Institutional Leadership for Multicultural Integration in Higher Education

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Abstract

In order to be able to conduct an effective multicultural analysis, many features need to be evaluated to find strengths and weaknesses, to determine where change is needed, to define new strategic measures, and to take strategic decisions with the purpose of improving the multicultural setting of the organization. CETYS University is at a stage where leadership is aware of the multicultural trend in higher education, and it is taking a proactive role by engaging its people—the human talent—in assessing global risks to build its knowledge of customs, norms, languages, legal systems, and other cultural capabilities. This paper describes as a case example a multicultural analysis of CETYS University with a clear depiction of its cross-cultural challenges and commitment to multicultural leadership. A diversity of strategic actions is being embraced by leadership for helping and supporting a new direction in the improvement of the institution’s global performance.

Introduction

The common practice of internationalization in higher education brings along a valuable strength represented in academic mobility that contributes to the development of science, technology, and innovation in teaching and learning. Multicultural learning happens when mobile students and scholars bring cultures, languages, curricula, organizations, and traditions with them when they choose to live an international experience in higher education (Fletcher, 2012). Understanding diversity is no longer optional for students, it is a must-have ability for developing a global mindset; leadership understands that embracing the necessity of diversity will create a competitive advantage (Uhlig, Quentin, Chang, & Dominguez, 2007). As an example of
one institution that has recognized the need to embrace multiculturalism into its future, CETYS University is highlighted as a case study example.

An appropriate and realistic organizational transition analysis of CETYS University starts with the long history of transition events in the life of the institution. Since 1961 when CETYS was born in the city of Mexicali, Mexico, leadership has faced many challenges, has explored new approaches for a renewed decision-making process, and has established new strategies for institutional assessment and for institutional planning where the workforce is connected to a core mission and vision. The management of diverse resources at CETYS University is a strategic action with different levels of complexity depending upon the organizational framework. Leadership at CETYS University is facing multicultural challenges mainly due to an innovative decision-making process by leadership seeking broader international activity in the global context of higher education; this includes international mobility of students and faculty, and collaborative academic projects with foreign institutions. Ultimately, the organization depends on its professional workforce to make it increasingly more competitive in the global economy (Caligiuri, 2012). Leadership has embraced the responsibility of providing international awareness, international knowledge, international experiences, and international development for students and faculty as one of the main streams of the institutional strategic plan.

The 2020 Strategic Development Plan of CETYS defines this institution’s raison d’être for the following years; it poses strategic trends and clearly expresses the challenges and implications it faces. The purpose is the opportunity for students (high school, undergraduate, and graduate) and faculty of developing a global mindset in terms of multicultural environments, global business frameworks, and international collaborative efforts. Many institutions in higher education throughout the world have been attracting students to study abroad because it is important to establish the linkage between “knowledge-producing countries” and “knowledge-seeking students” (Fletcher, 2012). Leadership must be willing to take more risks, to understand and learn from experiences of institutions of higher education around the world, to face
undetermined issues, to place the image of the institution at high national and
international level, and to create a change in international attitude inside and outside of
the institution, if they want to increase international attraction.

**International Exposure and Its Effects on the Development of Students as Future
Global Leaders**

The new vision of CETYS University is set as follows: “CETYS University will be a high-
quality educational institution, competitive worldwide, functioning as a learning
community, and recognized by its actions and results in favor of sustainable
development.” The focus of this vision is that it defines the type of university CETYS
intends to be by its humanist education parameters, global competitiveness, viability,
and sustainability for the following ten years. Leadership defines and operates a high-
quality education strategy that guarantees measurable results in the key processes of
the institutional life (student learning, the role of faculty, academic programs, and
finance management, among others). Additional emphasis of this new vision is the
strengthening of strategies that consolidate CETYS in the international field, and its
positioning as a competitive university in this context (2020 CETYS University Strategic
Development Plan).

