

# Team Building as a Tool for Developing the Competencies of Members of the Ghana Association of University Administrators (GAUA): A Case of the University for Development Studies

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## **Abstract**

*Team building is a strategy for the empowerment of employees to enhance performance and productivity. Universities could benefit from this approach if implemented appropriately; however, applying this concept to higher education administration is limited. The author discusses team building's pertinent issues as a tool for developing the competencies of University Administrators and Professional Staff: a case of the University for Development Studies. These issues are relevant to implementing team-building amongst Administrative and Professional Staff in the University. The importance of team building amongst Administrative and Professional Staff includes better communication, staff motivation, promotion of creativity, development of problem-solving skills, increasing professionalisation, breaking barriers, and collective empowerment.*

**Key words:** *Team building; Professional Staff; University Administrators; GAUA*

## **Introduction**

Team building as a job design philosophy sees employees as self-reliant teams, other than as individual workers. Team building is defined as identifying and motivating individual employees to form a team that stays together, works together, and achieves together. Team building, therefore, is a way of enhancing team spirit amongst team members for improved relationships, productivity and open discussions on project concerns (Vantagecircle.com, 2021). Brady (2018) opines that team building entails helping employees and employers to work together as a team. Team building is seen as an important factor in any environment; its focus is to specialise in bringing out the best in a team to ensure self-development, positive communication, leadership skills and the ability to work closely together to solve problems (Fapohunda, 2013). Team building is defined as an intervention conducted in a work unit as an action to deal with a condition (or conditions) seen as needing improvement" (Dyer, 1977, p.41). Team building is also defined as a process by which members of a group diagnose how they work together and plan changes to improve their effectiveness (Beer, 1980, p. 140). However, team building involves a wide variety of activities presented to

organisations that aim to improve team performance. Further, team building brings out team members' potential to ensure personal growth, effective communication, governance, and collaboration to solve a problem (Fapohunda, 2013).

Team building also entails the process of preparing groups of people to achieve their aims. This involves steps such as the elucidation of team goals, identification of challenges that comes with achievements. With effective team-building strategies, employees are united with a common purpose to achieve more incredible feats. Finally, team-building revolves around goal alignment, building good work relationships, defining team members' roles, and finding solutions to problems encountered by the team. Institutions that invest in building successful teams benefit from whipped-up morale, high performance, and projects accomplishment.

Team building activities help foster teamwork, creativity, motivation, establish trust amongst team members. Another importance of team building activities is improved communication in the team. It creates the atmosphere for colleagues to understand and communicate well, which directly translates into a project or assignment. Organisations that utilise team building activities experience increased collaboration for work-related tasks. These kinds of activities push employees out of their comfort zone, and allow them to meet other team members who they may not usually work with.

Team building will be an essential tool for university administrators to foster collaboration and develop each other in the face of rising challenges in public universities in Ghana, notably the University for Development Studies. This fosters relationships amongst the category of non-teaching professionals who render administrative and professional support service towards promoting the core business of teaching and research in universities. The job as a university administrator or a professional non-teaching staff calls for exploring various forms of team-building strategies that involve continuous learning to meet performance expectations. In the words of Ahuja (1988, 177), "a continuous and systematic process of learning and growth is designed to prompt a change in the behaviour of individuals by preparing their intellect and innate qualities through the acquisition and understanding of the newly acquired knowledge". Training programmes on the job and outside one's university will progressively remedy any performance deficiencies.

Consequently, any weak link in any constituent body will influence the overall institutional grading and be a source of worry to the other parts and subparts contributing to the more extensive system's efficient running. No matter how one looks at a university, the non-teaching partners are now a vital component who need to be trained and motivated at all times. Building ourselves as a team of non-teaching professionals in the university, prospering together, and falling together in the upcoming single spine salary structure may benefit the non-teaching Staff's morale in the coming years (M.Tanko & Kuuire, 2012).

### **The problem**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has come with many innovations in all spheres of life. Higher education is now changing radically, and the old ways of management no longer work. For example, organisational charts, compensation schemes, the communication hierarchy, command and control channels are no longer working. Administration and management of Higher Education have become more challenging due to the following reasons: students these days are younger and immature, students come into the university from diverse backgrounds, the workforce is more hyperactive, resources are dwindling and body politic has changed, and internalisation has increased because of social media.

