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University management: from successful corporate culture to effective university branding

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Abstract

The objective of the article is to define a framework for evaluating the state of the corporate culture at Higher Educational Institution (HEI) after reorganization. Using the case study of Kazan Federal University the research establishes the connection between the academic culture and corporate visual identity of HEI; highlights the need to interweave external brand promises with internal branding efforts not to lose its credibility. The study emphasizes the link between the choice of potential consumers evaluating a complex intangible offering of the university and the degree to which people within organization use the university brand value in their everyday work.

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1. Introduction

Kazan (Volga region) Federal University is one of the oldest educational institutions of higher education in the Russian Federation. It has a history of more than 210 years. During all these years it has been at the forefront of scientific developments and educational endeavors both nationally and internationally. It is not only famous for its prominent scientists and outstanding people but also for the high level of professional training and profound scientific research.

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The transformation of higher education system in Russia in recent years has set certain challenges not only to those who are involved in teaching process but also to those who are in charge of university management (Safiullin et.al, 2014). This process is a complex issue and includes not only the transition to Bachelor-Master Degree structure but also the introduction of new Educational Standards of the Third Generation which are based on general-cultural competence and professional competence paradigm (Shaidullin, et.al, 2014).

Being the center of education and science of the Volga region the University is greatly responsible for keeping the status of one of a leading higher education institution in Russia. In accordance with the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of October 21, 2009, # 1172 “On establishing federal universities in the Northwestern, Privolzhsky, Ural and Far Eastern Federal Districts”, the Development Program of the Federal State Autonomous Educational Institution of Higher Professional Education “Kazan (Volga region) Federal University” for 2010 - 2019 was elaborated. One of the ultimate objectives of this program is to enter the rating of top hundred world's leading universities. To guarantee the realization of these goals University authorities laid a lot of efforts to integrate 24 Institutions and 4 branches into one smoothly and successfully functioning unit. The Program is aimed to improve global competitiveness of the University and to shift from classical educational institution to the research university where entrepreneurial and innovative activities are paramount (<http://kpfu.ru/rector>).

One of the tools that helped University authorities to go through transition period successfully was thoroughly developed corporate culture that served as a framework to hold together all members of the organization.

2. Corporate culture and university branding

2.1. Concept of corporate culture

The concept of culture could be described as a variety of activities, beyond simply getting the job done, which constitute organizational life. These activities include interpersonal relations, principles and values of the company and internal-external images advice to new members. The concept focuses analysis on the processes by which the meanings of organizational events are produced and sustained through communication. Culture serves both as a description of the organization of activities and meanings in organization, its structure, and as a description of the activities by which these meanings come to be produced and shared in organization (Deetz, 1982).

Changing environment and such external factors as demographic, economic and political conditions play significant role in the performance of the HEI, but there are also some factors that arise from within and to gain strength from “the values, processes, and goals held by those most intimately involved in the organization's workings. An organization's culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level” (Tierney, 1998).

The influence of the corporate culture is not limited to the university itself. It occurs at many levels starting from stakeholders and local authorities and including the state authorities. Since these organizations are very different the main purpose of the organizational culture is to be translated in such a way that the emergence and consequences of cultural conflict are kept to a minimum and the development of common goals is enhanced.

According to Tierney (1988) organizational culture encourages practitioners to:

- consider real or potential conflicts not in isolation but on the broad canvas of organizational life;
- recognize structural or operational contradictions that suggest tensions in the organization;
- implement and evaluate everyday decisions with a keen awareness of their role in and influence upon organizational culture;
- understand the symbolic dimensions of ostensibly instrumental decisions and actions; and
- consider why different groups in the organization hold varying perceptions about institutional performance.

A lot of executives believe organizational culture to be an important component of success. If the concept of organizational culture is communicated clearly, managers are given an opportunity to better formulate and solve company's problems to improve its performance. To implement effective strategy within the company managers should understand the structure and components of corporate culture that is its framework. Tierney (1988) defines the essentials of organizational culture in HEI by the following framework: environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy and leadership. The importance of corporate culture has been described as “secret to business

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