

DEEPENING THE CONVERSATIONS

Practice Reflections on the
Institutional Culture Enlivening Process
at Nelson Mandela University

IIZE OLCKERS
Lead Facilitator



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2013 – 2017

Deepening the Conversations – Practice Reflections on the Institutional Culture
Enlivening Process at Nelson Mandela University 2013 – 2017

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OLD HOLY PLACES

*"The cared-for character
of the old stone churches,"
your mother said,
"is what I regret most.*

*"They tore them down and, instead,
gave us such ugly buildings
to worship in: to marry, to bury,
and take the Host."*

*And up in St Peter's ruins
we found the very font
where you were christened
- cracked sheer across:*

*and spirit spilt from your face.
Grasping for a human faith
you asked, "Could people want
to ruin this place?"*

Brian Walter

[from the series, "Port Elizabeth", published in "Mendi: Poems on the sinking of the Mendi" (Walter, Lagan & Somhlaho 2017: 44), and displayed in the South End Museum, Port Elizabeth]

*Our future is greater than our past ...
We are not defined by our failures ...
Past forms past perceptions
We have made these things
We can unmake them ...
We can all re-dream the world, our lives
We should begin to think anew.*

Ben Okri

[extracts from the poem, "Mental Fight" (Okri 2000)]

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FOREWORD



This project and other examples show that human agency makes a difference.



Derrick Swartz

Nelson Mandela University Vice-Chancellor

At this time in the higher education sector, it is contended that leadership commitment and the strategic choices leaders make, matter in how universities can be steered, even under difficult conditions of state underfunding and indifferent market forces, to make a difference in breaking the grip of inter-generational deprivation and inequality.

Moreover, the strength of our “open” university systems, has meant that academics and administrators often show amazing creativity and innovation in fostering all manner of social experiments aimed at breaking down barriers, empowering others, foregrounding the causes of marginalised voices, new curricula, teaching and learning innovations, and research projects focusing on inequality in and beyond the university system. There are many examples replete with really promising local inclusive education innovations over the past two decades; one of which is our own Institutional Culture Enlivening Process (ICEP).

This project and other examples show that human agency makes a difference.

There are, in my view, two major inter-generational challenges facing South African universities – one, historical, and the other, socio-cultural. The historical challenge involves the legacies which our generation risks bequeathing to future generations – the democratic project’s unfinished journey, and its failure to translate the political freedoms secured in 1995 into substantive transformations in the economic and social order.

The ICEP project was one of our attempts to rise to this challenge and to convene difficult and transformative conversations about what is unfinished from the past.

The socio-cultural challenge of our time involves the growing gap between our generation – who now run the social and economic institutions of society – and the new generations coming into universities. One thing which the recent crisis in higher education made patently clear to me has been the massive cultural and social chasm between students and university administrators, a con-

FOREWORD

text in which we were truly “lost in translation” – in arguments about how best to understand and explain the core problems and its solutions.

During the height of the #FeesMustFall crisis, sitting in endless mass meetings, it felt at times like we were unable to find common ground from which to see the same world. It seems to me that if we are to succeed in breaking the grip of an unequal and undemocratic inter-generational heritage, we must urgently find each other; build alliances based on mutual trust and understanding; of being common and equal stakeholders in a system whose success depends crucially on cooperative existence and governance; and in which students and staff need to co-create common futures.

It is these competencies, skills and orientations that universities need more than ever. This was the second dimension of the ICEP project: To offer into our institution new paradigms for organisational change and leadership approaches, new ways of being and doing that emphasise active listening, enable participation, ensure diversity of voices, co-create our future and ultimately, create the conditions in which we can live more closely into our vision, mission and values.

The ICEP process created new spaces for these emerging voices to collaborate with us to rethink curricula across the disciplinary environment; explore new teaching and learning methodologies and pedagogies; as well as new work practices and ways of re-imagining our future as Nelson Mandela University.

Arguably, we survived the extinction threats of the last Ice Age because of our ability to combine our competitive spirits with our cooperative genius, our acquired sense of solidarity, compassion and instinctive sense of fairness, and how we have learnt to exist in harmony with each other and our natural environment. The threats of the coming Age will require us to do this again with much more intentionality and consciousness and some of the approaches and skills embedded in the experiment of the ICEP project will be foundational to this next journey.

Derrick Swartz



INTRODUCTION



Today, we are all in a different time and space with great opportunity for a re-conceptualisation of a “new university” more responsive to societal needs – locally, nationally and globally.



Allan Zinn

Institutional Culture Enlivening Project (ICEP) Project Manager, Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD) at Nelson Mandela University, and CANRAD Occasional Publications Series Editor

The publication of this book, authored by ICEP lead facilitator, Ilze Olckers, provides a perspective on and insight into the praxis employed in advancing a progressive transformative space at our university between 2013 and 2017. The target group was staff – academic, and professional and support staff – who needed to better-understand, appreciate and action change within themselves, and their unit, faculty or division – so that we could be more responsive to student needs.

For many, the ICEP project was a defining period, especially for “people on the margins”, as they struggled to be accepted into the mainstream of a university previously controlled by *Broederbond* Afrikaner-culture. A rupture with the old colonial, segregationist outlook was needed. There was always tension with a “slowly, slowly catches the monkey” approach as we needed to enrol broader layers to effect meaningful institutional transformation. The advent of #FeesMustFall late in 2015 provided the impetus to really slough off the lingering apartheid decay.

Today, we are all in a different time and space with great opportunity for a re-conceptualisation of a “new university” more responsive to societal needs – locally, nationally and globally.

At the start of the project in 2013, CANRAD gladly accepted the challenge of being a “container” for ICEP, as we believed the work would also advance one of our aims and objectives, namely: “To strategically facilitate the integration of scholarship and transformative action relating to the advancement of non-racialism and democracy”.

It was always a pleasure engaging with Ilze Olckers in our monthly management and quarterly reference group meetings, as she proved to be an experienced and deeply-reflective facilitator who continuously challenged pre-conceived notions. She was hard on herself and prepared thoroughly for each process and engagement. Although it was not always easy operating across the East-

INTRODUCTION

ern and Western Cape divide, the professional functioning of the local ICEP office compensated when queries were raised.

The big challenge for us now is to see how much internal traction continues with regard to ICEP-type processes within the university, without the specialised support systems that such processes require. Ilze herself offers some commentary in this regard, in this book.

The end of this ICEP five-year phase coincides with the coming into office of the Chair in the Centre for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation. One trusts that lessons gleaned from the ICEP period 2013 – 2017 will be taken up structurally going forward.

This third publication in the CANRAD Occasional Publications Series follows that of “Dr Beyers Naude: Afrikaner Turned Freedom Fighter” (March 2017) and “Steve Bantu Biko Lives: The Quest for a Human Face” (September 2017). The fourth will commemorate the life of George Botha, a school teacher at Paterson High, who was murdered in detention at the Sanlam Building in December 1976.

Enjoy the book!

Allan Zinn



INSTITUTIONAL REFLECTIONS



The accelerated pace of change requires novel approaches to managing complexity, contradictions and uncertainty



Reflections on Vision 2020 and the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process

Heather Nel

Institutional Reflections by Prof Heather Nel, Senior Director: Office for Institutional Planning, and Custodian of Vision 2020

Globally, higher education institutions have to navigate increasingly complex and uncertain terrains because of phenomena such as globalisation, international ranking, shrinking government funding, and demands to widen access.

The accelerated pace of change requires novel approaches to managing complexity, contradictions and uncertainty. Planning – if done imaginatively – can be a powerful tool to encourage the emergence of innovative ideas, strive towards a shared mission and vision, and foster a transformative institutional culture.

At Nelson Mandela University, the crafting of an aspirational 10-year Vision 2020 strategic plan was initiated by Vice Chancellor, Prof Derrick Swartz, in 2008 and approved by Council in 2010, following extensive stakeholder engagement. Formulating Vision 2020 provided a unique opportunity to define the university's distinctive academic purpose and identity, and to determine strategic priorities that would catalyse substantive transformation, especially as it relates to designing curricula that embed diverse knowledge paradigms to prepare graduates as democratic citizens with adaptive expertise and a critical consciousness.

One of the core strategic priorities embedded in Vision 2020 is to develop and sustain a transformative institutional culture that optimises the full potential of staff and students. As part of co-creating such an institutional culture, the university invested considerable strategic funding to implement a pioneering "institutional culture enlivening process" (ICEP) over a five-year period commencing in 2013.

Through the expert facilitation of the lead facilitator and her team, employees in various domains of the university have been encouraged to "deepen the conversations" to grapple with complex issues relating to power, privilege, inequality, social justice, and – more recently – decolonisation. This transversal culture change process has used innovative methods to gear the university system for the emergence of transformative change, inspired by a collective vision of possibilities as articulated in Vision 2020.

INSTITUTIONAL REFLECTIONS

To create the conditions for whole-scale transformative change in any living system, such as a university, it is important to cultivate a culture of learning and trust through conversation. To this end, ICEP engaged various parts of the university system in sustained conversations to elevate levels of interconnectivity, shared identity and purpose, and collective capacity among diverse organisational stakeholders. This, in turn, contributes to sustainable self-organising change.