Institutional leadership has decided that the first strategy for enhancing international
development opportunities for students and faculty is the transformation of the
institutional vision into a new vision with an international approach. A new strategic line
of direction in this vision is sustainability in higher education, and leadership has gone
through the process of identifying and defining leadership capabilities and challenges in
the context of sustainability. Some of the strategic actions are offering students the
opportunity to acquire an international dimension, by adding value to people, and by
contributing with ideas and principles that lead to the solution of local and global
problems while fostering a global mindset. This is supported by an immersion in
multicultural experiences with the understanding and sensitivity toward other cultures,
by achieving the mastery level in an additional language, and by acquiring the required
skills that will allow them to excel in their professional lives. One learning strategy with strong presence in current higher education is distance education (e-learning) by structuring academic programs in a diversity of disciplines, and it does not necessarily require the physical movement of the educational consumer or provider (Linhan, 2012).

Thomas and Inkson (2004) defined that cultural intelligence enables people to recognize cultural differences through knowledge and mindfulness, and it gives a propensity and ability to act appropriately across cultures and the many strategic actions that CETYS has embraced. This explains how the institution has taken the stepping stone in each of the stages of global development using a set of values embedded in the institutional education model, the mission, and a newly designed international vision. Leadership has been increasing the level of awareness of the importance of social, cultural, and contextual factors of an organization’s creativity (Paulus, 2003). From the academic program’s perspective, leadership expects that academic staff participate in the design of programs ready to undertake new multicultural experiences with institutions from other countries.

The Board of Trustees of CETYS University represents the main strength for the decision-making process geared toward the growth and development of the institution. The board of the three campuses is very committed and aware of the many challenges that the institution is currently facing in all three locations (Tijuana, Mexicali, and Ensenada, Mexico); as entrepreneurs, they understand and get involved in a well-planned decision-making process. Sustainability on the board is continuing on a natural pathway. The second-generation board members are coming on board with an innovative attitude, and they are ready to undertake the challenges and carry out strategic changes.

Efforts to become a sustainable institution of higher education are being implemented by leadership at CETYS based on a transformational leadership direction with emphasis on: (a) faculty development, (b) investments in information technology, (c) renewal of library resources, (d) new infrastructure, and (e) a more aggressive globalization strategy creating more international relations around the world. Additionally, new strategic actions are in place: improved academic exchange agreements, foreign
languages for students, the search for more funds for scholarships with the main goal of recruiting talented students, a stronger linkage with industry, increase knowledge of environmental issues, and more community presence. Authors Ter Horst and Pearce (2010) stated that integrating environmental issues with foreign language study provides important opportunities for students to increase their language proficiency, develop their understanding of concepts related to the environment, and become more involved in a global community through virtual learning projects. CETYS’ students have been associated with environmental international projects in the United States with partner institutions, and by students participating in international conferences and research projects.

A competitive advantage for CETYS in the region is its reputation as a top-ranked university, which includes a recognized longevity of more than fifty years in higher education at the regional and national level, an MBA program ranked among the best in the nation, and a recently granted U.S. accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). All the previous features are strategic instruments to display the capability of the institution to grow beyond borders, and to become a leader in innovation and transformation of quality in higher education. Additionally, leadership promotes accomplishments of students, faculty, and the institution; with no doubt, these outcomes support the image of a sustainable institution in the minds of the public. Since the current president took office back in 2010, international promotion and communication efforts have been focused on heavily covering the Southern California market. This has helped the institution to remain financially healthy through very harsh economic conditions. Currently, the institution has more than two hundred students from this region enrolled in the Tijuana and in the Mexicali campuses.

The benefit of international exposure that the leadership at CETYS is looking for within an innovative international dimension includes the following strategic actions:

1. Developing a global mindset in students and faculty by applying a value proposition by being flexible, innovative, and competitive.
2. All the students have an international exposure to multicultural settings.

