Leading change in the academy: a biographical narrative of how a dynamic strategic planning model for transforming Student Affairs in a historically white institution was developed

Kholeka Moloi, Kuzvinetsa Dzvimbo and Thandi Ngcobo

Abstract

In this article, the authors present a proposal for a dynamic strategic planning model for leading change within academia in the post apartheid era. This model is mainly informed by experiences of one of the authors in leading strategic change in a Historically White Institution's (HWI) Division of Student Affairs. It also draws from works by Mintzberg (1994) and Kaplan and Norton (2001 and 2004) on strategic planning and the use of strategy maps in leading change in a HWI in the South African context. The main question we attempted to answer is: how do managers lead strategic change in Student Affairs? This question is answered through a critical biographical narrative of one of the researchers and her colleagues. Methodologically, we make use of a case study approach which enabled us to grasp the subjective meanings of social action by major actors as they conceptualized the leading of change through a strategic planning process. Such an interpretive approach provided the authors with an opportunity to investigate understand and explicate the challenges of strategic leadership attempts of transforming Student Affairs. Theoretically, the discussion and exegesis of leading change through strategic planning is interrogated through a post-structural and a post-modern perspective in an attempt to re-write the possibilities for new meta-narratives and identities in Student Affairs. The objective is to point towards an analytical discourse practice that engenders the development of cultural spaces that are inclusive, transformative and emancipatory" (Giroux, 2006, p.234). This is achieved by the development of a social epistemology of strategic planning in Student Affairs which accentuates questions about: what sort of knowledge should be produced on leadership and strategic planning; by whom and for whom?

Introduction

How do managers lead strategic change in a Historically White Institution (HWI)? The discussion in this article answers this question through a critical biographical narrative of a Black female academic that was in a leadership position in the Division of Student Affairs (DoSA) in one such university.

This involved an arduous process of leading strategic change in this unit. In answering the question above, we therefore examine how strategic planning as a leadership tool was conceptualized and utilized in an effort to bring about sustainable and continuous change in that Division. Furthermore, we critically reflect on the process of conceptualizing and initiating strategic change in the Division from a leadership and process perspective by adopting a biographical approach which focuses on one aspect of University management in the academy: Student Affairs. Student affairs are an arena that is fraught with racial, ideological, educational, intellectual, political and ethnic contestations. From a methodological perspective, we relied on the 'case study' approach to enable us to grasp the subjective meanings of social action by major actors in student affairs at this institution as they experienced and conceptualized the strategic planning process. Such an interpretive approach to the study of leadership, the conceptualizing of strategic planning for transformation in the Division has its roots in Weber's notion of Verstehen and the hermeneutic – phenomenological tradition and symbolic interactionism as articulated by Weber (1947) and Heidegger (1986).

Since our case study is a Division of a HWI, the issues of politics, race and ethnicity, knowledge and power also needed to be probed so that we could posit ways in which racial inequality in student affairs could be dealt with by a University society that is still racially divided? In a HWI the issues of race and ethnicity are highly emotive and contested terrains. As we discuss the leadership change role in the DoSA, our concern also embraces the process of racial and ethnic (in this case Afrikaans and African) "group formation and boundary maintenance" (O'Sullivan and Wilson, 1988, p.223) in the unit.

We begin our discussion by offering reasons why we opted for a biographical narrative and case study methodology. We then delve into the biographical narrative by one of the 'key actors' and that of her colleague whose experiences form the basis of this article. Thirdly, we utilize a variety of theoretical perspectives to discuss the processes of leadership and strategic planning in the stated Student Affairs Division. Here, we rely on the actual planning and leadership processes that the researchers were involved in regarding the development of a strategic plan, its implementation and monitoring process in the student affairs division at the university. The discussion of leadership, strategy and continuous change in the academy is premised on the works of Mintzberg (1994), Kaplan and Norton (2001 and 2004) on the strategy focused organization and strategy maps, respectively. We then offer a conceptual perspective that is based on a meta-theoretical

