

COLLABORATION OR COMPETITION: A CASE OF SELECTED PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN BOTSWANA

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative efforts and strategies are widely applied in modern business and academic environments. Most of the collaborative learning research has been done on children and college/university students. Academic and administrative staff in higher education institutions also learn from interaction with fellow higher learning institutions. This paper shows the divergence and convergence of collaborative learning efforts in privately owned higher education institutions in Botswana. The main benefit of collaborative learning is that people capitalise on one another's resources, knowledge and skills exchanging knowledge, evaluating one another's ideas, and monitoring one another's work. This paper is based on the understanding that collaborative learning is based on that knowledge can be created within a population (academic staff) where members actively interact by sharing experiences and take on asymmetry roles. A qualitative research was done on five (5) Botswana privately owned institutions of higher learning where face-to-face interviews were carried out to a sample of ten (10) academic staff, two from each of the five institutions covered in this study, who were drawn using a purposive sampling approach. Results of the study showed that there is clear lack of collaborative activities in the Private Higher Education institutions (PHE) covered in this study. Instead what stands in the results is overwhelming evidence of immense rivalry and stiff competition where higher learning institutions try by all means to bring the more successful institutions down.

Key words: *Collaboration; knowledge sharing; higher education institutions; communities of practice;*

1. Introduction

In the 21st century knowledge economy, organisations are encouraged to work collectively beyond their formal boundaries and come together in unison in order to create and share knowledge rather than existing as independent rivals. This can be done through the establishment of Communities of Practice (COPs) as tools for collaboration. According to Jang and Koi (2014), COPs are a knowledge creation grouping which obtains and distributes knowledge and work tactics needed by members of different organisations in the same industry so as to make them learn from each other hence become more effective.

Creation of COPs by academic staff members of Private Higher Education (PHE) institutions in Botswana enables these members to collectively participate in problem-solving activities thus increasing work efficiency leading to improvement of the work performance of the individuals and their organisations at large. The improvement in work efficiency is thought to have a financial effect characterised by a reduction of operational cost and time needed to accomplish given tasks. Pattinson and Preece (2014) argue that collaboration by organisations through COPs, for example, leads to development of more effective business strategy and innovation, help in the establishment of new lines of business, help solve organisations' problems on the spot, transfer best practices from one organisation to the other, and helps to develop and transfer professional skills among employees of these organisations.

In the 21st century complex, technology-savvy, innovation-driven and dynamic organisations, collaboration through the establishment of inter-organisational networks and relationships is critical. This is especially so with organisations like PHE institutions operating in a highly regulated environment like the one obtaining in Botswana. This situation makes it imperative that these organisations foster inter-organisational collaboration which brings together professionals from different organisations thus presenting a powerful monitoring and innovation force that will make close institutional regulation even unnecessary. Collaboration of PHE institutions will enhance knowledge creation and sharing, and boost technology learning and commercial exploitation of new ideas resulting in enrichment of organisational performance and profitability. These will have the net effect of ensuring a well-remunerated workforce and well-resourced institutions that will lead to stakeholder satisfaction resulting in the avoidance of battered images. This study therefore seeks to determine the extent of institutional collaboration (or otherwise) by selected PHE institutions in Botswana at the level of academic staff and benefits derived from such collaboration if it exists.

2. Literature review

2.1 Knowledge as an organisational resource

Kim and Ju (2008:283) define knowledge as “a meaningful resource that makes a new society unique”. Also Bilinska-Reformat and Sztangret (1999) define Knowledge as a subset of intellectual capital of the business, it is information that has a meaning, context and purpose and this makes it possible to undertake action. Knowledge is information effective in action which is focused on results (Kim and Ju 2008). Knowledge is the integration of information, ideas, experience, intuition, skill and lessons learned that create added value for a firm (Leo-Paill, Korot and Tovstiga 2005). Knowledge is also considered as a “belief”, “commitment”, and “action” which distinguishes it from information (Kim and Ju 2008). According to (Kim and Ju 2008:283) Knowledge management refers to “the overall process of activities affecting knowledge: creating, capturing, identifying, organizing, storing, representing, transferring, and reusing knowledge. Knowledge management process is considered to consist of five phases: knowledge creation, preservation, sharing, reuse, and evaluation (Kim and Ju 2008).

