STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING CULTURE OF REFORMS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian universities like other public service organizations have been facing problems since the economic depression of the 1980s. Over the years there have been a lot of concerns and worries on how universities can be revitalized to bring back the lost glory. Several measures of reforms were introduced into the university system. But as in other re/arm programs in the public sectors across Nigeria and Africa, the reform programs implemented, did not bring sustainable results. The conditions of ailing organizations are not better than before the reform programs started even among the World Bank's inspired reforms.

If reforms are to be effective and sustainable in universities, experts have suggested the use of cultural reformation by developing cultures that support, encourage and reward innovations and change.

Therefore this paper is based on the premise that, achieving excellence in universities depends on development of organizational and operating culture that favors changes and innovations. First, it-provided a generalized conceptual framework of reforms issues in public organizations. Second, it explores (he relationship between organizational culture and the management of change. Third, it provides broad outlines of a comprehensive reform strategy, centered on changing university cultures.

INTRODUCTION

When Nigeria became a sovereign nation in 1960, the first priority was to develop an educational system that would train cadre of Nigerians capable of taking over the reins of the rapidly growing economy. The basic structure of higher education was developed in 1960s and was closely modeled on the English system.

Within a short period many Nigerians were educated to take over the economy of the country. In fact by the 1980s, the universities were producing a lot of graduates, in the humanities and the social sciences, to be absorbed by the civil service.

In the last few decades universities in Nigeria are experiencing chaos due to the economic downturn which affected many other sectors of the economy. The student body had grown many times. At the same time, the physical facilities, staff, and budget had remained somehow static. Scholarships were cut; dormitories, dining halls, and classrooms became overcrowded.

Academically, the university also began to slide. Budgets for libraries and laboratories are not enough. Professors could not cope with the growing number of students. With so many strikes, the number of hours in class dropped drastically and course work was truncated. Even in government circles there is an implicit recognition that academic standards and productivity have fallen drastically. The contents of course work and the degree requirements no longer meet generally accepted international standards. For quite some times this has been the condition of Nigerian universities, just like most public services agencies in the country. This made Nigerian

universities to provide services with very limited resources and de-motivated staff. The output of the services provided is left for individual to guess.

However the gloomy picture of Nigerian universities is not much different from other public sector agencies operating in the country, as in other developing world. The government is not unaware of the difficult situations under which public agencies operate. In most instances the international community is also very much aware about the conditions of the public institutions. In the midst of all this tumult, the government of Nigeria began to move toward badly needed changes in education. Usually adopting fire brigade approach to reform measures which come after prolong strike by the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities.

In some instances the government is inspired to undertake reform measures by donor agencies or the World Bank.

So far many developing countries acting either solo or in conjunction with the international agencies have since the 1980s, experimented with various strategies for reforming universities and other moribund public organizations. The reform programs are aimed at effecting changes in the public sector organizations, to make them better in line with the realities of the moment.

This paper is developed based on the basic premise that the performance of organization and any changes to be introduced is influenced by the culture within the organization. Therefore, any efforts to reform inefficient organizations that do not include deliberate strategies for changing organizational culture are bound to fail (Schein, 1992; 1999). The paper provides broad outlines of a comprehensive reform strategy, centered on changing organizational cultures and how it can be used to the management of change in universities. Specifically, it brings the concept of organizational culture, which has been used successfully among private organizations and has recently found widespread application in the public sector in many developed countries.

Concerns and Worries

Reform is described as a plan, program, or movement which attempts to bring a systematic change in the way things are done in organization. In Nigeria, the declining quality of education since the 1980s has called for measures to boost education at all levels.

However the ways in which reforms are introduced in universities and other public service agencies in Nigeria and other developing countries has left much to be desired. A recent evaluation of the World Bank's support for public sector reform found that only about one-third

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of the Bank's projects had satisfactory outcomes. And even when satisfactory outcomes were achieved, it appeared unlikely in most cases that they would be sustained, Schacter (2000).

Schacter (2000) reported that a major factor contributing to the failure of most reforms in the developing world has been the "technocratic" approach adopted for the reform programs. This approach treats reform programs as an "engineering" problem. A phenomenon to be addressed through "blueprint" or "textbook" solutions; where reform problems and their solutions are fully specified in advance, with projects clearly defined at the outset and implemented on a predictable timetable, over a fixed period, featuring quantitative targets for payroll and workforce reductions, redrawing of organizational charts, rewriting of job descriptions, training courses for public servants, installation of new systems for human resource and public-financial management, etc.

