



Role of Leadership in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Why there is serious dearth of the capable leadership in the Indian Universities? Is there something missing in the process that is causing fundamental challenge to find such leadership that can be identified and groomed to be national heroes? Academics and academic institutions from time immemorial have had the culture of independent thinking and autonomy. Teachers, even in the Mahabharata or Chanakya era, had the freedom to decide what to teach and to which pupil depending on their interest and capability. Even the king could not interfere; such has been the power of teachers and their absolute vow for freedom and autonomy to passionately drive towards excellence.

KEYWORDS

Leadership, academic, Co-academic etc...

Leadership in Higher Education:

Academics and academic institutions from time immemorial in India have had the culture of independent thinking and autonomy. Teachers, even in the Mahabharata or Chanakya era, had the freedom to decide what to teach and to which pupil depending on their interest and capability. Even the king could not interfere; such has been the power of teachers and their absolute vow for freedom and autonomy to passionately drive towards excellence. The current students, faculty, and the Alumni are always most impacted by the reputation and ranking of the institutions and therefore are the most important stake holders. By ignoring the Alumni and current faculty as stake holders in decision making, the institutions would tend to move away from commitment to excellence.

Therefore, there is a strong need to cultivate and groom leadership for the Indian universities who are passionate about diverse aspects of education, but not limited to teaching and research, and are not afraid to take major decisions for the long term growth of the institution they serve. Also, unless there are compelling reasons for change, the leadership needs to have continuity to be able to implement big changes. If we see very successful corporate, they have had long tenure for the leaders to implement their vision. With frequent change in leadership, there is constant change in focus and the institutions go directionless in terms of vision and mission. The support of government and promoter (in case of the private institutions) needs to be that of the facilitator to help institutions through faculty and students achieve their highest potential. The top three priorities are:

- Achievement of excellence in higher education,
- The management of teaching and learning,
- Research, innovation and engagement with community and enterprise.

Some special efforts on part of Govt. must be made to regulate and conduct academic leadership development programs and to aid or assist financial and other infrastructure facilities to look after the ongoing leaders. Development of leadership skills and knowledge will bring personal as well as organizational benefits. This will be an indication for growth potential for the growing and prospective leaders in the higher education. The literature identifies large number of benefits to the faculties and higher education institutions. Some of the benefits the teaching faculties enjoying with regard to academic leadership development programs are as follow:

- An opportunity to learn and aware full scope of the higher education leadership;
- An opportunity for continuous learning and focused learning;
- The skills for effective learning and linking learning with doing;

- Familiar with right sharing of the job of academic leadership towards teaching, research and others administrative roles;
- The development of team building with students and teaching faculty;
- Creation/part of vision and mission statements of the institution;
- Creation of work culture and managing cultural diversity for the benefit of the students and institution;
- Developing appropriate business strategy skills and knowledge pertaining to higher education;
- Skills to manage in uncertainties and natural calamities;
- Keeping competitive spirit alive for sustainable growth of individual as well as the organization, Challenges and Changing Role of Academic Leadership Now the time is posing very big challenge to Indian higher education management.

The selection needs to be through a process of grooming and transition, as we see in the best of the corporate e.g. Tata Group, to ensure easier acceptance within the system and smooth take over from one generation of leadership to the next. If there is necessity to bring someone from outside, the internal acceptance and the familiarity with the institution should be ensured to facilitate smooth transition.

It is heartening to see that the Indian Higher Education System is debating on its role in 'transforming India'. Normally, this has been a call from the political system. Therefore a brief background of the political approach may be useful before the academic community assesses its role.

The process of Industrialization did not impact or alleviate the poverty that remained within India, as its identity in the world community. Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, came up, in 1971, with the slogan "Garibi Hatao desh bachavo" (meaning "abolish poverty rescue and country") and transform India. The role of education and skill building as precursors to economic development was also mentioned. But the slogan remained a political slogan! A subsequent appraisal suggests that, all in all, the "garibi hatao" did little, and, and accomplished less. However, the program also received support of the next Prime minister, Sh. Rajiv Gandhi.

Once again the higher education system did not participate, with vigor, in this "transformation process" the education system remained on the fringe.

The arrival of the rocket technologist, APJ Abdul Kalam as the President of India gave a direction. He dreamt of a 'Developed India' by the year 2020! He remained passionate and committed to what he called Vision 2020-transforming India with a focused manifesto for change. He dreamt of a nation where education

with a good value system is not denied to any meritorious candidates because of societal or economic discrimination. He further envisaged India as a nation which is best destination for the most talented scholars, scientist, and investors from around the world. The higher education system continued to be in a state of despondency and the political system did not have much faith in its role in transforming India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, in 2007, expressed his concern by saying:

"Our University system is, in many parts, in state of despair.....higher education enrolments are abnormally low, almost two-third of our universities and 90 percent of our college are rated as below average on quality parameters....I am concerned that in many states university appointments, including that of Vice-Chancellors, have been politicized and have become subject to caste and communal consideration and there are complaints of favoritism and corruption".

He immediately appointed a high level National Knowledge commission (NKC), to suggest major reforms and changes needed in India's Higher education system to transform India's Socio-economic status in the world community. The NKC came up with detailed reports on the state of higher education in India and suggested several reforms for "Expansion, excellence & equity" in India's higher education system. While some initial steps were taken for bringing in expansion of the system, the major challenges of reforms still remain to be tackled. The concern remained as regards the non-availability of skilled manpower of quality. Indian universities were not being recognized in the top 200 universities of the world. The question of transforming India, with non-availability of talented manpower in large numbers, remained a major challenge to the higher education system.

This is a major challenge given to the higher education system in India. Transforming India through the development and use of skilled, educated manpower is now the major challenge facing the higher education system. With these concerns, for the first time perhaps, the agenda of "transforming India" has been directly connected with the objectives of the higher education system.

The government of India is bringing out a new national Education policy (NEP) to meet the changing dynamics of the society's requirement with regards to quality education, innovation and research, aiming to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to eliminate the shortage of manpower in science, technology academics and industry (3). The responsibility of "transforming India" is going to be placed on the shoulders of higher education system.

Conclusion:

The major thrust of transforming India is expected to be through the production and effective use of "skilled manpower" required by India; and even how India can supply the same to the rest of the world. The higher education system of India is very well endowed for focusing on the production of the much needed "skilled manpower". However merely producing graduates from the existing system is not going to enrich India's demographic dividend, and in fact, if not trained to global standards, India may have a demographic disaster on hand, with unemployable youth crowding the job market. Conscious steps, with in the mandate of higher education system, will have to be taken if the higher education system can effectively respond to the call of "Transforming India". The three pillars of the higher education system viz:

1. Teaching;
2. Research; and
3. Service.

Their relevance to "Transforming India" has been examined and an attempt has been made to identify the roles of the three major stake holders in the higher education system viz.

- A. The students,
- B. The teachers, and
- C. The Educational Institutions.

The Higher Education System can and has to take this challenge of "Transforming India".

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