



*The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor*

**PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**WELCOME AND OPENING: HRCoC WORKSHOP**

**TvW 10-24 Kopanong**

**22 February 2016**

- Our Chairperson of the HRCoC, Ms NV Mokoka and other Council members in attendance
- Colleagues

Welcome to this important workshop which aims to ensure that this most crucial institutional Department of Human Resources has the appropriate and necessary strategy, structures, plans and processes in

place to fulfil its vision: *To be recognized as effective, efficient and professional department that enables the University and its employees to thrive.*

During the Academic opening address last Monday I spoke of the need for the university to focus on its core mandated business of teaching, learning, research and innovation and community engagement. However, in order for us to do so we need to ensure that we have in place the systems and processes that will facilitate that in a seamless and integrated way. What many people at Unisa don't realise – or perhaps won't accept - is that Unisa is fundamentally very different from its sister institutions in South Africa. The National Plan for Higher Education (2001) proclaimed Unisa as a dedicated distance education institution, which has a different delivery model and different funding structure from the other universities in our country. Our teaching model dictates that our structures, systems and processes are as important as pedagogy because put very simply, there can be no teaching without a facilitating structure. We have been bearing the brunt of the dissonance between the two for many years now, and underlying much of it, is a lingering sense that those in the admin domain are “just support;” they are there to serve our academics, or to impose impossible demands around templates, deadlines, regulatory compliance and so on, while on the other hand admin staff complain

that academics have little appreciation of the complexity and integratedness of the systems that drive the academic project and indeed, the university, and often treat deadlines (for example) too lightly, which results in delays and service delivery failures.

Colleagues we simply cannot afford to feed those misconceptions at Unisa. The truth is that our teaching model is based on well-functioning and effective systems and processes. So too is the efficient administration of Unisa. *All of those* need to be fully integrated and to function optimally if we are to realise our vision for Unisa (and its staff and students,) to *thrive*.

It is my view that Human Resources is the *Linchpin* around which all activities at Unisa revolve. HR is not merely a cog in the great machine that is Unisa: let me repeat, HR is the *Linchpin*. And in case some of us did not know, the “linchpin” means something, or someone, that holds the various elements of a complicated structure together.” I think you get my meaning. HR straddles both the academic and admin domains and its focus on people *and* processes ensures that it is deeply enmeshed in every aspect of the university and its operations, in a very powerful and unique manner. Perhaps the most simple example one can use, is the impact that is felt by an individual, the department, the

student, and ultimately the university strategy, when a contract is delayed.

It is therefore critical that HR should, as the saying goes: *“Have all of its ducks in a row.”* I note that the

following guiding principles underline the HR strategy:

- Alignment with the mission of the university;
- Fosters an environment that allows colleges, departments and organizational units to lead and aspire towards excellence;
- Supports the recruitment and retention of high-caliber academic and professional and support staff;
- Complies with all applicable laws, regulations and policies;
- Employs best practices and leads in innovation and quality;
- Promotes fairness and equity;
- Fosters diversity and inclusion;
- Demonstrates fiscal responsibility and resource stewardship; and,
- Promotes ethical behavior in the community.

It always bothers me colleagues that there seems to be a tendency to ignore *“People”* when we craft our guiding principles. And when I say people, I don’t mean *“numbers”* who can be measured in terms of

attendance at developmental courses, or talent management or the IPMS for example. That is but one aspect of “People” – their development. I speak here of the very essence of Ubuntu/Botho: the ethos and practice of fundamental humanity that involves caring, consideration, encouragement and support, - of one another and of our students - beyond the realm of the HR department.

In my view HR has a crucial role to play in effective communication at Unisa, which again, extends beyond the traditional communiqués to also embrace face-to-face, telephonic and personal email engagement. It is probable that the majority of people who engage with HR are worried, anxious, angry or upset. What I would like to see in your strategy then, is a communication model that takes cognizance of HR’s human/people-focused role in the institution and the power that it has to contribute to ensuring a safe and nurturing space for all Unisans. In my view, failure to realise that “people” mean so much more than mere numbers, will continue to impede in a very negative way, the efficacy of HR at Unisa, not to mention our institution’s transformation agenda. I have noted that your values of *Respect, Courtesy and Fairness* touch on this aspect but one would like to see that broadened, formalized and articulated more meaningfully.

In conclusion Chairperson and colleagues, Unisa is going through tough times. We have seen a significant increase in meetings and various other demands on our time and our capacity. My request to us all is that we use this time professionally, constructively and efficiently, so that we do not end up in an endless cycle of revisiting, amendments and delays. Unisa has planning and implementation cycles that are integrated and aligned with the institutional meeting schedules and planning rhythms, as well as regulatory reporting timelines, and incessant delays can be costly in terms of finances, implementation and institutional efficiency.

I wish you well with your workshop and I look forward to great things from Unisa's HR as we move into the 2016 – 2020 strategic period.

I thank you.