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| Analysis of research findings: 2192

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POSITIONING THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI AS A THOUGHT LEADER IN INNOVATION

Background

Currently the environment in which universities operate is dynamic. In order to maintain its leadership status both nationally and regionally there is need for universities to understand the changes taking place in the education sector and align themselves adequately to best cope with these realities. The University of Nairobi (UoN) must therefore, undertake to serve its stakeholders’ and satisfy their needs as well as keep identifying and seizing unique opportunities whenever they arise.

According to the UoN Short Term Implementation plan (STIP) (2017, p16) innovation and creativity is the hallmark the institution intends to uphold to create and deliver value to its customers. Management therefore needs to drive its agenda through cascading its objectives to its internal relations to impress on the importance of innovation as one of its key pillars. Public Relations (PR) can also strive to sensitize staff on the importance of behavior change, attitude, practice and performance which in turn leads to enhanced service delivery.

As the oldest university in Kenya, UoN has a lot to offer. It enjoys a big concentration of scholars and continues to be a key player in the global arena of academia through partnering with internal and external collaborators to offer solutions to societal problems whilst enriching its resource base and visibility.
A FISHBONE ANALYSIS OF FACTORS AFFECTING UoN'S QUEST AS A THOUGHT LEADER IN INNOVATION

Factors hindering UoN from being seen as a thought leader in innovation

- UoN MANAGEMENT
  - Not prioritizing issues
  - Bureaucracy
  - Inadequate Financial Support
  - Inaccessibility
  - Ineffective Management Styles
- GOVERNMENT
  - Corruption
  - Policies that hinder Development
  - Lack of Goodwill
  - Lack of Intellectual Property Rights
  - Politicization
- MEDIA
  - A lot of Red-tape
  - Exorbitant charges for media coverage
  - Limited spots to show case innovation
  - Consistent negative coverage

- INNOVATORS
  - Lack of funds
  - De-motivation
  - Shortage of HR Capacity
  - Under-staffed
  - Poor internal Communication
  - Academic biases
  - Lack of incentives
  - Young innovators vs Renowned innovators

- PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE, UoN
  - Near zero Input
  - Budgetary constraints
  - Under-staffed
  - Poor Internal Communication
  - PR Guiding Policy lacking
**Problem statement**
The University of Nairobi is working towards creating an innovation ecosystem through various initiatives such as the annual Nairobi Innovation week. The University has in place strategies that promote innovation and creativity and this is echoed in its core values and corporate strategic plan. However, there seems to be a disconnect between these concerted efforts and what exactly is portrayed in the public domain. UoN is yet to come out clearly as a thought leader in innovation.

**Problem justification**
An analysis was made citing the factors affecting UoN’s quest as a thought leader in innovation. Using the Fishbone Analysis the potential causes that contribute to this were categorized.

**Management**
There are several issues that have been identified and hinder the university’s quest to stand out as a thought leader. To become a leader in innovation, many aspects come to play. Some to these include the need for change in attitude, money being pumped into research as well as good will of management in terms of providing financial support. An enabling environmental ecosystem as well encouraging and motivating both staff and students to think innovation and creation in order to come up with start-ups and incubation hubs leading to commercialization are of essence. This however, has been met with challenges ranging from bureaucracy in processing of documentation, researchers not being able to access management to either enquire or consult or even present their woes, ineffective management styles as well as not prioritizing issues.

**Government**
On the side of government, issues of concern range from government not being supportive in fast tracking of various processes which are crucial in implementation of projects, corruption, the putting in place of policies that are a hindrance to development and are time-wasting and bureaucratic, a lot of red tape in procurement processes leading to long delays in projects kicking off on time and poor intellectual property rights. Politicization has also not helped.

Everything the government does for anyone publicly or institutionally seems to always take a political angle. For example, the government’s mandate is to remit monthly capitations to
universities in Kenya for their operations as well as payment of staff salaries. However, due to politicization there are always delays in paying staff salaries leading to inconveniences and sometimes staff unrest which in some occasions can have a negative impact on service delivery like academic staff not being motivated enough to teach thus causing student unrest.

