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## BUSINESS PROCESS REENGINEERING IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: THE CASE OF ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY AND BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

The teaching learning processes of Ethiopia Universities were devised some decades back and passed through little modification since then. It is only after the problems were accumulated and customers were dissatisfied that the universities came to understand the need of transformation from the old system to the new one which is customer focused. As a result, all government universities attempted to embark Business Process Reengineering (BPR), as the tool is believed to bring the desired result of matching the universities' products to the country's vision of joining the middle income countries in the coming twenty years. To this end, this piece of study was undertaken and the case study design was chosen and data were obtained from three sources; Ministry of Education, Bahir Dar University, and Addis Ababa University. The study envisages that there is confused prospect for the BPR implementation. Besides, the study also found out communication problems in both case universities in general and in Bahir Dar University in particular which will threaten the prospect unless immediate measure is taken. As to the BPR implementation, the attempt so far is best described rather as business process improvements than business process reengineering.

### KEYWORDS

BPR, Higher educations institutions, Ethiopia

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Expansion of higher education has led to a need for improved efficiency in administrative services, along with a greater range and flexibility in degree programmes than currently exists: new organisational structures are required (Ford et al., 1996). The ultimate purpose of reengineering universities is to improve productivity and customer satisfaction. And to properly reengineer the processes, it is important first to understand whether a change is really needed. Many literatures claim that the need for change in today's environment is unquestionable because virtually all organizations operate in dynamic environment when sticking to the already designed process may mean lagging behind the demand of the day. Furthermore, Penrod and Dolence (1992) argue reengineering as a suitable means for ensuring higher educations instructions adapt to the changing demands being placed upon them.

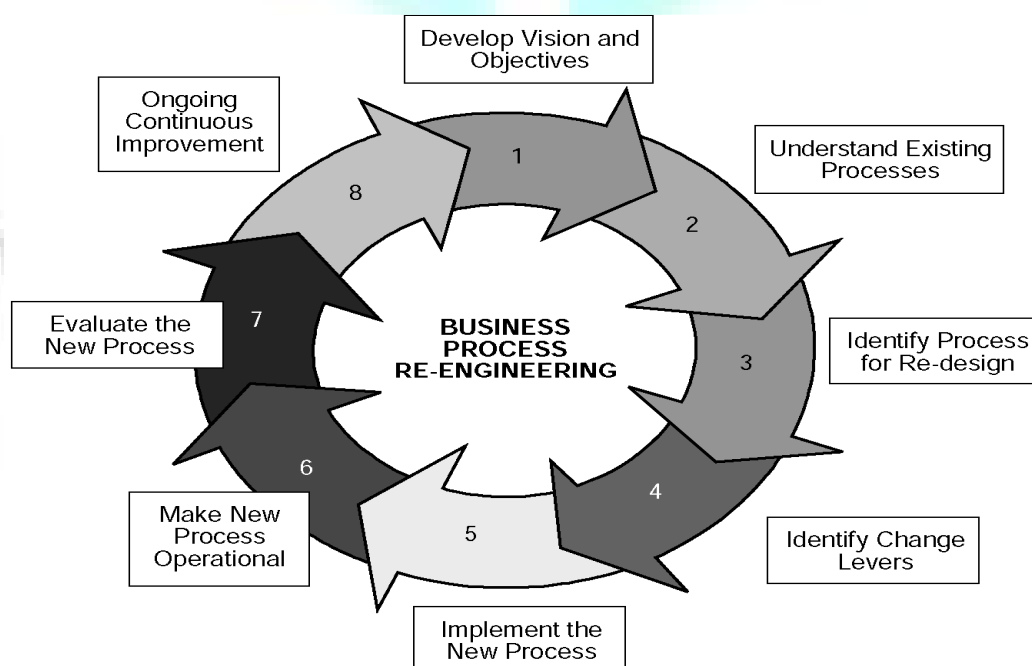
The long run goal of implementing BPR is to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and economy (Hammer, 1995). Through employing the right strategy, policy, and structure in general it is possible to achieve efficiency. Besides, delivering customer satisfaction better than competitors do will secure competitive advantage. In this regard, it is a new phenomenon for our country, Ethiopia, to redesign the process though the practice of revising the past system has been practiced since the past years as a form of governmental reforms. What is new in the BPR which doesn't exist in any other systems of process revising is that implementing BPR will lead to paradigm shift from the existing process which requires starting from the scratch

### 2. LITERATURES REVIEW

#### CONCEPTUALIZATION OF BPR

According to Hammer and Champy (1993) business process reengineering is defined as the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business process to achieve dramatic improvements in critical contemporary measures of performance, such as cost, quality, services and cycle time. BPR removes hindrances and using technology to drastically invent the way in which work is done.

