



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**ADDRESS: LAUNCH OF THE LEADING CHANGE PROJECT**

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Thank you Programme Director. Good morning colleagues...

## **INTRODUCTION**

Leading change is not simply about change for change's sake. It is much more important than that. When we look around, we are very aware that change is everywhere and we are not really managing it. Sometimes it feels as if it has overtaken us. Society has got a change speed wobble. Even in the City of Tshwane we are trying to cope with rapid social change and the consequences of popular protest. Leading change at a time such as this may therefore seem arrogant, but change is our condition, so we have to face it. Internationally, nationally and locally we are in perpetual, and often turbulent, change. But I'm sure you agree with me that we are all longing for good leadership.

Everywhere we need vision, purpose and resolution. It doesn't matter whether we are talking about politics or higher education; we need leadership to go with the change that seems somehow to be unbridled. Since so much seems de-centred, my intention today is to recapture our academic role in society. Leading change is therefore about the 'big picture' which is higher education as a whole, in all its current complexity and contestation, especially in the wake of the #Must Fall Movements. It is also about universities in South

Africa which are facing enormous challenges from students and labour. Vice Chancellors are very aware of the claims on universities to provide solutions to social issues, creative ideas for future planning, innovations to transform people's lives and a humanity that speaks across the huge divides in our society, especially the glaring inequality that threatens our democratic future.

But leading change is also about us at Unisa. It is our change that matters in the workplace; it is our academic plans that will shape our institution up to 2030; it is the nature of who we are and how we do things here that are very important. I am convinced that leading change in the big and the smaller spaces is what all of us need to be doing. Inclusive leadership has to be at the heart of Unisa if we are to lead other universities and if we are to make a difference to the country.

In 2011 we introduced you to our conception of a high-performing university, which we believed would be the catalyst for our strategic vision. That conception was encapsulated in our *Charter on Transformation*, and proposed the creation a new institutional DNA, through amongst others, the inculcation and practice of the 11 C's plus 1, the revitalisation of the academic project, and the development of a mind-set that is receptive to change, transformation and development.

It is however evident that we have not achieved the results we had hoped for, despite our very solid history, and I believe that this is a fundamental stumbling-block to the successful functioning of our university.

The video we have watched reminds us that Unisa has a superb legacy. We have transformed from being a colonial and apartheid university to a democratic institution committed to social justice and equality. But we have yet to see the full flowering of these fundamental democratic building blocks. A dramatic change has yet to work itself into the nature and substance of intellectual leadership, curriculum reform and epistemic realignment, not to mention systemic, operational and cultural re-visioning and transformation.

The fact is, colleagues, *Change* is not an event but a complex process guided by a vision, with no defined destination; it is a condition that feeds off its context and that requires constant renewal and rethinking; it is about transformation, new knowledge, wider scholarship, and different curriculum; it is about being an African university in character, not simply a university in Africa; it is about culture and systems. It is also about consultation and communication - and that is why it is imperative that I lead the change at Unisa. But I can only do it with you. We have to lead together. Universities are not dictatorships and participation is central to academic practice.

Now more than ever before, our social and educational context is exerting an unstoppable transformative momentum. 2016, I believe, will go down in the history of South Africa and

our university, as a turning point – a detour from the rather lacklustre and complacent “business-as-usual” approach of which we have *all* been culpable. Unexpectedly, our universities have been thrust into intense contestations around employment, insourcing and other social issues, including rape, exclusion, inequality, racism, corruption and poverty eradication, and our country is wrestling with similar challenges; all of this during an election year. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soweto Uprising is fresh in our memory and there are features of that protest which are both similar and different in the current climate of social change. They are similar in the sense that student leadership has always been a strong feature of change in universities, but they are also different because post-apartheid South Africa should have achieved greater equality for its people. This social deficit underlies much of the protest we experience.

Vice-chancellors have been drawn into the centre of labour and economic transformation, even as they have to deal with their main mission, which is academic change. Universities are expected to take the lead in areas that have in the past been the responsibility of government departments. This represents a huge challenge for the higher education sector because our shrinking budgets are being stretched to the limit as a result of massive demands that are made on universities. These stresses and strains have been compounded by legitimate protests by students in respect of access, funding and academic support and success. They have also critiqued the relevance of many university curricula, which they argue, do not speak to the urgent development needs of our country and Continent, nor our cultural identities as Africans.

