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CLIENT EXPECTATIONS OF ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The research focused mainly on determining exact expectations that a client has from an academic institution. What any centre would combine to fully satisfy its clients would comprise of academics, social activities, culture and even sports and so has Academic Institutions tried all it can to combine all these features at once. Moreover, the elements of the content of an outstanding academic institution are defined and urged to be put into action. Utilizing the resources available; Human resources are used as much as possible to drive the best services home hence staffing was carried out keenly and professionally to ensure best decisions made and executed. Material resources were also gathered to support the result and findings of the study.

INTRODUCTION

In the period of globalization is characterized by changing patterns or standards to blend with the change in the environment in the manner in which business is conducted. In this area, business is assumed to have a greater proportion. The globalization of business has resulted in the emergence of alterations in the competitive structures of business and notable shifts in the patterns of demands throughout the world. For this reason, the challenge of global marketing is to develop strategic plans that are competitive in the intensifying world markets. For a growing number of business organizations, being global is no longer a luxury but a necessity for economic survival (Cateora and Graham, 1999).

This situation is true not only of business and industrial organization but also of institutions of higher learning, which are affected by globalization. Higher education institutions face problems of decreased enrollment, student attrition, and competition. These problems have been only partly addressed because of many school administrators' sensitivity to the issue of marketing of academic institutions. Some educators view marketing of education and recruitment of students as undignified and objectionable. Other educators regard these measures as manipulative and unbecoming of higher education institutions. However, with changing student needs and societal expectations, increasing competition for scarce clientele, limited resources and unlimited financial pressures, many educators are forced to adopt strategies for making their institutions viable (Yilmaz, 2005). Confronting an era marked by dwindling support and competition, it is incumbent on administrators and higher education leaders at colleges and universities to broadcast who they are, what they do, and what makes them valuable (Anctil, 2008). Furthermore, to be viable in the modern era, today's colleges and universities must strike a balance among delivering sound academic programs, conducting and promoting research, and engaging with the community as social institutions and places of

higher learning - - while also meeting the contemporary challenges of running large organizations with dwindling public support and greater competition from education sectors which are operating for profit (Anctil, 2008).

Taking into account the impact of globalization on academic, the researcher conducts a study of client expectations of an academic institution in a global context. The problem is examined in the context of the Value Discipline Strategy typology which focuses on three strategies of marketing; namely: operational excellence, customer intimacy, and product leadership, as applied to the Future University of Sudan. The predominant factor that is emphasized in the use of the three strategies is value (Treacy and Wiersema, 1995).

The research involved a survey of the expectations of students of an academic institution that operates in a global context.

MARKETING OF ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Work on the marketing of academic institutions were performed by researchers in the past (Yilmaz, 2005). Using the theory of Philip Kotler and Karen Fox, Yilmaz examined three aspects of the problem: (1) the brief history and changing environment of distance education; (2) the specific marketing communication tools used in Distance Education; and (3) the benefits provided by marketing communications to distance education institutions. Naude and Ivy (1999) conducted a study of the ways in which old and new universities responded to the rapidly changing academic environment in which former polytechnics were altered to become full-fledged universities. They studied 81 old universities and 50 universities to determine how marketing was undertaken in the two segments and noted that the two groups of institutions used fundamentally different approaches to operationalizing their marketing strategies.

Hawkins and Frohoff (2010) approached the challenges of marketing higher education in the context of the assumption that students were not customers and neither were their parents. Furthermore, posing a challenge to marketing was the view of many academic and university personnel that marketing compromises academic freedom. In the context of these controversial views regarding the marketing of higher education, Hawkins and Frohoff attempted to discover answers to questions such as (1) the way in which today's university marketers make decisions and their greatest challenges; and the challenge that the university marketer faces when allocating inadequate resources, given the characteristics of an academic environment. With the university communication professionals as respondents, the two researchers discovered that less than fifty percent had a marketing plan for more than one year and that only forty-one percent of these professionals allocated their marketing dollars on the basis of marketing demand.

