

SERVANT LEADERSHIP, AFRICANIZATION, AND DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION AS CONDITIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AT UNISA

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This article discusses effective leadership in educational environments and in particular focuses on the current situation at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The end of Apartheid in South Africa has brought many opportunities but also some challenges especially in education. Three conditions that contribute to ensuring strong distance education programs at UNISA are discussed. Ways to implement change and the resistance this may cause are also analyzed. The article has greatly benefited from interviews with Peter Havenga of the University of South Africa. His openness and vision have strongly influenced the developments at UNISA and likewise this article.

INTRODUCTION

One of the major challenges in today's South Africa is, according to Peter Havenga, executive director of academic planning at the University of South Africa (UNISA), providing educational access to a large number of previously disadvantaged students.

After the end of Apartheid, increased learning opportunities had to be created, and building many residential universities was clearly not practical. Open and distance learning, however, proved a viable alternative to pro-

South Africa Country Information

Population: 49 million
Urban population: 62%
Life expectancy: 50 years
Literacy rate: 86.5%
Internet users: 4.4 million (2009)

Source: The World Factbook, 2012: CIA.

vide educational access and opportunity to a great number of students. Throughout its history, UNISA, as the leading ODL institution in South Africa, has offered educational opportu-

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nities to students who previously had not been admitted into other institutions for financial, academic, or racial reasons. In 2011, UNISA had a total of approximately 320,000 students from 130 countries. The degree credit success rate was over 62%. The openness of UNISA enables it to educate even the marginalized, as it has never strived to become an elite institution, but has flourished by being inclusive. Although in South Africa the right to basic education does not carry over to tertiary education, the mission to provide access resonates with the University of South Africa in the service of humanity.

Havenga's academic background is in law; he has a BA (law), LLB, and LLM from the Rand Afrikaans University, and an LLD from UNISA. Professor Havenga has taught at both the undergraduate and graduate level, has published in books and peer-reviewed journals, and has received a prestigious ranking from the National Research Foundation of South Africa. He is a true international scholar, with research projects at the University of Cologne (Germany) and the University of London, along with becoming a Life Member of Clare Hall, University of Cambridge. Before his appointment as executive director of academic planning at UNISA, Havenga was the deputy dean in the Faculty of Law and the director of the School of Law.

In order to help future professionals recognize and systematically implement e-learning innovations and programs, Havenga has three recommendations: deliver quality programs, make better use of the advantages of e-learning, and increase advocacy by academics. He pointed out that some e-learning programs, just like some face-to-face programs, are below standard, but as the teaching is digitally captured, it is easier to evaluate an online program than a traditional one. In addition, the advantages of e-learning programs can be better utilized as, for example, the massive open online course experience has shown. His third recommendation is that higher education institutions should play a strong advocacy role, from the introduction of the e-learning innova-

tions and programs through their execution. The academics must be involved, as they are ultimately responsible for teaching and learning and innovations. Higher education institutions must provide support and play an enabling role.

During our discussions, three themes emerged that are currently receiving much attention from those involved in taking UNISA forward: servant leadership, Africanization, and disruptive innovation.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Leadership occurs everywhere, among all people and all cultures. We have seen tribal leadership, which could be cruel and often was fear based. Leaders were elected based on their strength and agility; we also saw family leadership, which could be equally cruel. Later forms of leadership were the preclassical leadership in which kings and church played an important role and where brutality and oppression was considered to be justified, and classical leadership where leaders lead, organize, control, divide the labor and manipulate in order to obtain the desired results. Fortunately, the current leadership form is much more progressive.

According to Bass and Stogdill (1990), the earliest literature on leadership mainly dealt with theoretical issues—with the identification of different types of leadership and how these related to the functional demands of society. Leadership as an art or science is relatively new. Leadership was often looked at as a theory, with the result that it failed not only to take the leader into consideration, but also the interaction between the leader/individuals and identified problems. Fortunately, in the last decades more attention has been paid to different styles of leadership. One of them, servant leadership, is seen as being particularly effective and important in the context of UNISA. Havenga brought up the topic of servant leaders and provided a paragraph he wrote for a review discussion:

The concept of servant leadership is a management philosophy originating from the writings of Robert K. Greenleaf (1970), but it is ancient and is contained in many religions ranging from Christianity to Islam. In terms of this philosophy, a servant leader is a servant first and a leader second. A servant leader looks at the people first and asks how he can serve those around him by taking responsibility and solving problems. Servant leadership can best be associated with a participative management style, and the highest priority of a servant leader is to encourage, support, and enable subordinates to reach their full potential and abilities. Such an approach requires one to delegate responsibility and engage in participative decision making. In a certain sense this is easy in the UNISA context since decisions are debated in a committee system, which means that UNISA has a participatory management style embedded in its structures. Do I see myself as a servant leader? Again, this judgment call must be made by my peers but my own perception is that I am. As a servant leader I fully realize that it is not about me and my interest, but about the people around me, and especially the students. Ultimately we are all servant leaders to the UNISA students. (P. Havenga, personal communication, June 19, 2012)

Even though Greenleaf proposed the concept of servant leadership in 1970, it is a subject of recent discussion and research. Servant leadership has been found to work best in specific cultures (Hannay, 2009). Pless and Maak (2011) state that the focus of servant leadership as being not on the advantage of the leader, but on the benefits to the follower. The servant leader thus must empower followers. Key values that should determine the leader's behavior are: integrity, altruism, humility, empathy, personal growth, fairness, and as mentioned before empowerment (Yukl, 2010).

