**THE CHALLENGE OF THE REGISTRY IN MEETING GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES IN UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION**

Being

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By

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**PREAMBLE**

Good afternoon, distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

About six weeks ago, I gave a keynote address at the Redeemer’s University, Ede on building professional Administrators for global competitiveness. About 10 days ago, I gave a Registry lecture on Strategies for overcoming new challenges in University administration. Today, I am to talk on the challenge of the Registry in meeting global best practice in University administration. In my mind, there is a lot of overlap in the three. If you must meet global competitiveness, you have to adopt global best practices and if you must meet these criteria, you must have the competencies that meet global expectations. Naturally, these would translate into enabling the administrator to overcome the ‘new’ challenges, hopefully, baring the albatross called the ‘Nigerian’ factor which always negates our best intentions!

I therefore, tried to read the mind of those who crafted this programme. The question is, why we need to meet ‘global best practices’? What is ‘best practice’, local or global? What makes a global university? Are Nigerian universities meeting global parameters (as in global ranking and league tables and as reflected in their vision statements) either in their curricular, infrastructure or even in their governance, management and administrative processes, procedures and practices?

In the light of the above, I shall, in this presentation consider the following:

* Economic and Social Indicators for Rating ‘global’ Universities
* Global best practices in Management
* The competencies needed to meet global best practice
* The way forward

We shall, in conclusion, attempt to proffer some suggestions that, all things being equal, may enable us as administrators, to meet best global practices.

**Nigerian Universities and Global Ranking**

In a survey conducted by worldtop20.org, the five top universities in Africa for 2019 are from South Africa. These are:

* University of South Africa
* University of the Witwatersrand
* Stellenbosch University
* University of Kwazulu-Natal
* University of Pretoria

**Economic and Social Indicators for Rating ‘global’ Universities**

**Economic Indicators**

1. **Innovation (60%): Innovation, the output of the universities activities and findings to economy, society and culture, in agriculture, healthcare, financial and communication services, and its help in sustaining innovations (which supplant older products with revolutionary and more superior ones) and efficiency designs (which permit companies to build and sell established products for less) help companies serve their existing customers better, that drives economic growth.**
2. **Research (30%): This category criteria looks, at the university’s global and regional academic reputation for research excellence amongst their peers. The aggregate number of citations per paper represents the overall impact of the research by the university in industries publications. And finally, the role of universities in disseminating brand-new knowledge and ideas in the global research community.**
3. **Publications (10%): This criterion is based on the overall number of scholarly papers (reviews, articles and notes) that contain affiliations to a university and are published in high-quality, impactful journals. This is also influenced by the amount of papers that have been assigned as being in the top 10 percent of the most highly cited papers in the world for their respective fields. As the quantity of highly cited papers is compared with similar papers (same publication year, subject and document type), that can be considered a robust indication of how much excellent research the university produces.**

**Social Affairs Indicators**

1. **Facilities (15%): A University’s learning and living environment, and infrastructure are a key indicator for students to know what to expect from their university experience. Factors such as housing, IT, library and career development facilities, in addition to the number of students’ societies were considered within this criterion. This category is studied to offer a definite sense of the learning environment of each institution from both the student and the academic perspective.**
2. **Teaching (30%): A University’s quality of faculty is a major role of its ability to attract and nurture tomorrow’s finest minds, and inspire the next generation of potential research academics. This indicator measured the number of academics who have won major international awards, prizes, medals, and student teaching quality assessment data feedback, in addition to, study rate and student faculty ratio.**
3. **Employability (40%): The most important indicator of a university’s success is its ability to help industry with innovations, inventions and a work-ready graduated workforce. That can be measured by the number of a university’s alumni who have the ability to work effectively in a multi-cultural environment, to deliver presentations, to manage people and projects, and ultimately hold CEO positions internationally, nationally and locally. The data to access these results were gathered from surveys of employers, graduate employment rates and careers service support.**
4. **Social Responsibility (15%): Effective indicators are the number of obligations a university organizes and takes to society by investing in the local community as well as in charity work and disaster relief. We also examine the inclusiveness of the university to students, especially at scholarships and bursaries, disability access, gender balance and low-income outreach, and the university’s engagement in environmental awareness and its regional human capital development.**

The Times Higher Education Rankings are not much different. Only two Nigerian Universities made the top 600-800 while one University made the top 1001!