approach to the discussion of strategic planning in the stated Division of Student Affairs. The conceptual schema borrows from critical theory especially the work of Habermas (1971) and Giroux (2006) and post structuralism/modernism as articulated by Foucault (1972, 1980) and Baumann (2002). Finally, we make use of the works of Friedmann (1987); Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (1998); Beer and Nohria (2000); Takeuchi and Nonaka (2002); Senge (2002) and Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski and Flowers (2005) to weave through a critical discussion of a model of strategic planning we view as being relevantly dynamic for leading change in Student Affairs in a post apartheid era. Such a discussion foregrounds the strategy process as: an analytical process; a visionary process; a mental process; an emergent process; a process of negotiation; a collective process; a reactive process; and a process of reflective transformation (Mintzberg *et al*., 1998). We conclude the discussion of leading change through strategic planning by briefly utilizing a post-structural and a post-modern perspective to attempt to re-write the possibilities for new meta-narratives and identities in Student Affairs. In the process we hope to point towards an analytical discourse that engenders the development of cultural spaces that are inclusive, transformative and emancipatory" (Giroux, 2006, p.234). In so doing, we develop a social epistemology of strategic planning in Student Affairs by privileging questions about: what sort of knowledge should be produced on leadership and strategic planning; by whom and for whom? (Badat, 2006; Fuller, 2006 and Weiler, 2006). Such a critical approach "facilitates a constructive engagement with the social world that starts from the presumption that existing arrangements – including currently affirmed identities and differences – do not exhaust the range of possibilities" (Calhoun, 1995) for action, change and transformation.

Rationale for the biographical and case study methodology

The biography or life story methodology regarding the study of leading strategic planning in the academy enabled us to document the inner experience of the participants and how they interpret, understand and define the world around them (Bryman, 2004). Furthermore, as Rosenthal (2004) argues, a biographical approach enables researchers to interpret the meaning of phenomena such as leading change in strategic planning in the overall context of a biography. Epistemologically, we found hermeneutics to be appropriate for assisting us to adopt a theory and method that enabled us to interpret human activity and meanings by staff in the Division of Student Affairs

(DoSA) as they engaged in the development of the transformative strategic plan. Following the work of the major proponents of phenomenology we took the position that it was essential to focus on:

> . . . how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher (researcher) should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of that world.

> (Bryman, 2004, p.16)

From an ontological perspective it became essential to adopt a constructivist approach since our concern was with the manner in which staff and in particular the Acting Executive Director in the DoSA as social actors were continually constructing social phenomena and their meanings. Therefore, social categories of leadership in the academy, strategic planning and their meaning were continually being constructed by the Acting Executive Director, staff and students in the DoSA. Consequently, we took an approach to knowledge production about leadership and strategic planning which is germane to constructivism that it (knowledge) is indeterminate.

As noted by Rosenthal (2004), the biographical life story of researchers, regardless of the specific research questions, is based on fundamental theoretical assumptions which, in our case, took the following views into account:

1.   In order to understand and explain the leading of strategic planning, it is essential to construct the genesis of the action: creation, reproduction and transformation of the DoSA;

2.   In order to understand and explain the actions of staff and leaders on the DoSA it is important to explicate the actions of the major actors: the Executive Director, her staff and students. This promises to provide the development of a better understanding of the players' subjective perspectives and courses of action during the process of strategic planning and leading change by the Acting Executive Director. Our major concern in such an biographical study is to understand the meanings the participants attached to their actions. From a hermeneutic perspective, our concern therefore is with the theory and method of interpretation of human action in leading change through strategic planning.

3.   In our quest of an understanding of the processes of leading change and strategic planning, it was essential for us to interpret the experiences of the major actors in the DoSA, as part of their overall context of their current professional life and future perspectives as they were trying to transform a HWI in their own portion of the entire university.

The overall goals of all these activities is an attempt to reconstruct and analyze social phenomena about leading change through strategic planning in Student Affairs by a female Black academic and her Black male colleague. The focus is on both processes and structures that were essential in changing cultures about leadership, strategic planning and change management.

Since our methodological concern was with one particular 'case' at the university, a biographical narrative was complemented by a case study research design. As such, we resorted to a detailed analysis of the case under study; the DoSA, regarding how the Black female academic and her Black male colleague were engaged in leading change through the process of strategic planning which involved the reconstruction of social phenomena and meaning in this HWI's unit. These colleagues were therefore participant observers in this process. We did not delude ourselves into thinking that our findings at this university can be generalized to all other Historically White Institutions (HWIs). Our view was that this discussion can shed light on the process of leading change through the tools of strategic planning in similar divisions in other HWIs.

A unique case study was also essential because the researchers were interested in providing a suitable context for their research question, which is: how do managers lead strategic change in Student Affairs in a HWI? This was done through the participant observation and, as already indicated, analysis of a social process of strategic planning in the Division. The participant observations were structured and unstructured as both the Acting Executive Director and her colleague met formally and informally with staff and students in the DoSA. The participant observation method enabled the researchers to discern the 'ongoing behaviour of the key participants', the students and staff, as it occurred. In the process they were then capable of noting and recording salient features of the processes of leading change through strategic planning. As Cohen and Manion (1994, pp.106–107) contend, the purpose of a case study is: "to probe deeply and to analyze intensively the multifarious phenomena that constitute the life cycle of the unit with a view to establish generalizations about the wider population to which that unit belongs". In this

case, the wider population that the DoSA represents is staff and students at the university.

