Change, Leadership and Change-Oriented Leadership Theories in Higher Education: A Review

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1   Abstract.

Universities in 21st century are playing an important role in fostering the next generations of leaders who would be capable of dealing with significant economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges. However, higher education institutions need to be sustainably developed in order to have the potentials to contribute to the development of the societies as well. This shows that major changes must be planned, implemented and maintained in the context of higher education to transform the universities to the entities which can operate in the turbulent environment effectively and efficiently. Thus, the practical application of relevant theories of change and leadership in higher education institutions is pivotal to achieve this objective. Based on this view, the current paper aims to review a few theories of leadership and change which are pertinent to the context of higher education, and to discuss the characteristics of change-oriented leadership as well as to posit that change-oriented leadership may be the best suited leadership style which can be applied in higher education institutions in the turbulent environment of 21st century.

2   Change Theories

In this section, a brief review of some change theories including general theory of change, theory of emergent and incremental change, theory of temporal planned change, the Punctuated Equilibrium Model of Strategic Change and the theory of Strategic Change Complexity will be presented. It is notable that a part of these theories have been tested in higher education settings and have received a significant support in this area.

2.1   General Theory of Change

There are four theories in terms of change in organizations which describe how and why organizations implement change programs as well as explain about the process and direction of change within the organizations (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). These theories which construct the pillars of general theory of change encompass life-cycle, teleological, dialectical, and evolutionary theories.

Based on life-cycle theory, change progresses in a linear style and every stage of this process needs to be completed in order to form a stage for the next step to occur. This theory is based on the existence of programs or rules and regulations within the organization.

Teleological theory as the second theory within the general theory of change assumes that organizational change is strategic. In addition, the organization is assumed to have an ultimate goal as the purpose for the initiating and implementing change and is directed by that purpose toward attainment of the ultimate goal. Along this path toward the ultimate goal, the organization is required to accomplish intermediate goals as well as implementing and evaluating new changes as well as its progress. One of the important issues to be taken into account is that the ultimate goal itself as a result of the evaluation process may also be changed.

Dialectical theory is the third one in this category. According to this theory, the organization is placed at the focus of a conflict between competing goals as well as competing internal and external forces and in other words, between change and stability. Based on this theory, change is initiated and implemented when there is a variation in the balance of power among competing forces and as a result, the organization departs from its status quo. Thus, this theory is similar to theological theory since it proposes ambiguity with regard to the path of the change process. However, as opposed to theological theory which suggests that the ultimate goal of the organization is known, the ultimate goal of the change is unknown since it is decided based on the shift of power of competing forces in the organization.

The fourth theory of change with respect to the general theory of change is the evolutionary theory which is basically about organizational competition, evolution and survival. In other words, it considers organizational change as an ongoing cycle of variation in the forms of organizational processes or structures, selection of the processes or structures that are best matched to the organization's survival, and maintaining those organizational aspects that have contributed to the organization in terms of its survival. Like teleological and dialectical theories, in this theory the specific path of organizational change is unknown as well.

One of the most important issues in general theory of change is that the combinations of two or more of these general theories explain the condition of organizational change within the organizations (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995).

2.2   Theory of Emergent and Incremental Change

This theory was developed based on the results of a study conducted in a small business organization by Yetton, Johnston, and Craig (1994). It postulates that change may be initiated and implemented in an unplanned way due to the adoption of new technology. On the other hand, when the organization adopts and implements a new technology, the implementation contributes to the improvement and betterment of organizational members' competencies as well as structural and management processes of the organization and consequently leads to the development and advancement of the organizational strategy. According to Yetton et al. (1994) by segmenting major significant changes into small increments, not only the change can be managed easier, but also the dark or undesirable side effects of it may be reduced and minimized.

The existence of freedom to choose a gradual or quick way of incorporation and application of the new technology, the existence of a change supporting culture and climate, and lastly the existence of a flexible structure in the organization are considered as the main assumptions of this theory.

