

# The Yawning University Leadership Gap and the Quest for Quality Management in Higher Education

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## **Abstract**

*This Article is on the Yawning University Leadership Gap. It evaluates the future possibility of having university leaders who can propel the concept of quality that is required in Uganda at present. It is observed in context that most professional employees in these universities, especially lecturers, have neglected their career expectations. Yet great and charismatic leaders of the time like Professor Kajubi, have elected to retire after serving diligently with front running behaviours. So there is a gap. This article concludes by warning that unless there is high career resilience, universities might find it hard to respond to the obstacles in the academic leadership work environment, hence the need for a strong career identity and insight from the younger academic staff.*

It is common knowledge today that Universities in Uganda are in a leadership crisis. The reason is simple. As the proliferation of universities continue to be registered by the National Council for Higher Education, academic gurus and greatest of their time like, Professor William Senteza Kajubi, have announced their retirement. Replacements have not been easy to come by!

Elsewhere in Makerere University, the highly trained and indeed highly placed have also started retiring in droves. Recent data have, in addition, indicated that at least 50% of the Makerere Professors will be eligible to retire in the next five years. In the *New Vision*, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 2007, Kyambogo University also advertised the posts of Vice Chancellor and Deputy Vice Chancellor. Therefore, the departing academics have left or will certainly leave behind a yawning leadership gap.

Besides, Kitandwe in the *New Vision* of Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September (2007) asked "What is the future of higher education?" Kitandwe observed that the report about Kyambogo University being understaffed is alarming and a real warning to the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE). He noted that the whole of Kyambogo has one full professor and that in Makerere and Nkozi, qualified though the lecturers may be, in some faculties they are conspicuously not up to the tasks before them. Moreover,

Mahmood Mamdani (2005) had expressed his worry of "scholars in the market place." Almost all universities are looking for leaders who can enhance group cohesiveness, member cooperation, member motivation, problem solving, decision making, resource accumulation, and help deal with change or improve the quality of work life so as to realize the university mission.

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to document the yawning university leadership gap and suggest ways to beat the coming shortages of skills and talents so as to ensure quality management of our institutions.

The massive departure of University Professors would not pose a problem if there were adequate numbers of younger managers prepared to step into the departing executives' shoes when the time comes. But in most universities, there won't be!

The tables I and II below explain what the leadership concept comprises

Table 1 Definition of leadership terminology

Term	Definition	Metaphoric meaning
To lead	To be first, or to channel others by example, or to assist them by giving directions or to guide them by modelling superior performance.	Possess precedence
Leader	A person who occupies a formal or informal position of authority, over a group. The group confers this position granting higher status to the individual whom they recognize and follow as their leader. Leaders require followers.	Positional predominance
Leading	A process including vision developing, goal setting and direction giving aimed at unifying the disparate motives, desires and efforts of the members around a single philosophy, agreed vision statement, common set of values or consensus purposes. Leadership requires focus and results in unity.	Process prescription
Leadership	A phenomenon akin to trailblazing where individuals are out in front of others exploring virgin territories, mapping new pathways and setting the pace. Leadership requires front-running behaviours from individuals and therefore has its roots in human diversity.	Personal priority

**Table 2 Realms of application: Leadership as “being out in front”**

<b>Realm</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Leadership metaphor</b>
Time	To exist before	Predecessor
Place	To arrive at before	Pioneer
Route	To find the way before	Trailblazer
Skill	To have more skills	Expert
Knowledge	To have more information	Authority
Ability	To have more ability	Master
Power	To have more influence	Superior
Experience	To have more history	Senior
Learning	To have more learning	Scholar
Technology	To have a better way	Inventor
Paradigm	To have a better map or model	Innovator

