

Addressing Students' Unrest in South African Universities: The Need for a Facilitative Management Approach

Bunmi I. Omodan

*Walter Sisulu University, South Africa
E-mail: bomodan@wsu.ac.za*

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ABSTRACT This study addresses the continuous occurrence of students' unrest in South African universities due to the alleged pseudo-collaborative management styles of universities. Experiences, literature and observation, confirmed that student-oriented unrests are unabated, and that management of universities seem to struggle to ameliorate or find a lasting solution to these issues. This study is a theoretical analysis laced with facilitative management theory. The study is located within the transformation agenda by adopting a transformative paradigm to guide the study. The suggestible solutions, which include promotion of collaborative engagement, galvanisation of public opinions, the building of listening leaders and participatory management, were discussed as a dimension of a peaceful university system. The study also recommended full implementation of collaborative engagement, respect for the opinions of all stakeholders with a listening ear and ensuring that university culture is structured to accommodate equal participation of all stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

There has been a continuing concern about student unrest. Student-oriented protests and student campaigns have become common, with many posing severe challenges to universities and their stakeholders (Heffernan 2019). The first notable student protests in South Africa broke out in 2009, which later spread across the country to reflect concerns around fees and demands for free education (Saul and Bond 2014). Student protests started as peaceful marches, such as the "Fees Must Fall" campaign but gradually became violent as students burnt buildings on campuses (Booyesen et al. 2010; Hayes 2017; Mutekwe 2017). There were also reports of severely injuring security force members such as the police and private security agencies during attempted invasions of university property (Sempijja and Letlhogile 2021).

The South African Student Congress (SASCO) and the Student Christian Organisation of South Africa (SCOSA) initially started the #FeesMustFall campaign, which later joined sweeping protests by other Student Representative Councils (SRCs) in 2015 to reject proposed fee increment. In 2015, one of the notable student activists, Mcebo Dlamini, encouraged students nationwide to boycott classes in opposition to the proposed increase of up to 11 percent in fees where education should be free of

all charges, including registration fees and tuition costs (Kgoroba et al. 2017). This cause gained momentum as it spread across universities, with most institutions observing mass demonstrations on campuses with arson inversion of university property (Hodes 2017; Luescher 2017). Evidence from recent students' protests across universities in South Africa showed that unrest issues are ongoing and need urgent attention. Notable among the propellers of students' unrest is the lack of a proper management system (Engelbrecht 2015). For example, North-West University, Tshwane University of Technology, University of Zululand, University of Fort Hare, University of Pretoria, University of Cape Town recently faced one student protest or the other (Mutekwe 2017; Mavunga 2019), while Walter Sisulu University and the University of the Free State were not exempted (Dayimani 2021; SABC News 2021).

The continuous unrest in the universities shows that there may be issues with the existing management skills of the universities to manage students' unrest effectively. The perceived lack of proper management contributes to the cause of disturbance at the universities. This surfaces in the research conducted in Nigeria that managers of higher learning lack the temerity to control students' unrest with recommendations that dialogue mechanism and training administrators

on crisis management is quintessential (Uyanga 2016). Research conducted in Kenya also indicates the exclusion of students and parents in the management process, including leadership deficit which was adjudged as one of the root causes of unrest (Mariene 2012). Since the case of student unrest is not limited to South Africa, it further confirms the need for a concerted strategy suitable to managing students' unrest in the universities. This argument agrees with Uyanga's (2016) recommendation that all hands must be on deck in the university system to ensure its peaceful operation and productivity. In the same vein, Omodan et al. (2018) also concluded that a collaborative management system involves inclusive decision-making with students and other subordinates in the management process, among others. However, this is not limited to students' involvement alone but the utilisation of all human capital within the university system.

Research Objectives

Based on the above lacuna, this study aims to ameliorate the issue of students' unrest using the instrumentalities of facilitative management:

- That is, facilitative management theory would be analysed as a tool for managing students' unrest in Universities.

Research Question

Therefore, the following question was raised to pilot the study:

- How can facilitative management style be integrated towards the management of students' unrest in South African universities?

