

Necessity for a Paradigm Shift in Academic Leadership: The Foresight of Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Higher education's academic leadership is evolving as a result of political, social, economic, and technical forces. Today's universities must contend with issues like declining financing, a more diverse student body, globalization, and escalating competitiveness. Traditional leadership styles must give way to more flexible and strategic methods in order to accommodate these developments. This study emphasizes the necessity of a paradigm change in academic leadership by fusing visionary leadership with effective management. It suggests that in order to guarantee institutional growth and sustainability in a setting that is changing quickly, academic leaders must take on the roles of strategists, political navigators, people centered leaders, and vision builders.

Background

Since academic and organizational leadership is often the root cause of institutional problems, particularly in developing nations, leadership is an essential component of higher education institution across the globe. The vision, effectiveness, and professionalism of leaders play a major role in the success of colleges. Academic leaders must handle a variety of stakeholders while attending to administrative, financial and academic duties as colleges have grown more complicated. Leadership positions have grown and changed due to the quick changes in higher education, putting pressure on leaders to be prepared to handle these difficulties. According to modern perspectives, leadership is a dynamic process that involves communication and reciprocal impact between leaders and followers.

Understanding Academic Leadership

Is Academic leadership different from leadership in other sectors?

Leadership in other corporate contexts is very different from academic leadership. Academic frequently oppose formal authority in universities, which have comparatively flat hierarchical systems in contrast to business environments. The nature of many academic subjects, which place a strong emphasis on individual autonomy and require academics to independently progress knowledge within their professions, further support this. However, traditional collegial norms encourage cooperative decision making, which may restrict the adoption of directive leadership strategies (Marshall et al., 200). As a result, the difficulties faced by academic leadership are different from those seen in corporate or governmental settings. Academic leaders must continue to be actively involved in teaching, learning, research, and intellectual endeavours in order to promote academic quality, whereas private sector leadership is primarily motivated by the objective of generating shareholder value. Protecting academic freedom is still a top priority in this situation (Sathye, 2005).

Additionally, government funding, political expectations, and statutory accountability requirements- including

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reporting duties outlined by legislative provisions- all influence the regulatory framework that higher education institutions operate under. Although they may be similar to those encountered by public sector companies, these limitations are mainly absent in private businesses. Furthermore, compared to conventional performance metrics like financial profitability, the results of higher education-especially in learning and teaching such as producing knowledgeable citizens, innovative professionals, and people who can interact with diversity- are intrinsically complex and challenging to measure.

The New Context of Academic Leadership

Rapid change, complexity, and increased demands in higher education institutions characterize the modern setting of academic leadership. Today's academic leaders must negotiate a world characterized by student-centered learning, heightened accountability, budgetary limitations and international rivalry. Their responsibilities go beyond academic supervision and include stakeholder engagement, resource management, strategic planning and innovation. Leaders are also expected to maintain educational quality, institutional ideals, and academic integrity. In order to ensure sustainable institutional growth, this context need flexible, imaginative, and inclusive leadership that can effectively address changing sociological, technical, and economic problems.