The younger and talented in these universities have neglected their career insight and career identity. Career insight is how much employees know about their interest, their skill strengths and weakness, and the ways these perceptions relate to their career goals. On the other hand career identity is the degree to which employees define their personal values according to their work. Universities can only be innovative and adaptable to the degree that their employees have career motivation. Employees who have high career resilience are able to respond to obstacles in the work environment and adapt to unexpected events such as changes in work processes. They are willing to develop new ways to use their skills to cope with obstacles and unexpected events. Employees with high career insight set career goals and participate in development activities that help them reach those goals. They tend to take actions that keep their skills from becoming obsolete. If university lecturers for example, fail to conduct research projects, how can they keep up to date with what they deliver, leave alone fill the gap in the management of higher education? Employees with high career identity are committed to the university; they are willing to do whatever it takes (e.g. work long hours) to complete projects and search for quality lecture materials to meet student demands. They also take pride in working for the university and are active in professional career development.

In order to determine the solution to this problem, there is need to reflect on the model of career development summarized below:



As indicated, the third stage is the maintenance stage, where the individual is concerned, with keeping skills up-to-date and being perceived by others as some one who is still contributing to university success. Individuals in the maintenance stage have many years of job experience, much job knowledge, and an indepth understanding of how the university runs its business. They are supposed to be valuable trainers or mentors for new lecturers. They are policy makers and reviewers. However, most of the lecturers in this stage have plateaued. Universities should therefore ensure that lecturers' skills do not become obsolete by encouraging them to read more and get fresh information. If not, the future leadership gap will most likely widen.

The final stage is the disengagement stage where individuals prepare to change in the balance between work and non-work activities. Older employees elect to retire and concentrate on non-work activities. However, it is noted here that regardless of age, employees may elect to leave and change occupation or jobs. Most of our charismatic professors are at this stage but replacements are difficult to come by. This will be true for almost all universities in Uganda if nothing is done by all stakeholders involved.

The attention this issue is getting today in the senior rank is huge. Universities have to realize that they have to take action now to avoid a future where half or all the desks in the professor's suite go empty.

So what should universities do in order to accelerate their leadership development efforts? Universities need to condense and speed up what traditionally has been a fairly lengthy trial-by-fire process. There is need to provide training that is both highly effective and efficient. Senior leaders should be on the lookout for ways to bring their most promising subordinates forward. Taking the following steps will help you ensure that your university has the leadership talent it needs in the years ahead.

### **Tell them they are high potentials**

Should high potentials know they are being eyed as executive materials? Absolutely, Yes. For one thing, it will help them see the value in a lateral move designed to develop a particular competency. Good developmental assignments will be horizontal and 'zigzag' moves, rather than traditional vertical promotions.

Secondary, if you do not say anything, you stand a greater chance of losing them to a competitor who wills to be more forthright.

At the same time, caution them against taking their status for granted. Just because they are high potential today does not mean they will be so tomorrow. They should know this is not a guarantee. The goal is to make them feel confident as they tackle new challenges, not cocky.

### **Stretch them in multiple directions**

While sending talented young managers through executives training programs or giving them assignments can provide a wealth of learning, it is learning that comes at a significant time cost. A quicker, more targeted approach is to give them a series of shorter stretch assignments that round out their skills. They need to learn to influence and negotiate with their peers across boundaries in the university. The stretch assignment need not be a completely new role; instead, it could be a new assignment that complements the high potential's regular duties. For instance, a talented Dean who has mostly teaching experience might be given duties that require more contact, thus strengthening his external perspective on the university (McGill and Stocum, 1993).

### **Charge them with tackling problems as a group**

Giving a group of high potentials a challenging problem to solve is an effective way to speed their learning. It allows them to strengthen cross-organizational relationships and engage in the sort of analysis, persuasion, and negotiation essential to their success in their senior ranks (Levine, 2001).

### **Encourage them to learn from the experts**

Experts like Professor Kajubi who have been leaders in various universities are excellent examples. It is said that "if you develop a reputation as a sugar industry consultant, you get sugar industry clients. Thus creating mixed teams of high potentials and experienced senior managers, is an efficient way to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next and develop high potentials' skills at the same time. If one follows you, it does not matter how quickly you move.

\* **Executive coaching.** Participants work with an executive coach. During this time, each high potential completes a detailed self-evaluation and undergoes two 360-degree performance reviews. The results are used to assess individual strengths and development opportunities and give focus to the long development process (DiBella, et al., 1996).

