

Work Efficiently – Two-Level Synergy Mechanism of Universities' Talent Introduction in China

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Abstract: Against the backdrop of rapid growth in brain circulation, there rises a lively and growing discussion about the appropriateness of introduced talents. In the sphere of higher education, how to ensure that the talents introduced by universities are in line with the needs of secondary schools is an urgent problem to be solved. This has undoubtedly provided the primary rationale for this paper. After expert interview and international comparison, it is concluded that more emphasis should be placed on constructing a highly efficient two-level mechanism for talent introduction in Chinese universities. Furthermore, it argues that in the implementation course, clarifying the boundaries of rights and obligations between universities and secondary schools can make a big difference. Under the premise of consistent goals, the communication during employment process and the effectiveness of feedback process should be enhanced as well for achieving the connotative development of talent work.

1. Introduction

In the planned economy period, universities in China mainly went along with the Soviet model of the 1950s and applied a three-level management system consisting of universities, schools and majors. However, such division among majors was too clear and detailed, which seriously hindered the progress of emerging disciplines and interdisciplinary disciplines. To respond to the opportunities and challenges from market economy and higher education, China began to launch a new discourse on the reform of internal management system within universities in the 1980s. Establishment of a two-level management system involving only universities and schools became a matter of particular urgency under that context. The original intention of this reform is through equipping secondary schools with more powers in personnel, finance, teaching as well as scientific research, these schools would turn to relatively independent entities with certain responsibilities and rights. ^[1] Accordingly, their operation vitality is stimulated and talent cultivation is improved in a broad sense.

In 2017, China's State Council issued "13th Five-Year Plan for Development of National Education Industry", clearly stating "to further promote decentralization in universities". After then, the action of two-level management system become more extensive and in-depth. Fundamentally, two-level management system should "maintain, react, regulate, guarantee and promote the efficiency of the whole working system within universities". ^[2] Being an instrumental component, two-level synergy mechanism between universities and secondary schools functions as "link" and "catalyst", which also exerts a profound influence on achieving the intended goal.

In practice, as far as talent introduction is concerned, it is of great necessity to strengthen the orderly connection between universities and secondary schools. Universities are the body of recruiting talents. Secondary schools are the main front for talents' working. How to ensure that the universities truly recruit talents that meet the demands of schools is the core of success. Therefore, this paper will concentrate on the construction of a two-level synergy mechanism for talent introduction in Chinese universities, and strives to provide beneficial reference for pushing forward talent work.

2. Theatrical Framework

In response to the predecessors in Frankfurt school, Germany philosopher, sociologist Jürgen Habermas put forward theory of communicative action in the 1980s. In the previous view held by the majority of the Marxist group, the economic base of discourse in structural transformation occupied a predominant position. By way of contrast, Habermas took language and communication as the central focus, which was more supra-structural. For the first time, he pointed out that communicative action was based upon a deliberative process, where two or more individuals interacted and coordinated their action on the basis of agreed interpretations of the situation.^[3]

On balance, the theory places a premium on emancipatory communicative act. Meanwhile, synergy is communication-based. Starting from this respect, theory of communicative action has shed light on addressing the tension between universities and secondary schools by cultivating a highly efficient two-level synergy mechanism. With all these efforts, it is likely that “precise introduction” can be achieved.

3. Problem Statement and Attribution Analysis

The most prominent problem emerged from talent introduction is that in many cases, the talents recruited by universities are not really wanted by secondary schools. With little argumentation, this is detrimental to realizing the full potential of talents. Combined with this, the development of secondary schools gradually becomes lack of momentum and universities’ human, financial as well as material resources are also wasted in the long term. The question arises as to how these negative consequences can be mitigated. Through attribution analysis, it is revealing to see that institutional arrangement related with talent work has been chronically overlooked by universities, especially the construction of a two-level synergy mechanism between universities and secondary schools.

3.1 Boundary of Rights and Responsibilities is Not Clear and Internal Reform Lacks Unified Benchmark.

During past practice, internal reforms often fall into the trap of “zero-sum game”. That is, the relationship between universities and secondary schools is discussed in a more opposing position. The functional departments stand in the position of the university and hope to grasp more control of macro policies and resources. While from the perspective of self-development, secondary schools strive to obtain the most relaxed policies and as many resources as possible.^[4] The main contradiction stems from the fact that for both sides, mutual rights and obligations are not clearly defined, and the working mode of certain rights equals comparable responsibilities is not established neither. In the absence of a clear approach in performing respective functions, talent work cannot be carried out in an effective manner.

