

RU MANAGEMENT IMBIZO RECORD,

MAKANA RESORT, MONDAY, 12 SEPTEMBER 2011

Vice-Chancellor – Reflections on RU 2006-2011

RU has become a better University over the past 5 years. Some people may disagree, say standards are slipping – we can argue about that. This is one version/story, from the Vice-Chancellor's perspective, bearing in mind he may be too involved, and also there may be 10 other versions of past 5 years at RU.

We must put the stories on the table. Healthy to have different stories in an institution - by playing and knocking together, that's how change happens. You judge whether story is real. Need a critical reflection on where we are today, and where we go from here. Must be self-critical in reflections and chart way forward together. Be bold, honest, identify challenges and weaknesses. Set out an agenda for next 5 years. Make choices and decisions, and *implement* those decisions. One of RU's biggest weaknesses is lack of implementation. We love to talk and make policies, but are very poor at implementing them.

Recognise power relations at work. Appeal for today, put those positions aside. Feel can talk openly. No one will be fired! The more loyal people are, the more right they have to be critical, because criticising selves.

Framing Issues

Context - whatever we do is not done in a vacuum. Everything in South Africa is framed by the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights.

We should live and breathe those aims and values and apply them to our daily behaviour and practices. Human dignity, appreciate difference and diversity, no place for racism, sexism, prejudice, intolerance.

1997 White paper on HE = key principles and policies of any University. Don't want a hierarchy between academic and support staff. All needed but academics are central - can't have a university without them. A university revolves around the academics - not the Vice Chancellor.

Everyone has the same rights - not trying to give licence to academics to mistreat or look down on anyone. 3 purposes of a University: produce knowledge and graduates and community engagement. We are not a business. Can never speak about students as "customers" or "clients". Learning can only happen in partnership.

Institutional Change Dynamics

Not all change is good, can be destructive. Must be clear what kind of change is not needed at RU. RU staff come to work and leave on time (a big problem at other universities). Can tell work patterns from TENET statistics of internet usage at universities around the country. RU busy evenings and weekends. Other universities quiet after 4 and over weekends.

Constraints must also be understood e.g. the small subsidy earned by only 7300 students. No surplus or money to pay staff more. But change also brings possibilities.

Paradoxes of trying to do many things simultaneously. Have to make choices e.g. Grahamstown housing market a very peculiar one- have had task teams, tried to address but haven't been able to change anything. Can't satisfy everyone. Have to observe labour laws.

Must be open and transparent about the choices we make.

2006 Imbizo

[Need a cross-section at every Imbizo. Means some have to be included (e.g. next generation staff) representatives of NEHAWU and NTEU have as much right to be there as Council representatives]

7 Issues at 2006 Imbizo

Vision and Mission - once we have clarified our path, it will 'write itself'

Size and Shape- have enrolment plan for every 3 years, aiming for 7645 by 2013. Middle Managers must know Size and Shape issues. Numbers, fields, undergrad, postgrad, qualifications offered etc.

Critical to RU, determines funding. Only growing by 29 undergrads in next 3 years. Hope by 2012, can give every 1st year a place in Residence including those just above NSFAS ceiling. Funded by res budget. Plan to grow by 400 postgraduates. Enough accommodation for them? New academic programmes introduced. Need to attract new postgrads from other universities.

Key Challenges - Transformation & Modernisation

A. Transformation

[2005 Institutional Audit. Many recommendations and commendations. But informal feedback was that the biggest challenge for incoming VC would be 'modernisation'.]

- Social equity – we have done well in terms of student equity, numbers of white and international students same, proportions decreasing. Not same for staff.
- Institutional Culture- don't want all to think, act and look the same. All shaped in powerful ways. Time to be more critical about dinner table conversations.
- Strong Laissez Faire Culture at RU. 'Let 1000 flowers bloom', use academic freedom and institutional autonomy at RU to avoid accountability. Vice Chancellor's office doesn't interfere with who gets accepted and excluded from RU - Dean's decision. But there seems to be an aversion to any real democratic and peer accountability. Decisions taken but long delays or no implementation. Must hold Deans and Directors responsible for what is and isn't done.

