

Understanding Transformation in Higher Education Post-Mergers and Incorporations: A Case of a South African University

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ABSTRACT Higher education institutions in South Africa have been merged with unreasonable and unrealizable goals which have created a number of challenges including tensions and clashes amongst the key stakeholders on their understanding of transformation. This study aims to provide an understanding of the transformation post-merger and incorporation of the Durban University of Technology (DUT). This study is grounded in both quantitative and qualitative research traditions whereby a survey was conducted in the form of a structured questionnaire and in depth-interviews with the university leaders. The questionnaires were analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Scientists version 12 generating the reliability coefficient Alpha of 0.947. For qualitative, the non-probability purposive sampling was used and NVivo software (version 10) was used for organizing and analysing data. This study revealed a disproportionately high percentage of the university leaders who have limited understanding of the transformation agenda of this university and the solutions to transformation challenges. The study revealed the respondents' understanding of transformation as influenced by internal and external factors. This study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge, as there is a dearth of published information on the understanding of transformation in the merged and incorporated institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Institutional mergers and co-operations that the South African government encourages are intended to close the gap between historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions through the rationalization and redistribution of the physical, financial and human resource base in higher education (Kakai, 2000). The merged and incorporated institutions in South Africa seem to be caught up in cultural clashes, racism, gender inequalities, resistance to change, the exodus of the leadership, centralist leadership styles, doubtful understanding of transformation, and untransformed curricula that is unresponsive to the needs of its stakeholders (students, society, industry and the country). For example, Chalufu (2002) indicates that there were major tensions, with a potential clash of institutional cultures, between Natal and ML Sultan Technikons, and since the merger between these institutions, the new entity has been affected by frequent disruptions and frequent changes in senior management. According to Ncayiyane & Hayward (2007: 23), 'transformation' in South Africa elicited different tensions and expectations from different constituencies. This is supported by Cohen (2006), who observed that the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (a merger between the University of Port Elizabeth (PE), PE Technikon and Vista University) was the subject of legal action, several resignations, and dissatisfaction by staff, who had to re-apply for their posts after the merger. A study conducted by Goldman (2011), on the merger of the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) with the Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR), indicated that the way individuals perceived the merger had a definite impact on their level of job satisfaction. Those who were negatively predisposed toward their historic institution were less satisfied with their jobs than those with positive predispositions. Based on the above stated challenges brought by transformation in higher education institutions, this study looks at how transformation, post mergers and incorporations, is understood and perceived by universities, using the case of the Durban University of Technology (DUT). Furthermore, this study aims to provide an insight into the broader understanding of transformation in merged and incorporated institutions of higher learning.

The DUT is the product of a merger of ML Sultan Technikon and Technikon Natal, which took on the name of the Durban Institute of Technology on 1 April 2001. This was the first example of a merger between universities in the history of higher education in South Africa, and the first in the reconfiguration process of the sector, which began in earnest in 2004 (Du Pre, cited in Annual Report, 2008: 2). In the case of this resulting merger, the Durban University of Technology (between ML Sultan and Natal Technikon), it was felt that the goals of the merger were not clearly stipulated (May & Mason, 2007). While, Kavanagh &

Ashkanasy (2006) explain that the purpose of mergers, closures and incorporations are to streamline for efficiency, with the focus on financial stringency and the achievement of diversity, growth and rationalization. Du Pre (cited in the Annual Report, 2008: 2) mentions that, while it was a voluntary merger, it nevertheless had the usual number of challenges and problems faced by all other institutions which merged as part of the changing South African Higher Education Landscape in 2004/05. Du Pre (2008) further argues that, while the constituent institutions were two similar institutional types, namely technikons, they however had different cultures, such as academic, religious, racial, nationality and language cultures, and this had to be taken cognisance of and managed over the period of the merger. The above background necessitates the following section to cover the theoretical framework that critically reviews major aspects of transformation in higher education institutions, followed by the research design employed in this study as well as the discussion, conclusions and recommendations thereof.

