

Governance Challenge- The Case of University Salaries and Structure in Kenya

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Abstract: *Universities are the citadel of knowledge and would ideally be expected to set standards in whatever they get involved with for others to follow. In this article, it is shown the systematic erosion of collegial management structure envisaged in universities and the replacement of same with non-academicians at the top. This replacement has been enhanced by salary evaluation tools that place lecturers to the level of laborers. In the end, there is serious challenge to governance of universities and the underlying consequence on freedom of academics impacting negatively innovation.*

Operative words: Governance, salary evaluation, management structure, academic freedom, innovation

“How can I compare you to those who taught you?” Germany Chancellor Angela Merkel’s response to judges, doctors, and engineers’ demand for same salary as teachers.

The circus that has been playing out in Kenyan public universities on salaries and remuneration continues unabated in 2018. It would be a tragicomedy and quite hilarious in the league of Francis Imbuga’s Betrayal in the City. But the conversation is about the highest learning institutions in the land where logic and power of intellect should prevail. How that has happened, is something that will need unraveling and a discussion. And it starts with the base value of a lecturer and the impact on governance. That is, the basic salary that the professor should be earning and how it impacts on university governance. This is informed by the realism that percentage increases are of no value if the base is nothing.

In July 2017, the university faculty union rejected the Salaries and Remuneration Commission (SRC) job evaluation report of public universities in Kenya arguing that the report does not reflect the correct position of job of a lecturer. Indeed, Chairman Wasongais quoted saying, “The report downgrades the highest academic position in the land; elevates administrative positions over academic positions and woefully fails to understand the role of academic positions in higher education.” Therefore, according to the academic staff union, the grading system has failed to recognize their special role, banding them lower than junior administrative colleagues.

To understand how this came about it is important to get a grasp of what job evaluation is all about. Job evaluation is grounded on the premise that like any economic activity, a job has a going price. That is, a job can easily be valued. This valuation of the job is based on a written job description. Job evaluation therefore relies 100% on this raw material called job description. The more that is written on the job description, the more likely the job will be of higher value or higher in hierarchy. There are many tools of valuing jobs. In the case in question, SRC relied on Paterson Classic to engage in job evaluation. Paterson classic is a common tool of use in the southern part of Africa and United Kingdom.

The Paterson system investigates the decision-making components of work and sorts jobs into six major groups. It has been around since the late 60s (www.patersongrading.co.za). At the top of the hierarchy is policy making, then programming decisions, then interpretive decisions, choice of processes, responsibility for part of a process and performance of job elements. The levels correspond to top management, senior management, middle management, junior management and skilled positions, semi-skilled positions and unskilled positions as depicted in the table below.

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Band	Kind	Title	Grade	Kind	Title
F	Policy-Making	Top Management	10	Coordinating	President (MD)
			9	Policy	Vice-President (Ex Dir)
E	Programming	Senior Management	8	Coordinating	General Manager
			7	Programming	Admin Manager
D	Interpretive	Middle Management	6	Coordinating	Department Manager
			5	Interpretive	Superintendent

C	Routine	Skilled	4 3	Coordinating Routine	Supervisor Technician
B	Automatic	Semi-Skilled	2 1	Coordinating Automatic	Chargehand Machinist
A	Defined	Unskilled	0	Defined	Labourer

Source <http://www.patersongrading.co.za/> (13/10/2018)

From the analysis, the Paterson system entrenches what those in management know as Max Weber’s concept of bureaucracy as envisaged in the clear presentation of hierarchy of authority. It is simple and not complicated where decision making process is clear. On its part, SRC adopted ten parameters made up of accountability, decision making, impact, working conditions, responsibility, job knowledge, managerial skills, interpersonal skills, independent judgment, and problem solving to try and address the six levels as provided by Paterson system. In essence, to confirm who is the MD and who is the labourer for every government institution. The dominant factor is who makes decisions which has an impact on governance.

Other tools of evaluation include the Castellion system, which was developed by Cortis for South African Breweries. It is a point-rating system according to six factors: decision making, pressure of work, controls and checks, consequences of error, education and experience. Though all six factors are rated and the final job rating is an aggregate of all six evaluations, the dominant factor is decision making. The decision-making scale ranges from simple decisions, through pragmatic decisions to tactical decisions and strategic decisions (Jordan, J, Mills. C, Moyo. T, Keshav. C, and Ndoziya. J1992)

On the other hand, Hay Group Guide Chart/Profile Method of Job Evaluation is based on three factors, each of which has sub factors. It starts from the premise that all jobs exist to achieve a purpose—to create value in their organization—and evaluates this by analyzing the value that is created (accountability), how it is created (problem solving) and what the job requirements are that a person has to meet in order to deliver the value (knowhow) (www.hays.com.sg/salary-guide/index.htm).

From the three methods mentioned above, it is clear the Paterson is woeful in evaluating university jobs hence the results should not be surprising. A modern job description has two main components, job requirements/specifications providing academic, professional/technical qualifications, years of experience and core competences a holder needs to have, and work description providing purpose, objectives, duties, and responsibilities of the job. These parameters become variables of measurement in the job evaluation. Further, the value of a job will be different from industry to industry, sector to sector and even company/institution to company/institution depending on amount of work and the valuation of the company/institution among other factors. This forms the basis of salary negotiations either by management or by unions.

