

Chapter VI: Conclusion

6.1 *Introduction*

Transformation is presently a concept which is associated with all universities and which provides a typification of a variety of processes at present under way at a large number of South African universities. Transformation essentially involves a process of change that is of a fundamental nature. Seen within the context of the unique nature of universities worldwide, this concept is not found generally, as such, in the current international literature on the topic of universities. For that reason there is no clarity as to what is understood by the notion of transformation both nationally and internationally. It is generally known, however, that higher education internationally is being faced by radical changes, and this is generally acknowledged in literature in the field.

From the above and from the entire study it becomes essential in my conclusion to first of all give attention to the notion of transformation and to reflect on my experience with the PU vir CHO in terms of this process.

6.2 *Perspectives on transformation*

6.2.1 The national perspective

The democratisation of tertiary institutions is a process of transformation of institutions to enable them to fully meet the higher education needs of South Africa, and specifically, of the diverse communities each of them serves. Such a process has become necessary because of the changed nature of society in which they function, and because maintenance of efficiency at institutions cannot prevail without a return to disciplined conduct. A culture of learning and teaching should be rebuilt. This requires, inter alia, that all constituencies perceive the structures of governance to be legitimate.

The process of transformation inevitably includes the transformation of the governance system of an institution. Central to this governance system is the composition of the council of an institution. A fundamental principle regarding the composition of the council of an institution is that the institution itself must make decisions to bring about change.

The academic institution is like no other organisation or commercial enterprise. It should not be treated by elected officials as if it were simply like any other government agency. Neither should it be treated as if it were primarily a business, although it should adopt sound business practices.

Council members need to understand and respect three important values and traditions within the academy: academic freedom, institutional independence, and consultation with stakeholders for appropriate decisions. These concepts are sometimes misinterpreted and abused - both inside and outside the academy.

Traditional academic values should be respected and considered because they are critical ingredients to the success of the finest higher education systems in the world. Higher education systems that have contributed the most to their countries have operated in environments in which academic freedom was respected. The reputation of academic institutions is primarily a reflection of the competence, creativity and contributions of academic staff.

Academic institutions are fragile because they are so vulnerable to criticism. History shows that they can be resistant to attack - but it is sometimes necessary for councils to protect the institution, vice-chancellor, academic staff, or other members of the campus community from external attack. Councils that have shown the courage to stand up to unwarranted attacks provide the protection critical to institutional success.

Universities in South Africa are undergoing the most significant period of change in their history. The work of the National Commission on Higher Education (which built on the work of earlier stakeholder research, commissions and individual studies, the Green Paper, White Paper, and the Higher Education Act of 1997, spell out a new vision for higher education in South Africa based on equality, equity, democracy, justice, access, redress, effectiveness, academic freedom, high quality and public accountability.

To achieve these goals, the structure of higher education was changed in fundamental ways by adding a Council on Higher Education (CHE) and strengthening the role of the Ministry of Education while guaranteeing high levels of autonomy for individual institutions. Such autonomy, if it is to be sustained, must continue to be earned.

According to Ncayiyana and Hayward (1999: 54-55), in the new structure of higher education, the responsibilities of governing councils are tied to transformation and linked to the Commission on Higher Education and the Ministry. In this context, council members are involved in rethinking and restructuring their institutions to meet the conditions of a new democratic system, the economic requirements of a rapidly growing economy, the training requirements of its students (a majority of whom has suffered from the deficiencies of apartheid education), the needs of its citizens for continuing education, and the demands for creativity in the modern world. The next few years will require extraordinary council leadership in addressing issues of academic programme quality, oversight, reform, access, student aid programmes, accountability, cost containment, productivity, restructuring and many other challenges related to the enormous demographic shifts in student population under way as a consequence of the end of apartheid and the opening of a new democratic era in South Africa. It is a challenging and daunting time to be a council member, but it is also a unique opportunity to make a difference in the nation's development and prosperity.

The nation's commitment to wide access to higher education has created new pressures at the very time when there are other tremendous demands on government resources. Thus, patterns of funding for universities and technikons are also changing dramatically. There need to be diversification of sources of income if high quality institutions are to be maintained and fully developed.

Thus far, higher education institutions have been amazingly adaptive to the transformation and change essential to survival, growth and stability. But still, there will be increasing pressure to improve, explore new options, and constantly changing environment of a new world order. The pressure will not cease, indeed it may grow, but council member must protect vigilantly the independence and academic freedom that is fundamental to the integrity of the nation's universities.

There is little doubt that council members will have to be more keenly aware of public policy developments than has been necessary in past decades. The nation needs its most able and influential citizen to serve on the councils of higher education institutions - men and women who care deeply about education, as well as who understand the finances of large and complex academic institutions, the political and social issues that find their way into the council chamber, and the responsibilities and duties associated with their advocacy role on behalf of the public trust.

