

GOVERNANCE AND CREATIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEBANON

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The author elaborates the concept of corporate governance and examines its implication on the higher education sector. She advocates that adopting appropriate corporate governance structures renders the environment of higher education institutions more creative-friendly thus advances knowledge economics and economic growth. She adopts a constructivism, interpretivism, and deductive approach and relies upon secondary qualitative data to produce a descriptive study. The author presents a theoretical framework to explain governance and its impact on creativity in higher education institutions. She then deduces a list of essentials to help higher education institutions become more creative-friendly. She finally examines the Lebanese higher education sector and offers some recommendations to make it more creative friendly.

Key words: Governance, Creativity, Economic Growth, Knowledge Economics, Quality Assurance, Globalization, Higher Education, Lebanon.

JEL-codes: A 22, B 52, E 02.

Introduction

Good governance can be defined as the system through which the performance of institutions is guided and supervised so as to achieve the required objectives. Furthermore, the purpose of good governance is to build up and reinforce accountability, credibility, and transparency along with the integrity of data and information, so as to protect different stakeholders.

Governance in higher education refers to the means by which higher educational institutions are formally organized and managed; it is the way in which universities are operated. Governance in higher education became a key policy in the 21st century since higher education became more vital for the development of the economy and the society (Kennedy, 2003). Universities are uniquely positioned to advance knowledge creation and could play a major role in fostering creativity and developing knowledge based societies.

A knowledge-based economy is one in which the generation and exploitation of knowledge play the principal part in wealth creation. This is different from the industrial revolution when machines replaced labor to build up wealth. Small countries are in a stronger position to compete in an information based economy since it is no longer geography that determines the winner but the creativity and capability of innovation and generation of knowledge. Creativity has been attributed variously to divine interventions, cognitive processes, the social environment, personal traits, and chance. Some say it is a quality you are born with but most others say it can be taught with the application of certain techniques.

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This paper intends to elaborate the concept of corporate governance and its application in higher education institutions. It advocates adopting appropriate governance structures to render the environment of higher education institutions more creative-friendly thus advance knowledge-based economies.

The first section of this paper discusses how the subject is approached in the literature. The second section presents the adopted methodology. The third section proposes a list of essentials to render the higher education institutions more creative-friendly environments. It then explores the potentials of the Lebanese higher education sector in fostering creativity and advancing knowledge economics in Lebanon. The author concludes the paper with a set of recommendations to the higher education institutions in Lebanon.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Corporate Governance

1.1.1. The Background of Modern Governance

The phenomenon of corporate governance has been practiced long ago without the term being used. Some scholars such as Tricker even considers that Plato in his dialogue dealing with Guardians of the Republic and the Governance of the Greek City stated issues relevant to modern corporate governance. Adam Smith (Smith, 1776) recognized that there was a separation between ownership and control in the way corporations were owned and managed. Berle and Means in 1932 (Berle, Means, 1932) wrote the “Modern Corporation and Private Property” and argued that the growth of enterprises in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was the precedent stage to modern corporate governance. The geographical spread of the corporations contributed to the realization of the need for governing principles as part of an organizational structure.

The term of corporate governance emerged in the literature in the nineteen eighties and became a well established field of literature in the nineteen nineties. The concern for such practices increased as a result of major financial scandals in corporation such as Enron in which managers misused their authorities and lead to the bankruptcy of the enterprise with thousands of employees losing their jobs and shareholders losing millions in terms of investment (Fox, 2003).

John and Senbet (John, Senbet, 1998) propose a comprehensive definition of corporate governance that summarizes its main aim. Corporate governance deals with mechanisms by which stakeholders of a corporation exercise control over corporate insiders and management such that their interests are protected.

Shareholders/owners and managers have two main conflicts (Jensen, Meekling, 1976): different horizons and different risk preferences. Firms have indefinite lifetime thus their owners focus on the long term wealth, unlike managers who care about the cash flows received during employment. Owners diversify risk in their portfolio unlike managers whose main wealth is derived from the firm.

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There are numerous definition of corporate governance all of which referring to the existence of conflicts of interest between insiders (mainly management) and outsiders (shareholders/owners).

Two main theoretical views govern the discussion of modern corporate governance. The first known as the Agency Theory that views the corporation as a private property of its shareholders whereas the second known as the Stakeholder Theory that considers the corporation as a social entity that is open to new diverse influences.

