

The Morocracy Problem: Postmodern Leadership and Its Discontents in Higher Education

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Abstract:

Universities were once imagined as sanctuaries of the mind – places where ideas competed on their merits and where the pursuit of truth, however elusive, remained the organizing principle of institutional life. That image has not simply faded; in many cases, it has been systematically dismantled. This article takes seriously the question of how and why.

We introduce the concept of morocracy as a defining pathology of contemporary higher education governance: the structured elevation of the intellectually weak, the professionally incompetent, and the ethically indifferent to positions of authority. Morocracy is not an accident of bad hiring decisions. It is a self-reproducing logic that rewards loyalty over competence, conformity over critical thought, and institutional obedience over scholarly integrity. Where it takes hold, it does not announce itself. It settles in quietly, and tenure follows.

Against this backdrop, we ask what kind of leadership remains possible and what kind remains meaningful. Drawing on postmodern thought, particularly Lyotard, Baudrillard, Foucault, and Derrida, we argue that concepts such as "effectiveness," "quality," and "excellence" are not transparent descriptors of reality but socially constructed narratives that can be, and routinely are, appropriated to serve morocratic ends. The technical-managerial model of university leadership, with its devotion to rankings, standardization, and measurable outputs, does not resist morocracy. It provides it with respectable language.

In its place, we propose three interlocking leadership orientations: deconstruction of institutional practices that privilege loyalty over merit; epistemological polyphony, which protects genuine expertise from homogenizing pressures; and ironic leadership, a stance that embraces contingency and uncertainty without surrendering commitment to meritocratic principles. The postmodern leader, as we conceive her, is not a detached observer but an active custodian of the spaces where critical thinking and authentic scholarship can still breathe.

The stakes reach well beyond the institution. When morocracy captures university governance, it does not merely damage one organization. It quietly erodes the epistemic foundations on which open, democratic societies depend.

Keywords:

Postmodern Leadership, Morocracy, Deconstruction, Epistemological Polyphony, Meritocracy, Higher Education Governance.