Contemporary Challenges to Knowledge Management in Higher Education: A Gateway to Excellence and Innovation in Africa

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Abstract

This article focuses on contemporary challenges to knowledge management (KM) in an African higher education setting. Issues around Eurocentric and Indigenous Knowledge and the detrimental effects of apartheid education are problematised. The idea of relevant knowledge in African universities is analysed, with emphasis on indigenous approaches to knowledge management. It is argued that the merging of universities in post-apartheid South Africa is part and parcel of the national attempts at consolidating the strength of universities so that they could become effective agencies of socio-economic and political transformation. Finally, it is concluded that the promotion of organizational culture is inseparable from the ongoing transformation of African universities.

Keywords: Apartheid, business management, colonialism, globalization of knowledge, higher education in South Africa, Indigenization, knowledge management, neo-liberal capitalism, organizational culture.

Introduction

Since the end of colonialism, African universities have often been accused of being institutions that remain seedbeds for the cultivation and dissemination

of European and American perceptions and cultural values. Within post-colonial African scholarship, the question of the nature of the knowledge our tertiary institutions produce and the dissemination of this knowledge, have similarly been a complex source of ongoing debates among scholars in our many disciplines. Since many of our African universities have been established in terms of the organizational paradigm of the home university in the colonizing country, this managerial legacy is similarly not helpful. Ali Mazrui says in this regard,

> … in most African countries the institution of the university itself is one large piece of Western culture transmitted to an alien society. A number of universities in former British Africa were initially overseas extensions of the University of London and awarded London University degrees. One or two universities in former French Africa are still, at least partially, part of the French university system. Louvanium University in what is now Zaire also began as an extension or subsidiary of Louvain in Belgium (Mazrui 1999: 200).

Mazrui's observation is that the colonizers' colonial connection went through the African universities, making the African university 'one large piece of Western culture transmitted to an alien society' and by implication, a transmitter of western culture and values. Such an observation is critical because it raises the question of the relevance of knowledge which these African universities are producing and disseminating. It is my contention that it is especially through appropriate knowledge management strategies and practices that contemporary knowledge production at the African universities can become a gateway to excellence and innovation in the continent. This is a critical to effective socio-economic transformation.

In South Africa Knowledge Management has evolved along the trajectory of the struggles for social justice, equality and democracy. Within the context of the apartheid era, knowledge management was about power and domination. The main instrument that facilitated the imposition of the apartheid oppressive machinery in South Africa was the dissemination of distorted knowledge. For example, the idea that the history of South Africa started with the arrival of white people from Europe, and that South Africa was a promised land for the Afrikaners, that it makes good economic sense to

have indigenous African people restricted to their homelands in which they can develop themselves economically and politically, became the foundational basis for the official knowledge systems and policies under apartheid. This type of knowledge was basically a colonizing knowledge or a knowledge that was disseminated with the specific aim of legitimizing and justifying apartheid and before this period, colonialism. This was one of the observations that were made by Franz Fanon (1963:51) when he stated that:

> The settler makes history and is conscious of making it. And because he constantly refers to the history of his mother country, he clearly indicates that he himself is an extension of that mother country. Thus the history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation ….

In this way, we can fairly say with impunity that it was through the type of knowledge that was disseminated at African universities that these institutions became the vehicle for the mental colonization even after the demise of colonialism and apartheid (Smith 2006: 555 - 569).

Within the apartheid society, knowledge was not something that was homogeneous. It was indeed compartmentalized on the basis of who should know what according to race. In this regard, certain types of knowledge systems were considered illegal to know and produce. The main type of knowledge that was deemed official knowledge was that type of knowledge that justified the inevitability and the inherent goodness of the apartheid system to the development of South Africa and to the perpetuation of the Christian religion. What was supposed to be known by Africans had to go through a process of censorship lest dangerous knowledge might spoil the innocent mind of the Africans! Access to resources at African universities made it an immortal fact that the knowledge that is disseminated at African university will remain inadequate as compared to that type of knowledge that was acquired and disseminated at white universities. With the demise of colonialism and apartheid in the case of South Africa, colonial knowledge systems have increasingly become questionable and in some cases, these knowledge systems are no longer entertained within the circles of decent academic debates.

