



ACADEMIC LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A “PARTICIPATIVE” PERSPECTIVE FROM ONE INSTITUTION

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Introduction

The context of the higher education leadership mantle is dynamic, complex and multidimensional (Filan and Seagren 2003, 21). The elusiveness of the leadership notion has enticed researchers to interpret, capture and analyse the essence of leadership in higher education from different perspectives. As Burns (1978, 2) noted thirty years ago, “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth”. Although these studies identified leadership as a concrete and observable phenomenon, no consensus has as yet been reached on the exact characteristics of a successful leader in higher education (Buller 2006, 159). The concept *leadership in higher education* thus presents numerous opportunities for further investigation.

Recent studies not only highlight the diversity of universities, departments and leaders but also the constant change, adjustments and turbulent environment of higher education during the past few years (Hanna, 2003, 34). Lees (2006, 333) consequently asks: “Why would a sane, rational person even consider becoming a leader at a higher educational institution?” This article intends to answer why sane individuals at this university should consider becoming leaders by arguing that the type of leadership that enhances a culture of cohesiveness can indeed address and resolve critical issues collaboratively. In order to explore and interrogate this specific aspect of leadership, we cover three areas. First, we investigate the concept of leadership and transformational leadership in literature. Then, employing qualitative research, we examine how challenges of leadership can be better addressed at one institution in South Africa. We next explore possible solutions to these challenges by means of a leadership profile, and we ultimately draw a number of conclusions.

Conceptual framework

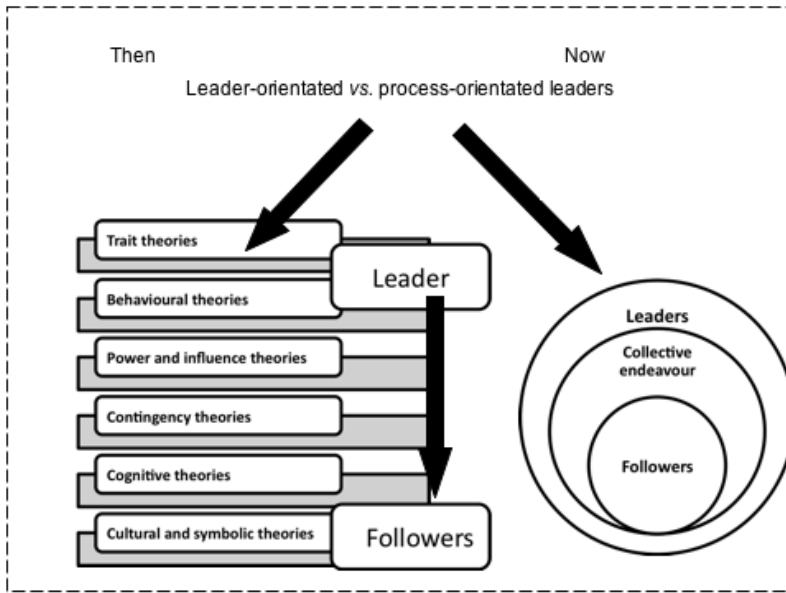
Although Wolverton, Gmelch, Montex and Nies (2001, 59) state that “... leadership is a matter of degree” and is therefore indefinable, we believe that an explanation of the concepts *lead* and *leadership* might serve as a useful heuristic in the investigation of leadership in higher education. McCaffery (2004, 59) explains that the word *leader* is derived from *laed* - a word common to all the Old North European languages - meaning path, road, course of a ship at sea or journey. Furthermore, the words *lead* or *leader* usually refer to the social influence of authority figures and can be defined as someone who accompanies, rules, guides or inspires others on their journey and steers them in the right direction (Taylor, Peplau and Sears 2006, 327). *Leadership*, on the other hand, is a recent addition to the English language, and which came into use only in the late 19th century (Brungardt 1998, 1). It seems that the concept *leadership in higher education* encompasses a much more complex meaning that reaches beyond a single authority figure and revolves around the needs, aspirations and expectations of both the leader who aspires to lead and those who choose to follow (Keith and Levin 2002, 19). In other words: leadership in higher education involves a relationship or, in the words of Morrill (2007, 9) a “followership”. Astin and Astin (2000, 9) concur by defining leadership as a “collaborative endeavour among group members.” We wish to suggest that the role and functions of *leadership* are today integrated in higher education where academic leaders need to lead, motivate or direct their units to accommodate transformation collaboratively.

