



Effectiveness of board of trustees in university governance

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to find the effectiveness of board of trustees in Turkish foundation universities. Their effectiveness was examined under six dimensions: contextual dimension, educational dimension, interpersonal dimension, analytical dimension, political dimension, and strategic dimension. The existing roles and expected roles of board of trustees were compared to find their effectiveness. A descriptive method was used to collect data. The survey was applied to the population and interview was applied to selected board members. The research indicates that the members of board of trustees do not fulfil effectively their responsibilities and they need to improve their ability to provide better governance in the foundation universities.

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1. Introduction

The system of the board of trustees has been one of the important issues in the governance of universities. Boards in higher education are both the highest authority and the body ultimately accountable for the conduct of the institution. Understanding the selection and the role orientation of the trustees has been refined by recent works. Some studies provide a rational for the continuing applicability of the long established guardianship concept to public boards under current circumstances. Others analyse problem areas and potential improvements. The current study examines the effectiveness of board of trustees in Turkish foundation universities.

Board of Trustees has a ranking authority and assumes responsibility in higher education institutions (Chait, Holland and Taylor, 1991). The defining aspect of board of trustees is that it's composed of individuals who serve voluntarily though they have a significant role in governing of universities (Owens, 1995). It's found out throughout the history that it's the best way to meet both institutional needs and demands of community. Board balances institutional requirements and expectations of community. These kinds of boards serve to community as protecting the goals of institutions (Lenington, 1996). The purpose of a university is neither to be an institution which makes science for science nor to be an institution which sacrifices its vision as fulfilling community demands. Kerr and Glade (1989) resemble that function of the board to a kind of guardianship and defined "Board of Trustees" as guardians.

Viewing the references, there have been innumerable articles and books published in 1960s and 1970s. Those published in following years dealt with the conformation of board to the outcomes of the environmental and global changes. However, there has been no dramatic change in their charge of administration or taking responsibility. The fundamental issue discussed in recent years is that how the board can work efficiently (Carver, 1995). In the following years of 1985, the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Collages (AGB) studied the issue in detail.

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Ingram, Handerson and Taylor (1993) define the trustees as the central authority of governing and point out the relationship between the administration and the board of trustees. The board is to assume five principal responsibilities; which are selecting and appointing president, evaluating president, supporting president, fulfilling the policy and governing and assessing institution. However, Wood (1983) describes the common responsibilities of the board members as follows: appointing the president, assessing the institution, assessing the policy of board, supporting the president, evaluating performance of the president, renewing mission, approving long-term strategic plans, controlling curriculum, assuring funding, protecting institutional autonomy, representing both community and institution, being in charge as an appeal court (when needed), assessing performance of the board. Besides, board takes some other responsibilities related to ones above. In higher education, the members of board equally share responsibilities for university governance, though each member has a defined duty based on the policy. None of the members can accuse any other member for any issue.

In non-profit organizations, the board of trustees provides a means for members of the organization to elect or appoint individuals that oversee the function of the university (Bowen, 2012). A board of trustees has the powers in order to manage the assets of the university, within the perimeters defined in the bylaws (University of Pennsylvania, 2012).

One of the most important tasks of board chair is to make each member to perceive all the responsibilities well since membership requires participation and re-productivity (Bargh, Scott and Smith, 1996). The researches show that although many members undertake these responsibilities for years, they do not clearly realize what they really are. Universities are governed primarily by laypersons; not educators and serve without compensation. Such has been the case since the seventeenth century. To improve the effectiveness of members of board, many states in USA make prospective members have an educational schedule and extend it in a long-term process (Beaudette, 2012). The duration depends from three-week to one-year. In addition, members share their experiences by participating conferences held on their own profession. If the members are not guided properly, everything will be seen in harmony a while and when the problems come out it'll be too late to sort them out (Ostrower, 2004).

Assuming these responsibilities, members of board of trustees have a political task in university governance (Gade, 1993). The administering authority is president. When needed, president has to inform members of board about his/her services. Members do not possess an authority over administration or academic issues. Universities are which are unique owing to their structures of administration. Universities can be governed as neither private companies nor state institutions (Birnbaum, 1993; Jones and Skolnik, 1997).

The governing structure which consists of board of trustees has worked properly so far. It's a good example of academic autonomy and shared governing (Karimi, Hosseinzadeh and Azizi, 2011). Besides, it's possible to view inappropriate or illogical implementations in trustee system.

1.1. Qualifications of Efficient Members of Board of Trustees

All the responsibilities listed above can be examined in six dimensions which are contextual dimension, educational dimension, interpersonal dimension, analytical dimension, political dimension, strategic dimension (Rahimi, Damirchi and Seyyedi, 2011). Each dimension consists of a couple responsibilities of board members which help us better understand their responsibilities.

