

Competency Building for Academic Leadership in India

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Abstract

The changing scenario of higher education institutions due to industry demands, announcement of new education policy 2020 has given us a wakeup call regarding the competencies needed for the academic leadership. This paper attempts to identify the main competencies required for a leader in an academic scenario, the outcomes of the presence or absence of these competencies and the most preferred means of developing these competencies among the academic leaders in the current higher education context. The current paper has used Cranwell and Daly approach for studying the existing literature. The core academic leadership competencies identified based on the literature review are Personal capability, Interpersonal capability, Intellectual capability, Skills and knowledge, Administrative competencies, Competencies of social responsibility, Institutional competencies and Personal knowledge and Skill. And for the development of the same a systematic leadership development program needs to be developed to ensure academic leadership effectiveness in research universities.

Key words: Competency, Academic Leadership, Leadership Programs

Introduction:

Leadership is an ancient concept which was in use even before the term was coined in its formal sense. The applicability of this concept is universal i.e., it is relevant in every form of an organization. Academic leadership is different and distinctive due to the locations of its application which are universities, colleges etc. Businesses and higher education institutions are similar in many respects as they both have similar elements like goals, structures, hierarchies, cultures, vendors and powerful stakeholders and the leaders in higher education can learn a lot from these organizations but there are some basic differences between them which make higher education institutions unique, it is different because of its activity mix in terms of teaching students with a wide range of aptitude, research, service and outreach.

This paper attempts to identify the main competencies required for a leader in an academic scenario, the outcomes of the presence or absence of these competencies and the most preferred means of developing these competencies among the academic leaders in the current higher education context.

The following are the objectives the paper attempts to study,

1. To study the relevance of academic leadership
2. To identify the core competencies desirable for an academic leader
3. To identify the most preferred means or modes of academic leadership development

This paper endeavours to achieve these objectives by the means of studying the existing literature by the mode of Cranwell and Daly approach of descriptive analysis.

Indian Higher Education Scenario:

India has worked towards transforming its higher education landscape into a very successful one in spite of many impediments. It has being able to create widespread access to low-cost high-quality university education for students of all levels. With well-planned expansion and a student-centric learning-driven model of education, India has not only bettered its enrolment numbers but has dramatically enhanced its learning outcomes. As a result, today, India's student population is a force to reckon with among them are potential thought leaders – researchers and academics – positioned at the helm of knowledge creation, entrepreneurs and executives of the future, industry-ready and highly sought after and from them emerges India's massive workforce which powers its ever growing economy. However, India has emerged as a regional hub of education which is attracting global learners from all over the world as India dons the mantle of a higher education leader and emerges as the role model for delivering high-quality education to vast numbers at low cost. Despite this India's higher education institutions are not yet the best in the world – India has fewer than 25 universities in the top 200.

Issues in the higher education system in India (based on the report of FICCI Higher Education Summit 2013 - Higher education in India: Vision 2030)

- Significant disparity in higher education across genders, social groups and geographies
- Low employability of graduates perceived by industry

According to FICCI-World Bank employer satisfaction survey, 2009 conducted across 150 companies in India. Around 64% of the surveyed employers are “somewhat”, “not very”, or “not at all” satisfied with the quality of engineering graduates' skills. Top skill gaps are in General skills – reliability, self motivation and willingness to learn and Specific skills – problem solving, ability to design and conduct analyses, and reading.

- Lagging behind other countries in university rankings and research output

“There is need for Indian universities to catch up with counterparts in the quality of teaching and research. The number of patent applications by Indians comprised only 0.3 per cent of the total applications filed in the world.” – *Excerpt from speech delivered by Shri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India on the occasion of the convocation of SIDO KANHU MURMU in April 2013*

- Outdated and irrelevant curricula

“Our academic syllabus is not up to the highest standards as recognised by world universities”
 “ -Excerpt from the speech delivered by Shri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India, at the convocation of the North Hill University, October 2013

- Lack of corporate and inter-institutional linkages, under-resourced higher education institutions and under-qualified faculties have impeded growth of research in India. While the number of academia-academia and academia-industry partnerships are increasing, high quality and deep partnerships are largely limited to the top institutions in India
- Lack of professional leadership

The advent of National Education Policy 2020 with its key facets concentrating on Increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio, Restructuring of Higher Educational Institutions, advocacy of Multidisciplinary structure, changes in the regulatory structure, increased impetus towards research, setting up of foreign university campuses and more thrust on Vocational education has only reinstated the need for a quite capable academic leadership.

Relevance of academic leadership

In times of these challenges each of our country’s higher education institutions need someone at the helm of affairs to steer these organizations transform into complete success stories overcoming all the challenges posed by a globalised economy as listed above. This highlights the need of academic leadership in the current scenario. Leadership is the process whereby one individual affects the other members of the group towards the attainment of defined group or organizational goals.

An institution of higher learning (IHL) relies on its leadership effectiveness in creating a pleasant teaching environment for faculty and in providing students with quality of education they deserve (Afnan Al-Shuaiby, 2009).

Dr. Cecilia Hahn Berg et al in their report compiled the responses from 8 universities in CESAER (Center of Advanced European Studies and Research) task force HR and the outcomes of a workshop with participants representing both HR and faculty in 16 European universities of science and technology from 11 countries during the CESAER HR Conference in May 2014, regarding “Where do we want to be regarding leadership in academia in 10 years from now”. The following recommendations were the result of the same; they found that defining and investing in leadership may be a key for releasing creativity, innovativeness and efficiency at the universities. The management teams/executive boards at all European universities to strive towards providing good conditions and support for management and leadership in academia like allocating time for leadership, limiting the number of team members reporting to the manager, clearly defining roles of and expectations on leaders, and utilising HR competence and tools as a strategic resource in this work. To have a role model and ambassador for leadership in academia in the high level management of the university may enhance the speed of leadership development within the university and academic world. Leaders to be appointed after a regular application and selection process, based on academic,

pedagogical and leadership skills as well as personal traits, where HR expertise is utilised in the process.

Few would argue that there are fundamental differences in the challenges facing leaders within higher education versus those in the corporate world and in the roles that each must perform. College presidents are not private sector CEOs, clearly. But Leaders within higher education and the corporate world show very similar personality profiles when assessed characteristics are viewed as a whole except in the case of commerce, stress where the higher education leaders scored less when compared to their counterparts (A Witt/Kieffer Study, 2013).

The Core Competencies Desirable for an Academic Leader

An academic leader is first an academician then an administrator here we begun the competencies required by an educator as a leader in a class room as well as in a variety of situations. Then proceed to discuss the competencies as a leader. Spendlove (2007) mentioned that, competencies are defined as sets of behaviors that are instrumental in the delivery of desired results or outcomes (Bartram 2005). Competencies are defined as personal traits, behaviors, skills, values, knowledge and many other existing frameworks (Elham Shahmandi, et al, 2011).

This article listed in Concordia Online Education (November 2013) on educational leadership lists out Five Traits of a Good Educational Leader:

- a. Self-awareness: A good educational leader needs a solid understanding of oneself and should also have self confidence. They should know how to start each day and lead their school, their fellow teachers and their students in the right direction and help to accomplish the goals of the classroom and the school.
- b. Excellent communication: The best educational leaders are excellent communicators. A leader cannot lead a group of people if he or she does not speak with them.
- c. Resourceful: Educational leaders should be resourceful and open to new ideas. Especially during tough economic times, technology helps to change the classroom and educational leaders, including teachers, need to be open to new ideas that might improve their classroom. They also need to know how to use the resources they have to the best of their ability.
- d. Lead by example: The best leaders in the educational system make it a point to lead by example, and not simply by words.
- e. Power of teaching and learning: Above all, educational leaders must have a belief in the system and the students they are teaching. If a leader does not believe the students can do it, or does not feel the teachers are adequate, then everyone is doomed to failure.

There are many different characteristics and traits of a good leader, but these ensure that anyone who can embody these traits can make a good leader in the school system. Whether the leader

in question is a principal at an elementary school or a coach at a high school, these traits can be applied in a variety of different circumstances. Being a good leader is not something simply left for administrators. Teachers must also strive to be the best leaders of their classrooms and teach students how to become the leaders of tomorrow.

FSA Human Resources Division listed out the 28 Leadership Core Competencies divided into five levels by the leadership levels, as the common competencies applicable to all categories of leadership including academic leadership.

1. The dimension of Managing Self characterized by the competencies of Integrity/Honesty, Interpersonal Skills, Continual Learning, Resilience, Oral Communication, Written Communication, Flexibility and Problem Solving ability.
2. The dimension of Managing People in described in terms of Human Capital Management, Leveraging Diversity in workforce, Conflict Management, Public Service, Motivating and Developing Others
3. The dimension of Managing Projects which is a combination of Team Building, Customer Service, Technical Credibility, Accountability, Decisiveness and ability of Influencing/ Negotiating with others successfully.
4. Leading Organizations described in terms of External Awareness, Vision, Strategic Thinking and Entrepreneurship skills.
5. Managing Programs Technology Management, Financial Management, Creativity / Innovation, Partnering and Political Savvy.