Effective academic leadership can be viewed as being the biggest advantage a university can have in a resource-hungry, competitive higher education environment (Ramsden 1998, 4). Given the above, leaders can aptly be described as “the brokers of time and relationships” (Krahenbuhl 2004, 48). Taking into consideration the critical role of such *brokers* in the rapidly changing context of higher education, our empirical study was guided by the primary question: How can challenges of the 21st century in higher education be better addressed at this specific institution?

Higher education leadership today, particularly in South Africa, is confronted not only by transformation but also with the task of simultaneously moving universities forward. It seems therefore crucial to revisit the wisdom of previous research. Relevant theories uncover important clues about leaders and followers' values, perceptions and leadership styles, which could provide current higher education leaders with valuable information when planning direction. It is however necessary to bear in mind the warning of Bargh, Boccock, Scott and Smith (2000, 26) that, owing both to its unique characteristics and the current period of profound transformation in higher education, general theories are not always compatible with the context in which it is practised.

Figure 1 demonstrates the revolution in leadership theories that occurred over centuries and varied from an individualistic, leader-centred focus to a distinctly process-centred one with recognition to mutual power and influence (Kezar, Carducci and Contreras-McGavin 2006, ix). It outlines but one perspective on the shift in focus from one of what leaders *can do to or for others*, to one of *how leaders engage with others* (Morrill 2007, 8). The circles in figure 1 highlight leadership in higher education as the glue that holds a university together, and this *glue* can direct, accommodate and inspire the entire university community.

Figure 1: A perspective on the history of leadership



Adapted from McCaffery (2004:63); Middlehurst (1993:13)

Academic leaders, however should be aware of at least two paradigms - transactional and transformational leadership - that has dominated scholarly research on leadership since the 1960's (Van Zyl 2008, 183-185; Kezar et al. 2006, 108; Wolverson et al. 2001, 41). Burns's transactional theory (1978) offers a negotiated process in which the power bases of the leaders and the followers counterbalance each other. Consequently, the success of this leadership depends on the conviction that an individual can make a difference (Van Zyl 2008, 192; Filan and Seagren 2003, 26). Bass, a disciple of Burns, moved in a slightly different direction in focusing on collectively directed leadership, where any power exerted by leaders and followers mutually supports a common goal (Wolverson et al. 2001, 42). Our views in this article were influenced by the theory of transformational leadership, firstly because this leadership style acts as a bridge between old and new insights of leadership and secondly, because it focuses on the interactions between leaders and followers, an emerging idea significant in the university context (Kezar et al. 2006, 35).

Transformational leaders are self-confident and inspire, or display what Golemann (1998, 196) terms "emotional intelligence". However, Morrill (2007, 13) emphasises that transformational leadership must not be seen as motives or rigid categories; the key factor must be the "potential to motivate the academic community to respond effectively to change". We believe transformational leadership in higher education should tend to arouse, satisfy and engage individuals, while simultaneously becoming a source of inspiration to staff, administrators, and students (Barling and Turner 2005, 1; Filan and Seagren 2003, 26; Kelly 2003, 1; Astin and Astin 2000, 8-9). In the ensuing discussion of our empirical research it will become evident that, if leadership in higher education acknowledges and embraces followership, this situation might have a positive downward ripple effect to every member of this particular university community.

An empirical study

Our empirical study took an interpretivist stance with a qualitative approach whereby we interacted closely with academic leaders at one university. A qualitative case-study design employing semi-structured interviews allowed us to explore - through a variety of lenses - how academic leaders at this particular university deal with challenges (Baxter and Jack, 2008, 544). We followed a case-study approach because: a) the focus of the study was to answer "how" and "why" questions; b) we could not manipulate the behaviour of those involved in the study; c) we believe that the contextual conditions (cultural diversity) are relevant to the phenomenon of leadership challenges at the particular university and, d) the boundaries between the phenomenon leadership and the context were not clear (Yin in Baxter and Jack, 2008, 545). For example, the study of how to deal with challenges at (say) University X sought to determine leaders' perspectives on how to approach these challenges in the very specific context of University X. University X is a multicultural parallel-medium institution which was established in the early 1900's. Its six faculties offer a full range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes to almost 25 000 students. Over the past few years leaders have been challenged enormously to function within the framework of an increasingly diverse university community.

