

“Leadership for Change”

Dalarna University meeting at Falun, Sweden,
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1. Introduction

As is the case with many higher education institutions in this day and age, we have been going through a process of change at Stellenbosch University (SU) for some time now. The transformation of South Africa since 1994 had an impact on my University. It set us on a course of broadening our horizons by deciding to make a meaningful contribution to the welfare of the whole community – the country and the continent.

This discussion is an opportunity to get to grips with the concept of the engaged university, the relevant university, the university that makes a difference to the lives of people by taking on board an instrument such as the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. But – and this is the interesting part – doing it in such a way that it enhances, not detracts from, the pursuit of academic excellence.

Engaging with the challenge of human development goes to the heart of the role, function and place of the university in society. Engagement enriches the academic enterprise, improves research, makes learning and teaching better.

But not everyone agrees on this. Not all academics peering from the ivory tower will see it this way. If you do go this way, you can expect some resistance. So leadership is crucial. That is why I want to address role of leadership in bringing about change in an academic organisation.

Let us use this as an opportunity to strengthen higher education everywhere. I want to tell you about our experience at SU. But let me first take a step back by briefly looking at the idea of the university as such.

2. Role, function and place of the university in society

The modern university may be characterised by three distinct yet overlapping functions¹. In the first place the university is a centre of education or general formation through learning and teaching. The emphasis here is *pedagogical* – on shaping the graduate through an open and rational exchange of ideas.

¹ Adapted from a characterisation by Hennie Rossouw, *Universiteit, wetenskap en kultuur: opstelle oor die krisis, uitdagings en geleenthede van die moderne universiteit* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1993).

In the second place the university aims at the generation of new knowledge via research. The emphasis is *cognitive* – on the skills and facilities and methods for producing measurable, reliable qualitative and quantitative knowledge outcomes.

Finally, the university serves as an important instrument for the furthering of goals external to itself, often determined by social needs. The emphasis here is *pragmatic* – where the application of knowledge is pursued to the benefit of society.

Universities have the profound task of satisfying all three characterisations, as all three are always pertinent to a greater or lesser degree in different contexts and times. Moreover, university management is about the art of keeping all three these paradigms alive, yet knowing which model fits when and where. The challenge is to integrate the paradigms comprehensively so that the university becomes what Castells² calls an “engine of development”.

3. Origins of hope at Stellenbosch University

Now, my “engine” is situated at the southern tip of Africa, in the town of Stellenbosch, approximately 50km from Cape Town. SU is one of 23 public universities in South Africa. The country has a combined head count of 521 000 students in higher education contact tuition.

Stellenbosch has 28 000 students (of which more than a third are at postgraduate level), 10 faculties spread over four campuses, and 900 academic staff members.

Our roots go back to 1859, but we were officially established in 1918. Today, Stellenbosch is one of Africa’s leading research universities. Last year, we broke into three global rankings in quick succession – the QS World University Ranking, the Times Higher Education World University Ranking, and the Leiden Ranking. Overall, we now occupy the second position in Africa (behind the University of Cape Town), but we are the continent’s leading research-intensive university. According to South Africa’s Department of Higher Education and Training, we have maintained the highest weighted research output per fulltime-equivalent academic staff member for the third time in a row.

The transformation of SU is a very interesting story. Once known as the so-called “cradle of apartheid”, having produced a number of apartheid prime ministers, we have since become a “national asset” providing equal access to all.

This new direction was captured in an important policy statement in the year 2000, our *Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond*³. In it, “[t]he University acknowledges its contribution to the injustices of the past ... and commits itself to appropriate redress and development initiatives.”

² See Manuel Castells, *The University System: Engine of development in the new world economy* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 1991).

³ www.sun.ac.za/university/stratplan/statengels.doc

When I was appointed Rector and Vice-Chancellor in 2007, I dedicated my time in office to the tangible realisation of this commitment. In my installation address⁴ I pointed out that we faced the challenge of “relevance”. We would have to find a way to move “from success to significance”.

I proposed to my colleagues that we establish a “pedagogy of hope” at the University. This was inspired by, amongst others, the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. It was his *Pedagogy of the oppressed*⁵ and *Pedagogy of Hope: reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*⁶ that had led to a global emphasis on a “critical pedagogy” within education, conveying the idea that education should play a role in changing the world for the better.

Freire asked what demands democracy placed on the curriculum. He argued that education should stimulate critical thinking and a critical consciousness. People should be empowered so that they may free themselves from oppression, poverty, injustice and the difficult task of living peacefully with former oppressors in a new situation.

I felt that by infusing our pedagogical outlook with this kind of hope, we would be able to become not only “significantly different” from our past, but also “significantly better” in terms of our excellence and commitment to the people of our country and continent.