Unionization of workers can be traced to the 1700 to early 1800 where workers in Europe were comprehensively repressed. This provided a clear distinction of workers and management. The management represent owners of business hence cannot be in union. From this, every institution would have unionisable staff made up of general workers and non-unionisable staff made up of managers and supervisors. Ten year data on the proportion of paid workers who are union members place Kenya at 33%, UK at 28%, USA at 12%, Tanzania 5%, and Qatar/Saudi/UAE at 0%. For Kenyan universities, there is clear confusion as one cannot tell who is in management and who is in union. On the face of things, being in unions seems notto have given Kenyan university lecturers good value.

In a2014 article by Ishmael Munene’s“*The Problem with Public University Salaries in Kenya*” the position isthat due to the stranglehold of Collective Bargaining Agreements, lecturers and professors in the same grade earn similar salaries, despite differing levels of productivity. In other words, “pay for performance” is anathema in Kenya’s public university system.”This could therefore explain the poor pay lecturers collective have ended up earning (Munene, 2014).

However, in the same article, Munene points out that under the agreement, the most senior professors earn a consolidated monthly pay of around US\$3,300, while their junior counterparts make US\$1,757. This salary level is almost the same in 2018 with Salaryexplorer.com giving the average salary of a lecturer at Kenya shillings 296,500 with the range being 93,000 for lowest to 500,000 for the highest. “Twenty years ago (from 2014) a senior university professor, a judge, and a member of parliament earned similar monthly pay and benefits. Today (2014), anMP takes home around US\$9,400, while a judge makes US\$7,000 per month.”

There seems to be a much deeper problem with the remuneration structure of university staff than just being in the union. While joining unions reduced the job of a professor to a skilled laborer status and the picture of a professor banging pots and pans, screaming from both sides of the mouth and singing solidarity forever does not augur well with the status of the profession, keeping quiet seems to have done irreparable damage. While some professors are extremely offended to be referred to as members of a union, clearly when a country shamelessly pays a member of parliament more than a professor,then the professor’s professorial demeanoris

shattered. Something is exceptionally wrong with such a society and the people to tell society so, are in the university. Job re-evaluation is therefore imperative for sanity to prevail.

Uniformed pay structures bring forth some level of fairness. Some of the institutions that have uniformed pay structure include US government and United Nations. The overall objective is to treat all workers the same and pay for the job, not the person.

However, under Paterson system, the number of people reporting to an officer has a significant weighted value as it reflects decision making and position of leadership and hence the level in hierarchy of things. The professor will have no one reporting to him/her except the tutorial fellow, student assistant, or graduate assistant who might all be non-paid staff. The departmental chair, programme leader, dean, deputy vice chancellor, vice chancellor will have several individuals reporting to them starting with personal assistants, clerks, tea persons, and other positions as the hierarchy rises. This kind of evaluation is more suitable for government ministry or military than the university, the top of the education chain.

In the university, the lecturer is the manager of the classroom. The lecturer awards the degree, not the department chair, dean or even the vice chancellor. In the PhD/doctoral classes for example, the lecturer oversees CEOs, managers, and other senior people in society. He/she does not create them, he/she manages them. The lecturer plans and executes the times and places for supervising the various student one has, tutorials, lab sessions, mentorship sessions, advisory sessions, and so forth. All this apart from the "known" job of developing course outlines, course notes, researching, teaching, setting exams, moderating exams, marking exams, publishing, supervising, and grading of students. The highest position in this management structure is therefore the professor brought about by first job requirements-academic, professional/technical qualifications, years of experience and core competences, then work description. This recognizes that the product on sale here is knowledge.

When it comes to university management therefore, the professors/lecturers make policy decisions collectively. The elected chair or dean of the department then implements as an equal. A dean/departmental chair are therefore lecturers on tour of the dean's office, an appointment that has no permanence. Deanship is not a job/profession/occupation/career. Nor is VC, DVC, or other university appointments above the professor. They therefore cannot be evaluated as jobs. Appointments including the VC are lecturers with some allowances that cease as soon as the two/five year tour of duty ends. Those allowances cannot therefore be significantly different from the salaries the person will revert to, otherwise the individual will undergo pecuniary shock on the end of the tour. Recognition of the lecturer position for managerial tour of duty is reduction of work load on number of classes the dean, chair, director, deputy vice chancellor, vice chancellor teaches. And in collegially managed universities, the senate would ratify all the placements and set the monetary compensation for the tour of duty, basic pay and compensations for various support staff service positions as per endowment of the institution. Fairness and objectivity based on the transparent collegial peer management prevailed. The professors could not join any union as they were the "owners" of the universities. This left union activities to support staff.