B. Modernisation

Need adherence to principles, but flexibility in approach. Ensure systems support our top academics - they should not be worrying about transport, accommodation, visas etc. Need project administrators/managers. Not secretaries. All secretaries should be encouraged to upgrade skills. An administrator is not a better paid secretary. Need team of 4: intellectual → Project Manager → Project administrator → Secretary. RU does not have enough Project Managers and administrators.

If academics don't have to bother with that stuff, they can much more productive.

Inadequate information: relevant, timeous information is needed to inform policies and decision-making. Some fantastic achievements e.g. finance budgetary statements available almost immediately. Did not have adequate research done on postgraduate issues before we made decision to become more postgrad - should rather look at pass rates and ensure students here are sorted before getting more.

Inefficiency

Amateurish approach in many areas at RU. A few people at RU produce huge amounts of research and generate huge funding (one up to R10million per annum) but often handicapped and frustrated by inadequate systems and inflexible attitudes. Need to find ways of facilitating these academics' work. We cannot afford to lose them!

Modernisation is long overdue in many areas - come into 21st Century. YOU know the answers to many of these shortcomings – please pass them on to Directors and Executives.

Other Challenges

Become more research oriented and more postgrad. Without compromising quality or student experience. No one currently dedicated to 'taking care' of postgrads.

R450 Million- Main budget, R130 Million- Research budget, R150 Million- Churns around RU [donor money] = approx R730 Million budget. Some universities have R2billion just in reserves!

New infrastructure

Teacher Education building, Life Sciences, Computer Science building, postgraduate residences, postgraduate Centre, indoor sports centre, remaking of postgraduate village as a Professional and Continuing Education Centre,

Planning

Improve staff equity profile, retain black staff, continue to build next generation of academics especially black and women, support new staff in settling into RU and Grahamstown. Systemically address remuneration - finalise policy.

Finalise IDP for next 5-10 years. Underpinned by Faculty and Division level plans. Compass, not blueprint. Goals, strategies, funding, time frames, accountability.

Campus development plan.

Address non-engagement or non-timeous responses on critical issues/policy development
Takes a long time to move from ideas to proposals at RU (especially for funding).

Conclusion

RU 2008 public apology and declaration on remaking RU as a small but outstanding African University – was a critical moment in RU’s history. Pursue knowledge, understanding, critique and reason, promote human dignity, equality, non-sexism, non-racism, critical citizenship and all the human rights and freedoms proclaimed. Assert and protect the core purposes of a University (public good, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability).

Transform, modernise where needed and have the courage to confront our problems and remake ourselves. But also take great pride in where and who we are.

DISCUSSION

- Should RU be more business-like?

VC: Yes, agree, be more business-like, but not the same as ‘being a business’. Have to be professional in everything we do. Fundamental difference though is that a business needs to make a profit. A University must do core business (teaching, research, CE), and balance books. If looking at profit, would have to close departments, even e.g. flagships like Journalism because being cross-subsidized. Also a university is not a hierarchy with a powerful CEO who drives decision-making. Operate as a holiarchy - units have much autonomy, but with respect for academic freedom and organizational autonomy.

The Vice-Chancellor cannot interfere with ‘business units’ (departments) in the same way as a business. Cannot take immoral decisions, even if popular (e.g. taking in students who cannot succeed.)

RU’s greatest danger is complacency - patting ourselves on the back too much.

- Tension between academics and admin. How to deal with?

VC: Must ask selves what/who is reasonable. Use website to gather and share generic information on RU’s profile (needed for use in funding applications etc). Need project managers to do much of that. Will free academics to do other, more productive things. All about respect. Don’t treat people differently because they are ‘not an academic’

- RU is growing numbers but not growing facilities at the same rate

VC: RU smallest university in South Africa BY FAR (eg UNISA 270 000, TUT 60 000, UFH 11000, RU 7000). RU always told itself ‘doomed if you grow’ (even at 4000, 5000, 6000 etc). We could choose a number and stick to it, but that will have a huge impact on our budget. We only get 1.23% of national teaching input funding pie. Will always be a Vice-Chancellor’s headache - need to find a benevolent billionaire.

- A pleasure to deal with academics who have Project Managers and a nightmare without. Much inadvertent friction though the way things are phrased - deliberately antagonises Support staff.