Over time, conversations become engrained in an organisation's beliefs, values, norms, culture, and strategy. In this way, intentionally changing the qualities of conversation, including who talks to whom, when, where, why, about what, and in what way is an important vehicle for transformative change. This non-linear theory of change is rooted in the complexity paradigm, which acknowledges that an organisation is an adaptive living system capable of developing unexpectedly creative solutions when it is in the state of disequilibrium, referred to by some as the edge of chaos (Stacey 2000). The simultaneous conditions of order and disorder, certainty and uncertainty, autonomy and interdependence, are powerful sources of energy and creative potential for the emergence of transformative change (Stacey 1996; Wheatley 2006). This approach suggests a new perspective for thinking about organisational transformation. Instead of planned interventions in which leaders move an organisation from an existing state through a period of transition toward predetermined strategic outcomes, change is described as an ongoing process of meaningful and generative conversations where purposeful outcomes are jointly created by diverse members of the system.

University leaders are confronted with the ambiguity and turbulence arising from rapidly changing economic, social, political and technological environments. As such, they are ready to experiment with optimal ways to enhance their capacity for sustainable growth and inclusive development. An important condition for sustaining and consolidating emergent organisational change that has evolved organically, is the need to reflect upon and learn from the rich experiences of various stakeholders who have been immersed in culture change interventions, such as ICEP. By harnessing the reflections of the lead facilitator, this publication makes an important contribution to the sense-making required to "connect the gains" of a largely intangible culture change process within a complex living system. In time, this can be amplified through further research capturing the observations of those who have participated in these transformative processes.

Heather Nel



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ilze Olckers

Lead Facilitator

As the symbol of the spiral or fractal has been living within this project since its inception, I may invoke it one more time to express my gratitude and recognition of the role of so many people in contributing to this social experiment that has been the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process (ICEP).

If I were to start on the outer rim of this spiral, I would acknowledge (as I do again in chapter 1), the visionary leadership of Nelson Mandela University's Vice-Chancellor, Prof Derrick Swartz. Those words – visionary leadership – are often used flippantly, rolling off the tongue. In this case, however, it is indeed true. And that is a rare and precious thing.

While Prof Swartz had the vision for the project and motivated for the allocation of resources necessary to support it, he also understood so many of its dimensions in a way one doesn't often encounter in leadership: dimensions like the nature of complex processes, the non-linearity of the unfolding of the project, the difficulty with issues of causality when needing to connect some of the gains



of the project (when working with a complexity paradigm, it is not possible to work with a direct line of causality and say “x caused y – and therefore had this kind of impact”), the sometimes contradictory nature of the interests of the different publics the university serves, the tolerance for paradigm clashes (opposing world views) among some of the senior leaders in the institution, the tensions between personal change and structural institutional changes, and the challenges of attempting to do work that positions one as an “outlier” among others. He also had the courage of his convictions when it came to issues of insourcing and looking at the question of access to quality education for previously disadvantaged students, the creation of a different model of medical school and other innovations within the university space over the past years. He was also willing to adopt a genuine “learning orientation” – albeit a robust and critical one – to the processes we



*You can't remake the world
Without remaking yourself
Each new era begins within
It is an inward event
With unsuspected possibilities
For inner liberation
Only free people can make a free world.*

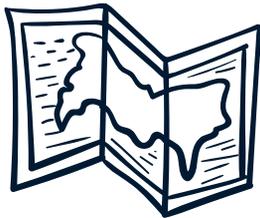
- Ben Okri [extracts from the poem, “Mental Fight” (Okri 2000)]

introduced as part of ICEP into the Extended Management Committee (EMANCO) space. He supported the putting away of computers for the duration of our retreats, partook in the knee-to-knee listening exercises, embraced the circle and cafe conversations, and generally set a tone and “created a container” within which we could pursue the methodologies and technologies we knew would “deepen the conversations”.

However, from 1 May to 31 December 2016, during the height of the 2016 #FeesMustFall period, Dr Sibongile Muthwa stood in as the Acting Vice-Chancellor, as Vice-Chancellor Prof Swartz was on special assignment leave. Her leadership during this time embodied everything our project aspired towards. She explicitly and intentionally invoked the principle of collective leadership with her senior team. She displayed grace, kindness and humour under pressure, as well patience, endurance and fearlessness. She kept

her heart open and the police and other security forces off our campuses for as long as was humanly possible. She maintained a “listening orientation” throughout; a lasting image I have of her during this time is sitting bent forward in her chair, her elbows resting on her knees, her face serene and composed, in concentrated active listening. *Namaste**, Dr Muthwa.

Prior to and following these times, she held the portfolio of Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Institutional Support, where she led a complete repositioning and realignment of the work of this large complex, male-dominated division.



“Fellow journeyers along the way. Thank you.”



But before the ICEP story unfolded, before ever meeting Prof Swartz or Dr Muthwa, we need to go back in time to a day in August or September of 2009, and to Nino’s Restaurant in Klipfontein Road, Cape Town, where I met Prof Denise Zinn – who was then the Dean of Education at Nelson Mandela University – to talk about a possible renewal and transformation process for her faculty. That meeting set in motion a series of events that eventually led to the ICEP process. It was her leadership stance that made it possible for something like ICEP to come into being in the first place. It was a stance of “not knowing” exactly what was needed but having the courage to experiment with something completely new. Prof Zinn was the original “leader-as-host” in the Margaret Wheatley (1992) sense of the word. She was willing to create a space that served as the bridge between the work demands of her faculty colleagues, and the need for a compelling, meaningful, socially-just and relevant vision for their work and their faculty. She was the initiator of humanising pedagogies as an educational philosophy in the classroom at Nelson Mandela University and also the pioneer of exploring humanising pedagogies and practices in the university’s organisational life.

Scattered around Prof Swartz, Dr Muthwa and Prof Zinn, are the special friends of the ICEP project. You will know who you are: staff members and some students who developed a loyalty over the years, not only to what the project stood for, but also to us; they saw our humanity as the ICEP team, our striving to do the right thing and to do it right. They supported us, forgave us, teased us, and showed up at every workshop session with the kind of unconditional positive regard that makes group-process magic possible. Among these friends of the ICEP project are also my former partner in “embrace”, Rejane Williams, with whom much of the core work of transformation practice was conceptualised and prototyped over the past 10 years, and who was always available for a supervision conversation. I also want to acknowledge Erica Coetzee and Sue Soal, who in our small informal supervision

These were moments when our transformation journey recovered its “human face”, in the words of many African scholars, as we celebrated together the gains and breakthroughs as well as shared the despair and the long road still ahead.

**Transformation
comes more
from pursuing
profound
questions
than seeking
practical
answers.**

– Peter Block



group and in some of our ICEP workshop spaces, helped carry the spirit of the project and, through their own gifted and specialised expertise, helped birth certain key aspects of our work. Fellow journeyers along the way. Thank you.

Further along the outer rim of our gratitude spiral, supporting and guiding our work over all the years, was our Reference Group, who met every quarter from the first informally-convened session in April 2012 while we were still in the contracting phase of the project. At our final Reference Group meeting in November 2017, we would have met together 16 times over the years. And every time we gathered was, for us, a quarterly milestone, a reflective moment within our action/reflection cycle and one we looked forward to and depended upon for the responsiveness, coherence and resilience of the project. Often the check-in rounds of these sessions were deeply meaningful moments of reflection on where we had been during the previous term or semester, and how far we had come; the complex challenges and wicked questions we were facing as an institution, and the most impactful or “elegant” responses (in a mathematical sense) ICEP could offer the system at the time. We often worked with Donella Meadows’s concept of “getting the beat of the system” and Otto Scharmer’s idea of “sensing into the field” (Scharmer 2009). These were moments when our transformation journey recovered its “human face”, in the words of many African scholars, as we celebrated together the gains and breakthroughs as well as shared the despair and the long road still ahead.

Taking a turn now into the first seam of the inner shell of the spiral, we come to our Project Team who met from time to time to make important practical project decisions. This team consisted of Allan Zinn, our Project Manager, Prof Heather Nel, our Management Committee (MANCO) representative and Dr Laura Best, Special Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor. I express my gratitude to this team, who never wavered in their loyalty and dedication to this project: To Laura, who was our “portal” to the Vice-Chancellor and who brought to our project her own extraordinary intellect, a decades-long, deep understanding of social activism,

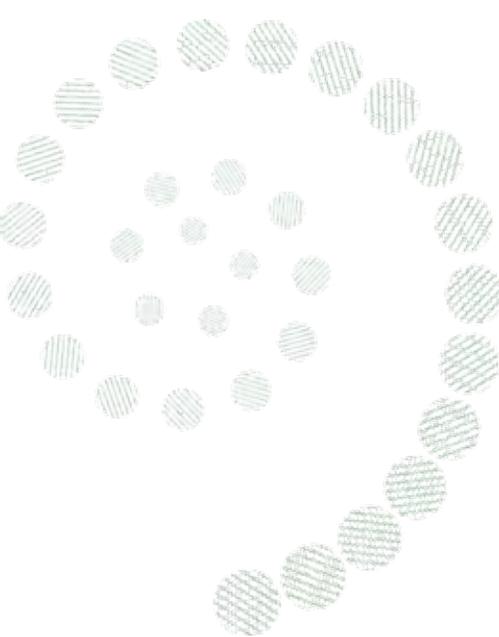
To get lost *is to* learn the way

African Proverb



and an all-consuming passion and commitment to social and organisational justice – not forgetting her wicked sense of humour. And to Heather, who remained the “still point” of due diligence, good governance, correct protocols and utmost professionalism throughout our journey, including all our reporting and budgeting cycles. The way in which Heather, as the key institutional person responsible for the strategic planning function of the university, and as the one person in the system with transversal powers across the different domains of the university, worked closely with us, embraced the ICEP process and immersed herself in the new organisational paradigms of planning and development, was one of the most enabling and gratifying parts of this work. She had to straddle the tensions between regulatory compliance at a national departmental level and the different language and discourses that formed part of our social experiment. She did so graciously and rigorously, all the while handling multiple strategic projects and managing and guiding her own office through its own renewal process. When our continuity facilitation journey within the EMANCO space came to an end in October 2014, Heather resumed responsibility for the EMANCO retreats, together with Laura, in a way that embedded some of our approaches, methodologies and technologies to further develop the kind of workplace community we had envisaged with our EMANCO processes.