There are various forms of knowledge and Bilinska-Reformat and Sztangret (1999) contribute that embrained knowledge includes beliefs, ideals, values, thinking schemes and models that are deeply rooted in people and that people treat as axioms. Bilinska-Reformat and Sztangret (1999) further attest that tacit knowledge is knowledge that is not immediately, explicitly or embedded in the culture, routines and internal processes of individuals and organisations. Tacit knowledge consists of intuition, feelings, perceptions and beliefs often difficult to express and therefore difficult to capture and transfer (Leo-Paill *et al.* 2005). On the other hand Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) define explicit knowledge as one articulated in formal language and transmitted among individuals, being easy to articulate, communicate while tacit knowledge is personal knowledge embedded in individuals based on their experience. From another perspective Leo-Paill *et al.* (2005) consider explicit knowledge as easily identifiable, easy to articulate, capture and share (it is the staff of books, manuals and reports).

Jacobs (1999) refers knowledge as categorized into: – Know what, or knowledge about facts, – Know why, or knowledge of basic principles, rules and ideas, – Know how or knowledge about how things work and – Know who or knowledge about people and relations. Knowing what, why, how and who are vital questions for academic practitioners when establishing networks. Knowledge management and innovation requires understanding and application of four (4) domains namely culture (knowing who we are), process (knowing how we know), content (knowing what we know), and infrastructure (knowing the who, how and where) (Leo-Paill *et al.* 2005).

2.2 Knowledge sharing

Diverse organisations including higher education institutions have adopted knowledge management over the past decade as society has identified effective knowledge management to be a crucial factor for success in every sector (Kim and Ju 2008). Due to environmental changes, higher education institutions now face ever growing faculty demands for sharing quality resources and expertise (Kim and Ju 2008). Knowledge sharing between individuals can be viewed as the flow of knowledge from someone who has it to someone who wants it (Kim and Ju 2008). Approaches and strategies for knowledge sharing may differ according to who shares his or her knowledge and with whom (for example supervisors, colleagues, counterparts from other institutions). Knowledge sharing (formal or informal) means transfer, dissemination, and exchange of knowledge, experience, skills, and valuable information from one individual to other members within an organisation (Sajeva 2014). As such Kim and Ju (2008:282) define knowledge sharing as “the process of being aware of knowledge needs and making knowledge available to others by constructing and providing technical and systematic infrastructure”. From an inter-personal perspective, knowledge sharing between individuals is considered to be the process by which knowledge possessed by an individual is converted into a form that can be understood and used by others (Kim and Ju 2008).

It is widely acknowledged that knowledge sharing has a positive effect on organisation success and competitiveness (Sajeva 2014). Knowledge sharing can be done at various levels within the organisation, between organisations or between individuals (Kim and Ju 2008). Study results show that perception is the most influential factor and reward systems are the second most influential factor for faculty/lecturer knowledge sharing (Kim and Ju 2008). Knowledge sharing includes active communication, talking to colleagues, and learning from colleagues, collaborating, helping others with information or knowledge, consulting and mentoring (Sajeva 2014).

