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LEADERSHIP INTEGRITY FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: PROMOTING STABILITY AND INNOVATION

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ABSTRACT

Leadership integrity is a critical component in the governance of Nigerian universities, which impacts both stability and innovation. This paper explored the importance of a robust leadership integrity framework in enhancing governance practices within these institutions. In Nigeria, universities play pivotal roles in national development through research, education, and societal engagement. However, challenges such as corruption, mismanagement, and political interference have historically hindered their effectiveness. A leadership integrity framework aims to address these challenges by promoting ethical leadership behaviors, transparency, and accountability among university leaders. It involves establishing clear codes of conduct, rigorous monitoring mechanisms, and promoting a culture of integrity at all levels of university governance. Adhering to a framework on university leaders can mitigate risks associated with financial mismanagement, nepotism, and unethical practices that undermine institutional stability. Furthermore, a culture of integrity fosters an environment conducive to innovation. When university leaders demonstrate integrity in their decision-making processes, they inspire trust and confidence among stakeholders, including faculty, students, and the broader community. This trust is essential for attracting investment, fostering collaborations, and nurturing a culture of academic excellence and innovation. Ultimately, a leadership integrity framework is not only crucial for enhancing governance practices within Nigerian universities but also for promoting their long-term sustainability and contribution to national development goals. This paper advocated for the adoption and implementation of robust integrity frameworks to foster stability, encourage innovation, and uphold the credibility of higher education institutions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Leadership, Integrity, Framework, Improve, University, Governance, Nigeria, Stability, Innovation.

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INTRODUCTION

University education is a basic necessity in the creation of a knowledge economy in all nations. Investment in university education is par excellence an investment in people. The main objective of university education is to educate tomorrow's citizens, professionals, captains of industries, leaders and to foster the discovery of new knowledge that may either strengthen or challenge established ideas and norms, all with the aim of deepening human understanding and improving the human condition. The general view is that the universities in Nigeria occupy fundamental position in national development, especially in developing high-level manpower to achieve universities stated goals and objectives, there must be improved relations among the various vital units or groups to stabilize and innovate the governance structures. However, the universities cannot be left alone to stabilize internal and external tensions, as well as, innovate existing mechanism of governance, without effective leaders with integrity. This is because leadership integrity provides a vision that enables universities to respond to societal needs and ameliorate strained relations within the system. To aid a proper understanding of this paper, the following issues are pursued:

- University Education;
- University Governance;
- Concept of Integrity;
- Leadership;
- Leadership Integrity Framework;
- The Need for Improving University Governance;
- How to improve University Governance for Stability and Innovation through Leadership Integrity Framework;
- Conclusion and Recommendation

University Education

A university is a social institution whose basic missions are to preserve the culture and heritage of society, generate new knowledge and transmit it (Igwe & Ilechukwu, 2013). According to them, a university is an agent for shaping not only the destiny of individual, but also of the nation. Society has created and supported the university in the belief that by preserving, discovering and transmitting knowledge they serve the common good and advance the status of humanity. The objectives of university education as stated in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014) are:

- Intensifying and diversifying its programmes for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation;
- Making professional course contents reflect our national requirements;
- Making all students parts of general programmes of all-round improvement in university education to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge, nationalism and information technology (IT); and
- Making entrepreneurial skills a requirement for all Nigerian universities

In Nigeria, the origin of university education began with the establishment of the University College, Ibadan in 1948. Since then more universities have been established to meet the ever-growing need for tertiary education. These universities are now group into five generations namely: first, second, third, fourth and fifth generations. As at 17th December, 2018 Nigeria has 165 approved universities (45 Federal Universities, 47 States Universities and 75 Private Universities) (NUC, 2018).