Jensen and Meekling (Jensen, Meekling, 1976) argued that the corporation is a contract in which a principle party (external owner) makes use of a second party (an agent/manager or entrepreneur) for the purpose of using his skills or knowledge. The agency theory addresses two problems. The first problem is when the goals of the principle and that of the agent divert. The second problem is the difficulty with monitoring the agent.

The Stakeholder Theory emerged in the nineteen eighties to challenge the Agency Theory since it introduced a group of stakeholders besides the shareholders who have a stake in the objectives of the company such as employees, clients, and the public interest (Freeman, 1984).

Regardless of which theory is applied, two principles need to be consistently respected: performance and conformance. In the nineteen eighties, corporate governance was mainly driven by the performance issues that promote a less legislative view and focus on the output/performance of the firm. The reaction came at the beginning of the nineties in the form of emphasis on the conformance issues that promote regulation for directors about the ways things should be done. Recently, the trend is to keep an eye on both issues for successful corporate governance.

1.2. Corporate Governance in Higher Education

1.2.1. A Stakeholders' Approach

It is crucial to understand the complexity of contemporary higher educational systems where many different actors need to work together to create open and creative-friendly environments. Various stakeholders include students, parents, high schools, teachers, researchers, media, private sectors, international organizations, and social partners (unions and associations). These stakeholders interact in a complex, non-linear pattern through formal as well as informal networks (Cerna, 2014).

Adopting the Agency Theory is therefore not valid for higher educational institutions because of the many stakeholders involved. Moreover, a new player besides the principle and the agent is added: the regulator in the form of the State. It is an external force independent of the market affecting both the owner and manager. Regulations could be considered as external governance forced on the higher education institutions.

The organizational structures of higher education institutions are becoming more complex since institutions themselves have become increasingly interdependent with external forces and accountable to external organizations governmental and market based. The concept of

governance in higher education refers to the internal structure, organization and management of autonomous institutions. The organization of internal governance is generally composed of a governing board (board of trustees, board of directors), the university president (executive head, CEO) with a team of administrative staff, faculty members, academic deans, department chairs, and usually some form of organization for student representation.

Kezar and Eckel (Kezar, Eckel, 2004) define governance at the macro-level of policy decision making and suggest that governance is a multi-level concept including several different bodies and processes with different decision-making functions. Generally, institutions are recognized as autonomous actors with varying degrees of interdependence with and legislative commitments to the external stakeholders and national government.

Several authors (Kezar, Eckel, 2004; Lapworth, 2004; Middlehurst, 2004) point out that next to the concept of shared and participative governance a new form of governance has emerged, i.e. the notion of corporate governance of institutions that has increasingly become a more dominant approach to tertiary management.

Among the issues addressed in governance in higher education are the following (AGB, 2001):

1. The role and responsibilities of the board should be well defined. The board should among other activities review and guide major corporate strategies, policies, and objectives. It is also responsible for monitoring the institution's performance and governance practices. It needs to be fully informed and make sure it applies ethical standards.

2. The board's relationship with faculty decision makers, the delegation of authorities as well as practices of communication with the internal management should be clearly defined.

3. An effective internal control system should be set and contentiously reviewed.

4. Timely and accurate disclosure should be made on all material relevant to the institution including its financial situation, performance, ownership and governance structures. The information should be disclosed in accordance with the high standards of accounting, financial, and non-financial disclosure. The remuneration of the high paid staff and the compensation paid to main directors (deans, chair, etc) should be disclosed too.

5. The nature of institutional relationships with external stakeholders is to be clear.

6. Staff and faculty should be encouraged to participate in promoting corporate governance by giving them access to needed information and encouraging them to freely communicate their concerns about illegal activities to the board and be confident that they will not be compromised for doing so. The development of performance — enhancing mechanisms for employees' participation helps in this respect.

7. Academic freedom should be maintained. However, freedom alone is not enough to build a creative-friendly environment. Policies should be formulated and leaders appointed to nurture a culture of trust where innovation could prosper. Appropriate accountability mechanisms should be adopted that foster innovation and encourage risk taking (Cerna, 2014).

