

National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
New Delhi

Thirteenth Foundation Day Lecture

Governing Academic: Within and Without

by

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August 08, 2019

National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration

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Educational Planning and Administration**

August 8, 2019

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(Deemed to be University)

2019 (4H)

Published by the Registrar, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, 17-B, Sri Aurobindo Marg, New Delhi and printed at M/s. Viba Press Pvt. Ltd., Okhla Industrial Area, Phase-II, New Delhi-110020.

Governing Academic: Within and Without

Pankaj Chandra

I

Thank you very much for inviting me to deliver this Foundation Day Lecture. It is an honour to be amongst academics who have a nuanced understanding of education and who deeply care about higher education. I come from the world of management and having run institutions, both public and private, the issue of governance and organizations is very salient to me. Governance is the glue that ensures whether goals will be achieved. Its impact on lives of students and academics is deep. Its impact on the future of education is deeper. Today, I would like to talk about how governance and higher educational institutions in India have shaped their engagement with each other, much to the detriment of both. And, what may be a way out.

Universities are about how lives could be lived. They prepare young people for challenges of tomorrow. That is how universities deliver to the nation in perpetuity with ideas that are ahead of time. Theory of today becomes practice of tomorrow and society draws on these resources for advancing knowledge that will better the world. When a society becomes too lazy to draw upon

this knowledge or when the university fails to experiment or build questioning & innovative values in students, then the society becomes vulnerable to a possibility of an economic and social decline. Society then stops driving change in how it will define living and building relationship with people and their ideas. Four forces are influencing societies to re-calibrate their position on how life is going to be lived. These are demographics, science & technology, climate change, and urbanization. They are having a phenomenal impact on how people think, work and relate with others and the state of resources for the same. They are also re-writing our understanding of the laws of the society.

What does this do to the world of higher education? Education significantly affects both the changes themselves and our ability to manage and adapt to these changes. It is well known that size and quality of higher education impacts national and the regional economies. Bigger the cover of higher education, higher are the chances that society as a whole will have better prepared citizens to lead and adapt to these global changes. Societies that are able to create equal opportunity to get quality education, are more likely to develop the DNA of survival in these changing circumstances than perhaps those where access is not based on capabilities. It is important for the young in a society to believe that only merit and

capabilities matter in universities and outside. The more contemporary and deeper are these capabilities, better are the chances that an economy will shift towards higher value add activities and deploy better ideas & technologies for social purpose. Large populations of young in geographical proximity provides for a bridging of information gap but without an ability to link the science driven world view with one's own sociological context, it becomes a volatile admixture of disablement and discontent. Most important, Indian institutions will have to understand the nature and causality of these impending changes and articulate how the society will need to drive them and transform itself simultaneously, in order to adapt to changing environment and its ensuing requirements.

Finding nimble yet robust governance systems is the key to managing change that is upon us in. Governance in an academy is about

1. Ensuring that the university is being true to its charter
2. Creating an environment of excellence in learning and innovation
3. Developing and steering the institution on the basis of a shared vision of the institution
4. Defining roles of various stakeholders: students, faculty, staff, university leadership, boards/executive councils, alumni,

government, funding organizations, recruiters etc.

5. Securing and safeguarding its autonomy: academic, administrative, financial
6. Securing safety of both ideas and people within the institution;
7. Enforcing accountability of various stakeholders
8. Navigating through organizational management and influence
9. Managing long and short term finances, and
10. Ensuring translation of its ideas and innovation for use by others.

On almost all counts, most of our institutions fail to show exemplary performance. And we must ask, why? But before we do that, we must understand the relationship between elements of this governance system.

II

The governance system of an academic institution comprises the structure of governance (i.e. the sponsoring agency and their intermediaries, the governing bodies, the executive, faculty, staff and the students), the policies/rules/processes that govern the institutions including resolution of conflicts, the inter-relationships between various groups comprising the governance structure, processes for reconciling short term and long term

objectives, and the renewal system. It is the interplay of these elements that defines how well the institutions will be able to meet their objectives. Four main types of governance situations seem to be prominent amongst Indian institutions. The first type is where the governance is dominated by the bureaucracy of the state government which largely defines the agenda of the institution in very narrow terms of admissions, teaching, examination and hiring of the vice chancellor, the registrar and the faculty & staff. This organizational form controls most of the processes related to the above. It struggles through the management of a large number of affiliated colleges. The second type can be seen in central universities where the university leadership establishes norms of engagement and the faculty are largely passive or act in opposition to higher level mandate. The vice chancellors of these institutions govern through rigid rules and are in turn dependent on thinking from agencies like the UGC (as are the State institutions) or the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). The third governance environment appears at stand-alone institutions – they are found in all disciplines but particularly in engineering, management and medicine. Institutions in this group are small in size and are seen to be “faculty governed” where the institute leadership is expected to largely implement what the faculty decides – deviations almost always lead to conflicts. In recent times,

