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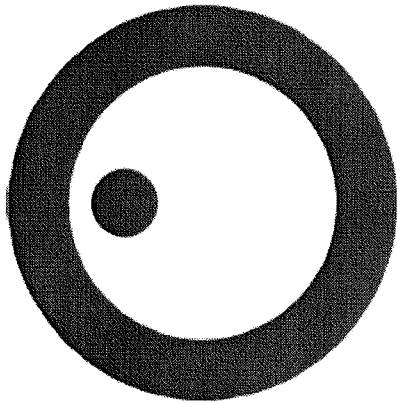
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LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES DRIVING THE TRANSFORMATION AGENDA IN A UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the leaders' knowledge and leadership attributes that have the potential to influence transformation, post-merger and incorporation of the DUT. The research study is grounded in quantitative methods whereby a survey was conducted to 191 university leaders with 133 returned successfully generating the response percentage of 70%. The findings generated the reliability coefficient Alpha of 0.947 indicating the high degree of acceptance and consistent of the results. The findings revealed the highest percentage of 70% regarding the belief that transformation refers to restructuring the institution more than commonly anticipated variables such as race (56%). Furthermore the findings revealed that nearly 40% of the research participants do not feel that the university creates platform for open debates; independent thinking and freedom of speech (30%). This study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in the realization of both the institutional and national transformation agenda.

Keywords: Race, restructuring, stakeholder, transformation agenda

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions in South Africa have been merged with high expectations and condescending goals which have caused a plethora of challenges including tensions, violent confrontations and clashes amongst the key stakeholders on transformational issues. According to Ncayiyane and Hayward (2007, p. 23), 'transformation' in South Africa elicited various tensions and expectations from different constituencies. Joubert and Martins (2013, p. 112) argue that institutions of higher education continue to grapple with transformation issues due to additional pressure from stakeholders, including students, the business community and donors. They argue that the transformation agenda in UNISA covers the entire spectrum of the strategic planning process, including the vision, mission, values and institutional operations. Zide (2010, p. 650) argues that as part of the transformation agenda, open public debates should be held to interrogate issues of public concern as well as issues of governance, as they affect staff and students alike. While, a plethora of researchers have focussed solely on open debates (Heifetz, Kania & Kramer, 2004; Ramphela, 2008) as the way to provide solutions to challenges faced by higher education institutions. The current **politicised** South African higher education institutions (HEIs) dominated by the indecisive and politically deployed leaders have triggered this study. This study is influenced by different views previously presented by researchers above with an attempt to provide an empirically proven perspectives on leadership influence on transformation. The primary objective of this study is to interrogate the knowledgeability and leadership attributes that have the potential to influence and achieve the transformation agenda of the university.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The term "leadership" has many definitions but for the purpose of this study the term encompasses and refers to university managers to lead, drive and influence transformation. Olasupo (2011, p. 163) contend that leadership

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach (Cresswell, 2009) was employed whereby a structured questionnaire that reached a large number of employees in leadership positions (junior to middle) which made possible for the quantification of the findings. Quantitative designs deal with a large number of respondents, use numbers to generalisable comparisons and conclusions about populations (Ghuri & Gronhaug, 2005) as the case in this study. The empirical study was conducted by means of a survey questionnaire which provided for the collection of large amounts of data. The study employed a stratified random sampling of 191 respondents, ideal to test for the finding's reliability and validity, distributed equitably between academic and non-academic leaders with university leadership between Peromnes Grades 8 and 6 (junior and middle management). The stratified random sampling is a modification of random sampling in which a research divides the population into two or more relevant and significant strata based on one or number of attributes (Lewis, Kaufman & Christakis, 2008, p. 215-223). A host of researchers (Welman, Kruger and Mitchell, 2005 and De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont, 2005) argue that a sample can only be described as representative if it has the same properties or characteristics as the population relevant to the research in question. A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was developed with a range from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, and (3) undecided, to (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree, allowing for the perspectives and views of the sampled university leaders to be captured through responses to leading statements.

