The effect of leadership on service delivery in universities

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at assessing leadership effectiveness on service delivery at the University of Namibia and all its campuses throughout the country. The study was carried out during the month of February 2013. The methodology consisted of document analysis, interviews through face to face, video and tele-conferencing. Purposive sampling was applied to come up with the sample. Findings of the study indicated that there is good service delivery to full-time students but poor service delivery to open and distance learning (ODL) students under the Centre for External Studies (CES). There were problems of late delivery of learning materials, assessment of assignments and examinations. Students did not get feedback timeously from their lecturers. There was a crisis of ownership of the ODL students as the programs offered are owned by different faculties but the students belong to CES. There is poor coordination of programs and activities. The findings pointed towards a structural crisis hence it was recommended that CES be given autonomy to run its own programs.

Keywords: leadership assessment, effectiveness, service delivery, poor coordination, feedback

INTRODUCTION

University of Namibia operates on a dual delivery mode namely full-time and distance education. Students at the Main Campus and regional campuses receive face to face tuition whilst those in ODL centers study through distance. The purpose of the Centre for External Studies is to become the leading open and distance-learning Centre in Namibia and beyond by enabling people to achieve their full potential through accessible, innovative and flexible learning. Its aim is to provide accessible quality higher education and to create opportunities for professional development to adult members of the community by providing open learning through distance and continuing education programs (UNAM, 2012 Year Book). It is quite commendable that the programs offered through conventional and ODL are similar, the fees are the same and the assessments are the same. However, judging from the disquiet among ODL students during registration at UNAM, the researcher hypothesized that the university was facing leadership challenges regarding service delivery.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Leadership is critical for the success and survival of all forms of organizations. Hughes et al (2012) argues that the role of leadership in organizations is to put structure and order. Leadership in organizations has to direct and coordinate the work of group members and building interpersonal relationships with others. Influence by showing your followers that you want to achieve results is critical. Leaders who are visionary can actually steer the organization towards great success. Leadership effectiveness is shown by quality results. The coordination of the human element in achieving set goals and objectives is critical. Getting results through others and the ability to build cohesive, goal –oriented teams is the essence of a good leader.

Leadership is a complex, multifaceted process concerned with the art of influencing followers in a particular direction which involves casting a vision, goal setting and motivating people (Sendlove, 2007). Brown (2001) proposes that effective leaders have to develop both managerial and leadership behavior and traits. To this end, management is concerned with the implementation of set objectives on the basis of established rules. It answers how are the rules applied and is concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness and quality of services provided to both internal and external stakeholders (Sifuna, 2012). Brown (2001) avers that leadership contributes to individual and organizational growth and renewal. He further submits that leadership is under-utilized in many universities as most academics feel that they have nothing to do in contributing towards building human capabilities and capacities. This would normally lead to staff, stakeholders and students being disgruntled thereby leading to poor results. Leadership is a personal commitment to make a difference in lives of others and their constituencies. It is also about motivation, inspiration, aspirations, relationship building and creative change. It can be argued that management is about working within boundaries of the status quo, whilst leadership has more to do with seeing other wider possibilities and trying to make them happen.

Effective leadership in higher education

Bryman (2007) proposes that leadership in higher education is expected to maintain autonomy, consultation and fostering a culture of collegiality. Collegiality refers to opportunities for members in the university to feel that they belong to a mutually respected community of

scholars who value each other's contributions to the institution and feel concern for their colleagues' wellbeing (Gappa et al, 2007). Bryman (2007) further observed that many senior managers/ faculty heads take themselves as academics and not as leaders. They feel that they are not responsible for leadership and management of the activities in their faculties and departments. This in most cases has led to problems in how work/ activities of universities are coordinated. Poor coordination of activities could result in poor service delivery. This study wants to find out if UNAM is also facing similar challenges.

Leadership effectiveness can be measured in a variety of ways. Leaders are considered effective when their groups perform well against set standards. Basham (2012) further elucidates that traits that define leadership are included in either a group or individual category. Group traits include collaboration, shared purpose, disagreements with respect, division of labor and a learning environment. Individual traits include self-knowledge, authenticity/ integrity, commitment, empathy and competence (Astin and Astin, 2000). Many organizations have been performing badly yet they claim to have great leadership. Effective leadership in universities is measured through quality service delivery to students and staff which then transforms to superior results. Followers should have confidence and satisfaction in their leadership.

