Future Challenges for Institutional Leadership in a Malaysian Education University

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Abstract

This paper is prepared based on the purpose to examine how leaders in the Faculty of Business and Economics (FBE) in a Malaysian Education University face the challenges using their existing leadership skills to produce graduates according to the labor market demands. Are these leaders alert and able to respond to the new globalization change in developing and producing the graduates? Quality graduates should be able to move along with the market demands and possess high competencies skills in their core area. They should be credible enough to achieve any objectives set by them or by the organization. To produce quality graduates the faculty cannot run from training them to be good leaders. Leaders in the faculty have to seriously consider how the leadership skills can be developed in the faculty staffs who are involved in producing these graduates as well as the curriculum developments for the students training.

Keywords: Leadership Skills, Quality Graduates, Faculty Leaders

Introduction

In realizing the Malaysian aspiration to be a regional education hub in Asia, educational institutions are being pressured for change and the adoption of progressive steps concerning: virtual classrooms, global communications, global economies, tele courses, distance learning, corporate classrooms, increased competition among social agencies for scarce resources, pressure for institutional mergers, and statewide program review. These forces hold the potential for a radical rethinking of the mission, structure, curriculum, student body, and stakeholder relations of virtually every college and university.

In order to plan effectively in this environment, college and university leaders must be able to anticipate the impact of new developments on their institutions and curricular programs. Efficient contextual planning in uncertain times depends on obtaining accurate and continuous intelligence about changes in the institution's external environment.

Zakeri (2004) states that "Globalization, innovation in technology, changes in the business world, and the increasing diversity of the workforce may be altering the kinds of college competencies and general skills universities and colleges are being called to deliver". Further,

college graduates typically find themselves in the center of economic, political, and social realities that define our complex global world. Thus, education at all institutions (universities and community colleges) must address the diverse demands placed on graduates because competencies and skills needed for effective functioning in a global society and in workplaces may be changing. The natures of these changes are such that training in higher institutions must be extended beyond the narrowly focused, job-specific technical training orientation that has typified many programs at many universities. If the educational system is to effectively prepare graduates to fill job requirements in the 21st century, curricula must in line to reflect the dynamic needs of modern industries in the information age" (p.412). It is clear from Zakeri's (2004) research how leadership in the Faculty has to react towards curriculum developments in their programs to face the globalization and information technology age demands. Something must be done by the faculty leaders to gain recognition in producing quality graduates.

This paper examine how leaders in the Faculty of Business and Economics, (FBE) at a Malaysian Education University face the challenges using their existing leadership skills to develop change towards curriculum, competencies and skills essential to their graduates' career development with regard to the programs offered by the Faculty.

Issues, Goals And Future Priority In Malaysia Education

The mission, vision, values, goals, and issues for Malaysian universities are based on a national agenda. The nation's 'Vision 2020' initiatives promotes a paradigm shift from an economy-based on labor-intensive and lower-end manufactured products to an economy based on knowledge as part of the process of becoming a fully developed nation. The steps taken to realize the vision through education are as follows.

Shift to the knowledge economy (K-economy), globalization and flexible organization of production. Universities are important in the K-economy for the creation of new knowledge (research) as well as the dissemination (teaching) and application (development) of existing ones. Universities and other tertiary institutions are needed for training higher-level workers like professionals and managers.

Human capital is a 'buzz word' in the Malaysian economic scenario, the Prime Minister have repeatedly promoted and challenged the business sector and educational institution to develop their human capital, to be independent of foreign expatriates in research, technology, and commodity development of the nation. Develop highly skilled workforce to preserve current and traditional economies while creating new ones. The challenge can be described quite simply as to how to expand into a new market without alienating an existing captive market. In education, the existing captive market for international students consists mainly from countries in the Middle East, the Indian sub-continent, and South East Asia, while the new market will cover Hong Kong, Indochina, and China.

The 9th Malaysia Plan is develop among others, is to raise the capacity for knowledge and innovation and to strengthen the institutional and implementation capacity. Move up the value chain, develop new technology based industries, and innovate to be competitive.

