

# Actors' Interpretations and Organisational Change Processes: The Case of the University of Ghana's Strategic Vision of Becoming a 'World Class University'

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## Abstract

Despite its seemingly subjective and ambiguous nature, the notion of a World Class University (WCU) appears both established and widely discussed in higher education discourses over the last decade. At the same time, some scholars have argued that the notion does not fit or refer to universities in Africa. In the year 2010, the University of Ghana which is the largest university in the country, agreed upon a strategic vision for the university emphasizing the notion of WCU. In this regard the question emerges, what this WCU vision at the University of Ghana actually means in practice, since it is not prescribed by the university's leadership but left open for interpretation, operationalization and further implementation by all members of the organization. Using an interdependency management perspective, this paper examines how university leadership and academic staff interpret the WCU strategic vision at the University of Ghana and to what extent organizational change processes are the result of the implementation of the university's WCU strategy.

**Keywords:** World Class University, management, academics, interdependency management

## 1.0 Introduction

The notion of a 'World Class University' (WCU) was coined in 2003 by Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) and has been used widely over the last decade (Deem, Mok & Lucas, 2008; Hazelkorn, 2013; Salmi, 2009). In the year 2010, the UG which is the largest university in the country, agreed upon a strategic vision for the university emphasizing the notion of becoming a 'World Class University' (WCU). In general a World Class University, according to the literature, among other things, emphasized in the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's (SJTU) annual ranking of World-Class Universities, Altbach (2013), Altbach & Balan (2007), and Salmi (2009), refers to highly ranked top research universities in the world. These top research universities are mostly characterized as being decoupled from their national boundaries and are at the apex of the global ranking systems and the global knowledge economy.

In this regard the question emerges, what does this WCU vision at the University of Ghana actually mean in practice, since is not prescribed or specified by the University of Ghana leadership but left open for interpretation, operationalisation and further implementation. Using an interdependency management perspective (Braun, Benninghoff, Ramuz & Gorga, 2014) allows us to understand how leaders and academics at UG initiate, mutually coordinate and depend on each other to allow for change to occur without university leadership imposing on the academics and vice versa. Therefore, this paper focuses on how the WCU vision is interpreted by university leadership and academic staff within the university and the indications of what these interpretations mean for organisational change in the university.

For the benefit of this study, it has been assumed that, there are two possible interpretations. First the academics' interpretation which is argued to be focused on academic excellence, i.e. the path towards realizing the WCU vision will consist of more curiosity driven research and high quality graduate programmes (Altbach 2013; Altbach & Balan 2007; Pinheiro, 2015). Second the leadership's interpretations is expected to be centered on relevance, and problem solving, i.e. having a better link to society in order to ensure the institution's survival and maintain its legitimacy (Chatterton and Goddard, 2000; Goddard and Vallance, 2013). In the African context, as Cloete, Maassen & Bailey (2015) only recently the major universities have become more focused on their strategic development, research productivity and related issues. In this context this study of a specific African university with a relatively clear but not specified vision is of relevance not only to Ghanaian higher education, but also for getting a better understanding of the change dynamics of major universities.

A brief contextual background of the development towards the World Class Strategic vision of UG is presented. In order to answer our research question we start by offering a brief reflection surrounding the controversies regarding strategy in the higher education literature; this will enable us to provide a basis for our research question. We present possible interpretations of management and academic of WCU. Furthermore, we also present a brief reflection on organisational change process. We then provide the method of collecting our data in answering our research questions. This is followed by presentation of our data and discussion.

## 2.0 Developments towards the “World Class University” Strategic Vision

In order to better understand actors interpretation of the WCU and the consequences. It will be prudent not only to understand the context within which UG operates, but most importantly how and why the development of this strategic vision came about. The UG being the oldest and in many instances serving as a role model to other universities in setting the pace, envisioning to transform UG to a ‘World Class University’ with the main aim of contributing to national development and also being part of the global knowledge economy. According to the *National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (2010)*, Ghana’s ambition to become a fully-fledged middle - income country requires a vision of development which fully applies and integrates science, technology and innovation into national development strategies to harness fully the nation’s total science and technology capacity to achieve national objectives for poverty reduction, competitiveness of enterprises, sustainable environmental management and industrial growth

The then Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, Professor Ernest Aryeetey in August 2010, said the university envisions to become a centre of excellence in becoming a “World Class University”: this is a manifestation that it is “not possible for higher education institutions to opt out of the global environment, since its effects is unavoidable” (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009, p.7). In a speech read in the 2011/2012 academic year the vice chancellor reiterated that “in order for universities to remain relevant, universities must be thought leaders who initiate change and guide society as well as respond to changes in society by rethinking new ways and strategies of doing things”. As part of this vision, a strategic document was launched where stakeholders were invited. Within this strategic document, the UG highlighted nine priority areas that it will focus as part of its vision to become a WCU. 1) Research 2) Teaching and learning 3) Internal stakeholders 4) gender and diversity 5) Institutional processes 6) Financial performance 7) Asset management 8) Monitoring and evaluation and 9) External stakeholders (UG strategic document, 2014). This strategic vision of becoming a World Class University has led to some changes. In line with this, UG has revised its mission statement in order to reflect the current strategic policy.

