Re-thinking the Management of Higher Education Institutions: Transformational Leadership

Otiemo-Omutoko (Ph.D)
Lecturer at University of Nairobi
P.O. Box 24386-00502 Nairobi.
Email: lyllemutoko@yahoo.com

1 Abstract
The study attempts to examine the management of higher education institutions in Kenya and it explores how challenges facing universities can be addressed with an aim of keeping up with contemporary trends of management and enhance quality and responsiveness. The sample included two public universities and two private universities which were selected on the basis of their proximity to Nairobi as well as the availability of information. Twenty participants from four universities constituted the sample. Four female and four male lecturers, four deans, four chairmen/heads of departments and four heads of ICT departments participated in the study. Questionnaires were used to collect data. A Documentary and Content Analysis was done and a Field Study carried out in March 2009 on management of higher education institutions. This paper explains the legal framework within which universities operate and it assesses how universities in Kenya are managed and the extent to which IT is used as a tool for effective management of complex operations as necessitated by increasing populations. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are universities in Kenya managed?
2. What are the challenges that universities face?
3. How can university management be bettered to suit economic and social changes?

The paper attempts to shed light on how higher education institutions can apply corporate knowledge management practices and carry out management by results to support every part of their mission. The paper argues that there is need for higher education institution to focus on consistent and coherent practices in the systems and procedures that are followed, which means that quality assurance should be undertaken in the context of the institutional strategic plan, these will assist in dealing with challenges and constraints facing higher education institutions.

2 Introduction
Higher education is in crisis today and the current situation is not sustainable throughout the world. The situation is aggravated by low quality which is as a result of rapid enrolment, growth under limited resources, inefficiency in terms of inappropriate use of public resources in higher education, high dropout rates, programme duplication and inequity. Despite all these challenges, the administration of universities is expanding countrywide and therefore the need for modernising the curricula and ways of managing the operations of higher education institutions.

In Kenya higher education is provided in universities, polytechnics, teachers training colleges and middle level colleges. Higher education refers to all formal and non-formal education and training offered after basic education cycle. Under this definition therefore, higher education includes: universities, polytechnics, teachers training colleges, institutions offering technical and vocational education and training, secretarial colleges, NGOs providing commercial skills and other development programmes beyond basic education institutions offering pre-university academic programmes. These institutions are usually state or privately owned. For most of these institutions,
the Government and Ministry of Education provide the overall lines of educational policy which
guide governance. However, this paper focuses on the management of universities.

The paper delves into the question of management and institutional leadership of universities
in Kenya. The paper further intends to seek out better ways of management of the institutions.
Against this backdrop, the paper seeks to highlight the general and legal frameworks within which
higher education institutions operate with an aim of providing practical and contemporary initiating
knowledge management techniques and management by results.

3 The Place of Higher Education in Development
Higher education is of paramount importance to economic and social development. Institutions
of higher education have the responsibility of equipping individuals with advanced knowledge
and skills required for positions of responsibility in government, business and professions. These
institutions produce new knowledge through research, serve as conduits for the transfer, adaptation
and dissemination of knowledge generated elsewhere in the world and support government and
business with advice and consultancy services. Higher education institutions also play important
social roles by forging the national identity of the country and offering a forum for pluralistic
debate (World Bank, 1994).

4 Higher Education is in a Crisis
Despite the clear importance of investment in higher education for economic growth and social
development, the sector is in a crisis throughout the world. The crisis is most acute in the developing
world. Some of the crises include: inability to contain pressures for enrolment expansion, adverse
operating conditions like overcrowding, lack of resources, deteriorating physical facilities,
deterioration of the quality of teaching and research, and lack of resources. In addition, there is
under representation of women in higher education, both for students and in management. There
is also the problem of declining resources per student and inefficient use of these resources. The
other glaring challenge that continues to bud is that higher education generally remains elitist,
with majority of the students coming from wealthier families. According to Word Bank (1996),
higher education is in a crisis throughout the world because of rapid enrolment under conditions
of limited resources, inefficiency, inappropriate use of public resources in higher education, high
dropout rates, programme duplication and inequity because “public subsides as a proportion of unit
costs of higher education often far exceed the subsidies to primary and secondary education.” World
Bank (1996) also expresses its concern on management and institutional leadership which determine
good governance and achievement of institutional objectives. The researcher concurs with World
Bank and argues that the management of universities is aggravated by appointment of lecturers to
administrative posts without training in management and often times there is no one to direct them
on what is expected of them which exposes them to ad hoc management.