Data were collected through systematic, open-ended interviews. Ten leaders were interviewed between July and December 2008. Purposive sampling was used to select ten academic leaders (seven male and three female) according to the following predetermined criteria for desirable participants (Henning, van Rensburg and Smit, 2004, 71):

- leaders at University X permanently appointed (top management, deans, directors or heads of departments);
- Professors, older than 45 years, from diverse cultural backgrounds and from a variety of disciplines.

The predetermined criteria allowed us to find key informants which could provide information rich data until theoretical saturation was reached. Participants gave informed

consent both to participate and that interviews may be recorded (McNiff and Whitehead 2006, 86-87; Bruckman 2002, 1). Qualitative content analysis was employed to make sense of the data. The data were coded and categorised manually to identify themes that could be used in the re-contextualisation of the data when these were integrated as a basis for arguments (Henning et al. 2004, 104-107). The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by the following factors: openness and trust that all information will be kept confidential; data was supplemented by findings from the literature; data was described as accurately as possible; verification of raw data and raw data and notes of all the decisions taken was kept safe (Niewenhuis, 2007,111-113).

Aim and significance of the investigation

The aim of our qualitative interviews with academic leaders was to explore the different perspectives regarding leadership in the 21st century within the context of University X primarily, but also within a changing South African higher education dispensation. Utilising a qualitative approach, we attempted to use the rich descriptions of the participants to investigate and interpret dealing with challenges confronting leadership holistically.

The interviews re-orientated our current understanding of the complexity of dealing with challenges in higher education. We, like Chu (2006, 115), believed that a vision could serve as a tool to ensure a meaningful and lasting effect in addressing critical challenges. However, an additional perspective emerged during the interpretation of the data, namely one of followership. It seems that the key factor for leadership is "to take people along" (Participant G). Consequently, a vision can only be implemented if followers are active participants. Participant D stresses that "a leader today does not stand separate from his followers. I even want to say he does not merely walk in front. He walks in the front lines, with his arms around them."

Social capital is so crucial today that there are critics who imply that the lack of this particular asset led to the downfall of South Africa's former president, Thabo Mbeki. For example, the Associated Press (2008, 1) highlighted that "despite his nine years at the top, Mbeki never managed to win the hearts of the masses because of his aloof, academic manner, lacking ... spontaneity". It seems as if "leaders do not get extraordinary things done by themselves" (Kouzes and Posner 2007, 27). Participant H explains: "And the leader becomes like the conductor of a choir. And he will get people out. This is time for you to sing a solo, and then it is time for the two of you to do this. But in all the dynamics ultimately give an excellent result."

It could be argued that leadership in this institution probably needs to embrace followers beyond the borders of vision. Leadership should excite followers with its vision in order to create a positive mood that can set a university on a new course towards excellence. By excellence we mean a visible, productive academic community where every individual will be the beneficiary for years to come (Leaming 2007, 128).

Critical leadership challenges

Higher education in South Africa has, since 1994, found itself in the midst of profound transformation and changes, confronted with a challenge "to embrace the new" (Pityana 2003,1). How universities address these issues, foster transformation and take advantage of challenges will determine their survival. It is vital that leadership should manage resistance to the new in a positive fashion, because "it is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent; it is the one that is most adaptable to change" (Darwin in Marshall 2007, 1).

The next session discusses identified themes used as evidence in continuing arguments of how leadership and decision making systems in University X could create reciprocal commitment when addressing challenges (Henning et al. 2004, 107).

People orientated leadership

In higher education, the concepts leadership and management pose challenges requiring a complementary set of competencies. The symbiotic nature of the management/leadership relationship is highlighted by the fact that there is limited value if you do things right, while not knowing where you want to go, or equally importantly, it would not help to know where you are going if you "haven't got the wherewithal to get there" (McCaffery 2004, 59). Equally importantly, Krahenbuhl (2004, 185) reminds us that "the dean may find it distasteful to think of him/herself as a manager, but a significant portion of the dean's leadership task is effective management". Leaders must nevertheless not regard themselves as "paper pushers", because if they do, "that may be all they will accomplish" (Lucas 2000, 28). The focus of this article is not on a question of being one or the other, because in higher education leadership/management functions are closely integrated, as noted by Bennet (2003, 184) "in the academy, good management is a necessary condition for effective leadership, and vice versa."

The bottom line is that higher education leaders in the 21st century need to be effective managers of what they have. Therefore this article argues that leadership/management in University X has "people." Only if they manage/lead this social capital effectively, then they will lead their institution to greater achievements (Leaming 2007, 18; Chu 2006, 114). Table 1 reports how participants in this study understand social capital of people-orientated leaders.