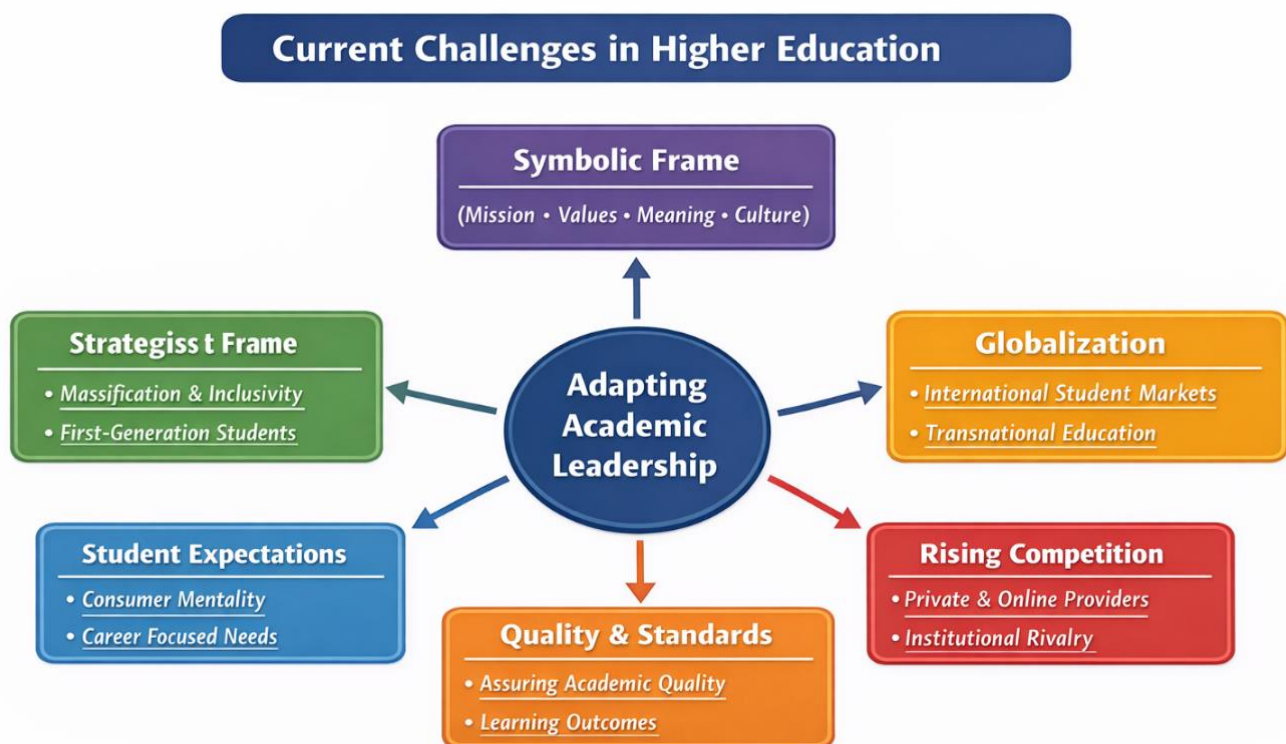


Figure 1

Source: Author

Contemporary Change Forces in Higher Education

Rapid structural, economic, and cultural changes characterize the context in which higher education institutions operate. The way universities operate, are funded, and define their educational mission has all changed as a result of these changes. Institutions are therefore under increasing pressure to maintain both academic quality and financial viability while continuing to be socially responsive.

Expansion of Access and Student Diversity

Higher education's shift from an elites to a society of masses has greatly increased involvement from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. Although this growth encourages fairness and inclusivity, it has also brought about difficult issues with student readiness, retention, and academic support. Universities must now meet the demands of more diverse students, many of whom are the first in their families to pursue higher education, necessitating extra institutional and academic support systems (Wolverton et al.)

Financial Pressures and the Rise of Entrepreneurial Universities

Universities have been forced to aggressively seek for other revenue streams due to reductions in public financing, which has turned conventional academic institutions into businesses. Branding, partnerships, and income diversification are examples of market- oriented strategies that are now essential to an institution's existence. Even though these forces may conflict with long standing academic standards and collegial traditions, higher education can no longer retreat from business realities.

Shift Toward Student-Financed Education

Students now bear a larger portion of the costs of higher education as government funding decreases. This change mirrors a large trend toward user funded education models and privatization, which raises student financial investment and modifies expectations for institutional performance, accountability and transparency.

Globalization and International Education Markets

Cross-border education and international student mobility have increased as higher education is increasingly seen as a globally traded service. Long term planning becomes more complicated and unclear when institutions are exposed to unforeseen market changes and increased international competition, even as global engagement offers intellectual and financial benefits.

Intensified Competition Among Institutions

Competition for students, resources, and reputation has increased since higher education was made more accessible to private and foreign providers. Universities currently function in a setting where it is no longer possible to assume enrollment stability, which can result in financial fragility and, in certain situations, staffing and academic program restructuring.

Quality Assurance and Academic Standards

The quick growth and commercialization of higher education have been followed by worries about academic dilution. Institutions have responded by fortifying quality assurance frameworks to guarantee uniformity in instruction, learning objectives, and student involvement, bolstering credibility in a field that is becoming more and more competitive.