Literature review

Transformation agendas in higher education institutions

Different researchers have made attempts to discuss factors that could drive the transformation agenda in higher education institutions. Examples of this are: Ncayiyane & Hayward (2007), who discuss the expectations and tensions of different stakeholders; Kavangh & Ashkanasy (2006), who present the purpose of mergers; and Mapasela & Hay (2005) who focus on higher education policies. Zide (2010: 120) argues that a transformation agenda of any institution should be aligned to its institutional strategic planning process. An institutional strategy sets the tone, the vision, mission and direction the institution is taking, and hence, the transformation agenda has to be aligned to the strategy. Zide (2010) avers that a failure to respond to this kills every essence of transformation. The Soudien Report (2008: 111) deliberates on the context of the transformation agenda in higher education and, in particular, the need to root out all forms of discrimination and that institutional management must provide transformational leadership which focuses on effecting deep educational change. The Soudien Report says further, that until there are open and honest debates and discussions about transformation and about discrimination in all its facets, the divides of the past will continue, however progressive the policies, to act as a brake on fulfilling the transformation agenda outlined in the White Paper (1997). This has been confirmed by Shields (2010: 2), who argues that to be successful in achieving educational reform, transformative leaders require a robust understanding of dialogue, moral courage, and

activism; and an understanding of their role. Zide (2010: 650) contends that, as part of the transformation agenda, open public debates should be held to interrogate issues of public concern as well as issues of governance as they affect staff and students alike, thereby holding the members of the Executive Management accountable to the community they serve. Such an approach would promote transparency, public accountability, and good and sound corporate governance. Ramphele (2008) asserts that open debates lead to a situation in which the ghosts of the past are called by their names, if we are to bury the past and forge ahead with a free and non-racial South Africa. Public debates should address the evils of the following ghosts: racism, ethnic chauvinism, sexism and authoritarianism. This study interrogates the perceptive understanding of transformation at DUT and is also informed by the aforementioned discussions by different researchers on the facets of the transformation agenda. This study extends previous discussions by researching operational, individual, and departmental or faculty, as well as institutional and societal effects that could add on the realization of the transformational agenda of the university and that of the country. The DUT is an ideal case study to interrogate such factors that have a potential to influence the transformation agenda, as it is the first example of a merger incorporating a previously advantaged and a questionably disadvantaged institution in the history of South Africa.

Society needs and transformation in higher education institutions

The institutional debates on the realization of the transformation agenda have a potential, through responsive curricula, to positively impact on societies. The transformation of the curriculum is therefore at the heart of institutional response to societal needs (Fourie, 1999) and societal development (Zide, 2010: 68). Ngara (2003) contends that the curriculum is a key element because it determines whether students acquire competencies and capabilities that turn them into thinkers, leaders and responsible citizens with a capacity to make a real contribution to societal development. Currently, higher education in South Africa is under increasing pressure to meet the social transformation and skills needs of the new South Africa (Kistan, 2002). At the same time, it is under immense external and internal pressure to improve on its policy and delivery performance (De Clercq, 2002). One of the indicators of social transformation in education is increasing the demographic representation among graduates and reducing the demographic difference between student intake and graduate throughput (Jaffer, Ng'ambi, & Czerniewicz, 2007). It could be deduced that higher education institutions' transformation should respond to societal demands, as is deliberated by the researchers mentioned above. This study extends their arguments by questioning whether the

curricula in the merged institutions does respond to societal, national, business and economic needs.

National and global transformation in higher education institutions

Mabelebele (2013: 6) raises current challenges facing the higher education sector, which are the management of enrollment planning in order to be in line with national needs, while ensuring institutional financial viability. The Education White Paper of 1997 set the basis for the envisaged transformation of higher education. It states: South Africa's transition from apartheid and minority rule requires (that) existing practices and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for a new era. . . . In South Africa today, the challenge is to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities (DoE 1997). Moja (2004) argues that, to position South Africa to operate successfully in the global economy, it would be necessary to transform the higher education system in ways that make it responsive to globalisation challenges. This responsiveness has sometimes been wrongly interpreted in the Africanisation debate to mean meeting global needs at the expense of local needs. According to Moja (2004), the goal is not to serve external needs, but rather to prepare human resources that make the country a partner in a globalised world. The globalisation versus Africanisation debate leads to polarized positions that are not helpful in positioning higher education to be responsive to the global knowledge society. Ensor (2004: 340) conducted a study that tells the story of the attempt of government and higher education institutions in South Africa to embrace what were viewed as the most significant contemporary ideas for higher education curriculum reform, those deemed most productive for meeting the challenges of globalization and the knowledge society. What this means for higher education is that transformation, in fidelity to its claimed radical roots, must incorporate goals and purposes which are linked, even if indirectly, to an emancipatory and broad-based social and political agenda (Singh, 200: 9). The researchers above concur with the direction this study is exploring in terms of higher education responsiveness to national needs and also examine the understanding of the interviewees on external factors such as national (including the promulgation of new policies) and global influence on the transformation.

