WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE LEADER?

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Abstract: This paper aims to evaluate what makes an effective leader as perceived in private universities in Albania. Interviews were carried out through administration of a questionnaire of forty-seven participants in the selected university. At the conclusion of each questionnaire, the participants were asked to highlight what makes an effective leader as per their perception of what a leader is in the institution. The findings revealed that a trustworthy leader and who exhibits a high level of integrity makes an effective leader. Additionally, it is their role to provide direction for the institution, primarily for the leaders at the executive level that is involved in policy administration and adoption.
Key words: Leader, Higher Education, effective leadership

1. Introduction

Two decades after the collapse of the communist regime, higher education in Albania has continuously been suffering the impacts of the centralized and public education system that defined the country in the previous years. Nonetheless, current trends, such as the internationalization of higher education, which is an emerging necessity, is still lowly adopted. As per the country's Ministry of Education and Science, the institutions that offer higher education in the country are thirteen public universities and thirty-eight private universities (Ministry of Education and Science, 2020). More than sixty thousand students are pursuing courses in the institutions, with only a few of them having internationalized their programs. The role of leaders in higher education institutions has been a topic that has been attracting significant interest over the years. The rationale behind the interest is due to the influence of the institutions in developing future leaders of society and the changing shape of leadership in high education institutions where it faces significant global bottlenecks in the sector (Kalargyrou & Woods, 2009). Over the years, several contextual shifts have been experienced in the high education sector in Albania in terms of institution globalization. This has been due to the development of private institutions meant for profit-making, elevated "cross-border academic mobility," and the institutions' internalization (Sotirofski, 2011).

Leaders in higher education institutions ought to evaluate significant ways through which they can lead their organizations. Additionally, they are tasked with finding essential approaches that fit in their respective institutions. In the academic sector, the leadership roles feature many anomalies, unlike in the traditional executive roles that resemble structures found in other sectors. In the educational sector, the roles of the leaders are unusual and feature myriad complications.

Currently, learners have more opportunities concerning their university selection for both academic and professional development. They often opt for institutions that promise them a higher quality of education, best services, and affordable costs. They opt for universities that reassure them when making a significant investment in their lives, such as opting for the right institution for their undergraduate studies (Bruçaj, 2019). As such, many institutions are developing distinct managerial strategies that aim to elevate their organizational performance and the quality of education they offer to the learners.

Albania has been rapidly experiencing a continual shift in educational needs for its citizens in the last decade. Private institutions have been gradually sprouting, and as recorded

earlier, there are more than thirty private institutions in the country. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Albanian government opted to implement the policies regarding the starting of private higher education that has resulted in an increase in the number of private universities (Bruçaj, 2019).

The expansion of the sector calls for the quality of services and the leadership role in ensuring the learners admitted at such a facility get to return and value for their investments. This paper aims to evaluate what makes effective leadership as perceived in a private university in Albania. Leadership is integral to any institution's progress, and the lack of an effective leader will lead all the activities to shambles and, subsequently, the collapse of the institution as a whole. However, organizational structures exist in such institutions at the top executive and department levels (Kalargyrou & Woods, 2009). In evaluating what makes up an effective leader at the university levels, the study will involve the development of a questionnaire that will be completed by employees.

2. Literature Review

Traditionally, the leadership concept can be described as a process or activity that involves influencing the activities of a group as a way of promoting efforts towards both goal setting and achievements. Currently, leadership concepts integrate various other concepts and distinct approaches. The approaches and ideas adopted include a transformative, visionary, and charismatic leadership whereby leaders are treated as managing meaning instead of just goal achievement and follower motivation. According to Kalargyrou and Woods (2009) "Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles". It is vital to comprehend the private university staff's perception of leadership roles and responsibilities to ensure the learning goals are achieved and measures are integrated to ensure quality education.

Leadership is one of the vital factors for the advancement of private institutions of higher education. Bryman (2009) states the characteristics of leaders both at the departmental and institutional level. They include; providing direction for the institution to progress, developing a structure to foster the development of the direction, promoting a supportive and collaborative environment for the institution to sore high, establishing trustworthiness, being a person of high integrity, play the role model, facilitate the consultation process as well as a decision-making process, and respect the respective departments of the institutions in advancing their cause while networking on its behalf (Bryman, 2009). Other characteristics highlighted by the author include respecting the existing culture and still instilling values that are intertwined with the institution or department's mission and vision and ensure the staff autonomy is protected (Black, 2015). Leadership in universities, whether private or public, is meant to elevate the institution's performance while utilizing all the available human resources effectively while ensuring the recruited staff is of great significance in the institution's progress.

