



Leadership Roles in Managing Change towards Academic Excellence at the Branch Campus

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ABSTRACT

Leadership roles are of prime importance in determining the destiny of an organisation particularly when dealing with change efforts. This paper discusses the current leadership situation in UiTM Pahang and tries to relate the leadership roles in managing change in order to achieve academic excellence. Some recommendations are proposed to enhance the leadership functions and roles to facilitate the university's efforts in achieving academic excellence and attain the status of world-class university.

Keywords: *leadership, managing change, academic excellence*

Introduction

UiTM is in the process of restructuring and reorienting itself to be a fully research university by the year 2010. Along with it come the issues of change, such as work culture, scholarly approach, research – teaching reorientation and the like. Faculty members in all UiTM systems are expected to participate in this great change so that the 2010 vision could be achieved.

This paper tries to identify the leadership roles in managing the change process at the branch and program levels and to propose several recommendations that could accelerate the change process in the effort of enhancing academic excellence.

The Situation

1. Information about the “change effort” has not been clearly communicated to the faculty members particularly at the branch campuses.
2. Faculty members especially the junior ones are not sure of the nature of change that the management is trying to put forward.
3. Some of the leaders (Heads of Departments, Program Managers) are also not too sure about the priorities in the change effort and ended up changing unnecessary rules and procedures.

Discussion

Understanding Change

The first thing that need to be addressed by the Heads of Departments and Program Managers is to understand clearly what are the desired organizational change and what are the potential effects of change on the people involved (in this case, the faculty members). A simple definition of change is; it is the movement away from the present state towards a future, or a response to some significant threat or opportunity arising outside of the organization (George & Jones, 1996; Gilgeous, 1997). It must be remembered also that change involves some alteration in activities or tasks which may face some resistance from the faculty members. As an example, incorporating the culture of research and professional development as the main agenda in academic enhancement to faculty members who are generally comfortable with what they have been doing (teaching) for a long period of time.

The People Factor

The second issue that needs to be addressed is that change involves people. Linstone and Mitroff (1994) mentioned that one of the main factors which seem to present a major challenge in implementing change processes is the human part of the organization. This is so because it involves values, preferences and attitudes toward a particular activity or issue. Human attitude has three distinct components, which are cognitive, affective and behavioral tendencies (Dunham, 1984). These components of attitudes may induce a person to support or resist changes occurring in the university. Cognitive responses are opinions relating to usefulness and necessity and about knowledge required to handle change. It normally consists of the information a person possesses about the idea of change which is based on what he or she believes is true. Affective response refers to feeling of being linked to satisfaction or anxious about change and it involves evaluation and emotions. Affective response may arise due to the feelings of insecurity, fear of the unknown, and selective information processing. Instrumental responses refer to actions already taken or which will be taken to handle the change. In most cases it concerns the way a person intends to behave toward change.

The Link between Outcome and Success/Failure

The outcome variable of the forthcoming change may be in the form of receptivity, resistance, commitment, cynicism or stress. It has been reported that the acceptance of organizational change increases with organizational commitment, harmonious industrial relations climate, education, job motivation, satisfaction and security (Iverson, 1996). However, acceptance of change decreases with role conflict, tenure and environmental opportunity. Job satisfaction and good relationship between Heads of Department and Program Managers help to shape positive attitudes of faculty members toward change.

Focus of Change

The university is made up of a number of interdependent subsystems such as departments, units and faculties. Heads of Departments and Program Managers must be aware that effecting change in their respective jurisdiction may affect other departments, units or faculties. If such changes do not match the needs or working procedures of these other subsystems, then most likely the

outcome of change may not be a positive one. Some of the factors that served as focus for change that need to be given attention are as follows (Harris et al., 2003):

- i. Loss of faculty contribution to the institutional mission of teaching
- ii. Lack of recognition for creative and innovative work
- iii. Dissonance in the value of education versus research
- iv. Lack of criteria or benchmarks for defining and evaluating excellence in education
- v. Planned review of promotion, retention, and tenure policies
- vi. Economic forces which create constraints that can make education a lower priority.

Recommendations

Based on the above premises in the processes of change, some of the actions that Heads of Departments and Program Managers should consider are:

Education and Communication

Communicating change using the right and appropriate channels to faculty members can help them see the logic of change and therefore reduce resistance. Misinformation or poor communication can create significant confusion and mistrust, and was found to be the normal cause for resistance to change. If faculty members received full facts in consistent and unambiguous way, all misunderstanding will be cleared up and resistance can be reduced. Visions and goals as well as the plan for achieving the goals must be presented in as many forums as possible. Communication can be achieved through one-on-one discussions, memos, group presentations, or reports.

However, in the first place, the Heads of Departments and Program Managers themselves must be clear about the desired change initiatives that they will promote and implement. In addition, credibility and mutual trust in the management-employee relations should be maintained at all times during the change process.

Faculty Members' Participation

Getting the participation of the faculty members in the decision-making process at the micro level for implementing change can reduce resistance. It is normally difficult for individuals to resist a change decision in which they participated. In addition, to reduce resistance, participation of faculty members in such activity can also increase commitment and the quality of the change decision.

Facilitation and Support

For change efforts to take effect, Heads of Departments and Program Managers should facilitate and offer supportive assistance to faculty members to go through the change process. This is especially needed when fear and anxiety are high among faculty members regarding the outcomes of the proposed change. Some of the supports that Heads of Departments and Program Managers can offer include counseling, therapy and new-skills training to facilitate adjustment to change.

Negotiation

If resistance is centered in a few powerful individuals, a specific reward package can be negotiated that will meet their individual needs. Concurrently, two-way communication is essential where feedback from faculty members must be acquired. Heads of Departments and Program Managers must be open-minded and flexible to incorporate improvements to the change plans based on the above feedback. Opposition opinions must be viewed with respect and debated openly. This can lead to a sense of trust and faculty ownership as well as dissuade feelings of threat, secrecy and subversion.

Consolidate Gains to Promote More Change

Heads of Departments and Program Managers should continuously monitor and fine-tune the change processes and always demonstrate commitment to on-going improvement of the new activities. Faculty members should be informed about the effectiveness of the new plan or changed items. This will enable these leaders to identify new premises for change which has not been anticipated before but can promote faculty improvement. In addition, faculty members will likely view the change efforts more positively if they see evidence that changes are having a positive impact. Forthcoming and creative cooperation as well as excellent performance in the change process should be properly rewarded so as to create job satisfaction more change efforts can be introduced to achieve the stated mission and vision of the university.

Conclusions

In the process of facilitating the change process, Heads of Departments and Program Managers must take an extra effort to examine the premises for change, understand the factors affecting change, the potential outcomes of faculty members' attitudes which may result in resistance to the proposed change. These leaders must be intelligent enough to formulate and communicate the change initiatives to faculty members so that misinformation and confusions can be avoided. Careful negotiation with potential oppositions is important to gain cooperation and timely rewards for excellent performance are vital in the process of securing continued commitment to future change efforts. This calls for leaders to be more proactive in effecting change in their respective departments, units or faculties. Caretaker leaders would not be able to help bring the university to the desired vision and mission to be of world-class status.

References

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