

CHANGING PATTERNS OF HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Kazakhstan has recently enacted a comprehensive transformation of its higher education system. In 2010, the Ministry of Education and Science (henceforth, the Ministry) proposed the State Program of Education Development for 2011-2020 (henceforth, the Program), a strategic road map of education reforms. One of the main points in the current educational reform is a proposal to grant greater autonomy to higher education institutions (HEIs). Consequently, this drastic organizational change raises concerns about the development of effective institutional leadership. This paper addresses recent developments of higher education leadership in Kazakhstan. The purpose of this paper is to determine changing patterns of higher education leadership and discuss relevant professional skills and capacities of higher education leaders in the context of recently proposed reforms. Based on research findings of the longitudinal study done in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, the paper draws on research data, documentary analysis and comparative analysis of higher education governance practices.

Introduction

The last 20 years have witnessed higher education reforms in Kazakhstan, including organizational change. One of the current concerns is university leadership and governance in higher education. In this case, questions have been raised about the role of leadership in the context of the ambitious reform of granting greater autonomy to local academic institutions. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the subject of university autonomy. Although, several studies have produced estimates of institutional autonomy in Europe and the US, (Anderson, D., Johnson, R., (2009); Estermann.T. & Nokkala, T., 2009; Johnstone, D.B.) there is still insufficient data for higher education leadership in universities of transitional economies including academic institutions based in the post-socialist bloc of countries. The main issues addressed in this paper are: a) identification of higher education leadership patterns: b) the emergence of institutional autonomy and c) relationships between the Board of Trustees and university administrators in Kazakhstan.

Higher education leadership in Kazakhstan

There is a large volume of published studies describing the role of leadership in higher education worldwide. The study of higher education leadership is not a new phenomenon and debate continues about best strategies of university governance and management for university leaders to adopt. However, far too little attention has been paid to the issue of development of higher education leadership at universities in transition (Johnstone and Bain, 2002; Johnstone, 2011). Today, increasing forces of academic globalization and marketization of higher education have led to changing patterns of higher education leadership. In research literatures, the concept of leadership on the institutional level implies university leaders having organizational capacity and strategic vision of bringing about change or altering institutional trajectories (Johnstone, 2011, 182). The traditional understanding of higher education leadership is gradually changing from the leadership by one person to distributed leadership and the role of effective executive team is constantly growing.

To date, higher education Leadership in Kazakhstan has consisted of the following key institutions: the Rector, the Academic Council and the Boards of Trustees. In public universities, rectors are appointed by the Minister of Education and Science. In the case of national-status universities, rectors are appointed by the President as advised by the Ministry of Education and Science. So far, there has been little theoretical treatment of higher education governance in Kazakhstan. Furthermore, many issues such as striking a balance between the Rector, the Academic Council and the Boards of Trustees have not yet been explored in detail.

In much of the world, university presidents, chancellors and rectors, as in the case of Kazakhstan, have come to their top management positions through academic career pathways. Rarely have there been university rectors who joined universities coming from the corporate world. In Kazakhstan, as in much of the world, all the rectors, without exception, hold a doctoral degree in a certain academic field and have a significant teaching experience (Altbach, 2011,6).

Today, both the state and university administrators come to the realization that higher education leaders need further professional development and training apart from their Learning "on the job". The rector's business skills of integrating academe and industry and managing a good R&D climate have been reflected in the State Program of Education Development 2020 which points out that higher education institutions are encouraged to establish business innovation centers and business incubators on their campuses (2010,50-51). With the accelerating trends of the market, a top manager of academic institution needs to be an effective academic leader with strong financial and business management skills.

Kazakhstan, among many other countries in transition, has just started to consider models of managing universities as corporations. Due to the absence of the tradition of educational management as a discipline per se, there has not been much professional support for university leaders and their professional training in Kazakhstan. It occurs that it is not only the case of Kazakhstan but also of many universities across the world. As Altbach (2011, 3) has emphasized:

"contemporary universities require a combination of professional management and administration as well as the traditional participation of the academics in the essential academic functions of the institution, in much of the world, there is little awareness of the significance of professional administration and few methods of providing training for administrative staff"

University leadership is always embedded in a certain social and institutional context. As mentioned above, there has been no such discipline as higher education management in Kazakhstan and since there was no specific value for education manager's professionalism. Due to being well-familiar with the post-Soviet contexts, Heyneman poignantly observes that "(...) Kazakhstan and other new nations from the former Soviet Union would have to professionalize their higher education systems. They would have to treat them like important and complex areas of their economies - health care, social security, environment and the Like" (2005, 2). To date, university leaders and their executive teams have developed much reliance on the Ministry of Education and Science due to the entrenched tradition of "the state control model" (Fielden, 2008). University leaders are likely to be followers of the official ministerial decrees and orders. In fact, when asked the question of 'what is your vision for the university?', one of the university rectors has responded to us saying, "you would have to ask the Ministry that".

Since one of the emerging reforms of the Program is the granting of greater autonomy, university administrations will be expected to develop their strategic visions and develop innovations in their management practices. Given the institutional freedom, we believe, it will take some time for the university leaders to develop their leadership skills and professional attitudes.

On the institutional level, the rector appears to be a key decision-making figure in the university governance. The decision-making powers of the newly introduced institutions of the Boards of Trustees have not been developed. So far, most academic institutions in Kazakhstan follow the entrenched post-Soviet governance structure of the Academic Council which supervises the decision-making process at the university. The Academic Council chaired by the Rector is the highest governing body of the University.

