Living Good Governance

Background/Context/Key Challenges
Governance, at its heart, is related to how an institution measures itself, and how it intends to grow. A well-run institution instills confidence and respect from students, faculty, and the larger community. Yet, governance is a challenge in several Indian technical education institutes. The vast majority do not have much financial or academic autonomy, which means they often cannot make key decisions affecting their performance, such as faculty appointments. These institutions can include those that are well-respected to those who have very weak quality control. Given this wide range, effective governance at an institution is of critical importance.

In addition, there are different governing bodies in India that oversee the accreditation of courses and autonomous status of technical institutions. Oftentimes the amount of paperwork and fees associated with these certifications can pose as impassable barriers for institutions.

Despite these obstacles, high-performing institutions usually have some sort of governance system in place that extends beyond just a high-functioning Board of Governors (BoG).

Currently, institutions that are part of the Government of India-World Bank Technical Engineering Educational Quality Improvement Project (TEQIP II) are asked to meet a minimum number of specific performance indicators tied to governance. While many institutions can simply "tick the boxes", the real question is, how many have truly internalized best practices? This case study looks at some of the similar traits amongst institutions that demonstrate a strong commitment to good governance.

Why TEQIP?
Good governance is one of the hallmarks of TEQIP II, and there is an entire website dedicated to the topic, full of examples and research. Like other topics in this series of case studies, TEQIP II has highlighted the impact of good governance and compels institutions to take pause and reflect on how they govern themselves. Some of the activities supported under TEQIP include training and mentoring institutes to undertake a Governance Self-Review, to author a Governance Development Plan, and to host regular, transparent Board of Governors (BoG) meetings with publicized minutes.

Beyond just providing a framework and technical assistance to enact good governance practices, TEQIP II has also contributed financial support to help institutions gain autonomy and accreditation by covering fees. Without the project, many institutions would not have had the capacity or resources to pursue such things.

In order to see good governance in practice, field visits were carried out in August 2015 to seven TEQIP-supported institutes who had met all of the governance-related indicators, as reported in the TEQIP management information system (MIS), and as recommended by the National Project Implementation Unit (NPIU), the body that has been implementing TEQIP

II. Of the institutions, two are NITs, three are government-aided and two are private unaided colleges.

<u>Lessons for other institutes</u>
As mentioned earlier, almost all institutions in TEQIP II have some type of governance plan in place, but the key is turning that plan into part of the DNA of the institution. Some key signifiers of the internalization of good governance practices include:

Delegation – Trust from the Bottom to the Top
A BoG member at PESIT indicated that he did not involve himself (as best practice) in the day-to-day running of the institution, but rather, trusted the Head of Institution (HoI) to make decisions and report back to the BoG. Though the BoG approves all faculty appointments, the BoG member stated that he knew a rigorous process was in place and thus trusted the system, making the approval process very streamlined and quick.

This lack of micro-management also rang true for several other institutions, for instance, at BMS, most decisions are delegated to the department level, and only specific approvals are pushed up to the level of dean or the Board of Studies. Faculty members who were interviewed indicated that they felt that their voices were heard during these decision meetings, and that they were pleased with the transparency of the process.

At ICT – Mumbai, a similar democratic process is followed, where each head of department rotates every three years, and are nominated based on faculty recommendations. Each department has the collective authority to decide on academics, funding and research, and can consult with various advisory committees. The BoG rarely gets involved unless a higher-level approval is needed, and in many instances, an email endorsement suffices. VJTI has a similar relationship, where the BoG Chairman can provide an e-sign off.

Even more significant than delegation is the trust that comes with it – based on interviews with administrators and faculty, people felt that the modus operandi at their institution was well-understood and impartial. No one felt that decisions were being made behind closed doors, or that the BoG was disinterested or disengaged from their institution. At NITK – Surathkal, trust is evident in the following mentality: that the director did not "make" decisions, but rather, "endorsed" them.

Document, Document, Document
Related to trust and delegation is the documentation of institutional procedures. Sometimes there are explicit rules in place and in other instances they are implied. Though it may seem overly bureaucratic to codify the processes and procedures related to governance, it is imperative to have consistency rather than rely on the subjective interpretation of various stakeholders.

For institutions like VNIT and ICT – Mumbai, their practices are already documented and they are now moving to e-Governance models, turning BoG meetings paperless and using technology to develop management information systems (MIS) for the entire institution. In

fact, ICT – Mumbai credits the TEQIP MIS in helping them think through how to build documentation, and how public funds should be used and accounted for.

VNIT also has a project underway to map out all of its models for human resources, hostels, e-Payments, e-Governance, etc. which they plan to make public by posting the flow charts on the school walls.

Creating documentation does not necessarily have to turn into a heavy, bureaucratic exercise, as not every piece of paper needs to be immortalized. Rather, it's the documentation for routine institutional procedures that matters, especially for those that involve a decision process. Many of these may already be implicitly understood amongst staff, but it is always best to record them or program them using technology. Procedures can always be revisited and revised, but at least they exist in case there are any questions, personnel changes or disputes.

Never Rest on Your Laurels
Though many institutions have completed their Governance Self-Review and Governance Development Plan, it does not mean that their work on governance is finished. High-performing institutions are always refining their goals and adjusting policies to help them get to the next level.

For example, at NITK – Surathkal, they have identified some targets to focus on, such as supporting faculty development. In order to practice what they preach, the BoG authorized financial support for all faculty to travel abroad to gain exposure, and then introduced a performance-based evaluation system. Another target of theirs is to crack the top 200 ranking in India, so they have sped up recruitment to decrease the faculty-to-student ratio. ICT – Mumbai has a strategic plan in place through 2100, while PESIT is concentrated on pursuing academic excellence, and has approached individuals with experience at IITs to become BoG members in order to advise on this.

This constant refinement has also enabled many of the institutions to create their own separate committees for activities that need attention (e.g. many of them have committees that focus on finance and research), but they have also tried to identify ways in which they can make certain processes even more efficient. At VJTI, the alumni association takes care of student grievances, which has proven to be a satisfactory way to handle complaints for both students and administrators alike. This also points back to the benefits of delegation.

Conclusion
Understanding good governance and living good governance are two different things. Just as a student can have a plan in mind for how he or she is going to pursue a degree, reality often gets in the way. Similarly, an institution may have an idea of how it is going to move forward with its governance model, but that plan might sit in a file cabinet for years while the status quo persists.

Taking small steps, by modeling from the top and introducing more delegation, or promoting good documentation, can lead to significant behavioral changes that slowly become embedded. Charting the institution's progress is also imperative, because it is difficult to know where you are going if you do not know exactly where you have been. This type of regular institutional evaluation does not yet seem to be common, but is a good way to measure performance and determine where course correction is needed. Ultimately, good governance is an attitude, a behavior, rather than a template to be followed, but it is necessary to lay the groundwork by first establishing some good practices.

For more information about TEQIP II, please visit: http://www.npiu.nic.in/
or write to npiuwb@hotmail.com.

Methodology
Data was collected from interviews (based on a list of standard questions) and observations from students, faculty and administrators from seven institutions in the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. The following institutions (A-Z) were visited:
- BMS College of Engineering (BMS) – Bangalore (Government Aided)
- GH Raisoni College Of Engineering – Nagpur (Private Unaided)
- Institute of Chemical Technology (ICT) – Mumbai (Government Aided)
- National Institute of Technology, Karnataka (NITK) – Surathkal (NIT)
- PES University (PESIT) – Bangalore (Private Unaided)
- Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI) – Mumbai (Government Aided)
- Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology (VNIT) – Nagpur (NIT)