

Learning and Leadership: Exploring the linkages between higher education and developmental leadership

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Understanding how developmental leadership emerges within society and the processes which encourage this is critical to paving the way for development and inclusive, stable states. This review seeks to explore the role that higher education plays in developing the behaviours, skills and values that are essential for developmental leadership, and whether or not it can provide opportunities for developmental coalitions to form. It recognises that there is a symbiotic relationship between higher education and the broader political, social and economic environment, in which they both influence the development of each other over time.

The research will assess the processes and factors within higher education institutes that may contribute to the formation of developmental leaders, networks and coalitions, focusing on the following areas:

- The subjects studied and competencies developed;
- The approaches to teaching and learning;
- The governance of institutes;
- The development of values; and
- Opportunities and mechanisms of coalition/network building within higher education institutes.

Key findings

Research indicates that there is a correlation between education, civic engagement and social participation. Increased levels of education are associated with higher aspirations, more diverse perspectives on issues, greater public awareness, respect and understanding of others. In addition it is associated with higher levels of critical and analytical thinking and positive social/civic behaviours such as voting and volunteering (Campbell,

2009; Kirlin, 2002; Kuh, 1995 and White, 1997).

Government policy and the needs of the economy can have significant influence on the types of skills developed within higher education, as seen with the focus on higher education's role in meeting the needs of the knowledge economy and providing sufficient skills and human capital for economic growth. This has typically led to a focus on science and technology skills. Alongside this, evidence suggests that the subjects studied are highly influential for the development of transferable skills, competencies and values associated with developmental leadership. Research indicates that arts, humanities and social sciences provide a broader educational experience that contextualises learning and often provides more opportunities to develop leadership skills (Brungardt, 1996). In addition social sciences, economics and law are the most common fields of higher education study for African heads of states (Theron, 2011). These subjects tend to encourage collaboration and provide opportunities for students to test and develop their leadership skills; they also encourage historical examination of leadership styles and exploration of ideas beyond students' individual perspectives, as well as consideration of broader social issues. This potential tension between the economic, political and social needs of higher education will be a key area for exploration in the field research and network analysis to see if there is a correlation between subjects studied and developmental leadership in practice.

The ways in which higher education is taught influences the development and consolidation of skills. More interactive, student-focused pedagogy, such as

group work that increases student interaction and critical analysis, is seen to have a positive influence on expanding cooperation, awareness of others and issues of collective good (NSSE, 2010; Stinson and Miler, 1996; Walker, McLean, Dison and Vaughan, 2010). In addition it can provide opportunities for students to practice leadership skills on a small scale and develop their own leadership style.

There is debate in the literature over whether or not values can be taught, or if they are acquired during learning via association, habit and example. Some research suggests that the role of the teachers is critical in aspiring positive behaviour within students by modelling good leadership and values associated with developmental leadership. Others suggest that the teaching and learning process can inform behaviours. However, these are also influenced by individual factors and a student's social environment, which if students move to study can be very different from their home environment. The latter is important in exposing students to new ideas and providing the freedom for them to explore these, particularly within newly formed networks.

Higher education institutes can model effective governance and developmental leadership qualities to students. In particular, opportunities for students to be involved with governance and other extra-curricular activities can be important for the development of leadership skills and to provide opportunities for networks to form.

The networks formed during higher education can influence the emergence of developmental coalitions, and also help to inform attitudes and behaviours of students, for example perceptions of the value of trust, collaboration and social responsibility. Research indicates that such behaviours, when formed during

adolescence, persist into adulthood.

Historically, student movements have played a critical role in bringing about institutional, economic and political reforms. Some of these have started within higher education institutes and evolved to support democratic and social causes. This is combined with research that finds that those who are engaged in civic activity during adolescence are more likely to remain engaged during adulthood (Kirlin, 2002). This suggests that higher education may provide a critical space for civic engagement to develop.

The emerging findings of this literature review draw attention to the potential ways that teaching, the subject studied, governance of higher education institutes, and social factors including extra-curricular activities and the networks formed during higher education, can be instrumental in the formation of developmental leadership. These will be applied to the final stages of this research programme, undertaking primary research in case study countries to explore how these processes have influenced the emergence of developmental leadership in different country contexts.

Download the full paper:

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