In addition to the three core characteristics of BPR, rethinking, radical, and dramatic improvements in critical measures of performances, Vokola et al (1998) recommended the essential processes to be followed cyclically. Such processes, as depicted below, dictate BPR implementation to be continuous as there always exists room for improvement in the world of dynamism.



Source: Vakola et al. (1998)

In the cyclical process, Vakola et al. identified eight essential processes which begins with redefining the mission and objectives and ends with seeking for ongoing and continuous improvement. According to them, the process continuous as the vision and objective of the organization scales up due to quality improvement, cost reduction, and delivery speed improves.

#### **FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF BPR**

Despite the significant growth of the BPR concept, not all organizations embarking on BPR projects achieve their intended result. Hammer and Champy (1993) estimate that as many as 70 percent do not achieve the dramatic results they seek. Having BPR repeatedly at the top of the list of management issues in annual surveys of critical information systems reflects executives' failure to either implement properly or acquire the benefits of BPR (Alter, 1994). This mixture of results makes the issue of BPR implementation very important. BPR has great potential for increasing productivity through reduced process time and cost, improved quality, and greater customer satisfaction, but it often requires a fundamental organizational change. As a result, the implementation process is complex, and needs to be checked against several success/failure factors to ensure successful implementation, as well as to avoid implementation pitfalls.

### **3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Business Process Reengineering (BPR) has become a major concern to our country, Ethiopia, since the past few years. Almost all governmental and some private organizations attempted BPR implementation hoping to result in better performance and superior customer satisfaction. Although the notion of BPR is many decades old, Ethiopia has currently overwhelmed with its implementation. Some governmental organization, which so far have implemented BPR, claim to have better results. Being one of governmental organizations, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education has currently demanded all governmental universities to implement BPR since the past five years.

Currently, the number of government universities increased to thirty, and hoped to be more in the near future. However, the ever increasing numbers of students who join government universities together with the dynamic global environment necessitate well equipped and modern universities with technological driven process which the old system can not accommodate.

Thus, transforming to the new system from the old one needs a fundamental redesigning of university systems. Seemingly, cognizant to this fact, universities tried to rethink the way they used to do business through BPR. However, critics of failure overshadowed universities claim of BPR implementation in the case universities. Examining the extent to which such critics holds true is the very reason why this research was undertaken. The central research question is " have the case universities implemented BPR according to their designs and the theory?"

### **4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The major objective of the research is to examine the implementation of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) in the case universities. To better understand this, the following specific objectives are worth stating.

- To validate whether there was real need for universities to implement BPR
- To assess how different stakeholders participate in the study and implementation of the BPR?
- To evaluate the extent to which the BPR implementation meets the standards of BPR as recommended by Hammer & Champy, 1993

### **5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The results of the study would contribute meaningfully to the implementation of BPR by pin pointing possible sources of challenges and suggesting possible strategies of alleviating the problems, as BPR is a continuous process. In addition to this, comparing the results of BPR with the former traditional method promotes its acceptance. Besides providing empirical evidence from the literatures enhances stakeholders' confidence on the BPR as a real preferred tool of achieving the desired objective. The study can also contribute its part to the customized body on knowledge in the area.

### **6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

The study attempted to examine the implementation of BPR in Ethiopia government universities in particular reference to how the selected universities perceive BPR and how they are implementing it to realize the country's aim of producing practical and real problems solution oriented manpower.

To better approach the respondents and gain appropriate response, the qualitative method that searches for meanings, reasons, and explanations that considers the explanatory research design was used. The study used case design for it is believed to be the appropriate for the study concerned, as could be justified below.

