

# Changing Dynamics in Global Higher Education



**H**igher education is experiencing a dramatic changing of the guard. According to the American Council on Education, nearly 50 per cent of the Presidents and Chancellors at US and European Universities are age 61 or older, many approaching retirement very soon. With the average tenure of senior academic administrators now less than 8 years, substantial leadership transitions are imminent.

## ***Competing for the World's best***

The race is truly an international one. Higher education now finds itself in a truly global marketplace. Complicating things even further are the rapidly growing educational markets of Asia, South America and the Middle East. China for example, is in the process of building

100 new universities to come online in the next 10 years and already produces more English speaking university graduates per year than the US.

Each of these markets is facing increased competition for the world's best students, faculty, and senior administration, while aggressively recruiting leaders to satisfy demand for their gradually maturing programs. How will institutions around the globe respond to this ongoing, overwhelming challenge? And how will they overcome the logic which discourages investment in leadership development because leaders tend to migrate rapidly up the reputation-based hierarchy, from one school to the next? Clearly, something has to change.

As higher education moves further into the new millennium, it must continually explore creative ways of iden-

tifying and recruiting leadership talent. Recruiting more diverse individuals to the ranks of senior administration and the Presidency — and then retaining them — will remain a daunting task.

## ***Talent redefined***

Higher education must first take a hard look at its definition of leadership and begin to openly question whether that definition is too narrow to address future demands. The challenges being faced today are vast and will continue for the foreseeable future; so too should be the talent pool of future leaders.

The stakes will continue to rise. Search committees, trustees, and search firms must refrain from becoming conservative in their views of what constitutes effective leadership. Uncovering assumptions about leadership is not

without its challenges. Adding new ideas and perspectives will be crucial to creating a deeper understanding between disparate groups. Merely studying what made past leaders successful is no longer enough.

### ***New sources of talent***

Extensive higher education experience, academic credentials, deep passion and commitment to academe will continue to be important for future academic administrators around the globe. However, as positions become more complex the necessary talents needed to be effective may come from individuals with different backgrounds than were once held as traditionally most important. Talent must be identified, encouraged and supported in order to progress and develop. Once identified, emerging leaders need a plan to ascend the administrative ladder in order to move forward.

### ***Preparing the next generation of leaders***

Some progress has certainly been made in cultivating and tapping the available talent but academia has historically struggled to mine the depth and richness of its talent pool. Higher education is full of smart, dedicated individuals who, given the proper preparation, may emerge as the leaders of tomorrow. Internal promotion and national recognition have mostly been derived through individual performance, grants, research papers, annual meetings and awards, with little thought to team-based leadership or development of future leaders. In fact, historically, higher education has not valued nor been a hospitable place for team-based

development. And although this environment is slowly changing, much work needs to be done. A change of culture may be the first step.

### ***The Corporate Model***

At present, there is little evidence of succession planning in higher education and academic medicine at a strategic level. Part of this stems from the culture of academia, where success is often partially defined by the constant upward movement of individuals along the perceived hierarchy of institutions.

Development and succession planning should not be confined to the process of identifying which person can assume responsibility for a particular job, but rather a broad strategic roadmap for the future leadership development and talent development of the organization.

Compared to industry, higher education has been slow to adopt formal leadership development strategies. Whereas it is not uncommon for companies in private industry spend an average of 2.5 per cent of their annual budgets on leadership development, this is nearly unheard of in higher education.

Over time successful companies have developed a robust infrastructure to build leadership talent at all levels of the organization. Corporations also commonly use a mix of leadership development strategies including instructor led-classroom experience, web based courses and experiential (action learning) activities. And development of future leaders at large corporations often begins as early as the interview process, with the use of behavioral interviewing techniques to test the fit of a prospective new employee. Another common technique emphasized by successful

corporations is exposing high-potential leaders to a wide range of business areas through a series of rotational assignments in rapid succession.

### ***Conclusion***

In a few short years, most Western institutions of higher learning will face a turnover of all or most of their senior leadership — at the same time that developing nations are dramatically expanding access to higher education and consequently increasing their profile in the competition for academic leaders.

As the landscape of higher education continues to change, so will the need to look at talent in a broad context, combined with formalized programs of development and succession if academia is to continue its mission. A new model must be adopted which identifies and develops leadership talent, uses development opportunities as an essential tool for retention while respecting the traditions of competition and excellence that have sustained Universities for centuries.

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