2.3 Benefits of knowledge sharing in higher education institutions

It has become evident as most economies become knowledge intensive that knowledge is a valuable resource (Howell & Amansingh 2013). Organisations that are able to share knowledge effectively from one organisational unit to another are more productive than organisations that are less capable of knowledge sharing (Inkpen and Tsang 2005). Knowledge has become a valuable resource connected with the organisation's ability to innovate and to gain a sustainable competitive advantage (Naftanalia 2002). In practice, rewards are often used as a tool to encourage knowledge sharing among employees (Sajeva 2014). Knowledge-rich and knowledge intensive organisation that is unaware of the knowledge that they own is probably also unaware of the potential value of such knowledge as a knowledge asset (Mearns 2012). Knowledge sharing allows iteration and interaction between individuals, organisations and society (Howell & Amansingh 2013). Expected associations and contributions rather than rewards, are the major determinants of attitudes toward knowledge sharing (Kim & Ju 2008).

In their study Papadopoulos, Stamati, & Nopparuch (2012) found that self-efficacy, perceived enjoyment, certain personal outcome expectations, and individual attitudes towards knowledge sharing are positively related to the intention of knowledge sharing in employee weblogs.

Since higher education (HE) institutions are among the main generators and producers of knowledge, it is paramount to examine how this knowledge is embedded in the organisation as well as generated and disseminated to society (Howell & Amansingh 2013). Higher education institutions just like their counterparts in the corporate industry should also assign equal importance to an employee's willingness to cooperate, collaborate and share knowledge (Howell & Amansingh 2013). Most of the knowledge sharing in higher education is found to be done externally were there are clear rewards of both internal and external recognition (Howell & Amansingh 2013). Faculties in academic institutions are among the most important constituencies representing their institutions because of their knowledge production and reuse capability (Kim and Ju 2008).

Higher education institutions can be classified into academic or scholarly knowledge, and non-academic or organisational knowledge (Li, Roberts, Yan & Tan 2014). It is widely accepted that knowledge is not only generated by shared expenses internally, but from research and external networking (Li *et al.* 2014). Faculties are the major component in collaborating and sharing knowledge in academic institutions, it follows therefore that their perceptions and attitudes towards knowledge sharing through campus wide institutional repositories should be considered fundamental in the knowledge sharing process (Kim and Ju 2008). The success or failure of an organisation (for example higher education institutions) depends more on the effective use of knowledge, information and data (Mearns 2012).

Academic practitioners are motivated differently in either to engage or to disengage in knowledge sharing practices. As such there are a number of justifications that drive academic staff from various institutions to share knowledge for example hard rewards, soft rewards, and altruism. In their study Wang & Hou (2014) found that hard rewards, soft rewards, and altruism for organisational benefits are significant determinants of knowledge sharing behaviours (KSBs), Soft rewards have a significant positive effect on both altruism for organisational benefits and altruism for personal satisfaction (Wang & Hou 2014). According to (Wang & Hou 2014:6) Soft rewards are " individual expectations of achieving implicit outcomes (for example personal reputation and relationships with others) in return for performing knowledge sharing behaviours, while hard rewards are " individual's expectations of obtaining explicit outcomes (for example promotion, financial rewards, reciprocity etc) in return for performing knowledge sharing behaviours (Wang & Hou

2014). According to the self-determination theory, individuals may be motivated through external (controlled motivation) and internal (autonomous motivations) (Wang & Hou 2014). Individuals (for example higher education lecturers) feel autonomously motivated when they perceive self-determination is selecting their objectives freely based on self interests, curiosity or abiding values (Wang & Hou 2014). Both scholarly and non-academic knowledge are perceived to exist in explicit and tacit forms (Li *et al.* 2014). Explicit academic knowledge in higher education (HE) may include course outlines, teaching slides, text books, assessments strategies, while tacit knowledge includes knowledge delivery, course design, course management, teaching style for example learning by doing (Li *et al.* 2014).

Knowledge sharing between employees across teams or organisations allows organisations to exploit and capitalize on knowledge-based resources (Howell & Amansingh 2013). The value of knowledge sharing in higher education institutions (HE) is that it encourages people to exchange, express, negotiate, and understand tacit knowledge (Howell & Amansingh 2013). There are various ways of sharing knowledge between higher education institutions (HE) which include interaction, cooperation, texts, dissemination, and problem solving (Howell & Amansingh 2013).

