

**CHANGE LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITIES –
THE CONFUCIAN DIMENSION**

By

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ABSTRACT

The intensified *competition* of the global, market-based knowledge economy requires changed leadership practices in universities and colleges everywhere in the world. National policy makers increasingly see knowledge as the core resource and dynamic of modern economies, and prerequisite for nations' global competitiveness. The main source of productivity and competitiveness is knowledge production and production of human capital. Universities are seen as "power stations" for these production needs. By implication, the quality of their leadership turns crucial. At the core of organizational change is the quest for a renewed capacity to make relevant decisions about visions and missions, find adequate strategies for production, marketing and ways of restructuring available resources. On this backdrop it has turned interesting to wonder whether the leadership of universities located in "Confucian cultural Lands" has an advantage in the increasing global competition. Due to certain characteristics of Confucianism, university leaders in these countries may prove more effective and efficient than their competitors in other world regions in terms of changing their organizations to become more effective means for national policies. In this paper dominant university rationales are presented. Then university leadership competence is attempted linked to Confucian ideas, and it is discussed whether this is a clear-cut advantage, or, if these ideas also might be counter-productive...

1. Globalization forcing universities to change their organization

The intensified *competition* of the global, market-based knowledge economy requires changed leadership practices in universities and colleges everywhere in the world. However, due to differences in university tradition, different national economy and different status of the professoriate, the speed of change varies. As a trend, national policy makers increasingly see knowledge as the core resource and dynamic of modern economies, and prerequisite for nations' global competitiveness. The main source of productivity and competitiveness in the Information Age (Castells, 1996) is knowledge, both as input, but increasingly also the knowledge production process

(Castells, 1996; Stehr, 1994 & Bell, 1976). Knowledge is seen as both discipline-based pure/scientific knowledge and as know-how, or human capital vested in nations' and firms' applied research for practical problem solving (Gibbons *et al.*, 1994). To strengthen both scientific knowledge and general competence, national policy makers are increasingly recasting higher education and research policies to cater for knowledge based economical growth.

Thus, within the global knowledge economy, the university takes centre stage in economic and industrial policies. In the words of Castells (1994:16): "If knowledge is the electricity of the new informational-international economy, then the institutions of higher education are the power sources on which the new development process must rely". In order to competitively meet demands in the global higher education market, the production (research, teaching and service) must be changed to be relevant for the new situation. Changed production requires a changed organization. The operating steering core of the university as an organization is its executive leadership (President/Vice-Chancellor/Rector). At the core of organizational change is the quest for a renewed capacity to make relevant decisions about visions and missions, find adequate strategies for production, marketing and ways of restructuring available resources, in other words – a need for adequate leadership and management *practices* (Tjeldvoll, 2002; Welle-Strand & Tjeldvoll, 2002 & Welle-Strand & Thune, 2002).

With the dynamic and competitive rise of economical power in the "Confucian Lands" in general, and China in particular as backdrop, it seems fair to wonder if the particular culture of the Asia-Pacific region has a favourable effect on leadership. More specifically, it is fair to ask whether the particular influences of Confucianism could be an advantage for more effective university leadership. This query led to

initiating a research project aiming at checking this assumption. The project titled *Change Leadership of Universities in Confucian Lands (CLINC)* was established at National Chi Nan University, Taiwan in 2008 (Tjeldvoll *et al.*, 2008).

Before attempting to establish a rationale of linking Confucianism to leadership dimension, a glance is made at an attempt to categorize western university models in terms of leadership and change. One of these models – the Service University – is highlighted. This model seems to be the one responding most effectively to the requirements of globalization.

In modern times, western universities, first German, later American, have set the stage for what has been regarded as the “right” university organization, in terms of constitutive logic, criteria of assessment, reasons for autonomy and motivation for change. Applying these four dimensions, according to Olsen (2005), four visions of the western university can be envisaged.