Student access and success are, in essence, transformation issues. It is the responsibility of council to ensure that there are workable and coherent institutional policies on student access and success, particularly with regard to students with deprived educational backgrounds. Coherent policies are only possible in the context of an institutional strategic plan that states where the institution intends to be in a given number of years, what courses it expects to offer, how many students will be enrolled, throughput rates, the ratio of staff to students, anticipated funding levels, and the long term vision for the future. Student success policies and strategies also have far-reaching management

implications for student housing and catering, classroom space, and staffing levels, as well as library and recreational facilities.

If change is to be legitimised and institutionalised, power is an important decisive factor. Power needs to be exercised in an appropriate manner in order to gain the support of internal constituencies for change to have a lasting effect.

Reforms introduced from outside, particularly from above, as stated by Fourie (1996:52) and earlier in Chapter three, are seldom successful and lasting. Universities are bottom-heavy structures, even if hierarchical, and on many issues change imposed from the top has little chance of success unless it is mediated and accepted at grass roots. The role of the national higher education policy is therefore mostly of facilitator of, or barrier to, developments which originate within institutions.

However, organisations will not change if the people in them do not change as indicated by Fourie (1996:52). Institutional effort will only work with individuals' effort. However, individuals and groups to which they belong have long standing practices based on particular values, beliefs and expectations. These values, beliefs and expectations are, to varying degrees, challenged by innovations and change. The process of change, particularly in the initial stages is therefore an uncomfortable one, because the individual or group has to reconstruct reality and develop new meaning.

6.2.2 The PU vir CHO experience

As indicated in Chapters IV and V, respectively, towards the end of 1993 to early 1994 the black students in this campus started to conscientise themselves about the expected changes in the higher education system. This was the period when the management of this University also started with its consultation process in order to initiate a debate to address fundamental changes which accompany

global economy and the sweeping political changes which presented profound challenges to this University.

Through memoranda and demonstrations by black students and the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union, an awareness was created to the University Council that change can only be delayed but not stopped. This has finally led the University Council to commit itself to transformation.

What is important as mentioned earlier on is that two parallel processes unfolded in this institution of higher learning. While the Broad Transformation Forum was engaged in debates surrounding issues like access, **language, the character of the University,** and **governance,** the forum was also busy dealing with substantial matters like the appointment of vice-chancellors, the Green Paper on Higher Education, White Paper on Higher Education and submissions on the statutes of the University.

The reason that language and institutional character are being put in **bold** is that during this painful process there was insufficient consensus on the language policy and character of the University. This is why there were deadlocks and workouts during these heated debates. Black students in particular, supported by NEHAWU always accused the other stakeholders, particularly Council and other student groupings which were predominantly white such as PUK Studente Aksie (PSA), of treating language and the character as the non-negotiable issues. This was one of the most painful processes experienced in this campus. But to a certain extent it contributed a lot to making people aware that there are no such thing as, "...this one cannot be negotiated or changed".

Sometimes through lack of commitment people tend to question the legitimacy of the process and of the Forum itself. The other burning issue which was dealt with was the veto-powers of the Council. Initially some stakeholders wanted the Forum to have statutory powers and be able to veto decisions, and Council's duty be there just to endorse. Well, I believe this won't happen to any institution

and to further confirm that, it is endorsed in the Higher Education Act that Institutional Forums will only be there for advisory purposes - they can't replace or supersede the Council.

Whether these Institutional Forums will have any impact on the decision-making process of Councils is questionable. During interviews conducted through telephone and electronic-mail in order to gauge levels of transformation at other universities in South Africa, the status of the transformation forums and their relations with the universities' Councils were identified as one of the problems affecting transformation of higher education institutions. It is one topic that really needs serious research.

It remains a question whether the ministerial appointees in the Councils do play any significant role in decision-making process of the universities or are they just there to rubber-stamp the decision of the Councils. This will also need to be looked deep into thoroughly in the future.

One can also safely conclude that while the process design at this University might seem impressive, the question is: "was the process itself truly negotiated or was it merely pushed to meet the requirements of the higher education legislation?" How many people did know that this kind of process was evolving? This translates on whether the broader community was involved and what was their impact. OR was this just an internal arrangement?

Being an optimist, and through the experience of transformation workshops/bosberade and observation, the author also concludes that an Institutional Forum (a legitimate one), will expedite renewal and revitalisation, it will use dialogue as the vehicle of progress, it will help re-established trust, but more importantly, it will allow stake holders to formulate ethos, a shared ethos and values for the University. The management of universities must accept that their universities will have to change but more importantly, they must convince

members of senate, staff and students that transformation is good for the institutions and ultimately for individuals themselves.