The effectiveness of a leader is associated with the institution's ability to ensure its objectives are achieved. According to Sotirofski (2011), instructional leadership in private institutions often prioritize the educational programs, continued and sustained academic excellence, and the teaching process issues. Additionally, influential leaders are categorized as schedule leaders who are tasked with identifying and developing problems within the institution's environment and integrating instructional goals and objectives (Bryman, 2007; Nathanaili, 2018). Such leaders, who utilize the approach, are more involved in promoting high education standards and ensuring the assessment and inspection are significant of their employees.

In Albania, a recent development that involves the programs internalization and massification has led to an increase in the strengthening of the major factors to ensure quality education is provided in the universities. Private

universities have been at the forefront to ensure the awareness is taken into account the competition brought about by new private universities and colleges (Nathanaili, 2018). Here, an effective leader's role is integrated to ensure such policies are developed through the private sector. According to Black (2015), for an institution to achieve a fulfilling and ensures the learners' needs are taken into account, a continuous improvement platform is necessary under quality and effective leader (Black, 2015). Such a leader works in collaboration with other departments to ensure continuous improvement while developing a quality system that ensures fear is reduced, teamwork, measurement, as well as recognition and rewards, are offered to ensure there is quality in the services that are being offered at various private institutions in the country.

Successful private universities in the country have a long-term vision of ensuring their programs are internationalized to attract international students. As Bruçaj (2019) denotes, such institutions thrive on visionary and strategic approaches within their leadership and management structure. Influential leaders in such institutions are well focused, both internally and externally, ensuring excellent collaboration with partners and staff coordination that ensures a motivation climate (Nathanaili, 2018). Despite the challenges they encounter in leadership, they manage to ensure quality education is provided with the limited resources available. Ultimately, effective leaders foster the teaching quality and emphasize the institution's significance in the research activities development. As such, this paper aims to evaluate what makes an effective leader in universities. In the evaluation, the paper will take into account the evidence from a private university in Albania.

3. Methodology

In evaluating what makes an effective leader in universities, the study concentrated on a private university in Albania. In the university, fourty- seven employees were selected to fill in a questionnaire to understand what makes an effective leader in their institution. The evaluation was limited by the utilization of a single university that represented a small sample size that accounted for only one of the total private universities in the country.

A total of fourty-seven employees at the selected university were involved in filling the questionnaire that featured the questions concerning what makes an effective leader, according to their experience and perception. Through the university mailing list, departmental employees and executive management level employees were contacted through their email addresses.

The questionnaire featured both closed-ended and open-ended questions about leadership effectiveness. The questionnaire had two sections, with the initial section featuring closed-ended questions while the second part featured open-ended questions. Each participant was urged to set aside approximately fifteen minutes to respond to the questions presented to ensure the continual flow of thoughts and presentation of the answers. They were given two days after which there were supposed to send their filled questionnaire. At the end of the two days, fourty participants managed to send their responses while seven failed.

4. Analysis and Evaluating the Analysis Results

In the context of an effective leader, the analysis of the responses highlighted a number of aspects that define an effective leader's behavior. An effective leader was presented as being trusted and featuring individual integrity by the participants. A trusted leader who features individual integrity was the most recurrent behavior among the participants. Trust and integrity are two intertwined concept that the respondent highlighted as essential for an effective leader. Effective leaders ought to feature humility, honesty while instilling trust in their team. Trust is a key ingredient and the employees out to know that a leader is ready to fight for them whenever a situation arises. Further, more than half of the participants

highlighted that an effective leader is the one that is supportive of the staff at their disposal. This characteristic was frequently mentioned in the question that required the participants to answer while using a real-life scenario involving a leader in higher education institutions and what they thought was effective for such a leader. To assert their claims, the participants agreed that a supportive leader is often interested in their staff while ensuring they have significant time to talk and commit to knowing their needs. This way, they help everyone at their disposal to achieve the stipulated goals and consider their vast interests and handle them significantly.

