



ODL COMMUNIQUÉ 53, 23 MARCH 2011

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1 **IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT: VIDEO AND SATELLITE CONFERENCING**

In 2010 Senate approved that from 2011 all video and satellite broadcasts would be recorded and sent to all students registered for a particular module (free of cost) as soon as possible after the broadcast. Due to unforeseen problems, the posting of these recordings are late and students will receive them within the next two weeks. *We are urgently addressing the issues that resulted in the delay. Please take note of the following:*

- a) With regard to Video Conference (VC) sessions, VC recordings will only capture presenters on the Muckleneuk and Florida campuses due to challenges associated with regional (remote) class rooms, for example absence of Video conference (VC) facilitators.
- b) The recordings made up to present will *only* be sent to students registered for the first semester.
- c) Lecturers must (from now on) kindly indicate if the recorded broadcast of the first semester should be automatically included in the study package for the second semester.
- d) Please take note that when using PowerPoint slides, that you need to heed the advice of the Satellite Broadcasting (SB) and VC staff recording colour schemes, font size and amount of content on each slide. Detailed guidelines will again be sent to all staff using these facilities.
- e) Please take note that these recordings are official Unisa products and therefore have to be of a quality that can make us all proud.

The VC and SB staff members are very helpful and will assist you should you need any advice.

2 ODL PODCAST 5: THE ROLE OF INCENTIVES IN TEACHING



To listen to this podcast, click on the icon on the left. The podcast has a duration of **4.09** minutes. If for whatever reason you cannot access the podcast (or prefer reading to listening), I include the script of the podcast as the text to “Mumbo Jumbo 10” in this communiqué).

Introduction to the podcast: I am continuously amazed at claims by some Unisa staff that if Unisa wants them to fulfil their employment contracts, that Unisa must provide “worthy” incentives. For example: Academics may say that if Unisa wants them to use myUnisa more effectively, they need to pay them more... Or: If Unisa wants them to do research, management must make it worthwhile. Or what about this one: If Unisa wants them to supervise students, management must make it more attractive.

Do I miss something? I thought that this is what academics are already paid to do...

3 UNISA 2011 TEACHING AND LEARNING FESTIVAL 2011



Since 2010 there were plans to host a Teaching and Learning Conference at Unisa during September 2011. There were several initial plans and we are excited to announce that the plans have started to crystallise in a *Teaching and Learning Festival 1-9 September 2011*.

The tentative plans include that there will be a Teaching and Learning Symposium on Thursday 1 September till Friday 2 September 2011 with international speakers to provoke and stimulate our thinking about teaching and learning in an ODL context. Confirmed speakers so far include Prof Gilly Salmon (University of Southern Queensland, Australia) and Prof Ormond Simpson (Fellow of the Centre for Distance Education, University of London International Programmes). We also envisage having an Innovation in Teaching and Learning Cocktail and Award function on Thursday evening 1 September. What a way to celebrate the arrival of Spring!

The week following the symposium (Monday 5 – Friday 9 September) we will host a number of interactive workshops and living labs regarding a number of issues in teaching and learning in an ODL context such as using mobile technologies, using Open Educational Resources (OERs), using podcasts, and so forth.

Please keep these dates open? It will be an opportunity not to be missed!

4 THE HOUSE THAT SELF-INTEREST BUILT

I am currently working on a paper reflecting on the way curricula and pedagogy in ODL institutions serve social justice. In the context of Unisa's Curriculum Policy, serving social justice should come *naturally* in the light of the fact that one of the principles of the Policy entails that all curricula at Unisa should respond to Unisa's vision to be "*the African university in the service of humanity*". We are also a signatory of the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC). The current process of formulating an agenda for transformation also focuses on finding ways to celebrate and promote elements of humaneness such as community, care, communication and co-operation.

Nurturing these values stand in stark contrast to the many everyday examples in South African society where our political and civil discourses resemble more a race of survival of the most corrupt and self-serving than those who selflessly serve.

An article that has accompanied me in my own journey to understanding the implications of this age of rampant and often parasitic capitalism is an article by Mintzberg, Simons, and Basu "Beyond selfishness" (MIT Sloan Management Review, Fall, 2002: 67-74). These authors start their article with this amazing statement: "A syndrome of selfishness built on a series of half-truths, has taken hold of our corporations and our societies, as well as our minds. This calculus of glorified self-interest and the fabrications upon which it is based must be challenged" (2002:67).

In the first paragraph titled "The house that self-interest built", they explore the "glorification of self-interest" and how greed "has been raised to some sort of high calling: corporations have been urged to ignore broader social responsibilities in favour of narrow shareholder value" (2002:67). Mintzberg et al (2002:67) continue: "A society devoid of selfishness is certainly difficult to imagine. *But a society that glorifies selfishness can be imagined only as base*". Ouch. Eina.

Mintzberg et al (2002) provides a powerful counter-narrative to the glorification of greed and self-interest by contesting five half-truths or fabrications.

First fabrication: We are all, in essence, economic man (sic).