The biographical narrative

The female researcher joined the university in November 1997 after having been identified by her lecturer and supervisor, her current colleague now a full professor in the university, as a potential lecturer. Her experiences before joining the university also include being a school principal. From the period of her appointment to the university to February 2007 she has worked in the Faculty of Education in the department of Education Management in different levels ranging from 'contract lecturer', junior lecturer, senior lecturer to her current position as an associate professor. The latter position she has held since 2002. In March 2007, she was seconded to head the Division of Student Affairs as Acting Executive Director. Before March 2007, she had never heard of nor had been anywhere near this Division. Therefore, her secondment was her very first knowledge, encounter and experience of the Division and senior management within the University in general.

Coming from an education management professional and academic background, she was confronted with having to first understand the new and somewhat 'strange' environment of the Division. The work processes, and procedures were carried out completely differently from the 'normal', teaching, research and community involvement activities she had been accustomed to in the Faculty of Education. In her own words: "I must confess at the beginning, I felt lost, more and more confused because everything was strange. Some of the difficulties I encountered were:

- a completely different work ethic;

- every staff member worked from a budget which they controlled;

- there was no sense of 'urgency' in the service delivery;

- the staff members were involved in solving students' problems from the morning to late evenings; and

- there were students at the doors of staff for different kinds of problems and complaints at every moment and every day of the week".

For her, these experiences that she was beginning to construct were new and they began to take a toll on her. On studying what was going on and finally getting a grasp of the setting and how work was performed, she eventually knew what was needed to improve 'how we all thought about our work'. In her conceptual and epistemological schema, what was needed was a fundamental mental and paradigmatic shift. She could not believe that one unit could be so different from others while operating in the same HWI. These different constructions of social and contested realities 'affairs' became very challenging mentally, emotionally and physically.

The situation was exacerbated by the fact that the Rector, who sets very high standards for performance and achievement, was also being driven by imperatives from the University Council and key stakeholders of HWI to achieve quick results and transform student affairs. As a manager who believes in 'pathfinders' and in people who play in the first league, he was not willing to compromise on the deliverables he was setting for the new and inexperienced Acting Executive Director. This was all done within the context of a HWI that is being driven by a management ideology of managerialism and performance management; and commercialization of instructional materials in light of declining subventions from the State for public institutions. The new Acting Executive Director was now operating in a strange environment in which "market and market-like practices" (Slaughter and Rhoades (2004, p.10) are being pursued vigorously by the University management and being literally forced on the entire university through 'Executive' Deans and 'Executive' Directors.

Following her appointment as an Acting Executive director, this researcher had to look for a leadership framework, model and paradigm that would enable her to effectively and systematically lead and monitor a multiracial staff and student body. She needed direction that would enable her to carry on with her work whilst simultaneously making improvements on certain aspects which, from consultation with the two directors and other staff members in her new unit, were necessary. What she realized was that the staff members were very busy on a daily basis with day to day operations and the solving of unending student problems. These problems were mainly related to students requesting assistance for funds, for example, to attend one meeting or some conference; meals; car hires to attend one meeting or the other. Furthermore, the SRC was almost always confrontational on issues of racism and dissatisfactions with how Black students were being treated by some staff members and students at the residences at the main campus in particular.

As a result of the nature of their work, staff members in this Division were always so exhausted that they did not have time to even think about the need for a strategy or a plan that was essential for making sense of the present, let alone the future in Student Affairs. In addition, the Division was operating on a poorly conceptualized and developed strategic plan that was 'housed' in a redundant document to which no one ever referred to. The development of a comprehensive and living strategy became a starting point for the new Acting Executive Director, together with her two new Directors and the rest of the team to resuscitate what had existed and had been neglected and to improve that strategy where pertinent. For her, the greatest challenge was on leadership and planning for change. The questions that continually confronted her were:

● How can the team and unit plan to help all students deal with issues that they found dissatisfying regarding the Division's service?

● How can the team plan for having a day in which it could focus its attention on research aimed at improving their services and contribute to the research output of the University?

● How can it professionalize student affairs so that they could not only deal with the day to day problem solving and operational activities, but have its activities felt in the nine University faculties and the Management Executive Committee (MEC)?

Other critical issues that the new Acting Executive Director had to interrogate were, *inter alia,* that:

● Since its inception the Student Affairs Division had never organized a national and international student affairs conference;

● There was an absence of an intellectual and research focus in the thinking of the staff; and

● There was no student resource centre that provides students with information on student affairs nationally and internationally.

