

Building Trust in a Diversified Society: The Essence of Leadership

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Abstract—When leaders inspire people, there is a solid self-confidence, but not one that walls others out. Leaders are about whom they are and can open themselves to others. They are in sync with their inner self through disciplines that keep them honest, knowing, and open. The first and most demanding obligation of a leader is the Socratic injunction to “know thyself.” The accelerating pace of the commercialization of science, technology and academia, together with the diminishing traditional value system has led to the abuse of authority and power of leaders in all spheres of life. It is difficult find a leader that portrays the qualities of leadership in society.

Trust appears to be a primary attribute associated with leadership. Part of the leader’s task has been, and continues to be, working with people to find and solve problems, but whether leaders gain access to the knowledge and creative thinking they need to solve problems depends on how much people trust them. When followers trust a leader, they are willing to be vulnerable to the leader’s actions. Honesty consistently ranks at the top of most people’s list of characteristics they admire in their leaders. In times of change and instability, people turn to personal relationships for guidance, and the quality of these relationships is largely determined by the level of trust. This paper outlines the challenges facing the leadership of South African academia through quantitative and qualitative survey and outlines the qualities that need to be instilled in a diversified society through the restoration of trust.

I. INTRODUCTION

South Africa is a multicultural democracy of approximately 44 million people. Until 1994, the apartheid ideology created a scenario of inferior educational opportunities for people of color. Education was often highlighted through protest action by the disadvantaged population. In particular, the teaching of the Afrikaans language was rejected by generations of secondary students [4].

The African National Congress-led Government faces a challenge to address the existing disparities. Administrative bodies were created to oversee education at every level and to improve the quality of education for previously disadvantaged individuals (PDIs). With the formulation of a unified national Department of Education, the Government merged the 21 universities and 15 Technikons into 23 non-racial, more equitably resourced institutions. The college sector, which includes teacher training institutions and other vocational institutions, has also undergone major restructuring [9].

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper sketches the challenges facing the leadership of South African academia through quantitative and qualitative survey and outlines the qualities that need to be instilled in a diversified society through the restoration of trust. Empirical data was gathered to help the leadership of the institution to understand the challenges, barriers and opportunities in respect of the cultural integration process through an institutional culture survey.

III. THE IMPACT OF MERGING TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The then Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, announced the merger of higher education institutions in November 2002 as part of the restructuring process in higher education. The rationale for the mergers was based on equity, social restructuring, democracy, financial constraints experienced by the historically disadvantaged institutions and education for the masses that would improve the economy of the country [9].

A. Internal impacts

The first and most important impact is on employees (academics and administrative staff) who have been treated in an inferior manner. Discussions with academics revealed that they were of the opinion that the university had totally taken over the Technikon and the morale has diminished to a level of being virtually non-existent. This affects the entire teaching and learning process and service delivery in organizations. Experience of the researcher at Unisa is that valued academics (approximately 60%) left the Department of Economic and Management Sciences of Unisa (previously Technikon SA) to move to the University of Johannesburg and to industry, as well as academics taking early retirement. The university implemented its processes in the Technikon environment with little or no consultation. Programmes are phased out due to a lack of lecturing staff.

Service delivery is a matter of concern in HEIs as they have become much larger to handle and communication through the levels of hierarchy has become difficult. There seems to be an inequitable allocation of work within academic departments, thus causing further frustration [8].

Talent is attracted and retained through appropriate incentives and rewards and this applies aptly to academia. The challenge of attracting and retaining the best academic talent is a national priority [14]. There is grave concern about the working conditions and the issue of salaries of academics

which should be debated nationally and even internationally. It is acknowledged that the remuneration level in academia has not kept pace with other sectors of society. Many academics have migrated to the private sector and sometimes overseas. If this attrition of academics continues, HEIs face another major challenge. Academia needs to reclaim its status as an attractive, esteemed, prestigious and rewarding career so that the best talent can be retained. Leadership needs to understand that academics are the pillars of academia and deserve recognition and rewards in order to be retained in the academic environment, or face the consequence of a lack of academics and the elimination of programmes. This correlates with the decision made by government where teacher training colleges were shut down and the country currently faces a lack of proficient teachers.