#### **CASE STUDY DESIGN**

Existing literatures such as Hall et al. (1993) suggest that the assessment of BPR in organizations including in higher education institutions would benefit more by investigating in-depth understanding of the real experience of implementing BPR. Therefore, the research will use government higher education institutions which have embarked on BPR for its detailed case study design.

The selection of the case study in government universities is based on one decisive factor: Evaluating nature of radicalness in process change implementation and the universities status so far. Therefore, I have chosen case 1: Bahir Dar University (where I belong), and case 2: Addis Ababa University, a 60 years old and multi campus university and whose system I had known well before BPR implementation and I believe it is important for comparison and to evaluate wholeness of the Ministry of Education BPR strategy.

Actual case study fieldwork had been done through a triangulation approach to get both breadth and depth information, and which is in line with suggestions in Yin (1994), with an open-ended interview involving BPR team leaders and the Ministry of Education concerned person for higher educations' BPR.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS**

I used thematic analysis. The themes were developed based on the extant literature reviews, especially from the recommendations of Hammer & Champy,(1993) and Penrod and Dolence(1992). In the process of assimilating data in to themes, the raw data were broken down into manageable forms. I also conducted an audit trail, a scheme for identifying these data forms according to their speakers and the context. Speakers were also typically referred in a manner that would provide a sense of context. The next stage of analysis involved reexamination of the categories to determine how they are linked, a complex process called "axial coding" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The discrete categories that were identified in open coding were compared and combined in new ways as I began to assemble them in to the themes. Finally, I translated the conceptual theme based model into the story line that would give meaning to readers.

### **7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The BPR projects at the case universities have been implemented since 2009. For this reason, the interviews sought to examine the design of the BPR studies, the challenges that BPR stakeholders are facing in the initial stages of project roll-out and problems faced so far, the role of Ministry of Education in supervising and helping to synchronize BPR in all universities, and availability of resources for the full implementation of BPR. The discussion that follows begins by identifying whether there was really a need to launch BPR and the participation of stakeholders that went on at the outset of the BPR programs.

The cases are reviewed under the themes of: Need for BPR in academic institutions Involvement of different stakeholders in the study of BPR, communication, IT infrastructures, Role of MoE- in keeping harmony/synchronization, adequacy of financial resources, success results so far, and future conditions. These headings are identified to be thematic areas for BPR implementation based on the research objectives of this study and key findings gathered through interview and the universities' BPR study reports.



**NEED FOR BPR IN ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS**

The Ethiopian universities' processes have been formulated many decades back. For example Addis Ababa University is the pioneer university in Ethiopia and has been in operation for the last six decades. Its organization process was devised since the beginning with little modification through the periods it has passed. Since the process considered only the time it was devised, it can't satisfy its customers as it should these days. To this end, AAU's key informant and BPR study report strongly claimed a felt need for a dramatic change of the systems even before MoE initiated the idea of BPR.

Similarly, both MoE and BDU informants support the AAU's felt need for change as both of them criticize the old system for its obsolescence, rigidity, and falling far from the demand of the country and the global environment in general. The performance of higher education is of great significance for the competitiveness of nations (Porter, 1990). Therefore universities should produce competent and skilled manpower for Ethiopia to be competitive in the global arena. *"The country's universities should design their processes in a way that enable their graduates execute the country's policy and hence it was inevitable for universities to redesign their processes considering the 70/30 policy."* (Informant, MoE)

It is therefore clear from the key informant that there is really a need for change from the old system and BPR is the preferred tool for its completeness and innovative nature. Ford *et al.* (1996) argue that BPR could enable HEIs to develop organizational structures that enable innovative teaching and learning methods, whilst maintaining some element of the important student-teacher relationship. The process needs to be student centered and available means of transferring knowledge from the teachers to the students shouldn't be confined to a chalk and talk method. The old Ethiopia curriculum was devised based on the social science theory dominant and didn't take in to account today's competitive global environment. Thus, considering the global environment and the current policy of Ethiopia, the change to fit these things is inevitable for Ethiopia universities to play their roles of producing the right amount and kind of graduates to the market.