Moving a little further and deeper around the spiral seam of the inner shell, we come to Allan Zinn, our Project Manager. He is a struggle stalwart, utterly committed to non-racialism, and one of a select group of truly feminist men, who helped reposition the university within the Metro of Port Elizabeth and its surrounding communities. In his role as Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD), he has led the intellectual process of convening difficult dialogues and critical consciousness colloquia, and coordinated initiatives such as Diversity Month, Africa Week and CANRAD’s various annual memorial lecture series. He has little tolerance for too much uncertainty and too much complexity and kept us on the straight and narrow with incisive questions, clear directives and firm boundaries when they were necessary. He was always available to hear us out on difficult topics and decisions and offer practical wisdom. Initially, our project was also housed within the CANRAD offices and then in the same building on North Campus, until we moved to the university’s Bird Street Campus at the beginning of 2016. Allan was the one who had to sign off on all the requisitions and as line manager, oversee much of the project administration. He had the unenviable task of ultimately being responsible for our project management, while trusting and working with an itinerant



Issues of institutional culture and honouring NMMU women

A truly transformative culture

IN June we hosted the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process's annual Immersion Training Retreat where 40 staff and students jointly deliberated on the ongoing challenges of transformation and decolonisation at NMMU.

It was a difficult and moving experience as we listened to both students and staff speak their pain and frustration at the slow pace of change and, as we now look back on the events of this term, it seems almost inevitable that something radical and profoundly disruptive needed to happen.

In August we celebrated Women's Month, and as we come to the end of a tumultuous 2016, we specifically want to honour the women of NMMU.

September celebrates our diverse and collective South African 'heritage' while at the same time the call for the 'decolonisation' of our curricula and institutional practices picked up momentum, while October is the anniversary of the first FMF disruptions on our campus a year ago.

This year it hit NMMU hard, with weeks of tension and trauma on and beyond our campus boundaries. All of these events, locally, nationally and globally, asks of us to renew our efforts and the urgency towards a truly transformative institutional culture. Is it possible for us to harness all of these energies and to turn all the sacrifices of 2016 into the rich compost of a fertile new beginning in 2017?

On 9 August, I noticed the 'Google Doodle' celebrating our Women's March in 1954 led by the iconic line-up of four diverse women and I thought again of the role South Africa has played, globally, for social justice and women's rights. On some of our sister campuses gender issues reached fever pitch in 2016 and on our own campus we had to deal with awful incidents of gender



*DISCUSSIONS ... Among this year's 40 staff and students attending the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process's annual Immersion Training Retreat were Arts and Culture's **Nicki-Ann Rayepen** (from left), Candice Morkel, Arts and Culture's **Kelly Felix** and Communication and Stakeholder Liaison's **Andrew Kock**.*

violence.

I am thinking of the powerful leadership of so many women within our NMMU community. The strong female student voices. The women workers in the reintegration process and in our unions. The new generation of young women academics who are dancing with their dual citizenship of the new millennium, as well as the legacy of the "colonial" academy of which they form part.

I am thinking of our female

I am so moved by the leadership these women (supported of course by their male colleagues) have shown during these difficult and contested times. To balance the right to protest, and the right to be safe and unharmed on our campuses. Recognising the need for relentless dialogue and any strategy for the de-escalation of violence on campus, with the right of the police to independently enter our campuses and act according to their own protocols. Not only striving

their newly-discovered power, are still learning the responsibilities that come with power. How to create something more just, more fair, more inclusive, more humanising with that power.

Many staff are fearful of the future, intimidated, enraged and on the brink of burn-out as we witnessed in our processes and during the weeks of disruptions and disrespect; while at the same time rising to the occasion, displaying resilience, adaptive expertise, commitment and compassion beyond what anyone could have expected from them.

The scenarios we are facing are forcing us to confront extremely "wicked" questions – questions of complexity with no clear cut answers.

How do we do accelerate and fast-track deep transformation with fewer resources? How do we do more integrated planning in a time of even greater uncertainty? How do we create more inclusive, innovative, responsive processes within a bureaucracy and still adhere to good governance? How do we provide more meaningful and relevant information to our whole NMMU community to help shape our collective future? How do we co-create a different future from the ones predicted by all the worst case scenarios that currently abound?

"It is only seems impossible, until it is done."

It has taken extraordinary courage, wisdom and compassion to balance the demands of students and parents who insist on their right to study; and the voices of students who insist that education has to be suspended to confront the enormity of the structural and attitudinal challenges of inequality and exclusion that face us as a nation, writes Ilze Olckers.

lecturers and professors who pioneer community-based engagement strategies and inspire students in their classrooms and beyond, the women HODs and DOSs who work their hearts out to keep our academic project going, as well as nurture human relations and new curricula.

I am thinking of all the professional women responsible for a range of critical support services, finance, risk-management, communications, facilities management, IT and more. Our first female Director of Sport and our Executive Director: HR, as well as all the administrative support women and of course all the women in senior leadership, led by our extraordinary Acting VC, **Dr Sibongile Muthwa**.

daily towards containing the situation on campus, but at the same time preparing various court papers and legal battles, as well as keeping the mind-boggling range of institutional issues relating to the academic recovery project in mind at all times.

As predicted, these are really difficult times. Realities have hit home. The financial situation and status of the entire Higher Education sector is on a knife edge. We have heard and read about hate speech and actions. Micro-aggressions and systemic injustices continue too as we have witnessed in the "Case for Change" conversation in PE and in George.

Many students, emboldened by



lead facilitator who was mostly off-site (being Cape Town-based), and a Project Administrator who worked flexi-time on a different campus, in a project whose purpose was often to disrupt and challenge the *status quo*.

Many hours were spent in his office over these past five years, chewing over the next phase of our work. In the words of Nancy Kline (2005), Allan was our most consistent “thinking partner” and sounding board along the way.

The next most intimate partners of the ICEP project were our team of external facilitator colleagues and, in particular, Sharon Munyaka, Desiree Paulsen and Hanna Kotze. We also want to acknowledge Zola Ntsimango and Gary Koekemoer, who assisted us on special occasions. It is Sharon, Desiree and Hanna’s commitment to Nelson Mandela University, Vision 2020 and social and organisational justice more broadly that sustained their involvement with the ICEP project. It was not, sadly, the nurturing, holistic and integrative way in which we as a team worked and learnt together! This was one of the areas of the project where my own blind spots

These were moments when our transformation journey recovered its “human face”, in the words of many African scholars, as we celebrated together the gains and breakthroughs as well as shared the despair and the long road still ahead.

prevented me from advocating more vigorously for additional resources that would have enabled reflection and sense-making time within our team of external facilitators. We were always working with the tension of, on the one hand, employing independent consultants, due to the high level of skill and expertise this work required, the usefulness of the “outsider/insider” approach in these facilitation settings, and the need for our work as a “facilitation team” to align and cohere in terms of our “theory of change”, design elements, social technologies and core curriculum; and, on the other hand, our fiduciary duty to spend public resources on building internal leadership and facilitation capacity within the existing system.

As a result, our external facilitators were called in to facilitate and sometimes co-facilitate discrete pieces of work in the system,

without ever feeling sufficiently embedded within, and familiar with, our overall change project. We thank them for never being completely discouraged by this, and for continuing to show their fullest humanity and commitment for each piece of work. I thank them for bearing so graciously with my control tendencies to have an input into every workshop design, and every PowerPoint presentation, and every question posed on every PowerPoint slide in every session! And then to make only the scantest of time for their need to de-brief and grow in their own practice afterwards.

In particular, I want to acknowledge Sharon, who was tasked with the bulk of the facilitation work, as an alumnus of Nelson Mandela University, an organisational psychologist and Positive Organisations scholar, a brilliant young black woman, who was willing to skill herself in transformation practice, and experiment with our approaches and methodologies. She willingly stepped into potentially triggering spaces and managed to work with self-awareness and self-care doing this very difficult work, and has committed to continue to support the university on its transformation journey going forward.