Geoff Scott et al, (2008) in their paper identified the following as the capabilities for effective leadership under four heads as listed below,

Personal capability:

1. Values and ethics
2. Willingness to take a hard decision
3. Wanting to achieve the best outcome possible
4. Remaining calm under pressure
5. Persevering when things are not working out as anticipated
6. Taking responsibility for program activities and outcomes

Interpersonal capability:

1. Transparent and honest
2. Motivating others
3. Influencing people's behaviour and decisions in effective ways

Intellectual capability

1. Having a clear direction in the area of responsibility
2. Seeing the best way to respond to a perplexing situation

Skills and knowledge

1. Understanding how universities operate
2. Being able to make effective presentations
3. Being able to organize work and manage time effectively
4. Ability to chair meetings effectively

Jean B. Leslie in his paper presents findings from a Center for Creative Leadership study conducted between 2006 and 2008 to explore the concern that leadership skills are lacking. The survey covered 2,200 leaders from 15 organizations in three countries. The study showed that crucial leadership skills in today's organizations are, in fact, insufficient for meeting current and future needs. The study identified seven leadership skills viewed as most important now and in the future which are: leading employees, strategic planning, inspiring commitment, managing change, resourcefulness, being a quick learner, and doing whatever it takes. The Leaders were found to lack the skills they need to be effective today i.e., inspiring commitment, strategic planning, leading people, resourcefulness, and employee development identified as the "the current leadership deficit." Today's leadership capacity is insufficient to meet future leadership requirements. The four most important future skills — leading people, strategic planning, inspiring commitment, and managing change — are among the weakest competencies for today's leaders. This finding was consistent across countries, organizations, and level in the organization.

Dr Sailesh Sharma in his paper examined the relationship of teachers' perception of the Leadership Capacities of their Principals to the Leadership Qualities of Empathy, Decision making, Time Management, Comfort etc, according to him Successful leadership is not the result of simply obtaining a position, but rather possessing the knowledge and understanding of successful leadership skills along with the personal ability to effectively implement those skills. The findings showed that the Principals were perceived to be having Moderate leadership Capacities and Moderate level of Leadership Qualities and a strong and positive correlation between perception of teachers on leadership capacities and leadership qualities of principals.

Gupta et.al., (2021) has in the changing higher education scenario due to the advent of National Education Policy tried to articulate the competencies needed in the context of innovation, reform and major changes to facilitate continuity of the innovations till the vision of the institute is achieved, the selection of the right person will make a difference in the design and implementation of innovations.

Alizadeh. Somayeh et. al (2019) in their study spread across of two phases identified 62 personal competencies and 19 functional competencies through Carnwell and Daly approach and in the first phase of study then shortlisted 19 competencies, including 12 personal competencies and 7 functional competencies using modified Delphi approach as trainable core competencies. Thus highlighting the need for both personal and functional core competencies in academic leadership.

Kyamanywa P et, al., (2021) using grounded theory identified the requirement of personal, functional competencies as requirement in the academic leadership in medical institutions.

Elham Shahmandi, et al, 2011, in their paper listed out the following competencies as the most needed in an academic leader so as to improve their universities and colleges to survive and continually develop. These competencies include leadership skills, communication skills, persuasive skills and professional skills.

Gonzalez noted that the future senior administrators in these IHL must be equipped with 4 skills in particular they are as follows:

1. Personal characteristics and skills such as flexibility, anxiety control, time management, adaptive management, positive attitude toward people, innovative, motivating, honest, diplomatic, visionary and entrepreneurial spirit.
2. Administrative competencies like decision-making, delegation, exploring alternatives, financial and administrative competencies, team work, communication, visioning, planning, negotiating, conflict resolution, evaluation, knowledge management, networking, marketing project management, and response capacity.
3. Competencies of social responsibility include social commitment, sensitivity to cultural diversity, analysis of demands, and knowledge of economic situation.
4. Institutional competencies are contained institutional identity and philosophy, and leadership (Gonzalez (2004) cited in Elham Shahmandi, et al, 2011).

According to Yang, There are four categories of leadership competencies identified by the faculties' members: Personality and disposition, personal knowledge and skill, administrative competency and social responsibility competency (Yang, 2005, cited in Elham Shahmandi, et al, 2011). Based on Yang (2005), leadership competencies identified by 22 Respondents in Chinese IHL are:

Personality and disposition: (1)Devotion, (2) enthusiasm, (3) selflessness, (4) benevolence, (5) justice, (6) tolerance, (7) self-discipline, (8) kindness, (9) responsibility, (10) determination, (11) diligence, (12) commitment, (13) persistence, (14) flexibility, (15) charisma, (16) openness, (17) creativity, (18) initiative

Personal knowledge and Skill include: (1) A combination of Chinese and Western culture, (2) profound knowledge background, (3) knowledge about social reality, (4) knowledge of international higher education theory and practice, (5) international experiences and background, (6) higher academic reputation and achievement, (7) academic Discernment, (8)

familiarity with the university (9) social skills (10) continuous learning ability, (11) English language skill, (12) critical thinking.

