

Training university leaders and managers – why and how?



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European higher education institutions are operating in a highly competitive environment, which requires different institutional responses to “face the challenges” this presents. There is growing competition for students and staff, to attract funding and to assume a strong strategic position in the market. Such major changes mean training current and future leaders and managers to new leadership and management styles. Yet in Europe, the demand and supply of higher education management programmes present a highly fragmented picture. The MODERN European higher education modernisation platform was set up as a European-wide instrument to address this fragmentation.

Content	Page
1. Introduction – the call for professional leadership and management	2
2. The responses to external challenges	4
3. The European provision of training programmes in leadership and management	9
4. Conclusions	13

1. Introduction – the call for professional leadership and management

Major reforms have taken place at system level in European higher education in the last ten years, triggered among others by the Bologna Process. Although the impact of these reforms is very uneven across the board, they have resulted in the need for higher education institutions to reinvent themselves in order to enhance their attractiveness in the market and profile themselves much more strategically.

European higher education policies – A drive for change

Launched in 1999, the Bologna Process has generated a number of reforms at system level in the 47 signatory countries in terms of new degree architecture, of practical tools to promote more flexible student-centred learning supported by adequate quality mechanisms and of qualification frameworks. Significant progress has been made, yet at the level of higher education institutions much remains to be done in terms of the concrete implementation of curriculum reforms, in order to allow more flexible learning paths thereby producing graduates with the appropriate knowledge and skills needed in the labour market. Strong leadership and management are required to implement these changes.

The 2006 communiqué from the Directorate-General Education and Culture (DGEAC) of the European Commission *Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation* (COM (2006) 208 final) already focused on the need for governance, funding and curriculum reforms. In 2007, the European Council, through its resolution (dd. 23 November 2007) on modernising universities for Europe's competitiveness in a global knowledge economy urged the member states to:

take the necessary measures to modernise higher education institutions by granting them autonomy and greater accountability to enable them to improve their management practices, to develop their innovative capacity, and to strengthen their capacity to modernise their curricula to meet labour market and learners' needs more effectively.

Since then a number of other communiqués have been released addressing the needs for “new skills for new jobs” (COM (2008) 868) and cooperation with enterprises (*A new partnership for the modernisation of universities: the EU Forum for University Business Dialogue* – COM (2009) 158 final, for instance). More recently the EU2020 Strategy as the follow-up of the Lisbon Strategy highlighted knowledge as “the engine for sustainable growth” and stressed the role of the universities: “[i]n a fast-changing world, what makes the difference is education and research, innovation and creativity”.

The European Commission has just issued a new communiqué on the Modernisation Agenda: *Supporting growth and jobs – an agenda for the modernisation of Europe's higher education systems* (COM (2011) 567/2 - September 2011) which calls again for member states and European higher education institutions to play a much more proactive role in contributing to the development of a smart, dynamic and sustainable competitive economy in the Knowledge Society at the heart of the EU2020 Strategy. The Commission highlights that “the full potential of higher education institutions is still underexploited. Europe has too few world-class universities and needs a much wider diversity of institutions to address different needs”.

European higher education institutions are operating in an increasingly competitive environment, which requires new institutional responses to “face the challenges” this presents. There is growing competition for talented students and staff as well as competition for funding for education and research. As an external force, the proliferation of rankings forces universities into examining how they can improve their performance.

Responding to a competitive environment

Equity and access remain a main problem since students from lower socio-economic backgrounds still do not enter higher education in sufficient numbers. The demographic decline will lead to a significant decrease in the number of traditional students in the coming years, with its many negative effects on the labour market and economic development. The challenge for higher education institutions will increasingly be to enrol non-traditional students of all ages and to diversify the provision of educational programmes to strengthen the graduates' employability in the knowledge economy.

Enrolling non-traditional students in higher education

There is a tension between the values traditional academic heartland and the competitive modern environment with its requirement to move into more strategic research. As knowledge organisations it is also their role to engage a lot more fully in innovation and transfer their extensive knowledge to society.