In contextual dimension, the members of the board perceives and accords to the culture and institutional norms and take the responsibility on these matters. They regard the customs, goals and aspects of the institution considering them as "guides".

In educational dimension, the members of the board assure themselves that they perceived the subjects related to the governance of the institution. Members are to identify the responsibilities, roles and performance of the board and find out opportunities needed to improve themselves. It is essential to keep the members up to date with the recent issues.

In interpersonal dimension, the board constitutes teams which support improvements of the board of trustees. The board also works in favour of the teams by strengthening the relationships between members so that both the goals of the team would be flourished and there formed leadership in the team.

In analytical dimension, members perceive ambiguity and complexity of cases that they face. They consider uncertainty and doubt to be vital factors. They examine the cases and problems broadly and different points. They suspect the cases and take different thoughts into consideration.

In political dimension, the board of trustees has the responsibility of leading good relations with the others related to the institution. It also regards charges and authority of others and the unity of governing process. The members contact occasionally directly to the ones who have key roles at university.

In strategic dimension, the board contributes to forming strategies and institutional visions, which is the crucial role of the board in political basis. It takes steps in advance to remedy the problem.

The research is based on the six key competences mentioned above. In this respect it is focused on that if the members are aware of their duties and how well they fulfil them. Comparing the outcomes of the research with these dimensions, it is found out how well the members performed their roles.

1.2. The Historical Back of the Board of Trustees in Turkish Higher Education

In 1959 ODTU (Middle East Technical University) was the initiator of the process of trusteeship among Turkish universities. This is one of the oldest state universities in Turkey, which was governed by the board of trustees – set forth by an exceptional law. Even Ottomans put trusteeship like implementations into practice in madrasa (theological school attached to a mosque), that did not resemble the ones at present. Madrasas and attached foundations were governed by a board and funded by the income of the foundations (Doğramacı, 2000; Jones and Skolnik, 1997). The exceptional position of ODTU was abolished by the military movement in 1980. Although there had been some initiatives of establishing private universities before 1980, they could not be carried out. As the following the movement, Bilkent University – foundation university- has carried out the process of trusteeship satisfyingly (1984), which is a considerable contribution to development of trusteeship in Turkish Higher Education (Hassanzabeh and Ebadi, 2007). Trusteeship has actively been carried out since 1993 by establishment of foundation universities increasing in number day by day. More than twenty foundation universities founded in a short time have been governed by board of trustees. Even if the initiation of board of trustees in university governance began with a state university, the trusteeship continued in foundation universities.

The governance of Turkish universities has dual system. State universities are governed by selected and appointed president. President in state universities has all powers and responsibilities. However, foundation universities are governed by the board of trustees. In terms of the law 2547 and article 14, the decision making organ of the higher education institute, board of trustee, represents the institutional body. Board of trustee is responsible for making contracts and ratifying appointments, promotions and depositions of administrative members, faculty members and other staff, approving the budget of the institution and tracing the implementations and defining student fees. Besides it accomplishes other responsibilities defined in bylaws by the foundation. Board of trustee shall assign other executives of the institution to fulfil any of its responsibilities.

Even though regulations governing foundation universities are completed in 1990s, the written rules and regulations cannot govern universities that one of the most important administrative difficulties of foundation universities seems lack of experience and knowledge of trusteeship system, of which members are elected among successful managers in business or universities. However, succeeding management on those positions differs from fulfilling the positions of a Chairman or members of trusteeship system. Even though many of the members struggle for the sake of universities, they haven't taken part in the process of establishment and institutionalization of the system. Establishment and administration of universities are a process which contains cumulative history, culture and experience. Recently founded foundation universities would face many difficulties owing to lack of those processes in addition to administrative problems.

The trustees of an organization will contribute significantly to our understanding of organizational governance (Maasen, 2000). The politics of fundraising and the consequences of wider social policies will increase the quality of the large-scale organizations (Akyüz, 2001; Carver and Carver, 1997).

2. Materials and Methods

The study is based on 140 members of 20 foundation universities. This is a descriptive research and interviews and surveys are carried out in order to collect data because the descriptive method is one of the best ways to get information from the organizations. Since the population is a small group, the survey is applied to the population instead of sampling. Both quantitative and qualitative data is used. A quantitative method was used to understand the trustees' perceptions of effectiveness of universities. All the data that were collected for the survey is analysed quantitatively besides interviews have been worked out within individuals who have taken part on university governments and board of trustee. The survey is developed upon board effectiveness measurement scale of Chait, Holland and Taylor (1991). The collected data is classified into six dimensions which are contextual dimension, educational dimension, interpersonal dimension, analytical dimension, political dimension and strategic dimension.

