

Academic Leadership: The Need for Training

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Abstract

Higher education in India is undergoing considerable change. In India a major chunk of students study at public and private colleges which are affiliated to state universities and these institutions will have to transform to meet the challenges of the future. Organizational transformation is heavily influenced by its leadership. In the Indian context leaders in academic institutions essentially come from the ranks of academia and have specialized knowledge in their field of study and good research credentials. However, in the globalized scenario they are expected to design compelling visions, manage people efficiently, and steer their institution to profitability, a role for which they are ill prepared. This paper highlights the need to develop transformational leaders and able administrators from academicians. This means part academicians will need training in administration a hitherto neglected area. The paper calls for the need to design training programs for leaders in academia encompassing all aspects of running an organization including marketing, finance, human resources with special emphasis on educational institutions. Such a well rounded training program which aims at developing efficient administrators out of academicians will help fulfill the leadership void that exists in most academic institutions today and help take the institution on the path of growth.

(Key words: Higher education, globalization, leadership, training, management)

The environment of higher education is changing at an unprecedented speed and on a global scale. In the Indian affiliated college system principals are expected to play the pivotal leadership role. Educational leadership is the key to the success of educational organization. To be successful in today's changing environment, higher education institutions need competent, effective academic leaders. Traditionally leadership in academia is a neglected area. This paper highlights the need to change this approach and develop transformational leaders within academia. It also discusses the role of training in various aspects of college administration so that academicians are able to transform themselves into efficient managers and run their colleges like modern day corporations.

Higher Education Scenario in India

Higher education in India is undergoing considerable change. India has over 600 million people who are under 25 years of age and by 2020, India will have the largest tertiary-age population in the world and will have the second largest graduate talent pipeline globally, following China and ahead of the USA. Government plans to revamp the whole sector over the next five years. There will be a complete change in each and every aspect from funding, leadership and management, quality assurance, accountability, relationships with industry, international collaboration, right up to the

way research and teaching are done. This transformation is being driven by various factors both national and global. Some of the factors responsible are economic growth, demographics, internationalization of education, global competition for talent and research funding and primarily the commoditization of education. As India's education system stands poised for a complete transformation it faces daunting challenges in the form of quality and poor student teacher ratios. The general standard of education in India is low. There are not enough places in schools, colleges or universities to cope with the enormous and increasing demand. With the rise of the middle classes, an increasing number of people today do not rely on the state to provide an education service. Hence, the private sector is already playing a significant role in the development of education in India, and its influence and presence will increase substantially.

Under the new five-year plan (2012-17), undergraduate education, for the first time, has been elevated to a top priority position in the government's push on expansion, inclusion and excellence. The undergraduate sector in India is huge: currently 14.6 million (86%) students are enrolled on undergraduate courses, compared to 2 million (12%) on post-graduate courses. In India a major chunk of students study at public and private colleges which are affiliated to state universities, teach the courses, curricula and examinations specified and regulated by their parent state university. The affiliated college sector in India is huge, enrolling over 90% of undergraduates, 70% of postgraduates and 17% of doctoral students. State universities are run and funded through their respective state governments funding falls far short of their requirements. State universities depend on affiliation fees paid by the colleges for their survival. These fees, supplemented by state government funding, are generally used to pay salaries and little else; most have poor infrastructure and conduct little research, although pockets of excellence exist. Many state universities spend much of their time administering the exams and admissions to their affiliated colleges leaving little time and resources for growth. In years to come student populations will become more demanding and expect better value for money, competition which has already started to rear its head will increase and institutions of higher learning be it colleges or the affiliating universities will have to transform themselves in all respects to survive.

Organizational transformation is heavily influenced by its leadership. However in India there is little understanding and appreciation of the role of leaders in academic institutions. In fact though there is considerable work on areas like leadership and motivation not much of this focuses on higher educational leadership.

Leadership: Its meaning and relevance

The term "Leadership" has attracted increasing attention in practical and theoretical sphere since many years. Leader is a person who inspires leads and directs his followers towards realization of some specific goal or outcome. A leader motivates followers so they can strive hard toward attainment of specific objective. House (2004: 15) defined leadership as the ability to influence others and to direct their efforts to achieve success. Leaders have different leadership styles through which they can lead their subordinates, some are authoritarian, some might be democratic, and some are achievement oriented, and so on. Leadership styles may vary from organization to organization and even within the organization. Leadership constitutes one of the most critical determinants of ultimate success or failure. The difference between excellence and mediocrity, or even survival and extinction, is often a direct reflection of the leadership within an organization (Birnbaum, 1988). It follows that leadership is a necessary element in service organizations like colleges too. However leadership in higher education has been given less importance and is not explored widely especially in developing countries.