Tensions between the academic heartland and strategic research

Taylor describes it as follows:

Research is an intensely personal activity, strongly dependent on the ideas of individuals or groups of individuals. Academic staff feels a fierce personal ownership of their research; it shapes and dictates their career development and their status with their peers. Moreover, research, by its very nature, is unpredictable, moving in unforeseen directions with unexpected consequences. Research, therefore, does not lend itself to control and management. Yet, in the fast-changing competitive world of today's higher education, there are constraints that require the application of some sort of management framework. Funding and quality issues require priorities to be agreed. Re-

search may also imply risk; for the modern university, risk-taking is an essential part of institutional vitality, but risk must also be understood and managed (Taylor 2006, p.2).

The need for strong leadership, governance and management

The transformations needed to enhance institutional performance require strong leadership and the professional management of all support services. Yet at an institutional level, there are wide gaps between highly performing institutions and low performers. Historical, contextual and institutional reasons do provide some limitations. However, these are often used as a justification for a laissez-faire attitude on the part of institutional leaders. The current reforms offer many opportunities for higher education institutions to rethink themselves and to exercise more fully the autonomy gained by an increasing number of them from the State, though many institutions seem unable to do so.

One of the main reasons for this is the lack of strong institutional capacity, leadership and management to make strategic choices based on institutional strengths, to build a strategic position and to communicate adequately with society and play a key role in addressing the increasing problems of society.

A fragmented offer of executive development programmes

The European scene offers a highly fragmented picture of the diverse needs for the professional development of current and future leaders and managers. The same fragmentation characterises the offer of short, executive leadership and management development programmes, degree programmes in higher education management and other forms of learning such as coaching and peer learning. The MODERN European higher education modernisation platform¹, a consortium of ten core and thirty associate partners (European associations and academic providers of higher education management programmes), has investigated these various forms of learning and training programmes in higher education management.

2. The responses to external challenges

Different national policy and institutional responses

In many European countries, the economic crisis has highlighted the urgent need for different national policy responses, structural changes, diversification of the provision of higher education in national systems and for a different role for higher education institutions. There is growing awareness of the critical role which universities can play in addressing the many complex problems faced by society and in contributing to economic development through close collaboration with all stakeholders. National governments are reviewing the overall

¹ www.highereducationmanagement.eu (page accessed 15.01.2012.)

higher education landscape, questioning the number and types of institutions needed at a national level to serve public agendas and reach a critical mass. This is increasingly leading to institutional mergers, alliances and strategic partnerships.

New forms of multilevel and multi-actor governance are emerging:

Higher education and research institutions cannot ignore the effects of the multilevel processes they are governed by. They need to design and implement institutional strategies that allow them to play their own roles in the new system dynamics of EU higher education and research” (van Vught 2009, p.18).

While the degree of autonomy that universities enjoy from state control is generally increasing in European countries, there are still many constraints placed by the State. This impacts on the capacity of higher education institutions to manage complex sets of strategic developments, to define appropriate policies and organisational arrangements and to find the right mix of human and financial strategies to support their overall vision to help address all challenges of society.

Increasing Institutional governance autonomy

Traditionally, university governance and decision-making processes were based on collegial arrangements involving the whole academic community (OECD 2003; OECD 2008). These collegial decision-making processes were positioned within the authorities of academic bodies such as the senate, which traditionally also served as the governing body. The OECD report *Education Policy* analysis identifies two emerging trends for institutional governance. First, the powers and authority of the executive leadership and management are rising significantly within the institutions, and second, there is far more input from and increased participation by external representatives in governing bodies that are increasingly separate from academic matters and decision-making (OECD 2003, p.71).

