JPSE
The Spirit of Education

Journal of Practical Studies in Education
ISSN: 2634-4629

GTA Press

Book Review: King, W. J. & Mitchell, B. C. (2022). *Leadership Matters: Confronting the Hard Choices Facing Higher Education.* United States: Johns Hopkins University Press

Dan Manolescu (Corresponding author)
ESL Freelance and Award-Winning Author, USA
Email: Dan.manolescu@att.net

Received: 12/02/2022
Accepted: 06/04/2022
Published: 01/05/2022

Volume: 3 Issue: 3

How to cite this paper: Manolescu, D. (2022). Book Review: King, W. J. & Mitchell, B. C. (2022). Leadership Matters: Confronting the Hard Choices Facing Higher Education. United States: Johns Hopkins University Press. *Journal of Practical Studies in Education*, *3*(3), 17-21
DOI: https://doi.org/10.46809/jpse.v3i3.48

In the context of our changing times with dramatic and unexpected challenges, *Leadership Matters* sends a strong message to higher education leadership, addressing the pressing needs for flexibility and adaptation, but also focusing on the tasks for those who govern these "repositories of American culture." Extraordinary challenges require governance prowess and extraordinary decisions. Organized in nine chapters followed by extensive notes, the book represents a major contribution to the overall concepts of strategic planning, management and operations, stakeholder relations, campus and community, accreditation and athletic conferences, to name just a few. W. Joseph King and Brian C. Mitchell share with the readers their strong belief that the American higher education system will continue to be relevant in the coming years if their leaders can prove themselves to be adaptable and effective in their decision-making approach.

Referring to an earlier volume published by the same authors, *How to Run a College: A Practical Guide for Trustees, Faculty, Administrators, and Policymakers* published in 2018, the preface delineates three periods marking the historical development of the higher education system. First came the post-Civil War era, with its wave of private college mergers and the emergence of "new types of graduate and professional training at universities such as Johns Hopkins, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Caltech, and the University of Chicago." The second period, concentrated on the middle class values reflected in the learning process, covered the years between the Great Depression and World War II. In the authors' view, we have just entered "the third period of inflection," in which higher education leadership is facing "changing economic, social, cultural, technical, and demographic shifts." The task ahead is not unprecedented, but still poses unique challenges owing to obvious factors like tuition increases, bureaucracy, state and federal financial partnerships, but also to rapidly changing demographics.

Several logical questions arise from the in-depth analysis of the current situation, one of which comes from the year 2020, when analysts and educators were wondering "whether many American colleges and universities would open to accept traditional, residence-based classes in the fall." The reason was obvious: Out of the $3-trillion stimulus package to the economy, the higher education branch only received $14 billion, although the original request was $50 billion.

The well-documented introduction argues that most American colleges and universities have always depended on philanthropy, government support, to which an endowment was usually added; however, the overall picture, unfortunately, pointed to insufficient funds. To support their argument, the authors resort to examples coming from prestigious institutions like Harvard University. Referring to their own financial report for the fiscal year 2017, America's "oldest and best resourced institution" made the following remarks:

> This year's operating surplus … may represent a high-water mark for the foreseeable future, however, due to the broad and ongoing revenue pressures in higher education … Since the 1950's, higher education in the United States has been a growth industry, and has enjoyed demographic increases in student populations, generally steady economic expansion, increases in federal research funding, and robust investment markets. This picture has changed. Higher education has matured as an industry and revenues are under pressure as student numbers have plateaued, tuition costs reach limits of affordability, federal research support is threatened, and expectations for returns in the investment markets are muted. The industry is showing financial strain, even in these comparatively healthy economic times, with the recent closures, shrinkages, and mergers of smaller, less well-positioned schools. (pp. 2-3)

According to the authors, trends accounting for the financial hardship might include not only changes in demographics, but also the increasing numbers of lower-income college students, which presents a seemingly insurmountable challenge. Furthermore, the introduction pleads for "strategic visionaries" to embrace "change that is equal to the task of confronting these great challenges."

