

**Unlocking and Enhancing Innate Creativity in University Administration: Registry  
Personnel in Perspective**

**A Paper Presented at the 2021 Professional Lecture of the College of Medicine  
University of Lagos on Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2021**

By

**Dr. (Mrs.) Taiwo Folasade Ipaye, *FNIM*,  
Former Registrar, UNILAG  
Director, AMDRC  
University of Lagos.**

**Protocol:**

The Vice- Chancellor, **Prof. Oluwatoyin Ogundipe, *FAS***

The Provost, **Prof David A. Oke**

Deputy Provost, **Prof. O.A. Ebuehi**

College Secretary, **Dr. Olayinka Obafemi-Moses**

Dean of Faculties

Directors

Members of Staff of Admin. Dept. and the Registry

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Gentlemen of the press

**Introduction**

In 1948, Nigeria had only one University, the University of Ibadan, today, it has 45 Federal Universities, 53 State owned and, 99 Private Universities (National Universities Commission). The Registry is the administrative hub that links the various organs of the university governance structure, today we want to look at strategies that we can adopt to unlock and enhance our creativity in university administration from a practical angle. I will be drawing from personal experience to bring this closer home.

In the early years, there were only a few graduate staffs in administration with a maximum of a first degree in the humanities. Many were in the executive and secretarial cadre and following

the acquisition of additional qualifications on the job, were able to rise through the ranks and be converted to the administrative cadre. As a result of their dedication, hard work and commitment, they were often entrusted with administrative responsibilities. Today, to be an administrative officer, you must possess a minimum of second class lower grade at the first degree. Many are holders of Masters Degree as well as professional qualifications and we are beginning to have more doctorate degree holders in administration. The truth however is that you cannot compare the commitment, competence, and integrity of today's administrators with that of our predecessors.

### **Why is this so?**

A major challenge is the lack of professionalism which has been defined as the conduct exhibited by people who are providing advice and services that require expertise and who meet defined or generally accepted standards of behaviour (Armstrong, 2016). It "involves the pursuit of both excellence and competence that achieves a practical link between knowledge and theory on the one hand and public purpose on the other" (Mosher, 1976). In the words of Olaopa (2017) "A professional is someone who possesses core knowledge of, and deep familiarity with the specific expertise that enables him or her to move with ease among the concepts of his or her profession". The implication of this is that professionalism is a continuous process of training and professionalization, hence you have major professional regulatory bodies organising C.P.D.'s (Continuous Professional Development). I want to describe professionalism simply as having a reputation for excellence and being thought of as someone who exhibits professionalism under any circumstance. Why then is it difficult for us to act as professionals? The answer lies in the following assumptions:

- ❖ We fail to understand the meaning of public accountability.
- ❖ We have no clear understanding of rules and regulations.
- ❖ We fail to comply with the code of ethics guiding our employment.
- ❖ Many of us are not working in a just, fair and transparent environment.
- ❖ We easily tolerate, foster corrupt practices.
- ❖ The physical condition of our working environment leaves a lot to be desired.

### **Unlocking your Creativity as an Administrator**

Many professionals in the non-teaching cadre in the university system have limited understanding of university affairs neither do they avail themselves of opportunities to attend conferences, seminars, workshops, public lectures etc. where such issues are discussed and they can learn from. If we are to be convincing as highly professional members of staff within the system, you must demonstrate competence and the ability to exercise reasonable independence in a mature manner. You must be able to go beyond what is expected of you and concretely add value to the operation of the department in order to make a difference. To unlock your creativity, you must;

- i. Work on constantly improving your command of the spoken and written English language. There are several free applications on the internet. Learn, relearn and unlearn.
- ii. Buy and read books, better still go on the internet, be abreast of current knowledge and skills used in the profession.
- iii. Invest in yourself; attend trainings and workshops for self improvement. Its rather unfortunate that despite the many public lectures that goes on in the university system, we rarely take advantage of them to learn new things.
- iv. Make yourself more visible in your work environment in this age of disruptive technology; the social media has put the world in our palms.
- v. Be ICT compliant, you need to be skilled, versatile and smart. Learn how to make use of appropriate software relevant to your schedule.
- vi. Pay attention to your comportment and dressing. Ensure you look professional always.