The general trend now is towards increasing the level of autonomy for higher education institutions. It is accompanied by the implementation of new monitoring and supervisory instruments by the State and other stakeholders to hold higher education institutions more accountable for their contributions to national policy objectives, which is “often referred to as the development of the evaluative role of the State” (de Boer/File 2009, p.9, after Neave 1998). De Boer and File go on to posit that:

the widening of institutional autonomy has also led to the strengthening of institutions as organisations and the rearrangement of authorities and responsibilities across different levels, which had resulted in stronger leadership now located at the top of the university” (de Boer /File, 2009, p.13).

Increasing financial autonomy

The economic crisis and the slowdown of the global economy have exacerbated financial constraints on public budgets. The proportion of state core funding is generally decreasing and universities are being encouraged to find new ways of diversifying their funding basis and generate new sources of income to support their strategic developments in order to ensure their financial sustainability. There is a growing trend to move away from line-item budgeting towards block grants or performance-based funding mechanisms, with single lump sum amounts for institutions to manage internally according to their strategic priorities. Robust financial strategies linked to institutional strategic plans have become a must for the financial sustainability of higher education institutions.

With financial autonomy comes the freedom to make surpluses and dispose of assets, to generate additional income for general operations or for capital investment, but also to make contingency plans taking into account fluctuations in performance. A study carried out by OECD (2004) highlights that “university boards tend to be cautious about the exposure of traditionally cash-managed institutions to the uncertainties of borrowing”. New financial skills are needed to engage universities in more sophisticated financial arrangements for the development of capital projects.

Improving governance, leadership and management

Such major transformations and expectations require modern governance arrangements, dynamic leadership and the professional management of university services, critical for the sustainability of higher education institutions.

There is a need for the further professional development of university leaders and managers to learn to strategically manage all these new developments and to profile their institution strongly in the European (and global) higher education market. Strong leadership styles have become crucial to take on board the many changes. Adequate internal communication and the quality of the dialogue which senior leaders engage with various academic units (faculties, schools, departments) and the entire academic community have also become crucial issues.

As far as middle management is concerned:

... deans and middle management bodies are significant across all aspects of the institution activity. Under new governance structures, there has been a shift in the power held by the deans. Traditionally the dean was elected as a representative of the academic staff and often had great influence but little power. Deans now have an executive function similar to the executive head and are usually appointed rather than elected. Deans exercise budgetary and other managerial functions and must increasingly balance the traditional role of protecting the interest

of academic staff with a strengthened managerial role” (see Eurydice 2008, p.44).

As Shattock reports (2003), whatever the governance model, an effective balance of powers needs to be achieved at the various decision-making levels in the institution.

The challenge for leaders and managers is to introduce new ways of operating without undermining the institution’s overall mission, to acquire new skills to operate in an “accountability and audit culture”, to protect the best interests of their institution and to manage risks effectively in order to protect (and increase) the reputation of the institution. They need to have the capacity to deal with a complexity of tasks and different value sets, while relying on strong “strategic intelligence” and powerful institutional data for decision-making purposes. Professional services are no longer peripheral activities to academic objectives in modern university management. They are at the core of the university activities, developed in a context of significant trust between the senior leadership, the academic community and a professional administration.

**Rethinking the skills
needed for university
leaders and managers**

In this context, it is particularly relevant to refer to the work of Burton Clark *Creating Entrepreneurial Universities. Organisational Pathways of Transformation* (Clark 1998). Clark developed the concept of an entrepreneurial university which is based on five key elements: “a strengthened steering core”, an “administrative backbone”, an expanded developmental periphery, a diversified funding base, a stimulated academic heartland and an integrated academic culture (Kwiek 2008; Clark 1998). The “strengthening of the steering core” refers to the trend of the growing power of executive authorities within an institution and a shift away from the traditional collegial decision-making and governance.