Kumuyi wrote a series of articles arguing for political implementation of servant leadership in Africa to replace the "self-serving governance that the continent is famed for" (2007, p. 18). While Kumuyi approaches servant leadership from a religious point of view, the

servant leader model is well suited to education, as most teachers wish to build up rather than tear down. Havenga echoes this sentiment in his discussion of servant leadership.

AFRICANIZATION

The University of South Africa is "proudly African in the service of humanity" (UNISA online—about UNISA, n.d.) We asked Havenga to expound on this statement. He explained that this statement embodies UNISA's attempt to be relevant in the communities in which they are serving and working by trying to ensure that they are relevant to the African context. There are specific guidelines for Africanization at UNISA, and some of these guidelines are in place to ensure that the lens through which they approach the design of curricula is an African lens. So, for example, when UNISA uses case studies, they try and offer African cases. They prescribe, where possible, textbooks written by African authors dealing with African issues. Havenga stated that there are many views, some very strong, about Africanization, but considered the topic too complex to be dealt with in a simple paragraph.

There are, however, authors who have widely discussed Africanization and a very useful discussion concerning the definition of this concept is found in Louw (2010). He states that Africanization is generally seen as a renewed focus on Africa—what has been taken from Africa [during colonial rule]—and the emergence of a new sense of pride. With regard to the local curriculum, there is a renewed focus on indigenous knowledge and an African community competing in a global society. Africanization reflects our common legacy, history and postcolonial experience. "Through this legacy, we have to connect with the broader African experience and establish a curriculum that binds us together. We then confront our own sense of Africanness, transcend our individual identity, seek our

commonality, and recognise and embrace our otherness” (Louw, 2010, p. 43).

Some weighty critiques of Africanization were presented by Horsthemke (2004), one of which is that seeing African students as different “paves the way for IQ-based inequality arguments” (p. 579). Botha (2010) argues that the Africanization of higher education in South Africa is not incompatible with internationalization, but that each university should carefully balance the two drives to present something worthwhile to the world at large.

DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION

During our discussion of social media and UNISA, Havenga also touched upon disruptive innovation, a concept put forward by Bower and Christensen (1995). In debating the nature of the university, Havenga mentioned that as UNISA moves to digitize, social media and online delivery of coursework will have a huge impact on the pedagogy, thereby assisting in the determination of the type of university UNISA will become. This scenario clearly reflects disruptive innovation: “a process by which a product or service takes root initially in simple applications at the bottom of a market and then relentlessly moves up market, eventually displacing established competitors” (Disruptive innovation, n.d., p. 3). A simple example, though not directly related to education, is the pocket calculator: first there was the desk calculator, not easily portable although a handy instrument and widely appreciated. The pocket calculator replaced it and can be seen as a disruptive innovation.

For UNISA to stay relevant and expand, technological innovations must be incorporated. When asked for further clarification, Havenga elaborated on the delivery of courses online as a disruptive innovation. While the move to an online environment for a dedicated distance education institution does not carry the same level of debate as in a residential institution, online delivery, as a disruptive innovation, must be addressed. For UNISA, a

transition to online courses will enhance openness and broaden access as it provides another way of delivering teaching and learning, adding the possibility of more asynchronous programs. UNISA will therefore meet this disruptive innovation by moving to online teaching, first with postgraduate students and then also include undergraduates.

A challenge in this transition is changing the skills set and the attitudes of academics. Online teaching requires a different approach and not all academics are able, or willing, to transfer skills to an online environment. The administrators have a challenge as well. Any change requires proper management, and more often than not the management of change is the most important factor. We have seen that distance education is growing. We should also realize that demographics, technology, and the preferences of adult learners who have become increasingly aware of their being “a client in the market” have created a disruptive environment in higher education. Carmody (2009) relates Christensen’s approach to K-12 public school instruction in the United States. Christensen himself coauthored an article specifically about disruptive innovation and higher education with recommended policy changes (Christensen, Horn, Soares, & Caldera, 2011). The theory of disruptive innovation is valuable in examining education at all levels, as educators tend to overlook things that are obvious to outside observers. If you work at a college or university, you may agree that, due to disruptive innovations, your world will never be the same.

CONCLUSION

Three areas have been identified that are especially important in the context of effective leadership at UNISA. Servant leadership is seen as an effective way to responsibly lead students. Africanization provides a way to stay relevant to the students and vision of the university. Disruptive innovation can be used to foster growth as technology changes. Our

interviewee, Professor Peter Havenga, also identified delivering quality programs, making better use of the advantages of e-learning, and increasing advocacy by academics as ways to help future professionals recognize and systematically implement e-learning innovations and programs.

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