24 Challenges of the Management of Higher Learning Institutions

Eric M. Ngumbi
Lecturer in Law, Kenya School of Professional Studies
Attorney and Research Consultant
P.O Box 60550-00200, Nairobi- Kenya
Email: emngumbi@yahoo.com

1 Abstract
Higher education is going through a period of unprecedented change worldwide with institutions of higher learning rapidly expanding and new ones emerging. New trends are fast-growing all in response to the increasing society’s needs and expectations in the developing global market. In this regard, effective management of the higher learning institutions has become one of the most challenging issues facing higher education today. This is because the management is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the institutions and therefore has a direct bearing on the success and development. Failure to sufficiently address the emerging management challenges in higher education has impacted negatively on the growth of our institutions. Consequently, most of our higher learning Institutions have suffered and continue to suffer financial losses, poor academic performance, staff dissatisfaction, loss of students and erosion of public confidence, among others. The upshot is a diluted quality of education, a collapse of institutions and production of half-baked graduates; a direct threat to the attainment of the national development of our country. In view of the above, there is great need to address all these challenges and embrace effective management in order to be productive and prosperous. The institutions need to be administered by creative minds that are capable of offering a variety of effective management styles. The author therefore seeks to examine the main challenges in management of higher learning institutions and present recommendations on the best practices to effectively manage higher learning institutions so as to achieve the institutional objectives as well as Kenya’s Vision 2030.

2 Challenges of the Management of Higher Learning Institutions
Effective management is one of the most challenging issues facing higher learning institutions. Managers over the years suffered severe challenges in the execution of their mandate. These challenges are both internal and external.

3 Internal Challenges

3.1 Financial Hurdles
Higher learning institutions in Kenya largely depend on their revenue from the tuition fees they generate from their students. Such heavy dependence on tuition coupled with lack of alternative income sources have made these institutions expensive and thus not affordable for most Kenyans, in effect, limiting their services to the children of high socio-economic status. This is more particularly in private institutions which do not receive any Government support. The financial challenge has thus remained one of the greatest hurdles in the management of the institutions. Higher education institutions require sufficient financial stability to permit orderly development.

Financial uncertainty and sharp budgetary fluctuations hinder good governance and make rational planning impossible. Adequate funding is required in order to sustain academic programmes and conduct research. Without funding, it is impossible for lecturers to create knowledge. Universities cannot operate without adequate funding and be expected to deliver quality education services. The
importance of higher education as a public good must be matched by adequate public investment to enable institutions to discharge their public responsibilities. University managements have a duty to embrace good management practices to make those universities outstanding world-class institutions but without sufficient funding, such efforts are in vain.

Private higher learning institutions which do not have university charters are disadvantaged in that they do not enjoy the financial privileges which are availed to chartered universities. They cannot get grants and neither can they get government loans. This is a major drawback to their growth and development. The upshot is that these institutions rely wholly on self-funding thereby impacting negatively on their operations. An example is the inability to remunerate their staff in accordance with market rates and poor infrastructural facilities. This hinders their academic growth and generation of knowledge.

3.2 Low Quality and Standards

Universities worldwide are in a fix, caught between severe budget cuts and a flood of students in search of useful degrees. In Kenya, overcrowding, low budgets and staff retention problems have contributed to inefficiency and dwindling academic standards. Distance Education is one of the areas faced with challenges in the monitoring of standards. There is no effective policy governing foreign programmes and co-ordination of distance education. This threatens the quality of the substance offered.

3.3 Low Research and Publication Capacity

Research is one of the core pillars of the university system. Publication of research findings in reputable journals is one of the ways in which these findings are widely disseminated to stakeholders. However, this has sharply dropped in our institutions. Due to heavy teaching responsibilities – brought about by the rising students numbers, plus the need to moonlight so as to make some extra money to supplement the meagre pay, members of the teaching staff are not keen on undertaking meaningful research and publishing their work.

3.4 Enterprise Risk

An enterprise risk is any issue that impacts an institution’s ability to meet its objectives. Enterprise risks have a direct impact on an institution’s achievement of its objectives or mission in the following four areas:

1. **Strategic** – high-level goals that are aligned with and support the institution’s mission.
2. **Operational** – ongoing management process.
3. **Financial** – protection of institution’s assets.
4. **Compliance** – the institution’s adherence to applicable laws and regulations.