The purpose of the university was to provide for and promote university education, learning and research (Effah & Hofman, 2010). Its roles were not confined to serving national interests. At its inception, the university was to give high quality international education to many African countries (Effah & Senadza, 2008). In the year 2010, UG revised its mission statement to “develop world-class human resources and capabilities to meet national development needs and global challenges through quality teaching, learning, research, and knowledge dissemination.” (UG website). The study is curious and intrigued at how higher education institutions adopt imported concept or notion (for example World Class University) as a strategy. This is because one should not assume the semblance of imported organizational templates as mere institutional isomorphism due to internationalisation and globalization. Hence there is the need to look closely at how such imported concept is indigenized.

The above explains why the researcher chose UG as the focus of the study in order to unearth how various relevant actors interpret the strategic visions of becoming a WCU template and the and examine the extent organizational change processes are the result of actor’s interpretations of University of Ghana WCU strategy.

## 3.0 Research Focus and Key Question

Despite the widespread notion of organizational strategy in some higher educational literature, the concept is somewhat contested in the literature. This could be attributed to the fact that considering the highly institutionalized nature of universities, as noted by (Maassen and Potman, 1990; Musselin, 2007), there are doubts that the notion of a strategic vision which is transplanted from the field of business to universities, will lead to the desired results. Some arguments against the view of the university as a strategic institution characterize the university as a loosely coupled organization (Weick, 1976). Taking a step further from Weick’s theory, Musselin (2007) argues that the unclear and ambiguous technology based on Weick’s characterization makes strategic planning at the organisational level difficult. Fumasoli and Lepori (2011) assert further that, universities are old and slowly evolving organizations whose essential institutional nature hinders strategy. This to some extent helps one to interpret university strategy and mission statement as window dressing, which is not linked to the day-to-day decision making (Krücken & Meier, 2006)

From the above characterization of the university in terms of strategic application and change process, it will be difficult if not impossible for university leaders to impose a command-and-control system; this is predicated on the fact that university leaders depend on the cooperation of academics in knowledge production, and academics depend on university leaders to create the circumstances under which they can function effectively. Again, the organizational units articulate their own interests in both strategy formulation and implementation. This is because universities have traditionally organized their activities around the various disciplines; each unit has its own norms, values and belief systems, which lead to different goals and priorities (Becher & Trowler, 2001). As a result of the hierarchical and strengthened structure of university leadership, any

attempt by leadership to impose overarching strategic visions on behalf of the whole organization will inevitably become ambiguous and vague (Cohen, March & Olsen, 1972).

From the above, looking at the possible tensions between the two levels (university leadership and academics), how can these levels function effectively in a mutually dependent way? How do these levels interpret the strategic vision of the UG WCU template? In the academic literature we can find various meanings attributed to the WCU notion by different scholars. For example, some scholars, like Birnbaum (2007), criticized the WCU notion as alien and not useable as a university strategy. At the same time, (Altbach and Balan 2007; Deem, Mok & Lucas, 2008; Hazelkorn, 2013; Salmi, 2009) promote the use of the WCU template, even though they claim that it does not fit or cannot be used by universities in Africa (Maassen, 2012). Finally, what are the consequences of the interpretations of the UG strategic vision? Hence the overall research problem or statement of the problem addressed in this study can therefore be formulated as follows: ***How is the institutional 'World Class University' (WCU) strategy interpreted in the University of Ghana and how has the WCU strategy affected organizational change process?***

### 3.1 Perspectives of interpretations of World Class University by Management and Academic Staff.

In this research what the world class university (WCU) notion may mean is not the focus of the underlying paper, since it is interested first, in the way the WCU vision that has been introduced as an important strategic aim or frame is interpreted by various actors and second in the consequences (in the sense of organizational change process) of the interpretation of this vision.

Universities are pressured to adapt in accordance with changes in society. Universities, contributing to such changes, interpret these changes in different ways in order to fit into the dynamics of the society. Hence the university has a dual complex task of acting and thinking to be part of the larger global arena, that is moving the path of becoming academic excellence (Altbach 2013; Altbach & Balan 2007; Salmi 2009), while at the same time, acting and adapting itself to the needs and demands of the local environment in which it operates (Chatterton and Goddard, 2000). In other words, the university needs to balance academic excellence with social and economic relevance in order not only to survive, but to also remain competitive and enhance its legitimacy. From an interdependency management perspective, the study on UG draws on how both management and academic actors tend to interpret its WCU vision and consequences of such interpretations as a way of adapting and contributing to the dynamics in society.