VC: Sensitivity is paramount. Not sure deliberate but must think about every word. Suggest write a 'rage letter' but keep it overnight before sending. May not even send.

- Be honest about different approaches and narratives. Some believe a Lassaiz Faire approach can be developmental. Others want intervention. Need to talk more about class issues, academic/admin divide. Lack of support for extended studies students.

Institutional Culture

[See Jean Baxen's document on the Imbizo website] "We are talking about ourselves. We produce and reproduce Institutional Culture. And narratives work to produce us."

Louise Vincent: A Narrative View

2 background assumptions: a) Institutional Culture is important and b) it is hard to identify/define/pin down. Amorphous and intangible. That has consequences - 'words can mean anything we want them to mean'. IC is 'airy fairy, easily dismissed, not real'.

Must respect the sense of importance people give to Institutional Culture, and try to make it more tangible.

A narrative view = 'stories'. Massive changes in national and institutional context and policies, but some things are staying the same. How does that affect people and how do we collude in that 'social reproduction'? "The more things change the more they stay the same."

We understand ourselves and others through the stories they tell (not just architecture and artefacts). We have sophisticated ways of explaining 'us' (give a gloss to chaos).

We see each other through the lens of the stories we tell about ourselves. We 'story' one another and that also influences our identities.

The Institutional Culture of an institution is in part made up by the stories that people tell about that institution... ± 5 stock stories in each family/institution - sediment its identity and character.

What are RU's 5 stock-pot stories? We need to identify and critique them.

(Politics students' exercise: write about a 'racial story experienced at RU' - gives a powerful insight into people's experiences). Stories do the work of social reproduction, but can also be used to interrupt social reproduction.

RU story #1 = excellence

RU story #2 = standards have slipped, students can't read or write

RU story # 3 = RU used to be good, but now focused on transformation, not good anymore

RU story # 4 = whiteness

RU story #5 = drinking culture

RU story # 6 = wealth/exclusivity

RU story # 7 = cool/ 'over it'

If we leave the story-stock unchallenged, then we are complicit in social reproduction.

We must make 'normal' strange. What is 'normal'? At RU, white, western culture is 'normal' and anything else is 'strange'. We need to think what stories are in our stock-pot, where do they come from, what role do they play?

Leaders need to make opportunities for new stories to be heard, to challenge existing stories. A moral and ethical imperative. Look for more than 'people who I can feel comfortable with'. Aim to 'see' other people's experience.

Sally Matthews : The Wind at My Back

Invisible knapsack of privilege, carried by all whites. See list of 46 items (USA) – intranet document. Sally has developed 'RU, white female academic' equivalent list.

Institutional Culture shapes itself around the dominant people - usually not conscious or obvious. Some are privileged by this, and others face problems or obstacles as a result.

"Lots of people look like me and come from a similar background"

Often the 'advantaged' try to protest that they are not really that advantaged after all.

RU not as welcoming or familiar for some as for others. What needs to change - where is the 'hidden wind', what can we do apart from 'just leave'?

- Carve out breathing space/ a place to feel comfortable
- Tell some new/different stories
- Make the privileges visible
- Seek mentorship to help resolve issues
- Participate in building a more diverse staff and student body

A dilemma for the privileged: can't 'stop' being a man/ white/western etc, but do I use that to intervene on behalf of others who are disadvantaged?

Mandy Hlengwa - Video - The Safe Bet

We fit in at RU if our cultural practices 'fit' with the dominant Institutional Culture.

