Academic Leadership: Need of the Hour

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Abstract: *The present paper highlights the functions, roles and essentials of an effective academic leadership. The paper also highlights three of the leadership best practices for navigating unpredictable adaptive challenges such as that posed by the corona virus pandemic. The pandemic Covid 19 forced entire world to restrict themselves in a closed premises, resulting in great loss all around in every sector and education sector too has not been an exception in this crisis. Academic leaders across the world have responded and kept the learning in continuation by moving their educational and associated activities online; as, a sense of instancy shook the nation. The decision to turn to remote learning was made swiftly, particularly by those institutions working on a shared leadership model, benefitting from a greater amount of sharpness and creativity.*

Key words: *Academic Leadership, Pandemic, Covid19.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

Academic leadership is the term given to leadership in an academic setting or organization as a specific subdivision of overall leadership. Academic leadership is a setting that includes areas such as creating vision and mission for the organization, setting up creative ideas, cultivating and offering teamwork. Academic leadership is the move of raising a community of scholars to set direction and accomplish common purposes by empowering faculty and staff.

1.1 Development of Academic Leadership

Academic leadership is decisive in higher education because it has a huge impact on the quality of student learning (Ramsden, Prosser, Trigwell, & Martin, 2007). Academic leadership is also intricate and demanding. Many academics (e.g., Academic Coordinators), may not find themselves fit to be a leaders in the traditional sense. This often come from an absence of formal authority or line management over other academics that deliver the course/program. However, leadership is much more than that and include motivating and inspiring people without using any power or force. Through their work, their behaviour their demeanour their action, leaders need to be able to impact, encourage, and persuade others to follow. As Academic Coordinators, you have this huge responsibility on your shoulder. You must strengthen your relationships and use your positive approach to get your peers to deliver on program outcomes and quality. In simple words, as Academic Coordinators you must get yourself accustomed in the roles you occupy and act as leaders. This is becoming even more important as work is delegated and assigned in flattened organisational structures of most universities. Academic leadership requires whole lot of knowledge and skills, and is defined as a whole by a complex suite of behaviours.

A leadership structure, the Integrated Competing Values Framework (ICVF) provides an understanding into this complex suite of behaviours as a whole and help in conquering one of the difficulties we have in improving our effectiveness as academic leaders – the difficulty of understanding the strong points and weak points of the 'parts' and developing those, when they are usually practiced and evaluated as a 'whole' (Vilkinas & cartan 2001, 2006). Effective academic leaders know the technique to maintain a balance between the internal and external factors and are able to move between the five operational roles identified in the ICVF – Developer, Monitor, Deliverer, Broker, and Innovator. They know when they need to focus on their people and when to focus on their tasks. Most importantly, academic leaders need to be effective Integrators (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2001). They must be able to make split second decisions on, which role is most appropriate at a given frame of time and in a given situation and react accordingly.

This 'split second decision' usually involves consideration on, and contemplation of, past experiences in relevance to the new situation, what worked and did not work in the past in the same or a similar situation, and therefore what needs to be done now. Development of academic leadership is not a straight and simple process. The literature very clearly illustrates that mere training is not good enough to get a noticeable change in leadership style and calibre. Development is an ongoing process that takes time and persistence. Various Researches in leadership development also indicates that individuals must presume self-awareness of their leadership style and influence with feedback they get from their people. (Atwater, Brett, & Charles, 2007).

Our self-evaluations are often biased. Hence, the opinion from our significant co workers is important to gain a real or 360° degree view of our leadership capabilities. After all, they are the ones who have the most genuine experience as they are the ones actually working with us and not just watching and observing from far. With an authentic and reliable triangulation of your leadership profile, you can then use experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984) to construct your leadership skills and profile. An unobstructed goal or target provides a better focus for learning and attention.

Figure 1. Skills for Academic Leader
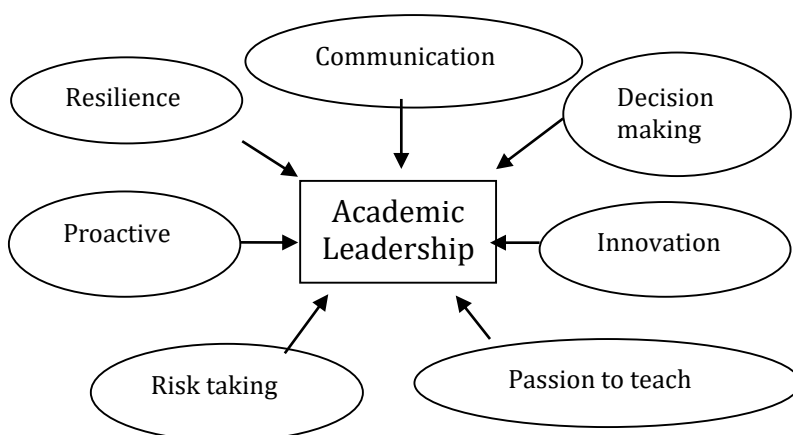
- **Communication**
    Until you evidently communicate your vision to your people and convey them the approach or idea to attain the result, it will be extremely difficult for you to get the outcome you want to see. In Simply words, if you are not able to communicate your message effectively to your people, you will not be considered as a good leader. An efficient communicator can certainly be a good leader. Words have the power to motivate and push people to make them do the unthinkable for the betterment of them as an individual and for the organization on a whole. If you utilize them effectively, you can achieve exceptional results.