University Governance

The concept of governance most often refers to the internal structure, organization and management of autonomous institutions. Governance is all encompassing, it has to do with the internal administration and management of all facets of an educational institution. Onwuekweikpe and Asagba (2013) averred that governance in universities means the ways through which universities are formally organized and managed. It involves the ways in which universities are operated. All over the world, governance of universities, according to Maduagwu (2004) is the internal structure, organization and management of autonomous institutions of learning. Such organizational structures are composed of a governing board, the president with his team of administrative chancellor and staff, faculty, senates, academic deans, department chairs and the organized study body. Eurydice in Omokhoa and Michael (2013) stated that governance focuses on the rules and mechanisms by which various stakeholders influence decisions, how they are held accountable, and to whom. With reference to university education, governance speaks of the formal and informal exercise of authority under laws, policies and rules that articulate the rights and responsibilities of various factors, including the rules by which they interact. Omokhoa and Michael (2013) provided that:

University governance encompasses the framework in which a university pursues its goals, objectives and policies in a coherent and coordinate manner to answer such questions as: who is in charge, and what are the sources of legitimacy for executive decision-making by different actors? (p. 128).

Therefore, governance deals with the exercise of power or authority that emanates from laws, policies and rules that drive university educational activities throughout each academic session. Furthermore, the nature of the managing relationship determines whether governance is described as cooperate and business oriented or collegial shared form of governance. Accordingly, governance involves a multi-level process and activity involving various bodies and aspects with different decision-making functions (Onwuekweikpe & Asagba, 2013). Thus, there is the tendency to see governance as being different from internal management of a university. In this regard, Emetarom (2012) observed:

university governance structures across sub-Saharan Africa are generally derived from the institutional models of higher education established by former colonial administrations, although they have been modified in practice, by national political philosophies and associated approaches to the detriment of administration (p. 477).

In Nigeria, universities are quasi-statutory organizations created by an Act. The university governance structure encompasses the following:

Formation of Council: Responsibility for institutional policy decisions resides with a University Council whose membership is normally drawn from government, the university and less commonly, organizations from the private sector. The composition of each Governing Council of universities comprised: the Pro – Chancellor, the Vice – Chancellor, the Deputy Vice – Chancellors; one person from the Ministry of Education, four persons representing a variety of interests and broadly representative of the whole Federation or State (whether federal or state university), four persons appointed by the senate from among its members; two persons appointed by the Congregation from among its members; and one person appointed by Convocation from among its members. The Council has an overall responsibility for the policies and operations of the university and for certain particular subjects, including matters of finance, staff conditions of service and discipline, the property of the university, building programmes and material provisions for students (Nwafor, 1998).

The responsibilities of council should be leadership by example, Conduct Council Business/meetings in decorum; conduct as Part-time members of the public services; respect the visitor and his directives in the Visitation Report, Order of Protocol, protect the rights of all in the academic community-irrespective of ethnic, religious or political affiliations. The council ensures fairness, balance in recruitment or the discipline of staff, uphold quality in students' admission, engage unions, effectively in dialogue and respect agreement, respect the rule of law, due process and due diligence, entrench university culture and protect academic traditions – selection of Chief Executives, Management Officers, among others.

Senate: The composition of senate include the Vice-Chancellor as Chairman, all Professors, Dean of Faculties, Provosts of Colleges/Campuses, Heads of Departments and other senior members of the academic staff representing various interests. The senate is responsible for all the academic affairs of the university, including the provision of courses and the approval of their syllabuses; the admission and progress of students through examinations and otherwise (Nwafor, 1998). In carrying out these functions it requires the concurrence of Council to provide the necessary financial and other resources. Senate should be a relatively large deliberative and participative body made up of academic staff members. The non-professional members elected by the congregation should be board representative of faculty interests and varied experience within the university.

Students Representation in Governance in University: The level of students' participation in university governance is moderation and on the average (Omokhoa & Michael, 2013). Although the students' representation in governance of university has not been adequate but students in university or other categories of higher education (polytechnics and college of education) have right to contribute or have a say in the governance of university.