**The Impact on Administrators**

You might say that all the above indicators have nothing to do with Administrators. Let us consider the first social indicator. A lot of the outcomes here have to do with how we manage our students, our staff, our environment and the quality of service rendered by teaching, non-teaching and other professional staff, as well as the tools we use, such as our level and usage of IT in the delivery of services, the totality of which converge to create a global learning, teaching and living experience.

**Facilities (15%): A University’s learning and living environment and infrastructure is a key indicator for students to know what to expect from their university experience. Factors such as housing, IT, library and career development facilities, in addition to the number of students’ societies were considered within this criterion. This category is studied to offer a definite sense of the learning environment of each institution from both the student and the academic perspective.**

The second social indicator is the employability indicator **measured by the number of a university’s alumni who have the ability to work effectively in a multi-cultural environment, to deliver presentations, to manage people and projects, and ultimately hold CEO positions internationally, nationally and locally.**

Almost all of us here are alumni of one or more Nigerian universities. Thus, what is expected of the products of our universities is also what is expected of administrators that are ‘global’ in competencies.

In the words of Jamil Salmi (2009), “….it is important to note that elite (global) universities are not labelled by ‘self-declaration; rather, their status is conferred by the outside world on the basis of international recognition”[[1]](#footnote-1) and local reputation and competitiveness.

**Characteristics of globally competitive universities**

What do the top Universities in the world have or do that enables them to adopt best practices which in turn make them globally competitive?

* Good governance – freedom and autonomy as leadership that has gone beyond basic needs and are therefore committed to accountability, transparency, inclusiveness without primordial sentiments
* Multiple sources of income that are not tied to the purse of government but from research, patents, investments, benefactions etc
* Openness to new ideas fostering competition, innovation and professionalism
* Efficient management of talents and resources, human, material, financial and environmental
* Quick response to the demands of an ever-changing global market
* Customer-centric service delivery
* Stable and accessible infrastructural facilities like water, power, transport, communication, health, education and learning
* Highly digitized processes- e-learning, e-governance, e-administration etc
* Stability of academic calendar and government policies

From the scenario painted above, we can conclude that, benchmarked against global standards of what makes a university, except for a handful of the almost 200 universities in Nigeria, if any, we are in our infancy.

To make matters worse, the Nigerian factor almost always negates our best intentions and efforts.

In my opinion, all these factors should not discourage us as university administrators from self -development opportunities that empower us to become informed and truly educated as ‘world citizens’. This ensures that we are sufficiently knowledgeable and able to contribute intelligently to on-going conversations about the world of work, global developments in technology, science, the human agenda and the environment as well as the global conversation on the meaning and functions of universities. We must remain really committed to moving away from being ‘minds ignorant of their own ignorance’.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Best Practice. v. Smart Practice**

A **best practice** is a method or technique that has been generally accepted as superior to any alternatives because it produces results that are superior to those achieved by other means or because it has become a standard way of doing things because, over time, it has worked exceptionally well.[[3]](#footnote-3)Best practices are used, among other things, to maintain quality. Sometimes a best practice is not applicable or is inappropriate for a particular organization or institution’s needs or the level of development of a country. Therefore, the so-called best practice must be balanced with what is unique to our institutions and the practices we have in common with universities globally, such as provision of services to students, staff and our publics and, ranging from employment practices, students’ services, and the administration of the committee system, among other things. In balancing this equation, we must consider our level of infrastructural, social and environmental development as well as our very unique cultural identities and norms.

## Some researchers have therefore, suggested that rather than chase best practice, policy implementers should rather adopt **‘smart practice’**, which is defined as the ability or the means of achieving a [goal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goal) in a cost-effective manner, taking into consideration, the local conditions. In other words, not all so called best practice can achieve desirable or appropriate results in every context. Bardach[[4]](#footnote-4) recommends when adapting smart practices from another source or environment, it is important to identify the core essence of the practice while allowing flexibility for how it is implemented so it remains sensitive to local conditions.