As we now round the second curve of the spiral leading us toward the innermost space of the project, I need to acknowledge Claire Dullisear, our project's first administrative support person from March 2013 to May 2014; Deronique Hoshe, our most recent

*Change
Reshaping concepts
Re-imagining renewing redirection
It is a painful process
Transformation*

Immersion 2016

intern (2016 to 2017); and Harsheila Riga, our project coordinator from July 2014 onwards. At the beginning of 2013, we were pretty desperate to get the project going but required a significant degree of administrative support to do so, as the very nature of the project was to convene conversational sessions, which entailed manifold logistics. Claire attended one of our very first sessions in January as a staff member, part of the Governance Administration team. She was one of a few dynamic young women in that team



**A single stick
may smoke,
but
it will not burn**

African Proverb

who were just itching to live into more of their potential – and when we advertised for the position, she applied. At the time, the project was in its formative stages and Claire had to improvise and innovate in terms of setting up systems, developing relationships in the university, figuring out how to best support me as lead facilitator in setting up workshop spaces, preparing the workshop materials and recording the sessions without being intrusive. On top of that I was only on-site for a limited number of days a month and she had to work unsupervised and self-directed. It was a big “ask” of a young colleague and she managed so well we had to fight off multiple attempts by other domains in the institution to recruit her. Eventually, she was offered a great opportunity in another section of the university, which had much more promise and profile in terms of her own career trajectory. And we were left in a difficult situation, a month before our annual immersion retreat at Cape St Francis Resort, with logistical challenges that would intimidate a seasoned professional! But, as the project was conceived on a fortuitously auspicious Leap Day, and as we must have had ancestral and other forms of invisible support, we were about to get very lucky. We urgently advertised for a replacement and the most qualified candidate, Harsheila Riga, was available immediately on the basis of a short six-month contract, to help us out and for her to see if she enjoyed the work and could manage its requirements with her family and other obligations. And the rest, as they say, is ICEP history.

Since July 2014, Harsheila was not only the “face” of the project on campus and in the university as a whole, and the “voice” of the project over the phone to everyone we engaged with over the years, coordinating and holding all the operations of the project together; but she also held the “spirit” of the project in her being.

She held both a compassionate and empathetic stance, essential for working with a broad range of internal stakeholders and individuals, and faced each day with professionalism and forthrightness, that helped contain often difficult situations. She was consistent in her documenting and archiving of all the different data sources and materials that have made up this project over the years, and ensured the smooth unfolding of every single process since that very first immersion retreat a mere 10 days after she took the job.

She handled the budgets and cost centres, and did all the liaising with the external facilitation team for all their processes. She knew every possible venue in which an ICEP-style process could be convened for any number of participants and was first in line with the caterers (thank you to Rory Nevin and his team) when it



came to workshop refreshments. And she mostly did this for multiple processes at a time. She handled all our travel and accommodation, including workshop participants from George Campus or additional out-of-town facilitators. On top of this, she was “connected” in every possible sense of the word and regularly scanned websites and other media for relevant readings or inspiration for our work. She never complained about Sunday evening emails and last-minute requests for workshop materials when insights only came to me at the eleventh hour. She tolerated my almost pathological need to postpone every decision to the very last possible moment to allow as many conditions to ripen and facts or insights to gather as was possible before finally making a call. As mentioned in the body of these reflections, a large part of the “enrolling” and cajoling of staff into ICEP processes fell to our office and the bulk of this work fell to Harsheila. She also managed our interns and, in particular, Deronique Hoshe, who was a great help to her these last two years and did such good work, way beyond her years and experience.



Finally, nestled at the heart-core of the spiral, is my family, my husband Stef and sons Arusha and Bodhi, to whom I came home after every trip to Port Elizabeth. Years of year-planners stuck on the side of the fridge with “PE” written in thick black koki pen into every month. Thank you, all three, for believing in Vision 2020 and in Nelson Mandela University as much as I did, for sharing the “agony and the ecstasy” of this work and for saving the pillow fights for when I was away.

In the end, says American author Byron Katie, the most intimate relationship we can ever have is with our own thoughts. I am grateful to my spiritual and conscious contemplative work practices that enable me to take a “witness” position to my own thoughts as much as I am able to sustain it, to stay alert to synchronicities and messages from different dimensions, and to trust my intuition as my highest form of knowing.

Any merit, I dedicate.**

Ilze Olckers

*Namaste: A Hindu greeting meaning: “I see the divine in you.”

**Any merit, I dedicate: A Buddhist practice meaning: any good that comes from what I have done, I share with others.

CHAPTER

01



*With us,
things must have a beginning ...
Here, now is an origin
Let's be wonderfully awake
For what we are going to create,
To make happen,
In this mass co-scripting
Of the future*

Ben Okri
[extracts from the poem, "Mental Fight" (Okri 2000)]

Background to the **INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE ENLIVENING PROJECT (ICEP)**

My first formal meeting with the Vice Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellors at Nelson Mandela University¹ took place on 29 February 2012.

Until writing these reflections, I did not realise that this meeting took place on a Leap Day in a Leap Year. As someone who would not disregard the symbolic significance of this kind of temporal synchronicity, I had to do a quick Internet search on the possible meanings of this auspicious beginning. The (albeit selective) reading on the Internet revealed it to be a day of significant spiritual power, explaining that this rare numerological occurrence alludes to a feminine energy that helps us birth our creations and bring ideas into the physical world. Because it only presents itself every four years, it is like a portal that opens up and we can allegedly create a ripple effect into the future. The numerological energies of the day apparently combine the impulses of healing and teaching.

Just like the breath-taking rainbow over Missionvale Campus on the morning of our launch as Nelson Mandela University on 20 July 2017, the date of the conception of this project was, in retrospect, recognised as a blessing, one which inspired a most extraordinary work/life journey over the last five years.

The reflections on this work/life journey are written in what Sam Wells and Josie McLean (2013) call “an unapologetically subjective” voice. It constitutes my institutional memory, practice reflections and questions as the lead facilitator of the project over the five-year period. It is the only way I could authentically wrestle this dynamic and unfolding social experiment into the written word. But it is not the only or most vital version or narrative of this story. A “multi-perspectival” sense-making and reflection is essential to realise a more meaningful, more layered, more complete version of these events.

Transformation

Messy

Challenging,
Provoking,
Invigorating

Open up your mind

Renewal

Communication and
Stakeholder Liaison
August 2015

¹ In July 2017, the university was relaunched as Nelson Mandela University, after 12 years (2005 to 2017) as Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (which came about through the merging of the University of Port Elizabeth, PE Technikon and Vista University). For ease of reading, it will be referred to as Nelson Mandela University.



This, together with his unequivocal commitment to a truly transformative university, created the environment in which we could begin to experiment with deep organisational change.

During the writing of this story, I remained true to the journaling instructions we gave to participants in all our processes, namely writing to discover, rather than merely to capture what I thought I already knew. I also included the personal and scary bits. The structure of the writing, as it emerged, resembled more of a spiralling in and out – often going back and forth, covering the same themes from a slightly different angle – than a linear chronological process. In this way, it perhaps mirrors some of the process itself. Hopefully the inherent “order” will emerge for you as you read, in ways that are meaningful to you.

We (the ICEP team) have also attempted to gather up some of the elements and artefacts that made up our processes, such as poems, proverbs and pictures that say something about the living dynamic nature of the ICEP journey. To capture something of the “institutional voice”, we have inserted, in between the practice reflections, our ICEP submissions to the *Talk@NMMU* newsletters over the period 2014 to 2016.

But let’s get back to that first meeting.

My understanding is that this meeting was at least partly inspired by the ongoing feedback and reports that Prof Denise Zinn – the university’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Teaching and Learning and former Dean of Education – had brought into the leadership space of the institution, about the transformation journey we had embarked on in the Faculty of Education over a two-year period, from late 2009 to 2011.

The impulse for the institution-wide ICEP project therefore came, in part, from the Faculty of Education’s *Re-visioning Journey*, which started with the arrival of Prof Zinn, as the new Executive Dean of Education in mid-2009.

By 2009, Vice-Chancellor Prof Derrick Swartz had been in office for just over a year. Both his background in the trenches of the mass democratic movement and his rare intellect as a radical sociologist provided him with a deep understanding of the complexity of organisational change. This, together with his unequivocal commitment to a truly transformative university, created the environment in which we could begin to experiment with deep organisational change.

At the time, the university’s Vision 2020 document, a visionary framework for the young, newly-merged Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, was in its final phases of being crafted by many different task teams in the university.

Historical context of Nelson Mandela University

It goes beyond the scope of these reflections to delve into the full historic and extraordinary journey of Nelson Mandela University as a peculiarly-South African higher education institution.

In short, we find one of its origins as the *Broederbond*-established, apartheid-era response to the domination of the more liberal Rhodes University in Grahamstown, in the Eastern Cape. With the establishment of the University of Port Elizabeth (as it was originally named) on 31 January 1964, it was the country's first dual-medium residential university and was allegedly intended to provide an alternative home for for white Afrikaans- and English-speaking students ... who did not associate with the ethos of Rhodes University during the height of the apartheid years.