Concept of Integrity

Integrity refers to an unwavering consistency and persistence to uphold noble-values and beliefs (Melky, Johanis, Suddin & Benny, 2018). According to them, integrity is a concept that shows a consistency between actions and values or principles. Integrity is correspondence between one's

words and actions (Pillay, 2014), a notion which Bekke in Pillay (2014) declared as behavioural integrity, or how well people match their espoused values to their actual values. Engelbrecht, Heine and Mahemba (2017) presented integrity as adherence to moral principles. It is thus, integrity creates a clear belief to trust people, since it gives feeling of moral principles that can stimulate one to feeling of fairness or moral character that provide a kind of predictability that can help one cope with uncertainty (Colquitt in Engelbrecht, Heine & Mahembe, 2017). Melky et al (2014) noted:

Integrity can be the strength of self-identity, communal identity and institutional characteristics that can be seen, observed, felt and shown. .. It is about individual and organizational characteristics which are perfect based on noble values such as honest, truthful, trustworthy, accountable, transparent, efficient and wise (p. 9).

Integrity therefore addresses issues of honesty, trust, morals, personal value, fairness, compassion, character, courage, authenticity and consistency of words and actions. Pillay (2014) classified integrity into different domains. They include:

- Integrity as wholeness: character, that is collection of virtues;
- Integrity as consistency of words and actions: Social behaviour, stability and consistency of words and action across time and situation;
- Integrity as consistency in adversity: Courage, unchanging behaviour in the face of temptation, crises, misunderstanding and challenge;
- Integrity as being true to oneself: Authenticity, acting according to one's own conscience, desire and abilities against financial gain and pressure;
- Integrity as moral or ethical behaviour: Honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, compassion. These components relates to actions which are in line with socially acceptable behaviour

Leadership

Leadership has to do with influencing members of an organization to achieve pre-determined objectives (Abraham, 2013). It is a dynamic process in a group whereby one individual influences the other to contribute voluntarily to the achievement of group tasks in a given situation (Ogunu, 2000). According to Nwankwo in Obi (2003) leadership is concerned with the initiation, organization and direction of the action of the members of a group in a specific situation towards the achievement of the objectives of the group. Broone and Kurtz in Ojo and Ojo (2012) put it this way:

Leadership is the function by which a manager unleashes the available resources in order to get the organization to carry out plans to accomplish objectives or the act of motivating or causing people to perform certain tasks intended to achieve specified objectives. It is the acts of making things to happen (p. 8).

These acts may be addressed to any or all of the three very crucial functions such as:

- Establishing the goals, purposes or objectives of the organization;
- Creating the structures through which the objectives are fulfilled; and
- Maintaining or enhancing these structures

The same way, Oshionebo and Aruyo in Ojo and Ojo (2012:9) opined that leadership power related to the following functions:

- Establishing organizational objectives;
- Determining the plans to accomplish desired organizational objectives;
- Working out the strategies, programmes, procedures and standard methods to guide workers;
- Developing schedule to keep the work moving towards the objectives; and
- Adjusting plans periodically in the light of new information and changes in operating conditions.

