



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MS MAKHANYA, PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PRINCIPAL'S SUMMIT

MUCKLENEUK CAMPUS

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**UNPACKING THE 'LEADING CHANGE' AGENDA AND WHAT IT
MEANS FOR MANAGERS**

Welcome to the Principal's Summit.

Colleagues, change doesn't happen in a vacuum. And if we are honest, it is seldom managed or led, especially in an integrated way. Nevertheless, our 'Leading Change' campaign rests on five pillars, which are informed by the Transformation Charter and the academic project, as our core function in the university.

To be able to do this, we now have a 'business model' or 'organisational model', if you prefer, which includes our mode of delivery. Ultimately, it's all about the sustainability of Unisa and its future.

TRANSFORMATION

I am sure that all of us agree that *transformation* is at the core of our change discourse and strategy at Unisa. This is not new. Transformation was the impetus for the Higher Education Act of 1997. It has been an essential part of our agenda for nearly two decades, so 'Leading Change' is simply the latest and most urgent phase in a long

procession of strategies to realise our vision of an African university.

We live with global uncertainties on a big scale. Not just Brexit and the end of empire, or the war in Syria, or exiting presidents and prime ministers, 'Black lives matter', or rising 'Trumpisms', not to mention the current #RhodesMustfall, #FeesMustFall and #OutsourcingMustFall movements at home.

This global and national volatility has resulted in reactive and crisis management. Fortunately, however, the Change Management Unit in my portfolio is in place, which has helped us adopt a less reactive, and a higher-level and strategic approach to imagine a more sustainable future.

I have worked with the Unit to give coherence to the change agenda by highlighting five main pillars: African scholarship; changing institutional culture; rethinking

systems; promoting inclusive and ethical leadership; and adopting a transformational discourse.

I have also recently given some flesh to the bones of *transforming scholarship* to properly situate research and curriculum in African contexts, drawing on African philosophies, science and knowledges to broaden our intellectual repertoire.

The idea of Africa-centred scholarship is to open up received Northern or Western canons to an engagement with indigenous ways of knowing. I have written about this in articles and the media, and I have spoken about this in speeches and in meetings, but it bears repeating.

Transformation means *broadening* scholarship. As Achille Mbembe at Wits has reminded us, 'decolonizing knowledge is... not simply about de-Westernization', and he goes on to quote Ngugi wa Thiongo, who argued that it means developing a perspective which allows us to see ourselves

clearly, but always in relation to our *other selves* in the universe, including all creatures.

This transnational engagement gives us our competitive intellectual advantage. Africa is, after all, also global. The tendency to set up a binary between Africanisation and globalisation limits our ability to influence scholarship. If you think about it, it is also intellectually dishonest.

THE ACADEMIC PROJECT

In unpacking the 'Change Agenda', which is the intention of the Principal's Summit this year, I am re-iterating that the academic project must be at the centre of Unisa, in line with our 2030 vision and strategic goals. But it has to be a *transformed* academic project. Everything else should promote and sustain it.

In truth, this is the basis of any university's sustainability and it has to be the main thrust of our transformative agenda. It should become the mantra of our senior and middle managers. It must be our guiding vision. We must

take this as our collective responsibility, no matter which portfolio we are in, or what position we hold.

For me, we re-think the 'idea of the university' with our feet firmly in Africa, our minds on African ingenuity and innovation, and our hearts on *humanity*. Our vantage point gives us different insights, allows for creative interactions among knowledges, and produces *influential scholarship*, as our Academic Plan puts it.

The *idea* of the university has to be different, it has to signify connection with our society and co-create solutions with community. Its location cannot be far-off Europe or America; it has to be closer to home, and we need to *feel* at home, if our academic project is to be inspiring for a new generation.

But in Unisa's particular context, the academic project is also about open, distance and e-learning pedagogy, which speaks to *how* we do things, *what* systems we devise and

maintain, *how* the curriculum is conceived and delivered, and what technologies we employ.

Transformation is therefore about our teaching modes, as well as our Africa-centred perspectives.

THE BUSINESS MODEL

This received major impetus when at our last Senex meeting we approved Unisa's 'business model', which will facilitate our journey to 2020 and 2030, and that will move thoughtfully towards greater online engagement, relying much less on older print and basic digital modalities.

We will incrementally adopt a 'navigationist' approach to knowledge, in place of uncritical rote learning, because of the benefits of virtual environments. Electronic platforms and increasingly sophisticated digital fluency are therefore part of our change agenda in both the short- and long-term.