Table 1: Importance of people-orientated leaders

A	"The human component is very important. It is the focus, because we are not machines which you can turn on and off as one pleases. For me, it is important to win the hearts of the people and then their minds."
B	"I think a leader serve his corps which he leads from different functions and, well, services. He must empower, he must encourage, he must stimulate, he must bring people together, those types of things. And that he rather walks behind the people and pushes them forward, than walking ahead and pulling them along. And he empowers people to perform."
C	"So you must involve the people and they must feel they are on board, they must feel that it is their faculty, not the dean's or the head of the department's faculty. Oh, the one important thing is that one should be people orientated, one must know people, and be sensitive to their needs. That is what I meant earlier on."
D	"A leader is someone that takes people with him/her by means of their vision and inspiration and not by their ambition. But today, one's personality must be such that one does more than merely embracing people. One must accommodate people. Especially today. One must reduce the distance between oneself and one's followers by means of excellent communication, by empathy, by understanding, and by structures that are established to make contact or to listen to everyone."
E	"And then also take an interest into the people who are supposed to follow one. If you are not interested in the people, one may think you are leading yet you are walking alone. They are far behind, they are not with you. So you must always check your rear mirror to see whether they are still in sight. If they are not there, forget it - you are not leading, you are gone."
F	"He must get along with people."
G	"You'll have to be sensitive about people and so on. Because I believe, if you as a human are pursuing leadership, it is basically because you want to serve people. And I certainly see leadership or understanding a leader as being an enabler. You want to make it possible for people to perform in their various areas of performance and I see that as being a servant. And that goes a long way."
H	"I think a very good leader is able to naturally make everybody feeling important. A person who is able to do that is to me outstanding. I think it is appreciating your people. If you do not value your people that work with you, the choir is not going to sing well. There are a couple of guys standing in the background saying, "No we won't sing." And we all know what the effect of that would be. And in the orchestra some of the violins decide, "No I am not going to play anymore."
I	"You must acknowledge that other people are also important. In a university you work with intellectuals, so sometimes your subordinates may be right. You have to listen to others."
J	"So, the qualities for me are to value and to really listen. Someone sensitive to people so that they feel acknowledged and appreciated. Really, there is a hunger to be valued."

The responses captured in Table 1 seem to confirm that leadership is being challenged to acknowledge competence and value in order to create a relationship of reciprocal respect, which would ultimately lead to an atmosphere conducive to transformation and change at this institution.

Transformation and change

Already in 500BC, Heraclitus comforted people that "there is nothing constant except change" (Farzaneh 2009, 1). Since transformation and change are conceptualised as a natural part of human development, higher education in South Africa, too, did not escape the throes of unsurpassed change or, put differently, "massive political and administrative surgery" (Ndeble 2004, 1; Walvoord, Carey, Smith, Soled, Way and Zorn 2000, ix). As a matter of fact, change in education is so significant as to be recognised as a respectable field for research (Jansen, Herman, Matentjie, Morake, Pillay, Sehoole and Weber 2007, 157). Therefore the challenge arises for higher education leadership to develop academics' "adaptive capacity for tackling an ongoing stream of hard problems" (Heifetz 1994, 247).

Naturally strong leadership is required to inspire, direct and guide people by replacing the *obstacles* of change with *opportunities* of change, a deliberate action, thus, to enhance quality. This means that if academic leaders want to improve the quality of their academic output, it is inevitable that departments become dynamic, ever-changing units (Leaming 2007, 117). This notion is supported by the challenge of cultural diversity at the campus of University X.

Cultural diversity

South Africa's university student body is becoming increasingly diverse and manifests its uniqueness in different ways. Each separate element (cultural, educational level, ability, age, part-time or full-time, place of study, individuality, and disability) raises different challenges and requires different solutions. A critical challenge for leadership at University X for instance is to establish an atmosphere fostering cultural diversity, especially when it seems that, historically, higher education in South Africa has a poor record in respect of embracing cultural diversity. Pandor claimed that although the new vision of 1994 was one of reshaping South African society, "14-years into the new democracy universities have not changed much" (CHE 2008, 1). Reddy (2004, 1) adds that in South Africa the state and the composition of its personnel has changed, but civil society (higher education institutions) has yet to adapt. The focus of this article is not to explore the problems of cultural diversity, but to highlight that if culture diversity is addressed collaboratively it does not necessarily have to be an obstacle. According to Pityana (2003, 4-5), it should actually be regarded as an "opportunity for intellectual dialogue". In other words, diversity can be seen as varied perspectives and approaches that different identity groups offer (Thomas and Ely 2001, 36).