3. Students learn about international standards in higher education.

4. Achieving the mastery level of the English language (bilingual graduates).

5. Students seeking certificate programs in foreign universities are aligned with institutional academic programs.

6. Enhancing students’ mobility via new international agreements in other countries.

7. Enhancing global perspective and global experiences for students via double-degree programs with foreign institutions.

8. More faculty with doctoral degrees.

9. Active faculty participation in research, academic, and cultural projects with partner institutions.

10. Distinguished Chair program.

The current purpose of leadership is that students starting at high school level embrace an international perspective and develop a global mindset. This is going to be a major challenge due to the fact that internationalization at this level in all three high schools has been limited to the International Baccalaureate program (IB). Although this is a recognized international program for high schools, high school students at CETYS are also starting to engage in international mobility. Last year, high school students participated in a program in India, and this year in one program in the United States. Additional international experiences for high school students are being planned in Prague, the States, and in Canada by the end of this year or early next year. These early international experiences for high school students are giving students the ability to appreciate a teaching-learning process where innovation and creativity from cultural diversity is inspiring. Acquiring generic skills like teamwork, presentation, writing skills, and communication skills is emphasized and integrated by visiting organizations (Svanström, Palme, Maria, Carlson, Nyström, & Eden, 2012).
In regards to supporting undergraduate students’ global leadership mindset, CETYS needs to deal with a big challenge, which is recruiting talented bilingual faculty with doctoral degrees. The state of Baja California is in the northwestern part of Mexico and too far from the other states, and in particular from the nation’s capital. Thus, a very important advantage is being close to the States, but hiring faculty from there is very costly; therefore, a special fund to hire this type of faculty has been established according to the stages of the new 2020 Strategic Plan. This action will also address a requirement from the U.S. accrediting agency, to which the institution is committed.

One critical way for organizations to achieve a competitive advantage is for them to create an approach of recruiting and retaining high-quality managerial talent that includes a focus on developing the kinds of skills and behavior that tie directly to the needs of the business (Berke, Kossler, & Wakefield, 2008).

Analysis of International Leadership Strategies

Living multicultural experiences is the key factor for all students when trying to link the institutional educational model and internationalization. In addition, the teaching-learning process has to reinforce this mind-set, which is embedded in the curriculum and the co-curriculum requirements of each academic program. The key questions that leadership has structured to approach this analysis based on the American Council of Education (ACE) International Laboratory conducted at CETYS University in 2010 are:

1. What is the level of alignment of internationalization and the institutional educational model?

2. Are there institutional learning outcomes related to internationalization and global learning?

3. How is internationalization embedded and implemented within the academic programs and co-curricular activities?
4. Is institutional leadership setting up goals for students to learn additional languages? In addition, how are they going to make sure that these requirements are fulfilled?

5. Has the institution implemented an assessment process regarding internationalization and global learning outcomes?

The top priority is to reach the level of alignment necessary for the educational model and internationalization goals. The purpose is to meet the effectiveness goal while seeking a comprehensive alignment with the global learning outcomes. In addition, it is to know how these outcomes have been embedded in each academic program and co-curricular activity. A benefit to this learning experience is the students’ life within internal and external communities as part of their academic development. Students are being prepared to act as promoters of internationalization by learning global leadership strategies through international programs, visits to international organizations, international internships, and participating in academic exchange programs in other countries. By doing so, students are helping to enhance and produce innovative international projects at CETYS in their role as future leaders with a global mind-set. There are now international outcomes in each of the academic programs, so each student needs to live an international experience during his/her academic life at CETYS. All undergraduate students need to fulfill a graduation requirement of passing the English as a foreign language (TOEFL) exam with a minimum of 550 points.