Mr Geoffrey Letsoalo, our Vice Principal: ICT/Chief Information Officer is developing an ICT Plan with Professor Chris Swanepoel (who has been recently appointed to handle the SITS and other related projects in the Registrar's Office) and the Registrar, Prof Gordon Zide, to ensure the viability of the SITS platform and its wider application in admissions, registration, assessment and graduation administration, as well as enhance its capacity to track student performance to completion, and provide big data to improve Unisa analytics.

The intimate link between technology and administrative efficiency is extremely important in improving Unisa's systems and addresses a key pillar of the 'Leading Change' agenda, especially in laying the foundation of a broad learning platform for our future ODeL ambitions to offer interactive learning and promote digital literacy.

I believe that if we read the 'business model' with the Academic Plan, we have a winning formula for

transformation. The 'value proposition' in the approved business model captures Unisa's academic and administrative essence.

It states that 'Unisa will be a comprehensive Africa-focused and Africa-centred, globally competitive university, offering under-graduate and postgraduate programmes and research in various defined niche areas, which will be informed by national development and transformational needs, and the principles of knowledge creation, gradueness and employability, and that will be delivered primarily via cutting-edge open, distance learning opportunities, leading to accredited qualifications.'

Colleagues, The Executive Deans could not have crafted a clearer *what* and *how* of change. In support of the business model, they have deftly explained the delivery model as a 'blended approach'. They declare that *'[t]he e- in ODeL will mean an increased use of the capacity of ICTs, but not a*

wholesale e-learning approach for all courses at all levels in all colleges.'

To quote again from the document, 'There will be no one-size-fits-all formula, and flexibility and variation, both in terms of substance and pace between disciplines, will be possible.'

The academic project is therefore ultimately about transformation through Africa-centred scholarship and pedagogical innovation, positive relationships with students, staff, external stakeholders and various publics, for a *sustainable* future. All this is in harmony with our heritage of distance education, but is dynamically responsive to contemporary social, economic and intellectual forces, and open to innovation. But none of this will be possible if Unisa is not sustainable.

SUSTAINABILITY

As you know, there is a growing literature on *sustainability* and higher education which is moving from advocacy in the ecological space, for example, our commitment to the UNGC principles and annual report, to a more integrated and holistic conceptualisation of sustainability.

Since the #MustFall movements, we have shifted our focus urgently to financial sustainability. At Senex last week, Mr Phumlani Zwane, our CFO, re-emphasised Unisa's fiduciary responsibility in the face of insourcing and the call for free education. He warned of shrinking revenues from student and state sources and rising expenditures on human resources and technological developments, not to mention our infrastructural obligations at the big campuses as well as the regions.

Up to now, we have been looking at sustainability from a challenge- driven perspective. We have been *doing* sustainability, but we need to embrace a longer-term view, which is about *being* sustainable. I am reminded of William

Scott's distinction between *doing* sustainability and *being* sustainable.

Change, in the short term, is *doing* sustainability; stabilising our ICT environment; getting our finances sorted; and anticipating budget cuts under the new post-school funding model, based on performance and graduate success. In addition, we have to deal creatively and pragmatically with the demands of labour, which are making massive claims on Unisa's reserves.

If we come up with practical, implementable solutions – the so-called 'quick wins', we will give momentum to transformation. This requires belt-tightening, reconsidering our priorities, exploring third-stream income, and supporting proposals to increase public funding.

In the longer term, colleagues, I can tell you that *Universities South Africa* has sent proposals to the Fees Commission of the Presidential Inquiry into Higher

Education, which present two models for fee-free university education. The first one relies on government subsidies construed as public funding, and the second on advocating a graduate tax to generate private funding. Whatever the outcome, there is no doubt that Unisa will have to change its financial planning and re-imagine how to attract and allocate already over-stretched resources.

'How' we lead change – in other words, *doing* sustainability, is, in the immediate term, about the insourcing contract workers. It is also about cutting our spending to employ more people even when we are already spending too much on salaries.

Perhaps as important, therefore, is the realignment of our human capital to the academic project through the *Mvusuludzo* Project, which is currently underway. Doubtless you have already been interviewed for the 'as is' report in the first phase.

***Mvusuludzo* needs all managers to participate fully in a comprehensive review of the administrative, professional and other support sectors of the university. KPMG has been commissioned to design a more efficient organisational configuration to better achieve the 2020 strategic objectives. The way we lead and manage this process is extremely critical in a time of social turbulence and job insecurity.**

We also lead change through the ‘business model’, which can help us to concentrate on the key resources and processes. In the end, however, it will be up to us to persuade staff to embrace dramatic organisational change. This is why the second pillar of ‘Leading Change’ focuses on creating a culture at Unisa that is conducive to new challenges, skills transfer and institutional reform, in a spirit of negotiation and co-operation.

