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MAKING AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES SMARTER: A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE FORGOTTEN DIMENSION

Abstract:

As the world becomes more globalized and the economy becomes more knowledge-based, there is growing pressure on universities and other higher education institutions to become full economic and social development agents. More often than not, such a societal push for a new social contract for universities has resulted into smart universities generally defined as “a platform that acquires and delivers foundational data to drive the analysis and improvement of the teaching and learning environment”(Roth-Berghofer (2014). However, one is to realize that this is a mere technological approach to what ought to be a smart university. Naturally, this approach, in addition to overlooking socio-economic factors, does not account for the knowledge management dimension of smart universities. In so doing, it does not deal with the translation and transmission of research produced by universities to users such as governments, industry, NGOs and the public at large. Even more importantly, it does not account for the role that senior managers of universities can play in that knowledge translation process. Furthermore, the review of the literature on organizational change from a leadership perspective is not specific enough to account for developing countries' unique learning conditions (Kiggundu, 1994; Owoc and Marciniak, 2010). This is in addition of the increasing push and demand for open science, open innovation and co-creation. Thus, it is becoming more and more imperative for the managers of these African institutions to make them high performing in terms of knowledge transfer and contribution to social and economic development of the continent.

This paper proposes a framework that provides senior managers of African universities and research institutions the necessary managerial tools to transform their organizations into entrepreneurial hubs by focusing on the forgotten dimension of smart universities, i.e. knowledge management. The framework focuses on 5 dimensions of management of a research institution, namely, Strategic Management; Collaborative Institutional Arrangements; Internal Management Administration and Supervision; Research Operations and Knowledge Management.

Based on a systematic literature review approach, preliminary results show that the proposed framework offers the benefits of a better understanding of knowledge management in such specialized organisations as universities in a developing country setting. Furthermore, it allows many contingencies such as socio-economic factors, namely poverty; the scarcity and the high cost of higher education, to be taken into account when trying to make African universities smarter. Thus, the proposed framework may be a useful tool for and NRENs their administrators, not only as an institutional performance evaluation tool but also as an organisational transformation one.

Summary

Sub-Theme

SMART Governance: Services and tools

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