In the light of the above concerns, this article is structured as follows. The first section gives a brief definition of knowledge management according to the concerns of this paper. The second section treats the idea of relevant knowledge in African universities with emphasis on indigenous approaches to knowledge management. In the third section, it will be argued that the merging of universities in post-apartheid South Africa is part and parcel of the national attempts at consolidating the strength of universities so that they could become effective agencies of socio-economic and political transformation. Lastly, the fourth section will look into knowledge management from the perspective of organizational culture, and argue that the promotion of organizational culture is inseparable from the ongoing transformation of the African university. Finally, I make some concluding remarks.

A Brief Definition of Knowledge Management

Fernandos Simoes (1998) defines knowledge management (KM) as that of 'building and exploiting intellectual capital effectively and gainfully'. Another definition by Nasseri (1999) says that KM is the '… name of processes that accumulate knowledge capital and leverage it to create value'. On the other hand, the State University of San Diego (1999) describes KM as 'about getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time'. Here there is a common factor which these understandings of KM share. This common factor is an understanding of knowledge as a commodity which is acquired, developed and managed in a way that will eventually lead to the maximization of profits through successful marketization of products. In this regard, the discourse on knowledge reduces knowledge to something similar to any product or commodity that can be bought and sold with the intent to maximize profits. This is the type of argument which we find being advanced by critics of the global neo-liberal capitalism.

In a similar vein, we find Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005: 57), ardent critics of neo-liberal capitalism arguing that the management discourse as we find it in disciplines such as business management is one of the main sites in which the spirit of capitalism is inscribed'. According to Boltanski and Chiapello:

> As the dominant ideology, the spirit of capitalism theoretically has the ability to permeate the whole set of mental representations specific to a given era, infiltrating political and trade-union discourse, and furnishing legitimate representations and conceptual schemas to journalists and researchers, to the point where its presence is simultaneously diffused and general.

These two authors went on to say that management discourse developed in the 1990s when it was realized that in order for the spirit of capitalism to flourish all over the world,

> management literature cannot be exclusively orientated towards the pursuit of profit. It was also to justify the way profit is obtained, give cadres arguments with which to resist the criticisms that are bound to arise if they seek to implement its abundant recommendations, and to answer the demands for justification they will face from their subordinates or [people from] other social arenas (Boltanski & Chapello 2005: 58).

The argument that is being proffered by Boltanski and Chiapello is that the management discourse as we find it in business management courses is intended to promote the growth of new modes of capitalism whereby managers end up running corporations, companies and firms on behalf of the real owners. Yet, they also had to develop a discourse which had to legitimate itself. In this regard, management was to be conceived as,

> a profession with its own rules, thus consummating the break with leadership whose legitimacy derived from ownership, and on the other hand to pave the way for a professional education (Boltanski & Chiapello 2005: 59).

In this regard, the discourse on business management was integral to the evolution of contemporary neo-liberal capitalist practices. It is therefore criticised for having become the handmaid for the expansion of neo-liberal capitalism. Within such criticisms, a discourse on knowledge management

runs the risk of being seen as serving neo-liberal capitalists purposes that have nothing to do with the traditional pursuit of knowledge.

As we shall see in the course of this discussion, there are African scholars who have seen knowledge management at African universities as a way of entrenching and perpetuating the western socio-economic, political and religious hegemony in post-colonial African societies. For example Ali Mazrui persistently argued that the knowledge that was produced at African universities was mainly aimed at providing an umbilical link between multinational western capitalism and Africa. He avers:

> In the very process of producing educated manpower, creating new forms of stratification, accelerating westernization and modernization, African educational institutions have been major instruments through which the western world has affected and changed the African universe.

Universities virtually functioned as institutions for the promotion of western civilization, 'at least de facto' (Mazrui 1978: 307). It is obviously clear that Mazrui was critiquing the knowledge that was produced at African universities on the grounds that this type of knowledge was biased in favour of western economic aspirations and western culture. For this reason Mazrui made a suggestion to the effect that:

> University admission requirements should be reformed in the direction of giving new weight to certain subjects of indigenous relevance …. The university in turn should re-examine the content of its courses in the different fields, guided in part by permitting indigenous culture to penetrate more into the university, and in part by permitting non-western alien contributions to find a hearing (Mazrui 1978: 308).

