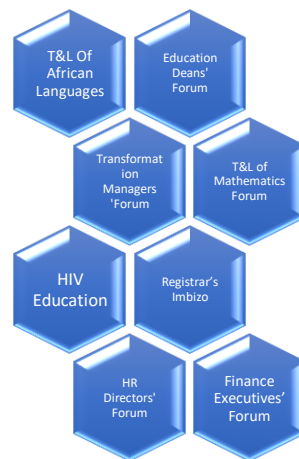


A Transformation Compact for the South African public HE sector, by George Mvalo

For centuries universities continue to have a very important role to play in the development of nations and societies. This public mandate constitutes a critical pillar of the three missions of a university i.e. community engagement, research, teaching and learning. The ever changing pressures and demands on universities also places increased demands on how universities are transforming. This transformation covers various dimensions including the institutional cultures, the transformation of the curriculum and inclusive assessment practices to attracting diverse students and staff into the academy.

On Monday 3 September 2018 members of the 26 public universities converged at Emperors Palace, Kempton Park, Johannesburg, South Africa, for a Transformation Colloquium organised under the auspices of the Transformation Managers Forum (TMF), one of eight communities of practice of Universities South Africa (USAf) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: USAf Communities of Practice



The theme of the Colloquium was : Social Cohesion and Transformation in SAHEI An Elusive Concept: Reflections from the field.

The theme was apt since transformation, like many other concepts remains imprecise which admittedly also lies its potency for engendering thorough going change (for generations to come) in public universities.

The founding mission of the Transformation Managers Forum (TMF) states that,

“The TMF endeavors to be a key advisory, advocacy and capacity building Forum in support of achieving the transformation objectives of the HE sector.” Through this colloquium contributes to the achievement of the TMF’s mission.

In his welcoming address, the chairperson of the TMF stated the purpose of the colloquium thus,

“The fundamental purpose is to bring together transformation practitioners from the 26 public universities to deliberate and assess the transformation distance we might have traversed, the detours we have encountered and to determine sign posts for the road ahead”.

The colloquium objectives were,

- To build a national platform for HE transformation that is driven by transformation practitioners.
- Create a shared vision for the transformation of public HE.
- Examine and highlight effective practices and initiatives for institutional transformation.
- To lay a foundation for the emergence of a multi-stakeholder movement for social change.

Intellectualization of transformation

In his address to the Transformation Colloquium, the Chairperson of the Ministerial Transformation Oversight Committee (TOC), Prof Andre Keet challenged transformation managers and public universities to place the “intellectualization of transformation work at the centre of the transformation project”.

Besides advising the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Keet outlined the TOC objectives as including

- Study of Transformation Charters of institutions as basis for developing sectoral Charters.
- Develop transformation indicators in collaboration with stakeholders such as the Transformation Managers Forum, and
- Establishment of a national Ombud for the sector

Keet who argued for knowledge to be an intervention not institutional culture, raised two issues central for the intellectualization of transformation work, i.e. knowledge transformation that should be reflective of social reality, secondly that institutional culture is a key area for transformation work, where “institutional culture is generated by the pedagogy of knowledge generated in the classroom.” He also argued how “racism owns knowledge through a process where knowledge is disciplined in a way to exclude”. He concluded by challenging the transformation managers to create own interpretive mirrors of what is just and right within public universities that serves as buffer for social injustices.

Transformation not reformation

Speaking on the topic: The transformation trajectory: topical debates on decolonisation the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the Vaal University of Technology, and a former Chairperson of the Transformation Managers Forum and Deputy Chairperson of the USAf Transformation Strategy Group, Prof Gordon Zide, started by asserting that “transformation is by its very nature, disruptive... totally destroys what’s in place.” Whilst management becomes comfortable with the status quo transformation managers work is to disrupt the

space. He reminded transformation managers of their “responsibility of making noise about curriculum transformation.” He further enquired as to “ why is it that transformation managers are not members of faculty boards and senates?”