I had to decide whether to sell the idea to my colleagues slowly-slowly, or whether to boldly set a course and get everyone to come on board. I decided on the latter approach. In my experience, a high take-off speed is crucial for lift off. And the fact that you might still need to build your plane as you fly it should not deter you.

So, we went to Council and argued that by harnessing our strengths, by following a science-for-society approach, we could demonstrate our relevance as an institution. By taking on some of society’s toughest challenges, we could position ourselves as the ideal partner for those wanting to make a difference in the world.

My colleagues and I looked at local, regional and international development agendas, including the UN’s Millennium Development Goals. We formulated five themes of our own to guide our activities as university: teaching and learning; research; and community interaction.

Our themes are:

- (i) Fighting endemic poverty and related conditions;
- (ii) Promoting human dignity and health;
- (iii) Consolidating democracy and human rights;
- (iv) Deepening peace and security; and
- (v) Balancing a sustainable environment with a competitive industry.

⁴ <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Management/rektor/docs/russel%20installation%20speech.pdf>

⁵ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1996 [1970]).

⁶ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of hope: reliving Pedagogy of the oppressed* (London : Continuum, 2004 [1992]).

I am happy to say that we got the full support of Council.

The next step was to galvanise academic and support staff around these themes. The University responded with enthusiasm, and we were flooded us with proposals based on existing expertise and programmes.

A committee sifted through them, and by 2008 we had a solid batch of 21 strategic hope-generating initiatives. The list has grown since then; we now have more than 30 initiatives resorting under the HOPE Project⁷.

4. Lessons

We still have a long way to go. And despite all we have learnt so far, we have by no means figured it all out. None the less, there are some important lessons that I would like to share with you.

4.1 Vision, Vision, Vision

The first lesson is that vision is everything. It is all about deciding where you are heading, and communicating that to your constituency as best you can.

A clear vision, encapsulating an easily identifiable goal, is important for several reasons. It attracts the attention of outsiders, it invigorates academics and professional staff, and it lets you tell a simple story of what it is you want to achieve, why and for whom. Your vision must be tied to the core functions of the university: teaching and learning, research and community interaction.

In our case, we knew we wanted to build a pedagogy of hope in higher education. The challenge was to turn it into something you can get sink your teeth into. It required lots of deliberation, consideration, debate and dialogue, but the advantage of such a process is that you build consensus.

4.2 The role of the Vice-Chancellor and other senior leaders

Here is a key lesson that I have learnt: For a campaign to be taken seriously it has to be owned at the very top. But that, of course, takes up a lot of one's time and attention. Fortunately, our Council and my management team have understood this. They have given me the leeway, as CEO, to lead the HOPE Project as our advancement campaign.

Strategic donors want to hear from the horse's mouth; they want to be able to judge for themselves whether your campaign is a core strategy, or if you are merely busy with public relations. And trust me, they will decide for themselves – pretty quickly.

So, to be successful, an advancement campaign should rest in the Office of the Rector or Vice-Chancellor or President. As the university's top academic and top executive, you must

⁷ <http://www.thehopeproject.co.za>

give the campaign focus, commitment, time, energy and enthusiasm. And more so, it must formally become a key performance area of your job.

4.3 Building on the best ideas

The third and final lesson speaks to the value of stimulating the academic community to come up with imaginative and innovative proposals that could give effect to your vision of where you need to go as an institution.

We invited Deans to ask the people in their departments to submit their best ideas and strongest proposals – of two kinds. The first would be projects that they had wanted to undertake before, but which could be executed quicker with the necessary funding. The second would be new ideas – big, bold, strong ideas that also required funding.

5. Hope-generating initiatives

Next, I provide some examples of the exiting initiatives that SU staff and students came up with to give expression to the HOPE Project and its five themes. (For a more comprehensive overview, visit www.thehopeproject.co.za)

5.1 Graduate School⁸, incorporating PANGeA and the African Doctoral Academy

This example will appeal especially to members of Dalarna University's School of Education and Humanities.

Africa requires more solutions of its own to the many problems it faces. The brain drain has robbed the continent of some of its brightest minds, and universities' output of graduates and research is too low. Clearly, higher education in Africa needs a boost. Universities have a key role to play if Africa is to participate more fully in the global knowledge economy.

SU supports efforts to reinvigorate African scholarship in aid of human development. Three related initiatives by the University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences contribute toward this goal. They form part of the HOPE Project.

A Graduate School has been established to grow and sustain world-class postgraduate programmes and coordinate relevant research in Africa. The African Doctoral Academy is building the capacity of postgraduate students from Africa to study problems related to the continent's development more efficiently. And SU and six other leading African universities have started collaborating in a network called the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics (PANGeA).

Since 2010, 76 doctoral candidates have enrolled in fully funded full-time doctoral studies through the Graduate School. Of this number, 17 are from South Africa, 30 from other SADC countries and 29 from elsewhere on the continent.