**INVOLVEMENT OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS IN THE STUDY OF BPR AND THE CONFORMITY OF IMPLEMENTATION WITH THE PLAN**

For the full implementation of BPR, so as to achieve the desired objective, all stakeholders should be involved in the study mainly because reengineering the process should be studied, executed, and evaluated by these stakeholders at the end of the day. The teaching and learning process is one of the core processes for universities and hence the academic staffs are the major stakeholders and need to contribute their opinion to the BPR study. The informants explained how the staff involved in the study process; *"Major stake holders had been involved in the study of BPR in each university and the universities had come up with important ingredients for their final studies."* (Informant, MoE)

However, the informant's source to say so is the universities report and the Ministry didn't establish a supervising team to ensure whether the claimed involvement was done as stated in the report. *"Teams were established including the top management of the universities and the teams tried to incorporate the staffs' view in the study"* (BDU's and AAU's report on staff involvement). As can be read from the BPR studies of both universities, teams were established which includes the top management in the universities. And as the informants explained, the final draft of the report was presented to the staff and clarification was made for sought points.

However, the opportunities made to get access to the team were not sufficient. For the full involvement of the staff and full disclosure of the whereabouts of the study, there must have been regular meetings to at least brief such a matter. Besides, these days it seems that BPR has undergone a deep sleep as rumors circulate around the case universities, as I have tried to observe, and key informants also acknowledged.

By and large there should have been and should be greater involvement of the stakeholders in the implementation with good understanding of what to do. The study found out that the involvements of academic staffs are not satisfactory. And the 'implementation' lagged behind the duration set in the study of both universities. This may in turn can have implementation on involvement and commitment levels of both top management and academic and administrative staffs.

**RADICALNESS OF THE CHANGE PROCESS**

BPR involves radical and fundamental changes, and it evolves from the need to recognize that the long-established ways of doing business were mostly designed for customers, services and products that are different in today's competitive environment. There has also been a shift in organizational focus towards improving quality, the customer, and innovation, rather than emphasizing control and cost cutting (Hammer, 1990). Therefore, organizations are moving to re-engineer old business processes by introducing new structures and procedures, and are including new ways of doing business. This must hold true for Ethiopia universities.

Building an imaginative thinking and a clear and compelling vision for future processes is critical to the successful implementation of BPR (Talwar, 1993). BPR calls for a radical change that involves focusing on the analysis of business processes rather than the functions of an organization, and reengineering these processes in order to maximize the performance. The bit by bit change and improvement process will not solve the problems our universities were having and only the radical change can cure them.

In this respect, the case universities seem to understand the importance of the radical change in their core processes such as the teaching learning and research and community services so reform their curriculum in a different approach than it used to be.

The course alignment approach is completely new to Ethiopia universities in general so far. The fact that students will be given the opportunity to take aligned courses in any order they like makes the system very flexible. Besides, students' stay in the campus is determined by their academic performance and interest to shorten the duration. This makes a sense that the fast performer can get his/her degree in less duration than slow performer. And there are also two versions of certification; complete degree after taking all the course system modules and core competency certificate after taking a single aligned course system. Furthermore, in the BPR study of BDU, the design deserves to be called radical as many of the processes are conceptually designed from the clean slate. And the introduction of course chairs and assistants seem ideally feasible for flexibility education system. However, such radicalness and brilliance remained on the study report to date and the changes are mere improvements. Similarly, in AAU, the implementation seems as per the study except for few deviation in the undergraduate program such as the report claims to allow students the have major-major, major-minor, and the flexibility to allow students take as many general courses as they can across departments.

**COMMUNICATION**

Communication is one of the essential change management tools perceived as very important in facilitating BPR (Hammer, 1993). He emphasizes the need for communication throughout the change process at all levels and for all individuals, and stress that communication should occur regularly between those in charge of the change initiatives and those affected by them, and that this communication should discuss sensitive issues.

Despite the importance, there have been insufficient communications in the case studies as BDU informant stated *"There had been some meetings to communicate to the staff in the first two year but I don't think they were sufficient."* For the past two years, there has never been any formal communication about the whereabouts of BPR in BDU to the staff formally. Such a delay or negligence in communication opens the door for rumors to circulate in the university that the process fails. On the other hand, the Ministry of Education has facilitated the way for universities to communicate their achievements by letting universities establish the higher education council. But the communication should have grass root level clearances before the top management presents 'achievements' to the national meetings. Otherwise, the implementation will remain live only in reports.