This technocratic approach overlooked the fact that public service reform programs, though it has important technical aspects, is a social and political phenomenon driven by human behavior and local circumstances. It is a long and difficult process that requires employee to change, fundamentally, the way they regard their jobs, their mission and their interaction with all stakeholders of their organization.

This technocratic measures has underplayed the degree to which progress in reform depends upon thorough "culture change" in organizations. To introduce reform measures successfully, it has been suggested that organizations should adopt a culture that favor innovations and change, including the deeper underlying assumptions of values. This entails a good understanding of the nature of the culture, an assessment of the culture, dealing with the multiple subcultures, understanding the different cultural forms, and using those forms to facilitate change, where necessary (Rainey, 1996a: 159). Accordingly, designing effective reforms requires an understanding of the organizational culture — how it is created, sustained, changed and transmitted.

Therefore for effective reform leading to change and productivity in universities, it is worthwhile to inculcate a culture of reforms so that changes and innovations becomes part of the organizational values and work ethics among employees. When culture of accepting reforms becomes the norm in universities, changes would be suggested, carefully measured, introduced and implemented by employees on a continuous basis. When this happens, organizational problems are nip in the bud before they go out of hand. When organizational problems go out of

hand, it attracts the attention of outsiders, and at that point the problem may require heavy capital outlay and major expenditure before it get fixed.

Conceptual framework

Public Sector Reforms in Africa: A Background

Reform measure is undertaken in order to put the workings of organizations in the right track. It is a process of trying to strengthen public service agencies so that it accomplishes the objectives for which it is set to do. The history of reform policies in developing nations falls broadly into two: These are the "quantitative" first-generation, and the "qualitative" second-generation reform programs inspired by the World Bank and other donor agencies.

Owosu (2005) reported that the first-generation reforms were implemented between the 1980s and early 1990s. It was undertaken as a part of the economic reforms policies that were implemented across the continent; it focused exclusively on trimming the size of the government. Policies implemented to reduce the size of the public sector included retrenchment, cost recovery and privatization (Lienert and Modi, 1997). Although it succeeded in reducing the government wage bills, it did not improve the performance of the public sector. One reason for the ineffectiveness of the policy was that it was too narrow (Numberg, 1999).

The second-generation reforms began in the 1990s. This time, the policies focused on improving the quality of public-sector employment and to make it more attractive (World Bank, 2001; Haque and Aziz, 1998). Specifically, remuneration and promotion policies were used to reward performance; measures were put in place to improve management and accountability; and employees were provided with incentives, skills and motivation. The second-generation reform policies also did not produce the desired results. And most public-sector organizations in Africa have continued to be inefficient (Lienert and Modi, 1997; Numberg, 1999).

Schacter (2000) also observed that the greater part of the reform programs that are supported by donor agencies in the developing world fits into the following areas:

I. Administrative capacity building;
II. Strengthening policy capacity;
III. Institutional reform; and
IV. Civil service downsizing.

Activities in these areas may be undertaken either as part of a comprehensive program of public sector reform that covers many or all government departments and agencies, or a narrower program that focuses on only one agency.

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Organizational Culture and Change

Culture is defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

Culture change means changing the corporate ethos, the images and values of an organization. Change or reforms alters the culture of an institution by changing the underlying assumptions and overt institutional behaviors, processes, and structures. In universities this can be changes to the curriculum; changes in pedagogy; changes in student learning outcomes; changes in policies; changes in budget priorities; new organizational structures; new decision making structures; changes in interactions; changes in institutional self-image; and new relationship between the institution and its stakeholders.

Adrianna (2002) reviewed literature on higher education in relation to change efforts. He reported that as far back as 1980s, organizational researchers across various disciplines began examining the role of culture in organizations (Morgan, 1986; Schein, 1985; Smirich & Calas, 1982). Later the role of culture was connected to organizational effectiveness and governance (Tichy, 1983) (Schein, 1985). Culture shifted from being used as a descriptive device to becoming linked with improvement and success. According to Adrianna (2002) higher education followed this pattern.

Early research illustrates that universities had unique cultures from other types of institutions, describing the myths and rituals of universities; student and faculty subcultures (Clark 1970; Lunsford, 1963; Riesman, Gusfield, & Gamson, 1970).