Several names from the past are brought to our attention, when Arthur Morgan (together with the board of trustees at Antioch College) is cited as a worthy example to be followed. When Morgan officially presented his ideas, it was clear that he knew what was absolutely necessary: "expanding the student body to five hundred, recruiting top-notch faculty, and increasing salaries." In other words, he suggested a program of work and study to "make academic life more holistic."

Another name is added when, in 1958, James Earl Rudder became vice president and afterwards president of Texas A&M College. It was Rudder's idea to establish two groups, the Committee on Aspirations and the Century Council. The message was clear: "The future of Texas in large measure depends on how successfully its institutions of higher education plan now to meet the challenges anticipated in the next fifteen years." (p. 8)

Chapter 1, entitled *Presidents, Provosts, and Board Chairs*, introduces a fresh appraisal of the role of the three foremost leaders of a college or university. "Two of these leaders, the provost and the board chair, align with specific shared governance constituencies: the faculty and the trustees. The president serves as a bridge between the two and may actually be a member of both bodies." (pp. 10-11) In this respect, leadership is treated as quintessential in our understanding of higher education institutions and their role in shaping the future generations of young minds. In a seemingly debatable approach to the function of a leader, three types of presidents are compared: "presider, change agent, and strategic visionary."

According to King and Mitchell, the function of the presider can be epitomized as holding tradition and protocol. They are definitely excellent organizers and offer practical solutions and opinions, but may be viewed as less efficient in using their creativity and initiatives. By comparison, change-agent presidents may not be too receptive when it comes to certain traditions and protocol. However, their biggest asset is the way they innovate, which in itself entails a new vision with remarkable outcomes. Even with a good reputation for necessary changes, such presidents may not be able to outlast their welcome. The third type of president is the strategic visionary, with their understanding of the need to place their institution in the world. "They link strategy, revenue, and expenses to move beyond a change agent," and their plan may design a future that might last for years and even decades.

At a time of upheaval in American higher education, the authors argue in favor of a new and revised strategic view that will require the president, "the keeper of the faith and defender of the realm," to "embrace a campus community rather than dominate it." Furthermore, presidents are expected to play a role that takes their institution beyond the campus, with implications in their partnership with the community, with relationships that might draw much needed fundraising abilities.

When we look at the difference between the role of an institution as an academic enterprise and that of an economic engine, the provost may have the most difficult job on campus. King and Mitchell argue that "the best provosts have a unique skill set, which emerges from long years of distinguished service on the faculty." (p. 22)

The third member of the senior leadership group is the chair of the board of trustees, with their three duties: general oversight, approving budgets, and supporting the president. In the authors' opinion, "the board chair must manage the relationship among trustees, administrators, and faculty." (p. 25) Together with the president and the provost, the board chair will have to "reimagine how they think, not only about their roles, but also about each other." (p. 26)

Chapter 2, *Strategic Planning*, typically associated with military leadership and martial actions, relates to strategy as defined by Clausewitz (1976) in his work entitled *On War*, where he argues that strategy "must be compressed into the fewest possible actions – again, ideally, into one. Finally, all minor actions must be subordinated as much as possible. In short, the first principle is: act with the utmost concentration." (p. 29) Additionally, Martin (2013) notes that "strategy is not planning – it is the making of an integrated set of choices that collectively position the firm in its industry so as to create sustainable advantage relative to competition." (ibid.)

When discussing the composition and functioning of strategic planning committee, the authors suggest that "the board, faculty, administration, staff, students, alumni, and community should be represented." (p. 30) If their decisions are made in a transparent and deliberate manner, King and Mitchell agree that they are bound to succeed. By the same token, they recommend that the president serve as chair. "Our reasoning is twofold. First, the president will ultimately be held responsible for the success or failure of the strategic plan. Second, the president must orchestrate the implementation of the plan in continuing relationships with the many constituent bodies." (p. 31) As noted in the book, the strategic planning process should be implemented with a thorough analysis of the institution and the competitive environment.