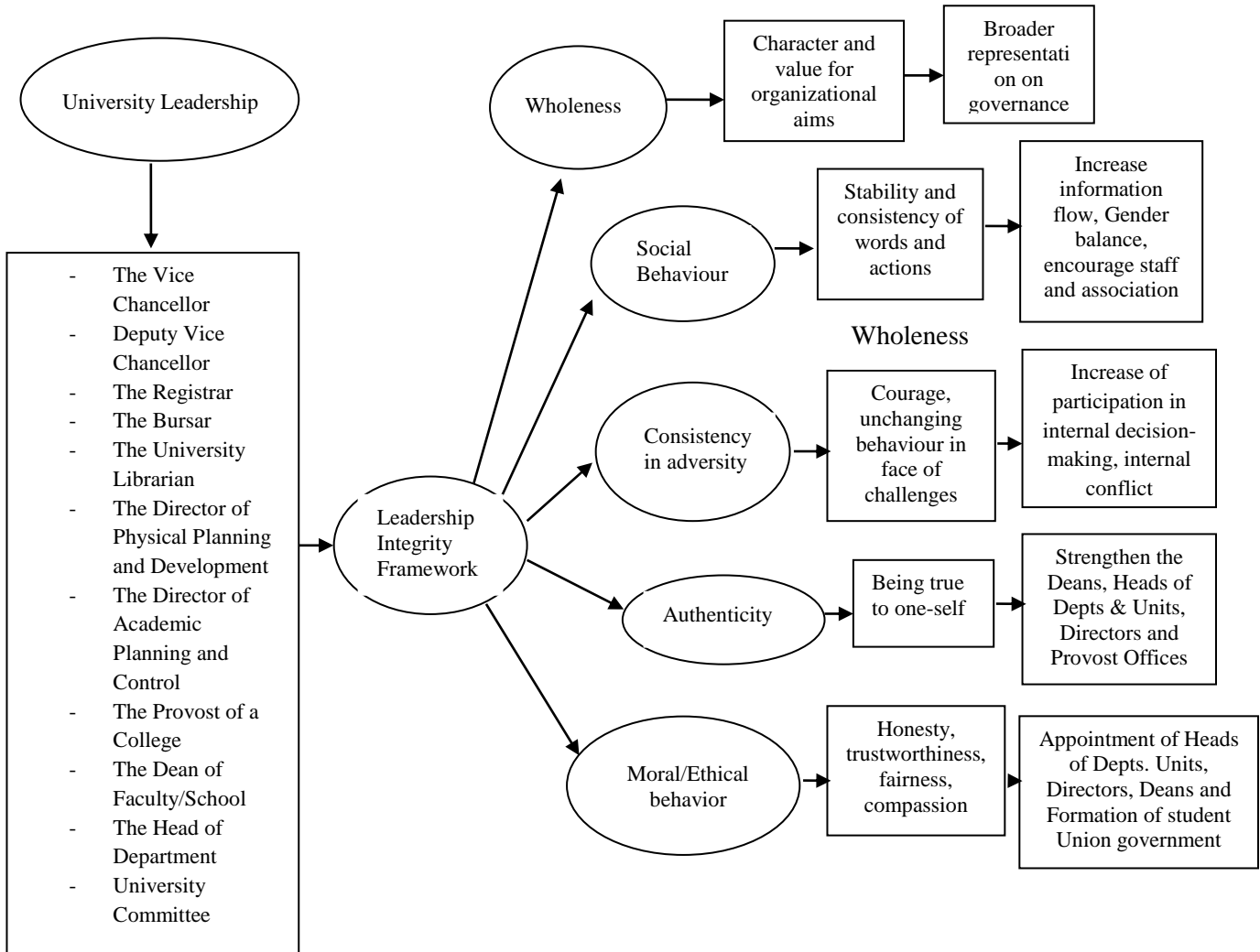
Significantly, leadership derives its power from values, deep convictions and correct principle (Ojo & Ojo, 2012). Van and Engelbrecht in Engelbrecht et al. (2017) observed that adherence to moral principles capture the essence of ethical values and therefore can be seen as an important driver of leadership behavioural integrity.

Leadership Integrity Framework

Trait approach to leadership describes certain traits associated with leadership. A leader might be described as loyal, brave, trustworthy or compassionate. From this perspective, integrity space becomes a very important indicator for the leader (Melhy et al., 2018). Leadership integrity stands for the honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, compassion, courage, authenticity and wholeness as leader demonstrate across situations and time in an organization. Leader integrity has been argued to be the source of an organization's tone and ethnical atmosphere (White & Lean in Elsetoubi et al., 2017). Leadership integrity is the leader word and action alignment plus leader consistency of articulated leader values (Simons in Holmes & Parker, 2018). According to him, leadership integrity is the level of consistency between a leader's words and actions and the leader's follow through on their spoken values. Leadership integrity framework is particularly significant in the light of Melky et al. (2014) conceptualization of integrity of a leader as—the consistency between leader actions and values principles.... Integrity is recognized as honesty and truth of leader's action. The leader needs to have integrity, especially as a principal (university administrators inclusive). A principal (university administrator) with integrity will gain trust from the staff, colleagues, students, parents and other stakeholders. A principal (university administrator) with integrity is seen as trustworthy because his words become his actions.

The description of leadership integrity by Melky et al. (2014) can be adapted to various crucial aspects of university governance for stability and innovation. The outline that follows (Figure 1) shows a framework that integrates leadership and integrity with ideas in improving university governance for stability and innovation.

