

Academic Leadership and Governance of Higher Education – Book Review

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BOOK REVIEW

The globe has experienced dramatic transformational changes in how we communicate, in social media, and in governance from dictatorial to democratic leadership in the last decade. The transformation in the global landscape, social and political, has led to a call for change in how high educational institutions deliver and operate in this new space. The call for this new paradigm in higher education operation is partly because of the information revolution era. The information revolution has created different avenues and philosophies, in conducting business, communicating with each other, social media, doing things and creating new products to the point where the phenomenon of distance education has evolved in higher education (pp. 1-2). Traditionally, education was conceptualized and delivered by way of the lecture-method, more so at the higher educational level, but with the advent of the internet people are advocating for the change in this mode of teaching-delivery. Change which is needed to revamp and chart new paradigms is being retarded or sterilized by some leaders, including higher educational organizations, simply because of the fear of the unknown that comes with change. Hendrickson et al., (2013) opines, “While adapting to change has always been a challenge for higher education, in recent years the pace of change has accelerated so rapidly that academic leaders face new and unprecedented demands, making it difficult to manage these challenges and adapt to new realities” (p. 1). Although Hendrickson and colleagues’ perspective points out the innate resistance to change by humankind, there are inherent pending opportunities to change and that resisting change will not cease the reality. In fact, it widens the gap and opportunities will

pass the resistant by. Hence, the aforementioned perspective is the rationale behind the book, Academic Leadership and Governance of Higher Education, written by Hendrickson and colleagues as they seek to provide prospective leaders and current leaders with a framework for understanding the need for change, embracing change, and navigating the resistance to change because of the scope it brings. The book is, therefore, a historical analysis of contemporary issues of importance in higher education and a prescription for navigating the calls for change that beckons to the old education paradigm. Hendrickson et al. have documented historical and contemporary issues that lament on the higher educational product, providing a road map for navigating the murky waters of change and highlighting the importance of recognizing that an organization of higher learning is a subsystem in a system.

Unlike other books on leadership, this one views higher education, as operating within an open system in which the external environment will shape the nature of internal education deliverables. The challenge has been that many educational administrators want to continue operating within their ‘bubbles’ with little acceptance of the external environment’s demands and cultural context. The conflicts arise when the administrators’ historical reference is threatened by the wind of change as some sacrifice the beckoning call of change for mission-driven policies (pp. 5-17). Hendrickson et. al.(2013) notes that “A highly effective shared governance model is as much the product of an institution whose administrators understand its purpose or mission as healthy enrollment, strategic planning, and clear budgeting and management.” (p. 9). They continue, “In other words, leaders of healthy, thriving institutions understand their purpose and niche in the broader

higher education community, and because of this knowledge, their institutions are better governed and positioned to succeed in tough times” (p. 9), indicating that effective and great leaders understand the external milieu, and balance their core values within the context of the external environment. This does not imply that the leader foregoes his/her vision or core mission statement; but in fact, the institutional leader must clearly articulate his/her mission and operate within the greater opportunities of the marketplace.

The book is classified into fifteen chapters subdivided into five major categories, Parts. The Parts range from History, Politics, Globalization and Organizational Theory in Higher Education to External Constituencies to The boundary spanners to the academic core to Implementation of the academic mission. Among the advantages of the book are low readability, historical analyses, academic references and examples, current issues in education, and concise chapters. In this book, Hendrickson et al. (2013) provide a theoretical framework that envelopes the discussion of higher education as well as practical principles for guiding a desired effective leader of such an organization (p. 5). Using the current realities, globalization, information revolution era and people’s new expectations, the authors highlight the reluctance of many administrations and the catastrophic nature of their resistance to change on the viability of their organizations.

Hendrickson et al. forwards that for the purpose of their book, mission denotes “[a] purpose, philosophy and educational aspiration of a college or university” (p. 9). While the core values and mission of higher education can be static, those institutions are operating in an ever-changing environment with which this must be accepted and recognized by the institutional leader (p. 11). The leader, therefore, must be adaptable to change and the contextual-aspect of the time and while aligning the core values of the institution with the demands of the external environment (p. 12). The authors warn against institutional changes that mirror another institution and as such the individuality of the organization is lost, which they refer to as mission creep – imitation (pp. 12-13). Hence, Hendrickson et al. argue for the individuality of an institution and doing so within the wider context of mission and simultaneously responding to societal realities, changes – realigning mission to societal realities. Using works of Abraham Flexner (1930) and Kerr (1963), Hendrickson et al. argues that a higher educational institution is a subsystem in a system