2. Four Western university rationales

In *Figure 1* below, four visions or models of university are contrasted in terms of their a) rationale or constitutive logic, b) criteria of assessment, c) reasons for autonomy and d) change. The two upper is similar in the sense that they have shared norms and objectives. The two lower is similar in terms of having conflicting norms and objectives within them. In terms of *governance/leadership*, the two visions to the left are similar in being governed by internal factors. Different actor groups, especially the professoriate have the decisive hand in decision-making. The top leadership position

is often more a symbolic than a real leadership function. The models on the right side are similar in being steered by external forces (e.g. market or state), and in having a more distinct, often appointed leadership, with real accountability to a board of mandators.

In terms of *change*, the two models to the left, change, if happening at all, will normally depend on the opinions of the professoriate (upper left) and on negotiations between different actor groups (lower left). Until recently, motivation for thinking change was quite low due to the fact the funding from the state was safe and regular. Now, when the state is reducing funding, and pushing universities to take increased responsibility for their budgets, also these universities are forced think about change strategies. The two models to the right have normally had to consider change. The upper right has been used to this for a long time, and is, hence better prepared for increased needs for change (and own restructuring) when governments reduce funding, and leave university leadership with the challenge of finding revenues themselves.

Finland is a particular interesting country case. Its current higher education reform policies (Tjeldvoll, 2008) serve as a valid example of how a country is changing from “representative democracy” to “service university”, in terms of a) rationale or constitutive logic, b) criteria of assessment, c) reasons for autonomy and d) change. (Olsen, 2005).

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|---|---|--|
| <p><i>Autonomy:</i></p> | <p>University operations and dynamics are governed by <i>internal</i> factors</p> | <p>University operations and dynamics are governed by <i>environmental</i> factors</p> |
| <p><i>Conflict:</i></p> <p>Actors have <i>shared</i> norms and objectives</p> | <p><i>The University is a self-governing community of scholars</i></p> <p><u>Constitutive logic:</u> Free inquiry, truth finding, rationality and expertise.</p> <p><u>Criteria of assessment:</u> Scientific quality.</p> <p><u>Reasons for autonomy:</u> Constitutive principle of the University as an institution: authority to the best qualified.</p> <p><u>Change:</u> Driven by the internal dynamics of science. Slow reinterpretation of institutional identity. Rapid and radical change only with performance crises.</p> | <p><i>The University is an instrument for national political agendas</i></p> <p><u>Constitutive logic:</u> Administrative: Implementing predetermined political objectives.</p> <p><u>Criteria of assessment:</u> Effective and efficient achievement of national purposes.</p> <p><u>Reasons for autonomy:</u> Delegated and based on relative efficiency.</p> <p><u>Change:</u> Political decisions, priorities, designs as a function of elections, coalition formation and breakdowns and changing political leadership.</p> |
| <p>Actors have <i>conflicting</i> norms and objectives</p> | <p><i>The University is a representative democracy</i></p> <p><u>Constitutive logic:</u> Interest representation, elections, bargaining and majority decisions.</p> <p><u>Criteria of assessment:</u> Who gets what: Accommodating internal interests.</p> <p><u>Reasons for autonomy:</u> Mixed (work-place democracy, functional competence, <i>realpolitik</i>).</p> <p><u>Change:</u> Depends on bargaining and conflict resolution and changes in power, interests, and alliances.</p> | <p><i>The University is a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets</i></p> <p><u>Constitutive logic:</u> Community service. Part of a system of market exchange and price systems.</p> <p><u>Criteria of assessment:</u> Meeting community demands. Economy, efficiency, flexibility, survival.</p> <p><u>Reasons for autonomy:</u> Responsiveness to “stakeholders” and external exigencies, survival.</p> <p><u>Change:</u> Competitive selection or rational learning. Entrepreneurship and adapting to changing circumstances and sovereign customers.</p> |

Fig 1. Four Visions of the University (Olsen 2005)

Constitutive logic

In the typical Scandinavian equality and strong democracy traditions, the constitutive logic of Finnish universities have been electing different actor groups to governing boards on all levels. Board decisions have been based on bargaining and majority decisions. In line with the Humboldt model they have been governed by internal factors, the values and interests of academic staff, administration and students, although with conflicting norms. Now the constitutive logic is changing from being internally to being externally based. The change is towards the external market and a price system. The university has to serve its surroundings, regional, national or global. The university is forced to look for customers of its products, in order to survive. Although, in the Finnish case, the State will act as Guardian for quite some time, in order to give “birth help” to universities in the market place (Tjeldvoll, 2008).