Measuring instruments

As all participants were competent, they was capable of completing the questionnaires unassisted. The statements that were included in the questionnaire used in this study were formulated in accordance with the guidelines by Fullan and Scott (2009); Hemsall (2014); Mabelebele (2013); Makgoba and Chetty (2010); Mendenhall *et al.* (2008) and Service and Carson (2013). Mendenhall *et al.* 2008; Service and Carson (2013); Cohen (2010); Neck and Manz (2013); Seedat *et al.* (2014).

Data collection

The data were collected over a three-month period from May to July 2013. Of the total of 191 questionnaires distributed, 133 responses were received representing a 70 percent response rate. To maintain confidentiality, the questionnaires were distributed and collected by the researcher. The Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha values for individual dimensions were high and a reliability coefficient of 0.947 was recorded.

Data analysis

The quantitative data collected from the respondents was analyzed using SPSS, version 12 for data capturing, presentation, analysis and interpretation.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research findings indicate that there is a need for improvement regarding leadership factors influencing transformation and this implies that they need to be prioritised when radical change management interventions are conducted with the aim to achieve an institutional transformation agenda. A frequency analysis was undertaken to determine the exact areas where attention is needed. This study found 56% of the respondents having an understanding of transformation in the context of race. Only 21% of them had a different view. The research findings reveal nearly 70% of the respondents as understanding transformation in the context of restructuring of the institution. Only 13% of the subjects had a declared disagreement with the latter finding. This study shows nearly 56% of subjects regarded transformation as referring to moving away from the comfort zone into the unknown. Only 19% had an opposite opinion. Over 60% of the research subjects understood transformation as referring to changes taking place in our society. The research findings on redressing past injustices, at nearly 60%, are closely equated to the statement on transformation as referring to reflecting the changes taking place in society. Almost 50% of the research participants had an understanding of the transformation agenda of the university; about 30% had a contrary view. This study also demonstrated more than

of the respondents have an understanding of the transformation agenda of this university. This raises serious concerns about the strategic stance, direction and efforts of the university in achieving the transformation agenda, as more than half of the respondents are either in disagreement with or undecided about their understanding of the transformation agenda. This suggests that the university does not have an agenda or plan to resolve matters brought by transformation in the post-merger and incorporation era of this university. The most notable finding supporting the aforesaid conclusion that a high percentage of university leaders had contrary views and were undecided about their understanding of the transformation solutions within the university. The major limitations of this study was on the research participants is reluctant to divulge information as they were afraid of being victimised by university leaders. For future research it is suggested that this study should be replicated at other merged universities in South Africa as the way to develop a remedial comprehensive plan where commonalities exist in terms of challenges. Future research should focus on the open-ended questions and focussed groups in order to triangulate the aforementioned findings. Future studies could investigate how internal responsive training and developmental programmes could realise the transformation agenda of the university and that of the society.

Therefore, this study came to the conclusion that in order for the leaders to improve the knowledge of transformation, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration:

- 1) The university leaders should embark on the realignment or restructuring of faculties and departments with clear outcomes and outputs in order for the transformation agenda to be realised.
- 2) The university leaders should ensure that all university leaders share the same knowledge on transformation which could be earned by sensitizing the university leaders and interventions of change conducted.
- 3) The university leaders should ensure that institutional structures are deliberating on transformation issues and take measurable decisions and resolutions aimed at bringing about radical changes.
- 4) The university should have an all-encompassing strategic plan with clear measurable transformation goals, outputs and outcomes in place in order for all university leaders to understand and act upon the transformation agenda of the university.
- 5) The university leaders should have an open door policy with a clear communication plan which will increase the visibility and accessibility of the leaders by their stakeholders in order to be able to air their transformational views, suggestions, initiatives and uncertainties without any fear.

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