Leadership in higher educational institutions

Leadership that is required in higher education is referred to as academic leadership. Academic leaders have more challenges than the leaders of business organization. One important reason is the stakeholders, there are various stakeholders in academia such as students, faculty members, etc so an academic leader must have to look upon every one individually and use different policies to deal with them (Sathye 2004). In fact academic leaders in the Indian affiliated college set up are often caught between the conflicting interests of faculty members, administrative staff, college managements, funding agencies like the government and regulatory bodies like the university they are affiliated to. These leaders find themselves oscillating between the desires of these multiple stakeholders. Hence effective leadership in higher education has a great deal to do with balance. Gmelch (2000, p 1) captures the essence of the problem when he writes that: 'in order to be a leader in higher education, one must be a 'dove' of peace intervening among warring factions that are causing destructive turbulence in the college, a dragon driving away both internal and external forces that threaten the college, and a diplomat guiding, inspiring, and encouraging people who live and work in the college environment.' The environment in which academia in India operates is increasingly political, and the stakes – economic and otherwise – have never been higher for colleges. It is imperative that leaders emerge who can successfully negotiate the turbulent times that lie ahead and can reinvent academia so that it retains its relevance in a world which desperately needs what higher education has to offer.

In the Indian context leaders in academic institutions are essentially academicians with specialized knowledge in a field of study and good research credentials. There is a huge gap between being an academic and moving into a leadership role. Further the environment today is highly volatile and many of them have a traditional mindset, lack experience in a business enterprise environment required to run colleges in a competitive set up, have minimal preparation for such leadership, and lack familiarity with all the aspects involved in managing and leading a college. This did not become a major hindrance in the past as long as colleges functioned in a protected environment because almost all colleges and courses received government funding. However with globalization and the entry of private players who manage their educational institutions like corporations many things have changed. There is emphasis on innovation and sustainability, government is gradually moving out and colleges of the future will have to generate their own resources much like corporations,

In times to come they will be expected to design compelling visions, manage people efficiently, and steer their institution to profitability. They would have to be leaders who run on the edge, have a vision for the institution and are willing to take risks and develop and implement schemes to convert campuses into avenues to generate revenue. This is necessary so that they are able to steer academic institutions to success in turbulent times.

Developing the Academic leaders of the future: Role of Training

Academicians need to be trained in various aspects of management so that they are able to transform academic institutions into better organizations for the benefit of all stakeholders. One innovative way in which leaders can help escape a traditional thought of leading in an academic setting is through specific course work in which future leaders will learn to identify their skills and techniques that transform their academic strength and link it to leading a business. The phenomenon of leading an educational institution as a business creates a need for a leader to have feet in both camps; the academic side of the college and the business aspects of leading a dynamic, forward moving institution. These potential leaders may be described as hybrid leaders who have academic excellence with industrial relevance.

Leadership training programs for leaders in academia must be designed on the basis of the curriculum for business management programs. This means they should encompass all aspects of running an organization including marketing, finance, human resources with special emphasis on educational institutions. As the new millennium progresses, educational leaders will be constantly challenged to be more effective in strategic planning, modifying organizational structures and bringing more control and flexibility to budgeting processes and staffing patterns. In fact, '... effective leaders are often described as individuals who are able to control resources in a way that organizes the organization to effectively meet its goals' (Ginsburg, 1997, p 27).

Leaders of colleges must be trained in the management of financial resources in higher education. It need not cover any of the technicalities of accounting practice, but focus instead on finance as an integral aspect of university management. This will provide participants with a broad understanding of where the traditional funding comes from to operate a college, how they can choose to spend it so as to make the most out of limited resources, and how they can try to control expenditures as well as how the college can try to generate funds. There should be emphasis on common mistakes that occur and likely scope for fraud.

Leaders must also be trained in marketing considerations in higher education. Leaders must learn various aspects of marketing management, branding, strategic marketing, and competitive positioning. This is because in the world of high competition colleges must be able to highlight their strengths and convert them into their core competencies and market their institution. A number of leaders in academia in colleges in India are not well versed with the use of modern technology nor are they media savvy this course will help to improve their skills in this area.

All organizations are composed of human resources and educational institutions are no different. One of the biggest challenges before leaders is managing their human resources in the form of faculty as well as administrative staff. Leaders must be familiarized with concepts of organizational behaviour like organizational culture and climate, performance appraisals selection and placement. They must be aware of the increasing diversity of employees and how to best manage it. This is necessary because finding and retaining good employees is one of the biggest challenges leaders in academia face today.

Such a well rounded training program which aims at developing efficient administrators out of academicians will help fulfill the leadership void that exists in most academic institutions today and help take the institution on the path of growth.

Conclusions

The future challenge for institutions of higher education will be to develop effective and efficient leaders. There is already a leadership crisis in academia. As the education sector opens up to greater competition leadership roles will become increasingly complex. Educational institutions cannot afford to take the leadership role casually; they need to put even more emphasis on the professional development of academic leaders. Programs must be designed for professional development for those who are willing and interested in becoming leaders. If the success and growth of higher education depends on leadership that can function effectively and efficiently in an increasingly complex society, every effort must be made to provide that leadership.

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