

Chapter 9

Cultural Transformation and Academic Leadership: The Context of Turkish Higher Education

Yasar Kondakci

Middle East Technical University, Turkey

Merve Zayim-Kurtay

Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium

ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to elaborate on the leadership properties in the transformation in higher education across the world by advancing specific illustration from the Turkish higher education context. Three specific objectives were identified around this broad aim: (1) document the current forces of change surrounding HEIs, (2) identify the culture shift in HEIs, and (3) provide literature-based evidence for the leadership gap in the face of culture shift and develop preposition for academic leadership. Higher education institutions (HEIs) form one of the sectors which has been drastically affected from the trends and developments in the economic, political, social, and technological spheres and responded to these change forces by radical transformations that have touched their traditional and historical value systems. This chapter argues that HEIs need leadership practices to survive the crisis and conflict era successfully, which carry some properties of transformational leadership while holding the traditional academic leadership perspective.

BACKGROUND: THE IMPACT OF THE FORCES OF CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Myriad of internal and external forces push HEIs to undertake transformational changes in their structural and functional characteristics (May, 2006). Several scholars highlighted the importance of confronting these forces on the part of HEIs to ensue their survival (e.g., Chevaillier, 2002; Jeliaskova & Westerheijden, 2002). Altbach and Forest (2006) stated that growth in demand for higher education (HE), diversification, increased global interconnectedness, and advances in technology are the key forces putting

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imperative on HEIs for change. Similarly, Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008) provided a detailed list of forces that push HEIs to undertake comprehensive change in which generic forces putting pressure on organizational world in general and concrete implication of these forces on HEIs are specified. Sporn (2006), furthermore, suggested a list of key forces of change in the HE context as financial constraints, proliferation of information and communication technology, competition and marketization in the HE sector, and increasing professionalization in the academic administration, which have pushed the universities towards adopting the characteristics of Anglo-Saxon university model. In a similar way, Taylor (2006) stated that emergence of quality assurance systems, change in the funding modes, globalization and internationalization, integration of new technologies into HE, and ever-increased focus on market dynamics call for universities to adapt their organizational and structural characteristics. Decades of research attest that these forces bring about new forms of university governance, which, in turn, give rise to the development of new modes of management, leadership approaches, and work for academics (e.g., Jayasuriya, 2015; Scott et al., 2008; Sporn, 2006; Taylor, 2006). Under the influence of these forces calling for change, in addition, the traditional ideals and deeply rooted values of HEIs are challenged (Macfarlane, 2005) and HEIs have left not only with a struggle to maintain balance between these conflicting forces but also with a more complex mission to fulfill. Thus, the roles and responsibilities of academic leaders also turn to be another challenge to be more demanding and arduous (Rich, 2006; Scott et al., 2008) and the leadership displayed has become an important issue of concern to manage this cultural transformation. Similar to other developed and developing countries, Turkish HE has been also under intense pressure of change even though some structural characteristics and contextual realities prove to be obstacle. Thus, gaining deeper insight into these change forces and their implications on HEIs are crucial to embark on the transformation process with culture as one of the most important aspects and achieve managed change process in HEIs. In this respect, the major purpose of this study is to shed light on the current change forces on HEIs and explore transformational leadership as an effective leadership style to be displayed to achieve cultural transformation HEIs have been undergoing. This study also aims to discuss current reform trend in Turkish HE system and utilize transformational leadership as an additional lens to the current management practices and guide the future ones in Turkey.

Forces of Change and Implications on HEIs

Different scholars elaborated on the detailed impact of each of these developments on HEIs. First, the shrinking public resources and new modes of finance have had major impacts on teaching and research practices (Simsek, 1999). HEIs, thus, have been in a rush for finding new financial sources to sustain their research and teaching and ensure the quality of their practices. They basically involved in entrepreneurial activities (e.g., technology transfer, investing in technology, knowledge transfer, and start-up firms), fundraising activities, and initiating new modes of academic delivery (e.g., privatization, developing paid programs, and competing for limited research funds). Jayasuriya (2015) affirmed that increasing cuts in public funds in the UK, USA, and Australia have pushed the universities into marketization, which resulted in the development of a corporate culture. The author elaborated on this cultural shift at universities accompanied by these developments and stated that “rather than eroding the ideological function that ‘public good’ plays in shaping the public university, these changes have reconstituted the nature and character of the public university” (p. 974). Additionally, global economic rationalism has been suggested to result in new modes of performance evaluation (e.g., English publications), which subsequently impacted the dominant academic culture in Hong Kong (Lin, 2009). Universities tend to

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