Winning is more admissible than losing, and competition is common than cooperation in Western Cultures. These tend to intensify intragroup and intergroup conflicts. Meetings of groups are often managed in a win-lose climate - that is, individual or subgroup interaction is ticky (Richard, 1976). In the Universities, there are various groups such as the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG), the Ghana Association of University Administrators (GAUA), Federation of Universities Senior Staff Association of Ghana (FUSSAG), and Teachers and Educational Workers Union (TEWU). Among these groups, there have been various conflicts at one point in time or another.

Between UTAG and GAUA, there remains coupling and decoupling, which over the years diminished the importance of the administrator's role in University administration, leading to hatred and mistrust among the two groups of Senior Members. UTAG thinks that the core business of a University is teaching and learning. Hence, they consider their members the most critical group of people than all other support staff. They also perceive university administrators as failures because, historically, the first cohort of Registrars were drawn from the Civil Service, based on experience, and without higher degrees. GAUA members, on the other hand, think that they now have the same qualifications and could have equally become teaching staff (Lecturer), but they chose to be administrators (Tanko & Kuire, 2012).

Also, there are more scholarship opportunities for teaching staff than for professional or Administrative Staff. At the Faculty or School level, most Deans support teaching Staff financially to attend conferences at both national and international levels. However, the administrative Staff are denied such opportunities.

In the face of all these, University Administrators need to be productive, which is why team building is essential for them. Accordingly, they can compare notes and draw inspiration from each other and other predecessors, and this will help in building higher education in Ghana. There is the need for University Administrators to meet, link up, and deliberate in finding solutions to issues/problems and presenting the same to management. It is expected that this will lead to the development of Public Universities and the country as a whole. University

Administrators need to make themselves relevant and indispensable in the face of the challenges GAUA faces with the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission and sister associations like UTAG. Considering all these, how do administrators make themselves valuable and relevant? The solution is to strive to be competent and effective in the discharge of their duties: they must build team competencies to be proactive and innovative in their contemporary times. If a team is to perform, then individuals need to contribute their strengths. Accordingly, there is the need to develop individual administrators' powers who must commit to developing each other. Administrators must have the relevant professional understanding of what they do and must have command over basic administrative facts in the University for Development Studies.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Models of Team-Building***

Teams go through different processes of building and the phase determines its effectiveness and the challenges (Macintosh & Burton, 2018). Having an understanding of the varying steps and factors of team-building models will help build a cohesive team and improve institutional performance. One of the common models for team-building was proposed by Bruce Tuckman (1965). Tuckman (1965) accordingly introduced five different phases of team-building which are forming, storming, norming and performing, and later added with Jensen in 1977, the adjourning phases.

The forming stage of team-building involves an assembling of tasks which include the setting out of a plan, collection of information and bonding. Team members at this phase are independent of each other and may not even trust each other. Which is the reason for which there is the need to bond at this phase. The storming phase deals with finding strategies to address the competing ideas of members. Good relationships must be borne out of the bonds. Effective leadership is one tool that can be employed to move the team to the next phase (Team Building Company, n.d.b). This is followed by a norming phase where the team goes through working practices by agreeing on policies, rules and regulations to guide operations. At this point, team members would have learned to trust and accept the contribution of each other. This leads to the performing phase where an open and fair environment is created for work. Here, high levels of performance, independence, motivation, and competence which leads to effective communication, collaboration and decision-making are recorded. Tuckman (1965) proposed a final phase of team-building which is adjourning. The Adjourning phase involves the identification of factors that could improve future processes by taking into account the contribution of team members.

In addition to the models on team-building (Dyer, Dyer, Dyer & Schien, 2007) introduced four factors that can lead to increased institutional performance. These are the Context for the team, the Composition of the team, the Competencies of the team and the Change management skills of the team. The context of the team is reflected in the environment where the team performs. The quality of the work

environment must be set by the establishment of goals and rewards. Structures must also be put in place to mitigate challenges (Irwin, 2013). The composition of teambuilding is related to the character exhibited by team members this is because it is vital to know the attitude and skills team members will bring to bear to contribute to the overall success of your team of the institution. This is where the competencies of teams come in. Given this, the selection and the constitution of team members must be carefully done. In this case, team members without the requisite competencies to set out the right goals, to carry out tasks must be laid off (Irwin, 2013). The composition of teams is important also for the fair resolution of conflicts and members must have the flair to take risks to achieve goals (Irwin, 2013). Finally, the Change is about the team's ability to assess and evaluate its performance and to be able to make changes when the need arises. In this case, teams must make room to adapt constantly to change in a competitive environment to meet demands at each point in time. It is however, worth noting that, the risk is that teams may smug and loose either their cutting - edge or the drive that brought them to their current phase (Team Building Company, n.d.b). Evaluations of the models discussed can serve as a guide to change and develop (Irwin, 2013) GAUA. What then is the history of GAUA as a team and how important is team building to the development of GAUA?