Some operational features to consider when adopting best practice from other environments include:

* Adaptability
* Comparable context and infrastructure
* Political and economic conditions
* Available resources

In my opinion, therefore, revisiting the indicators enumerated above regarding top global universities, we should be talking about adopting **smart practice**, that is, practices that give us maximum leverage within the infrastructural development of our environment as well as the political, financial and social context of our universities while striving for global best practice as we develop further.

In view of the very nature and definition of best practice, I now wish to examine what we understand as global best practices in management or administration.

**Global Best Practice in Management**

Universities by definition are universal and thus should be able to operate as a global entity especially as each of our universities strives for global competitiveness as in league tables and international rankings. This is because local graduates and local curricular have no place in a globalised information age driven by the digital revolution and the fourth industrial revolution. There is a proliferation of universities in every cranny of our nation. Several factors of the digital age, including the convergence of several generations, especially the millennials and the generation Z form the bulk of our customers, whether as students, staff or business partners, funding agencies and the external publics. Therefore, managers of universities, especially the career administrators must be aware of the global competencies needed and mandatory for meeting the needs of these customers.

In effect, new management ideas that meet the challenges of our times are springing up, in response to the New World of Work and current thinking on the Human Agenda. The wise manager or Administrator will learn, study, and apply the best current thinking based on global and best or smart practices.

In the late 20th century, best practice management concepts included excellence and total quality management, re-engineering, systems thinking, cross functional teams, empowerment, delayering and flat organization charts, learning organization, dialogue, reinventing work, and diversity.

In the new Information Age and the new world of work, where flat, flexible and egalitarian organisations and where hierarchy and bureaucracy are being systematically dismantled, Management practitioners have identified the following as the most important ideas on management in the 21st century:

* **Management is for everyone**. In the information technology age, management knowledge will become increasingly available to everyone. The distinction between management who ‘lord’ it over ‘workers’ will fade away
* **Management is for learners**.  As information becomes the chief product of every business and, especially universities, and as knowledge continues to explode, everyone will be a learner and the manager's foremost task will to promote learning among every cadre of staff such that they can ‘innovate’ in their thinking, attitude and how they perform their functions.
* **Management is based on communicating.**  As techniques for planning, strategizing, decision-making, and problem solving become commonplace in the organization, the need for improving communication will be paramount and managers will be increasingly using dialogue and other communication tools as opposed to commands and instructions.
* **Management is about change.** As technology and information reshape all our lives, change management will be "business as usual" and managers will be change agents who guide everyone to find and embrace the best new practices. This will include teachers, students and other members of the workforce.
* **Management is broad based.**  As boundaries disappear within organizations and in the world at large, the scope of management will grow and managers and university administrators will be organizational development experts, diversity experts, facilitation experts, consultation experts – and much else.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Global Best Practice in Administration of Universities**

Global best practice in Higher Education Management would include the following:

* Standardizing complex everyday processes while providing flexibility for local requirements. Such processes include Students’ services such as admission, registration, certification and transcript management, lodging and library services; staff and recruitment such as advertising, assessments through interviews, all financial services.
* Transformationof service delivery through seemless transactions at every level, including committee work
* Managementof the workforce across the nation and globally in an efficient, timely and cost- effective manner.
* Engaging in meaningful global talent management.
* Creating an appealing globalized workplace while ensuring employee engagement.
* Improving accountability through self-assessment and open reporting.
* Makinginformation and data easily accessible.
* Including change management as a critical success factor.

All of the above demand a technology-enabled institution and Administrators that buy into it and are prepared to become the change agents in their workplaces. These best practices are important for improved overall efficiency, and increase inthe ability to compete in today's rapidly changing global market.

