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LEADERSHIP IN THE VIRTUAL HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR: Is there a new way to lead in the on-line distance learning environment?

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Abstract

The growth in e-learning and other distance modes of delivery in the higher education sector, the explosion in borderless higher education and the marketisation of higher education, pose a challenge to the traditionally characteristic structures of decision making and consensual leadership in Higher Education. The paper seeks to examine if there is significant difference between leadership in the traditional Higher Education (HE) environment and leadership in the virtual HE environment by examining the framework of leadership models taken from the business literature - transformational and transactional leadership as well as the newer forms of leadership models such as servant leadership and distributed leadership. The models are applied to the case of an emerging virtual arm of a traditional university. The analysis suggests that the virtual higher education institution requires a complex repertoire of leadership skills and abilities but the process of leadership strongly suggests a dispersed or distributed approach.

Keywords: Virtual; Higher Education; Leadership; Distributed

1.0 Introduction

Whilst the literature on leadership in traditional, collocated organisations is vast, studies on leadership in virtual, distributed organisations still remain limited. Much of this focuses primarily on technical leadership and effective team leadership in the virtual environment (Kayworth et. al, 2000; Jarvenpaa et. al, 1999; Clases et. al 2003; Yoo et.al 2004; Panteli et. al 2004; Panteli 2004). However there is significantly less

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published literature on leadership in the virtual higher education environment in terms of the management of the virtual university. The paper seeks to examine if there is significant difference between leadership in the traditional Higher Education (HE) environment and leadership in the virtual HE environment. For the purposes of this paper, the leadership focus will be on managerial leadership at the executive, senior and supervisory leadership tiers of the organisation.

In attempting to come to some conclusions on a leadership model or framework that could be most effective in the virtual environment emerging in the University of the West Indies (UWI), internal documents on governance and the structure of the Open Campus of the UWI will be examined. As the University moves towards implementing this innovation, it will need to determine which approach to leadership could best be applied to adequately address the regional needs of the English speaking Caribbean and to compete in the global higher education environment.

2.0 Leadership in Higher Education

The literature on leadership in organisations is extremely wide and varied and has developed tremendous momentum over the last fifty years. The literature spans the early Organisational Behavioural studies of McGregor on Theory X and theory Y (See Robbins, 2005, pp.170-173), to the more current movements of leadership “gurus” such as Quinn with his recent works on the concept of the fundamental state of leadership (2005).

The traditional approach to managing universities has been described as a process of “organised anarchy” (Cohen and March, as cited by Balderston, 1995). University management, in the period up to the early 1990’s, had an environment of collegial decision making, with policy making in the control of the academic staff that generally had little or no management expertise or training. Decisions were carried out by a corps of professional administrators who had minimal input into the decision making process (Lauwerys, 2008). Lauwerys’ description is subtler than the much quoted one of managing academics as equivalent to “herding cats”, but closely reflects Mintzberg’s typology (1979, 1983) of universities as professional bureaucracies, where power rests with the academics, coordination across departments is limited, skills are standardized and there is a thin support corps that functions purely in a service role. With the rapid increase in technological

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developments and changes in socio-economic structures primarily resulting from globalisation, nations are experiencing the need to respond rapidly to the demands of the new knowledge economy. As the knowledge economy expands, there is increased pressure on universities from governments to create the human and social capital required to transform these economies into competitive ones (Middlehurst, as cited in Gregory, 1996; Marginson, 2007). At the same time, there is a decline in funding from traditional public sources, yet paradoxically more governmental oversight and demand for accountability of Higher Education institutions are becoming the norm in the sector (Marginson and Sawir, 2006; Kezar and Eckel, 2002).

The external pressures to change have created a tension between the view of the university as a “special” organisation, a community of scholars, and the contrasting view of the university as a business, offering a commodity like any other business (see for example Naidoo, 2003, 2007; Knight 2002). It is therefore important to understand the changing role of leadership in Higher Education against the background of the changes occurring within the socio-economic and political environment.

Davies et al (2001, p. 1025) point out that the earlier models of collegial governance no longer “sit comfortably with pressures from customers who expect a business-like response in dynamic situations”. The resultant need for transformation of the Higher Education environment has put a great deal of focus on the role of leadership and leaders in effecting such changes in a relatively resistant environment.

