

APPROACHES OF LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I have approached aspects of the importance and necessity of leadership in higher education, seen as a vector for the sustainable development of universities. Throughout the paper, I addressed aspects of transformational and real leadership in higher education, highlighting the need for adaptive change in education in the current context. Given the scope of the adaptive change interventions, the emphasis is put on transformational leadership, as the main conceptual drive of such endeavour. The transformation through an adaptive change process of the School starts from the vision of articulating an authentic educational system that cultivates values that it uses and likes in the broadest sense of the components of this vision. The primary objective of the present review is to reveal how the real leadership theories are applied in higher education institutions. This paper concludes with an academic leadership summary for educational institutions to enhance managerial effectiveness, which would also be beneficial to future research for studying relationships between specific leadership styles and effectiveness in higher education. Although leadership has been mostly discussed in organizational context, managerial effectiveness is of great significance also in educational setting.

KEYWORDS: *higher education, leadership, innovation, values.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *I23, M10*

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is considered to be one of the most important elements contributing either to the success or failure of the organizations and also to organizational development. Many of the activities of the organizations and institutions operating in the educational field refer to the achievement of some programs or goals. These strategic activities are the responsibility of the leadership of these organizations. Thus, it can be said that, many times, leadership is the most important factor when analysing the success or failure of a program (achieving or not achieving a goal) (Grover, 2010). In fact, who else would take responsibility in case of failure if not the leadership of the organization?

Leadership is also very important when we talk about the existing relationships among the members of the organization and about the motivation of the staff within educational organizations and institutions. Considering the fact that the employees (teaching staff, auxiliary and non-teaching staff) of an organizational institution/organization are not, in general, well paid, the managers (formal leaders) must compensate for this lack and stimulate employees to achieve the organizational goals.

Organizational success is based on several factors such as financial and technical resources, logistics, technology and human resources. Combination of all such factors brings the achievement of goals in an organization. This, in turn, drives organizations to seek the best individuals to lead and manage this process. The organizational expectation from leaders is to possess specific characteristics that will enable positive organizational outcomes. A leader is an influential individual undertaking the leadership role. The other members are considered as followers within an

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organization. Leadership has significant effects on both followers and the organization. (Gozukara, 2016)

2 CHALLENGES OF THE ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Over the last twenty years, higher education in Romania has undergone a number of more or less coherent or effective reforms and changes. Higher education faces a number of challenges beyond the remarkable extent of participation and upgrading of specializations and of some curricular content. Among these challenges, we briefly list only those that seem more significant to us (Andreescu et al., 2011):

- the homogeneity of higher education at the level of institutions, the programs offered (quasi-identical in universities with at least formal different profiles), the students learning experiences, the conception and evaluation of "performance", of philosophy and educational ideology;
- the very low participation in lifelong learning, well below the EU27 average, which is also suggested by a gross enrolment rate in higher education of only 7.4% for people aged 25-29;
- low graduation rate of bachelor's degree programs (about 60%) and the very short average time spent by a student in a study program (only 1,3 years), suggesting that students lack the resources (financial, suitable and time resources) to continue training, or that they quickly lose interest in the study;
- loss of relevance of university diplomas - implicitly of the study programs and academic curricula - on the labour market. A recent study showed that over three-quarters of employers felt that it did not matter whether a candidate had a master's degree in addition to a bachelor's degree;
- the overwhelming share of the student's education activities in bachelor or master programs (with traditional format) among non-budget financial resources;
- the Romanian higher education system lost, as a whole, some important market niches (such as foreign students or the ability to retain graduates with special potential from the secondary education).

Romania faces a poor quality of the public education system as a whole, highlighted by the fact that no university in Romania is in the top 500 universities in the world or in the top 200 in Europe, compared to Finland which is the 74th in the international ranking and the 23rd in the European ranking. (IHE, 2006)

Education is poor for a reason of incorrect structural design: the dominant focus on knowledge delivery, at the expense of skills training through the development of transferable competences, and, first of all, of value-based behaviours. This reality shows that our way of acting is reactive and not proactive. Reactivity in the Romanian educational system means (Staş, 2012):

- our permanent and constant standing, as individuals and society, "after the game", whatever it is (for example, the complex process, defined by profound adaptive changes, of the European integration of Romania after the accession to the European Union - and the absorption of European funds, of about 7-8%, an extremely low one, fully proves the argument put forward);
- our dominant focus on behaviour based on rules that are always built by "others", without having a major initiative and a proactive attitude;
- our structural inability to proactively contribute to the rapid construction of any new value-added game, characterized by flexibility, adaptability, sustainability and high learning ability.

