the institution has to arrange for expert talks, workshops, seminars for the students as well as for the teachers. It is also the responsibility of teachers to

stay updated with the present trends of the society, to be tuned with the industry and academic and if needed to suggest changes in the curriculum.

How quality is managed? Areas for managing quality

Faculty positions usually combine the role of teacher, scholar, researcher and institutional citizen (Astin & Astin, 2000) all of which have leadership responsibility in some form or other, either explicitly or implicitly specified within the role. Academics may also develop additional external leadership roles within subject discipline peer-groups, research collaboration project teams and external professional bodies. (e.g. Vice-Chancellor, Chief Executive, President, Vice-President, pro-Vice Chancellor) resonate with executive, 56 roles encountered in other sectors, academic leadership roles (such as Deans or Heads of School) are unusual and commonly have complications such as transitory nature of role-holders (for example on a 3-year rotating basis, much like a secondment). Academics may also develop additional external leadership roles within subject discipline peer-groups, research collaboration project teams and external professional bodies. Excellence in higher education is also a major aim of the XII Plan. The quality of our current education system leaves much to be desired. As per the Times Higher Education Rankings 2012-13, the top ranked Indian institutions are IIT Kharagpur (234), IIT Bombay (258) and IIT Roorkee (267). The top ranked institutions as per the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) System 2012 were IIT Delhi (212), IIT Bombay (227) and IIT Kanpur (278). Apart from the fact that none of the Indian institutions ranked are in the top 200, interestingly no Indian university finds a place in these rankings. These rankings are limited in their scope and coverage of institutions, especially those in Asia. However it is worth looking at the components on basis of which good quality Universities are judged. Firstly, single discipline universities and universities dedicated to just postgraduate studies are not considered because of their narrow focus and areas of strength.

According to RUSA the major components considered are teaching (learning environment, student teacher ratio, quality of curriculum), research (volume, income from research, reputation), and citations (research influence). Other factors included are international outlook, industry income, employer reputation etc. Indian higher education is not particularly strong in the above-mentioned areas, which is certainly a cause for concern. The universities were ranked on a scale of 100 based on the following parameter. The university system in India needs to look at these parameters, closely and endeavor to improve each one of them and especially focus on the component of research.

International models for Academic Management

From bureaucratic administrator to leader for learning Changes in school administration over recent decades are part of a larger trend in the management of public service organisations that can be characterised as the decline of older public administrative models and the rise of a new public management (NPM) model. The ideas and research findings behind the NPM model in public, flatter management structures, market-like mechanisms, decentralization, customer orientation and evidence-based improvement of services – have significantly changed the approach to organizational management (e.g. Barzelay, 2001; Jones, Schedler and Wade 1997; Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Schedler and Proeller, 2000). Perhaps the most salient change in attitudes about school management created by the NPM trend is the centering of the principal's activity and behavior on what is referred to as "instructional leadership."

Typical Leadership Paradigms in Higher Education

The challenges experienced in HE over recent decades have led to the emergence of various leadership approaches within the sector and can be observed in many HE institutions across all regions, whether research-led, teaching-led, large or small, specialized or multi-faculty.

1. Hierarchical Models

One of the most typical approaches encountered in HE institutions is the authority and power model associated with hierarchy (Astin & Astin, 2000). The negative aspects arising from this type of command-and-control approach have been previously highlighted.

Academic leaders need to dispense with "positional" authority, normally associated with command-and-control leadership, in order to enable more transformational learning approaches to be undertaken by students (Amey, 2006). It has also been suggested that a command-and-control approach is particularly unsuitable and counterproductive when managing academic colleagues (Goffee & Jones, 2009).

2. Individualistic Models

Individualistic leadership is based on personal status and professional recognition, is usually encountered within academic faculty positions, and has been identified in American colleges as a key reason for driving the higher value of research versus teaching (Astin & Astin, 2000). The balancing of teaching and research commitments is a contentious theme in many HE institutions. The negative effect of individualistic leadership is that it makes collaboration more difficult, since competition is seen as more rewarding. Additionally the individualistic paradigm is biased against some minorities, particularly women, who may take career breaks which affect their accumulation of research achievements.

3. Collegial Models

Collegiality is a term used in two distinct ways: sometimes it refers to a system of governance driven by consensual decision making and on other occasions it refers to mutual supportiveness among staff (Bryman, 2007). Whilst the latter peer-support is valued in academic communities (Bryman, 2007), the former is the usual structural outcome (i.e. a committee or bureaucratic-based approach) which paradoxically drives the general dislike in academic circles of “administrative” work (Astin & Astin, 2000). Clegg and McAuley (2005) assimilate these by defining the Collegial concept as one where academics work together whilst retaining their individual interests, eschewing any attempt to be actively managed, so that individuals are left to do their own thing as long as traditional rituals and duties are observed.