### **History of GAUA**

In 1972 in Nairobi, a group of administrators thought of bringing all University Administrators together and they recommended the formation of regional conferences in West Africa (AWAP), Ibadan in Lagos. However, these conferences did not take place as planned, but it was agreed that an inaugural meeting of the Ghana Association of University Administrators (GAUA) should be held. This meeting was convened and opened by Dr. Agyei Bekoe, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana.

According to Dr. Kwapong, "GAUA was established to:

- i. promote the advancement of higher education to its fullest
- ii. advance the professional competencies of administrators in all universities in Ghana
- iii. advertise regular and constant contact amongst its members
- iv. seek the welfare and interest of its members.

Dr. Agyei Bekoe, in 1980 emphatically stated that in the past few years, there had been the tendency to distinguish between the academic and administrative Staff of our Universities, as far as salary and other conditions of services were concerned. He opined that at the highest level of university governance, teaching and non-teaching staff are intimately linked. The roles for teaching and non-teaching staff cannot be divorced from each other without impairing the university's efficient and harmonious functioning as a whole. According to him, they complement each other. Therefore, it is essential to stress the purpose of sound administration in our Universities by building the team of GAUA in Public Universities in Ghana.

### **What goes into the Team-Building of GAUA Members?**

Institutions utilise various team-building strategies and activities to garner mediations for the preposition of multiple purposes such as improving interpersonal relationships, increasing motivation, aligning with change programmes, increasing productivity, finding direction and resolving conflict (Kriek, 2007). Team building consists of a variety of activities geared towards increasing team performance. There are two fundamental strategies in the team-building process, including recognising the correct issues and appropriately tackling them and adopting order.

Some factors may call for the need for team building in the administration of higher education institutions. Among these are decreased productivity, apathy and lack of involvement in teamwork, lack of initiative. One can also mention conflicts or hostility among Staff, low participation in decision-making, and complaints of discrimination or favouritism.

The journey into higher education administration is a very challenging one, but it is also rewarding. Over the years, University Administrators have played vital roles in policymaking and decision implementation in Universities. Administrators are essential to the management and successful running of the university because they are pillars of support for teaching staff and complement the work of teaching staff by daily running. They serve as leaders and managers of the Universities. They further serve as custodians of the history and cultures of the Universities. Teaching staff rely on administrators to support them to be successful in their duties. Together, administrators have helped to place Universities in the national and international space. However, academics and administrators have distinct functions to perform. The two groups are allies who should operate to achieve the goals of the institution.

Continuous leadership training and capacity building is a must for every institution which aims to be successful, impactful and perennially relevant. This is especially so for higher education institutions such as the UDS, of learning with the triple mandate of generating knowledge through research, disseminating knowledge through teaching and applying knowledge through community service. The efforts of academics/faculty members who perform these core duties must complement non-teaching Staff who are adequately trained and have a good understanding of their work environment and the knowledge industry. Team building should be an essential topic in Public Universities in Ghana. University Administrators strive to find their feet in the eternal impasse with UTAG, Fair Wages and Salaries Commission and the Government. In the face of these challenges, GAUA must explore ways to develop members who match current administration trends. Team building structures should be put in place to build Administrators in Public Universities further to make them indispensable and productive.

### **Objective/Purpose**

Over the years, several models of strengthening staff capacity and promoting Staff's professional development have evolved. However, it is observed that the majority of staff and team leaders place greater emphasis on institution-directed

professional development, which is rarely able to provide customised solutions for individuals. Also, teams on a variety of higher education management issues are directly applicable to their job schedules. Therefore, this article seeks to complement other holistic and top-down models of enriching the staff of the university's leadership competencies and capacity by providing a forum for regular team building, professional development activities, and customised solutions to higher education management.

The article seeks to understand better workable approaches to solving current higher education management issues and strengthening individual and team capabilities. It is also geared towards creating an owned and jointly responsible leadership development process and generating multi-thought-tanks for various university administration segments. This will be streamlined to include relevant and sound policies to complement other systemic staff development models. Administrators should be encouraged to take responsibility for strengthening their teams along the lines of individual capacity building and proffering workable solutions to challenges in their immediate work environments.

