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Institutional Capacity Building for Autonomy & Accountability of Technical Education

Management

KEYWORDS :

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ABSTRACT

Changing social and cultural dynamics have occasioned a re-imagination of the enormous potential of autonomous institutions in the face of the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. In this perspective, autonomy presents an opportunity for institutional transformation and renewal, by way of institutional capacity building. A willingness of some educationists and academicians to examine the challenges and opportunities that await their institutions has resulted in the adoption of capacity building as an important activity for institutional ascendancy. At the core of capacity building is the recognition that strategic thinking and action about both an institution's weakness and potential are critical to its effectiveness and sustainability. While there is no one way to undertake capacity building, the most effective approaches include three stages: 1. Assessment, 2. Planning and 3. Intervention. At present, autonomy and accountability are the key attributes for technical institutes to qualify for assistance under the Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP) launched by the Government of India with World Bank aid. Current political and economic realities require that a well-educated and trained indigenous workforce is needed to sustain technically based industrial operations in developing countries. The economy of nations in transition/developmental phase can be effectively stimulated by building the technical capacity of their workforce, through quality engineering education programs. In fact, high quality engineering education is a necessary forerunner to a more secure, stable and sustainable world, and hence developing countries seek to enhance their human, institutional and infrastructure capacity

INTRODUCTION

"Let me challenge all of you to help mobilize global science and technology to tackle the interlocking crises of hunger, disease, environmental degradation and conflict that are holding back the developing world." -

Kofi Annan, United Nations.

The economy of nations in transition/developmental phase can be effectively stimulated by building the technical capacity of their workforce, through quality engineering education programs. In fact, high quality engineering education is a necessary forerunner to a more secure, stable and sustainable world, and hence developing countries seek to enhance their human, institutional and infrastructure capacity.

Capacity Building in general is a set of those externally or internally initiated processes designed to help individuals, organizations and communities to appreciate, manage and increase existing and potential resources and their changing circumstances with the objective of improving the stock of social, financial, physical and human capital.

The contemporary view of capacity building goes beyond a conventional perception of growth. The central concern - to manage change, resolve conflict, manage institutional pluralism, enhance coordination, foster communication, and to ensure that data and information are shared – require a broad, holistic view of capacity development.

Changing social and cultural dynamics have occasioned a re-imagination of the enormous potential of autonomous institutions in the face of the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. Despite an ever-present cacophonous chorus of naysayers, they remain the colleges of choice for students seeking excellence. These students will expect and demand the same innovative academic programs, well-trained faculty, state-of-the-art facilities and the organizational efficiency that are evidenced at most institutions with established reputation. In this perspective, autonomy presents an opportunity for institutional transformation and renewal, by way of institutional capacity building.

THE CONCEPTS

Why autonomy? : The basic objective of an institution as against that of a mere organization is its commitment and obligation to society. An educational institution definitely serves a social cause, rather the most crucial one. Whether it be general education, or technical education, it needs to operate with certain degree of autonomy for an uninhibited performance with fullest scope for creativity and flexibility, and with a resilient response to changing social needs. It is stated in no uncertain terms in Magna Charta Universitatum:

- "The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies."
- "To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power."

Institutions need autonomy for –

- **academic freedom -** to be able to decide what is best academically for the public: what programs to offer, how to offer, what teaching and learning methods to be used, what are the standards of teaching and learning and research, etc
- **Personnel management -** to be able to have one's own personnel management system that assures the recruitment, retention, development and performance of personnel to deliver desired academic outcome
- **Financial management -** to be able to administer the use of fund in order to efficiently and effectively attain the desired academic outcome.

Definition of Institutional Capacity Building: The process through which organizations conduct activities or interventions that are designed to make them better at doing what they are meant to do.

Autonomy and Institutional Capacity Building are interrelated.

Autonomy implies capacity building that leads to accountability as put below –

- Autonomy is not an end in itself but a means to achieve capacity (Quantitative) and capability (Qualitative)
- Capacity and Capability are prerequisites for Quality and Relevance, and Sustainable Development and Economic growth.
- Quality and Relevance should be instruments of Accountability towards the stakeholders.

KEY QUESTIONS ON ROLE OF TECHNICAL EDUCATION IN CHANGING SCENARIO

Following questions could guide the efforts towards institutional capacity building.

- What kind of careers are emerging in today's interconnected world, where are they merging and how do we prepare our students and communities for them?

- How can our departments, schools and university as a whole achieve an enhanced international presence?
- How can institutions of higher education be positioned for success in today's global environment and what role should local, regional, national and international partners play?
- What global trends, developments and related research topics are most important to our scholarly disciplines today, and how can we take advantage of such to create new knowledge in the future?

THE NEED FOR INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

As cited in a paper by K.Kasturirangan, India is the third largest higher education system in the world, next only to China and US. India's total production of engineers is 582590 in 2007 but considering the future opportunities this number need to be increased and quality enhanced.