1.2.2. Governance Versus Quality Assurance

A study performed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) tried to investigate the differences between good governance and quality assurance guidelines in higher education (Henard, 2009). The governance guidelines work on clarifying the institutional structures and procedures of the board whereas the quality guidelines focus more on the planning processes themselves and the nurturing of a quality culture within the institution.

They have thus different perspectives, the former an institutional framework whereas the latter focus more on the procedural aspects. However, the study showed that even though the guidelines vary in terms of the form, details, and aim, they have the same direction. Quality assurance and governance share several key issues namely; defining the mission, the institutional structure, planning, participation, and transparency.

The OECD members realized the importance of the corporate governance in enhancing the economic efficiency and growth of a nation. They perceived corporate governance as a “set of relations between a company’s management, its board, its shareholders and other stakeholders” (OECD, 2004). The principles of corporate governance by the OECD were initially formulated in 1999. The work became an international benchmark in its domain.

1.3. Knowledge, Creativity and Higher Education

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1.3.1. The Knowledge Economy

According to the New Growth Theory, creativity is the main drive for economic development (Romer, 1998). It is the most important factor of production that improves the other two factors, labor and capital to lead to abundance. According to Paul Romer, the classical belief that resources are scarce is outdated because given technological development and creativity; an economy will have abundance and will no longer faces diminishing returns (Romer, 1993). An unlimited artificial resource base is created by the combination of elements using technology. Labor is no more the physical labor, it is the physical labor plus ideas and inventions. Romer makes the distinction between material goods and spiritual goods. The material goods such as food and equipments satisfy the physiological needs of a human being. The spiritual goods mainly ideas and knowledge satisfy reason and ethics. Spiritual goods are not rivalry unlike the material goods and have positive externalities, thus they propagate their benefits to others at no added costs and tend to be free goods. Creativity, mainly made up of ideas, propagates its benefits and in turn increases creativity thus abundance and sustainable growth. Education, according to Romer, is primary because it is responsible of fostering an environment of creativity and of freedom of thoughts.

Today, creativity forms the main activity of a growing section of the global economy. The creative industries capitalize on generating wealth through the creation and exploitation of intellectual property and the provision of creative services. The creative professions relying mainly on the intangible assets include many such as writing, art, design, theater, television, radio, motion pictures, crafts, marketing, strategy, scientific research, product development, teaching, and curriculum design.

1.3.2. Creativity and Innovation

Creativity is defined as a mental and social process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations of the creative mind between existing ideas or concepts. Creativity could be also defined as “an assumption-breaking process” because creative ideas are generated when one discards preconceived assumptions and attempts a new approach that might seem to others unthinkable. Moreover, creativity means: originality (not reproduction), appropriateness (not every novelty is creative), future orientation (not looking backwards), and problem solving ability (thinking outside the box) (EUA, 2007).

Graham Wallas presented in 1926 one of the first models explaining creativity (Wallas, 1926). According to Wallas, creative insights can be explained in five stages; preparation, incubation, intimation, illumination, and verification. The person starts preparation by focusing his mind on the problem to explore its dimensions; he then internalizes it into his unconscious in the incubation stage. In the intimation stage, he gets a feeling that the solution is on its way. The solution jumps to his consciousness in the illumination stage; he will finally verify it, elaborate and apply it.

While creativity is the act of producing ideas, innovation is the entire process of both generating and applying such creative ideas in some specific context.

1.3.3. The Role of Higher Education

Higher education institutions are undergoing a paradigm shift trying to cope with this changing environment. Universities frameworks need to be dynamic enough to continuously overview and update the curriculum keeping an international perspective to match a fast changing global job market.

Educators are thus expected to act in futures oriented ways while remaining true to their professional standards of the present environment. Researchers should select topics with an international scope and take advantage of the information technology development to collaborate with scholars across the globe. Information could be spread fast creating a kind of “knowledge web” across the world (Hyun-Chong, 2005). Knowledge emphasized is to be mainly the know-how (ability to do things and gain skills), the know-why (about the natural world, society, and human mind), and the know-who (social relations) rather than the know-what (knowledge of facts) (Earnest, Young, 1999).