Much of the discussion of leadership models for the Higher Education environment has centred on an adoption rather than an adaptation of models from the business literature and management practices of the last twenty years (Yielder and Codling, 2004). This has resulted in a tension between the collegial approach to managing and the managerial practices which demand greater coordination and controlling for the purposes of accountability (Yielder and Codling, 2004). The leadership models that are generally accepted in the Higher Education Literature can be categorised in "Role" (Servant, Steward, Adaptive, Distributed and Shared Leadership) and "Process" (Transactional and Transformational) models.

2.1 Transactional vs. Transformational Leadership in Higher Education

In his study on Pro Vice Chancellors at ten UK institutions, Spendlove (2007) concluded that the key competencies that were viewed as necessary in effective leaders were academic credibility, openness, honesty, willingness to consult others,

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the ability to think broadly and strategically and to engage with people. This study mirrors the earlier findings of Turnbull and Edwards (2005) in their study of a single UK Higher Educational institution where they found that the leadership challenge was in balancing the preference for no management from academics with the need for strict and strategic management principles for economic survival and viability. The complexity of the university environment requires that leaders are able to harness the human resources of the organisation to get buy-in from the staff in order to produce the change. This is best achieved through a transformational leadership style than through a transactional style of leadership (Kezar and Eckel, 2002; Davies et. al 2001; Pounder, 2001; Ulukan, 2005).

Cameron and Ulrich (1986) elaborated on this by indicating that transformational leadership is the model best suited to create readiness for change by creating a vision and mobilising support for this vision among the followers.

Further empirical studies which look at leadership styles/typologies in the business environment, among hospital nurses, and mental health workers (Bycio et.al, 1995; Pearce et. al, 2003; Aarons, 2006) indicate that the polarity between transformational and transactional leadership is not supported by the empirical evidence in terms of followers' responses to their leaders' management style.

Clearly, the dichotomy between transformational and transactional leadership is not as "bipolar" (Denison et. al., 2005) as it may seem. Indeed the leader in the University environment has to rely on both models to create a vision for change, to mobilise resources both human and financial to effect the change (all transformational leadership qualities) but must also be able to articulate clear goals and expectations to faculty and monitor performance for feedback (transactional leadership qualities). For that reason, transactional and transformational leadership in the University setting may be seen as two faces of the same coin of leadership by roles, relying on a single "heroic" Vice Chancellor or Dean to impel staff to change, innovate and transform the environment.

The conclusion from the discussion on transformational and transactional leadership models is that both have a place in leadership activities, at least within the Higher Education sector and form a part of the repertoire of leadership skills and competencies that the leader should call on, contingent on the status of the organisation at any particular time (Pounder, 2001; Quinn 2004).

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2.2 Process Leadership Models in Higher Education

In the above discussion, there is no clear cut resolution of the transactional versus transformational leadership debate in relation to the suitability of either model to deal with the current dynamic environment of higher education.

Although global forces are moving universities closer to a market focused model of leadership and management, there is still the consciousness of the University as a somewhat different type of organisation which may not fit neatly into the typologies for leadership which are described by Mintzberg (1979), Gosling and Mintzberg (2003), or Quinn (2004). The question of the university as offering a public good that is intangible (Naidoo 2003, 2007) but of immense social importance influences the kind of leadership models that have emerged in the more recent literature.

The process led models look at leadership from the perspective of the follower and suggest that, given the highly individualistic environment of academia, the leader's role is specifically to create an enabling environment in which the professional core can flourish and execute change (Woods, 2007).

Leadership models such as servant leadership (Sergiovanni, 2000), shared leadership (Pearce et. al, 2007), adaptive leadership (Daly and Chrispeels, 2008; Eddy et. al 2006) and distributive or distributed leadership (Gronn, 2009; Harris 2008; Harris and Spillane 2008) have focused more on leadership as process. Leaders, in these models, take the role of facilitators to enable stakeholders to work together to come up with solutions to non-routine, ill defined problems (Randall and Coakley, 2006). The leader must be willing to open up to critique from the members of the organisation from all levels (Sergiovanni, 2000), and to accept that leadership can come from any level of the organisation (Gronn, 2009; Harris, 2008). Harris (2008) argues that distributed leadership recognises the potential for multiple leaders to emerge from within the organisation once it provides a supportive and enabling environment.

