‘Commodification’ of Knowledge: Challenges and Opportunities of a state funded university – A University of Botswana Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of tertiary education in the development of a knowledge based economy, with particular reference to developing countries and in the particular case of the University of Botswana (UB). It presents evidence to suggest that the commodification of knowledge is important to the fulfilment of this role and that if UB were to embrace this notion, it would help focus the fragmented approach of business practices in the University. The study also asks whether the resource allocation model at UB supports commodification of knowledge and examines what alternative approaches could be adopted, concluding that the adoption of a formulaic resource allocation model would better support this aim.

A case study approach was adopted especially for its potential to capture explanatory and descriptive data. The three phases of study used were firstly the documentary research where reports were inspected and classified into categories. The second phase concentrated on the semi-structured interviews with members of the senior management staff at UB that served to clarify, confirm, refute and/or corroborate documentary research outcomes. The third phase of the study combined the data collected from the different sources. In combining both quantitative and qualitative data this thesis took advantage of data complementarity, facilitation and triangulation.

The findings of the study show that UB embraces the notion of knowledge based economy through advancing the intellectual and human resource capacity of the nation and the international community. However the definition of commodification was not uniformly understood across UB faculties. The study also finds that UB did not seem to have a resource allocation model but had a budgeting system that did not support commodification of knowledge. While the human resource accounted for 67% of the total budget of the institution there was no staff allocations model to manage it. The inadequate database was found to be a major contributing factor which was exacerbated by lack of clear business processes in certain critical areas. The principles underpinning commodification of knowledge could be traced in UB policies even though there was a need to strengthen systems, processes and quality control mechanisms to facilitate and support data collection and establishment of database. A practical system which has the potential to help establish a systemic approach that would interrogate business process in UB is proposed.