Mintzberg et al (2002:68) contest the notion that we are all (and only) *homo economicus* "obsessed with our self-interest, intent on maximising our personal gains. *Homo economicus*, in other words, is never satisfied, but always wants more – demonstrably, measurably more – and is continually calculating to achieve that end". The notion would have us believe that "pushed to the limit, every woman – and every man – is a willing prostitute. Everything, everyone, every value has its price" (2002:68).

Contra to this first fabrication, Mintzberg et al claims that integrity and self-respect are non-negotiable values (2002:68) for many. In a society where everyone fights only for him or herself, life becomes a game of "Survivor", where we outplay and out-scheme one another in service of self-interest. *But this is not true of all of us. Or is it?*

Second fabrication: Corporations exist to maximise shareholder value.

Mintzberg et al (2002:69) claim that shareholders are only *one* of several stakeholders. The emphasis has moved away from companies and corporations allowing employees and their communities to be the primary beneficiaries of the growth and success of the company; to the present-day scenario where “fewer and fewer shareholders are in any way committed to the businesses they ‘own’” (2002:70). This results in a situation where shareholder value “drives a wedge between those who create economic performance and those who harvest its benefits” (2002:70).

Third fabrication: Corporations require heroic leaders

The authors ask the following pertinent question: “How have these shareholders, so removed from the corporations, been able to appropriate so much of the benefits? The answer is rather simple: They have co-opted the chief executives by rewarding them disproportionately for the performance of the entire enterprise. Through options and bonuses, *they have bought off the chiefs*” (2002:70; emphasis added).

The rationale for the paying out disproportionate bonuses is based on the fabrication that the chief executive alone is responsible for the entire performance of the company and “that this performance can be measured and the chief executive rewarded to do the shareholder’s bidding” (2002:70). This obsession with shareholder value and the notion of the “heroic leader” who is “larger than life, riding in, not to save the day, but to raise the stock price”, drive a wedge of disconnection between a company’s executive and the employees.

I wish I had space in this communiqué to duplicate Mintzberg et al’s (2002:71) table in which they contrast “heroic management” and “engaging management”. With regard to “heroic management” Mintzberg et al (2002:71) state that the “higher ‘up’ these managers go, the more important they become. At the ‘top’, the chief executive *is* the corporation”. In stark contrast to this picture, “engaging management” emphasises that an organisation “is an interacting network, not a vertical hierarchy”. Under “heroic management”, rewards for performance go to the leader, while under “engaging management” rewards for performance is shared amongst everyone and aimed at making the company a better place for everyone (2002:71).

Mintzberg et al (2002:71) then makes this astonishing claim: “Perhaps the reason we are so obsessed with leadership today is that we see so little of it” (2002:71). The authors then quote a character in one of Brecht’s works who responds to someone who says “Unhappy is the land that has no heroes”; by stating “Unhappy is the land that needs heroes”...

Fourth fabrication: The effective organisation is lean and mean

Building lean and mean organisations by means of expensive re-engineering and restructuring programmes and strategies facilitated by well-paid external consultants have become the mantra of the day. Often “doing more with less” actually means “pushing people and machines to their limits rather than discovering smarter ways to run companies” (2002:72). Mintzberg et al (2002:72) state that the worst consequence “of all this restructuring has been the breaking of a basic covenant between employer and employee: the implicit pledge of security in return for loyalty”.

This made me think: There is a huge number of Unisa staff that is required to do increasing more with less and fit in more things to do in the same amount of hours. Many people are at breaking point. *Does someone notice? Does someone care?* [Please take note that I address the other side of the coin in this week’s podcast].

Fifth fabrication: A rising tide of prosperity lifts all boats

This fabrication has as basis the claim that wealth and riches will eventually trickle down to those at the bottom of the social ladder – they should just wait... Mintzberg et al (2002:72) provides the following statistics to confront this lie: “In 1989, the United States had 66 billionaires and 31.5 million people living below the official poverty line. A decade later, the number of billionaires had increased to 268, whereas the number of people below the poverty line had increased to 34.5 million”. *I suspect South African statistics show the same...*

While it may be possible to confront the above fabrications with factual evidence, Mintzberg et al (2002:73) actually suggest that a more effective way is telling stories of individuals and companies who have embraced “engagement” with one another and those around them, in promoted the values of trust, judgement and commitment.

Mintzberg et al (2002:74) conclude their article by stating the following: “We can live our lives and manage our enterprises obsessed with getting ever more, with keeping score, with constantly calculating and scheming. *Or we can open ourselves to another way, by engaging ourselves to engage others so as to restore our sense of balance*” (emphasis added).

After working through this article, I wondered:

- How do our curricula at Unisa encourage students to question the meta-narratives of greed and self-interest? Or do our curricula contribute to many of our students believing in greed as a “higher calling”? What opportunities can we build into our curricula to not only question the meta-narratives of self-interest and greed, but actually provide students to serve their communities selflessly as a credit-bearing part of their degrees, diplomas and higher certificates?