I have already committed to addressing these burning issues directly, but they will need the wisdom of the entire Unisa community, from the National SRC to Council and the Unions, but especially from Senate, bearing in mind that ultimately, our core task as a university is the academic project, which includes teaching and learning, research and innovation, and community engagement and responsible citizenship. Leading change for me means leading change with academics because students and workers look to us to be involved in making a better future, and bringing new ideas and solutions to that future.

Colleagues, what I have realised as I have mulled over these complex issues and how to tackle them, is that it is not that there is an unwillingness or receptiveness to change, but rather that our approach has perhaps been reactive, fragmented and sometimes lacking in coherence, integration, communication and focus, thus making it difficult to generate the kind of transformative momentum that is so crucial for success. This has meant that a number of really excellent projects have been launched in isolation and have therefore not achieved the acknowledgement or cumulative impact that they deserve. So, leading change is about thinking of Unisa as a whole.

That is precisely what we intend doing with the Leading Change initiative which we are launching this morning. Leading Change aims to ensure institution-wide convergence and coherence among all of our change and transformation initiatives, be they academic,

operational or systemic in nature, so that they all form part of, and contribute to, Unisa's DNA. In that process, colleagues, I believe that we will all begin to understand and appreciate, through our active participation, that Unisa is a university that is the sum of its parts, and that our capacity to achieve excellence in all spheres, is limited only by the bounds of our collective imagination and our will to pull together.

The leading Change project rests on five pillars, which cover the transformative drivers such as discourse for change, ethical leadership, rethinking systems, changing culture and African scholarship.

### **1. The first pillar is *transforming scholarship***

This first pillar on transforming scholarship is broadly about four pertinent issues: It is about *changing the very idea of the university*; secondly, it is about *epistemological decolonization*; thirdly, it's about *curriculum transformation*; and finally, it's about *pedagogical change*.

*Changing the very idea of the university* is a long-standing decolonial demand that dates back to the times of Edward Wilmot Blyden in Sierra Leone in the 1830s, who advocated an indigenous African university emerging from African historical, cultural and intellectual soil, rather than a (Eurocentric) university in Africa. This decolonial demand for an 'African university' was articulated as a process of Africanisation within the broader decolonial agenda in its opposition to European imperialism.

The attainment of political independence was not, however, accompanied by a serious commitment to scholarly independence beyond the cosmetic change of the name of universities and giving them vernacular-sounding ones. Genuine transformation, we know, is about more than the appointment of black university Vice-Chancellors, or increasing the number of black academics and students and adding the work of African scholars to an old curriculum.

This shallow form of Africanisation assumed a mainly reformist character that did not touch the idea of the university and the Eurocentric and Northern foundations of knowledge and curriculum in South African institutions of higher learning. Consequently, the agenda of changing the conceptualisation of the university has remained *unfinished business* in the democratic project across Africa and beyond. We are now dealing with that unfinished business, which has powerfully manifested itself in the *#Must Fall Movements* that have shaken us out of our complacency, ensuring that rethinking the university has become an immediate challenge across South Africa, and even in other countries.

Today, the question of 'cognitive justice' for a people whose very humanity has been questioned, whose rationality has been denied, whose histories have been silenced, and whose knowledges and languages have been relegated, has become a loud and legitimate demand.

The challenge is: How do we respond to this demand as a university?

The *transforming scholarship pillar* is multi-faceted and entails the following:

- Recognition of the fact that all human beings are born into a valid and legitimate knowledge system;
- Taking cognitive justice issues seriously through re-grounding and re-contextualising the university within African historical, cultural and intellectual realities;
- Changing the mission and identity of the university to reflect its African location, without in any way losing its universality;
- Promotion of Africa-centredness in research and publications as part of transforming scholarship;
- Addressing the problems of language imperialism through the systematic introduction of African indigenous knowledge systems, the official use of African languages and an infusion of African thought into all the academic and intellectual endeavours of the university;
- Rethinking the curriculum through a careful and systematic critique of Northern epistemic dominance and opening up ecologies of knowledge that reflect the local, African and Global South perspectives;
- Democratising how we teach, through negotiated, conversational, and dialogical forms that take on-board other forms of teaching and learning, including those indigenous to Africa, and which listen and hear African student voices, and also use an African archive;
- Opening up scholarship rather than stultifying it in received forms.