As a result of these challenges, the new Acting Executive Director needed to plan very seriously on how to 'turnaround' Student Affairs as it had existed for over 30 years to a new unit that would be aligned with the direction that the University was taking. The new Acting Executive Director was also

concerned by the perception of the MEC about student affairs that the DoSA was not adding any value to the University. That perception was, for her, correct and critical because the DoSA:

1. Did not engage in research activities.

2. Was not visible in the university and was not even mentioned in the University reports in terms of 'impact' and effectiveness.

3. Did not convey collective professionalism regarding how tasks were performed because, for example, each staff member controlled and did with his/her budget as they saw fit.

4. Thinking among staff members was completely different from what she had expected because they regarded themselves as administrative workers and did not see their connection with the different faculties in terms of providing support upon which the academic achievement of all students depends.

5. Did not have future oriented leadership.

Therefore, it was essential for the new Acting Executive Director to try, without appearing to be imposing herself, and influence staff to change a culture that they had been accustomed to for over ten, and in some cases sixteen, years. This was a serious challenge. However, she understood that change takes place at three levels, namely, the surface level, the intermediate level and at the deep level. Her understanding of the challenges before her therefore was that for any fundamental change to take root, it was at the deep level that she, the change agent, needed to strike. Unfortunately, this takes time and requires a deep personal commitment, deliberate patience and continuous conversation and persuasion. This is taking into consideration that she was dealing with people's mental models and deeply ingrained mental assumptions, beliefs and attitudes. What she was confronted with is what Youniss (2008) regards as subject-subject social construction of knowledge and interpersonal relationships. She was also confronted with the university's dissatisfying history and culture in mediating development so that political-moral identity becomes the key source of collective meaning for individual lives in the University.

She was also confronted with a situation in which she found it difficult to introduce people who had never been directly involved with academic work to start speaking about their professional role in servicing students. In this area, she was dealing with deeply held assumptions of how each one of the staff members perceived their work. In their own words, the staff continually pointed out to her that: "we are administrative staff and we have thus nothing to do with academia". One of the senior staff members would actually say to her that when she was employed in her position she was told to do operational work and solve students' problems. She was afraid that if she even 'stayed a day away from work' in a week doing research, she would be violating her contract. Some of the staff members were just not interested in research. The need for a leadership academy for training student leaders became eminent. Furthermore, the Rector had also expressed the view that he wanted such an academy to be established. The Acting Executive Director then had to impress upon a male Black colleague that there was a need for them to begin to work with the nine faculties in the University from the perspective of the DoSA. This would be beneficial to the students themselves in providing them with much needed support to the faculties in terms of collaboration and enlightenment regarding the students' personal problems such as those relating to finances and health issues. These aspects would eventually give light to the students' level of academic performance, the high drop-out rate because the DoSA would be collaborating with academic faculties in research and publications. What she discovered was that, there is a plethora of avenues for research in Student Affairs and that the lack of research in the unit could be attributed to its isolation from the rest of the University.

According to the Acting Executive Director, the leadership prevalent in the Division had been of people working in silos without mutual consultation. Almost all the decisions that had been taken had not been shared. In her account, some of the people in leadership positions expressed the view that working in teams was inconceivable. In some quarters of student affairs, people expressed that they had been used to a consultative style of leadership. Thus, to make the strategic plan work, the team needed to learn how to fuse different leadership styles to be able to work with individuals effectively (fusing both the autocratic and democratic leadership styles). In the main, this required epitomizing the concept of shared leadership in order to make the 'critical connections' that are required for 'successes' in complex systems such as student affairs. A fundamental shift in the consciousness of each one of the staff members became eminent, if the team was to bring about the necessary change and implement strategic change. The transformation of the

consciousness of the staff in student affairs would be a major leadership training institute on its own. It required moving beyond the day-to-day operations to 'persuading' staff to get things done in a way that would help make the team's activities felt by the students, the University Executive Leadership (UEL) and the rest of the academy. Paulo Freire's (1970) work on the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, becomes useful as it helps in the context of this discussion because it helps us to analyze the relationship between knowing the world (the experiences of staff in student affairs) and changing it (goal attainment). The emphasis here is the relationship between critical awareness (transformation of consciousness) and social action (engagement) and the process that each one of the staff members in the DoSA would go through to attain strategic change (political and moral consciousness of individual staff members).

Given that the University is engaged in the transformation process, Student Affairs had to follow suit. Both the issues highlighted above and the University transformation agenda prompted the need for a well articulated strategic plan to guide the everyday activities and, more importantly, to give the DoSA a direction of the future and how its leadership could be aligned to the entire university. To be able to achieve this, the Acting Executive Director needed a partner to work with from the Faculty of Education to help her 'think and map out' and articulate a strategy. This is how the second researcher, a Black male academic with vast experiences in strategic planning across the African continent was brought into the process of leading strategic change in the DoSA. His role was to work with the Acting Executive Director and her executive team and assist in mapping out the strategy and its final development. The second researcher sat with the executive team in the DoSA on a weekly basis, assisting them in thinking through and being engaged in conversations and guiding them where they had no skills or knowledge in thinking strategically. It became imperative that the team needed to develop a strategy map for leading the transformation process in the DoSA. The key questions were:

1.   Does strategic planning work as a tool of professionalizing student affairs in the academy; and

2.   How does one lead and manage change in one unit of a HWI where students, especially the Black student, are of the opinion that they are entitled to funds and other services because they were historically disadvantaged?

