



Perceptions of Staff towards Utilisation of Resources Mobilised by Universities

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Abstract: This study sought to examine the perceptions of university staff towards the utilisation of resources that they receive from various sources. Overcoming bureaucratic barriers is key to entrepreneurship. Universities with fewer barriers or hierarchies find it easier to undertake entrepreneurial activities and speed up idea creation and decision making. New centres and structures for the development of new activities can be formed easily. The institution should maximise autonomy and individual ownership of initiatives. Building an entrepreneurial culture within the staff body is essential for universities to increase and improve the quality of entrepreneurial activities. Encouraging and rewarding entrepreneurial behaviour in all staff reinforces the commitment to developing as an entrepreneurial university. To score highly, universities should have incentive and reward systems for those staff members that actively support entrepreneurship and business creation activities these systems should be available at an individual level as well as for faculties / departments.

Keywords: Staff, perceptions, utilisation, resources, mobilised

1. INTRODUCTION

Most universities mobile resources from students and other sources for use in their normal operations. However, the tendency is that after raising those resources, the staff, especially academic members are involved in their use. An important but often under-exploited resource for the universities is the collaboration with the external environment and its stakeholders. This includes partnerships with communities, local organisations, local government chambers of commerce and alumni. Collaborating with external stakeholders can provide new relationships and be an important source of expertise and experience that can be used in entrepreneurship education and support services (Atkinson-Grodjean, 2002). To score highly, universities should collaborate and maintain regular contact with external stakeholders, have up to date information on their location and activities, and have activities that integrate their experience and expertise into entrepreneurship education and start-up support services. Universities that value entrepreneurial learning commit to regular review, validation and updating of entrepreneurial course content. To score highly, there should be mechanisms to entrepreneurship (knowledge, skills and competence) in all degree programmes (Johnstone, 2004). The learning outcomes should be validated at the institutional level through appropriate mechanisms (internal or external moderation for example) and given due recognition in courses. Students should have a clear understanding of the learning outcomes achieved. To stay up-to-date and relevant, the entrepreneurship education needs should be continuously reviewed and updated. One important aspect of this is to integrate the results of current entrepreneurship research into teaching. To score highly, universities should encourage staff and educators to keep the curriculum up-to-date with recent research findings and encourage the internal exchange of knowledge.

Once staff and students understand the benefits of developing an entrepreneurial mindset and of becoming entrepreneurial, the university should provide opportunities to experience entrepreneurship. This involves exposing staff and students to environments in which they are more likely to encounter challenges which can encourage the development of entrepreneurial skills. This may include staff

training, entrepreneurs in residence who teach and engage with staff and students, access to real life problems, as well as awards and other means of recognition. Education activities should be integrated with enterprise-related activities to ensure entrepreneurs are adequately prepared for creating start-ups through their education and that they have the support to put what they have learned into.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

University academics play a very critical role in the development of any university. However, many a time, they are not adequately involved in the utilisation of resources for the benefit of the universities. It is crucial for universities to allocate resources for the research aspect of the academics so that they can contribute to new knowledge and increase the visibility of their universities. The specific question this study sought to address is: What are the perceptions of staff towards utilisation of resources mobilised by universities?

2.1. Research Question

To what extent are university staff members involved in the utilisation of resources

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative methodology and made use of a case study research design. This methodology was chosen because qualitative research methods of collecting data such as an interview would give the respondents an opportunity to voice out their own views on the subject of their involvement on the utilisation of resources without being restricted by the pre-stated formulations based on the researchers own frames of references often guided by theory studied by the latter (Kumar, 2008). The sample consisted of participants from both private and public universities. Customary to the qualitative ethnographic research paradigm, the primary researcher himself was the instrument of data collection (Bailey, 2013). The researcher employed the interview for data collection. The researcher used a semi structured interview guide. The interview chosen as Cohen and Manion (2011) observe, because it allows detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions and opinions. Ambiguities can be clarified and incomplete answers followed and respondents own words are recorded (Anderson, 2011). The use of a small sample is common in qualitative research, where the aim is depth and not breadth.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Efficient Utilisation of Resources

Whereas those at the epicentre of university financial operations like finance directors, deans, finance managers and buyers indicated that their universities were not inappropriately using the resources, particularly financial resources, those at the periphery had other ideas. Those who indicated that the universities were not inefficiently using their resources argued that the universities were always receiving inadequate funds. They argued that capacitation of universities (in terms of providing adequate funding) should come first, before we talk of measuring efficient or inefficient use of those funds. One of the participants had this to say about this phenomenon:

For those at the periphery of the budget processes, there is understandably a perception that the university has a lot of money which is not being properly utilised. You only need to be in the finance department to understand the perilous juggling that takes place on a daily basis to keep the institution afloat (P18).

