



### **PRINCIPAL'S STATEMENT TO SENATE**

During the inter-session since the last Senate Meeting, the university has been pre-occupied with a number of developments. On the one side, there is the debate about the appropriate construction of our academic programmes, and concerns about the perceived threat of academic restructuring at Unisa, targeted at some small disciplines especially in the College of Human Sciences. This has been framed in some circles as the ascendancy of managerialism, an aversion to collegiality, a threat to academic freedom and hostility to scholarly pursuits on the part of the Executive Management of this university.

On the other side, efforts have been underway to continue our endeavours of transformation at this university. Two critical interventions come to mind. First, the university engaged Accenture to assist us with mapping out a business architecture for the institution, which could become the key instrument in aligning people, process and technology components, to provide a framework for designing the required capabilities for the future envisaged ideal university. The final consolidated report was delivered to the university on 15 August 2007. It will also be recalled that we had invited the Commonwealth of Learning to constitute and coordinate a panel of experts who would undertake an institutional trial audit on the University of South Africa with a view to preparing for the HEQC Audit scheduled for August 2008. The panel visited the university for this purpose in June, and a final report has now been submitted.

Our institution has also launched its new information portal under the auspices of the Department of Information and Strategic Analysis. This is a much anticipated institutional resource that will make available to staff pertinent, accurate statistical data that will undoubtedly contribute to a more informed institutional profile. Extended management was also recently treated to a presentation on the Unisa Call Centre and we were at once struck by the sophistication of the systems and the possibilities that it holds for our institution in

advancing both our offerings and our quality of service. MyUnisa must also receive mention. This is an exciting instrument in our institution that offers immense potential for ODL delivery, both in terms of our interaction with our students, and in terms of support for our academics, and we must ensure that we take full advantage of that potential. All of these developments speak to an institution that can and indeed, must become confident and agile in the use of technology as we respond to the needs of our learners.

Alongside these two initiatives, the Extended Management team of the university held two breakaways in August. One was to review the 2007 Operational Plan and to assess performance management at the university, and the other a training workshop on the implementation of the strategic plan and understanding strategic management. In an effort to bring closure, direction and certainty to the questions regarding conditions of employment, so as to consolidate and give effect to the merger, on 17 July Executive Management resolved that once agreement had been reached at the Unisa Bargaining Forum about the new Conditions of Service, these would be applied to all staff at all levels within 30 days from that date. It will now be understood that the new Conditions of Service are now the official standard determining conditions of service at Unisa. On another note, I cannot fail but mention the Unisa Inspired Week held in August. I trust that such initiatives are understood as efforts at creating and developing community at the university.

I take this opportunity to thank all the colleagues who devoted so much time and effort in seeking to establish this university on a sound footing. Prof Narend Baijnath and his team in the portfolio Strategy, Planning and Partnerships, Dr TND Sidzumo-Mazibuko and her team in Corporate Services, Prof Barney Erasmus and his team at the Portfolio Operations, and without doubt, commendations are due to Dr Marie Ferreira and her team at Corporate Communications and Marketing as the lead department in the planning and development of the Unisa Inspired Week. On behalf of colleagues in the Executive Management team, I could not express enough, our gratitude and appreciation to these and many other colleagues across the university for the spirit with which they have appropriated ideas and implemented them. It is often when one contemplates the commitment of such Unisians that one begins to understand that the foundations are in place for building the new Unisa.

## II

At our training workshop recently, Mr Tony Manning introduced us to the DPAR Cycle: strategy, leadership and change involve the same activities. It begins with an honest assessment of the issues, facts and assumptions (D) leading to dissatisfaction with the status quo. Then possible futures are outlined and analysed, and options and choices looked at (P); possible actions to learn are explored (A) through drivers, goals and actions; and finally a continuous review, reflection and revision of the strategies and actions ®. I, for one, observed

through the workshop that we have applied the best available management and strategy theories, we have assessed our context, and we have set a compelling vision for this university.

And yet we have not set this place on fire with evangelical zeal. We are having to deal with some resistance in pockets of the university that, in my view are hankering after a past long gone, and devoid of any critical intellectual thought. It occurs to me that at issue are the cultures, principles, philosophies and underlying assumptions about our common existence together. It appears to me that in reality we do not yet, at Unisa, envisage a common or shared future, and we do not occupy the same social and academic spaces even though we may be employed by the same institution. In other words, I perceive that there is a clash of cultures, which must somehow be resolved in such a manner as to ensure that there will remain here, an institution we can all be proud of and that we can bequeath to future generations. In Tony Manning's idiom, we need to identify "the hill" towards which we all advance in determined steps and with clear objectives.