Another significant characteristic highlighted by a significant number of the participants as a quality of an effective leader was the ability to consult others concerning different choices that require meaningful decision making at various stages in running the institution or institutional department. The participants cited such a leader as the one who reflects on the employee's values since they are consulted frequently in carrying the institution's objectives or the department. Integrating others' views within the universities helps inform the decisions made while taking into account the opinions of those leading to a higher probability of succeeding correctively (Nathanaili, 2018).

A leader's act to inculcate unambiguous values meant to help others in comprehension and appreciation of the directions they are taken touted as a characteristic of an effective leader. One of the participants, who had held a leadership position earlier in their life, stated that values are significant as they help make the institution activities more meaningful and inclusive for the staff. For instance, a leader ought to frame the reality so that the people they are leading delves into their ideas while viewing them as meaningful and beneficial to their interest for growth career-wise (Bryman, 2009).

A sense of direction as a characteristic of an effective leader in universities was intertwined with the leader's ability to inculcate a transparent set of values. 25% of the respondents, supported the attribute. The characteristic addresses the clarity of both values and direction as provided by a leader. Private universities are well managed and require a strategic leader who is ready and willing to make the best out of the available opportunities for the institution's growth. Leaders who feature such a characteristic aims at developing a strategy and marketing it among the employees and oversee the strategy enacting process, as the staff gets along with the idea. The highlighted characteristics are consistent with the leadership requirement in most of the private universities in the country. Collectively, as per the findings of this study, we can conclude that the characteristics of a leader, at both the institutional and departmental level in private universities includes;

1.The ability to provide direction for the institution/department,

2.Developing structures aimed at supporting the provided direction, ensuring and fostering a surrounding that is both collaborative and supportive,

3.Trustful personnel who has the ability to establish trustworthiness,

4.Exercising personal integrity,

5.Being a role model to their team,

6.Incorporating the staff at their disposal in consultation with the help of informing a decision-making process,

7.Ensuring timely communication concerning various developments,

8.Networking on behalf of their team while representing their respective levels to advancing their cause,

9.Considering and respect the established culture and integrate values that are informed with a clear vision and ensure staff autonomy is protected.

5. Findings

The findings presented herewith were the ones that focused on the objective of the study, which was determining the characteristics of an effective leader in university institutions. Further, the styles of leadership and the approaches employed were evident from the

respondent's answers. The main questions concentrated more on leadership effectiveness. They were vital in providing essential insights into an effective leader's roles and what they perceive as being effective in leadership roles. Further, the questions that addressed both effectiveness and university leadership were of great help. Each participant was equally instructed to provide insights concerning the effective leadership they are familiar with in the private university they operate in. More specifically, characteristics of the effective leader in universities materialized significantly among all the participants.

Deducing from the responses sent by the respondents, the following was the summary of what makes an effective leader. An effective leader is supportive of his employees/staff and involves them in consultations and processes of decision making. Effective leadership incorporates the inculcation of values integral in helping others comprehend and embrace the leader's direction as well as consulting the staff at their disposal. Further, effective leading calls for a sense of direction whilst being cautious and protective of their staff. As such, as presented in the participants' responses, effective leadership is consistent with most of the literature reviewed concerning the university leadership in Albania. While the participants did not provide a compatible list of effective leadership behavior, majority acknowledge the highlighted aspects are significant in determining an effective leader.

6. Conclusions

This study's findings are consistent with the literature review, as presented by Posner and Locke, in a report compiled by Bryman (2009). It reviews significant attributes of an effective leader within the selected university in the country. This implies that effective leadership perception and behavior are somehow universal in the administration of higher institutions in Albania. In the context of both departmental leadership and university leadership, the participants highlighted almost similar characteristics.

The fact that the finding are consistent with the literature review serves as a reassurance since a divergence would raise query concerning the whole study. As such, there are clear message from the participants highlighting what makes an effective leader in their respective institutions. As derived from the responses of the participants who filled the questionnaire, creating and ensuring the trust is maintained, giving a definite sense of direction, and ensuring the values that define leadership are integrated by a leader, then the holders of such roles are effective. Additionally, an effective leader protects his/her staff and it is imperative that they do not take grudges while taking responsibility for failures of their teams. Supervisory role by the leaders can be performed closely whilst being involved in the decision making process. Ineffective employees leads to ineffective leaders and as such, they are all an institution and an effective leader can lead a team to be effective. Such attributes not only highlights the leader effectiveness but also ensure the employees roles are stress free whilst ensuring there is job satisfaction and consequently productivity and progress.

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