\* **Peer-group work.** High potentials participate in group development sessions with other high-potential leaders from related units with whom they have not worked before. These peer groups participate in explicit training in driving innovation, managing conflict, and other key leadership skills, culminating in a computer-based simulation in which participants play senior leadership roles. (Genus et al, 2003).

\* **Action-learning project teams.** Individuals also serve on action-learning project teams, in which they tackle an actual question or problem of strategic importance to the university. On these projects, people are exposed to new areas. Better yet, they have a chance to learn from a successful university leader who sponsors the project work. This is where the program and the skill enterprise meet. We need to connect the learning and development experience with what is actually going on in the university.

### **Make learning objectives explicit**

To make the most of every moment devoted to leadership development, universities need to be explicit about the desired outcome of each assignment. What specific skill should it strengthen? What gap is it meant to fill? Keeping the learning goal front and centre can be a challenge in so-called action-learning work, where individuals are being held accountable for the outcomes of their work even as they are approaching the work as a learning experience.

With all assignments, whatever their type, make sure you reward development, not just performance. It is noted here that preparing high potential, even exceptionally talented ones, for senior leadership positions can not happen overnight. But targeted, well-designed development opportunities can accelerate their journey to the executive suite and ensure they gain the experience and skills necessary to be successful there. When those who have served long in their senior ranks retire, their leave-taking will be an occasion to wish them well rather than regret their loss, for your university will have a cadre of experienced leaders ready to step to the fore and keep the university strong, viable, and growing in the years ahead.



- Reallocate time and resources among activities, according to priorities.
- Reassign tasks to others who may perform them more effectively, or at lower cost.
- Contract work outside the university (consultants or vendors), where cost-effectiveness can be obtained.
- Streamline the process of work or reduce it in scope, such as handling paperwork, approvals, or information flow.
- Redefine service levels within the company (e.g., speed, cost, quality).

Similarly, as a result of utilization analysis, some individuals may better be assigned to different jobs - ones that

- Do others in the university perform activities that duplicate what you do or what your department does? What actions would remove these duplications?
- Do you currently perform any activities that are not formally part of your position description or performance plan? If yes, should they be continued?
- If you were to make one change in your job to increase its value to the university what would it be?

As a result of such analysis by university managers and employees, work may be reassigned, jobs restructured, and working relationships redefined (Mintzberg 1996). Some work may be automated; some may be contracted outside the university (or brought back into the university). Above all, work may be simplified and priorities set more clearly.

The focus of utilization analysis is on the activities that constitute the job, not the current performance of the employee or the skills and development plans of the employee. It is vital to eliminate unneeded work and focus activities on the right priorities (Mintzberg, 1996). It is important not to focus on the people themselves as the work is examined.

To match new requirements, some employees may need to be redeployed, retrained, and refocused in their work. Some may need to be replaced with talent that is better suited to the tasks (although this may involve redeployment rather than leaving the university). In this way, the organization and the focus of activities are directly related to performance.

Improving utilization brings to mind the concept of rightsizing. In a positive sense, rightsizing is a process by which a university reviews its organizational requirements, examines the effects and consequences of various restructuring tactics, and devises a rational plan for eliminating unneeded work and excess employees. More simply, it has been defined as making sure that organizations are the right size and shape. Rightsizing means having the right number of qualified employees performing essential work activities in the most effective and efficient manner. In most organizations, however, rightsizing means downsizing, although staffing may be increased in some priority areas at the same time that reductions are made elsewhere. Rightsizing, therefore, focuses on the people as well as on the work and implies a reduction in overall employment.

## **Empowerment**

Beyond work design, employees want to be given the resources necessary to act and the accountability for results. They want to feel they count. Says Harvard Business School Professor J. Richard Hackman, "If you want me to care, then I want to be treated like an owner and have some real voice in where we are going" (Main, 1988). The concept evolved from the "employee involvement" emphasis of the 1980s, which brought employees more directly into decision making.