these have been some of the more celebrated and sought after institutions in the country. These stand-alone institutions do not enjoy a smooth relationship with sponsoring agencies like the MHRD. These agencies have played the role of enlightened owners who control through the choice of board of governors, the choice of institute leadership and funds. Finally, the private institutions present another style of governance. They are largely controlled by their promoters, are mostly run like family businesses with low faculty participation in governance, are generally low on transparency, and have yet to establish quality in both academics and governance (of course, few exceptions do exist here as well – obviously, the question is whether Indian higher education system runs on exceptions?). The Colleges, amongst them, that are affiliated to a university face the added control from the University. The preponderance of government agencies rather than educational bodies (for example, accreditation bodies or association of universities or association of Vice Chancellors or education think tanks) in defining how universities are managed defines the tenor of engagement in this domain.

The quality of governance defines the quality of education that will be imparted by the university. It should be designed to deliver the charter of the institution. Academic institutions are organizational forms that require a governance

environment that balances academic freedom with accountability through a process of participative decision making. This balance can be very easily disturbed by extreme positions. An aggressive and control driven leadership or a board or the sponsor would turn the other stakeholders hostile and destabilize this fine balance. Similarly, an institutional agenda driven by self-preservation of faculty and staff creates permanent fissures in the relationship between leadership and them thereby weakening the governance system. What makes this governance system so vulnerable to an imbalance in this relationship? Academic governance works on the principles of mutual persuasion, low demarcation of academic and administrative roles, and the primacy of merit in ideas & actions. And most important, an aspiration towards self-regulation. An overreach by any stakeholder violates these principles, destroys the ability to dialogue, weakens the appreciation of various skills required to run an institution and develops institutions that are sectarian, based on personal exchange and low morale. Along with permanency in employment, the above can create a potent mixture of entitlement, whimsical decision making, and low accountability. Such an environment creates a barrier to learning, advancement of knowledge and change, in general. It appears that this balance has been severely shaken in the Indian higher educational scenario.

How we govern our institutions impacts who comes to work, how we enable our best and brightest to achieve their potential in life, how we find solutions to challenges facing our societies, and how we impregnate the now with the possibilities of the future. But most important, Governance impacts the health of the university as an organization and how it contributes to the learning of the student and its teachers.

The higher education ecosystem operates in two distinct worlds with very insignificant crossover. It reflects the ethos of the larger society. There is one world where institutions could be rural as well as urban, both government or private but where the quality of preparation of students and teachers is low, domain knowledge is low, commitment to the purposes of education and the institution are low, motivation to improve the learning environment is low, professionalism is low, financial resources are low, motivation of founders and trustees to engage with the institution is low but the control is high, infrastructure is poor, work environment is uninspiring, and where desire and ability to bridge deficits in students is also low. You get in but have few alleyways to explore when you get out. And there is the other world that is aspirational as it is difficult to get in because it is easy to fly out, where the so called “best” converge, where a semblance of merit exists, where all conversations are over

information and facts, where insights don't count, and where access to the world is the aspiration. And there are shades of the two in between. Such is the tiered world of higher education in our country.

These systems have become what they are because of the nature of their governance structure. A comparison of the governance structure of a typical Indian institution vis-à-vis its global impactful counterpart that has lasted long would be instructive. The first question is about who makes choices at an Institution: globally impactful institutions are self-regulated while Indian institutions are regulated but the government and its proxies. Lets now look at their governance structure. The Society or the Public monitors outcomes at global institutions through citizen's and public reviews. In India, we are now starting to do it through ranking by the government. Elsewhere, the role of the Regulator is to simply grant permission to start or exit. In our country, the Regulator grants permission to start (and rarely to exit); sets minimum number of credits for a programme and the duration for its completion, cadre ratio, student-faculty ratio, requirements to graduate, choice of global partners; it defines broadly all academic agenda including programme details, curriculum, syllabus etc.; it sets guidance on admissions, fees, compensation, evaluation of faculty, rewards & incentives, means of promotion;

as well as the number of hours that a professor should teach in a week or how they are to be evaluated and even when should they retire. The Accreditor, globally, sets the minimum acceptable quality of the programmes and the minimum number of credits that define a programme and such accreditation is mandatory to operate. In India, accreditation is also about minimum acceptable quality of the programmes based on regulator's fixed specifications and it is optional. The Role of the Government is also at variance. Globally, the State establishes policy at the broadest level including the minimum enrollment from the State (in case of public institutions), defines subsidy for students from the State, provides incentives for promoting new areas of teaching & research, approves budget for public institutions, establishes the minimum compensation (i.e., the floor) for public institutions, and in certain countries does not even specify retirement age. Institutions, especially public ones, are seen as the pride of the State and they receive special attention. It is not unusual for a State Governor to host a reception for a visiting delegation or a fundraising event of a public institution. Their counterparts in India practically detail the operating governing environment which includes minimum enrollment from the State and subsidy for students from the State (in case of public institutions); search & selection of Syndicate members, Boards, Vice Chancellors,

