Knowledge and Learning Management: Challenges to University Chief Executives

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Abstract

The mission of University Education in Nigeria is to produce highly motivated and skilled graduate teachers and public service for the basic education system. Knowledge and learning management has been identified as a pre-requisite for establishment and maintenance of a learning organization like the universities. However, the Vice-Chancellors as knowledge managers, are faced with lots of challenges and tasks occasioned by the emergence of new knowledge and how to manage them. Among, the challenges identified include resistance to change including new knowledge from ICT, low level of institutional connectivity and inadequate resources and facilities. Strategies identified for improvement include: empowering Vice-Chancellor through retraining in managerial skills, attracting and retraining top talents and deploying them to enable the institutions benefit from their knowledge as well as encouraging institution independence and provisions of needed facilities.

Introduction

The quality of the output in our educational institutions is largely a function of the school administrator whose role and responsibility is to plan, control, supervise, co-ordinate as well as translate policies into realizable outputs (Ukwaji and Eteng, 2017). The Vice-Chancellors who are chief administrators in University Education, play considerable roles in the process of decision making and control over human, financial and material resources for the goals of teacher education to be achieved. This makes them very crucial in the business of managing knowledge and learning. Enyi (2010) define an administrator as individual who directs the affairs of an organization in such a way as to achieve its primary goals and objectives and who gets things done quickly and effectively.

The university administrator who is the chief executive identifies the vision, mission and strategies and objectives of the school in advance, and provides means of accomplishing them. The education managers need to acquire some of managerial skills (either formally or informally) which Babalola (2016) notes would enable them to deal with various administrative challenges. One of these challenges is related to knowledge and learning management. The school executive should realize that in this capacity as a leader, knowledge and learning has become part and parcel of his leadership. Nkan (2010) acknowledged that knowledge management presents unique leadership challenges. The chief executive must assume the role of promoting knowledge and learning throughout the school, and must also set the tone of the school, demonstrate that knowledge and its management.

However, personal experiences and interactions with University Education administrator (VC) reveal that they face a lot of challenges, in the course of managing knowledge and learning. This forms of focus militating against Vice-Chancellors effective management of knowledge and learning and preferred solutions as a means of enhancing the quality of knowledge generation and learning in their institutions.

Administrative Roles of University Education Administrators in Knowledge and Learning Management

Vice-Chancellors are education administrators and in this capacity, they perform key leadership functions. They work in conjunction with the Deans of schools, Heads of Department and Co-ordinators of units and other external stakeholders in education. The education administrator according to Ukwaji and Eteng (2017) is a chief executive who creates, maintains, stimulates, and unifies the human and material resources within an educational system towards the achievement of the set goals of the system. These goals often boarder on effective teaching and learning.

As leader, education administrators are idea brokers that enable exchange of ideas to benefit the organization. This exchange of ideas according to Trompenaar and Hampden Turner (2014) is part of meaning and involves the ability to procure new knowledge and integrate them into the framework of the organization. For a leader to be effectively lead an organization, Gravin (2013) posited that the leader must be well grounded in knowledge management.

The school administrator or leader must exhibit transformatory leadership traits in order to manage knowledge and learning effectively. Transformatory leadership is that which creates valuable and positive change in the leader (Iheonu and Ugochi 2010). In addition, the leader in this bracket seeks for new working ways, he tries to identify new opportunities vis-a-vis traits and tries to get out of the statusquo and reshape the learning environment in order to take his people to the next level. It is when an educational administrator has the above pre-dispositions, traits and enabling environment that he will be able to harness the potentials in his subordinates and then plan, organize, execute and manage learning and knowledge that will enable him to achieve the pre-determined institutional goals.

Concept of Knowledge and Learning Management

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English,Wells (2015) defined learning as knowledge gained through reading and studying. It further refers to knowledge as the information, skills and understanding that one has gained through learning and experience. Edwards (2017), in a related dimension, defined knowledge management to mean the processes by which organizations convert raw information, widely available to everyone into relevant knowledge and use this knowledge to achieve their own goals.

