

Society's participation in University Governance.

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Universities are wonderful institutions in which citizens learn, create knowledge (universities research activities) and whose knowledge and culture is transferred to society (university's third mission).

Their role in the development of countries and the success in the world-wide competition has been recently and globally acknowledged. The trigger that has activated this acknowledgement has been the recognition of the global nature of the world economy and the importance that knowledge has in its growth and development. Universities themselves are involved in an unavoidable process of competition, and they need to do important efforts in order to improve their results and be able to remain in the role they presently have.

Competing for success does not exclude necessarily the spirit of cooperation. Universities are altruistic organizations and cooperation between them is made possible thanks to the behaviour of the human communities involved: students and teachers.

Is there a causal link between success and governance? Could it be that in the one hundred most successful universities in the world (agreed by the different international rankings) the vast majority have governing bodies with a majority of external members (lay members)? And among these top hundred, in those few that do not have this kind of "lay or external" governing boards, it is easy to observe at first glance that they are, by their history and tradition, close to the influence of their social environment, which with no doubt, greatly also influences their strategies.

It does seem that the presence of society in Universities strategic decisions and in its administration, helps the institution to succeed in the decisions that lead to quality and competitiveness in the new society, where knowledge is the basic resource that enables development and growth, be it personal, economic or environmental, this last factor being the one that makes development durable (sustainable).

Some of the main competences of these governing boards, competences that are very similar in most countries, are the following (Moses, Ingram dixerunt):

- Developing and approving the mission and strategic directions of the University;
- Appointing and supporting the university's chief executive (president, vice chancellor, rector..) and monitoring his/her performance;
- Preserving university independence;
- Approving the annual budget and business plan;

- Approving and monitoring systems of control and accountability, including general overview of the University's controlled entities;
- Assessing the board's performance (self-regulation);
- Overseeing and monitoring the academic activities of the University;
- Representing and advocating the campus to the community;
- Interpreting the needs of society and the professions to the campus.

In some countries, governing boards have the responsibility to appoint the top executive of the university, this trend is not yet implemented everywhere, but the lack of this responsibility is recognized as an important governance issue.

GOVERNING BOARDS TRUSTWORTHINESS)

In order to be able to compete and to succeed, universities need to have freedom for action and to be able to choose from available options. That is to say, they need AUTONOMY to choose their appropriate path and to exercise their mission.

If Governing Boards are in place, the practice of the first autonomy that needs to be preserved: freedom of teaching, is guaranteed. Thus, the need to set procedures for the purpose of employment protection disappears - procedures such as teachers' tenure or other labour-protection lose the sense of protecting freedom. Maybe the employment protection procedures are of help in other issues- certainly they are not appropriate for enabling higher or fairer wages for teachers, in the dialectic between security and wages.

Well, Governing Boards are, in practice, great guarantors to society of the autonomy that needs to be given to university so that it can compete successfully.

For this mechanism to work, the Governing Board must be reliable, by reliable I mean that it must be trusted by both the internal members of the university as well as by society.

If a Governing Board is perceived as trustworthy, it will then be able to provide a good enough performance not only to exercise autonomy, but also to help towards the definition and implementation of strategies that seek quality in University services.

Conditions for trustworthiness:

Governor appointment

Altruism (non-paid volunteer governors)

Accountability

Support for the executive (vice-chancellor, rector, president ..)

The way the governor is appointed is of great importance for the trustworthiness of the Board. The individuals should be carefully chosen, to make sure: of their commitment to serve, of their

independence, as well as making sure that they have the skills the Board needs.

Altruism is also a must; being committed even though they have no financial interest is a source of trust.

The AGB in the USA propose a set of questions to potential Trustees which are a good reference of what you would like the new member of the Board to be clearly aware. AS an example, some of these questions are:

1. Do you have an interest in higher education and a genuine concern for this university?

Because university issues are not simple, and they are very different from the corporate environment, it is important for the Board members to be interested in the academic environment.

2. Are you prepared to commit the necessary time and energy?

Members of the board not only have to attend meetings, but also they will be asked to understand issues and participate in committees, interact with the rector's team and other members of the Board.

3. Have you any conflicts of interest?

Trustees taking strategic decisions for the University, must be free of conflicts of interest.

4. Are you prepared to work within the conventional framework of academic governance?

In academic governance, unlike in business, there is a lot of decentralized decision making, leadership exercised by persuasion. For Trustees it is important to realize that, even though they must express their opinions, ask questions, they need to accept group decisions they may not agree with.

LEADERSHIP

It would be desirable to exercise leadership at all levels, especially at the president and executive level. Leadership is not simply giving orders and having people obeying those orders; it has more to do with persuading than with overcoming.

Leadership is also accepting responsibility for our mistakes, showing a clear spirit of service and knowing how to express our ideas on how the appropriate governance of the university organization should be, writing them down and presenting them to others, in order to make them known.

I believe that one of the areas that the IAUGB could work on could be to promote the importance for University Boards to be perceived as trustworthy, both internally within the Institution and by Society.

I believe that for Governing Boards to be more effective, trustworthiness is essential. I would like to encourage to explore and share ways of building trust in this forum.