Policies and transformation in higher education institutions

The South African higher education ministry has promulgated a number of policies, forcing institutions of higher education to adopt both institutional and national transformation agendas. The article written by Mapasela & Hay (2005) provides a descriptive theoretical analysis of the most important higher education policies and initiatives, which were developed by the democratically elected government of South Africa after 1994, to transform the South African higher education system. Mapasela & Hay (2005) argue that the South African higher education fraternity, currently overwhelmed by mammoth change initiatives, is simultaneously faced with two processes, namely:

- Transforming the socio-political state of the country, and
- Transformation to respond to national higher education policy imperatives.

Leaders in higher education tend to focus mainly on the above processes and avoid key institutional transformational drivers, including the competencies of employees, who will be driving change and policy implementation. South African policy-makers, in their attempts to break away from the past, are oblivious of the realities of thorough policy implementation and do not take into consideration the voluminous nature of policies as an inhibiting factor. Ensor (2004: 344) indicates that advocates of the disciplinary discourse were deemed by many policy makers to be elitist, conservative and resistant to change, harking back to a privileged past. Undoubtedly, this could have adverse effects for academic staff, who are expected to propel change and transformation, but who are often confronted with the complexities of implementation, which entail, among other aspects, dealing with cumbersome procedures, processes, bureaucratic structures as well as increasing workloads (Mapasela & Hay, 2005: 111). Change and transformation, brought about by new policies, are not easy phenomena to deal with, particularly if they coincide with other socio-political and economic pleas for change (Mapasela & Hay, 2005: 111). The arguments raised above indicate the disjuncture between new policies and procedures developed which might be caused by less consultation of employees at operational level and which derail or hamper the smooth implementation of policies, factors which are further explored in this study. Furthermore, in the South African context, policy implementation and enforcement are perceived to be derailed by inept decision-makers and line managers. This has led to policies, approved by selected institutional leaders only, without being cascaded down to employees at lower levels, which directly destroys institutional culture of transformation.

Institutional culture in higher education institutions

Higher education institutions in South Africa have been characterized by tensions brought by transformation enforced by government policies, which have created a culture of silence amongst the university leaders. Ncayiyane & Hayward (2007: 23) indicate that transformation includes institutional funding, student financing, curricula reform, student access and success, academic research, institutional culture, as well as equity and gender issues. The stability of a culture of academic freedom in a nation is measured by that nation's tolerance of free, open and frank debates (White Paper 3, 1997:57), criticism and commentary (Teferra & Albach, 2004: 41). Kulati & Moja (2007: 157) argue that, while the ethos of professional autonomy and academic freedom has given rise to a collegial culture that promotes selected participation in decision-making and enriches the process of knowledge production and dissemination, it has also resulted in a lack of institutional cohesion making it difficult for those in leadership to drive or steer change in the context of a rapidly changing external environment. In previously advantaged universities, both students and staff experienced the culture of silence and individual thinkers were victimised and threatened with dismissals (Soudien Report, 2008: 113). Even though this study is informed by the arguments raised above, it extends these by investigating whether transformation can change institutional culture, post-merger and incorporation of the DUT.

Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman (2004) and Niemann & Kotze (2006) are unanimous that a strong institutional culture does not just happen, but that an inclusive institutional culture should be purposefully cultivated by management. In transforming an institutional culture or sub-culture, there needs to be an awareness of the complexities surrounding transformation processes, necessitating the unveiling of the underlying values, expectations, and dreams with a view to constructing a strategic framework for cultural transformation within a changing environment (Niemann, 2010: 1005). Murdoch & Du Toit (2010: 91) concur that among the most crucial links in the chain of successful implementation of a quality culture at a university are the support of management and sound governing structures, but ultimately it is dependent on the links between the individual employees. Wilson (2005), however, emphasizes the lack of studies on how a culture 'reacts' during a period of transition, meaning that institutional management has little to go by and needs to focus on strategies for transforming a culture (Niemann, 2010: 1006). The study conducted by Murdoch & Du Toit (2010), on a culture of quality in South African universities, revealed concerns about quality as based on increased workloads and research or administrative related expectations rendering staff incapable of delivering high quality teaching. The effect of this complex of

factors marks all members of the institution, including academics, who are either frustrated by an increased administrative workload and/or perceive the merger to be an organisational, managerial and budgetary exercise, rather than an academic one (Norgård & Skodvin, 2002: 84).