Chapter 3, *Management and Operations*, delves into the deep concerns caused by the extraordinary competitive strain in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic with the ensuing economic problems that only added to the existing worries related to finance, especially revenue. A survey of admissions directors published in the 2019 edition of *Inside Higher Ed* reported that their enrollment goals had not been reached by July 1, and they were obviously concerned about the students' ability to pay their debts. According to the same source, most argue that "higher education needs to do a better job explaining the value of earning a college degree." (p. 44) To put the matters into a wider perspective, Angel Perez, Vice President for Enrollment and Student success at Trinity College is quoted to have said the following:

> Most people who inherit the role were trained as admissions officers, a job that rarely provides adequate preparation for the diverse responsibilities of today's enrollment manager. I am expected to serve as an institutional leader who attracts talented students from across the globe and helps them finance their education, all while using the latest research and high-impact practices to create models for student success and outcomes. I must achieve all of this while meeting the college's revenue and student-demographic goals. (pp. 44-45)

The beginning of the 21st century has already brought changes that might contribute to the betterment of business and finance through the introduction of new analytic tools and technologies. They might provide challenges but also new capabilities in dealing with the evolving set of data-driven and data-informed decision making techniques. Higher education leadership can only benefit from these new developments, which can also help in "creating and nurturing a campus climate of collegiality, communication, and transparency." (p. 56) When the president, the provost and the board chair resort to new ideas, innovation can only lead to what may be called a "healthy campus culture." Difficult as they may be, decisions of this kind may require frequent adjustments and changes to both management and operations.

Chapter 4, *Stakeholder Relations*, switches the readers' attention to the differences between the different levels of stakeholder. The board of trustees and the faculty are the driving forces that share governance responsibilities, albeit they represent competing interests with different views. According to King and Mitchell, "The success of the governance team depends upon two interlocking issues: whether or not team members are educated about the level and limits of their responsibilities, and how well they do their job." (p. 59) For the governance stakeholders to work as a team, in the authors' view, "there is nothing like an ongoing professional continuing education program comparable to what is possible in field like law, dentistry, medicine, and nursing." (p. 60) Furthermore, there are many programs training senior leadership through graduate programs or the national higher education associations.

Presidents are asked to balance, prioritize, and maintain a good relationship with the stakeholders, that means working with the trustees and the faculty. The authors argue that one skill is deemed to be essential in cases that might work well with a complexity of stakeholders, and that is undertaking a listening tour. The tour will give the new president an opportunity to "capture a sense of the place and determine where the sensitivities or minefields lie. "(p. 62) Although a key to strategic visioning, the listening tour might not be enough. The best solution would be to have a president who can form a team and work efficiently with the board chair, trustees, provost, faculty, and senior staff. In the authors' view, presidents also have an important role not only in being the liaison among the stakeholders, but also in serving as "first responders" in the worst possible scenarios, when the president is "the final judge and jury."

Along the same lines, provosts are also asked to lead, in close coordination with the president, with a clear cut distinction between their responsibilities, but in the end providing the same level of trust and respect. Besides their professional relationships with the trustees, provosts must have the ability to "give bad news to the president," and at the same time work "to protect and support the continued, vital, role of the faculty in shared governance."

As stated in the book, the third key stakeholder is the board chair, whose responsibilities would include the following: "to select, retain, and replace the president; to shape the discussions that define the program of offerings at a college or university; to work with the boards to control the purse strings." (p. 71) These groups of stakeholders should be able to coexist and to function together efficiently.

Chapter 5, *Campus and Community*, goes one step further into the life of a higher education institution. Being part of the local, regional, national, or global community, a college campus lives a life of its own by enhancing the success of the area "due to its role in the creation and transfer of knowledge."