The focus of this requirement is in the commitment that students need to demonstrate by passing the TOEFL exam (the official version or an institutional one). This learning outcome represents an international standard requirement within the global context of higher education. It is recommended that all undergraduate students pass the TOEFL exam prior to graduation date, so this does not become a hindrance for graduating or for obtaining the degree. This way, students and the institution will have a quantitative measure of the English level of their graduating students in regards to an international standard (ACE International Lab, 2010). Students with English fluency are privileged to interact with international students; the knowledge of this language opens the door for
collaborative academic projects and effective communication and understanding (Jon, 2012).

The institution fosters the learning of the English language by offering a series of free English courses to all students so that they can get a passing grade in the TOEFL exam. This is carried out through a so-called College English program, which is offered at all three campuses. The starting point is the placement exam that tells the English Language Center where each student should be placed. There are five modules and the content is grammar, writing, conversation, and cultural aspects of the English language. As part of students’ international profile regarding the English language, their English level is assessed for oral, writing, and reading skills by using a simple scale that identifies three levels per aspect: Basic, Intermediate, and Advanced, in addition to asking whether they have taken the TOEFL, and if so, the points scored. It cannot be denied that English knowledge empowers international students to establish relationships with other students (Jon, 2012).

**American Council of Education Engagement**

The American Council of Education (ACE) is considered one of the top academic organizations. One of the most important international strategies that leadership has taken is the decision of seeking an international self-study approach established by ACE. This self-study was conducted in the year 2010, which was guided by an institutional international committee and a coordinating group. The scope of this self-study is directed toward the institutional community by focusing on CETYS University as a learning community. CETYS University assists participating institutions in the development of a comprehensive internationalization strategy, in addition to the assessment and follow-up of each institution’s advances toward achieving its internationalization goals (ACE International Lab, 2010). The content of this self-study contains topics related to the international initiatives, opportunities for development, and the opinions from students and faculty for approaching new geographical areas for international development. The results of this self-study showed that students and
faculty would like to have more opportunities in the international arena, and participate in international projects. This feedback recommended the inclusion of international learning outcomes in each academic program. The institutional vision was changed mainly because of this reason.

In addition, preparing faculty members within the international context to understand the trend of higher education is another of the top priorities of leadership. Every year since 2010, faculty members have been participating in the ACE international program. There are more than ten people at the institution (including the president) who have had ACE Fellowships. This fellowship has brought many international opportunities to the institution; from the individual point of view, it represents international exposure to faculty members from the United States and their academic culture for one year, and the opportunity to exchange experiences among members from different countries. They all participate in collaborative activities with leaders at the host institution, and the strengths of this international effort are the continuing relationships among peers and the continuous improvement of the fellows (ACE International Laboratory, 2010). At the institutional level, CETYS University is getting more recognition for its emphasis in academic development by supporting faculty professional development.

Another international strategy is the Distinguished Chair program. In the context of continuous improvement in pursuing global competitiveness, three centers of excellence (Competitiveness; Innovation and Design and Innovation; and Social and Human Development) were established, with each being supported by the recurring visits from experienced foreign faculty, and in particular from the CETYS’ global network of partner universities. This global network includes prestigious universities in Europe, Asia, and the States. Linhan (2012) noted that image, resources, and coalition are the most important factors for a successful international relationship in the global market of higher education. These visitors serve as mentors and distinguished lecturers when they are on campus. CETYS University is finding new strategic ways of operating and getting support from partner universities in offering a variety of academic alternatives, which emerged from a collaborative effort that helps the teaching-learning process when the
universities send their own faculty to assure and enhance the quality of the programs (Linhan, 2012).

Some people at the institution are not convinced that CETYS needs to seek a more extensive globalization strategy; they strongly believe that the priority is the continuous improvement of the institution within the internal context, mainly the improvement of academic programs and faculty development. However, changes in societies, markets, customers, competition, and technology around the globe are forcing organizations to clarify their values, develop new strategies, and learn new ways of operating.

