

DISCUSSIONS ON STAFF RELATED MATTERS

Facilitator: Jude

Scribe: Lebona

Structure of discussions

- Introductions
- Why are you here, in this group's theme?
- Group conversations
- Recommendations

Reminder about rules/principles of engagement agreed upon

- That this is all about conversation and dialogue
- Participants must listen to each other
- Resist the temptation of monologue debate
- Engagement might be uncomfortable
- Need to normalise discomfort as engagements/discussions could get "hot"
- Participants to share truthfully how they feel
- Openness
- Non-closure – participants might not come to conclusions on certain matters
- Liberty to choose which areas one (or the group) wants to focus on as every theme (e.g. students, labour, name of institution, etc.) under discussion affects staff
- Being aware of the rank/power one holds (outside of this room) which might suppress other views. The group discusses staff matters but it might be comprised of people from different spheres of the university such as students
- Equality: every voice matters
- Which groups are represented? Mainly staff members except for a scribe who is a student. The intention was to have each group being comprised of people from different spheres of the university to get multiple views on matters relating to staff
- Freedom to speak in one's own language, and the possibility to translate

A question was asked whether there was a list of items to be discussed and the facilitator explained how the engagement on the discussions was structured. It was indicated that there were three main things to be done: **introductions** through an activity called a constellation activity during which the participants would give **reasons** why the theme they were discussing was important. Participants would then choose specific issues they would want to focus on and **discuss them** cafe-style (discussing the theme in small groups and reporting to each other). A report would then be presented to the whole group the following day. The participants were encouraged to stay in the group for the duration of the discussions.

INTRODUCTIONS

Profile of the group: 10 participants: 5 Males; 5 Females (pus 1 who joined at a later stage)

Activity

The participants were asked to break into three small groups to introduce each other. The purpose of the activity was to provide a platform for the participants to know each other to create a friendly and relaxing atmosphere for everyone to engage in discussions. There was a reluctance to break into smaller

groups as some participants felt that the group was small enough on its own, so they could as well do the introductions without being in small group. The facilitator however stressed the importance of being able to speak freely in smaller groups for some people, hence this activity. She also encouraged people to get used to doing things differently. Introductions were done in small groups, thereafter the small groups came together and introductions were done in a bigger group.

The following questions were answered as participants were introducing themselves to each other

Who are you? (Summary of responses is given below)

- **Academic staff:** Lecturers from different Faculties some of which holding leadership positions such as Heads of Department and Deputy Deans
Faculties/Departments/Centres represented (Accounting; Linguistics; Law; Education; Sociology; CHERTL)
- **Support Staff:** Manger of Student Wellness; HR Department HoD; Finance Division; Oppidan Administrator; Chairperson of Middle Managers Forum;
- Alumnus
- Trade Union representatives (NEHAWU and NTEU)
(Please refer to the sign-up list for the names)

What is your role at the university? (Summary of the responses is given below)

- Produce graduates
- Labour matters
- Active involvement in the Unions by giving legal advice
- Working with off-campus students; their wellbeing, their academic matters, etc.
- Administration
- Management (Human, Financial)
- Research and teaching
- Development of academic staff
- Development of teachers
- Development of people

RESPONSES TO THE QUESTION: WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THIS GROUP?

- Safe space to talk
What is an unsafe space? This is a space where you are unable to express yourself because your superiors are around you and exercise power on you, so much that you are unable to deal with matters bothering you, and you feel like you have no voice; the place where one feels victimised; the space where there are “pockets of power”, and people who think that they are untouchable; the space which is very constraining
What is a safe space? The space where everybody listens to each other and is safe; no body judges you because we all come with the same problem
- Not enough of these conversations are available
- Participate as an employee of the university
- To talk about staff issues as the university has lost a number of good staff because people do not feel free to speak, and this does not make them happy; staff members need to talk to each other more about the problems they have
- Rhodes university being an academic and intellectual “home” and one cares very deeply about what happens in its space