From an interdependency management perspective, it is assumed that, not only the university leadership (vice chancellor & central administration) has the full power to interpret strategic visions despite the strengthened leadership structure. The academics remain relevant since they are in the helm of affairs in the core activities. They are involved in knowledge production, knowledge dissemination, and are crucial actors in ensuring that the universities' strategic goals are achieved. In essence, balancing the stronger hierarchical leadership structure with the continuous dominance of academics in the core functions of teaching, research with their beliefs system, there are bound to be varied and different kinds of interpretations with regards to the UG's WCU vision and the consequence of the interpretation. Hence, the adoption of the interdependency management (Braun et al., 2014) perspective as part of this study allows us to appreciate the new form of management and how various relevant actors interpret the University of Ghana's vision and its consequences.

Based on the literature studies, WCU emphasizes increase in research activities at the forefront of knowledge (Hazelkorn, 2013; Salmi, 2009). This assumption is related to the dominant interpretation of the World Class University notion as emphasized in the Shanghai Jiao Tong University's (SJTU) annual ranking of World Class Universities, and in the academic literature, including Altbach (2013), Altbach & Balan (2007) and Salmi (2009) who all link the World Class University notion to academic excellence; the need for more basic research and allowing academics to define their own research problem in their knowledge area.

Management assumption of the WCU notion is not linked to the concept of academic excellence, but it relates to the need of influencing and championing that knowledge production should be more directly and effectively relevant to society (Gibbons et al 1994; Goddard and Vallance, 2013). As a result of the strengthened hierarchical governance structure, which is argued to be partly inspired by New Public Management (Maassen & Stensaker, 2011). Management is mainly about setting and giving strategic direction, planning, controlling and to some extent directing the affairs of the university (Maassen 2003). The management relates to the assumption that the university is committed to enhance social and economic relevance and problem solving as a way of realizing the expectations from society, and satisfying dynamic societal needs (Goddard and Vallance, 2013). In essence, management desires to look ahead and adapt quickly for aligning the institution's activities to societal and industrial needs in order to be relevant, maintain the legitimacy of the institution and ensure survival (Chatterton and Goddard, 2000).

### 3.2 Perspectives of Organisational Change Process.

In essence, one of the subsidiary notions or ideas behind strategies, for instance, the UG WCU vision, policies or

reforms is whether change actually happens or not (Gornitzka, 1999). However, reforms or strategies do not lead automatically to new ways of doing things or practices. This is premised on the fact that change is too complex to be analysed especially given the fact that the strategic vision introduced in 2010- 2015 is relatively young, having in mind the heavy bottom nature of the university (Clark, 1983). Again, universities are organisations that change within their own institutional, national and global contexts and there are a lot of factors that influence changes in universities. Hence, examining relatively causal relations is in general difficult in this context.

In this paper, organisational change describes any kind of change that is taking place within the University of Ghana. However, the study also recognizes that, since change is a process, it can emerge within the University of Ghana deliberately without being planned strategically. Following Gornitzka, Maassen, Olsen & Stensaker (2007) organisational changes could be initiated by identifiable group of actors which could be strategically planned. This study advanced these arguments and uses the UG's WCU strategy as a frame of reference where management and academics within their own circumstances mutually allow for, and initiate change from an interdependency management perspective.

We also acknowledge the conceptions of change above as carried out in studies like Esterhazy (2014) and Frølich et al., (2014) but we build on the understanding of how strengthened management/leadership and academics from an interdependency management perspective mutually allow for and initiate changes based on the consequences of the interpretations the UG WCU strategy. This paper focuses on four dimensions of organisational changes, i.e. academic core (research and academic programmes), internal governance and human resource policy from interdependency management perspective.

In order to analyze organizational change aimed at strengthening academic excellence by conducting more curiosity driven research which is the interpretation assumed to be emphasized by academic staff, the paper assumes that if academic interpretations of the WCU strategy are dominant then emphasis in the organizational change processes at UG will be on strengthening basic research activities and human resource policies that will aim at hiring professors that will enhance curiosity driven research activities. The indicators for research, grants/funding for research activities, collaborations, peer reviewed academic publications and changes in recruitment procedures, changes in criteria for faculty member's reward/incentive systems will serve as a lens for analysing whether changes are taking place that are aimed at strengthening basic research activities and human resource policies respectively.