Concerns about engineering education include:

- Problems of skills to compete in the global economy
- Problems of engineering institute failing to attract and retain quality faculty
- Its implications including risk of losing significant opportunities to thrive.
- Not more than 15% of graduates of general education 25-30% of technical education are fit for employment

These concerns indicate the urgency of Institutional Capacity Building.

A willingness of some educationists and academicians to examine the challenges and opportunities that await their institutions has resulted in the adoption of capacity building as an important activity for institutional ascendancy.

The result of this focus on capacity building has profound implications for the future of autonomy and the potential that can be tapped. Every college or university can benefit from an activity aimed at building, strengthening, redefining and sustaining institutional capacity. Technical institutions in particular have to adopt Institutional Capacity Building as an ongoing process in order to keep in pace with the rapid expansion and diversification of its knowledge-base.

THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building is a systematic, intentional and strategic process that results in the strengthening of infrastructures, programs, systems, policies, procedures and practices that support and sustain an institution's mission. Capacity building is a proactive exercise that draws on the foundation of existing institutional strength and potential.

At the core of capacity building is the recognition that strategic thinking and action about both an institution's weakness and potential are critical to its effectiveness and sustainability. While there is no one way to undertake capacity building, the most effective approaches include three stages:

1. Assessment, 2. Planning and 3. Intervention.

Assessment: Once a college or university commits to engaging in capacity building, it must undergo a comprehensive evaluation of current institutional capability. This involves an unfiltered examination of institutional strengths, deficiencies, challenges and opportunities. The data gathered during this phase provides the foundation for the development of an implementation plan, which is not to be confused with a strategic plan. While some activity in this phase may be similar to the analysis often undertaken in advance of developing a strategic plan, the intent and purpose are very different. Strategic plans are indeed useful in the process of capacity building as they provide a map of an institution's desired future end state; capacity building ensures a strong and sustainable institution as an important outcome. Effective strategic plans might include a capacity building implementation plan as an important subtext.

Planning: In the planning phase of capacity building, the implementation plan is developed, which addresses the identified deficiencies and challenges and the intention to explore, develop or expand potential opportunities. The implementation plan outlines detailed strategic steps for remediation and correction and may focus on such institutional operations as fundraising, enrollment management, curriculum, facilities, fiscal management, leadership and governance.

Intervention: An implementation plan that becomes a vital, dynamic institutional document with active support from the leadership and key constituents defines the intervention that is the final phase of capacity building. In this phase, the implementation plan is undertaken with financial, technical and consultative support in a process that involves administrative management and oversight, benchmarking, scheduled reporting and formative and summative evaluation.

The concepts of different modes of Capacity Building

Mode of Capacity Building	Means	Process	Ends
Building the capacity of an organization: organizational development	Strengthens the organization's ability to perform specific functions, such as R&D	Builds coherence within internal operations; develops the possibility of continued learning and adaptation	Improves the organization's viability, sustainability, and impact in relation to its mission
Building the capacity of an institutional subsector (e.g., EDP-cell, Placement cell, etc): sectoral development	Strengthens the ability of the sector or subsector to improve its overall impact	Develops mutually supporting relations and understanding within the sector or subsector	Achieves confident and meaningful interaction with other sectors and sections based on shared strategies and learning
Building the capacity of whole system: institutional development	Improves the ability of primary stakeholders to identify and carry out activities to solve problems	Enables and stimulates better interaction, communication, conflict resolution in the system, enhancing resources	Increases the ability of primary stakeholders to engage with and influence the overall efficiency to fulfill their goals.

Criteria for effective institutional capacity building:

- What is our business? = Visioning (Vision and Mission)
- Who are our clients? = Targeting
- What do our clients consider/value? = Situation/Needs Analysis
- What have been our results? = Performance Review/Evaluation
- What is our plan? = Action Planning

THE FOCUS AS PER THE "ENGINEERING FOR A BETTER WORLD" PROPOSAL SUBMITTED TO UNESCO

In 2003, the United States of America rejoined UNESCO after an absence of 18 years. The US government indicated to UNESCO that it wanted a significant portion of the increased funds that it would provide to its budget to be allocated to enhancing its programs in engineering and engineering education.

A major proposal on how to mount an enhanced program, entitled "Engineering for a Better World", has been developed by the US engineering community and UNESCO's engineering staff and submitted to UNESCO.

The program strategy to promote human and institutional capacity building in engineering will focus on the need for:

- strengthening engineering education, training and continued professional development;
- standards, quality assurance and accreditation;
- development of curricula, learning and teaching materials and methods;
- distance and interactive learning (including virtual universities and libraries);

- development of engineering ethics and codes of practice;
- promotion and public understanding of engineering and technology;
- development of indicators, information and communication systems for engineering;
- addressing women and gender issues in engineering and technology;
- inter-university and institutional cooperation, including fellowships;
- development of engineering and technology policy and planning to promote the above.