She had to construct and develop a new paradigm of managing and leading in which the focus in the DoSA would be on continuous learning and knowledge production, integration of skills, development of multi-skilled staff, developing dynamic coalitions across the University, and focusing on collaborative advantage in the unit (Chattell, 1995). A strategic plan was needed that had to focus on: leadership (executive behaviour), context (vision, mission and strategy) and culture (beliefs, behaviours and assumptions). In the preparation of the entire team the Acting Executive Director had to adopt a framework for working with her team adapted from the work of Hackman (2002) depicted below:
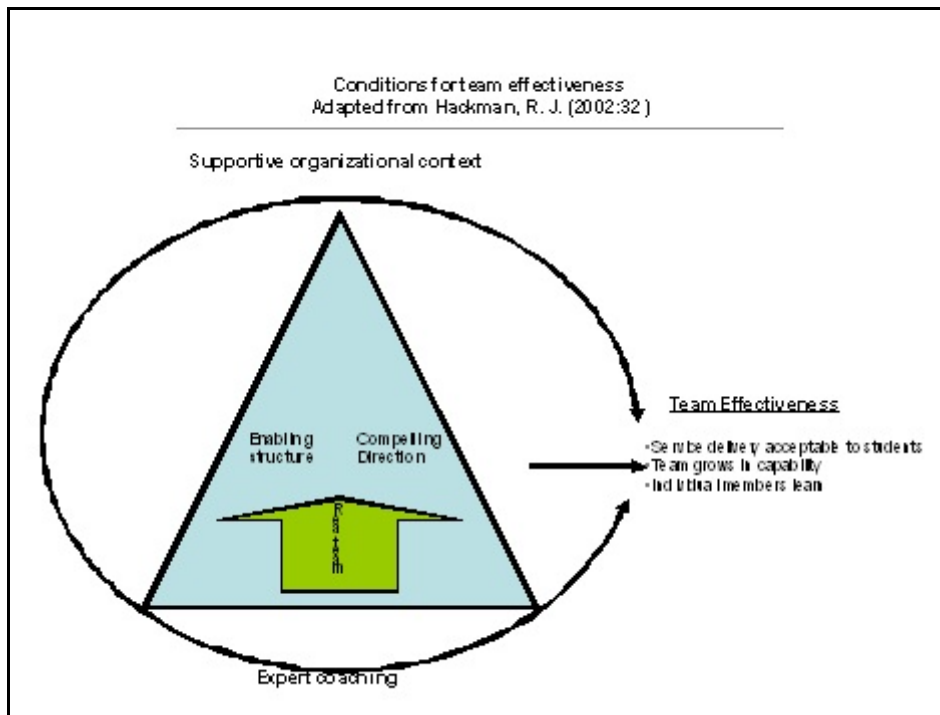
Emphasis had to be on developing a cohesive team that was effective. In the process, she had to develop her leadership skills and competencies so that she could develop a "capacity to influence others by unleashing their power and potential to impact the greater good" (Blanchard, 2007, p.xix) in the DoSA.

Her coaching, mentoring, guiding and leading styles and frameworks had to be enhanced considerably. Prompted by a sense of urgency and a clear and compelling vision, the Acting Executive Director developed a model of working with her team by adapting Hackman's (2002) framework, as depicted above. The main ingredients of this model are: an enabling structure that she had to develop; a compelling direction with a shared vision and mission among her staff and students; and an ability for expert coaching as a leader so

that she could focus on changing the culture of the DoSA by utilizing a number of learning models. In this regard, she drew heavily from the works of Takaeuchi and Nonaka (2002) on organizational knowledge creation; and Wenger (1998) on individuals learning as a community of practice. She also drew pointers from the work of Gallimore and Tharp (1990) on Vigotsky's Zone of Proximal Development in working with the team to a point where their performance moved from a stage where they are assisted by capable colleagues to a phase where the individual can now 'automize' the learning process in strategic planning and leading change. In the process the Acting Executive Director and her team adopted a meta-theoretical approach to the process of leading change in strategic planning in Student Affairs which will be discussed below.