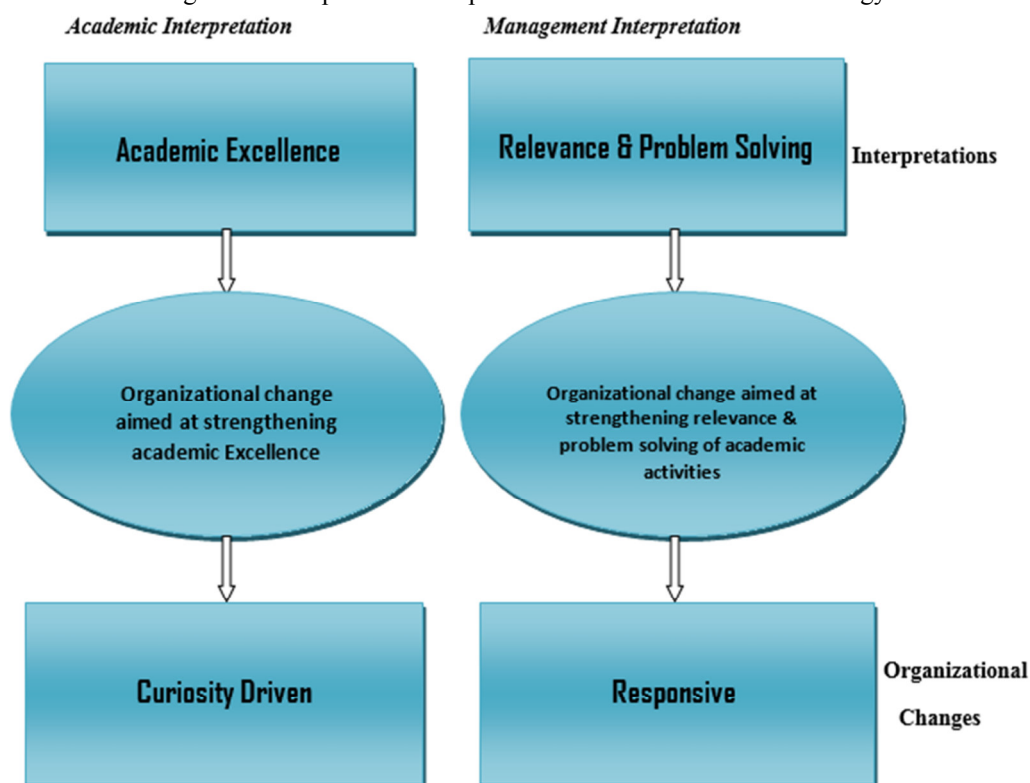
On the other hand, in order to analyze organizational change aimed at translating relevance to responsiveness which is the interpretation assumed to be emphasized by management, the study then assumes that, if management interpretations are dominant the emphasis should be on strengthening academic programs that are more relevant to the needs of society, problem oriented research and internal governance that incorporates external stakeholders in order to maintain relevancy. These indicators will serve as an analytical lens for analyzing whether changes can be identified that is aimed at strengthening relevancy and problem solving. New masters/doctoral programs, changes in programme structure/curricula and changes in decision making, changes in organizational structure, changes in governing bodies will serve as indicators with respect to academic programs and internal governance respectively.

In sum, the interpretation and possible effects of UG's WCU strategy are presented in Figure 1; they are derived from the above literature review. The analytical framework for addressing the study's questions consists of four blocks; the upper layer depicts the categorization of academics' and management's interpretations of UG's WCU strategy which are assumed to be focused on academic excellence and societal relevance respectively. In the same vein, the lower layer represents the assumptions about how organisational changes or effects are the results of academic excellence and relevance interpretations. In the next sections the notion of academic and management interpretations of UG's WCU are elaborated and conceptualized.

The upper part of the analytical model (fig 1) which represents academic and management interpretations is used in the study as a lens and a set of guidelines through which interviews with relevant actors and strategic documents are analysed based on how they (relevant actors) interpret the UG's WCU strategic vision.



Figure 1: Interpretation and possible effects of UG's WCU strategy



In sum, apart from the two possible assumptions regarding the direction of change as shown in the analytical model and explained above, another third possibility of the direction of change based on actors interpretations of the UG's WCU strategy is, there might be a possibility that, the direction of change may be unclear/blurred, in the sense that, there could be combinations of interpretations as opposed to dominant interpretations by both actors.

#### 4.0 Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how relevant actors (management and academics) at the University of Ghana interpret the university's vision of becoming WCU. A further subsidiary aim was to move a step further to understand and examine to what extent are organizational change processes are the result of actor's interpretations of University of Ghana WCU strategy. With regard to the focus on the organizational changes the dimension for this study included, research, academic program (academic core), internal governance and human resource policy. In order to achieve the exploratory and descriptive purpose of this study, the researcher used a qualitative approach as a research strategy. This approach gave participants (actors) the opportunity to bring out their feelings, understandings and perceptions about how different actors interpret the UG strategic vision of World Class University template and the consequence of this strategic vision (WCU) in UG.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted among ten UG management and academic staff; this is made up of five management and five senior academic staff. the semi-structured interview were an essential part of the study, since they shed light on the patterns of decisions and actions which need to be "recognized and shared by organizational members as a collective pursuit of organizational goals" (Fumasoli & Lepori, 2011, p. 3). Documents such as UG annual reports, UG strategic documents, UG Basic Statistics and Visitation panel reports provided valuable insights in helping to map up changes that have taken place in the fours sectors mentioned above as a result of the WCU strategy. A critical data analysis was done based on open-coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Neuman, 2000).