In the authors' assessment, certain areas of the United States generally benefit from the value of the academic institutions on their land: New York, Boston, Washington, Pittsburgh, Minneapolis, Austin, Atlanta, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. Colleges and universities should be "asserting their value" and eliminate the misconception that a higher education institution is a "city on the hill," and therefore separated from the town. The impact of closing St. Joseph's College is quoted in this case because it dealt a devastating blow on the community of a small town in Indiana. According to their mayor, "the city of Rensselaer took in significant income from the campus's utilities use, which totaled $640,000 in 2017." (p. 79) When the college was closed, the loss of such magnitude was also seen in many other areas, with fewer visitors or tourists and less interest in the local values. Good academic leadership, as asserted by the authors, must make their presence noticed with a vital role to play in combining subjective and objective research to augment the evolution of colleges and universities as "living and dynamic institutions."

An interesting case study becomes significant in the analysis of Washington & Jefferson College, whose tax-exempt status was challenged by the City of Washington, a small industrial town not far away from Pittsburgh. The higher education institution was fortunate when the suit brought to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court "ruled in favor of the college." In 1997, one of the authors (Mitchell) had the opportunity to liaise with the city officials and county commissioners and managed to bring

the two groups together. Consequently, more work was necessary to prove that the college was ready "to support the local police and fire departments, the commercial interests in the downtown, and the social and cultural life of the city." (p. 82)
A special touch is added to the chapter when the authors go back in time and refer to original Greek definition of the academy, the enterprise that "fostered and promoted a cultural accumulation of knowledge, transmitted across generations by its practitioners." (p. 91)

Challenges driven by regulation, market, and consumer tolerance come into focus at the beginning of Chapter 6, *Accreditors, Athletic Conferences, and Beyond*. Granted that institutions may have a wide array of outside organizations and affiliations, good leadership outside the campus has ramifications into national and state associations which define its place in the community. As far as regulation is concerned, the authors lay claim that accreditation needs to be taken into consideration. The Council for Higher Education offers a succinct presentation of the accreditation commissions:

> Regional accrediting commissions are among the oldest accrediting organizations in the country. The United States is divided into six accreditation regions: New England, Middle States, North Central, Southern, Western, and Northwest. Seven accrediting commissions operate in these regions. All regional accrediting commissions review entire institutions, as opposed to programs or schools within institutions. (p. 93)

Instead of a national body, the government relies heavily on these regional accreditors. To support their ideas, King and Mitchell point out that "accreditation is best accomplished through a voluntary association of educational institutions." (p. 94) Outstanding professional judgment, correct application of requirements, and unequivocal trust are essential in the process.
From accreditation we segue to athletic associations and conferences in the same area of "peer-run, self-regulating organizations." The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletic (NAIA) are brought into the discussion owing to their "combined membership of almost 1,350 colleges and universities in the United States." Most institutions rely heavily on college sports and they are proud of their own history and traditions. Since such activities do not pay for themselves, it is the task of the higher education leadership to "care and feed athletics."

The focus then switches to new developments in areas of deep interest which entail "growing economic, racial, and ethnic segregation and an intolerance for difference." National organizations like the Association of American Colleges and Universities have devised strategic plans to address the above-mentioned issues. These comprise "a truth, racial healing, and transformation effort (in partnership with the W. K. Kellogg Foundation), a religious differences initiative, and an initiative to advocate for liberal education with systematic employer surveys." (p. 102)

If private colleges and universities are somehow affiliated with religious organizations, the church may have an active role in the governance of the institution, including the creation of "an environment in which individuals may develop deeply-held values." (p. 104) When the church makes a commitment to the college, presidents and board chairs will definitely see the benefits from the incoming financial assistance and the more favorable school image within the congregation. In all these cases, presidents are the ones who "should be diligent in giving these activities and relationships the dedicated time that they deserve." (p. 107)

Success and failure are two words used at the beginning of Chapter 7, *Measuring Success*. Difficult as it may be, knowing which institutions are most at risk of failing in the future, led Zemsky, Shaman, and Baldrige (2020) to develop a test: The College Stress Test, which took into consideration "institutional factors, ranging from market segment and geographic region to average enrollment and financial health." The view supported by the authors in this case refers back to the challenge faced by presidents and board chairs in getting trustees and faculty to have fruitful debates and conversations.