3.2 With the Impulsion of Short-Term Returns, Universities Have the Tendency to Stress Quantity Rather Than Quality.

Functional departments in universities are often the direct setters of reform programs. However, due to the intense pressure from various evaluation indicators, they tend to pay more attention to actively promoting extensive expansionary development. Quality ends up being less of a concern, making the contradiction between universities and secondary schools more and more tense. The underlying reasons manifest themselves in three aspects. In the first place, during the process of target design, a large proportion of universities only depend on inherent empiricism. This is compounded by the preference to one-sidedly pursue the increase of the total amount. Secondly, university administrators do not have a nuanced understanding of disciplines and practical needs from secondary schools have not been fully taken into consideration. Last but not least, the main role of secondary schools has not been exercised. No procedure is conducted to gain their objective feedback.

3.3 Due to Limitations of Real Conditions, Secondary Schools Are Insufficient in Subjective Initiative.

The internal management of universities, in its essence, is about dealing with rights and responsibilities in all management levels and among different interest groups, reflecting their relations by means of rights distribution and responsibility sharing.^[5] Inadequate decentralization directly leads to the deficiency of resources at the secondary school level, to name but a few, the right to speak and the available funds. What's worse, an abbreviation vision also sets obstacles on the way forward. As a consequence, secondary schools act negatively in the course of talent introduction. In turn, having no talents that are compatible with schools' demands will intensify the pressure on the optimization of faculty composition and the innovation of talent cultivation. In the long run, secondary schools' trust towards universities will be put at risk and pushback may occur.

4. Construction of Two-Level Synergy Mechanism for Talent Introduction in China

Given the contradiction above, what is the balance to be struck between universities and secondary schools? When viewed in a holistic manner, the two-level synergy mechanism provides a new insight for solving this problem. In terms of talent introduction, the operation of synergy mechanism can be further divided into three stages, namely target design, process operation and feedback adjustment. Correctly handling the relationship between universities and secondary schools in these three links serves as the top priority for the sustainable development of talent work. Its impact is both consequential and enduring.

4.1 Defining Respective Rights and Responsibilities is the Prerequisite.

Efficient cooperation of two-level management system takes synergy as the basis. Furthermore, synergy relies on the clear division of rights as well as responsibilities. In general, there are two categories of rights in universities: one is more like transactional; the other one is related with decision-making. More concretely, transactional rights have strong subjective attributes, and the replacement of original subjects will fail to set things in normative motion. Thus, they belong to undisputed rights. For instance, universities are responsible for strategic planning, institutional setting and adjustment, while secondary schools are in charge of daily teaching and student management. In comparison, rights of decision-making are the key point that need cautious exploration.^[6]

With regard to the two-level synergy mechanism of talent introduction, a considerable amount of interest should be attracted to the subjective position of academic power. Accordingly, for universities, they need to respect disciplines in all arounds and give full play to secondary schools. In addition, administrative intervention towards academics must be reduced, and the formation of a free, equal as well as relaxed environment needs to be promoted. On the other side, secondary schools are at the forefront of talent training. They are more familiar with the requirements of the employment market, and can stay abreast of the advances in research fields. Hence, they are available to give rapid response as to professional adjustment and curriculum setting.^[7] It falls into the responsibility of secondary schools to actively provide universities with information on talent demands and specific standards. Establishing a series of supporting policies, including talent judgement, talent retention and talent assessment is also conducive to enhancing the working performance.

4.2 Safeguarding the Consistency of Objectives is the Basis.

Universities and secondary schools are not simple administrative affiliations. Instead, they together form a close strategic alliance based on high recognition of organizational goals. Schools are not only executive organizations of universities' strategy, but also essential participants in strategic planning. They can carry out relevant activities more autonomously under the framework of consensus. In actual situations, it is quite common that there are over 20 or 30 individual schools in one single university. Under most circumstances, these secondary schools do not belong to the

same level. They face different opportunities, challenges and corresponding strategic actions also vary unquestionably. Therefore, identifying developmental goals in a reasonable manner merits deep examination. On one hand, the centripetal force of overall target must be ensured. On the other hand, enough space for independent development must be given.