2.3   Theory of Temporal Planned Change

Huy (2001) in the development of his strategic change theory examined the dimensions of time and the content of change and suggested that change is directed by its purpose and that a time perspective effects on the specific organizational change that is selected.

According to him, changes with immediate results are implemented by change agents with a short term perspective while those changes whose outcome and impact can be seen in the future are implemented by change agents with long term perspective. In addition, the concepts of quantitative and qualitative dimensions of time must be considered (Huy, 2001). The quantitative time can be measured on a clock, but qualitative dimension of the time is subject to individual feelings and perceptions.

According to temporal planned change, there are four change interventions including commanding, engineering, teaching and socializing.

Based on the commanding intervention, directive and coercive courses of actions are taken by the change agents during the implementation of the change and quantitative dimension may be observed widely within this intervention.

In engineering intervention, the change agents analyze, understand and redesign work processes in order to improve the speed and the quality of the production based on a clock time. In the other words, courses of actions with respect to change emphasis on redesigning and reprogramming the processes in time based framework.

Teaching intervention is about a logical and guided learning method in which change agents are involved actively in order to reeducate the change targets or organizational members. In fact, change targets participate in their own reeducation and they no longer can be considered as passive elements, since based on this method, they cooperate in effecting their own personal change through changes in their fundamental beliefs. Thus, this intervention is about the qualitative dimension of time.

In socializing as the last intervention of the Huy's strategic change theory, the quality of the relationship amongst organizational members is enhanced through the courses of actions taken by the change agents.

2.4   The Punctuated Equilibrium Model of Strategic Change

Romanelli and Tushman (1994) in their theory of punctuated equilibrium model of strategic change posited that organizations face two modes of change. The first one known as convergent or equilibrium periods occurs when the organization transition through periods of stable activity with only incremental change and the second one takes place when the organization experiences   short periods of sudden change known as reorientations or revolutionary periods.

The antecedents and consequences of change are described by this theory since the theory provides a means to predict patterns of organizational change by theorizing that the consequences of one organizational change set the stage for the subsequent period of stability or equilibrium and thus become the antecedents of the following major change initiative.

In other words, strategic change occurs when the inertia resulted from a continuous stability is overcome and the two factors including change in the environment and turnover in top management break this inertia (Romanelli & Tushman, 1994).

This theory has also been tested in the area of higher education and has received support as a theory of change in the educational arena (Gold, 1999; Parson & Fidler, 2005).

2.5   Theory of Strategic Change Complexity

Dolan, Garcia and Auerbach (2003) presented a complexity theory of strategic change. They argued that organizations are complex and their behavior is

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affected by many rules resulted from environmental uncertainty when interacting with their environments. This environmental uncertainty leads to organizational complexity and chaos and by managing these rules which have been resulted from environmental uncertainty, organizations can be directed in a desired direction.

According to (Dolan et al., 2003), this theory have some assumptions including the existence of complexity in the organization, the importance of the relationship between the organization and its environment compared with the internal organizational relationships in terms of the objectives, values and changes in the organization and the existence and contribution of environmental turbulence to the organizational chaos.

3 Leadership Theories

This section discusses a summarized review of leadership theories in the context of higher education institutions including knowledge leadership, transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, academic leadership and strategic leadership.

3.1 Knowledge Leadership

Knowledge leadership is a process whereby group members are supported by individuals' learning processes which are necessary to achieve group or organizational objectives (Stogdill, 1974, pp. 9-10). From another perspective, knowledge leadership refers to continuous improvement and innovation in terms of information resources, individual skills, knowledge and learning networks (Skyrme, 2000).

In addition, some factors such as orienteering of learning, creating climate that supports learning, supporting individual and group level learning process and acting as a role model are considered as vital aspects of knowledge leadership (Viitala, 2004).