DISCUSSION

- Going into uncomfortable spaces is good for your own development. Misunderstand potential benefits, from not understanding.
- About fear. Many occasions when we are all afraid - choose the comfortable option leaders need to model.
- RU a very small community. All know each other. Difficult to crack into networks when new. Only get assistance when known, or helped by someone who is known. Not about colour.
- Issue around status and who gets things done for them - senior people are treated differently
- We need to look at 'stock stories' in the administrators' field. Would be beneficial. Mandy's story very powerful.
- Came to RU in 96 from Zimbabwe. 'Foreign student' - move to RU residence and noticed black students and white students sitting at different places - and black Zimbabweans sat with the whites. The black Zimbabweans had a similar culture, that's why they felt comfortable with the white South Africans. Be careful not to equate race with cultural differences.
- It's about many things - very complex. Also about class, having similar experiences
- There is a 'cost' to 'fitting in'
- Had advantage of arriving at RU with social capital. Much of what happens is subconscious. We don't deliberately seek to alienate. We are not bad people
- What is the 'ideal institutional culture' - what are we aiming for?
- Where Institutional Culture is not alienating, excluding, marginalising
- Everyone has a story. The ideal would be if we could come to each encounter without any assumptions. Do not speak on behalf of other groups or even on behalf of your group. Give each story equal validity. At RU it seems some stories are privileged above others at certain times in the institution's history.
- Political forces lie behind some practices/ Institutional Culture. Important to understand, be aware of. Need a deliberate plan to address how to go forward.
- Get the stories on the table - eg VC was told, soon after joining RU: 'Look, listen and learn how we do things at RU' – this condescending approach enraged many, but the intentions behind it were not malicious.
- Must unpack the 'Rhodes way of doing things'.

VC: RU admin story (what the administrators would like...), is 'The big man' story i.e. what the Vice Chancellor says, you do. Retired Professors see themselves as 'the guardians of RU'

– and support the ‘big man’ story. Very familiar. They expect the VC to tell Directors in no uncertain terms - am the big man. Personally, I don’t operate that way. Ask people to get on with their jobs, take responsibility.

- Been here 11 years – much has changed positively – RU used to be very patriarchal. Whole interview panel was white and male but now very different panel compositions. We must give credit where it’s due.
- ‘Big man’ culture has caused paralysis in University, people are waiting for instructions but when not forthcoming, many people don’t want to take responsibility.
- Experience with previous VC who asked ‘Do you feel part of the RU Family’. But what is the RU family and what does it stand for?
- We can address issues personally – do not need ‘the big man’ to intervene
- Not everyone has good stories. Must ask what underlying factors produce difference? How are we allowing for difference and diversity?
- What gets done about offensive incidents? How do we create a safe institutional space to raise the issues? Get message out it’s not about evil intent.
- Have a course/seminar for all staff? (Similar to critical citizenship course for students?) How do we neutralise power relationships?
- Call it a communication workshop. That’s what is needed most – Communication.
- Finance Division had very positive feedback following tea with Tshidi - regarding Institutional Culture. People just hadn’t thought about these things - awareness must be raised. Important to have/initiate personal discussions.
- Include existing staff in induction of new staff?
- Literature suggests surveys are very weak instruments for getting honest responses regarding racial issues.
- Each of us has to assume personal agency - speak out when someone does things which offend a person’s sensibilities.
- Grappling with where we are. Must hold the good and change the bad.

Institutional Culture conversations can feel chaotic and not grounded. Must identify our values and take our on-paper intentions into our daily lived experience Informal discussions are good, but we need systems and mechanisms to formalise and deal with difficult situations.

3 Ideas arising from these discussions: Collection of RU admin story stock, communication course/process and interaction with Tshidi and departments. Recognise we are at the

beginning of a process. No ideal. Need to create an environment in which most people feel comfortable most of the time.

Equity, Diversity and Stewardship - Tshidi Hashatse

Use of racial categories is necessary in talking about redress and undoing what apartheid did to groups of people. No proxy for talking of race (as with students eg school attended, socio-economic status etc.)

Although formal inequality has been done away with, inequalities and disparities continue. Even the ability to access justice is not equally available to all in South Africa. In some respects, the inequalities are growing. Important to recognise and appreciate that. (Some statistics given)

Quite a few areas are making pleasing progress in South Africa e.g. black and female doctoral enrolments. In order to talk about transformation, we need to ask ourselves why we exist, and what context do we exist within. What is our role as a HEI to contribute to constitutional rights and a sustainable society, to speak truth to power, to produce black intellectuals, credible and rigorous critical thought?

Equity

Many people interpret it as legal compliance. But we need to move further than that. Some see it simply as a numbers game. But it's also about what we do, how we do it, how we look.

Diversity

What kind of diversity does our Institutional Culture allow for? (Excellence, capability, quality - how is it packaged?). Diversity in its widest form - language, perspective, environment. Do we embrace or do we tolerate diversity? Many RU residences say 'we tolerate diversity' on their website- what kind of message does that send?

Equity and quality CAN co-exist and be pursued simultaneously - but do our narratives support that?