Faculty etc. including the duration of their tenure, compensation & required credentials; they also oversee the academic agenda including programme details, curriculum, syllabus etc.; define processes for admissions, fees, maximum compensation (i.e., the roof) for public institutions; evaluation of faculty, rewards & incentives, processes for promotion; what is quality and who can judge it, budgets for public institutions; when should the semester begin & end in a year; and also, amongst others, which topics should be considered for doctoral dissertation. Faculty at public institutions in India are considered equivalent to government servants and are regulated in that brash manner by respective bureaucracies. And finally, let's compare what the University and its Boards do. Globally, this governance element is involved in search & selection of trustees, board, Vice Chancellors, etc. including the duration of their tenure, compensation & required credentials; the faculty are selected by faculty themselves; they set all academic agenda including programme details, curriculum, syllabus etc.; establish processes of admissions, fees, compensation (roof), evaluation of faculty, rewards & incentives including the conduct of promotion; they define what is quality and who can judge quality; define cadre ratio, student-faculty ratio, requirements to graduate; tenure (which is an extended probation ranging from 6 years to 10 years); they recruit faculty globally; they choose global partners; and develop

new areas of specialization to meet the changing societal and industrial requirements. Most important, they raise resources for the institution. The counterpart in our country, largely, conduct admissions (in some states, however, admissions is also done by the State); public institutions set papers for examinations, evaluation & declaring of results for large number of affiliated colleges as well; and other administration functions in the running of the university organization.

One can see that the big question in higher education is about Who makes choices/decisions regarding higher education? Several questions are embedded in that one question:

- Who selects its stakeholders?
- Who judges what is to be taught and how?
- Who judges what is quality in education?
- Should those who fund higher education make academic choices?
- Who funds and who pays for education and how much? and
- Should faculty in public institutions be considered as public servants?

Many tensions exist in the Indian academia – between competing visions of higher education, between the stakeholders, in striking a balance

between research and teaching, between competing resources, and between competing opportunities within and outside the university etc. They impact the governance of the university and consequently its health and its excellence. Hence, it needs to be re-designed.

III

Governance in higher education can be viewed from multiple lenses of decision making and influence. They help us understand the complex interaction of issues that define the governance system in the Indian university. They also support the argument that governance is about ways of doing things. There is a strategic view of governance at the university which allows universities to establish a long term view of their own activities and make choices that support it. These also relate to the purpose of the university and the roles of each stakeholder; the structure of the university and the related aspects of autonomy, relationship between stakeholders (within the university and outside) and its accountability; and the task of curating university values. University as an organization imposes its own constraints and challenges in the way it is governed and the processes needed to keep it healthy. The university as an organizational form is far more complex than other organizations because of its matrix structure, its knowledge ethos, its cultural openness, its lack

of perceived hierarchy, its consensual decision making processes, its tolerance for variance, its continuous youthful character and the accompanying impatience, and its single minded pursuit of new knowledge. This is reflected in the organizational view of the university. Finally, governance is as much about vision and processes as it is about their execution. Issues of capacity, tactics and performance for managing the university effectively are captured in the operational view of the university. Getting things done or the logistics of running the institution is as crucial, if not more, than the policies designed to run them. Most leaders do not understand the need for managerial systems that will enhance operational capabilities and consequently help achieve the objectives of the university.

The structure of relationship between the government, the regulator, and the university define the extent to which each of these views can be exercised effectively. Two such relationships need some attention – the one within the academy and the one from outside.

IV

Let me first turn to governance within the University. The University is an organization of people who are accountable to stakeholders (including the professoriate) and who need to be enabled, motivated and rewarded for achieving

objectives that they set for themselves within the context of the university's objectives. More importantly, university organizations need to be fundamentally excellence-seeking. The demands on this organization to diversify activities and build new areas of expertise, engage deeply with diverse stakeholders, manage elaborate infrastructure and technologies, deal with complex external institutional processes like the courts, for example, and raise resources has only increased the complexity of the governance in institutions. Indian universities have developed an organizational ethos that can be seen as a struggle between the professoriate that wants to define internal norms and related decision making and the State that desires to control institutional objectives and their execution through a multitude of agencies and rules. This has had a deleterious effect on the culture, the incentives, and the learning ambience of the university. Managerially, this would represent a highly contested organization with poor prospects of growth. Let me point to two areas of dissonance in internal governance:

Organizational Leadership

Leadership is one of the most significant element of an organizational governance system. Its choice and its role defines the tempo of the organization and its direction. Three attributes define a leader –

her vision, her courage, and her execution capabilities & style. The leader defines and works the organizational relationships, brings stakeholders to buy a vision, and stands tall in times of doubt and steadfast in times of uncertainty, and keeps advancing the organizational objectives. Academic leadership is unique as it is premised on influencing without using authority. So why do academics choose to become institutional leaders?

