

The ICT Forum – The ‘ICT Management in Universities’ – Workshop Series

Introduction – The Problem

Every organization exists for one and only one purpose – to create value for shareholders by providing superior services to its customers at the highest possible profit margins. This truism in business also applies to universities. The university has customers just like any other business organisation – in this case external customer are students. It also goes without saying that there are stakeholders – and in the case of federally-owned institutions, their core interest is also return in investment but in a different nature – not money but high quality education for the nation's youth.

As government funding for state-owned universities dries up, all universities in Nigeria will continue to face the challenge of somehow providing best-in-class education with as little funds as possible. ICT holds the key to better quality of education in a cost effective way but a cursory look at the rewards gained from huge ICT investments in Nigerian universities is far from satisfactory. This again is a reflection of a global train in which most businesses have not been able to justify in business terms, the huge investments in IT made during the last decade.

In a nutshell, the problem is this:

1. The pace of ICT penetration into the core processes of many state-owned universities is very low.
2. There is insufficient return on investment for ICT for the past 5 years and unless there is a fundamental change at the IT strategic apex, this trend will likely go on for some time.

To get a deeper understanding of these problems, it suffices for us to reflect on the following questions:

1. University portals are now the rave, but how many of them incorporate past database of student results?
If online registration is to be effective, a complete results database for at least the past 5 years is necessary so that the system can make decisions about eligibility for certain courses etc.
2. Of the universities that have broadband Internet connectivity, how many of them use 50% of this bandwidth for productive purposes that are in line with the core mission of the university?
3. How many universities have and use internal email systems?
4. How many universities have well developed and frequently updated courseware?
5. How many administrative and other backend processes have been computerised?

The Causes

While it may be easy to blame corruption, IT-ignorant management for the status quo, any student of Systems Theory and dynamic complexity knows better. Every single player in the university has in one way or the other contributed to the situation. Possible causes are briefly listed below.

1. Dissonance between strategic management and ICT departments. This results in an IT strategy that does not clearly support and complement the organizational strategy.
2. Lack of basic management skills by heads of IT departments.

3. Unsustainable approach to implementing and solving ICT solutions. This can be linked to 1 and 2 above.
 4. Ignorance of the broad issues in IT by the leadership of ICT units. For example the true capability of open source, or Web 2.0 and creative ways to leverage IT beyond mere Internet access.
 5. Laziness on the part of academics to use IT to drive teaching – usually because these academic's lack the skills and know-how to do so.
 6. Lack of the appropriate infrastructure to use ICT effectively to drive organizational processes.
- This list is by no means exhaustive but represents the core issues.

The Solution

To remedy this dissonance between IT and Management, the Forum is proposing a four prong solutions:

- a. A series of targeted workshops to bridge the knowledge and competence to make IT and management work in resonance.
- b. For these workshops and other projects that the forum will introduce, we shall seek to leverage partnerships to promote responsible and results-centric ICT in the universities. Potential partners include – the ETF, Kaduna Business School, Lagos Business School, the Nigerian Universities Commission as well as other foreign donors.
- c. A media campaign to draw attention to the broad issues involved and get more people to realize the problem.
- d. An annual 'ICT Effectiveness Ranking' of Nigerian universities. Using a carefully selected set of metrics, we shall rank universities to basically determine how judiciously they use money, how significant their IT projects are to the university's core mission, creative use of ICTs and how sustainable ICT projects are. Such a ranking could become the basis for which donors aid universities.

The Forum CIO Workshops

These workshops, target IT policy makers especially within the university system – to equip them with the relevant business and managerial skills required to reverse the trend and ensure that IT departments serve the university's core mission which can be reduced to the following broad challenges:

- ⊕ Supplement teaching in universities with rich media and live interactions both within the university and with the world at large.
- ⊕ Effectively and total computerisation of backend operations such as Course Registration, inter-unit communications, admissions and information dissemination.

We agree with Andrew McAfee in the November 2006 Harvard Business Review that in order to return IT to glory, executives have three roles to play in managing IT:

1. Help select technologies that meet organizational requirements.

2. Nurture the adoption of these technologies [...especially by senior and strategic management without whose buy-in everything will eventually fail]
3. Ensure the exploitation of these technologies [with metrics that make sense to management]

The take home value of these workshops shouldn't be anything less than the knowledge, toolkit and best-practices to play each of the above roles.

Workshop Deliverables

During these workshops, participants shall acquire the following competencies:

- a. Be able to differentiate between the roles of CIO (chief information officer) and CTO (chief technology officer) as well as understand the underpinnings of new roles like the CISO (chief information security officer).
- b. Evaluate the significance of ICT trends such as evolution of Open Source, Web 2.0/3.0 and digital convergence to IT in universities.
- c. Define and measure business metrics for use in evaluating IT effectiveness. Examples of such metrics are Return on Investment, Boost in Productivity, and Reduced time to 'Market' etc.
- d. Basic managerial skills in fields like Project Management, Basic Finance, Leadership, Negotiations and holistic Intelligence.
- e. Identify and list the top 10 ICT needs of their university as well as identify the most effective, best-of-breed solutions for these needs.
- f. Writing RFP (request for proposals) that are cover the full scope of the university's needs.
- g. Evaluate ICT contract proposals.
- h. Procedures and best practices for evaluating contractor's work prior to hand-over.
- i. Getting and keeping skilled and talented IT professionals within the university system.
- j. Understand and manage dynamic complexity through Systems Theory.

Target Audience

⊕ Senior and Strategic Management

- ⊕ VCs and DVCs.
- ⊕ Directors and Deputy Directors of ICT Departments|Units|Directorates.
- ⊕ Directors of MIS and Academic Planning Units.
- ⊕ Deans and HoDs.
- ⊕ Student Union representatives.

⊕ Line Management

- ⊕ Unit heads of IT departments.
- ⊕ Staff of audit and accounting departments.

⊕ Transactional & Operational Staff

- ⊕ Network Administrators
- ⊕ System Analysts
- ⊕ Database Administrators
- ⊕ Application Developers

Please note that the course content for each of these broad categories will be slightly different.

Budgeting Considerations

Expenses	<p>Take home package for delegates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Forum-branded box files. ⊕ Printing/photocopying of presentations/handouts/case studies. ⊕ Flash or PowerPoint CD or workshop contents.
	<p>Workshop venue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Conference room with seating for at least 30 delegates. ⊕ Duration: 4 days
	<p>Feeding for delegates and facilitators</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Tea break in the morning. ⊕ Lunch
	<p>Resource Persons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⊕ Transportation and Accommodation for duration of workshop ⊕ Stipend for each lecture/presentation.
Financing	<p>Course fee: N25000 per participant?</p> <p>Grant from donors – can ETF or Ministry of Education help?</p> <p>Volunteer facilitators?</p>