B. External impact

Industry is being impacted indirectly by the caliber of students employed in the workplace. This is revealed by the productivity level that South Africa has achieved in the past few years. The official rate of unemployment is approximately 30 percent, increasing to over 60% for youths in their late teens and early twenties. Tertiary education does not seem to be reducing the current crisis [11].

C. Quality of education

The challenge is to improve the quality of education across the entire value chain. It is important to remember that quality stems from the quality of life experienced by individuals, whereby society instills morals, value, ethical conduct, honesty and integrity to name but a few positive characteristics [15]. The implementation of quality principles in the early years of the child and continued in primary, secondary and tertiary education, leads to individuals practicing quality principles throughout their work life. Schools are deprived of resources, facilities and qualified teachers. It is virtually impossible to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and quality in education in these circumstances [16].

IV. EXPERIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

At the beginning of 2008, the University of Johannesburg (UJ, the University) established a Steering Committee to manage a “Cultural Integration Project” to address the “softer” issues pertaining to the merger process. This Committee saw the need to conduct empirical research to help it to understand the challenges, barriers and opportunities in respect of the cultural integration process. Resolve Workplace Solutions (RWPS) was thus contracted to conduct an institutional culture survey, which collected both qualitative and quantitative data.

Analysis of the quantitative component of the survey revealed that UJ had a “culture index” of 52. Conclusions drawn from the quantitative component included:

- Culture fault lines at UJ were drawn on the basis of race (which links to language) and legacy institution (which links largely to campus and vocational vs. formative education).
- These fault lines were manifest in perceptions of unfair and inequitable treatment and a sense that difference/diversity was not valued or accommodated.
- Transformation was believed to be poorly planned and managed, and a large number of staff (black and white) was anxious about the consequences that transformation would have for them.

During 2009, the University implemented a number of “culture integration interventions”. These included Diversity Management workshops for managers, increased and targeted communication around culture issues and values, a culture blog and days dedicated to diversity and culture. At the end of 2009, Resolve was approached to conduct a follow-up survey. Because of budgetary constraints it was agreed that this would be a quantitative survey only, consisting of four sections:

- Biographical data (exactly the same as the 2008 survey).
- 55 statements about various aspects of the UJ culture (exactly the same as 2008).
- 24 new statements to assess the impact of interventions.
- 10 new statements to assess knowledge of/engagement with the interventions.

The survey was conducted online and through hard copy completion over a three week period in March 2010.

Results

A total of 585 submissions were received, 460 online and 125 paper copies. Unfortunately 25 of the paper copies were received when the analysis was almost completed and were thus too late to be included in the analysis, and 11 submissions did not contain enough answers to be usable. The total usable participation was thus 549, constituting 19.4% of the target group (all UJ permanent staff).

Three hundred and twenty-nine (60%) of the respondents had also participated in the 2008 survey. The sample of participants reflected the overall race/gender/legacy institution demography of UJ relatively closely except that white participants were somewhat over-represented and black African participants were somewhat under-represented. While the sample is smaller than that of the 2008 survey (which was 36.1%) it is still large enough to generalize results with some confidence.

A. Analysis of the original 55 statements: Entire sample

The “global index” for UJ has increased from 52 to 57 (a statistically significant increase), which indicates that respondents are somewhat more positive about the aspects of the UJ culture tested. Even more encouraging is that scores for all demographic groups have improved – some more markedly than others. The biggest increases have been for

black African staff (49 to 57) and Zulu speaking staff (49 to 57). Black African respondents, who were notably the most negative in 2008 (49), are now, along with white respondents, the most positive (57).

In general, the differences in scores between different demographic groups are less marked than they were in 2008. This indicates that group perceptions of these aspects of the culture are more closely aligned than they were in 2008 and the “fault lines” are narrowing.