5 Legal Framework within which Universities Operate
The principles of legislation are determined by the universities act. In Kenya, each university is
operating under a separate act which means that each of the institutions is autonomous, while each
of the private universities operates through a Government charter. The University Act determines
the procedures for establishment, merging and divisions, the principles of operation, the principles
of financing, the limits of autonomy, the principles of management, organisation of studies, the
legal status of assets of the university, the basic rights and obligations of teaching staff and students
and the state of supervision over the legality of activities of universities. For instance, University of
Nairobi is governed by University of Nairobi Act, No.11, while the University of Dar-es-Salaam
is governed by University of Dar es Salaam Act No. 12. Each university is governed by a set of
statutes.
The law also defines the main terms related to higher education, there are many laws governing higher education. These laws are from a number of sources which include statutes, court decisions, administrative rules and regulations. Law has a differential impact on the universities and affects the environment within which the university operates. It also articulates the powers and structural relationships of the state with respect to universities. Laws further define the legal status of the institution and its governing board, describing the range of permissible activities and duties, they also affect the relationships between the universities and students, faculty and staff. Law is also the mode by which broad policy issues are pursued, for example, access to education, ratio of boys and girls, age, and to whom this education is to be given (Perkins, 1973).

6 The Effect of Law on Universities

The laws of higher education have various effects on these institutions, they bind people and actions and that is why there is rigidity and conservatism which sometimes inhibit change. These laws are viewed as having tentacles of insensitivity, conflict, technicality, wrangling, inflexibility, expense and delay. Inflexibility makes it difficult or even impossible for the university to respond to changes.

In higher institutions of learning, the law may be the source of university problems, a good and recent example is the requirement that students should pay fees before registering for exams within a month into the semester. Also, the inception of Module II Programmes initially caused unrest in public universities. The “legalisation” of the university tends to result in rigidity and inflexibility. This explains why reforms in these institutions are rare and difficult to make. However, reforms can be made through laws, that is, through legislatures and the senate which is bound to take a long time.

As a force for conservatism, if law articulates policy and structures of authority, and if authority identifies with policy, the preservation of policy becomes confused with preservation of authority and with the law. This results in those in positions of responsibility often being interested in self-preservation and advancement which can cause resistance to change.

7 Management of Higher Education Institutions: Findings and Discussions

Any institution should have a defined administrative structure which ensures division of labour and a clear way of doing things. Only 30 percent of the participants had an idea of the hierarchical levels in their university, this is an indication that most lecturers and managers do not quite take an active part in management issues or they only know about the operations at their own levels. It is worth noting too that those who know about these levels are those who have done administration as a discipline. This situation may be attributed to lack of orientation, induction of new staff and mentorship.

Management training helps in improvement of managerial skills, 64.3 percent of the respondents had attended related courses while 28.6 percent had not. Those who had attended such training find them beneficial in terms of acquisition of knowledge and improvement in skills and enhancement of commitment to work. 14.8 percent of the lecturers do not view training in management as important. In one of the universities, one of the deans had not attended any relevant training which puts to question his competence and the commitment of his employer in enhancing performance.

Knowledge of institutional practices and rationales is vital for performance as it helps members comply and act accordingly. Majority of the respondents have this information, however their perception of the concept is different. The researcher concurs with Kidwell, Linde and Johnson, (2000) that the concepts of knowledge management are applicable to universities. Knowledge management is the process of transforming information and intellectual assets into enduring value. Knowledge starts as data, that is, raw facts and numbers. This knowledge should be shared with staff e-mails, memos, and notices, so that it can be put to work and used in making decisions. Information can be captured in documents or better still in databases for easy retrieval.
Using knowledge management techniques is vital as in the corporate sector. If used effectively, these techniques can lead to better decision making capabilities, reduced “product” development cycle time for example curriculum development and research. It can also lead to improved academic and administrative services and reduced costs. In any faculty, there are members who posses institutional knowledge, for example curriculum developers, researchers who have informal connections with funding institutions, and professional managers and lecturers who have uncovered useful reports that deans or departmental chairs can use in developing strategic plans. Relying on the institutional knowledge of unique individuals can lead to exponential improvements in sharing knowledge and improvement of practices. Knowledge management practices can be used to support every part of universities’ mission. From the study, it is evident that only a few of the respondents are aware whether their institutions manage affairs from a corporate perspective. However, the institutions of higher education which participated have a vision and mission statement which guide and drive activities.

Committees or governing boards are legally responsible for final institutional decisions which include results, discipline and effecting changes. The senate is the main board and its membership is defined. The statutes create laws which in turn delineate specific powers. Institutions of higher education are run by boards, despite this fact, 28.6 percent of the participants do not know this which shows that many staff lack knowledge on management of their institutions and this may explain why universities are in crisis.