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of the measurement scale results is 0.84. According to the factor analysis, all the questions are relevant and the reliability is shown to be high since alpha is higher than 0.45 for each.

Respondents indicate their choice of responses on the four-point Likert scale. Four alternatives are given to the each question of the survey which are " (1) Totally agree", " (2) Agree ", " (3) Disagree ", " (4) Totally disagree ". Likewise, the same questions are used in the interviews and comments of the experts are taken into account. Interviews were conducted with five experienced board members in order to get profound information about the administrative process of private universities.

77 survey letters out of 140 were sent back which is 55% of the total. The causes of the relatively low participation rate are that the members of the board are not present full-time at universities and they have been abroad from time to time and they are not accustomed to these kinds of researches as well.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the survey are examined in six dimensions which are contextual dimension, interpersonal dimension, educational dimension, educational dimension, analytical dimension, political dimension and strategic dimension of which outputs are examined separately. Initially the 45 questions in the survey letters that were sent to the members were classified according to their dimensions and their frequency were found out and the percentages were computed. The mean scores range from 2.04 to 2.95 on 4.00. The highest mean score was found in the interpersonal dimension, 2.95 and the lowest mean score was found in the analytical dimension, 2.08. Instead of examining each question independently, it was thought to be more accurate to evaluate the findings in groups. Instead of examining each question independently, it was thought to be more accurate to evaluate the findings in groups.

3.1. Contextual Dimension

According to the answers to the eight questions in contextual dimension; members' understanding of university culture and institutional norms has been successful in 37%. 39% of the members partially qualified with contextual competence, which prevents them to assist university governance effectively. Although participating and perceiving the issues in general, they are not able to take part in improving and contributing to those. On the other hand, 24% of the members defined insufficiently qualified with contextual competence (Table 1).

Chairmen of the boards inform the members about the meetings on different dates of which frequency varies according to universities – the average meeting session is between fifteen and thirty minutes. In addition to the general meetings with the members, the ones between chairmen and president are held at least a week, of which issues are determined by chairman or executive boards, however, the issues proposed by president are also included. In some of the universities, it has been observed that presidents undertake responsibilities which chairmen are not able to fulfil actively.

3.2. Educational Dimension

According to the findings the poorest competence of the members is educational competence. Only 3% of the members define themselves totally capable, 24% define themselves capable and 47% define themselves incapable of self-improvement, undertaking responsibilities professionally and fulfilling membership properly. On the other hand 26% of those defined themselves completely unqualified on those as to the alternatives of the questions given in survey. By the findings in educational competence, all the members of the boards are in need of educational utility programs both pre-service and during their service (Table 1).

Board consists of academic and non-academic individuals. While academicians are able to perceive the institutional structure but not the governing process, others have difficulties in both.

Table 1: The Percentage of Contextual and Educational Dimension of Board of Trustees

	Totally Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Totally Disagree %
Contextual Dimension	5	32	39	24
Educational Dimension	3	24	47	26

3.3. Interpersonal Dimension

It's found out that interpersonal competence is the best competence of the members, and not only formal but also informal interaction among members is common such as spending time out together periodically and discussing the issues about their responsibilities. 27% of the participants define themselves totally sufficient, 46% define sufficient and 22% define insufficient on interpersonal competence. Only 5% of those perceive themselves unqualified with the needs of the subject matter. Not even the countries which have been applying trustee system have as much higher rate as 73% as shown by the survey, of which one of the most important determinants would be cultural background of the country (Table 2).

Table 2: The Percentage of Interpersonal and Analytical Dimension of Board of Trustees

	Totally Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Totally Disagree %
Interpersonal Dimension	27	46	22	5
Analytical Dimension	5	32	39	24

3.4. Analytical Dimension

In analytical dimension, the members of the boards expresses that they hardly perceive the complexity and indefiniteness of universities. By the findings, 57% of the participants, 38% is disagree and 19% is totally disagree, notes that they can scarcely analyse the system of universities, which constitutes a high percentage of the members in charge of governing universities. On the other hand, 29% of the participants are able to analyse and 14% are able to analyse exactly the structures and the processes (Table 2).

Not being able to analyse the issues properly is because of that the members each has different institutional backgrounds, however, the more experienced they become, the better they perceive related issues and comment on them.

