In Search of a Dual Mode Organisational Structure

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INTRODUCTION

The importance and potential of open and distance learning is widely recognized internationally and rapidly growing in developing countries. The rapid expansion of lower level education, and the need for continuous upgrading of qualifications and skills for the workforce have increased pressure on Institutes of Higher Educations (IHEs) to increase access. The existing capacity of the IHEs is inadequate to meet the growing demand and there is a remote chance of an expansion in the higher education system in the near future mainly due to financial constraints. The private sector distance learning institutions are structured as mostly single mode institutions and in some cases are generally extensions of overseas institutions. The organizational structure of distance learning programs of public institutions is based on dual mode model.

Dual mode institutions in most cases have established a unit within their organizational structure as college or department with limited autonomy and authority. These administrative units are under enormous pressure to grow and deliver courses with limited capacity and technical know-how. Programs development and delivery through the distance mode usually depends on the mercy of the academic departments whose primary responsibilities are to serve the on-campus students. Distance education programs in some cases are treated as cash cow to augment their income. Thus the effectiveness of the current organizational structure is in question for the promotion and development of distance learning programs. This paper provides an understanding of the magnitude of issues on structural adjustment which will stimulate discussions and allow people to share experiences.

DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Development is perceived primarily as economic growth, and is related to factors of labour and capital. The post-modern economic development added two additional factors: "human" and "social" capital formation. The human capital formation requires a nation to educate its population to embrace technological advancement, develop management competencies, undertake research for innovations, which in turn develop a global competitive edge to attract investment. The World Bank added "social capital" as a missing link in the development process. This is simply connections for knowledge sharing. The social capital refers to the informal rules, norms, and long-term relationships that facilitate coordinated action and enable people to undertake cooperative ventures for mutual advantage. The social capital formation requires educating people to understand themselves and their surrounding environment, developing social cohesion and cooperation, understanding their individual and collective roles as citizens and members of communities, and active participation in the socio-economic development process. The social capital formation has in the recent past become more important for clan based societies where vices of the cash economy are gradually undermining the role of Chiefs and disintegrating the social fabrics.

Economic theories such as Monetarist and Keynesian argue that economic growth increases opportunities for employment and income; and the lower bracket of the society contributes and benefits from the trickle down effect of economic growth. The economic growth and consequent trickle down effect could not effectively reduce the growing number of poverty-ridden people around the globe. Thus, the goal of development shifted from merely economic growth as an end to that of the growth of people and enhancing the quality of human conditions (Aderinoye and

Ojokheta, 2004). In 2000, the United Nations adapted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with a view to complement the economic growth for improving quality of human life.

The former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan expressed optimism by stating that: "The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are still achievable if we break with business as usual and massively accelerate and scale up action now". Education that shapes a knowledge based society is regarded as the driving force for accelerating the achievement of MDGs. Of the eight goals, three are directly education related and the other five require inputs from education. Therefore, "education is the route to the full development of people as human beings with social, spiritual, intellectual, and cultural aspirations as well as with economic interests (Daniel, 2004). The individual as well as a society who "aspires economic and social development must similarly build on the foundation of knowledge and skills through a system of delivery of education to reach the masses as appropriate to the present time" (Mishra, 2005).

The status of the current education and learning opportunities and future prospects in developing countries and small states in particular at all levels is not adequate to provide formal education as well as life long learning opportunities for the growing population. Conventional methods of teaching are not up to the task and Commonwealth nations have the opportunity to harness the potentiality of distance education to massive increase in human learning (Daniel, 2006). Distance education has emerged as a "business unusual" approach in increasing education opportunities (Khan, 2005).

The growing demand for increasing access to higher education and pressure from governments and/or civil society forced the traditional higher learning institution to commence delivering programs through the distance mode. In some cases, the monetary purpose to augment income in the face of shrinking public funding led to the conversion of single mode traditional institution into dual mode. Thus, the administration and management of distance education functions in dual mode institutions appear to be misunderstood and/or conveniently neglected.

ORGANISATIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The organizational and administrative structure of distance education can be categorized as single and dual mode institutions and a cooperative or consortium (Perraton, 1991; Rumble and Latchem, 2004). There are sub-categories within these broad categories depending on the institutional purpose, application of technology, level of operations etc.