*Empowerment*, literally "the gaining of power," is a term that has been applied for more than a century to the strengthening of political influence, generally among people not involved in key decision making. It became popular when the Students for a Democratic Society, in the 1960s, "condemned the 'Establishment' and sought empowerment for helpless minorities outside the system." It grew from the slogan "Power to the people" (Dawson, 2003).

Managers have several ways to empower employees to perform effectively. First, they ensure that employees have the resources they need, particularly information. They give individuals and teams the authority and responsibility to act and to manage themselves. Managers help build lateral relationships across the organization that facilitate problem solving and learning (Harland, et al, 2005).

## **Work Teams**

In university management, more authority and responsibility are delegated to employees, with less overall management involvement. Where there are fewer management levels and fewer managers, as is often the case, employees look for a different type of leadership. Through coaching and support, managers are expected to enable employees to manage their own work.

Work teams need to be responsible for making important decisions, subject to the rights of management to challenge those decisions. In fact, the idea of "self-managing teams" or "autonomous work groups" implies more decision-making authority than these groups often have. Like redesigning jobs and increasing talent utilization, the emphasis on teams pushes power and control over work to a lower level in the organization. As a result, teams can take actions to improve work methods and procedures, improve talent retention, manage staffing more flexibly, improve service and product quality, and improve decision making (Lawler, 1986).

Teamwork is essential for high performance. One slogan of the quality movement is, nobody is perfect; only teams are. Collaboration is needed to develop from a group of employees the skills, ideas, and energies necessary to solve problems and respond to competitive challenges. Leaders are necessary to unlock these talents.

The idea of a team is that people cooperate in working together to ensure each other's success. This does not require altruism, but rather a sense of common purpose and a feeling that their individual goals are compatible with this purpose. Teamwork also requires mutual trust and confidence, which result only by working together effectively.

A university manager, seeking to foster teamwork, needs to find ways for people to work together instead of alone (create interactions, keep the teams small), needs to emphasize team goals and accomplishments (always say we), needs to build trust by delegating consistently (be predictable), and needs to focus on small successes that lead to long-term success (Carlopio, 1998). In this way, successful planning is possible.

University managers need to use creative ways involving people in planning and problem solving. The most common ways are shifting management tasks to the team, using survey feedback, using quality improvement as a focus of team activity (like quality circles), using union-management quality-of-work-life programs, or redesigning courses (Leggel, 1995). Considerable experience has been developed by companies in using these various involvement processes and self-directed work teams (Harland et al, 2005).

### **Information Systems**

Since there are fewer levels of management and fewer staff resources in today's universities, information systems help academics coordinate and manage themselves. Inexpensive computing and the use of networks make it possible to have information directly available to the employees who need it, throughout the organization. Employees can share information and coordinate their activities without going through management levels. In this connection, internet services are extremely valuable.

### **The need for quality services**

Universities are continually seeking to upgrade or improve the quality of their services provided, and reduce the time it takes to design, develop, produce, and deliver them. Areas of concern typically include:

- Streamlining and decentralizing services to get "closer to the customer".
- Delegating authority and empowering employees to meet customer needs.
- Improving the speed and availability of information needed to act.
- Speeding service cycle times, achieving just-in-time marking, grading and rapid response to market changes and customer requirements.

### **The need to embrace new technology**

Universities are rapidly applying new technology. Every management function is being redefined through the development and use of new systems: research, teaching, materials management, communications and the like.

People are a bigger part of the automation equation than anyone could have predicted. And much more upfront education and training of people will be required to meet the higher levels of automation required.

Information technologies are changing in the way people communicate, work and even play. Information is not controlled by the management hierarchy, but is readily and quickly available to all employees, empowering them to be direct participants in the management of the university. Such changes are driven by advances in computers and microelectronics. As personal computers and computer networks become commonplace, employees gain a personal information access and processing capacity that is unprecedented.