3.5. Political Dimension

It's found that the members generally fulfil their responsibilities upon political competence. 18%-totally agree and 44%-agree in total 62% of the members undertake the responsibilities of forming policies and have a positive interaction with the ones who are in relation with the university. On the other hand, more than one third of the participants, 27% is disagree and 11% is totally disagree, do not have a considerable contribution to the issues on political dimension (Table 3).

Table 3: The Percentage of Political and Strategic Dimension of Board of Trustees

	Totally Agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Totally Disagree %
Political Dimension	18	44	27	11
Strategic Dimension	26	43	23	8

Strategic Dimension: In this dimension, it's found out that even though the foundation universities have been established recently, they have already developed their strategies and have been leading their activities solemnly. It may be the reflection of that majority of the members has been in business in this position. 26%-totally agree and 43%-agree in total 69% of the members agree that they perform effectively their duties. On the other hand, 23% of those disagree and 8% of those totally disagree (Table 3).

As a result of the interviews with the members of the board of trustees, some of the major points as follows:

It's pointed out that foundation universities are not entirely autonomous on administration and finance, that the government does not support the foundation universities efficiently and that Interuniversity Council (YÖK) gives priority to the state universities. It's also expressed that there hasn't been real competitiveness among state universities although there has been a growing competitive environment among foundation universities. It has been spoken out that Interuniversity Council should endeavour to improve quality of both foundation and state universities.

Reviewing the results of the interviews through six dimensions, the members of the boards of trustee noted that they perceive themselves competent contextually and they also pointed that their educational experiences helped them throughout their service. In educational dimension, they appeared not to be in need of self-improvement. While they emphasized the importance of education, they did not support the compulsory education similarly to the ones abroad. In interpersonal dimension, they expressed that they are in a close relationship with both the other members and academic staff formally and informally. In analytical dimension, they stated that they are not able to figure out the complexity and indefiniteness of universities and changeable issues. In political and strategic dimension, they had statements similar to the survey results.

4. Conclusion

The interviews and surveys indicate that there have been unprincipled implementations of appointing faculty members in foundation universities. Thus, some of the institutions seem to be a domestic company and they are in need of qualified staff. While some of the members have been appointed to the board due to their close friendship to chairmen or business relations, the others have been appointed due to their academic success and experience. Since trusteeship has been defined voluntary, the individuals who undertake these roles are to possess a number of institutional principals to perform their duties effectively. However, considering these institutions have been established recently – the individuals in charge are not the graduates of those so that it is not possible to expect the members carry out efficient and productive works owing to their institutional loyalty.

Members of board of trustees hold the vision of institutions since their effective performance determines the competition power and quality of the university. The foundation universities, which undertake more and more responsibilities day by day and have an improving influence in Turkish higher education system, will have more effective contributions in near future. The most important reasons of uncompetitive structure of foundation universities are that foundation universities haven't completed their physical structure and that they are not capable of compete with the state universities and that they haven't formed confidence on community yet.

Developing confidence to foundation universities in the following decade requires that members of board of trustees perform their duties effectively and properly. Members of board are to be sensitive to the community demands and fully qualified with the academic competence. They are to create a detached environment to balance the extreme demands of both sides act as negotiators between them. They are to develop stable policies, long and short-term strategies. The community relies on the foundation universities on condition that those institutions fulfil their long-term goals successfully.

As a result of the research, the members of the board of trustees are not qualified with contextual competence, which is mostly because of lack of cultural accumulation. Rapid constitutionalization different from cultural and historical background is threatening foundation universities. If it succeeds in the reformation process, it will be a prospective model for state universities.

To succeed in the process mentioned above, the members of the board of trustee are to improve themselves through a number of educational programs. It is not possible to make use of business experiments on universities since business management broadly differs from institutional management. It is inevitable to have educational reinforce to adapt those experiences in university management.

Foundation universities are on a favourable basis through interpersonal, political and strategic dimensions. Interpersonal competence depends on national culture and satisfying strategic competence depends on well adaptation of business experiences to university system.

Analytic incompetence is to overcome by educational programs in advance and during the members' appointment. Otherwise, the system remains complex and unfamiliar.

4.1. Research Suggestions

Considering educational incompetence of members in terms of research results, it is suggested to strengthen members' effectiveness on university governance by training through two or three-day seminars. Besides, prospective members are to be trained regularly on their roles and responsibilities.

It is a great contribution to trusteeship process holding annual conferences of which issues are the problems of foundation universities that have been increasing and growing fast and in which individuals share their experiences.

There has been a need of a union which is in charge of training programs of members and holding annual conferences. The union is to deal with the needs and the problems of the members and helps institutionalize the position as well.

Members of board of trustee have to assess themselves at least once a year, which reinforces self-improvement efforts of members and contributes to improvement of administration of foundation universities.

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