WORLD FEDERATION OF ENGINEERING ORGANIZATIONS (WFEO) INITIATIVES

The WFEO Committee on Capacity Building is an international committee consisting of members from both developing and developed countries. Members are currently being nominated by the some 80 member organizations of WFEO.

Motivated by a renewed interest in engineering and engineering education at UNESCO, the WFEO has established a new Standing Committee on Capacity Building, with the United States as the host of the international organization.

The activities of the new Committee will include:

- Providing pathways for the technical and professional societies of the developed world to make their expertise available to engineers in the developing world – including technical publications, conferences, codes of practice, and ethics
- Utilizing state-of-the-art distance learning technology to deliver needed information and interactions to engineers and engineering educators in developing countries
- Strengthening engineering education, both initial and lifelong learning, in developing countries – including making available global best practices in curriculum reform and engineering practice
- Providing an information resource for teaching and learning materials, laboratory equipment, software, etc. for the engineering education needs of developing countries
- Addressing pipeline and diversity issues in providing the needed quality and quantity of engineers for the world's needs
- Promoting collaborative efforts between institutions in the developed and developing worlds
- Promulgating quality assurance standards and accreditation for engineering education throughout the world, particularly in developing countries
- Developing pathways for engineering volunteers in the developed world to spend time and effort working on capacity building in developing countries – including efforts in times of disaster relief

APJ ABDUL KALAAM'S VIEWS ON INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING
IN THE INTEREST OF THE NATION

Who else could better envision the technical capabilities and the underlying technical education system in India than Dr.APJ Abdul Kalaam? In his classic work 'Envisioning an Empowered Nation' he claims that the most important mission for us is the creation of capacities for nation building through educational institutions.

He considers the following capacities as of vital importance.

(a) Research and Enquiry: 21st century shall be managing the information and knowledge gained in the 20th century by adding value to it. The students must be taught with the skills of research and enquiry, thereby finding their way through the sea of knowledge, for achieving sustainability by technological abilities.

(b) Creativity and Innovation: These two characteristics have to be nurtured amongst the students who would be able to work hard continuously accepting changes with flexibility of outlook, to bring about refinements to the things with a willingness to play with ideas and possibilities.

(c) Capacity to use High Technology: The institutions should equip themselves with the tools of high technology to enhance the learning processes.

(d) Entrepreneurial Leadership: It involves three things – First, identifying and then solving a problem in the context of development with a desire to fulfill the needs of all. Secondly, taking a calculated risk for the sake of a larger gain. The third part is the disposition to do thing right.

(e) Moral Leadership: It calls for a compelling vision for human betterment, with positive disposition, influencing others alike.

(f) Perfect Learner-ship: An institute's mission is to generate perfect learners with all the five attributes mentioned above, inculcating in them a burning desire to learn throughout their life.

RECENT INITIATIVES IN INDIA

University Grants Commission — the apex body regulating higher education in the country — recently accepted in principle a report submitted by the Central Advisory Board on Education (CABE) in June 2005, recommending granting of autonomy to institutions, on the ground that it is a "pre-requisite for enabling them to achieve their goals and objectives", by adopting Institutional Capacity Building.

The need for autonomy came to the fore because of concerns that affiliating universities were being bogged down by the number of institutes they had to manage. Apart from cutting red tape, autonomy is seen as essential to meeting the requirements necessitated by the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS), under which foreign universities will be able to set up shop in India.

At present, autonomy and accountability are the key attributes for technical institutes to qualify for assistance under the Technical Education Quality Improvement Programme (TEQIP) launched by the Government of India with World Bank aid. A total of 127 technical institutes in 13 States in India that are securing World Bank assistance under TEQIP have witnessed a remarkable improvement in their infrastructure and quality of teaching by a systematic approach to Institutional Capacity Building. Of the 127 technical institutes that are part of TEQIP, 18 are National Institutes of Technology (NITs), besides 80 Government technical institutes and 20 private technical institutes.

CONCLUSION

Pursued earnestly and with integrity, capacity building can result in transformation that is real and on going. Through this process, a college or university declares its intention to take full and complete control of defining who they are and who they wish to become.

Capacity building has the potential to create formidable autonomous institutions fully prepared to sustain themselves and confidently face the challenges of the 21st century as equal and noteworthy members of a vast and diverse community of colleges and universities.

State-of-the-art science and technology capacity must be built in developing countries if they are to be able to compete effectively in the global economy. Current political and economic realities require that a well-educated and trained indigenous workforce is needed to sustain technically based industrial operations in developing countries.

A technical workforce pool is also needed to fuel entrepreneurial startup efforts that meet local needs. Well-educated engineers and scientists in developing countries will find appropriate ways to extend R&D results to marketable products and services responsive to local needs. Further development of such entrepreneurial startups can lead to products and services that profitably extend to regional markets, and eventually global markets.

For realizing all these objectives, it is essential that Institutional Capacity Building must be taken up on a massive scale, with the strategy of 'Think Globally and Act Locally'.

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