Information technology is increasingly becoming a teaching and learning aid. Introduction of advanced technology provides only a temporary competitive advantage, as others quickly achieve parity by catching up. It is the effective *application* of the technology - the productivity through people - that yields an advantage. The current university leadership will be guided by speed, simplicity and self confidence.

- Speed is the ability to anticipate and act, instead of review and react; it is the ability to see and seize competitive advantage first.
- Simplicity is clarity in understanding competitive facts and articulating a competitive vision instead of resorting to complexity and sophistication for their own sake; simplicity is crucial for speed.

- Self-confidence is necessary for people to be willing to be simple and swift.  
Universities and especially those staff members interested in developing a worthwhile career need to be engines of quality management by:

### **1. Craft a learning plan**

Transition failures often result from the sink or swim mentality many universities possess. It is recommended that a new leader be proactive and develop a formal learning plan well before the first day on the job. It should include, customers, technologies, systems, and structures, as well as culture and politics of the university. Getting acquainted with a new job can be like drinking from a fire house. You have to focus, take responsibility, and be systematic about deciding what you need to learn and how you will learn it most effectively.

Look to a wide range of information sources to get the most complete and accurate picture of your situation. Start with your immediate boss, direct reports, and peers in other departments, but be sure to include students, analysts, and frontline staff as well. Also look for those people who facilitate cross-functional integration and ask them for continuous evaluation.

### **2. Psychologically promote themselves**

You are a rising star. In the not-too-distant future, you are going to be in demand, as older executives reach retirement age and start to leave the university. To hhsse s neee ao t

### **3. Build the team you need**

That means asking the tough questions, touring the facilities, and talking to customers. Second, always remember that you are not constrained by the staff you find on location. You might be inheriting someone else's baggage - and there is no need to spend your time figuring out how to make a team out of a group that is not interested. Therefore, building the right team and securing early wins are two critical building blocks for a successful transition. Transitions are exciting and difficult. Both the university and the new leader have a tremendous amount invested in a successful transition, and by managing that investment actively and strategically, each can dramatically increase the chances for success.

### **4. Keep your best on board**

Keeping your best people on board and avoiding high turnover is urgently needed. This should be top priority of university managers today because demographic trends suggest that retaining top talent is emerging as a major competitive imperative for universities in the next decade. So what steps can your university take to encourage retention, and what can you, as an individual manager, do personally to support your university efforts?

Instead of thinking about what causes people to *leave*, focus on what causes them to stay (Mintzberg, 1996). For instance, while some employees may leave an organization to get a larger pay cheque at another, that does not necessarily mean that the organization should focus exclusively on pay to keep valued workers. Stick to the concept of job *embeddedness*. The more embedded a person is in his job, the less likely he/she is to leave it. There are specific practices that universities and individual managers can implement to increase job embeddedness - and, hence, retention as indicated in Table 4.

#### **Why people stay**

There are three interdependent aspects to job embeddedness, each of which can apply both to the university itself and to the surrounding community in which the person lives and works.

1. **Fit:** In this case staff members perceive themselves as compatible and comfortable with the university and surrounding community. For example, when they believe that their employer shares their values and that their

knowledge and skills match the demands of the job. They also feel a sense of belonging to the community in which the university is located.

2. **Links:** Here, staff members have strong, positive connections with other individuals in the university and with people and groups in the community.

3. **Sacrifice:** A staff member believes that leaving the university and the community would require giving up many things valuable, such as interesting projects, rewarding professional relationships, and a rich, meaningful social life outside work.

The closer the fit between the employee and his university and community, the stronger the links they have with the university and the community, and the greater the potential sacrifice of leaving both, the more "embedded" the person is in the job - and the less likely it is that they will defect.

Not only does embeddedness enhance retention, but it also has a positive impact on performance. Employees who are more embedded in the organization demonstrate a higher in-role performance. They satisfactorily fulfil job duties and extra-role performance. They routinely go above and beyond their job description. These are the future leaders to be.

### **How to increase employees' embeddedness**

Comprehensive onboarding practices, thoughtful career planning and development, and policies that enhance work-life balance offer particularly valuable ways to increase job embeddedness. The following are suggested by Levine (2001).