#### 5.0 Results and Discussion

As this study attempts to understand how managerial and academic actors at the University of Ghana interpret the strategic vision of becoming a WCU and the possible effects of actors interpretations which is in consonance with the first and second research question respectively, a summary of the findings is vital in understanding how the various actors coupled with documents reviewed interpret this vision. It provides a descriptive account based primarily on informants' responses to the interview guide and strategic document analysed. Data analysis reveals two main categories of academics and management interpretation of UG's WCU that is related to academic

excellence and relevance/problem solving respectively. This is done with the guide of the first research question, literature review and analytical framework. Hence the two main actor's interpretations are presented as follows;

- A) UG Academic's interpretation of WCU as academic excellence
- B) UG Management's interpretation of WCU as relevance & problem solving

#### 5.1 UG Academic's interpretation of WCU as academic excellence

*"We are in a global world and if we (UG) want to be recognised and accepted internationally we need to increase our research activities; we need to add on to knowledge, be innovative and trigger arguments" (UG 08). "Increasing our research activities is key. Another vital aspect is to make our research activities known by publishing in well reputed or high impact journals, this will increase our visibility and improve our rankings" (UG02).*

The above academics interviewed interpret academic excellence as increasing research activities at the fore front of knowledge. This also means placing much emphasis on basic research which will aid to produce top notch knowledge that will also enhance UG to become research intensive university. Research universities as indicated by Altbach (2013) are academic institutions that are committed to the creation and dissemination of knowledge at the highest possible level. What this means is that academic/research excellence; that is bringing research activities at the fore front of knowledge should be one of the prime goals of the University of Ghana if it wants to become a WCU. It is in this direction that the relevant ideas that encompassed academic interpretation place much emphasis on research activities and research excellence which is in line with UG's goal of becoming a WCU. Academics interpreted this perspective as wanting to be part of the global knowledge economy, hence in doing so one key way is to be recognised and accepted internationally is to increase its research activities; in the sense that there is a need to add on to knowledge, be innovative and trigger argument.

Another vital aspect is to make UG's research activities known by publishing in well reputed or high impact journals, this will invariably increase UG's visibility and improve its rankings is in consistent with the work of Altbach (2007). He argues that research oriented universities are underpinned by research excellence that is recognised by peers and also advances the frontiers of knowledge. Expanding the frontiers of knowledge through reputable publishing houses is one of the key emphasis some respondents asserted to. Following Altbach (2007a), he argues that through recognition of research excellence, universities become visible and create a niche for themselves.

As part of producing top notch frontier knowledge, most academics are of the view that, it will lead to innovation. Whereas some academics interviewed made emphasis that, they are in charge of research activities and they determine their own knowledge activities, surprisingly, most academics revealed that, in the context of UG, their research activities should to some extent impact certain areas of the Ghanaian society. This has in essence placed a shift from advancement of knowledge of its own sake to applied scientific knowledge. Most respondents posited that engaging with industries in the long term will lead to innovation through research. This is because when you are in touch with industries, you get to know what they want, and as researchers, we will come out with something that will suit their needs and increase efficiency, through constant engagement our research could help change their modes and methods of operations.

Following this line of thought it is not surprising that as part of its academic interpretation, the UG in its strategic plan has explicitly stated that, "in these changing times, the application of new technologies drawn from evidence based research in areas such as agriculture and manufacturing have transformed many economies" (UG strategic Plan 2014, p. 12). It is against this background that most respondents stressed the need to bridge the gap between the university and industries in Ghana.

#### 5.2 Management interpretation of WCU as relevance & problem solving

Another interpretation of UG's WCU that was identified by management which is in contrast with academics interpretations is to be relevant which in essence means the need to be well connected to society, training of human resources and solving societal problems.

*World Class University from the UG perspective sees it as a role the university is playing, and one of the roles is the products its trains. The world over, WCU are known for the quality of students. These students become ambassadors and promote the image of the university (UG 06).*

Management maintained that, training of workforce has been one of their core mandates since the establishment of the university but this strategy serves as a renewal of its legitimacy in a way to contribute and adapt to changing society. This is espoused by Chatterton and Goddard (2000) that enhancing the training of human resource that will be able to compete globally coupled with the fact that human capital is essential in the development and growth as well as competitiveness of a nation. This will ensure that the future manpower and industries' demands for skills in the various regions and sectors in the Ghanaian economy will be met and, more importantly, also contribute to the gross domestic product performance. Most respondents emphasised that the university's strategic document captures and re-echoes the need to train the nation's manpower. The university's

mission statement emphasises the role of the institution in developing “world class human resources and capabilities to meet national developmental needs and global challenges” (UG strategic document, 2014 p. 9).