Thus the main concern in knowledge management at the African university is mainly about the issue of relevance of the knowledge that is produced and disseminated by African universities.In the same vein with Mazrui, the issue of the relevance of knowledge was also raised by Aklilu Habte, Teshome Wagaw and Ade Ajayi when they said:

> African higher education is also constantly challenged to be relevant and responsive to the myriad needs of developing societies .... Conducting research, developing appropriate technology, and facilitating its deployment for the solution of development problems are additional critical functions that institutions of higher education are called upon to provide …. As vectors of values, self-identity and pride, the indigenous languages must be not only researched, codified and taught, but also used as languages of instruction at all levels and as keys to the knowledge and wisdom accumulated by African societies over the centuries (Habte, Wagaw & Ajayi 1999: 696).

In the light of observations such as these, the discourse of knowledge management in the post-colonial African university is problematised when scholars factor in the issue of relevance. In other words, knowledge management in the post-colonial or post-apartheid African university should be geared mainly towards the pursuit, acquiring and dissemination of relevant knowledge—a knowledge that addresses the main concerns of the society or communities which the African university find itself in.

Pursuit of Relevant Knowledge through Indigenization

Almost all African countries are aspiring to be democratic states or have achieved some form of democracy. Most of the African states are developmental states (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, South Africa, Zambia, Namibia). For institutions of higher education, relevant knowledge depends on what Lee Bollinger, the President of Colombia University (2005) describes as the understanding that the qualities of mind needed in a democracy are precisely what extraordinary openness of the academy is designed to help achieve. Generally, African universities capture their primary functions in terms of teaching, research and social engagement. Higher education institutions in Africa therefore face the challenge of producing its own human resources and human capital in anticipation of pursuing domestic development programs, and on the other hand produce critical thinkers and scholars who can contribute effectively in the global knowledge industry.

African universities are therefore not only expected to be centres of 'academic excellence', but because of the developmental imperatives and peculiarities of the continent, they also have to be 'centers of relevance'. As it was raised in the introductory section of this article, the issue of relevance is a very critical one especially in the light of curriculum development and the identity of an African university. Other African scholars have argued that due to its early connection with colonialism, the African university shares a strong identity with a multinational corporation. As Mazrui puts it:

> In the cultural domain, the pinnacle of the structure of dependency was the university, that institution which produced overwhelmingly the coming first generation of bureaucratic and political elites of post-colonial Africa, whose impact on the fortunes and destinies of their countries seemed at the time to be potentially incalculable …. What should be emphasized is simply that the university lay at the pinnacle of the structure of cultural dependency, and the multinational commercial enterprise at the pinnacle of the structure of economic dependency. But just as the African has its genesis in European imperialism, so does the commercial multinational corporation (Mazrui 1978: 287).

In the above observation, the African university was established to foster cultural dependence among Africans in the sense that the knowledge that was disseminated at these universities was mainly aimed at serving the knowledge of western imperial needs. Mazrui went on to say that during colonialism:

> The required cultural relevance had to come from a western-based educational structure. The higher the position in the commercial company for which an African was needed, the higher the level of western education normally expected …. The importance of western education for western investment in Africa grew rather than declined with the growth of African nationalism (Mazrui 1978; 293).

In other words, during colonialism the issue of relevance was closely related to the needs of western multinational corporations instead of the

African contexts which these universities served. It was through acquiring a western identity that African graduates were 'de-Africanized in advance before they [could] become culturally-relevant for the multinationals' (Mazrui 1978: 294). What is implied here is that during colonialism universities were not there for the promotion of African identities, but to promote westernization so that these westernized Africans could be interlinked with multinational interests. Mazrui went on to say that at these African universities,

> the decision as to which kind of subjects ought to be given priority in Africa is reached as a result of examining in what is regarded as important in the western world … (Mazrui 1978: 299).

What is implied by Mazrui is that by virtue of being western oriented, the curriculum of the African university is more concerned with western needs than African ones.

The observations of Mazrui were also echoed by Linda Tuhiwai Smith when she argued that our common understanding of knowledge is mainly based on the idea that all civilized knowledge originated from the west. Thus she writes:

> The globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge and the source of 'civilized' knowledge. This form of global knowledge is generally referred to as 'universal' knowledge, available to all and not really 'owned' by anyone, that is, until non-Western scholars make claims to it. When claims like that are made history is revised (again) so that the story of civilization remains the story of the West (Smith 2006: 560).

What can we discern from this observation is the argument that western knowledge has dominated all discourses on knowledge to such an extent that authentic knowledge can only be legitimized through western lenses of knowing.