In the Economic exchange theory (EET) perspective, each academic staff member's behavior is influenced by rational self-interest that is when a person feels that the obtained rewards are more than the cost, he/she will share the knowledge (Hung *et al.* 2011).

2.4 Knowledge sharing challenges

In relation to inter-organizational knowledge sharing, one of the major challenges in higher education institutions (HE) lies in the critical ability of an organisation to create, transfer, organize, share and apply knowledge (Mearns 2012). Compared to profit making organisations, academic oriented institutions exhibit a relatively weak willingness to share knowledge (Kim and Ju 2008). A major challenge in knowledge management (KM) involves motivating people to share knowledge with others (Hung, Durcikova, Lai & Lin 2011). It has been widely observed that individual members of academic institutions place a higher priority on individual scholarly achievements than on sharing common vision toward organisational goals and objectives (Kim & Ju 2008). Due to the exceptional characteristics of exclusiveness and individualism, the process of knowledge sharing and knowledge management in academic institutions are often not systematic and may be inefficient (Kim & Ju 2008). In most higher education institutions cases, there is absence of formal system in place for sharing, and also there is very little outlet for individuals to discuss their ideas or exchange information (Howell & Amansingh 2013).

For higher education (HE) institutions to achieve the desired level of collaboration, team working and knowledge sharing, the value of knowledge generation and sharing should be emphasised at the individual level while recognizing group or team based performance (Howell & Amansingh 2013).

2.5 Collaboration

The competitive attraction of collaborations, alliances or networks is to bundle competences and resources that are more valuable in a joint effort than when kept separate (Thompson and Strickland, 2003:174). Collaboration is a working practice whereby individuals work together to a common purpose to achieve business benefit (www.aiim.org/). Collaboration is commonly interchanged with terms such as "networking," "cooperation," and "coordination," so there is sometimes confusion around the true meaning of collaboration (Gajda 2009). In whatever form, collaboration as an alliance, partnership, joint venture, ecosystem can, if appropriately integrated and executed provide a valuable model and enhanced performance among the participants (Hawkins & Little 2011). In majority of cases, people think that anytime they are working together, they are collaborating, and working together happens in varying levels and knowing one's goal will determine whether he/she needs to network, cooperate, coordinate, or collaborate.

Gajda (2009) define (a) Networking as exchanging information for mutual benefit, (b) Cooperation as a shorter term, informal relationship for sharing information as only goals, resources and structures are separate, and (c) coordination as a longer term effort around a project or task, with some planning and division of roles. Chelf (2012) contributes that collaborations typically fall into one of two categories - collaborations to integrate services or collaborations to resolve complex issues, while www.aiim.org argue that key features of collaboration can be categorized as synchronous such as online meetings and instant messaging and asynchronous collaboration such as shared workspaces and annotations.

Kanter (2010) provides steps for a successful collaboration as including (a) be open to romance, but court carefully, (b) know yourself, build your strengths, (c) seek compatibility in values, (d) treat the “extended family” respectfully, (e) put the lawyers in their place, (f) vow to work together until business conditions do us part, (g) but do not count on the contract, (h) so keep communication -face-to-face, (i) spread involvement, create more ties for more people, (j) build organizational bridges-formal structures, (k) respect differences, (l) teach partners, learn from partners, (m) be prepared to change yourself, and (n) help everyone win. Gajda (2009) mentioned that collaborations evolve and develop following the following stages, (a) envision results by working individual-to-individual, (b) empower ourselves by working individuals -to-organizations, (c) ensure success by working organisations-to-organisation, (d) provide continuity by working collaboration-to-community. Hawkins and Little (2011) on the other hand attest that every relationship is different, but the key stages of development will be common to most collaborations and these include (a) identification of objectives and drivers-should be transparent to stakeholders, (b) consider the available resources, that is, skills and competences to support a collaborative approach, (c) knowledge management – one of the benefits of collaborations is the ability to share knowledge with partners, (d) develop the strategy to drive the initiative forward, (e) understand the dynamics of the market – how will the competitors, suppliers, and customers see collaboration?, (f) consider possible collaborative partners-existing traditional relationships are often the starting point, (g) initial exit strategy-overall strategy should include the implications of exiting the relationship, (h) risk management-risk profile to be worked on together, and lastly (i) business continuity and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

