



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

OPENING REMARKS BY PROF. PETER M.F.MBITHI, DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR (ADMINISTRATION & FINANCE) DURING THE TEAM BUILDING SEMINAR FOR FINANCE DEPARTMENT HELD AT THE CENTRAL CATERING UNIT (CCU) ON JUNE 17, 2013

I take this opportunity to welcome you all to this session of team building for the staff from the Finance department.

This is a follow up seminar after the one held at this same venue last year. The department will use the opportunity to reflect on its collective responsibility and performance for the past one year as it charts the way forward into the future.

It will also be an ideal time to perform a SWOT analysis of the department, improve on your strengths to exploit the available opportunities, as well as reduce your various weaknesses which may have been noted.

TEAM BUILDING

What is a Team Building

Team building is a philosophy of job design in which employees are viewed as members of interdependent team's instead of as individual workers. Team building is an important factor in any environment; its focus is to specialize in bringing out the best in a team to ensure self development, positive communication, leadership skills and the ability to work closely together as a team to solve problems.

Reasons for team building

The overall goals of team building are to increase the teams understanding of team dynamics and improve how the team works together to deliver on set goals or objectives.

Unlike working as a group, working as a team incorporates group accountability rather than individual accountability and results in a collective work product. In essence, working as a team produces more discernible results than a group.

There are many advantages to this approach. These include the following:

- Increased flexibility in skills and abilities
- It is more productive than work groups with individual mindset

- It is more beneficial in times of organizational change
- It encourages both individual and team development and improvement
- It focuses on group goals to accomplish more beneficial tasks

Strategies of an effective team

The following are effective strategies identified, which a leader should employ to enhance team building:

1. Establishing clear and inspiring team goals
2. Maintaining a results-oriented team structure
3. Assembling competent team members
4. Striving for unified commitment
5. Providing a collaborative climate
6. Encouraging standards of excellence
7. Furnishing external support and recognition
8. Applying principled leadership

GENERAL PERFORMANCE

But whereas Team Building is the key agenda of this workshop, there are other areas which the department needs to address in order to improve effectiveness and service delivery to clients and customers. One of these is customer relations.

As a key department in Central Administration (under Administration and Finance Division), the Finance Department plays a critical role in the operations of all other units/departments. It is therefore paramount that staff's serving in various sections treat customers with courtesy, respect and with a high sense of responsibility.

Units like Expenditure Section and Students Finance, which deal with customers on a daily basis, are in great focus here. Even today, there are staff who complain of inordinate delays in processing of payments and even when this is done, some staff do not treat customers with due courtesy.

Related to this is the whole matter of discipline amongst staff. Lack of this is manifested in office absences, lateness and general lack of concern. You can imagine the agony of a member of staff whose spouse/child has been discharged from hospital, and then there is no one in Finance Department to release the hospital cheque or even their NHIF contribution card.

STRATEGIC PLAN

As you may be aware, the University has recently developed its 2013-2018 Strategic Plan. Consequently, all Colleges and Central departments have been required by Management to also develop their strategic plans cascaded from the University one.

Part of the thrust of the University of Nairobi Strategic Plan is the realization that the University is currently facing competition from both local and foreign institutions. The University therefore has to continue upscaling the value of its products to survive the competition. Demands on the University from various stakeholders have also increased over time.

As a core department, the Finance Department must play its rightful role in facilitating the University to deliver in such a demanding environment. The department must assist in the transformation of the University from focusing primarily on regulatory reporting to providing data and information that the University needs to more effectively run its operations.

It is my hope that these challenges have been incorporated in the department's draft Strategic Plan for 2013-2018.

PERFORMANCE CONTRACTING

I cannot talk of Strategic Planning without also touching on Performance Contracting. As you are aware, the University has been on Performance Contract since 2005/2006, with the department also on Performance Contract for the last seven years.

I am aware that the Finance Department is one of the better performing departments in Central Administration, but the challenge remains: does the apparently reported good performance translate to better service for our clients? Are we necessarily better than other units in meeting ours and the University's Strategic objectives?

Since a performance contract is the implementation tool of the strategic plan, it is expected that your performance contract picks targets from your strategic plan, which is itself cascaded from the university's strategic plan. It would be contradictory if a department reports high scores in the performance contract while the University does not score well in the core functional areas of the department. I take this opportunity therefore to urge the core sections of the department to ensure they assist the Finance Officer in not just achieving the departmental goals and objectives, but ensuring they are properly tied to the University ones so that we all score as a big team. It is not worthwhile to be ranked high without something to show for it, even at the corporate level.

HUMAN RESOURCE AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT

But even as we make these demands on the department, it is important for management to ensure that the department is adequately facilitated for it to deliver. Consequently, management has to provide the necessary, qualified personnel (Accountants and other specialists) to the department. Whereas this has generally been happening, we know there are areas with gaps especially in the sense of understaffing. These always need to be brought to the attention of management. Further, cases of staff deserving consideration for promotion should also be brought to the attention of management, especially where such staff meet the requirements for promotion.

As for the physical working environment, I am told the department is one of the best endowed in terms of offices and furniture (compared with other departments of Central Administration), possibly because as the keepers of money, you know when to raise requisitions. The University is committed to providing the right environment for staff to deliver to their optimum, and in case of issues they should be brought to the attention of the Finance Officer and ultimately, to management.

Finally, I take this opportunity to thank the workshop organizers, the resource persons who will be talking on various subjects and all staff, and to wish you a fruitful seminar.

Thank you all and have a good day.