



Transformational Institutional Leadership in Higher Agricultural Education



Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) play a key role in shaping the present and the future; transforming minds and processes, and nurturing talent. Hence the quality and direction of leadership in these higher educational institutions is of paramount importance. Transformational leadership is a value-based approach where a leader is expected to be visionary, an inspiration, a role model, and an intellectual stimulant. This kind of leadership, which goes back to 1978 when it was framed, places a lot of value on individualized consideration. Given the diversity of staff (academic and non-academic), transformational leadership in Higher Education Institutions requires good chemistry in order to achieve successful operational and strategic results.

Transformational leadership has to be supported by various institutional policies which should guide staff in their various offices and positions. For example, having in place and spear heading the teaching and learning policy, sexual harassment policy, Quality Assurance framework, communication policy and consultancy policy, among others, are some of the key attributes.

There is no leadership without willing followers. Willing followers are those who have embraced and bought into the vision of the institution and the leader. If we as Vice Chancellors take the path of leadership without followers, our term in office will have just been a walk alone.

Strategic partnerships

A leader needs to be a problem solver, with networks in Government, in Industry, with Alumni and internationally which when brought to bear, help to resolve the challenges the institution is faced with while building the synergies that the University requires. *This is where partnerships are important.* As a University (University of Zambia), we have a dedicated strategic direction on fostering community outreach and beneficial partnerships and have created over 300 strategic partners who in



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the case of the School of Agricultural Sciences include both the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries and indeed many other agro companies.

Organizational politics

For the public universities, we face political influence in University Governance. But I believe from a leadership perspective that we will successfully deal with this challenge by starting from having an Institutional vision which must be shared with internal and external stakeholders. The vision must include how the people aspects will be addressed knowing fully well that the success of the vision depends on human capital implementing the different strategic initiatives in the university. This vision must also include how the University will build research capacity and foster partnerships, address knowledge generation challenges and foster skills development.

Another way to go navigate the political landscape is to institutionalize everything we do in the University. We need to have strong systems in place to the extent that even when you have a person with average leadership skills in the University, they can manage in the face of strong systems.

Apart from strong systems, we need to have well established shared work culture practices in the institutions.

Skills development and employability

The biggest contention between Universities and industry is that graduates who come out of universities are not able to fit into the job market. The University of Zambia is alive to this challenge and is actively implementing initiatives to address this gap. One intervention we have put in place is the development of demand driven programs. Further, we now have a rigorous process for program accreditation with the Higher Education Authority and with relevant professional bodies.

From the perspective of agricultural training, we have a partnership for hands-on one year practical advanced agricultural training using Israeli technologically supported agricultural models. Most of the students who have come out of this program have emerged with a change in attitude and mindset about agriculture. We also have very strong partners in China led by Jilin Agricultural University who are anchoring our collaboration around the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre (ATDC) in Zambia.

Therefore, our working with employers must be consistent from year to year if we are to achieve skills development. I would also like to suggest that our pedagogy should move towards one third theory and two thirds practical.

On the question of employability of our graduates, the University of Zambia has started working with Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) to develop an *Employability Framework*. We have recognized that there are skills that employers are looking for in our graduates apart from the technical skills we render in the classroom such as critical thinking, communication skills, innovation and



entrepreneurship skills. Apart from the *Employability Framework*, we are also developing an *Employability Policy*. This is in response to the need to show the place of industry and the place of academia which must be followed through religiously to deal with skills development for youths and their future employability.

Conclusion

Transformational leadership is about driving a compelling vision. A leader must be a good role model and must be able to take the people on the journey to achieve the vision. A transformational leader must be able to adapt to the needs of the situation. The most enduring attribute of the leader is the character. We need to develop leaders of integrity in our student training programs and in our workplace. Therefore, we need to transform ourselves as current leaders into transformational leaders. Finally, we have a greater and enduring responsibility to provide value-based education.

About the Author

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