#### *Make Orientation and Socialization Comprehensive*

The onboarding process presents several opportunities to help a new employee develop strong links both to the university and to the community, and many of them are quite simple to implement. For instance, just giving the newcomer plenty of chances to get to know her new colleagues and discover shared experiences and other commonalities can help her start forging strong employee-university links.

Another way to build strong employee-university links is by helping the new employee forge a personal connection with you. Included as part of a broader program to improve retention, and invite new managers and a guest to a get-to-know-you-dinner.

*Build job-embedding factors into career planning and development*

Helping your employees with career planning and development offers additional opportunities to strengthen job embeddedness. Job embeddedness can be improved through ten areas.

*Table 4 Realising Job Embeddedness*

<i>Ten Things you can do now to improve Job Embeddedness</i>
1. Provide staff with information about community activities and resources.
2. Offer perks based on tenure and excellent performance.
3. Let staff design their work environment.
4. Offer staff bonuses for demonstrating commitment and job involvement.
5. Encourage direct reports to publicly

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**Enhance work-life balance for employees**

Flexible and family-friendly work arrangements strengthen embeddedness on multiple fronts (Tidd et al, 1997). A university that helps its staff balance their work and non-work lives demonstrates values that staff really buy into, thereby enhancing employee-organization fit. If the university facilitates access to needed resources, such as al resourcesl Tc(y) Tj0.780 Tw-460 Tc( al)0lpy

Feedback	Do I give people timely and direct feedback they can act on	University staff want truthful, direct, and timely feedback. Retention and productivity improve when employees trust you to raise issues promptly and honestly.
Succession planning	Have I identified potential successors?	It is important to nurture future leaders who can make the university grow. If you have not identified possible successors, you are probably not delegating as much as you should, and you may even be a decision-making bottleneck.
Evaluation and alignment	Am I attuned to university changes that may require shifts in how we run the university?	All universities encounter challenges posed by changes; for example, in student and community needs. To determine how best to evolve your university, regularly scan for changes, seek fresh perspectives from talented subordinates, and envision new programmes designs.
Leading under pressure	How do I behave under pressure?	During crises, employees watch you with a microscope - mimic your behaviour. By identifying your unproductive behaviour under pressure (such as blaming others or losing your temper), you can better manage those behaviours and avoid sending unintended messages to staff about how they should behave.
Staying true to yourself	Does my leadership style reflect who truly I am?	A university career is a marathon, not a sprint. If you have adopted a leadership style that does not suit your skills, values, and personality, you will wear down.

### **Implications for quality management in higher institutions**

In the 1980s, the most popular book on management was called *In Search of Excellence*. Managers saw in it some advice worth taking. The authors visited many of the top firms in the United States to find out what made them different; better than the other firms. They were searching for excellence. Basically, excellent organizations insisted on top quality. They cared for their customers. They listened to their employees and treated them like adults. They emphasized human creativity over analysis and

"high-tech" tools. The following are

excellent university - there are only universities that maintain their excellence by adapting quickly to changes. The secret to *staying* excellent is to:

1. *Become a niche-oriented market creator*, finding new markets and meeting their needs. This comes very close to making custom-designed programmes for individual organizations or consultancy.
2. *Change the structure of the university*, to have fewer layers of management. This allows the university to adapt to student consumer needs more quickly.
3. *Be responsive and adaptive*, and be fast in making such changes.
4. *Be internationalist*, even if you are a small university. The big markets are in other countries, as well.
- 5.

The way to instil feelings of achievement, responsibility, and growth is to encourage employees to: agree on some specific goals; write out the goals in less than 250 words; read the goals carefully; and take a minute periodically to review results as compared to goals.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, if universities do not address the existing leadership gap and the needed management best practices as sighted above, quality management in higher education is likely to remain more on paper and a big challenge. There is need for strong and proactive career planning systems that can help lecturers become aware of interests, values, strengths and weaknesses. Universities need provide information and establish action plans for the high potentials to achieve their career goals and bridge the gap.

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