**Media**
Media has also impacted negatively on this process due to their biased profiling as well as consistent negative coverage of the UoN, provision of very limited spots to allow the university to show case innovation hence inadequate awareness created and the exorbitant charges slapped by media for coverage. The university needs to shout loudly about what it is doing in order for it to shine amongst its competitors. Innovation is now trending and since the institution has the knowledge base and capacity it is in its best interest to change its strategy and embrace other avenues like innovation in order to compete globally.

**Innovators**
As a result of inadequate funds innovators are de-motivated. They are not able to engage adequate human resource capacity in the development of start-ups, in some cases they end up using outdated equipment or are not able to procure state of the art equipment due to lack of funds or bureaucratic procurement procedures. Evidently, there is poor internal communication between the innovators, management and PR. There is also the issue of academic biases, young innovators looking for funding *vis a vis* competing with renowned innovators who are established in research as well as have donor funding this proving to be a challenge. There is also the element of de-motivation by management not appreciating the innovators. Management should consider giving innovators incentives to appreciate all the good effort made in coming up with these innovations.

**Public relations**
Another issue that has hindered the institution’s progress to this end, is the near zero input, lack of coordination in matters communication and advertising due to the absence of Public Relations (PR) guiding policies, lack of adequate staff and budgetary constraints leading to the department not effectively delivering on service as is expected. Whereas the PR office should be helping create awareness to the public, the management on the other hand needs to fully support the
innovators agenda if the institution is to become and gradually be seen as a thought leader in innovation.

The study will seek to identify how PR can enhance the university’s visibility and positioning as a thought leader in innovation with a view to changing the publics’ perception of the brand.

**The situation**

An in-depth situation analysis using SWOT and PESTLE analysis was used at the university to identify the factors affecting take off of innovation hubs and startups.

**SWOT analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Robust ICT infrastructure</td>
<td>1. Poor management and governance</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. World renowned university</td>
<td>2. Insufficient collaboration and networking</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Wide knowledge base</td>
<td>3. Reduced funding</td>
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<td>4. Varied academic programmes</td>
<td>4. Poor communication</td>
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<td>5. Highly skilled personnel</td>
<td>5. Poor management of research grants</td>
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<td>6. Strong resources and assets base</td>
<td>6. Low performance by subsidiary companies</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Financial sustainability</td>
<td>7. Staff de-motivation</td>
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<td>8. Vast library resources</td>
<td>8. Politicization</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities</th>
<th>Threats</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Advances in ICT</td>
<td>1. Reduced capitation from Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Innovation and Technological advances</td>
<td>2. Increased competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Increased demand for consultancy</td>
<td>3. High cost of ICT facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Mentoring of upcoming Educational Institutions</td>
<td>5. Emerging life-threatening medical conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Collaboration with industry</td>
<td>6. Poor internal communication</td>
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<td>7. Prioritization of research by the government</td>
<td>7. Staff and student strikes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Element</td>
<td>Factor</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Elections</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Staff/Student strikes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Insecurity/terror threats</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Inflation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Restructuring of staff</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reduced capitation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Individual’s expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technological</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use of social media to communicate and disseminate information</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Superior programmes offered</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>Going green thus reducing pollution by use of printed material when necessary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal</td>
<td>Change of Government policies in education sector</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Tough rules by Commission for University Education (CUE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stakeholder mapping and analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High power, low interest</th>
<th>High power, high interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Keep satisfied</strong></td>
<td><strong>Key stakeholders</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Staff (academic and non academic)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Students</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Government</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Regulatory bodies</td>
<td></td>
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<td>5. Commission for University Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Unions</td>
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<td>7. Donors/Collaborators</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Alumni</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Suppliers</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low power, low interest</th>
<th>Low power, high interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minimum effort</strong></td>
<td><strong>Keep informed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Competitors</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Research institutions</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3. Professional institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Public</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Media</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2. Partners and collaborators</td>
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<td>3. Industry</td>
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Methodology
To achieve the set out objective, a mixed method approach was used. Data was collected through survey and interviews, as it provided the researcher with a guide on how to get factual data and or thoughts and reactions of the institution’s public on its positioning as a thought leader in innovation. Three key informants were interviewed and (30) questionnaires administered.

