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Organization Development Intervention On The Research Capability Of Lecturers: Insights From Ruaha Catholic University (Rucu) In Iringa, Tanzania

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Abstract

The major roles of most universities include: teaching, conducting research, and offering community service. In order for a university to grow, it must invest in research. Unfortunately, in most universities, research is not adequately conducted. The purpose of the study was to assess the organization development intervention on the research capability of lecturers. A number of scholars have highlighted the reasons why university lecturers have not been enthusiastic about conducting research. These reasons include insufficient knowledge on scientific competencies for carrying out quality research and insufficient management support to build and manage potent research teams. Another cause was indifference towards carrying out academic research. This study was carried out to assess whether organization development interventions can down play the above-mentioned challenges and ultimately augment research by university lecturers. The study found that knowledge on scientific competencies, attitude towards research as well as building and managing research teams significantly influence research and publication.

Key Word: *Organization, Development, Capability*

1.0 Introduction

It is universally acknowledged that the fundamental function of universities among other functions is to transmit knowledge. The impact of research on knowledge transmission cannot be understated. Research greatly provides a lecturer with up-to-date information that is eventually passed on to students. However, it has been noted that over the years, research and publication especially at RUCU has drastically declined. The available records revealed that between 2005 to 2012 only 8 out of 120 lecturers had published in peer reviewed journals. Shockingly, no books have been published by lecturers and no papers have been presented in conferences. Again, no lecturer has published in any international journal (Directorate of Research Report).

These figures above indicate a dormant growth in publications and research in the University. Publication is a fundamental requirement for promotion. It goes without saying that the decline in publications has significantly contributed to a decrease in promotions. For instance, from 2016 to 2019, only two senior lecturers were promoted to the position of associate professor. According to the Personnel Officer, no other promotions were recorded. This is mainly because promotion and research and publications are conducted simultaneously. These factors were synonymous with the scheme of service and promotion norms used by several universities in Tanzania.

Interactions among employees at RUCU were perceived to be relatively poor. The researcher thinks that this could be the major reason why research has not been explored. As a matter of fact, research is conducted individually thereby eroding team-based research and publications. This has ultimately wiped out research mentorship: the tradition of senior lecturers mentoring junior lecturers in research is rapidly diminishing. The existing situation at the university calls for immediate response to some of the following questions: what factors determine robust research publications at the University? What could be done to intensify staff active participation in research?

A more holistic evaluation of the problem could be conducted using SWOT framework. In terms of the internal strength, RUCU has recently started investing in ICT. Institutional capacity for ICT service delivery is relatively improved. There is a new modern library built with a number of facilities to

support personal and group development. Furthermore, there is a reliable number of supporting staff from the ICT department to increase research and publication. It was assumed that ICT advancement would simplify access to current and relevant materials electronically and thus provide alternatives to dependence on hard copy materials. At least, all employed academic staffs were considered to be potential researchers since they were research degree holders and were computer literate. These factors were holistically considered as stepping stones to building a competent research community at RUCU.

It is observed that the University suffers from limited funding for development of more and adequately reliable ICT and physical infrastructures on one hand. On the other hand, teaching and learning is still conducted using traditional methods, which limit interaction in the learning process. There had been intent to strengthen investment in e-learning, but little has been done. Also, there was a high teacher to student ratio, which resulted into abnormal high workload per lecturer. Despite insufficient evidence on the practical competencies of lecturers in research, little has been done to build more research skills and competencies at institutional levels.

Regardless of the challenges that an institution faces, the education sector remains a vital avenue for research development. The higher learning sector in Tanzania has greatly advanced in the past few decades. As a result, RUCU has been able to employ more academicians to deal with increase in enrolment. Upon graduating to a fully- fledged academic institution, the University planned to enroll 10,000 students. Increased enrolment will require academicians to conduct more research in order to boost teaching. The fast growing market demand creates a disguised demand for lecturers/researchers. RUCU as an institution has the capability to out-compete other academic institutions. In addition, online publications open doors to RUCU academicians who are equipped with ICT skills to publish.