Criteria of assessment

In the Finnish University as a representative democracy, assessment was based on “who gets what”. Internal interests were accommodated to make every group as satisfied as possible. There was hardly any need to take external stakeholders need strongly into consideration. Accountability was diffuse. Whatever low efficiency, there was no risk of bankruptcy. In the future, the assessment will be based on to which degree the university is meeting community demands. Key words indicating success or failure are economy, efficiency, flexibility and survival. If not delivering, survival is not sure (*Ibid.*).

Reasons for autonomy

In the traditional Finnish university institutional autonomy was traditionally seen as part of the Humboldt tradition. However, in a distinct Scandinavian democracy tradition, “work place democracy” has also been a hall mark. The combined effect of these two traditions effected strong exclusive institutional autonomy and very high individual academic freedom. Now the underpinning of autonomy is dramatically changing. The Finnish University must now operate independent of the State, be autonomous in order to react flexibly and fast to changing market demands, as well as respond to its own stakeholders. Autonomy is now essential for survival, while be accountable to its stakeholders (*Ibid.*).

Change

Why has changes occurred in a Finnish university up till now? They have been products of bargaining between different groups, and conflict resolutions. Changes in internal structure, programmes, change of persons in chair positions have happened as effects of changes in power, interests and alliances between groups. Changes have generally not been very extensive, and they have been an entirely internal business. When the current Finnish higher education reforms take effect, changes will occur related to what will increase competitive strength. Learning must be effective in producing competence demanded by the market. A slogan from other parts of the world where universities already have become “service universities” is that they have “to learn or burn” (Welle-Strand & Tjeldvoll, 2002). Dynamic and effective internal learning processes will be a key feature of changes in the future. If the leadership is not able to make the university competitive, it will have to change its leadership. The same will be the case with professors who do not teach or research in a way that respond to market and customers’ demands. Although, Finnish universities for quite

some time will enjoy special economic support from the State, the new logic is clear: The Finnish University has to be entrepreneurial and take responsibility itself for its economy.

Summarised it is fair to claim that the Finnish University is leaving a historical phase where its main features were that of a safe “representative democracy”, protected fully by the State, to a future where it is “a service enterprise embedded in competitive markets” (*Ibid.*). The vision is frequently labelled the Service University. In this vision of the university there is a marked contrast to the traditional research university in terms of focus on research or teaching, length of programs, length of courses, personnel policies, organizational relation between research and services, decision making/leadership and funding (Tjeldvoll, 2002).

3. The Service University

In most European countries all the four visions are active at the same time, but with different strength. Although the oldest universities in Scandinavia began as institutions mainly for training of professionals, the Humboldt Model that appeared (in Germany) from the beginning of the 19th Century had profound influence world-wide. Post WW II development also meant strong influence on European universities by the American functionalist vision (Fig. 1, upper right field). In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Mao Tse Tung’s thoughts, the Cultural Revolution in China and the student radicalism at western universities of the 1970s, also the vision of the university as a representative democracy gained solid ground in several European countries (Fig. 1, lower left field).

During the last decade, however, it is the fourth vision – the Service University (Fig. 1 lower right field) – that has become increasingly dominant. While e.g. Norway at large still is mostly influenced by the “Representative Democracy” vision, the one private higher education institution in Norway of some size, the Norwegian School of Management BI, is gaining strong ground nationwide. This latter institution has its funding mainly from selling research and education services to clients in a market. This private institution’s structure, leadership and strategies reflect the Service University. However, the second largest public university in Norway, the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) recently took organizational steps making it the clearest move by a public institution in the service university direction. The most prominent indication for this move was the fact that the university board in 2005 decided to change its management system, from elected to appointed president. Student representatives in the university board tipped the decision in favour of more effective leadership, against the vote of the professor representatives. Norway’s largest university, University of Oslo, however, still is strongly settled in the “Representative Democracy-vision”, and continues a practice of electing its most popular professor as president.