Risk analysis
A risk assessment citing issues that can hinder UoN from positioning itself as a thought leader in innovation was carried out. At the same time an impact/probability rating measuring the risk levels was done with a view to putting in place strategies to counter the underlying issues. The importance of a risk assessment is to help an organization evaluate potential risk factors that could endanger the lives of its employees as well as for management to assess whether or not they are doing all that is necessary to curb possible looming disasters.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk scenario and potential impacts</th>
<th>Impact/ probability rating</th>
<th>Risk level</th>
<th>Risk treatment strategy and mitigation plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Unstable financial situation</td>
<td>High impact/low probability</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Explore income generation projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Revision of university budget</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Negatively affect operations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Can lead to liquidation</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Reduction in student admissions due to competition</td>
<td>High impact/high probability</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Review and revise academic programmes to feature unique aspects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Explore avenues to grow partnerships/collaboration that will add value</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Operational challenges as a result of reduced revenue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aggressive creation of start-ups and incubation hubs to boost employment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Restructuring of staff</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Frequent strikes by staff and students</td>
<td>High impact/high probability</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Develop mechanisms that problem solve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Open communication channels with stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Affects public perception of the brand</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Impacts negatively on the brands image and reputation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Damage to property</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Political atmosphere</td>
<td>Low impact/low probability</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Increase cohesion and integration sensitization drives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can affect university operations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage sober politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Can cause animosity amongst staff and students</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The objectives

The university’s corporate objectives are:

- To expand the university’s resource base and enhance productivity.
- To contribute to the development of society through the creation, storage, application and dissemination of knowledge.
- To enhance the competitiveness and image of the university.
- To enhance value-adding partnerships and collaborations.

The following PR objectives were drawn from the institution’s corporate objectives

- To increase awareness of UoN as a thought leader to its stakeholders by 75% by 2019.
- To expand UoN’s resource base by Kshs. 200 million and enhance productivity through value adding partnerships and collaborations by 2020.
- To enhance the university’s competitiveness and visibility by 80% among stakeholders with a view to changing public perception of UoN by 2018.
- To enhance creativity and generate innovative ideas by 80% through application and dissemination of knowledge with a view to becoming a centre of excellence in innovation by 2020.
Literature review

What is innovation?

This is the process of generating ideas with the intent to create value addition for any organization. This may take the form of creation of a new service, system, or process, or better still enhancing those in existence. Innovation can also lead to discontinuing an inefficient or out-of-date service, system, and or process.

Innovation components

In the recent past, the education sector has experienced a paradigm shift. This has led to increased competition in academia globally Becher & Trowler (2001 p.1). Innovation is fast evolving and is a game changer in today’s competitive world. Cortese (1992 p.104) posits that Universities are charged with great responsibilities for awareness creation, knowledge dissemination, technological transfer, as well as provision of an enabling ecosystem towards a sustainable future. According to Shriberg, (2002, p.42), universities represent the cutting-edge of knowledge. Therefore, universities ought to know the pathways along which industries are developing and investigate the innovation processes associated with those pathways as this will assist in aligning their contributions to those of industry Manu (2014, p.3).

At the core of innovation governance is clarity on the role of innovation in the organization’s future success, including prioritized objectives for innovation as cited by Dawson (2014, p75). Manu (2014, p.5) posits that a strategic approach in the role played by universities in local innovative processes is vital as it entails aligning university needs and internal potentials within specific contexts of industry. Challenges in the world today are more complex. It is increasingly vital therefore, to bring together more diverse minds to the drawing board and compare ideas in order to break down silos as cited by Cowan, et.al. (2009). Further, collaboration and teamwork calls for listening, brainstorming, adjusting, focusing, aligning, linking and leveraging of ideas to help solve complex issues. Thinking together is open innovation and strategic doing guides the process. Partnerships are critical for growth of any institution.

According to Baiya & Price (2017, p.32) an innovation continuum provides opportunities and challenges that need to be identified and understood and new ideas generated, leading to the
development of product and service creation in order to address the challenge(s) at hand. This paves way to testing the solution(s) and receiving feedback, and finally roll out of the product to the various stakeholders.

Steve Jobs once said “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.” In order for organizations to keep up with global competitiveness and curve a niche for themselves they must identify, create and implement ideas that are most effective in delivering value addition to their stakeholders. Value creation leads to success through change that is witnessed by stakeholders with regard to enhanced service delivery. The result of achievement in outputs forms a basis for long term impact. This eventually contributes to the realization of outcomes.