**The Challenges of meeting global best practices in Nigeria**

As I indicated earlier, it is very difficult to meet global best practices in governance, management and administration in any industry without the tools that meet global standards. The following pose a threat to the best intentions in carrying out business of any kind or providing service in any organisation:

* Infrastructure – water, energy, transportation, communication, health services and even sanitation
* Culture – attitude to work, world view, underdevelopment culminating in nepotism, tribalism, corruption, authoritarianism, arbitrariness and disregard for the rule of law
* Political underdevelopment resulting in policy instability
* Technological underdevelopment and low access to communication technology.
* Resistance to change of any kind and in some cases, insularity.
* Over-dependence on government initiatives, including funding and direction

In spite of the above challenges, the smart administrator still has to provide excellent service that enables the achievement of university expectations and propels the institution to global visibility because Nigeria cannot stand alone in a global world. Secondly, striving for global best practice as a personal determination is in the best interest of any administrator and every Registry within the available resources. Therefore, as initiators and implementers of university policies, as department charged with operating the collegial tradition of decision making through the committee system, as the institutional memory of the university and the most visible department for the promotion of university image and public perception, the administrator has no choice but to make excellent choices, based on fairness, the rule of law, openness and accountability.

**Competencies for global best practices and competitiveness**

The personal competencies that are every administrator needs to remain competitive and to meet global best or smart practices in university administration include the following:

* Ability to contribute to strategic decisions using insight and understanding of the university, including ‘the idiosyncratic human challenges’ of the 21st century university
* Excellent grounding in industry specific and inter-disciplinary knowledge and rules, regulations and laws
* Knowledge sharing
* Movement away from mere procedural knowledge to creative knowledge
* Advanced information and communication technology skills

Soft skills, including team-building, conflict resolution, and change management.

**The Way Forward**

Global best practices are not unattainable. It simply means that the administrator must be more creative in providing solutions that enable our registries to deliver excellent service within the means of our institutions and to the benefit of our stakeholders and our personal development. To be sure, some university managers and administrators are responding to the challenges presented by a changing world. They are evolving to serve a new age. But most are evolving, still locked in the traditional perception of their roles, ‘clerking’ meetings of committees, pursuing mundane tasks mindlessly, operating analogue administration in a digital world.

Therefore, to overcome dysfunction and meet the demands of **smart practice**, every administrator should:

1. Pursue seriously, the acquisition of technological skills and management knowledge as well as the acquisition of soft skills, emotional intelligence and open-mindedness.
2. One-cap-fits-all solutions, either in addressing student matters, human resource issues or customer service are no longer feasible. Creative imagination and sensitivity in handling situations are mandatory, even in an era of digitisation.
3. Career mobility and acquisition of new skills to fit emerging fields of specialisation mean that university administrators must become proactive in their career plans.
4. Development of leadership qualities that include personal resilience, emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility
5. Encouragement of team work across specialities to inspire appreciation of cross-cultural, cross generational and cross-speciality attributes and contributions.
6. Openness to and willingness to embrace change for personal development and institutional advancement.

**Conclusion**

In this discourse, we examined the concept of global best practice and indicated that it is dependent of the state of development of the community in which it is to be applied. We, therefore surmised that local smart practise may be more appropriate to each situation.

We examined the social and political indicators for ranking top universities in the world and those circumstances that make empower them to adopt ‘best practices. Benchmarked against such institutions, we acknowledged that due to the infrastructural, political and social state of development, we should for now, aspire to smart practice, while acquiring the competencies that will catapult our governance, management and administration to the level of best practices.

We concluded that as administrators, we should proactively and creatively pursue best practice with local variation and personal development strategies that enable us collectively and individually become globally competitive.

I thank you all.

Chief Mojisola Ladipo, mni

1. Jamil Salmi, (2009) *The Challenge of Establishing World- Class Universities.* <https://www.forbes.com/2009/08/10world-class-best-university-ranking-world-bank-opinions-colleges-s> 910/03/18 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Orr, D. (2004) *Earth in Mind: on education, environment and the human prospect*, Chicago, Island Press, 2nd Edition [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best\_practice [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bardach, Eugene (2011). *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. [ISBN](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Standard_Book_Number) [9781608718429](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:BookSources/9781608718429). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 21st Century Management [↑](#footnote-ref-5)