METHODOLOGY

In order to respond to the above research question, the following methodological process was adopted. Firstly, the study is a theoretical paper that derived its strength from the facilitative management approach, located in the transformative paradigm. This paradigm is majorly focused on the social emancipation of people facing the problem under study by transforming their predicament for the better (Paupp 2009). This aligns with Mertens' (2007: 216) recommendation that "transformative researchers need to be aware of societal values

and privileges in determining the reality that holds potential for social transformation and increased social justice". Romm (2015) also reiterated that the transformative paradigm is an alternative research lens that takes cognisance of social justice and political agenda, generating fairness in social issues. Since this study deals with social interrelationships between the university management and students, social justice and internal organisational politics cannot be underestimated. This paradigm is relevant because it assists in understanding the sociality that exists among university stakeholders towards ensuring the social justice that could lead to peaceful co-existence in the system. In order to propose an indelible social transformation in the university system, the study takes solace in the facilitative management theory. The theory was explored, and its assumptions were presented as a practical dimension of social justice capable of promoting peaceful relationships among the stakeholders of universities, which is the theory's assumptions and its connections to the collective management styles as a means of tranquility in the system. This study is taken from a larger project approved by the Walter Sisulu university ethics committee with ethical approval number: FEDREC 03-11-21.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Theoretical Framework: Facilitative Management

Facilitative management is an inclusive process with openness towards stakeholders and their opinions in the process of management. According to Emerson (2018), it minimises conflicts among groups and group members. Perhaps this is because it accommodates different diversities, opinions, perspectives and equal participation in the decision-making process. This is more of an intensive collaborative management process because it helps to overcome constraints in resources, build effective teams, efficient coordination and facilitate productive conflict management and communication networks (Lashway 1995). This is not far from Stamevski et al.'s (2018) argument that a leadership model facilitates deep collaboration. According to Stamevski et al. (2018), deep collaboration is when all the stakeholders (leaders and subordinates) engage themselves to transform and achieve organisational goals. This is a process where the collective intelligence of human capital is made

to maximise and determine the choice of action (Cufaude 2004). In this management style, leaders, managers, and the superordinate listen and seek the connective ideas of the followers in a collaborative manner which could be described as helping others make things happen (Ansell and Gash 2012).

Deducing from the above, facilitative managers act as partners in the decision-making process that an organisation uses. Facilitative management is associated with a leadership style that focuses on listening to subordinates, treating everyone as equals, and promoting group consensus. However, this can be contrasted with directive styles, where leaders make decisions without input from their subordinates (authoritative leadership style) (Afsar 2014). Therefore, facilitative management promotes group participation when making decisions; thus, an organisation's success depends on effective communication within teams rather than one leader's decision-making abilities. This is likened to collaborative management, where leaders share responsibility for leading an organisation and involving everyone in the process of setting goals or reaching consensus on major decisions (Blumenthal and Jannink 2000).

From the above argument, one could then present the following as the assumptions of facilitative leadership styles:

- **Promotion of Collaborative Engagement:** From all indications, facilitative management and its managers promote collaborative decision-making by involving everyone in the process of setting goals or reaching a consensus on major decisions. This act has been described as relatively one of the best management styles any organisation should adopt (Nix and Zacharia 2014). This is because it incorporates and strengthens the system against unethical politicking that could jeopardise the actualisation of the set pre-determined goals and objectives (Adetola et al. 2011). This is to confirm further that facilitative management via collaborative engagement promotes effective management of organisations, including universities.
- **Galvanisation of Public Opinions:** From the above analysis, one could confirm that facilitative management is a kind that seeks input, opinions and advice from those who will be affected by a decision before making a decision. This could come from asking

questions, encouraging discussion, and modifying decisions based on how others will view the decision. Facilitative managers typically do not make unilateral decisions but prefer to obtain consensus from those affected by the decision through open dialogue. This is because consensus building as a mechanism for decision-making is significant to peace and tranquility in the university system (Omodan et al. 2018). That is, the galvanisation of people's opinions and consensus building is tantamount to an effective decision-making process (Hartnett 2011).

- **Building a Listening Leader:** Listening facilitative managers pay attention to what others have to say and listen carefully with a non-judgemental approach when listening to those involved in the decision. In such a management process, managers use active listening techniques and ask questions to ensure all possible views are considered. This assumption of facilitative management encourages subordinates, suppliers, and other relevant parties to express their opinions openly and consider everyone's views. This is in consonance with participatory engagement, which should give room for equal opportunities and recognition to all the participants without displaying power politics to suppress the powerless in the process (Bernardes et al. 2015). In this case, the managers only ensure that others feel heard and facilitate the dialogue to reach a compromise among all those involved in the process.
- **Encourage Participation:** From the above argument about facilitative management, one could argue that such managers believe that everyone can contribute ideas and that everyone's concerns should be considered. Therefore, facilitative managers create enabling environment that ensures participatory inputs from all stakeholders before making a decision and maintains open communication to ensure everyone's concerns are respected throughout the decision-making process. Such management does not encourage unilateral decisions until all relevant information has been gathered and ideas well thought about, rather than through an initial impulse or intuition. This fosters unity among the participants and enhances productivity (Abdulai and Shafiwi 2014) through social peace and tranquility.

