

Pursuing the change path in universities through transformative leadership

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Abstract: *This paper examines ways in which university leaders can bring about transformation in universities by drifting away from the ordinary practices and beliefs. Significance of being proactive and assertive about change while at the same time looking after the people concerned is discussed. It also explores analytical areas such as vision, change of mind set and role modeling. An attempt is made to examine how transformational leadership can be exercised to bring about meaningful change by heavily borrowing from the business world. The paper provides coherent differences that university leaders are required to make in leading change effectively. It develops a conceptualization from which major change strategies can be planned and carried out mostly from a personal leadership orientation.*

Key words: *Leadership, change, vision, mindset, role model, transformation*

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I. Introduction

Global trends are changing how we live, work and educate. There is a fundamental change in the principles of competition. In fact traditional rules as we knew them no longer apply and with a lot of ambiguity, certainty of foreseeable future predictions is impossible (Smit, 2000). This century is confronted with technology driven reality in which the world has been leveled in business and economic competition for equal opportunities (Friedman, 2007). Technology is disrupting the conventional job market as we know it today and unpredictability is forcing an evolution. Organizations are forced to change due to globalization, developments in information and communication technology, economic crises and demographic changes (Ragsdell, 2000). External and internal factors that drive this demand are all related to speed, direction and outcomes of change in organizations (Dawson, 2003). In today's global marketplace, change is an ever-present feature in organizations, and leaders must not only embrace change, but also bring along their entire workforce with them as they navigate through the twists and turns of continuous change. The role of Leadership in driving innovation in today's world cannot be underestimated. Accelerated changes in modern times force leaders to engage in creating conditions and commitment to continuous improvement (Govindarajan and Trimble, 2010). The conflicts we face today is the new civilization colliding with the entrenched forces of old order.

Universities across the world just like all organizations face unprecedented change. They are uncertain about what they have to do and are unsure on how to respond to emerging realities. The rapidly evolving technological landscape is making traditional higher education system redundant. Degree programs within universities now meet professional, vocational, continuing education and accrediting needs of students. Consideration of scheduling academic programs and corresponding facilities now requires a balance between synchronous and asynchronous organization. Accordingly university missions have been stretched to respond to varied constituent demands and expectations. However, it is now possible that many who are spending quality time in universities will be forced to do something totally unrelated to what they study.

Stacey (2000) argues that the university in its complexity consists of a large number of agents that operate according to their own principles. In recent years just like in many sectors, the environment in which universities operate has become increasingly complex, uncertain and turbulent (Bruyns, 2001). This touches on globalization of economies and internationalization of institutions and a drastic reduction in public funding (Altbach, 2011). Current economic and societal trends have triggered critical concerns in dwindling resources that are not in tandem with institutions demands. This coupled with the call to shift from traditional pedagogy to learner-centered pedagogy and the trending demand for e-learning, calls for visionary leadership (Eddy and VanDerLinden, 2006). It is now evident that universities are ranked on the basis of their performance. This requires innovation and leadership with unique creative mind (Rogers, 2003).

It is even now inconceivable of how sophisticated change has become. Meaningful change in such very real circumstances can be stressful and can easily lack commensurate leadership. This reality challenges university leaders to reconsider their thinking and problem solving required in the 21st.

In recent times, university education has undergone enormous expansion as a result of increase in enrolment in university education. This is majorly as a result of the societal perception that this education is crucial in sustaining individual growth relevant to the social-economic development. Pressures for change in universities are evident on all sides, and the pace of change is ever increasing and as such, managing this diversity is a complex business (Meister-Scheytt and Scheytt, 2005). Amidst all these, the world today is yearning for leadership that will foster institutional improvement and overall organizational transformation (Dinham, 2007). The scarcity of research in university visionary leadership (Almog-Bareket, 2012) calls for a deeper interrogation of this subject. The role of leadership has become a real target for whether or not an organization makes it or not in today's volatile and highly competitive markets. Collins' (2002) research revealed that successful organizations have leadership articulate vision which support core ideologies that stimulate progress towards a new future. To cope with these changes transformational leadership and by extension transformational behavior has become the sole dominant paradigm over the past 20 years (Tourish, 2008). Certainly the role of university leaders as change agents has become increasingly important (Amey, 2006). This changing context has further revealed the inadequacy of traditional leadership approaches in universities (Davies, Hides, & Casey, 2001). Yet this does not fit well with the desired transformation. It is therefore imperative that university leaders understand the complexity of change, be visionary, have the right mind set and model the change they want to see in institutions.