Institutions of higher learning do often engage in activities which involve high risks. Without proper Enterprise Risk Management, an institution may pledge itself in irreparable losses. An example could be when the institution is implementing large projects or implementing new programmes such as Distance and E-Learning Programmes and transition from a college to a university, and others. The private sector in higher education is more prone to huge risks than the public sector. Other forms of enterprise risk are such as reputational risk which may be occasioned by poorly remunerated staff and court battles from both internal and external sources, among other factors.

3.5 Inability to Embrace Technology in Learning Programmes

We are in an e-world. ICT has been one of the key factors that has nourished and stimulated the development of the global economy and led to an increased sharing of different cultures. For higher education institutions, ICTs will affect the type of skills that students have when they enter higher education, their expectations of the facilities and learning modes and the type of skills and intellectual attributes that those leaving higher education will need to have if they are to operate successfully in the modern world. However, many institutions are unable to embrace this technology owing to lack of the requisite huge capital and inability to pay skilled manpower. Such institutions have thus lagged behind hence losing prospective students to the developed e-institutions.
4 Human Resources Challenges

The role of the Human Resources Manager is evolving with the change in competitive market environment and the realisation that Human Resources Management must play a more strategic role in the success of an institution. Institutions that do not put their emphasis on attracting and retaining talents may find themselves in dire consequences, as their competitors could easily outplay them in the strategic employment of their human resources. Some of the challenges facing the Human Resource Department in every private institution are discussed below.

4.1 Too High Staff Turn-Over

Sufficient compensation for services offered is the dream of any scholar teaching in an institution. Most higher learning institutions have been unable to retain talented and experienced lecturers for want of sufficient remuneration. This disrupts the academic programmes hence affecting the academic development of the institution. It all culminates into reduced student numbers. Lectures concentrate on looking for greener pastures or multi task by teaching in other institutions at the expense of their core duties at the institution. They always leave for greener pastures whenever the opportunities arise. This has proven to be costly for the institutions that offer training to their staff because they offer the refresher courses only to be used elsewhere. Such institutions are compelled to repeat similar training on annual basis. Sometimes this has the effect of causing migration of students especially where students are attached to particular lecturers. Some students may opt to follow certain lecturers to the institutions they move to. High turnover is also stimulated by poaching which is done by well paying institutions.

4.2 Need to Re-Train Teaching Staff

Staff recruitment is another area which lags behind and impacts negatively on teaching and research. Majority of university teachers have had no initial pedagogical training. Most of our private institutions rely on individuals who have not acquired their highest level of academic training as lecturers. To improve their efficiency and effectiveness in delivering their services, staff, and especially the academic staff, must be trained continually in relevant areas. This has an adverse effect on the school’s finances.

4.3 The Challenges of Workplace Diversity

The dimensions of workplace diversity include, but are not limited to: age, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, sexual orientation, educational background, geographic location, income, marital status, military experience, religious beliefs, parental status, and work experience. Most of the human resources problems in the work diversity could be attributed to ineffective HR management. The future success of any organisation relies on the ability to manage a diverse body of talent that can bring innovative ideas, perspectives and views to their work. The challenges and problems as a result of workplace diversity can be turned into a strategic organisational asset if an organisation is able to capitalise on this melting pot of diverse talents. With the mixture of talents of diverse cultural backgrounds, genders, ages and lifestyles, an organisation can respond to business opportunities more rapidly and creatively.

4.4 Students’ Moral Decay

Management of higher learning institutions is faced with the challenge of securing and maintaining discipline amongst its students. There are emerging social evils such as drug use and abuse, immorality and indecent dress code by our students that have greatly affected performance. Managers find it quite a challenge to instill and maintain discipline owing to the perception of freedom held by the society in relation to services that are heavily paid for. It is widely felt that the hefty fees charged by these institutions is consideration enough for the students to get not only the academic services but also to enjoy adequate freedom while they remain in such institutions. The management has to make a choice whether to set and enforce strict rules of discipline and lose students; or allow the much needed freedom and liberalism at the expense of positive behaviour.
4.5 Failure to Meet International Standards

The ongoing globalisation in higher education will demand that universities and colleges in the world conform to some universally accepted norms, which may include good management practice in the delivery of higher education. This means that universities that do not observe good practices in management will simply not succeed in an increasingly competitive labour market and complex society. Therefore, the university administrators in developing nations need to be trained in the requisite administrative skills that can make universities more globally competitive.

