

CHALLENGING POSITION OF DEANS IN GOVERNANCE PRACTICES IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, PAKISTAN: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This research study inclines to investigate the foremost challenges faced by the deans in governance process in public universities, Pakistan. There is role conflict in governance practices in both selected public universities. The universities constitutional short falls have created room for working on supposition and everybody opts what deems him fit. Qualitative case study approach was used to obtain both the aspects e.g. in depth description and analysis of bounded system. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The study pinpointed that there is role conflict between various responsibilities in the public universities in Pakistan which caused difference of opinion to the extent of job clash. Every stakeholder complains that his duty is being performed by the other. As a result, confusion and misconception gives birth to complexities in university system. The confusion of role has been noted in many areas like dean versus chairmen, dean versus pro-vice chancellors.

Keywords: *Public Universities, Governance, Position, Role Conflict, Deans & Constitutional Short Falls.*

Introduction

Governance demarks the status of different officials to collaborate in steering the universities on right track. Different names have been adopted by chief academic officers. Every separate body is part and parcel of the entire process that promotes the cause of university to its ultimate goal. Academic vice chancellor, provost, dean of academic affairs, and dean are some of those labels (Sensing, 2003). While, Birnbaum's (1992) study asked interviewees to name the important leaders on their faculties, forty four percent of the respondents named to dean (Martin, 1993).

Deans are commonly referred to as 'senior officers' of the university and participate as members of executive standing committees reporting to the board

on matters of programme and academic planning and implementation but do not typically appear on the executive team (Boyko and Jones, 2010). Though, deans' position is very important from governance point of view but there is a vacuum regarding deans' status as such, they are described as the unsung professionals of the academy- unsung because their contributions to the academic enterprise are rarely recognized (Rosser, 2004; De Boer and Goedegebuure, 2009).

According to Martin (1993) the position of the dean has not been rationally studied. About the dean's work he thinks two reasons need be viewed. In the first place dean being member of president's cabinet occupies a unique position which enables him to share the leadership responsibilities for the university as a whole. Further dean has broader understanding because he is involved in teaching and learning process. Through his resources the faculty can have a better guidance to work well. In the second place in consensus with March (1986) term 'density of administrative competence,' which means collective effort of managers and leaders making the organization a success. Without competent administrators at other levels even a strong effective president cannot deliver goods to affect the quality of institutional programs.

A dean takes decisions on large issues like allocation of resources in respect of budget, personnel, and space as well as smaller issues including the allocation of travel funds etc. It is the office of dean to determine either change is needed or adhocism is safe in the face of exigencies of academic life. He knows the priorities of a department at a particular period of the time of action. He assigns tasks and responsibilities to particular department. It is dean who judges the performance of the chairperson of a department. It is dean's proper communication that helps the chairperson to do departmental tasks as expected (Tucker and Bryan, 1991).

This shows that dean's role being complex is seen by everyone hard to understand. It is hard fact that even those persons who closer to the deans position hardly comprehend the actual role of a dean. The complexity of deans' status in the governance makes everyone look at it from personal standpoint. It is not clear as to what one wants of the office of a dean. As in the capacity of head of the faculty a dean is involved in decision making process. Obviously dean happens to be responsible for administrative as well as academic decisions. As an academic head it is only dean who provides a link between central administration and academic departments. However, dean's effective leadership strives efficient and inclusive structures, networks and processes (Martin, 1993; Fagin, 1997).

Wolverton, Wolverton & Gmelch (1999) focusing on the repercussions on account of role conflict and role ambiguity their study finds the deans walking on

tight rope while balancing between their departments and central administration (Baldrige, 1971) because being backbone to university decision making their role is unclear whereas, the success of each group lies on the performance of dean. Again, as administrators in hierarchical setting they act in a way that suitable to the situation as per demands and expectations of the team with which they work. Having legitimate authority the dean that works more decisive his office becomes more effective.

This study find that role conflict and role ambiguity come in the way to organizational commitment. As such, to obtain more commitment lesser role conflict and role ambiguity is must. It will be a prospective positive move to address the issue of role conflict and role ambiguity if a university needs to find way to maintain its worth at its peak. If dean is made a crucial link in decision making process this move becomes the first step to understand how far the role conflict and role ambiguity minimize their effect.

Perceiving dean as an extensional to presidential role McCarty and Young (1981) have evaluated deans' role. Ends and means of education, selection of faculty, and preparation of budget are counted as fundamental duties of dean. Since the departmental chairperson acts for the dean in many ways, the relationship of dean with faculty remains first and foremost. Good communication and good relationship both contribute to eliminate if not all problems yet keep them to a minimum. In case there is no full-fledged chairperson of any department automatically dean becomes its administrative head by default. As such he appoints a senior person to look after the day to day affairs thereby (McCarty and Young, 1981; McCarty, and Reyes, 1987; Tucker and Bryan, 1991).