A dual mode institution offers program(s) by both on-campus conventional and off-campus distance mode teaching and learning. The administration and management of the distance mode teaching and learning integrates with the mainstream administration and management while teaching integrates with the conventional academic departments for teaching staff to teach both modes. In most cases, a department or unit adds to the conventional structure to administer the distance mode while power and authorities remain with the conventional administrative system. The models remain fluid and converging over the years incrementally and experimentally.

DUAL MODE INSTITUTION

Establishment of dual mode

Dual mode institutions in most cases emerge from single mode face-to-face teaching institutions by establishing a unit either to coordinate and/or to administer the development and delivery of academic programs through the distance mode parallel to the conventional offering and/or new programs as off shoots of the on-campus programs. Most of the institutions unsuccessfully take a piece-meal approach (Robinson, 2004) to change without proper planning to involve all internal stakeholders to take the ownership of change management. The decision of introducing distance

education imposes from the higher authority with little consideration of the organizational culture and ethos. The newly born distance education unit (DEU) finds itself in the middle of strong resistance from the conventional academic and administrative units to change to cater for the needs of distance education. The shifting paradigm is a daunting task to facilitate distance education and includes the development and distribution of materials, provision of tutoring and counseling, management of student records, tracking of assignments, conducting examinations etc. The DEU embarks on a massive campaign to motivate academic and administrative staff to understand the changes and needs for their participation in distance teaching and learning with mixed success depending on the variation of support from top management. Capacity building is one of the cornerstones during the establishment period of the DEU and success depends very often on the availability of external assistance rather than internal sources. Experience shows that DEUs who managed to establish links with Open Universities or similar institutions built some degree of capacities in instructional design, writing of course materials, assessment system, and students' support system.

Organisational structure: undefined relationships and responsibilities

The main purpose of setting up a DEU is mainly to provide a framework for the academic and administrative staff to develop teamwork for facilitating parallel teaching and learning of conventional and distance students. However, the addition of a piggyback structure to the existing organizational structure, which was originally established to serve the conventional teaching and learning, could be seen as an isolated unit and seemingly ineffective. The mainstream functional administrative units seldom change to integrate the functional relationship with the DEU. Definition of authorities and powers between mainstream administrative units and the DEU remain ambiguous to the disadvantage of bringing much needed changes to support distance teaching and learning.

Most of the dual mode institutions decision-making process follows the same conventional system. In some cases, a committee adds to the system with representation from academic and administrative units to support the policy and management decision of the distance teaching and learning. Although, functions of this type of committee vary between institutions, it serves as an advisory committee without statutory authority. The mainstream committees with traditional memberships may either accept or reject recommendations and suggestions for policy changes for distance education. It is hard to change policies while the members of the committees have little understanding about distance education. In most cases, the head of the DEU secures memberships to lower level committees to explain various issues effecting distance education and the need for policy changes.

The DEU mandates to work collaboratively with the teaching department to convert traditional to distance education programs by developing course materials and securing academic support services for students. The ambiguous status of the DEU undermines its credibility to deal with the academic schools and faculties.

Administrative challenges

Administrative support from the top management that was appointed to lead and manage the conventional education system shows enthusiasm about distance education but they are handicapped by the lack of knowledge and understanding about distance education. They concentrate more on managing the affairs of traditional students who have strong voice due to their presence on campus while they provide lip services for distance students, as they are not an immediate threat to the stability of the institution. Some institutions arrange study visits for top management to sister institutions or hire specialists to train the management staff with mixed success.

Recruitment of adequate and qualified staff with appropriate distance education knowledge and skills is one of the most challenging tasks of the DEU. In most cases, staff from conventional

administrative system redeploy to the DEU with traditional attitudes, ideas, and excitement. This group of staff are likely to be less committed to distance education and prefer to return to their parent unit. DEU also recruits staff from the open market with little or no experience in distance education. Some institutions arrange training for the DEU staff but in most cases, the centralized staff development administration attaches less importance to train DEU staff compared to their traditional counterparts.

The DEU seldom gets full autonomy in respect of student administration. The academic units and the central student administration unit control the admission while the DEU remains as an onlooker. The central student administration unit is reluctant to introduce flexibility but follow rigid and conventional admission criteria and process to the detriment of the potential distance students. In addition, for record management, information technology and library services etc. they attach priority to the on-campus students at the cost of distance students sufferings. There is likely to be a considerable number of staff in the parent institution that is implacably opposed to distance education (Neil, 1981).

