Evolution Trends Of The Leadership In The Romanian Academic Environment

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyze the trends that mark the evolution of leadership in the Romanian academic environment from a systemic perspective to integrate the past, present and future. In our approach we start from an analysis of how the multiple transformations that took place within the Romanian society in its whole has influenced the academic environment, emphasizing especially the moments of rupture caused by the numerous reforms started and never completed and the problems of chronic underfunding faced by the system.

Starting from the observation that globally there are many voices questioning the level of adaptation of the current educational system to the realities of the contemporary world, we shall briefly present a couple of views on how the European and the American education of the future might look and also the way in which the academic leadership should manage this process of change.

Since any vulnerability may represent in certain circumstances an opportunity, based on an existent analysis, as well as on some personal opinions we shall present the way in which the Romanian academic environment could develop. Believing that nowadays the exchange of experience and the know-how between different branches of the society are the key to obtaining a booster effect that will allow the occurrence of a synergy between them, we are proposing a vision through which the academic environment can take advantages, seizing on the experiences of the business environment, the effect of "leapfrogging" to eliminate the distance between the academic environment and similar systems in other countries with tradition.

Such an approach would be not a benchmarking process, but a process of identifying the challenges of the future and discovering through creative means the most adequate methods to support them. After all, if there is a resource of which we can say with certainty that it is abundant in Romania, that resource is creativity. The academic leadership could ensure the success of the process of making changes by the optimal guidance of this resource and by this action would ensure the progress of the educational system, thus regaining the rightful role as the engine of progress in the Romanian society.

Key words: leadership, academic environment, change, trends

1.Introduction

The numerous changes the Romanian society has passed through in the last period, starting with the transformation of the whole socio-economic system that took place in the 90's, continuing with the Euro-Atlantic accession process and more recently the that was not fully overcome, have generated huge costs that affected each sector. There is no need for a exhaustive analysis of this period to observe that many of the problems emerged could have been avoided or attenuated, thus reducing the devastating impact they had on some broad social strata.

Looking at the global situation we clearly see that the world is dominated by powerful conflicts and challenges that increase the uncertainties and the risks are huge. The financial crisis, the crisis of the Euro zone together with the crisis of confidence that it has caused among the population within the whole European Union, the revolutionary movements that might break the already precarious balance existent within some regions, represent just a few of the problems faced and struggled by humanity.

Therefore, in this context we do not find it surprising that voices accusing the failure of the current leadership both in Romanian society and at European and global level are becoming more numerous. Obviously, this approach, which shifts the responsibility solely on the leaders' shoulders is extremely simplistic and does not take into account the many aspects such as the extremely high level of change that humanity knows due to the evolution of technology, the changes of paradigm taking place within the business environment, increasing concern for the environmental protection and social justice, the issues arising in relation to the sources of energy, the increasing numerous criticisms directed towards political models, etc.

But what is clear is that the need for a proper leadership suitable for these turbulent times is increased. Be it the political, economic, social, business or civil society, each environment faces such problems.

Under these conditions, the academic environment, criticised until recently by many for (almost) all evil on Earth, becomes today the place where increasingly more people turn for answers. In the situation where the intellectual capital is increasingly seen by many as a chance to resolve the problems that affect the modern society and can provide answers to the numerous challenges faced by humanity, the role of the academic environment becomes once again important, both by training future leaders and by providing solutions through research programs that occur under its umbrella.

In this seemingly complicated picture, the Romanian academic environment is challenged and must respond, thus being forced to provide solutions to the problems of the

national present and the challenges launched by the world in general, as well as the challenges of the future we can only anticipate. In this respect, Richard Riley's opinion, former Secretary of State for Education in the United States of America under the Clinton administration, that "We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technologies that haven't been invented yet, in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet." seems more relevant today than ever.

In this context, leadership is becoming increasingly important in the Romanian academic environment both in terms of how it is communicated to students and the way it is applied within various universities.