The question now arises as to when Institution X will reach the stage where its vision will reflect the contributions and interests of its culturally diverse constituency? We think that the challenge we face at this institution is to "begin at the beginning – back to the basics" (Pityana 2003, 8). Leadership at Institution X may commit itself to building and promoting a culture of tolerance and respect in order to contribute to the achievement of a multicultural campus (MacGregor 2008, 1). As Participant E emphasised: "It might be something we would not achieve during our lifetime but it is a path worth mapping out, so that we know what the direction which we were working towards, was. We may fail, but at least we will take solace in knowing that we failed, while trying."

Potential solutions at the level of leadership

Theorists have identified a variety of solutions to the above-mentioned issues, arguing that leadership should create a diverse culture, develop a strategic planning process, consult others, learn to say no or be someone who cares, think strategically or apply self-directed leadership (Van Zyl 2008, 180; Leaming 2007, 1-18; Sorensen, Furst-Boe and Moen 2005, 17; McCaffery 2004, 76). Drucker (in ThinkExist 2009, 1) adds the idea of active involvement through collaboration through the following message:

"The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say 'I'. And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say 'I'. They don't think 'I'. They think 'we'; they think 'team'. They understand their job to be to make the team function. They accept responsibility and don't sidestep it, but 'we' gets the credit....That is what creates trust, what enables you to get the task done."

It can be argued that the leaders at University X need support, expertise and commitment from followers by means of an interwoven relationship.

Interwoven relationship

If only academic leaders could mould members of the university community to fulfil their wishes. Wolverton et al. (2001, 55) maintain that changing people's perspectives is so difficult that almost the easiest way to deal with it would be to recruit and hire new people. Such an approach would not only be short sighted, but is unrealistic and unachievable (55). The second most logical way would be to incorporate followership. This reciprocal relationship is explained by Prentice (2005, 167) who sees leaders as a being orchestral conductors who must pose challenges, but also provide fulfilment.

Given the above realities, we interpret leadership at University X as an interwoven relationship in which *my vision* becomes *our vision*, i.e. the result of a collective process, open debate and collaborative commitment embodied in the values and skills of leadership. Few would deny that good communication and interpersonal skills are critical towards realising the above-mentioned vision. Lucas (2000, 7) explains the value of active listening skills when she reasons that "being president of a university is like being the caretaker of a cemetery; there are lots of people under you, but nobody is listening".

Consequently, it is necessary to explore a leadership profile that would move people to listen, to admit mistakes, to participate actively, that would create a space where information is openly and trustfully discussed, where individuals have an opportunity to admit mistakes and are able to play a significant role in debates when decisions are finalised (Sorensen, Furst-Bowe and Moen 2005, 8).

The heart of leadership

The purpose of this paper is not to highlight the diverse characteristics of leaders in higher education, but to focus on those united strengths that acknowledge followership. We therefore attempt a higher education leadership profile (see Table 2) encompassing the vital attributes (identified by participants in our empirical study). We regard this set of attributes as being at the heart of dealing with challenges in this millennium. Not only do leaders have to understand themselves and the higher education environment in which they operate, but the followers need to be equally aware of the *superman/woman*-expectations demanded of leaders.

