Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

0108

Does a Pandemic Change Leadership Approaches? Insights from a PHEI During the COVID-19 Hard Lockdown

Willy H. Engelbrecht[1]

[1]the Independent Institute of Education, johannesburg, South Africa

Research Domain: Management, leadership, governance and quality (MLGQ)

Abstract: Purpose: Determining the extent to which faculty managers from a private higher educational institution (PHEI) in South Africa change their leadership approaches during the Covid-19 hard lockdown to ensure education continues and students remained serviced.

Literature Review: The 2020 academic year has proven to be a challenging and disrupting on both a professional and personal level due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The rapid changes required by HEI due to Covid-19 certainly tested leaders' ability to remain dynamic, mutually inclusive and transformative in the sense that academics are not overlooked nor left behind in this whole whirlpool of events

Research Methods: A interpretivism paradigm was applied using qualitative research methodology to source rich data through the application of in-depth semi-structured interviews. A non-probability sampling method was applied supported by convenience sampling that outlined the parameters for the researcher to determine the changes in leadership approaches. The data was collected trough semi-structured intervoews that was done using online platforms.

Results and Discussion: Two main themes emerged, Leadership Amendments and Transformative Approaches, from the research regarding leadership and how they changed their approach due to the remote working conditions.

Key words: Higher education; leadership; employees, managers, Covid-19

Paper: Purpose: The study assessed the extent to which faculty manager's leadership approaches, from the perspective of employees (academics), at a private higher educational institution (PHEI) in South Africa, changed during the Covid-19 hard lockdown.

Literature Review: The 2020 academic year has proven to be a challenging and disrupting year (Marshall, Roache & Moody-Marshall, 2020:31) on both a professional and personal level due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Most developed countries have made significant progress with their vaccine programmes, but the developing and less-developed countries are experiencing additional waves of the Covid-19 variants. These additional waves of infections has a devastating impact on the economies of countries and forces organisations to constantly evolve and rethink the way in which

business is done. The impact of Covid-19 on academics as been significant and this study consider the view that employees has in terms of how their managers leadership approaches changed during the Covid-19 pandemic due to remote work conditions. Although the higher education sector was able to continue with its teaching online during the Covid-19 pandemic, not all institutions of higher learning was equipped to immediately transfer to the online teaching model (Marshall *et al.*, 2020:31).

The leadership team of a HEI is a direct result of the success experienced by the institution (Bush, 2007:391; Bush and Glover, 2016:81). Leadership is described by Rada (1999:19) a "dynamic process" in which stakeholders are "mutually" benefiting from the successes obtained by the institution. Supporting this is Baba (2019:22) who notes that leaders are influential beings that promotes the development of individuals to exceed personal and professional goals to become better at what they do.

The rapid changes required by HEI due to Covid-19 certainly tested leaders ability to remain dynamic, mutually inclusive and transformative in the sense that academics are not overlooked nor left behind in this whole whirlpool of events (Artese, 2020:7). Rather, leaders had to adopt the use of technology and start using it to their advantage to motivate and retain staff moral and focus on delivering quality material to students above all odds (Duemer, 2016: Markova, 2012:2; Marshall *et al.*, 2020:31; Persichitte, 2013:16; Sirin *et al.*, 2018:2008; Zuber-Skerritt, 2007:988). Remote work has proven to be a challenge for most staff as managers had to trust staff would deliver work as in normal circumstances as well as staff getting used to remote working conditions (Choudhari, 2020:1).

Research Methods: A interpretivism paradigm was applied using qualitative research methodology to source rich data through the application of in-depth semi-structured interviews (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013:1; Maggs-Rapport, 2000:219; Reiners, 2012:3). An in-depth understanding of the Covid-19 phenomenon on leaderships ability to maintain or adopt new approaches to manage academic staff in a remote working condition informed the use of a phenomenological approach (Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2014:19; Nieuwenhuis, 2007:47). A non-probability sampling method was applied supported by convenience sampling that outlined the parameters for the researcher to determine the changes in leadership approaches. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted through both online platforms and in face-to-face conditions with all Covid-19 protocols being observed. Thematic analysis was used to identify the key themes that academic staff raised regarding the change in leadership or management during remote working (Quinlan *et al.*, 2019:341; Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013:400). The credibility and dependability of the research as determined through a triangulation process in which managers were asked to reflect on their changed behaviour in leadership during remote working (Quinlan *et al.*, 2019:164). The PHEI where respondents were based provided ethical clearance (R.15487) together with each voluntary participant that signed a consent form confirming that responses would be anonymous and kept confidential (Louw, 2014:263; Maree & van der Westhuizen, 2007:42).

Results and Discussion: Two main themes emerged from the research regarding leadership and how they changed their approach due to the remote working conditions. Theme 1, Leadership Amendments, showcased that in most instances there was no substantial change in the managers approach to leading the team, rather the tools and methods used to apply the leadership approach had to change. For example, walking to someone's desk to support changed a call, more emails, and regular meetings amongst teams during the week. Theme 2, Transformative Approach, reviewed the

activities and approaches leaders followed to engage the academic staff and keep them operational during the remote working conditions. It is evident that majority of the leaders approaches relate to the characteristics of a transformative leader.

Key words: Higher education; leadership; employees, managers, Covid-19

References: