

Good University Management: A Cambodian Perspective¹

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I. Introduction

Good university governance and management are a continuous quest over time and space. Different models and approaches have been suggested and used, with many scholars, researchers and experts in the study of higher education debating and making recommendations about how universities should be governed, managed and administered for productive gains. For instance, in ASEAN, the ASEAN University Network (AUN), ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN), Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) and Association of Southeast Asia Institutions of Higher Learning (ASAIHL) have been established to share information and ideas.

Also, in Europe, the Bologna Process involved a series of ministerial meetings and agreements between both EU and non-EU countries designed to ensure comparability in the standards and quality of higher education qualifications. Through the Bologna Accords, the process has created the European Higher Education Area, in particular under the Lisbon Recognition Convention. The Bologna Declaration was signed by the Education Ministers from 29 European countries in 1999, forming a part of European integration.³ The Bologna Process constitutes an intergovernmental agreement, and does not have the status of EU legislation. Also, as the Bologna Declaration is not a treaty or convention, there are no legal obligations for the signatory states: participation and cooperation are voluntary.

¹ Based on a paper presented at the First Russia-ASEAN University Forum in Vladivostok, Russia, September 1-2, 2016.

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³ <https://www.ehea.info>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bologna_Process.

Effective, efficient and accountable governance, management and administration, quality of programs (including learning outcomes, program review and development), best learning services for students (including student counselling and assistance to poorly performing students, internet and library access, classroom environment and its management, healthcare services), good and qualified academic staff (including capacity building), physical and financial resources and internal quality assurance are the central elements of these institutions. They have set up indicators for checking and balancing between the policies, regulations and guidelines on the university's governance, management and administration and implementation. Hence, good and bad university management can be measured.

Higher education is becoming transnational, with regional and global connectivity and cooperation. It has been doing so by supporting study-abroad schemes, with academic exchange among students and faculty, experimental university policy for quality improvement and institutional infrastructure building, and initiatives like the UK's Open University for the working population seem to offer the most relevant insights for immediate or medium-term higher education policy reforms. This trend can be regarded as globalizing higher education, so that there are few borders or limits to an individual nation's education, but it needs more collaboration and cooperation to continuously develop and improve teaching quality, produce good graduates and thus ensure long sustainable development of higher education.

Towards this end, it is beneficial to share experiences in the governance and management of a university with cooperative partners and other universities and to learn from others' experience and knowledge in order to improve and develop stronger university governance and management. Thus regional and international collaboration and cooperation in the form of signing memorandums of understanding have been increasing. Similarly, there have been moves from a narrow to an open approach in developing universities: for example there is increased establishment of inter-university cooperation in the form of regional and international alliances or associations and of regional quality assurance institutions, such as the various institutions in ASEAN noted above. These institutions share the same purpose, strengthening quality assurance through mainly concentrating on good governance and management of member institutions (including university leadership and management), academic programs, students' learning and other services, academic staff, physical resources, learning resources, financial resources, internal quality assurance and policies. Some

countries and regional groupings focus on instructional accreditation while others do on programing accreditation and others do world ranking.

II. Governance, Management and Administration of the University

Good leadership or good governance and management is always essential for universities as for any other institution, both public and private, national and international. The question about good leadership or good governance and management is a matter for continuing debate. It is sometimes good to ask the opposite question: what are bad leadership or governance and management? To say another way, it is similar to a very beautiful woman who has both very good body and mentality (including morality and virtue) or it is like the most delicious food that every human kind always wishes to have. Based on my knowledge and experience, so far there is no absolute answer to such questions; no single model for good/best leadership/management. It is an incremental process based on long-life learning and research, doing and sharing philosophy and practice of good governance and management in the field that you are associated with.

As in politics and society in general, a university really needs a good leader. Thus a university will collapse if there is poor leadership (Chairman of Board of Trustee or Directors, President, Chancellor, person who has power/authority to manage, lead and decide...to make the university work). Just like a nation-state, a university requires a good and clear governing and managing system, which gives direction to the administration and formulates and defines the power structure and establishes clear tasks and responsibilities. Once it has a clearly defined organizing structure, a university has the means to establish its vision, mission and goals through strategic planning and the implementation of the resulting action plans. A proper strategic plan should focus on the concept of result-based management which aims for quality control, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and thus the sustainable development of the university. In order to achieve this, one should concentrate on some key elements as follows:

- style of management/leadership (management and organizational structure);
- types of academic components (including size), including what you want to be best known for;
- tangible vision, mission and goals which are easy to quantify;
- available human resources with a good committed team;
- available physical resources and infrastructure (including buildings, office space, labs, classrooms, ...);
- financial resources; and

- support from stake-holders (including faculty, staff, students, state and private institutions, and the general public) nationally as well as partners in the region and beyond.

Three levels of organizational structure exist in a university: governance, management and administration.

1. Governance

This refers to the policy-making structure responsible for making decisions on the overall development and direction of the University. The governance structure can be different from one university to another. However a common model overseas comprises:

- a Court or Council (for the allocation of resources);
- a Senate, Academic Council or Academic Board (for oversight of academic programs in general) and
- Faculty or School Boards (for oversight of particular groups of academic programs)

For Cambodian universities, a Board of Directors or Trustees is the highest governing body. Then it may have academic board and other boards but they are under governance or management.

2. Management

This is the executive body of the university and is responsible for detailed policy-making and overseeing the administration and operation of the university. It thus serves to make sure that the vision, mission and all the goals, are achieved through the design and implementation of strategic and action plans which are carried out effectively, efficiently and accountably. The usual pyramid of management structure comprises:

- The President or Vice-Chancellor;
- Provosts, Vice-Presidents or Pro-Vice-Chancellors;
- Deans of Faculty, Colleges or Schools; and
- Heads of Departments or Units.

3. Administration

This is responsible for executing the agreed policies and decisions. Thus, it requires sufficient well-qualified administrative staff. There are two main models of administration within a university. In the traditional model, this is based on group leadership, power at grassroots with decisions being collegial by consensus and compromise; the resulting regulations and procedures are thus often rather inflexible. The other, so-called modern

model is based on centralized power and strong leadership, with individual responsibility at all levels; administrators are more powerful in the drive towards efficiency in their particular domains.

Each model has both strengths and weaknesses. It depends on the culture and environment of the institution. However, it should avoid going to the extreme which will not sustain the growth and development of the university in the long term.

III. A Cambodian Perspective

For the higher education system in Cambodia, the three levels of organizational structure of a university must comply with the Education Law of the Kingdom of Cambodia, related Sub-decrees of the Royal Government of Cambodia and Declarations (*Prakas*) of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport on the establishment and subsequent running of a university or other such higher education institution. Subsequent initiatives towards the same end have included Royal Decrees on the establishment of a Supreme National Council of Higher Education; and that of the Accreditation Committee of Cambodia (ACC), which is responsible for the recognition to higher education institutions through its National Standard of Accreditation on Higher Education in Cambodia based on a set of nine Minimum Standards.

Comparisons between public universities and private universities in Cambodia indicate that there are different components of the Governing Board or Council. Apart from the Rector or President of the institution, members of the Governing Board of a public university comprise higher governmental officials from related ministries; whereas those of private universities can be the owners and representatives of the faculty, the private sector and/or student organizations. Strictly speaking, according to the Education Law, government officials cannot be President or members of the Governing Board of private universities; however the current implementation means that this does not apply to all private universities.

The role of governance through establishing and implementing higher education policies depends on the need to establish the right balance between external control and an institution's autonomy. During the initial stages of a country's development, when skilled labor and human capital are scarce and the market mechanisms for human resource allocation do not function well, explicit coordination to expedite the national development seems necessary, and hence the control mode can be the dominant mode of governance

through legislation and other governmental interventions. South Korea followed this strategy when it was on the initial take-off and growth-acceleration paths. However, as the economy grows and market mechanisms develop, such a central mode of control results in various kinds of inefficiency, and it needs to gradually yield its way to the autonomy mode. This is the critical moment when the higher education authorities should be careful in keeping the balance in designing and implementing the reform plans. Korea was not perfect in keeping such balance and suffers the so-called education bubble phenomenon. However, universities in South Korea have been successful within the last twenty years. Research and publications are leading many countries in the region, which have made higher education in this nation gain momentum of growth and popularity worldwide as an international destination for pursuing graduate degrees. Cambodia can learn many important lessons about the detailed ideas of policy reforms in the higher education sector from South Korea. The most important benefit for Cambodia from the Korean experience seems to be the key insights about the nature of higher education governance and why Korea adopted the observed reforms and what were the positive as well as negative consequences of these.

In addition, *planning* (results-based management planning), *participation* (social participation, including staff, faculty, students, alumni, community, companies and other stakeholders and gaining support from them), *productivity* (getting work done to achieve vision, mission and goals by having good strategic plans and action planning, with all involved persons participating in the implementation process), *progress* (continuing the advance of the university through proper planning and initiating new activities in different directions, to cope with new trends and the development of higher education in the country, region and the world at large), *partnership* (building up a good connectivity, including collaboration and cooperation with national, regional and international universities, together with establishing good relations, collaboration and cooperation with government institutions and private firms or companies, and establish memorandums of understanding for cooperation with non-governmental organizations and international institutions and organizations) are seen as key foundations for good university governance, management and administration.

As an example of how cooperation between universities on an international scale might be fostered, the following will consider one potential example.

IV. Possible Areas of Cooperation between Cambodian and Russian Universities

The Cambodian and Russian governments have a long history of diplomatic relations, especially from the early 1980s to 1990s. During this period, the Russian government provided a lot of assistance, including economic aid, military aid, technical assistance and education assistance. In terms of education assistance, the Russian government at that time helped to train trainers-of-trainers. The Russian language was taught in high school and at universities and other educational institutes. The Russian government also provided many scholarships to Cambodians to go to study in their country. This was much reduced after the 1993 general election, with diplomatic relations not being as close. However the Russian government still continues to provide scholarships to Cambodians and other forms of educational exchange, although much less than other countries such as Japan, South Korea and some ASEAN countries. Nevertheless, as noted in a recent article on ‘Cambodia: Russia's Gateway to ASEAN?’ by Samuel Ramani:⁴

Cambodia has 8,000 students studying in Russian universities, and a history of student exchanges that date back to the Soviet era. These educational linkages will help ease distrust of Russian intentions amongst the younger generation of Cambodians. It also will impact long-term policy decisions, as Cambodians educated in Russian academies are disproportionately represented in senior government positions.

The two countries continue to support each other in the regional and global economic development and security. The relationship between the two countries is considered to have become more close after the Prime Minister of Cambodia Samdech Techo Hun Sen led delegates to attended ASEAN-Russia Summit 2016, it happened in Socchi from 19-20 May 2016. On sidelines of the summit, the Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen met Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss on the strengthening of bilateral relations, Russian assistance to Cambodia (including negotiation on Cambodian debt to Russia), and the two countries signed some memorandums of understanding. Education was one element in the discussions. Thus, as Ramani (*ibid.*) noted:

Russia's strengthening of ties with Cambodia is a key component of President Vladimir Putin's broader goal of expanding Russian influence within the ASEAN bloc. Medvedev's historic trip to Phnom Penh in November 2015 further underscored the importance of Cambodia to Putin's Southeast Asian strategy. Medvedev's trip was first official visit of any Russian leader to Cambodia since Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze traveled to Phnom Penh in 1987. These diplomatic overtures are a major step toward resolving strains between Russia and Cambodia that have lingered throughout the post-1991 period. Despite

⁴ <http://thediplomat.com/2016/06/cambodia-russias-gateway-to-asean/>.

this progress, the transition towards a genuinely fruitful Russia-Cambodia partnership is still fraught with obstacles stemming from inefficiencies in Cambodia's economic system, and negative historical legacies.

Russia has a long- and well-established higher education system, and Cambodia can learn lessons from this to strengthen and enhance its own higher education. The two countries can explore ways to promote collaboration, especially between individual universities, involving both public and private Cambodian universities. To help boost cooperation requires mutual awareness and understanding of differences in the culture, education, economics, politics and technology by people at different levels in government and in academia. It is not just one side offering scholarships: there should be a mutual exchange.

In a similar fashion, both public and private universities in Cambodia have been receiving study visits from companies, government institutions and higher education institutions from ASEAN countries and beyond, including Japan, South Korea, China, India, USA and some European countries, with memorandums of understanding for cooperation being signed. Thus, Cambodian and Russian universities should follow a similar approach for cooperation and the development of partnerships through signing letters of intent and memorandums of understanding. This opens the way for faculty and students to do exchange programs, including, staff-faculty exchange, student exchange, research exchange, joint research, participation in seminars, workshops or conferences, and credit transfers as well as joint degree programs.

This approach will promote people-to-people understanding and connectivity between the two countries. Thus, it helps the blossoming of diplomatic relations, economic cooperation and other social development. Thus the First Russia-ASEAN University Forum, held in Vladivostok after the Russia-ASEAN Summit 2016, is seen as another milestone in the achievement of cooperation between the two countries. It is very important for both countries through the participation of higher government officials and university management and scholars, to share, to learn and to network and hence, identify ways forward to possible future collaboration in the education sector.

V. Conclusions

There is no single model of university governance, management and administration to be followed. Alternative approaches should be used as appropriate to meet the vision, mission and goals of each university and as well as the government policy on education in a given country. ASEAN countries have a diverse educational systems because they have different

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histories, with different forms of government as well as culture and religion, and thus different forms of university governance, management and administration as prescribed by its constitution, education laws and other central guidelines. However, whatever these are, each university should take measures to make sure that its system is a strong one.

In terms of cooperation between Cambodian and Russian universities, it is important that all concerned parties should try to develop strong and sustainable ties through the initiation of, for example, study visits by leaders in the sphere of higher education including ministry officials and university management and faculty from each country to find out possible ways for cooperation in teaching and research. Both public and private universities in Cambodia should be involved: quality assurance means that many of the private universities in Cambodia are similar to or better than public ones. Cambodian higher education has moved from accreditation for the Foundation Year programs in the first year to the need for full institutional accreditation and the strengthening of governance, management, administration, academic programs, student services, academic staff, physical resources, financial resources and internal quality assurance.