Benchmarking to international standards have been the preoccupation of many Malaysian universities, but this is the first time it has been made a firm national policy that allows for the creation of a differentiated system of higher education that includes the setting up of research universities. Benchmarking opens organizations to new methods, ideas and tools to improve their effectiveness. It helps crack through resistance to change by demonstrating

other methods of solving problems than the one currently employed, and demonstrating that they work, because they are being used by others (Spendolini, 1992).

Challenges Face By The Faculty

The Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia in 2006 announced that all the 27 existing Teachers Training Colleges that produce certificate of teaching will be upgraded to the Malaysian Teachers Training Institute and with this announcement they can now produce graduates teachers with degree. This implies to all Malaysian universities that offered degree of education that it will no longer be the only institution producing graduate teachers in the country. Further implications to UPSI are that all the faculties will have to review the programs offered. This is because a Malaysian university of education is no longer the only university to produce graduate teachers so they now have to produce graduates who are more credible and possess higher competencies to meet the challenges from other institutions. By doing so, graduates from the education university will have the edge in the market as compared to graduates from other institutions.

At present, the university has been given the green light to the all faculties to start thinking about their future due to the current changes. Some faculties are starting to offer programs not fully concentrating on teacher training but are creating programs which major in core areas and minor in education. It is one of the way UPSI reacts to the current change for it survival. But the primary question now is how the faculty leaders have to redesign or develop their programs that can enhance the quality of their graduates? What are the development programs for the lecture's in order for them to train the students? Berlin, Kavanagh, and Jensen (1988) conclude that," if schools are to progress, the principal cannot allow daily duties to interfere with the leadership role in curriculum" (p.49). Leadership skill is the answer for the faculty leaders and their educators to develop for themselves and for the students. With these leadership skills, all the relevant parties will be trained to be people who will work towards the organization's mission and vision as well achieving the organization's objectives.

Traditional Way Of Thinking Faced By Faculty Leaders

In responding to the current change, leaders in FBE have planned the new programs but they do not have clear plans regarding the content and curriculum developments of the programs. All the lecturers busy with the administrative work compared to developing the programs' strategic plans for the students. Stronge (1988) calculates that 62.2% of the elementary principal's time is focused on school management issues, whereas only 6.2% of their time is focused on program issues (p.32). Running the faculty based on the mindset of the typical government servant, that is just producing graduates with traditional learning style and teacher centered is no longer relevant nowadays. Negative feedback from the students, who have already graduated is a signal that the faculty is not moving towards excellence. Some of the issues brought to the faculty have not been considered seriously. Only good captains can take the ship to the desired destination. Leaders in the faculty should realize that their existence is to train students to be quality graduates. Training quality students is their core business.

Knowledge about general educational competencies and skills which former graduated students found essential to their careers would be useful to leaders in the faculty for constructing effective curriculum. It is important to all the educators in the FBE to deliver not only the basic contents and skills of program subjects but they must not leave behind

leadership development skills such as competencies and capabilities to their graduates in order for FBE to be advanced in producing demanding graduates for the market.

Leadership For Tomorrow

Smylie and Conyers (1991) conclude that teaching has become a "complex, dynamic, interactive, intellectual activity ……. (not a practice that can be) prescribed or standardized" (p. 13). Time has changed thus our thinking and actions must also suit with these changes. The faculty's leader's roles must meet the rapidly changing needs of our students and stakeholders. Educators in the faculty should develop credibility and competencies to make innovation in their delivery systems towards training the students. They must have the skills in problem finding and problem identification for them to plan or to mold the higher quality students with intellectual activities.

Faculty leaders are trains human beings and not robots. Humans deliver their basic learned knowledge towards others and in various situations which are not schematic. They have to teach competencies in critical thinking, making decisions, and other leadership skills in various cultures and norms. These competencies should be considered essential or basic skills for graduates at the end of their studies. Zakeri (2004) indicates that "despite the technological changes occurring in place of work, communication and interpersonal relationship skills, problem solving, critical thinking, reading, writing, listening and speaking effectively are expected to remain critically important to the work force as we begin the 21st century"(p.417). Faculty leaders now have to look back and should be fully alert of their existing leadership style and skills in facing the future challenge for training higher quality graduates.