Finally it is notable that ICT plays a major part in knowledge leadership. Hence, there is a link between knowledge leadership and ICT and since leaders are highly aware of the role of information and knowledge sharing, they plan and develop knowledge networks that help to organizational effectiveness maximization (Lakshman, 2007). On the other hand, leaders utilize ICT and knowledge management to have better concentration on main internal and external clients.

3.2 Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the process of engagement of the leader with subordinates in order to create a connection that advances and promotes the degree of inspiration and ethics in both the leader and the subordinates (Northouse, 2013, p. 204).

From another point of view, transformational leadership is based on the leader's impact on subordinates and the behavior used to attain this effect (Bass, 1985, 1996).

Four elements including charisma or idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration constitute pillars of transformational leadership (Bass, 1998).

With respect to charting innovation, change and transformation programs, Burns (1978) considered transformational leadership as reflection of the qualities and actions that are required for implementing change processes and Bass (1991), believed that transformational leaders own good skills in terms of building visions, rhetorical, and impression-management capabilities and apply these skills to create strong emotive bonds with subordinates to assist them advance their performance.

Finally, a transformational leader supports the executives to take control of the inertia that is innate in the organization in order to allow strategic change to be carried out (Wiersema & Bantel, 1992).

3.3 Charismatic Leadership

House (1977) in his theory of charismatic leadership suggested that leaders chart courses of actions in distinctive ways that have particular charismatic impacts on their subordinates such as dominant, robust desire possession for influencing others, being self-confident, and possessing a strong sense of one's own ethical values.

Some authors pointed out that the charismatic leaders cannot succeed in significant change strategies. Among them, Nadler and Tushman (1989) believed that although charismatic leadership is essential for strategic turnarounds, but still it is insufficient. They suggested that charismatic leadership and instrumental leadership, as a means of implementing changes, must be practiced together, otherwise a charismatic leader will lead to failure in terms of initiating and implementing changes.

3.4   Academic Leadership

Discipline, peer and professional recognition, knowledge, personal qualities, experience, expertise and team acceptance constitute the pillars of academic leadership (Yielder & Codling, 2004).

In addition, Rowley and Sherman (2003), comparing academic and administrative unit leaderships in higher education institutions suggested that one of the main challenges in universities is the appointment of non-academic personnel in leadership roles which consequently lead to creating ambiguity and misperception in the academic environment. According to them, the effective academic leadership is characterized by some features such as commanding trust and respect, collegial environment creation and acceptance, and implementation of leadership instead of fighting it within academic settings.

Moreover, there are four competing cultures including collegial, managerial, developmental, and negotiating cultures in the academic environments which can be categorized into three domains as structure, process, and attitude and for charting sustainable change in higher education institutions, the change process and structural change must be joined together (Bergquist, 1992).

3.5   Strategic Leadership

Boal (2004) defined strategic leadership as:

> Strategic leadership is a series of decisions and activities, both process-oriented and substantive in nature, through which, over time, the past, the present, and the future of the organization coalesce. Strategic leadership forges a bridge between the past, the present, and the future, by reaffirming core values and identity to ensure continuity and integrity as the organization struggles with known and unknown realities and possibilities. Strategic leadership develops, focuses, and enables an organization's structural, human, and social capital and capabilities to meet real- time opportunities and threats. Finally, strategic leadership makes sense of and gives meaning to environmental turbulence and ambiguity, and provides a vision and road map that allows an organization to evolve and innovate. (Ibid.: 1504)

Strategic leaders are highly oriented and have strong tendency toward strategy, meaning that they are able to translate strategy to courses of action in order to further implementation, they align people and organizations, they decide about effective strategic activities and improve strategic competencies as well as skills and finally, they represent a kind of dissatisfaction or

impatience with the current capacities such as absorptive and adaptive capacities and wisdom (Davies & Davies, 2004).

From a systemic perspective, Boal and Shultz (2007) considered organizations as complex adaptive systems whose components interact to each other in a way that cannot be explained or interpreted by standard linear equations and in this condition, the role of the strategic leaders is very crucial in directing organizations toward the achievement of their objectives, improvement of organizational learning, adaptation in the turbulent environments by shaping the evolution of component interactions and constructing the shared values that provide the foundation by which the past, the present, and the future of the organization coalesce.