*“The problems we are encountering now in the 21st century are very complex; hence, the university is seen as an instrument to solve the numerous problems” (UG06).*

*“We interpret WCU from the engagement point of view. That is we need to be in touch with the society, the industries, corporate entities and every constituent, they are important for our survival and acceptance” (UG, 04).*

One of the ways UG management interprets WCU is to engage and solve societal problems. This is because, management argues that, in contemporary times, society faces myriad of challenges and hence university needs to affect the development of society through academic activities. The New Castle University (2006) cautioned that for us to safely reach the 22<sup>nd</sup> century we must gain control of the 21<sup>st</sup> century problems. This can be done efficiently through research in order to help identify solutions to complex global issues such as access to energy, climate change, food security and disease prevention. They are of the view that through the university becoming more connected to society and collaborating with stakeholders, academics and researchers are able to acquaint themselves with the challenges society face and solve them through research. Most respondent were of the view that in order to become a world class university, there was a need for a better connection between the university and its society. One of the ways in which the university is getting connected to the society is establishing and engaging in public debate through the ‘New Year School Programme’.

*The New Year school is an annual residential programme of about a week’s duration organised by the College of Education of the University of Ghana, Legon, at which people from all walks of life meet to deliberate on topical issues of national and international interest. The School is usually held during the last few days of December and the first three or four days in January (University of Ghana Website)*

The aim of the programme among other things is,

- 1. to provide a platform for the dispassionate discussion of matters affecting the overall development of the country*
- 2. to encourage consensus-building among people of diverse opinions and backgrounds*
- 3. to educate the general public on important and topical national and international issues*
- 4. to provide a forum for the initiation of public policy (as evidenced by follow-up actions on the recommendations of the School)*
- 5. to assess public opinion on pertinent issues in order to ensure good governance*

Respondents were of the view that this platform brings various opinion leaders, corporate world and academics together, who come out with varied ideas and opinions on socio-economic issues with regard to national development.

### 5.3 Organisational Changes

The second aim of this study was to examine to what extent are organizational change processes at the University of Ghana the result of the implementation of the university’s WCU strategy? The findings of this study track and explain the changes in the four sectors of UG (internal governance, research, human resource policies, academic core and funding) that exist over the last five years (2010-2015) as a result of academic and management interpretations of WCU strategic visions. The semi structured interviews and documents gave us a better understanding of the motive behind such changes based on the various actors’ interpretations. This will allow us to determine or deduce in which direction of organizational change the UG is moving towards based on academic or management interpretation.

#### 5.3.1 Research Activities

As part of the institution’s vision to become a WCU with the aim of increasing research activities, University of Ghana has identified four priority areas (UG Research Report, 2013). This according to some respondents will enable the university to focus and promote international collaboration in research initiatives that will not only enhance the University’s research output but also affect the development of society. These research areas are: malaria research, trans-disciplinary research into climate change adaptation, enhancing food production, processing and development policy and poverty monitoring and evaluation. The four priority areas were initiated by the university leadership together with various research centres, colleges, academic units, senior faculty researchers for deliberations and acceptance (UG Research Report, 2013).

Currently, a centralised office; Office of Research, Innovation and Development (ORID) was established in 2010 to foster and enhance research in the University, as part of its efforts to support and promote research. ORID’s mission is to promote, coordinate and facilitate research activities, and also to lead the development of the university’s strategic plans, including business plans and fund-raising strategies (UG Research Report, 2013). Another subsidiary aim of ORID is promoting creativity and innovation, patenting and commercialization of intellectual property. In this regard, some respondents emphasize the need of using research output as a catalyst in solving key problems in industry and society.

One important development of translating such plans into action is the establishment of technology development and transfer centre (TDTC) which is under the auspices of ORID. Currently, the centre seeks to facilitate the development and transfer of technologies in the areas of information communication technology, horticulture and livestock to the private sector. Another exciting change process is the development of the Intellectual Property (IP) Policy which most respondents' emphasise will ensure that innovators are encouraged by benefitting from their discoveries and innovations. Innovations are also enhanced by promoting and rewarding the generation and implementation of creative ideas.

*Funding* is the life blood of every university; enough funding is one of the key resources in undertaking relevant research. However, relevant among issues that respondent mentioned was the problem of inadequate funds for research which remains a serious constraint. The UG has allocated part of its internally generated funds to set up funding schemes which are accessible to members of the university community for research. As part of its aim of becoming a research excellence institution. ORID has set up UG research grant scheme to encourage faculty members to actively engage cutting edge research activities that will enhance UG research profile. Currently UG have instituted three types of funds that can be accessed by faculty members (UG Research Report, 2013).

