



ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 32, 15 SEPTEMBER 2010

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1 **A LEADER'S FRAMEWORK FOR DECISION MAKING**



Making decisions in the often fluid and complex world of ODL is often (if not most of the time...) difficult, contested, and questioned. When hindsight proves some decisions to have been ill-conceived, it is claimed that the decision-makers acted either too soon and did not analyse the situation carefully, or analysed too much and acted too late, or that they consulted too little or too much. In an article by David J Snowden and Mary E Boone titled "A leader's framework for decision

making" (Harvard Business Review, November 2007:1-8) they offer an interesting framework to leaders making decisions ranging from simple, complicated, complex, chaotic and disorderly contexts. Instead of prescribing *one* leadership style that fits all circumstances, they propose that wise leaders "tailor their approach to fit the complexity of the circumstances they face" (2007:1). "All too often, managers rely on common leadership approaches that work well in one set of circumstances but fall short in others" (2007:1). This approach is the result of subscribing to a Newtonian understanding of the world where *everything* is measurable and predictable. Snowden and Boone (2007) developed a "cynefin" framework ("a Welch word that signifies the multiple factors in our environment and our experience that influence us in ways we can never understand"). The framework sorts the issues leaders are facing into

...five contexts defined by the relationship between cause and effect. Four of these – simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic – require leaders to diagnose situations and to act in contextually appropriate ways. The fifth – disorder – applies when it is unclear which of the other four contexts is dominant" (2007:2)

Simple contexts are characterised by stability and clear cause-and-effect relationships which “require straightforward management and monitoring”. In simple contexts it is possible and often appropriate to import best practice from elsewhere. Snowden and Boone (2007:2) however warn that often simple contexts are overly simplified and therefore imported best practices don’t deliver the expected results.

Complicated contexts “contain multiple right answers, and the appropriate solution is arrived at through a careful analysis of the context. The unknowns in complicated contexts are known. Because the complicated context calls for investigating several options – many of which may be excellent – good practice, as opposed to best practice, is more appropriate” (2007:3). In contrast to complicated contexts where there exists at least one right answer, in *complex* contexts there is no clear *one* right answer. In complex contexts, “unknown unknowns” can disrupt any possible plans and introduces unpredictability and flux (2007:5). Complex contexts have the following characteristics (2007:3):

- It involves large numbers of interacting elements
- The interactions are nonlinear, and minor changes can produce disproportionately major consequences.
- The system is dynamic, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and solutions can’t be imposed; rather, they arise from the circumstances.
- The system has a history, and the past is integrated with the present; the elements evolve with one another and with the environment; and evolution is irreversible.
- Though a complex system may, in retrospect, appear to be ordered and predictable, hindsight does not lead to foresight because of the external conditions and systems constantly change.
- ... In a complex system the agents and the system constrain one another, especially over time. This means that we cannot forecast or predict what will happen.

In a chaotic context, “searching for right answers would be pointless: The relationships between cause and effect are impossible to determine because they shift constantly and no manageable pattern exist – only turbulence” (2007:5).

Snowden and Boone (2007:7) conclude their article by providing a very interesting and helpful matrix to guide leaders not only to classify a particular context correctly as simple, complicated, complex or chaotic, but the authors also explore how leaders should respond in each particular context. For example, in *simple* contexts, leaders should make sense of the context, categorise and respond. In *complicated* contexts leader should sense, analyse and then respond often convening a group of experts to guide them towards an appropriate correct decision. In *complex* contexts, leaders should probe and look for emerging patterns. This means that leaders should open up discussions, listen to dissenting and diverse opinions. In chaotic contexts leaders should act, sense, and respond.

In *chaotic* contexts there is no time to analyse, or to get a team of experts together. Leaders “look for what works instead of seeking right answers (2007:7). In such circumstances leaders should take immediate action and provide clear and direct communication.

What I personally like about this framework, is that Snowden and Boone (2007) provide a list of “danger signals” which could arise in each context as result of the leadership style chosen. For example, in chaotic contexts where there is no time to consult and there is a need for immediate action, the danger is the development of a “cult of the leader”. For each of the danger signals, Snowden and Boone (2007) provide a number of responses which can enhance responsiveness and appropriateness of the responses.

There are times that call for listening and analysis, Then there are times that call for immediate action. May we know the difference...

2 MYUNISA: WHO USES MYUNISA?

In ODL Communiqué 31 of last week, I reported on the number of students that have access to myUnisa. Quite a number of staff responded to these statistics with disbelief. A number of responses raised issues with regard to not necessarily the integrity of the data, but rather questions requiring more detailed responses. Ms Magdaleen Arlow (ICT) kindly shared the following detail with me regarding the 219 467 students that used myUnisa up to 15 September 2010.