Madness
Constant change
Learning, searching, trusting
Entering the unknown reality
Courage

Immersion 2016

It offered an academic orientation similar to the University of Pretoria, described so eloquently by Prof Jonathan Jansen in his seminal narrative on transformation in higher education, "Knowledge in the Blood" (2009), as including a combination of fundamentalist pedagogy, and an authoritarian and patriarchal culture of compliance and obedience.

This was followed, after the arrival of democracy in our country 30 years later, with the subsequent incorporation of Vista University, which was based in Missionvale township, into the University of Port Elizabeth (known as UPE), and the merger process with the multi-campus Port Elizabeth Technikon, to form one of Higher Education and Training Minister Blade Nzimande's 12 comprehensive universities in the early post-apartheid era. PE Technikon was by far the oldest institution of the three, with its roots in the country's oldest art school, the PE Art School, which was founded in 1882. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University opened its doors on 1 January 2005.

**If you want to
go quickly,
*go alone.***

**If you want to
go far,
*go together***

African Proverb

And then, most recently, and as a culmination of many years of negotiation and visionary leadership, on 20 July 2017, the institution was re-launched as the world's one and only Nelson Mandela University. The launch celebrations took place under a massive rainbow at Missionvale Campus, to the sounds of praise-singing and orchestras, choirs and jazz, and beautiful, moving memories and speeches.

The university has seven distinct campuses: South Campus and North Campus are situated on a nature reserve, alongside the wealthy, predominantly-white suburb of Summerstrand in Port Elizabeth; the township-based Missionvale Campus is home to an inspiring new Education Foundation Phase building; Second Avenue Campus houses the university's iconic and award-winning "green" Business School in Second Avenue, Summerstrand; the historic Bird Street Campus in Central is where the first lectures (at the then University of Port Elizabeth) were offered in 1965; George Campus (situated 360km away in George and previously called Saasveld Campus, a leader in forestry research at the time) is known for its pristine natural environment; and the newest Ocean Sciences Campus, launched in September 2017, is set to establish Nelson Mandela University and Port Elizabeth as a marine and maritime hub. On the cards for the future will be the university's new medical school.

The Faculty of Education's *Re-visioning Journey*

This initial transformation journey was made up of various organisational change dimensions, including a participative process to craft a new and compelling vision for the faculty, and to develop a new organisational structure that supported the new vision.

Through this process, we created the opportunities, orientations, skills and spaces to have the much-needed but difficult race-based conversations to address the ongoing racialised behaviours and micro-aggressions in the faculty. These conversations were necessary to develop more diversity literacy, awareness of organisational justice and authentic relationships in the faculty; as well as to begin the process of curriculum renewal that would "live into" the newly-crafted vision of the faculty. At the time, the faculty was struggling with an uninspiring decontextualized vision for its work and core purpose, and a divided and de-moralised staff climate.

Prof Swartz's vision for a transformative university created the "container" and inspiration for the Faculty of Education process. The two-year journey, from October 2009 to June 2011, included five *Re-visioning Journey* workshops, each two days long with "homework" assignments in between, drawing on the-then re-

cently published book “Knowledge in the Blood” by Prof Jonathan Jansen (2009), as a scholarly guiding text.

Prof Jansen’s text chronicles his tenure as Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria and offers a theorised account of a personal transformational leadership journey in the context of a historically-white university struggling to find its way in a post-apartheid South Africa.

It deals with racism and prejudice, specifically and explicitly in a higher education setting. It tells the story of Prof Jansen’s own personal transformation journey at the Faculty of Education, and interrogates how racialised behaviours, worldviews and curricula are passed down through the generations, drawing research from sources about other oppressive systems and inter-generational legacies of pain and injustices such as the holocaust.

In the final chapter of “Knowledge in the Blood”, entitled “Teaching to Disrupt”, Prof Jansen speaks of a “post-conflict” pedagogy containing nine key elements, which had great meaning and resonance for us at the time. Some of these elements continue to form a central part of our processes, such as the importance of listening, the acknowledgement of our brokenness, the importance of hope and the necessity to disrupt “received knowledge”. This chapter also speaks about the role of leadership and the need to create “risk-accommodating” environments to enable learning and change.

The *Re-visioning Journey* was followed up with various curriculum renewal workshops, with the establishment of the *Abakwezeli Team*, a new layer of younger leaders in the faculty, making up



A straight tree never lasts in the forest

Akure, Nigeria



the heads of programmes in the various schools. This culminated in the crafting of a curriculum development framework to guide the curriculum renewal work in the whole faculty. Almost 10 years later, this curriculum framework has stood the test of time and is now supporting an institution-wide Teaching and Learning Process, including a set of curriculum statements to guide the re-positioning of the Teaching and Learning Project and the renewal and “de-colonisation” of curricula across all the faculties and for the university as a whole.

During the re-visioning workshops, we experienced a deep and often moving “opening up” process that allowed the pain of the past to flow freely. It was not an easy process. We had many heated race-based conversations. People were often enraged or in tears. The conversations confronted staff at a deep level about their own prejudices and “received knowledges” and what the essence was of the notion of humanising pedagogies.

Part of the aim of the workshops was to model in the design, methodologies, materials and facilitation; what humanising pedagogies might look like in practice. We were not only dealing with the cognitive side of teaching and learning; we used experiential methodologies, story-telling and poetry, and we held the sessions in diverse locations, including the South End Museum, the Red Location Museum and the university’s Missionvale Campus, to help members of the faculty to recognise each other’s diverse backgrounds, histories and humanities in these different texts and spaces where we gathered.

The humanising pedagogies and the academic programmes offered by Nelson Mandela University’s Faculty of Education today are like a different country when compared to the fundamentalist pedagogy bequeathed to it by its apartheid past. Something very deep had shifted during the span of the *Re-visioning Journey*, with a new curriculum process that reflected that shift. Of course, this work is ongoing and iterative and now, almost 10 years since we embarked on those first conversations, the institutional memory of the process is fading. Its significance has been overtaken by powerful events that have come in its wake, such as the #FeesMust-Fall movement of 2015 and 2016, bringing with it a new set of texts, challenges and opportunities for renewal, re-thinking and advancement.

Dr Muki Moeng was a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the time we started our journey. She played a leadership role in the initial stages of the process and in the retreats we convened to create a new vision and framework for the faculty. We were all very

During the re-visioning workshops, we experienced a deep and often moving “opening up” process that allowed the pain of the past to flow freely. It was not an easy process.

disappointed when she announced that she was leaving at the end of 2009 to take up a post at North-West University.

But at the beginning of 2015, she returned to the university to take up the post of Dean of Education. Whilst it is difficult to quantify qualitative shifts in organisational cultures, the fact that Dr Moeng chose to return to lead the Faculty of Education is testimony to the kind of transformational work that had been done by that faculty over the previous six years.

And so, this multi-dimensional, trans-disciplinary, custom-designed change project – part organisational development, part transformation practice, part curriculum renewal – was, in retrospect, the “pilot” project for the large-scale institution-wide initiative we eventually named the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process.

Recognising an institution-wide need for deeper conversations

During that initial meeting in February 2012, following on from the completion of the Faculty of Education’s *Re-visioning Journey* in 2011, Vice-Chancellor Prof Derrick Swartz stated that the university’s leadership wanted to embark on a conversation-type process for the whole of the university community. Dr Sibongile Muthwa, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Institutional Support, and Prof Piet Naude, formerly the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Teaching and Learning (now the Director of the University of Stellenbosch Business School) came up with the concept of “Deepening the Conversations” in the institution. This was understood as providing opportunities for shifting conversations among staff and students from purely operational and transactional engagements, to potentially-transformative, strategic, generative and healing conversations that could make a qualitative difference to the institutional culture of the organisation. Inadvertently, maybe intuitively, the two Deputy Vice-Chancellors had in fact articulated elements of a new theory and paradigm of large-scale institutional change.

Traditionally, an organisational development consultant’s first response in such a contracting situation would be to suggest some

The way he described the project, as I remember, was “taking the vision and values of the university, which are currently explicit and captured in dense documents, and creating the conditions and processes that would lead to these becoming implicit in behaviours and work practices over a decade”.

kind of diagnostic process to identify the main themes presenting in the organisation, around which the most impactful intervention would then be designed. Both the Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellors were adamant that this approach would be a waste of time and resources. The issues that presented at Nelson Mandela University, they claimed, were completely-predictable embedded forms of racism and sexism, the devastating legacy of apartheid, on all our organisational landscapes. At the time, we did not use the language of decoloniality, but it was implicit in at least some of our understanding of what was required. The university’s vision speaks of being a dynamic African university. This question of what was meant by being a “dynamic African university” would have to be at the heart of our institutional conversations – conversations that would inevitably need to talk about colonialism and apartheid.

At the time, we did not speak explicitly about the pedagogical project of the university but, as knowledge sharing and making was our core purpose, it also would have to form a core component of our conversations. This theme would be made explicit in the formal proposal that was to follow.

Two things stood out for me during that initial meeting. The first was the moving testimony by Dr Muthwa, as the most senior black woman in the institution, of the micro-aggressions and daily indignities she was enduring in her portfolio at the time. She spoke with courage and dignity about this painful reality, but I felt the strong undercurrent of grief and injustice while she was talking. I was very moved both by her composure and her pain.