Administrative competency consists of: (1) Vision, (2) setting ambitious and achievable goals, (3) holistic mastery, (4) discernment, (5) collecting and processing information, (6) Strategic decision-making, (7) leading, (8) organizing, (9) coordinating, (10) evaluating and supervising, (11) motivating, (11) communicating, (13) staffing, (14) reconstructing new institutions, (15) resource-raising, (16) marketing.

Social responsibility competency include: (1) Political sensitivity and firmness, (2) implementing the national educational policy, (3) accomplishing university mission, (4) public figure, (5) service sense, (6) sense of opportunity, (7) sense of competition.

Means or Modes of Academic Leadership Development

Effective leadership is commonly accepted as central to organizational success. Universities are definitely not immune to this need for effective leadership as they face similar challenges as any other organizations Arsenault, P. M. (2007). To date, faculty are appointed to a senior rank based upon their deep subject knowledge, experience, and scientific accomplishment (e.g., number of publications in international journals), not based on leadership skills. Subsequently, senior faculty members hold leadership positions without adequate preparation (Susanne Braun, 2009). Recent studies by Scott, Coates & Anderson (2008), and Debowski and Blake (2004) suggest that selection and development processes for higher education leaders are often unrelated to what is necessary to negotiate the daily realities of their work, that the nature and focus of leadership development programs do not always address the capabilities that count.

But the expectation towards those leading the higher educational institutions is very demanding as they have to face similar challenges as other organizations such as competition, survival, growth, rationed funding, satisfaction of customers (the student community), getting the best workforce, managing the changes in technology, internal management challenges etc. but the impetus given to leadership development in other organizations is missing in academic organizations both in terms of research studies as well as in terms of leadership development programs.

A. Somalingam et al in their paper discussed the changing role of academic leadership in higher education context due to greater amount of cultural diversity, ever-growing technology, funding arrangement, institutional competition and unpredictable uncertainties. Based on a review of published literature many recommendations to improve the same were made some of the pertinent ones are i) Indian higher education institutions must prepare for more efficient internal capability for which the development of academic leadership is one of the vital factors, ii) The exclusive program of academic leadership development should be conducted to teaching faculty through variety of methods and case studies and iii) Effective leadership programs must be considered at all levels of higher educational institutions (A. Somalingam, 2013).

Geoff Scott et al, (2008) in their paper identified the following as the most preferred modes of leadership development methods in the order of their listing,

Leadership development methods	Rank
Learning “on-the-job”	1
Ad hoc conversations about work with people in similar roles	2
Participating in peer networks beyond the University	3
Participating in annual performance reviews	4
Participating in peer networks within the university	5
Participating in 360 degree feedback reviews based on known leadership capabilities	6
Study of “real-life” workplace problems	7
Participating in higher education leadership seminars	8
Completing formal leadership programs given by external providers	9
Undertaking site visits to other institutions or agencies	10

Bryman. A. 2007, in his research paper highlighted the lack of systematic leadership development for employees in higher education. The article presented two approaches to the development of leadership in higher education based on two different programs offered to researchers at a large German university. The first program constituted a leader development initiative for junior faculty on an individual level, whereas the second focuses on the development of leadership within university departments on a group level. The paper provided recommendations for establishing and evaluating effective leadership development in higher education presented.

Elham Shahmandi et al, in their paper discuss that the system assumed that the faculty and staff would have the requisite competencies for managing and leading quality within their environments. Any improvements desired in the operations of quality and that required training by academic units would be left up to them to do as needed. This means that Deans, heads of departments, professors, senior lecturers, program coordinators and others who have strategic roles in faculties through managing committees and courses would be required to interpret what competencies, roles would be needed to inform their operational quality and so engage in self-development. A systematic leadership development program needs to be developed to ensure academic leadership effectiveness in research universities. Development actions targeting employee competencies must be planned, implemented and assessed. In order to be efficient, development should be a systematic process instead of occasional. As a whole, HRD has so far focused very strongly on developing individuals. The overall quality of a faculty or department would not be enhanced when only certain members assume that they are competent leaders and managers and have not been engaged in team building to improve their leadership and managerial capacity (Elham Shahmandi, et al, 2011).

Conclusion:

Thus, looking at the changing scenario of higher education institutions the leadership also has to undergo a change from the traditional seniority based to one that is professional in its approach. The core academic leadership competencies identified are Personal capability, Interpersonal capability, Intellectual capability, Skills and knowledge, Administrative

competencies, Competencies of social responsibility, Institutional competencies and Personal knowledge and Skill. And for the development of the same a systematic leadership development program needs to be developed to ensure academic leadership effectiveness in research universities.

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