The report does not distinguish between formal and non-formal students. With regard to gender, female students use myUnisa much more than male students. The number of female students are 127 424, while 92 042 male students use myUnisa. The following pie chart provides a graphical picture of these statistics (Figure 1)

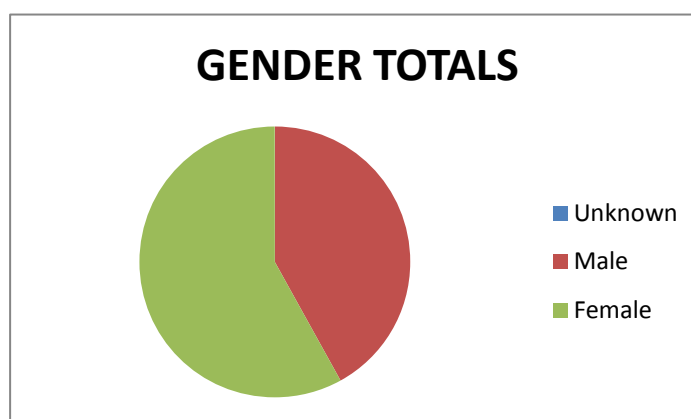


Figure 1: The gender distribution of students using myUnisa

With regard to these students age group, the following histogram (Figure 2) shows that the majority of students using myUnisa are between the ages of 23-31.

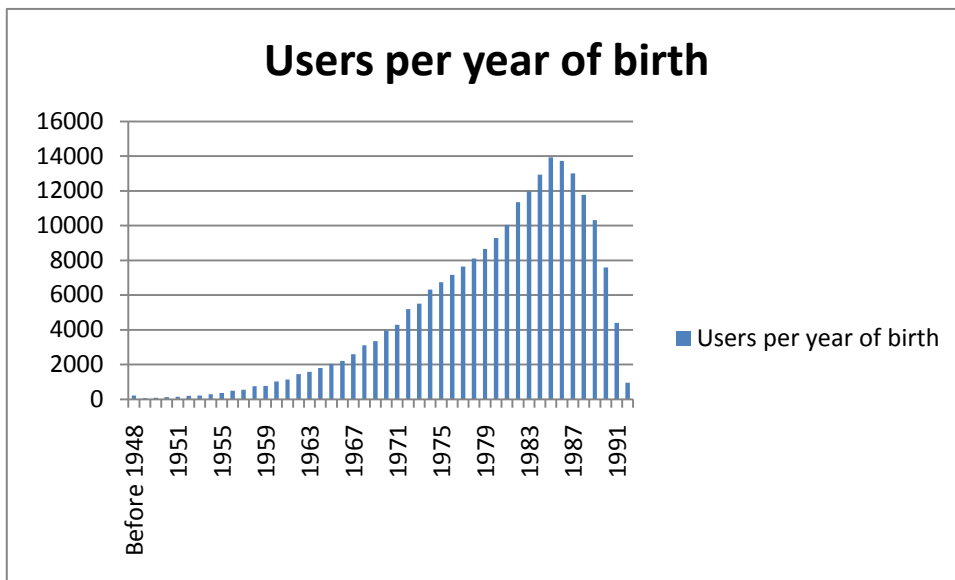


Figure 2: Users of Unisa per date of birth

The following table (Table 1) shows where those students are located, per district. Though interesting, it is very dependent on how many students Unisa has in that particular district to really evaluate the significance of this data. The table only shows districts with more than 2 000 students.

| DISTRICT | Total per district |
|------------------|--------------------|
| PRETORIA | 25069 |
| JOHANNESBURG | 22997 |
| RANDBURG | 12726 |
| DURBAN | 10846 |
| WONDERBOOM | 6049 |
| KEMPTON PARK | 5690 |
| ROODEPOORT | 4661 |
| PIETERMARITZBURG | 4140 |
| CAPE TOWN | 3752 |
| INANDA | 3645 |
| GERMISTON | 3625 |
| WYNBERG | 3622 |
| BELLVILLE | 3529 |
| PINETOWN | 3452 |
| GOODWOOD | 2855 |
| BENONI | 2831 |
| PIETERSBURG | 2814 |
| ALBERTON | 2804 |
| BOKSBURG | 2784 |
| EAST LONDON | 2333 |
| RUSTENBURG | 2086 |
| PORT ELIZABETH | 2084 |
| BLOEMFONTEIN | 2002 |

