



Going Against The Grain: Leadership in Building an Innovative Institution

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Leadership: What does it involve?

Vision:

The art of seeing
what is invisible
to others –
Jonathan Swift

- **Articulation**
 - **Collective vs Leader's Vision**
- **Need *not* be completely be black and white**
- **Dynamic**
 - **Your vision should not tie you down**
 - **Should have the ability to change – to me this is hardest thing – remaining agile and still be within broad parameters of your vision**
- ***“If you want to build a ship, don't herd people together to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” – Antoine de Saint-Exupéry***

Courage

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYRIUP15twQ>
- **Courage to me is the most important element**
 - **We all want to play it safe --- lest we get hauled up**
- **Courage in leadership means**
 - **Leader is willing to get himself / herself bruised**
 - **In any new task leader is willing to be the first to do it**
 - **Leader has the capacity to fail and still get back on his / her feet**
 - **To convince the team to do what is undoable**

Innovate,
Innovate,
Innovate, ...

Vision and Courage should result in innovation

Innovations in Academics a must

- Out of box thinking
- Every month you need to ask what innovations have been made
- Innovation must for national and international recognition
- Get fun back into education
- *Fractal Academics at IITH, Creative arts, Engrg. Sci, Drones, etc.*

Innovations in administration very hard

- Govt. institutions are bound by government norms
- But within that you can still make innovations

Processes Innovations

- To get something done you don't need 5 signatures and five forms

Not all innovations will lead to success, many will fail, be prepared to handle failures

Leader vs Boss

- **Being Decisive is not always a virtue**
 - **binary thinking is most dangerous**
 - **as Steve Sample former President of USC says, “Think Gray”.**
 - **Be open to change, be flexible, be agile**
- **<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bddeB6SRBJg>**
- **Leader needs to sell himself first before he sells his / her ideas**

Leaders vs Managers

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXh87AqdrTU>
- **Easy to be a manager – very difficult to be a leader**
- **Leadership entails**
 - **Creating an innovative ecosystem**
 - **Generating ideas**
 - **Raising funds**
 - **Helping faculty raise funds**
 - **Giving wings to faculty**
 - **Creating an environment for students to learn with fun**
- **Leader should never become too predictable – otherwise your deputies will manipulate you**
- **Your decisions can only effect the future – do not spend too much time on the past**

Autocratic, Democratic or Consultative

This is a huge dilemma

One needs to develop a balance among the three

Whatever you do, some will get offended and leaders will get accused of being autocratic

Being autocratic, generally should be avoided – in some extraneous cases one may have to be autocratic – but this has to be far and few between

Consultative is a must; consultative group should be diverse

GBMs are good but very rarely a GBM can make decisions

Integrity and Generosity

- **Integrity is paramount**
 - **If you want respect of your team, integrity is the most important characteristics**
- **Generosity**
 - **Share credit or give away all credit -- do not take all credit for yourself**
- **Integrity and Generosity will enable you to gain the loyalty of your team**
 - **They will be willing to go beyond the call of duty**
 - **This is a must if you want to build an innovative institute**
 - **Constant innovation is not possible unless your team is willing to go the extra mile or put the extra hours – including weekends**
- **Stand by your team; believe in them**
 - **If something goes wrong the leader should have the courage to take responsibility – avoid blaming it on your team**

Faculty

- **Your greatest asset**
- **Be very selective in recruitment – suffer in the short run but not in the long run**
- **Every new faculty hire must be as good or better than the existing one**
- **Give freedom to faculty – do not micromanage**
- **Empower and enable your faculty**
- **Invest in Research facilities, Laboratories**
 - **Faculty cannot function without this**
- **Have a consultative approach – even if it is your idea do not articulate it first – if a young faculty articulates that idea – give credit to him / her – you are already a leader**
- **Listen to your faculty, listen to their advice**

Students

- **Another great asset for an academic leader**
- **Most intelligent and smartest group on campus**
 - **Most faculty cannot accept this**
- **Greatest challenge: How to get the best out of the students**
- **Create an academic environment that is fun (e.g. Creative Arts, Drones, Engineering Arts courses at IITH).**
- **Listen to them**
- **Have town hall meetings**
- **One has to have a *kid-glove* approach, need to be soft and tough at the same time**

Against the Grain: Thoughts

- **Build your institution with young faculty – Prof. P. K. Kelkar’s Anecdote on phoenix rising from the ashes**
- **Do not spend time trying to convert bad to good.**
 - **Some deadwood will always be there in the system.**
 - **Bell shape curve -- Gaussian Curve will always be there**
- **Innovate on processes and structures which make good → better, and better → best**
- **Average raised only by impulse – average is never raised by having uniformity**
 - **Uniformity is another name for mediocrity**

Against the Grain: Thoughts ...

- **Steve Sample: *A Leader should pay close attention to experts but never take them too seriously, and never ever trust them completely***
- **Leader does not exert his authority by saying NO**
- **Leader exerts authority and loyalty by saying YES**
 - **If faculty has ideas, see what is good in the idea do not see the negative**
 - **Give faculty wings to innovate**
 - **If they fail – idea will automatically die – so why worry**
 - **If they fail – be there to help them**

Against the Grain: Thoughts ...

- **When it comes to management and administration – have very few layers for decision making**
- **Sleep over things before you make a final decision**
 - **Society prides on leaders who make quick decisions, but that needs to be done only in extreme situation**
- **You will have to say NO many times – NO needs to be handled very tactfully – ask yourself how a NO feels to you**
- **Have least possible rules, *if possible no do nots***
- **If you have the courage to start something new, have the courage to shut down old stuff**

Concluding Remarks

- **Gary Wills: Wielding Power by Giving Up**
- **Have some advisors / friends you can approach**
 - **Someone who you can call freely and get the advice with no strings attached**
- **Warren Bennis: ... *while only a tiny fraction of the population are practicing physical scientists, essentially everyone is a practicing social scientist ...***
- **Need to create a culture of**
 - **free thought, no fear**
 - **outlandish ideas**
 - **have fun with ideas**
 - **what if, why not**



Many Thanks

***Unknown: Sometime the
hardest thing in life is to know
which bridge to cross and
which bridge to burn***