Academic administration: a careless situation

General mandate requires the academic departments to take the academic responsibilities while the DEU take administrative logistic support responsibilities. Academic responsibilities include program development, development and review of course materials, provision of academic support, responding to students' academic queries, assessment, examination etc. The academic departments seldom share the enthusiasm of the DEU, the academic home for programs. Academic departments in most cases do not have a comprehensive plan for the development and delivery of programs through the distance mode. Decisions of program development for distance mode sometimes depend on the collective views of the academics and are based on what they are willing to do and/or what they can do rather than the developmental and market needs. Program development proposals from DEU are considered an undue interference by the academic departments and are resisted vigorously. DEU always remain at the receiving ends in program development decision creating further tension with academic departments.

Academic administration of on-campus in respect of selection of applicants, processing of exam results etc. strictly adhere to the schedule and students needs while a different approach is attached to distance education. There appears to be little accountability for not completing processing of applications for admission, returning of marked assignments in time, processing of exam results with considerable delay etc. If the Head of the DEU brings such situations to the Head of the academic department, further tension is often created.

Administrative staff of academic departments consider their duties for distance students as additional tasks and very often demand additional pay. This is one of the major obstacles for the integration of the administration of DEU and academic departments.

Academics' attitude: a dilemma

Success of a distance education program in a dual mode institution largely depends on the attitude and commitment of lecturers (Siaciwena, 1989). The dual mode institution oversimplifies this important factor by changing the terms and conditions of employment of current lecturers to include distance teaching in their duty statements. The new recruits contract of employment includes both modes of teaching. Attempts to apply motivational theory (Lonsdale, 1993) for changing the attitude and commitment result in mixed success. Wolcott and Betts (1999) identified lecturers of a dual mode institution into two camps: distance teaching is "a part of assignments" and "above and beyond". Experience shows another camp who is sitting on the fence and watch.

The common belief is teaching distance is an additional burden, an additional load and there should be some kind of compensation for additional load. Dual mode institutions address this critical issue in varieties of ways and means.

Dual mode institutions usually introduce regulatory measures to force lecturers to participate in distance teaching by introducing distance teaching as one of the criteria for recruitment, renewal of contract and promotion. The collegial mode of decision-making process undermines the effectiveness of such regulatory measures. The Head of the DEU becomes a member of committees to ensure the functionality of the regulations but a single voice is not adequate to influence decision.

Some institutions recruit academic staff and/or course coordinators in the DEU to reduce the burden on lecturers. In some cases these measures create more tension than solving problems due to lack of definition of who does what and most importantly lecturers' frequent disapproval of course coordinator's actions. Academic departments are in the opinion that transferring some academic responsibilities to the DEU course coordinators undermines quality assurance.

The most popular measure has been the introduction of compensatory model for the distance education-teaching lecturers. Lecturers are compensated for writing and reviewing course materials, marking assignments and exam papers etc. Although, the monetary benefits create attraction for the lecturers to participate in distance teaching, a group of lecturers who do paid consultancy work compare the value for their time between consultancy and distance teaching. Thus, compensatory model fails to attract quality lecturers except few who consider distance teaching an "outreach service to the community".

Financial management

The financial management of distance education programs appears to be less discussed but is a very important issue for the sustainability of such programs. In some of the literature distance education is defined as a cash cow to support financial shortfall in other parts of dual mode institutions or to service debts. There is little understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness of distance education and the needs for a flexible financial management system. Some institutions allocate seed money for the establishment of the DEU while others secure funding from external sources in the name of increasing access to education. Academic departments remain dissatisfied because they believe that they are not getting an appropriate share for their contribution while the DEU has little say in the management of income from distance students. Much needed facilities and services are not readily available because of lengthy centralized purchasing procedures to the detriment of students learning difficulties.

CONCLUSION

Literature on dual mode organisational structure is yet to provide a general framework for effective management of development and delivery of programs through the distance mode. Research in this area is too limited to draw any general conclusions. However, during the last two decades open and distance learning has emerged as an alternative to the conventional education system including the expansion of dual mode institutions. The administrators, policy makers, and practitioners have gathered a wealth of experience when encountering problems, finding solutions, and developing innovative ideas. Sharing of these experiences and ideas is very important to throw some light on this complex but important issue on the dual mode organizational structure.

Organisational structures will always vary between dual mode institutions but it is feasible to develop a general framework as a guide to develop individual institutional organization structure. Research in this field needs to be pursued to share innovative solutions.

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