2.6 Benefits of collaboration

Collaborations are among modern approaches that enhance business formations, networking, effective management and growth. These networks are planned and conducted to share organizational resources especially knowledge-based ones to create more advanced competences cooperatively that are valuable, rare, in-transferable, inimitable and non-substitutable (Najmaei & Sadeghinejad 2009). In commercial settings collaboration is the system used by designers to improve organisational functioning and the quality of products (Alby & Zucchermaglio 2007). Since collaboration implies knowledge sharing, it can be considered a special form of knowledge diffusion (Liu, Rousseau & Guns 2013). In their study Yang and Chen (2007) found that applying social network-based collaborations to support knowledge sharing helps people find relevant content and knowledgeable collaborators who are willing to share their knowledge. Knowledge sharing requires collaboration between the consumers and contributors of knowledge, namely the collaborators (Yang & Chen, 2007).

In a Study done by Yang (2007), results showed that there was a strong positive relationship between a collaborative culture and the effectiveness of knowledge gathering and sharing. Facilitator, mentor and innovator roles were positively correlated with individual knowledge sharing effectiveness (Yang 2007), and this could also apply to higher education institutions. The power of collaboration by organizations provides

new opportunities for organizations as they look for additional ways to collaborate and network for the benefit of communities and regions (Welch, 2012). Mowery *et al.* (1996) provide that motives for the formation of these more recent collaborations include i) the need to spread the costs and risks of innovation, as capital requirements for development projects in industries have risen, ii) higher development costs and risks, along with a perceived shrinkage in product life cycles also mean that rapid penetration of foreign markets is more important than ever in many technology intensive industries, something which may be easily achieved through an alliance, iii) alliances are formed to facilitate strategic coordination among competitors (for example higher education institutions) to increase market power, iv) one of the most widely cited motives for collaboration, is the acquisition of new technical skills or technological capabilities. The advantages of collaborations as provided by Todeva and Knoke (2005) are: i) collaborations allow each partner to concentrate on activities that best match their capabilities, ii) learning from partners and developing competencies are enhanced, iii) adequate suitability of resources and competences of an organisation are optimally utilised, iv) collaboration networks boost participants innovativeness as measured by rates of publications, patenting and Research and Development growth.

Relationships of any kind have a lifecycle and to maximise the benefits of a collaborative approach, there is need to consider longer term implications on value creation with the aim of improved efficiency (Hawkins & Little 2011).

3. Methodology

The study used qualitative research methodology in the form of in-depth interviews. Academic staff from the five top private higher education institutions in Botswana were interviewed to determine the extent to which they collaborate with fellow academics in various facets of their operations. The interview was used in this study to dig deeper into the motivations of respondents and their reasons for responding in the manner that they did. The formal interview (in which set questions were asked and answers captured on a standardised schedule) and informal interview (in which the interviewer is free to modify the order of questions and change the wording to suit the responses given by the interviewee) were used. The informal interview increased the salience and relevance of questions as they were determined by the needs of the interviewee and the interview was matched to the requirements of the individual interviewee and his/her circumstances.

In planning for the interview, thematising (clearly outlining the theoretical basis of the study and its broad aims) was done first and then specific objectives which in turn produced the right kind of data which addressed the research problem followed. This stage was followed by the designing of the interview schedule which involved the translation of research objectives into questions that would make up the main questions in the interview guide. Questions adequately reflected what exactly was to be dealt with in the study, hence the variables which the interview sought to measure/investigate were clearly outlined. Mostly open-ended questions were asked since these are flexible and allowed the interviewer to probe and to discover even what the respondent did not intend to reveal. They also allow the clearing up of any misunderstandings that may exist which have the potential of hampering the accuracy of responses and assist in establishing rapport which enabled the interviewer to make a correct assessment of the respondents' inner thoughts.

