Research Article

Trust in Higher Education Management and Organizational Culture

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the importance of trust in higher education management and organizational culture, in some of its advantages but also limitations.

Keywords: higher education, management, organizational culture, trust, academic motivation

1. Introduction

The changes brought about by COVID-19 (Ferreira & Serpa, 2021) have been, and still are, remarkable in most people's lives, and also in the context of education (Sá & Serpa, 2020a) and higher education (Sá & Serpa, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d; Ayman, Kaya, & Kuruç, 2020; Rasiah, Kaur, & Guptan, 2020; Croucher & Lacy, 2020), in addition to the challenges for academics, including their (un)professionalization or (re)professionalization (Ferreira & Serpa, 2018a; José Sá, Ferreira, & Serpa, 2019). This change occurs in a context of social re-legitimation of higher education (Roos, 2019; Adhikariparajuli, Hassan, & Siboni, 2021; Prieto-Jiménez, López-Catalán, López-Catalán, & Domínguez-Fernández, 2021), characterised by increasing complexity. Thus, it is necessary to be careful about the increasing reliance on digital technologies in education and virtual learning, which may jeopardise the richness and complexity of the face-to-face teaching and learning process. Although the benefits of virtual learning are undeniable (e.g., accessibility and flexibility), the educational process in this environment hinders human interaction only possible in face-to-face education (Powell & McGuigan, 2020).

The emergence of the digital society (Ferreira & Serpa, 2018b) and the consequent need for digital literacy (Sá, Santos, Serpa, & Ferreira, 2021) reinforced the need to shape a different higher education culture (Sá, Serpa, Ferreira, & Santos, 2020; Ayman et al., 2020; Abad-Segura, González-

Zamar, Infante-Moro, & Ruipérez García, 2020; Garcez, Silva, & Franco, 2021).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) build their culture through the education they offer, the research they carry out and the community service they undertake, and these connections add to the evolution and improvement of their organizational culture. The organizational culture of a given HEI is unique and differentiates it from other HEIs in terms of its features, such as the mission, values, symbolic and historical capital, habits and rituals (Erdem, 2016).

In this sense, and as Holsether and Hoffmann (2021) argue, 2030, the target year for the world to attain the Sustainable Development Goals set out by the United Nations in 2015, is approaching rapidly and, thus, societies have to work fast towards attaining, specifically regarding the topic under analysis, "[...] SDG#18: Rebuilding trust. Trust builds, distrust destroys" (para. 1-2).

In this letter to the Editor, the authors aim to discuss the importance of trust in Higher Education Management and Organizational Culture (Santos & Gonçalves, 2018), in some of its advantages but also limitations.

2. Higher Education Management and Organizational Culture

Education, or rather, schooling, is a highly complex process (Serpa, Santos, Ferreira, & Sá, 2020). It develops through a school system that takes place in several organizations or collective units coordinated with a defined structure and in which social processes occur (Serpa, 2016a).

Each of these organizations, with its success over time, tends to shape its organizational culture, envisaged – in a brief definition – as shared ways of thinking, feeling and acting socialized by its members, and that have demonstrated success in the organization's internal integration and external adaptation (Santos & Gonçalves, 2018; Schein, 2010; Serpa, 2016b; Erdem, 2016; Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2020; Coman & Bonciu, 2016). According to Tierney (2008), culture entails the rules, mission, values and principles that make up an organization's identity through organizational and professional socialization processes. These forms go beyond the pre-existing formal dimension and are simultaneously structure and action, inside-outside of the organization, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the formal and the informal in the organization and its dynamics (Serdenciuc, 2019; Serpa, Sá, & Ferreira, 2020). According to Barbosa, Borges, and Serpa (2021), the potential of analysis that makes the structure of an organization paramount when analysing organizational dynamics is anchored in the relationship between the formal organization (the formally established functioning and the hierarchical relationships) and the informal organization (how the formally established norms and relationships take place in practice, which may diverge significantly from what was formally established).

In the context of higher education, organizational culture has been studied for a long time and is still a polysemic concept, with several types of Organizational Culture (OC) (Masland, 1985; Serpa et al., 2020; Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2020; Ferreira & Hill, 2007; Serdencicuc, 2019; Gaus, Tang, & Akil, 2017). As noted above, OC is different from organization to organization, but there are common elements to the OC of all organizations that shape effective leadership. Eydgahi and Lahidji (2004) cite Covey (1990) when listing the seven habits that characterize highly effective individuals:

1. Be Proactive: Principles of Personal Vision;
2. Begin with the End in Mind: Principles of Personal Leadership;
3. Put First Things First: Principles of Personal Management;
4. Think Win/Win: Principles of Interpersonal Leadership;
5. Seek First to Understand, then to be Understood;
6. Synergize Principles of Creative Communication; and
7. Sharpen the Saw: Principles of Balanced Self-Renewal (p. 9.844.1).