The question may well be asked: How appropriate are such loose and fluid models in an increasingly competitive higher education environment where institutions must often change or die? (Drucker, 1993). The new higher education environment may be seen as one which must cope with the tension between knowledge processing and business processing (Martin and Marion, 2005). In this conflictive world, power is fluid between the knowledge processing element of the higher education institution and the business processing element. It is therefore the role of the leader to facilitate

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the smooth and seamless flows between the two elements of the higher education institution by removing barriers. This would require the leader to relinquish his traditional role of leading from in front and instead empower the employees to work in “healthy networks” where they are able to innovate and respond rapidly to the changing environment. (Martin and Marion, 2005).

However, the delivery of higher education has evolved rapidly in the last ten years to focus on mass enrolment and dealing with students as “customers and clients” (Yielder and Codling, 2004). This has placed pressure on Universities to find innovative means of expanding access to higher education among its communities, while coping with the realities of shrinking resources. Many universities have therefore turned to the use of modalities which allow for rapid increase in enrolment and resources. The internet has been an important development which has spawned a new way to deliver programmes with little or no face-to-face interaction in the traditional classroom setting, thus offering Higher Education Institutions an opportunity to grow outside of their physical boundaries (Portaencasa B., 1996).

With globalisation and the resultant liberalisation of services, including education, covered under the GATS treaty, on-line distance learning (ODL) institutions are growing rapidly in the transborder offer of higher education. Given the complexity and rapidity with which that environment changes in consort with technological developments, we turn to examining the ODL Higher Education environment. The framework of the leadership models discussed above will be used to guide our analysis of the appropriate leadership model to be applied to this environment.

3.0 Leadership in the Virtual Environment

Relative to the wealth of research on leadership and leadership in higher education, the literature on leadership in the virtual environment is still quite thin. The management and leadership of the virtual environment must take into account the discontinuities that are inherent in the environment (Chudoba et.al., 2005; Shekhar, 2007). Thus the early literature on leadership in the virtual organisation stressed the need to manage and bridge the physical distance between leaders and followers, the willingness to delegate, the importance of articulating clear goals and tasks, the need for close attention to managing cultural differences, and the development of organisational identity issues (Cascio, 2000; Handy, 1995, Brown and Gioia, 2002). Given the physical discontinuities of the virtual organisation (geography, time, space

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and culture), the traditional leadership theories have not found much favour in the literature as being effective models in this environment. The role of the 'heroic' leader for example is seen as less important in the virtual organisation than in the physical environment (Brown and Gioia, 2002). Brown argues that in the virtual environment there is a shorter time horizon for visioning due to the rapidly changing environment. Thus the traditional "far seeing" visionary leader model is not appropriate in an environment where the future changes unexpectedly due to the rapidly evolving technology, exponential increasing competition.

Given the dispersed and complex nature of the virtual organisation, it would appear that the leadership model that best addresses the complexity of that environment would belong to the process leadership models typology such as distributed (or distributive) leadership (Gronn, 2009) or the behavioural complexity model (Quinn, 1988, Denison et.al 1995). Brown and Gioia (2002) and Yoo et. al (2004) through empirical studies both conclude that these two models provide the best basis for defining the type of leadership most effective in the virtual organisation. Although Brown and Gioia (2000) argue that distributive leadership in the virtual organisation still "retains the intuitive sense that there is something special about leadership associated with the upper echelons" (p. 410), Yoo and Alavi (2004) view leadership in the virtual environment as a less hierarchical and more organic relationship that may be distributed to different members of the team. Thus they identify leadership roles that emerge from the research such as initialiser, scheduler and integrator.

Much of the research on leadership and management in the virtual environment has actually been based on what Handy (1995) argued has to be the nucleus of the virtual organisation and which has become the unit of analysis of the virtual environment - the virtual team. Due to the distributed nature of the virtual organisation, Handy (1995) further points out that managing people you cannot see requires a great deal of trust, which in turn requires that the organisation be broken down into smaller teams. The importance of trust in effective performance of virtual teams is the singularly most agreed on constant in the study of effective leadership of virtual teams. (Kayworth et. al, 2000, Jarvenpaa et. al, 1999; Clases et. al 2003; Yoo et.al 2004, Panteli and Sockalingam, 2004; Panteli 2004). Several studies have therefore concluded that the virtual environment requires high levels of trust and relationship building through the use of various techniques primarily through computer mediated technology.

