

# **ENVISIONING AN INSTITUTION TRANSFORMED – RHODES UNIVERSITY TRANSFORMATION SUMMIT**

Date: 28-30 July 2017

Governance Discussion Group

Venue:	New School of Languages
Facilitator:	Nazeema Mohammed
Process Scribe and author of report:	LS Masuku Van Damme
Participants:	18 including the facilitator and scribe

## **DISCUSSION PROCESS**

### **1. INTRODUCTIONS, PROCESS AND ROLES OF FACILITATOR AND SCRIBE.**

We started with a discussion on the rules of engagement which were all accepted which made room for free and non-intimidating engagements. We then proceeded with introductions. We had to share with everyone what our interests in the groupings we were in were. My role as a scribe was dual. With only 3 students in the group and the only postgrad one I was expected to double as one too. My participation in discussions was mainly in the breakaway groups where lead people were expected to scribe and present. I moved from group to group and resumed my scribe role when the group leaders presented their recommendations. The Facilitator maintained her neutrality and guided the discussions so that it stays within the boundaries of their briefs by the contractor (University).

### **2. EMERGING QUESTIONS WHICH WILL GUIDE AND FRAME THE DISCUSSION**

The facilitator requested the discussion group to raise matters they would be interested in discussing that are related to Governance. She indicated that the matters raised would lead to the identification of the core areas that the breakaway groups will focus on. The areas raised were as follows:

- i. Who runs the university?
- ii. Why is the Vice Chancellor expected to account for everything OR/AND why does the VC want to account for everything and what is the role of other senior managers?
- iii. Who is responsible beyond the Vice Chancellor?
- iv. How is governance experienced?
- v. What is the role of the university in the current times? And how is it shifting in the context of the current shifts and what are the implications on governance?
- vi. What are the current governance structures?
- vii. What is the composition of Council and is it structured according to the King 4 Report precepts and requirements in terms of specialisms?
- viii. What are the decision making mechanisms and the flows of accountability and power?
- ix. What is the value of the institutional forums
- x. What are the sustainability and institutional development plans and which legislative tools inform them?
- xi. What are the institutional development plans?
- xii. What are the focus areas and priorities? There needs to be reviews of plans and mechanisms for accountability must be put into place.
- xiii. There is a need to put into place sustainability and institutional development plans
- xiv. How do we make the governance process more inclusive?
- xv. What is the role of council and can the role of the board of governors be more meaningful and value adding to the process rather than be considered more and more as symbolic?
- xvi. What is the object of governance? – We need to define that!
- xvii. What is the purpose of the university?
- xviii. What is the role of council and the boards of governance?
- xix. Has the Higher Education Act been costed to determine whether it is implementable with the current finances the university receives?
- xx. The student governance structures need to be reviewed and issues of accountability, responsibilities be explored such as minutes, expenditures etc.

### 3 TO EXPLORE AREAS OF CONVERGENCE AND DIFFERENCE

The purpose of the exercise was for everyone to examine their views, conceptions within the views of others.

The core question raised was – *WHAT DOES GOVERNANCE MEAN FOR RHODES UNIVERSITY?*

The self and positionality - interrogating guiding questions for this activity were;

- a) What is my role and importance within the context of a question that has been raised?
- b) To check if there are differences in understanding
- c) To talk about individual responsibility

This question produced two statements which unveiled many layers which made the discussants realise that there are complexities and not clearly defined boundaries between the issues. The statements were:

*“Rhodes does not belong to itself!”*

*“A university is a statutory composition and an entity that is accountable first to itself”*

Responses to this questions were

- i. To assume that the university is only funded by the state is erroneous
- ii. Autonomy is a critical aspect of a university.
- iii. The University exists as a result of the public good
- iv. It is accountable to the state and in its accountability there will be tensions and conflicts and it fulfils different roles and twists and turns – the support of government can constrain and also liberate.
- v. We are seeing a lot of state interference and taking away of the autonomy
- vi. Autonomy does not mean an absence of accountability
- vii. Academic freedom – is within and below and the constrains of academic freedom come from within the academy where there is a lot of silencing, naming and shaming
- viii. Academic freedom is within agreed upon social ideologies, social practices= it’s a constrained freedom

- ix. The Bill of Rights – provides freedom of expression which is bounded and the Acts have to take their brief as well as be responsive to it through implementation of its prescripts.