In summary of the theoretical perspective, collaborations are an important asset for any manager or leadership team because of their potency in working with internal and external stakeholders to coordinate the work necessary to meet strategic business objectives. Therefore, facilitative cum collaborative management is a systematic approach to managing conflict in the workplace, including universities. It makes it possible for university managers to deal constructively with any perceived uprising from students to avoid destructive and adversarial positions that can result in general productivity loss.

The Disjuncture between the Assumptions and Students' Unrest

Major students' unrest in South Africa indicates a disconnection between the students and the universities, which may be argued as a lack of facilitative leadership and management styles. In South Africa, the major causes of students' unrest are relatively the same all over universities. However, the most important demand revolves around financial aid from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (Phandle 2021). NSFAS is a government-organised scheme that offers student loans, bursaries and scholarships programs in South Africa (Naidoo and McKay 2018). In the same vein, protesters have also demanded affordable housing and transportation for students from residential colleges to institutions of higher learning and tuition payments (Fomunyan 2017). The student protest at the University of Cape Town in 2015 was a watershed moment and seems significant in the history of student unrest in South Africa. The students also proposed the removal of Cecil John Rhodes' statue (Kwoba et al. 2018). Students expressed their dissatisfaction with the university's slow progress toward transformation during the demonstrations, which included agitations against racism, access, and funding opportunities (Nyamnjoh 2016). "Rhodes Must Fall", a campaign that was centred on the need to remove the statue of Cecil John Rhodes, was very significant and sparked a movement for the quest to "decolonise education" throughout South Africa (Kwoba et al. 2018).

Among universities that have witnessed students' protests regarding accommodation and National Student Financial Aid programs (NSFAS) funding, including the University of Limpopo in 2009, 2011,

and 2012; Mangosuthu University of Technology in Durban in 2009 and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in 2012. In 2004, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) was founded, followed by the Vaal University of Technology (VUT) in 2014, and finally, Walter Sisulu University of Technology in the Eastern Cape Province. In 2012, two Western Cape FET Colleges were established: False Bay College and the College of Cape Town (South Africa History Online, n.d). The type of management system is one of the most important aspects of students' unrest (Engelbrecht 2015). North-West University in Mafikeng, Tshwane University of Technology in Johannesburg, University of Zululand, University of Fort Hare in Alice, University of Pretoria in Pretoria, University of Cape Town, among others. Walter Sisulu University and the University of the Free State are not excluded (Mutekwe 2017; Mavunga 2019; Dayimani 2021; SABC News 2021).

The above-cited unrest situations in South Africa suggest that universities and relevant government agencies may not have done up to their expectations in ensuring a peaceful university system. Therefore, it is not out of place to doubt the possibility that the facilitative leadership style is moribund or not adequately implemented in the system. Based on this, the following recommendations deduced from the assumptions of facilitative management theory are presented as the possible solutions to the problem of students' unrest in South Africa.

The Nexus between Facilitative Management and Management of Students' Unrest

The following are the suggestible solutions to ameliorate the perpetual students-oriented unrest that has eaten into the core of the university system in Africa. These solutions are deduced from the purview of facilitative management, as discussed above. They are collaborative engagement, galvanisation of opinions and listening leaderships, and participatory management style.

Collaborative Engagement

Collaborative engagement is very important in managing universities against unpleasant activities because it enables all the stakeholders to get together and work towards actualising the system's

goals and objectives (Giel et al. 2021). It is not far from what Pretty (2003) refers to as collective management, which implies that management should be done by all the members of a particular community or organisation instead of just one individual or department. That is, the university stakeholders, including students, should be carried along in the process of management. This is in line with the perspectives of Tsui (2001) that collectivism in management encompasses all levels of participation, from the individual level to collective level engagement, which also includes that everyone's interests are taken into account when making decisions about an organisation or community.

