

SELF DEVELOPMENT: AN IMPERATIVE FOR BRIDGING THE CRITICAL HUMAN RESOURCE GAPS OF THE 21ST CENTURY UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATOR IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The very huge potentials of the 21st century has no doubt reflected on the way things are done in virtually every spare of human endeavour. This critical redefinition of the rules of engagement has met a lot of institutions in developing countries quite unprepared and therefore unable to respond adequately to the challenges posed by a fast changing world. This paper focuses on the Nigerian university administrator who's role is pivotal to the continued existence and optimum performance of the system. The paper among other findings observe that the conventional training acquired before employment may be grossly inadequate to respond to the core contemporary challenges faced by university administrators in Nigeria. This paper among other recommendations suggest coaching, supportive supervision, and continuous training and development.

INTRODUCTION

“Time and the world do not stand still. Change is the law of Life”(John F. Kennedy)The 21st century and its attendant realities perhaps met the world and particularly the developing world completely unprepared. This is manifest in the fact that a number of our political, economic and social institutions have been overpowered by some critical elements that define and would continue to define this century.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the 21st century is marked by unprecedented speed and drive towards efficiency in almost every facet of human endeavour. This trend has therefore raised the stakes with respect to service delivery expectations. People therefore tend to get absolutely impatient with the same delays and inefficiencies (especially in service) that marked the previous centuries. The truth is that the man who travels in a fast

air plane, fast train, fast car, and eats in a fast food outlet and uses a smart phone may find it difficult to endure and appreciate a slow and inefficient service delivery system. Anyhow we want to look at it. There seem to be a consensus of opinion that service delivery is today unarguably the most enduring yardstick for measuring performance in both public and private organizations (Achimugu, 2013).

A very major challenge with the service delivery dictates of the 21st century, especially in most developing countries like Nigeria is that most of our tertiary institution were not (and are largely still not) strategically prepared and positioned to equip students with the requisite skill and knowledge to tackle and surmount the challenges of the 21st century.

It is this reality that underscores the unrivaled importance of self development as a pragmatic measure as well as a turn - around paradigm for bridging a critical skill and knowledge gap within the society and indeed, the management of organizations in the 21st century. The university which is a major interface between two generations represents a very crucial battle ground. Moreso that there is a tendency for the service delivery expectation of the younger generation to remain unmet, especially if the men and women that man and manage the system are not equipped to handle such expectations.

Similarly, the technological hype of 21st century seem to position the younger generation at a vantage position to beat our old systems, in a number of ways that range from the presentation of fake results for admission to the carrying of self awarded certificates. It is against this backdrop that the theme for this conference, and indeed the topic of this particular lecture could not have been more apt, as it addresses a very core challenge of university administration in the 21st century.

CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

There is a way to do it better – Find it (Thomas Edison)

Development: This is an internally and/or externally driven systematic process. It empowers individuals, communities and institutions to achieve positive change. Leading to sustainable growth, advancement and improved qualities of life (HDg-N,2013).

In all its extreme and likewise restricted usage, development is about positive change. It speaks to a process that emphasizes a positive shift in the way things are done, or a strategic positioning aimed at bringing significant improvement to the way things are done.

Self-Development: Self development refers to a planned, goal oriented learning that both reinforces and expands the depth and breadth of an individual's knowledge, skills and expertise (The US, army).

It is therefore, a systematic process of improving one's self with the aim of harnessing and or fine-tuning latent potentials in order to bring about positive change and enhance individual capacity to meet up with the contemporary challenges and demands of the roles and responsibilities of their immediate environment.

THE INDISPENSABILITY OF ADMINISTRATORS IN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Those who drink water must remember those who dug the well – Anonymous

The centrality of administration in every human endeavour cannot be overemphasized, as administration has over many centuries of human engagements, remained pivotal to the realization of set goals and objectives. The university represents a mosaic of many interfaces making it a complex organization with huge goals/objectives, broken into a plethora of challenging duties and responsibilities. The duty of galvanizing and harmonizing this rather complex interface in a bid to meet up with set objectives lies primarily on the administrative arm. It is therefore safe to state that a university without the administrative arm is like a vehicle with a healthy engine but without wheels. From admission, registration, to matriculation, then to convocation, and likewise employment, promotion, Discipline to retirement, the university administrator cannot be ignored because these duties almost entirely rest on their vital inputs.