My hope is that once all these changes have been made, UNISA will be a truly proud African university, shaping futures in the service of humanity. We will also have carved out a niche for Unisa in African scholarship which will be our competitive advantage in the grand scheme of higher education.

## **2. The second pillar of leading change is *changing culture***

This pillar is about creating UNISA as a 'home' for all in their diversity. It is about making UNISA an equitable, transformed and inclusive university that values all of humanity. This preferred culture cannot be different from the diverse culture or climate described in the Constitution of our country and which is enshrined in the Bill of Rights.

In order to achieve this, there is need for UNISA to understand the current or the 'perceived' culture as described by its many constituencies, as well as what they would prefer the UNISA culture to be in future. This knowledge should assist us in crafting a strategy to address the gap between how our various audiences perceive UNISA currently, and what they would like to see in future. This new UNISA should exhibit African values of *Ubuntu/botho*, community and solidarity, which reside at the heart of our Transformation Charter. Changing culture therefore involves living out a set of values, which still include

social justice, fairness and excellence with integrity, but which have been broadened and updated in the 2016–2030 Strategy, to include:

- Collective responsibility
- Integrity
- Innovation and excellence
- Responsive student-centredness
- Dignity in diversity

The process of embedding these values should permeate all dimensions of the university, such as the attraction, recruitment and retention of staff, the admission and socialisation of students, teaching and learning, knowledge production, governance, leadership, funding and budgeting, as well as managing infrastructure. Unless these dimensions are imbued with African values, the likelihood of changing the culture of UNISA will be small, and only symbolic.

For us, change is about ethical conduct and good governance. Peter Drucker, the so-called ‘inventor of modern management’ famously asserted: “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” And it *is* true colleagues, that people are more loyal to an institution’s culture than they are to its strategy. Strategy changes, but a strong culture endures, deepens, and forms the resilient bedrock of a vibrant and successful university. It becomes synonymous with the institutional brand and reputation and provides a level of risk mitigation that cannot be achieved by strategy alone. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, for good or bad. A complacent culture, or a poorly functioning culture, poses the danger of blinding the institution to external threats – we have been made painfully aware of that! So let us ensure that we create an inclusive, positive, collaborative culture at Unisa.

### **3. The third pillar of leading change is *rethinking systems*.**

This means being in control of systems that support the academic project rather than being imprisoned in a technological web. Making technology accessible and understandable, subservient to, and in the service of, the intellectual enterprise of the university is very important for linking learning and research with systems. We are dramatically rethinking the way we teach and learn in light of online education and blended learning, which keeps Unisa at the forefront of Distance Education.

Our Open Distance and e-Learning model will be based on the fact that we are about ‘teaching students’ and producing and disseminating knowledge. First, our students, in their various settings and from diverse backgrounds, will be our point of departure. Secondly, the nature of the knowledge, and the differences in the disciplines that we teach, will inform and affect what, how, and why we teach. Thirdly, we believe strongly that digital literacy forms an integral part of the graduateness of students. The library has a major role to play in

helping to create access to resources through virtual services. Consequently, an online library is a key distribution channel at Unisa.

Unisa will follow a blended approach as a pedagogically sound approach to promoting ODeL. The *e-* in ODeL will mean increased use of ICTs, but not a wholesale e-learning approach for all courses at all levels in all Colleges. There will be no 'one-size fits-all' and flexibility and variation, both in terms of substance and pace between disciplines, will be our approach.

Our vision and strategy is to establish Unisa as an African Open Distance and e-Learning university leading the world using all the technologies available *in integrated ways*, so that technology is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Much research is emerging globally that is challenging our original thoughts on the role of technology which needs to be thoughtfully considered and compared, as we chart our path into the future, bearing in mind that we have made commitments in our strategy.

Changing systems is also about providing superior service to students. Systemic change is about efficiency, support and student-centredness. Systems are, of course, part of how admission happens, from applications to registrations, and about how curriculum is delivered. It is also about our workflows and efficiencies in everything we do. Leading change in systems in Distance Education is naturally a priority and that is why it has received such prominence in the UNISA 2030 Strategic Plan.