4. Collaborative Models

Developments in leadership thinking over the past 30 years have emphasised collaborative approaches (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997; Bennis, 1999, 2009; Kouzes & Posner 2007) yet Higher Education has been relatively slow to pick up the importance of this principle, largely due to the traditional functional specialism engendered in faculty structures. Within academic roles successful leaders are increasingly seen to be those more able to develop collaborative partnerships and to establish networks in a non-hierarchical manner (Amey, 2006), whilst retaining accountability and evidence-based approaches which demonstrate what does, and does not work.

5. Transformative Models

Transformational leadership models have tended to dominate the understanding of leadership within the HE sector (Astin & Astin, 2000) and tend to come across positively with their evident foundation upon human action, which matches the request of faculty and campus-based leadership roles. At an academic level, the “learner-centered” approach to education matches the accommodative concepts of transformational leadership (Amey, 2006). Additionally, the transformational approach is also perceived to match with the challenges of a changing sector (globalization and user-driven demands) and is a leadership approach which will better enable the creative solutions which are needed to meet those challenges.

Review of related literature

Searches were made of online databases using the following key terms: leader* or manage* or administration* plus higher education* or university* or academic plus effective* or Academic leadership. Although the focus was on leadership, which many writers seek to distinguish from kindred terms like management and administration, it became apparent early on that the terms were being used in ways that did not distinguish them in a precise or consistent way.

Black (2015) conducted a study on Qualities of effective leadership in higher education; Analysis demonstrates that, with minor changes in terminology, the constructs remain appropriate and valid. The definitions of activities and behaviours offer insight into how Higher Education leaders could be developed and therefore form a potential framework of leadership capabilities for Higher Education. The framework developed in this analysis offers a suitable range of approaches for leaders in HE. Within a changing world an effective leader must be both student and teacher (Kotter, 1996): always hungry to learn more about how to enthuse, engage and empower those who follow. For staff in academic positions, becoming a “learner” may be uncomfortable, so these individuals should be encouraged, through the active, visible and credible example of seniors and peers, to appreciate the benefits and necessity of personal leadership development.

Bryman(2007) This study is a review of the literature concerned with leadership effectiveness in higher education at departmental level. The literature derives from publications from three countries: the UK, the USA and Australia. The analysis of the studies selected resulted in the identification of 13 forms of leader behavior that are associated with departmental effectiveness. The findings are considered in relation to the notion of competency frameworks and, in the conclusion, their general implications are explored in relation to the notion of substitutes for leadership. These reflections suggest that leadership, in the traditional sense associated with leadership theory and research, may be of limited relevance, because academics’ professionalism and their internal motivation mitigate the need for leadership of this kind.

Sengupta(2015) The Indian higher education institution are increasingly becoming forces to compete and required to keep pace with the global system of education by making its own contribution to the society. In such setting, the role of a leader in academia becomes highly essential who will lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute the community of teachers, students and staffs towards improved educational practice and pursuit (Katzenmeyes& Moller, 2001) of excellence. Indian higher education system, today, is under strong pressure to show improvements which requires institutional governance, autonomy, and high-quality education, but the matter of the fact is that most of the higher education institutions are unable to meet the global standard. As because of the matter of the fact that, it is the Academic Leaders who will translate mission and vision in to reality.

Knight & Trowler, (2001). According to them, the changing and challenging academic conditions are including longer hours, pressure to publish, more administrative tasks, over management of academics, loss of

collegiality and aging, malaise & marginality resulting into low-esteem and confidence. Most of these changing scenarios are also applicable to Indian higher educational context except over-management of academics. In India, most of the higher Educational institutions are being managed poorly due to poor recruitment policy and shortage of Academic leadership.

Henkls' (2005) concern was on fragmenting and loosening of institutional boundaries and the changing nature of academia. This Henkel's concept is having wider application on Indian higher education. The immature industry of Indian higher education is being thrown into global competition. There is a tremendous changes taking place in the management of higher education institutions and the scope of Indian academic leadership since Indian higher education industry is fragmenting and loosening its institutional boundaries.

Sathye (2004) Academic leadership poses problems that are distinctly different from leadership in business or government agencies. Private organizations are guided solely by considerations of maximizing shareholder value. Academic leaders need to stay close to teaching, learning, research and scholarship to bring out the best among academics. Issues of academic freedom are of great importance and relevance in this context.

Debowski and Blake (2004) concluded that academic leaders of teaching and learning require the general attributes noted as being important for many leadership roles—for example, the ability to develop a collaborative and supportive culture and to provide opportunities to share knowledge between colleagues. However, they also suggest that the following capabilities and competencies specific to learning and teaching are also necessary: a strong commitment to pedagogy, and an understanding that course design and curriculum development should be driven by a strong grasp of how learning occurs and the effects of different forms of teaching on student learning; a sound awareness of the university, faculty and school, and teaching and learning policies; knowledge of the curriculum areas and factors which need to be considered when designing relevant and effective curricula; the ability to evaluate and review courses and programs; the capacity to analyse and evaluate curriculum content for relevance, suitability, currency and uniqueness; an understanding of student needs and learning styles; and ongoing development of new teaching strategies (such as flexible learning).