1. *Seed Grants: These grants are targeted at faculty members at the early stage of their career to enable them to explore new ideas to apply for larger funding or bigger grants in the future and would normally not exceed GHc5000.*
2. *Investigator led Grants: These grants would normally not exceed GHc30000. According, to respondents these types of grants are awarded to faculty members with a clear research question they wish to address.*
3. *Multidisciplinary research Grants: These shall not exceed GHc100000 and are for multi-disciplinary and inter faculty research projects which specifically address a national developmental issue and are capable of shaping or influencing policies in Ghana.*

Even though some respondents admit that this funds initiated by university management are not adequate, most acknowledge that, it is a step in the right direction. An interesting revelation from some respondents was that, research problems should be framed within the four priority areas of the university which is developmental related in order to have access to the research grants. It was also revealed that conference grants has also being set up by management to stimulate academic research activities by participating in international conferences, seminars, workshops (as presenters, critics and chairs of sessions), however, respondents were quick to add that, themes, topics of such conferences needs to be relevant and have an impact not only to academic knowledge but most importantly must be relevant and applicable in solving to societal challenges. Hence, one could argue from the respondents assertion that, management to some extent are inducing academics to use focus their energies in helping solve societal problems by the institutionalizing the research grants.

### 5.3.2 Cooperation/Collaboration

The UG in its quest to become a world class university has strategic alliances with other institutions and non-institutions. These alliances in one way or the other are meant to not only for UG to become effective and competitive but also to learn from each other and create effective networking. It was revealed that, partnerships and collaborations have also been considered as one viable avenue to achieve the mission of enhancing research activities that will enhance not only UG's visibility but also helping solve various challenges of the society.

One general development is the boost in capacity building development for UG faculty members is the building Stronger Universities in Developing Countries Initiative (BSU), a partnership between research and higher education institutions and Danish government. The project which is funded by the Danish government aims at strengthening research and educational capacities. The University of Ghana is involved in three thematic areas that is Environment and Climate (BSU-EC), Growth and employment (BSU-GE) and Human Health (BSU-HE). Within the two year period at each phase UG will receive 20million Danish Kroner, while Environment and Climate Platform will receive 8million Danish kroner (UG Research Report, 2013). Strategically, one can deduce that, the focus areas of UG collaborations is related to finding solutions to socio-economic challenges.

Another brilliant initiative respondents drew attention to, was the fact that in order to enhance international cooperation and draw on foreign academics, the University of Ghana in 2011, established a Diaspora Linkage Programme (UG-DLP) under its Next Generation of African Academics project funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The UG-DLP seeks to promote partnerships with African Professors in the diaspora in order to draw on their expertise to enhance UG's faculty strength for post-graduate teaching, supervision and thesis examination, with particular emphasis on PhD training. It is expected that such partnerships will lead also to collaborative research that will enhance research productivity. The UG-DLP seeks to establish links with existing Diaspora Networks, partner universities and individual diaspora professors.



#### 5.3.4 Academic Programmes

One of the trademarks of universities is the programmes they deliver to their products (students). Respondents were of the view that one of the core functions of the university is to train students by imparting knowledge to individuals who will become ambassadors of change by applying the skills and knowledge they acquired. As a result, respondents placed emphasis on Masters and PhD programmes since they are of the view that not only do they form the backbone of the next generation of academics but to handle complex problems and situations in the current knowledge economy. As the society is changing, so is it for us to adjust our programmes to suit the relevance of the local, national and global trend.

In contemporary times, the value of knowledge is weighed by the instrumental value as opposed to the theoretical value. It is also in this direction that there has also been the introduction of general but compulsory courses. These courses are to support students in their academic and general development but do not form part of their main specified programmes. A major change at the University of Ghana is the introduction of the University Required Courses (UGRC). These are unique to the University and compulsory for every student (University of Ghana handbook, 2011a; 2011b). The aim of these courses is to 'ensure broadminded individuals and critical thinkers' (Ibid). They include academic writing, numeracy skills, critical thinking and practical reasoning. Numeracy skills are compulsory for students in the Humanities, except those offering Economics, Computer Science, Mathematics and Statistics. The courses are also to enable students solve real life problems (University of Ghana Handbook, 2011).

In its quest to ensure academic excellence and to revive its academic programme, changes have been made in both undergraduate and post graduate programmes. Of most importance are the changes in the structure of PhD programmes. Beginning from the 2012/2013 academic year, the University of Ghana changed its PhD duration from three years to four years. This change was to pave way for inclusion of course work, experiential learning or research internship (UG Research Report, 2013) as compared to the previous three years which only placed emphasis only on research which is evaluated through thesis examination and viva voce.

#### 5.3.5 Internal Governance

Currently, there has been the introduction of the collegiate system. This in essence means that UG has decentralized its administration into four colleges: college of health sciences, college of humanities, college of education and college of applied and basic sciences. Each college is headed by a Provost. This reform according to a respondent is also to enable other smaller faculties merge with bigger ones to create an environment where researchers can cross over to different departments and faculties under the same college without any administrative hindrances. This will create an enabling environment that could also enhance interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research that will solve grand complex challenges in society. It has also allowed deans who head the various faculties coordinate with other deans within the same college to plan and apply for resources.

The current collegiate structure has freed university leadership in many functions and now university leadership concentrates on international relations, strategic vision and other related matters. Nonetheless, the university leadership keeps a keen eye on every activity that goes on in each college to ensure that the various units' activities are in line with the mutually agreed strategies. A respondent was also of the view that, the new structure has created a flexible way of doing things without following cumbersome procedures as was the case previously so as to adapt to societal needs and demands. Now things are done in a clear and efficient manner without any delays.