One of the most complex and exciting aspects of organizational leadership is change making. It is expected that leaders understand the changing environment and their needs and will transform their organizations to meet the requirements as they unfold. Change making, however, is about courage – believing in something and building consensus to implement change. Centralization of decision making and not being able to accept decisions that one did not support have been two of the biggest failures of university leadership. Academic community in our institutions mostly follows two stances towards a leader – they become sycophantic to a leader or they oppose the leader on every issue (there is very small third group that is independent thinking and votes on merit of the proposition). These dent the courage in a leader to stand tall and experiment. When asked why would he bring a trivial organizational discipline issue to the Board of

Governors, a leader of a public institution responded by saying that did the Board not want him to follow Central Civil Services or CCS rules? A conversation with the concerned employee would have served the purpose, set an example, and maintained respect for the leader as an approachable head. Academic organizations differ from others as they depend on individual sense and sensibilities to define the latitude that they can take with the system without sacrificing excellence. Leaders without courage find it convenient to hide behind rules. A case in point is a situation that arose at one of our premier universities. The University had given study leave to a young faculty to undertake doctoral studies abroad. At the end of the leave period, the faculty sought another six month's extension to complete the thesis. The university refused and asked the faculty to return immediately much to the detriment of the completion of the thesis. Governance requires making judgments in institutional decision making which "governance by rules" destroys. Here, an emphasis on a prescriptive culture, rather than protection of the core, makes change making impossible. This, unfortunately, has become the state of affairs at many of our so called "best" institutions. But the more fundamental question is, what kind of leaders are we selecting?

One has to only look at the leaders and their search process at our universities to quickly

understand why leadership is a weak link in our university organizations. Our universities do not have robust processes to search them out nor prepare them for such roles. Governments fail to appreciate that all institutions are unique, their context varies and hence their issues are also going to be nuanced differently. Yet, it selects as if one model fits all. The search and selection committees rarely visit the institution to understand its culture, its needs, and the kind of leader the institution needs at that juncture. Same is true for most leaders who are selected. Worst still, when such decisions get made in State Capitals or Delhi, these decisions are highly likely to be incorrect. The likelihood of those close to the institution, making these decisions correctly, is higher as they would understand the needs of the institution and its culture better. But this would require preparing the institution and its stakeholders to engage in a committed and an unbiased search.

Academic leadership, like in other organizations, has to possess many capabilities and has to perform at a level higher than others in the organization. The core, of course, is academic competence, fairness, integrity, and administrative prudence. Academic organizations in India do a very shabby task of preparing organizational leaders or providing feedback & training to bridge managerial deficits. Which dean or a VC has received any feedback? We see so many

institutional heads who have barely held any serious academic administrative position prior to becoming Deans or even VCs. Even where they do, rarely have they taken positions of significant change-making or written committee reports that have become exemplars for academia. These opportunities help build leadership skills in the world of academic administration specially visioning, building consensus, managing disagreement and ensuring that execution is flawless. It also gives an opportunity to recognize one's own style of management and develop an intuitive feel of issues and their resolution heuristics.

Demands on academic leadership is only increasing and becoming more complex. But when organizational leadership gets awarded on the basis of sectarian considerations or for being part of an interest group or through some influence or for a consideration, universities receive leaders who carry none of the above competencies. All of these, act as barriers to transformation of a university organization.

Decision Making Processes & Organizational Culture

The culture of the university organization – norms, pattern of behaviour and its consistency, ways of addressing issues and disagreements, or as people say “the way we do things here” has changed for

ever. It establishes the identity and defines the commitment of the organization, its focus, and most important its decision making environment. Culture of an organization is impacted by a variety of factors. First, the culture is as enlightened and effective as the people within because it is they who give form to it and protect it. Two, culture is never static and it must evolve with the environment, internally and externally. Once, it remains static for an extended period of time, it becomes an awfully complex task to change it. Three, since culture defines identity, dignity (perceived or real), self-belief and ownership, changing it is as much about sensitivity as it is about new ideas. Four, culture is built on shared vision and values of those who believe in them. Consequently, appropriate recruitment and actions of leadership become strong signals of intent of change. Cultures that do not define their core values or are seen to change their core values with changes in dominant groups or leadership, experience rapid deterioration of excellence. And last, while culture is a matter of belief, it is bolstered by performance and external validation of the quality of outcomes. Academic culture, as result, came to be defined by academic freedom and autonomy, excellence and meritocracy, and academic conversations and a strong respect for peer review processes. This culture is carried over years through a socialization process where individuals acquire knowledge, skills, values,

habits and attitudes of the society to which it belongs to. An interesting intellectual question is how does a culture repair itself?