#### **4 UNPACKING VALUES**

*What are the governance structures that have been put in place to address transformation and is the vision known and shared?*

- i. There is no clarity on what the vision of Rhodes University is and not everybody subscribes to the new vision.
- ii. There is strong resistance to moves towards a new vision which still needs to be crafted.
- iii. The roles of different people on the vision and implementation of visions is erratic i.e. the School of Languages is not accessible to people with physical disabilities
- iv. We should not only be talking about academic freedom – support staff were never consulted about the construction of the languages centres hence its lack of functionality, yet disability accommodation is a major compliance and why is Rhodes not compliant?
- v. Some areas which were created to promote governance related values such as the Equity and Institutional Culture office are non-compliant and therefore non-functional and staffed by 3. Their role does not seem to be recognised and they exist as a symbolic structure and it does not have real power.

#### **5. OTHER QUESTIONS CRITICAL FOR STRUCTURING & INFORMING BREAKAWAY DISCUSSION GROUPS**

- i. WHO IS THE UNIVERSITY

(Two views)

There is a lack of ownership of the university which results in othering by everybody but the VC. There is a blurring as to who is doing what and who is making those decisions and the structures and mechanisms of making those decisions are not known.

The VC acts like he is THE University and when things go wrong he takes responsibility. The responsibility he should take is by delegating responsibilities to where they should

be implemented from the onset. He is not a delegator but he and management are controllers who deprive people of being the University. The politics of collegiality defines managerialism.

ii. HOW IS THE PROCESS OF GOVERNANCE EXPERIENCED

There is a Chinese wall between management and staff. This has to do with cultural shifts which are also informed by that this is the last university that has not undergone what other universities have. Or it is the last and only university that did not have to do certain things. We also see things that we like within the university that we don't want to part with and as a result have become more managerialism. There is a need to decentralise power, decision making and responsibility.

iii. STRUCTURE AND CULTURE

These go together – a culture of accountability is missing despite the fact that the Deans are elected. Bureaucracy should be an enabler rather than a constrainer– could mean that things are done efficiently and a bureaucracy that works. We need a culture that cascades down compliance. The relationship between structure and agency must be recognised – culture can be autonomous from structure. There is a lack of feeling accountable by senior admins. Senior management feels responsible amongst each other rather than the rest of staff. The attitudes in ways of working must change. Minority rights need to be recognised and questions such as “How do you own a space that does not allow you to practice your culture? What does integration look like in the context of looking at transformation?”

iv. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

- The biggest problem is that collegiality drives the university
- Faculty boards are weak and not coming up with substantive issues
- All directors must be held responsible
- Humanities the weakest thus far

v. HOW DO WE STRENGTHEN OUR GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES?

- The SRC – how can the University support the strengthening of student governance structures? How can students instil a culture of accountability, responsibility and transparency in their governance structures?

## REPORTS EMANATING FROM DISCUSSIONS

### DISCUSSION GROUPS

#### **A. FITNESS OF PURPOSE OF STRUCTURES WITHIN RHODES IN SOUTH AFRICA IN GRAHAMSTOWN**

The extent to which RU achieves its purpose in its academic project. If we do not know what we have, we cannot ask for anything. Go back to statues, do we have skills, resources to achieve our purpose. A current status report is needed to do this. The University in its current status and lack of understanding where it is renders itself NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE.

The current structures are not fit for purpose.

Why not?

- 1) Need clarity on understanding the purpose of the structures.
- 2) Over democratised structures/committees – not focused on their purpose, too large, overlapping of discussion between structures/committees.
- 3) Lack of ownership and individual agency – there is a sense that staff are feeling overwhelmed and morale is low. There is a sense that some staff serve on Committees but do not make substantive contribution. This could be because of the ineffective functioning of some structures/committees – structure composition and accountability of structures/committees as well as recommendations not being revised and/or implemented.
- 4) The institutional rules need to be revised.