Governing structures in higher education institutions

Kulati & Moja (2007: 166) state that there has been confusion with regard to the scope of responsibility of governing structures, with students often challenging the role of councils as the primary governing body, and seeking instead to establish institutional forums as structures of governance alternate to the authority of management. A survey conducted out of 35 institutions revealed fairly widespread complaints, amongst students, workers and other constituencies, that gaining access to governing structures had not led to empowerment, nor to effective participation (Cloete, 2007: 276). Participants also voiced their fears of unclear lines of authority, crisis management, lack of confidentiality, over-emotional reactions and not getting the staff united around a shared vision. The Soudien Report (2008: 103) indicates that a precondition of the successful transformation of the higher education system is, as White Paper 3 argues, the “transformation of the structures, values and culture of governance” (White Paper 3: 3.1). This study extends the arguments advanced by the researchers above by investigating whether transformation is aligned to the university strategy.

The teaching and research staff in quite a large number of African institutions is smaller than the non-academic/administrative staff. The administrative bureaucracy in African universities is disproportionately large. The number of non-academic personnel and the proportion of resources allocated to this sector are disproportionately high, and the quality and performance of the administrative cadre leaves much to be desired (Teferra & Altbach, 2004:). Bureaucracy and inefficiency are rampant. Training and skills development for the non-academic staff are rarities. Efficient management and administrative systems are of paramount significance to the productivity and effectiveness of any enterprise; academic institutions are no exception. By and large, however, African universities suffer from poor, inefficient, and highly bureaucratic management systems (Teferra & Altbach, 2004: 30). Poorly trained and poorly qualified personnel; inefficient, ineffective, and out-of-date management and administrative infrastructures; and poorly remunerated staff is the norm throughout the many systems (Teferra & Altbach, 2004: 31). In addition, the gender

imbalance in higher education is acute in virtually all African countries and in most disciplines. Various efforts and initiatives have been made to increase the participation of female students in postsecondary (tertiary) institutions (Teferra & Altbach, 2004: 35). This study is in accordance with the researcher's arguments on the administrative staff's questionable performance; and this study investigates whether transformation is set for success by competent leaders.

Research methodology

Quantitative approach

A mixed-methods approach (Cresswell, 2009) was employed with both a structured questionnaire, that reached a large number of employees at leadership positions (junior to middle), enabling some quantification of findings, and in-depth interviews targeting university leaders who were at middle and senior management positions. The study employed a stratified random sampling of 191 respondents, ideal to test for the finding's reliability and validity, distributed equitably between academic and non-academic leaders. The quantitative survey adopted a stratified random sampling; and the university leadership between Peromnes Grades 8 and 6 (junior and middle management) were identified as the total population. A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was developed with a range from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) undecided, (4) agree to, and (5) strongly agree, testing the perceptions of the university leaders through leading statements.

Qualitative approach

The qualitative aspect of this study also used a non-probability purposive sampling, where 28 university leaders in middle and senior management positions were surveyed. In-depth interviews were conducted with 28 academic and non-academic leaders from Peromnes Grades 1 to 5 as well as key stakeholders, including trade unions and the Student Representative Council (SRC). These include Vice Chancellor and Principal, 3 Deputy Chancellors: Academic, Research and Administration, 6 Faculty Deans, 4 Executive Management members, Registrar, Director: Human Resources and Finance respectively. Furthermore, 6 academic Heads of Departments, one Research Director and one Director for Quality Directorate and Marketing and Communication were interviewed. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with presidents (2) and secretaries of the trade unions and SRC (2) respectively. The respondents were asked on how they understand transformation post-merger and incorporation.

Data collection

The data were collected over a three month period from May to July 2013. Of the total of 191 questionnaires disseminated, 133 generated a 70 percent response rate. To maintain confidentiality, the questionnaires were distributed and collected by the researcher. The Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha values for individual dimension were high and a reliability coefficient of 0.947 was recorded.

Data analysis

The quantitative data collected from the respondents was analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 12 for data capturing, presentation, analysis and interpretation. Descriptive was used for data analysis and interpretation. The NVivo software (version 10) was used for organizing, analyzing and sharing data.

Researchers' role and recording of data

Permission was requested and granted from the DUT ethics committee to conduct the study, and consent was formally obtained from the participants. At the same time, the confidentiality of participants was maintained at all times and guaranteed and participation thereof was anonymous. A pilot study was undertaken prior to conducting a full-scale study.

Research findings

The frequency analysis was conducted on the understanding of transformation within the university, which necessitated strategic change management interventions to be conducted in order to respond to the shortfalls discovered by the following subsequent empirical findings. The structured questionnaire had ten leading statements interrogating the respondent's understanding of transformation on various factors, which are presented below.

Table 1: I have an understanding of the transformation agenda of my university

Almost 50% of the research participants have an understanding of the transformation agenda of the university. Only 29% have opposite understanding regarding the latter statement.