P17 who concurs with the above sentiment stated that:

Before I joined the finance unit coming from another unit within the same university, I had the feeling that the funds were not properly accounted for. Now that I am in the nucleus of financial matters, I realise the profound challenges that the university experiences in balancing its various competing strategic needs. It is, therefore, not accurate to suggest that resources are not being properly utilised (P17).

The sentiments above were expressed by participants who are directly involved in the receipt and distribution of the finances that come to the universities. It is therefore, understandable that they appear to be on the defensive, because to them, this might seem like a direct attack on their performance.

The observations by the participants who stated that universities are already underfunded and need more resources from the state to function efficiently are congruent with findings by William (2009) who posits that:

Funding levels in most Southern African universities have remained relatively low over the previous ten-year period and there was little evidence of the situation improving very soon. This has led to overcrowding in lecture rooms, limited student-access to computers and basic equipment, deterioration of buildings and less support for research.

The participants who felt that their universities were not efficiently utilising their resources gave a number of reasons for their standpoint. All the other periphery respondents in the study expressed their displeasure at the way how their universities were utilising their financial and other resources. The respondents and participants indicated that funds were not efficiently utilised at macro-level of the university since at their level they were receiving very little or nothing at all as the budgets that they crafted at the beginning of each year were never considered. One participant had this to say:

There is a lot of wastage at top management level. Although I am not privy as to how the university utilises its budget, all I know is that the government pays our salaries; as for student fees, which run into millions per semester, as a department we see nothing of those funds (P12).

Respondents highlighted a number of activities they thought were indicative of inefficient use of resources. These include unnecessary travel by principal officers, creation of overlapping posts, too many projects running simultaneously, acquisition of expensive vehicles for personal and not organization's benefit, and expensive international travel, among others. According to the respondents and participants, these activities or acquisitions were not core to the existence of a university, and thus leaving some major activities without resources.

For example, one participant stated that:

The board and committee system is a huge drain to the system. When the committee convenes a meeting (and by the way, these meetings are not very few), there is a lot of expenditure that is involved (P1).

It is also interesting to note that when it came to the question of which activities were viewed as an unnecessary drain to the university, those who had disputed the inefficient use of funds by their universities, appeared to agree that there were quite a number of these. As an example, some of the participants in this category had this to say:

Foreign business travel drains huge resources from the meagre finances of the university and yet its contribution to the university was not readily visible (P2).

Researchers tended to concentrate on desktop researches as opposed to applied research which does not do much for the university other than wasting money (P8).

The need for universities to use their resources (particularly, the financial resources) prudently, is corroborated by Mayanja (2001) who argues that:

State universities' authorities should tread carefully when it comes to the use of their meagre financial resources from public coffers. There are so many people out there, who think money spent on universities is an unnecessary drain to the fiscus. What with the restless and large numbers of the unemployed graduates? Rather, these enemies of universities' funding argue that the money should be channeled towards productive sectors of the economy that will create employment to absorb the already graduated students.

It is prudent therefore that universities use their funds efficiently to avoid providing ammunition to those who wish to see allocations to universities fundamentally reduced.

5. CONCLUSION

The evidence from this study regarding this phenomenon reveals that there was a dichotomy between the perceptions of those respondents and participants at the epicentre of university financial operations and those at the periphery. Finance directors, finance managers, deans and buyers maintained the argument that universities were receiving very little funds to meet their requirements and could therefore, not afford to use them inappropriately. On the other hand, all the other peripheral

respondents and participants expressed their displeasure in the way how their universities were utilising their financial resources. They stated that funds were being inefficiently utilised at macro-levels of the universities, since at their levels, they were receiving very little or nothing at all. Evidence provided to support the inefficient use of funds, included unnecessary international travels, acquisition of expensive luxury cars yet core businesses of the institutions were struggling to get transport; and creation of many non-core posts to accommodate relatives of some senior personnel within the university.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that universities should use their funds efficiently to avoid providing ammunition to those who wish to see allocations to universities fundamentally reduced. Universities should ensure that university funds are expended on university activities in an efficient, economical and appropriate manner to enable the optimum effectiveness of scarce resources in the achievement of the university's strategic objectives and priorities. The universities should ensure that all staff are aware of the university policies and guidelines in relation to expenditure of university funds. They should ensure that all expenditure documentation is accurate, complete and promptly processed. The universities authorities should involve honestly, all key personnel in the utilisation of available resources to ensure understanding and input into the operation of the university's annual budget processes relating to income budgets. The universities should also establish adequate controls over assets and capital expenditure to ensure the physical safety of assets and the relevant, accurate and timely recognition in the financial management systems. Universities should also maintain a financial framework that enables the external and internal review of accountability and performance by independent auditors, ensuring the establishment and operation of suitable controls and the accountability of monies. Universities should develop, maintain and adhere to policies, procedures, and guidelines in a manner that ensures the reliability and accuracy of financial management information, thereby ensuring that financial management and administrative obligations of the university are satisfied. Universities need some structural changes to their governance and administrative structures to align themselves with the guidelines of entrepreneurial universities and utilise resources more efficiently.

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