Imagine the admission and registration process, the handling of staff concerns like employment, promotion, housing, and retirement as well as the administration of meetings, committees and the like, without the university administrator. The system will most definitely run aground. It therefore follows that the Nigerian university administrator is an indispensable part of university governance, in all its ramifications.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL IMPERATIVES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA

“A change is brought about when ordinary people do extra ordinary things” (Barack Obama) One obvious reality that stares us all in the eyes, in the 21st century is that the rules of engagement in almost every facet of life have significantly changed and the university system with its large youth population and complex administrative duties is at the center of these paradigm shifts.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are therefore left to wonder how we can remain analog in a digital world. It is therefore imperative for the university administrator to pick up hands-on (Practical)skills in other to match up with reality of the times we live in.

Computing Skills e-mail, Microsoft office, power points e.t.c

Official Communication Skills

In the 21st century, the administrator should not only know what to say, but must also know how to say what she or he wants to say. A serious message could be lost, misunderstood, and even cause chaos courtesy of poor communication skills.

- Memo writing
- Good report writing
- Courtesy

Self Packaging

- Good grammar
- Cooperate dressing
- Good offices
- Complimentary cards e.t.c.
- It is important to note that a lot of what constitutes areas for self – development, lays outside the proper sphere of what a university can impart. It therefore requires much more than a certification.

Broadening Your Knowledge Horizon

In many ways, knowledge rules the world because you are what you know. It is therefore important for university administrator to improve their knowledge base by acquiring higher degrees in areas relevant to the work they do.

OBSTACLES TO SELF DEVELOPMENT

*“You can never cross the ocean unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore”
(Christopher Columbus).*

Work Schedule

The official schedule of most university administrators is so tight and overwhelming that the tendency is to get buried in the schedule that you think of no possible way of enhancing your knowledge and skills.

Huge Economic/Social Demand

The average Nigerian worker has huge family responsibilities to tackle, amidst slim resources. This fix, makes self development almost impossible. Moreso that most effort at self development could be both time and money consuming. It is however, important to note that the price of not developing yourself is heavier than what it cost to invest in self development.

The Perceived Entitlement Syndrome

A whole lot of times, and especially in developing countries employees seem to be predisposed to shifting the sole responsibility for self development on their employers and in the event these employers are not forthcoming, they remain the same way, year-in-year out. It may however be important to stress here that, no employer takes the sole responsibility for the lack of skills, knowledge and needed expertise of an employee. The deficit, insults and bad image will always be yours, hence the need to be proactive.

Poor Knowledge Based On Available Avenues for Self Developments.

The university is such a closed system that its interaction with external elements may be weak to know and to take advantage of the many opportunities available out-side the university community.

Apathy

Most university administrators are not adventurous enough to explore and learn skills outside the routine of their jobs and so even when opportunities come they fail to cease such opportunities

SELF DEVELOPMENT AND THE 21ST CENTURY UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATOR – PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATORS

“Oranges hold their juice until they are squeezed” (Anyebe, 2014)

*Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap but by the seeds that you plant
(Robert L. Stevenson)*

Coaching and Mentoring

This is an internal and cost – effective mechanism for self development. Here, a superior is given the opportunity of passing practical skills to a subordinate (coaching) or a subordinate identifies an exceptional superior who may be not even be in his/her department and decide to take him/her as a mentor and role model.

Short courses/Training

A lot of short courses/training exist in areas like public speaking, report writing, administrative gist, practical, etc. university administrators should take advantage.

Taking (not just accepting), and giving responsibility – **the tale of two Master- Drivers.**

It is important for younger administrator to take on some responsibilities. (Instead of shying away from them) so that they can learn. On the flipside however superior officer should feel free to share knowledge with subordinates and believe in them to assign some responsibilities. This would serve as a means for building the capacity of subordinate.

Using The Internet

The internet is a whole world of opportunities that could be harnessed for the purpose of self development

Adequately funding training and skill development of university administrators

Our universities must urgently realize that the development of the administrative arm is today (in the 21st century) no more optional.

Never forget that

“...tomorrow belongs to those whoprepare for it today” (Malcolun X)

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