Table 2: Profile of leadership

Vision		
Aspect	Explanation	Justification
Clear and creative vision (Participants A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J)	Leadership starts with a vision with direction.	"Leaders gaze across the horizon of time imagining the attractive opportunities that are in store when they and their constituents arrive at a distant destination" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007:17).
Strategic thinking (Participants B,F,G,H,I,J)	Critical thinking, analytical and problem-solving skills.	"Leaders have a desire to make something happen, to change the way things are to create something that no one else has ever created before" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007:17).
Change (Participants G, H, J)	Learn and adapt quickly.	"One of the hallmarks of effective leadership in this century will be the capacity to learn and adapt quickly. Years of experience will no longer be enough – and, in some cases may prove a hindrance" (Conger, 2002:xxi).
Skills		
Model the way (Participants A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J)	Practise what you preach.	"You can't teach what you don't know, and you can't lead where you won't go" (Jackson, in Women in Technology, 2008:1).
Expertise and self-confidence (Participant J)	A skill cannot be built by only reading about it.	"Expertise, then, becomes the basis of collegiality, autonomy and academic freedom. And though race, gender, and other biases may be at work, academic expertise is the espoused basis for hiring, rank, prestige, and pay" (Walvoord et al., 2000:16).
Accountability (Participants B,C,D,E,G,H,I,J)	There is a greater push today for accountability of leadership from the private sector, parents and government.	"The lack of adequate performance measures tied to funding hurts the higher education institutions financially" (Nair, 2002:2).
Stay humble (Participants C,D,E,J)	Arrogant leaders create arrogant followers.	"Boastful chairs that claim department achievements as their own destroy the departmental climate" (Chu, 2006:32).
Interpersonal skills (Participants A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J)	Excellent communication skills are needed, which include non-verbal and verbal skills, respect and conflict management.	"They are good listeners and remain respectful of the collective wisdom of their colleagues" (Wergin, 2003:128). "It is important to respect others, from all walks of life. Everyone has something worthy of respect; it's important to find that" (Friedman, 2008: 49).
Intrapersonal skills (Participants C,D,E,J)	Leadership must be open to new ideas and resist competitive behaviours.	"To be effective, you must understand your own strengths and weaknesses. Knowing yourself helps give you confidence" (Leaming, 2007:35).
Community connectors (Participants A,B,C,D,G)	Leaders must connect their teams to organisations and go beyond the boundaries of the campus.	"The final integrated key issue for leadership is connecting individuals, teams, departments and the college itself with the community. Clearly, leaders must bridge their teams to the larger organisational culture" (Filan and Seagren, 2003:28).
Entrepreneurial skills (Participants B,C,D,G)	Leaders have to plan budgets and generate income.	"Increasingly in the globalised knowledge-driven world, higher education institutions can no longer afford academic insularity. It is essential that they embark on cooperative endeavours and partnerships with a range of local, national and international players and organisations. To this extent new linkages and relations should be fostered with

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Management skills (Participants A,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,I,J)	Effective planning creates focus, direction and energy.	commercial enterprises..." (CHE, 2001:1) "Effective management is a required pre-condition for department success" (Chu, 2006:14).
Technological skills (Participants D,E,H)	Technological advances force leaders to adapt and integrate these skills with existing institutional and departmental strategies and initiatives.	"In order to access information in the knowledge society, be globally competitive and efficient in managing universities, it is imperative that adequate information technology systems be in place" (CHE, 2001:9).
Shared goals and team building (Participants A,B,C,D,E,F,G H,I,J)	Participative decision making.	"Team building requires more than putting a group of people in a room and closing the door. Deans need to understand behavioural styles, have an awareness of how people with different styles interact and be able to capture the strengths of team members" (Wolverton et al., 2001:102).
Empowering and motivating skills (Participant A,B,D,G,H,I,J)	Motivate and do not push.	"Pushing faculty members to do things seldom brings a satisfactory result" (Krahenbuhl, 2004:49) but to motivate means a different thing - "I would follow him to hell since he is the only man I know who could get me back" (Johannsen, 2008:1).
The leadership leap (Participants B,C,D,E)	Challenge traditional ways of working confidently.	"But the leader needs more than inspiration. A leader ventures to say "I will go, come with me". A leader takes the risk of failure along with the chance of success" (Greenleaf and Spears, 2002:29).
Values		
Trust (Participant E,G,H,J)	Trust makes people grow and thrive.	"Trust for both leader and follower must be built on a solid moral and ethical foundation" (Homrig, 2001:4).
Integrity (Participants B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J)	Leaders must be sincere, honourable and trustworthy.	"You cannot give favourable schedules or allocate funding on the basis of congeniality" (Leaming, 2007:5).
Credibility (Participants A,B,C,D,E,F)	Leaders have to practise what they preach.	"What chairs say, what they promise, their explanations, and even their apologies must be believable" (Chu, 2006:32).
Empathy (Participants D,E,G,H,I,J)	Leaders must be able to forget about themselves.	"When we are not empathic leaders, others around us stop being authentic, stop bringing talent and energy into the workplace and stop using feelings to support personal work related goals" (Cooper and Sawaf (1997) in Atkins and Singelton, n.d.: 1).
Honesty and fairness (Participants D,E,J)	In the academic community every person matters and each person's welfare and dignity must be respected and supported.	"It is clear that if people anywhere are to willingly follow someone - whether it's in battle or into the boardroom, the front office or the frontlines - they first want to assure themselves that the person is truthful, ethical and principled" (Kouzes and Posner, 2007:32).
Authenticity (Participants D,E,G,H,I,J)	Leaders must be genuine, honest and reliable.	"It is only authentic leaders who are able to make the vision become a reality" (Marshall, 2007:16).
Humour (Participants A, B)	Leaders should not be afraid to laugh or smile.	"Strong leaders have a good sense of humour" (Leaming, 2007:33).