Ideal-typical differences between the traditional research university (visions 1, 2, upper and 3, lower left, in Fig. 1 above) and the Service University (vision 4, lower right) are visualized in Fig. 2 below.

| TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITY | RESEARCH ACADEMIC SERVICE UNIVERSITY |
|---|---|
| arts and science cantered two-tier + instructional program year long courses life-long personnel research organization layered on top of teaching organization decentralized choice of research agenda funding by gifts and grants | professional schools post-baccalaureate degree & training programs tailored for clients one-week to four months courses many adjuncts service carried out in parallel units central planning and contracting of service funding by contracts |

Fig. 2. The Research and Service University compared (Tjeldvoll 2002, based on Cummings 1995).

Taking Norway as national context, the (public) University of Oslo exemplifies the models to the left and the (private) Norwegian School of Management BI the model to the lower right. Management is elected in UiO, while it is appointed (after a head-hunting process) in BI. In the Service University research and teaching tend to be carried out separately, either within one university, or between two institutions, one being a pure research university and the other a pure teaching university.

Both Australia and England are discussing a policy for differentiating between pure teaching universities and pure research universities. For both the ambition is to have “world class quality” of teaching and research, respectively. Top quality teaching

universities are seen as necessary in order for these countries to continue to attract international fee-paying students to the countries' extensive and lucrative higher education industry.

It is within this global picture of countries and institutions struggling to find leadership and strategies for becoming excellent and competitive that the Confucian dimension and possibly positive effects on leadership takes particular interest. Is there an East Asia cultural dimension affecting leadership quality resulting in high competitiveness?

4. Linking university leadership efficiency and Confucianism

On the above described backdrop of universities' role in the global knowledge economy's competition, and the lightning economic successes of Asia-Pacific Countries, it has turned fair to wonder whether the leadership of universities located in "Confucian Lands" has a cultural advantage in the increasing global competition. Due to certain characteristics of Confucianism, university leaders in these countries may prove more effective and efficient than their competitors in other world regions in terms of changing their organizations to become more effective means for national policies¹. However, against this assumption could be claimed that the deep respect for education and university professors in the Confucian culture, might also make it difficult to reform leadership to become able to make organizational changes².

¹ This query is the concern of the CLINC Project (Change Leadership in Universities of Confucian Lands), where university leadership in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan are studied and compared to international trends of changes in universities organization, as well, as observing how universities in East Asia are doing on the international rankings, e.g. THE's ranking (Tjeldvoll *et al.* 2008).

² This query is stimulated by direct observations at a Taiwanese university in 2008-2009, and by information given in interviews at Japanese universities, autumn 2009. Moreover, the

Three particular dimensions of Confucianism are assumed to be favourable for university leaders in East Asia: Firstly, a common, deep-rooted respect for *education* as a value, and, by implications, strong *motivation* by people in general to pursue and invest money and time in education (Sims, 1968:128 & Cheng, 1997). Hence, Confucian university leaders are likely to have students that are generally more motivated to work harder, than in other countries. Present day facts supporting this assumption about strong motivation for education is the remarkably high achievements by 15 years old students from Taiwan, Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore – in OECD’s PISA tests (OECD, 2007), and that close to 90 % of Taiwanese high school graduates continue into tertiary/higher education (Tjeldvoll, Tang & Vore, 2009).

Secondly, related to the social implications of the Imperial Examinations, students in these countries are used to see *competition* as something natural. The Imperial Examination System in China lasted for 1300 years, from its founding during the Sui Dynasty in 605 to its abolition near the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1905. The system is seen as having its roots in Confucius’ education thinking (Liu, 2002). Since competition is a distinct feature of globalization, students in Confucian countries are assumed to have more readiness and acceptance competitive behaviour. The advantage for university leaders then is that they have students with a mind set that will contribute more strongly to strengthening the university’s competitiveness than universities in other cultures...

different Confucian Lands (Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Mainland and Singapore) may share the same Confucian cultural legacy, but constitute profoundly different national context in terms of development stage.