Idea of role models = benevolent approach. Ensure we are not modelling exactly what is being identified as difficulties e.g. black lecturer having accent criticised. Do the role models really open the imagination to different possibilities e.g. this black lecturer is an expert in their field?

We still live very separate lives in South Africa and stereotype each other all the time.

Institutional Culture

Impacts on equity, especially recruitment, selection and retention of black staff.

Equity & Stewardship

Involves Governance, Accountability, Courageous leadership, Self-regulation not intervention, Foresight.

Our future is not in the Vice-Chancellor's hands, it is in all our hands. What strategic thrusts are we choosing and how do they contribute to our transformation goals e.g. how will equity imperatives be addressed in our postgrad growth plan?

How will we ensure our drive to increase number of students from other social classes are able to succeed (i.e. not just provide access)?

2010 Equity Tables – RU is under-represented in various occupational levels versus SA representative profile (economically active). Remember dealing with small numbers eg RU top management = 4 people only. 1 is African, therefore 25% African (South Africa population is 74% African). Statistics also available on new appointments and promotions. (See Tshidi's slides)

What strategies are needed to overcome barriers?

'Black academics on the move' - research into why people are so unhappy. Should do similar study now but for all academics.

Benchmarking information for South Africa is available. Most progressive to least progressive sectors e.g. senior management, top management.

DISCUSSION

- Need mechanisms for addressing equity on the administrative side. On academic side 'grow your own timber', student scholarships, Mellon kresge e.t.c. On admin side we don't yet have specific mechanisms.
- We need to get structures right in Divisions to allow development/succession to take place, position jobs as development posts. The intern Programme (food services, clerical, graduate) is proving very successful. Difficult at more senior levels – we need more aggressive strategies.
- Problem: Not enough tradesmen training in South Africa to provide the expertise needed. Battle to fill posts with designated groups.
- Entire sector faces similar challenges. Salary and training challenges
- Constantly losing very good people in scarce skills areas
- Foreign nationals are not counted for equity targets. RU has no targets regarding international staff, but we recognise internalisation as one of our strategies. Can't pursue or prioritise above equity though.
- class as a proxy for race?
- RU is not good at tracking students in extended studies once they've left programme. Social and curriculum issues too.
- Need to agree where interventions need to be (grade 10?) and track before and after - what support is needed, how to empower. Developing a programme in student recruitment.

- Need a cross-functional team, to know what each Division/Unit is doing to support Extended Studies students e.g. Registrar, Library, Dean of Students, Counselling, Career Services etc. Middle management forum could look at?

Open Session

Ken Robinson Video on changing educational paradigms – see

http://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_changing_education_paradigms.html

Middle Managers Forum

Human Resources to organise – develop a space for discussion around critical issues. Roger Adams to convene and request topics from middle managers.

Institutional Paralysis

“The tail shouldn’t wag the dog. No clarity regarding how to determine ‘is it a good idea?’ in Institutional context. Many people ‘afraid of doing the wrong thing’, not that they don’t want to do it.”

Many have a good idea, but time consuming, need forum to share ideas and take forward without being nullified by other areas of University.

Some great ideas go almost all the way to implementation but our very consultative approach allows for last minute objections.

RU is very risk-averse - so we tend to be married to the ‘we’ve always done it this way’ approach.

Discretionary decision-making level is too much vested in senior management, not enough in middle managers. Need people to feel they are developing, making decisions (including mistakes). Also, means senior managers are over-extended.

We must use RU’s existing risk management system more effectively.

Our Institutional Culture doesn’t balance positive and negative feedback. When people don’t do the right thing, we don’t tell them, we gossip behind their back. Should be about learning, not punishment.

But punishment and incentives change behaviour?

Do we need a performance appraisal system?

We do have Institutional structures for new ideas – kick in once decision is taken

Didn’t happen with level zero. No one was/is sure what was/is going on.

Are we striking the right balance between broad consultation, and speedy/effective decision-making?

Trust, communication, are key agents. People don't take responsibility on themselves to find the mechanisms and drive ideas through. Communication is so important.

We try to make perfect decisions but now have apathy because people think 'it's not going to happen, so why try?'

Accountability

"Why don't we have it? Lack of mechanisms? Do managers meet enough with staff? Giving feedback? Need process in each area- not 'managers don't have time.'"