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Despite the number of research projects on virtual teams and what makes them effective, researchers of virtuality have been very reluctant to develop models or frameworks of leadership that could replace the models that have been traditionally developed in the business literature. Primarily, this could be because of the relatively small scale of the research projects which, although some have been on functioning virtual organisations (Brown et al, 2002, Cascio 2000) have been often restricted to created environments of global virtual teams within an educational context (Kayworth, and Leidner, 2000; Yoo and Alavi, 2004; Jarvenpaa et. al. 1999). Although this may be cause for some conservative acceptance of the emerging definitions of leadership in the virtual environment, for our purposes where our intention is to examine leadership in a virtual higher education environment, this provides a good spring board for attempting to come up with a model for leadership skills and behaviours in the virtual environment.

4.0 Leadership in the Virtual Higher Education Environment

With the increasing move to virtual or on-line mode of delivery of Higher Education, the question asked may be: “what kind of leadership is necessary to successfully develop in this environment?” It is tempting to turn to the business world to look at models in e-commerce that can be transferred to the Higher Education environment. Indeed, many of the larger virtual universities currently dominating the market are set up as private companies with the profit motive guiding the choice of business model adopted. However in the development of virtual Universities, UNESCO has indicated four emerging models: (1) a newly created institution operating as a virtual university; (2) an evolution of an existing institution with a unit or arm offering virtual education; (3) a consortium of partners constituted to develop and/or offer virtual education; and (4) a commercial enterprise offering online education.

(<http://www.unesco.org/iiep/virtualuniversity/home.php>)

For the purposes of this paper we will focus primarily on the second model of on-line and distance learning in the context of the traditional Higher Education institution moving into a virtual environment, with specific reference to the case of the University of the West Indies and its development of an Open Campus. Apart from the researcher’s own interest in this area, it is very instructive to examine how an institution with a traditional leadership model can develop a model that will best deal with the new challenges of borderless higher education.

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In seeking a framework for determining the leadership structure that is a best fit for the virtual higher education environment we suggest that it is important to examine (1) The environment in which the institution is situated; (2) the rationale for adopting a virtual mode of delivery; and (3) the internal structures needed to address the requirements of this institution. By examining these three elements, it is expected that a context for leadership in the virtual environment will emerge and will assist in determining the best fit of leadership styles/behaviours in this environment.

4.1 Environmental Factors

The growth of borderless higher education has been seen as a response to globalisation and the knowledge intensive needs for the development of competitive economies (Naidoo, 2003). The inclusion of Higher Education as a service in the GATS agreement has also impelled the rapid development of Mode 1 delivery (transborder/virtual delivery) of higher education (Knight, 2002). However for some traditional universities, the development of on line or virtual programming can be seen as an attempt to expand access and “massify” education in order to meet the demands primarily of their home market as determined in most cases by the national governments.

The development of an Open Campus of the University of the West Indies, for example, is a strategic goal in the institution’s 2007-2012 Strategic Plan “... to enable the University to expand the scope, enhance the appeal and improve the efficiency of its service to the individuals, communities and countries which it serves” (UWI Strategic Plan 2007-2012, p.31).

Consequently, it is clear that the Open Campus of the UWI is an attempt to be responsive to the market demands which affect all universities as has been described by Pounder (2001) and Spendlove (2007). Thus the Open Campus in this highly competitive environment will require leadership which is capable of responding rapidly to changes and still be able to straddle the demands of tight management control in order to ensure market competitiveness as well as visionary and transformative ideas to be able to respond to the demand for new programmes and up to date technology. In this regard the leadership model of the virtual arm (the Open Campus) of the UWI is not really differentiated from the leadership of the traditional face-to-face university that has to confront those issues within its national boundaries. The transformational leadership model with its emphasis on motivating change,

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providing a clear and compelling vision and mission (Cameron and Ulric, 1986; Kezar and Eckel, 2002) is as applicable in the virtual environment as it is in higher education environments that are affected by the rapid rate of technological and societal changes.

4.2 The Rationale for Adopting a Virtual Mode of Delivery

The reasons behind an institution's decision to move to a virtual platform are fundamental to the kind of leadership and management model put in place. Movement to the virtual mode of delivery can be seen as solving physical space constraints and increasing revenues to the institution (Portaencasa B, 1998) and this is indeed one beneficial spin-off of expanding to on-line or e-learning for an institution that cannot or does not wish to grow its on campus enrolment. Leadership in this kind of environment however will have to focus on marketing, cost containment, economies of scale, clear performance measures, measurable goals and targets, business plans and other managerial tools. In other words more managerial leadership (Yielder and Codling, 2004) or transactional leadership is necessary. In the case of the UWI Open Campus, growth in enrolment in UWI programmes regionally is a primary objective of the Campus (see UWI Strategic Plan 2007-2012, p. 28) as the facilities for on-campus growth at the three physical campuses are inadequate.

