

Introductory Note for the Special Issue

ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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All human beings, in whatever profession they work, are ultimately made suitable to justify their positions by academicians only. Whether imparted through formal or informal mode, imparting knowledge and wisdom used to be compared with divinity and the person instrumental in imparting knowledge used to be considered as 'Guru' (the one who gives) and was treated over and above all professions. In India teachers have traditionally been accorded the highest esteem, even if it was not matched by commensurate economic rewards. Therefore, academics used to enjoy unparalleled sanctity in society as the through put of teaching -learning process. Not only professionals but ancient kings also used to bow before 'Gurus' for the sake of attaining wisdom to run their kingdom. This spirit of academics started with imparting common life skills and extended gradually to specific work based and war based skills and further with development in different fields of knowledge, to imparting knowledge of disciplinary streams and their advancement. However, the past few decades have witnessed the change in academic profession with a precipitous decline in the stature of once-revered guru (Jayaram,2003)¹.

GROWING CHALLENGES IN THE COMPETITIVE WORLD

Academic leaders of today are sitting in the midst of this challenging and rapidly shifting environment. With the forces of globalization, market growth and increasing competition, the field of academics could not remain untouched from the ills of competitive world. Positioned amidst IT revolution, the market and community responsiveness,

educational institutions of today are the uncertain space of operation. It has gradually started becoming more and more commercialized in view of increasing market demands for high quality education, comparability of education across institutions and countries and measurability of impact of education on individual's professional life.

Olson & Presley (2015), in their book , Future of higher education, have examined many challenges faced in fashioning the academic institutions of today through their research, predictions, concerns, and advice on institutional finances, student access, changing technologies, and the philosophical underpinnings of higher education. They address the multiple challenges facing higher education today, offering ideas and solutions².

In the above scenario, the kind of leadership which used to be exercised through informal modes in a personalized manner, got completely changed. Up to the mid- 1980s the management of academic institutions including universities was generally based upon a 'collegial' approach, with decision making in the hands of academicians with limited management expertise.

Since then, however, there has been a steady trend towards more 'corporate' approaches to leadership, and associated professionalisation of leadership and managerial roles. Now academic institutions have started taking the form of business organizations with their functional specializations like Human Resource, Finance, Marketing, Public Relations etc. Loud proclamations for their academic excellence in media through business magazines, print advertisements and other modern modes of social networking, play a major role for their survival and sustenance in the society.

1 Jayaram, N. (2003). The fall of the Guru: the decline of the academic profession in India. In *The Decline of the Guru* (pp. 199-230). Palgrave Macmillan

2 Olson, G. A., & Presley, J. W. (2015). *Future of Higher Education: Perspectives from America's Academic Leaders*. Routledge

CHANGING PARADIGMS FOR ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

Inspired by the world of competition, such academic cum business organizations had the strong desire to touch the shoulders of their market giants and reach new heights of excellence in the eyes of their target groups to generate more and more revenue for further growth in the educational sector. Government funded educational institutions which used to enjoy unparalleled market position and high brand value in view of providing low cost/ high quality education with funding support extended by public resources, also started facing difficulties due to governmental pressure for self resource generation for survival and sustenance. Hence, the private market of education started booming further by targetting the class of people ready to afford money for ease of selection. Hence, they were looking for academic leaders with corporate bent of mind who can optimize the resource utilization and can be instrumental in corporate branding of respective institutions, generating revenues and giving tough competition to other similar governmental/ non governmental institutions. Similarly, government institutions also started looking for academic leaders with administrative frame of mind who can ultimately serve the similar objectives to be present in the common market race of survival and sustenance along with quality assurance to society.

As a result, the academic undercurrent/ culture and the genuine spirit of imparting education, started facing an uncalled for transition and the desirable objectives of academic excellence and satisfaction of those imparting knowledge reached at the cross roads.

Bolden et. al (2012), on the basis of their research on UK educational institutions, stated that 'academic leadership' is not provided by people in formal managerial roles. It is largely considered as arising from engagement with influential colleagues within one's own academic discipline, especially those who play a pivotal role in one's transition and acculturation in to academic life. He further states that academics across the sector recognise leadership in actions that (a) provide and protect an environment that enables productive academic work, (b) support and develop a sense of shared academic values and identity, and (c) accomplish 'boundary spanning' on behalf of individuals and work groups. Boundary spanning here refers to the ability to create opportunities for external relatedness, getting things done via institutional administrations, mentoring colleagues into wider spheres of engagement, etc³.