Cultures emerge to serve a purpose. You change the purpose and the culture changes its hue. But once formed, it takes special effort to re-purpose both the organization and its culture. The purpose of the university organization in India has been vitiated over years and so has been its culture. Successive Central and State governments have imposed their social and cultural values on higher education while imposing their ways of doing things but never releasing it to think for itself. They have distracted the university from its purpose – access became devoid of quality, learning became free of knowledge and application, philosophy of education got taken over by the assembly line driven by coaching classes and examinations to enter universities, and the professoriate became obsessed with governance and not by learning and knowledge generation. How did it impact the culture of the university organization and its decision making process?

Academic institutions, globally, involve its stakeholders in shared governance through a combination of direct participation on boards and academic councils as well as through involvement in committees at the university, school and

department levels. What makes this culture of consensus building complex in India is the fine line between participation and active opposition. Who gets in becomes crucial for decision making? When institutional leaders spend little time influencing others in the community and when faculty do not restrain themselves from preventing initiatives that do not benefit them directly but are beneficial to the institution, the university becomes moribund. Experiments die out.

Indian universities are more hierarchical than flat in their organization culture. Flat organizations facilitate governance by equals. There also, however, is a hierarchy of processes and decisions that defines the independence of the decision maker while involving the community in providing inputs. Committees are generally seen as ways of collecting and synthesizing inputs and providing recommendations based on a deeper assessment of the issue at hand by a reasonable sized group. Faculty, on the other hand, desire referendums in large faculty meetings with discussions on every issue. Organizationally, this is very ineffective when deep discussion is desired though it may serve to reflect the mood of the stakeholders when a decision is to be made. That is why universities are supposed to have standing departments, schools and university level committees for deep discussion of issues and for views and recommendations to flow upwards.

Many times, this does not happen when departments or schools do not function as independent thinking groups but rather as vested interests (in such cases, decision making gets centralized) or when the capture of the higher level decision making body is so complete that even inputs are not sought from others (thereby creating anguish and isolation amongst the academics). Of course, the net result is deep polarization. Both are detrimental to making transformational changes in the organization.

The culture in our universities has become fragmented over the years and they fail most of the tests of organizational robustness and innovativeness. They have become rigid and are no longer self-correcting; they are not performance and outcome driven and hence have become unaccountable; they are bureaucratic about change as everything is mandated by the UGC or the MHRD or the State Education Boards etc. hence shared vision has not evolved; its ownership has become weak hence socialization to the core of its culture is nobody's concern; and most important of them all, our universities have not been able to recruit people into their vision, values, and commitment of building high quality institutions hence have become grounds of conflict. The balance in our universities has tilted towards those who do not align with institutional goals. Such individuals also visualize the university in the time

frame of their tenure rather than one that has to outlive all those who come through it. The university organization has to shift its weight to the other side by attracting people who will re-build the university with a culture of performance and accountability and fairness and who will nurture others to excel. Another aspect of culture is building a narrative around respect based on merit and not necessarily association or tenure at the institution. One key failing of our universities has also been our inability to monitor and implement our norms. Culture goes awry if its essence is not reinforced periodically. Department chairs and Deans play a very important role in this regard. There are always elders in academia and administration who remind all of the days gone by, who build historical perspectives around decisions and dilemmas, and who induct the new into the culture of the organization. Such people arise instinctively and are mandated only by their intrinsic belief in the value of the university organization and their commitment to it. This is an important missing link in our universities. And the key glue to sensible decision making in the university organization.

VI

Let me now address how the outside – the government and its various organizations and the

society have impacted the working of academia. I would like to make five points in this regard.

First. Organizational structure forces a certain type of behaviour that in turn defines how the organization is going to perform. Higher education ecosystem is over-structured with too many players like MHRD and the counterparts in States, UGC, AICTE, Niti Aayog, PMO, Executive councils, Courts etc. who jostle for the control of the lives of university organizations. The current structure represents a control & conflict oriented organizational design. It is complex and poorly coordinated when it comes to decision-making and it does not allow any alternative view to percolate. Moreover, it makes governance very onerous and difficult since it is premised on controlling all strategic decision-making. They leave little place for the aspiration of the institution and its internal stakeholders - people who actually deliver quality education. Three pathologies accompany the current structure. One, their impact has not been positive as they are unable to distinguish the organization of a university from a revenue organization. That a university is fundamentally a social organization whose first purpose is learning & knowledge generation and that it is managed & enabled very differently from all that bureaucracies manage, is an idea that comes with enormous angst and difficulty to bureaucracy. Second, there is a belief in the bureaucracy that institutions are not

capable of taking care of themselves and hence need to be managed from outside with firmness and rigidity (and often with persistent disrespect). And third, the failure to coordinate amongst the large number of agencies reflects either a lack of clarity in terms of how the academy should be managed or a power struggle between them or both and that is impacting universities adversely. Policy entities define both the input and internal processes but rarely think about outcomes. What is clear is that successive governments including the politicians and the bureaucrats do not have a long term vision of higher education that is premised on India's needs both within and globally. They fail to recognize that without universities cooperating with governments, the latter's goals can never get served. And universities cooperate when effort is made to align its goals with those of the external stakeholders. This is what makes a university organization unique. To change their performance, the structure must be changed first.