**Positioning the UoN as a thought leader**

According to Chernatony & McDonald (2005), in PR brand success is result oriented as it seeks to add value through competitive advantage. Good brands are vital assets for propelling competitive advantage and product management is vital for organizational competence hence, needs to be harnessed Aaker (1996 p.8) and Louro & Cunha (2001). This has seen the UoN in conjunction with the PR department endeavor to position its brand as a thought leader in innovation through forums such as the Nation Leadership Forum, and the Nairobi Innovation Week which brings together people from all walks of life, with the sole agenda of seeking solutions to existing problems and value addition in society. The PR department has been active in partnering with industry, government, donors and private sector with a view to pooling together ideas to create innovative ventures to generate income as well as to offer consultancy services.

**Internal publics**

The internal publics’ of any organization provide the platform for corporate image and can be presumed brand ambassadors especially if they align themselves to the institutional vision and mission. Chapleo (2005) posits that active participation of stakeholders and focus on consistent messaging is a vital PR strategy. Therefore, UoN must constantly remind its internal publics that their loyalty towards the brand image is key to upholding the institutions reputation, as it wins the trust of stakeholders.
Public Relations theory

Diffusion theory

The diffusion theory posits that innovation is communicated among members of a social system over time via certain mediums Roger (1961). PR campaigns are intended to illicit action, with a view to enlighten and create awareness of a particular issue. However, the diffusion theory thus draws clarity on the shared purposes of the media and public relations as stated by Walsh (2012). Therefore, UoN should endeavour through its leadership, champion and cascade its future plans through driving institutional values to what it perceives the UoN to be.

According to Shannon and Weaver’s two way communication model, this will apply to UoN whereby the innovative idea would be generated and diffused by the sender in this case management or the researcher. Through awareness creation it would be encoded and or processed, the public relations platform and media would provide the channel of communication, staff and students who are the receptors of the idea or information would in turn interpret the same as the receiver and will be likened to the receptor who will then channel back the encoded message to the source eliciting a reaction probably in form of rolling out an idea with subsequent implementation of the same.

Consequently, noise present in the environment affects the reaction or attitude of audiences in response to feedback leading to the outcome and subsequent output. The implementation and success of innovative ideas from the institution therefore would depend largely upon the attitude of the staff, students and external stakeholders.
The business planning model

1. Awareness
   UoN echoes innovation as one of its key pillars.

4. Evaluation
   ✓ Conduct surveys
   ✓ Get feedback
   ✓ Carry out social media monitoring
   ✓ Conduct interviews

2. Formulation
   The overall objective is to become a thought leader in innovation with a view to upholding world class status
   - Creation of new ideas and startups
   - Implementation of projects
   - Use appropriate communication platforms to reach out to the various audiences
   - PR to profile the UoN brand as leader in innovation
   - Media to positively profile the UoN brand

Budget:
Kshs.20 million for communication to stakeholders, events, seed money for startups and incubation hubs, equipment

3. Implementation
   ✓ Provide an enabling ecosystem for startups
   ✓ Sensitize internal publics on their role in project success
   ✓ Collaborate and partner with donors
   ✓ Management to rally its support on projects and subsequent roll outs
   ✓ Hold frequent forums to showcase its products
   ✓ Set up feedback channels for stakeholders
   ✓ Create visibility through social media, documentaries, host media briefings

A Business planning model
Research findings

The survey

All the respondents indicated that innovation could be interpreted to mean many things. It was evident that innovation is a creation of new ideas and or making better, existing ones. It was a way of solving problems and providing solutions by use of critical means to the advantage of the institution. It also emerged that innovation is multifaceted and challenges existing technological systems of innovation with an aim of providing new technological advances.

With regard to UoN being a thought leader, various reactions were elicited. The respondents all agreed that as the oldest institution, it was best placed in terms of intellectual capacity, to come up with more creative innovations something they had not tapped into adequately.

Regular communication with employees is key in order to create the right ecosystem for innovative strategies to thrive. Top management must strive to encourage active participation in creating of inventive strategies as well as embrace new ideas whilst emphasizing the importance of innovation. Of course it is necessary to ensure staff awareness during the different steps of the implementation of the innovation strategy.

