

Chapter 18

Enhancing Educational Leadership in Transnational Higher Education

Gareth Richard Morris

The Perse School Suzhou, China

James Morris

IT Project Management, UK

Lei Li

Suzhou Science and Technology Town Foreign Language School, China

ABSTRACT

In every industry and field, and at every institutional level, good leadership is essential. Equally significant is the remit a leader is tasked with fulfilling, and the point in time at which this is expected and the situation one must work within, alongside the context. This all makes defining good leadership and good leaders fraught with difficulty, as what may work well in one situation, may not work so well in another. For transnational higher education, the situation is complicated further because providers can vary in terms of location, size, complexity, context, and remit. It is also challenging because of the ongoing COVID pandemic. Consequently, this chapter will briefly introduce transnational higher education, along with the idea of what successful and effective leadership constitutes. It will then go on to consider different leadership styles before examining a specific transnational higher education provider and discussing some of the leadership approaches and features that have been evidenced in a specific academic school at this institution over the past decade.

INTRODUCTION

Good leadership and management are essential in all industries and fields, and for all entities. This is because good leadership enhances the likelihood of success, however this may be defined. It also increases the probability that institutional effectiveness, however, it is measured, can be improved. What defines good leadership though is somewhat open to debate as it arguably encompasses many qualities, traits, behaviours, and skills, as Krakoff (2020), Watt (2009), Bryman (2008) and Eastwood (2020) highlight. Success and effectiveness may also be considered based on the remit that a leader is tasked with fulfilling, and dependent upon the point in time, context, and situation in which a leader must work. Put simply, this makes defining good leadership and leaders more challenging than it might at first appear as what may work well in one situation and with one group of people may not work so well in another. This is evidenced across professions and time periods.

For transnational higher education, the situation is complicated further because providers can vary in terms of structure, size, context, and remit among other considerations. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has only added to the challenges as onsite, online, and various hybrid forms of blended delivery feature, making an already complex situation even more complicated. Indeed, the working world was already increasingly challenging and unpredictable pre pandemic as the work of Orazbayeva et al. (2020) illustrated. It is also important that leadership and management are studied in a transnational higher education content for a variety of reasons. Firstly, there is very limited research regarding leadership and management in this under-researched educational area. Secondly, transnational higher education is a lucrative, important, and evolving domain, made more challenging to lead in due to macro global geopolitical developments. Thirdly, on an institutional level, good leadership can aid recruitment and retention initiatives and guard against damning reviews of employment sites like glassdoor; a significant consideration for transnational higher education providers. In addition, educators need good supportive leadership to do their job to the best of their ability. This is vital because the future of education, as Stephen Hawking (2018) states “lies in schools and inspiring teachers”.

On that note, this chapter will begin by introducing background context to the case study higher education institution. Theories of educational leadership and management will then be considered. The methodologies of the various research studies which form the basis of this work will then be briefly introduced, prior to the results from these being discussed. Finally, the implications will be considered with recommendations made for transnational higher education leaders, managers and administrators.

BACKGROUND

International Higher Education: On the premise that education is regarded as the engine room for future creativity, ingenuity and economic development (Watt, Richardson and Smith, 2017), it is unsurprising that in China schooling, or learning, at all levels is deemed to be essentially important. Cai and Hall (2016) highlight the important demand to internationalise higher education nationally, while Trembath (2016) notes the potential this has for future global competitiveness. The implications of all of this are that, pre COVID-19, a reasonable number of international institutions were able to start operations within the country often operating like multinational subsidiaries. Indeed, the internationalisation of higher education, in which transnational providers played an important role, has been useful in evolving educational provision (Morris, 2021a).

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