Complexity of leading change

A study on higher education by McRoy and Gibbs (2003) suggests that, leadership plays a critical function in change management process. Leaders should be able to communicate the desired vision and be a role model in the entire change process. In both developed and developing countries, there is a common recognition that learning institutions require effective leaders if they are to provide the best possible education. Leading change is not a simple task; it is one that requires much preparation and training. There is not a universal approach in leading change. Leading change is very complex and requires the leader to utilize and maximize an organization's total resources to perform at optimal levels facing the occurrence of environmental, technological, societal, and structural changes (Bruhn, 2004). It also requires a certain type of leadership that will both facilitate change and support the individuals involved.

Leading change in universities is a daunting task that is often undertaken at times of pressure on unclear budget cuts (Shattock, 2005). Calls for transparency and repaid modernization is causing discomfort, clash of cultures and working practices in the sector (Garforth & Kerr, 2009). Initiating complex change in education calls for varied choices and decisions making at the organizational level. These decisions may at times create conflicts in people's values and beliefs (McCluskey, 2004). It even gets worse at universities where academics are idiosyncratic and good in prolonged arguments (Meister-Scheytt and Scheytt, 2005). Demands from students, parents, employers and governments at large even complicate the whole matter. Securing organizational change to a large extent depends on effective leadership (Carnall, 2003). Senge (2006) at one time observed that leaders and organizations that work with creative tension end up learning how to use the energy that emanates from it as they direct it towards their vision. A leader plays a crucial role in the effective execution of change. Support and accountability are two components that are embedded in leading change effectively. A leader must be able to transform a team, organization, and relational system because those are components in the change management process (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). The approach the leader uses helps to determine whether or not change will be effective. For change to be successful, it needs to be managed effectively. That is to say that, successful organizational change needs to be organized, implemented, and evaluated (Gill, 2003). An effective leader can make all of the difference between a successful change program and one that is disastrous. However, how that is achieved is ultimately up to the leader of the change initiative. Gill (2003) mentions that, leadership makes a whole difference. It is about demonstrating vision and strategy, while developing a sustainable culture of shared values. In this complex process the leader engages all four dimensions: cognitive, spiritual, emotional, and behavioral (Gill, 2003).

Need for transformative leadership

It is fine actually for leadership to be a group-shared responsibility (Lussier, 2013). This of course speaks directly to Hersey and Blanchard's (in Lussier, 2013) model of Situational Leadership. It revolves around the selection of a specific leadership style. The leader of change is similar to the tip of a propelling object, the tip certainly is not the impetus for movement or change, other factors may have contributed to such motion; however, the spear guides the tool through the air to its object. The leader of change often time is responding to a situation, which has made the prospect of change a reality for the organization. A leader's role in creating effective change has been reiterated by many change theory authors, notably Quinn et al., (2000), discussing the nature of change in relation to human system transformation. The adaptive skills required to engage in, and

possess lasting change can be effectively accomplished when adjustments are made to attitudes, work habits and overall life perception in ways that can often be very painful for the individual and collective groups.

Rather than taking the role and focus only on individual and group levels, the role of a university leader as change agent should notice that Organizational Development is a system-wide process. The leader, during the process will learn to improve organization effectiveness: making faculty happy, meeting financial goals, improving productivity and stakeholders' satisfaction (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). According to Anderson (2010) and Gill (2003), an effective leader of change has a flexible mindset, can sufficiently diagnose problems, capitalize upon opportunities, has an engaging quality to their personality, is receptive to learning opportunities, and values feedback. Such components allow an individual to propel the university towards a change, which feels inclusive, responsive, and timely. A leader has the opportunity to develop meaning-making system and sustainable initiatives that drive the occurrence of change (Brown, 2012). The more prepared and structured the change design, the higher the leader's ability to effectively implement change (Brown, 2012).