In the same vein, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o argued that the hegemony of western knowledge can be seen in the predominance that is usually given to European languages in our discourses. He writes:

> I want to suggest that our various fields of knowledge of Africa are in many ways rooted in that entire colonial tradition of the outsider looking in, gathering and coding knowledge with the help of naïve informants, and then storing the final product in a European language for consumption by those who have access to that language …. We collect intellectual items and put them in European language museums and archives. Africa's global visibility through European languages has meant Africa's invisibility in African languages (Wa Thiong'o 2005: 160).

In other words, by ignoring the use of our own African languages in academic discourses we somehow perpetuate the visibility of European languages in the global arena whilst simultaneously burying the visibility of African languages.

As a way of trying to address the above concerns, the academic world has begun to recognize in a serious manner what is commonly referred to as indigenous knowledge systems or indigenous communal approaches. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) are partly about understanding that local practices and views of the world is an essential defining feature of the local communities. These communal approaches continue to inform the worldview of local people and in particular, therapeutic interventions. Exclusive and denialist approach to IKS can easily flaw the knowledge creation processes content of what is taught and researched interventions.

Ethically, how do institutions measure value of individual academic involvement in community activities? What kind of mutual obligations should exist between universities and communities where community agencies are co-partners in the teaching and learning processes? What capacities should be developed to enhance the fieldwork component of qualifications/programs in such a way that the indigenous knowledge systems and interventions are part of a scientific academic learning process and add value to the scholarly ethos?

Other related questions come to mind: Do communities look upon

our university to provide answers and explanations to issues that bother them? Are we seen to be improving the quality of lives of people? Do we produce knowledge that takes the African conditions as its central challenge?

With regard to the educated graduates we produce: What are our graduate outputs? Are we producing the highest number of persons who fail by virtue of coming from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds or fail because of underperformance, and non-performance by academics and related university se4rvices? What are the ethical obligations of African institutions of higher education in instances where students in the name of academic freedom and entitlement to quality education, have concerns about our delivery. Graduate outputs can be linked to access, accountability, staff capabilities and forms of assessments within faculties or schools. Collaboration on intellectual mentors and postgraduate research scholarships, discourses that shape thinking around common educational and social development issues, are some of the common areas in need of serious engagement among African universities. The merging of South African universities provides an excellent opportunity for the realization of the above challenges.

Mergers and the Consolidation of Knowledge Management

South Africa as a new democracy and developing state in the African and the world order has outlined its developmental trajectories. Given one of the broad definitions of KM, that it is about getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time (2002), it became critical that South Africa reviews its higher education landscape. This view of this process was informed by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the national priority goals and the development strategy for the country, Higher Education White papers and national strategies and regional needs as agreed with other countries through structures such as SADC and the AU. One of the outcomes of the review of the HE landscape in South Africa was the merging and consolidation of the 36 public higher education institutions, 9 science councils, five national research councils and many other research formations linked to universities, labour formations and NGOs.

Mergers in higher education are perceived as globalization responses wherein universities consolidate their strengths and economies. Academics

have criticized mergers for corporatisation, corrosive leadership (Thornton 2004) and threatening academic freedom. In South Africa the mergers were deeper than responding only to economic consolidation. Mergers in tertiary education addressed the apartheid mental and physical infrastructure designed to entrench inequality, selective academic programs for different categories of citizen, unequal allocations of financial resources for teaching and research. Mergers were also endeavours of locating and appropriating higher education within the national and regional development and transformation agendas. They also become critical for human development strategies in line with national priorities and global market forces. Added to this list is the intention to increase and monitor quality of academic programs, access to educational opportunities, transparency, good governance and accountability as higher education institutions (HEIs) are public funded entities. Mergers in South Africa were not an optional choice but were necessary as one of the strategic moves to forging a democratic South Africa beyond the colonial and apartheid legacies. Mergers have presented a number of challenges to higher education such as:

- Balancing academic freedom and autonomy with national accountability and best practices adopted from the corporate world;
- Introduction of accounting mechanisms and legal instruments for conducting research;
- Robust accreditation and national audits of academic programs;
- Active engagement and participation of students in the governance and activities of universities; and
- Creation of mega-multi campus universities with student populations of more than 40,000.