- **Decision-Making Capabilities**
    Apart from having farsightedness, a leader should have the potential to take the right decision at the right time. Decisions taken by leaders have a long lasting impact on masses. A leader should think well before hand while making any decision but once the decision has been made, should stand by it. Although, most leaders take decisions on their own, but it is highly advisable that you discuss key stakeholders before taking a decision. After all, they are the ones who are directly involved and will face the consequences of your decisions.

- **Resilience**
    There is a famous saying we all must have heard," When the going gets tough, the tough gets going". As a matter of fact, great leaders also follow this rule. They are resilient and have an optimistic approach. They always back up their followers; despite of all the difficulties; where most people get engage in complaining about the problems, great leaders look for solutions and not the problems.

- **Passion to teach**
    Passion is an important ingredient for almost everyone who wishes to be successful and happy in their job. But passion is even more important for academic leaders, who specifically have a great impact on their organization's climate and culture.

Passionate people have a tremendous energy that can greatly affect teacher satisfaction and zeal to work, as well as student performance. It's not the knowledge in the books which make a good leader: It's the care and commitment for the work and the people who collude with you that makes the difference," Forbes. People admire and want to follow a passionate leader; a leader is the one who takes care about not only the cause for which they are working, but also the other people who are involved in the creation. Passion for the projects, for the organization and for the people involved is key to successful leadership."

- **Risk-Taking**
  Most of the educators already know that failure can be the biggest teacher. as teachers should instil risk-taking ability amongst their students in order to accelerate growth, truly effective leaders encourage risk-taking amongst their subordinates and colleagues by providing a understanding environment that encourage not just successful ideas or initiatives but efforts as well, no matter the outcome. Without failure learning cannot be achieved, we all learn from our mistakes and rectify the mistakes in our further tasks. Hence the effective leader has this quality of giving an open ground to play to his employees where the employees are not afraid of doing wrong and hence not trying anything new at all. Great leader offers a trust in his team and allow them to take calculated risks to execute their ideas. At times it is required from leaders to think out of the box, and be innovative. Leaders must be flexible enough to know when it is time to try a new procedure or implement a new policy.

- **Innovation**
  Leaders, who wish to make a long lasting impact on their organization, should aim for proactive, rather than reactive, leadership. Reactive leaders wait for problems to arise before tackling them, are often struggling from crisis to crisis, without taking away any lessons for the improvement of organizations and processes in which they operate.

  Proactive leaders, on the other hand, get involved and cooperate with their teams to completely justify their management roles. Proactive leaders lead by example, and always seeking for the areas of improvement. Irrespective of the level, of the management one is working with, middle or top-level management, forward-thinking leadership is the best way to manage.

  When we are working in a team it is very important for the leader to make his team members comfortable so they all can align themselves towards a common goal. similarly an academic leader should create a space where his subordinates, students, parents and everyone involved directly or indirectly ,can work together for a common objective .it is only through absolute maturity we can come out of this crisis. May be others don't have the same perspective as you do about the situation. In some cases, may be they don't have the skill set or experience either. Instead of forcing yourself or them, move to position yourselves as a team working on a common problem together. An example of a *leader's* statement could be: *friends, we have got a problem here and I know, together we will get through it and we are going to solve this problem.* As leaders, we seek continuously to do things that help communicate the worth and potential of others so clearly they are inspired to see it in themselves.

Figure 2. Academic leadership effectiveness
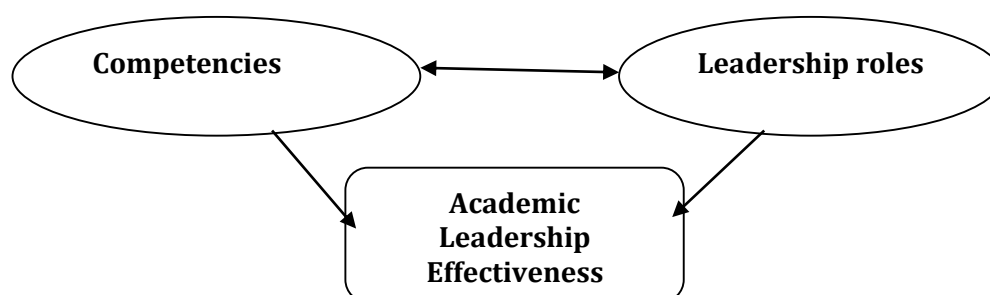
2. AT A GLANCE: ACADEMIC LEADER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Administering the department
• Recruiting and orientation of faculty and staff
• admitting and orienting students