CRITERIA FOR A TOTAL QUALITY SCHOOL

Effectiveness is equated with the concept of quality. Quality means perfection of workmanship by which an entity adhered to in its operation. According to Bones and Griggs, 2008, the organization decides whether its practices conform to its objectives and strategies in a way that meets the clientele's need.

The achievement of quality is dependent on how the organization embrace change. The contemporary thinking on this aspect focuses on total quality management (TQM). Total

quality management (TQM) is a philosophy that is driven by the constant attainment of client satisfaction through the continuous improvement of all organizational processes (Robbins, 2003). In the academic exercise, students and their parents should attain satisfaction from educational services. The services in school should be rendered with the perspective that the students are paying for the services that are provided by the school. For this reason, total quality management should be implemented in the school system. The concept of total quality school can be understood better in the context of the criteria presented by Arcaro (1995) namely; customer focus, total involvement, measurement, commitment; and continuous improvement.

Customer Focusing is a technique for identifying the customers, products/services, quality characteristics, and performance measures which are most important to your business unit. There are two of customers, the internal and external customers. The internal are within the institution who are already part of the university. As for the external, these are the students that are expected to join the university either from secondary school or from other universities.

Putting customer focus on students more specifically on financial capability on their academic training for higher education would allow students as clientele to make viable options in pursuance of their career. Customer focus can help build a student-centric higher education system that delivers quality, flexible learning experiences that lead to educational credentials for personal growth and career success (Soares,2009).Customer focus brings additional advantage. By understanding how students select personal options to which higher education they will choose, will provide guidance for parents and educational institutions on the courses they will offer.

The concept of total involvement was seen by Jon Miller of Gemba Panta Rei as a means to explore some routes to optimum employee engagement. Miller (2005), stressed that the on the importance of employees cooperating in any organization to actually achieve what is intended. Also, true total involvement will be attained by teams where each person would get the opportunity to contribute as much as possible and strengthen the mission of the firm and push it forward.

Kanter (1999) identifies several elements of the excellent organization. These elements include clear, vision-driven management and effective leadership; keeping the goals of the organization limited and ensuring that these schools are addressed; making standards explicit and operational; introducing continuous change, improvement and innovation; building in high-involvement, commitment, participation, ownership, and empowerment of colleagues; scrupulous attention to the clientele; informed an pro-active leadership; devolution of responsibility to autonomous teams; the use of management information systems to monitor and measure activities and outcomes; and the development of creativity through problem solving approaches and reward systems.

In an academic institution a baseline data that serves as a yardstick to measure performance is adhered to. Once a staff member realizes that he/she does not meet the required standards, he/she should attempt to improve on previous work; hence improvement cannot end. Teaching techniques and assessment strategies should be varied to ensure that a true reflection of the performance of every learner is always given. Participation of educators in the establishment of baseline data can motivate them to work hard and improve quality so that they satisfy their customers, that is, their learners (Barry & Tye, 1991). It is imperative that all the educators in the school situation should be involved in the school activities and work as a team in the

improvement of quality so that a new culture is inculcated continuously in the school. The overall performance of the school will improve when all the educators become accountable and responsible for the day-to-day activities of the school. According to Schmoker and Wilson (1993), teaching a modern curriculum requires the close integration of academic staff together with the support staff and learning resources.

The chief concern of education is to see to it that students develop the skills necessary that will enable them to transfer what has been learned to "real life" situations. The students must be able to perform a given skill at an acceptable level of competency as taught by the teachers. Some typical evaluation device used to measure the development of these skills is the achievement test. Both Cronbach and Thorndike and Hagen (1993) refer to achievement tests as being measures concerned with progress after practice in certain content areas. To measure student academic learning implies a thorough evaluation through test to determine students level of comprehension which can be observed in terms of the changes in behavior.