Table 2: I have an understanding of the nature of transformation problems within my university

Table 2 reveals the disproportionately high percentage of 54.2% of the research participants who understand the nature of transformation problems within the university. The latter finding is much higher than the previous results with the difference in percentage of 5.2%. Only 19% of the research participants have an opposite understanding, which is far less than the disagreement observed in the previous Table.

Table 3: I have an understanding of transformation solutions in my university

Table 3 shows 42.1% of the research participants understand transformation solutions of the university, which was far lower than previous Tables. Furthermore, Table 3 shows the disproportionately high percentage (35%) of the respondents that are undecided regarding the latter statement, which is the highest as compared to other variables. Only 23% of the research participants have opposite understanding of the transformation solutions.

Table 4: I have an understanding of transformation responding to societal needs

The total percentage of 48.1% of the respondents have the understanding that transformation responds to societal needs. Only 21% have a different understanding with the highest percentage of 31% undecided.

Table 5: I have an understanding of transformation pertaining to pressing national needs

Throughout the study, Table 5 reflects the highest percentage of the research participants (57.2%) who have understanding that transformation pertains to pressing national needs. Only 21% of the research participants have the opposite opinion.

Table 6: I have an understanding of transformation as eliminating waste

Table 6 has the lowest percentage (41.3%) of the research participants who understand transformation as eliminating waste as compared to other highest variables of the study. Only 21% have the opposite understanding with the latter statement and have the highest percentages (30.1%) of those who are undecided in this study.

Table 7: I have an understanding of transformation giving effect to new policies

Table 7 indicates 51.2% of the research participants' understanding that transformation gives effect to new policies. Only 23.4% of them have the opposite understanding regarding the latter statement.

Table 8: I have an understanding of transformation as changing institutional culture

Only 54.2% of the university leaders have an understanding of transformation as changing institutional culture. Only 26.3% who have the opposite understanding.

Table 9: I have an understanding of transformation as influencing employees to adhere to university core values

Half of the research participants have an understanding that transformation influences employees to adhere to university core values. Only 26.4% have an opposite understanding.

Table 10: I have an understanding of transformation as promoting knowledge sharing

Table 10 shows the highest percentage of 56% of the research participants' understanding that transformation promotes knowledge sharing. Only 23% of the research participants have a different understanding regarding this statement.

Major findings

The major highlights of this study show the disproportionately high percentage of the university leaders' understanding of transformation as: pertaining mostly to pressing national needs (57.2%); promoting knowledge sharing (56%); changing institutional culture and understanding of transformation problems (54.2%) respectively. Another major highlight of

this study is that almost half (49%) of the respondents have an understanding of the transformation agenda of this university. The fact that 51% of the research participants are either against the latter statement or indecisive, reflects a bad picture that transformation is known by only few leaders. The majority of the research participants (54.2%) understand transformation problems (54.2%) facing the university as compared to a lower percentage (42.1%) of those that understand transformation solutions in this university.

The qualitative observations on the understanding of transformation within DUT were categorized into four nodes or themes, which are internal and external (factors), past imbalances and those based on operational activities. The findings generated through the NVivo qualitative analytical tool indicate the total coverage of 1.36% of the research participants understanding transformation as based on internal factors, which include transforming the curriculum and the creation of the research culture, changed student attitudes and behaviour, staff demographics, conducive management systems, programme specialization and increased numbers of women graduates on scarce skills qualifications such as in Engineering. This has been confirmed by the following observation advanced by a member of the senior management team within the university, that:

“Transformation is a broad term looking at the way you respond to the current needs of society in terms of curriculum and how responsive is the curriculum and how it takes care of the experiences of students as customers. It also refers to the management system’s creating an enabling environment so that people can do things and how it impacts on student experience. Transformation refers to improving the research culture where it was and where it should be”

The respondents referred to their understanding of transformation as based on the external factors at DUT with the total coverage of 1.64% as: responding to current societal needs, experiences of students on campus, legislative reforms, changes in government, industry, South African demographics and global changes. Concurrent with the previous passage, the member of the senior management team pointed out that:

“Transformation is kind of self-inflicting and is dependent on the external environment, government policy and procedures force university to change. For example, transformation

in curricula in universities should not have changed by its initiatives but have been forced by government because of changes in the sector, industry and changes in leadership”

“Transformation is influenced by external forces, legislative reforms and curriculum renewal and it has been forced by the DoHE, government, industry, sector and internal management”.