In this paper we wish to outline the evolution trends of the leadership in the Romanian academic environment based on the one hand from an analysis of how they have evolved over time and on the other hand from the analysis of the challenges that this environment will face in the future. Given that any educational project needs a long period of time to show results, either positive or negative, due to the particularities of this system, we believe that any target set both at central and each university level must take into account a time frame large enough to be able to observe the effects and, perhaps more importantly, should be followed consistently throughout that period.

Due to the essential importance that such a project plays in the success of educational institutions, the national education system, and society as a whole, we consider that any approach for analysis and forecast is highly relevant, especially since the gap existent in comparison with the developed countries, offers in addition to many challenges,

opportunities as well. We believe that, as some countries had technological benefits through the leapfrogging effect, based on relevant analysis and forecasts, the Romanian education system can benefit from the same kind of effect provided it identifies properly the trends to where the education of the 21st century is heading and finds the best routes to get there as quickly as possible.

Our approach will be based both on studies and forecasts on the evolution of the European and global education system and forecasts on the evolution of the Romanian education system, on various studies and expert opinions, as well as on works published by authors and their educational practice.

Without claiming to revolutionize the view on the evolution of the academic leadership and through it, the evolution of the whole system, we believe that this paper provides a relevant and pertinent point of view, offering the possibility to serve as basis for wider discussions.

2. The evolution of leadership in the post-revolutionary Romanian academic environment

The authors of the work "White Paper for Quality and Leadership in Romanian Higher Education in 2015" consider the current moment as being part of the third cycle of reforms undergone by the post-revolutionary Romanian education. Although there are a number of challenges faced by the Romanian education with constancy worthy of better causes, among which we mention the constant underfunding and the often inconsistent nature of the reforms tried, we consider the delimitation provided by the authors of the aforementioned paper to be

extremely relevant for highlighting the challenges faced during this period by the academic leadership.

The first cycle marks the era of "reparative reforms" which marks the period when the Romanian academic environment has taken the first steps towards the process of adjusting to the new realities. It is obvious that this period was extremely difficult for leaders from the academia and, to be objective, even for those who were called to establish policies nationally in this. We believe that this cycle has been a time when the success of the measures taken to modernize various universities depended mostly on the individual skills of those called upon to implement them. Since the internal models were practically nonexistent, and the ability to successfully replicate the external models was severely limited by the numerous factors that covered various areas, from resistance to change of the people involved in the system (which was explainable after they were formed in an opposite system) to the problems of material and property nature, and not least, to the uncertainties which are becoming a constant generated by the inconsistency of the government policies; this period marked a very slow progress.

Another challenge faced by the leadership from the academic environment academics in this period was the profound change marked by the request for training programs. If some specializations that were highly popular before became undesirable overnight, the new labour market conditions have entailed the creation of new ones, which, in turn, has generated many problems that leaders had to respond to, from logistical issues to difficulties in finding people with the necessary skills to fill the positions needed.

Such aspects determined us to believe that this period was one in which the role of leadership in academia was as important as it was difficult and to consider that the study of the lessons from those years was extremely important to those who want to play a role in the future as leaders in the Romanian education, regardless of the targeted level.

The second reform cycle referred to "strengthening the autonomy, governance and quality". We believe that this period marks the time when the objectives of the academic leadership have started to target the synchronization with the European academia, mainly at the same time with the commencement of the negotiations for the accession to the European Union. Although it was somewhat less turbulent than the previous period, we believe that this period was also marked by challenges at least as important as the previous one.

The process of harmonizing the practices within the academic system with those at the European level required a major effort by the academic leadership, starting from the observation that a very large number of new policies and procedures had to be designed, implemented and assessed in a very short period of time and that often some of the stakeholders manifested a strong resistance caused by either divergent interests, or poor understanding of the reasons for carrying them out.

In the new context, another problem faced by the leaders from the academic environment was represented by the increased competition coming from the universities from other European countries. At the same time with the European Union accession, the cost of some university programs in other member countries (which was previously a

significant barrier) decreased dramatically, such programs becoming more accessible also due to the simplification of access conditions (we are particularly referring to the bureaucratic aspect).

Given that for obvious reasons the first students (or potential students) who took advantage of these opportunities were the ones recommended for such a step by their results and capabilities, it is obvious that the Romanian academic system had a lot to lose in this new context, both on short and long term by reducing the recruitment base for future university teachers.

