The Gown: Academic Staff Mentoring, Development and Official Communication within the University System.

Being the text of paper delivered

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Protocols.

Acting Vice Chancellor, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, while I am not privy to the reasons that informed the decision of the Academic planning/ Quality Assurance unit of this University, the Osun State University, to afford me the privilege of expressing my thoughts about issues of serious global concern and immense academic significance in its hallowed precincts, I think that it is a fair assumption for me to proceed in the belief that this is not a privilege that is lightly accorded. I therefore, place on record my deepest appreciation for this rare privilege accorded me.

I also like to quickly commend the persistence, consistency and resilience of one Dr. Kehinde, whom I am meeting physically for the first time this morning. He was on my trail at all times to ensure my presence here today. He is a good ambassador of this great institution- and so I am here today to interact with this august audience on three (3) core areas of our "parsonage", viz;

- Academic Staff Mentoring,
- Academic Development and

- Official communication within the system.

This is perhaps in our quest to bequeath to the current and coming generations a lasting legacy and also lay a good foundation of succession plan. If my thinking is correct then, I commend the University for its Thoughtfulness and Long-sightedness.

I consider the University the simplest or easiest place to work in, perhaps because of its administrative structures and intellectual membership. These two, in place, appear to make life easier and seemingly well-organized for the academic. No wonder in common parlance, it, the University, is referred to as Citadel, Ivory tower, the Gown...! These three areas of my assignment which are central to our comfort zone in the academia are actually, in my opinion, inter related and inter twined. A good or excellent mentorship/mentoring leads to good and focused academic development and consequently sound ethics and excellent knowledge of the operations of the system or in other words the procedures and line(s) of communication within the University.

It was therefore slightly difficult to caption this presentation because using any of the areas will be narrowing our scope, so I have taken the liberty to caption this write-up/presentation as THE GOWN.

1.0 Mentoring Academic Staff.

 Several definitions and interpretations of the word mentoring have been put forward a few of which are listed in Olowookere (2012) as follows;

- Schooley (2010), mentoring involves a formal or informal developmental partnership where employees receive information, advice, and guidance from an experienced professional, usually within the organization, who has expertise and a strong desire to help others grow in their jobs.
- Moorhead & Griffins (2004) defined mentoring as an arrangement in which more experienced workers help less experienced workers grow and advance by providing advice, support and encouragement.

- Ismail & Arokiasamy, (2007) Mentoring is also a dyadic relationship between a more experienced member of an organization and a less experienced individual).
- Mentoring encompasses coaching, sharing perspectives, and transferring knowledge and wisdom to the mentee(s).
- It is also taking special interest in helping another person to develop into a successful professional, which in the research context includes any support for the individual to develop and maintain their research profile and activities.

All the authors generally agreed that, in recent years, mentoring had become one of the easiest ways of developing the skills and talents of individuals in many different organizations, including the academia, since learning as academic work involves multiple changing processes of personal development. They also noted clearly that there are three components in the mentoring process viz: the senior more experienced fellow (mentor), the junior less experienced fellow (mentee) and the organization. In the academic setting (university), the mentor is a senior faculty member who advices or guides the junior faculty member (the mentee or protégée) in matters relating to achievement of academic success.

I posit that the root of academic mentoring was in fact the genesis of the University itself. Briggs (2013) while tracing the concept of the university noted that,

> "The notion of teaching and learning at the higher education level commenced on the basis of tutelage and apprenticeship, well before the 11th century. Renowned scholars, not institutions, at different locations attracted students who negotiated with and studied directly under them, commonly in the disciplines of Medicine, Law and Divinity – the original professions. With time, these teaching and learning centres became more formalized in a manner in which the scholars were aggregated into centres which then, as corporate bodies, took over the responsibility for imparting knowledge. The name university by which such centres gradually became known, probably originated about the middle of the eleventh century, from the Latin word, universitas, which at the time, was not used only for institutions of higher learning. Over the centuries, however, the name evolved into that of its present usage – an institution incorporating the scholars, the teachers, the generality of subjects taught and the physical location of the organisation."

This implies that tutelage or mentoring, as the case may be, was the focus of the university, be it teacher – student or teacher to teacher.

Several researchers have in recent times investigated the latter and observed its lack and the consequent erosion of academic quality, development and ethics especially within the Nigerian university system.

In a case study of University of Calabar, Anijaobi-Idem and Archibong (2012) observed systemic deficiencies on the part of the university administration in terms of absence of planned orientation/training programme for new academic staff, problems associated with teaching and learning, relationship-oriented issues (mentoring)and work environment related issues. They opined the need for Orientation/induction programmes for new staff.

