

## **Space Management in the Administration of Higher Academic Institutions in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Space management is an aspect of institutional management that deals with the allocation of appropriate space to various functional academic faculties which provides measurable benefits to the academic experience of students and staff. This paper deals with issues surrounding the organization of space management in institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. It highlights and offers alternative views on the importance of space management; the utilization of space as management tool, its constraints to effective organisational process management. The paper offers useful suggestions on how to improve space management efficiency in higher institutions. It also recommend that there is the need to centralised the responsibility for the space management; data relating to space-use and utilization should be collected on daily basis and stored in digital and manual formats.

Keywords: Space Management, administration, tertiary institutions, Nigeria.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The last decade has seen an increasing use of space utilisation surveys, primarily as a means of assessing how intensively - and therefore how cost-effectively - the estate is being used. This is a very powerful empirical means of demonstrating weaknesses in space use, and can help institutions in identifying areas to focus upon in order to improve matters.

However, it has to be recognised that a space utilisation survey is simply a measure of one aspect of space use or space management. It records the number of people using a space across a given time period - it does not assess the 'quality' of this use of space, and generally only focuses on a relatively small part of the estate, namely teaching space.

It is vital to recognise these strengths and limitations of space utilisation surveys in relation to improving the use of space within an institution. In many ways the strengths of such surveys have been recognised, particularly in terms of internal institutional debates on 'problem' parts of the estate. Despite this, utilisation rates have not changed to any significant extent over the last decade, remaining relatively low across the sector.

Although space utilisation rates remain relatively low, it could be contended that this is not through want of application of various space or estate management techniques to the issue. Thus techniques such as computerised timetabling (centralised or locally based), room booking systems, space charging, re-modelling and re-allocation processes have been used, amongst others.

One interpretation, therefore, is that the relationships between management techniques and factors such as the age, layout, type of activities and condition of the estate have not been effectively identified, thus preventing a more sensitive selection and application of management technique. A second interpretation, and one that we believe is probably more fundamental, is the limited involvement or engagement of the academic community in the process - especially in terms of representing their curriculum-based need for space. This is largely because academic staff often does not consider the efficient use of physical resource management to be part of their professional responsibilities. In fact, space efficiency can jeopardize the financial viability of courses and activities for which academic staff are responsible.

Improving space use is not simply an estates issue. Recognition of this point is, we would argue, central to the successful improvement in space management. The involvement of senior management, the academic community and other users of the estate and interested parties is essential if maximum benefit is to be gained. Also, managing space is a complex process. Mechanisms or measures can be put in place – but these need to be actively and intensively managed in order to get real improvement in space use.

Effective space management in universities and higher institutions can provide measurable benefits not only to institutional finances but also to the academic experience of students and staff by the use of tools and space utilization. The use of tools of automated timetabling and space utilization measurement provide universities and other higher education institutions with some very sophisticated ways of managing teaching space. However, these are just tools and on their own will not necessarily improve space. Before these tools can be usefully applied the institution must develop a coherent space management strategy.

Space charging is a valid, simple and effective way of getting some control over the usage of teaching space. But in many instances this control does not necessarily deliver better educational outcome, even if it appears to offer better utilization rates. Space is one component of an interdependent set of resources at the disposal of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria which is used in carrying out their programmes effectively and as well as being used in ensuring their operational efficiency. Although the importance of space management function is increasingly receiving more attention from our institutional administrators than ever before, due largely to the increase in student enrolment and partly due to agitations by various unions and pressure groups on our institutional campuses, yet the organization of the space management function has remained largely rudimentary and haphazard with practically no effective co-ordination except in a few of Nigerian institutions of higher learning.

Space management is an aspect of the institutional management that has to do with the allocation or scheduling of appropriate space to the various functional facilities, departments and units as well as the arrangement of furniture, equipment and work stations within the functional facilitate department and units to facilitate their work.

Space management like any other branch of management relies upon the basic management tools to perform its functions effectively. For purpose of discussion, the term “space management” is used to describe or designate the person who is responsible for the space management functions in each of our institutions of higher learning. The space manager is responsible for planning, organizing, controlling, directing, supervising and co-ordinating the space management efforts to ensure that the maximum use is being made of the existing space and also ensure that adequate plans are being put in place to meet the future space requirements of the institution.

