# Role of Academic Leadership in Bringing about a Transformational Change in the Organizational Behavior of Hei's in India

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## ABSTRACT
This study reviews the current scenario of higher education in India and the need to bring about a qualitative change in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs). As HEIs have become more accountable to stakeholders, they need to be pro-active in bringing change to sustain the existing international competition. The major responsibility, of bringing about this qualitative change in the HEIs, lies upon its academic leaders. However, academic leaders face a number of challenges in initiating this change. Thus, this study intends to propose Heifetz's adaptive leadership model, which could be adopted by the academic leaders, as the primary process for initiating the required change. In keeping with the above, a few academic leaders from HEIs in Pune were interviewed to determine how they: Conceptualize leadership and see themselves in leadership roles. Effect leadership and institutional change in the areas of faculty development, students' development, education programmes, external relations and internal operations and the challenges there in. Could apply the Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership Model as a primary process for initiating change in order to mellow down the challenges faced by the academic leaders in bringing about the institutional change.

*KEYWORDS: Academic Leadership, Organizational Change, HEIs, Academic Reform*

## INTRODUCTION
This study reviews the current scenario of higher education in India and the need to bring about a qualitative change in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs).

As HEIs have become more accountable to stakeholders, they need to be pro-active in bringing the required change to fulfill the expectations of the stakeholders and sustain the existing international competition. As the onus of bringing about this change lies on the academic leaders, this study attempts to understand the concept of academic leadership, the importance and role of the academic leaders in initiating change, and the challenges they face while initiating change both within and outside the institutions of higher learning. It also proposes Heifetz's adaptive leadership model, which could be adopted by the academic leaders, as the primary process for initiating the required change in today's more business oriented academic environment in which HEIs are required to compete to attract students and are facing greater scrutiny and accountability from outside constituencies.

## OBJECTIVES
➢ To determine how the academic leaders conceptualize leadership and see themselves in leadership roles.
➢ To find out how the academic leaders execute their leadership and bring about institutional change in the areas of faculty development, students' development, education programmes, external relations and internal operations and the challenges therein.

➢ To apply the Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership Model as a primary process for initiating change in order to mellow down the challenges faced by the academic leaders in the various areas of developing the institute.

## METHODOLOGY
Five HEIs from Pune city were selected on the basis of size and growth in terms of courses, students and campuses developed. Interviews with the academic leaders of these institutions were conducted with the help of a questionnaire to elicit their responses, to gauge their insight into the academic and administrative processes and the challenges they face in development of areas viz: leadership skills, styles and training, parameters of change like faculty development, students' development, education programmes, external relations and internal operations. All of them willingly shared the data, gave time and inputs through the interview and discussion. However, this was subject to our agreeing to maintain confidentiality and non-disclosure of the names of the institutions. Here, we would like to describe our approach. We the authors are associated, with an institution as teacher and taught and work closely with institutions for both research and training purpose and are aware of the fact, that there is a vibrant ownership and academic leadership movement in HEIs.

## SCOPE

The paper discusses issues related to the role of academic leadership with due respect to their leadership style adopted in HEIs and also focuses on:

1. Policy formation for Institutional Change.
2. Effects of Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership Model on initiating and fostering change.

It also seeks to describe the way in which the HEIs in Pune, India have been functioning and draw lessons for better academic leadership. In the process of analysis the other aspects reviewed are the education market, and innovations in education industry in India.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This review of the literature aims to bring out the current scenario of higher education in India, role of Academic Leadership in imparting quality, efficiency and excellence in higher education. It aims to set forth the theoretical framework of the Heifetz's Adaptive Leadership Model and its utility in fostering change to enhance the quality of higher education.

## HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDIA

The growth of the Indian economy in the recent past and the compulsion to sustain it, is forcing the Indian government to accelerate the process of developing all the branches of the Indian education system. Thus, development of higher education has been one of the most important agendas of the Indian Government in the past few decades. Implications are clearly proven through the setting up of a number of higher education institutes within the country starting right from post-independence .There has been a marked progress in the expansion of higher education, if we look at the increase of higher educational institutes in India. For instance during 1950 and 2008, the number of universities has increased from 20 to about 431, colleges from 500 to 20,677 and the teachers from 15,000 to nearly 5.05 lakhs. Consequently, the enrolment of students has increased from a mere 1.00 lakh in 1950 to over 116.12 lakhs [20]and as of 2010, universities and university-level institutions in India include 20 central universities, 215 State Universities, 100 Deemed Universities, 5 institutions established under State Act and 13 institutes of national importance apart from around 17,000 colleges including 1800 women's colleges, functioning under these universities and institutions.

However, as Amitabh Jhingan, partner, Ernst &Young, puts it, "growth in numbers has not been accompanied by an improvement in the delivery of higher education and consequent outcomes." The challenges facing the higher education system continue to be access, equity and quality. The gross enrolment ratio (GER) has grown but there still exists a wide disparity across regions and gender.[21]

Kannan Kasturi, in "India Together" reports that too many new self-financing private institutions present a dismal face, offering poor quality education at high cost to millions of students, but going scot-free as the bureaucracy looks away and politicians' cash in.[12]

In 2006, Sanat Kaul in his paper 'Higher education in India: Seizing the opportunity' states that Pune in India, near Mumbai, is another attractive educational center for students. Nearly 200,000 students from across India study in a hundred educational institutes and nine universities. It is rapidly developing into the educational capital of India. However, on the flip side, all this hectic activity has drawn the interest of Maharashtra's most powerful politicians to the profitable arena of 'Edu-business'.

Besides, institutions of Higher education are facing greater scrutiny and accountability from outside agencies that impact accreditation, funding and financial aid resources.

Thus, in this changing academic environment, leaders at institutions of higher education are confronted with increasing demands to transform these institutions, as stakeholders' expectations have risen and resources have diminished. Colleges and Universities compete intensely to attract students and to generate revenues as operating costs rise and government subsidies decline.

In order to deal with the changing academic environment, there is a need to analyze the models of leadership that focus on the competencies, behaviors, and situational problems of individual academic leaders. These models tend to focus on collegiality as the primary aptitude for engaging faculty, and are concerned with satisfying departmental needs over those of the overall universities and the higher education system at large. Leadership in today's academia should take into account the needs and demands of various stakeholders. In the current environment faculty needs and development become one factor among many major elements that need to be considered to accomplish the mission and goals of the university or higher education system. As higher education looks towards new faculty entering academe as a strategic lever to infuse and maintain academic vitality. Although teaching is often an expectation and responsibility, most often the faculty members do not have formal training in the teaching pedagogy or "pedagogical content knowledge". Faculty development thus, refers to a broad range of educational activities that institutions provide to enhance professional career growth of practitioners and teaching faculty in their roles as educators. Hence, professional development should be an ongoing endeavor for all faculty members because their growth as instructors has a profound impact on their students.

Thus, the academic leaders need to plan consistently, take innovative decisions and effectively execute them to fulfill the requirements of the stakeholders and in turn bring about a qualitative change in the institute. Let us then understand what academic leadership is.

## CONCEPT OF ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP

ACADEMIC means Intellectual or Scholarly. LEADERSHIP is all about Learning, Excelling, Accommodating, Developing, Evolving, Realizing, Sustaining, Honing, Innovating, and Pursuing. Hence, academic leadership is not the same as any other leadership. Academic leaders exercise their leadership within settings that have markedly different institutional purposes, cultures and expectations than the organizations in which business leaders typically exercise their leadership. But, leadership, as defined, is not situational. The styles of effective academic leadership are diverse and not tightly patterned. Moreover, globalization has affected all sectors and more prominently education; hence the need to understand Academic Leadership from Global Perspective.[1]

In keeping with this, the study intends to emphasize the fact that in today's academic environment of the HEIs, academic leaders who are the decision makers need to view leadership as a "process" that requires creativity, innovation and input from all relevant stakeholders. Heifetz (1994) proposes a method of leading, referred to as "adaptive leadership" that can be sustained for long-term, adopted by stakeholders, and is responsive to the competitive higher education market. Heifetz stressed that leadership is the "activity of mobilizing people to tackle the toughest problems and do the adaptive work necessary to achieve progress". Specifically, this model provides a framework for determining when to and how to lead that can result in creative problem solving and foster successful and sustainable modifications in the relationship between the institution and its stakeholders.