Leaders can help provide individuals and organizations with the knowledge that they need to acquire the skills, perspective, and motivation to change. Leadership and change are both collaborative thus, the intertwine with culture and stakeholders are key components (Senge, 2006). The role of a leader is to transform complex and integral theories, and to compliment them with the deep, inner foundations of a person (Brown, 2012), making transpersonal meanings of such, and execute decisions by the use of conventional or creative steps in an impactful, yet competent manner. In transformation, the university leader should be able to examine group systems. He should engage in dialoguing, group facilitation, group learning, self-directed work teams, large-scale interventions, team building and virtual teams (McNamara, 2016). The functional structures are those organizations that groups similar tasks and functions. There are some advantages to functional organizations, such as the ability to make decisions expeditiously and efficiently because the skills sets, the authority to act, the team effort and organization camaraderie are in one place (Sullivan, 2016).

Visionary system

Visionary leaders can be located in every sector of society such as business, government, religious organizations, and community at large (Kirkpatrick, 2004). Their ability to inspire and communicate vision in shaping subordinates behavior makes them stand apart. Thompson's (2003) study on visionary leadership emphasizes the inordinate challenges of educational leadership in the 21st century that will require the transformational power. This revelation is augmented by Kahan's (2002) theoretical study on transformative leadership. These leaders ensure followers are self intellectually stimulated with individualized consideration (Valenzuela, 2007). Their use of effective communication shapes subordinates attitudes and enhances productivity leading to organizational transformation (Waldman, Ramirez, House, & Puranam, 2001). It is presumed that visionary leadership behavior creates trusted leader member relationship and higher commitment of employees (Yukl, 2006). This in turn enables the leader to motivate his staff in achieving challenging tasks (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). Motivation towards the vision results in increased commitment to organizations (Huang, Yun, Liu, & Gong, 2010).

Gill (2003) states that change must be well managed- it must be planned, organized, directed and controlled – it requires effective leadership to introduce change successfully. Leadership of successful change requires vision, strategy, the development of a culture of sustainable shared values that support the vision and strategy for change. It calls for leading with an autopilot mentality (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). This requires leaders to have a thorough understanding of the variables involved within the environment while having the ability to perceive issues from a wider perspective that takes into account the people, the situations and the risks and benefits of change management strategies. Leaders who operate in autopilot mode may miss underlying reasons for people's behaviors or not be able to see key consequences of change.

To achieve this visionary approach it is paramount that a proper assessment is done. The value of assessing an organization from a macro level helps to identify and analyze departmental problems endemic to its culture or organizational environment (Rogers & Fong, 2000). This approach aligns with systems theory in that what is common to the entire university affects the whole organization by examining leadership problems, communication problems, workload distribution, strategic vision, organizational objectives, organizational culture, advancement or promotion opportunities, and rewards and recognitions (Rogers & Fong, 2000). This approach supports leadership development in that there is transparency, accountability and measured performance results.

Through visionary leadership, the change agent creates a sense of urgency, either by identifying a crisis or potential crisis or by identifying an opportunity (Kotter, 2007). The successful change agent or leader cannot single handedly change an entire organization. Building a powerful coalition that incorporates stakeholders from all levels of the organization can help the leader achieve his vision (Kotter, 2007). Yukl and Lepsinger (2004) portends that when external environment is turbulent and uncertain it requires quality leadership that can envision a better future. They are also able to encourage innovative thinking that propel organizations to

survive. This is what is critical in our higher learning institutions. Certainly the leader's ability to envision the future gives him impetus to mitigate institutional challenges with ease (Senge, 2006). Visionary university leaders should be those who are able to use imagination and innovation in a paradigm-breaking manner and not merely those who have risen in academic ranks. These leaders should have the capacity to develop novel scenarios that have not been envisioned by others within institutions (Schwahn and Spady, 2001). This simply implies that just by the mere fact that one is a qualified Professor of repute is not enough criteria to propel him to assume university top leadership. This tradition must come to an end if we need to transform our university education. Visionary leadership in institutions should inspire confidence among the faculty and arouse their enthusiasm to stretch their limits (Berson et al., 2001). This in turn encourages intellectual stimulation (Avolio et al., 2004). It is therefore imperative for university leadership to implement and promote the organization's vision and strategy.