Leadership at CETYS University has undertaken major challenges in competition and in organizational changes. The customers (parents and students) go through the selection process for higher education in a more detailed way, and they are looking for important benefits that include image, accreditations, scholarships, international activity linkage with the business community, and job opportunities, among others. With the demanding new profile of customers, the institution is ready to continue making investments in learning resources, more qualified faculty, computer labs, library, classroom technology, Internet, videoconference, etc.

**Institutional Cultural Diversity Awareness**

The institution’s cultural awareness and perspectives are integrated in a set of institutional capabilities emerged from the institutional mission and vision to enhance the competitiveness, image, growth, and international development of CETYS University. The multicultural awareness of CETYS was born in the early 1990s when the first exchange agreements were signed with universities in the United States, one of them being San Diego State University (SDSU). This agreement was an innovative student exchange program called MEXUS, where students from both institutions would attend two years at their home institution and two at the foreign institution.

Furthermore, in the 1990s CETYS began to establish international relations with several Canadian universities; a couple of years later, student mobility became a central means for multicultural awareness. Nowadays, the institution has advanced to multi-
collaborative agreements with universities in many countries (the U.S., China, Spain, Finland, India, Japan, Korea, Canada, Chile, France, and Italy, among others).

Learning communities are growing, networking among students and faculty is increasing, and the pattern of communication is improving; these strategic actions have been in continuous transformation with the support of technology using Skype, videoconferences, e-mail, etc. The ability of the institution to improve global competitiveness is a customer/community partnership perspective that Hubbard (2004) explained as the understanding to perceive demographic changes in the global marketplace. By having an U.S. regional accreditation from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), and the accreditation for the business programs with the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), leadership is seeking a third one for the engineering programs with the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). CETYS is reinforcing its global awareness in academic quality and the global trend in higher education of student learning accountability and institutional quality assurance. Cultural diversity awareness is one of the main concerns of current leadership at CETYS University. In Table 1, data is presented regarding student mobility in different programs across the world as a demonstration of this initiative.
Table 1. Student Mobility: National and International Exchange Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Exchange</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Exchange</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CityU Double Degree</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>382</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDSU Double Degree</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DG Hogeschool Zeeland</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer/Winter Programs</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>955</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of International Programs

The Value of International Development

Developing a global mindset involves a fundamental transformation, and the only way to achieve it is through an extended assignment requiring real work in another country (Mobley & McCall, 2001). The cultural awareness at CETYS is being enhanced by valuable proven international strategies. Leaders of the institution are capable of designing double-degree programs, bringing distinguished lecturers from different countries, providing the opportunity for faculty to continue their doctoral studies, supporting faculty to do international internships, promoting international stays for graduate students around the world, and the probability of participating in a higher education consortium. All the previous actions show the level of importance that
leadership assumes for learning innovative strategies for improvement of its capabilities for international development.

The knowledge acquired from international partners is the turning point to leverage the competencies gained from the international assignees’ experiences upon their return (Caligiuri, 2012). Proving that when people are focused and clear about their decision-making criteria, they can begin to achieve what they may previously have thought impossible (Wheeler, 2009). Every faculty member who has the opportunity to experience an international venture brings the knowledge back to the institution via improved teaching abilities, and students get to enjoy active learning within multicultural settings. Shaules (2010) stated that what deep culture empathy requires is more than adopting an intellectual stance of tolerance for diversity.

The value of a very intense strategy embraced by the president of CETYS is the structure of an International Educational Committee and the integration of a group of international advisors. Members of the International Educational Committee have been engaging in group conversations that are critical during the analysis of potential international opportunities for the institution. Schamber and Mahoney (2006) described group critical thinking as a “purposeful, collective judgment produced by a task-oriented small group of four to six members that combines interpretation, analysis, evaluation and inference, or contextual considerations upon which the judgment is based regarding the specific task at hand.” Each advisor has been assigned a geographical area for international exploration for future international opportunities for the institutions. These opportunities are the student exchange programs, short academic programs, certificate programs, faculty exchange, and research projects, among others. In an internal collaborative effort, the president and the group of international advisors have created a very important networking of international peers for exchanging knowledge, expertise, and for planning mutual strategic projects.