The senate became the professors committee that would put controls in academic affairs including the VC and on the non-academic bureaucrats. However, the situation worsened when vice chancellors became political players rather than academicians first. The case of a current senior counsel being rejected by management to be the chair of school of law could have started the decline of collegial management. The decline gave opportunity to bureaucrats to entrench themselves. The Vice chancellors allowed themselves to be seduced by the bureaucrats with power plays, extra allowances, and super salaries with some becoming demigods. Crucially, it made monetary sense for the VC and other academic administrators to see themselves as different from other professors. In the process, the non-core support system became the core drivers of the university. Student centeredness moved to bureaucratic centeredness. The universities slowly lost the purpose for which they were established. Lecturers became moonlighters. Universities became glorified high schools. One VC was known to stand at the gate to note down late comers! Manufacturing of degrees became possible.

Universities across the world on the other hand operate in the very unique position in the hierarchy of education. They are at the pinnacle of knowledge industry and society. They define the way life operates in each country. They provide the beacon on which the country judges its growth, development, and civility.

The student tuition fee cannot effectively sustain the work of creation and dissemination of knowledge (a fact some private universities seem unaware of) and benefactors step in. As the number of professors increase, the sharing of income is openly done, accounted for, and the benefactors sufficiently driven to ensure, just like the monks the professors are well taken care of. Endowment funds, scholarships, and sponsorships are now the drivers of university education. The philanthropists such as, Rockefellers, Carnegies, Sanfords, Gates, Buffets, Chandarias, and hopefully in future for Kenya the Karumes, Kirubis, Ekirapas, Ambweres support a specific scholarly work by particular professors to keep the universities going.

The professor's disdain to discuss matters of remuneration has come to haunt them, especially in the Kenyan sector. There was the derogatory anecdote of "professor driving a VW beetle" that became the butt

story in the eighties as individuals jumped from academia and entrenched themselves in the pits of politics and avarice of greed. These individuals in positions of authority ingrained the contempt for the lecturers and worked hard to put a gap between themselves and former colleagues materially.

A professor joining a trade union is therefore a great climb down and could have clouded the pay for performance structures that inform all universities with parameters such as class size, publications, supervisions, grant attractions playing a key role in size of compensation. Being in the union reduces the professor from creator and transmitter of knowledge to a labourer seriously undermining the authority of knowledge. It is because of frustration of the erosion of comradeship and collegial commitment that informed management of universities plus universality of the university that forced junior lecturers to join unions.

Security officers, ICT experts, accountants, human resources, laboratory assistants, or any other support staff earning more than the lecturers in a university is a reflection of crippling power the bureaucrats are wielding and emasculation of the lecturer. Instead of being first among peers, the VC has been reduced to unmitigated bureaucrat while the lecturers have been turned into skilled labourers. The camel has taken over the tent. With super salaries and a bloated support staff to justify the positions, universities are left with no cash to pay decent salaries to professors. The stage is set for chaos in the university sector and labour unrest.

Problem is not confined to Kenya universities. In the UK, minister for education Jo Johnson as reported by BBC on 7th September 2017 as urging institutions to show greater restraint in vice-chancellors and senior level salaries when it emerged that some universities were paying their vice chancellors over £300,000 with some over £400,000 per year. The staff union accuses the vice chancellors of hiding behind “shadowy remuneration committees” with two thirds of vice chancellors sitting on their own remuneration committees. For the UK, this disease has been borrowed from some US private universities and they are determined to reverse the trend.

In the Kenyan context, borrowing from the UK and attacking the super salaries could be a good start. However, the situation has systemic, systematic, and structural challenges that need addressing. While as noted above that position of VC, DVC, Dean, Directors, Chairs in universities are just temporary before reverting to normal teaching, this is no longer the case. In some universities, by the time the VCs, complete their tour of duty, the relationship between them and their peers is so toxic, that they are no longer able to continue teaching in that institution or any other institution. In the process, the universities are losing good brains in particular area of study.

The collegial mien needs to be recovered. The senate need to reclaim its role in the management of universities. Structurally, the university councils, though put there with good intentions, are entrenching the emasculation of the peer management system of the university by usurping the role of the senate. The senate is the college of equals able to hold each and every member to certain standards. However, it can only play its role if the VC is not all powerful with double digit salaries against fellow professors and is actually appointed by the senate itself. The university councils should therefore be restructured to board of trustees made up of five people overseeing the assets of universities and providing a moral beacon with the Chancellor chairing. On the other hand, the unions need to appreciate the value of senior professors, and just like in the law society and other professional bodies, provide the comradeship that is needed more on the guild fashion than a trade union in order to uplift the whole group. The job evaluation will then be done in an atmosphere that is able to recognize the highest valued job in a university is the professor, with a pay and benefits the same level as a Member of Parliament and Supreme Court judge as it was 20 years ago. Other jobs, librarian, human resource, accounts, marketing, legal, IT are then aligned to that perspective so that the need for bloated workforce will not be there and everyone will start earning decent pay. The VCs, DVSSs, Deans, will then get an allowance as per institutional/school capacity that is reasonable, fair, objective, and sustainable either in lump sum or percentage of individual salaries. This will bring back good governance in the universities.

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