Thirdly, despite dynamic democracy development and concrete social equality policies in most Confucian countries³, natural acceptance of *social hierarchy*, which is a distinct feature of Confucianism, is still a cultural and mental reality in these countries. Both the behaviour of Asia-Pacific students in western universities and the student behaviour experienced by western professors in Asia-Pacific class rooms give support to a cultural particularity. The implication being that there might be more acceptances of requests from above, and a widespread respect for the leader. The leader's authority can be applied more indirectly than in the West. In the West, particularly in Western Europe, university democracy and academic freedom have been distinct forces, and elected university leaders with mostly symbolic authority have been common practice. Now, this is changing in the West, due to the need for a more achievement-oriented leadership. This change is normally not appreciated by the professors. They fear "Managerialism" (Currie & Tjeldvoll, 2001), less democracy and reduced individual academic freedom. In contrast, the third Confucian feature (accept of hierarchy) may contribute to more efficiency for the university as a whole. Traditional acceptance of hierarchy and orders from above are assumed to increase university leaders' possibilities for more efficiency, and making them more effective in implementing competitive strategies. These assumed links between Confucianism and more effective university leadership are supported by Castells' analysis of how the global power centre in the future will move from the North Atlantic Region to the Pacific Rim (Castells, 1996).

Confucianism is seen as an important source for cultural refinement, combining

³ Communist party-led countries like PRC and DPRK may by many not be seen as having had much democracy-development, and also many would claim that democracy in Singapore has serious limitations. However, it's worth while pondering over that Chinese and Singaporean leaders' claim they pursue a form of democracy with Chinese (or Confucian) characteristics.

intellectual and moral virtues (Garrett, 1993). It developed over more than two thousand years, independent of major outside influence. Humanism comes out as a central dimension of Confucianism, founded in three key principles: a) ren - love for others), b) yi – fairness and c) li – proper behaviour (Chen, 1997). A particular organizational implication of these principles is their effects on communication. According to Chen (1977) Confucianism sees interpersonal relationships as long-term and mutually binding. This is regarded as more important than the actual business activities. Related to leadership, an important quality is to maintain good relationship with followers, creating a feeling of family where pleasures and sorrows are shared (Lin & Clair, 2007). This will create certainty and predictability. In sum, communication in the Confucian tradition will tend to be more process-oriented than in the West, where there tend to be more direct focus on outcomes (*Ibid.*). However, today it clearly looks like the Confucian countries are highly productive and certainly delivers economic outcomes.

People and nations' well-being certainly does not depend on economy alone. Cultural values for sure are crucial to make life meaningful. However, without a sufficient economic foundation, it may even be impossible to keep up valuable culture. To secure a healthy national economic development seems to have been goal number one for Asia-Pacific countries after WW II. First, Japan rose to the second largest economy in the world, followed by the successful Asia-Pacific Economic Dragons (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore). Particularly the history of Taiwan is amazing, from being “undeveloped” before 1895, being a Japanese colony for 50 years, till 1945, then enduring a hard dictatorship for nearly 40 years, before towards the end of the last century appearing as the Taiwan Miracle, both in terms of economic, social and democratic development (Gold, 1986). To what extent has Confucius' ideas about education and society contributed to these successful socio-economic changes in the

Asia-Pacific Region? In the CLINC Project (Tjeldvoll, Chen & Yang, 2008) an attempt is made at grasping the thinking of university leaders in Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan about the following six dimensions of a university, assumed to be important for its competitiveness in the market: Management, Research & Teaching, ICT, Personnel policies, Funding & Market relations and Internationalization. Strong motivation/efforts, high competition orientation and natural accept of hierarchy/leadership were found to be three particular features of Confucianism. In the CLINC Project there is an ambition of looking for reflections of these features in the university leadership's thinking about how to increase the institutions competitiveness. Moreover, there will be attention to identify how Confucian communication style and the establishment of long-time personal relations are manifested. In particular, what happens when restructuring seen as unavoidable lead to a confrontation between the old values and the more brutal requirements of the market?