Students and faculty have travelled for academic and cultural purposes from Central America (Costa Rica) to South America (Argentina, Chile, Brazil), to Europe (the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Portugal, Czech Republic, Ireland, Spain, Finland, Austria,
Switzerland, Italy), to Asia (Japan, China, India), Australia, as well as the United States and Canada. As part of the students’ international profile regarding interests in their future international development, there are three main reasons, which have to do with culture, technological development, or an area related to their major. One of the most popular means of international experience preferred by students is the double-degree program with City University in Seattle, WA, where almost three hundred students from multidisciplinary academic programs have lived this valuable experience since 2005.

Institutional learning outcomes and program learning outcomes are expected as part of any accreditation process. Four institutional learning outcomes were developed by CETYS, and one of them focuses on cultural diversity (“Embracement of cultural diversity”), defined as follows:

*Upon concluding the academic programs, students will show knowledge and tolerance towards other cultures, and will apply these skills to establish human relations, thus manifesting respect towards diversity.*

Another institutional learning outcome applies only to college programs where the English language is required; this outcome is “Clear and effective communication in English,” and it is structured as follows:

*Upon concluding the academic programs, students will be able to express ideas clearly and using the appropriate language in English in an oral, written, and visual way.*

These two learning outcomes related to internationalization include assessment tools and observations about the evidence required for achieving the level of learning expected in each outcome. In another institutional learning outcome, assessment tools are an institutional rubric to assess attitude toward cultural diversity, and upon the end of the academic program,

*It is expected that students will show knowledge and tolerance towards other cultures, evidence of this outcome is the skill demonstrated by students in case studies and papers related to cultural diversity.*
In another institutional learning outcome, upon concluding the academic program, students will be able to express their ideas clearly using appropriate English language skills in oral, visual, and written modes. The assessment tool for this outcome is the application of the standardized English language test with a minimum passing grade.

Conclusion

The current global environment is placing organizations under new challenges, and CETYS University is not the exception. Leadership models that new leaders follow will play a critical role in the success of their organizations. Innovation, technology, collaboration, and effective communication are some of the best features an effective leader must engage in. Higher education is a field where transformational leaders are visionaries, role models, and facilitators who prepare their employees to work in a dynamic environment. Therefore, transformational leaders are at the forefront, guiding people to work toward the mission and sustainability of the institution (Hawkins, 2009). Perhaps what is lacking in many leadership practices is transformational leadership, which is based on personal values, beliefs, and qualities in combination with the ability to elevate the interests, awareness, and acceptance of the group, and to stir followers to look beyond their own interests (Berendt, Christofi, Kasibhatla, Malindretos, & Maruffi, 2012). Leadership at CETYS is trying to achieve the goal of integrating high schools, undergraduate, and graduate programs in one big international community. The reason for this is with the purpose of: (a) creating international awareness for global leadership issues among students; (b) enhancing faculty development; and (c) taking to a higher level the image and prestige of the institution as an international role model for institutions in its own country (Mexico).

To sustain long-term performance with current public scrutiny and transparency with coherent, aligned actions with the strategic plan of the organization, universities must develop an analytical strategy based on a sustainable operation seeking global development. This strategy at CETYS includes a set of actions, where its complexity would be to continue the practice of self-analysis and describing how meaningful every
feature involved in sustainability is. Transformation, innovation, effective communication, employee commitment, and a new culture of globalization are part of an effective decision-making process of institutional leadership. Other issues related to strategic international development at the institution are the understanding of technology innovation, rapid competitive moves, peer-related international work, and work ethics aligned with the institutional ethics framework based on the institutional mission. The pathway for reaching global competitiveness is by applying these strategic actions to internal and external sustainability planning, and by extending leadership decision making beyond the organization into the community.

References


