

Leadership in Higher Education

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The purpose of the study was primarily concerned with exploring the major issues that are confronting presidents of higher education and the transformational leadership practices and concepts warranted in addressing today's issues. A Delphi technique was used with a broad-based panel of 52 experts who were university presidents in the United States. The expert panel provided input to 41 distinct indicators that included a list of concerns, issues, management practices and concepts, and effective leadership qualities. These indicators were force rated through three rounds to determine levels of agreement and consensus determined from medians and interquartile ranges for each indicator. Specifically, the study determined the following: 1) The major issues confronting college/university presidents; and 2) The major issues confronting college/university presidents are susceptible to transformational leadership practices and concepts.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education can become the central player in reshaping the quality of leadership in America. The focal point of this transformation would begin with college/university presidents setting the tone. They could begin with rethinking their roles, practices, and beliefs, by implementing transformational practices and concepts with the explicit goal of producing future generations of effective leaders.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided foundation data for this study and for decision makers of higher education as they seek to improve the environment for institutions of higher education.

1. What are the major issues confronting college presidents?
2. Are the major issues confronting college presidents susceptible to transformational leadership practices and concepts?

Overview

Higher education is at a crossroads where it must redefine its mission accompanied with measurement standards as to how it is going to meet the needs and obligations to citizens demanding higher education in the 21st century. Higher education is facing the impact of globalization/internationalization, the development of information and advance communicative technologies, rapid change in demand in employment, economic challenges to funding, and the critical need for highly qualified educators who have practical experience in their discipline.

Accordingly, these factors will create a need for a partnership atmosphere with educators, state governments, and businesses as higher education continues to realize enrollment expansion. This can begin only with effective leaders as presidents of institutions of higher education employing transformational concepts and practices who comprehend the situation and provide visions of the changes and directions that will be necessary to achieve this atmosphere.

This study is significant because the beneficiaries from the delivery of this study process will be the citizens and society, as education and knowledge are the cornerstone of society's growth, development evolution and continuance. The providers of this delivery are the presidents, and the effectiveness or notoriety of the university falls upon the president. This study provides additional understanding of the traits, management practices, and concepts found in an academic leader.

This Delphi study was designed to determine the expressed acumen, traits, and characteristics common to the expert panel, who may be considered transformational leaders and are presidents of institutions of higher education. A three-round Delphi technique of inquiry was used to survey a panel of presidents of higher education institutions who may be considered transformational. Findings included a ranking of opinions as to the acumen and characteristics that are reflected in these presidents' leadership and decision making.

Procedures

The communication channels were postal service, email, and telephone. The instrument was questionnaires that require numerical forced ranking of statements. The instrument was tested by obtaining the forced ranking from the expert panel. Questionnaires had formulated inquiries as to the building of relationships reflecting the interactive, mutual, and shared nature of transforming leader behaviors. Questionnaires were structured for anonymity, and communication to the expert panel was by mail. The population was presidents of accredited higher education institutions in the United States as listed in the 2007 Higher Education Directory®, the 25th anniversary edition as published by Higher Education Publications, Inc. This is a directory of accredited postsecondary, degree-granting institutions in the United States recognized as accrediting bodies by the U.S. Secretary of Education and by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. This directory includes both public and private higher education institutions.

The names of presidents associated with these institutions of higher education who were selected as expert panel members came from this directory. An institution was chosen utilizing a random numbering selection criterion from the Random Number Generator in Excel™ software. The president listed as associated with this random selected institution became the targeted prospective expert panel member.

Results

The summary results of the three invitations were a total of 300 offerings with an expert panel of 52. Each member was assigned a unique number for researcher accounting and tabulation responses. This unique number was used throughout all three of the rounds of ranking which allowed for ease in the summarization of data. Beyond the individual's willingness to participate in the study, he/she also met the following qualifications:

1. Current position as a president of an institution of higher education.
2. President of an institution of higher education in the United States.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The distinction between transactional and transformational leadership practices and concepts in higher education may not be as clear as traditionally believed.
- University presidents recognize the critical need for devoting time in providing all stakeholders of their higher education institution with a vision, purpose, and with values that result in a clear and consistent direction.

- University presidents recognize that establishing an environment of excellence in the performance of their institution for higher education inspires trust in their leadership as well as energizes the complete organization including faculty, staff, and students.
- University presidents realize that their major challenge in introducing change at their institutions of higher education is the traditional and historical structures of culture with its accompanying policies and procedures.
- Both transactional and transformational leadership practices and concepts will have to be applied at an institution of higher education to ensure change due to the reluctance of tenured faculty and staff to consider changes due to personal impact.
- The situation and environment of reduction in state and/or government funding to higher education will require critical application of transactional and transformational leadership practices and concepts to ensure that an institution of higher education succeeds in its purpose of learning.
- For an institution of higher education to be successful, its president must have the individual quality of commitment demonstrated with passion, intensity, and persistence which will supply the energy to momentum, and motivate and stimulate the stakeholders to strive toward a group effort.
- A university president's competency in knowledge, leadership skills, and technical expertise is necessary to ensure the successful completion of a transformational effort.
- The attribute of authenticity must reside within the university president's acumen so that there is consistency between his/her actions and most deeply felt values and beliefs.
- The climate and relationships with an atmosphere and environment of both transactional and transformational leadership within higher education requires further research.

Limitations

The following limitations pertain to this study:

1. Research did not include management theory, as presented in business colleges by educators or by management practitioners or theorists, prior to 1965.
2. Restrictive boundaries were placed by the researcher on phenomena relating to institutions of higher education whose purpose is the development of technical skills, commonly referred to as technical schools, even though many of these have now become accredited and offer both bachelor and master's degrees.
3. Restrictive boundaries were placed by the researcher on training schools developed by corporate America whose programs may have become accredited to offer degrees.

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