The colloquium is the first to be held since the 2nd HE Summit on HE transformation which took place on 15-17 October at the Durban International Convention Centre. One of the immediate resolutions of the 2015 summit was that :-

“transformation indicators should urgently be developed for the system to help steer transformation goals to support effective implementation of transformation imperatives.”

The TMF had exactly the transformation indicators in mind/ This was exactly what the TMF had in mind exactly the transformation indicators in mind/ when on 16 September, 16 public universities convened at the Parktonian Hotel , Johannesburg for a historic workshop which had as its singular outcome the development of a Transformation Barometer for the sector. The Transformation Barometer was conceptualized to be a “self-monitoring and reporting tool” which was presented by the Transformation Strategy Group at the USAf Board. The USAf Board adopted the Transformation Barometer for implementation by public universities as of 2017.

It is instructive to note that the Transformation Barometer (an outcome of deep level engagement over a period of 4/5 years), contains a set of common transformation goals which all public universities have agreed to, as the minimum which universities have committed to achieve.

It should be noted that HE transformation is not a linear process with a predetermined end goal, but as the 2nd HE Summit Durban Statement observes,
“ transformation of [public] universities is multi-dimensional and complex (2015:2)

The Transformation Barometer is constitutive of 4 dimensions/ themes and sub-themes which each institution is expected to report on.

The first dimension is Institutional Culture with the following sub themes, Governance, Leadership and Management and Social Inclusion. The second dimension is Equity and Redress which includes the sub-theme: Staff and Student Access, Support and Success. The third dimension is on The Academic Project with the following 4 sub-themes: Teaching and Learning; Research; Community Engagement; and Transformation and Diversity Competencies. The last dimension which is primary to the attainment of the three dimensions is an Enabling Funding Regime with three sub-themes as follows, 1) funding strategies to diversify the sectoral funding pool, 2) transformative budgeting and costing process and spend (including B-BBEE); and 3) Improving efficiencies in business processes and use of facilities.

For the first time, public universities in South Africa have of their own volition developed their own self-evaluation and monitoring tools which they can bring to the table when engaging with the Minister of Higher education and Training and the Ministerial Transformation Oversight Committee which the TMF has forged very close working relations with through its Chairperson who by the way is a former member of the Transformation Managers Forum.

Whilst many university councils have adapted the Transformation Barometer, it is early days to determine its impact.

The transformation colloquium was organized according to panels and roundtable discussions which discussed pertinent issues germane to the sector viz; equity issues including celebration of employment equity; curriculum transformation: decolonization and de-westernisation; transformation of institutional culture; gender based violence; language of teaching and communication in HE; and inclusions and exclusions in HE.

The Transformation Managers Forum at its last meeting for the year agreed on the following priorities for 2019

- implementation of the Transformation Barometer
- implementation of the Disability Framework for PSET system
- gender transformation including gender- based violence
- hosting of a common campaign day for the sector
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The TMF has a contribution to make in the continued “complex and multi- dimensional” work of university transformation. However, the TMF cannot do it alone but through working with various actors in the transformation project.

Prof. Marcus Balintulo, the former Rector of the then Cape Technikon and interim VC of CPUT commenting on the slow pace of transformation in public universities likened university transformation as akin “transforming universities is like shifting a cemetery since you get no cooperation from the inhabitants”

The Transformation colloquium contributes to the ongoing debates on higher education transformation and the assertion contained in the 2015 Durban Statement on HE Transformation, that “debates about transformation involve fundamentally questioning the state of our universities, who is teaching and researching, what are they teaching and researching, and what the qualitative experiences of students [and staff] in our universities are like?” (2015:4-5)

The Transformation Barometer as a compact for the 26 public universities should be seen as a self -reporting and monitoring mechanism geared to assist public universities to respond to the HE Summit’s call “to report annually on progress made with respect to each resolution that forms part of their scope of responsibility” (2015:4)

George Mvalo is the Chairperson of the National Transformation Managers Forum, a representative body of the 26 public universities in South Africa, the views expressed here are his personal views.