The study adopted purposive sampling (judgment sampling) which is the method of choice for most qualitative researches. Items for the sample were chosen purposefully (deliberately) by the researchers using their own discretion. The personal element therefore has a big chance of influencing the selection of the sample which may lead to the researcher selecting a sample which yields findings that support his point of view, resulting in the entire study becoming biased. To prevent this, the researchers remained impartial and professional and worked without bias since they have the necessary experience in research to take sound judgment using set criteria to select the sample. This rendered the results obtained from this sampling strategy tolerably reliable.

To initiate the process of purposive sampling, the selection criteria that are essential in selecting the respondents or sites to be studied was determined first. A list of the attributes essential to the study was created and then units of investigation that matched the list were identified. These criteria were established to directly reflect the purpose of the investigation and to guide the process of identifying information-rich sources. In this study, the criteria used to select information-rich respondents were that the respondents should be members of the academic staff in non-managerial positions, or in lower and middle level management, and should have been with the organisation for at least one year so as to ensure that they fully comprehend the goings-on in the organisation.

4. Findings

Below are the responses to the questions posed to the ten interviewees.

Do you have any idea of what collaboration is all about? Cite examples of areas where staff members of PHE institutions can collaborate (work together).

All the ten interviewees exhibited a good knowledge of what collaboration in institutions of higher learning entails. Some interviewees even indicated that they have been involved in institutional collaboration at higher education institutions they have worked at before. Some of the popular areas where staff members of PHE institutions can collaborate that were cited by the respondents include:

- Curriculum development
- Research
- Pedagogical aspects
- Community engagement
- Staff sports
- Sporting infrastructure
- Sabbatical leave
- Staff exchange
- Management exchange
- Joint workshops
- Joint staff meetings

Do you have any linkages with academic sister institutions in Botswana? Describe the areas of linkage.

All the ten interviewees indicated that they do not have any linkages with academic sister institutions that they remember. They all alluded to the fact that the academic institutions that they come from do their own things without reference to their counterparts. Interviewee 1 stated that he was involved in an attempt to establish an association of PHE institutions that was named Botswana Association of Private Tertiary Education Providers (BAPTEP) and a few meetings were held but the idea suffered a still birth. He indicated that the initiative failed because some institutions accused one of the institutions of having a 'big brother' mentality and wanted all other institutions to toe its line of thinking. This view was supported by

Interviewee 3 from another institution who indicated that BAPTEP “failed to see the light of day” because the institutions attempted to work together as partners on one hand while in normal business practice, they viewed each other as business rivals. This, according to the same interviewee, bred mistrust which led to lack of commitment to the founding values of the association. Interviewee 3 worded in stating that there was no way BAPTEP could succeed when there is so much “rivalry with PHE players seeking to outdo each other and portray the best image in the eyes of key stakeholders like government, industry, academics and students and potential students”. The same interviewee argued that the major sources of the rivalry emanate from the fact that the institutions share the same labour and student market. He added “These institutions are fighting to portray each other in bad light to the stakeholders so that when government-sponsored students are located to the institutions, those seen in a positive light get more students than those perceived in a negative manner”.

The rivalry existing in PHE institutions was further emphasised by Interviewee 8 who indicated that there is no way PHE institutions can work together when some of them regard others as recruitment ground for both academic and non-academic staff. He cited an incident where one institution woke up one morning to find that half the classes had no lecturers. The interviewee stated that when the owner inquired, he was told that all the missing lecturers were now teaching at one of the institutions. He drove there and a serious quarrel ensued between the owner and the head of the institution which had ‘stolen’ the staff of the other institution. The same interviewee indicated that to date, the owners of the two institutions do not see eye to eye.