2. Methodology and Approaches

To be able to answer our research question and properly elaborate the concept of corporate governance, its application on higher education and its influence on rendering the environment of higher education institutions more creative-friendly, the author decided to adopt the constructivism rather than the objectivism approach (Creswell, 1994). She therefore considers that social phenomena and their meaning are continually being accomplished by social actors. She will describe the phenomenon of adopting measures to ensure good governance and examine its reflection on creating a creative friendly higher education environment and on economic growth.

The researcher considers that truth is formed based on social interaction; for that reason she adopts the interpretivism rather than the positivism approach to research (Creswell, 1994). To answer the research question, she follows a deductive approach. Thus, she builds a theoretical framework, based on secondary data, advocating adopting appropriate governance structure to create an environment that encourages creativity before she deduces lessons that Lebanon could benefit from. The research is qualitative and descriptive in nature. It seeks to provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon in question based on secondary data.

3. Results: Towards a More Creative Higher Educational Sector

3.1. The Model

In order to invest in knowledge, a country needs sufficient creative human capital or intellectual capital (Katz, 2003). Higher education institutions, through appropriate governance, are expected to avoid the conventional system hindering creativity and attempt to provide a creative-friendly, rich, imagination-fostering environment.

The author provides below an extensive list of essentials, she prepared based on literature, to help higher education institutions offer such an environment (Table 1).

Table 1.

Institution's Culture
Be proactive, future orientated and always one step ahead
Emphasize cross-cultural and cross disciplinary exchange
Offer interdisciplinary programs
Adopt a flat and informal flexible organizational structures
Be open to experimentation
Encourage risk taking
Tolerate failure/mistake
Reward innovation
Fund research
Provide to faculty/students the infrastructure and conditions needed for research
Admission
Admit a diversified body of students in terms of talent, qualification, and backgrounds
Select students for their personality based on interviews as well as entrance exams
Admit students who show passion for the field
Admit students who have an independent and contrary point of view
Admit risk takers
Curriculum and Teaching Techniques
Teach courses in thinking skills (Edward De Bono)
Encourage problem solving in a confrontational way where a person does not automatically accept a set of premises on which to build the answer but try rather reformulating the question.
Start every lecture with brainstorming to bring the students to the topic discussed.
Ask students to collect all items they could find (articles, pictures, charts, etc) on the topic
Set open-ended problems to help students reformulate and discuss ideas
Develop students groups to work on solving problems
Allow students to deconstruct their courses and try to reorganize them
Assess students learning through a variety of techniques evaluating their creativity
Stimulate and reward curiosity and exploration

Build internal motivation
Encourage confidence and willingness to take risks
Provide opportunity for choice and discovery
Encourage students to have the creative mentality of the entrepreneur
Faculty and Staff
Allow faculty to question the content and structure of courses
Encourage teachers to be learners and learning facilitators engaged in the learning process
Evaluate teachers based on their creativity as well as competence
Reduce the teaching load to members involved in research
Encourage staff to be creative practitioners by staff development, appraisal and promotion
Students
Seek students feedback in a variety of ways on many issues
Encourage students to provide a critique of the curriculum
Require students to develop real solutions to real needs in real time
Train students to adapt to changing working environment circumstances and manage the change
Offer students a global perspective in approaching issues discussed
Encourage students to contribute in shaping the future
Teach students to think critically and perceive relationships that are not evident in the problem discussed
Expose students to expertise of the working professional not within the walls of the institution for the mutual gain of both stakeholders
External Environment
The higher education institutions are to be supported by an external environment that encourages creativity
The governmental authorities are to move to accreditation systems that value, promote, and assess the extent to which the institution's environment fosters innovation
The quality assurance authorities are to quit the traditional system that perceives the quality in higher education as conformity to a standard since higher education is supposed to promote
The legal environment must protect the property rights
The private sector is to be encouraged to fund research

Source: compiled by the author based on data provided by (De Bono, 2018; EUA, 2007; Haddawy P., Igel B., 2007; MIT, 2003).

3.2. Lebanon

3.2.1. Facts about Lebanon

Lebanon is a small country (10452 square Km) with a population of 6,229,794 (Index Mundi, 2018). Its economy is mainly dependent on services; in 2017 the share of the agricultural sector in GDP was 3.53%, of industry 12.01% and of services 76.03% (Statista, 2018).