Feels like a 'managers vacuum' regarding strategic thrusts. The Vice-Chancellor assumes Directors are communicating with their staff. Do Managers have a sense of where we are going as an institution? Our strategic choices have serious implications for their work.

The Library Director has done much in this regard. Showed how library fits into the University. Staff are extremely grateful. Role model.

The issue of accountability and communication needs to go on the Middle Managers Forum.

Needs of students

"A university is not a business, but HE is becoming increasingly competitive. Should we be more student-focused than institution-focused? Should we see students as clients? We are not currently meeting their needs, especially postgraduate students."

We are spoilt because we get more applications than places, so may feel we don't need to put in much effort.

We have great systems and services for undergraduate students' needs in many ways, but must not become complacent. Do have a great student bureau.

Students don't always know what's best for them, whereas academics often do. Dangers of client-centred approach.

See graduating student as our 'profit', not money. That is our output. We are fortunate in that we can pick and choose the quality of input.

Students feel they have 'rights'. Maybe they *are* clients in some instances, e.g. when using IT services.

Where leaders learn

"This phrase first appeared in marketing materials many years ago. People like it, but RU has not defined what exactly we mean by it. The time has come to give substance to the logo (goals, strategies, , mechanisms, definitions) or to drop it altogether."

The VC has written a discussion piece which is available on the Imbizo website at:

<http://www.ru.ac.za/institutionalplanningunit/ipu/rhodesuniversityimbizo2011/>

Academic-Admin Divide

“There seems to be an unwritten rule at RU – a power differential – where it seems to be ok to ‘talk down’ to admin. Very hurtful even though only done by a minority. Have good and bad days. E.g. email from an academic to a senior Finance manager: “let me tell you what a budget is”. Intentions may not be malicious. Do understand academics see much bureaucratic red tape but difficult to balance. May need better communication, and non-threatening forums in which to engage.”

Many academics assume administrators know less than them. Attitude changes when they find out one has a Master’s though. Shouldn’t be that way.

“Profs speak to Profs and when they have time they speak to God”. Other Industries also have their ‘rulers’.

There is no reason under the sun to treat another person with disrespect. We must not accept that.

If necessary in conflictual situations, lift the fight to Director or DVC level to talk to the academic - always an unequal fight for middle managers. HoD’s and Directors must shelter their managers from such treatment. But hope a less than 5% problem at RU.

Need to give all academics equal attention, not treat the prolific ones ‘better’ or differently?

In reality we should give all academics the same attention but we have to give more to some – particularly those making a huge contribution to RU input subsidy. We should be proudly support staff - none of us can survive without the other.

Shouldn’t we treat all the same – ie not even differentiate between ‘academic’ and ‘support’?

But we need to focus communications. Help people to navigate what’s relevant and what is not eg we have different criteria for promotions etc.

Some people will say - why send to me if it’s only for academics? The more focused the communication the better.

Mary: People in town feel RU is well run. Hear at conferences how other universities are in trouble. Very proud of way RU operates.

Closing (VC)

Thanks to all for coming. Would have liked to hear more voices. Is this format the best for this constituency?

Not sure if all issues fully discussed. Some issues not put on the table e.g. is there a future for white males at RU? Need to confront openly and honestly. Must avoid untrue rumours. Are more vigorous in looking for equity candidates but no policy on not employing whites. Rest assured that no policy change would be done in secret.

Must finalise remuneration policy.

There is no intention to divide academics and admin. Sometimes we don't treat each other with dignity. No excuses for that.

Each division should decide what decisions can and can't be taken within the Division - must consider impact on rest of University and especially budget/F & GP. Deal with minor issues within divisions eg VC doesn't need to give input on menu options or seating arrangements for functions. Try to empower managers as much as possible. (eg Michelle decides on use of VC's discretionary fund, within reason). Can delegate much but also understand that the Director still takes ultimate responsibility.

Middle Management Forum should discuss where the decision-making levels are. Protocols and policies enable more devolved decision-making. Eg how much money can be spent on curtaining per metre at RU – then this applies across the board, even for the VC.

Have a Middle Management Forum – but ensure a meaningful agenda and role - don't just meet for the sake of meeting.

End 17:45