„A cause of implicit positioning in reactive mediocrity by focusing the education system on knowledge is given by their nature: by definition, knowledge is more perishable in relation to skills and attitudes. Of the three verbs that define the pattern of human development through education - to know, attached to the accumulation of knowledge, to do, attached to the practice and

development of skills and to be, defining the process of forming attitudes - the most "stable" is the third one, because cultivating attitudes is directly related to the development of personal value systems, and values are the ones that last most in time,,(Staș, 2012).

Strategic thinking and action means, first of all, a longer time horizon, which shows the need for leadership, as future design is its first coordinate. Among the knowledge, habits and attitudes, the latter are formed in the longest time, but it also lasts the longest. And the consequent practice of a specific set of skills leads to their transformation into behaviours and then to the formation of specific attitudes. We can exemplify the fact that delegation and coaching, assertive communication, as well as managerial and leadership skills, are based on the critical ingredient called trust - the consequent practice of mutual trust leads to its positioning as a number one value with a very wide transferable range. The wise cultivation of the most harmonious proportion of knowledge-skills-attitudes and the degree of the transferability of skills acquired in school, from the years of training through education to the years of professional manifestation in society, are the first proactive indicators with which we measure the performance of the School as a system.

The critical condition for Education to be able to assume and fulfil this strategic role is that, through design, its functioning mechanisms contain internal processes with high learning ability that ensure the continuous and dynamic positioning of Education as the first factor of sustainable development of society

Therefore, a series of projective actions, strategic for the development of higher education, are required in accordance with the changes that occur in the educational field, in society in general. Competition and internationalization plus the need to increase the quality of education through a growing and deeper openness to the needs and expectations of stakeholders leads to changes in the entire educational environment, especially in the process of effective organizational coordination and development. Therefore, a particular emphasis should be placed on improving the management of higher education institutions by developing administrative capacity and by creating some structures for the formation and development of the university *leadership*.

3. DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP – A FACET OF THE LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITIES

In response to these challenges, we can talk more and more about distributed leadership through which the act of management is conceived as a dispersed process within the organization (within the systems, activities, practices and relationships). Distributed Leadership is defined as an approach to agreeing the strategic direction by all stakeholders and communicating strategy within the whole organization. Also, the distributed leadership requires the organization to have the capacity, capabilities and resources to meet the planned goals. This also brings us closer to the concept of governance. Most Leadership and Management researchers show that Leadership in universities is widely distributed within the entire institution (Bolden et al. 2009).

The concept of distributed Leadership has become popular in recent years as an alternative to the centred leader, suggesting that Leadership is a property of the community more than an individual property. Gronn (2000) describes Leadership as a concerted, holistic action (concretive action), where the whole is more suggestive than the parts, while other authors (Spillane et al.,2004) show that from a distributive perspective, the Leadership practices embody the form of people's interaction.

Possibilities, which refer to how leadership is distributed, depend on the tasks, context, structure and personalities of the individuals. The most significant versions are shown in the following table:

Table 1. Versions of distributing leadership

| Versions | Characteristics |
|-------------|---|
| Formal | Decentralization of administrative authority at the level of universities and departments; |
| Pragmatic | The negotiation of sharing responsibilities; |
| Strategic | The assignment of some people outside the university to bring new skills, knowledge, contacts; |
| Incremental | Progressive opportunities of experiences and responsibilities; |
| Opportunity | People who voluntarily assume additional responsibilities outside the university (e.g. consultations with the business environment, the policy makers, the leadership of some project teams); |
| Cultural | The Leadership is assumed and shared organically (e.g. The development of a research offer) |

Source: adapted from MacBeath et.al.,(2004), p.25

We can say that Leadership has a strong cultural footprint, taking into account that the academics come to decisions on their own initiative in order to cope with the challenges of an ever-changing environment. It is noteworthy that at the level of universities leadership is more assumed than imposed. A deeper analysis at the level of higher education reveals several ways of experimenting with leadership, as follows (Bolden et al., 2009):

- Disconnected – lack of a coherent, consistent vision. Different components of the institution aim at different directions;
- Unemployed – the staff avoids involving in Leadership and management;
- Dissipated – the leadership is too divided into groups with little responsibility in implementing decisions and actions;
- Distant – leadership seems to be fragile at the operational level of the organization, inaccessible;
- Dysfunctional – leadership does not succeed in achieving all the proposed goals; measuring performance is a difficult and not always relevant process, from time to time focusing on quantitative aspects at the expense of the qualitative ones;

From analysing these aspects, we can determine that organizations struggle with the tension between collegiality and management, between individual autonomy and social engagement, between academic authority and administrative authority and between formal and informal. That is why organizations design their own structures, processes and systems to eliminate these tensions. That is why adaptive and transformational changes are necessary.