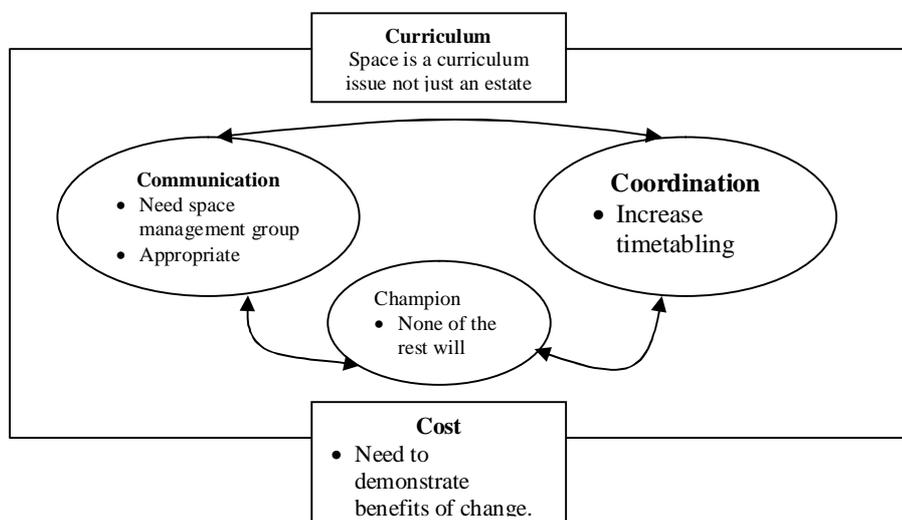
## **METHODS AND MATERIALS**

This paper presents literary discussions on the subject of space management using literature derived from various sources. The arguments and discussions are organised in debate format without the need for empirical analysis.

## **DISCUSSIONS**

Various techniques and approaches have been used by estates and senior management to improve space use, such as room booking systems, creation of pool space and so forth, but unless academics view space as a core part of curriculum planning and delivery and take an active role in managing it, then progress in space management will be limited, as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1: Diagram illustrating the focus of adequate space management



The success or failure of the space management function depends upon the space manager’s ability to plan. Planning, according to Terry (1968) is the selection and relating of facts and the making using of assumptions regarding the future in the visualization and information of proposed activities believed necessary to achieve desired results. The space manager uses the information and the facts available to him to carry out his day-to-day operation as well as his short and long terms plans. He evaluates the existing space to ensure that it meets the standard of local fire service and building codes.

He collects and analyzes the space management information that may be required, and make the information available to individual to and groups that have the right to know the current as well as the future space needs of the institution. Such individuals and bodies may includes deans and heads of departments, the registrar, the dean of student affairs, managers of the auxiliary enterprises, the senate and the Governing Council of the institution. He keeps building and room inventory and analyzes how schedule or allocated space is being used. He determines how space should by comparing the institutional ideal space students with the existing situation and noting the deviation so that corrective measures may be taken. In spite of the wide range of functions that are performed by the space manager, very little has been done to organize his office properly. The reasons for this may be attributed to: tradition; common sense; experiences in other institutions; philosophy of the institutional administrators; the size of the institution; and, cost consideration.

Tradition is the customary way of performing a set of tasks. Hence, if a certain way of organizing space management functions has “worked” in the past, the institutional administrators are less likely to change the practice even though the present situation may suggest an alternation in the practice. The force of tradition, therefore, is one of the factors that militate against an effective organization of the space management functions in institutions of higher learning.

The ideas of many traditional administrators are derived from “common sense” as noted by Hurton and Hunt (1972) that common sense consists of a group’s accumulation of collective guesses, hunches, and haphazard trail-and –error- learning.

Many institutional administrators have, at one time or another, worked in other institutions of higher learning. As they move from one institution to another in response to offers of better conditions of service, they carry along with them their accumulated experiences which often influence their organizational skills.

The personality of each institutional administrators and the degree of importance that they attach to the space management functions is crucial to the output of their work within the organizational structure of the institution.

The size of the institution affects the organization of the space management. Generally the bigger the institution, the more likely it is that the space management function will be systematically organized. In a multi-campus institution, the need to respond quickly to local conditions may force the institutional administrators to decentralize the space management function. In a medium-sized institution, the space management activities are always centralized.

Organizational structures often have budgetary or financial implications. Institutional administrators often evaluate and analyze the effect of organizational arrangements on their financial resources before making decisions on how a particular activity should be organized. Cost-benefit analysis is often conducted to justify the need to organize an activity in a particular way or fashion. Despite accumulated skills which an administrator may possess, there are significant constraints on effective space management for instance:

- (a) Special and measurable targets are rarely found. The link between space management and academic and financial planning is patchy and inconsistent. For space management to be effective, objectives need to be link to overall institutional resources planning. They need to be specific

and to relate not only to general- purpose teaching space but to specialist space, research, office and support space.