Mergers therefore have presented HEI with massive volumes of information and knowledge that must be processed, shared and centrally embedded in the knowledge industry. Our KM strategies should enable us to identify and secure appropriate technologies to interface with the academic community, establish and consolidate relevant knowledge networks within short periods and identify research and opportunities quickly in a competitive environment. Now that the mergers are stabilizing, the onus is upon the academics and academic leadership to create spaces for dialogues and

discursive engagements on issues such as academic freedom, social engagement, transformation and equity, technology in higher education. These are spaces to think critically outside the comfort zones of the past and in the context of a globalised and technology driven higher education environment.

Overall, the mergers will be a story of success if they:

a) Enhance access and equity goals for both students and staff (National Working Group 2002; Jansen 2003). The access and equity of African and young up-and-coming academics continue to pose a challenge for higher education in South Africa. Staff access and retention must include access and retention of all young up-coming academics and senior but productive retiring academics. How do we know about them? A KM mindset will to a great extent help HE to develop and access a global pool of these academics. The retirement of productive academics must not present them with a bleak future outside academia, but be an entry into another level of engagement within the academy. Retired and senior academics are a resource for enhancing disciplines and attracting revenue for the institution;

b) Create new institutions with new identities and cultures that transcend the past institutional histories and contribute to deracialisation (Jansen 2003). The new identities can be expressed through leadership and management that have a different mindset on matters of transformation, access and diversity of opinion.

c) Produce new academic infrastructures or physical spaces to express the value and responsibilities of academic freedom;

d) Are driven (at least for the first five years) by transformative academic leadership and management; and

e) Create spaces and opportunities for academic freedom that go hand in hand with responsibility and mutual accountability of staff and students.

The mergers need to produce curricula and academic programs that engage the local material conditions and articulate with the global conditions

which impact on them. New institutions will not produce relevant knowledge if the academic and research leadership do not or refuse to understand global competitiveness and national development as the contexts that influence and shape the knowledge and information industry.

The mergers therefore have created new institutions, such as UKZN, which,

> [f]ace[] the challenge of creating a higher educational institution that respects, values and demands academic excellence, but at the same time takes seriously its responsibilities as a national and regional resource. The task of creating new curricula which reflect this vision, which achieve academic excellence and which relate strongly to culture and values of African society—this is a challenge which our academics have embraced with sincerity, eagerness and application and there is a great deal of excitement around the idea of contributing towards the process of building a truly South African, post apartheid university (Makgoba 2004).

On the other hand Mantzaris and Cebekhulu (2005) cautions that universities are sites of knowledge but can become sites of disillusionment. This disillusionment, in my view, can develop out of the lack of insight into human factors, factors that influence allocation of resources, pursuance of the old curricula in a transformed institution, failure to rationalize programs and lack of congruence between the academic endeavour and other supportive pillars, delays in creating social and academic spaces that allow critical thought and intermingling of stakeholders, scholars, researchers and students.

Institutions of higher learning become a critical and strategic actor in development because of its fundamental role in the knowledge industry, generating tacit and explicit knowledge, transferring knowledge into usable information, and developing human capital for the nation.

In South Africa in particular, some of the universities had to engage in mergers. These mergers brought fundamental and irreversible changes in the landscape of higher education in South Africa. Transformation, equity, access, excellence and African scholarship are some of the central concepts that form the common thread of the visions and missions of the newly

merged institutions in South Africa. The visions and missions imply a strong recognition of and rootedness into the African conditions and engaging with the universe from a position of strength and contextualized identity. Mamdani (1997) puts this by saying, 'excellence has to be contextualized and knowledge made relevant'.

Mamdani also talks about responsibilities of being an African university, which amongst other things serve to adapt our scholarship to the social structures and cultural environment of Africa but by so producing knowledge that takes the African condition and the African identity as its central challenge. African universities have to search for answers to the questions deriving from specifically African conditions. In the African universities, this also impacts on issues such as staff access and equity in the retention of African academics of stature, the attracting of highly skilled professionals within the south-south cross-country and cross-border collaboration, and the attracting of young promising African scholars to pursue careers in the academy within and outside the continent. Shaping African universities in the national and global arenas therefore, is beyond the conventional functions of universities; it includes other variables, areas of intellectual responsibilities and scholarship. KM can be adopted as a strategy to engage Africa with itself and connect it to the global industry, position unique flagship programs such as IsiZulu Studies and specific forms of Music primarily in the School of Music at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

African universities have redefined themselves through their vision and mission. These visions and missions are in line with the broader national ones; the university's is focused, specialized and limited. The mission of this University challenges us to draw our inspiration primarily from our environment partly by generating developmentally relevant research, be socially responsive and to provide community service. The African context in our vision and the global approaches shape the role and relevance of higher education in the 21st Century. African universities have to confront some fundamental and difficult questions related to the following issues:

Access

Who may access higher education? How do we measure prior learning towards tertiary access? How do we measure the appropriate levels of access? How do we support learners at their appropriate levels of access?

