

Reframing the Perceived Changing Academic Roles of Deans at Makerere University

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Abstract

Deans are important in higher education institutions for they nurture, facilitate growth and development, and set and uphold high standards for faculty, staff and students. They are expected to continually create a positive work and learning environment within the schools that they head to amidst challenging situations and complex environments. Such conditions would necessitate understanding how deans perceive their changing academic roles and how they reframe their perceived changing academic roles at Makerere University. Two objectives guided this study: (1) to explore how deans perceive their changing academic roles at Makerere University; (2) to examine how deans reframe their perceived changing academic roles at Makerere University. This study was based on the interpretive worldview and subscribed to the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl. This study draws on interpretive methods because of the need for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under exploration. Biglan's typology of academic disciplines as soft pure, soft applied, hard applied, and hard pure was applied to purposively select and interview eight academic deans of the schools within colleges. Thematic data analysis was adopted from which the deans perceived their changing academic roles in Makerere University as complex since they were hectic, multiple, financially constrained and affected by situational politics. These perceptions were attributed to the University's strategic direction, recent changes in the academic environment and the University's growth in terms of student numbers. Those deans mostly reframed their perceived changing academic roles using the human resource frame. While the political frame was mainly used in science-based disciplines, the symbolic frame was the least exploited lens. This study recommends that the University ensure that the deans are more involved in strategy development and review, including identifying money-generating projects to allow the smooth running of schools. There is also a need for deans to reframe their changing roles by being more intentional in using the political frame, including networking and creating partnerships in order to solve their financial constraints.

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