Later studies on higher education linked culture with organizational success (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Peterson, Cameron, Jones, Mets, & Ettington, 1986). Further studies demonstrated the way that different cultures shaped various institutional functions including governance (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988), leadership (Birnbaum, 1988), and planning (Hearn, Clugston, & Heydinger, 1993; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996).

Two links between culture and change have been made in the higher education literature. The first set of literature suggests that institutions need to have a "culture" that encourages change (Curry, 1992). The goal of this body of research is to determine the aspects of culture or type of culture that need to be fostered to promote institutional change (Schein, 1985). The

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second set of ideas suggests that culture or key institutional elements that shape culture, i.e. vision or mission, are modified as a result of the change process (Eckel, Hill, & Green, 1998, Guskin, 1996).

Organizational cultural change is difficult, but not impossible. Resistance to the organizational culture change as way of increasing performance often comes from the use of the cultural analogy. The argument is that if organizational cultures are like societal cultures, then it would be futile to attempt to change them. However, there is overwhelming evidence from both private- and public sector organizations around the world that organizational culture can indeed be enhanced systematically. As Wilkins and Ouchi (1983:480) argue, "While it may be the case that developing new or very different social understanding is more difficult than influencing contracts (in a market) or establishing new rules (in a bureaucracy), culture in organizations may be more adaptive and more easily developed that we assume, given the anthropological metaphor"

A successful change of organizational culture, however, requires that things be done differently. Merely modifying the actions of a part of an organization will not change the culture; cultural change requires changing the shared behaviors and symbolic context in which specific organizational actions occur.

Universities that wish to transform or adopt changes in the way they do things require favorable culture that will aid the transformation process. Edgar noted that for effective reform in organization there is the need to change the way of thinking and behaviors of people within the organization. This has been buttressed and practiced by many organizations among them is the department of defense of the United States of America. In there efforts to transform the armed forces, Edgar (2004) reported Rumsfeld (2002), as saying, "We must transform not only our armed forces, but also the Department that serves them by encouraging a culture of creativity and prudent risk-taking…All the high-tech weapons in the world won't transform our Armed Forces, unless we change the way we think, train, exercise and fight."

Also in the same vain following a detailed investigation of the Columbia disaster, the Columbia Accident Investigation Board concluded that the organizational causes of the accident were rooted in the Space Shuttle Program's history and culture: "In the Boards view, NASA's organizational culture and structure had as much to do with this accident as the External Tank foam."

Therefore if real change is to occur in universities rather than cosmetic or short - lived change, it has to happen at the cultural level. This is because the way people behave is determined to a large degree by their culture. Culture is very powerful. It can be used to bring about positive change. A prime example is the cultural change effort at British Airways, which transformed an unprofitable airline with a poor reputation into a paragon of politeness, customer care, high turnover and profitability by changing its organizational culture.

Therefore it should be understood that the underlying causes of problems in organizations are not in the structure, the management, or employees; they are in the social structure and culture of the organization. Changing the performance of organizations requires more fundamental changes to the organizational culture, than to the structure of the firm.

Any organization that institute value system that support changes and reforms among employees would have an institutional culture that is conducive to risk taking, initiative, creativity, and the need for continues improvement. This can be achieved by allowing employees to take initiative and participate in decision-making, and by welcoming new ideas and new approaches; and also by encouraging innovation through giving rewards, recognition and latitude to experiment in the organization.

In an innovative culture, middle management and front line staff are frequently initiators of innovations, not only implementers. Innovative culture also assumes fair performance appraisal system, because innovation depends on excellent performance; a culture that tolerates inadequate performance not only begins to destroy innovation but too often destroys careers.

Common Sources of Resistance to Change

To introduce successful cultural change in the university that values the acceptance of reforms, it is essential to understand some of the common reasons why organizational members resist change efforts. These reasons as reported by Edgar (2004) are grouped into two, at individual and at the organizational level.

At the Individual Level
• Fear of the unknown
• Self-interest—what's in it for me?
• Selective attention and retention—overwork
• Habit
• Re-valuing of skills and knowledge
• Threats to individual (and to unit identity)
At the Organizational Level
• Threats to power and influence

- Perceived system constraints on action
- Lack of trust
- Different perceptions and goals
- Bureaucratization
- Resource limitations
- Egalitarian presumption—one size fits all
- Rewards and incentives mismatch

Strategies for Cultural Change

In response to the numerous challenges facing higher education, new strategies and behaviors that are associated with change process are required. To succeed, change in universities must be intentional and continuous rather than merely reactive to external and internal pressures. The type of reform recommended is planned change or transformational change otherwise known as transformational change. This change according to Geralyn, is the type of change that (1) alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products; (2) is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; (3) is intentional; and (4) occurs over time.