When a histogram is compiled of the statistics above, the result is as follows (Figure 3)

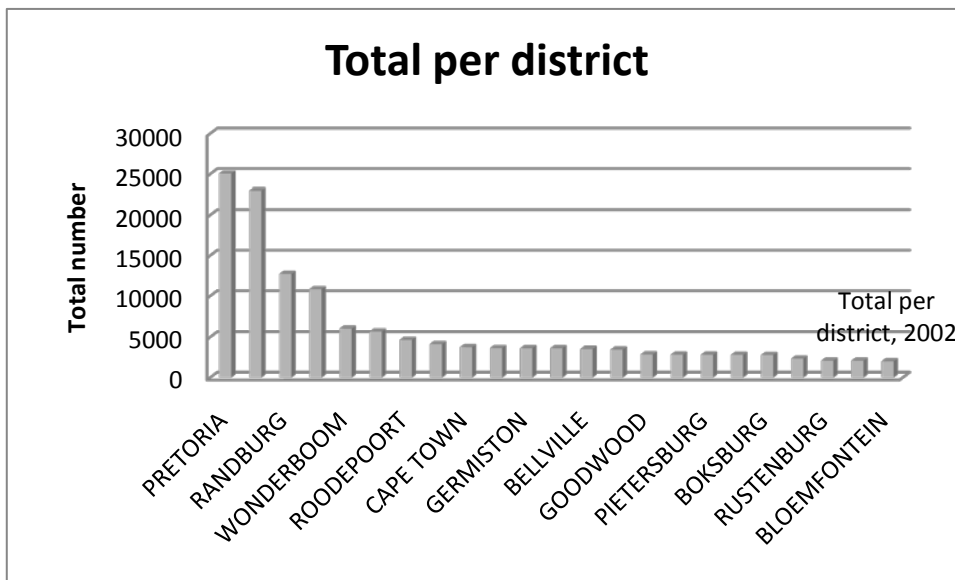


Figure 3: Distribution of myUnisa users per district

When considering the number of logins per student, the following statistics provides an interesting picture. Over 63 085 of the 219 467 students (28.74%) have logged in on myUnisa more than 50 times in 2010 (so far). The numbers of students that have logged in more than 12 times are almost 77% (see table 2 for more detail).

| Number of visits in 2010 | Total number of users/students |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|
| More than 12 times | 168 880 users |
| More than 30 times | 105 332 users |
| More than 50 times | 63 085 students |

Table 2: Number of logins per student

In a report that served at the STLSC meeting of 20 September, the following detail of the use of myUnisa was shared:

Tools that enjoy the most activity are Announcements (course emails) for academics and Assignment submissions and File downloads for students. Already for 2010, 7 629 announcements have been added by staff members. Students have submitted 911 277 assignments via myUnisa, 41% of total assignments received; with the main due date for assignment 1 for semester 2/2010 a still a week away. Assignment 2 for semester 2/2010 is only due in September.

In 2009, 1 170 648 assignments were submitted online. File downloads total 2 066702 since January 2010. In 2009 students downloaded 3 169 415 resources from myUnisa. The following table (Table 3) provides an overall picture of the use of myUnisa:

| myUnisa Statistics | 2009 | 2010 | |
|--|------------|-----------|-----------|
| | | August | September |
| Total number of active students | 197 653 | 210 328 | 218 823 |
| Annual total number of student visits | 10 288 912 | 7 099 905 | 8 175 727 |
| Annual total number of staff using myUnisa | 1 366 | 1 578 | 1656 |
| Number of course sites - year modules | 3 176 | | 2 703 |
| Y2 modules (July to June) | 417 | | 188 |
| first semester | 1 451 | | 1 742 |
| second semester | 1 413 | | 1 737 |
| Number of course sites already created for 2011 - year modules | | | 1 928 |
| Y2 modules | | | 78 |
| first semester | | | 1 621 |
| second semester | | | 1 567 |
| Number of modules (with students) not on myUnisa | 28 | | 12 |
| Annual total of announcements (course emails) added by staff | 15 114 | 7 629 | 8 623 |
| Number of assignments submitted via myUnisa | 1 170 648 | 911 277 | 1 206 571 |
| Files read/obtained on myUnisa | 3 169 415 | 2 066 702 | 2 478 555 |
| Number of academics participating in Onscreen marking | | 51 | |

Table 3: An overview of the use of myUnisa

The above statistics provide a somewhat surprising picture to many of us who still doubt the fact that many of our students do have access to the Internet. Yes, there are students who don't have access, or not regular or sustainable access – but many of our students do have access. The above picture may state that the majority of our students have access.