4 Change-oriented Leadership and Tridimensional Leadership theory

Change-oriented leadership as a new dimension of leadership behavior has been supported empirically (Ekvall, 1991) and encompasses a wide behavior pattern which can be grouped into four categories (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991):

- Promoting change and growth

This category mainly is about pushing the growth and initiating new projects.

- Having creative attitude

This category covers a range of behaviors with respect to offering and experiencing new ideas and methods of performing tasks, paying attention to the potential opportunities, inspiring thinking along differently as well as discussing and sharing new opinions and ideas.

- Taking risks

Basically, this category is about the capabilities of leaders in making quick decisions and risk taking in decision making processes.

- Having visionary qualities

In this category, a leader is supported by his skills in envisioning and giving thoughts and plans.

In another study, Yukl (1999) through a factor analysis found out the following characteristics for change-oriented leaders which were consistent with the finding of Ekvall and Arvonen (1991).

- Suggesting creative and new ideas
- Having confidence and being optimistic when suggesting new significant turnarounds
- Taking a long-term perspective on challenges as well as opportunities
- Envisioning exciting and appealing new possibilities for the organization
- Developing relationships with people outside the work unit

- Analyzing the activities, services and products of the competitors

However, after categorizing leadership behaviors in a hierarchical taxonomy, Yukl, Gordon and Taber (2002) concluded that change-oriented behavior factor comprises four elements as follows:

- Monitoring and identification external threats and opportunities
- Proposing new strategies and building new visions
- Encouragement of innovative thinking by followers.
- Risk taking in order to promote and advance significant changes

These findings also are aligned with the findings and propositions of Tridimensional leadership theory (Yukl, 2004) as well as change-oriented behaviors identified by Yukl (2012, p. 70).

It is notable that some studies about change-oriented leadership style in educational sector and mainly in the context of higher education have been conducted (Ekvall & Ryhammar, 1998; Ekvall & Ryhammar, 1999; Hansson & Andersen, 2007; Ryhammar & Smith, 1999; Sellgren, Ekvall & Tomson, 2008).

5   Other relevant theories in higher education settings

There are other relevant theories to the study of change-oriented leadership in higher education organizations and according to Soaib and Sufean (2012, pp. 54-64), these theories especially in terms of university governance include open system, structural and political theories. Additionally, outcome-oriented leadership, systemic leadership, revolutionary leadership as well as theories of educational leadership and management can be considered as main theories that explain leadership in higher education organizations.

6   Synthesis and Conclusion

The world in 21st century is going to face significant challenges in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental issues (Scott, Tilbury, Sharp & Deane, 2012) and the concepts of sustainability and creating a sustainable society as well as a sustainable future through establishment of sustainable universities are the main debates in the era of university governance. The importance of education for sustainability is so vital that United Nations has called the recent decade (2005-2014) as the decade of education for sustainable development. Even in UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil, it was suggested that universities should become models of best practice and transformation (Scott et al., 2012). In this way, relevant theories of change and leadership must be practiced in higher education settings. However, the environment of universities is opaque and turbulent and since change-oriented leadership covers a wide range of

behaviors in terms of initiation and implementation of change through practicing an appropriate leadership style especially in turmoil environments, it may be concluded that the application of change-oriented leadership style is a great contribution to chart necessary transformation toward sustainability in universities and to establish sustainable universities. These sustainable universities are the main entities to form sustainable societies as well as sustainable future.

It must be noted, however, that universities are mainly responsible in expanding the frontiers of knowledge in all disciplines and areas of study, for the ultimate purpose of advancement of human civilization, through research and development activities. As such, the suitable form of leadership for universities is the one that promotes and fulfils the said responsibility, by harnessing the high-resource intellectual capital that is readily available in universities through common values, culture, and aspiration for the advancement and well-being of human good.

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