

## Chapter 2

# Grounding Institutions of Higher Learning as Learning Organizations for Developing Intellectual–Knowledge Society

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter explores the complex and dynamic environment in which institutions of higher learning (HEIs) have to operate and the imperative for them to transform themselves into learning organizations. This chapter is underpinned by the concept of learning organizations as its theoretical exposition to gauge the capacity of universities to learn and transform themselves. The chapter argues that institutions of higher learning are strategically poisoned to transform themselves as learning organizations. Thus, learning organization-based HEIs could be advanced by transmitting knowledge through teaching and learning, knowledge production through research and managing, and disseminating knowledge through community engagement or service learning. These responsibilities form part of the integral and core business of the HEIs, especially of the universities.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Institutions of higher learning in the developed and developing world operate in a complex, volatile and challenging environment. The demand for these institutions to execute their core business more often exceed the capacity and the financial support

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they receive from government and public sectors. Higher education sector in the information age and knowledge society is to transcend from what Barnett (2011, p. 31) calls ‘knowledge-for-itself’ or ‘knowledge-in-itself’ to ‘knowledge-in-world’ or ‘knowledge-for-the-world’. The era for institutions of higher learning to exist for the privileged few is fading away and considering that higher education institutions are public entities funded from the public purse, there is demand for them to be active role-players in transforming society. Essentially, ‘knowledge-in-world’ or ‘knowledge-for-the-world’ (Barnett, 2011) challenges the idea of perceived higher education as an ivory tower, nothing to do with the world miseries, the world over is subjected to endure. In most nations especially those in the third world, the education sector is expected to come up with innovative solutions to socio-economic and political challenges. Since most of the problems are economical in nature, education is viewed as the foundation to the ailing economy (van Rhyn, McMillan, & Ndlebe, 2016).

The proponents of learning organisation theory such as Hudson (1999), Marquardt (2011) and Senge (1990, 2006), view learning organisation as an organisation capable of facilitating the learning of its workforce and harnessing the knowledge capability and experiences for the benefit of all its stakeholders. Organisational learning or learning society is ‘a never-ending journey’ (Watkins & Golembiewski, 1995, p. 99), ‘a vision’ (Senge et al., 1994, p. 5); ‘a continuous aspiration’ (Garratt, 2001, p. x) and scholars such as Marsick and Watkins (1999, p. 219) perceive it as not the real destination. These elements underlie the importance of life-long learning among people and within institutions. Considering the emergence of information age and knowledge society, the chapter interrogate the complex and dynamic environment in which institutions of higher learning (HEIs) have to operate and the imperative for them to transform themselves into learning organisations. The chapter argues that institutions of higher learning are strategically positioned to transform themselves as learning organisations (Bui & Baruch, 2011). Thus, learning organisation-based HEIs could be entrenched through rigorous interface of reaching, research and responsible community engagement. The infusion of the university core function not only helps the institution to forge and brand its identity, but also grounds its relevance in society. Through teaching-research-engagement activities, universities assume the role of using research to identify solutions directed at addressing community challenges (Bender, 2008). It is through the advancement of scholarship that transferring knowledge through teaching and learning, knowledge production through research and managing and disseminating knowledge through community engagement or service learning. These responsibilities form part of the integral and core business of the HEIs especially of the universities.

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