Olorunleke (2015) in the study of Mentoring as a competency tool for the development of the University teaching staff using Adekunle Ajasin University Akungba-Akoko as a case study, strongly advocated mentoring program and policies in the University systems as a means of building a new generation of academics and responsible leader of tomorrow.

Another dimension that probably makes mentoring necessary, is the gradual ageing of the professorial class who would subsequently leave the system. This calls for an urgent need for the institutions to develop implementable strategies for entrenching sustainable mentoring and succession plans for their teaching and non-teaching staff cadres (i.e. system renewal).

Roles of Academic Mentors:

The mentor plays key roles in the life and career of the mentee. These roles make him virtually the focus of the mentee at all times and in all aspects as such a mentor can provide support in a number of ways such as:.

Sounding Board	to test ideas and suggestions on
Facilitator	to be able to point to potential opportunities, arrange introductions
Advisor	to provide objective advice on a range of issues, including career opportunities
Coach	to directly assist the mentee to improve a specific skill

Expert	to act as a source of technical/professional knowledge
Source of organizational material	to be able to explain University policies, culture, values
Role model	to promote and encourage positive behaviours in others
Source of feedback	to provide constructive feedback
Confidant	to express fears and concerns to
Motivator	to encourage the achievement of goals and boost morale
Challenger	to challenge assumptions and encourage alternative thinking

In research, mentoring is not simply for junior staff; nor is it remedial. It should be available throughout a research career and adapted to the individual's experience and expertise. Carrying out research can be a very lonely process, the primary role of a research mentor, therefore, is to provide encouragement for, and show an interest in, the mentee's research plans and activities.

It is very easy for new academics to spend all, or the vast majority, of their time carrying out teaching (and sometimes administration) related activities, which often involve tight deadlines and prompt feedback. Research often tends to take second place. It is therefore important for research mentors to help new staff members with appropriate time planning and management; suggesting time deadlines for achieving agreed targets and checking that these are met. Other specific roles include:

- Offering support and encouragement to help the researcher to
  - transform research ideas into projects that could attract external research funding
  - develop a personal research strategy, plan and targets
  - to focus on a manageable research agenda
- Helping the researcher to monitor the achievement of targets and outcomes
- helping them to plan a longer term research career
- Giving constructive feedback on, and acting as a sounding board to explore ideas and issues arising from, the research being carried out
- Reading and commenting on draft papers for publication and
  - offering advice and guidance on suitable journals in which to publish

- o   advising on their publication strategy and suitable outlets for research outputs
- Providing guidance on funding opportunities and appropriate collaborators
  - o   Commenting on draft grant applications
  - o   making grant applications (e.g. TETFUND)
  - o   advising on funding sources
- Providing guidance on supervising research students and postdocs.
  - o   encouragement to attend key conferences etc in order to gain new research ideas and make new contacts
- Demystifying the 'rules of the game' –
  - o   what is worth doing and when, where and how to network,
  - o   developing a career plan,(i.e. helping them to plan a longer term research career)
  - o   understanding promotion criteria and
  - o   markers of esteem for national and international standing in the discipline.

Mentoring for New Senior Academic Staff

An aspect that is constantly overlooked is the mentoring senior academic staff members who are either new entrants into the academic community or coming from a different cultural or academic background. The assumption in the case of the latter is that they have been in the academia long enough to adapt to most situations easily. This is actually erroneous as the staff had been groomed under different academic culture and regulations.

The role of a mentor in this case will be different from that of a new academic. There will be a focus on Department and university strategies, procedures and challenges. The period of mentoring may be quite brief and a major element of it may be to facilitate introductions to senior members of the university. Nevertheless, the need for some structure and support during the induction period should not be overlooked. In many cases, it may make sense for a Head of Department to act as the mentor.

Benefits of Academic Mentoring.