The services sector is historically built on human resources. The human capital in Lebanon is educated and speaks fluently many languages besides its Arabic mother tongue (namely French, English, and Armenian). The median age is 30.5 years meaning that half of the population is young (Index Mundi, 2018). Moreover, 24.09% of the population is between 0-14 years, 16.42% between 15-24 years, and 44.79% between 25-54 years.

The literacy rate is 93.9% (Index Mundi, 2018) with a total of 192,522 university students (Bank Med, 2014). In June 2016, 75.9% of the population was using the internet (Internet World Stats, 2018).

There are more than 8 incubators/accelerators in Lebanon (IDAL, 2017). An incubator is a technological pole that places at the disposal of companies and start-ups offices, infrastructure, technological tools, counseling, synergy and networking, and financing. It thus provides a ground where creative ideas can be developed into sustainable businesses.

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Given that the population is young, education is very important to formulate the economy of the future. The strength of Lebanon when it comes to higher education is its diversity, multi-cultural aspect, and openness.

The earliest higher education providers in Lebanon were private foreign missionary. The American University of Beirut (formerly the Syrian Protestant College) was established by Protestant American missionaries in 1866 and the Saint Joseph University by the Jesuits in 1875.

In 1950 the Lebanese government established the national public university. Later, in 1960, the Beirut Arab University, affiliated to the Alexandria University in Egypt, was established. The number of universities and university colleges in Lebanon nowadays is 50 private institutions and the public Lebanese University (Ministry of Higher Education, 2018). Around 77% of these institutions were established in the 1990's when the Lebanese government decided to expend the sector.

The curriculum was early an international and intercultural one taking the basis of the west and adapted it to the east. What helped in this process was that the Lebanese population is diversified and multilingual as previously mentioned. Lebanese students looked for such curriculum since many of them migrated to work abroad and wanted to be prepared for international competition. The net migration rate was estimated in 2017 as -20.3 migrants/1000 population (Index Mundi, 2018).

The students' body is also diversified. The mobility of students inward and outward existed years ago. Foreign students studied at the Saint Joseph University, American University

of Beirut, Beirut Arab University, Lebanese American University (formerly Beirut University College), and the Lebanese University. Today, 21.5% of the students' body at the American University of Beirut for example is composed of international students (with a foreign passport) from 75 different countries (AUB, 2018). Mobility works both ways since many Lebanese students leave Lebanon yearly to study abroad. In 2006, it was estimated that 7.3% of the Lebanese university students were studying abroad, their top destination is mainly: France, USA, Germany, Italy, and UK (Atlas, 2006). Many of these graduates return back as faculty members, managers, and entrepreneurs to Lebanon. Foreign faculty members cross the border yearly to teach in Lebanon too.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, adopting good governance practices in higher education institutions leads to a better performing sector. Implementing such practices is becoming even more important with globalization and the internationalization of higher education since the structure of the institutions is becoming more complex and the competition among them fiercer.

Practicing good governance in higher education in a country like Lebanon where the population is young and higher education is vital to produce qualified human capital has a great impact on economic growth. Practicing good governance is expected to improve the quality of the provided service and to enable graduates to be more innovative and knowledge producers.

Looking at the higher education sector in Lebanon shows that it could become the main support for the advancing of knowledge economics. Its major strength is being an excellent environment for cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary exchange.

The higher education institutions need to start creating a culture that tolerates failure and rewards innovation. The admission criteria of students to different major should emphasize more the personality and passion to the field. The teaching techniques that encourage students to be more involved in the learning process, curious to discover, experiment, take risks and formulate personal independent opinions are to be encouraged. Faculty, staff as well as students need to be evaluated based on innovation as well as other competences.

The challenge is for the ministry of higher education in Lebanon to adopt accreditation policies and quality assurance measures that assess the creativity of the institutions. The Lebanese government is to become very strict in applying pre-existing laws protecting property rights and to issue new legislations to match the coming needs.

The private sector is taking steps in funding research and research centers in many universities and is accepting students' internships. This relation is to be strengthened and further developed for the mutual benefits of both partners.

Lebanon could grow faster if oriented towards the knowledge economy. It has the basis needed for such an economy to flourish but needs to further direct its efforts in this way. The higher education institutions are supplying the job market yearly with thousands of graduates who will contribute greatly in such an economy provided they are well equipped and educated in ways to nurture their love for discovery and creation.

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