Accenture undertook a Gap Analysis on Unisa and observed, among others

- Leadership development to enable executive and other levels of management to deliver according to institutional goals;
- Redefine and integrate business processes to streamline and integrate operational functioning and provide process excellence;
- Culture transformation to transform Unisa into becoming a high performance, service-excellence culture and align behaviour to the strategy and values of the to-be organisation.

The CoL Trial Audit Report issued a number of commendations to Unisa, as well as some challenges and recommendations. Of particular significance is the appreciation expressed, for efforts being undertaken to embed the institutional culture and practice in ODL principles, continuing efforts at academic and research performance, and the promotion of learner support and investment in staff development. Among the 53 Recommendations, I highlight the view that ODL programmes should be mandatory on all teaching and relevant support staff, and that all teaching staff should integrate myUNISA and its pedagogical applications into their teaching to the extent that they become a condition of employment at Unisa. There are also recommendations about a restructured research organisation at Unisa, etc.

All of this suggests to me that we have a "hill" to climb before we get to Bertolt Brecht's proverbial "plains". We need to realise clearly that we can no longer continue as we are; that operational, academic and socio-political pressures demand that we change, that it cannot be "business-as-usual". Frankly this hackneyed binary debate about managerialism vs

collegialism much loved by Unisa scholars is passé and it no longer evokes intellectual meaning. It simply posits structures and processes that are inseparable, into opposites, and it undermines the comprehensive and integrated nature of academic processes as if there is something inherently wrong with the appropriate management of resources, demanding accountability and working to accomplish defined results. Equally, an academic institution functions best when it conceives of itself and its manner of operations not merely as a set of individuals but as a community of scholars bound together by a philosophy of intellectual exploration, observant of society and the natural environment, contributing to the renewal of society's resources, in skills, learning and technology, and holding society to a vision about what it could accomplish to better itself.

Our commitment, therefore, is to support the truly academic aspirations of all our staff. It means that we must address arguments that are pseudo-academic but which in fact harbour reactionary notions about our human and organisational condition at Unisa and in our country. I am keen to encourage explorations of our future states in a spirit of adventure in unknown dimensions, to free the human spirit and excite intellectual desire to even greater heights or depths.

### III

I fear that if we continue as we are, we shall mortgage that future in a market of barren ideas. Of immediate concern is the image and reputation of this university as an open learning and distance education institution. In keeping with the ODL ideals and practices we must be forward-looking, inventive and creative. We must explore otherness – the otherness of learning and understanding, the otherness of knowledge and intellectual perspicacity that comes with our diverse cultures and histories. We have all come here with our diverse narratives. We need to get it into our minds that this prevailing Western philosophical hegemony can no longer survive without challenge; not just here in Africa, but I believe also throughout the world of learning. The second implication of ODL, I suggest, is that we should value our students. Our students are our fellow learners and interlocutors in the learning in the Aristotelian mode. That suggests to me that a teacher begins with a regard and respect for the learner as a fellow enquirer after knowledge.

That we should have so many students at Unisa failing in their studies persistently; that results - especially in some subjects - remain persistently poor, has nothing to do with academic excellence, nor does it merely show the failings of the students, but the lack of teaching competencies of the lecturer as well. To put it another way, it is just as important to the lecturer that students succeed in their studies as it is to the student. There is a reputational risk to this university when large numbers of students fail in their studies or drop out altogether without completing their studies.

I pause here to pay tribute to those many academic, instructional and professional staff at Unisa who go out of their way to support students, with a devotion to their duties that is without parallel. Many such efforts are rewarded not just with good results but in the formation of a bond with the learner that establishes one as a teacher of excellence. We have to address the question of throughput and success rates at Unisa as a matter of urgency. Towards this end I have been conducting interviews with the Executive Deans in order to get a sense from them as to whether there is sufficient appreciation of the urgency of this matter, and to urge that plans be submitted to address the quality of learning, learner support and throughput at each of our colleges.

Finally, I wish to suggest that we have arrived at crossroads at Unisa. To start with, we have to be serious about our ODL aspirations. That means as the CoL Trial Audit Report suggests, that ODL must become a prevailing academic culture of our institution. If that is so then our pedagogic model must demonstrate that and our course structure and academic system must be much more focused. We should be researching and publishing on ODL learning and teaching philosophies and methods, alongside the best scholars and practitioners in the field. The process towards a new PQM is of critical importance to Unisa as we establish our credentials as an ODL institution of academic accomplishment and with a social mandate. We have been trailblazers in the South African higher education spectrum with our college model. But we need to go further. We need to rethink our academic model, and introduce more and better interdisciplinary collaborations, programme and research groups. And so we are at crossroads as to whether we have the courage of our convictions regarding our ODL model or we insist on being an inefficient and mediocre hybrid institution.