4.6 Poor Leadership and Management Strategies

The existing management styles in some universities are not adaptable to the 21st century higher education system, which is characterised by massive technological expansion and development and cannot therefore propel an institution to the full realisation of its objectives. The poor management of higher education institutions is manifested in several forms such as:

1. Breakdown of communication between heads of institutions, lecturers and other stakeholders.
2. Poor management and misuse of resources thereby denying essential services to students and staff.
3. Failure by most heads of institutions to ensure quality assurance, either because they are not well equipped for that or they do not know that it is part of their responsibilities.

In view of the above, there is a great need for readjustments in order to fit into the new global system.

4.7 Recurring Students’ Poor Performance in Some Programmes

In most cases, students joining private learning institutions are the ones who fall short of the qualifications for joining the Regular Programmes in the public institutions. Their inability to perform in class may water down the institutions’ performance record thereby discouraging other would-be students. This is common where the institution offers programmes examined by external bodies such as KNEC, ILEX, ABE and others. The institution in this case exercises no control over the results. Massive failure can therefore challenge the management in convincing the public of the schools’ academic competence.

5 External Challenges

5.1 Commercialisation of Education and other Unhealthy Competition Practices

Bad and unhealthy business practices are exceedingly being practiced by some institutions to the detriment of others. There are institutions which operate to dilute and negate the value placed on diplomas or other awards issued by private institutions. These are the institutions which do not have policies on standards and quality assurance. Due to the commercial aspect, numerous institutions have thrown standards to the wind and opted to admit students so long as the students are financially sound, their academic competencies notwithstanding. Such institutions have commercialised their diplomas hence causing the erosion of public confidence and employer trust on the awards issued by the private sector generally. A diploma from a public institution is more likely to be considered for a government job than one issued by some private institutions. This is detrimental to the students in standard institutions. This is a serious challenge for the management of an institution that embraces standards since it will have to balance between academic standards and student numbers and survive in the competitive market.

5.2 Public Versus Private Higher Learning Institutions

Public institutions of higher learning have a leading threat to the private sector. Some of them engage in unethical business practices which are tantamount to driving the private sectors out of business. The glaring example is seen in the admission process. These universities no longer mind about academic standards. They have lowered their admission qualifications to grades that are so
low that a student who would at best qualify to join a middle-level college can now easily join the university. This has negated the very object of establishing private institutions. By greatly lowering admission requirements, universities have swept majority of potential students for the private institutions since they can now easily find their way into universities thus leaving the private instructions with little or no catchments area. Commercialisation of higher education by public universities has frustrated the private sector’s efforts to thrive in the industry. Standards have fallen and students can easily buy degrees and diplomas with their money or bodies. Students would thus opt for this leeway.

5.3 **Legal Regulations that Frustrate Advancement or Development of Higher Learning Institutions**

Higher learning institutions more so the private ones are faced with numerous legal hurdles in the establishment and conduct of their business. There are complex legal procedures that these institutions are required to comply with before they qualify for registration and recognition of their awards. This has made it difficult for many of them to kick off and execute their mandate. Outlined here below are the key obstacles.

5.4 **Bureaucratic Procedures in Establishment and Accreditation**

In Kenya, CHE developed the Universities (Establishment of Universities) (Standardisation, Accreditation and Supervision) Rules, 1989), which provide for the establishment and accreditation of universities. Accreditation in Kenya means public acceptance and confirmation evidenced by award of a charter that a university meets and continues to meet the standards of academic excellence set by the commission. For any institutions to be accredited, the commission must be satisfied that the institution concerned has adequate physical, human, library and financial resources, viable relevant academic programmes and sound structure of governance.