Figure 1: Leadership Integrity Framework for University Governance



Source: Authors (2024)

The Need for Improving University Governance

When we consider the fact that there is the need for stability and innovation crucial for the overall growth and development of Nigerian universities, the need to improve governance of universities cannot be overemphasized. Besides, there are major internal conflicting relationships that characterize the various groups within the universities. The major sources of internal university conflict are staff and management relations and students and management relations. Effective mediation of these conflicts is important for because (1) academic staff and university administration need to cooperate, if institutional goals are to be achieved and (2) differences between students and administration often generate grave consequences for universities (Emetarom, 2012). Omokhodion (2008) observed that students' unrest in Nigerian higher institutions has been great cause for concern for the Nigerian Government (Federal, State and Local) the higher institutions administration, parents, guardian and Nigerians in general. He

stressed that whenever students unrest occur, they are usually associated with loss of learning periods, destruction of lives and loss of public and private properties. Students' unrest may lead governments to question the effectiveness of their financial support to universities and make it difficult for universities and make it difficult for universities to win the governmental cooperation and the goodwill necessary to maintain institutional autonomy.

Moreover, a major source of internal conflict could be from the daily integration between university administration and staff. According to Emetarom (2012), a major source of friction is the fact that senior university administrators are seen as more accountable to government than to the university. She noted that where disagreements arose between staff and government, university administration has frequently sought to impose the governments' position on dissenting groups rather than attempting to mediate the conflict. She further remarked that university leadership may resort to authoritarian rather than consensus building strategies. Hence, Leach (2008) remarked that the obstacles to governance include strained working relationships, which have been variously described in terms of war and evil. It is believed that there is lack of trust and apathy which are the most significant barriers to meaningful faculty participation in governance of universities. For peace and cordial staff, students and administration to be achieved in our universities, it means that we must have the right university leaders with integrity who can find a formula for simultaneously serving both government and the university community (Emetarom, 2012).

How to Improve University Governance for Stability and Innovation through Leadership Integrity Framework

Universities in Nigeria are created to satisfy specific or general educational needs of a nation through teaching of students, conduct of research and dissemination of knowledge together with other community service activities. The achievement of these objectives require and organization to decide up and to implement appropriate academic policies, and to administer the services to support them with a minimum of economic waste and maximum utilization of human talent and material resources (Nwafor, 1998). In this way, the transformation of prevailing patterns of paternalistic governance into structures of participation, accountability and integrity is require, which will involve staff and students as responsible partners. To realize these, the following ideas of leadership integrity framework (Figure 1) hold the promise to improve governance for stability and innovation within Nigerian universities. They are:

Wholeness: This represents leader's character and virtues. It equally stands for the strength of leader courage and bravery to make a balance decisions that are honest and upright (Ololube, 2024); as well as, the value for organizational aims and objectives. Courage, bravery and value for organizational aims are character strength that university leaders need to efficiently govern the institution. Leaders in this domain of leadership integrity framework are capable of producing long-term sustained success (Obi, 2003). Thus, university leaders should encourage broader representation in the university governance due to the multi-level and multi-layered nature of the university. The role of the university leadership should involve coordinating and convening for purpose of governance via discipline and respect for the rule of law, due process, due diligence and fairness. In this regard, Omokhoa and Michael (2013) maintained that persons to be appointed to the council, as Vice-Chancellor, Deans, Directors, etc. should be of proven integrity, knowledgeable and familiar with the affairs and tradition of the university (that is value

for organization aims and objectives as indicated in the wholeness domain of the leadership integrity framework). Thus, a university leadership with character, virtues and has value for organizational aims should not focus on personal interest and power play and should not lose sight of its duties. Therefore, the leaders should display leadership by example for reasons of stability and innovation.

Social Behaviour: This domain includes stability and consistency of words and actions across time and situation (Pillay, 2014). One way university leadership ensures stability and consistency of words and action is through establishing useful channels of communication and conflict medication procedure as well as creating potential resources that can be mobilized in support of common interests within the university community. Furthermore, formal and informal consultations among university administration, staff and students should be used in response to potential conflict problems.