Communication to all levels of personnel must remain active from start to finish keeping everyone involved and working towards a common goal. Without a common understanding about what is happening, confusion and uncertainty about the future can result in resistance strong enough to stop any reengineering effort (Penrod & Dolence, 1992).

The communication in the case universities is poor, both internal and external, and needs immediate improvement. Universities need to communicate the paradigm to everyone concerned and foster an environment that rewards teamwork, creativity, and value-added thinking (Hammer, 1995). Otherwise such overlooking of communication may cumulate and finally cause the BPR implementation fail. It is easier to communicate day to day and eliminate the confusion than trying to take remedial action ones the accumulation of confusion mounts up.

**IT INFRASTRUCTURES**

BPR initiatives would attempt to utilize IT to link teaching and learning process across the functional boundaries of academic departments. Information should become an institution wide resource and should be transferred and accessed and institutionalized (Ford *et al.* 1996). According to MoE informant, the Ministry of Education has exerted considerable effort to make sure that universities have appropriate IT infrastructures.

Information technology is both an enabler and a driver for BPR implementation. However, the information system is only a tool to be manipulated by human beings. It is therefore important to acquaint the staff with the new technology mainly through training. The information technologies are hoped to be enlarged and be available to the users in the near future, according to MoE informant. Still the available ones are encouraging and hence will not hinder the implementation process as this study found out. The failure in getting appropriate connection and usage of information technology is highly attributed to universities' leadership commitment rather than absence of opportunities, according to MoE informant. The student information management system in Bahir Dar University can be regarded as breakthrough to the university. However, there is still the business as usual tendency around the registrar that instructors are required to submit students' grades in both SIMS and in hard copy. Similarly, the IT infrastructure is better in AAU as there are broad band connections in every office in the university and the university's website becomes prudent and continuously updated.

**ROLE OF MOE IN KEEPING HARMONY/SYNCHRONIZATION**

For the development of any country, educated and qualified man power is needed. Different sectors in that country should work harmoniously with the country's goal and vision. As a result, universities play pivotal roles for such support because they are the source of skilled man power. Besides, to realize the country's wide transformation process and zeal for development, universities are expected to play leading role in BPR implementation. Although the need seems to be felt by the top level of the country, informants in the case study fully support the idea of reforms in universities old education system.

The Ministry of Education should play monitoring and supporting role for universities for the full implementation of BPR. The new universities have both advantages and disadvantages for being new. The fact that there is no deep rooted old organization culture reduces the possibility of resistance for the new change. Besides, there might be few resources to restructure and the new systems to be established will be according to the requirements of BPR. On the other hand, being new also has disadvantages in resource shortage and getting experienced personnel for the core processes obtained. In both cases, MoE is expected to play organizing role. According to MoE key informant, so far the attempts are not sufficient. For example, the existence of course alignment system in BDU for undergraduate students and major-major curriculum for the equivalent students in AAU is evident for failure in curriculum harmonization between the case universities.

**ADEQUACY OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Financial resources are obviously important to move the initiatives, since without enough funding any efforts would end meaningless and stagnant. Therefore, budget allocations to BPR should be viewed as a long-term investment to get favorable results which would give profit to the organization (Kotnour, 2001). Since the BPR is a deliberate tool for effective transformation and the country in general needs the change, appropriate budget has been considered since the conception of BPR.

It was realized from the discussions that in order for BPR to happen successfully, a university needs to have an adequate amount of funding sufficient to implement change and to back up unpredictable circumstances or uncertainty. BDU's informant support the above idea that to the best of his knowledge, there has never been financial shortage in real sense as there is a possibility of transferring budget from one account to the other within the university. Therefore, finance is not the restrictive factor in the case universities. This is really the much unexpected finding in this study because literatures claim that in developing countries finance is one of the major constraints for BPR implementations.

**PROSPECTS OF BPR IN THE CASE UNIVERSITIES**

The government invested huge investment and will continue to invest on higher education institutions to accomplish the desired goal. All the sought goals and the vision of the country to join middle income countries in the coming twenty years will only be possible through skilled and able manpower. Similarly, information technology will make BPR effective and efficient or dull and nonsense otherwise; it all depends on how individuals manipulate it.