### **Enhancing your Creativity**

You must go beyond what is expected of you and concretely add value to the operation of the department. The Registry is the custodian of the rules and regulations governing our universities, let us be integrity watch dogs and we will earn the respect of not just that of our subordinates but our colleagues and superiors alike. We need to evaluate and redesign our mode of service delivery lest we become extinct. To remain relevant, professional administrators must acquire and hone the following skills;

-Team work

-Good communication skills

-Creativity and Innovativeness

-Critical thinking

-Networking skills

-Vision- where do you see yourself within and without the organization?

"The happiest people I know are always evaluating and improving themselves while the unhappy ones are usually evaluating and judging others" (Anonymous).

In order to further enhance your creativity as a professional administrator, there is need for personal self development through the acquisition of appropriate skills such that you;

- Understand the reasons for the existence of the universities and appreciate the need for customer focused services.

- Possess basic research related skills and be well versed in Information Communication Technology.
- Possess excellent managerial/leadership skills
- Appreciate the value of punctuality and regularity at work and the need for them to go the extra mile to ensure their schedules are effectively carried out.
- Have excellent communication skill
- Demonstrate excellent interpersonal and human relations skill
- Have strong analytical skills and a capacity for independent critical thinking.
- Can be imaginative and possess problem solving skills
- Have excellent cooperative skills based on tolerance, integrity and a sense of personal responsibility.
- Appreciate what it takes to be a world class institution.

## **Registry in Perspective**

In this age of disruptive technology, flexible working hours, remote workers and millennial staff, we need to rid ourselves and others of the mentality that administrators are mere clerical officers. It is important that University administrators keep abreast of innovations and developments that would have direct impact on their operations for greater efficiency. The Registry must serve as a catalyst by putting in place a structured programme for training and retraining of members of staff to ensure that they serve their customers; fellow workers (teaching and non-teaching); students and the general community in a professional manner. We must come out of our shell, have a voice and be seen as professionals who;

- Generate ideas.
- Make contributions that have significant impact on decisions of the various committees we service.
- Are efficient and well trained.
- Can compete favorably with our counterparts globally.
- Articulate and well grounded in the rules and regulations of our institutions in which we took part in formulating.
- Are transparent, loyal and imbued with integrity.
- Add value.

The structure of our Registry has remained largely the same over the years, the same thing goes for our operations, with slight modifications in some universities and a few making some innovative changes that has positively impacted their branding. In a typical Nigerian university you have such departments/ sections as:

Registrar's Office

- ✓ Council Affairs
- ✓ Senate matters/ Academic Board
- ✓ Personnel; Establishment/Human Resources
- ✓ Admissions
- ✓ Records
- ✓ Examinations
- ✓ Certificate
- ✓ Faculties etc

Let us look at the operations in a few of these sectors and review what has changed in terms of operations. I'll be making copious references to the University where some of our creativity and innovativeness has positively impacted the operations of the Registry.

## **Student Matters**

In most institutions, as a result of government policy the admission process has remained basically the same since the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) took over the process in 1978, although JAMB has gone ahead to modify its operations by making extensive use of ICT in delivering its mandate, the story is however not the same in all the universities. Even with the introduction of Post-UTME examinations, a lot still needs to be done to make the process easier for all stake holders and a number of universities are struggling to fully computerize the process. Some of the innovations introduced at the University of Lagos in order to make the process easier for stakeholders is the use of chatbots to respond to a large number of frequently asked questions so that students do not have to visit the campus before their questions are answered. Help desks were created with dedicated lines and courteous staff, as well as providing prompt response to e-mail enquiries. We also have in place a tracking system for monitoring the selection process. The section has greater visibility on the university website.