Rational of the Study

This study proceeds to collect the views of different scholars who have demarked the position of a dean in the network of a university. This study ventures to offer substantial matter for the prospective output of the university. The challenges faced by the dean in governance process has been specifically studied the areas explored regarding role, responsibilities and powers sharing of the deans. This is expected to help achieve the cause of ultimate goals of a university.

Methodology

Qualitative case study was situated activity that determined on one facet of the problem (Yin, 2003; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). It again demanded the research to observe the phenomenon in person. Morse and Richards call it a discovery which speaks for the researcher to know the things in reality. It took place in natural situation which permitted researchers visit the sites of participants

(Creswell, 2009). All the stated characteristics persuaded the researcher to focus on the intensive instances to conclude the mission in natural situation. This study pertained to examine particular aspect of university governance exclusively to determine the challenges faced by the deans in terms of their roles and powers in governance process in public universities in Pakistan.

Sampling

The research has selected two public universities which would serve the purpose. The purposive sampling was used for this study. This being Judgment sampling the researcher would be enabled to explore the real situation for the study (Merriam, 2009). The authenticity and extent of meaningful sample was subject to obtain rich information for profound study. The size of sample within case was determined by a number of factors relevant to the study's purpose (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009). As, this research was to investigate deans' challenges in the process of decision making and implementation. They are middle managers between faculty and administration need be in line with the hierarchy of decision making. In this respect, ten deans from different faculties of two selected public universities of Pakistan were the participants of this study. For confidentiality they were named UA (University A), UB (University B) whereas the research participants were named Aca with numbers 1,2,3....

Data Collection Procedure

Semi- structured interviews were used as a best tool to investigate in the right context. Interview was acknowledged as a main source of qualitative data in order to comprehend the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009). Through this strategy the researcher explored many facts and examined to strengthen research process there was variety of interviews conducted in different situations. Interviews were essential source of information (Yin, 2003). Interviews provided in-depth information pertaining to participant's experiences and viewpoints of a particular topic (Turner, 2010).

Research Findings & Discussion

Role Conflict

The latent field of deanship, which, if considered realistically and addressed in the broader interest of university governance the educational as well as leadership output will be more prospective and purposeful. The main barrier to purposeful governance is conflict of roles of concerned parties. Though the office of deans is regarded middle management yet due to ambiguity of law the roles and functions of deans' in governance process face challenging situations. The existing mechanism being most intense the conflicting position always keeps them in push

and pull situation. However, the multidimensional post of dean is not given exact status to play potential role. It was argued unless positions or responsibilities are not clear taking every stakeholder on board there will be problems and if everybody is working on supposition, the institutions cannot achieve their desired goals.

The role conflict that is found in public universities is consistent with weak governance framework and policies. In both selected public universities there is found same type of role conflict among stakeholders. The roles are not defined clear as a result system is working on assumptions and in most of the cases deans are found playing the role of chairmen too. So in this state of affairs there is frequent overlapping between the role of dean and role of chairmen and role of dean and pro-vice chancellors that has created contradiction between them. In this situation deans' work remain problematic and confused.

If we move back in our public universities when I was student clearly vice chancellor was following the deans if any faculty member had any issue if they went to vice chancellor and vice chancellor called dean that this is your faculty issue you have to resolve it. In that time even the system was somehow clear we deans had some position we were heard but now even students are rushing direct to vice chancellor and we are just looking. So this culture has made the system more confusing the kind of environment we are facing it is violating everything as just things are going on and I as dean find my role nowhere. I as dean thus humiliated even in the eyes of my students. (UB, Aca: 2).

UB, Aca, 2 observes that in past to some extent the system was clear. Dean had sufficient status so much so that vice chancellors deemed it fit to consult the dean in many matters. But with passage of time the situation worsened when vice chancellor took all the matters in hand needing no input from the deans concerned. As such, deans are facing awkward situation because there is clear violation of set norms and rules are already not defined. This makes the deans think what is their role in the university governance particularly in matters concerned to their respective faculties. If the students bypass the office of dean and administration welcomes them the deans is left with no choice.

What I am supposed to do by the end of the year I have to evaluate the teachers of my faculty through ACR {Annual Confidential Report} but authority then directly calls teachers and shows them report and then my positions becomes very critical. Dean is team leader, team leader means who leads faculty to the right direction, right way if you go other

countries faculty dean is least concerned to the matters of students, least concerned to the faculty promotion dean has powers but such system and culture is not available over here every student directly enters in dean's office I still couldn't understand what does mean by academic head that's why it is creating more confusion in the system in fact I am not happy with my role even. (UA, Aca: 4).