The responses of the academic leaders interviewed were analyzed to illustrate the merits and potential of adaptive leadership in initiating or accomplishing successful change in academia. This also helped us to find out how they executed their leadership to bring about institutional change in the areas of faculty development, students' development, education programmes, external relations and internal operations. The adaptive leadership model is used to explain, in part why the change initiatives implemented by the academic leaders failed in its impact in totto. Also, to demonstrate how academic leaders can employ the adaptive leadership process to facilitate successful transformation in the above mentioned areas.

Before analyzing the responses, let us explore other models of leadership that have been used to analyze the context of higher education. While such discussions hold merit, and draw similar conclusions concerning the difficulties of leading in the higher education environment, they do not provide a clear course of action that reflects the demands of today's changing environment and that could be effectively applied to the areas of improvement as stated above. We shall then summarize the dimensions of Heifetz's adaptive leadership model. An analysis of the responses of the academic leaders and discussion of the merits of applying the adaptive leadership model to the changing academic climate conclude the paper.[9]

## LEADERSHIP MODELS
Leadership in today's institutions of higher education must take into account the needs and demands of various stakeholders, and include these major stakeholders in the change process. It is no longer acceptable for any one stakeholder group to place responsibility for instituting change on the shoulders of one individual leader.

Studies have stated that leadership in today's more business-like higher education environment must be able to manage the competing needs from the current marketplace, should focus more on transactional leadership, transformational leadership, or a combination of both. Transactional leadership, which is based on motivating people to perform in exchange for specific rewards, has been shown to enable the HEIs to manage the conflicting demands of maintaining a balanced budget while continuing to support the needs of the faculty. However, the limitation of this approach to leadership is evident: when leadership lacks the resources to provide a basis for the exchange, it can become difficult to obtain commitment from the faculty.

The ability of a leader to generate commitment to change underscores the primary dimensions of transformational leadership. Originally defined by Bass and Bass and Avolio transformational leadership is the ability to motivate employees to excel beyond what is expected through the use of individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and charisma. The practice of transformational leadership by the academic leaders has been found to be related to faculty satisfaction and the willingness to expend the extra effort required in the change process. Furthermore, this style of leadership works well in situations where administrators, have few resources with which to induce behavioral change Pounder examined the relationship between transformational and transactional leadership and university organizational effectiveness. He concluded that the style of leadership which reflects a combination of both transformational and transactional dimensions may be most effective in providing the university with the flexibility it needs to make substantive changes.

However, the limitation of both the transactional and transformational leadership styles is its focus on the traits and behaviors of the individual leaders as the pathway to effect change. Therefore, if the transformational leader enters the change process too late, there may not be sufficient time to gain enough support to initiate the necessary changes. Furthermore, when the transformational leader steps down, the leader's change initiatives may not be maintained unless subsequent leaders possess not only the same charisma and ability to inspirationally motivate, but the same vision.

## ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP
Adaptive leadership is based on the premise that leadership is more of a process rather than individual personal capabilities. This process requires people to focus on the specific problems at hand and to modify the way they have worked in the past. According to Heifetz, this type of leadership should compel all stakeholders involved to work towards a solution through debate and creative thinking, identifying the rewards, opportunities, and challenges they will face. The outcome of the process should be positive change that is non-threatening to those responsible for generating and executing the change.

In addition, since adaptive leadership focuses on process, not person, this model employs the knowledge of all who have a vested interest in moving the organization to a higher level, and provides a framework for attaining employee commitment to actively participate in seeking and implementing solutions to challenges. By engaging people to become active participants in the change process, adaptive leadership offers a route around historical constraints that reinforce the way change has been traditionally introduced. According to Heifetz and Linsky, leaders are confronted by two types of problems- technical and adaptive. Technical problems are well defined, the solutions are known, and anyone with adequate expertise and organizational resources can solve them. Adaptive problems refer to problems that are not well defined, therefore the solutions are not known in advance. When adaptive problems exist, there are generally many different stakeholders involved; each with his/her own interpretation of the issues at hand. Most importantly, solutions stem from the stakeholders themselves, not from one single entity, since "the problem is

rooted in their attitudes, priorities, or behavior". If the leader fails to recognize that the organization is being confronted by adaptive problems, and applies instead a more technical solution, successful change will be compromised.