There are varieties of method used to promote existing culture or to introduce new one in organizations. Patience and long-term support is needed for a new culture to be entrenched among all the stakeholders in organization. Organizational change will stick only when the new behavior become rooted in the social norms and shared values of the organization.   To promote or introduce culture of reforms in universities there are certain basic steps that should be followed and these are:-

A   **Determine the need for change**

Cultural change begins with an exploration of why a particular change is necessary or important. Unless the university environments and all stakeholders really believe that the status quo is unsatisfactory and that change is necessary and beneficial, the change process may be doomed from the beginning.

The proposed change should be congruent with institutional goals and values. It should focus on a future of improvement, not on fixing an existing problem that may invoke defensiveness in those reluctant to change. There is a greater chance of acceptance when individuals internalize the need for change. Problems occur when leaders do not gain supporters and do not engage in eliciting and listening to counter-arguments.

View Change as Positive

In order to succeed, crafting a change agenda that makes sense and does not assign blame is critical. Change often seems threatening to people because they interpret the need for change as an indictment of their current or past knowledge, competence, or performance. Change initiatives should be framed so as not to make people feel attacked or diminished.

C. Changing the mission and the value system of the university to reflect the new cultural trend

Inculcating a university wide culture that favors reforms among the university community must be anchored in the university's mission and values. Accordingly the mission and the value system of the university need to be change to reflect the new cultural agenda. Changes that do tally with university beliefs are likely not to succeed. Therefore the first thing to do in inculcating a culture of reform in universities is to have a mission, vision, and value systems that favor innovation, acceptance and implementations of change and the need for continues improvements in all aspects of the university system.

D. The council and senate are the cultural change agents in the university environment.

The most important agent of change is the university council. This is because leaders are the primary transmitters of culture. For example, a survey report by Prosci, "2003 Best Practices in Change Management," reported that employees want to hear messages about change from two people: the CEO and their immediate supervisor. The council, vice Chancellor, and units Head have the responsibility to focus on specific areas of cultural change the university is interested to pursue. When the council provides focus and direction it would be communicated to the vice chancellor for implementation.

In instituting a new culture the Governing Board of university should consider the following:-

- *The university council must have a strong reason for introducing or promoting a new value system in the university. It is important to have a strong assessment on the need for cultural change in the university, noting the advantages and the disadvantages of the new value system that would be introduced. This should be done in collaboration with the vice chancellor of the university.*

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- *The council must determine how every stakeholder would be involved in the cultural change processes. The council should ensure that the process of cultural change is inclusive and that a wide range of stakeholder should be involved in meaningful ways. Accordingly there is the need to involve all stakeholders across the university to participate in developing and implementing the proposed cultural change that is centered on the need for reforms and continues improvement in all university activities. In this respect, participatory decision-making becomes integral. Although this can slow the process, a change effort will generally be more successful if many people with different perspectives contribute to its formulation and implementation. It should be understood that not everyone in the university will accept the new change initiative, but a sufficient number of interested individuals are needed for adequate manpower and energy to support the change effort.*

- *The council should keep the pressure on the vice chancellor, the senate, departments and faculty to accelerate the pace of change.*

- *The council must ensure that goals are set; that processes are in place to monitor progress; and that the vice chancellor and key leaders are held accountable for results.*

- *The University council -Vice Chancellor Relationship*

  The Council should recognize that the vice chancellor of the university must be able to devote the requisite time and attention to the change. Council support of the vice chancellor is crucial in an environment that may be resistant to change and is needed to help avoid leadership burnout. The council needs to understand that successful cultural change relies upon risk-taking, and shared responsibility.

E. Deploying Resources: Money, Time, and Attention

Changing or re-invigorating dormant values of organization cost money. There are real costs associated with it by supporting meetings, release time, program development, support services, and faculty development. Monetary support for cultural change is therefore essential. An important indicator of the durability of the cultural change effort in universities is the extent to which it becomes reflected in the budget of the university. University council and management can also develop supporting structures, give incentives, and provide resources for the cultural change efforts. Examples of incentives include:

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- Sending teams of people to regional or national conferences on the issues
- Cash bonus
- Free Laptops
- University recognition etc

F. Establishing Cultural Change Teams

A key action supporting the acceptance of culture of reforms in universities is to develop an initial set of cultural attributes that represents the new culture. Creating teams can do this and two types of teams are identified for an effective institutional change, and these are: Task Teams and the Strategy Teams.