Conceptualizing leadership and strategic planning in Student Affairs

Students are the core 'businesses' of higher education and training. A thorough knowledge of the composition and characteristics of the broad diversity of the student population, including expectations and dis/satisfactions, psychological/physical development, behaviour and motivation, is crucial for ensuring the development and administration of the programmes that promote student success (UNESCO, 2002). The leadership requirement in this case therefore related to 'expert' knowledge and understanding of students and their development. Through a careful analysis of existing data, the staff in the DoSA was required to develop a comprehensive and accurate socio-cultural picture of the student population and identify inadequate or missing information elements. The aim was to enable the team to effectively initiate appropriate action and inform campus administrators, faculty, student leaders, on the governance and nature of the student body (UNESCO, 2002). Data relating to these issues was gathered by means of surveys, focus group interviews and panel discussions. As indicated in our ethodology section this was a way of making sure that staff in the DoSA were actually involved in the collection of data and the development of better understanding of meanings that are generated through student and staff interactions.

The DoSA is one of the key components of the University whose main responsibility is adding value to the overall short, medium and long term strategic goals and plans of transforming a HWI. The main subdivisions of the DoSA at the University are Organized Student Life and Governance and

Student Accommodation. These two subdivisions were born out of the lengthy and ineluctable process of strategic task team preparation; student affairs alignment; and the integration and renewal that started in May 2004 and was concluded exactly three years later (May 2006).

The vision of the Student Affairs Division is to provide opportunities for an optimal University experience to all students. This vision and mission was developed in alignment with the University's strategic goal of 'a preferred student experience which is defined as 'to promote the holistic development of the student in preparation for the world of work and responsible citizenship'. In accordance with guidelines provided by the MEC and as a result of the Integration and Renewal Process, the DoSA was structured to add value to the goal of a preferred student experience in the following key areas that impact on the student and his or her life in the University:

- Organized Student Life and governance. (SRC, societies and student media);

- Student Community Service;

- Student Discipline; and

- Student Accommodation (physical facilities and residence life).

The Division consisted of four operational areas in which the team had to conceptualize a plan that would enable the creation of a sustainable market and stakeholder satisfaction within and outside the academy. The team's strategic architecture of efficiency and effectiveness in these four areas was the basis for internal process performance systems, divisional learning and growth to achieve overall institutional value, transformation and student satisfaction.

As the team developed its strategy, it was also important for it to remember that the university is committed to a process of global transformation in key areas of scholarship; competitive research, creativity and innovation in teaching and learning; and the whole process of curriculum reform and renewal. As a Division, the team had to make sure that their work enhanced this transformation agenda. Since the DoSA dealt with the largest university stakeholder group, it also had to make sure that its plan contributed to the development of an institutional ethos and a new culture within the academy so that key areas of employment equity; a multi racial and multi ethnic University can be anchored in an environment where all will feel a sense of belonging. As the team had to make sure that its focus was to be the needs of the student body and how the unit could work with this body so that the unit could learn,

develop and adopt requisite leadership skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes that will enhance its trajectory towards a transformed leadership culture and repertoires.

If the University is to achieve the transformational objectives of the South African Government, as articulated in the Education White Paper 3, then the DoSA has a pivotal role in bringing about enduring change in the University in terms of its strategies, leadership, structures, processes, culture, performance and outcomes. Since the DoSA is only responsible for the student life outside the classroom, it had to ensure that the student is prepared to take part in the academic, intellectual, moral, spiritual and physical life of the University. The intention is to eventually contribute to the development of human resources skills, knowledge and research that relates to such as the development of a non-racial, non-sexist society and the embracing of the democratic values that are enshrined in the South African constitution.

The role of the DoSA vision and mission

The Division's vision was used to guide the strategies, structures, processes and culture of the Division in achieving the broad goal of transformation in the University. The mission statement in the strategic planning process, on the other hand, was to:

- Exploit existing capabilities and develop new ones;

- Diversify sources of (energy) skills, competencies, tacit knowledge and experiences;

- Learn from previous mistakes and successes; and

- Plan and implement change carefully, holistically and in a participatory manner (Stadler, 2007).

In the process, the team was able to align strategies, processes, culture and performance, information architecture, organizational architecture, and its human resources management systems that it believes would enable the achievement of the desired transformation within the University.

Strategic profiling: SWOT in Student Affairs

The following is a brief presentation of the SWOT analysis that the unit then conducted:

Strengths

1.   Access to faculties and resources within the University.
2.   Qualified, competent, experienced staff with institutional memory.
3.   Ability to engage the SRC in national, regional and international students' movements.
4.   The existence of a variety of activities (intellectual, political, professional, physical, moral, social and spiritual) that students can be involved in on all campuses.
5.   A greater percentage of a student body that is in general well-disciplined, tolerant of diversity and accepting of change.
6.   High performance in some areas of student leadership.