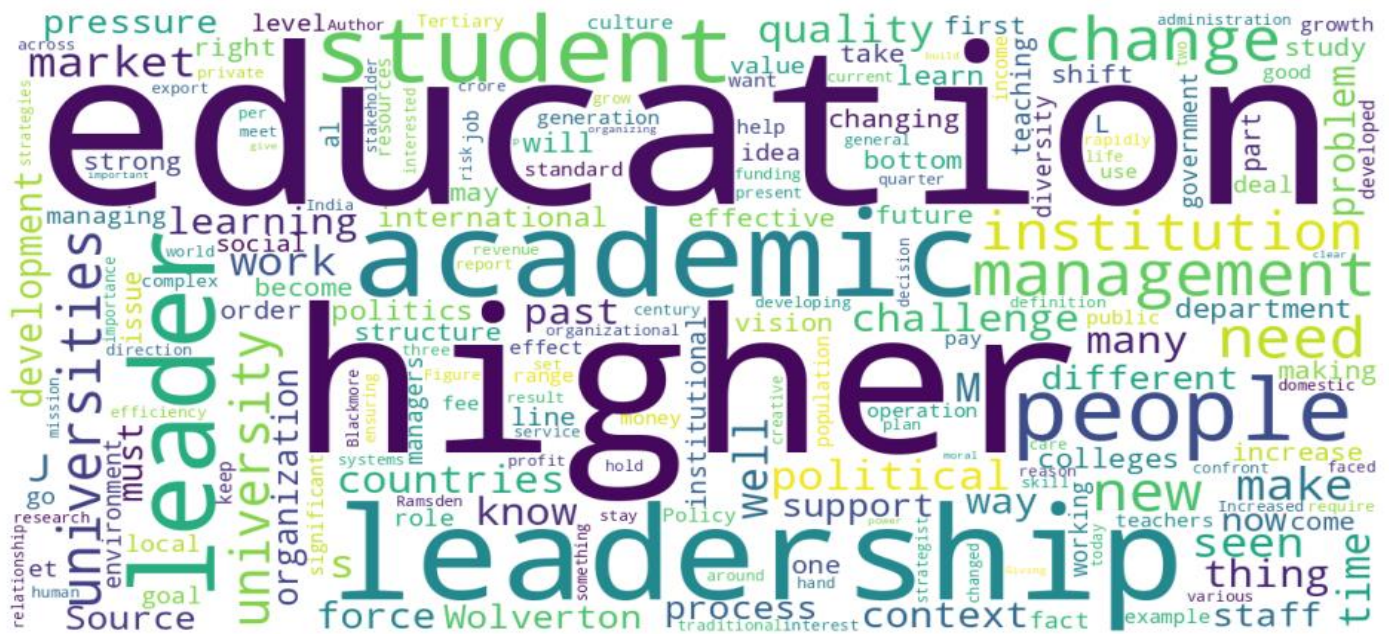
Consumer Orientation in Higher Education

A consumer driven paradigm of higher education has emerged as a result of the increased reliance on student fees. In terms of quality, employability, and educational experience, students increasingly see education as an investment and anticipate observable rewards. Blackmore and Sachs contend that this change reframes education as a positional good, changing the nature of connections between teachers and students from mainly pedagogical to increasingly contractual.

Changing Student Expectations and Learning Preferences

Students today want learning pathways that are adaptable, technologically enabled, and relevant to their

careers. Peer networks and digital platforms have a significant impact on their decisions, therefore colleges must continue to be flexible, creative and sensitive to changing student expectations.



Source: N-vivo

The prevalent and recurring ideas that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the academic leadership document are graphically represented in this word cloud. Word's prominence and size reveal their conceptual importance and frequency in the text.