While it is crucial not to forget those students who don't have sustainable and affordable access, it is equally important to realise that more and more of our students have access.

Thanks to the myUnisa team for these statistics! Keep up the good work!

3 AN OVERVIEW OF FUTURE MEETINGS

- The team looking at intellectual property rights, copy right and social media will meet on 30 September 2010 in TVW 10-150.
- The next meeting of colleges interested in collaboration in offering a range of higher certificates will be held on 30 September 2010 at 14:00-15:00 in Mphe Batho, outside the Philadelphia restaurant.

4 CHS VISIT TO THE REGIONS

After the report in last week's ODL Communiqué, I heard of an initiative of the Executive Dean of CHS aimed to increase understanding and collaboration between the CHS and the regions. Prof Moeketsi and Dr Zawada visited Polokwane recently, and Prof Moeketsi and Prof Cornwell will visit Durban on 29 to 30 September. A delegation including Prof Mashile, Prof Phillips and Prof Cornwell will visit Parow on 7 to 8 October. These visits take place in the belief that there is much that we can learn from the centers – both their initiatives and their needs – and that we can then look at innovative ways in which we can support them.

Well-done to the CHS team!

5 A CELEBRATION OF INNOVATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING AT UNISA, 29 OCTOBER 2010

All Unisa staff is invited to a celebration of innovation in teaching and learning at Unisa on 29 October 2010 in the Dr Miriam Makeba Concert Hall, on the Pretoria campus from 08:30 - 13:30.

At this event we will celebrate innovative practices in teaching and learning ranging from the use of tutors, E-tutors, Mxit and other social media, portfolios, satellite broadcasts and video conferencing, etc. As we would like to provide lunch for everyone attending the event, it is essential that you book a place by sending an e-mail to the Project Administrator of the ODL Project, Ms Tshoanelo Mokoena, mokoets@unisa.ac.za.

Detail of the event will be circulated closer to the date. Don't miss this opportunity ...

6 TOWARDS AN ODL PEDAGOGY

For the last three weeks I reflected on what an ODL pedagogy will look like. HR is in the process of looking at the training that will be offered in 2010 for all Unisa staff, and ODL will be a specific focus in the total menu of offerings. This made me think of the following question: *What kind of mindset is required working in an ODL institution?* What are the values that specifically inform and should shape Unisa as an ODL institution? *What does an ODL practitioner 'look like'?* Who are they?

It is easy to think that this only applies to academics teaching and Unisa. But actually, ODL is a matter that should form the basis of everyone at Unisa, whether as academic, professional, and administrative or support staff. *ODL is not only an academic matter.* Should it happen that our academics are excellent facilitators of learning who design and teach excellent curricula, but students don't have access to this excellent teaching (whether through the post or online), then ODL will fail.

Should we have excellent tutors and staff in the regions, but their initiatives and expertise are not integrated into the strategies and support frameworks of Unisa, then ODL will fail. If the person answering a student query at the Unisa Call Centre does not have an ODL mindset, ODL will fail.

During a wonderful conversation with Ms Patel (HR) and her team during the week, we started to explore the scope and content of an ODL mindset. The group tentatively started to map an ODL mindset as encompassing a crucial understanding of how systems work and how different elements of a system shape and impact on other elements of the same (and other) systems. This may be one of the crucial issues for Unisa to resolve – *how to grow systemic thinking in every staff member*. Another crucial element is an emphasis on *servant leadership* – to really have an overriding concern for our students and one another and serve one another with the utmost care and professionalism. Then there were also elements such as innovation and creativity, the ability to deal with uncertainty and paradox, being competent in an increasingly technologically-driven institution and being able to understand the need for and processes of change.

What mindset will be required from all Unisa staff in ten years' time if Unisa really wants to be a comprehensive ODL institution in the service of humanity?

7 ODL REPOSITORY AND BLOG

All the ODL task team reports, the overview of the recommendations of the STLSC and other ODL documents are available on the Unisa Library's Institutional Repository at <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/dspace/handle/10500/3072> (accessed 22 September 2010). The repository is updated on a regular basis and if you register on the repository, you will get notifications of any new uploads.

You are also most welcome to comment on this (and previous) ODL Communiqués on the Unisa Staff website. On the right hand side of the Unisa Staff website, you will see a section titled "Important links" under which you must then click on "Blogs". On the blog page, you will notice two links namely "E-connect" and "Open Distance Learning". If you follow the latter you will be able to read and comment on the ODL Communiqués.

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this ODL Communiqué represent my personal viewpoints and do not represent the viewpoint of any other member of the Unisa community.