Four university models

The report ‘The Red Queen Effect: Succeeding in the new economics of higher education’ (2009) from the PA Consulting Group (United Kingdom) also provides an interesting set of examples for future university models. PA Consulting points out the major shifts in policy, market and technology currently driving fundamental changes in the higher education sector, in which old models of university provision will no longer succeed. Four alternative university models are proposed to face the challenges of the 21st century.

First, the ‘Amazon University model’ in which universities exploit the potential of technology to make courses available online through e-learning platforms, extend accessibility of courses/modules to larger audiences through online provision and simplify course portfolio by sharing content with other institutions to avoid duplications. This

model offers an alternative to the problems faced by many universities to cover costs related to a wide range of numerous specialised courses.

In the second 'on-demand' university model: students have the freedom to design their patterns of study throughout a period of time according to their needs, circumstances and chosen mode of delivery (i.e. individual learning, face-to-face work, work-based study, and module selection). This model makes it possible to have a better use of the institutions' physical and human resources.

The third 'learning hotel' model builds on the idea of a 'research hotel' being steered by some universities from around the world and is based around highly specialised equipment for narrow research fields made available to short term visiting research teams. It is a place for collaborative knowledge exchange, research and problem-solving activities.

Finally the 'umbrella university' model is proposed as a response to the current fragmentation of primary academic activities into a mix of knowledge transfer partnerships, lifelong learning networks, commercialisation ventures as well as secondary business activities such as property management, IT, and all run mainly as in-house operations. The university becomes a holding structure for a range of separately managed businesses which can be run either for a single institution or for several institutions at regional national level, thus offering increased flexibility.

These models offer interesting ideas for major transformation of universities in the 21st century, taking advantage of market opportunities, on excelling in the critical capabilities of delivery and response to customers and generating added value while sustaining margins for further investments.

Whatever the model, PA Consulting highlights fundamental questions which university leaders must ask themselves to determine their course of action; i.e. what their student market is, whether they have a clear understanding of their core institutional business (teaching, research, services) and opportunities to enter new markets, and what their niche and competition is in that market. PA Consulting also highlights that practical tools borrowed from business planning or portfolio analysis are needed to support environment/market analyses and will necessarily lead to the development of institutional management strategies for academic institutional core business and resources (HR, estates, IT, learning resources and finances).

3. The European provision of training programmes in leadership and management

The MODERN European platform on Higher Education Modernisation was launched by ESMU, the European Centre for the Strategic Management of Universities², with the support of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme, specifically to address these issues. ESMU carried out a survey of training needs in higher education management and investigated the provision of short courses and degree programmes available in Europe. It produced a number of thematic reports on critical issues for the strategic profiling and organisational development of European universities to face the challenges described in previous sections. These focused, respectively, on governance reforms, quality and internationalisation, funding, regional innovation and knowledge exchange. ESMU also piloted new forms of experimental learning through peer learning activities on funding issues and on quality in internationalisation.

ESMU organised a web-based survey on training needs and training providers in higher education management. The survey was carried out from 2010 to mid-2011. The survey collected the views of academic and administrative leaders and managers in European universities. While the survey on training needs is not the focus of this article some of its findings are highlighted to support the conclusions on the adequacy between the current provision of training programmes in Europe and the perceived demand.

Higher education professionals from thirty-four countries throughout Europe responded to the MODERN survey on training needs. Two thirds of the respondents indicated that not enough was done in their institutions to satisfy the training needs of institutional leaders and managers. Almost 50 % of the respondents were of the opinion that leadership and management training should first and foremost be a national activity in the national language. Just over a third of the respondents reported that their institution had an overall policy and programmes for the professional development of their institutional leaders and managers. Where available, these programmes were typically in the form of in-house seminars, workshops or courses. The most relevant types of training for institutional leadership and management were said to be training courses, learning among peers, coaching and workshops.

Lack of time among leaders, lack of funding and resistance among academic staff were said to be the main obstacles with regards to lead-

Training needs

The perception by HEI staff

² www.esmu.be

ership and management training programmes. A large majority of respondents indicated that leadership training should focus on strategic management, research and innovation, human resource management, internationalisation and the organisational culture of universities.