Suppose for the appointment of faculty members it is responsibility of registrar office they have to announce post, conduct written test and arrange cases in selection board and at the most dean can arrange subject specialists but that too dean has to do everything I think there is mix up of roles which creates problems and difficulty to carry on things that who should do what or perform what duties. (UA, Aca: 7).

There is conflict somewhere and not drawn a line to differentiate which has created perplexity as a result there is great uncertainty and improbability which have affected governance process and difficult to balance the administration.

Conflicts between Deans and Chairmen

Role conflict is found between deans and chairperson's role. Chairmen think it is their role and job which the dean is doing as such overlapping their role jurisdiction and dean thinks it is his responsibility as head of faculty. There is definitely somewhere problem which fails to draw a line to discriminate between the roles of both entities. Obviously it is bound to create confusion and even sometimes battlement and teachers are divided in groups and have made the governance process very politicized.

In my faculty the role of chairmen is minus they just handover the course outlines or exam results to dean and expect dean should do everything and provide them everything no one asks chairmen or head of the departments when vice chancellor calls deans' meetings he asks to report him about chairmen and sometimes I don't get report from chairmen and chairmen say they have given report to dean but I don't get even I don't have any power so if every time I report authority that I don't get favor from my faculty chairpersons then authority calls my deanship failure so there is big confusion and big question what does mean by academic head but I think I am just a symbolic figure nothing to do productive as dean.(UB, Aca: 5).

UB, Aca 5 says generally in a faculty the job assignment of the chairmen is to submit course outline and exam results to the dean concerned. But a practice is that the dean is asked by the vice chancellor to provide everything concerning the

faculty, while chairmen or heads of the departments are spared of the task. Usually in the meeting with vice chancellor deans are called upon to submit report about the performance of chairmen. May the chairmen have not submitted their reports even dean has no power to ask the chairmen to do anything. Now deans' position becomes critical on the one hand and no compliance from heads of the departments and chairmen on the other hand administration call it deans' failure. The concerned chairmen are not even called upon to explain and if dean complains for chairmen then it creates tussle between dean and chairman. This irrational reaction against deans stops them from doing the duty with contentment. It speaks volumes regarding unclear role of dean. It is imperative then what status does a dean have. Nominally he is academic head practically he is no more than a symbol of deanship only to do what the high ups intend him to do. Question does not arise about productive initiative on the part of dean as such.

I as dean was always clear that dean should be planner, decision maker I should plan outlines and schemes of courses and plan to produce more researches, and design time table and handover to chairmen and then chairmen role should start from there but what is problem here even leadership is confused like in meetings vice chancellor puts all responsibilities to deans he says if your chairmen don't work then you should visit classes, you dean check attendance you should monitor because you are academic head I will ask you that's what vice chancellor says. (UA, Aca: 6).

According to UA, Aca 6 a dean conceives his role that he should be a planner and decision maker. Since dean has direct influence in hiring, promoting, tenuring, and evaluating faculty as well as allocating funds that directly influence to their faculty because deans is in a better position to support faculty's effectiveness (Sensing, 2003). He is supposed to plan outlines and scheme of courses, produce more and more research opportunities besides designing the time table to handover to the chairmen and head of the departments to start their work along the schedule. But there emerges uncomfortable situation due to the misconceived behaviour of the vice chancellor who urges the dean to visit the classes, check the attendance and monitor the performance even if the head of the departments fail to do so. Because vice chancellor tells the deans that as a dean he has to act the academic head even if head of the departments do not work properly. It is however imperative that what is the view of vice chancellor regarding deans' status when he relinquishes the chairmen and heads of the departments and compels the dean to do their job. It puts the entire faculty performance in dole drum.

Dean and Pro-Vice Chancellor

Though there was already problem of demarcation between different entities like confusion about head of the departments' roles and the deans' role. There has emerged even another awkward situation that around 2006-2007 the posts of pro-vice chancellor were created in big public universities. It was felt that vice chancellor who is pre-occupied with various assignments a post of pro-vice chancellor would ease the work of vice chancellor. Instead of smooth working of the system it has added to aggravate the situation resulting in more conflicts and ambiguities. Like there are sub-campuses in some public universities those campuses are run by pro-vice chancellors and there is zero role of deans. There exists the board of faculty which is chaired by dean in main campus but in sub-campuses instead of dean the pro-vice chancellors chair the board of faculty meetings. There the status of dean is eliminated that act violates even the constitution of the university.