Reforms are vital because it is only through them that change can be embraced and changing needs met. On the question on reforms, 14.3 percent said that there had been no reforms in their institutions while the same percentage were noncommittal possibly because they were not aware of any. The reforms that were mentioned included those to do with methodology, decentralisation of examination process to individual faculties, introduction of research office in each faculty, decentralization of financial management to college level, reorganisation of faculties and departments to form schools and institutes.

To improve delivery of services, institutions of higher education can provide various services in the web. Data reveals that 21.4 percent have no idea as to what a web portal is, it is likely that is why they did not respond, on the other hand, 64.3 percent responded that their universities had the facility. However, those who had this facility did not seem to know the web-based information sources available on individual desktop interfaces. It is my view that universities should have this facility as a way of improving communication and provision of delivery integrated services.

Institutions of higher education use institutionalised and specialised knowledge which is necessary for making informed decisions and better contribution in terms of expertise. However, only 41.0 percent make use of this kind of knowledge, some in development of programmes, some institutions appoint such people to head special committees and teaching of students. The remaining 59 percent either made no comment or did not think it was applicable. The responses were therefore an indication that this kind of knowledge was barely known about or used by staff for management.

The use of strategic plans for management is necessary as it gives a direction. Majority, that is 64.3 percent of the universities have strategic plans, 78.6 percent have a detailed action plan to enhance management and 71.4 percent have the results of the action plan assessed. This is an indication that there is an attempt to use corporate practices in management. Assessment of results of action plans is done through annual appraisal of processes, performance contracts and targets.

Various ways were suggested for improving the models of governance:

1. Use of top-down and bottom-up approaches as opposed to quasi-bottom-up which is practiced in some institutions of higher education.
2. Use of participatory management.
3. Facilitate controls rather precipitate them to be inhibitions.
4. Continuous participation of all stakeholders in issues that affect professional growth of staff.
5. Embracing of constructive change.
6. Objective use of annual or bi-annual evaluation reports.
7. Use of a more open approach of management and adequate communication channels so as to enhance communication. In this connection, there should be internet connection, fax machines for both staff and students. Telephone facilities should also be available and in working condition. For staff, these services should be paid for.

7.1 Management by Results
The model below borrows from the performance agreement between the University of Joensuu and the Ministry of Education for 2001-2003 (Ministry of Education, 2000). This model can be applied in the management of universities as it is result-oriented. The premise of management by results is that objectives should first be set for institutional activities and the overall objectives can be quality research, education and artistic activities, enhance their social impact and interaction with cultural, working and business life. This should be followed by determination of resources needed for their implementation, for instance, there can be core funding, performance-based funding, national funding and project funding. All the resources should be taken into account in overall finance. Thereafter, targets should be set and they should be target oriented. This could include the number of degrees to be awarded in each field of study, admission, certain policy lines whenever needed, structural development and guidelines concerning certain activities and the role of Open University instruction. For effective management and evaluation, performance indicators should be outlined for performance evaluation, for example, excellence in research, education, adult education external research financing, and graduate placement. Evaluation of these steps should be continuous and terminal, this can be done during meetings and workshops and the outcome can be used to revise objectives or to set others.

![Diagram of Management by Results]

Figure 1: Model of Management by Results.

8 Challenges Faced by Universities
Universities in Kenya are facing a number of challenges which affect delivery of services such as teaching and conducting of research, these are the core functions of institutions of higher education. To begin with, the challenges faced affect lecturers, students and administrators. In some of the institutions, staff levels are rather low which increases workload. Secondly, the morale of lecturers is relatively low because of low salaries, erratic promotion practices and insufficient funding for research.

There is increased demand for higher education and that is why there are many universities coming up. As a result, there is growth in individual universities, managing this growth in itself is a
challenge and it is bound to affect sustenance of quality. Some of the institutions have poor physical facilities and these facilities are insufficient which results in overcrowding in the lecture halls. These issues are perpetuated by lack of corporate governance practices in some of the institutions of higher education.

Some of the institutions have setbacks in their communication systems in that the flow of information is not smooth; this affects efficiency because staff may not act accordingly due to lack of information. A number of institutions of higher education have not been able to keep touch with their alumni and when they have been successful in doing this, they have not had effective activities. Alumni can play a great role in development of institutions and they can have a positive influence on current students through networking and mentorship programmes.

Budgetary allocations for public institutions by the Government are usually inadequate; these allocations are the ones used for budgeting according to vote heads. The effect are that funds are inadequate at any given time and this affects the running of programmes. In some of the universities, lecturers are not provided with stationery and this ultimately affects delivery of knowledge. With the advancement of technology, delivery of instruction can be made more efficient by the use of projectors and computers; however, the equipment is inadequate where it is available.

