

RESEARCH MANAGEMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY



BY

A.B. NABEGU AND A.I. NAIBBI

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INTRODUCTION

Nigerian universities have realised that for them to fulfil their major mandate and remain relevant they must be seen to play a crucial underpinning role in enhancing the economic competitiveness of Nigeria in the world knowledge capital through quality research (Makanjola, 2012). Consequently, today universities in Nigeria are struggling to take the necessary steps that will enable them to integrate research into mainstream activities where technical transfer offices and university-industry partnerships are becoming increasingly being proposed. Some universities namely, Ibadan, Ife and Lagos have created a position for a third Deputy Vice – Chancellor responsible for research, innovation and partnership. Despite this realisation and the efforts, however, at the present moment, systematic support to research activities remains a relatively marginal issue in Nigerian universities as the institutions necessary to manage the whole complex research enterprise is either weak or none- existent (Sambo, 2012).

Yet the need for institutions for research management with a view to sustaining long-term high-quality research activities has been emphasised as an essential part of a general reform of university management, allowing for more transparency and efficiency in accounting for its activities. Beyond the financial management requirements a strong need was expressed across all universities for more professional support of, and training for researchers and the relevant administrative staff (Casadevall and Fang, 2012).

Also, the steadily increasing amount of third-party funding through competitive bidding has generated the need for a range of skills and services. For example, more proactive marketing of research capacity, communication and negotiation skills, (international) project management, contact brokerage, legal knowledge and financial management among others (Agrawal and Cockburn, 2002).

There is no doubt that managing a research is an increasingly challenging task. On the one hand, you need to be prepared to collaborate and compete at a global level, but on the other, you are often obliged to depend on local sources of income (Armenakis and Harris, 2002). Furthermore, creating a strategy that will lead to the best outcomes in terms of research impact or innovation requires a special skill which frequently lies outside the experience of those chosen to lead, regardless of their professional distinction. As succinctly argued by Johnson (2013), the management of research is not the same as the research itself – although it can sometimes feel like it – but is nonetheless vital in a world whose growing interconnectedness presents us with challenges and opportunities of an unprecedented magnitude.

In addition, within the current setting, almost all universities in Nigeria complained about the increasing demand on researchers in dealing with all these aspects of research management, and its impact on their “core” activity of conducting the research itself. Many identified an inherent danger

of under-utilizing scientific capacity and slowing down academic career development, especially for young researchers, where most of their time was spent acquiring and managing projects rather than furthering their scientific work. Others acknowledged, though, that these additional skills would greatly advance their range of experience, and open new opportunities for researchers (Armenakis and Harris, 2002). Hence the need for research management in Nigerian universities

WHAT IS RESEARCH MANAGEMENT

Research management is a clearly recognised discipline in its own right, with national professional bodies, such as the US-based Research Management Institute Inc. (RMI), and British-based Association of Research Managers (ARM), devoted to it (APM,2006). Research management covers anything that the universities can do to maximise the impact of their research activities which includes activities like identifying new sources of funds, project, financial management of grants, and assistance in exploiting research results through commercialization of projects, knowledge transfer, and dissemination to the larger society.

WHY IS RESEARCH MANAGEMENT IMPORTANT

The teaching and research that universities conduct may benefit the moral, social, and economic aspects of society, and universities are publicly funded by governments for these purposes, but they are not necessarily responsible

to society (Boulton and Lucas, 2008; Shellard, 2010; Rennison, 2011; Shaheen, 2011). Today, and even more so in the future, universities will be seen as corporations in the business of education. So-called “corporate management,” is becoming much more important in universities, although it will probably always be challenged by academics who believe that they are responsible to themselves, not to society (Deem, 2001; Derbyshire, 2010). As Taylor (2006) said: *Research is an intensely personal activity, strongly dependent on the ideas and imagination of individuals or groups of individuals. . . . Research, therefore, does not lend itself to control and management. Yet, in the fast-changing competitive world of today’s higher education, there are constraints that require the application of some sort of management framework.*

You will need to develop and use the management tools, skills, and expertise if Nigerian universities are to achieve and maintain excellence (Feldon et al., 2011).