The crossroads challenge us in another manner. It means that each our staff, sooner or later, must make strategic choices for themselves. This university can no longer carry the baggage and dead wood of those who have no interest in the accomplishment of this university's mission and purpose. We have reached a stage where we shall identify any of our staff, at all levels of our institution, who derive no benefit for themselves except by being here, and who offer no benefit to this university. We shall be offering severance packages and encouraging them to leave the university so that we may recruit a new breed of scholars, professional staff and administrators imbued with the sense of mission and commit to this university and its future.

With the new Conditions of Service and remuneration system we believe that Unisa is now in a position to attract the best scholars, professionals and administrators/managers. We desire to support and retain the best scholars we have at this university, and there are many who are devoted to their craft, committed to supporting their students and ensuring their success, and accomplished researchers. We are also now poised to attract and to retain the best scholars

in all fields. That is the bedrock strategy that will help us bring this university to greater heights.

In short, we want to create an environment where scholarship may thrive and where intellectual life may prosper. What we do not need at this university are those among us who see this university as a convenient fall-back assurance system for their future while they pursue other interests; have only a marginal interest in their students and have not published for many years. We shall identify them and encourage them to take a package and go, hopefully amicably. We have realised that this system has obtained at Unisa for many years with impunity, largely because it was allowed to. That means that managers have shied away from managing adequately, the people and resources under their care. It also means that for far too long Unisa has abdicated its responsibilities to the unions and to the congenitally disgruntled minority who have successfully held this university to ransom. That cannot be allowed to continue. We have a right and a duty to demand professional conduct, to hold each other accountable and to uphold the finest traditions of academic life.

#### IV

At the recent management *lekgotla* we identified the quality of management as the critical missing element in the realisation of our strategic goals. We noted that too many of our management corps at all levels lacked the confidence and resolve to undertake their tasks successfully. Many often struggle without support from their colleagues, and experience constant undermining. We fear that as a result, the institution receives mixed messages, as some managers have not owned the strategic direction being pursued by the university. This year, therefore, we shall review the performance of managers, and institute development training to enhance capacity for managers in communication, people skills, systems and processes. In other words the prevailing culture will be one of empowerment of managers and the putting in place of support structures and systems to help them do their work.

It was also resolved at the *bosberaad* that we needed to make the underlying values of the institution more explicit and that they may become the defining characteristic that shapes our conduct. In the first instance, we desire to become a caring, fair and just institution in our dealings with students and with one another. That means that we should undertake to listen to each other more, engage in robust debate if necessary, but always treat one another with respect even where we differ most. It also suggests that we undertake to become a listening organisation, that we give one another an opportunity to be heard, and that our actions will result from what we have heard rather than what we assume about another. This means that we should cultivate sensitivity.

Finally, we therefore undertake to become a learning organisation. We learn as we go. As an academic institution we value learning. Learning is, in fact our *raison d'être*. We need to communicate our underpinning philosophy of life together; that which makes it possible for us to live together rather than tolerate one another in our common space.

Prof David Mosoma, the Deputy Vice Chancellor, presented a statement on institutional values and ethics of management at the management *indaba*. We wish to inculcate across the institution the notion that integrity is an essential human value that gives quality to our decisions, and helps us establish an environment of trust among ourselves. As Norman Vincent Peale and Kenneth Blanchard say in their little book: "There is no right way to do a wrong thing". We could change life at Unisa if only we applied the ethics check that Peale and Blanchard refer to, and adopt the ethics of responsibility. Prof Mosoma's paper will be distributed, and the recently adopted Unisa Charter on Ethics will hopefully be adopted by Senate and by Council as well.

V

To end this address, I wish to take this opportunity to report on the status of the Conditions of Service. As we understand it the Conditions of Service apply to all staff at Unisa. There is, however, an implementation programme that has been adopted. It is my understanding that the salary and financial payments will be effected by October 1. Work will then begin on phase two of the remuneration plan to consider those who need a further performance indexed rating. With all the difficulties that accompanied the process, I understand that the placement process is now complete. The second phase has also begun in order to identify gaps and to place qualifying staff in appropriate positions. For both these matters I wish to pay tribute to colleagues in Human Resources who have worked hard to finalise a very difficult process.

I am also aware that the final phase in this process, and one which will consolidate and bring to an end the merger processes, will be the voluntary severance packages which are being negotiated within the UBF and should be publicised soon. Once all that is done, we can then attend to the critical academic matters like the tuition model, the PQM and the shape of our academic units.

I trust though that we can all agree that merger work is a challenging business and an exhilarating task. I have found it so.

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