The total coverage of 3.18% of the research participants, with the understanding of transformation as based on redressing past imbalances such as staff, student and post-graduate representation, management, demographic changes, the move from apartheid into democratic government, people living with disabilities redressing the institutional structures and better balance in terms of racial composition has been computed. According to the Head of Department (non-academic):

“Transformation has to do with the participation of the previously disadvantaged groups e.g. women and people living with disabilities”

“Transformation means moving from apartheid to democracy”

“Transformation refers to the participation from all stakeholders to university structures”

“Transformation refers to what needs to be done to redress the imbalances of the demographics of staff, students and postgraduates”

The research participants’ revelation of their understanding of transformation has been based on operational activities with 2.47% total coverage. The respondents cited restructuring or realignment, teaching and learning, retention of students, access, streamlining of functions, focus on key goals, culture and mind-set changes. In reference to this some of the observations were observed from a senior member of the university:

“I have restructured the faculty to allow realignment of the faculty between the core function and the following committees were established:

- o Teaching and learning, assessments, access and retention of students.*
- o Research and higher degrees*
- o Health and safety”*

“I’ve also streamlined our functions which allow for capacity building”

Furthermore, the participants indicated clear communication, definition of roles and responsibilities and inclusive recruitment and selection processes as features of

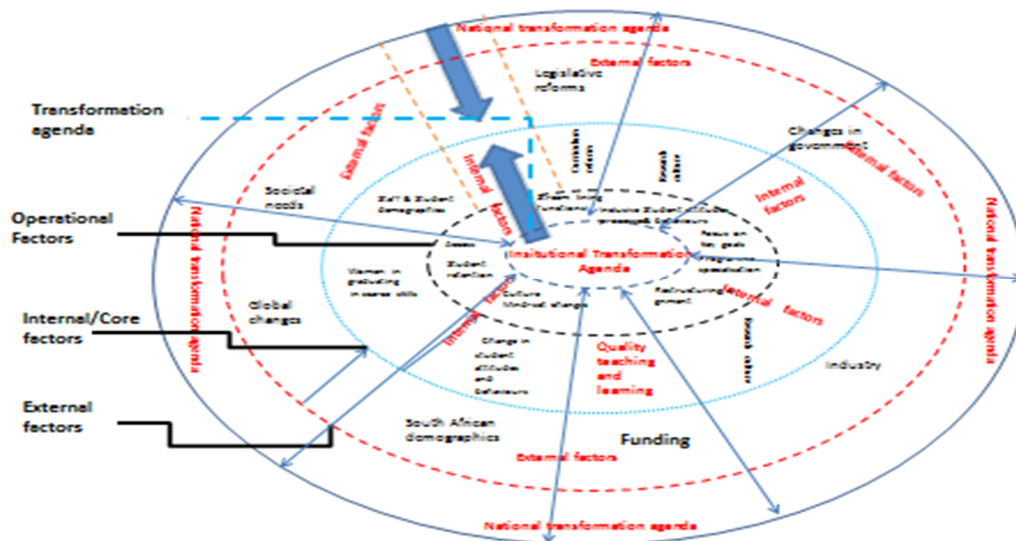
transformation within the university. Concurrent to the latter statement, the trade union indicated that:

“Transformation refers to clear communication, roles and responsibilities to be clearly defined”

“Recruitment and selection in HR was operating without policies with timeframes and the HR Scoring system was poor”

The research results, as gleaned from the in-depth interview findings above, reveal that the term “transformation” in a higher education institution is multifaceted and has multi-perspectival connotations. The research findings show internal and external factors such as redressing past imbalances with mainstreamed operational activities responding to students, employees, society, industry or business, government and global needs as the main cornerstones of transformation in higher education institutions.

Three Tier Model of transformation in higher education institutions in South Africa



The above findings resulted in the articulation of the “Three Tier Model of transformation in higher education in South Africa”. The Three Tier Model reveals the multiplicity of factors shaping institutional and national transformational agendas. The transformational agenda has been seen as influenced by internal and external factors. The operational factors (internal) have been identified as influencing transformation, which includes: student access and

retention, change in attitude and behaviour, streamlined functions and business processes with the aim of aiding efficiencies. Operational factors also focus on achieving the set goals of the university with the aim of improving the effectiveness, programme specialization, restructuring and change of culture and mind-set as pillars influencing the transformation agenda of the university.

Another central element that shapes the transformation agenda in higher education institutions are core factors (internal) which are the cornerstones of universities' existence. These factors include curriculum reform, research productivity, quality learning and teaching, staff and student demographics reflecting provincial and national statistics, funding, equity of input (women in the engineering field which has been previously dominated by males in South Africa) and equity of output and improvement of qualifications. The Three Tier Model (TTM) suggests that operational and core factors (internal) revealed by the study findings are influenced or shaped by external factors (including rapid legislative reforms, changes in government, industry, funding, South African demographics, global changes and societal needs) in order for the transformation agenda to be realised. This model suggests that the institution (higher education institutions) and the national transformation agenda can be influenced by internal (operations and core) and external factors.