When we talk about systems, it should also be clear that we are not simply dealing with platforms, programmes, software and pedagogy. We are also thinking about the linkages between Human Resources, Finance, Management and the academic project. How do we make things work for teaching, research and community engagement? This means that systems need to support our vision, mission, strategy and plans. This has a bearing on the *Mvusuludzo* Project, for example, which is an exploratory exercise to make the best use of our rich resources in human capital to achieve the aims and objectives of a leading African Open Distance and e-Learning university. Its intention is to optimise our skills and capacities to realise our 2030 Vision. I am concerned that this attempt to align staffing with our vision is being misconstrued as a restructuring instrument to threaten people's employment. In leading change, I want to emphasise that we will be doing this together, so the participation in the *Mvusuludzo* Project is part of our journey to finding a better way of working. It is not an instrument to terminate employment. This has to be clearly understood. Let us accept that in imagining a brighter future for UNISA we will naturally be changing things. Such change does not translate into retrenchment and unemployment. How could that be a brighter future?

#### **4. The fourth pillar is *asserting ethical, transformative, participative and intellectual leadership***

*Leading change* in higher education is very important for Unisa because we produce most of South Africa's graduates. By the end of 2016, we will have sent more than 40 000 Unisa graduates into the economy. That is an extraordinary contribution. But I also want to argue that changing leadership is equally important because there seems to be a lack of authentic, credible, transformational and decisive leadership based on inclusiveness and participation. Over and above this, there is a need for intellectual leadership that is ethical in order to address developmental challenges faced by South Africa, the continent and the world. I have invested heavily in cultivating ethical policies and practice in the university. In fact, this has been a key feature of my tenure as Principal and Vice Chancellor and I feel quite vindicated to note that increasingly, one is witnessing a growing and vocal emphasis on the importance of ensuring effective and efficient governance in both the public and private sectors. The list of nominations for the position of Public Protector provides evidence of the acknowledgement. Ethical leadership and governance is, without a doubt, a global and national higher education imperative.

I believe, however, that ethics are intrinsic to academic disciplines as well as management, and ethical leadership is not only about good governance and service delivery, but also about academic integrity. Ethical leadership means living the values we have set out in our vision and mission declaration. Our leadership needs to exemplify the values of collective responsibility, integrity, excellence, responsive student-centredness, and dignity in diversity. Much of that will be evidenced in how we manage our intellectual, human and material resources in the current environment which is plagued by scarcity.

The ethics of respect are *also* essential to build healthy relations with students and staff. So much is written about leadership, but we see too little of it in action. My quest is that it becomes a feature of Unisa at all levels. Generally, we tend to leave leadership to executive management, but it is my view that we need to cultivate and nurture leadership at all levels of our institution. In this way, we will naturally improve leadership and management across the university. But it requires new paradigms, new thinking and new approaches to leadership. What I am keen to promote is participative leadership, which is inclusive and consultative, and which allows staff and students to take the lead. Leadership is not only the prerogative of management. It needs to permeate the whole university – at course level, at departmental and college level, on committees, in assessment practices, in curriculum transformation, at Senate level and across the entire institution.

**5. The fifth pillar in leading change is *focusing on consultation and communication and developing a change discourse***

Effective change depends on a clear message and a sense of urgency. Moreover, it requires engagement and ownership, driven by a heartfelt belief and passion to deliver excellently on all aspects of our multi-faceted tasks. Nothing beats good, honest communication, and lots of it, and consultation is naturally a hugely important part of communication, especially in universities. The core work of a university is teaching, research and community engagement, each of which is essentially about consultation and communication, even contestation, but that must happen with a very clear appreciation of the fact that we are growing and graduating students who deserve to emerge from our university well-equipped for whatever future they may embark upon.

The truth is that this is particularly pertinent in the ODeL context. Academics need professional and administrative staff in order to deliver quality service to students, and to do so they need to work together, with mutual appreciation and respect of, and for, one another, and the common goal that we are all pursuing. To do this we have to ensure regular consultation and collegial communication. Our relationships, colleagues, depend on collaboration, which comes from open and frank discussion, consultation and ultimately, agreed strategies. Communication also has to happen with a much wider audience than the university. It must span various sectors and stakeholders, including government, corporate interests, partners and collaborators, to build our reputation.