- Opportunity to speak to similar minded people about issues not being dealt with at the institution
- To talk about issues of accountability and leadership, and where to from here
- Talk about issues not being talked about at the university
- How to deal with struggles of finding one's foot due to the skin colour, alienation and being feminine
- To engage in this safe space to make sure that Rhodes university is a welcoming space for all
- See ways of facilitating discussions on transformation matters
- Concern around financial status of the university which affects all staff members and how to tackle staff challenges
- Challenging the norms at the institution, e.g. binary male/female system; not enough space for new and younger staff to speak; uncertainty around when does one have a voice and when doesn't one have it; seeking to understand how to deal with a problem where one can have a safe space at one moment with one group of people but having to be completely voiceless in another group; grappling with questions like when does one have a voice, and when not to have a voice; at times one might feel like having a voice but circumstances do not allow everyone to talk. The participants were made aware of the complexities of using such classifications as white/black or male/female, which might make others uncomfortable, but it was agreed that they should feel free to use any that they felt like using.
- Realisation that academic staff become more and more unhappy at Rhodes and this space provides a platform to open up; the space includes everybody – young or old, black or white, male or female; not feeling 100% safe at Rhodes university
- Passion to keep central the academic project (teaching & research); sometimes too many decisions are made for reasons that are not necessarily the best for the academic project
- Concern around systemic transformation at the university; people might have personal issues but there are broad structural issues that need to change, e.g. labour's voice need to be heard more clearly at the institution, the corporatisation of the university needs to be pulled back; the core business of the university is teaching the students and doing research, everything else comes second; the academic project has to be at the heart of the university
 ---There is an element of fear at the university; people are scared to speak out and this has existed for many years; people are afraid to speak out for fear of losing their jobs; there structures where workers are meant to have their inputs but their voices get drowned by other voices; the concern is how do we change the structures at the university for the voices of the staff to become much more important and much more influential

GENERAL DISCUSSIONS

- Some lecturers feeling not protected by the university, especially during the student protests; lecturers felt intimidated and forced to leave lecture halls while students were swearing at them; lecturers felt that they were treated as if they were nothing even though lecturers sometimes act as guardians for the students as they sometimes turn to lecturers when they have problems, but when they disagree with the management, they confront lecturers displaying all sorts of intimidation – banging on or breaking lecture hall doors, showing disrespect, shouting and pointing fingers at the lecturers. Most of these were done by black students whose culture does not allow such behaviour; it is not that they should not speak, but they have been taught to speak with respect to the adults. The new culture that students portray makes some lecturers very uncomfortable. An example was given where one lecturer (at the Accounting Department) left the university due to these scary and unpleasant experiences.

- Staff members not properly consulted when problems arise and end up tackling issues on their own; they are normally called to meetings after things had happened and told about what happened; meetings are not usually called before these incidents happen to advise staff on what to do; lecturers sometimes do know students better than the management, therefore they need to be consulted and asked for better approaches to get to the students instead of doing something first and realising later that that was wrong and then coming back to the staff for advice
- Staff are the main stake-holders at the university but it feels like their concerns are not prioritised (it is like they are a second race) and it is the interests of the students that are prioritised, and yet students are here for a short period of time unlike staff members who are here for, in some cases, their whole lives with their families
- The academic project being the main focus of the university is important, but where does the support staff feature? For the students to be in the lecture halls, it is through the work of the support staff by looking after them in terms of their wellness, their health, etc. For example, if all the students were to be sick, there would not be this academic project. Though efforts are being made to bring the two groups (academic and support staff) together, at the ground level this division keeps on coming. For example, for sabbatical leaves, what about support staff? There is a tendency to overlook them; members of the support staff are very important to allow the members of the academic staff to do the job as there is one purpose for which they are all working towards achieving. The whole purpose is educative, though different people may play different roles. Perhaps the role of support staff has not been articulated clearly to show that their role is critical to allow the academic staff to fulfil their mandate. There is sense that different sectors of staff feel devalued, though their roles are very important – there is a lack of value, recognition, appreciation or even visibility of their role.
- There is a norm of de-humanising support staff or everybody who is not an academic staff to such an extent that some support staff are being called by derogatory names (an example of one senior manager having been called a *coolie* woman was made). A concern was if this happens at the managerial level, what more with support staff at the lower level? This portrays deep culturalism that needs to be transformed; there is patriarchy in a system that for example dehumanises women (black in particular). Groups such as this one are here for a common purpose and perhaps ways could be found to articulate feelings and try find solutions
- Academic staff issues
There is lack of collegial support from some members of academic staff. Some senior staff members look down upon their junior staff. One staff member narrated how she was humiliated by her HoD due to student assessment issues where a student took an exam script to the HoD without having not discussed it with her, and the HoD just came to her office and shouted at her without giving her the opportunity to explain herself. The lecturer was so much hurt that she nearly resigned; she also thought that the incident had a racial element in it and when she reported this to the senior management the HoD denied everything and the matter was just dropped; such incidents erode trust among members. These personal stories indicated practices of dominance and racial tensions at the university that need to be addressed.
- Policies of the university
Some policies are old and do not address some of the challenges faced by all staff; It is like some of them (policies) are discriminatory as they accommodate interests of certain people; some are not even aligned to the constitution of the country; racial and gender differences still being used to bully others; need for people to be harmonised so that they can work peacefully; voices from workers are important; a concern that the management of the university is sometimes not

