

More Than Was Asked For: Leading a Significant Change in a University

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Setting

Nation University (pseudonym) is a leading institution in its country with a department for training K-12 school teachers. Nestled in a large city with a diverse student population, the university prides itself on its academic excellence and innovative teaching methods. In response to identified challenges with its teacher preparation programs, the university sought to evaluate and enhance its teacher education program to maintain its standing and ensure it produced highly qualified teachers for the country's schoolchildren.

Case

The university's administration engaged a team of external experts to review its teacher education program. The objective was to identify areas for improvement and recommend enhancements that would align with

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current global standards and practices. Initially, the university expected that the consultants would suggest minor adjustments to the curriculum structure and course offerings, such as updating course content, suggesting new program formats, incorporating new teaching technologies, and increasing the number of practical teaching experiences.

However, the consultants' findings were far more radical than the university administration anticipated. After an exhaustive review, they concluded that smaller changes would not suffice to address the underlying issues or to meet the evolving needs of the country's K-12 education landscape. Instead, they recommended that the university make a comprehensive and sweeping shift toward a clinically-based teacher education approach. This approach emphasized extensive hands-on teaching experiences from the first year onward, significant collaboration with local schools, and a fundamental redesign of the curriculum to prioritize field practice over traditional classroom learning.

The recommendation startled the university's administration and faculty. The proposed changes would entail a major paradigm shift, resulting in a complete overhaul of the university's existing teacher education approach, with practical consequences for all stakeholders. The team of experts argued that this transformation was essential to both address the challenges that had already been identified and equip the university to produce the type of educators needed in the country's schools. They also highlighted that such a shift would not only enhance the quality of teacher training but also elevate the university's status as a global frontrunner in educational innovation.

The university leadership found themselves in a challenging situation. Whereas the university had expected suggestions for incremental change, the consultants' offered a well-founded recommendation for profound, systemic transformation. In exploring whether or not to take up the recommendation, the university's leaders now had critical considerations to address: framing the change to secure buy-in from all stakeholders; the need for significant investment in new resources; their partnerships with local schools and the national school governing body; and, ultimately, envisioning their future position in national and global education.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What steps should the university take to evaluate the feasibility, merits, and potential impact of implementing the experts' recommendations?
- What strategies should Nation University use to collaborate with its stakeholders, including faculty, students, and partner schools, to envision a new future?
- What should Nation University communicate to the current campus community, prospective students, and the public about the rationale for these changes? What resistance might Nation University encounter and how might they respond?
- What steps should Nation University's teacher education program take to maintain their strong reputation nationally and globally? How can that reputation help as they undertake these changes?

- Is the goal of education to serve the local community, the national community, or the global community? Does this case illustrate any tension between those goals?
- How can a teacher education program be designed to prepare teachers to develop the global citizenship of youth? In what ways is a clinically-based program with extensive field work well-positioned to be able to contribute to this goal?