• Identifying/determining faculty roles, priorities, assignments
• Encouraging teaching • Developing and updating curriculum
• Promoting scholarly activity
• Developing/mentoring/coaching faculty and staff
• Creating a supportive, cooperative and productive work environment/culture
• Giving feedback and performance evaluation to faculty
• Handling staff • Creating a common vision, setting desired goals, developing unit plans
• Managing space and facilities
• Coordinating raising funds and building ties with external constituencies
• Handling academic/human resources/legal policies
• Disseminating/sharing department information and dealing with the media
• Serving as an advocate for the department's interest

Performing roles of a faculty member
• Delivering classes
• Development of curricular programs/individual courses
• Advising and acting as mentor for students
• Being a part of examination committees
• Seeking funding for research
• Conducting research and scholarly work

Providing service and support to varied constituencies (college, University, outside communities, associations)
• Participating in college/University governance committees/task forces
• Participating on college/University search committees
• Being part of outside committees and task forces
• Executing leadership tasks in professional associations/networks
• Providing pro bono/paid consulting services

Enhancing professional/personal development
• Maintaining the balance in the roles/tasks of a chair/head with personal, family, or community responsibilities
• Participating in development activities of professional associations/networks
• Administering personal growth activities

Academic leaders: At the time of crisis
        Leading any academic institution at the time of crisis is highly stressful, given that the role and the influence of the leader are enlarged in times of change. Three of the leadership best practices for academic leaders handling and coping with a crisis are considered here. They are connecting with people as individuals and developing mutual trust, delegating responsibilities and creating leadership goals throughout the organization and communicating clearly and regularly with all the people whose risk is involved.

Connecting with people
        The qualities of an effective leader while handling the adaptive challenges have been discussed time and again, which includes traits like sense of responsibility, credibility and integrity. However in an unpredictable and uncertain crisis like the one we have faced, the quality that is most needed is emotional balance & stability that makes an academic leader to put the interest of his people first and his personal interests latter. Faced with the novel corona virus pandemic in the past, academic leaders had learnt to quickly overcome any kind of personal difficulties, and quickly assess their immediate responsibility where students, faculty, and staff are experiencing genuine difficulties in their everyday life.
        Building relationships and developing mutual trust in a crisis is tough, and needs the academic leaders to be genuine and get themselves involve in active listening and understanding without any kind of judgment, accepting opinions ,advice and criticism, and communicate their view point transparently, while promoting psychological safety (Kezar et al., **2018**). In a crisis, leaders are often called upon to resolve interpersonal and work-related conflicts as they arise, though they should encourage healthy discussion and conflict as appropriate, providing that it is functional (Robbins & Judge, **2018**). Investing in people & relationships at the time of crisis is perhaps the best and long lasting

investment as it will strengthen the bond between students, faculty, and staff and the institution; an investment that will give full returns, once the crisis passes, and forever.

Distributing leadership

A difficult challenge such as that posed by the corona virus pandemic cannot be successfully handled by the efficient academic leader acting alone (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001).A fixed and rigid communication structure in an organization fails at the time of crises as it is always uncertain .therefore several crisis management teams should be formed and leadership responsibilities should be delegated to these teams to implement the appropriate strategy. An academic leader believes in distributing the responsibilities rather than keeping everything to themselves. This approach works better in comparing to other leadership approaches and it helps in getting better perspective as multiple heads are involved.

Sufficient resources should be gives to these teams in order to work as per their space and working style. Full cooperation in the form of trust can help these teams to exhibit their best of creativity and problem solving skills to bring the desired change.

Communicating clearly

Communication between Leaders and all stakeholders in a crisis should be clear and regularly (Edmondson, **2020**), during the phase of crisis, though message needs to be conveyed as early as possible and hence the channels the channels to transfer those messages should be selected carefully and several channels needs to be used in order to reach the maximum and to its best. As the communication to the staff is formal it needs to be done in private digital groups or through emails whereas social public platforms can be used for students. The credibility and virtue of the leader play an important role at the time of crises; the messages or directions are not taken seriously if the leader is not trustworthy and people don't consider them as credible.

Looking Forward

The leaders must understand the importance of communicating clearly, delegating or distributing their responsibilities, having a frequent conversation with the people involved and keeping connect even at the time of such huge crisis, is what needed to make a perfect leader. There is nothing as best leader, but it is the one who can deal with all the adversities thrown on him with calm and composure and come out as a winner with his people and for his people.

3. CONCLUSION:

The paper has been an attempt to bring in light the real concept of education, which is definitely not just imparting knowledge and making your learners clear their exams .The role and responsibility of educator is much more than this, it's not limited to just the academics, because education is to make your learners ready for real life challenges and for this, first educators need to lead by example.

Academic leaders need to stay close to teaching, learning, research and scholarly activities to bring out the best among academics but at the same time they should easily be adaptable for any coming challenges or crisis and lead from the front as leaders. They should not lose their basic and core strength of academics but they must definitely be prepared for the advanced role which is academic leadership.

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