transparent, the reason why issues are multiplying; some support staff members want to pursue studies but they are not given such an opportunity by the management; this is a sign of discrimination

- Support staff (systemic issues?)

Rotating of the cleaners seems to be a problem and no consultation is made when this happens; concerns have been raised about this in the management meetings but it is still continuing; some of these support staff are regarded as part of the entire faculty; there is a need for macro-compacting – need for compact between management and workers; certain things should not happen without consulting and negotiating with workers even if there are disagreements; there is a need to value support staff

On the issues that the university is facing, there should be effective matching of workers in terms of appropriate qualifications, experience in higher education and their capabilities. It seems like junior managers sometimes are not properly led by their seniors so much that they sometimes operate without leadership. There is a need to do introspection – this is where the university is, what has led to this, and where to from here? Everything that is happening now has been happening for a long time. Movers and shakers are required in the leadership positions - people who deliver on key deliverables

Concerns from academic staff - There is a perception that it is easier to create a post in the administration than it is in the academic sphere

There is also a perception that different standards apply in terms of salary scales: e.g. a member of the support staff with Honours Degree earning more than a professor; these differences create tensions between academic and support/administration staff. Academic staff are concerned that the centre of power is with the administration and not with them. Who makes these decisions in this university? The top management must be transparent.

- Labour legislation

It seems like the minimum requirements set by legislation seems to be what Rhodes University uses as maximum every time

- Issues relating to e.g. Funding

Seems to be lack of leadership: need for people to deliver on key issues

Historical issues relating to funding issues: what are we doing?

- Labour disputes regarding salary increment: being told that there is no money but new posts being created afterwards

Participants' ideas about the reports presented by the working groups

- Budget

The financial status of the university is not sustainable.

Normally people at the lowest level of salary scale are the ones to lose their jobs first if the university has to consider retrenchment; but those high on the payroll keep their positions or are able to move to other places to get jobs

Concern on some people holding different positions (e.g. HoD and Dean, etc) and getting paid for those responsibilities and yet the university is saying it does not have money

Some Temporary Support staff working for small number of hours on contract but having to use a lot of money to come to work as most, if not all, are from the township and they have to use the little money they have for transport

Where is the money, and who are the people managing this money, do they know what they are doing?

- Student funding; there is a feeling that a lot of “poor” people do not know about NSFAS, and they are being left by the way-side as they are not being helped; issues of corruption and lack of transparency at government level disadvantage these people
- Some of the reports not reflecting the real issues; processes of reporting not properly given; e.g. labour group not engaging with other stake-holders (e.g. HR Department); and teaching and learning group not engaging with the Research Office; some stake-holders were told not to participate and yet issues were of concern to them; an example was made about HR Department which has 100% transformation at the level of senior management and nobody came to ask about this; there is a feeling that the entire process was completely disorganised from the start; groups were not set-up properly and some people did not know what to do; some groups had very small number of people but others had many people; recommendation is made to look at the methodology of reporting; some reports failed to give greater detail on what to do;
- Teaching and learning
There was a concern that some stake-holders were not involved in the discussions leading to the writing of the reports, e.g. CHERTL not being involved in Teaching and Learning committee, and the document compiled and presented before the committee ended up being not good.
No time is allocated to the academic staff in terms of how much to spend on research; and how much on teaching; one is just told to teach and research; there also needs to be an environment where one is encouraged to research and measured according to the research out-put