In the end, what every business seeks is commitment – from its customers, staff, and partners, and the entire organization. Commitment erases friction, creates momentum and drives substantial profit. In the academic institution, a great need of commitment from students, parents, staff and the society at large is important. With total commitment, the University moves steps ahead and grows stronger day by day. A total quality institution would easily draw the commitment from the targeted parties.

One of the fundamental tenet pertaining to total quality management is that everyone in the organization must be dedicated to continuous improvement, personally and collectively. As Senge (2000) has suggested, those organizations which are most capable of surviving and prospering are "learning organizations" where people, processes and systems are dedicated to continuous improvement personally and collectively. In order to be true learning organizations, schools must be afforded the resources, especially time and money, needed for training, quality circles, research, and communication with the school's stakeholders—the business organizations, colleges, community residents, and taxpayers. Schools must also rethink practices that focus narrowly on students' limitations rather than their range of innate strengths. Howard Gardner (2001) has pointed out the self-defeating nature of a narrow academic focus, encouraging educators to acknowledge the existence of multiple intelligences and potentials within each student and to help students develop their much intelligence more fully day by day. True dedication to the improvement of all students will require educators to reexamine current practices of grading and assessment. Educators must examine the wide range of effects that externally imposed assessment has on students' capacities to grow, to learn, and to assess the quality of their own work as well as the work of others. Many schools are already implementing new assessment strategies as part of their total quality plan, including process portfolios, exhibitions, and celebrations of students' progress throughout the year.

Continuous improvement is where the challenge lies and where the real functioning of the university is determined. After convincing the customers and making them part of the university, the task lies in proving the effectiveness of the university and maintaining them in the institution by making them believe that this is where they belong and nowhere else. Therefore, this works out by continuous improvement and ensuring that the university is always going high and higher moving steps ahead. Continuous improvement refers to endless development especially with the emerging trends that it has to be updated with thus being able

to introduce from time to time, the latest technologies that will enable an advanced learning system.

Educators should adopt an attitude of improving previous efforts. It implies that 20 educators should improve previous outcomes and quality and also be ready to improve the present outcomes for a better product or service. Van der Westhuizen (1996:307) further notes that continual improvement requires the next effort to be better than the previous one. Therefore, educators can improve on the mistakes of the past and strive for excellence. Every educator need to aim at continuous improvement in all the school activities. Steyn (1996:129) suggests that educators should establish the baseline data that the school can use to measure improvement. Quality results at the end of the year serves as proof of good performance.

TQM is an important set of tools that can be implemented in the educational institutions (Sallis 1996:28). TQM Strategy supports the constant meeting and exceeding of customer expectations through integrated system techniques and training. This includes continuous improvement of all processes, resulting in high quality products service and reducing scrap and rework (Williams 1994:5).

VALUE DISCIPLINE STRATEGY

What value discipline strategy to be used to address the expectations of the clientele through operational excellence, customer intimacy, and product leadership.

This involves providing all the means possible for the concerned to complete whatever they are in urge of doing by removing barriers either physical or mental, providing all required facilities or suitable technology and generally making the whole situation as easy as possible for them to deal with and complete their task. Therefore, the easier management makes it for its staff and customers to involve themselves in the entire business, the more effective their performance and the more successful the results.

In order to be successful in the market arena, any business must clinch a competitive strategy. A framework for designing this type of plan is offered by Michael Treacy and Fred Wiersma (1993) namely; operational excellence, customer intimacy and product leadership.

The operational excellence strategy is to lead the industry in terms of price. This strategy aims to accomplish cost leadership. The primary goal is to increase efficiency and lower prices to the end consumers. Profits are realized from decreasing production cost rather than increasing the prices. The strategy provides itself to a higher level, transaction-oriented and even out outputs that has little need for much variation of the product or services. It is a perfect markets of customers that value cost over choice. Normally those who are leaders are promoting operational excellence couple with strong organizational values and discipline and standardized operations. Operational excellence can be done in many ways which can also be achieved through reducing cost and shortening cycle time between customer order and ship date (Liker, 1997). In the case of higher institution of learning, operational excellence is equated by discovering that they can more effectively manage costs—and do it in a way that preserves their core mission (J. Denneen and M. Mankins, 2011).