5. Measuring the Confucian influence on leadership?

Recently a study of potential high relevance for studying the Confucian dimension of university leadership was found, carried out at the University of Colorado, US. Can Confucian influence on leadership in any way be measured? This was the starting point for a study by Kaibin Xu (2008). Like in the CLINC Project (Tjeldvoll *et al.*, 2008) his motivation is triggered by the fact that globalization has led to increased interest in leadership in different cultural contexts and, also, in organizations like universities. Universities are generally admitted to be particular organizations, traditionally without clear-cut goals or an achievement-oriented leadership. Xu's particular assumption is that the Chinese cultural context may provide particular effects on current leadership development in universities (Xu, 2008:2-4). The specific focus of the study was to

develop an instrument for measuring higher education leadership in the Chinese social and cultural context. As theoretical frame of reference for his study, both western leadership theories (Xu, 2008:16-27) and instruments, and the Confucian philosophy of leadership were examined. The survey he developed he found to be reliable with six confirmed factors – morality, academic expertise, nurturing, communication, fairness and managing (*Ibid.*). His findings suggest that the Chinese view of leadership is consistent with the Confucian philosophy of leadership. In the further studies it will be relevant to include Xu's rationale, and, to consider whether his instrument could constructively be applied in further, extended empirical research on how university leaders in Confucian countries are thinking about both their short term and long term strategies for change to enhance their international competitiveness. In terms of geographical areas, in addition to Japan, Taiwan and Hong Kong, university cases from Mainland China ought to be included, because China as country case today is quite different from the highly modernized and partly westernized East Asia Economic Dragons.

6. Concluding Remarks

The motivation for this paper at the outset was observations over the last fifteen years of how universities world-wide seem forced to change their organizational structure and leadership capacity. The development is significantly different in the Anglo-American world, the European Continent and the Asia-Pacific Region. The Service University (model) appeared first in Anglo-America⁴, and has since spread around the world.

⁴ Actually the label 'service university' was first time applied by a Canadian research council (Tjeldvoll 1997)

Reading THE's university ranking 2009⁵ (limitations of rankings admitted), it is amazing to observe how extremely dominant the Anglo-American world is in terms of number of universities among the 50 best in the world. Among the 50 top, this cultural region takes 36, and number 1-20 are all Anglo-American. Continental Europe is struggling, having only 5 among the 50 top. A country like Germany, origin of the Humboldt Model, has none. Confucian countries' universities are climbing on the rankings, compared to earlier years, and, are confirming an assumption about their increasing international competitiveness. They have 9 universities among the 50 top, making the Asia-Pacific Region ranking number two world region, after Anglo-America. Perhaps most amazing of all is that a small entity, like Hong Kong (8 million people) has three universities among the 50 top. Sweden (9 million people) has none.

However, on the other side, Asia-Pacific universities may also face some problems, caused by the traditional strong social status of professors, and high respect for them. The Cultural Revolution in China was also an attempt to curb the traditional power of academics. After the revolution they resumed their high social status, confirming also the strength of the Confucian tradition. Opinions by Japanese education researchers, as well as observations in Taiwan give support to a concern about "conservative Confucian-inspired" professors making it difficult to carry out change leadership. There is, however, likely to be context differences among countries in Asia-Pacific, affecting leadership. Among other factors there might be different accountability and external evaluation measures carried out by the governments of these countries. In China Confucius' ideas about leadership is already confirmed influential. In further studies it will be particularly interesting to follow a sample of Chinese universities' structural and

⁵ <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/Rankings2009-Top200.html> Accessed November 28th 2009

leadership/strategy development, not least when taking into account the fact that a high number of universities have had to merge, and, by implication have been forced to develop a new structure, and to find leadership capacity to effectively manage an institution quite often spread on different campuses. For further research the first goal is to have confirmed the Confucian influence in the region at large, and secondly, to assess whether this is an advantage for leadership efficiency, or not.

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