The process of adaptive leadership involves six stages when executing change in a complex, organizational setting where non-routine decisions are required. These include identifying the adaptive challenge as previously discussed, focusing attention on the problem to make stakeholders aware that change must occur, framing the issues in such a way as to sustain their attention, maintaining stress at a productive level to ensure continued efforts toward change,

securing ownership of both the problem and solution form the stakeholders themselves, and creating a safe environment for them by providing the resources and the "right cover" so no retribution will occur.

The following areas of challenge for the academic leaders to bring about a qualitative institutional change in the areas of faculty development, students' development, education programmes, external relations and internal operations are presented to further underscore the possible benefits of applying the adaptive leadership process when implementing change in an academic environment.

**Table: Dimensions of Adaptive Leadership**

| Step one | Identity the type of problem | Technical: every day issues with common solutions. Adaptive: challenging, new, uncommon situations. |
|---|---|---|
| Step two | Focus attention | Get people to pay attention to key issues. Secure commitments from those who will help you sell the initiative. Engage those who have yet to climb on board with the change issue. Adopt the behavior you expect from others, and take responsibility for problems, the organization is facing. |
| Step three | Frame the issue | Determine the time when issues must be presented to stakeholders, and focus on the opportunities such problems can provide. Employ the "discovery process" step back and see the big picture. |
| Step four | Secure ownership | Sustain the conditions through which stakeholders take responsibility for problem solving. Place the work where it belongs. Challenge employees' expectations. |
| Step five | Manage Stakeholder Conflict and Maintain Stress | Stakeholders with different agendas need to be aligned to achieve a higher purpose, while confronting conflict resulting from stakeholders' personal issues. This may be accomplished by establishing "rules of engagement" for discussing heated issues, and defining reporting structures Furthermore, it is often necessary to uphold the productive stress required for change to occur; especially as adaptive problems often require time to resolve. |
| Step six | Create a safe haven | Counterproductive measures need to be minimized. By slowing pace of change when possible and by Creating a secure place to discuss disparate perspectives. |

**Source: Heifetz et al. (2004)**

## FINDINGS

The following are the findings based on the responses elicited during interviews from the academic leaders in the initiatives they have taken and the challenges they have come across in bringing about institutional change in the areas of faculty development, students' development, education programmes, external relations and internal operations.

## 1. Faculty Development :

The academic leaders are keen on the personal and professional development of the faculty members as it would enhance the quality of the teaching learning process. They have also taken steps to enhance their professional expertise by encouraging them to develop their research skills, expand their knowledge database and improve their higher order cognitive skills, organize and depute them for pedagogical trainings and faculty development programmes. However, the routine administrative tasks, financial constraints and fulfilling other allied mandatory academic commitments make it necessary for the academic leaders to keep the faculty members engaged in all these activities leaving them with very little time and resources for their professional growth. Also the leaders expressed a need for formal leadership training and exposure to adopting the various leadership styles for effective implementation of strategies.

## 2. Students' Development

In order to make the students, independent learners the academic leaders strongly support the provision of various facilities viz; a Wi-Fi campus, laptops / PC's, recreational and sports facilities, multimedia learning packages, courses on innovation, national/ international events help them to develop their creativity, short term industrial projects and so on. However, they require a more conducive infrastructure, a dedicated human resource and adequate funds for providing the above mentioned facilities to the students.

## 3. Educational Programmes

Academic leaders support the need and importance of revising and internationalizing the curriculum to suit the global requirements of management education. Internationalization of the curriculum, would, foster the opportunities for students to study abroad, also, encourage faculty and student exchanges, increase international student recruitment efforts, export or import programs and create in the faculty members and students a greater global cultural awareness. However, they feel that the curriculum should be revised more frequently.