Have you ever held any workshops together with staff members of sister institutions. Explain.

All the ten respondents indicated that they have never attended joint workshops or even meetings with employees of sister institutions. They posited that during the time they have been with their institutions, no attempt has been made to conduct such workshops.

If there is any form of collaboration, how beneficial was it to you in terms of knowledge exchange?

All the ten interviewees stated that there is absolutely no form of collaboration among PHE institutions in Botswana but rather there is competition and rivalry. Interviewee 1 added that the degree of rivalry is intense that these institutions derive joy when misfortunes befall one institution, for example, when students at one of the institutions embarked on a damaging strike, leaders of other institutions were said to be deriving joy from that. The interviewees agreed that as such, the institutions were missing out on obvious benefits they were supposed to derive from collaboration in terms of lack of knowledge exchange.

Describe the relationship between your institutions and other sister institutions. Is it that of friendship or rivalry or competition?

Virtually all the interviewees indicated that the relationship between their institution and others is that of clear rivalry and competition and not friendship. Interviewee 1 stated that “their management looks forward to the day that they will wake up one day to discover that Institution A which is their fiercest rival is no longer there”. This position was corroborated by Interviewee 4 from the same institution who added that the owner-managers of his institution “send spies to gather information on bad things happening at that institution” because they enjoy it so much that it gives them hope of a better tomorrow. Interviewee 2 stated that whenever they want to fill vacancies in critical areas, they ask their staff members to give them names of employees of a certain institution who are competent so that they approach them with a better remuneration package. He added that the targeted institution always come with a counter-offer in an attempt to ensure that its employees do not join their fiercest rival. This was confirmed by Interview 3 who added

that the rivalry is so serious to the extent that the counter-offer was so attractive to the extent that some Information Technology lecturers forged a letter-head of a rival institution to forge offer letters resulting in counter-offers that saw their salaries almost doubling. Interviewee 5 and 6 alluded to the fact that while the institutions may not look at all other institutions as serious rivals, they certainly do not look at them as friends or partners but competitors. They intimated that certainly there is no good blood among the institutions hence no collaboration is taking place. This position was confirmed by all the other interviewees.

One of the sister institutions has held 3 research conferences in 2012, 2013, and 2014. How many staff members from your institution:

- a. Attended the conferences
- b. Presented papers at the conferences

All the interviewees except Interviewee 7 and 8 indicated that their staff members did not attend the stated research conferences. Interviewee 1 stated that their institution clearly stated that they were a teaching and not research university hence did not see any need for attending those research conferences despite the fact they were taking place less than four kilometers away. This was confirmed by Interviewee 4 from the same institution who indicated that their bosses clearly discouraged staff from attending the research conferences for fear that attendance and support for the conferences was going to result in the success of the conferences hence boosting the profile and image of the host institution. Interviewee 2 and 3 from the same institution stated that ordinary staff members were not even aware that there were research conferences taking place at one of their sister institutions although it later emerged that their institution was invited. As a result, no one from their institution attended the conference. Interviewees 7 and 8 stated that two staff members attended only the first conference where they presented a joint paper but they did so at the individual level with no institutional support. This discouraged them so much that they did not bother to attend any other conference hosted by the sister institution. As such, while international and local researchers from other sectors such as government, parastatals and other organisations converged at one of the PHE institutions for three consecutive years to present and/or attend research conferences, results of the interviewees clearly indicate that academic staff from sister institutions snubbed the conferences yet they were going to benefit in terms of enhancing their own skills at very little cost. The interviewees concurred that rivalry among the institutions at owner level is the major contributory factor and that attending the conferences and let alone presenting a paper could easily be misconstrued as allegiance to the host institution that may have serious repercussions to the academic staff member involved.

If there is no collaboration, in your opinion what do you think are the reasons for lack of collaboration?