Despite the opportunities for growth in research competencies and publishing, there were some challenges related to the ever growing publishing industry. RUCU academicians had a common perception on peer reviewed journals: they admitted that the general challenge is that book publishers impose stringent conditions. Again, the scarcity of seminars on research has become a barrier that has locked out prospective competent researchers. The researcher presupposes

that the decline in conducting research is mostly induced by a researcher's personal skills rather than the conduciveness of the research environment. In reference to the role of research in academic institutions, lecturers are expected to tirelessly carry out research regardless of what external forces dictate. Thus, a single factor analysis could not adequately direct the researcher to areas that needed intervention. The researcher, therefore, focused on several individual causes as they were identified by staff, but based on the model set of factors, which were also informed by the People, Process, and Technology framework (PPT framework). Therefore, the framework was used to carry out organizational analysis in light of perceived causes as will be shown in the next section.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by experiential learning theory. Knowledge related to experiential learning process is attributed to Aristotle's teachings. As quoted by Bynum, Porter, Messenger and Overy (2005), Aristotle stated that "for the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them". So experiential learning theory focused on the actual research experiences of participants and can be tested within six months. In the present literature on organizational transformation and learning, the theory is widely associated with Kolb. The experiential learning theory was famously associated with Kolb & Fry (1974). Later on, a more detailed analysis of the theory was found in publications including Kolb (1981), Kolb (1984), Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis (2001), Kolb & Kolb (2005), and later in kolb & Kolb (2012). This brought research capacity development close to the concepts laid down by Trostle (1992) who defined research capability building as "a process whereby individuals, groups, networks, organization and the wider social science community were encouraged and facilitated in enhancing knowledge and skills so as to increase their ability to carry out innovative and high quality social science research."

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Arsyad and Arono (2016)observed that the low level of research output was attributed to extra workload among university teaching staff, which robbed lecturers of adequate time to concentrate on research. It was also pointed out that the most potential researchers were charged with administrative duties in

addition to teaching duties, which limited their effective participation in research. Also, the study identified that lecturers had a negative attitude towards research. Swales (2004) mentioned that limited skills in research and lack of available update resources such as journals, books, and access to scholarly database also influenced scholarly research productivity. A combination of those factors forced most potential researchers to desist from conducting research thereby affecting the academic ranking and performance of the University.

Nielsen (2010), insists that experiences in research information-gathering, challenges related to research, as well as cultural and personal encounters along the way reflect the importance of information-gathering, which is a relevant segment when 'pursuing a PhD' in Development Studies. Dess, Lumpkin, Eisner& McNamara (2012) define learning organizations as organizations that encourage proactive and creative learning characterized by inspiring and motivating people with a mission and purpose, empowering at all levels, accumulating and sharing internal knowledge, gathering and integrating external information and challenging the status quo and enabling creativity. If a research institution adopts the learning organization culture, its academicians are likely to become active knowledge seekers. However, it is difficult in most cases to pattern behavior of all organization members along a single organization culture.

From related literature, it is evident that universities are liable to invest efforts on building the research capabilities of their employees in order to maximize their own potentials and intensify the university's growth. Additionally, most studies support the contribution of both facilitated and personal learning by individuals and research teams to develop research capability and competencies of lecturers. However, there is little knowledge on what circumstances and contexts contribute to individual learning, development of research competencies as well as university supported research.

3.0 Methodology

This study used both descriptive and comparative survey, which were conducted in four phases involving65 lecturers from diverse faculties. The study utilized a questionnaire, which was modified by the researcher based on the APEC-Deloitte Consulting Study (2010) model and the People, process, and

technology framework of Chen et al. (2003,).The data were analyzed descriptively using means and percentages.

4.0 Results

The mean before and after Organizational Development Intervention (ODI) for knowledge on scientific competencies needed for research changed from 2.4 to 3.4 with a mean difference of 1.0. The mean difference was significant with t-value of 4.858 and p-value of .002. The null hypothesis that Organizational Development Intervention (ODI) on research capability of lecturers at RUCO has no effect on the existing problem is rejected since the p-value is less than 0.05. These findings tally with the studies of Senge (1990), Jia et al (2008); and Iqbal et al (2011). According to Senge (1990), universities as learning organizations should ensure that there is expansion of knowledge through capacity building on research capability, which meet desired goals and enable creation and innovations.

The realized new results and expanded thinking patterns are nurtured in inspirational and conducive research environments. This allows people to continually learn together as learning organizations. In turn, this builds a truly committed team that aims to create and recreate existing knowledge from day-to-day as a way of expressing that they have scientific competencies and that they are capable of challenging the existing conventional social reality.

Secondly, building and managing research teams changed from 2.5 to 3.5, reporting a mean difference of 1.0.The mean difference was significant with t-value of 4.858 and p-value of .000. The null hypothesis that there is no difference in the mean score for building and managing research teams before and after intervention is rejected since the p-value is less than 0.05.