Without prejudice to the foregoing, I find these requirements unnecessarily elaborate, complex and unreasonable. They are untenable. They are designed to deny average middle-level institutions an opportunity to grow to universities.

This has become one of the greatest challenges facing higher learning institutions. As a result, middle-level private institutions can only partner with universities to offer their programmes. This is a big blow to the institution’s growth and development that has frustrated the quest by the private sector to contribute to the advancement of higher education in Kenya.

5.5 **Obstacles in the Validation of Programmes**

This applies to post-secondary school institutions that wish to have their academic programmes validated by the Commission in order to ascertain that they have appropriate standards and also for the purposes of collaboration with other institutions or universities for award of degrees in accordance with the Universities Rules, 2004. The process of Validation of Diploma Programmes leading to issuance of Certificate of Validation is a bureaucratic one that has locked out many potential institutions wishing to offer higher education.

5.6 **High Regulatory Charges**

The costs charged for the process are also unreasonably high hence making the process too expensive for prospective private institutions. Consider the third schedule to the Universities Act, the Universities (Establishment of Universities) (Standardisation, Accreditation and Supervision) Rules.
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<td>2. Activities leading to granting of letter of interim authority:</td>
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<td>(a) Evaluation of one academic programme</td>
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<td>(b) Inspection of institution</td>
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<td>(c) Issuance of letter of interim authority</td>
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<td>(c) Inspection of institution</td>
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<td>(d) Award of charter</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Annual subscription fees</td>
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### 5.7 Official Recognition Challenges

Privately-owned institutions are increasingly suffering the problem of official recognition. This occurs where the local universities fail to recognise the institution’s awards, diplomas or certificates for the purpose of credit transfers. Employers are also reluctant to recognise some of these institutions for the purpose of internship, employment or other partnerships. This is a direct threat to the institution’s growth and development owing to the negative impact to the institution’s key clients; the students. This reduces student numbers as students opt to go to institutions which are recognised.

### 5.8 Demise of Middle-Level Colleges in Favour of Universities

Notwithstanding its perceived benefits, the upgrading of middle level colleges to public universities by the Government has adversely affected the higher learning. It has made the industry unfairly competitive since learners prefer the university colleges to the private institutions. This is due to the academic privileges that accompany public institutions such as access to loans and bursaries.

This also gives an easy ride from a college level to a university without being subjected to complex procedures that are applied to private colleges wishing to migrate to universities. This is bias and grossly prejudicial to the private institutions.

### 5.9 Unfavourable Economic Climate

The economic status of a country has a direct bearing on the growth and development of educational institutions. The sorry state of the Kenyan economy has adversely affected the higher learning institutions. This is because like any other agency, the institutions engage in financial dealings including payment of tuition fees by students, procurement, and others. The 2007 post-elections violence experienced in the country, increased oil prices as well as global food crisis have led to a downfall in student enrolment.

### 5.10 Insufficient Government Support to Private Institutions

The Government has done little to facilitate growth of private institutions. Besides imposing exorbitant charges for establishment, standardisation and accreditation, the Government taxes these
institutions heavily notwithstanding that they depend for their revenue on the tuition fees they
generate from their students. Such heavy dependence on tuition coupled with lack of alternative
income sources have made these institutions expensive and thus not affordable to most Kenyans,
in effect, limiting their services to the children of high socio-economic status. HELB, currently the
only institution supporting students with loans, does not support students in middle level colleges.
This has denied many students an opportunity to pursue higher education in the private sector.

5.11 Political Interference
The management of higher learning institutions often suffers political interference. Politicians tend
to perpetuate their personal or political party interests by influencing the university administrators
who usually are political appointees. Sometimes this becomes irresistible on the part of the
administrators. An example is in the recent demonstrations by the University of Nairobi students
protesting against the Government’s extra-judicial killings, corruption and insensitivity when a high
profile politician ordered that the police should not at all interfere with the students’ demo. The
Vice Chancellor later lamented that as much as the students activities were against the university
rules of conduct, he could do nothing about them since they had been sanctioned by politicians; his
appointing authority. Other areas of interference are the university student leaders elections and
admissions.