Second. The root cause of this grand abandonment of a philosophy in education is a lack of imagination and experimentation due to standardization and control. When government took over control of all institutions, it could run them only by standardizing all norms & behaviour— standardizing how an institution is structured and operated, standardizing how faculty is selected, how admissions are done, how offices

are run, how buildings are built, how the libraries are to be stocked, how projects are to be done (where in the world does a government float tenders to award research projects?), how curriculum is to be shaped, how many hours do teachers teach every week, how exams are to be conducted, what compensation would teachers get, what kind of topics can PhD student work on etc. The rationale is obviously to standardize the process in order to normalize inputs across institutions and regions of the country when in fact the processes must be designed differently to get similar outcomes since the preparation of the students vary. It destroys academic values.

Once any agency wants to control a large empire, the only way it can do so is by “standardizing” all structures and processes. In academic setting, this standardization leads to uniform thinking, low experimentation, and low tolerance for anything diverse. Interestingly, in such a setting the only way to set quality is by certification and that too through a mass examination process. Such became the story of Indian higher education. The mandating of standardization of inputs of learning, its certification as well as its management was the victory of bureaucracy over academia. However, it had severe implications on the culture and values of the university. Classes did not matter (in fact both the faculty and the students were found

outside the class rooms), books and library did not matter, engagement with faculty and the peers did not matter; in fact, what was being learnt did not matter so long as you did well in the standard examination at the end of the year or semester!

The worst implication of the above is the emergence of a “government” mindset in our institutions – one that is not student centric and that governs by rules and less by culture & norms. This control mindset also manifests itself into areas like appointment of Vice Chancellors and Board of Governors or Executive Council members. The proposal to select VCs and faculty through a centralized selection process is ultimate example of this “sarkarikarn.” Bureaucrats are selected through a standardized national selection process that also allocates them to various States/ Services/Cadres. Are academics bureaucrats? And what capabilities does the government have in even appointing VCs or Registrars? Academics are selected and initiated by other academics in the same department and the university, as they are hiring colleagues with whom they will work in the future. Several States have already been hiring faculty for their affiliated colleges in this centralized manner. No wonder, why our institutions look, feel and operate more like government offices than vibrant academic centers of learning and teaching.

Third. Good institutions are all largely autonomous. They have a vision of how they would like to serve the society. No institution became excellent by implementing a vision of others or when someone else forced their vision on them. The notion that someone, who understands merit less, is making choices for me and is making decisions that affect me is a sure recipe of mediocrity and disaffection within academia. Making decisions that affect the university, much closer to the university, helps in making fewer mistakes. It improves the probability that the decision maker would understand the context of the choice better. Vice Chancellors being selected by committees that are located far away from the university and by those who do not understand the university well, or a suggestion of mass selection of faculty through a centralized public service commission where needs of the departments will not be understood, or a central admissions process where students and department do not create a match of their individual needs or the development of a model curriculum by a group of faculty, remotely, which would then be implemented everywhere – all of these efforts to standardize and control processes from a distance kills motivation, innovation, and consequently, excellence. Moreover, there has been a strong tendency in recent times to control and define what conversations can happen or can't happen at our institutions. This is a strong sign of poorly

governed ecosystem. Control is not just a disease of the public institutions. Lack of autonomy exists as much in private as it does in government institutions.

Lack of financial autonomy has negatively affected institutions. Severe under-funding for decades coupled with bounding the institutional resources on all ends – low revenues, low financial support, control on student size – the institution has very few areas to generate resources that are needed for ensuring quality learning.

The impact of lack of autonomy is that the best flee – generally faculty and now even students. The second level effect is that institutions with low autonomy will change less, will react much slowly to requirements of the society and of their students, and will be more authoritarian. This distracts the academic mind from their task of learning. The best flee to other countries or to other vocations. The mediocre define the culture of the academy and use rules over judgment to create a self-preserving environment. In this setting, many bright people become very average over time. Any change that affects them even marginally, is rejected.

Defining outcomes will become essential to improve the overall quality of higher education but what will be more crucial is to provide freedom to

institutions to develop their own unique experiments to achieve those outcomes. The tragedy of standardization is that it kills building a community of judgment: the central endeavour of autonomy.

Fourth. Authoritarian attitudes, control from outside, and lack of transparent communication within leads to mistrust in organizations. Mistrust builds governance deficits – conversations die, perceptions are formed, positions are hardened, data is ignored, micro-powers develop, opposition becomes the constant, and progress is stifled! The organization starts to require a herculean effort to manage itself. Power blocks emerge and they compete with each other in capturing decision making.