This result is consistent with the theory established by Bandura, which maintains that the basis of human behavior is social interaction. This theory can be employed in improving, building and managing research teams. For example, Bandura (1969), logically argues that learning is influenced by both behavior and expectancy. In this regard, Bandura recognizes the significance of basic behavioral concepts of reinforcement as a determinant of future behavior. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of internal psychological factors, especially, expectancies: it is considered that the prospects of succeeding in a given task will determine whether the task will be undertaken. If the odds of succeeding are high, then the task is most likely to be carried out.

Kolb *et al* (2005), asserts that learners acquire understanding that they internalize by being exposed to learning materials and by solving problems that were experienced as part of day-to-day activities. The practical implication of these results is that the intervention was effective. Specifically, three factors significantly contributed to the change i.e organizational efforts to build and strengthen research teams in the university, university's attitude in placing a motivation policy for those who have published their researches, and management's deliberate efforts to build skills and competencies in research.

Thirdly, attitude towards conducting research have improved from negative to neutral with mean difference of 1.2 with t-value of 4.858 and p-value of .000. The null hypothesis that the attitude towards conducting research before and after ODI has no change was rejected since the p-value is less than 0.05. These findings correlate with studies conducted by Benson et al (1991), Lertputtarak (2008), Iqbalet al (2011) and Rezaei et al (2013). Benson *et al.* (1991) concluded that innovation and quality management are directly related to the top management to enhance quality norms by setting policies and goals in the area of quality, treating it as a strategic variable, rewarding business unit managers on the basis of the quality of its products and/or services and making resources available for quality improvement.

Lertputtarak (2008), noted that there were five important factors affecting research output that could be conveniently grouped into three categories. These include: environmental, institutional, and personal career development related factors. To address the problem of low research output, the study put forward that the University Management needs to sequence solutions in relation with how they occur starting with the research and teaching environment followed by setting institutional rules and principles that support research output, and finally altering attitudes and behavior of individuals towards research. The table below presents a summary of pre and post evaluations cores in all the three areas of intervention.

Comparison of the Pre and Post Intervention Data

Research Capability	Mean Before ODI	Mean After ODI	Mean Difference	t-Value	P-Value	Ho Decision at a=0.05	Interpretation
Knowledge on	2.4	3.4	1.0	4.858	0.002	Rejected	Significant

Scientific Competencies Needed for Research							
Building and Managing Research Teams	2.5	3.5	1.0	12.722	0.000	Rejected	Significant
Attitude towards Conducting Research	2.3	3.5	1.2	9.753	0.000	Rejected	Significant

Therefore, there was an improvement in research capability because it is now clear that to some extent, lecturers have gained knowledge on scientific competencies in conducting research because through OD interventions carried out in the University, there is an increase of articles published in the University especially internationals journals. Up to this moment, about twelve (12) international journals have been published by one of the four faculties.

The University has established a research bureau and a performance criteria. The University has equally intensified its efforts in motivating research leaders, financing motivated researchers, and creating research units for all faculties in the University, which help in mobilization and management. Also, the University has created research promotion forums, improved the research environment, disseminated up-to-date information on research opportunities, and adopted a new policy on promotion of academicians. In regard to promotion, it is mandatory for applicants to indicate how much they have researched and published. Also, OPRAS has compelled lecturers to engage in research and publication. This shows that research and publication is gradually picking up momentum.

Conclusion

The organization development intervention, which was based on the fishbone model and the APEC-Deloitte Framework improved the research capability of lecturers in Ruaha Catholic University. Knowledge on research competencies needed for research and building and managing research teams were found to be moderate. There is a positive change in the attitude towards conducting research. The intervention activities designed by the researcher were considered successful as evidenced by the research outputs produced by the participants after the intervention.

Recommendations

The study recommends that RUCU Management should continue to improve areas that need special attention as indicated by the study. This requires the Management to offer adequate support and establish a follow-up system for research and publication. This could be better implemented through an established action plan by placing concrete dates, activities, responsible people, and resources needed. In connection to that, another action research should be conducted for the sustainability of the positive changes obtained.

Management should consider downplaying challenges facing research and publication in view of counteracting the challenges and ultimately boosting research. The study recommends that the models applied in this study should be distinctively used for other action research and interventional studies. This would be suitable for developing countries where inadequate research has resulted into inadequate information on the specific countries.

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