Another challenge is the existing bureaucracy which causes delays in communication, action and even difficulties in effecting any changes. Accommodation of students has increasingly become a problem. In public institutions of higher education enrolment by JAB is determined by bed space, these lock out many students who have met the minimum requirement which is a C+, while in private institutions many of the students have to look for alternative accommodation.

Currently there are many universities in the country which brings about competition, which implications which affect the available resources. For example, one private institution of higher education is a nonprofit making institution, it is church-based and its aim is to improve society. As such, its sources of funding are limited.

9 Possible Solutions to Challenges Faced by Universities

1. Improve staff morale by increasing their salaries and benefits. Morale can also be increased by reducing their workload, this can be done by employing more lecturers or engaging part-time lecturers as need arises.

2. Increased Government allocation and appointing a steering committee to manage funds generated by Module II Programmes so that they are used to facilitate all operations of individual institutions including development of infrastructure, improvement of facilities, remuneration of staff and funding of research activities.

3. Initiation of more income generating projects.

4. Acquisition of more technological equipment and training staff so that they can competently use them.

5. Access relevance of training to students and market needs before implementation.

6. Construction of hostels for commercial use to alleviate shortage.

7. Rewarding lecturers for all academic related activities that they engage in, including teaching.

8. Implementation of best management systems and practices.

10 Recommendations

1. Due to the fact that most of the respondents do not know about hierarchical levels in institutions of higher education, it is necessary that institutions take the responsibility of providing management training for lecturers and managers as this would help them in understanding protocol and improve their management. On the same note, orientation and induction of new staff should be a must after the recruitment process as this helps in
understanding activities and gives a starting point. Mentorship should also form an integral part of management.

2. Have a standard way of promoting lecturers so that they are aware of the requirements and these requirements should be followed so as to reduce discontentment.

3. Equip institutions of higher education with electronic equipment to improve methodology.

4. Investors should be encouraged to construct hostels for leasing to institutions of higher education and admission should not be linked to bed space. Also, individual institutions should attempt to increase boarding facilities.

5. CHE should be more vigilant on the programmes being offered by institutions of higher education and it should inspect facilities that provide higher education to ensure quality assurance. CHE should play a greater role in quality assurance.

6. To solve the problem of communication, institutions should develop a web portal through which all kinds of relevant information can be channeled to staff. The lack of resources for preparation by lecturers can also be dealt with by having a library service in the web portal, this would require that each lecturer should have at least a laptop so that they can make use of the facility conveniently.

7. To benefit from alumni, the institutions should have a database for all students, their progress and there should be a way of following them up after they graduate. In addition, they should be mobilised and motivated to participate in activities.

8. Higher education should be steered towards management by results so that universities should include performance-based funds in budgeting. Budgeting should be based on operational expenditure. The principle underlying management by results is that objectives should be set for institutional activities and the resources needed for their implementation should be determined through negotiations with the university, college management boards which constitute of principals, deans and chairmen/heads of departments. This should be done bi-annually or quarterly so that needs are met efficiently. For effective management by results there should be a steering system which should monitor and evaluate performance periodically.

9. There is need for Institutions of higher education to make use of knowledge-based management practices and corporate governance practices because such practices give direction as to where the institution is coming from and where it should go. Each university should therefore have a vision, mission, core values and a quality statement. These statements should assess relevance and find out if they are achievable. Institutional objectives should be derived from the statements and they should be SMARTER, which means they should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound, Evaluated and Result-based. The objectives should be evaluated continuously and periodically to find out if they are being met, if not then they should be re-evaluated for amendment. Besides, Institutions of higher education should have strategic plans which should be both long and short term, a strategic plan should be realistic and it should deal with strategic issues. For it to be effective, all stakeholders in management and relevant staff. There is need for Institutions of higher education to make use of knowledge based management practices and corporate governance practices should be aware of its requirements so that they own it.

10. All universities should have web-based information services which should include internet provision, a search tool, news feeds, links to relevant websites, content organised by topic, institutional marketing and on-line libraries, staff email, proposed plans and expected time of completion.

11. Institutions of higher education should have databases built on information created in connection with various functions that is decision making, performance agreements,
applications, student selection, funding and expenditure. These data can then be used to develop, monitor, evaluate and steer university activities.
12. Institutionalised and specialised knowledge should be used for better management.
13. Induction training for Heads of Department and deans so that they are better equipped to run departments and faculties.

11 Conclusion
Higher education is vital for economic and social development, therefore these institutions should be managed efficiently and issues facing them should be dealt with promptly in order for them to be able to achieve their goals which will ensure that the country moves progressively towards a guided direction. In order for universities to remain relevant, achieve their missions and to keep up with current trends, they can benefit from knowledge management practices which include making use of the corporate portal concept and management by results.

12 References