The root of this mistrust lies in forsaking the role of merit as the defining image of academia. Add to it, the severe under funding of higher education for decades and the reasons for this state of governance can be significantly explained. Access without consideration of quality has been the hallmark of the rapid expansion of the higher educational system. Once the yardstick by which you measure this form of organization that is knowledge oriented moves away from merit and merit alone, the organization starts to drift away from its purpose and starts defining its achievements in everything other than knowledge

generation and its uses. Relationships based on caste, religion, and personal proximity or obligations (social or discipline driven) or any other moral argument jettison merit from the neighbourhood of academia and derail its highest pursuit – the search for truth. The result is patronage, control and anarchy. The more anyone controls, the more anarchic the system tends to become. Appointment of incompetent and uninspiring leaders, blatant promotion of weak academics, rent seeking by university officials, faculty and staff limiting their engagement within the institution while increasing their engagement outside, closed faculty offices and empty libraries, stagnant and uninteresting curriculum, un-usable or un-cited research etc. are outcomes of this low involvement of stakeholders. Then there are the Board Members or Executive Council members who rarely engage with the institution beyond a few meetings but approve most significant policies and the direction that an institution will take. Merit goes out of all considerations and entitlement based on years spent in the university becomes the norm. One wonders, how can our institutions focus on excellence with so much of organizational dissonance due to intense mistrust amongst the stakeholders.

Fifth. *External* political influence has always been part of Indian institutional ethos. It was celebrated in the 19th century as part of India's independence

movement but it got vitiated since then as it lost its vital cause. Society forgot that universities were supposed to be safe places for unbounded conversations and that it was these conversations that allowed the youth to form their own independent opinion. It is the hallmark of education at any university. University politics became clients of their external sponsors and influencers and campus violence becomes its instrument. This changed the purpose of coming to an institution for many and remains a contested area especially in the vacuum created by a weak learning environment. Violent campus cannot be safe places for holding difficult dialogues.

VII

So, where do we go from here and how do we recover from our current state of governance. Let me conclude by making the following remarks. There is enough evidence to argue that institutions must be self-regulating entities that must make their own choices about themselves. Universities have to be developed into self-correcting entities and their governance system needs to be redesigned. And this will have to be done one institution at a time.

The governance system of a university represents the eco-system that helps in making the university work. It forms a supply chain of connected entities, people, processes and

perspectives that ensure that the strategic vision is translated into decisions at the university. Indian higher education system needs to address the following issues in order to overhaul its governance system that will foster excellence.

Defining the purpose of the university

A competitive and modern economy is as much about good governance, quality infrastructure, and judicious utilization of resources as it is about exploration of nature, an appreciation of diverse cultures, respect for public commons, modernization, and enlightened citizenship. The role of education is to help the individual reflect on such issues. Universities are the platform for such an enquiry and reflection. University's role as the premier think centre for the country or the region has to be re-established. This would require changing the charter of each institution and re-crafting their vision. Unless institutions are ring fenced from political interference, it will become difficult to develop self-correcting institutional abilities.

Defining the proving grounds & benchmarks

Indian higher education must lead efforts to make the society rid poverty and the economy become competitive and modern. Each institution must be able to choose what must be its mandate in this context and build appropriate capabilities over time to excel. There is an important place for high

quality teaching institutions who innovate with pedagogy with its commensurate incentives as it is for research institutions. But this choice has to be made by each of the universities themselves.

Delivering autonomy

Autonomy of the institution is the sine qua non for excellence. Autonomy is the ability to make one's own decisions in a transparent manner with appropriate oversights. Governments and private promoters, both, have to recognize that once they set up mechanisms of governance through internal structures and processes, a governing board, a process for strategic planning and financial oversight through statutory auditors, their role in directly governing the university diminishes. This will help in strengthening the internal governance and in developing professionals to run the institution. Government and promoters must seek stringent external reviews both of academic and financial outcomes. Mandatory accreditation then becomes necessary for peer evaluation of quality of programmes while external peer review do the same for faculty and their performance. Structures like the Court or the Syndicate and often the Executive Councils are not functioning in today's times. They either have to be closed or entry to them have to truly reflect a quality representation of society. This accountability would require autonomy of the university in the following domains: (a) an ability to select all university

employees including university leadership; (b) a clear right to develop and change programmes, curriculum and examination structure; and (c) allowing governance to rest with the Boards of institutions including decisions on admissions and fees. Funding mechanisms that allow institutions to choose how to dynamically allocate them to various heads is a measure of such enablement. Why badger an institution for not hiring faculty when there are no funds to do so? Universities are dynamic organizations – attempts to control them should be curbed as it slowly destroys their vibrancy, their meritocracy and their creativity. And there is no such thing as graded autonomy – it is either all or nothing.