³ Bolden, R., Gosling, J., O'Brien, A., Peters, K., Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S. A., ... & Winklemann, K. (2012). *Academic leadership: changing conceptions, identities and experiences in UK higher education*. Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

Hence, it is expected of researchers to focus their empirical research on the experiences of academic community with institutional leadership and their perceptions of how they are influenced, supported and given a sense of direction in relation to their academic work. This should include teaching, research, consulting, management development programmes, academic administration, inter institutional networking, outreach and international collaborations etc. Further, it is also pertinent to understand how academicians perceive 'academic leadership'; how these perceptions are different as compared to managerial leadership and other forms of influence within the institution; their impact on leadership related attitudes and behaviours in the academic context. They should also endeavour to explore the challenges that academicians face while working under such context and leadership and how it influences the academic work culture in order to narrate how positively such academic leadership can contribute to academic excellence along with the satisfaction of academicians.

To have the research based understanding of above issues, it is important to undertake small intensive studies on different institutions focusing on one or more of the following concepts.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Academic institutions are the amalgamation of a group of intellectual flock with multifarious motivations and interests, differing levels of capacity and ability to perform academic work, varying health status and stamina, contrasting personalities, psyche, emotional and social intelligence. With such a complex combinations of multiple traits with innumerable permutations and combinations, leading in a way so as to contribute to academic excellence without compromising with the self respect of academicians and to their satisfaction is a herculean task for academic leaders. Many times, academic leaders realize that all motivational theories of human resource management are the real myth and the upheaval of inter/intra group dynamics pose an additional challenge for the leader to face and resolve.

There is a marked difference in leading the employees in corporate world and playing leadership roles in academic institutions in view of the fact that through employees, leaders in such institutions are actually supposed to manage the knowledge creators and disseminators in a way that it promotes academic excellence. The concept of 'academic credibility' plays a pertinent role in this regard. More specifically, academicians are more willing to believe and trust someone as leader who has demonstrated an exemplary academic track record. More than the capability of the 'leader' it is perhaps in terms of the way academicians respond to them, that decides the efficacy of an academic leader. Therefore, it is very important for an academic leader

to be concerned about how academicians are responding to the way he/she is trying to lead rather than having the feel that being head of the institution, it is his prerogative to perceive the things in a way s/he considers appropriate. Academicians' perceptions about being respectfully treated in the institution by leader giving due regard to their professional identity, play a significant role in effective academic leadership. A high level of emotional intelligence is thus a desirable trait to meet above expectations of academic community. These are some of the research based hypothesis which need to be tested empirically in the current context to proclaim what contributes to effective academic leadership.

DESIRABLE ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP STYLES

Corporate leadership is marked with a range of leadership styles effective in differing contexts and above all, the situational leadership model by Hersey and Blanchard⁴, further justifies theoretically that academic leadership styles must vary with varying maturity level of faculty, and more specifically, with their level of confidence and commitment for academic excellence. There has to be a precarious balance between autonomy, support and direction as per the demand of respective academic situation, which is a challenging task for academic leaders. More so, a context dependent need to gradually move from transactional to transformation leadership style embedded in organic work culture is being felt by academic community, which needs to be put into practice in a systematic manner by academic leaders. A thorough research is needed to delineate desirable leadership styles best suited to different academic contexts and faculty traits for the holistic pursuit of academic excellence.

Academic Culture – Innovation, Change and Satisfaction

Efficacy of academic leader depends on how well s/he is able to blend his/her style of leading with existing academic culture, maintaining the flexibility and autonomy of faculty on one hand and addressing the issues of innovation and change on the other for the pursuit of excellence with satisfaction of teaching faculty. Many times, such higher order needs of academic world are better fulfilled by informal mode of academic leadership (Bolman & Gallos, 2010)⁵.

Scott (2004)² while addressing the Australian Universities Quality Forum on effective change management in higher

education, proclaims that the motto now must be “*good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas*”. Academic leaders have to develop skills for not only identifying what learning programs, research initiatives, action projects, approaches, priorities, quality improvements and strategic developments are consistent with their mission, to keep up with the continuous action and transformation in their operating context, but also at making sure these agreed changes are put into practice successfully and sustained⁶. A systematic and need based blend of academic leadership with respective work culture is desirable for promoting academic excellence with stakeholders' satisfaction. It is very important because academicians basically work for self respect and satisfaction as some of the biggest motivators and the undercurrent of flexibility and autonomy of functioning in academic environment is one of the most sought after indicator for satisfaction of faculty which needs to be further tested empirically.

Academic Bureaucracy-Dynamics of Power and Politics

In the past few years, there has been an irresistible rise of academic bureaucracy around the world. As academic institutions grow in size, they turn into more complex places causing worry to academicians that this expanded tier of management is a symptom of a new bureaucratic control being exerted over their academic lifestyle. “Academicians are the very people who understand academics and higher education and they should be trusted to become academic leaders as they have spent their lives in the array of education and can use their vast and invaluable experience and insight.”⁷

However, the increasing influence of power and politics at the larger level has started taking its toll on academics too, limiting the significant role that academicians can play while leading the institutions. Ginsberg (2011)⁸ states that universities have slowly been taken over by a class of administrators and managers who are less interested in training future entrepreneurs and thinkers as they are in turning institutions of learning into cash cows for a growing academic bureaucracy. The character of higher education around the globe including the United States has changed-

6 Scott, G., Coates, H., & Anderson, M. (2008). Learning leaders in times of change: Academic leadership capabilities for Australian higher education. http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=higher_education

7 <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/mar/30/academic-bureaucracy-rise-managers-higher-education>

8 http://archive.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2011/09/12/universities_weakened_under_weight_of_bureaucracy/

4 Hersey, P., & Blanchard, K. H. (1993). *Management of organizational behavior: Utilizing human resources*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.

