

The Drivers of Higher Education Leadership Competence: A Study of Moldovan HEI's

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Abstract:

This paper examines the qualities and skills needed by leaders and managers in Higher Education; the extent to which leaders and managers in 15 Moldovan Institutions perceive themselves to hold those qualities and skills; and the main drivers for holding higher levels of them. Review of the literature suggests that the qualities and skills examined belong to nine domains. The leaders and managers perceive themselves to be strongest on the Personal Values domain and weakest on Managing Resources. Where respondents have moved to the action stage of learning, perceive their organisation to be supportive of development, and have access to a broader range of development activities they are more likely to report higher levels of competence on the qualities and skills. The paper concludes that where institutions want to develop leadership and management capacity they need to help leaders and managers to psychologically commit to acting on their development needs.

Keywords:

Leadership, Competence, Action, Organisational Support

Introduction

This paper explores the state of leadership and management qualities and skills in the context of the transitional economy of the Republic of Moldova. It examines the extent to which leaders and managers in 15 of Moldova's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) perceive themselves to hold relevant qualities and skills for their role. It also ascertains the main drivers for holding higher levels of those qualities and skills. In this it presents part of a wider project aimed at the promotion and development of leadership and management across the Moldovan Higher Education sector.

The Moldovan Higher Education (HE) sector is facing significant change in its environment with the shift from a state managed economy to one that is now primarily market led (Bischof and Tofan 2018) and significant depopulation as younger people leave to find work in other countries (Bouton et al. 2011). More directly, HEIs were passed financial and decision making autonomy in 2013 and are now responsible for setting their own strategies. In response, there is a need to implement structural, policy and operational reforms and become more responsive to the demands of students and employer organisations. However, there is a perception that change is being held back by a lack of leadership and management capacity in the HE sector. To ensure that reform occurs, leaders and managers need to be able to drive through change and cope with greater complexity and it is notable that there has been no coordinated effort to prepare them for this challenge and training in modern management methods.

Determining the qualities and skills needed by HE leaders and managers is not a simple task. There is much debate in the literature about what it is to be a leader or manager in the context

of HE, the relevant domains of activity, and the nature of appropriate qualities and skills (Dopson et al. 2016). Before assessing the state of HE leadership and management, it is important to justify what counts as relevant qualities and skills and their domains. The first objective of this study is to develop a framework that identifies HE leadership and management qualities and skills and the domains to which they belong. The second objective is to establish to what extent HE leaders and managers in Moldova perceive themselves to hold the qualities and skills in those domains.

In the context of a study that aims to set the scene for change, it is also important to identify the main drivers or barriers to people becoming better leaders and managers in the context of HE. Understanding which drivers support people in becoming better leaders and managers will help direct resources to areas that will best support change. As a result, the third objective of the study is to identify the main drivers of leaders and managers perceiving themselves to be more competent regarding those qualities and skills.

In addressing these issues the paper starts by developing ‘a framework of HE leadership and management qualities and skills’ before identifying ‘the drivers of better HE leadership and management qualities and skills’ and five hypotheses that underpin the study. It continues to present the ‘method’ outlining the conduct of the study and ‘results’. Finally, the paper examines the implications of the findings in the ‘discussion’ and ‘conclusions’.