Conducting hierarchical management of objectives sets a good example in this field. To be specific, in terms of the whole talent work, goals are divided into three types. The overarching goal is formed after full discussion between universities' functional departments and secondary schools, involving both long-term strategic planning and medium as well as short-term development tasks. The designated goal serves as a specific indicator. It is characterized by academic background and developmental priorities of each individual school, and reflects universities' differentiated guidance. In the course of this approach, it is remarkable to note that universities should carefully analyze the vast array of demands from secondary schools and raise concerns on crucial issues which have emerged while implementation. After sufficient argumentation, communication and negotiation, people from both these two levels together develop talent introduction goals that are specific, measurable, aligned, realistic as well as timed. The autonomous goal is constructive, so that secondary schools can independently propose. It is only with the corresponding reward mechanism from universities can autonomous goals be fully materialized.

4.3 Strengthening the Interactivity of Employment Process is the Core.

4.3.1 Formulate Scientific Job Descriptions.

It would be a misconception to assume talents cannot be classified. It is extremely important for universities to imbed a high level of awareness that recruitment purpose comes first. Though there is no hard-and-fast rule, they can distinguish teaching-focused talents from research-focused ones. Besides, maximizing the potential of secondary schools play a substantive role in talent introduction. Through full consultation between both parties, pragmatic job descriptions are made. The visible recommendations for doing this are to describe clearly, clarifying the required qualifications, and meanwhile, not too specific for attracting as many outstanding candidates as possible.

4.3.2 Launch Effective Search Plans.

As for organization structure setting, a dedicated talent introduction team composed of people from various backgrounds at both the university level and the secondary school level is of great necessity. Specific composition evolves in alignment with working purpose. For recruitment of talents in fields of emerging disciplines or interdisciplinary disciplines, colleagues from relevant fields outside the hiring school should be invited to improve the correctness of the resolution. The main functions of this talent introduction team are comparing the national talent database, developing a wide pool of candidates, identifying potential sources of candidates, and finally determining a feasible timetable based on interactive discussions.

4.3.3 Conduct Fair Interview and Selection.

Much could be adopted from the practice of foreign world-class universities. In order to ensure the transparency of the selection process, University of British Columbia requires each talent introduction team to keep factual records of the recruitment process. The records include copies of advertisements as well as descriptions of special measures for recruiting the designated employees. In case human rights groups or government agencies inquire related issues, people can produce evidence that the hiring process is fair.^[8] In selecting candidates, more weight should be placed on the evaluation criteria. A series of factors from both the university level and the secondary school level should be considered with great caution. To illustrate, the applicant's own ability, like academic influence, research productivity, ability to attract and direct graduate students, ability to teach and supervise undergraduates, ability to attract and teach students from different backgrounds. At the same time, on the basis of soliciting opinions from the hiring school, the degree of fitness between the applicant and the school is also high on the working agenda. It can be reflected through following elements, such as the ability to work with colleagues, the relationship with the priorities

of the school, the contribution that can make to the school and so on. ^[9]

4.4 Enhancing the Smoothness of Feedback is the Driving Force.

The university is an academic community whose management process is continuous and interactive. On the whole, universities and secondary schools are tied inseparably to each other. The operation of any mechanism is constantly improved in the course of practice as well. There should be a consensus around the need for continuous feedback. From the perspective from universities, they should place a premium on solidifying useful reform measures, transforming good experiences into policies in a timely manner, and forming binding contract documents on some practices agreed with secondary schools to promote the standardization process. On the other side, from the standpoint of the overall interests of the university, secondary schools should actively offer their innovative ideas on talent introduction. Only in this way will the working efficiency of talent work be promoted across the board.

5. Conclusion

Two-level synergy mechanism is a key point of two-level management system. Its function is more prominent when talent introduction in universities is concerned. Special attention should be drawn to correctly handling the relationship between universities and secondary schools. By enhancing communication in the course of target design, process operation and feedback adjustment, the potential of talents is fully achieved and discipline construction as well as talent training is further pushed forward within whole universities.

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