We have ensured that our orientation programmes and matriculation ceremonies are more engaging for the new entrants, thus the introduction of a physical/virtual campus tour to familiarise them with the campus as part of the orientation programme. They also participate in novelty matches and talent shows during the orientation week. Their admission into the university is climaxed with a breakfast session with the Vice Chancellor and other Principal Officers on the morning of their matriculation ceremony. As a result of these innovations during my tenure as Registrar, we moved from a matriculation ceremony attendance level of 60% to as much as 95% at the peak.

In many of the first generations universities, because of the large number of students and the manual processing of results in the early years, the issuance of transcripts has been cumbersome and problematic. However, with computerisation some of these challenges are being overcome. We have gone the extra mile in Unilag to convert our legacy results in phases, and the process of computerisation, has greatly reduced the turn around time now to 48 hours. Moreover, students who graduated from 2010 onwards are able to generate water marked copies of their transcripts on-line. The transcript application process from beginning to dispatch is initiated and completed on-line with opportunity for tracking till it gets to the final destination.

We are also working in partnership with one of the leading international verification outfits World Education Services (WES), to ensure the verification of our students' records with ease and our stakeholders are all happier for these developments. All these couldn't have been achieved without the innovativeness, creativity and the vision of the registry staffs in charge of this schedule.

Our graduation ceremony have indeed become an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of our students and each of them have opportunity to be openly recognized and acknowledged with a handshake from the Vice-Chancellor before their peers and family. Similarly, their certificates are ready for collection immediately after the graduation ceremony. We have succeeded in making the event more meaningful for all students including part-time and Distance Learning Institute graduates. With all these developments we have managed to be business like in the organisation of the convocation ceremony by ensuring the efficiency and solemnity it deserves such that the ceremony is concluded within two and a half hours.

In the same vein, we have deployed the use of artificial intelligence in hostel accommodation balloting, election of student representatives for halls of residence and faculty executives. The use of various social media platforms in interacting with students has greatly helped in ensuring a more efficient and functional registry. Apart from this, the outsourcing of janitorial services since 2015 has helped to ensure that the beautiful, clean and alluring ambience of our campus continue to be well maintained, this is part of creativity in leadership. I can comfortably say that we are able to compete effectively with our counterparts globally.

## **Staff Matters**

This is one area of operation where the university system is still lagging behind the private sector and our international counterparts. There is need for a comprehensive review of our recruitment, selection and on-boarding process. We also need to improve on our appraisal, discipline and reward system. Talent Management is the buzz word in human resource operations all over, but our universities are yet to catch on. Our staff development policies leave a lot to be desired particularly as it affects the non-teaching cadre. Most of the constraints in this area are largely due to various government policies and guidelines over which we have no control. Staff training is an area that needs urgent attention particularly for the non-teaching staff. There is this popular saying, "if you don't train them you can't blame them" this is very true. Through our appraisal system we should identify areas for training and professional development. TetFund should stop discriminating against the non-teaching staff in this sector.

On the other hand, as individuals we need to make personal investments in our professional development. Look at our millennia and emulate their quest for acquisition of professional skill and certification. We should earmark funds and strive to be an active member of at least one professional body; ANUPA, NIM; CIPM, AUA etc. Make time to attend workshops, conferences and public lectures to keep abreast of developments in your field. We should also develop the habit of reading and conducting research in areas of interest and on subjects related to our work. Human resources is no longer practised the way we do in the university system, let's unlearn, learn and relearn. It's not just about certification.

We need to continue to acquire skills that will enable us compete favorably with our counterparts globally. In a rapidly changing global work life, Our Human Resource /Personnel department must begin to actively think outside the box about the reality of hiring remote workers, people working from home and staff with flexible work hours and evaluate the implication of that development on remuneration and appraisal. With the increasing use of artificial intelligence in our daily living, we must strive to acquire relevant I.T. skills that will help us improve on service delivery.