### **Importance of Team-building**

The following are the reasons why team building is essential for GAUA:

1. Facilitates better communication - Activities that create discussions allow open communication among employees and management. This can result in cordial relationships and the quality of work. Team building helps to break down communication barriers and prevents unhealthy competition, rivalry and point-scoring among Staff. Team building will enhance good communication among GAUA members working as a team.
2. Motivates Employees - Team building is a strategy to achieving better-operating policies and procedures, thereby motivating team members to achieve goals, raise and boost morale and confidence, and encourage GAUA members' sustained involvement. The more comfortable employees feel to express their ideas and opinions, the more confident they will take team leadership strides. GAUA members will be motivated to take on new challenges.
3. Promotes Creativity - Exposure of GAUA as a team outside the office setting and new experiences will stimulate their thinking beyond the everyday routine. Working together with other team members can kindle fresh ideas and creativity. This can be done by setting aside grants to support GAUA members who attend local and international Conferences. Incremental jumps in salary can also be given to GAUA members who present certificates after attending conferences.
4. Develops problem-solving skills - Effective team building can coordinate individual staff's efforts as they handle multi-tasks that make them exhibit their competence and explore knowledge, which may be dormant. Members are encouraged to come up with fresh ideas to solve problems and find

innovative ways of addressing management and administrative issues. Team building activities that require Staff to solve problems can improve the ability to think objectively and thoughtfully to address crises at any point in time. Teams that can pre-empt issues and determine solutions can effectively take charge when a crisis erupts.

5. Breaks barriers - Team building will enhance trust and support and increase the trust factor between the university's Management and GAUA. Often, there is a disconnect between the leadership team and employees because they sense a gap between them. Team building exercises allow leadership to be seen as a colleague rather than a boss, which is a catalyst for employee morale and breaking barriers. With team building, co-workers work well, and there are higher levels of job satisfaction. It also builds on team members' complementary strengths to produce results that employees cannot achieve individually.
6. Raises the individual and collective empowerment- Complementary strengths come together in a manner in which another balances one team member's weaknesses. Team building increases collective strengths. Rewards and recognition can be given when an individual's strengths increase the performance of the team. The team that is mutually building must be accountable by balancing challenge with support.
7. Enhances engagement with ownership of the task in hand - A good team supports and enhances the skills and learning of its members, and brings out the best in them. Being a part of a team makes it possible to do things one could necessarily not do alone. *Team members learn new skills from colleagues* and this tends to increase their own range. Thus individuals feel a sense of ownership when they become better at what they are good at.
8. Increase in professionalism - The increasing professionalisation of virtually all the support services of universities will in the future lead to the accord of tremendous respect to the roles of GAUA members as other partners come to appreciate that the GAUA members are in an entirely different sphere of influence in expanding the frontiers of knowledge in the university.

### **Challenges GAUA has encountered over the Years**

1. Superiority Complex - teaching staff have a perceived cold war between teaching and non-teaching staff. Teaching staff do not generally appreciate the complex responsibility of administrators.
2. Triumvirate university roles - the university is required to carry out teaching, research and community service. The part of community service is tied to the job schedule carried out by administrators. Conventionally that aspect seems to be silent in all public universities. More importance is given to teaching and research at the expense of community service. The importance is attached to only the teaching and learning process. However, teaching,

learning and investigation cannot be carried out effectively when university administrators do not carry out duties such as the processing of salaries, payments for logistics, processing of promotion documents, amongst others.

The senior members consist of teaching and non-teaching members involved in the policy formulation and implementation processes in any university's life. If one section is unattended to, its inefficiencies tend to affect the whole institution's corporate image. A very inefficient non-teaching staff section may cause several difficulties during admissions, registration, examinations, graduation, hall administration appointments, promotions and all forms of formal severance (Tanko & Kuire, 2012)

3. Lack of support from Principal Officers - Some Vice-Chancellors are not sympathetic towards university administrators' plight in crises because of coupling and decoupling issues. This has cropped its ugly head over the years, between teaching and non-teaching staff. University administrators have had to struggle on their own to ensure that non-teaching Staff are placed at par with teaching staff in terms of salaries (Single Spine Salary Structure/Implementation) and allowances.
4. Financial constraints and inadequate scholarships - GAUA members are not considered, for example Commonwealth Scholarship. There is an adage of asking what administrators are using a Doctorate Degree for. However, administrators also need to improve their quality and skills. Also, they need to specialize in the area of management because of the emergence of new trends of management of Public Universities.

