

## THE ROLE OF FACULTY IN CREATING A SUCCESSFUL UNIVERSITY

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### Introduction

A successful university, especially a world-class research university, requires at least three elements working interdependently: talent, governance and resources (Altbach, 2011:3). The focus of this paper is on the first element. Academic talent is an essential condition for success. This talent is more successful when it is enhanced and liberated through well-designed management systems. The role of the faculty in successful universities cannot be discussed without understanding the role of students. Primožic (2014) observes that students want to be educated, inspired and informed. They see themselves as students, not as clients. He notes that students seek empowerment and mobility opportunities, and require deep and active learning. Students seek increased accountability and autonomy, while also requiring mutual respect and a sense of equal partnership.

From the perspective of employers, the most important graduate attribute is a "willingness to learn" (Green, 2014). This leads to the question: how can universities provide underpinning systems which create environments conducive to the diverse requirements of faculty, students and employers?

### Context

Well-designed human resource systems of recruitment, selection, remuneration, training and career planning create conditions for long term organisational success. When they are internally consistent and consistent with strategy, these management systems can also serve to develop leadership capability throughout entire institutions (Collins and Porras, 1994). Unlike corporations, which can measure success in cumulative share price, research universities require a range of qualitative and quantitative output measures. These include indicators such as: accreditation, international and regional rankings, research grants, research impact measures, teaching and learning metrics, financial audits, graduate outcomes, numbers of student applications, especially at the graduate level, preferred employer status and level of philanthropic activity, among many other measures.

While these are useful measures, they are not the purpose of the university. In measuring success, it is important to not fall into the trap of measuring what we *can* measure, rather than what we *should* measure (Ulrich, 1999). Not only do we need to be aware of the tangible and intangible outputs which constitute success, we need to consider the tangible and intangible inputs which are likely to create conditions where success is possible. Bassi and McMurrer (2007) found that specific management systems indicate future financial success in listed companies. Conversely, inconsistencies between rewards, remuneration and performance management systems have been implicated in the downfall of major institutions (Royal and O'Donnell, 2013). One key role of institutional leadership is to create strong systems which allow systematic feedback to develop stability, and also allow openness to changing conditions (Collins and Porras, 1994).

### Implications for Research-intensive Universities

What are the lessons for research-intensive universities? Can universities design management systems which liberate intellectual talent? In contemporary universities, demands on faculty are high. There is forensic scrutiny of all aspects of teaching, learning, research and service. Contemporary universities require faculty to act in socially responsible ways, conducive to the "higher calling" of life as an intellectual (Zhakypova, 2014). At the same time, faculty are the

creative engine of universities. Like the students they teach, they require an environment which is conducive to growth and development and which is also adaptive to change. Hilltrop (1999) and Youndt and Snell (2005) found that an appropriate configuration of management systems is needed to create intellectual capital. This is consistent with Hartley (2014) who asserts that academic faculty should "be restless, be optimistic and not be satisfied". Sagintayeva (2014) argues that university management should fundamentally act as enablers, providing continuous improvement for professional development, while both students and faculty may take the role of reformers. Similarly, Mamrayev (2014) observes that faculty can do their best work when they have the appropriate tangible and intangible resources.

### **Systems to Liberate Talent**

Within this context, developing strong management systems is a necessary but not sufficient condition for creating a strong and successful university. Systems work well when grounded in clear and explicit values. Management systems do not work in isolation. The former Chief Executive Office of Visa, Dee Hock, noted that: "An organisation's success has enormously more to do with clarity of shared purpose, common principles and strength of belief in them, than to assets, expertise, operating ability, or management competence, important as they may be" (Hock, 1996). Hock derived the term "chaordic", from the combination of "chaos" and "order", to describe an organisation which has stability and yet is adaptive to changing conditions. Contemporary universities need both characteristics to succeed - order is necessary for the measured and robust research and teaching activities which build a strong institution. Yet, a research university has to always be open to innovation, change and fresh perspectives. This kind of ambidexterity is simple in theory, and yet can be complex to implement (MacCormick and Parker, 2010).

Researchers have tried to simplify this task. O'Reilly and Pfeffer (2000) highlight effective management systems which tend to create high performing institutions. These systems include management practices such as: employment security; selective hiring; self-managed teams; decentralised decision making and extensive sharing of financial and performance information. Mayo's (2001) "human capital" perspective of successful organisations incorporates more than individual capability and commitment, knowledge and experience. It also includes collaborations between people, and their networks both inside and outside the organisation. He distinguishes between human capital, which is what people take home with them, and structural capital - what they leave behind. Youndt and Snell (2004) classify human capital as individual employees' knowledge, skills and expertise; while social capital is knowledge resources embedded within networks of relationships and organisational capital is institutionalised knowledge and experience, manifested in databases, routines, patterns and manuals.

These views are distilled by Hock, cited in Waldrop (1996): "Hire and promote first on the basis of integrity; second, motivation; third, capacity; fourth, understanding; fifth, knowledge; and last and least, experience. Without integrity, motivation is dangerous; without motivation, capacity is impotent; without capacity, understanding is limited; without understanding, knowledge is meaningless; without knowledge, experience is blind. Experience is easy to provide and quickly put to good use by people with all the other qualities." Hock's approach assumes that organisations are communities, based on the sum of the beliefs, character, judgments, acts and efforts of those who are drawn to them. This view has some similarity to the role of universities as communities which serve communities.

In support of this overall view, Bassi et al (2001) analysed essential elements to optimise talent. They found specific themes to be associated with future organisational success:

- **Leadership Practices:** Managers' and Leaders' communication, performance feedback, supervisory skills, demonstration of key organisational values, efforts and ability to instil confidence;
- **Learning Capacity:** The organisation's overall ability to learn, change, innovate, and continually improve;
- **Knowledge Accessibility:** The extent of the organisation's "collaborativeness" and capacity for making knowledge and ideas widely available to employees;
- **Workforce Optimisation:** essential processes for getting work done, providing good working conditions, establishing accountability, and making good hiring choices;
- **Employee Engagement:** capacity to engage, retain, and optimise the value of its employees hinges on how well jobs are designed, how employees' time is used, and the commitment that is shown to employees.

Additionally, research-intensive universities balance the concepts of the "mechanistic" and the "organic" forms identified by Burns and Stalker (1961). Mechanistic systems are suitable for stable conditions and organic systems are appropriate for conditions which give rise to fresh problems and unforeseen requirements. Universities need to succeed in both forms, and so research universities are required to consciously develop a repertoire of management systems which move along a continuum from loosely to tightly defined roles, from informal arrangements to clear hierarchies, from informal to formal processes of communication and from consultative to directive leadership styles.

#### **Attributes of Measurement Systems**

Measurement systems require specific characteristics to be effective. Attributes of measurement systems should be that they are: credible, descriptive, predictive, detailed, actionable and cost-effective, (Bassi and McMurrer, 2007). Mayo (2001) suggests that human capital measures should be 'roughly right' rather than 'precisely wrong', simple to understand and clearly defined.

As universities develop and grow over time, their management systems need to mature and stabilise. In the entrepreneurial stage of a research university, management systems are necessarily based on constant change. As the institution matures, as the university moves to more divisional or functional organisational forms, systems require more stability. However, even stable systems need to remain open to change, and to be embedded in open systems, being open to feedback. As Collins (2009) found, complacency is not consistent with organisational success.

#### **Conclusion**

In measuring the success of research universities, it is useful to consider tangible and intangible inputs to that success. Ideally, intellectual talent is liberated through well-designed, internally consistent, management systems. These systems should embed ambidexterity, through appropriate levels of stability and openness to change.

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