Implication of review

The researcher has studied six researchers of different countries. These studies imply that basically a leader should be a life time learner, It was also suggested that Academic leaders need to stay close to teaching, learning, research and scholarship to bring out the best among academics. He should be open to learn from students and his staff members in the institution. Bryman has also suggested that, leadership conceivably may be more significant sometimes for the problem it fosters than for its benefits. This would mean that the issue in higher education institutions is not so much what leaders should do, but more to do with what they should avoid doing. Sengupta identifies the role of an academic leader in Indian Higher education as to contribute the community of teachers, students and staffs towards improved educational practice and pursuit of excellence. It was also observed that the academic leaders mainly lack in the knowledge of curriculum designing, evaluate curriculum content for relevance, suitability, currency and uniqueness; an understanding of student needs and learning styles; and ongoing development of new teaching strategies.

Therefore, it was suggested that if the pillars of higher education institutions are strong, it can surely lead to a strong building further with quality education.

Challenges

1) Learning communities and learner-centered approaches

Most of the academic leaders do not belong to learning community. They feel that once we have a degree, we know everything. It is not so. The leaders should be lifelong learners, Whereby others would be inspired.

2) Bureaucracy which stifles innovation and creates inefficiency and ineffectiveness

In the contemporary society today, most of the times leaders become an Autocrats, and then they do not listen to any of the suggestions of the fellow people. It is a big hurdle in progress of any organization. This bureaucracy stifles innovation and creates inefficiency and ineffectiveness.

3) Efficient use of resources

Efficient use of resources in the organization is a big challenge. The responsibility of Academic leader is to manage human, material, finance and all other resources efficiently. The leader has to be a bridge for the stake holders and manage all the human resources hierarchically.

4) Transitional and Combined role (teacher/research/leader) of Academic leaders

The Leader in Academics has to play a combined role of teacher, researcher and a leader. Many times he has to work beyond his limits. Mentoring, counseling, guiding the teachers is also a difficult task which the leader has to effectively manage. Manage conflicts in and among the departments as well as with the management. The leader has a crucial role to play to keep the organizational climate conducive, collaborative and co-operative.

5) Need to adapt and improve the organization

The leader has to adapt the change, he should be person who as a charismatic leaders adopts change try to bring innovation and creativity in his work style. Value and respect people.

6) Leading diversity and inclusion

Diversity management is an important aspect of Academic leadership. In most of the higher education institutions, students from different countries, states are admitted. They come from different cultural backgrounds; therefore the role of the academic leader is to see that they are comfortable, not facing cultural shock or any type of depression.

7) Governance

Usually Universities are run and governed by the directions of the respective Acts, Statute, regulations and ordinance in one hand and internal bodies such Executive Council, Governing Body, Academic Council, Finance Committee, University Court, the Senete, etc., and because of that the structures of governance and leadership within the academia are being virtually defined by such Acts and Statutes. Vice-Chancellor of the respective Universities will hold the position of Supreme Academic Leader as the ultimate power, authority and responsibility for making decision statutorily vested on him. The second level will be constituted by the Deans/Directors, Academic Directors of the faculty as they have the responsibility being the Head of the faculty for the conduct and maintenance of the standards of teaching and research in the academia. The third level comprises by the Heads of the respective departments as they have the authority and responsibility to manage their departments with utmost care. The positions in these levels are not static in nature rather subject to change after completion of the tenure. Thus, governance and leadership in Indian higher education involves a complex relationship amongst these levels.

8) Globalization and internationalization

Over the last two decades globalization has impacted operations of various institutions including academic institutions all over the world. The fact that higher education has now become a real part of globalization process, the cross boarder matching of supply and demand. Internationalization is seen as something higher education institutions do while globalization is something that is happening to them. This calls for a broader definition of globalization which embraces the entire functioning of Higher Education. Globalization is described as, flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values and ideas across borders as it affects each country in a different way due to a nation's individual history, traditions, culture and priorities (Knight and De Wit, 1999). Thus, globalization is a multi-faceted process and can affect countries in vastly different ways - economically, culturally and politically, but it does not take an ideological stance or a position as to whether this impact has positive and/or negative consequence.

Conclusion

Today, the scenario of academia in India is changing and expanding with the globalized system of education and universities and university level institutions are facing a veritable explosion of knowledge and technology in all fields. As a result, higher education institutions in India are increasingly becoming forces to compete and required to keep pace with the global system of education by making its own contribution to the society. In such setting, the role of a leader in academia becomes highly essential who will lead within and beyond the classroom, identify with and contribute to the community of teachers, students and staffs towards improved educational practice and pursuit (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001) of excellence. Indian higher education system, today, is under strong pressure to show improvements which requires institutional governance, autonomy, and high-quality education, but the matter of the fact is that most of the higher education institutions are unable to meet the global standard. As a result, the need of an extreme new breed of leadership in higher education becomes obvious. As because of the matter of the fact that, it is the Academic Leaders who will translate mission and vision into reality.

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