Unlike the 1950s, 1960s, or the 1990s, periods of great economic growth and federal budget surpluses, the current situation is completely different. Creative approaches would obviously include routine processes like the annual audit, which should be "more informed and informative." In such circumstances, mergers, acquisitions, and closures are likely scenarios, with presidents and board chairs equally required to lead the ensuing process.

Assessing all the possibilities and reviewing the governing processes would efficiently lead to continuous improvement. When the president, provost, and board chair work together towards the common goals of institutional improvement, success and measuring success will make the college or university "fulfill its mission."

The concept of Innovation in Chapter 8 becomes relevant when it is tied to assessment. According to a 2019 study conducted by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, that connection "determines the success of the practices and processes under which a college or university operates." (p. 124) Difficulties in using the right kind of innovation might stem from an ill-defined or nonexistent type of innovation to "cultural inertia," just two obstacles in designing programs to match the new social, cultural, and economic realities. True to their mission, higher education institutions would have to replace "outmoded institutional structure of colleges" and a less effective preparation of the new generations for the "modern economic and global issues."

Practical examples are offered when the following research work is recommended: Michael Crow and William Dabars's *Designing the New American University*, Clayton Christensen's *The Innovative University: Changing the DNA of Higher Education*, David Staley's *Alternative Universities*, Cathy Davidson's *The New Education*, Stephen M. Gavazzi and E. Gordon Gee's *Land-Grant Universities for the Future*.
Presidents, board, faculty chairs alike cannot be individually in charge of innovation. The effort to create an atmosphere of innovation must be supported by all of the above. Carnegie Melon and Arizona State are quoted a branding themselves as centers of innovation, while others like Harvard, NYYU, the University of Rochester, and Rowan are still debating what steps are needed to support an innovation campus culture.

The last chapter, *Why Leadership Matters,* goes back full circle to the initial assessment of the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath. Higher education administrations had to face unexpected challenges and most institutions found themselves unprepared. Nevertheless, "the pandemic demonstrated that "leadership matters." In what the authors consider a "call to arms," the entire body of a college or university should become more involved, "more creative, adaptive, and nimble." (p. 142) Leaders should be able to analyze and to change strategic planning and assessment, invest in innovation, and this can only be done if the whole process if transparent and collaborative.

To sum up, the title now becomes even more suggestive in its double meaning: These are matters that higher education leaders must consider if they want to survive and succeed, but, at the same time, we should all be aware that leadership matters in times of unprecedented changes and challenges.

References

Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2018-2022 Strategic Plan (Washington, DC, 2018), https://www.aacu.org.sites/default/files/about/AACU_Strategicplan_2018-22.pdf.

Clausewitz, C. v. (2007). *On War*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.

Council for Higher Education Accreditation, "Regional Accrediting Organizations," https://www.chea.org/regionalaccrediting-organizations-accreditor-type.

Harvard University, Financial Report, Fiscal Year 2017,https://finance.harvard.edu/files/fad/files/final_harvard_university_financial_report_2017.pdf.

"Innovation in Accreditation and Higher Education: Accrediting Organizations Describe Their Engagement, " 2019, https://docs.google.com/gview?embedded=true&url

King, W. J., Mitchell, B. C. (2018). *How to Run a College: A Practical Guide for Trustees, Faculty, Administrators, and Policymakers.* United States: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Martin, R. L., "Don't Let Strategy Become Planning," *Harvard Business Review*, Feb. 5, 2013, https://hbr.org/2013/02/don't-let-strategy-become-plan.

Mitchell, B. C., "Colleges as Good Neighbors: Why Towns Matter," *Huffington Post*, Sept. 30, 2012, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/colleges-as-good-neigbors_b_1721309.

Perez, A. B. "What is a Chief Enrollment Officer?" *Inside Higher Ed*, August. 12, 2019, https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/views/2019/08/12/defining-role-chief-enrollment-officer-important-opinion.

Zemsky, R., Shaman, S., Baldridge, S. C. (2020). *The College Stress Test: Tracking Institutional Futures Across a Crowded Market*. United States: Johns Hopkins University Press.