Task: If you were to choose the top 3 issues on staff related matters that you think are critical/important, which ones will they be? Participants were given small pieces of paper (stickers to write down issues individually). Then they broke into **2 groups** and compared their issues to see the similarities

- **First group (5) (3 Males, 2 Females)**
The following were the main issues of the group
 - 1. Institutional culture**
 - Some of the visual symbols are inclusive to some people but at the same time exclusive to others
 - Language: others disadvantaged as English dominates other languages; though there is a need to incorporate Xhosa in the teaching and learning, the university is creating global students. iSiXhosa can be spoken locally but students are trained to compete globally. This will also affect staff, and takes issues of respect and diversity into consideration.
 - Cohesion: has to do with sub-groupings within the workers – academic staff and support staff are sometimes factionalised and this might harm the relationships; it is all about how healthy the relations are
 - 2. Leadership capability and evaluation**
 - This is about budget and remuneration, and the capacity to develop those. Issues like why aren't we saving? This might be due to poor leadership.

-Institutional plan: one looks at the capacity or capability implement it, which is non-existent at the moment; part of the institutional will be to review structures to advance transformation. You cannot improve people's salaries because there is no money; there is a need to build the reserves to start moving people up the salary scales, we need to build the capability here. Capability is all about having the right people at the right positions, and if not, what are the reasons not to have them. Institutional plan will answer some of these questions.

-Financial sustainability: Speaks to all financial matters. For example, people need to be paid more especially in Grahamstown where accommodation is expensive; pay for the relocation costs for staff members, etc

-Implementation: relates to ongoing feedback and communication. It is also about implementing the policies that exist and the recommendations from this meeting, and provide feedback on all of these.

-Student funding with respect to staff: staff members' children finding some challenges accessing the university; staff members' children wanting to do courses not offered by Rhodes are not being subsidised as happens in other universities such as Walter Sisulu university. There is a concern that the staff members (particularly the academic ones) are under-paid compared to other institutions in the Eastern Cape.

3. Staff development and retention

--Career development

--Salaries need to be increased and particularly those of scarce skills

--Salary issues in general

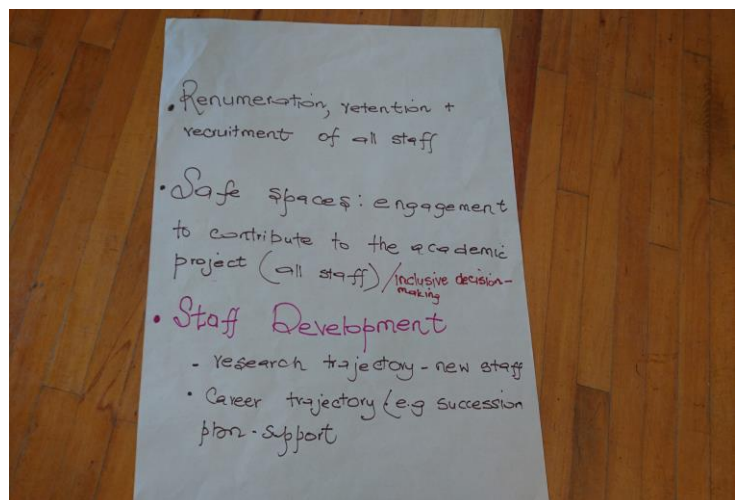
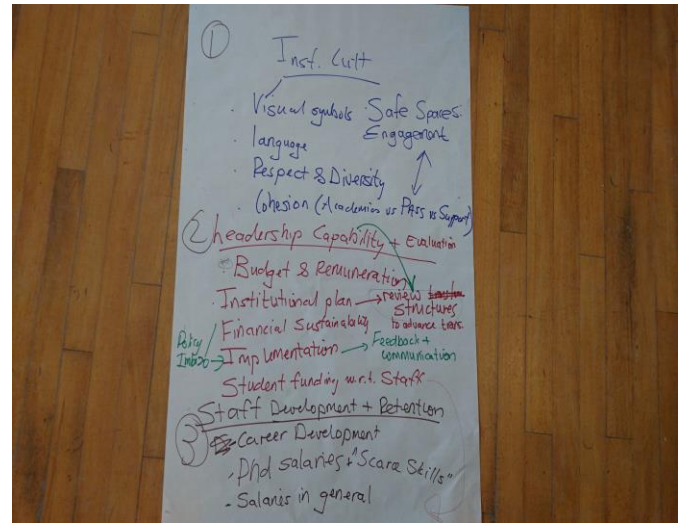
- **Second group (6) (2 Males, 4 Females)**