We need to transform to a more inclusive empathetic organisational culture. How do we ensure that the institution remains open to those who feel excluded? Make sure that all constituents are represented.

The structure reporting mechanisms are going to be revised and strengthened with implementation next year.

Recommendations:

- a) There must be a clear Institutional Plan that is aligned with statutory requirements and the purpose of Rhodes University.
  - a. The Plan should be informed by and embedded in local, national and global.
  - b. The Plan should have clear timelines for decision making and accountability.
- b) A discussion should be held to propose how all constituents could be represented in the structures to enhance an empathetic inclusive organisational culture.
- c) Revise the institutional rules, for example to strengthen the Institutional Forum, revise the composition of the Institutional Planning Committee.

**B. COMMUNICATION OF STRUCTURES – OWNERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

Recommend that knowledge about governance and management structures be shared with all staff members and student leaders to clarify structures, purposes, functions and links (interdependence between sections) clearly, including foundational King IV principles. These 'accountability maps' must be communicated clearly, in print and on a reconfigured and reconceptualised website. These must outline reporting lines and timeframes for decision-making and implementation of decisions clearly to ensure accountability. The outcomes will be ownership of structures and processes, increased trust and efficiencies.

**C. STUDENT GOVERNANCE**

STUDENT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

1. The SRC
2. Class reps
3. Faculty Reps
4. Sub wardens
5. Student Parliament
6. Director of student affairs
7. House and Hall Wardens

Our focus was on the SRC

#### An inclusive Review of the constitution

1. Vetting process of potential SRC members
2. A code of conduct for potential members
3. Training of members
4. Including every and using student email addresses so that part time etc. students feel included

#### The focus on student body participation

- Ensuring higher voting participation
  - People must know the importance of their vote
- Consultative meeting to solicit a legitimate student voice – mechanisms to be created for this

#### Transparency of SRC student benefits

#### Justified and audited financial reports

#### Mechanism for monitoring of the functionality of SRC responsibilities

Minutes to be submitted within and particular time, approved and signed through students email addresses

Sun SRC bodies to allow for easier access and better accountability - Bringing back the SRC Hall rep

The responsibilities of SRC members at University Council meeting

Submission of progress reports to the University Council and student body.

#### OTHER BODIES

- Enforcing a culture of accountability, legitimacy and accessibility within the smaller governance committees
- Stricter and holding committee members accountable and reviewing their efforts throughout their terms
- They should be easily dismissed as they are easily appointable
- Mechanisms to ensure that faculty and class reps attend meetings around curriculum etc. with lecturers
- Lecturers must stay on their lanes and - pollution of student movements by academic staff and they should use their forums to address their student related issues instead of coming to the



student protest activities. This was a comment in reference to the fact that the intentions of lecturers when they join student protests are known and if students have an opposing voice to the sentiments of a lecturer they get victimised in class and their marks decline without clear reason.

#### **D. CULTURAL ASPECTS/IMPLICATIONS OF GOVERNANCE**

Governance is not just about structure - it emerges from the belief, values and ideas of an institution. We need to ensure that there is widespread understanding of how governance works at the university and a sense of shared commitment.

Everybody in the university contributes to our focus on the knowledge project, as it manifests in multiple ways from community engagement to research to nurturing a physical environment in which critical engagement can flourish. We should not be able to say: "The university should do X" or "The university should do Y". We need to all take responsibility and participate because we are the university.

Where there is apathy or a lack of accountability and responsibility, managerialism will increase. It is in the spaces where nobody steps up to serve in an elected position or where a faculty board is not quorate etc. that efficiency measures will be put in place that make us more like an industry and less like a university.

We need to have opportunities for people to understand the range of forms of governance that are available and how each relates to specific institutional cultures and to make decisions about roles and responsibilities accordingly.