The second thing that stood out was the resonance I found with the Vice-Chancellor and his theoretical understanding of complex change. One of the things he said early on in our conversation was that he recognised that this was going to be a long-term project. He recognised that it would have to be transversal, cutting across all the domains of the university – the different “publics” that make up a university. He recognised that it would be an uneven, contested process. He spoke of a time frame of 10 years.

The way he described the project, as I remember, was “taking the vision and values of the university, which are currently explicit and captured in dense documents, and creating the conditions and processes that would lead to these becoming implicit in behaviours and work practices over a decade”.

In all my years as a consultant and facilitator, I had never engaged with a leader who had such a long-term and compelling vision, supported by a grounded sense of the “theory of change”, and an



**It is not
what you
are called,
but what you
*answer to.***

African Proverb

understanding of the investment it would take from the institution to achieve this deceptively simple goal. Looking back, it reminds me of what many visionary leaders call “back of the napkin” vision: an audacious goal, stated simply and clearly, allowing complex forces of change to begin to align themselves behind this idea.

Crafting a proposal – and identifying “institutional enablers”

Following this meeting, I was asked to develop a proposal for such a process. It was important to articulate a specific approach to transformative organisational change in the context of higher education. This proposal included how the project needed to be understood as a “pedagogical” one on multiple levels, and articulated upfront the “Institutional enablers”, i.e. the conditions necessary for the process to have the highest likelihood of having a meaningful impact.

My introduction to the idea of “institutional enablers” as being an explicit part of the contracting process came from a short piece written by Margaret Legum, which I found on a website (which no longer exists) many years ago. It fantasised about the ideal organisational conditions for an impactful transformative intervention, something almost never encountered in real-life situations. Legum was a pioneer in social change initiatives, bringing the “Time to Think” processes to South Africa many years ago. She was also the co-founder of the South African New Economics Network and the author of “It Doesn’t Have To Be Like This! A New Economy for South Africa and the World” (2002). This initial idea was given further weight by the “flawless consulting” principles of Peter Block (2008).

Some of the “enablers” in the original proposal did not materialise in our university project over the years, in the ways in which we expected them to. In spite of this, coming up with a set of stated expectations and commitments to be honoured from the side of the institution, served the project well and provided a touchstone to which we could return from time to time, as we encountered the inevitable turmoil and trouble inherent in this kind of work.

The original ICEP proposal remained a significant document throughout our journey. Initially it was used to enrol some of the senior leaders and deans into our process. It was used to guide the work of our Reference Group from time to time. Subsequently, we used it to orientate new external facilitators into our process, to form part of our facilitation team. We also used it to reflect on our learnings and our “theory of change”, which we developed specifically for the ICEP project at Nelson Mandela University,

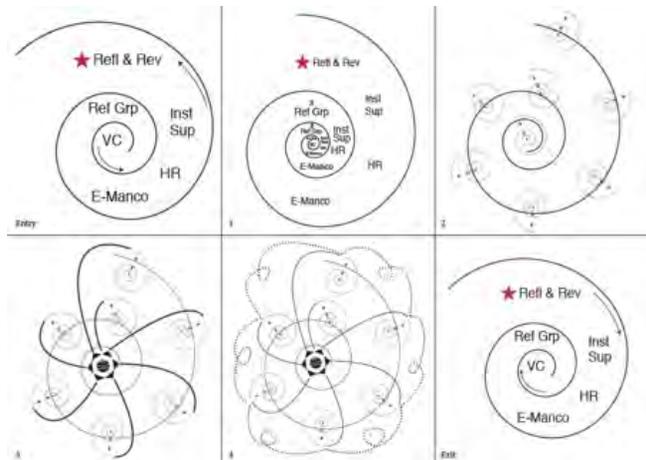
The spiral or the golden mean was identified to represent the “fractal” approach of our change process.

based on the complexity paradigm and transformation work (social and organisational justice) in organisations.

The project process was intentionally conveyed by using new images and metaphors to suggest the cutting-edge nature of our experiment, rather than reverting to a table or a flowchart or a timeline.

The spiral or the golden mean was identified to represent the “fractal” approach of our change process.

The project was to start with a specific set of interventions rep-



resenting a single fractal or spiral. As the conversations “deepened” in different domains of the institution, more fractals would unfold and be activated, until we had an enlivened organisational field made up of countless fractals, self-organising into our vision and values. Prof Denise Zinn would go on to speak about these as “force fields” in the multiple workshops and conversations she helped to convene over the five years of the project, and especially after her appointment as Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning. As the lead facilitator, the original proposal and the fractal metaphor continued to provide inspiration and a clear set of intentions and principles to guide the various design elements and strategic choices that had to be made over the five years of our journey. We refer to it in more detail in the section on our

Push
Moving forward
 force change
 movement
One place to another
Attract
 Student Housing
 September 2015

“theory of change”. The proposal itself is attached as an annexure to this story.

Conceptualising and designing a different kind of intervention

Many universities, with their own histories, were experimenting with various interesting and different interventions and architectures to address the issue of transformation in their spaces. It goes beyond the scope of these reflections to attempt to capture or comment on those initiatives. To our knowledge, however, no other large-scale social experiment like this one had been initiated in the higher education sector at the time.

The Anti-Racism Network in Higher Education (ARNHE), flowing



Retreat
To reflect
Intellectual, stimulating, interrogating
Congregating in quiet solitude
Withdrawal

Immersion 2014

from the ground-breaking Soudien Report (2008) on Transformation in Higher Education (Report of the Ministerial Committee on: Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions) provided a platform for many of the staff tasked with or committed to transformation at our universities, different stakeholders and academics, to come together to reflect on and wrestle with their task. And yet, despite some tentative attempts, these network meetings and initiatives did not seem to develop a meaningful praxis dimension; and practitioner input and participation were mostly absent from these events.

Subsequently, after #FeesMustFall, the Human Rights Commission issued another report on “Transformation at Public Universities” (9 December 2016).

This is an area that requires much more reflection and sense-making from all of us. How did we allow the sector to go from the Reitz incident at the University of the Free State in March 2008 to #RhodesMustFall in March 2015 without a more collective and



As transformation practitioners know, where and how to situate the institutional architecture or scaffolding that works toward radical institutional transformation and change is one critical aspect of the impact and success of the process.

comprehensive understanding of the paradigms and conditions necessary for leading and facilitating complex change?

While it is beyond the scope of these reflections to identify and list the interventions that did take place at other institutions during this time, we did benefit from various publications in the sector, such as the challenging selection of essays from Rhodes University entitled “Being at Home: Race, Institutional Culture and Transformation at South African Higher Education Institutions” (2015), edited by Pedro Tabensky and Sally Matthews. Our project also benefitted from the work we did, initially in collaboration with the Intercultural and Diversity Studies Unit of Southern Africa (iNCUD-ISA) at the University of Cape Town and subsequently with the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies (WiCDS) at the University of the Witwatersrand. We also had a tentative initial connection with the Office for Equity and Institutional Culture at Rhodes University. After #FeesMustFall, we benefitted greatly from the powerful documentary “The People vs The Rainbow Nation” (2016), directed by Lebogang Rasethaba, and the online journal “The Conversation”. At the time of writing these reflections, Rhodes University had also just concluded their Transformation Summit (28 to 30 July 2017) and we wait to see what insights that process yielded.

However, to our knowledge, no other comprehensive institutional culture transformational project, grounded in the vision and values of the institution, had been conducted in our sector in a way that made explicit its “theory of change”, that worked at the intersection of social and organisational justice, and within the organisational paradigms of complexity and living systems.

Structuring the project institutionally within Nelson Mandela University

During the conceptualisation and design stage, we relied on some of our learnings about how to position and structurally-situate the project, from consulting experiences in the corporate sector; as well as from some of the stories and struggles of our colleagues in these positions at other universities. Many organisations over the years have attempted to embark on transformation processes by appointing senior staff as directors or even Deputy Vice-Chancellors of Transformation.

Sometimes, these positions would be closely-aligned to the Human Resources function in the organisation. Mostly, however, they were not considered part of the strategic and core business of the organisation; they worked with outdated paradigms and theories of organisational change; did not have a clearly-defined praxis dimension; had very limited influence and often very limited re-



**Since suffering
as well as
joy comes with
being human, I urge
you to remember
this:
Violence is what
happens when we
don't know
what else to do with
our suffering.**

Parker Palmer

sources; and often worked with deficit legalistic and technical understandings of the transformative change required. Often these roles would result in “burn-out” or marginalisation for the staff in these positions as they attempted to challenge the status quo and navigate institutional politics. According to a senior transformation policy specialist in higher education, the broader South African universities’ Transformation Managers Forum’s experiences are no exception to the range of challenges listed above.

As transformation practitioners know, where and how to situate the institutional architecture or scaffolding that works toward radical institutional transformation and change is one critical aspect of the impact and success of the process.