Knowledge management is an important leadership skill because according to Northhouse (2004) knowledge is in extricably related to the application and implementation of problem solving skills in organization. Harding et al (2009) as further noted that knowledge impacts a leader's ability to determine complex organizational problems and develop solutions. Knowledge refers to the accumulation of information and mental structures used to organize that information. This type of mental structure is

called a schema-simply put a mental diagram used to assimilate information into usable knowledge. Once a leader formulate information into knowledge, individuals are more inclined to follow, based on the leader's expertise. Knowledge management according to Wikipedia, available on www.wikipedia.com comprises a range of strategies and practices used in an organization to identify, create, represent, distribute and facilitate adoption of insights and experiences. Such insights and experiences comprise knowledge which are either embodied in individuals or embodied in organizational processes or practices. Knowledge and learning management have become part and parcel of administrator's roles. The following are the characteristics of effective chief executive officers that support their learning and management.

1. They have a desire to learn. They integrate learning in all that they do and try to pull knowledge from every situation.
2. They have an open and curious mind. They seek out people who think they do and try to pull knowledge from every situation.
3. They show humility. They are willing and eager to learn from their mistakes.
4. They make learning public. This is because they realize the importance of feedback. (Bolt and Brassard, 2015).Knowledge management efforts typically focus on organizational objectives such as improved performance when the school administrator through his effective leader elicits and draws upon the myriads of experiences, wisdom, understanding and knowledge inherent in the workforce in synergistic fashion, creating shared vision.The organization according to Hovland (2012), is like a space shuttle ready for launch.

From the above, it can be seen that knowledge and learning are interwoven and interrelated because one has the attribute of the other. In this paper, the two concepts knowledge management and learning management will be used interchangeably.

Challenges of Knowledge and Learning Management in University Education to Educational Administrators

Vice-Chancellors belong to the higher school administrators. They have the responsibility of managing the teacher training institutions under their control. In addition, to being the chief accounting officers, they manage the staff, students, instructional programmes and finance of the schools, among other responsibilities. If they perform these functions creditably well, they could be said to have achieved administrative efficiency. However, they face some challenges in the face of managing learning and knowledge in their institutions.

This challenges are highlighted in sub-sequent paragraphs.

1. Managing Knowledge from ICT

Technology explosion and abundance of information availability are expected to create better leaders and administrators in higher institutions because of their accessibility to massive information. Wallington (2012) pointed out however that retraining of the leaders from yesterday has become a key management in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In education sector, ICT remains the key factor that blends both teaching and learning. ICT according to World Bank (2014) holds out the actions that chart the course of the new direction. One of the challenges confronting the application of ICT in teaching and learning in virtually all our educational institutions

including universities according to Yusuf (2015), related to inadequate ICT facilities as well as incompetent staff.

2. Change Resistance

One of the task areas in educational management as identified by Babalola (2016) is change management. Educational changes are problematic. This, according to West Burnham (2013), is due to the nature of the knowledge skills and attitude of those involved in educational change and the way that these are expressed into action. Education managers encounters various types of challenges, arising from innovations transformations and changes, occasioned by new knowledge. A worrisome dimension is the situation where the administrators themselves are even resistant to change or reluctant to adopt innovative strategies in management. Part of the reasons according to Babaloa (2016) is their inability to decide on the best course of action to handle the change. Added to this, is the fact that some staff are likely to resist change and may still want to cling to the traditional teaching and learning methods. This will no doubt affect acquiring new knowledge that will help system to make progress.

