

Administrators of public universities in the current context

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ABSTRACT: *Governance is essential in the development of a public university. In university governance, the administrator plays a pivotal role. If governance is the factor that contributes to the success of a university, the administrator must be the one who takes a decisive role in the success of all governing activities. In the context of our country's higher education system, in which fundamental changes are taking place, the university administrators are required to possess certain qualities and competencies. They need to be fully fostered to obtain those qualities and competencies.*

KEYWORDS: Governance; administrators; competence; quality; public university.

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1. Rationale

University governance is currently both a theoretical and practical issue that attracts concern in the academic world. Many authors have emphasized the important role of governance in the development of universities. According to Baldrige (1971), good governance is the heart of higher education; governing activities form the destiny of a university. Proper university governance is the decisive factor that determines the success or failure of any university. When considering the significance of university governance concerning the quality of higher education, Henard and Mitterle (2009) pointed out that the university governance had become the main leverage tool to improve the quality in all areas of higher education. According to Shattock (2006), university governance is one of the “important pieces” of any higher education system. The improvement of this activity may exert a significant effect on improving the quality of education of the whole higher education system. The fundamental element that makes a university the world's leading one can be attributed to the leading system of governance. In the meantime, Salmi (2009) listed key factors of a prestigious international university, including: a focus on aptitude/competence (students, teaching staff, research, internationalization); abundant resources (public funding, revenue, tuition, research grants);

favorable governance (regular support structure, autonomy in training, leadership team, strategic vision, superior culture). Thus, according to Salmi (ibid.), favorable governance is one of the three factors of a prestigious international university. However, how to conduct governing activities of a university depends on the quality and competence of the administrators. Therefore, it is an urgent issue to implement research to determine the role, the quality and competence requirements for the administrators, from which a training program can be built to improve the quality and competence of the administrators.

2. Research content

2.1. The roles of public university administrators

In a university, the administrators usually play the following roles:

i) Leadership role

With this role, the university administrators must be able to come up with the university's manifesto and mission; at the same time outline the university's strategic development plan for the next 5-10 years, along with many important policies on the fields of organization, personnel, academic and finance of the University. Besides, with a leadership role, the administrators are required to know how to encourage their staff members to complete assigned tasks.

ii) Linkage role

Gradually, universities have to expand their relationship with many stakeholders and societal organizations, for instance, the labor market, businesses, employers, sponsors, etc. Each of them has its unique characteristics and has different effects on universities. Therefore, the administrators must find the right way to establish a relationship so that the stakeholders can take advantage of their strengths to actively participate in the development of the university. In associating with stakeholders, the administrators must constantly pay attention to the interests of the stakeholders. To this end, it is necessary to build a linkage mechanism between the university and the stakeholders, in which the administrators play the most important role.

iii) Communication role

Within the university, the administrator plays a role as the information processing center, the one who communicates and disseminates information, in addition to being the university's spokesperson. All information released from and received by the university must be "*filtered*" by the administrators. Thanks to this "*filter*", information disseminating to university members and other stakeholders are not "*jammed*", is always mainstream information; helping the university management and administration can be done effectively.

iv) Creative role

This is considered as a vital role of the university administration. Under the impact of the fourth industrial revolution (Industrial Revolution 4.0), higher education is changing drastically and deeply. New university models such as *Smart University*, *Entrepreneurial University*, *Innovative University*, etc have been increasingly becoming a popular trend (Pham Thi Ly, 2008). The characteristics of these new university models are based on intelligence universities, data science, and digital technology. To govern universities in the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 requires the administrators to be highly creative. The role of the administrators is not only to help the university adapt to the Industrial Revolution 4.0 but more importantly, to make sure that university can have a worthy significant contribution to the development of

the Industrial Revolution 4.0.

v) Controlling roles

At university, the administrator is considered to be the controller. In this role, the administrator must regularly review the decisions and policies issued to bring to light irrational problems in decisions and policies for timely adjustments. In the field of university governance, compared to the personnel sector, the financial sector often experiences more changes, due to the variance of the state's financial and accounting policies. The academic field is, however, less likely to change.

vi) The role of resource coordination

Resources for universities are often limited, especially in terms of financial resources. When universities exercise autonomy, this resource becomes more and more difficult to access, because the state budget provided is becoming much scarcer than before. Therefore, the administrator must know how to coordinate the resources (finance, facilities, human resources, etc) for the operational and developmental needs of the university. Based on the tasks of each academic year, the development strategy of the university, the administrators decide whether the priority should be given to investing resources in this field/unit or other fields/units. Any scattered investment is not only effective but also a waste of university resources.

vii) Role of negotiation

In this role, the administrator has to meet stakeholders to discuss issues that have not been agreed upon. Typically, disagreements are often involved with the benefits that the university is required to please the stakeholders. These conflicts can also occur within the university when a policy of the administrator is not appropriate. The administrator must be the one who "*solves conflicts*" with a "*neutral agreement*" between the interests of the university and the interests of stakeholders. Therefore, negotiation is a very important part of the overall work of university administrators.