Nobody, no organisation, whether the government or private sector, would release its funds if that organisation doubts that such funds will be properly managed. One of the prerequisites required by any university interested in attracting research grants is to ensure that adequate structures have been put in place by the university to ensure adequate management in terms of the project itself and also proper management of the funds that given.

Universities need to convince these organisations and they must also have confidence in you. If you do not gain their confidence, you will not get their money. The private sector will not come to you, even the government will be wary of giving you funds, certainly, the research foundation will not touch you, if they are not sure that you will manage the grants properly, because, to any funder, the money they give you is an investment. Even when it is a direct donation or a gift, they want to see your results; they may not ask you for it if it is a gift, they may not even ask you for your report, but they still want to be sure that, the fund or money they give to you will be utilized appropriately. And if it is a grant, you must provide them reports. If it is a grant from industries, you must provide the service that they want.

Above all, research management is all about the process of getting a project completed on time, within budget, to the desired level of quality, and in a university environment where it is almost unheard of to be able to please everyone, to the satisfaction of as many stakeholders as reasonably possible.

A number of tools and techniques are available and have been used in research management; these include mind mapping, force field analysis, the grant chart, the RASCI chart and management by objectives among others (APM, 2006).

The RMI suggests that research management is accomplished through the appropriate application of logically grouped management processes comprising five process groups namely:

- Initiating,
- Planning,
- Executing,
- Monitoring and controlling,
- Closing.

The RMI also indicate the knowledge areas important for research management as:

- Integration
- Scope
- Time
- Cost
- Quality
- Human Resources
- Communication
- Risk
- Procurement

BENEFITS OF GRANT MANAGEMENT

- (i) Grant awardees are assisted to succeed

- (ii) Reputation and finances of the awardees' institutions are protected.
- (iii) Sponsors' goals are achieved, their funds judiciously spent and result properly disseminated,
- (iv) Government regulations are there in place to be complied with.
- (v) The anticipated benefits are derived from research outputs
- (vi) Requisite capacity is built
- (vii) Experience gained is documented
- (viii) The university is marketed

One thing Nigerian universities are very bad at doing is marketing their expertise. If you do not market yourself, no one will do it for you. Most news from universities that makes the headlines is bad news, such as strikes, and scandals. But how many universities have actually gone ahead in Nigeria to replace on websites or publish in newspapers the list of a database for expertise available for research in their universities? When this is done, various organisations would have the necessary information on the expertise you have in your University. But if we do not market our capabilities and expertise, how will the Organized Private Sector know that we have the expertise to solve their problems?

ORGANS OF RESEARCH MANAGEMENT

Ideally, the following are the necessary organs for efficient and effective research management.

1. Grant Management-Proposal Development and Submission

2. Grant Management-Project Management
3. Grant Administration – Research Capacity Building and Marketing
- 4 Grant Administrations – Post Award Activities
5. Grant Administration – Research Protection and Regulatory Management
6. Grant Administration – Intellectual Property and Technology Transfer

1. GRANT MANAGEMENT – PROPOSAL DEVELOPEMENT AND SUBMISSION

The institutional grant management structure should assist researchers in many ways such as:

- (i) Providing proposal templates with all necessary sections to lecturers/researchers
- (ii) Arranging for internal peer review of proposal
- (iii) Regularly reminding researchers of sponsors' guidelines including submission deadline.
- (iv) General facilitating internal review, approval and submission of proposals.

2. GRANT MANAGEMENT – PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Researchers should be assisted in managing the project in many areas including:

(i) **Human Resource Management**

This helps to ensure that hiring of competent project staff through due process, and in line with budget, is achieved.

(ii) **Purchase Requisition**

This ensures that right items are purchased in a competitive manner and in compliance with the project budget.

(iii) **Project Monitoring**

This involves tracking the performance of project and project output in relation to the implementation plan.