All the interviewees indicated that there is absolutely no collaboration and the most popular reasons cited for lack of collaboration are:

- Rivalry among the majority of these institutions
- Stiff competition existing among institutions because of recruiting students and staff from the same market
- Competition by institutions for recognition by stake holders as the best among others
- Attempts by some of these institutions to portray others as bad in the eyes of stake holders
- Lack of trust
- Big brother mentality by one or two institutions
- Jealous
- Lack of appreciation of the benefit of collaboration by most of the owners of these institutions

Are the academic programmes offered by your institution different from those offered by sister institutions?

All the interviewees stated that the PHE institutions covered in this study offer very similar programmes. Interviewee 1 indicated that there is a lot duplication of programmes and 'direct theft' of programmes offered by sister institutions. He added that when his institution abandoned franchised programmes in favour of its own homegrown programmes, the institution approached academics they knew were active in designing programmes at their institutions and paid them to design more or less the same programmes for them. This view was confirmed by Interviewee 2 who added that some institutions just acquire the prospectus of sister institutions and regurgitate those programmes they think are marketable and redesign them as their own. Interviewees 5 and 6 stated that all PHE institutions, except one from outside Botswana, offer the traditional academic programmes such as Information Technology and Business Management. Only one of the institutions offers different programmes such as journalism and multi-media studies over and above the traditional business and information technology programmes.

Is it easy for your institutions to admit students who were studying at another institution but have not completed the qualification they were studying? What are the impediments?

All the interviewees indicated that while all the institutions covered in this study are offering very similar, if not the same programmes, it is almost impossible to admit students at the middle of a study programme at a sister institution. All the respondents stated that they have never admitted a student from a sister institution who will not have completed a qualification to continue with his/her studies at their institution but only admit those who have completed a programme of study and now want to further their studies in a related discipline. Interview 3, for example, stated that they receive so many applications intending to study at their institution after dropping out at a sister institution in the middle of a programme but they only recognise a complete qualification not part qualification. This was confirmed by Interviewee 1 from the same institution who added that some applicants come to apply having completed certificate level and with a few courses remaining to complete diploma but they insist that they should start at the beginning of the diploma thus disregarding the courses they have already done because it is an incomplete qualification. All the other interviewees confirmed that it is the same story with their institutions. Interviewee 10 added that the challenge is that higher education institutions in Botswana do not have a uniform credit policy meaning that a singular module completed at one institution cannot be evaluated at another institution because it will be carrying different weights in terms of credits. This is why the institutions choose to recognise only complete qualifications instead of standalone modules/courses.

5. Conclusion

Results of the study revealed that respondents to the study have a good knowledge of what collaboration entails and were able to successfully state obvious benefits that emanate from collaboration of higher education institutions such as enhanced curriculum development, quality research output, more effective community engagement, more robust institutional management, more effective academic management, and so on. However, all the respondents pointed to a clear absence of such collaborative activities in the PHE institutions covered in this study. Instead of collaboration with its obvious benefits, the respondents revealed overwhelming evidence of immense rivalry, stiff competition, jostling for supremacy, and back-biting with the institutions doing whatever they can to undermine one another and bring down those that seem to be performing better than others on the market. This study revealed that the rivalry among PHE institutions covered in this study is so apparent that even when one of the institutions hosted three consecutive research conferences in 2012, 2013, and 2014, academic staff from other institutions literally ‘boycotted’ the conferences despite the fact that such conferences are critical in promoting research output and building research capacity in higher learning institutions. The net effect of that level of lack of institutional collaboration is that PHE institutions covered in this study are not benefiting from knowledge reservoirs domiciling in sister institutions as a result of a lack of knowledge exchange which usually emanates from collaboration. Higher learning institutions benefit more from the formation and promotion of collaborative clusters rather than existing as isolated business rivals – a situation currently prevailing in PHE institutions covered in this study.

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