3. Lack of Knowledge Sharing and Low of Institutional Interdependence

Knowledge management efforts typically focus on organizational objectives such as improved performance. In the school system, there is the need for collaborative effort for both knowledge creation and transfer. Individuals can explicitly encode their knowledge into a database, as well as retrieve knowledge they need that other individuals have provided in their own database (from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). This is known as codification approach to knowledge management. Another strategy to KM involves individuals making requests of experts associated with a particular subject on an ad hoc basis. Experts and individuals can provide their insights to the particular person or people needing this (Snowden, 2010). This is also commonly called or known as personalization. In each of these strategies, the essence is to improve on the performance of lectures so that students' performance can be enhanced. What has compounded the sharing of knowledge with outside institutions is the low level of institutional interdependence. Schools are not connected to one another and this posses a problem to knowledge sharing and knowledge management.

4. Inadequate Resources and Facilities

One potent index for evaluating educational standards and quality in any educational endeavour is an examination of the facilities for learning. In support of the above statement, Garvin (2013) noted that the quality of education that our students receive bear direct relevance to the availability of infrastructural facilities and overall atmosphere in which learning take place. Many universities lack the organizational capacity to manage knowledge effectively due to lack of facilities, trained personnel as well as inadequate fund to meet cost of information access. Enyi (2010) reports a high degree of dilapidation and absence of physical facilities, laboratories, workshops and libraries in most universities as a result of inadequate resources such as funds, manpower etc. This situation places considerable limitations to organizational learning and management.

5. Political Influence

Political interest may sometimes provide obstacles to knowledge and learning management. This is possible where innovation, arising from knowledge development, is not on government's "priority list" or where such innovations are perceived as undermining authority structures. In such situations, Educational Administrators are handicapped in implementing any innovation, because government's assistance will not be given.

6. Unstable Learning Environment

Only few universities have predictable academic calendars. Many university administrators face the challenges of unpredictable industrial actions by either staff or students. Last year 2017, national universities declared an indefinite national strike over government's non-implementation of an agreed salary package (Enyi, 2010). The challenges posed by above circumstances on knowledge management, are enormous. Apart from disrupting university academic calendars, staff are hardly motivated to involve in knowledge creation and utilization.

Suggestions

Due to the wealth of information, the knowledge explosion and the rapid development of information and communication, it is essential to handle complex information and knowledge intelligently and responsibly. The following are suggested as ways for improving knowledge and learning management by university administrators.

- Schools and leaders must attract and retain top talents and deploy them for greatest returns. In this way, the institution will benefit maximally from their knowledge.
- There should be orientation and workshops organized to enable older lecturers share ideas with the newly recruited ones.
- Schools should be networked to facilitate collaborative technology and promote knowledge sharing among institutions.
- On ICT challenges, administrators should help staff to view information as an integral part of all organizational processes and should emphasis taking advantage of the opportunities provided by ICT. It is through information that people develop new knowledge (Marchand, 2013).
- Administrators should have clear vision of the type of knowledge to be developed within their institutions and also direct staff to develop that type of knowledge.
- As regards unstable learning environments, arising from staff and students' conflicts, administrators require knowledge of higher level negotiation, involving knowledge of channels through which organizational conflicts can be checked. If leaders have accurate knowledge of their staff and students, they have a good chance of predicting their actions. Mechanism should be put in place to manage changes that may occur through new knowledge. This could be done through seminars and workshops.
- To minimize political influence on knowledge utilization, administrators should work in close harmony with government to identify common areas of greatest interest. Above all, administrators should have the intellectual capacity to influence political thinking.
- University Vice-Chancellors should be constantly empowered to upgrade their managerial skills through retrainingprogrammes.

- There should be no options or alternative to the provision of adequate infrastructure in universities as a condition for having sustainable knowledge and learning in institutions.

Conclusion

This paper identified and discussed the practical issues that confront University Education administrators in the task of knowledge and learning management. Evidences suggest that unless these pot-holes are removed or reduced, the capacity of training institutions to generate, acquire, assimilate and utilize knowledge will continue to remain in a mirage. Consequently, some key strategies related to information networking personnel development, adequate organizational infrastructure, institutional interdependence and knowledge sharing, among others were identified as crucial in addressing the contentious issues in the university.

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