Reframing Academic Leadership

Leadership Role	Core Function	Key Emphasis
Strategist & Evaluator	Enables adaptation through structure and change	Time management, organizational design, change processes, patience–persistence–process
Political Engagement	Navigates power and resource allocation	Stakeholder analysis, coalition building, ethical negotiation
Care, Well-Being & Performance	Develops people and productive environments	Communication, empowerment, teamwork, support
Visionary Interpreter	Sustains mission, meaning, and culture	Vision building, storytelling, symbols, rituals

Figure 2

Source: Author

Figure2 Description: Effective academic leadership emerges from the integration of strategic design, political skill, human care, and symbolic meaning-making)

The Leader as Strategist and Evaluator

Colleges and universities are challenging to administer and transform due to their disconnected architecture. Authority is severely limited by shared governance and autonomy rules, and inertia is considerable. This emphasizes how crucial it is for leaders to comprehend structure, pay attention to it, and do it well. The organization must pay attention to three interconnected layers of structure: (1) managing their own time; (2)

controlling the structure of their unit or organization; and (3) arranging the change process in order to increase the likelihood that they can adapt to a quickly changing environment. When planning change initiatives, the three P's of academic change- patience, persistence, and process- must be honored.

Leadership as Political Engagement

Decision-making in higher education is inherently political due to limited resources, diverse stakeholder interests, and diffuse authority structures. Academic leaders engage in intricate power structures where ethical judgement, coalition building, and negotiation are crucial. The ability to manage conflicting interests while upholding academic integrity and institutional norms is more important for effectiveness in these settings than avoiding politics (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Colleges and university administrators operate in a political environment. You must learn how to avoid it if you want to be effective. Academic managers must first confront their distaste for politics and doubts about their authority in order to accomplish this. This doesn't mean they should give up their morals and ethics; in fact, they should hold on tight to their ideals and goals for higher education. To get good results and stick to morals in a very political environment, you need to know a lot about politics, have strong skills, be empowered, have a strong moral sense, and be brave. Very successful academic leaders know how to make plans that are clear and doable, understand the political landscape, build strong networks and relationships with key stakeholders, and deal with both supporters and opponents.

Leadership for Care, Well-Being, and Performance in Higher Education

Colleges and universities depend on people, and those people are their most valuable asset. The hardest thing about being a boss is dealing with people. Institutions need to make a good place to work so that students can learn and teachers and staff can reach their full potential. Leaders in academia are successful when they can meet the goals of both the institution and its employees. In order to do this, they use basic strategies that promote growth and development that is adaptable and that build work environments that allow people to be creative and contribute:

1. Communication that is open and honest: Giving people the information they want and need.
2. Empowerment: Giving people the tools and support they need to do their jobs in a way that limits their freedom and makes their responsibility clear.
3. Effective teamwork: setting rules and giving help to make it easier for everyone to work together to solve problems and take action.
4. Support, teaching, and care: talking to people, getting to know their worries and needs, and helping them learn, grow, and be useful.
5. Hiring the right people: If you take the time to recruit and screen candidates carefully, you can make it more likely that the people you hire will be happy and effective.

The Leader as Visionary Interpreter

It is true that colleges and universities should be dedicated to truth and reason, but they become lifeless and dull without faith and emotion as well. A high level of intelligence is an important quality for higher education leaders, but academic administrators can do more if they are also spiritual leaders who help their constituents believe in and support the mission of their institution and spirited artists who put on performances that keep people interested and get them to applaud. As they know, institutions need a clear vision and purpose that both inspire and motivate people and help them make decisions and make investments. Leadership styles that are symbolic try to be very public examples of the values and goals of their organization. They make a story about the institution's past, present, and future that makes sense and is interesting to listen to. They then keep telling the story to remind people of where they've been, where they're going, and why. They know how important it is for an institution to have a strong and consistent culture, and they know what they need to do to build and

maintain that culture. It must also be well-executed artistically and meet the hopes and standards of the audience. People will not look at leaders if the symbols are wrong, if they go beyond what their people expect or what their systems can handle, or if they just give a bad show. Everyone is hurt and disappointed when things don't go as planned.

Academic leaders have a bigger effect when they (1) use the past to make a vision for the future, (2) set a good example, (3) create a heroic story and tell it a lot, and (4) use the power of ritual and ceremony.



Source: N-vivo

Description: This word tree visually demonstrates the contextual and thematic expansion of the central concept “Leadership” as it appears across the academic leadership. The branching structure reflects how leadership is discussed in multiple, interconnected contexts, consistent with NVivo’s word tree logic, where meaning unfolds through surrounding words and phrases.