A second major reason for moving to an e-learning platform is a pedagogical one. The primary drivers of adopting this platform include the need to provide potential students with learning tools that are more appropriate for the knowledge economy, to adopt a learner centred approach to teaching and learning given the new technologies available, and to develop flexible curricula that can change with the rapidly changing environments in which the learners must function. Based on our discussion of leadership models above, such an environment must be led by leaders who are willing to be a part of a network, communicative, consultative and enablers of innovation and new ideas as well as champions for the use of new developments in ICT (Awidi, 2008). In this context, leadership can more aptly be described as one of process and would be more reflective of adaptive or covert leadership styles (Mintzberg, 1998). For example, The Open Campus of the UWI has as one of its objectives the development of innovative programmes utilising the available ICT infrastructure. The Open Campus leadership, for example has taken the decision to move away from the proprietary software (Banner) that is used on its sister campuses to provide the student administration system. In doing so the technical team has developed a

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customised system using open source software (Moodle) to develop not only the student administrative system but also the Learning Management System for the on-line programme offerings driven by the identified stakeholder needs of seamless access. The leadership in the ICT area has been undertaken by the technical core in the Open Campus with the formal leadership team (Pro-Vice Chancellor/Principal, Deputy Principal and Directors) playing an enabling and supportive role, negotiating this thorny issue through the various levels of committee approval. Awidi (2008) argues that this approach is highly recommended for the successful implementation of innovations in the e-learning environment, allowing for the technical project leaders to set and define goals.

4.3 Internal Structures – Fit for Purpose

Another determinant of leadership style is the organisational structure that is adopted to be the engine for the virtual university. In the traditional university structure leadership is structured for the most part around the senior executive leadership (the Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellors, Deans). Although there are increasingly blurred lines of leadership in the modern university as it seeks to adopt “increasingly complex missions, involving mass higher education and regional and international markets” (Whitchurch, 2006, pp.159), thus effectively erasing the boundaries between leadership and management, other research (See for example, Turnbull and Edwards, 2005) has shown that the traditional view of leadership responsibility for change management still remains cogent.

As a result, the hierarchical structure of universities continues to be a standard in the higher education environment. However in the virtual learning environment the centre of power and leadership may well reside in the technical core and in the individuals who are able to access and deploy resources throughout the system. It is this embrace of the dynamic structure of the environment that differentiates the leadership of a traditional higher education environment from the virtual

The structure of the UWI Open Campus demands a flexible approach to leadership, recognising that the environment is a dynamic one. The Open Campus is a new venture that requires a great deal of external advocacy to get buy-in from the fifteen governments that support the regional University of the West Indies, as well as that of its other external and internal publics. In that regard the transformational leadership model is attractive in terms of planning and goal setting, inspiring and motivating support. In addition the Open Campus is developing new and innovative

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programming that requires creative thinking throughout the network of departments that form the campus.

Finally, the Open Campus has nodes of delivery in 15 countries which require leadership and management on site as well as close coordination with the other functional departments of the Open Campus in order to ensure high levels of service delivery to students and other clientele in a dispersed geographical environment in the English speaking Caribbean. Despite the commonality of language and historical background, each of these countries has its own cultural peculiarity that has to be taken into account in the development of the managerial and delivery structure. Within each country there is a senior member of academic staff heading the local Open Campus Centre. The tension for these Heads is the ability to act rapidly and flexibly in response to the local needs of their environment, while maintaining the standardization which is required for the efficient delivery of on-line programming.

5.0 Distributed Leadership in the Virtual Higher Education Environment

The geographical dispersion of the Open Campus requires a distributed approach to the leadership role as the traditional roles of Principal/Deputy Principal and even of the Finance and Administration Manager have to become more facilitating and “boundaryless”. Distributed leadership has the advantage of being able to span boundaries and cultures (Harris, 2008) and therefore provides a good framework for a structure such as the Open Campus. Although apparently a suitable model for functioning in the boundaryless virtual environment, and even more so for the additional geographical complexity of the Open Campus of the UWI, it is clear that there are some disadvantages should the institution follow an uncritical adoption of this model.