## 4. External Relations

The academic leaders feel that there is a need to strengthen the national and international corporate ties. It would give

the students an opportunity to get exposed to the global developments in their field. This would also result in improving the placements, thus, improving the quality of management education. However, they face problems in making, development of external relations a policy decision due the financial obligations.

## 5. Internal Operations

Academic leaders are aware about the need and importance of developing a state of arts infrastructure, an interactive pedagogy and a strong industry institute liaison in order to develop the system of higher education. However, they expressed the need for a stable budget allocation, co-operation from the stakeholders, and relaxation from administrative pressures, so as to focus on the academic development.

## APPLYING THE ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP PROCESS

The academic leaders can create a change in the department that would be sustainable and long term. Below is the analysis of how the academic leaders could use the six steps of the Heifetz's adaptive leadership process.

### A. Identifying adaptive challenges:

The first process in Heifetz's adaptive leadership model is for the decision makers to determine if the problems facing the institution are technical, everyday issues or more adaptive in nature, i.e. unusual and complex. If the leader fails to recognize that the institute is being confronted by adaptive problems, and applies instead a more mundane solution, successful change will be compromised. For instance, the challenges faced by the academic leaders in developing "External Relations" is an adaptive problem and the academic leaders need to involve all the stakeholders right from the owners, parents, corporate, government and private regulatory bodies, students etc in framing policies and designing effective strategies to implement them. This 360 degree involvement of all the stakeholders would help the academic leaders in changing the mindset and attitude of all the stakeholders and help them become aware of the need and importance of the change required. Academic leaders need to adopt a combination of the transactional and transformational leadership style to bring about the necessary changes.

### B. Focusing attention and framing the issue:

Though there is a general consensus that "Faculty Development" is hampered due to mundane academic and administrative bindings, academic leaders need to focus on the crucial fact that curbing the professional development of the faculty can become a quality crisis in the future and ruin the teaching learning process, development of the students, and growth of the institute and sustaining of the global competition. Thus, academic leaders need to frame this issue as policy decision and incentivize faculty members to take up research and higher education for their professional growth and in turn the growth of the institute.

### C. Securing Ownership of both problem and solution from the stakeholders:

Students' development is crucial for the success and qualitative growth of an institute. However, it is hampered due to lack of conducive infrastructure, a dedicated human resource and adequate funds. Thus the academic leaders could constitute a committee comprising of one or two members each from the key stakeholders. Brain storming sessions on the gravity and solutions required for this problem could be discussed as it would enable the stakeholders to develop an insight into the problem, take ownership of the problem and finally become advocates for resolving the problem and bringing about a radical change in the situation.

### D. Managing Conflict and regulating change:

*In order to maintain a productive level of stress, that will ensure to follow through the change initiatives, the adaptive leader must ensure that the problems that have been identified and the solutions that had been proposed remain on the forefront.* Also during general meetings and private one-on-one meetings the adaptive leader should emphasize the need to maintain quality and efficiency in the institute.

### E. Creating a Safe Haven:

An important component of the successful redesign of any strategy is the academic leader's efforts to create an atmosphere of trust among his/her faculty members and students. Sometimes, the faculty, students and other stakeholders want the leader to choose who was at fault for a particular problem. *Here, the leaders needs to make a concerted effort to publicly praise and appreciate people who make suggestions, no matter how critical they appear to be or whether it provides a political cover for them.* Also, as part of creating trust, the leader should be careful not to promise anything that he/she cannot deliver and describe the situation as it truly is and openly admit if he/she does not know the answer.

## CONCLUSION

It has been suggested throughout this paper that it is necessary to challenge models of leadership that focus on the competencies, behaviors, and the situational contingencies of individual leaders. Instead, the needs and demands of various stakeholders must be considered in order to accomplish the mission and goals of the academic organization. The adaptive leadership process, as examined in this paper, is not intended to be the only strategy available to solve significant organizational problems. However, this process can provide a set of guidelines that will enable leaders to know when and how to address the increased demand to be accountable, competitive, and financially viable in today's academic environment, while fostering sustainable and successful modifications in the relationship between the organization and its stakeholders.

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