6 Recommendations
6.1 Organising and Participating in Management Workshops and Conferences
Managers of higher learning institutions should endeavour to participate in refresher courses on
enterprise management and workshops, conferences and seminars on management issues. This
would create a forum where managers from diverse institutions of higher learning have an enabling
environment to discuss their challenges and share the best practices.

6.2 Qualified Personnel in Management
Some institutions are managed by persons with little or no management expertise. This is common
in the private sector where owners of the institutions wrongfully assign themselves the positions of
Managers/ Directors/ Chief Executive Officers, and others. In some other institutions, the principals
double as the Human Resources Managers. This ought to change if our institutional objectives are
to be achieved.

6.3 Utilisation of ICTs in Management
There is need to tap the potential of ICTs to enhance data collection and analysis, and to strengthen
management systems in educational institutions; to improve access to education by remote and
disadvantaged communities; to support initial and continuing professional development of teachers;
and to provide opportunities to communicate across classrooms and cultures. Most universities
in Kenya have very limited access to modern computing and communications technologies, so it
is increasingly difficult for teachers and students to keep abreast of current developments in their
academic areas.

Other issues worthy considered are:
1. **Further training of the teaching staff**: This would equip them with pedagogical skills given
   that most of them are not trained in education.
2. **Policy reforms**: Reforming policies on education and legal regulations of private institutions
to promote their establishment and development. The bureaucratic and complex procedures
provided for in the Universities Act and other pieces of legislations should be relaxed.
3. **Lobby for Government support**: Government support in form of students loans, tax incentives
   and grants would highly promote education in the private sector.
4. **Staff retention incentives**: This would reduce the high staff turnovers which greatly lower
   academic performance.
5. **Effective Management**: The institutions must be managed by persons of high academic standing who have the ability to offer quality leadership that will result in the achievement of institutional objectives.

   a) They must be persons who value knowledge and know how to create it through the efficient use and organisation of academic resources.
   
   b) Management or leadership should promote teamwork, communication among people being led, and instill the idea that people can rely on each other in many different ways, that is, cultivate a sense of participatory management.
   
   c) Management should be the source of inspiration and motivation for both staff and students. The ability to inspire staff has always been an essential tool of management.
   
   d) Management should be seen to safeguard lecturers’ and students’ interests.
   
   e) Management should take a positive stand against issues that may interfere with the university as a safe learning environment.
   
   f) Facilitation of access to international good practices in management through meetings and workshops.
   
   g) Conduct training in institutional management at the system level.
   
   h) Ethnic balancing in decision making process.
   
   i) Adopt management system that promotes national integration based on individual competency rather than ethnic balancing.

6. **Accountability and Transparency**: Creating a transparent, logical and well-understood set of rules for budgeting and accounting so as to have an enormous influence on the operation and performance of our institutions. Rules should encourage flexibility, stability and transparency. In many institutions across the world, bureaucratic rigidity results in inefficiency and waste. Higher education institutions must be accountable to their sponsors, whether public or private.

7. **Enterprise Risk Management (ERM)**: Enterprise risks have a direct impact on an institution’s achievement of its objectives or mission. Institutions should prepare to meet and mitigate the challenges of enterprise risk management in higher education. A workable framework would be as follows:

   a. Event identification – internal and external events that could affect an institution’s ability to achieve its objectives.
   
   
   c. Risk response – how management will respond to the risks an institution faces (for example, mitigate the risk, or share the risk).
   
   d. Control activities – policies and procedures that an institution establishes to ensure that it responds to risks.
   
   e. Information and communication – identification and communication of the right information to the right people.
   
   f. Monitoring – monitoring and taking corrective action as needed.

7. **Conclusion**

Solutions to all these challenges lie in the management. Universities and colleges must embrace good management in order to be productive and surpass their positions in institutional ranking.

Further to the foregoing, university staff needs greater freedom of research, greater professional recognition, a more open society and greater material rewards in terms of good financial remunerations. Institutions should also take it upon themselves to stop and avoid unethical business practices that are prejudicial to the other institutions. If implemented, the recommendations would greatly address the challenges we are facing today and promote the growth and development of our institutions.