Weaknesses

1.   Imbalanced racial student representivity in residences (e.g. one residence is 77% white and 23% black).
2.   Inadequate relevant professional qualifications and effective performance output amongst staff in the Student Affairs unit.
3.   Dispersion of campuses and new areas of operation (movement from one-dimensional to a matrix organization).
4.   Lack of research activities and therefore there is neither a publication nor a culture of sharing knowledge and skills in Student Affairs.
5.   Poor discipline in the areas of alcohol and substance abuse, academic integrity, and access control.
6.   Lack of standardized documents and procedures for engaging with student discipline across campuses.
7.   Insecure environments for students in all campuses.

Opportunities

1.   Location of the University in a big, financially prosperous and metropolitan city.
2.   Support from the MEC for Student Affairs.
3.   Willingness of external funders to support Student Affairs and the ability to source funding for worthy endeavours.
4.   Institutionalization of student leadership development programs.
5.   Ability to involve students in meaningful community engagement projects.

Threats

1.   Inadequate funds for students' and unit's activities.
2.   Inability to align with the University's strategic thinking.

3.   Politicization of student governance and poor student leadership.
4.   Diverse student body (race, class, gender, age, ethnicity, religion, political orientation, culture, personal attributes, learning styles, abilities, motivation, academic and personal preparedness for higher education) may result in tension, especially in residences.

The end result of the SWOT analysis was to develop a flexible strategic direction that enhanced the Division's ability to co-adapt to current changes and evolution over time, resilience in the face of setbacks, and ability to locate the constantly changing sources of advantages in Student Affairs and the University as a whole. In the process the team was able to be engaged in a continuous renewal process of reinventing itself as its circumstances changed. Hence, the Division was guided by the broad concept of institutional and student transformation in the strategic planning and implementation process especially a nexus of strategy, goals and tactics that engender unique roles of students as organic intellectuals as well as responsible and productive members of our current and future societies.

What emerged from the SWOT analysis was that there was a lack of professionalization, transformational leadership and a change strategy in Student Affairs which was a serious short coming that is affecting the team's other activities adversely.

Main strategic goal of the Division of Student Affairs

The main strategic goal we identified as being appropriate and promising success in guiding us realize the vision and mission of the university in both the short and long term is: to promote the holistic development of the student in preparing for the world of work and responsible citizenship. To achieve this strategic goal in both the short, medium and long term, the DoSA adopted a set of generic and unit specific strategic goals and strategies; key performance indicators (KPIs), and action plans for each unit to achieve their four main areas of strategic thrust. The three main strategic objectives that the team derived from this main goal after their strategic analyses are: (a) to provide optimal opportunities for student development and success; (b) to professionalize the DoSA; and (c) to develop and implement standardized policies and procedures. The strategic framework for achieving the institutional, divisional and unit goals was based on the 'strategy map template' developed by Norton and Kaplan (2004). It is an essential and flexible tool in managing and measuring the unit's goals and strategic objectives to achieve market value in the main areas of its strategic thrust. As a framework for creating stakeholder value, the strategy map focuses on the following key elements of the institution and the DoSA:

- Funding or the financial perspective (improved cost structure);
- Student and stakeholder perspective (customer value proposition);
- Internal perspective (operations, management, innovation); and
- Learning and growth perspective (culture, leadership, alignment).

These perspectives were then translated into an Action Plan with operational activities and time frames, responsibilities, costs, risks and mitigation strategies for each unit within the Division. It is through the action plans developed by all units in Student Affairs that the unit was able to translate the University's and Division's goals and strategies into 'action' by incorporating the following four elements (Pierce and Robinson, 1997, p.16):

- These action plans helped the team to identify specific functional tactics and actions to be undertaken on a weekly, monthly and quarterly basis;

- The action plans had clear time frames for completion and made it easy for the team to monitor themselves and check if they are achieving the global and strategic goals of the University as well as those of the DoSA;

- These action plans were able to assist the team in enhancing their degree of accountability by identifying the persons responsible for each action in the strategic plan; and

- Each action plan had one or more specific and immediate objectives that could be identified as outcomes that action generated.

For the team to be continuously capturing cross boundary synergies, it had to be involved in a systematic benchmarking process (especially of their performance) in order to create new standards and raise the bar in Student Affairs, (Ten Have, Ten Have, Stevens, Van der Elst and Pol-Coyne, 2003, p.22). That benchmarking process involved the following elements:

- Internal benchmarking with the university faculties and departments;

- Competitive benchmarking with the main competitors;

- Functional benchmarking with similar units in the higher education sector in general; and

- Generic benchmarking with commerce, industry and the public not for profit sector.

