

Performance - based appointments

Competitive hiring of VC ushers in a new era of engaging top managers.



JANUARY 6TH 2005, WILL REMAIN A HISTORIC moment not only for the University of Nairobi but also for all public universities in the country.

This was the first time in the history of public institutions that the competitive hiring of a CEO, of a public university was announced through a press conference. The press con-

ference was held at the University of Nairobi by the Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, Dr. J. B. Wanjui.

The importance of the occasion was manifested by the heavy media

presence at the conference. . In his press statement, the Chancellor said that the University had embarked on a process of reform, of becoming a centre of excellence and the leading institution of higher learning in the region. "This approach is to help us ensure that the resultant appointment is transparent and is informed as much as possible by meritocracy", said the Chancellor. Dr. Wanjui noted that the intended reforms could not be realized unless "we have the right individual at the helm of management at the university, supported by a team of competent and dedicated professionals who are passionate about sustained effective performance and high standards".

He reminded the media that the advert had clearly stated that they were looking not only for a world class academic but also an innovative, visionary leader capable of building a dynamic, motivated management team. The University had to change the way it was conducting business. "The status quo is not an option", he said, adding that change could only start if the right people were put in the right place in a credible manner and hence the need for a competitive hiring process.

He told the conference that the pace-setting recruitment process had attracted numerous responses from all over the world; candidates were screened based on criteria set by the University Council. Four candidates were short listed and interviewed.

Dr. Wanjui announced the appointment of Professor George A. O. Magoha as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Nairobi for a period of five-year renewable term with

effect from 1st January 2005. Prof. Magoha has since been reappointed for his second term after successfully steering reforms at the University,

The announcement marked a turning point in the transformation of the hiring of top managers in public universities. Since independence, Kenyans had been used to the tradition of surprise announcement over radio that His Excellency the President had made appointments.

How the decision was arrived at was never made public but was left to speculations, creating a culture of mystery and intrigue, a situation where possible candidates would always sit next to their radios, waiting for the status-transforming announcement.

History was made when for the first time; the post of Vice-Chancellor had been advertised internationally in leading magazine such as The Economist. PriceWaterHouse Coopers was mandated to source for applications nationally and internationally. Clearly, a new era had been initiated and with it came the need to embrace the best practice in recruitment which required the involvement of the University Council and external consultants in the search and interview process.

The announcement set in mo-

tion the anticipated reform process. Soon after, the position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration and Finance) was also advertised and Prof. Peter M. F. Mbithi was appointed as the new Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Administration and Finance, the circle of competitively hiring the top managers was completed when Prof. Jacob T. Kaimeyi was reappointed as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic Affairs early last year. Currently, all the College Principals and Deputy Principals have been competitively hired. And it seems like the other institutions had been, as usual, waiting for the mother of all public universities in Kenya to take the lead. No sooner had the UoN embarked on the reform agenda then it became fashionable for the other public universities to follow suit.

The reform agenda that was put in motion about five years ago has not only taken root but has also translated into visible achievements such as the transformed mindsets of staff in the way we do things, ISO 9001:2008 certification which means we can benchmark with the best and our new approach to service delivery. Other core values of the University of Nairobi such as community service which is clearly anchored in our current strategic plan, is one of the activities that earn a consistent positive image for the University.

***All top
managers are
competitively
hired and
put on
performance
contracts***