



Action steps for African Business Schools

Our conference on responsible management in Africa is now history, and if it is to prove a success, it is because many of you who attended are thinking about changes you hope to make at your school now that you are back home. But how will these changes be brought about? Directors of business schools really have little direct power. They do not typically have the power to dictate to their faculty what research projects to pursue. Nor do they control what goes on in the classrooms. Directors' power is indirect: if they want to make changes, those changes must be operationalized by action steps at the level of their schools' policies, procedures, and practices which in turn influence the research and teaching of the faculty and the learning of the students.

This raises the questions I posed for the panel. Exactly how might you operationalize the changes you think necessary at your school? What management instruments are relevant? How will you change them?

To focus the discussion, I listed a number of these instruments, and I have added here a few examples of what I have in mind.

1. Student admissions criteria (example: if you do not already do it, will you insist that all MBA applicants be interviewed?)
2. Curriculum: courses, syllabi, materials, and the pedagogy (example: is it better to have a dedicated course on ethics, elective or required, or should all ethics material be integrated into other courses? If the latter, how will you be sure the faculty embrace the change?)
3. Programs (example: might you launch an executive course on ethical leadership? Is there a market for that?)
4. Faculty selection criteria (example: would your objective be better met with a more academic or a more practitioner faculty profile? If the latter, would research suffer?)
5. Faculty mentoring, development, and evaluation
6. Faculty compensation and reward system
7. Student career counseling
8. Research funding
9. Your school's own administrative practices

This list is surely not complete, and you should feel free to extend it.

It is important to think hard about how these concrete action steps because Deans, as change agents, face a couple of obstacles.

First, as noted above, they have little direct power over what their faculty do in their research and teaching.

Second, not all faculty may agree as to what constitutes “responsibility” and to whom management owes it. This is not because they favor irresponsible management, but rather because intelligent and ethical people may have legitimate disagreements regarding management’s obligations to shareholders vs. other stakeholders.