Most of all, we have to raise our academic voice in society to influence policy development and statecraft. To that end, we need to re-energise the intellectual power of the university. I have recently read a set of essays by Bruce Macfarlane on intellectual leadership in higher education which calls for a renewal of the role of the university professor. It has left a profound impression on me. Our professors should be sharing their knowledge and understanding of the forces at play as we fulfil our charge as academics. We need to recover our intellectual influence so that ideas have currency again, and analysis and research are properly valued. Consultation and communication are fundamental to the creating and sustaining a collegial environment and the free flow of information. Academic freedom thrives when consultation and communication are built into what we teach, how we teach it, and how it is applied for the benefit of society. Academic freedom is also linked to accountability and responsiveness. In fact, I am convinced that the combined intellectual capacity of this university could be harnessed to dynamic effect. I believe that we have underestimated the knowledge capital we have, and we have relinquished far too much of it to other parties and interests. Students are to be applauded for claiming their space. Academics need to do the same.

Colleagues, genuine change will entail structural transformation. You will understand the need, then, as key transformation agents in the higher education sector, for your voices to be heard and to shape the changes that will be implemented in bringing about transformation, not only in line with objectives set by our Minister, but in the interests of academic justice. Communicating ideas is one part of our work; listening to communities and students is the other part.

Communication is wider than speaking or writing; it is about symbols, monuments and images. The recent protests in higher education show that unless we change scholarship, culture, systems, leadership and communication, universities will lose their credibility and relevance.

So you will understand when I say that I want to lead change to keep Unisa dynamic for future decades, keeping it true to its national and international legacy since 1873.

## **CONCLUSION**

Colleagues, some people are uncomfortable with change, which most psychologists put down to a fear of the unknown. But change can also be, and indeed it should be, energising, exciting and extremely satisfying and productive because it enables us to rediscover our sense of adventure, inspiration and purpose!

Let me end where I began – with the ‘big picture’. I don’t think of myself as a political commentator, but as you all know, I have always respected social analysis, so I have to remind myself and Unisa that inequality and the contest for ownership of knowledge and the economy now begs our immediate attention. We can’t ignore the loud claims of students. The political formations on campus have alerted us to the serious threats to democracy if we don’t lead change. The methods have sometimes been rough and ready, even involving vandalism, but the intractable issues still have to be faced. No-one is more conscious of the massive inequality of opportunity that is the legacy of apartheid than I am. I have once again been reminded of the big divide during the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my alma mater, Fort Hare University. As well commemorate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Soweto Uprising, we need to acknowledge the educational injustices that have dogged all our attempts to set up a fairer system. It is, however, one of the privileges of the academy that we have the chance and the knowledge to recover a leading role in how democracy matures. We should grasp the opportunity.

We should be pleased that students and activist academics are drawing on the wisdom of African theorists and diasporan thinkers to advocate epistemic justice. In this way, a mobilised academia is strategically linked to the big intellectual project to re-think the idea

of the university. If we listen to radical thinkers, they advocate the idea of a 'multiversity', because it widens the compass of knowledge, encourages philosophical competition, fosters inclusiveness, promotes debate, and advocates anti-racism, so that we can flourish.

Of course, what we are proposing with our 'Leading Change' project is not all new. We are already engaged in a number of initiatives that deal directly with the challenges I have mentioned, and many of you remember much earlier interventions. What is different, I think, is that our efforts should be co-ordinated and integrated for maximum benefit and impact, to ensure that genuine change remains at the centre of our transformation as a 21<sup>st</sup> century African university. Transformation is a work in progress. It is our collective journey. We all have to lead it.

We cannot continue to rest on our illustrious history and legacy. We have to start adding to and building on that reputation in a way that ensures that it not only endures, but that it 'defines tomorrow' for Unisa and her graduates. What I personally find so exciting is that I am very privileged to be a leader in a great university at a turning point in history, and that I have to honour to make a contribution, which if realised, will contribute positively to the lives of future generations and to the growth and development of South Africa. I invite you to commit with me, to make a difference as we lead the change towards an African university known for its quality as well as its equality.

Let's change together.