- (b) The management information needed is sometimes dispersed within HEIs. It is difficult both to get an overview and to have the necessary detail for effective space management.
- (c) There are gaps in available data, particularly about room capacities. The lack of functional suitability data makes it hard for individual institutions and the sector as a whole to assess the impact of space management practices on the quality aspect of space use.
- (d) Data collected, from utilization surveys for example, are not always integrated into space management policy or decisions. Utilization surveys often concentrate on general purpose teaching space, but this makes up only 15 percentage of the total net internal non-residential area of the HEI estate.
- (e) The absence of sector-wide and up-to-date space standards or norms was repeatedly highlighted as a problem by some survey respondents. Some HEIs have developed their own standards or norms, while 45 percent of respondents continue to use norms from the now-defunct university grants committee and polytechnics and colleges funding councils or space weightings, in some cases modified by the particular institution. None of these norms has been updated since 1990, and the space standards underpinning them are even older. Weightings only provide relativities in terms of space needs, and do not provide recommendations on areas required by specific activities.
- (f) Communication of space management guidelines and policies are sporadic, and users are not often involved in space management policy. Also, cultural issues revolving around ownership of space, resistant to change and lack of trust remain barriers to implementing change.

There is no universally accepted method of organizing the space management function in institutions of higher learning. However, the method of organizing for the space management functions may take any of the following forms:

*The Committee Approach:* This requires the formation of a committee charged with the responsibility of making decisions with regard to the space needs of the various functional departments and units in the institutions. The committee draws its membership from all the constituent departments and units in the institution. The common practice in most institution of higher learning is for the committee to operate on an ad-hoc basis. That is, the committee meets, discusses the matter before it submits its recommendations.

According to Hodges (1975) when an organization focuses the attention of a committee on a particular problem the result is often a solution superior to that which could be obtained from any one member working independently. The committee approach usually has Chairman who presides at the meeting and a secretary who keep its

minutes. The committee approach is a clever way of getting support and input from those most likely to be affected by the space management decisions.

*Special Office of Space Management:* A central office of space management may be set up and given the responsibility of gathering information on space and allocating or scheduling the available space to the various functional departments and units that require it. The head of the office normally should be responsible to the top administrator of the institution for the day-to-day operation of the office. In a multi-campus institutions where the space management functions have been decentralized, the central office may make broad general policies that are intended to be uniformly adopted and implemented while the detail of the policies may be worked out by the individual campuses concerned as the local conditions dictate. The central office should, however, co-ordinate all their space management efforts.

*A Single Individual Approach:* In some institutions, the responsibility for the space management functions may be vested in a single individual who may combine the job with his other official duties. This arrangement pre-supposes that the space management functions are not important enough to be on-going activity or to keep the person responsible for the functions fully occupied throughout the year.

*The Works Department Approach:* This is a practice that is increasingly becoming very popular in some institutions of higher learning. This approach involves that allocation of the space management functions to the works departments under the direction of the director of works or the facilities/physical plant Manager.

*The Joint Responsibility Approach:* Under this arrangement, the space management function becomes the responsibility of the central space management office, dean of student affairs and the manager of the auxiliary services or enterprises. The auxiliary services includes food services, student housing, college/university stores, confectionary shops, vending machines, day-care centres, guest houses, to mention but few.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Improvements in space management and use are not simply based on introducing 'mechanics' or 'tools' to achieve change, it requires change of 'mind-set'. This also includes viewing space as academic/curriculum issue to be managed (not reacted to) – rather than simply an estates' or support service. This in turn requires effective communication. Space use and space management can be further improved in that, space utilisation rates have not significantly improved over the last decade in Nigeria higher institutions, and space management measures are not always particularly effective.

More so, part of the reason for limited improvement in space use is that space management is a complex area, and needs coordinated, proactive and constant management. It also requires the active engagement of the academic community if it is to succeed. This has not happened uniformly, despite efforts by senior management and the estate community. The estate itself can also have inherent constraints, such as poor condition, unsuitable space, designed for different styles of teaching and research processes, which can influence space use and management. There is evidence for good correlation between space use and quality of space.

For improvements to occur; there should be proactive management of space; regular review of time tables; adequate review of the total size of the estate and capacity utilisation; and, action plans for improving space management should be considered and put in place, including a target for increasing the utilisation rate over an agreed timescale.

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