The results of our survey were in line with the hypothesis which underpinned the survey at the outset that despite the need for professional development for leaders and managers to face the many challenges described in earlier sections, new forms of governance, leadership and management and the subsequent need for training are only emerging in most European countries and higher education institutions. This also accounts for the great variations between European countries and the fragmentation in the offer of higher education management development programmes in Europe since there are for the time being no strong incentives to develop a variety of programmes for which there is a limited, yet growing market.

There is also a lack of a structured market in most European countries and at European level for professional categories of staff in higher education institutions (e.g. professionals in finances, IT, human resources) which accounts for a fragmentation in the provision of specific programmes to train higher education leaders.

Emerging market of higher education management programmes

In our MODERN *Mapping the field preliminary report* (2010), Maassen and Pausits highlighted that “higher education systems can be divided into three categories with regards to the development of management and leadership training”.

In the first category there is long experience and a research-based understanding of the need for leadership and management training. There is often a national agency which provides the framework for management and leadership training. Senior leaders and managers are specifically required to take these leadership and management programmes. The United Kingdom is the only such example in Europe with the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education as the national agency providing the framework for these developments.

In the second category we can find countries with an emerging national framework with typically a few national training programmes on offer. There are no formal requirements for leaders and managers to take these programmes. Some Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands and Germany can be placed in this category.

Most countries are at a very early stage in the development of management and leadership training in higher education. There is no national organisation to support this development. Training is often within higher education institutions and on a ‘learning by doing’ basis

or with the support of peers. Most countries in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe are in this category.

With a few exceptions, national policy-makers are not sufficiently stimulating the sector through a variety of mechanisms or financial incentives. Overall most higher education institutions are not giving a sufficiently high priority either to the professional development of their leaders and managers.

The ESMU MODERN survey of training providers of higher education management programmes focused on programmes which are widely available to any interested leader or manager, therefore leaving out of the investigation the in-house programmes increasingly developed by European universities. So far, ESMU has identified 28 degree programmes and 57 short executive programmes made available by 51 providers. Information on all these programmes will feature in the MODERN online tool on higher education management programmes.

The provision of higher education management programmes

Most of these programmes are less than ten years old and still need to establish a strong reputation for themselves in the sector, contrary to the long-established programmes in the United States. The programmes offered by the Harvard Institutes for Higher Education for University Presidents and senior managers have been going for many decades. The American Council of Education (ACE) has been offering a fully-fledged portfolio of leadership and management programmes for American university leaders and managers for a long time.

Target groups are often better defined in the case of short courses than for degree programmes. Such courses have a stronger European and international focus than is the case with the degree programmes.

Less subjected to national regulations than for degree programmes, the pricing policies adopted by the providers of short programmes vary greatly depending on the programme length, issue of membership and the positioning of the programme in the market.

The survey identified degree programmes ranging from the Master level to the PhD level. No bachelor programme on higher education management is offered in the sector although some programmes are also offered at the certificate level. The PhD programmes are either research-based or professional doctorates. A bachelor degree is required to enter the master programmes, whilst practical experience is rarely taken into consideration for the entry requirements.

The offer of specific degree programmes

Most degree programmes are offered in the national language and are nationally oriented, taking the national policy context as the reference. In some cases these programmes therefore offer too little relevance for professionals from other countries. The providers are a very small

number of universities which use their own teachers as well as practitioners from the sector for the delivery of the programmes.