This is a continuous process that the team was involved in as they strived to achieve the mission and vision of the University. As a professional group of staff in Student Affairs, the team has to possess a conceptual and theoretical grasp of the ways in which difference is constructed in the university through various representations and practices that name, legitimize, marginalize and exclude the cultural capital and voices of subordinate groups among our student body (Giroux, 2006). The question is: does strategic planning, as

described in this paper, enhance or hinder the development of different voices and identities in the academy? In other words, is there room for a none instrumentalist rationality in the planning process of a university that is committed to transformation? Put differently, how does strategic planning as a rational and a supposedly neutral, apolitical and ahistorical process enhance the production of knowledge and power in the academy? As critical and postmodern theories would question: how are networks of power relations intertwined with knowledge, subjectivity and ideology through a rational planning process? These questions point to the need for a transformative and empowering approach to strategic planning and a social epistemology of learning.

Critical perspective on leadership, strategy and continuous change

The process of strategic planning is in essence a way of initiating, implementing and managing change in the academy. Our particular concern is with change that benefits the majority and in particular those that were historically marginalized during the apartheid era within student affairs. Foucault (1972 and 1980) would speak of 'rehabilitation of subjugated knowledges even in the process of strategic planning and leadership in the academy. Our focus therefore is with the manner in which power in the academy works through discursive practices and performances of strategic planning. In, as Badat (2006, p.90) argues, using a critical and post modern perspective to interrogate strategic planning in Student Affairs, our concern then was:

> with the mutual interaction between historical social structure and conjuncture conditioning human agency and how limits and constraints are set on social action and outcomes, while also providing possibilities and opportunities for the same.

Habermas (1971) emphasizes the same notion but then his analysis focuses on knowledge constitutive interests that are embedded in a process such as rational strategic planning in Student Affairs. However, for our purposes, we chose to move away from knowledge constitutive interests that are focused on power, control and technical rationality to a more transformative planning process that lies within the purview of a hermeneutic discourse in which knowledge is always mediated through pre-understanding. Furthermore, we needed to borrow from a post modern discourse so that the focus of the planning process was to be on "agency more correctly on the habitat in which agency operates and which it produces in the course of operation" (Bauman,

2002, p.431). Thus the process of strategic planning needs to be problematized so that we unpack the epistemologies and fundamental instabilities and interpretations that undergird that process. In such a post-structural analysis we de-center the subject so as to give historical specificity to the process of strategic planning and change management in Student Affairs and the University.

Planning then is stripped of its technical assumptions such as: predetermination, the objective and detached planner and formalization (Mintzberg, 1994). In this conceptual schema, Mintzberg, *et al.* (1998), argues that planning for successful change flows from learning, growth and development. If strategic planning is to be transformative and empowering, then we should see strategy as: a visionary process; a mental process; an emergent process; a process of negotiation; a collective process; a reactive process; and a process of reflective transformation (Mintzberg, *et al.*, 1998). Here we also see the need for a 'constructionist' approach to the process of strategic planning especially in reference to the role of managers in Student Affairs. Team members had to continually ask themselves questions that challenge their basic assumptions on which they act and strive to improve their own capacity for self-reflection. As such, strategic planning becomes a process in which managers and their subordinates are also concerned with the creation of multiple realities, testing and experimenting. This is why it is essential to borrow ideas from the field of organizational learning and the learning organization in this process.

Conclusion

The South African Institutions of Higher Education are, in line with related governmental calls, variously engaged in activities aimed at helping bring about a societal transformation that will find all the country's individuals enjoying equal rights and dignity. The starting point in this article is that the success of these activities is most likely to occur if their implementers do not rely on strategic planning exercises which are simplistically informed by neat technical and rationalistic underpinnings. What this means is that, for these activities to succeed, leadership needs to acknowledge the complexity of change and 'implementer' and 'beneficiary' meanings when planning for transformation strategies.

In this article we presented a dynamic and socially constructed strategic planning model whose development was informed by the above. At the core of this article was a critical biographical narrative regarding experiences by one

of the authors, and those of her colleague, as an Acting Chief Director of a university's Division of Student Affairs. The development of this unit's strategic plan for transformation was enabled by the inclusive and 'emancipatory' nature of leadership by this author. The success with which this dynamic strategic planning model is being implemented serves to illustrate the importance of this type of leadership, the adoption of the learning organization concept and stakeholder 'meanings' when planning for transformation strategies. This model's 'institutionalization' or continued success will thus depend on how leadership will be enabling in this regard and therefore calls for continued research in that respect.

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Kholeka Moloi
Kuzvinetsa Peter Dzvimbo
Faculty of Education
University of Johannesburg

kholekam@uj.ac.za
peterd@uj.ac.za

Thandi Ngcobo
Faculty of Education
University of the Western Cape

ngcobot9@ukzn.ac.za