2.2. Quality and competency requirements for public university administrators

For the governance to be effective, the administrators must have these following

qualities and competencies:

i) Have a strong will and desire to succeed

Governance is an activity that requires university administrators to be brave. Sometimes the bravery can be expressed beyond the boundary set by the existing psychological - mental qualities of the administrators. At times of trouble when the administrators must answer the question “*to be or not to be*”, they need to be unwaveringly confident. Supposing that the university was a ship, then only when having those extraordinary qualities, could the administrator be able to steer “*the ship*” over the rapid flows of water to reach the new shores where “many passengers are waiting for the ship to use the goods the ship is carrying” (Vukasovic, p.205]. Along with that strong will, the university administrator must have an aspiration to achieve success. If there was no desire to move forward, no matter how skillful and knowledgeable the administrator is, he or she would not be able to achieve success. Psychologists have considered aspiration to succeed as a personal psychological quality which has a close relationship with the motive of human activity. Therefore, to become a successful administrator, the administrator must have the desire to achieve a certain position of authority, must be willing to accept competition with others, must desire to assert themselves and dare to take responsibility, must desire to show their rights and power to others, must have their style of behavior in public, must have a sense of responsibility when performing daily tasks related to management work, etc.

ii) Have strategic and creative thinking

Although the governance of the university is required to comply with general principles, when applied to each specific university, the administrator must be creative. According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, creativity is “to generate new value whether it is material or spiritual”; “to find new things, new solutions, which do not depend on and is not restricted by the existing one” (Hoang Phe, p.847). Thus, creativity is the ability to create new things. The inventions might be new ideas, new principles, new technological processes, new problem-solving methods, new material, and spiritual

products, etc. Accordingly, creativity is present in any fields of human activities. For the field of university governance, creativity must be firstly shown itself in the system of governance and the organizational structure to maintain and improve the effectiveness of the university operation. In the current context, when universities are moving towards the model of University 4.0 which is characterized by creativity and entrepreneurship, a university administrator must be creative and entrepreneurial. Only when possessing those capacities, can the administrators help the university not only adapt but also make a certain contribution to the Industry Revolution 4.0. University administrators must also have strategic thinking to guide the development of the university through mission statement and vision. Determining the right mission and vision is important for the university. When defining the mission and vision, the administrators must vividly visualize the image of his university for the next 10 years, 20 years or beyond, to set short, medium and long-term goals for the development of the university.

iii) Ability to connect and persuade others

The highest goal of the university administrator is to formulate the attitudes, values and meet the expectations of stakeholders inside and outside the university. This goal requires university administrators to be able to connect and persuade others. Without this ability, it is difficult for the administrators to direct their members to a positive attitude and pursue the core values of the university. Even if the policy put forward by the administrators is right, if they do not know how to mobilize and persuade others, the mission still cannot be fulfilled. The administrators also must know how to gain the credit from the stakeholders, helping them to trust the innovation and development of the university, instill the hope and expectations in them about the prospect of the university not only in the present but also in the future.

iv) Ability to lead the university to adapt to the changes of socio-economic environment and science and technology

The socio-economic environment of countries around the world is undergoing drastic and

profound changes. For Vietnam, the socialist-oriented market economy has been profoundly affecting the whole society and its institutions, including the higher education sector. Over the past decades, Vietnam's higher education has been associated with the development of a market economy. The market economy has both had a positive influence and posed challenges to the operational mechanism of higher education in Vietnam, resulting in fundamental changes in the theory and practice of university governance in our country. These changes require that the administrators should be more adaptive to fulfill the university leadership mission that is to move forward. Not only has the socio-economic environment changed, but also the science and technology environment is undergoing a drastic and profound change. The Industrial Revolution 4.0 has become the driving force for all innovation and development on a global scale. To adapt to the Industry Revolution 4.0, higher education must possess the following characteristics: Career-oriented training; Academic research-oriented and combined with innovation; Innovative activities in the startup ecosystem; Innovative activities based on smart university, data science, and digital technology; Higher autonomy mechanism in relationship with agencies and businesses; The internationalization activities operated towards promoting innovation; The harmonious development between the goal of capitalizing knowledge assets, increasing the economic value of universities and creating resonant values for businesses and the community. How to build a 4.0 university? What does it mean by university governance 4.0? These are questions that university administrators must be familiar with and then have to find ways to answer and solve them.

v) *Knowledge of the law and university governance*

To govern a university effectively, the administrators must have a broad understanding of political, socio-economic, cultural-educational and global issues. There are two fields of knowledge that the administrators must master: knowledge of law and knowledge of university governance. Knowledge of laws

helps the administrator to promulgate policies for each field of activity, operate autonomy and self-responsibility mechanism and govern the university's resources within the legislative framework. Knowledge of university governance helps the administrator to achieve success in their activities. Fielden has developed a formula for effective university governance, which is "to have background knowledge, understanding of organization and leadership skills" (2008, p.187). All three factors are directly related to the knowledge of university governance.