The survey found several degree programmes in the United Kingdom such as the Higher Education Management MBA at the Institute of Education of the University of London, the DBA in Higher Education Management at the University of Bath or the MSc in Education Practice and Innovation at the University of Southampton. In Germany the University of Oldenburg offers an MBA in Education Management and, in Norway, the University of Oslo offers a Master of Philosophy in Higher Education. In Spain the University of Alcalá and the University of Extremadura offer an International Master in University Management and a Master in Management of Higher Education Institutions respectively. In France, the University of Montpellier 2, the University of Paris-Est Créteil and the University of Sciences and Technologies of Lille offer a Master in Management of Universities and Information Technologies, a Master in Development and Management of Universities and a Master in Management of Social, Cultural and Territorial Organisations (Specialisation University Management and Higher Education).

More recently joint degrees have also been developed by several universities under the Erasmus Mundus programme. It is the case with the Erasmus Mundus Master in Higher Education offered by the Universities of Oslo, Helsinki and Aveiro or the MARIHE new Erasmus Mundus Master programme on Research and Innovation in Higher Education which will be offered by the Danube University Krems (Austria), the University of Tampere (Finland), the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück (Germany) and Beijing Normal University (China). Such programmes attract mostly non-European students.

Various attempts to set up a European-wide executive MBA in higher education management have so far failed.

Fees depend on national fee regulations and can range from a few hundred euros to fees in the 10 to 20 000 euros price range.

Short executive leadership and management programmes

There is large heterogeneity of short executive leadership and management programmes with seminars, workshops, courses of various lengths offered at various levels. The price structure varies considerably depending whether such programmes are offered as “additional support” (for example to the members of an association) or as a full cost or for-profit activity.

Many universities in Europe have established or are in the process of developing their own in-house leadership and management development programmes. Some also have international programmes such as the University of Warwick with its IPLM programme (International Programme for Leadership and management) and Central European

University with its Workshop Series on Higher Education Policy and Management.

In addition to the programmes offered by some national agencies and national rectors' conferences (such as the Norwegian Rectors' Conference), external providers also include European associations in higher education which have developed their programmes, courses and seminars on leadership development and management in higher education. Some of them also provide customised programmes to higher education institutions. A recent example is the Academy of EAIE, the European Association of International Education with courses on benchmarking, operating an international office and developing an international marketing strategy, or the Rectors' seminars which UNICA, the network of universities in capital cities offers to its members. One other example is the ESMU-HUMANE Winter School for senior administrators, a one-week leadership and management development programme which attracts thirty-five senior administrators every year from all over Europe and has a wide European alumni network of professional senior administrators.

The MODERN platform piloted a number of European-wide peer learning activities. Although it is clear that there is an emerging demand for such activities, the precise setting for such activity has yet to be further developed. The critical issue is to create a close link between the offer and the perceived needs (Fedrowitz *et al.* 2011). In the case of senior leaders, different informal learning settings of individual coaching and networking among peers seem more appropriate than formal programmes.

4. Conclusions

There is an emerging market for professional management development programmes in higher education in Europe, yet there are great differences across countries due to the diversity of higher education systems. Career planning is not sufficiently defined in higher education and the divide between the academic and administrative staff still prevails. Staff development is also not given sufficient attention.

As a result, for many individual staff members too few opportunities for career advancement are offered in their institutions. There is too little incentive for individuals to invest time and money in short programmes or in a degree in higher education management. The return on investment is not clearly perceived. There is too little (financial) support from the institutions for staff career progression.

Overall, the provision of management and leadership training in higher education remains highly fragmented throughout most parts of Europe and there is, in most cases, an insufficient connection between the supply and the demand in the market. The target groups and learning outcomes of the programmes on offer are too broadly defined in terms of skills, competences and knowledge.

The ESMU survey provided further evidence and confirmed preliminary perceptions that not enough is done at the national and institutional levels. As long as policy-makers do not give more serious consideration to the professionalisation of higher education management and support these with concrete structural support mechanisms and incentives, the situation will remain fragmented. Some higher education institutions will significantly endanger their long term viability without a clear understanding of the need to invest in the professional development of current and future leaders and managers in higher education in order to support new forms of governance, leadership and management, going beyond the resistance to address organisational defects.

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Biography:

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