The profile outlined in Table 2 largely confirms the degree of diverse characteristics needed for effective leadership in higher education. Diversity therefore actually appears to be beneficial, since higher education needs to identify and combine the strengths of the different academic leaders in order to achieve excellence and change. Participant G affirmed this notion when he noted: "And one other thing is I have quite a lot of divisions that I am responsible for. And I give people space to operate. As a result, there is a lot of creativity in all of my divisions and I have the necessary support from the directors and the heads of my various divisions."

Leadership in higher education institutions is indeed no easy task, and we do not want to ignore the significance of strategic governance, but we believe basic relationship skills can create a climate of trust and a sense of purpose. We thus suggest that leadership should create bonds of affiliation. When leaders treat followers as individuals and appeal to their hopes and desires, a snowball effect will develop. People will give more than expected, they will increase inputs and they will have fewer complaints. This may result in a cohesive endeavour in the direction of transition and innovation. Here the focus is on people with complementary skills, communicating a shared language and committed to a shared vision. Ultimately team members can become so integrated and cohesive in accomplishing the task at hand "that they may reach a level of synergy, in which the whole is greater than the sum of parts" (Little 2005, 33) and where the "rewards of active leadership are tremendous" (Leaming 2007, 125).

Conclusion

What did this study, admittedly limited to perspectives from ten academic leaders at one university, reveal about leadership in higher education? Firstly, it appears that the context of higher education in South Africa has been transformed, the roles of leaders are expanding as never before and leaders are facing tremendous challenges. Globalisation, the emergence of a knowledge economy, competition for resources, reduced staff components, contract employment, reduced government funding, new technologies for teaching and accreditation, all are forces that pressurise academic leaders in higher education. Secondly, since the overarching challenges of increasing quality and efficiency remain the same, it would furthermore be idle to think that things will become easier. Leadership is expected to promote excellence in all spheres of higher education and academic excellence in particular. Therefore, one important function remains to motivate staff towards scholarly productivity. An important finding of this study is that there is no agreed-upon recipe for successful academic leadership. We consequently have to acknowledge that leadership in higher education is a multidimensional concept and that its interpretation will legitimately differ among different observers and different institutions.

Thirdly, it is clear that no university can do without leadership that defines aims, goals and strategies and ensures that resources are in place to achieve them. In other words, "leadership does matter" (Marshall 2007, 16). Bargh et al. (2000, 65) inspire future leaders with their claim that "individuals really make a difference in universities" and that entire departments can be turned around within a period of two years." It is therefore vital to leadership to overcome barriers to change and to transform challenges into extraordinary windows of opportunity.

Fourthly, the critical reader may interpret the idea of a people-orientated leader as being a naive approach, but Jansen (in Kruger 2008,1) has recently emphasised the value of leader-follower relationships in the university context. He claims that the new rector of one South African university - where a great deal of distrust has developed - must be comfortable with different cultures and beliefs in order to restore trust between groups on that campus. Consequently, such a statement supports the idea of strategic leadership as a collaborative and interactive, - *back-to-the-basics, back-to-relations-values-and-skills*, process. In other words: the way to improve leadership in this era of higher education at this particular time and specifically in South Africa, is not only through intensive restructuring, but through attending to the culture of a particular university (Tierney 2004, 214). In an effort to capture a basis for a followership approach, leaders at University X can negotiate conflict by including people from all backgrounds and with diverse strengths in the leadership process. Perhaps a team approach can overcome critical barriers and transform diversity into unity.

This brings us to the final point: no-one should underestimate the importance of building relational bridges between leaders and those around them. We echo the old saying: To lead yourself, use your head; to lead others, use your heart. Always touch a person's heart before you ask him for a hand" (Maxwell 2008, 38). Perhaps this basic, underlying value will ultimately shape the new face of academic leadership at University X and in South Africa in the years to come.

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