



Intelligence

Coaching vice-chancellors

Thank you for coming together to learn; often some worry about exposing their weaknesses, others are know-it-alls



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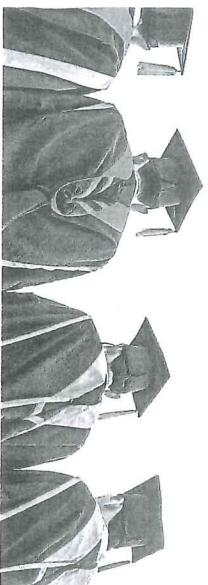
Last October I was invited to be one of the facilitators at a British Council sponsored induction workshop for the newly appointed vice-chancellors (VCs) and principals of public universities, and recently I was invited to play a similar role at a leadership training workshop for all the VCs and principals of the public universities. My topic in October was 'Transformative Leadership and Integrity', and this time round I was asked to talk about 'Strategies for Enhancing Organisational Culture', with Equity Bank's James Mwangi handling my earlier topic.

The theme of the October workshop was 'Developing Visionary and Effective University Leaders', while the more recent one was on 'Developing Strategic, Focused and Results-Oriented University Leaders'.

On each occasion, for several days the VCs were exposed to facilitators from various sectors. The participants interacted with each other and the facilitators, and reflected on how to follow up on what they had learned while together.

Impressively too, there's a Vice-Chancellors' Committee, a forum for consultation, coordination and co-operation, and it was this committee that organised the two workshops. It is chaired by Daniel Mugeendi, the VC of the University of Embu, and the co-ordinator of the programme was Peninah Aloo-Obudho, the VC of Maasai Mara University.

Where else do we see such organised collaboration between the CEOs of institutions in a particular domain – whether in the public sector or elsewhere? Kudos to the Vice-Chancellors, and also to the Ministry of Education, its Higher Education and Research-



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partment, the British Council and the quartet of sponsoring banks, namely KCB, Equity, Co-Operative Bank and NCBA.

It was bold of them to include any topic of culture strengthening, as many leaders – I might even say most – and in whichever sector, while having an adequate sense of their current culture and being able to put together a statement of their aspirational one, have little or no idea as to how to transition from one to the other.

Indeed, as I spelt out in my presentation (and as was the topic of my last column), they might not even have a proper idea of the actual culture, being overwhelmed by "The iceberg of ignorance".

So my contribution was to give the vice-chancellors some ideas about how to dissolve the iceberg and get their various stakeholders to open up and talk freely about the extent to which they are living their values and what they need to do more of and less of to live them more fully.

Universities are complex institutions, with multiple internal and external stakeholders, each with their

own expectations of how to behave and how to interact. So how to bring them together to unify around the visions and values of their university? How to align the council with the senior faculty and other management? How to align the back-office functions with the outward-facing ones? How to make the academic and non-academic trade unions and the student unions partners rather than adversaries? And that's just internal stakeholders.

I described ways of negotiating to win-win outcomes, with each stakeholder willing to indulge in give-and-take dialogue. This requires time and mediation skills to bring everyone closer together, so that energy is not wasted in unproductive stalemates and conflicts.

I wish the Vice-Chancellors well as they go back to apply what they had learned in the forums.

Back to my opening thoughts, where I praised this coming together of CEOs. Too often our training institutions stop short of inviting the top leadership to such gatherings, only reaching the upper-middle levels, and not least in the public sector – although the Kenya School of Government is now reaching further upwards. At the top level we know that some actually worry about exposing themselves to colleagues for fear of their shortcomings being revealed. And, the know-it-alls merely look down the organisational pyramid to see whom they should send for training.

But there's no one too senior to learn, up to and including Cabinet Secretaries and the President. For those at such levels one-on-one coaching is ideal, complementing group learning. And for the VCs and other CEOs, coaching should also be considered.

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