Discussion of the results

The primary objective of this study was to investigate how university leaders understand post-merger and incorporation transformation of the higher education institution. Almost half (49%) of the respondents had an understanding of the transformation agenda of the university. This is in disagreement with Zide's (2010) argument that the agenda should be aligned to the institutional strategic planning of the university. The majority of the respondents (54.2%) had an understanding of transformation problems within this university, which is in keeping with Teferra & Altbach (2004), who mentioned that bureaucracy and inefficiency is rampant and performance is poor in the administrative cadre of the universities in Africa. The latter researchers also mentioned poorly trained and poorly qualified personnel and gender imbalances as transformation problems encountered by higher education institutions. Even though Teferra & Altbach (2004) have concurred with the previous statement, their arguments are generally based on African institutions of higher education without making any particular reference to the University of Technology (UoT). Meanwhile, published literature on the respondent's understanding of transformation solutions at this

university was not available, which made it difficult to find the current interventions or strategies for providing solutions to transformational problems facing higher education institutions. The university leaders' understanding that transformation pertains to pressing national needs, responds to the RSA DoE (1997, p. 1) requirements that the government now expects a transformed higher education system to meet national needs for personal power and development. The government's stance on higher education institutions, that they respond to national needs, lacks clarity on specific national needs required to be achieved by the merged and incorporated UoT.

The disproportionately high percentage of the respondents, who had an understanding that transformation refers to changing institutional culture, is in accordance with Ncayiyane & Hayward (2007), who indicated that transformation includes institutional culture. However, these researchers do not clearly articulate on how institutional culture influences transformation, which is the focal point of this study. The university leaders' understanding of transformation, as based on transforming curricula, has been echoed by Watson *et al.*, (2009), who also cautioned about curriculum standardization which is associated with the need for curriculum change or restructuring. This was further supported by Schmitza (1998a), who indicated that transformation processes in the higher education institutions in South Africa has called into question the fundamental assumptions upon which academic staff build their disciplines and curricula. The understanding of transformation in this university has been also based on a response to the needs of people living with disabilities. Matshediso (2007) paints a dark picture on the study conducted on twenty-four higher education institutions, which concluded that South Africa is moving along a contradictory path for prioritizing access to higher education for people living with disabilities. This finding was also echoed by Zide (2010), that universities in South Africa are not accommodating people living with disabilities. While the latter researchers' arguments are consistent with research findings of this study, however, less is said on the mergers of the UoT in developing countries.

The respondents' views on transformation as located within broader societal transitional needs are supported by Fourie (1999), that changes in institutions, sometimes occur as a result of turbulence inside institutions, or more frequently, result from changes in their external environment. Even though Fourie (1999) agrees that transitions in the higher education system give rise to the transformation of higher education institutions, the focus is

not on a specific university that has undergone transformation. The perception that transformation is related to global changes is supported by the study conducted by Vaira (n.d.) who claimed that universities adapt to global forces. The instability of the academic workforce, shown by the study conducted by Hogan (2005), reveals 74% of the 81 institutions engaged in the restructuring of faculties, as evidenced by the research findings of this study that transformation refers to realignment or restructuring of departments. However, the arguments presented by the researchers above might not be pertinent to the South African higher education landscape and to developing countries because the above findings were gleaned from studies conducted by universities in developed countries.

The highest coverage of the respondents who understood transformation as pertaining to changes in the country's demographics is synonymous with Chalufu (2002) who indicated that at DUT, racial composition of staff reflects the demographics of the original institutions of ML Sultan (Indians) and Natal Technikon (Whites). However, his findings could not be totally linked to this study's finding, as it was conducted before the merger of this university. Transformation has been understood by the respondents as women graduating in the field of engineering within the university, as Shackleton *et al.*, (2006) believes that women students tend to be found in health sciences and humanities fields. Researchers such as Jawitz & Case (1998) argue that women are attracted to Engineering because it offers careers, that it provides opportunities to contribute to social development and is more favorable because of the high public profile (Jawitz, *et al.*, 2000). The latter researchers do not provide empirical evidence on the number of women graduating in scarce skills qualifications such as in Engineering as the research study findings were gleaned from the qualitative interviews which needs to be qualified.