At the University of Lagos, the retention of our first class students was introduced in 2014 in order to ensure that we retained the best of hands in the system. Furthermore the introduction of computer based examination for all new entrants and promotions to CONTISS 13 and above became established, the idea is to ensure that everyone is computer literate. Completion of appraisal form, application for leaves and some other HR request were computerized and every member of staff can only access their pay slips on-line. This has paid off; because it has reduced the amount spent on stationery, reduced processing time for activities and made the registry function better. Similarly, we have tried to move to a paperless registry by having almost all our meetings paperless, holding many on the virtual platform as well as computerizing the conduct of elections into Council, Congregation, Senate, Faculties and various committees.

### **The Task ahead**

I am very grateful for a platform such as this which has given me the opportunity to share my thoughts with fellow administrators. For those of us who are more senior in the system, we need to mentor those coming behind and equip them with skills needed for a successful career. The older generation should teach the younger ones with patience and the younger ones should make themselves teachable.

On another level, we should endeavour to improve our relationship with stakeholders in the system, the students without whom there will be no university. We cannot run away from the fact that without students we will be redundant, let's treat them as our customers and partners. The job is not just for the Vice-Chancellors and academics alone, we are all stakeholders. We must all work together to achieve the institutional strategic goals and objectives such that our graduates are equipped with the needed skills and competencies to make a difference in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We must therefore willingly key into the move to further incorporate artificial intelligence into the administration of our universities.

My charge to us is that in order to unlock and enhance your creativity, you must develop a reading culture, a thirst for knowledge and a desire to do things better. Remember, "every work is a self portrait of the person who did it, autograph your work with excellence "Anonymous.

I want to leave us with the words of our former Registrar, Mrs. C.F.A. Olumide, "with every posting, ask yourself what additional value can I introduce to my schedule, when taking decisions, am I fair to all concerned"

Remember it is you and you alone who can make a difference in your schedule

**I thank you for your attention.**

**Dr. Taiwo Folasade Ipaye, FNIM**

**November 2021**



## Reference

**Armstrong M** (2016) *Armstrong Handbook of Management and Leadership for H.R.* 4<sup>th</sup> Edition  
Pp 160-165

**Brown, Darrell (2016)** Ethics and professionalism in the workplace. “10 Golden Rules to Professional Ethics in the Workplace”:**LinkedIn post by Leandro Valente**  
<https://indianapolisrecorder.com/36d05298-7b96-11e6-8226-033c365dab07> Retrieved 4<sup>th</sup> October 2021

**Ejiogu Aloy** (1987) *Democratisation of the Administrative Process in Nigerian Universities Issues and Trends in Ejiogu A.M. & Ajeyalemi Duro Emergent Issues in Nigerian Education Vol 1* Joja Educ Resources and Publishers ltd.. Lagos. Pp 180-182

**Obeki, Stephen E. (2012)** *Administrative skills, Procedures and best Practices for University Administrators and Administrative Personnel.* MINDEX publishing Ltd Benin

**Olaopa , Tunji** (2017) *Transforming the African Public Service* )Pan African University Press. Austin, Texas. P.165

**Ipaye, T.F.** (2015).The Role of Administrator in Service Delivery: A Key Factor in the Achievement of Organizational Goals - Paper Presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Distinguished Lecture Series of ANUPA, Lagos State University Branch on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015 in the Main Campus, Lagos State University

**Iyanda, Kunle (2016)**The New University Administrator. November 28, 2016 Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Association of Nigerian Registrars Lagos

**Ogunraku, O. O.** (2012). Leadership and Governance in Higher Education - Challenges and Prospects of Developing the Next Generations of University Leaders, Academics and Researchers; Management Models - Paper Presented at the two-day Consultative Policy Dialogue by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors (CVC) and Trust Africa, CVC/AVCNU Conference Hall, Abuja, Nigeria

**Thornhill, C.** (2003). Pre-requisites for Effective Service Delivery.  
<http://www.dpsa.gov.za/bathopele/docs/afripubserday/UP%20Prof%20Thornhill.pdf> retrieved 12th march 2009

**Udoessien, E.I.** (2003). A Critical Assessment of University Administration in Nigeria. *The University Administrator* vol. 1 No. 5. ANUPA Lagos