TABLE 4.1 THEME SCORES

Theme	2008 score	2010 score
Fairness and Equity	45	48
Values and Vision	57	61
Valuing/Accommodating Diversity	49	54
Trust, Respect and Support	53	56
Transformation	47	55
Management	60	65
Job Satisfaction	63	68

There has been an increase in scores for all themes. The theme of Fairness and Equity remains the lowest scoring area and is still within the range of a “problem area”. Along with

TABLE 4.2 COMPARISON OF PARTICIPANTS

Theme	2008	2010 (repeat)	2010 (all)
Job satisfaction	63	66	68
Transformation	47	53	55
Management	60	63	65
Trust, respect & support	53	55	56
Vision and values	57	60	61
Value/Accom. Diversity	49	52	54
Fairness & Equity	45	46	48

While the increases are small, the very definite trend towards increasing positivity in all themes is encouraging.

C. Impact of interventions: Entire sample

The overall impact index was 56. The relatively low score may be because this aspect of the survey was conducted too soon – it takes time for the full impact of interventions to be effected and to be felt. Results for different demographic groups were generally closely aligned i.e. the overall perceptions of all groups were very similar.

The highest scores were received for the following statements:

Statement	Index
I am more aware of the UJ values than I was a year ago.	65
I make a greater effort to live the UJ values in my daily work than I did a year ago.	65
I have taken greater responsibility for living the UJ values than I did a year ago.	64
The University is more accommodating of diversity than a year ago.	62
I believe that my manager is good at managing diverse teams.	62

Trust, Respect and Support, this theme has shown the smallest proportional increase in score. Fairness and Equity should be the focus of initiatives going forward. The themes of Transformation and Valuing/Accommodating Diversity, whose 2008 scores defined them as “problem areas” have now shifted category and are an “area of concern”. The score for Transformation has shown the greatest proportional increase of all the themes. The Values and Vision theme now falls into the scoring range of “relatively positive”. Management and Job Satisfaction scores have both increased and these areas remain in the “relatively positive” category.

B. Analysis of original set of 55 statements: Repeat participants

The culture index for this group of respondents was 55 (i.e. higher than the 2008 score of 52, but lower than the overall score of 57 for the entire sample). All of the theme scores showed a slight increase, with “category shifts” for Valuing/Accommodating Diversity, Vision and Values, and Transformation.

The lowest scores were:

Statement	Index
The cultural integration interventions have deeply impacted the University culture.	47
I feel personally more recognised and rewarded for my efforts than I did a year ago.	47
I feel I can air my views and discuss my feelings more openly than I did last year.	50
Over the last year I have been encouraged to air my views and discuss my feelings about culture.	50

D. Impact of interventions: Repeat participants

The impact score for repeat participants was slightly lower than that for the entire sample, at 55. Most statements scored the same as or close to (a difference of one or two) the overall score, but the following statements showed bigger differences:

Statement	Entire sample	Repeat part.
I feel personally more recognized and rewarded for my efforts than I did a year ago.	47	43
I feel that vocational programmes are valued more highly than they were a year ago.	51	48
I feel more confident in management’s ability to transform the institution than I did a year ago.	53	50
I feel I can air my views and discuss my feelings more openly than I did last year.	50	46
I have seen tangible improvement in the way in which UJ employees behave towards each other.	53	50

E. Awareness of engagement with interventions: Entire sample

Awareness of the interventions was generally good, with only two particularly poor performers.

Statement	%age yes
I participated in Celebrating Diversity Day in 2010.	87
I have read a few or all of the series of articles on the UJ values in the staff member newsletter (U@UJ).	85
I participated in the Cultural Integration Day focusing on "Celebrating Diversity."	85
I am aware that the senior management team participated in a series of diversity workshops in 2009.	84
I have seen and read the UJ values banners around campus.	80
I have participated in the Culture Blog on the UJ intranet.	76
I participated in the UJ team for the 702 Discovery Walk the Talk.	66
I have received my UJ mug.	56
I have read the information about the Cultural Integration Project in VC Bulletins.	19
I have received my Calendar Can.	19

V. DISCUSSION

While there has been only a 5% increase in the overall culture index, this is a statistically significant shift and is something to be celebrated. The fact that differences on the basis of population group and legacy institution appear to have diminished is encouraging, and the increase in score for every single theme is a pleasing trend. Analysis of results for repeat participants shows a slightly smaller improvement, but a definite improvement nevertheless, with scores for all themes becoming slightly more positive.