Having the right mindset

Organizations continuously change and adapt to remain competitive (Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2008), however many changes stall or fail (Meaney & Pung, 2008). It is said that changing policy and even implementing a new technical initiative is far much easier compared to bringing about cultural changes in universities (Jenkins, Browne, Walker, & Hewitt, 2011). Recent studies indicate that only a third of organizational changes are deemed successful (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Several strategic considerations are required to drive change processes (Schilling & Steensma, 2001), this includes networking (Rugman & Hodgetts, 2001) and the overall desire to improve organizational performance (Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2008). The dawn of a new beginning is established as soon as people feel emotionally committed to doing something new (Bridges, 2009). This enhances the capacity of the leader to create an atmosphere where risk-taking, creativity and better performance can be realized (Carnall, 2007). This according to Kotter's model recognizes the importance of people feeling the need for change and the aspect of power for achieving change (Cameron & Green, 2014).

Nair (2003) observes that there are four key reasons for reform in higher education. Firstly, there is the technology-driven growth of information accessibility and greater communication. Secondly, globalization which has resulted in fierce competition. Thirdly, accelerated competition between institutions and finally, accountability of the leadership. Whereas a strong culture in essence might be an indication of identity and practices and expectations, it is however prone to resisting change (Blin & Munro, 2008). Research clearly shows individual traditions and much cherished identities are a tremendous social force in higher education that cause resistance to change (Valimaa, 2008). A university leader can be a strong mentor for faculty and other support staff. The leader can set the tone and has a "bully pulpit" that allows them to talk to the workforce as a whole, and they can use that platform to communicate to their staff and advise them about how to work through the challenges. The leader can also tout successes, which can be an essential element of bringing along a workforce; when your staff feel that success is imminent, they are much more likely to get behind the changes that are being implemented. The leader must have the ability to motivate the individuals within departments to the extent that they are able to carry on their required functions in the absence of the leader (Cummings & Worley, 2009). It is significant to note that even as the leader takes charge, he must be held accountable for organizational wide benefits

At university level the leader of change must have intellectual or cognitive abilities to perceive and understand information. Reason with it, imagine possibilities, use intuition, make judgments, solve problems, make decisions, be able to understand oneself and others, display self-control and self-confidence (Gill, 2003). Aiken & Keller (2007) stated that the success of an organization depends on its CEO's mindset. According to Aiken and Keller for a CEO to have a successful transformation, it is important to first make meaning of the transformation. Here, creating buy-in from stakeholders is important. This leads People to sense genuine attitudes. If the CEO believes, then the employees may believe. Brown (2012) reported that leaders have a mature worldview that is rooted in transpersonal meaning, utilizes diverse ways of knowing, and is adaptable through dialogue with others. Gill (2003) suggests there are specific components to an effective leader such as spiritual, cognitive, emotional and behavioral. These components in my opinion directly relate to the conscious awareness of a person. In order to be consciously aware, you must be cognizant of the rational processes of oneself and others. In addition, you need to have a greater understanding of meaning as it applies to people's personal and work lives.

According to Brown (2012) leaders can also act as catalysts for change and move the system towards a greater vision. They can work to create supportive conditions which encourage and support dialogue and innovation (Brown, 2012). They can also hold a unified perspective that rests comfortably in the unknown, and provide support in whatever ways are needed as the system emerges into a new way of being. The vision for change must be clear and easy to communicate. Further, the leader must not only talk about the change effort but must live the change as well. That is, "walk the talk" (Kotter, 2007). The effective change leader will also

create opportunities for short term wins and will publicize achievements immediately in order to keep momentum. Finally, the effective leader will not stop the change efforts until the changes have become incorporated deeply into the corporate culture (Kotter, 2007). An organizational leader can also appoint others to help them carry out their vision. Aiken and Keller (2007) note that this power that a leader has can determine whether the change vision is successfully implemented. As the global economy gathers pace changing nature of technology pose great pressures on institutions to change their structural and functional patterns. Higher institutions of learning need to create more effective programmes and procedures in response to market needs if they have to remain relevant. Donald, Steven and David (2006) revealed that commitment to change is impacted by the reflection on a complex calculus that hinges on different aspects of change and its consequence.

Role modeling

Collins (2001) published an extensive empirical research study of business leaders that were able to transform organizations from mediocre organizations to highly effective and successful companies. The key finding was leaders serving as role model. Essentially for change to take place in universities, leadership has to develop trust and commitment among followers (Covey, 2006). There should be responsible approach to accountability practices noted for a successful transformation of the educational system Sirotnik (2004). We should anticipate actions that will foster best ideas, best knowledge, and the best practices that will build careers to bear on educational future citizens. Leaders can make the difference between a successful and failed attempt to implement and sustain a change initiative. Aiken & Keller (2007) stated that a CEO's role in transformation can serve four primary functions: 1) making the change meaningful; 2) role modeling; 3) building a strong top team and; 4) relentlessly pursuing impact. To make the transformation meaningful, change leaders can adopt a personal approach, openly engage employees, focus on and share the successes (Aiken & Keller, 2007). To model the desired behavior and ways of thinking, university leaders can focus on transforming themselves, and taking symbolic actions.