Of course, there is also "the glass half full", meaning that the European Union accession also allowed an increase in mobility of teachers, who thus had the chance to enrich their experience by observing different ways of organizing the educational process and by learning other academics in a practical way.

We believe that these cycles, however difficult and often painful as they seemed, were essential in the way that they set the grounds for what can now be a new cycle of academic environment reform. In our opinion, this new cycle should aim at continuing the benchmarking effort and also an effort to anticipate the new realities that humanity will face, forecasting the challenges the educational systems will face in this scenario, challenges which, as we shall demonstrate in the next chapter, have a global nature and can identify the methods and techniques by which such challenges can represent an opportunity.

3. The challenges of the global academic environment in the contemporary world

Until now, the 21st century is characterized by remarkable progress in all fields of technology, with a particular focus on the ICT area, and, there are many chances for such trends to not only persist, but even increase, so that fundamental changes they produce in nowadays people's lifestyle will become tomorrow's realities.

In this context, the academic system, which has by nature a very considerable inertia in adapting to new, must identify very quickly and adequately the new challenges that such system will face in order to be able to respond optimally, especially since this process is facing difficulties in defining and regulating on national levels.

We present below some of the changes that the world will likely face in the future and that we consider extremely important for the near future, convinced that the evolution of the global academic environment will depend upon our adjusting to such changes.

The development of technology brings along a change in the skills required on the labour market. Of course, the rate at which this change occurs depends primarily on the level of development of each country, and it clear that this kind of change affects primarily the top areas that are present predominantly in the developed countries. Yet it is equally clear that it is only a matter of time before such changes will propagate in the currently developing countries. This change causes the labour market to capitalize more a series of relatively new skills; for instance, advanced problem-solving skills and advanced communication skills . In fact, this is perfectly understandable if one considers that two of the

effects of the development of technology are represented by the increasing the complexity of the problems faced by the decision makers within any field and an explosive increase of the social interactions caused by the new communication means. Under these conditions, an update of the objectives set by the academic educational programs is needed, and in this regard it is very important to have an increasingly active dialogue with the business environment. Also, the degree to which these kinds of changes are performed at the institutional and national level represents an extremely important element, the lack of a national strategy might be having adverse effects . In such a situation, the leadership skills of those who can facilitate this process gain a significant importance with a major impact on a large period of time. Due to the inertial nature of the academic systems, a mistake in this planning stage would require more time to be identified and an infinitely large period of time to be corrected.

Another important consequence of the development of technology and "the world of knowledge" brought by the last one is represented by the increasingly more importance creativity has within all the fields of activity. This observation in itself is neither surprising, nor argued, and however, the difficulties arise when one thinks of the way such skills can be taught and assessed as well. From this point of view, in our opinion, the academic environment plays a double role, the first one is to encourage the development of creativity among students through the integration of some teaching and assessment methods to stimulate and reward creativity, and the second is helping the lower systems to integrate such elements in their activity by providing guidance and exchange of experiences. In our view, creativity presents a series of some very important features that differentiate it from other subjects of study. For instance, creativity cannot be taught the same way one would teach economy as there are only methods to stimulate creativity and not methods to transmit it; in this respect, we mention Edward de Bono's theories that regard the lateral thinking ; creativity is difficult to assess and almost impossible to quantify; creativity does not have a unitary nature, it has various forms of expression depending on the individual and context, therefore we mention in this regard Howard Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences. All these make us believe that the way in which creativity is addressed in the academic context is of huge importance, thus the leaders from the academic environment are facing a serious challenge.