### **Achievements/Prospects of GAUA**

Administrators in the University bring continuity because they are the keepers of institutional memory (minutes/reports) and university seal. e.g. Registrars serve longer than Vice-Chancellors, and so do Faculty Officers serve longer than Deans. In view of this, GAUA members should also be given grants and scholarships to enable them attend conferences and also attain Doctorate Degrees and professional certificates. This can build bridges and minimise the gap between teaching and non-teaching staff in public universities.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***It is recommended that:***

A pathway for team-building is designed to help administrators in the university develop themselves individually and collectively in the face of changing management trends and administration of higher education institutions. It is essential to integrate team-building goals into the work schedule to develop the potential of staff and achieve maximum results from daily tasks.

A model of strengthening university administrators' leadership capacity across the university's Registry and Faculties should be developed. Provision of Campus Management systems can also be made, forming specialist interest groups such as all Faculty officers discussing issues that affect them. For example, every first Wednesday of the month, administrators in the Registry and across Schools/Faculties can get together to discuss a variety of schedules and tasks they are responsible for. An administrator at such meetings can be allowed to address a particular higher education management issue within the office's purview, to which others can contribute through a critical thinking process. This serves the multiple purposes of helping staff members source the latest information that addresses current challenges of higher education administration. It also helps develop presentation and negotiation skills, fosters teamwork, promotes unity in diversity, and encourages capacity building through an owned process rather than a top-down approach. Continuously learning and finding solutions to the emerging complexities in university administration is bound to draw partners' attention powerfully to the relevance of the university administrator's job.

Local Continuous Professional Development on professional topics can be organised. These can be developed into campus management interest systems where e.g. all Faculty Officers come together to discuss solutions to issues that affect them. It has been generally observed that most workshops and seminars do not directly benefit administrators. An arrangement can be made with Professional Bodies to come to the university's doorstep, with reduced packages, to enrich administrators' skills.

There is a need to build appropriate administrative capacities and skills by providing excellent professional development for administrators. Administrators' role is to change management in the face of such action as the increasing number of students, lack of financial support from the Government and interference of social media.

Administrators should be encouraged to join local/international professional networks. Administrators should network within the university and with colleagues in other Public Universities to plan team meetings and learn about new trends in different universities. The competencies of administrators should be developed through professional programs to increase professional and ethical standards. Since administrators play a vital role in setting ethical standards, it impinges them to observe the highest form of professionalism. Every university demands experts of proven competencies to direct it.

Formulation of mentoring schemes to ensure sustainability and succession planning. In this way, administrators can be directed and coached to enable them to learn. This will create self-awareness and self-belief in new appointees. The focus of the mentoring must also be to listen, offer support and get feedback. According to Scott (1995), if administrators contribute to policy decision making, they are more useful and become valuable.

Special grants and sponsorships for national conferences must be set aside, particularly for administrators who will attend workshops outside the country, to give administrators international exposure. Opportunities are provided to Teaching Staff; equal opportunities can also be given to administrators in this regard.

Incentives must be offered by the institution for innovation, risk-taking and learning.

A contributory welfare fund for Registry staff (Junior Assistant Registrar – Registrar) will help bring about unity and fellow feeling and enhance cooperation.

All University Administrators should work towards enhancing their knowledge and abilities to increase productivity. This can be done through conference attendance, reading journal articles, and creating a forum and avenue for members to share experiences.

### **Conclusion**

University administrators should endeavour to observe higher standards of professionalism. As administrators, they should network within and outside the university by joining local and professional networks and planning team meetings and retreats, participating in national and international conferences and training programmes from time to time to sharpen their skills. University administrators should also think about the administrative role explicitly and develop self-awareness and self-conviction. It will be in the interest of University Administrators to offer support, provide feedback and display integrity in decision making. Again, university administrators should strive to work peacefully with themselves and with all other Associations in the university.

Finally, implementing and supporting team-building amongst University administrators is essential for developing competencies of members. Team building and its implementation involves a lot and comes with many attendant challenges. Despite the obstacles, significant team building will offer many benefits to the University for Development Studies. University administrators certainly can improve upon their image through improved services. The administrator needs to be modest in crises and train and retrain to gain respectability among the tertiary system partners. The struggle for credibility is bound to linger much longer until the unfolding problems of relevance and confidence in universities are considerably reduced. As the saying goes in a Team, "Together Everyone Achieves More".

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