vi) *The ability of effective governance of university resources*

The university's resources include human, facilities and financial resources. Of those resources, human resources play the most important role. For resources to be properly allocated and used optimally, they need to be effectively governed. The task of the administrator is to balance resources, prioritize investment in the field/unit to create a "breakthrough" in the development of the university. In the context of limited resources for university activities, the administrator must have a strategy to develop resources, promote the human factor, pay attention to building a team of "potential talents", as an invaluable resource of the university.

The above requirements on quality and capacity for university administrators are considered as some basic stakes to create a portrait of university administrators in the current context. In particular, the core value of the administrators is to have *the courage and aspiration* to succeed while the basic competence of the administrator is *to be able to lead the university to adapt to the changes of the socio-economic and scientific-technological environment*. To acquire these competencies and qualities, the administrator needs to constantly learn and practice.

2.3. Refresher training program to improve the quality and capacity of public university administrators

i) *Objectives of the refresher training program*

- Program goals: To improve the capacity of the university administrators to meet the

requirements of renovating higher education in Vietnam in the context of international integration.

- Specific objectives of the program:

1) Regarding knowledge, learners are equipped with: Common concepts used in university governance; Basic knowledge about the system of university governance; models of modernization; University governance mechanisms; Solutions to improve the efficiency of the university governance; Quality and competency requirements for administrators at different levels (university, department / staff and department/center; subject level); Researching university management science;

2) In terms of skills, learners are trained some skills such as: skills to lead; skills to communicate; skills to create something new; skills to take control; skills to coordinate resources; skills to negotiate; skill to access to advanced foreign university governance models ...;

3) About attitudes, helping learners to: raise the professional awareness, morality and behavior of administrators of public universities; Continuing to foster the passion and excitement for the public university administrators; Demonstrating an objective and scientific attitude in the governance of public universities.

ii) Participants of the program

The administration staff of public universities includes Party Committee, University Council, Board of Rectors; Chief, Deputy Dean / Training Institute; Head, Deputy Head of Department / Center; Head, Deputy Head of Department;

Other cadres and lecturers in need.

iii) Program content

- Total minimum knowledge volume: 60 periods, including: Theory: 15 periods; Discussion, practice: 15 periods; Self-study: 30 periods.

iv) Distribution of training programs (Table 1)

v) Description of the content of the minimum required knowledge

- The commonly used concepts in university governance: governance, university governance, university governance model, mechanism operating university governance.

- Basic knowledge about university management: Factors of university governance (internal factors, external factors); University governance system (Higher education system administration; internal university administration); Contents and methods of university administration; The models of university governance in the world and the methods of application in Vietnam (American university governance model, British university governance model; Australian university governance model; governance model university of Singapore); Requirements for the mechanism of operating the university governance model.

- Quality and competency requirements for university governance: Having the strong will and aspiration to succeed; Have strategic and creative thinking; Ability to connect and persuade others; Being able to lead the university to adapt to the changes of the socio-economic science and technology environment; Knowledge of the law;

Table 1: Distribution of training programs

No.	Content of the training	Number of periods	Theory	Discussion, practice	Self-study
1	Concepts commonly used in university governance;	12	3	3	6
2	Fundamental knowledge about university governance (elements of university governance; university governance model; mechanism of operating the university governance model ...);	20	5	5	10
3	Requirements of quality and personalities for university administrators;	16	4	4	8
4	Scientific research on university governance	12	3	3	6
	Total	60	15	15	30

Ability to effectively manage resources.

- Scientific research in university governance: The need for scientific research in higher education in public universities; The content should focus on research in public university governance; Organizing scientific research on university governance in public universities; Application, transfer, and publication of research results in university governance in public universities ...

vi) Instructions for the program implementation

- Capacity building program for public university administrators is a tool to help public universities manage the university's staff training.

- Based on this program, presidents of public universities take the initiative in fostering capacity building for university administrators.

- The method needs to be easy to understand, giving a reasonable time for participants to research, discuss and practice by themselves.

- The form of organizing the training program should be flexible to suit all kinds of participants.

- After each part, participants need to be evaluated seriously and objectively through exams and essays.

3. Conclusions

In university governance, the administrators play an important role. If we consider that university governance is the main factor that contributes to the success of a university, then the administrators are the ones who decide the success of all governing activities. The higher education system of our country is undergoing fundamental changes, especially the diversification of ownership of universities, types of training as well as the requirements of employers, which has changed how the governance of university operates. To meet the increasing demands of society, administrators must have certain qualities and competencies. They need to be fully fostered, following a standardized program to have those qualities and competencies.

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