One central pre-requisite for the adoption of this model is to ensure that those persons who will have leadership distributed to them have the necessary skills and knowledge to exercise the tasks (Harris, 2008). In the case of the Open Campus this is a particular challenge as the Campus is being formed from a merger of pre-existing departments which had more traditional forms of leadership. Training, re-training and skills upgrade are a necessary element to the success of a distributed leadership environment.

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Another challenge for the Open Campus is the organisational culture which had hitherto been dependent on a “heroic” leader figure in the form of the previous Pro-Vice-Chancellor. There was a great reliance on this individual’s political know-how to acquire resources for the organisation, as well as a centralisation of decision making in that office. Changing this culture requires the development of a great deal of trust among the Heads of Departments and the managers/leaders in the system as well as the empowerment of the senior staff to fulfil some of these functions independently of central control.

These two drawbacks suggest that, at least in the transition phases, other leadership models of a more transactional nature may be necessary to ensure the smooth running of the organisation until the requisite skills, experience and trust can be developed fully throughout the system. In conclusion, in an immature organisation such as the Open Campus, transactional leadership which embodies these leadership behaviours may be a more appropriate fit until organisational learning reaches the level where truly distributed leadership can function successfully.

From the above discussion it is clear that Leadership in the virtual HEI has much in common with the traditional Higher Education environment in the 21st century context of rapid change. The Open Campus as an e-learning innovation of the traditional University of the West Indies also shares leadership characteristics with the virtual Higher education environment. However the analysis shows that in the fairly unique environment of the University of the West Indies of wide physical dispersion of its operations, a distributed leadership process is also necessary. Pearce et. al (2007), point out that virtual teams do not have the benefit of the formal leader’s presence immediately available and that ‘the top leader may have the ultimate responsibility for motivation but the reality may be that the day-to-day minute to minute source of motivation is, in fact, more dispersed and shared by team members’ (p.283).

Using the three prime leadership functions identified in the general literature (see for example Robbins 2005, pp. 346-347) of Vision and Mission Setting, Decision Making and Strategy Implementation and Controlling and Monitoring, Table 1 attempts to synthesize the leadership models appropriate to the traditional Higher Education Institution (THEI), the generic Virtual Higher Education Institution (VHEI) and the UWI Open Campus (UWIOC) based on the roles played by the leaders.

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| MODEL | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| R O L E | | Leadership Level | Transformation al | Transactional | Distributed |
| | Vision/Mission Setting | Executive Management | THEI/VHEI | | |
| | Decision Making/Strategy Implementation | Senior Management | THEI/VHEI | THEI/UWIOC | VHEI |
| | Controlling and Monitoring | Middle Management | | VHEI/UWIOC | VHEI/ UWIOC |

Table 1. Leadership Models for, Traditional Higher Education Institutions (THEI), UWI Open Campus (UWIOC) and Virtual Higher Education Institutions (VHEI)

6.0 Conclusions

This paper has looked primarily at a theoretical approach to the discussion on leadership in the virtual higher education environment with reference to the case of the UWI Open Campus. The study could however have benefited from more discussion on the various roles of leaders in the Higher Education environment from the strategic to the more operational levels. This is an area for further empirical study which would help to inform in more detail the varying skills and abilities that could provide a framework for leaders in this environment.

However from the theoretical analysis above, one may conclude that given the more urgent technological and time demands on higher education being delivered in the virtual environment, the reliance on the central leader to drive all the major processes of the system is not a practical leadership paradigm. A distributed leadership approach in the virtual environment is appropriate given the need for persons with specific skills to take up leadership roles on an emergent basis.

In the case of the Open Campus of the University of the West Indies, the added complexity of multi-campus presence in 15 countries with individual cultural differences, as well as the need for close collaboration with the production elements of the system that are also geographically dispersed, make a good case for the adoption of a distributed model of leadership. However, the note of caution sounded by Harris (2008) and Pearce et. al (2007) that distributed leadership can only be successful in an environment where the individuals are prepared and capable of

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exercising such leadership, must be taken extremely seriously. This is one area that the current leaders of the Open Campus, including this researcher, must reflect on carefully when distributing leadership roles to individuals within the system without adequate analysis of skills and competencies.

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