and this organic approach explains how the institution must operate in alignment with all the other subsystems in order to effectively function (pp. 14-16). As a result, one of the arguments of the authors is that mission-driven institutions cannot separate themselves from their wider-societal context as they are components of wider social structure. “No longer can the members of colleges and universities remain inside their ivory towers and expect to be relevant to the outside world” Hendrickson, et al. opine (p. 15) because globalization of higher education has transformed the old paradigm in which the educational system operated and failure to blend this reality with the core values of the institution will make it obsolete in the 21st century. A profound statement which was made by the authors as to the resemblance of the paradigm is encapsulated in, “The rapid growth of service-learning, community-based learning, and other forms of experiential learning in which faculty lead students in the ‘active construction of knowledge’ (Colby et al., 2003) requires the teacher and the students to consider the impact of their work on others and engage in democratic practices that advance democratic partnerships, scholarship, and learning” (in Hendrickson et al., 2013, p. 16). Simply put, the new paradigm of teaching-learning is a democratic partnership between the learner and the faculty, and not merely an autocratic ownership of knowledge, or power of knowledge over others.

Using David Riesman’s sociological research (Riesman, 1956, Hendrickson et. al. share this “He [Riesman] went on to describe how a successful institution, and the people who lead it, understand the institution’s basic purpose or mission and make decisions in alignment with that specific mission” (in Hendrickson, et al., 2013, p. 7). Riesman’s perspective offers a rationale for an effective organization, while it is driven by a mission-statement and core values, must align itself to wider societal context. The authors support the perspective of Riesman and highlight that it must be from an organizational-purpose aligned within the broader context of the environment, which is the hallmark for a healthy organization (p. 9). This explains why Hendrickson et al. argues that the higher responsibility of the organization is to its external environment while aligning its core values to the changing societal realities, which is the mode for continuity of purpose (p. 12). The authors summarize how change and alignment of the core values of the organization to the

demands of the environment are relevant to continuity. They write:

Administrators of colleges and universities that are mission driven yet responsive to societal change do not allow their institutions to creep into an area that is in-congruent with what they are or what they aspire to be. Rather they only add programs, services, or responsibilities that advance their basic purpose and are in harmony with their core values (p. 13)

Institutional leaders of higher educational organizations must grasp that they operate in an open system, in the context of the societal system or culture, and that while they account to their board of governors, they have the ultimate responsibility to the society. This does not mean they will need to change their core values, but for the purpose of continuity, there is a need for the alignment of their goals with the demands of the wider social context (p. 14). In the same breadth, administrators of these institutions must employ basic democratic principles of accountability, inclusiveness and transparency with the external environment as well as the internal milieu (p. 14). Hendrickson et al. remark that adherence to those basic democratic principles do not mean total openness of operations of the entity to the society, but "...it ensures that there is a mechanism for civil and rational discourse..." (p. 14). Hence, a highly effective organization understands its role to public, internal and external customers (p. 15).

It is a myopic perspective if administrators of higher educational institutions are to believe they have absolute advantage on knowledge, leverage on continuity because of their mere status-history and historic persona or antecedents (pp. 21-24). Hence, Hendrickson et al. remind leaders in higher educational institutions that they must act in the context of the external environment (p. 27). In fact, the author summarizes the perspective this way, "In open system the stability of the organization is dependent on its ability to obtain adequate resources from its external environment" (Buckley, 1967 in Hendrickson, et al., 2013, p. 27). This means that leaders of higher educational institutions must be accountable and responsive to the external environment for more than financial support as it goes to the organic nature of the entity. Hendrickson et al. (2013) justifies why administrators of colleges and universities should be mindful that they are not a law unto themselves as the Federal government in the

United States, historically, has influenced higher education— to include legislative framework, financial assistance and the building of some such institutions (pp. 87-112). The authors write, "Few may actually realize that the federal government plays a secondary, or supportive, role to state governments, which bear primary responsibility for education at all levels [in the United States]" (Hendrickson, et al., 2013, p. 89), suggesting why institutional leaders of higher educational organizations must understand the interaction between their institution and the wider society, the open system. Many examples were cited by Hendrickson and his colleagues why educators must be accountable to the outside (p. 97). In fact, some state governments, according to Hendrickson et al., set the policy framework of higher education by way of funding programmes – research and students' loan, which offers another perspective as to how the external environment influences the operations of educational systems. Here are some examples of the influence of the external environment on the internal operations of the higher educational institutions:

- The federal government created the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1802, but it did not commence offering collegiate-level degrees until 1933, and this would have reduced the number of entrants to other higher educational organizations, thereafter (p. 89);
- During the Great Depression, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt instituted the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act to fund higher education among the populace in order to stimulate economic activities (p. 91);
- In 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Student Loan and this increased the number of entrants to higher education by giving a wider group of people access to financial assistance (p. 92);
- Legislative framework for congress to change practices in higher educational outcome to include an accreditation body, regulatory oversights and a Fulbright Program geared toward providing financial assistance to those outside of the United States to attend higher education therein (pp. 98-133);

Increasingly governments are facing the daunting challenge of how to fund higher education, with decreasing resources and more responsibilities (p. 113). In order to provide for the precarious state of government and the impending challenges of

higher educational institutions and state funding as well as funding the tertiary education of its populace, institutional leaders must recognize this fact and institute measures to deal with their probable decline in enrollment.