A leader can also use outputs as a way to remediate deviations. This could also be done by going beyond stating the outputs, but by actually demonstrating the behaviors needed to improve them. A leader serving as role model instead of critical overseer is generally received more positively (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010). Allowing the faculty to actually see the change agent implement or model the changes they are attempting to make is influential in encouraging others to change. Lawson & Price (2003) added to this point by noting that for organization change to be sustainable, employees must be equipped through training for these new roles. It is essential that change be reflected in the leader who leads by example and empower their employees to also effect change (Gill 2003).

The role of a change agent is to put the system before self-interest and strive for inclusion of others, minimize hierarchical processes and systems by transcending base desires and modeling behavior geared towards a higher purpose, the ability to do the right thing, and inspire others to be their best selves (Quinn, Spreitzer, & Brown, 2009). In the past, plan for implementation only involves how to overcome employees' resistance. This is not enough. The university leader must transform himself first in skill and style and broaden his insights and understanding (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). There are three changes involved: developmental, transitional (from old system to new system) and transformational change (introduction of plan for implementation). Coupled with these, Clay (2010) observed that change leaders have low level of anxiety, emotional stability, confidence and openness.

It is interesting to note that unlike many organizations universities to a large extent are resistant to change (Marshall, 2010) and as many analysts observe, managing change in universities appears to be an inordinate challenge facing senior managers today (McMurray, 2001). Distributed leadership involves the creation of an open sharing culture that encourages dissemination of information coupled with trust within university structures (Brown & Littrich, 2008). When leaders apply a conscious approach, his or her dynamic expands which leads to a wider perspective of the situation (Anderson & Anderson, 2010). Consciousness also allows room to challenge the status quo, as there are hardly any two situations that are the same. The leader should lead stakeholders and employees to believe for themselves that the change will be beneficial not just for revenue but for their experience at the organization as well. Heath (2010) discussed the impact influencing individuals to believe in the need for change had on the change agent's ability to implement successful change within an organization. To a large extent university leadership lacks this ability on their faculty

When initiating change leaders have to convince their faculty that the change is necessary and positive for the university. Attempting change when the vision for change isn't clear will likely fail. Aiken and Keller (2007) cites Mahatma Gandhi "For things to change, first I must change." The key functions of a leader along with the guidelines and insights offered by Gill (2003) elucidate the role of leaders as change agents. A leader steers a change effectively through courage – the courage to fail, the courage to change and the courage to succeed. When a leader moves beyond their fear they are able to stimulate others to take chances (Stengel, 2008). The momentum of change has tremendous impact on structures and operations within universities which

in turn requires transformative leadership (Bowin, 2001). Besides the usual articulated issues of quality, accountability and cost effectiveness, university leadership is required to seek new solutions to emerging demands. These calls for reexamining and altering essential operations. In Seijts & O'Farrell (2003) view, university leadership should be involved in establishing a new direction for the organization and inspiring faculty to change their behaviors and routines.

II. Conclusion

Businesses are moving at a fast pace and are very competitive; so should universities. Successful change is one that is geared towards shaping the future by taking the leadership role, setting standards and creating convincing demands from the faculty. In addition, for universities to realize meaningful change, leadership must be willing to challenge organizational principles that have been culturized for generations. Leaders must be brave to weather the storm of criticism by challenging the status quo, thinking beyond ordinary university beliefs and venture and drive into new visions

Changes are needed within universities in order to keep up with global trends. University leaders should drive key transformation by performing four key functions: First, engage with others, make the transformation personal, and express the university vision towards success. Second, role model what success is supposed to look like by modeling the type of support that needs to be provided to the faculty and other employees based on the practice of the new behaviors. Third, build a strong team that is committed and one that will review the transformative process by making tough decisions about who has the desire and ability to motivate during the journey. Finally, pursue the impact of change by getting personally involved when it comes to financial and symbolic values.

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