![Graph showing views from stakeholders](image)

Fig. 1: Views from stakeholders

About half of the respondents felt the UoN had not done enough in terms of publicizing major innovative breakthroughs for the public to know. A good number felt that there was no coordinated way of encouraging an innovative ecosystem in spite of the institution being an
academic pacesetter in research and innovation. Some respondents felt that much more needed to be done in order for the UoN to provide the necessary platforms and hold frequent forums to showcase their innovative ideas. With regard to collaboration, the UoN has partnered with industry, the private sector and donors to propel the innovation agenda however, a lot more still needed to be done in order to come out clearly as a thought leader in innovation.

36.7% of the respondents agreed that management was supportive of innovation. 16.7% were neutral whereas another 16.7% were convinced of managements’ lack of support. 23.3% were critical of managements’ efforts in supporting innovative startups. Generally, it was felt that UoN was a thought leader in innovation and creativity and that it was consistent in development and promotion of innovation.

With regard to opportunities that UoN could explore to become a thought leader, it was felt that the institution could tap into students’ talents. By way of engaging in strategic partnerships with a view to securing funding specifically for innovation as well as sharing innovative ideas; securing deals with media companies to promote and publicize innovations; recognize and award innovators for their breakthroughs, and at the same time set up working innovation hubs as these would create competitiveness leading to more and better ideas. By approaching donors to support innovators with a view to commercializing the projects, the innovators will feel more compelled to pitch their ideas which would enhance the institutions image. Some felt that the institution needed to venture more into other areas of innovative research such as medicine, engineering, housing, business and not just concentrate on information technology. Creation of linkages with industry to curve a niche for each discipline is something also worth considering.

**Key informants**

Three UoN senior managers were interviewed as key informants. They highlighted different issues and spelt out strategies that could be employed by UoN to adequately position itself as a thought leader in innovation. There was a general consensus that there was need to demystify innovation as technology based since it was multifaceted. It was evident that management was constrained by environmental factors such as reduction in capitation, capping of tuition, bureaucratic government and procurement procedures. They impressed on the need for UoN to partner with industry, private sector, non-governmental organizations, government as this was
critical in generating real issues that affect society whilst looking for possible solutions to solving them.

They agreed that there is need to cross fertilize ideas through collaborations and interact globally as opposed to inbreeding and working in silos. The UoN needs to come up with high calibre research, enhanced infrastructure with certified laboratories, libraries and highly skilled human resource. They also echoed the need to actively involve the internal publics through active participation of issues. The respondents agreed that to drive the innovation agenda a lot of resources were necessary as this posed a challenge.

One respondent felt that PR role in management was clearly defined, whereas two did not agree. They felt that the department was still trying to find its space. It was evident that, even though PR was competing against other important institutional needs, there was need to revamp the PR department, strengthen it by hiring more qualified personnel who understand industry as well as the internal and external publics. They felt that it was important to set aside an sufficient budget for PR operations with a view to making it a fully fledged department. It also emerged that management support was critical otherwise PR operations would be in futility. It was proposed that if necessary every department should have a PR budget component since the PR central budget was constrained. They agreed that there is more to PR than image creation and firefighting. Through staff engagements PR gets to know problems on the ground.

Research analysis

The findings show that UoN is still not clearly depicted as a leader in innovation. However, it emerged that more still needed to be done in terms of tapping on available knowledge base, visibility and publicity of innovative breakthroughs.

Conclusion

The core findings indicate that UoN has a rich knowledge base to become a thought leader in innovation. However, it has a few challenges it needs to address in order to excel. That management’s support financially and otherwise is critical in the realization of this vision. PR can help raise awareness of UoN’s innovations through various platforms and should be aggressive in doing so. There is need therefore for more collaboration, publicity and visibility if UoN is to successfully position itself as a thought leader.
Recommendations
1. Management should strive to support and create a fully fledged state-of-the-art innovation hub for researchers
2. Management should employ a strategy of motivating innovators by rewarding them
3. PR budget should be increased to ably cater for Research, innovation and creativity
4. Aggressive partnerships and collaborations with industry and donors to propel UoN’s visibility and publicity on innovation breakthroughs
5. Engage media in publicity forums to shout about UoN innovation breakthroughs
References