- While community engagement has always been one of the key characteristics of higher education, is it not time that we take engagement to another level as the *leit motif* that permeates *everything* that Unisa does, teaches and assesses?
- There are many staff members at Unisa who serves this great institution selflessly, day after day, year after year only to be faced by the latest restructuring efforts to make Unisa “lean and mean”. Is it not time to talk about the social contract between Unisa as institution and those who serve her? *Are loyalty and job security two sides of the same coin?*
- Will we be brave enough to critically interrogate the notion of “heroic management” who get the bonuses for achievements but blame unwilling and stubborn staff for failures? To what extent is it viable that we explore the notion Mintzberg et al (2002:71) moots that an effective organisation is an “interacting network, not a vertical hierarchy? Effective leaders work throughout, they do not sit [only] on top”.
- What will make Unisa to be the preferred employer? What will make communities surrounding Unisa to celebrate us being in their midst, whether in the cities or in rural areas?
- To what extent can we break out of the walls of the “house that self-interest built” in our curricula, in the way we engage with one another and with the communities around us? How can we break out of the walls of the “house that self-interest built” in the way we treat employees and students?

5 CURRICULUM POLICY: TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

Now that Council has approved the Curriculum Policy, we can move toward implementation. Please take note that the [Curriculum Policy](#) is now available on the Unisa Staff Website (click on the link to have immediate access to the policy).

The Curriculum Policy provides a very broad framework for engaging with the different claims different stakeholders make on Unisa’s curricula. Please engage with the Policy whenever you review modules or develop new modules/qualifications.

So many policies, once developed and approved, die lonely deaths somewhere in dusty archives or somewhere in cyberspace. Curriculum development in higher education is too much of a contested space to allow this to happen. In next week’s communiqué I will discuss specific elements of the Curriculum Policy as well as share ideas on how we can implement the Policy.

Watch this space!

6 MUMBO JUMBO 10: PROVIDE ME WITH INCENTIVES, AND THEN I WILL DO MY JOB...

This is the transcript of this week's podcast:

In this week's communiqué, I reflect on an article by Mintzberg, Simons and Basu, written in 2002 in which they explore a number of fabrications upon which present day organisations plan, restructure and reward their top officials.

Reflecting on this article, I pondered some of the challenges we at Unisa face in building a culture of engagement. In my discussion of the Mintzberg article, I proposed that we should critically interrogate the notion and scope of the social contract between employer and employee. I also proposed that loyalty and security may be different sides to the same coin. The employer cannot complain about a lack of loyalty if they don't provide security. And on the other hand, employees cannot bask in the sunlight of job security and be disloyal. Having said that...

I am continuously amazed at claims by some Unisa staff that if Unisa wants them to fulfil their employment contracts, that Unisa must provide "worthy" incentives. For example: Academics may say that if Unisa wants them to use myUnisa more effectively, they need to pay them more... Or: If Unisa wants them to do research, management must make it worthwhile? Or what about this one: If Unisa wants them to supervise students, management must make it more attractive?

Do I miss something? I thought that this is what academics are already paid to do...

Before you arrange for someone to break my legs or run me over, let me restate my position.

I do not support abuse. I do not support any effort by whomever to ask more and more. I do not support the position that I have heard at Unisa when a superior responded to the real need of a junior academic for more understanding and support by stating: "If you don't like it here, you can leave". *But I am equally against the notion of incentives to encourage people to do what they were contracted to do.*

Is this obsession with asking for incentives a proxy for addressing our need that we may feel that our management does not appreciate our efforts? Is there something in this claim alluding to the fact that many Unisa employees may feel excluded from the culture of the payment of bonuses? Or has the virus of entitlement spread so far that we all want more and more, replicating an employer who wants more and more?

Teaching in the 21st century looks totally different from teaching 10 or 20 years ago. In an era where more and more students are connected to the Internet and where interactivity becomes a real possibility even in an ODL institution, teaching looks very different from 10 years ago. Office hours look different. Weekends look different.

So the question is not what incentives do I need to be a good teacher in the 21st century? The question is what institutional support can help me be the teacher I want to be?

7 RE THE PROVISION OF PREVIOUS YEARS' EXAMINATION PAPERS...

I am still waiting for the response and will include it as soon as I receive it.

8 THE SECOND CELEBRATION OF INNOVATION IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

And what a celebration it was...

In organising this "Second celebration of innovation in teaching and learning at Unisa" on Thursday 17 March, I was somehow scared that the programme would not live up to the standard set in the "first" celebration in 2010.

But I was wrong...

I would like to thank everyone who took part in the event, whether as presenters or attendees. It is events like this that makes me extremely proud to be an employee of Unisa.



From left to right: Dr Paul Prinsloo (ODL Coordinator), Mr Theo van der Vyfer (Economics), Ms Rochelle Wessels (Public Administration), Mr Jan Mentz (Computing), Prof Rita Maré (Vice Principal: Academic and Research), Mr Anton Jordaan (Management Accounting) and Mr Callum Scott (Philosophy and Systematic Theology).

9 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](#). The repository is updated on a regular basis and if you register on the repository, you will get notifications of any new uploads.

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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.