Consistency in Adversity: This represents courage, unchanging behaviour in the face of temptation, crises, misunderstanding and challenges. University leadership should be courageous to increase participation in internal decision-making. The university leaders should do their home-work, identify their various options, and show everyone the direction to follow in order to achieve the set objectives. Their greatest task is to mobilize and let everyone else know that it is not their job alone to manage the affairs of the university or to build it to attain greater height (Alkali, 2004). To Emetarom (2012), wider involvement of staff and students representatives in key university governing bodies as well as more opportunity for them to participate in selecting senior university administrators would strengthen these officials' sense of accountability to the university community. Besides, the virtue of courage will enable university leadership to constantly strive to strike a balance between governments' interest and desires and those of the universities. The university leadership should equally be consistent and courageous in handling internal university conflict. University leaders should be courageous to recognize staff and students as potential partners in common efforts to improve university conditions. When university leaders are courageous they may discover that students and staff associations can defuse potential conflict situations by:

- Holding regular meetings with their members to analyze problems and identify potential solutions;
- Designing mechanism for regular communication with members and university administration;
- Representing members grievances to university officials;
- Restraining students from making unrealistic demands and;
- Explaining to their members the role that they might play in strengthening the administration of university affairs (Emetarom, 2012: 482)

Ololube (2024) argued that the benefit of university leaderships is when they encourage increase participation in internal decision-making. Vice-Chancellor who feels too busy to interact with his/her staff, even occasionally, is less likely to succeed than one who takes off time to meet staff and even randomly accepts students' invitation. She noted that such moments provide opportunities for exchange of ideas and letting out steam which could otherwise have

accumulated to facilitate crises. She further stressed that the more a Vice-Chancellor is able to do this, the more successfully he/she is in the politics of university administration.

Authenticity: This domain include being true to oneself, acting according to one's own conscience, desire and ability against financial gain and pressure. As such the university leaders should servants like everybody else who has the responsibility to manage, to lead, to build and to develop. The capacity and success of the leaders should be on how best they mobilize everybody towards a common goal and how best they make them accept that they like them, are also servants, facilitators and indeed just one of them (Alkali, 2004). In this way, the university leadership should encourage or consider some decentralization of responsibilities to faculty deans, department heads, units directors, committee, provost of schools, colleges and campuses, etc. This practice if encourage will improve management efficiency, stability and innovation in the university.

Moral/ethical behaviour: This represents honesty, trustworthiness, fairness and compassion. These components relates to actions which are in line with socially acceptable leadership *behaviour* in organizations. Therefore, when university leaders discharge their duties in just, fair and honest manner. For instance, university leaders should be honest, truthful, just and fair and considerate in the appointment of heads of departments, heads of units, directors, deans, provosts and formation of student union leadership paying attention to due process and all relevant laws and edicts. This is probably why Paul (1990) stated that it is important that university leaders stay in touch with a broad cross-section of the institution and avoid cultivating an "in" group who wield all the power and receive all the perquisite. This is not to deny the value of cultivating the nest people in the university, but promotions and favours should be, and should be seen to be, dispense on the basis of demonstrated competence rather than personal relationships or support for the boss's view point (Paul, 1990).

CONCLUSION

Some attempts have been made in this paper to show that leadership integrity, is one of the necessary traits of university leaders, is an effective strategy in improving university governance in Nigeria for stability and innovation because the focus of the paper is on leadership integrity framework that entails five domains of wholeness, social behaviour, consistency in adversity, authenticity and moral/ethical behaviour to improve university governance for stability and innovation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- Implementing a Leadership Integrity Framework is essential to enhance university governance in Nigeria.
- Prioritizing transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct among university leaders, stability is fortified, fostering an environment conducive to academic excellence.
- The framework in this paper did not only ensure fair decision-making processes but also inspires confidence among stakeholders, encouraging innovation and strategic growth.

- Upholding integrity in leadership cultivates a culture of trust and collaboration, vital for universities to adapt, thrive, and lead in an increasingly dynamic global academic landscape.

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