

Gains and Pitfalls of Participating on International Staff Exchange Programs: Individual Experiences of Academic Staff of Makerere University, Uganda

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Abstract : Staff exchanges amongst different work organizations are a growing international phenomenon. In higher education in particular, it is not only the staff participating on international exchange programs, but their students as well. The practice of exchanging staff is premised on the belief that participating members of staff would not only get the chance to network with colleagues from partner institutions but also gain the opportunity for knowledge sharing and skills development. As a result, it would not only benefit the participating individual staff but their institutions too. However, in practice, staff exchange programs everywhere are not all 'a bed of roses'. In fact, some of the programs seem to be laden with unapparent source of trouble or danger for the participating staff. This paper is a report on an on-going study investigating the experiences of members of academic staff of Makerere University in Uganda who have ever participated on international staff exchange programs. The study is aimed at documenting individual experiences in order to stimulate, not only a debate, but practical ways of enriching the experiences of staff who engage on well-meant international staff exchange programs. The study has employed an exploratory survey research design in which self-administered questionnaire and interview guide are being used to collect data from university academic staff respondents selected through snow-ball and purposive sampling techniques. Data have been analysed with the use of appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics as well as content analysis techniques. Preliminary study findings reveal that the majority of the respondents (95.5%) were, to a large extent, fully satisfied with their participation on the staff exchange programs. Many attested to gaining new experience (97%), networking (75%), gaining new knowledge (94%), acquiring new skills (88%), and therefore bringing to their institutions something 'new' and 'beneficial'. However, a reasonably large percentage (57%) of the participants too expressed dissatisfaction in the institutional support that Makerere University gave them during their participation on the exchange programs. Some respondents reported about the 'unfriendly welcome' they received upon returning 'home' because colleagues detested how they were chosen to participate on such programs. The researcher thus concluded that international staff exchange programs are truly beneficial to both the participating staff and their institutions though with pitfalls. The researcher thus recommended for mutual and preferably equal engagement of the participating institutions on staff exchange programs if such programs are to benefit both the participating staff and institutions. Besides, exchange programs require clear terms of cooperation including on how staff are selected, facilitated and what are expected of the sending and host institutions as well as the concerned staff.

Keywords : gains, exchange programs, higher education, pitfalls

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