We have pro-vice chancellors now we have seven pro-vice chancellors in our university even some junior professors are made pro-vice chancellor over senior professor deans and we deans are asked that pro-vice chancellors are higher in cadre and now PVCs having influence in academic matters too when university constitution says pro-vice chancellor will perform such functions of vice chancellor or such other powers and functions in respect of the campus for which he is appointed (P.11) but still it is not clear that they are academic pro-vice chancellors or administrative. (UA, Aca: 1).

According to UA, Aca 1 there are seven pro-vice chancellors in their university they are made pro-vice chancellors above the status of dean who is senior professor in grade but juniors who are appointed as pro-vice chancellors supersede them. Deans are told that those junior professors made pro-vice chancellors are administratively higher in status than deans who are the senior professors. Thus, the newly inducted pro-vice chancellors indulge and influence the academic matters too. Though the post of pro-vice chancellor is created to perform such acts which fall in the purview of vice chancellor just to ease his task besides this they do such other functions which pertain to the campus for which he is appointed as pro-vice chancellor. But above all it remains unclear whether pro-vice chancellors' cadre is academic or administrative.

Recently we have one example one dean he was acting pro-vice chancellor but he was very influential person so he said he would be in selection board of his faculty as dean whereas he was not dean but acting pro-vice chancellor and he didn't allow dean to come in selection board

but he acting pro-vice chancellor came instead of dean so there is no defined role even now great confusion between the role of dean and pro-vice chancellor still not clear pro-vice chancellor is academic head or dean is academic head. (UB, Aca: 3).

In the statement given by UB, Aca 3 there occurred an untoward incident regarding the role of pro-vice chancellors in selection board in the appointment of faculty members. One dean was made as pro-vice chancellor he was influential so much so that he wanted to play the function of dean as well so he insisted to attend selection board meeting which is exclusively deans right and deans have to participate to suggest vice chancellor to appoint appropriate person for their faculties. Thus, this leaves no option but to question whether the fellow pro-vice chancellor should work as academic pro-vice chancellor or the administrator to support the vice chancellor. Matter remains still unresolved because the confusion and conflict is kept in official documents too like university constitution which is still not clear. As such the will and wish of those who have access to high ups works on its own.

Likewise we have deans committee which is chaired by vice chancellor and if vice chancellor is busy or out of country then according to the rules vice chancellor asks any senior dean to decide matters and take joint decision we deans have every month or after two months meeting on every issue like exam etc it is any kind of issues related to academic matters they are discussed in deans committee but now they have made it deans and pro-vice chancellors committee. (UB, Aca: 1).

UB, Aca 1 briefed that as a routine they have deans committee which is chaired by vice chancellor. In case vice chancellor is out of station/abroad/busy in some emergency activity then according to rule vice chancellor designates a senior member of deans committee to chair the meeting and take decisions with consensus among the participants. As a routine such meetings used to be held in a month or two and issues like exams or other academic related matter came under discussion there for amicable resolution. But an amendment has been made to name the former deans' committee as "deans and pro-vice chancellors committee". It again adds to more confusion and created ambiguity of status of the both entities. It can however create difference of opinion that may affect proper process of decision making. It can be further warring venue instead of cooperative and coordinated effort to address the issue under deliberation.

Discussion

There are more than one conflicts regarding role and functions of the deans. This state of affairs makes role of dean more confusing. They are handicapped to

perform their role with clash of opinion and embarrassment. In this situation status of dean becomes more awkward lacking in dexterity on the profitable and efficient output on the part of dean. The struggle for power between the chairmen and heads of departments with the dean is too embarrassing. In many cases heads of the departments think it's their duty which dean is performing whereas dean has a grudge that head of the department is overlapping his position because he is academic head and leader of faculty on the whole.

The point in question is that the problem is created due to no line of delineation between both the entities. This is but natural causing non cooperation and coordination in the faculty work. Obviously teachers divide in two rival groups specially due to confusion and not defined clear line has paved the way for political involvement of the vested interest add fuel to the fire and entire governance system is affected instead of effective.

Conclusion

This study meant to elude the views of deans about their role in governance practices and challenges they came across in public universities in Pakistan. This research study reveals that conflict is still there that what is role of pro-vice chancellor and what is role of deans and what is the role of pro-vice chancellors' in governance process that is consistent with weak governance framework and policies. This ambiguity and role conflict have created contradiction among stakeholders. Everybody is performing his/her role just on assumption, without clear comprehension of the job obligation, limits and powers.

Correspondingly, the matter of roles, powers and responsibility is so confusing and unclear that occasionally every other dean is helpless to ask his senior or fellow dean that what he ought to do in this perplexed situation. The role ambiguity and role conflict affect governance process. It is very important to clarify what is role of vice chancellor, pro-vice chancellor, deans then directors, chairpersons there is lot of confusion prevailing in the university governance.

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