Allan Zinn, in his capacity as Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD), had been asked to lead the search and contracting process for this project. As our contracting conversations continued, it became clear that CANRAD would, in fact, be the most appropriate institutional base for the ICEP process. This was a creative and innovative decision, despite being met with great contestation from the then Executive Director of Human Resources, who believed that the project belonged in the Human Resources space.

Some of the value of this choice lay in the fact that CANRAD had explicitly been created to advance the project of non-racialism and democracy as its core mandate. It is a centre with a broad transversal mandate in the institution. It is relatively independent of faculties and departments. It gave the project legitimacy as a university-mandated project without the constraints or limitations of being part of a specific domain of service delivery or line function in the institution, such as planning or Human Resources. Furthermore, it has both a theoretical and practical orientation in its work. Not least important was the credibility and integrity of the centre and its director in the institution. It was therefore a fitting decision that Allan Zinn would act as our Project Manager.

Strategically our project also fitted in with a few of CANRAD’s own strategic objectives for 2015 to 2017, namely:

1. To conduct basic and applied research on non-racialism and democracy
2. To initiate projects which critically analyse the notion of race and the manifestation of racism and its alternatives, within the South African context
3. To strategically facilitate the integration of scholarship and transformative action relating to the advancement of non-ra-

cialism and democracy

4. To develop and implement strategies relating to social cohesion within the university and the broader South African society
5. To provide an advocacy platform for the advancement of non-racialism and democracy

With reference to the fourth strategic objective above, we did not pursue the contested “social cohesion” narrative in the conceptualisation of the ICEP project.

In “The Shift of Emancipation: Visual Arts, Cohesion, Transformation, South Africa Vol 1” (Underpressure Agency 2016 – a collaborative project between the University of the Free State, Rhodes University and Nelson Mandela University), under the heading “Emergent Conversations”, the Nelson Mandela University team refer to how the calls for “social cohesion” in the context of this particular arts-based project were questioned and critiqued by

*Consultation
Talk – talk
Exciting, Energising, Tiring
Clear consultation reaches goals
Hear*

Office for Institutional Planning June 2015

participants. “Manelli and Marawu were concerned about the term’s misuse as a means for muting the Black voice. They see it as being used as a means of maintaining a white hegemonic *status quo*, and as a way of denying Black agency.” The authors also quote Mohamed’s comments about South Africans’ over-willingness to acquiesce and “shake hands” when we should be much more provocative in our approaches.

Instead, our primary mandate and the brief of our project came from *Key Strategic Priority Area 5* of the university’s Vision 2020, which included the notion of “institutional culture”, another contested concept in the scholarship of transformation. For a further discussion of our use and re-imagination of this concept, see the next chapter of these reflections.

Key Strategic Priority Area 5 of Vision 2020 is:

“To develop and sustain a transformative institutional culture that optimises the full potential of staff and students”

To institutionally strengthen this link between ICEP and Vision 2020, it was decided that we would have a second reporting line to Prof Heather Nel, the custodian of Vision 2020 in the institution and the Senior Director of Institutional Planning in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. She would be our conduit into the senior leadership spaces, including the high-level Management Committee (MANCO) structure of the institution. MANCO meets monthly and is the body with delegated authority to make formal university decisions. It consists of the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Executive Directors of Human Resources and Finance and the Senior Director of Institutional Planning.

Given that the project was initiated by the Vice-Chancellor himself, we would have a direct line to him if and when needed, access to the monthly MANCO meetings through Prof Nel; and our day-to-day management would fall to Mr Zinn. We also in due course “formalised” the informal Reference Group of the project, which in practice became our most meaningful quarterly reporting and reflecting space.

It took all of us a couple of months to complete the contracting conversations and get clarity on the practical aspects of the functioning of the project. The initial concept document was discussed by the informally-convened Reference Group on 5 April 2012 and was subsequently accepted and approved in principle by MANCO at a meeting on 13 June 2012.



In a follow-up meeting with the Vice-Chancellor on 4 September 2012, the locus and reporting lines of the project were finally clarified. (This was captured in the ICEP Quarterly Update July/August 2012.)

Every quarter for the duration of the project, we convened a Reference Group meeting, for which we provided a quarterly report and update. Often, critical strategic issues and questions were raised in these reports and meetings, both by us as well as the members of the Reference Group. These reports, togeth-



Knowledge
is like a
baobab tree;
no one person
can embrace it

An Akan and Ewe proverb
Accra, Ghana

er with notes on the corresponding conversations and discussions, as well as the short PowerPoint presentations prepared for each session, have been archived. There are currently 19 sets of Update Reports, up to June 2017, with their accompanying minutes or notes of the meetings. Reading through these reports provides the most comprehensive and probably most accurate record of the contextual narrative and unfolding timeline of the project, even though the myriad of micro-decisions that had to be taken along the way might not be sufficiently captured therein. It is hoped that these documents will provide a useful future resource to track and make sense of our social experiment, which can be described as a complexity-based organisational justice change process in higher education, prior to and during the #FeesMustFall period.

This strategic experiment of a transversal inter-disciplinary institutional change and renewal project, focussing on one of the priority areas of the university, and working across the institution, initially focused only on staff.

The first phase of the project commenced in July 2012. I, as the lead facilitator, was offered a part-time contract, initially for six months, to initiate, design and lead the project; to be renewed for a further two years until the end of 2014. The part-time contract required approximately six days per month on campus or facilitating workshop processes, with an additional approximately four days of research, preparation and design time per month. At the end of 2014, this contract was renewed for a further three years to continue to lead Phase 2 of the project, until the end of 2017. This decision to work as a part-time contract staff member was also strategic.

There has been some learning around the notion of the “insider/outsider” when it comes to leading disruptive transformation journeys.

While it is important that the lead facilitator is seen to “belong” to the university as a legitimate staff member, it is equally important for the role to be unencumbered by institutional constraints and organisational politics as far as possible.

Due to the nature of the work it is also not sustainable to be office-bound and work full-time. After facilitating intense processes, down-time is required to reflect and restore. The nature of designing transformative learning journeys requires research and creative design time that is often not compatible with formal work hours. The pauses in between processes provide insights and promptings around the organic unfolding of the overall project. The natural rhythms of breathing in and breathing out, afforded

While it is important that the lead facilitator is seen to “belong” to the university as a legitimate staff member, it is equally important for the role to be unencumbered by institutional constraints and organisational politics as far as possible.

The intention behind the word “enlivening” was to focus on the actual lived and embodied aspects of organisational life and to evoke the idea of renewal and positive awakening.

by a part-time contract is very well-suited, strategically, conceptually, practically and personally, to the kind of work required by this project.

Naming and initiating ICEP’s work

The first two years of the ICEP project was spent setting up project support and systems, attending to the overall shape of the intervention, developing materials, enrolling leaders into hosting “Deepening the Conversations” sessions, and facilitating variations of these sessions in many different domains in the institution.

While we had to have a formal name for the project to be able to refer to it and initiate activities, budgets and other organisational processes, it was strategically important not to give the intervention too high a profile in and of itself.

We wanted to minimise resistance to our work, even as we were introducing disruptive technologies, so that it could be seen as part of the mainstream operations of the university and not belonging to a separate “project”.

It had to be intimately associated with Vision 2020 and with promoting and embodying the strategic vision and values of the university. It had to be able to engage all the “publics” (in the words of the Vice-Chancellor) of the university without being exclusively associated with either the academic or professional cohort, management or workers.

And so, despite it being a bit of a tongue-twister, we foregrounded the concept of “enlivening” the institutional culture of Nelson Mandela University.

The intention behind the word “enlivening” was to focus on the actual lived and embodied aspects of organisational life and to evoke the idea of renewal and positive awakening.

It also mirrored our intention to work with an appreciative inquiry-type approach, where we would assume that everyone already had the yearning for the promise and realisation of the values (and Vision 2020 within them) and that we just needed to create the spaces to liberate those impulses. We further hoped that the word itself might implicitly guide us to only create those conditions in which such “enlivening” was most likely to occur within a living system, and thus using a living systems approach as our fundamental “theory of change”. We wanted to resist a “change management” or organisational engineering type of approach, with its associated images and narratives, and to rather evoke images and narratives of renewal and transformation in

How do we ensure NMMU is not re-creating another 'lost generation?'

Unlocking our students' full potential

DURING June each year we remember the contribution the youth made to achieving democracy in our country and in particular the role of school children and students who actively fought against apartheid.

Some of these youngsters, who dealt with the anxieties of teargas and the threats of detention and torture, even gave up their lives for the freedom we have today. And what of the thousands who suffered disruption of classes, deferred exams and lost years of their schooling or academic lives or even dropped out of the education system altogether?

These schoolchildren and students from the 1970s and 1980s are sometimes referred to as "the lost generation".

Similarly, as we celebrate Women's Day and Diversity Month at NMMU in August we also recognise the contribution of women to the struggle for freedom in our country in very particular ways.

We'll remember this in line with some sobering statistics:

- ▶ The rate of youth unemployment in South Africa is considered one of the highest risks to our country's future (SONA 2014).
- ▶ Only one in four students will graduate in the regulation time according to Higher Education South Africa (HESA).
- ▶ Our success rate, as universities, is around 36%. In other words, if this was a normal test or exam, we, ourselves as educators, have collectively failed.
- ▶ 55% of students will drop out of their studies completely. Statistically, this trend affects black students disproportionately adversely (Finweek June 2014).