How do we increase and sustain throughputs? How do we develop coherent systems of access in our south-south partnerships or tripartite partnerships? How best can we ensure that systems of access allow for the engagement of the continent's technologies that are complimentary to research, teaching, local and global social engagements and networking? (How do we ensure enough and quality technologies on the continent?) These are few vital areas, that universities must focus on if they want to be agencies of development, transformation and promotion of democracy. Knowledge management and the management of the appropriate technologies, can be used to enhance operations in these areas.

Quality and Excellence

The pursuit of excellence as the trademark of the university enjoins academics, students and administrators to pursue merit and excellence. I share Goma's view (1991) that such excellence must be dictated primarily by African aspirations, and by the quest to deal effectively with the central conditions and problems. Towards the achievement of this pursuit, the University must be able to attract good students from all walks of life and social classes, and to attract as well as keep excellence in faculty. Equally important, is for the University to provide the necessary conducive environment to learning, teaching and social engagement through resources and infrastructure support. Again, quality and excellence talk to issues of access, retention, recruitment, and retention, size and shape of our universities and relations with the state. Equally important, is the quality of the university's social engagement. Through social engagement society defines collaborative niches in knowledge production and interpretation activities.

Creativity

The University must engage in teaching, research, community service and skills development in order to acquire and transmit knowledge and skills that work (Ajayi, Lameck, Goma & Johnson 1996). This is particularly relevant to Humanities, professional and development disciplines that respond to social issues, concern themselves with quality of life, problem solving and

seek solutions that work within the institution of higher education and externally (programs that enrich the life experience of students at the IHE). Mission statements of the Universities raise a number of questions for the development of human and social science disciplines, and management studies. Some of the questions are:

- How can we help develop the necessary socio-economic environment conducive to quality academic pursuits?
- How can research be made to contribute to a more active role in the elimination of poverty, hunger, diseases, ignorance as well as production of excellent and creative graduates?
- What kind of graduates does our society need in order to face up to the new socio-economic and political transformational challenges?
- How can such graduates be developed into international scholars, professionals or academics?

In the light of the above questions, one way of developing and sustaining the scholarly ethos around knowledge production and management in a university is to develop a strategic plan that utilizes retired but productive professors and academics as mentors and points of reference for postgraduate studies programs or centres of research and social engagement linked to faculties and /or specific disciplines.

These questions can be dealt with effectively through commitment to a strong organizational culture that aims at entrenching this vision of the university in the national and international framework.

Organizational Culture and Knowledge Management

Knowledge production and knowledge management thrives and have the desired impacts or outcomes in particular kinds of environment. The onus rests upon institutions of higher education to create an optimum environment that remove obstructions and entrapments which compromise excellence and staff and student performance. One of the most significant requirements in the optimal functioning of the organizational cultural elements is the management and leadership at the helm of the institution. African universities require leadership and management who are comfortable to

implement but also question the national imperatives. This implies the ability to maintain the thrust of the national imperatives without jeopardizing the scholar's ethos and visa versa—a perpetual creative tension that defines the state and the university. The other elements are related to the qualities of the mind. Despite limited financial state resources, collaborations amongst us in Africa, appropriate judgments of scholarly temperaments, renewal of scholarship, common research and intellectual foci, African scholars can optimise their knowledge production and management and appropriately engage and interact with external and internal knowledge systems.

I view universities as co-operative enterprises in education and development. Amongst other things, the university must produce critical thinkers, strategists, and knowledge that can be managed and transformed into relevant information for addressing life and quality of life challenges.

Universities continue to be sites of knowledge, research, outreach and domains of contestation. They are also sites of transformation, hope and disillusionment (Mantzaris & Cebekhulu 2005). It is these creative tensions and contradictions or diversity of opinions, which make the exciting and challenging mix that characterises the university—especially in the postcolony. The first phases of transformation may present an impression of stifling debate and discursive contestation. Even so, this is the creative cauldron that allows the merging and transforming institution to lay the institutional foundations and value bases for a new university. Because of this, universities, particularly the university's leadership cohort, must understand that by design, universities, particularly those characterised by cultural diversity, a diversity of opinions, and a diversity of the identification of common challenges as well as solutions to these challenges, constitute the creative and often contradictory spaces of a society's developmental horizon. It is here where we find the continuous search for solutions and explanations. These institutional activities can thrive better and be fostered through optimum knowledge management in so far as developing new structures, access and enrolment processes, quality and excellence, and creativity and strategic projections are fostered and advanced.