The academic's functions encompass teaching but go beyond this and include the community's duty functions (Sá, Santos, & Serpa, 2021; Erdem, 2016; Prieto-Jiménez et al., 2021; Roos, 2019) in a context of internationalization of the curriculum and exchange of both students and academics (Sá & Serpa 2020d). Dzimińska, Fijałkowska and Sułkowski (2018) highlight the relevance of the role played

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by HEIs in society, which is multidimensional. These organizations are vital in knowledge creation, dissemination and exchange, production and promotion of innovation, and in taking on the role of service providers to the community. Thus, as HEIs play a pivotal role in promoting the development and progress of societies, preparing their students for the different and complex realities of the labour world, spreading the knowledge they produce. These institutions are, thus, critical in the construction and development of a democratic and sustainable society.

Even the assessment of organizations, applying, for example, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) diagnosis (Serpa, Ferreira, & José Sá, 2020), may be necessary but is not sufficient for the success of HEIs. However, if properly conducted, this analysis enables the design of the strategy and its implementation. The implementation of the strategy, for example, by the leadership is also critical (Pedraja-Rejas et al., 2020), as well as by other internal and external members of the organization (Dzimińska et al., 2018). A core element is also part of this process – trust.

3. Trust in Higher Education Governance

Trust is a complex phenomenon that is defined and interpreted in different ways (De Boer, 2002; Osburn & Gocial, 2019; Tierney, 2008; Hoppes & Holley, 2013). Vidovich and Currie (2011) cite Tierney (2006), who identified trust as "[...] a dynamic process in which two or more parties are involved in a series of interactions that may require a degree of risk or faith on the part of one or both parties" (Vidovich & Currie, 2011, p. 45). Furthermore, according to Hoppes and Holley (2013), the strength of trust in the organizational culture reduces the need for control mechanisms over faculty and administrators. Higher trust enables and promotes the faculty's work in terms of teaching, research and service. As a result, if the faculty members have trust in the competence, efficiency and integrity of the institution's administrators, they will become more involved and committed to their academic and research tasks.

Trust in organizations is *relational* and *conditional*, occurs over time and cannot be imposed (Tierney, 2008). HEIs are good examples of entities where trust evolves. Generally, the academy members are linked to it for a long time and because they really want to belong to the HEI. Thus, labour relationships and interactions are established based on trust and collegiality (Tierney, 2008).

In their 2018 study, Dzimińska and colleagues identified a set of attributes associated with trust, depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Attributes of trust

- The only way to attain confidence is to earn it.
- Trust in a relationship between individuals is very fragile, takes time to consolidate and is very easily damaged.
- Trust is based on the expectation that an organization does not have opportunistic behaviours and that its products meet the quality that consumers expect.
- Trust entails the involved actors' confidence that the organization and its members are upright and trustworthy.

Source: Adapted from Dzimińska et al. (2018, p. 4)

For example, within sustainability (Mzangwa, 2019; Leal Filho et al., 2020), trust seems paramount to overcome the tensions that Lattu and Cai identified in their 2020 study in the context of Finnish HEIs, and which relate to (1) academic leadership and management legitimacy, (2) regional political tensions and university profiling, (3) political power over the university system, (4) changing academic work and profession, (5) academic autonomy and the role of the state, and (6) the future role of the university institution (p. 1).

Furthermore, trust is pivotal in allowing HEIs to enhance their performance. Leal Filho et al.

(2020) argue that HEIs should adopt a set of actions in their path towards excellence (Table 2).

Table 2: Actions to allow the enhancement of HEIs' performance

Action 1	Focus on practical aspects of governance and higher integration of governance issues into the HEIs' dynamics.
Action 2	Institutionalize the integration of sustainable development issues in HEIs through greater intentionality in concrete activities (e.g., development of action and sustainability plans that foster a better relationship between HEIs' management and its staff)
Action 3	Focus on leadership contributions towards achieving the SDG objectives by assessing the levels of emphasis on the SDGs, setting targets for achieving the SDGs, and assessing the progress in terms of achieved goals.
Action 4	Identification of the means through which the leadership can engage in the training of the staff towards the promotion of sustainable development. Given the scarcity of training initiatives aimed at raising awareness among staff in HEIs, these initiatives can foster the development of such a relevant area.

Source: Adapted from Leal Filho et al. (2020, p. 12)

However, Kovač and Kristiansen (2010) warn that, in the specific context of higher education and particularly regarding the teaching practice, overconfidence and the absence of monitoring can be counterproductive in the development of cognitive and critical thinking skills. The authors advise that the potentially negative consequences of overconfidence should be guarded against. Among these, Kovač and Kristiansen (2010) highlight the "[...] use of heuristics at the expense of systematic processing, the feeling of complacency that invites cognitive inertia, the difference between practising traditional versus progressive types of teaching, the amplification of already uneven power relations, and the possibility of social exclusion" (p. 284).

4. Final Remarks

HEIs are central to societies to the extent that they contribute to the sustainable development of countries (Sá & Serpa, 2020e). In a context in which HEIs face serious difficulties, due both to the growing competition for students and their funding and economic sustainability, the loyalty of students, teaching and non-teaching staff, as well as their institutional reputation, play a key role in their survival, development and success. These institutions operate on the basis of trust and excellence of the services they provide, not only to their students but also to the community (Dzimińska et al., 2018). Therefore, trust within HEIs could be a driver for change, increase the loyalty of their stakeholders and improve their reputation. On the other hand, by fostering and developing the culture of quality, trust can promote in the HEIs' human resources higher involvement in organizational changes that lead to more sustainable and perennial development (Dzimińska et al., 2018).

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