This brings me to my final point: we need to shift to *being* sustainable – to functioning in an integrated and coherent

manner, as a *whole* institution, and not as a fragmented university. Such a developmental journey must be deliberate, and leadership will have to be shared, which is another crucial pillar of the 'Leading Change' agenda. Divisiveness will make us fail.

Our students and staff also have to be drawn into the transformation process through decisive leadership. In the noise of protest, we need to hear the *legitimate* pleas of *all* of our students, and not only of the most vocal. *All* students have to feature as the beneficiaries of transformation. So their participative and co-operative leadership is vital.

But in sharing that leadership, we have to be secure in our commitment to the academic plan and business model, which will help us to achieve the grand targets of our strategic and operational plan. And we must keep talking about them.

This is why I have been concentrating on the institution-wide conceptual framing of the ‘Leading Change’ campaign. It can work if we all decide to promote Unisa.

We have to think about Unisa *as a whole*. Competitiveness and hierarchies are serious obstacles to transformation. We need to shift to coherence, convergence and collaboration. We should consider the benefits of flattening our management hierarchy to devolve authority to where it belongs, and to adopt a system of self-regulation and clear role assignment, which moves beyond job descriptions to include personal initiative and defining leadership in terms of a role rather than a position. This is the best way to *be* sustainable into the future.

***Being* sustainable is therefore a longer-term transformative vision. Consequently, we aim to *be* ‘the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity’ through systemic ecological and relational thinking.**

But the focus should not just be on the reduction of energy or the use of resources, which we report annually in the UNGC report. Nor should it only be on social exclusion and racism – as urgent as they are in South Africa after apartheid.

What we set out to do should, more than anything else, be *restorative* in that it contributes to raising social, cultural and natural capital. Restoration is much deeper than conservation. It draws on all our reserves: intellectual, temporal, human, existential and spiritual.

This is ‘restorative justice’ to match the ‘epistemic justice’ that we currently write about in the debates about ‘decolonising’ the university, but which we also need to *live out* as ethical leaders.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

The Change Management Unit is part of my portfolio. It is meant to be a strategic nerve-centre in the transformation

project. It has already responded to Unisa Council's *Respositioning and Decolonising Unisa* conceptual paper and report, based on interviews with senior managers across the university at the end of 2015 and the beginning of this year. Prof Muxe Nkondo chaired the interview panel, and some of the staff in the Change Unit were included.

The Unit is led by Prof Greg Cuthbertson, who will respond to my address, ably supported by Prof Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni, a leading scholar in decoloniality studies, who heads up the directorate on the transformation of scholarship and curriculum reform, and Dr Malekutu Bopape, whose experience of multilingualism and progressive human-resource management make him an ideal candidate to lead the culture change agenda.

The systems and ICT directorate will soon have a seconded manager to replace Prof Sheryl Buckley, who has taken up a Dean's position abroad. Executive Management also agreed that a seconded position be established to promote

transformative and inclusive leadership as a specialisation to increase the operational capacity of the Change Management Unit.

The Unit is a strategic project with a life of two-and-a-half years until the end of 2018. In the spirit of austerity, it has very lean administrative support in the form of one administrative officer.

The strategic plan of the Unit has already set in motion an ambitious plan for transformation, and I am pleased to report that its close alignment with what I have set out in the 'Leading Change' agenda gives me confidence that it will interact collegially with all senior and middle managers, as well as staff at other levels, and students, to achieve the best outcome for Unisa.

I have already benefited from its insights, projections and advice. I commend it to you as a collaborative agency of transformation that has developed an online database of

scholarship on change in higher education, via the Mendeley platform, to provide thoughtful, evidence-based academic leadership.

When I launched the change online portal, I invited open discussion with members of the academic, alumni and student communities to imagine a transformed university. This has elicited a very positive conversation as colleagues have shared ideas about how we can project the Florida/Science campus, among other prospects.

I would really like to keep this positive approach to ‘Leading Change’ as we work together. I naturally respond to such innovation more readily than to the political rhetorics which serve narrow party-political interests when we have a community of over 300 000 students and a million graduates.

I therefore appeal to senior and extended management to work with me to continue transform Unisa. Join me on the journey.

Professor Mandla Makhanya

Principal and Vice-Chancellor

University of South Africa

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