The research findings were gathered till the mid of 2012 and it may be early to make a comprehensive judgment about the fate of BPR in Ethiopia universities. But it is still possible to evaluate whether the tool is on the right truck to its way of success. The study found out that the resource shortages are not of major threats for BPR implementation. But the human aspect of the implementation seems lagging behind the expected and deserves attention in the case universities and probably to other universities in the country. *"BPR is the new concept to our country and hence people may not be fully involved and be dedicated to the process at once. There will be a tendency to look backward to business as usual. There should be extensive communication to clear out doubts from the BPR teams and especially from the top management of the universities"* (Informant MoE).

This implies that it is of great responsibility to the top management of each university to the full implementation of BPR. There should also be strong and sustainable commitment and above all continuous communication to the staff. *"There seems to be role confusion in the implementation of BPR in our university. These days, there is no even specific office for the BPR team and the communication seems almost dead. I think there should be top management stability in the area. If there are turnover on the executive side, it will be difficult for the newcomers to address the issue on time and as required."* (Informant BDU)

Therefore, the prospect of BPR implementation lies on the effectiveness of the top management of universities. If there are committed executives with higher dedication and resume the implementation afresh, still the prospect is not dark. Regular communication with the staff, allocating budget for the infrastructure, and instilling sense of belongingness in the staffs' mind are the means to make the prospect even bright. Otherwise, there will be a huge lose of the country's resource which could have brought better result had it been invested in some other change management tools. In all cases, there will not be excuse for failure and if at all happens it will be to the executives' negligence.

Generally, getting the top managements' undivided attention in facilitating BPR success factors; communication, motivation, reestablishing qualified team for executions, and resources on the one hand and getting the stakeholders involvement in all matters on the other hand remain major challenges for BPR implementation in Ethiopia Universities.

**8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION****CONCLUSION**

It is to the country's need and a question of survival in the global environment for Ethiopia higher education to go through transformation which demands radical change from the theory loaded and talk and chalk method of delivery to the student centered and practical oriented education system.

This study found out few problems with many of the core processes identified as the building blocks of BPR in the case universities' studies. Change management that includes cultural and structural changes is well asserted by both sets of findings as a core element of BPR implementation in the studies. However, the implementation deviates from the study especially in BDU despite considerable improvements from the past practices. Hence the process is rather better referred to as business process improvements than of business process reengineering.

The communication problem exists in the case universities. Such problems are both internal to the staff and external among the other universities. A lot needs to be done in communication especially within the staff because their irreplaceable responsibility for the actual implementation

The Ministry of Education's involvement is found to be low especially in the curriculum harmonization. As a result, differences in the undergraduate programs between the case universities BPR studies exist. And such differences may create student transfer and employment problems, if implemented according to the studies. Its involvement in facilitating information technology in the universities in collaboration with telecommunication is encouraging.

The enormous initiation of the government and its readiness to support universities with the needed resources and the overall country's plan for transformation can be taken as furculum for the BPR implementation. However, threats will also overshadow if there will not be commitment from the top management, as the cases these days, and if the staff continue to remain passive for the implementation. As a final point, the prospect for the BPR success heavily lies on the hands of the top management in each university.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The government universities had established council and used to communicate every three months. Such communication is very important to learn from one another and to search for solutions together for common problems. The meeting is also important to harmonize the country's BPR studies implementation since many of them have similar departments, schools, or institutes and to keep core curriculum uniform throughout the country. Therefore it is highly recommended that the council should resume its work in a better and more frequent manner.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the overall implementation of BPR in all higher education institutions of the country. Not only should it facilitate the necessary resources to universities, it should also supervise whether the studies share uniformity, where they should, and supervise the implementation on time and accordingly.

There should also be regular communication about each progress to the staff as such communication can develop trust in the system and indicate clear role each staff should play. It will also diminish the impact of rumors. Especially for BDU, there should be clear and responsible body with identified place to monitor the overall implementation of its BPR.

The staffs should also be demanding in getting information about BPR implementation, communicate when problems are observed immediately with the concerned officials, and be part of the solution since the universities achievement will be the sum total of individual staff efforts put all together. There should be togetherness and team spirit to develop synergy and still the top managements of the universities are responsible to foster all these.

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