The group reduced their issues to the following:

- 1. 3Rs: Recruitment, Retention and Remuneration**

The university has a major problem with recruiting good staff to retain the reputation and excellence of what the university is doing; the town, the university, and the salaries paid by the university at all levels make the university uncompetitive compared to other universities. These impact on equity issues and the transformation of academic and support staff.

- 2. The creation of safe spaces**



where all voices are engaged towards the academic project which is the focus of the university, in order to make the project more visible. This links with inclusive decision making and leadership.

3. Staff development

From the academic staff, the income from research is increasing very slowly. The bulk of research is still done and income generated by very small percentage of staff, usually older academic staff who will retire soon. New generation needs to be grown and support younger staff to do research and create space so that they do not have 100% teaching load. So mechanisms should be there to build on this.

For developing support staff, there should be succession plans and opportunities to study further (e.g. part-time studies)

The common critical issues identified by the two groups are the following (the first 2 being prioritised):

1. Institutional culture

Visual symbols, safe spaces for engagement, language, respect & diversity, cohesion, Academic & Professional, Administrative & Support Staff (PASS)

PASS

-Development of a Promotion Policy/Guidance

-Line managers need to take responsibility to motivate and develop staff. This needs to be a measurable KPI; opportunities are provided; staff are not aware or are not encouraged to access these opportunities

-Line managers to focus on highlighting opportunities for PASS employees to improve qualifications and thereby enhance their promotion aspects

Academic

-Awareness drive of research development opportunities for new staff

-Raise awareness through effective communication of Research Funding opportunities for staff

-Retention policy applicable to all

Unanimous Agreement: Staffing issues cannot be considered in isolation from other challenges, i.e. income, student intake & throughput and other significant factors

2. Leadership, Institutional Capability and Evaluation

Budget & Remuneration, Institutional Plan – Review structures to advance transformation (IT/Finance), Financial Sustainability, Implementation of Imbizo/Other Deliberative Process outcomes and Feedback and Communication therein, 100% fee Remission for Employees, Safe spaces: engagement; Inclusive decision-making

-Develop Institutional Plan and Review structures to advance transformation

-Focus on financial sustainability of the institution

-What has led to the current situation

-Need for inclusive decision-making

-There must be key deliverables and measures

-Create safe spaces for engagement for ALL staff to contribute to the academic staff. The current approach contributes to the polarisation among Academic and PASS

-Focus on 3rd Stream Income Generation; this is important in order to enhance remuneration for academics

-Explore flexible pay practices

-Explore student numbers and growth

-Faculties and Departments need to address student intake and output. This is important as it affects Government Income Subsidy

- Size of Rhodes university is a major constraint or can it be a critical leverage in terms of Rhodes university being the smallest historic traditional university in South Africa
 - Explore Development of Programmes suited to location, e.g. Rural Development Studies
 - Marketing strategy for Rhodes university
 - Development of Rhodes university Institutional Value Proposition
 - Explore research development Programme(s)/Collaborate with other universities and across Faculties
 - Consider the Director of Postgraduate Studies as a full-time position
3. Remuneration, Staff Development & Retention
- Career Development opportunities, PhD Salaries & Scarce Skills, Salaries in General, Remuneration, Retention and retention of all staff, Research Trajectory

Threats and opportunities

- Size of Rhodes university being a constraining factor
- Geographic location – being situated in the rural area
- Number of enrolled students