Suggestion And Opinions

Agree with what Kouzes and Posner (2003) stated that "leadership is not at all about personality; it's about practice" (p.13). As faculty leaders, they have to develop change which can lead the faculty to new summits of excellence and the five practices suggested by K&P towards exemplary leadership should been practiced. The five practices are model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act and encourage the heart. These five practices suggested are for the leaders, relevant lecturers and staff as the followers in the faculty to play their role in facing the changes. Leadership development training programs for the faculty leaders include all the lecturers should be done. Now the university has made it compulsory to all the staff to attend a one week course call Bitara. Its main objective is to enhance excellence among the staff for achieving the university's vision to be a prestigious University in providing exceptional leadership in education, based on the advantage of broad experiences and high level of competencies in meeting global changes. In achieving this vision through excellent education, to suggest Bitara to embed these five practices towards exemplary leadership into their existing training programs. The training programs should not only deliver in theory but create situations that they can learn how to practice exemplary leadership. If the training program can proof to them how the five exemplary leadership practice can bring about different perspective in their beliefs and actions towards positive mindset in becoming excellent leaders, it will help the University to achieve the vision and mission.

For the student's curriculum development, every student should go through a specific leadership class or course. In this leadership class, the curriculum should design in its objectives to train them the ability to become leaders. Leadership skills are taught and

practiced in various realistic situations in the market place as leaders. It is more towards hands-on leadership course, so when these students graduate they hold the ability to lead any task assigned to them.

Since people first look at the leader's action then his plan, the faculty leaders must lead the way as to how they foresee the vision and mission of the faculty. They have to model the way so they can earn the right and the respect to lead through direct individual involvement and action.

Leaders must have a firm planning of their vision for the faculty. The vision is to be an excellent faculty in producing graduates with multi-skills that meets the current and future demands from the globalize business environments and communities. This vision must be transpired through the leader's eyes and shared throughout the faculty staff.

Fast forward thinking by challenging the process of how the work is done, from the normative process to the invention of the new process that meets the excellence. Leaders must venture out to meet the challenge in producing competitive graduates. Times have changed so traditional thinking has to be replaced with new innovative methods. Risk and failure should not stop the leaders in gaining innovation to find new ways in achieving his vision and mission. Leaders should learn to become a learner in overcoming any obstacles.

Clawson(2006) stated that " The quality of the leader-follower relationship will determine whether the followers will develop a view of task facing the organization similar to the view held by the leader" (p.37). Leaders must create relationships with the followers to enable them to act. How can leaders create a sense of environment to the followers so they feel personal power and ownership? They have to make followers feel strong, capable, and committed towards the faculty's vision to produce excellent graduates equipped with the current demands.

In striving to make dramatic change to the faculty programs and raise the quality of the programs offered leaders and the followers had to move away their comfort zone to meet the changes. Kouzes and Posner (2003) stated that "leaders have to make sure all the followers efforts see the benefit of their behaviors aligned with cherished values. Appreciations must be carry out with authenticity and from the heart of the leaders could bring strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry followers through extraordinarily tough times" (p.20). Rewards and benefits should be publicized so that they encourage people to gain recognitions and feel appreciated.

With the basic leadership skills in practices then the faculty leaders will be working towards excellence and alerted to the current changes. Then as a leader he or she will take the faculty towards the vision and mission of the faculty.

Conclusion

Learning to become a leader is a complex, multidimensional task. It takes self-discipline builds positive beliefs and positive inner principles and values towards the mission and vision of the organizations. Before the faculty can make any changes for the university and communities' demands in this globalization environment, the leaders themselves should play their role by having the excellent quality of leaders that can set as examples to the followers. They can manage to create the culture in the faculty towards excellence in work done as well as achieving the mission and vision. To be excellent, of course, the faculty as a whole which includes the mission, vision, lecturers, staff, programs, curriculum development knowledge, group development knowledge and activities as well as the graduates they produce should be recognized by the public and community. Weiss, A. (1988) said that "There is no more

powerful shaper of behavior in the organization than the behaviors of those in leadership positions" (p.1). Before university produces excellent and quality training teacher in the market demand, it must shape their lecturers and staff first with training in leadership developments programs. By having their masters in leadership skills, they would be able to produce students which can suit with the current and future market demands.

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