5 Bolman, L. G., & Gallos, J. V. (2010). *Reframing academic leadership*. John Wiley & sons.

and not for the better. Every year, hosts of administrators and staffers are added to university payrolls, even as budget crises force institutions to shrink their full-time faculties. When universities are run not by academicians but by a professional class of bureaucrats, the driving mission behind higher education is being lost. Without having spent time in an educational institution-without a purely academic pursuit to frame their broader career-professional bureaucrats tend to view management of institution as an end in and of itself. So rather than focusing on efforts to promote the best scholarship among faculty and churn out the most talented graduates, they tend to focus more exclusively on the institution's finances, or on battles to expand their own power, hence living in the state of participation vs. control dilemma and find it difficult to come out of it with benefit to no one.

Academic Leadership and Gender Diversity

Academic institutions are build up to address accelerating institutional and societal needs but the ratio of women in academic leadership positions is extremely low indicating the waste of most women's potential of academic administration. Only institutions able to recruit and retain women will be likely to maintain the best faculty (Bickel et. al., 2002). The long-term success of academic institutions is thus inextricably linked to the development of women leaders. It is, therefore, recommended that teaching institutions/universities/academic societies should strongly emphasize faculty gender diversity in respective institutions and target women's professional development needs. They should also work to maximize their faculty appointments while maintaining appropriate gender ratio.⁹

Eagly et. al (2003)¹⁰ conducted a meta-analysis of 45 studies of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles and found that female leaders were more transformational than male leaders and also engaged in more of the contingent reward behaviors as a part of transactional leadership.

Male leaders were more likely to manifest the other aspects of transactional leadership. Although these gender differences were small, the implications of these findings are encouraging for efficacy of female leadership in academic

institutions where need for transformational leadership style is high in order to be effective in the constantly changing academic environment.

Critical Role of Perceptions and Satisfaction

In the complex and dynamic environment of academic institutes, all leaders need to understand effective academic leadership behaviors and faculty's perceptions of their behaviors (Kelley, 2005)¹¹. Most important is to be able to correctly envision the needs of their faculty, empower them to share the vision, and enable them to create an effective institutional climate to their satisfaction as knowledge creation and dissemination always needs an environment of flexibility and autonomy. Many times, academic leaders remain trapped in the cycle of reflecting as the participatory leader to empower the faculty on face value but having the latent tendency of managing through power and control and sometimes even start intellectual exploitation for their own development which is one of the most damaging factor in academic world. The current scenario of Indian university/institutions' vice chancellors/directors indicates only 29 women holding academic leadership positions which are less than .1% of the total academic leaders of around 530 in number.¹²

CONCLUSION

Academic leaders have the power, authority and position to impact the climate of their institution, but many lack the feedback to improve being in the world of self fulfilling prophesy. If Academic leaders have the human and social skills, they can develop feelings of trust, open communications, collegiality, and promote effective feedback from faculty. Effective academic leaders must remember the parable of *The Blind Men and the Elephant*. If they are blind to critical information about their institutions, they could make erroneous decisions.

Satisfaction of academicians in an institutional system leads to excellence and Return on Investment (RoI) for all initiatives taken by academic leaders, whether in the form of career growth or faculty development opportunities, or facilitating efforts for national/international networking, or simple administrative facilitation, is very high as ultimately, everything is converging towards giving name and fame to the institution and intellectual capital of faculty is just instrumental for that. Hence, academicians' perceptions about academic leadership, feeling of flexibility and autonomy in

9 Bickel, J., Wara, D., Atkinson, B. F., Cohen, L. S., Dunn, M., Hostler, S., ... & Stokes, E. (2002). Increasing women's leadership in academic medicine: report of the AAMC Project Implementation Committee. *Academic Medicine*, 77(10), 1043-1061.

10 Eagly, A. H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M. C., & Van Engen, M. L. (2003). Transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles: a meta-analysis comparing women and men. *Psychological bulletin*, 129(4), 569.

11 http://200.6.99.248/~bru487cl/files/ai_n.pdf

12 <http://www.aiu.ac.in/Members/MembersZ.asp>

the system and their satisfaction with it can play a critical role in promoting academic excellence in any institution in a long run. However, it needs empirical testing for which young researchers should be encouraged to take the lead and senior faculty should contribute proactively by providing

them guidance and crucial information for this mutually beneficial endeavour. Only the academic community can withstand the increasing challenges of the modern world and move ahead.