The three components of the mentoring process identified earlier stand to benefit immensely from the process. It is in fact a symbiotic relationship, if worked on committedly by all parties involved. Some of the benefits include:

➢ **For mentees:**

- Provides impartial advice and encouragement
- Develops a supportive relationship
  - working more constructively with team members
- Assists with problem solving
  - understanding the university and
  - dealing with staff
- Improves self-confidence
- provides an extended induction covering policy and procedure
- Offers professional development
- Encourages reflection on practice

- **For Mentors**
  - Opportunity to reflect on own practice
  - Enhances job satisfaction
  - Develops professional relationships
  - Enhances peer recognition
  - It uses your experience, making it available to a new person
  - It widens your understanding of the organization and the way it works
  - It enables you to practice interpersonal skills
  - It provides personal satisfaction through supporting the development of others

- **For the Organization:**

  - Enables faster induction of new staff
  - It improves the University / department/ college community
  - Enhances individual performance
  - Encourages commitment to the organization
  - It improves communication

Qualities of a Good Mentor and Mentee

- The above listed benefits are achievable when both mentor and mentee have some basic qualities. A few of which are:
    - **For Mentors:** must be
        a) People Oriented
        b) Good Motivator
        c) Effective Teacher
        d) Technical excellence.

    - **For Mentees**

        a) **Eager to Learn:** must have a strong desire to learn new skills and abilities, with a desire to develop existing skills and abilities.

        b) **Team Player:** must interact with, cooperate and communicate with others.

        c) **Patient:** must invest time, effort and perseverance into the mentoring relationship..

        d) **Risk Taker:** must accept new and more challenging experiences.

2.0 Academic Staff Development.

The achievements of Universities are based largely on the contributions, commitment, and achievements of members of its staff who are working as individuals and in teams or groups. The development of this crop must therefore be paramount if the system is to achieve its mandates.

The key purpose of academic staff development is to facilitate personal and professional development thereby enabling individuals and groups to achieve their full potential and contribute to the provision of excellent teaching and research in the University.

Staff development includes any activity which contributes to the enhancement of their

- knowledge,
- skills,
- competence, or working practices.

Such activities for the academic staff include:

- Postgraduate courses, [development programmes and training]
- structured staff development activities,
- linkages and exchange programmes (local and international)
- attendance at seminars and
- Attendance and hosting of Conferences (local and international)
- Availability of Research grants,
- Research facilities/ equipment
- Active involvement with professional bodies, etc.

Staff development is a key contributor to the success of individuals and ultimately to the success of the University as a whole. This is important for the University in maintaining and enhancing its national and international reputation in teaching and research and in ensuring good management within the institution.

It is important to mention in passing the career progression of the academic staff, which of course is expected to be part of the mentor's information to the mentee to enhance achieving academic fulfillment. The progression is generally as follows: Academic Positions for progression

- Emeritus Professor (retired)
- Professor
- Associate Professor / Reader
- Senior Lecturer
- Lecturer I
- Lecturer II
- Assistant Lecturer
- Graduate / Teaching assistant

Conditions for movement along progression are often laid down by Senate of the various institutions and it is part of the mentor's role to educate and enlighten the

mentee on possible avenues for progression within the system. Generally, however, the criteria almost always include the academics core responsibilities viz:

- Teaching,
- Research and
- Community Service.

3.0 Official Communication within the University System.

The University system, particularly in Nigeria thrives very much on the committee system of administration and this has been entrenched in the operations of most academic tertiary institutions. The general academic structure depends largely on the system adopted in the main approved University academic brief, viz: Collegiate or faculty.

- Collegiate system:
    - University headed by Vice Chancellor
    - Colleges, headed by Provosts who are also chairmen of the College Boards
    - Schools, headed by Directors who are also chairmen of the School Boards
    - Departments, by Heads of Departments who are also chairmen of the Departmental Boards

- ➢ Faculty System:
    - University headed by Vice Chancellor
    - Faculties headed by Deans who are also chairmen of the Faculty Boards
    - Departments by Heads of Departments who are also chairmen of the Departmental Boards

The official mode or approved mode of communication therefore follows bottom – up approach. This means that all memoranda or communications or submissions must emanate from the Department and in some cases advance copies are sent to higher officer (this usually connotes element of doubt of the integrity of the lower officer). It is an aberration to write directly to the most senior officer without the comment of the immediate senior officer of the writer of such memo or application.

The general administrative positions are as follows:

- Chancellor
- Pro-chancellor/ Chairman of Council
- Vice-chancellor
- Deputy vice-chancellor (s)
- Deans of faculties(or Provost of College)
- Heads of departments/schools

4.0 Conclusion.

In concluding, it is of utmost importance, that the University management ensures that all new members of academic staff, regardless of seniority, should have an appointed mentor to assist in the induction process. The rationale behind this is that even experienced academics need guidance on the procedures of both the department and University. This will also enhance official communication within the system since university procedures will be part of the induction/ orientation. For new academics the need for ongoing support on all aspects of academic practice and culture is particularly important.

Holistic Staff mentoring and development are key contributors to the success of the individual and ultimately to the success of the University as a whole.

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