Research evidence refers to the fact that most rectors support the granting of institutional autonomy and shared governance on their university campuses. One of the rectors points out: *"currently, from the perspective of important principles of higher education governance, a rector is the main institute of governance and only then comes the Board of Trustees. But in the near future, we envision the Board of Trustees to be a top decision-making constituency"*. The Boards of Trustees, due to being a relevantly new institution of governance in Kazakhstan, appears to play an advisory, less-substantive role in policy formulation and mainly serves as the funding resource for the given university.

The emergence of institutional autonomy

Suggestions to grant greater autonomy to Kazakhstan's higher education institutions have been proposed by local and international higher education experts. For instance, an OECD review (2007,126) emphasizes the following:

"Autonomy of HEIs from the government, and autonomy of departments and individual academic staff within the HEIs, are critical for fostering a culture of initiative-taking from the institutional level down to the individual academic staff level"

According to the State Education Development Program of Kazakhstan for 2011- 2020, the whole of higher education institutions will be granted university autonomy. The given policy document discusses this organizational change more specifically (2010,49):

"a gradual, stage-by-stage process of granting autonomy to universities is planned. From 2015 onwards, autonomy will be granted to national research universities, to national higher education institutions in 2016 and to the rest of higher education organizations by 2018"

The Program envisages the higher education system that, by 2020, would be better managed and better integrated, more flexible in providing opportunities for altering institutional trajectories, and more financially self-reliant. Although, many members of the faculty actively supported the higher education reform in Kazakhstan in terms of autonomy, some people expressed concerns about the organizational change. For example, one of the members of the Academic Council at one of the universities observes/*universities will depend on economic incentives and begin to sell diplomas. The only thing that can prevent such a development - is the central control of the Ministry"*. Many interviewed university leaders were enthusiastic about the possibility of having greater autonomy. While some recognize that the Ministry still has to play an important role in the higher education governance.

University administrators and the Board of Trustees

According to higher education reforms, "the universities will be subordinated to the boards of trustees". The Board of Trustees, as a newly emerging institution of governance, plays a fundamental role in the transition from the "state control model" to the "state supervisory model" (Neave, G. and van Vught, F., 1994) to enhance institutional autonomy.

There are many universities in Kazakhstan that established the Boards of Trustees. Research evidence drawn from interviews with university administrators and members of the Boards has shown that in most cases the Boards of Trustees play only a consultative role at universities. For instance, one of the members of the Board of Trustees states, "we are able to advise and consult this university's top managers rather than setting some long-term visions". Many members of the Boards of Trustees have expressed their concerns of the lack of understanding higher education management and governance. They have confirmed their motivation to receive some professional training of serving on the Boards. It is worth-noting that the work of the Boards of Trustees, in many cases, is subject to a significant impact of university leaders.

As the Boards of Trustees need to have a say in strategic planning of universities, the Ministry puts a goal to develop new legislative mechanisms of rectors' appointment at public universities. Rectors are expected to be elected in the sense of meritocracy and open discussions among members of the Boards of Trustees and other stakeholders including faculty members and students. Rectors should develop effective relationships between key constituencies of the university governance as well as constructive relationships with the Board of Trustees. Electing a rector based on his or her professional skills and credentials is one step forward to accountability measures. With this new higher education leadership pattern, the Ministry encourages the Boards of Trustees and the Academic Council to evaluate the work of the elected Rector within their period in office. In this case, university leaders need to learn to be flexible and have a capacity to respond to economic constraints and challenges as well as perform strong fund-raising abilities. They must be able to communicate effectively to faculty members, students, policy makers, employers and other higher education stakeholders.

We hope to see our university leaders with a new perspective and capacity of thinking globally and acting locally. Every university leader should have a strategic approach, should be an innovator and be responsible for their short-term and long-term decisions. We briefly present some features of effective higher education leaders seen as relevant from our perspective:

- Strategist: reconciling short-term and long-term interests of stakeholders at the local and global levels and the establishment of a clear course of action to achieve success.
- Innovator: creating a supportive environment for innovation and change, the identification and use of new global opportunities, products and markets.
- Communicator: involvement and encouragement of the parties through the use of various communication channels to transmit clear messages.
- Rapport builder: the creation of a trust relationship through understanding and respect for differences, and at the same time, meaningful communication with people on a global level.

- Coach: education of the new generation of Leaders to maintain a Learning culture based on strengths.
- Decision maker: using global perspective, systems thinking and analysis for the implementation of a significant strategy in the conditions of uncertainty and insecurity.
- Global citizenship: recognition of both its uniqueness and values of other nations, cultures, etc., integration into the world community.
- Higher education institutions' top management needs to develop a system of shared governance where the Academic Council and faculty members are empowered to bring their expertise to contribute to important institutional matters.

Conclusion

This paper has implied that higher education institutions over the last 20 years have seen the emergence of different patterns of higher education leadership in Kazakhstan. In 2010, new and ambitious targets for the development of collegial management in universities in a phased process of granting greater autonomy to universities were clearly formulated in the State Program of Education Development 2011-2020. University leaders, having professional knowledge of the local features of higher education practices in Kazakhstan, may need to share their expertise and decision-making powers with the Boards of Trustees. In order to carry out the transition from the "state control model" to the "state supervisory model", both the state and universities need to build on the current developments of shared governance and raise institutional standards of accountability. The Boards of Trustees need to learn to oversee the overall functioning of an institution. Amidst the drastic reforms, faculty members should also have a say and the Academic Council is likely to develop their functions of academic governance.

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