4. "REAL" LEADERSHIP: CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGES WITHIN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

Therefore, it is necessary to manage a distinct set of "real" leadership challenges, in which the prevailing nature of the change orchestration is the adaptive one. The most important types of challenges for the real leadership are presented in Table 2.

The "crisis" challenges identified by Dean (2005), and also encountered in the current educational system in Romania, consistently call for system solutions based on specific leadership applications that allow us to solve crises in a constructive way.

Table 2. Real Leadership - characteristics

| Type of challenge | Characterization of challenge |
|---------------------------------|--|
| The challenge of "activation" | <i>The challenge of activation</i> occurs when a group or a fraction thereof refuses to face an aspect of reality that could actually improve its institutional performance or quality of life. In order to receive the challenge of activation, the leader must include among his acts the attraction of the group or the main decision-makers into a process of reconsideration or change of their premises, values and priorities in order to accept - or at least contemplate - the new realities. |
| The challenge of "development" | Regarding <i>the challenge of development</i> , it deals with the fact that the group could get considerable improvements in the quality of life or organizational performance, but only on the condition that they exploit their latent capacities. Therefore, in order to respond to a challenge of development, the leader has to trigger a process that will bring out and fully exploit the latent capacities of the group. |
| The challenge of "transition" | In the event of <i>the transition challenge</i> , we deal with the fact that the group would get significant benefits if it could make the transition from the current set of values to a new one. Therefore, in order to respond to a transition challenge, the leader has to orchestrate a process of cultural change that involves reconfiguring loyalty, changing mentalities and changing priorities to a degree adequate for the group to cope with the new reality. (Bolden et al., 2009) |
| The challenge of "conservation" | <i>The challenge of conservation</i> refers to the situations where the field is such that the group would not be able to improve its situation even if it could fully develop all its latent qualities. For example, among the obstacles the group faces may be the lack of investment capital, subordination to a foreign power or an economic crisis. In such severe situations, the leader's role is to make people protect their values and ensure that essential resources are protected until danger passes. In order to be able to get through the turning point, people need to know how to defend themselves strategically and show a strong determination. |
| The challenge of "creation" | Regarding <i>the challenge of creation</i> , we talk about a situation where an unusual combination of conditions offers the group the opportunity to acquire major and lasting advantages, provided that people can somehow come off their daily routine long enough to explore what lies ahead of them. Their task is to do things that have never been done before. For example, a group could have a major achievement if it included enough people to spend time and resources to find solutions beyond their prevailing conception and convictions. But there is a need for a very special "leadership" to call up people's imagination and to inoculate them with the ardour, attention, and curiosity they need to create what must be created, to overcome their prevalent paradigm and make a really useful discovery. |
| The challenge of "crisis" | In the event of <i>a crisis challenge</i> , the group faces a potentially explosive situation that may endanger the life of its members or another important aspect of the accepted order. These are very serious, potentially dangerous difficulties, where the time element is critical. Given that something unexpected and destructive may have happened, the people are anxious, confused and very vulnerable. In the face of a crisis challenge, the leader's task is to trigger a process that first attenuates the explosive nature of the situation, and then attracts the group members to make an effort and solve the problems that might contribute to the re-emergence of the crisis in the future. |

Source: adapted from Dean (2005), p.37

5. CONCLUSIONS

Leadership means first of all interaction with people and therefore an energy approach with all the consequences on organizations. This aspect confers a sensitive, intangible and a very difficult possibility for evaluation the satisfaction of the universities stakeholders. Is need to adapt the forms of Leadership of the specific for each university and their organizational culture.

The adaptive change of education within universities through leadership is a profound exercise of collective learning in the whole society, based on trust, honesty, competence, performance and courage, designed to generate irreversible gains - on short, medium and long term, for all individual and institutional actors involved in making it happen. The leadership in universities is a necessity for a rapid and profound transformation in step with the changes in society, a premise of sustainable development for an increasingly uncertain future. Leadership can be seen as a system, as a process, as a way of leading, as a cultural state that has a vibrant component as the model comes from the fact that things happen in reality. Therefore, a field of forces (social, political, financial) to generate a powerful vector in the direction of change is necessary, which basically means energy directed towards the achievement of a certain goal. Harmony and pragmatism support three essential components of the art of leading, which is the responsibility of the leader: the vision; adherents; resources. The vision communicates the intense image of the proposed goal - the Destination (target), but also the Path to achieve the goal. Adherents are the ones who join the leader, accompanying it on the Path, learning and, at the same time, generating learning themselves. Resources are the treasure of knowledge, influence and connections needed to implement the vision, with the direct support of the adherents.

In the future research is necessary to analyze the correlations between the multiply aspects of Leadership and construct a model that will be applied with adaptations in universities for a sustainable development.

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