Structural framework for Academic leadership in higher education

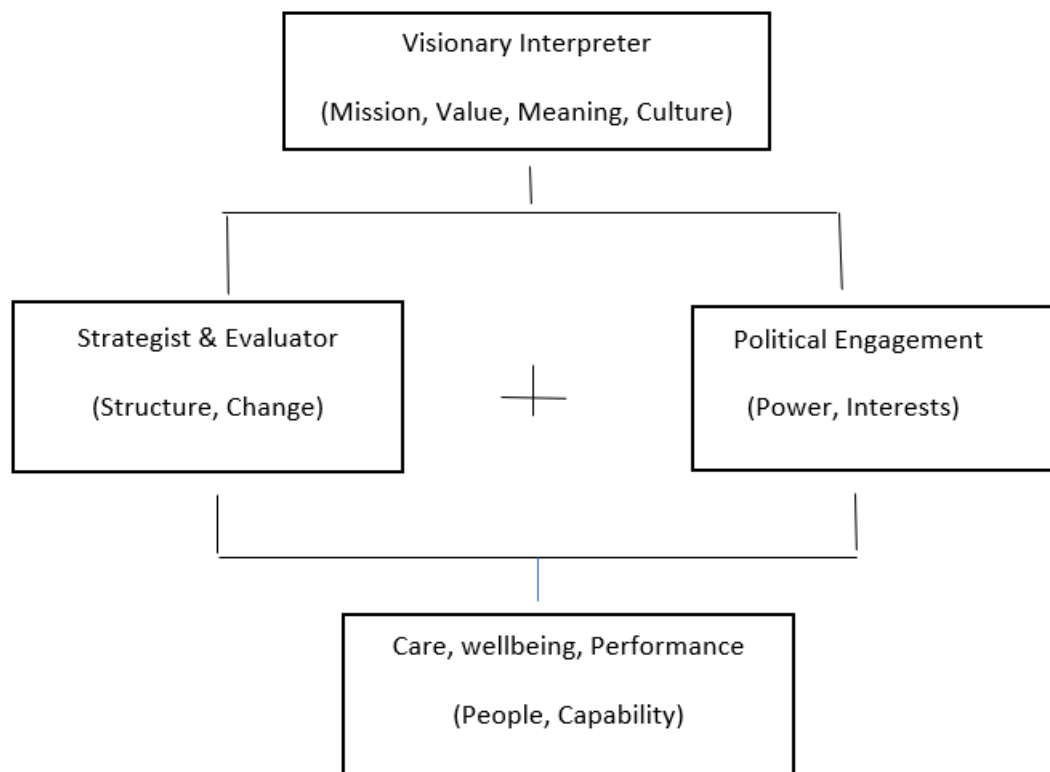


Figure 3

Source: Author

Figure3 Description: Four interrelated leadership responsibilities that are crucial in higher education are presented in this framework. In order to negotiate structural complexity interests, human needs, and institutional purpose, academic leaders concurrently functions as strategists, political actors, human-centered leaders, and visionary interpreters.

CONCLUSION

The study emphasizes how structural, economic, political, and sociocultural shifts are driving a significant restructuring of academic leadership in higher education. The complexity of modern institutions is becoming too much for traditional leadership approaches, which are mostly based on administrative control and hierarchical power. The result highlight that academic leaders work in distinctive institutional settings with outcomes that are challenging to gauge using traditional performance metrics, collegial governance, academic autonomy, and regulatory responsibility.

The analysis shows that a paradigm change toward an integrated and multifaceted framework is necessary for effective academic leadership in the modern day. In addition to being human-centred leaders who put care, well-being, and performance first, leaders must also be strategists who manage organizational structure and change, political actors who negotiate conflicting interests and resource limitations, and visionary interpreters who uphold institutional mission, culture, and meaning. In order to protect academic freedom and educational quality while addressing issues with massification, revenue generation, globalization, market rivalry, and changing student expectations, such leadership is crucial.

The study indicates that adaptable, morally sound, and purpose-driven leadership is essential to the long-term viability and relevance of higher education institutions. In order to navigate uncertainty and ensure long term

institutional success in an increasingly global and competitive higher education landscape, it is essential to prepare academic leaders with the ability to strike a balance between managerial efficiency and academic ideals.

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