While it is not possible to attribute the improvement in scores directly to the interventions, it is obvious that something is shifting perceptions at UJ and it is not unreasonable to deduce that the culture interventions may have contributed to this, particularly as overall awareness of and engagement with the majority of the interventions is good.

The overall "impact score" of 56 could be better (although, as previously indicated the survey may have been conducted too soon) – but it does fall into the slightly positive range and no demographic group scored below 50 for this set of questions.

With a few exceptions, awareness of and engagement with the culture interventions is very good. The scores for different types of interventions reflect the necessity to use a range of media, events and approaches in order to reach the widest possible audience.

In recent times, institutions of higher learning in South Africa have undergone minor as well as major changes in their core business and have applied different modes of transformational strategies. A lot of research on transformation to find and or isolate best practice has been undertaken by these institutions. The context within which transformation has been implemented in academia can be traced back to the different leadership styles and theories those leaders have applied. The players and followers with

large histories of diversification on the other hand have not enjoyed or found satisfaction in the leadership. These points back to the issue of trust which according to literature was the primary attribute associated with leadership. What comes to mind is what J.F Kennedy once said I quote "to be an effective leader your followers must have trust in you and that they should also be sold to your vision".

The essence of trust is integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty and openness. Conversely, the consequences of trust are: willingness on the part of the staff and to be vulnerable, and to feel safe to apply their creative thinking. If people feel unsure they turn to personal relationships for guidance. In defining trust there are three important variables namely relationship, expectations and behavior which must be held in check [1].

In earlier times we learned from political science research that democracy would be benefitted by boosting trust among the citizen of the country. Democracy may be defined as people power (Greek derivative). Developing countries are said to be in a democratic transition because whichever democracy definition one uses the people power domain will be found to be lacking compatibility with the markets and economic efficiency [13]. Democracy in this context is used loosely to mean mixed democracy despite its limitations. Later this changed to an idea that healthy skepticism was beneficiary to democracy. This was because citizens had vital role to play as watch dogs of government. We also learned from the similar sources that the case of low and high trust cancelled each out in that the number of yeses and nays were equivalent. Shah reflects upon the dwindling nature of trust in organizations and he asks the question how we can create organizations and institutions that can nurture trusting relationships [17]

A. Becoming vulnerable

This enables an individual to allow themselves to be hurt by those in the team who are in the position of leadership and who might get to know about their strengths and weaknesses [2]. This is an essential step in trust –building in that it lays cards on the table so that there are no hidden corners which when revealed can obliterate what trust existed. Invariably the individual assumes a positive humane stance that after the intervention is completed one will be better off than before. Like Malcolm-X puts it 'anywhere is better than where I been'.

B. Creativity

A question can be raised as to what are individuals willing to do to continue developing the sense of trust? Is there a space to walk the talk given the constraints such as time and budget? Creativity entails creating intangible assets within the institution. The institution has relationships with social economic environments as a corporate citizen [3]. That citizenship impacts in the communities through academic programmes as well as participation of employees through research and development. Institutional leaders who do not

pay any particular attention or whose mission is not communicated and shared by all staff run the risk of being mistrusted.

C. Leadership

The researchers concur with Schechter and Strauss [16] that leadership behaviour has profound effects on subordinates, including how they relate both to the leader and to each other. There was also assertion that there cannot be trust among team members, team commitment and effective teamwork without effective leadership. Clearly, leadership theory without actually differentiating between the leaderships styles indicates that leadership makes or breaks organisations.

D. History

Credit must be given to those attempts by the University Council at building trust by appointing or assigning leadership roles to the dictates of the New South African Constitution. On the same vein, the new leadership has brought the transformation agenda forward to the ears and eyes of the general public or university communities. This idea of building trust has been seen in the regular management executive committee (MEC) visits to the various campuses. However at the operational level the administration protocols have led to greater mistrust. Staff appointments of senior academic and middle range administrative staff do not show the same endeavors towards transformation in both new incumbents and attitude.

I would like to think that academic institutions are important to society in more ways than one. Firstly these institutions prepare graduates who will operate in business and the society at large. Historically parents send their children to these institutions with the belief that their children will be better off intellectually and financially and invariably contribute towards the upliftment of the society in a sustainable way. Academics must therefore trust the leadership of these institutions to facilitate the rendering of this service to the society. The second is the staff and their activities in the form of research and professional services they offer to society as corporate citizens.