Leadership is defining what is meant by such measures in an African context, especially where there has been a history of producing disadvantaged sectors of society through various processes of discrimination.

For instance, many talented girl learners have their education discouraged by staunch patriarchal families. More recently, most probably all learners experience how HIV/Aids impacts on the family while many have seen their schooling broken by the demands on them caused by this pandemic. We must recognize that excellence is not something that is inherent but developed, and that what is really important in the final analysis is that there is excellence in the final product. Through the different mechanisms of knowledgement, we need to ensure that the appropriate systems and structures are in place for this to happen.

Universities should be able to engage in what Vico (Cox 2002) describes as 'fantasia', that is the culture of seeking new ways and solutions from within and outside the institutions of higher learning. The branding, symbols, knowledge forms and organizational cultures within institutions of higher learning should embrace the values of democracy, its vision and liberties. Added to this is knowledge management which Serban and Luan (1999: 5) describe as 'using the brain power of an organization in a systematic and organized manner in order to achieve efficiencies, ensure competitive advantage and spur innovation'. Failure or inability to use the brain power within the institution in a systematic manner can express itself through high staff turn over, inability to engage productive researchers, academics, failure to identify potential scholars and researchers within the postgraduate cohorts of the institution, lack of and failure to create spaces for debate and dialogues in a university. Pedagogically, the curricula content and styles of teaching may remain irrelevant in a highly competitive and technology driven world. The universities should be the innovators and pace setters—not the followers. Especially where societies are characterised by information overload, it is universities that need to be the societal mechanisms that process and develop systems for knowledge utilization—especially where there are information bottlenecks. Knowledge management at universities is crucial for this to happen.

A culture of electronics dominates the global world. The onus is on universities to move quickly in deciding how best to utilize electronic communication to enhance the academic endeavour rather than the other way round where electronic communication may end up determining the foci of higher education and shape the competencies without necessarily understanding the qualities of the mind needed to nurture and sustain the

developing African democracies. One consequence of the merger in UKZN for example is the wastage of time, energy and financial resources spent on inter-campus traveling by academic leadership. Inter-campus communication and inter-campus and inter-university engagements should include the investing in other forms of electronic media, such as virtual offices (and classrooms), video conferences, teleconferences, one off securing of flybooks or laptops for all executives up to heads of schools, reconfiguration of smaller programs that have a potential to grow in the context of the mission of the institution, the national and global development and education commitments. The electronic communication must not replace physical contact, but should compliment it on a much wider scale than at present. The same operational principle can be extended to our postgraduate students and postdoctoral scholars. It serves also as an incentive and an attracting factor for scholars to stay on in the academy—the appropriate electronic provisioning of the tools of managing information and engaging with other scholars and researchers.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, I have shown that knowledge management is faced with many challenges in post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa. It was shown that knowledge management challenges us to look critically at the type of knowledge that we produce as an African university with the specific aim of ensuring that this knowledge is relevant to our context, and that it should help to promote the identity of an African university.

Knowledge management can add value to collaborations by allowing systematic sharing and processing of knowledge for application and teaching and learning. Through knowledge management, higher education institutions, such as the University of KwaZulu-Natal can create a new institutional ethos and culture and internal knowledge management systems (which define the organizational culture). Research and postgraduate studies are areas of focus, which like leadership define the stature of a university.

Knowledge management and some major technologies can be utilized to develop effective student and staff access and retention, the ensuring of the continuous development of the quality and excellence of the

variety of forms of endeavour at the university, as well as the different forms of creativity needed for the optimum functioning of the university. Knowledge management should play its appropriate role in a highly competitive environment, congested by large student populations (Kidwell et al. 2000). Creation, transformation and transmission of knowledge (Lauden & Laudon 1999; Serban & Luan 1999) remains the fundamental and cherished function of the university. Knowledge management should be developed and applied to consolidate the brain power of an organization and to build an institutional ethos which is enhanced with relevant technologies in our African context.

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