Given the fact that an increasingly number of occupations appear on the labour market which require multidisciplinary knowledge from various and sometimes unrelated fields, the education systems are facing another unexpected challenge. The dynamics in jobs transformation determines the employers to be increasingly less interested in formal education completed by potential employees, and to focus more and more on the skills they possess. Adding to this aspect the development of the ITC technologies, the academic system begins to meet a strong competition from alternative education programs. On the one hand, we consider the classical training and coaching programs with advantages such as short duration, flexibility of the schedule, as well as a focus on a specific area, all these enabling students to chose solutions that suit them best and, on the other hand, we consider the strong

development of distance education forms that offer training in very specific fields and have a creative and innovative approach because they took advantages of all the technological developments. The disadvantage of the latter, the fact that they usually do not issue diplomas, is heavily compensated by the extremely low costs for the student – costs consisting usually of internet connection – and, since employers do not consider diplomas to be essential anymore, this type of approach is appreciated by more and more students. Examples of such platforms include (but are not limited to) Coursera or Khan Academy , both offering a range of courses in various fields, also a very important aspect is that, since they are not connected to a formal system of education and its objective constraints (curricular area, field, etc.), they have the possibility to provide highly creative courses by binding together elements that belong to various domains, thus creating unexpected and challenging connections. Also, by working together with professors from different universities acknowledged, these platforms have started to eliminate one of the main reproach in the past, namely that the information provided might have been of questionable quality. In these circumstances, the role of the academic leadership increases in order to find new ways to enrich its offer so as to meet the needs of this type of "customers", a process which is already taking place in some countries (such as the United States of America) where some of the top universities have started to develop online platforms and offer some free courses.

We wish to emphasize the challenge of globalization, even if there are hundreds of papers and even more papers will be written on this subject. Obviously, the globalization theme is not a new one "higher education was always more internationally open than most sectors because of its immersion in knowledge, which never showed much respect for juridical boundaries." Nevertheless, given the fact that this process is stimulated by new technologies and the continuously growing mobility that characterizes this period, there is a high risk that the less developed countries will face an acceleration of the process of "brain drain". This can push the academic environment in those countries in a destructive spiral (they fail to maintain the best graduates in the system, which results in a decline in quality of education, which leads to decreased attractiveness, which leads to the difficulty of having valuable graduates, etc.), while the systems in advanced countries have only to benefit from this process. From this point of view, we believe that it is vital that the exact countries, whose academic systems are facing this danger, to undertake the most determined measures to adjust to new realities and the leadership within this environment is the most important one.

There are of course many challenges the academic environment will face in the future, some of them are well known and analyzed, some of them are a little less obvious and, for certain, some other challenges that could not even be imagined will emerge but, our aim within this chapter was to point out some of the directions that in our opinion will represent the concern of the academic leadership of the future, especially since, as we shall demonstrate further on, in certain contexts they can represent important opportunities for progress.

4.Trends in the European and American education system

The academic systems in the United States and the European Union represent for many benchmarks in terms of the quality of education, which is perfectly reasonable if we consider that only 19 of the best 100 universities in the world according to the "The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2011-2012" , do not belong to these areas.

However, the leadership within these two academic environments is facing a number of serious problems which proves that the challenges created by the need to adjust to new realities do not skip the developed countries either.

In the United States of America, the academic system is facing problems related to the low degree of completion of higher education by those who have started them, problems related to the continuously increasing level of debts that graduates have to reimburse once they graduate, as well as problems related to state funding of public colleges and universities . At the same time, Moody's rating agency has recently revised the forecast for 2013 for the private American universities from neutral to negative "marking a shift to negative from stable for even the sector's market leading diversified colleges and universities" , which proves once again the severe effects caused by the crisis in this area.

For the European Union there are still many problems related to the creation of the European Higher Education Area, as there are still difficulties in harmonizing the national academic systems and challenges in achieving the objectives of "the students-based universities", as well as difficulties related to internationalization, flexibility and quality assurance .

In addition to these challenges specific to each of those systems, in both cases there is growing concern regarding the training of the graduates and, in this respect, the conclusion of the European Council is relevant as it argues that "the graduates' qualifications do not always meet the needs existent on the labour market and the needs of the society. Public and private employers increasingly report mismatches and difficulties in finding the right people to meet the continuously changing needs of the knowledge-based economy." Another common concern of the leaders from these two academic systems is represented by the impressive level of the currently developing countries (especially China and India) which are developing their own academic systems by making huge investments in these fields. Given the fact that the academic environment plays an extremely important role in the development process in the knowledge era, it is clear that this kind of problems will concern the leadership within the academic environments in question.