From all indications, collaborative management, as one of the cardinal assumptions of the facilitative management theory, is suitable for managing students' unrest in the university system because it enables everyone to work towards achieving an objective (Omorobi et al. 2020; Giel et al. 2021). Working together shows that both students and university authorities understand that they are working towards one goal. By so doing, the students would devise another peaceful way of making their agitations known to the appropriate authorities instead of fomenting unrest and disrupting university peace. This aligns with the recommendation that collective activities are necessary because they allow more voices to be heard. It provides multiple perspectives (Mitra 2009) and creates trust among members of a community.

Galvanisation of Opinions and Listening Leaderships

Listening to the opinion of subordinates is fundamental to the peaceful co-existence of university stakeholders, including students. This creates trust and a sense of belonging among the subordinates (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003). When there is trust for leaders, the tendency for subordinates to become obedient is possible, which could enhance peace. In many leadership training and capacity development, leaders are taught about the importance of listening. Despite this lesson, most leaders do not apply it that much in real-life situations, which has resulted in many students' crises. Among these crises is the students' unrest in Nigeria, where students accuse university management of a deliberate attempt to ignore their consultations on pressing issues (Alimba 2008).

Hence, adopting the culture of harvesting public opinions and listening to responses of students' unrest in universities may not be out of place. This aligns with Lukaszewski's (2010) suggestion that it helps leaders/managers understand somebody's opinion or problem, which could also help find better solutions to various hidden issues. According to Heifetz and Laurie (1997), this could help avoid workplace conflicts from which universities are not exempted. Based on this, we argue that listening leaders may do well to avoid any negative feelings and conflicts at an early stage which is one of the hallmarks of management. In addition, Wong et al. (2007) argued that leaders' attention to the follower shows respect for them, making the working environment more enjoyable for all employees and increasing job motivation. When the working environment is more enjoyable for stakeholders, including students, there is a likelihood of peaceful co-existence.

Participatory Management Style

The last recommendation that could ameliorate the issues of students' unrest in the university system is a participatory management style. This was deduced from the assumptions of facilitative management, which believes that people in the origination must be given participatory and level plain ground to contribute to the system's decision-making process (Lichtenstein 2000). Participatory management is characterised by equal representation of all stakeholders in decision-making (De Vente et al. 2016). Historically, participatory management emerged in its current format after World War II, when it became apparent that managers needed technical knowledge and the ability to listen to their workers and involve them in the management process (Sandström et al. 2003). This management method has been adjudged as effective due to its ability to provide an equitable and just experience for all parties involved (Kim et al. 2017). According to Cheung and Wu (2011), this is often used in settings that include employees from multiple age groups, but it can be adapted to fit the needs of students. Therefore, participatory management could be used to unravel students' unrest by engaging the students and other stakeholders in the decision-making process of the issues that will affect them.

Hence, participatory management fits the needs of students' agitation to include students' representatives in the decision-making process. Furthermore, this system unequivocally allows for equality in representation and decision making, gives all parties a voice, creates an environment where conflict is accepted but not condoned and has been linked to an increase in productivity (Spears 2010) which could be peace and tranquility in the university environment. Therefore, a participatory process alongside student leadership can successfully manage students' unrest in universities. Based on this premise, we argue that participatory management can be helpful to student leaders as well as faculty and university administration by taking away the power tussle that is often seen as the propeller of students' unrest in the universities. This argument resonates with Ford and Angermeier's (2008) assertion that participatory engagement among people creates an environment where all parties feel as though they have control over their decisions, not just those in charge of the organisation.

CONCLUSION

This study is lensed within the purview of the transformative world view to transform the predicament of continuous student unrest in South African universities. To unravel this, facilitative management was argued as preeminent and fundamental to the management of human capital, which includes students in the university system. This study explored the theory and deduced assumptions such as promoting collaborative engagement, encouraging the galvanisation of public opinions, building a listening leader, and ensuring the participation of all stakeholders in the management process. These assumptions, therefore, inform the study's conclusion that collaborative engagement, recognition of opinions as a listening leader, and the adoption of participatory management style are the dimension of managing student unrest in the university system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

However, this conclusion was based on the literature that problematised students' unrest in some South African universities. Moreover, its recommendations are based on the assumption that facilitative management theory could be implemented

outside South Africa because people's management is relatively the same when it comes to conflict prevention and management. Therefore, the study recommends that the universities in South Africa should adopt a facilitative management approach by making use of collaborative engagement, respecting the opinions of all stakeholders with listening ears, and ensuring that the university's culture is structured to accommodate equal participation involving students and other stakeholders.

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