Many universities around the world operate multiple campuses and programs and these have proved to be difficult to coordinate and manage. The multiple duties and responsibilities for management could compromise quality service delivery in universities thereby exposing the leadership of the institution.

In many African Universities Sifuna (2012) found that leaders are not recruited and awarded for their leadership potential but for their academic qualifications, research, teaching and community service and rarely receive critical training in strategic planning, budgeting, human resource development and faculty management.

Cole 2004 identified the following types of leadership;
- Situational
- Charismatic
- Traditional
- Laissez-Faire
- Autocratic
- Participative
- Transactional

However, in the higher education context a blend of both transactional and transformational leadership is recommended (Basham, 2012). He argues that while transformational skills are highly recommended for their vision and sense of mission, transactional skills focusing on the exchange of work for various types of rewards are critical. Historically, organizations were viewed as learning systems and success depended on the ability of leaders to become direction givers and on the organization's capacity for continuous learning (Garratt, 1987). Transformational leaders tend to have attributes to learn across their specialist discipline. Transformational leaders are at the top of their functional specialty and have limited perspective to see that change is required and to consider the consequences of continuing with the same practices (Bass et al, 2003)

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is targeted to those who are involved in the higher education sectors who intend to enhance quality delivery and ensure success and survival of their institutions. Students and staff need visionary leadership which can steer the organization to higher heights. The study will also inform policy makers, university authorities and stakeholders that quality service is critical. A clear policy on the operations of centers and campus is a prerequisite.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study was to assess leadership effectiveness on service delivery at the University of Namibia, its campuses and centers throughout the country.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Site

The University of Namibia was selected for the study because of its dual mode of delivery. UNAM was established by the Act of Parliament on August 31, 1992. The vision of the university is:

To be a beacon of excellence and innovation in teaching, research and extension services

The mission is:

To provide quality higher education through teaching, research and advisory services to our customers with the view to produce productive and competitive human resources capable of driving public and private institutions towards a knowledge-based economy, economic growth and improved quality of life

The motto for the University is:

Education, Service and Development

In 2012 the university had approximately 16 000 students made up of about 12 000 full time and 4 000 ODL students. The university has eight faculties, 11 stand-alone campuses for full time students and 8 regional centers for ODL students that are spread around the country. The names of the campuses are as follows:
- Windhoek Main Henties Bay (SANUMARC)
- Katima Mulilo
- Khomasdal Neudamm
- Ogongo Campus
- Hifikepunye-Pohamba
- Ongwediva Engineering
- Oshakati
- Rundu

The ODL Centers are;
- Windhoek
- Otjiwarongo
- Gobabis
- Swakopmund
- Keetmanshoop
- Oshakati
- KatimaMulilo
- Rundu

Population and sample

University of Namibia had a total of 16 000 students in and 1300 academic and administration staff in 2012. The numbers include students registered at centers and other campuses that are distributed across the country.

Sample

Purposive sampling was applied in this study. Twenty academic staff, seven administration staff, and fifty students were involved in the study. The Vice Chancellor, the Registrar, Distance Education Officers, Pro-Vice Chancellor and the Bursar were the key informants.

Data collection instruments

The methodology consisted of document analysis, questionnaires, face to face interviews and video and tele-conferencing.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Are you getting satisfactory service from the university?
2. Does the University have guidelines on the operations of ODL/Centers?
3. Are you comfortable with your workload?

LIMITATIONS

Not all centers and campuses were covered by the researcher due time and financial constraints. Some of the respondents were not cooperative.