Surprisingly, institutional leaders and boards that manage higher educational organizations, sometimes fail to remember that the federal government as well as state government is responsible for the overall function of the nations and their respective jurisdictions (p. 141). As such, “A mission-driven institution should focus on how it defines its duties and obligations to its students, who are the focus of most colleges’ and universities’ goals, values, and missions” (p. 143). Hence, theoretically there is no closed system by which higher educational institutions operate, and that this is a fictitious mindset of the administrators. It is for this very reason that the courts are able to intervene in the operations and conduct of these organizations, because colleges and universities fall within the constitutional tenets of the society, giving students constitutional rights (Hendrickson, 2013, p. 144). There are documented cases in which the courts have ruled for and against the conduct of higher educational institutions (pp. 144-147). Hendrickson et al. also note that there are instances in which the courts allow the internal mechanism of the college and university to address matters to include dishonesty, denial of tenure, tenure and termination for cause, board appointments and governance, and faculty contracts (pp. 152-155; 168-172). However, the courts can intervene in cases of employment discrimination, age discrimination, sexual discrimination, and discrimination based on disabilities (pp. 157-169).

The engagement of colleges and universities in the wider society, open system, goes without saying and Hendrickson et. al.(2013) illustrate this repeatedly, “The idea that institutions of higher learning should exist for the betterment of the society and the promotion of democratic ideals is as old as the founding of this nation [United States of America]” (p. 179). While this is not explicitly written in the mission of higher learning institutions, implicitly it is to serve the advancement of the society in with which they operate (pp. 191-196), they have a role to the external society despite some administrators’ beliefs. This is encapsulated succinctly by the authors in this statement, “A college or university is considered a leader when it attempts to address a specific societal concern, such as crime or failing schools, by taking a leadership role in discussions

about the issue and making a significant financial commitment to efforts to resolve it (Axelroth & Dubb, 2010, in Hendrickson, 2013, p. 192). Hence, there can be no denial that the external environment is critical to the organic functioning of a college or university, and this explains why Hendrickson et al. dedicate an entire chapter on the change role of the external environment in influencing the internal operations of a higher learning institution (pp. 199- 217). Colleges and universities operate because of the subsystems that demand their functioning such as banks, hospitals, media houses, schools, administrators, oil companies, stock markets, law firms, accounting organizations, and security services. Hence, there is a clear interaction between the external milieu and the internal functioning of higher learning organization. So, the autonomy of the system demands that both function like a biological system.

It should not be forgotten that the book is on academic leadership of higher education and so the author dedicated the last five chapters to leaders, roles and responsibilities, chapter 10-15 (pp. 243-390). The authors begin this section of the book with an aptly fitting perspective that captions the importance of the leader and not the constituents of the institution. “It can be argued that no single individual in a college or university is more important to the advancement of the institution’s mission, adaptation to environmental changes, and development of democratic partnerships than its president” (p. 243). The change is simply parceled in the leader, president, because the leader must be the change agent. Stephen Covey puts it another way, before we can change a situation, we must first change ourselves (Covey, 1989, p. 18), which means that organizational renewal can only be done by a leader. One scholar refers to them as the giants (Kerr, 1963 in Hendrickson, 2013, p. 245) and another, the ‘living logos’ (McLaughlin, 1996 in Hendrickson, 2013, p. 245). There is another side to how the president is viewed as some scholar’s state that they are fakers (Sinclair, 1923, in Hendrickson, 2013, p. 245) and illusionists (Cohen and March, 1974 in Hendrickson, 2013, p. 245). Such a perception means that “We recommend that colleges and universities seriously consider ways to develop future generations of academic leaders” Hendrickson, et al. (p. 261); because these leaders are called upon to bridge the gap between the society and the institution, while forging ahead with a vision of transforming the socio-physical landscape in which the organization operates (pp. 262-264).

Academic Leadership and Governance of Higher Education – Book Review

This brings to the focal view of leadership discussion, the issue of governance that has changed over the last four decades and which is extensively discussed in Chapter 11-to-Chapter 14, Hendrickson, et al., 2013, pp. 269-338.

In concluding, throughout the book, Hendrickson et al. did not argue against the implementation of an organization's mission or core values, but believed they should be aligned with the societal realities and demands – restructure programmes in keeping with contemporary values without breaching the organization's core values. So the authors squarely place the issue this way, "Part of academic leaders' role in this process is to develop a cycle of strategic planning, budgeting, and assessment that advances the mission of the institution while adhering to the democratic traditions of the academy..." (p. 339) and this offers a fitting conclusion for a review of the book. The book is an excellent assessment of historical and contemporary issues in higher education and a prescription for institutional leaders to recognize the challenges and chart a path that makes their organization relevant, while being true to their core values.

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