⁸ See www.thehopeproject.co.za/graduateschool

5.2 Ukwanda Rural Clinical School⁹

This example will appeal especially to members of Dalarna University's School of Health and Social Studies.

The first medical doctors in South Africa who completed their full sixth-year clinical training in rural areas graduated from SU in December 2011. These eight students had been involved in the Ukwanda Centre for Rural Health of the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) in the Boland and Overberg.

Ukwanda is currently being expanded under the banner of the University's HOPE Project through the establishment of a fully-fledged Rural Clinical School (RCS) in conjunction with the Western Cape Provincial Government. The hub of the school is situated in Worcester and it has its spokes in Ceres, Robertson, Caledon, Hermanus and Swellendam.

The Ukwanda RCS is the first initiative of its kind in the country. It is aligned with international trends indicating that training undergraduates within rural areas helps to recruit students from and to establish graduates in those areas.

The health of people in rural communities is often poorer than that of people in cities. There are various reasons for this, with poverty being a main factor. There are also often simply not enough facilities, services or staff for efficient health care in rural areas. Ukwanda serves to combat this. Its students gain essential rural experience, and the health care that rural communities receive will improve in the long term.

5.3 TsamaHub's iShack¹⁰

This example will appeal especially to members of Dalarna University's School of Technology and Business Studies.

SU researchers have come up with sustainable improvements to the basic corrugated iron shack commonly found in informal settlements in developing nations that can improve lives the world over. They call their eco-friendly dwelling the iShack, and a prototype has been erected in the informal settlement of Enkanini on the outskirts of Stellenbosch. The estimated 8 000 people who live in this community have to make do with 36 taps, 60 toilets, no electricity, inadequate waste disposal and flimsy dwellings subject to floods and fires.

The "i" stands for "improved", and it entails cost-effective and incremental modifications to a basic shack. It has been designed to protect its occupants from extreme temperatures, and it features a solar panel for basic electricity needs. The roof is slanted for rainwater harvesting.

The iShack is the result of an 18-month transdisciplinary research project by SU's TsamaHub, an initiative of the HOPE Project, and the Sustainability Institute at Lynedoch outside Stellenbosch, in collaboration with the Stellenbosch Municipality.

⁹ See www.thehopeproject.co.za/ukwanda

¹⁰ See www.thehopeproject.co.za/tsama

The iShack and TsamaHub's research around sanitation, water and waste is intended to contribute to the knowledge base around incremental informal settlement upgrading. Three postgraduate students stayed in Enkanini to collaborate with local residents on the design. The materials and design were chosen based on affordability, accessibility and impact on thermal comfort.

The iShack is north-facing with a roof overhang – to maximise passive heating potential in winter, and provide shade in summer. Windows are strategically placed on the north and east walls to let drafts in for better air circulation.

A lining of disused cardboard boxes against the wall and roof is sprayed with fire retardant paint. Old long-life milk cartons are wedged between the cardboard and the zinc sheets for additional insulation. The floor is made from bricks picked up at the nearby landfill site, and on one side there is a half wall made from mud and straw, which helps to smooth out temperature fluctuations.

The iShack has small photovoltaic panel on the roof for two interior lights, a motion sensitive exterior light and a cellphone charger. In the next phase the researchers plan to introduce upgraded solar systems that can power household appliances. Six Enkanini residents have been trained to install, operate, maintain and repair the solar power system. It is envisaged that they will become energy entrepreneurs serving the community.

Prof Mark Swilling, Professor in sustainable development at the School of Public Leadership within SU's Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, points out that South African policy regarding human settlements has shifted from a once off housing intervention to an incremental approach of infrastructure upgrading. But for this to work what is needed are partnerships between shack dwellers, local government and researchers.

6. Imagine the possibilities

Helping SU move from success to significance has been a most exciting and rewarding journey. For me, what stands out is that we have changed the conversation about Stellenbosch University from being referenced in the past, to being about the future and the kind of world we want to build for generations coming after us.

Our HOPE Project has enhanced respect for what science can contribute to human development, the moral imperative of our time. It has inspired and galvanised our academics and other staff, highlighting their work as essential and worthwhile.

We have also managed to gain professional expertise in the field of university advancement. And, at the same time, through our capital campaign we have raised more philanthropic funds and attracted more research contracts than ever before.

Finally, we have shown that it *is* possible to change perceptions, elevate the relevance of an institution and garner more support. Imagine what this approach can do for higher education everywhere.

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SU's HOPE Project

www.thehopeproject.co.za

HOPE TIMES

<http://bit.ly/HOPETimesIITsamaHub> (iShack)

www.thehopeproject.co.za/tsama

Ukwanda Rural Clinical School

www.thehopeproject.co.za/ukwanda

Graduate School

www.thehopeproject.co.za/graduateschool

African Doctoral Academy

<http://sun025.sun.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Arts/ADA>

Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics (PANGeA)

www.pangeaonline.org