5. Trends in the Romanian education (directions of development)

As we shown above, the leadership within the global academic environment will have to face a large number of challenges in the near future and the degree to which such leadership will succeed in this role will depend to a large extent the welfare of nations under the conditions in which the importance of intellectual capital will continue to grow exponentially.

In this context it is clear that the mission of leadership within the Romanian academic environment will be even more complex as it will have to face both the European and

global specific challenges. We intend to present below some of the directions that, in our opinion, will characterize this process.

The growing interest shown by the potential students to some interdisciplinary training programs will represent the initial step in the evolution of the Romanian education. In this context, the academic leadership will have to design programs that require collaboration between several departments within the same university or even from different universities. In the first phase, this will likely be reflected especially in the master programs, as they suit best such approaches. An example in this regard is represented by Business Consultancy master's programs within the Faculty of Administration and Business of the University of Bucharest which are the result of analysis made in collaboration with professors from other colleges (sociology, psychology, mathematics, foreign languages, etc.). Such an approach has the advantage of the multitude of viewpoints which are taken into consideration when designing the programs, a better adequacy to market requirements, as well as the possibility to minimize the necessary additional resources by using the material bases of several institutions

Another important aspect which is closely related to the first, is the collaboration with stakeholders. Given the nature of the business environment, it is very likely that many companies or institutions which are potential employers of graduates to have made predictions on a strategic level, about the possible development directions of these fields. Based on these and initiating and maintaining an active dialogue with the business environment, the leadership from the academia is able to get a clearer picture

of future training needs and can adjust its programs to such needs. If this will have a successful outcome, given the fact that the inter-community mobility is likely to increase, then we can even witness a reversal of directions of students flow. A project which aims to help create and maintain this type of dialogue is the Centre for Organizational Strategy and Leadership of the University of Bucharest (CSOL-UB), which brings together representatives from the academia, business environment and civil society.

The Romanian academic environment will face another challenge in the next period, namely the increased competition from other providers of educational programs. We have already discussed about the competition emerging from other European universities based the decreasing of financial and bureaucratic obstacles raised by such an option and it is obvious that this trend will continue. On the other hand, it is expected that, in the future, the quality of study programs offered by private universities in Romania to grow continuously, so it is likely to attract more potential students from public universities. It is also evident that as eLearning platforms will become more efficient and affordable, there will be competitors in this direction either by extending the educational offer of prestigious international universities, or by creating new structures. Nevertheless, in our opinion, all these things require a tireless effort from the academic leadership to find the best methods to attract the best.

As we argued in this paper, we are convinced that the future academic environment will have to be extremely concerned about stimulating, encouraging and developing creativity. It becomes clear every day that the progress in tomorrow's world depends

on innovation which, in return is inextricably linked to creativity because more and more routine tasks tend to be at least partially automated and, in the developed countries, the optimisation process are beginning to reach the maximum possible efficiency. Therefore, under these conditions, it is essential for leaders in the academic environment to be able to manage the process of change towards an approach of the educational process based on the imperative need to develop creativity, which, in a purely conservative environment, represents a major challenge. Such project was started within the University of Bucharest. The educational concept named SPHERE-AA is based on the observation that there are nine channels that facilitate the formation of multiple intelligences: linguistic, musical/rhythmic, naturalist, logical-mathematical, spatial and visual, bodily-kinaesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, existential and each of them has certain characteristics regarding the optimal way of reception of information and intends to create methods to best stimulate this process.

6.Conclusions

One of the few advantages that currently developing countries have in comparison with the developed countries is that, on their way to modernization, they can adopt the most modern methods (whether we are referring to technology, procedures or ideas) without having to incur additional costs of change. In this respect, an illustrative example is the fact that in the Sub-Saharan Africa the development of telephony has exceeded the period of fixed landlines. Likewise we believe that by understanding the challenges that the future will bring we can do a similar leap.

We also strongly believe that a leading role in this process will be held by the academic environment.

Therefore, we hope that this paper can constitute a ground for analysis for those called to exercise leadership in the academic environment, thus succeeding to identify the best directions to use in leading us down this path.

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