E. Types of trust

There are different forms of trust and one could say that each one of them is peculiar and therefore needs be managed in a different way. Trust is an essential ingredient not only for improving performance but sustaining it during turbulent times. The more trust an organization bestowed among its people, the more those people will be committed to the mission, goals and bottom-line results of the organization.

Trust, however, is a complex feeling and one that cannot be coerced. There is no secret recipe to generate trust. The best an organization can do is to create and nurture a trusting environment.

Characteristics in building trust:

1. Integrity entails acting in a truthful way. The leader means what he or she says.
2. Consistency infers doing what you say.
3. Reliability entails keeping promises. The followers can without question depend on what leadership says.
4. Interdependence in other words actions are enhanced by the thought that together we stand. And hence both leadership and the followers are acting in each other's best interest.

F. Values

The values lack credibility because they are seen to have been imposed. Whatever route is chosen to establish legitimacy for the values, it should be followed by a process, which involves all staff, of identifying behaviors that will embody the values. Carry out "living the values" assessment at least once a year.

G. Leadership

Senior leadership: Leadership can *enable* or *constrain* the successful achievement of a vision and the creation of a values-driven organization. The behaviors, of the senior leadership of UJ are important because: Leaders have power, resources, influence and authority at their disposal to enable or constrain the success of the organization. Invariably leaders make a difference. Leaders act as an example to others to enable or constrain success. Also, leaders can enable others to make a difference in the organization. The leadership group must understand transformation and link the University's vision, mission, values and strategic goals to transformation. Middle level leadership should make the values open in recruitment processes, and verify them during selection. Also, it is this level of management tasks that enable employee involvement in socio-economic development initiatives.

H. Trust

The challenge in implementing cultural transformation projects is to change the behavior of the leadership group and senior level managers. It may as well be said the leadership group including their senior managers are not themselves sure or trusting. Maybe they are not certain about the leadership qualities of the University Council. The system might have failed them before. Perhaps it could be concluded that they are responsible for creating the current culture, and they are the ones who must create a new culture." The conclusions in the Institutional Culture survey as stated below attest to the failure in making interventions because of the lack of trust:

Diversity interventions frequently fail or have limited impact because the experience cannot be translated into a workplace in which nothing has changed. It is thus important that these interventions do not happen in isolation, but along with the other types of interventions (values linked to behaviors, communication, envisioning a transformed institution), as well as the creation of systems and processes that support change.

VI. CONCLUSION

Poor trust undermines policy and the resultant implementation. Trust was intimately related with understanding. Communication was essential because lack of it leads to misconceptions and rumours which together feed much mistrust. Leaders and managers ought to be visible and known by everyone in the organisation. Dispersed leadership is but a tired disparaging environment of 'leaderlessness' if it was not guided training development programmes for leaders and managers.

The current economic climate is proving exceptionally challenging. Are there any more disaster-rich words left to describe our economy? Adversity, catastrophe, tragedy all sound trite after months of economic trauma. It should hardly be surprising that those left standing at the end of this long ordeal might be somewhat stressed, depressed, anxious, and fearful.

One of the big predictors of morale is whether there is a high degree of trust among people within the organisation. Trust is not simply one desired attribute on a list of attributes describing the ideal leader. Rather, it is the very foundation that will support all other efforts. If your lawyers and staff do not trust you, don't bother trying to be inspirational, supportive, innovative, or visionary. If you don't have people's trust, they may do what you tell them because you have the title, but there is not the passionate engagement that results from true leadership. It is likely that during the past year both your personal "trust bank" and your firm's "trust bank" have been slightly overdrawn. In an economic downturn as serious as the one that is being experienced, people tend to operate in a climate of personal fear, and one consequence of that is an erosion of trust. This personal fear includes anxiety about what the future is going to look like, and that is where the leader has an important role to play. One definition of trust says that it is all about "engendering confidence and creating hope." If people cannot see a better tomorrow, they naturally tend to lose their trust in the leadership.

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