Another important office which was created in 2010, to ensure research functions was the Office of the pro-vice chancellor (PVC) in charge of research, innovation and development. This was created specifically to give attention to research activities of academics. Subsidiary to the PVC office, a new support unit 'research development officers' has been established with the sole aim of promoting and facilitating research at the lower units. They seek for funds, look out for calls for proposals, which fall in line with our priority areas, coordinate with donor agencies and advise various departments on latest information. This according to a respondent is a good development that has at least reduced their burden of writing proposals for grants. In addition, a new technology transfer officer(s) also monitor(s) prospective and potential opportunities, commercialisation process and liaise with industries and the university.

The University Council which is the highest decision making body in the University of Ghana has been changed to suit the strategic vision of the university. Thereby reducing ineffectiveness and delays of taking decisions. It was revealed that, the governance structure that was operated initially was developed to suit a particular circumstance and age but as society is changing, the university should be adaptive and be an agent of change. This invariably means that UG can no longer run its activities on single individual(s) and some central mechanism. The governance structure has been reduced but at the same time, it has given chance to external bodies to be part of the governance of the university. Some respondents claim it is crucial in safeguarding the university's relevance, not only in such times when the environment is unpredictable and uncertain but also for the users who actually provide the support and resources needed to keep the university surviving

### 5.3.6 Human Resource Policies

A university's quality turns largely on the competence and application of its faculty members. To enhance the quality of UG academics, there is now a new policy which requires all lecturers to hold PhD degrees. This Policy was introduced by the University Council in 2010; consequently, there is also a mandatory minimum entry point of PhD for all lecturers to teach in the UG. One key policy with regard to changes in quality of researchers is the change of entry qualification from MPhil degree to a PhD degree. This policy was enforced by the university leadership in the year 2010

*Reward systems* are initiatives that are put in place to attract the best teachers and researchers and to help retain them. With regard to this, some respondents were of the view that if the UG is to become relevant and also increase research activities, its faculty must be highly motivated. Salary and other conditions of service need to attract faculty from all over the world. Also there has been an urge from leadership to faculty; those faculty members, who conduct research that are applicable and use oriented, academics that design programmes that are highly professional oriented and highly sought after based on the demands of the society and business world that attract funding (in terms of full fee paying from students) and engage a number of graduate students, could be remunerated at levels higher than faculty members without such research programmes.

While some respondents claims such a "two-track salary system" undoubtedly cause initial problems, they argued that it could well be the catalyst required to stimulate some other faculty members to be more active and to raise themselves to levels where they would be engaged in similar research programmes that are relevant and can impact the needs of society attract similar remuneration. This is a difficult choice that the university must face squarely if it wishes to stimulate such initiative and drive for quality in its faculty. Research competence and output should be the determinants of which "track" a particular faculty member will use, even though respondents emphasised that this is still on the discussion table with management and academics and it is not yet been operationalised

## 6.0 Conclusion

The notion of 'World Class University' has become more and more accepted around the world. It implies that more and more universities can be expected to include the WCU template in their missions/visions and make it an essential element of their strategic plans. WCU in the academic literature (e.g. Altbach 2013, Altbach & Balan 2007, and Salmi 2009) emphasizes academic excellence. From interdependency management perspective (Braun et. al, 2014) the study underlying this article has explored management and academics interpretations of UG WCU strategy and to what extent this interpretation has an effect on organisational change.

The findings revealed that in practice the management's interpretation of the WCU at UG was still based on the notion of relevance and solving societal problems, this in essence means the assumption in the analytical model is valid. Regarding, the academic interpretation of UG's WCU, the findings revealed that though some academics emphasized academic excellence, it was more related to innovation and application to the needs of society rather than determining research needs towards their own knowledge activities. This means that the academics' interpretations are in line with the interpretations of the management of the institution which emphasis the notion of relevance and problem solving i.e. having a better link to society. Hence, based on the findings the study revealed that, there is a link between these two groups of actors' interpretations. This is because the relevance and problem solving interpretations is dominant by both academics and management.

Based on this dominant interpretation of relevance and problem solving or having a better link to society, what does it mean for organizational change? Based on the indicators of organizational change that the findings revealed, it provides a basis to suggest which direction of change process UG is emphasizing (based on our analytical model). Indicators with respect to sectors such as internal governance, research, academic profile and human policies, the findings revealed to some extent that, organizational change is moving towards the direction aimed towards strengthening relevance and problem solving of academic activities. Which means UG is moving towards the direction of emphasizing relevance and responsive to societal needs. Further empirical comparative studies of some flagship universities in Sub-Saharan Africa could be conducted to ascertain the influence of the vision of becoming a 'World Class University' and how that has impacted on the institution's behaviour in the areas of funding, performance of departments, research productivity, and rankings.

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