
Institutional leadership – where did i put my compass?

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Abstract

Rarely a day goes by without yet more negative publicity concerning individuals in leadership roles whether in the public or private sector. To the casual observer the one thing that one guarantee about institutions whether they be schools, universities, research centre, hospitals etc. is that leadership is in short supply or when it does exist appears ill equipped for the job in hand. The simple fact is that constraints on time and resources, plus the changing demands being placed on those in leadership roles means that the likelihood of failings of some form or another is relatively high. Even the greatest of institutions are not immune to human frailty, but rather than a sense of resignation it is beholden on us all to establish 'living' management structures that are better suited to the immediate environment without atrophying and becoming monolithic in nature.

For many in management roles the daily round is such that there is often a near absence of any sense of direction let alone any means by which to navigate. Days are spent in fire fighting, and to some making it to the end of the week is literally deemed a minor triumph. Is this what Institutional Leadership is really all about? Whilst no one should under estimate the veritable barrage of day to day challenges concerning funding, staffing, policy implementation, service delivery, targets etc. it is imperative to empower management with the skills, tools and appropriate support to enable a sense not only of forward momentum, but of milestones that are both achievable and celebrated. Currently the prevailing orthodoxy would seem to suggest that remuneration packages are deemed sufficient, but little else is done to support and enable positive forward momentum. Is it any wonder then that there are individuals who fall short, or succumb to internal pressures, politics or the vicissitudes of the hostile environment beyond? There are even those who would have us believe that mere possession of an MBA is sufficient to avoid disaster. Effective leadership demands much more and whilst heuristic learning will always be a feature of the role, with ample battle scars to prove it, there is surely a case for examining how we best equip men and women so that they are better able to progress, communicate and achieve goals that neither imperil them or the organisations that they lead.
