



The Office Of The Principal and Vice - Chancellor

PROF MANDLA MAKHANYA

PRINCIPAL AND VICE CHANCELLOR: UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

**WELCOME AND OPENING ADDRESS: UNISA EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP
WORKSHOP**

VELMORE HOTEL AND SPA

ERASMIA, CENTURION

17 – 18 JANUARY 2019

- Programme Directors: Prof Itumeleng Mosala and Mr Billy Selekane
- Colleagues in Executive Leadership

A very warm welcome to you all.

Allow me to start off by wishing you a healthy, productive and successful 2019. I trust that this workshop will lay the critically important platform

for the kind of cohesion, teamwork and leadership that will be required to steer our unique university into its full potential as a university of excellence, efficiency and service to our country and continent.

There is a beautiful song, deemed to be one of the 20 best songs of all time, written and composed by Curtis Mayfield, which articulates a growing sense of social and political awareness, the pressing need for change and the imperative for community and collaboration (rather than individual aspiration), when it comes to driving transformation. You may know it. It is called - *People Get Ready* (...there's a train a-coming). In fact, Martin Luther King Jr. named "People Get Ready" the unofficial anthem of the Civil Rights movement. Many of you I am sure, will know it well. Today I want to say to you: "People get ready."¹

Colleagues, our world is in disarray. Economies are in turmoil. There is a growing likelihood of more government coalitions, which seems to be creating even more division and disarray in the so-called "West." Our beloved neighbor is struggling to engender some kind of lasting stability and sustainability for its citizens, and further afield in Africa, in yet another example, our Kenyan brothers and sisters continue to deal with the devastation of yet another attack on its people. A new kind of

¹ Seal. People Get Ready. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLQ2joJ_BrI

nationalism is emerging that borders on fascism some say, and the shocking poverty gap between the rich and poor is driving increasing discontent, anger and agitation. I read an article earlier on this week which indicated that 24 African countries - nearly half of the continent - will be holding elections this year, (although I think that number is not entirely accurate). We too are gearing up for the next general election and bracing ourselves for the inevitable dynamics that accompany that. We are in a multifaceted state of flux.

Two key insights emerge from these trends. Firstly, *the future, our future*, is opaque, with the only certainty being that there will be ongoing, disruptive, epoch-making change for the foreseeable future. This is a reality both globally and nationally. Secondly, those who are prepared will prevail. Those who are not, will fail - and be left behind as part of the detritus which characterizes state, institutional and ultimately, civilizations' declines into obscurity and ultimately, irrelevance. So I would suggest colleagues, that if we, as the largest university on the Continent, and the most influential in the sector intend to prevail and ensure our sustainability for generations to come, we must make sure that we have put in place the necessary foundation.

Part of that preparation is of course understanding our context, strategizing intelligently and proactively and with vision and foresight,

measuring risks, mitigating risks, practicing financial probity and above all, acquiring appropriate Human Resources, including the skills and competency sets that will ensure the effective operationalization of all of the above.

But none of that will happen without intelligent and effective management and a unified leadership. And it is the striving for a unified leadership, which will comprise much of the work over the next two days.

Colleagues, our executive leadership is virtually all new. Most of the VP positions have been filled over the past year. Some of you have never worked in higher education before. What that means is that you have arrived with no institutional memory, or in-depth knowledge of the sector or our regulatory environment. I can say however, that you are catching up very fast! While that poses some challenges, in my view it offers far more exciting positives. I say this because in my view, I can say that we now have in our executive leadership not only high profile scholars, but also a cadre of individuals who are highly knowledgeable and proficient in their respective fields. Each brings to the table knowledge, skills and experience which, successfully harnessed, integrated and implemented, has the potential quite literally, to turn this

institution completely around. This diversity in leadership is something I have been striving for, for a long time.

My intention is for us to pull all of our competencies together and integrate them in a seamless fashion, leaving no gaps that will set any individual portfolio manager apart from the rest of the team. I don't want to see any gaps. I want us, in fact, to reach a state where potential problems can be identified and dealt with immediately, as a normal part of the leadership and management process. Ideally these only need to be brought to my attention after the fact – that is once you have resolved them. You must develop the confidence to do this. If, for example, you are approached by an external entity with specific questions, you must be in a position to answer confidently and knowledgeably even where it does not relate to your own portfolio. That is the kind of integration I refer to. You need to be so united, you need to reach such a level of leadership sophistication, that you are comfortably conversant with not only your portfolio and responsibilities, but also those of your fellow executives.

You will realise colleagues, that this means that there can be no artificial hierarchies. We are all here to serve our students and the outcome for our students will be precisely the same whether the work has been done

by a VP or an administrator. We must therefore move away from the tendency to create silos through our deliberate ownership of knowledge and the accrual of power to elevate ourselves and what we bring to the table, above and out of reach of our peers and those whom we manage. We cannot use our knowledge and position to exclude others in an attempt to stamp our authority and demonstrate our seniority or self-glorification. I know that this has been the case historically, when some people saw themselves as superior or special but let me repeat – when we deliver the product no one is, or should be, aware of those responsible for it.

We have a new team and we have a very comprehensive and impressive array of competencies between us. The very nature of and ODeL University requires the seamless integration and harnessing of our collective competencies. That must now happen as we do the necessary work to ensure that we inculcate the right leadership mindsets and practices to optimize the benefits for Unisa.

Let me conclude by saying that no VP is senior to the other. We lead and manage collectively. That does not mean the buck stops with me once a collective decision has been reached and then you, my dear colleague, are own your own. It means that once we have made that decision I will

walk with you and support you when you are under siege, when you are held accountable and in those joyful times when you excel. In such a paradigm there is no space for gossip, backbiting, “throwing your colleague under the bus”, or sadly, deliberately undermining a colleague. We must automatically be assured that our colleagues *have our backs*, as they say, no matter what, and we must simultaneously commit to having our colleagues’ backs – no matter what. We must at all times and in all circumstances present a united front and resolve our inevitable differences in a collegial and professional manner, but always in the best interests of Unisa.

I want each of us to focus our energies on achieving that cohesive and supportive state over the next two days. It is to our benefit. More pertinently it is to our students’ benefit.

I thank you.