"Task teams" would have the responsibility of reviewing the existing culture of the university and recommend new ones in line with the new mission of the university. This could be accomplished in a series of culture-modeling workshops that would draw participants from each faculty of the university to identify a set of cultural attributes for the new culture. This process would identify those attributes, rank them in terms of relative importance, and relate them to different cultural models e.g., research, teaching, administrative etc. The results of the workshops could define "success" and establish what success looks like based on the new value system and also develop an initial set of progressive performance measures for different individual components of the transformation process.

"Strategy teams" on the other hand would monitor the university cultural change process and oversee and coordinate the work of task teams.

Successful teams are composed of people who have the authority to get things done, knowledge of how the campus works, the skills needed to accomplish the tasks at hand, legitimacy and influence on campus, and who have the necessary time, energy, and interest.

G. Asking for periodic assessments of progress

The goal of any institutional change initiative is improvement, that is, the positive difference between the starting point and later points in time. Periodic evaluation is important to determine the extent of progress achieved, what strategies produced the improvements, and the consequences, intended and unintended, of the cultural change efforts?

The university should seek evidence of indicators of positive change from such sources as:
- Changes in curriculum
- Changes in pedagogy
- Changes in policy
- Changes in budgets
- New institutional structures

- Changes in external relationships
- New patterns of interactions and conversations among key stakeholders
- New language and self-concepts
- New decision-making processes
- A different "tone" on campus
- A clear sense of institutional self-image

H. Reporting the cultural Change Situation

For cultural change to be effective it is important to continuously report to the management of the university about the change situation on campus. University council can support cultural change initiative in the university by regularly creating opportunities for reflection and feedback. The report should cover such aspects as an overview of the change process, what has been accomplished, the incentives used, and the resources that have been devoted to it. The management should consider requests for resources to support the cultural change initiative.

I. Create Linkages with External Bodies

Institutions can look outside themselves to create useful linkages. Energy created by external connections to other institutions, funding agencies, and national efforts provide additional impetus. Understanding how the issues of a particular campus are tied to those of other institutions regionally, nationally, and internationally can help overcome the effects of narrow-mindedness that impede movement.

J. Communicating the Cultural Change Message to Stakeholders

Communicating the new culture is very important so that all stakeholders would be made aware of the behaviors expected of them. Employees should be informed about the new values and effective ways of communications should be used to transmit the new culture and to provide forums for the stories (both successes and failures) about key people and events that exemplify the new culture.

Consistent message should be aired to employees about the cultural change efforts until it sticks otherwise cultural change may be seen as just another fad. For example, at advertising giant Ogilvy & Mather, posters and cards are issued to each employee with clear, colloquial statements on "how we do business" and signed by David Ogilvy. Some of the ways universities can communicate the message of the cultural change may be through some or all of the following: -

- Communicate information about the change at regular university reports

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• Discuss the change at all campus retreats

• Devote regular time to the change agenda at every staff, department, or senate meeting

• Providing updates in reports or in the university bulleting or the campus newspaper

• Conduct a retreat devoted solely to the change issue, to hold off campus and away from daily worries that offer opportunities to bring a diverse group of people together to find new approaches, build trust, and hear feedback, share ideas and foster personal relationships.

• Conduct seminars in the university that focus on a specific issue of the cultural change initiative. The seminar or symposia or campus-wide meetings may revolve around a presentation or a collection of papers on a common topic. A prominent speaker followed by some type of facilitated conversations may occur such as plenary sessions or small group work. Summaries of discussions can be made known to the university community.

• Management of the university should engage in informal conversations with people at the corridor, during lunch break and after regular meetings to re-enforce important messages about the cultural change initiative of the university.

Conclusion

Cultural reform should be an on going process in organizations. Universities should understand that conscious efforts needed to be done in order to introduce the best values, which would entrench culture of excellence. Ad hoc changes may not bring the desired results needed. Educational reforms require more than a push from external sources in order to produce quality that meets standards. University staffs need to be grounded in a "culture of high standards" which includes the values, structures, relationships, and routines that shape university daily activities. Therefore if universities are to achieve new standards, they need cultures that value accomplishments born of effort rather than based on inherent capabilities of employees.

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