6.3 WAY FORWARD - THE 'DO IT' APPROACH

When suggesting on how to turn institutions into a success, Human (1998:172-202), says that there comes a time or moment when no amount of further research, debate, or planning can guarantee the successful implementation of a strategy or idea. "In fact, planning for action can sometimes paralyse us, rendering us immobile as we become increasingly aware of the problems and risks associated with the task we face. Another danger of excessive planning is that we become so bogged down in perfecting our plans that we lose sight of the reason we made in the first place. As managers grappling with change, we have to take the risk of going into action without the comfort of carefully researched plans. Theories of change should ideally be developed after taking action, not before".

The implication of this statement is that it is only during the process of implementation that policies and strategies can be tested, refined and improved. It is therefore, pointless to wait until everyone is perfectly satisfied with every aspect of strategy before putting to work. Implementation should not consist of the mechanical and uncritical application of a rigid formula, but should be a reflective and dialectical process in which ideas and actions interact and continuously shape and inform each other. This means that we need to accept that our policies and strategies may not necessarily be perfect.

Human (1998:173) says that those departments and institutions that acted early, by 'jumping in at the deep end', are in a far better position today than those that waited for the perfect policy to emerge from strategy sessions and workshops. Many of the initiatives put into action by new and reformed institutions will of necessity be experimental and should be seen as learning opportunities. It

should also not be forgotten that even experimental projects would be welcomed by the majority of people, especially the previously disadvantaged communities in our society. Any concrete efforts, even if imperfect, will be appreciated by those who are still waiting for a revolution to transform their lives. The efforts of those who are trying to do things that will have a positive impact on the community, are unlikely to be rejected.

What are the implications of the above-mentioned on universities? Many sectors of our institutions are caught in a frustrating double bind (a situation referred to by Human, 1998:173): they want to impose democratic systems, but are doing so from above, while failing to act democratically at grass roots level. To apply systems hierarchically from above without taking into account what is happening out there not only reflects bad management, but perpetuates an authoritarian culture in which the community and clients (students and staff in this case) are passive and helpless recipients of services. Therefore, a top-down approach and non-transparency hinder the progress in the transformation processes.

Certain inferences according to Fourie (1996:51) can be made: Within any higher education institution there are various groups with legitimate, though possibly conflicting goals and priorities, and each of these groups will view a forthcoming innovation differently, depending on how the innovation is likely to affect its own responsibilities and aspirations. Whereas some changes are system convergent, that is, they confirm or extend well established practices, others are system divergent and involve radical changes. The former can be dealt with in a relatively straightforward manner, but the latter require a new and more radical approach. Because of the fact that individuals and groups in an organisation might embrace certain values, yet act in different ways, there is often insight into a problem and recognition of what should be done to solve it, but an inability to effect the desired change. Operational changes without corresponding normative changes will be ineffective and superficial. Leadership that not only initiates change, but also structures, guides and supports the planned change process is important for successfully facilitating change.

Human (1998:212) illustrates how people at the grass roots react when there is lack of consideration of their needs by those holding positions of authority, and the uselessness of workshops when their needs are not satisfied. This also, is a perfect example for universities. Putting an emphasis on those cruel deeds who act in the name of the people without ever actually improving their lives, he says: "South Africa is becoming a scrap yard of workshops. Elderly caretakers shake their heads and chuckle to themselves as they clean up the piles of paper handouts and graphs left behind after yet another workshop or conference. The important people with their politically correct jargon and cell phones have left; **everything else remains the same.** A child leads a blind man across the road. Their pace is slow but sure, unaffected by the whirlwind of activity that has just been going on in the only hall in their small town offers".

The birth of the new, free, and democratic South Africa which also gave rise to the birth of the new *Bill of Rights* poses a challenge to European dominance and hegemony in universities. Section 8, *The Right to Equality and Freedom from Discrimination* states that the law must protect everyone equally. No person shall be discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, ethnic and social origin, age, disability, religion, colour, sexual orientation, conscience, belief, culture and language. This is also the emphasis of the National Commission on Higher education (NCHE) that the inequalities and inefficiencies inherited from the apartheid era and to the new social, cultural and economic demands should be addressed.

Thus, the new Consitution provides the impetus to rethink the Euro-centric and white-male dominated canon of knowledge on which South African universities were founded.

Hence, transformation processes at various universities have tended to reflect broader cleavages in society and have in many respects become part of the drive towards empowering a new hegemonic group, in order to replace the hegemony of the past.

It could be argued that there is a need to redress the occupational inequalities generated by apartheid. Narrowly conceived, the education and training programmes which can more rapidly produce large numbers of skilled black employees would, as a result, need to take precedence – at least for a large cohort of people. From this point, the virtual exclusion of black people from skilled occupations makes access to those occupations more urgent than the status distinction entailed in the vocational or academic differentiation.

This, of course, is to address the problem in terms of the basic right argument which asserts the need to abolish racial, gender and class inequalities in the sphere of education and in the occupational structure. The training provided for functionaries of political community-based organisations should be broadly based and, therefore, academic in character, leading to the development of flexible, analytical skills capable of being deployed in rapidly changing environment.