Defining roles & accountability

Academic institutions need to articulate clearly the roles of various stakeholders and the nature of their acceptable influence. This will minimize areas of conflict and help move the institution forward – an area where Indian institutions have done rather poorly. Restoring accountability within the university system is even more crucial. Processes relating to annual reviews, hiring, and promotion need to be decentralized and made meaningful. Academics are provided with tenure to enable them to research issues that are important to the society but not marketable or publish their research without any fear of retribution. It was felt that this would be needed to advance knowledge. This

privilege must not be violated. At the same time, the key question remains, what must be done if a faculty member stops generating knowledge post tenure or stops producing quality research? The current hiring, confirmation, and promotion processes of faculty is insufficient to judge or exhibit proficiency. Trustees, boards of governors or executive councils must play their strategic roles in protecting the purpose of the university, ensuring oversight, and enforcing accountability.

Getting the university leadership working

Given our control driven environment, leaders in academic institutions struggle to search for a relevance. Generally, leadership is given a mandate by boards or executive councils to achieve certain goals in a limited duration and it is their responsibility to develop a shared vision around these goals and deliver them to the benefit of the society. They also evolve policies and ideas on governance or future directions through interaction with stakeholders and see through their execution. They balance pulls from different stakeholders and are the key interface with external stakeholders. Like any leadership position in any organization, this is quite a challenging role. Several changes are needed to ensure that this role is performed effectively: first, the vice chancellor has to be supported very ably by her leadership team and her office – most offices in universities are ill-equipped to play such a role. Second,

successful institutions assign neutral and wise senior professors and board members as advisors (with no executive responsibility) to the leader to ensure that values/traditions of the university are maintained and that wise counsel is always available. Third, universities must deepen practices of strategic planning, annual planning and reviews, and periodic assessment of plan achievement to ensure that universities are moving ahead on ideas and plans that are evolved in every department. Fourth, the role of the leader as the chief executive officer has to be emphasized given the multitude of responsibilities that she carries including statutory responsibilities. Fifth, the government and the private promoters will have to work through the boards to influence the leadership and her activities rather than interfere directly into the affairs of the university. The leaders role will become even more complex and challenging in times to come because of the increased importance of external relationships in managing aspirations of universities. This will require training of the leadership team and decentralization of decision making to free them from day to day operations.

Managing Scale

The big challenge facing Indian institutions is to manage large enrollments. Rigid control by regulatory agencies have led to imbalance in size of the campus: on the one hand, we have large number of institutions that individually have

inadequate enrollment. While on the other hand, we have university systems with affiliated colleges that have unmanageable number of students. This dilemma has to be resolved in favor of quality. Beyond a point, the university has to open more regional campuses to manage a reasonable sized population within its system. This would be the evolution of a multiple campus university system with perhaps a limited set of program offerings pertinent to the university's spatial location.

Develop a new financial model for the university

Universities, whether public or private, urgently need to rework their financial model. As the number of universities and students grow, the old model of financing based on a prescribed ratio of students, staff and activities will need to be revisited. This has had two effects – one, where the responsibility of doing newer things has been left to the discretion of the funding agency thereby taking away local initiatives; and two, when majority of funding comes from a single source, the responsibility to the larger society diminishes (even if the funding is public). Raising funds from a variety of sources has the effect of democratizing priorities and also puts this initiative in the lap of academia. There is no substitute for philanthropic participation in higher education. Each university should be helped to develop an endowment. A one-time grant for universities to setup their endowment will be necessary. The financial model

will require setting aside a separate corpus for capital expenditure & maintenance, financial aid and research. Without increasing investment of both the government and the society, education of our youth will remain of inadequate quality.

The key question in India, however, will always remain, whether we will be able to execute any of the above changes in the governance system. This will require the government to agree to these ideas more than the institutions.

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Professor Chandra has served as member of the Government of India Committee on Clusters for Development of the Informal Sector. He was a member of the two High Powered Committees – the Government of India Committee on Rejuvenation of Higher Education (Yashpal Committee) that reviewed the Indian Higher Education system as well as the committee on the Autonomy of Central Institutions. He was a member of two Steering Committees constituted by the Planning Commission of India for 12th Plan Development, one on Higher and Technical Education (Where he also chaired the Sub-Committee on Student Financial Aid), and the other on Industry. He was a member of Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) subcommittee on Teacher Education. Until recently, he was also a member of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). He was a member of RUSA (the higher education regulator) of the Ministry of HRD, GOI.

Professor Chandra's research and teaching interests include manufacturing, management, supply chain coordination, building technological capabilities, higher education policy, and hi-tech entrepreneurship. He had published extensively in international refereed journals and has served on the editorial boards of several international journals. He has edited a book titled "Technology Practices, and Competitiveness: The Primary Textile Industry in Canada, China and India" (Himalaya Publishers, 1998) and has authored another book entitled "Building Universities that Matter: Where are Indian Institutions Going Wrong?" (Orient Black Swan, 2017). He has been conducting the national survey on Competitiveness of Indian Manufacturing since the last 20 years.

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