Customer intimacy strategy is molding or developing products to fit the specific needs of a particular market segments. They compete on the quality of products and services they offered at the same time satisfying wants rather than decreasing its prices. The company makes revenues from higher prices rather than from lower costs. The goal of customer intimacy strategy is centered on a unique range of customer services that allows for the personalization and the customization of products and services to satisfy a specific need of a market. The design and development of a product or service requires for an in-depth knowledge of customers needs and wants. The solutions offered rarely present the cheapest option for the customer, nor the most innovative, but are regarded as “good enough.” Companies that excel in customer intimacy combine detailed customer knowledge with operational flexibility so they can respond quickly to almost any need, from customizing a product to fulfilling special requests. As a consequence, these companies engender tremendous customer loyalty (Treacy and Wiesema, 1995). The same concept can be adopted in higher education of learning where various institution compete in terms of their total services to the public. Customer intimacy in higher education is manifested on the courses offering, quality of instruction and the services offers tailored fit to a specific needs of the students which is their clientele.

Product leadership strategy does not have a standardized strategy. Based on this strategy, stress and never ending innovation come into play. They prefer to move quickly into new markets with innovative new products. Product leaders normally introduced new products so that their competitors cannot operate alongside with them. This strategy aims to build an environment that continually carry a unique and superior products and services to the market. Product leadership includes excellence in creativity, problem solving and teamwork and coordination among members of the corporate community.

A product leader continually develops new and unique products and services that have an emotional and rational surplus value for clients (Impuls Marketing management services).

The product leader is defined to be creative, inventive and flexible with the culture of independence. We consider the situation ahead of us as one where these qualities would include new programmes, teaching techniques and even the overall structure of the university to try to introduce a more interesting and better system. The main aim of the product leadership is to actually and a position ahead of your competitors by producing goods or offering services unique in nature and rated the top and not easily taken over by competitors.

Applying this concept in and academic institution can be done in various ways; First, is when the institution will set the perfect strategies to identify potential clients who will be willing to enroll and raise the status of the university. Second, improvement of the standards of the university can be attain by trying to figure out what areas need improvement, what needs to be added, replaced or removed. Third, is to create techniques to build strong societal influence so that the university not only grows into an academic institution but also one which will work hand in hand with the society and try to uplift it as much as possible. Fourth, to have an immediate contact with the clients so as to figure out what they expect from a total quality institution and ensure placing exactly what the clients require not only satisfying them but delighting them and retain them in the university. Fifth, building the competitive advantage. This works still by contact with the clients and the

society. This enable the administration to know the progress of the university as per it is rated and what the clients see from the university's competitors that may not be found in the university so as to place what would even e better and more attractive to the clients.

Intellectual difficulties such as merging the concepts of a total quality school and the value discipline typology may arise. Problems might be met in the researcher's attempt to reconcile two theories and use them in the same context of a marketing plan for an academic institution. However, this seeming dichotomy of conceptual framework can be solved in the light of a common concept that reconciles the theories, and this concept is quality. The data generated from the expectations of clients based on the standards of Arcaro (1995) can be sufficiently addressed by the marketing strategies based on Treacy and Wiersema's value discipline typology (1995).

Measurable objectives consist of the following: Identification of the customers of the school, as to whether they are the parents or the students; Determination of the extent of participation of the academic community to the attainment of quality.

Determination of the ways in which the progress of the school is measured. Determination of the extent to which the management of the school is committed to quality improvement and productivity. Consistency of the management effort to benchmark educational process for continuous improvement.

Customer intimacy, which addresses the expectations of customer focus; and Product leadership, which is attained by means of: (1) relevant curricular offerings that enable the students to cope with the demands of global competitiveness; (2) quality education which is characterized by the selective admission of students; and (3) education which is in accordance with the Bologna Declaration of 1999.

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