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Osaka University

Challenges facing Japan's private higher education on governance

Yoshiro TANAKA

Autonomy is related to both decentralization and privatization of the university governance.

1. Shared Governance:

Governance in higher education was traditionally to bring fiscal, administrative and educational decision makers together to make the decisions needed to operate an institution. This idea of sharing responsibility for governance in universities set themselves apart from other complex organizations like factories and corporations. The idea was to foster freedom of inquiry, expression, and teaching through autonomy and self-regulation. In effect, there has been an implicit social compact in which society supports the university with the understanding that its resources and its freedom will be used to serve the public interest.

Today, shared governance looks different and has been both eroded and expanded. Added to the constituents in the governance system, for example, are trustees and auditors. Along with administrators and faculty, each believes that it is the most important—and the most potent force in an institution's governance. And each has a certain amount of power and leverage to see the institution from the perspective of its vested interest. Interestingly, typically absent from the list is the largest number of individuals on a campus—the staff. They are seldom given more than a token voice in the governance process.

2. Examples of actions by administrators to move the institution in a desired direction:

Administrators have enacted accountability schemes—rewarding institutions for achieving certain goals—like desiring to reduce the time it takes students to earn a degree. Administrators questioning the need for tenure initiated an university campus intended to operate without granting faculty tenure.

3. Forces for Change in Shared Governance:

Higher education has been challenged and criticized by numerous sectors of the population. While there have always been tensions among the parties to shared governance—in the 1990s some new pressures appeared which challenged traditional roles of the various constituencies;

- 1) Budgets became tight in the late 1990s causing institutions to cut programs or to carry them out in more efficient ways.
- 2) Tight budgets have also led to hiring more part-time faculty—typically at a level of 50% and higher of all instructional faculty with questions raised about salaries, benefits, and unequal teaching loads.



- 3) The general public has called for more accountability in higher education—measurable effects of the learning of students—tied to what professors do in the classroom.
- 4) Faculty tenure has been challenged as a means of security of employment rather than a protection of academic freedom.
- 5) Enrollment demands have required more attention to raising standards of admission and more accountability for producing tangible outcomes in student learning.
- 6) Greater attention to research among faculty has raised questions about faculty commitment to teaching—especially at the undergraduate level especially “Kyoyo Kyoiku (Liberal and General Education)”.
- 7) Faculty has been challenged to demonstrate how their governance, scholarship and professional activity do not take precedence or are in conflict with teaching and student contact.
- 8) Some say there is a one-sided expectation that the university—at public expense—is to provide salary, tenure, professional support, technical services, facilities, equipment, and the protection of academic freedom while the obligations of the faculty are nowhere specified. In fact some argue that faculty are not loyal to the institution that employs them, that they unfairly receive money for consulting off campus and are more committed to their profession than to students.
- 10) A final example concerns technology—faculty say that they must learn how to use more technology mediated instruction; that their students are constantly bombarding them with e-mail at all hours; and the competition from profit making educational institutions in distance learning challenge classroom instruction.

These examples reflect some of the challenges to familiar styles of faculty roles and responsibilities and thus to university governance and management. Who is in charge and who makes the decisions? Often the decisions are made for a particular incident or instance but fail to adequately address underlying issues. Furthermore, the negotiation process is often cumbersome, leads to winners and unhappy losers and thus to grievances and dispute. A recent study of governance among higher education institutions found that the government is emphasizing accountability and linking budgets with student learning.

The university administrator of the late 80s when growth was common, budgets were plentiful, and consensus seemed more the norm has turned into negotiator, businessman, consultant, politician, economist, techno-file and academician. Clearly, the context has changed and so has the job.

4 . Prospects:

The trends are here to stay.

At last perspectives from the strategic planning and the marketing of the university, the followings are issues to be discussed today. These trends demanded that leaders of universities adopt strategies to insure their survival and their prosperity as a part of the governance. These strategies fell into following six basic categories. Let me describe each, in turn.

1) Become less selective, create higher margins:

For those institutions with significantly more applications than spaces, the declines in the college age population created a shadow crisis. That is, for them, they suffered no outward decline in enrollments and no decline in revenues. These universities became less selective in choosing their classes. Where in the heyday of the baby boom these universities admitted one in ten applicants, they enrolled one in three at the trough of the demographic decline. As a result, they admitted students whose records were not as impressive. At the same time, these universities increased their tuition, seeking, in effect, higher payments from families of marginally less qualified students.

2) Compete for traditional markets:

These universities, and others across independent university landscape also worked harder during the period of declining population to compete more effectively for students in their traditional markets. Recruitment strategies were refined to a high degree, as universities looked to inform, impress, and entice young students to their campuses.

3) Reach out to new markets:

The more creative universities sought not only to solidify and expand their traditional base of students but to identify and reach out to new markets. This, too, required a substantial investment in marketing and promotion, and, here too, those universities with the most substantial financial cushion prevailed. Their strategies are not worthy.

4) Create niche dominance:

Some universities that had offered a broad curriculum responded to the general downturn in university age students by narrowing their focus and creating a specialized curriculum aimed at gaining dominance in a small segment of the market.

5) Reduce costs structure:

Universities unable to compete in these ways, many of these universities with no endowment funds and little prospect of raising private funds to fuel marketing or recruitment expenses, were forced to balance their books the old fashioned way. They were forced to reduce staff, sell assets, and sometimes borrow against the physical plant (mortgaging the buildings and the land). These universities were, of course, betting on the eventual upturn of the population, and hoped by taking drastic short term actions to return to financial health in the future.

6) Educational Entrepreneurship :

At the other end of the scale, many universities responded to the temporary downturn in enrollments by becoming more creative in the ways they used (and were paid for) their resources.

The decline in the college-age population in Japan lasted for nearly a decade and continue. The upturn in population will not be happened. We have discovered that most independent universities have remained wedded to the strategies they employed during the last decade. Marketing expenses have remained high, with no university willing to lead a unilateral disarmament. Outside revenue sources remain important. Strategic decisions regarding mergers and mission contraction have remained in place. In other words, the downturn in enrollments have made permanent changes in the independent sector of Japanese higher education. As you select strategies to deal with the current crisis, choose them carefully, for they are likely to be with you for some time to come.

(This is from the speech at the Osaka University "International Seminar for Higher Education Studies" on the 26th of January, 2006.)

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