(iv) **Technical and Administrative Reporting**

This helps to ensure that researchers keep up with reporting requirements. It helps to keep researchers on track because reports provide a measurement of real success of the project.

3. GRANT ADMINISTRATION – RESEARCH CAPACITY BUILDING AND MARKETING

(i) The institution of start-up grants for young lecturers, including support for equipment, small project, research support.

(ii) Support for attendance at conferences and professional meetings.

(iii) Identification and dissemination of funding opportunities. The younger researchers should be assisted to access available funds, that is, available research grants. And there are quite a number of databases you can subscribe to. The one that is more pertaining to us now is research-

Afridca.net. So all these things must be in place if you want to attract grants from the organised Private Sector. They are extremely shrewd when it comes to spending money.

(iv) Database of lecturers' research interests and expertise

(v) A listing of research facilities available in the university should be maintained to provide information for potential funders and facilitate collaboration.

(vi) A deliberate effort should be made to market research expertise and research outputs available in the universities to the Organized Private Sector. Universities are very poor at marketing achievements. The things that make headlines about our universities are scandals and strikes and not a contribution to development. This ought not to be on so. Achievements should be advertised, for example, an organisation of innovation days should be used to showcase research outputs. Universities should highlight their achievements in the press, annual reports, newsletters, websites, etc. corporate and personal contacts with the Organized Private Sector operatives are very essential.

4. GRANT ADMINISTRATION – POST AWARD ACTIVITIES

This involves facilitating the following activities:

(i) Grant review required

- (ii) Receiving and processing of award notice which also includes rejection letter.
- (iii) Endorsement of agreement on grants
- (iv) Any required pre-award negotiation
- (v) Establishment of account for the grant.

5. GRANT ADMINISTRATION – RESEARCH PROTECTION AND REGULATORY MANAGEMENT

Research administration also entails that appropriate institutional policies and infrastructure are in place to ensure:

- (I) There is compliance with appropriate regulations. For example, issues pertaining to safety and ethics.
- (II) That researches are conducted with high integrity
- (III) That any abuse of regulation is investigated and punished

6. GRANT ADMINISTRATION – INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

This will be the same facility that will be used for:

- (i) Patenting and licensing agreements. Today patenting has become a veritable source of income and prestige to American Universities (Mowery et al., 2001).
- (ii) Facilitating identification of marketable research output and companies that may have an interest in the output. It must be stressed that it is not

everything that emanates from research in the universities that is marketable, only some of them because when you talk about the market, no company wants to put something on the market and would not drive any benefit from it. The Economic benefit must be considered. It is only government that may decide to fund research in respect of its social responsibilities and not necessarily for profit-making. But the Organized Private Sector always wants some benefits or returns for sponsoring any research. Even when they talk about social responsibilities, they want some indirect benefit to come to that company. So we must ensure that we have a system that will enable universities to know the marketable research outputs from their universities and a system that will also be able to link up with companies that will be interested in those research outputs. Initially, it may not be that attractive to companies, because many of them may not want to take the risk. But if you can add value and convert it to a product that they know will succeed, then they will be more interested and the way you do this is to have research incubators which may not necessarily be the large ones.

CONCLUSION

Nigerian universities need the best institutional research management structure if they are to successfully compete in both national and international competition for a grant, increase research quality and output and meet accountability needs. In this regard, the universities must appreciate the need for the institutions and the appropriate calibre of staff

and the associated facilities that will make research and its output marketable. Secondly, the Federal and states governments that own universities must provide the universities with the opportunities, freedom and flexibility in recruiting, remunerating and developing their staff, both academic and administrative. In addition, universities should strive to allocate more funding and attention to the development of their young researchers, to their career and managerial skill development. The same applies to the administrative staff involved in research and innovation management. Universities should also try and encourage the establishment of business initiators, because at that level when the Organized Private Sector Operatives realise that certain ideas are actually going to work, they are more likely to buy into it and give you grants.

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