Conclusion

This study observed that just under half of the respondents have an understanding of the transformation agenda of this university. This raises serious concerns about the strategic stance, direction and efforts of the university in achieving the transformation agenda, as more than half of the respondents are either opposite or undecided about their understanding of the transformation agenda. This is supported by the disproportionately high percentage of the respondents who agreed that they understand the nature of transformation problems within the university. This suggests that the university does not have an agenda or plan to resolve problems brought by transformation in the post-merger and incorporation of this university.

The most notable finding supporting the aforesaid result was that the highest percentage of the university leaders were either undecided or disagreed about the understanding of the transformation solutions within the university. Another prominent finding of this study was that a majority of the respondents understood the transformation as pertaining to pressing national needs, which was also confirmed by the findings gleaned from the in-depth interviews. The major highlight of the study was on the respondents' understanding of transformation as changing institutional culture. This study suggests that the transformational agenda can be influenced by both internal and external factors. The research findings of the study have identified operational factors (internal), which include student access and retention, change in attitude and behaviour, streamlined functions and business processes with the aim of aiding efficiencies, as directly influencing institutional transformation agendas. Operational factors also focus on achieving the set goals of the university with the aim of improving the effectiveness, programme specialization, restructuring and change of culture and mind-set as pillars influencing the transformation agenda of the university.

Another central element that shapes the transformation agenda in higher education institutions in South Africa is the core factors (internal) which are key in the *raison d'être* of universities. These factors include curriculum reform, research productivity, quality learning and teaching, staff and student demographics to reflect provincial and national statistics, funding, equity of input (women in the engineering field) and equity of output and improvement of qualifications as defining factors in transformation in higher education institutions in South Africa. The research results reveal that operational and core factors (internal) of the study are influenced or shaped by the external factors (including rapid legislative reforms, changes in government, industry, funding, South African demographics, global changes and societal needs) in order to realize the transformation agenda.

There was a paucity of published literature on certain factors pertaining to the understanding of transformation in higher education institutions. Major limitations of the study were in the lack of published literature on transformational solutions applied to the periods before, during and post mergers and incorporations of higher education institutions. The unavailability of the published material does limit the study on the best practices or case studies that could be learnt from other institutions of higher learning. Furthermore, published material is scant on the understanding of transformation as eliminating waste in higher education institutions even though their activities have been seen as inefficient. Moreover, there was a dearth of data covering knowledge sharing as a transformation tool in higher education institutions and this

has disadvantaged the findings of this study, as knowledge management including sharing has been linked to productivity by other researchers in other sectors. Researchers in the future should investigate solutions applying to problems brought by transformation of higher education institutions in South Africa. Furthermore, future studies should investigate whether knowledge sharing could be promoted and used as a vital transformational tool or strategy before, during and post-mergers and incorporations of institutions of higher learning. Lastly, future studies could also focus on how inefficiency exercises or interventions such as Business Process Reengineering (BPR) / Business Process Management (BPM) /Work-study can be used as an ideal tool to eliminate wastage in higher education institutions.

Recommendations

A typology of the key recommendations arising from the results of the study includes the following:

- 1) The university should have an all-encompassing strategic plan with clear measurable transformation goals, outputs and outcomes in place in order for all university leaders to understand and act upon the transformation agenda of the university.
- 2) The university should implement interventions of change that improve efficiency whilst eliminating wastage.
- 3) The challenges or problems emanating in the post-merger and incorporation necessitates the university to have transformational solutions to be in place in a form of a scorecard.
- 4) The university transformation challenges should be prioritized by the university leaders and be included in their performance agreement plans in order to provide implementable solutions.
- 5) The university leaders should design and implement a knowledge management plan where measurable knowledge sharing strategies will be implemented.
- 6) The university leaders should ensure that the transformation initiatives and activities as well as problems and solutions are known by all key-stakeholders of the university (internal and external).

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TABLES

Understanding of transformation					
I have an understanding of:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly agree
1. Transformation agenda of my university	6.8	21.8	22.6	36.8	12.0
2. Nature of transformation problems within my university	5.3	13.5	27.1	45.9	8.3
3. Transformation solutions in my	6.0	16.5	34.6	33.1	9.0

university					
4. Transformation pressing national needs	3.0	18.0	30.8	37.6	10.5
5. Transformation responding to societal needs	.8	17.3	24.8	44.4	12.8
6. Transformation eliminating waste	3.0	25.6	30.1	30.8	10.5
7. Transformation giving effect to new policies	4.5	21.8	19.5	44.4	9.8
8. Transformation changing institutional culture	2.3	24.1	24.1	39.8	9.8
9. Transformation influencing employees to adhere to university core values	2.3	24.1	24.1	39.8	9.8
10. Transformation promoting knowledge sharing	3.0	19.5	21.8	33.1	22.6