FINDINGS

There is good service delivery to full- time students but poor service delivery to open distance learning students. Students have been complaining about lack of feedback and the quality of tutors. Results have been poor for the ODL students and this could be attributable to poor leadership within the university system. Students for ODL indicated that service delivery was poor. They were not getting feedback on assignments and dates for supplementary

examinations on time. There was no coordination of activities between ODL students and the Main Campus. Students were required to type assignments yet they did not have access to electricity and computers. ODL students indicated that they were required to register online yet they did not have access to the internet. Students studying through distance were made to pay same fees as full-time students yet they did not get same services such as face to face tutoring, library services and the internet. They also felt that tutors for ODL were not qualified and committed to their work leading to poor results. The distribution of study materials was said to be erratic and delayed. Venues for examinations and tutorials were always changed and not communicated to students on time. Examinations were in most cases conducted late due to lake of coordination and communication from the invigilators. Supplementary examinations were conducted soon after released of results leaving students with less time to prepare. Examinations for distance and full students were the same yet distance students did not have equal access to resources such as face to face tutoring, the library and internet facilities. Students also complained that programs offered through distance were limited resulting to limited choices.

Management and administrative staff indicated that there were no written policies and guidelines on the operations of ODL and CES. Directors and deans felt that there were problems in trying to motivate students from ODL centers because of poor service delivery. It was observed that distance education issues were usually implied and did not feature enough at the university. Interviewees indicated that the ODL Centers drew their program offerings from the different faculties and academic staff linked to the departments within the faculties. They further felt that the Director could be in a position to run this program smoothly without interference from the Main Campus. Staff also complained that there were no regular meetings to update them. It was observed that the University does not have a client charter which guides the conduct and provision of quality service to clients. Most organizations have client charters which guide them in meeting clients' needs. A client service charter helps the standards and commitments between a business and its clients.

Staff members interviewed at the main campus and other regional centers indicated that they were made to work very long hours and were denied leave due to pressure of work. Heads of departments indicated that they had huge administrative workloads, teaching and research. They indicated that this compromised on the quality of service delivery to students. Relationships between offices were constrained due to the differences on how these programs could be coordinated.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

University of Namibia has been faced with numerous challenges in coordinating ODL programs throughout its campuses. The findings of this study were not in agreement with Bryman (2011) who indicated that universities should develop managerial and leadership skills to achieve set goals and objectives. Collegiality lacked at the University of Namibia especially with the ODL centers. These were not treated as part of the university. Communication was poor and all the activities were divorced from the main campus resulting in structural problems. The findings of this study are not in agreement with Hughes et al (2012) who argue that the idea of leadership is to put structure and order in organizations. In the case of UNAM there is was proper structure and order for ODL programs. Activities were done in a haphazard manner. The reporting structure is was not clear. The ownership of ODL the programs was also not clear.

Students belonged to CES whilst programs were from different difficulties. There is no two way communication.

It was also observed that there was no written policy on distance education and the operations of the CES. There were no coordinated efforts from top management on the delivery of quality service to ODL students, staff members and stakeholders. It was further observed that there was lack of monitoring and evaluation of activities/programs by top management. The CES lacked facilities and support from top management. There was no constant and constructive feedback on students and staff. The type of leadership exposed by the university management is the laissez-faire. The no follow-up on issues pertaining to on ODL programs. Everything is relaxed and no one is really accountable for results.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It was recommended that the CES being given the autonomous to run its programs. The university is implored to develop an ODL policy. There is need to design curriculum and learning material relevant to ODL. There is further need to develop and implement an assessment policy and procedures manual on ODL assessment. It was recommended that the CES should have the necessary staff and infrastructure so as to provide quality service to its students, stakeholders and staff. The authorities need to attend to workload policy so that work is proportionally distributed. Proper consultation should take place between Senate, faculties and CES before new ODL programs are introduced. A close relationship between faculties and CES should be established to create awareness and to clarify the issue of ownership of the programs and students. CES quality committee should become more prominent in ensuring quality in the design of study materials and processing and delivery process. The university management should identify and implement a proper and effective communication system to communicate important information to all CES staff and students timeously. CES should secure more video-conferencing facilities across the country and especially in the north to ensure academic support services in especially in the sciences programs and course. There is need to come up with a service charter for the university since it guides their operations.

CONCLUSION

It was concluded that academic and administration activities were not coordinated. There is need for proper coordination of programs and activities. There is a poor link between students and staff and this needs strengthening. Monitoring and evaluation is critical. The university leadership is therefore called upon to rise to these challenges.

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