"What then," asked one of the participants at a two-day workshop with Higher Education Access & Development Services (HEADS), "is the key that will truly be able to unlock the full potential of our students?"

This question should be one of the guiding questions for us all, if we want to break the cycle of poverty and despair in our region and our country and ensure no more "lost generations" and give effect to the university's Vision 2020 strategic plan.

Is it possible, that the low success rate of our students has more to do with the low expectations of them by their lecturers, than with the actual abilities of the students themselves?

This is sometimes referred to as a "deficit approach" by educators to students of colour, or to women in traditionally male-dominated subject areas, and are subtly embedded through a "hidden curriculum" in our teaching (Salazar 2013).

Is it possible that our failures have more to do with the out-dated "banking approach" to teaching than that it has to do with the capacity of our students to learn? (See Sir Ken Robin-

The success rate of universities is around 36% – surely, a collective failed mark. What can we as educators do given our heady past to enable our students to successfully move forward and achieve, asks Ilze Olckers in an on-going series of articles relating to NMMU's institutional culture.

son and Sugata Mitra's TED Talks on Education).

Is it possible that the disconnect between students' lived lives – what Salazar refers to as their "community cultural wealth" (quoting Yosso 2005) – and their experiences in the classroom and on our NMMU campus, fundamentally undermines their performance and achievements? (A Humanizing Pedagogy: Reinventing the Principles and Practices of Education as a Journey Toward Liberation by Maria del Carmen Salazar Review of Research in Education Feb 2013)

This, together with other factors



CONVERSATION CONTINUES ... During June and July the ICEP facilitated conversations in various departments including Management Sciences, HEADS and E-Manco, as well as another mid-level leadership dialogue. Thirty participants including EBEIT's Sesethu Gqomo (left) and Language and Literature's Nancy Morkel also completed a second four-day intensive Immersion Retreat at Cape St Francis.

such as the micro-aggressions some students and staff still face daily on our campus and in the classroom,

also deals with micro-aggressions on the basis of gender and sexual orientation and lists many familiar themes that infuse everyday interactions as the NMMU community.

Many examples of this have been shared during our "Deepening the Conversations" processes over the past 18 months.

So if "The only effective instrument in the process of rehumanisation is a humanising pedagogy" as Paulo Freire is quoted as saying by Salazar, this then requires us to look very carefully at what more humanising pedagogies and practices ask of us as a university community.

To begin the conversation, Salazar identifies ten tenets of a humanising pedagogy and, for our purposes, humanising practices, across all the domains of our university.

This applies to Finance, as it applies to HR, as it applies to each class, each assignment, each sports event, each society, each ritual that makes up our daily lived lives at NMMU.

To access the Salazar article kindly e-mail elma.dekoker@nmmu.ac.za.



The EMANCO participants collectively realised, through the facilitated small group and plenary conversations, that a transformative institutional culture was in fact the most critical condition to accomplish.

natural systems. Finally, the word also alluded to the underlying humanising pedagogies which informed our processes and which aimed to centre the lived experiences of students and staff, and their striving to become more fully human.

At the time when the ICEP project was finalised in mid-2012, the university had already identified, within its eight-point strategic plan, three apex priority focus areas for the university namely:

- The size, shape, programme mix and growth of new areas that would define the university's identity as a comprehensive university;
- Sustainability – financial and other; and
- A transformative institutional culture.

As a starting point during the June 2012 Extended Management Committee (EMANCO) meeting, we facilitated a “minimum specs” exercise (<http://plexusinstitute.org/plexus-programs/liberating-structures-projects/>) for the university leaders to think through the minimum specifications they felt were required to achieve the objectives for all three apex areas. We wanted them to identify which one strategic objective they felt would be the critical condition from which the other two might flow, as the absolute minimum specification for success.

EMANCO includes about 25 members of senior management, including the executive Management Committee (MANCO) as well as all deans, campus principals, and senior directors.

The EMANCO participants collectively realised, through the facilitated small group and plenary conversations, that a transformative institutional culture was in fact the most critical condition to accomplish.

This was based on the rationale that if people felt a deep belonging to the university and were deeply enrolled in its vision and values, and if there was sufficient alignment among all leaders around the university's vision and values, then the creative breakthroughs, innovations, problem-solving, strategic choices and decisions required to give effect to the other two focus areas, would flow most powerfully and clearly.

This early exercise invested the ICEP with some strategic significance from the very outset of our work, and felt like a real breakthrough, despite the fact that right to the end of the project, certain senior leaders never demonstrably adopted our approach, supported our project or willingly participated in any our offerings.

Humanising pedagogies reject dominant educational practices in which an educated elite hands down theories and approaches to knowledge that are completely disconnected from the lived lives of students, which undermine their diverse backgrounds and typically have devastating results for their performance.

One of the biggest dangers and fault lines of transformation processes is that it becomes an “add-on” to the core business, or at best a parallel process to the “real work” of the organisation. We have come from an era where often transformation imperatives were even traded off against business imperatives – something which, in our corporate work, we referred to as “a deficit approach to transformation”.

Centering the transformation journey in the way we had up to that point, created an enabling “aspirational” approach and attitude to transformation, and the right environment to do the difficult work that was to come.

Grounding the project in humanising pedagogies

A particular gift Prof Zinn brought with her to the university when she was Dean of Education was her scholarship and thinking about humanising pedagogies, based on the work of Brazil’s Paulo Freire. Humanising pedagogy is espoused by leading liberation educationalists and philosophers, and was initially developed by Freire, author of one of the seminal books in this field, titled “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1970). It challenges the traditional “banking” notion of education and reinvents the principles and practices of education as an essential part of the journey towards liberation and transformation.

Humanising pedagogies reject dominant educational practices in which an educated elite hands down theories and approaches to knowledge that are completely disconnected from the lived lives of students, which undermine their diverse backgrounds and typically have devastating results for their performance.

Educators who wish to contribute to social justice, explains Freire, must start by recognising each other and their students as human beings who bring vastly different lived realities and diverse cultural, social and intellectual values into the university spaces and lecture rooms. Once this recognition takes place they become partners – co-investigators – in the journey of mutual learning. This, he says, is how we transform education and society, and achieve freedom. This concept was embedded in Vision 2020 and became one of the key concepts around which we would design our interventions and processes. It also motivated us to find progressive and aligned ways of working with the notion of institutional culture.

This conversation around humanising pedagogies is highly significant in the current South African higher education sector, where an estimated 55% of students drop out of their studies and only

**Wood
already
touched by fire
is not hard
to set alight.**

African Proverb

*Clearly student success,
as our core purpose,
needed to be at the
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and as one of the main
dimensions of student
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urgent inquiry into the
university's pedagogies.*

one in four students graduate within the regulation time (Council on Higher Education 2013).

Clearly student success, as our core purpose, needed to be at the centre of our work on institutional cultures; and as one of the main dimensions of student success, so did an urgent inquiry into the university's pedagogies.

Apart from the academic issues they face, a large percentage of students have reported, in multiple forums over the past years, their feelings of alienation and displacement at university. While this may also be an issue for middle-class students, it is particularly acute for working-class students or first-generation students and, in the context of the Eastern Cape, especially for students from rural areas. It is this discordant and alienating lived experience of university life that further tips us from a conversation about pedagogies back into a conversation about institutional culture. These concepts remain "entangled" and much more academic and reflective work is needed to understand the mutually-reinforcing dynamic of exclusion and struggle between what happens inside and outside the proverbial classrooms on our campuses at this time.

Questions started to emerge, such as this one: Which framework could combine the transformation challenges of classroom pedagogy with the need to re-think issues of daily organisational life at university, to help us have holistic, integrated, meaningful conversations about student success with all the different stakeholders and role players that make up our university communities?

And it was questions like this that led to some of the exciting work and social experiments that became the ICEP Story.

"Organically unfolding" as paradigm and practice

The initial brief, during the first two-year cycle of the project, was to offer "Deepening the Conversations" sessions to all the different domains in the institution. These sessions were each specifically designed for the particular domain we were working with, using a common set of social technologies and based on a similar set of questions and readings around the purpose and alignment of these domains in relation to Vision 2020. We used the term "social technologies" to refer to a broad range of methodologies or conversation constellations or structures for meaningful engagement that would best enable and support those critical conversations, and the human relationships and interactions required to co-create our futures. These methodologies are both "new/old" methods, to borrow a phrase from indigenous scholar Prof Manu-

Curriculum
Finding meaning
Reflecting Defining
Searching
The centre of transformation
Learning

Office for Institutional
Planning June 2015

lani Aluli-Meyer from the University of Hawaii, practised in indigenous settings from the earliest of times, such as gratitude rounds and circle conversations; as well as “new/new” participative processes, simulating the complex adaptive living social systems that we inhabit.

We referred to the initial intervention in each domain as an “entry” process. In some instances, the “entry” process was followed up by further facilitated conversations in these departments or schools; but in some domains, there was no appetite from the leadership to pursue these conversations further.

Throughout the first phase of the project (2013 to 2014), we worked with an “organic” unfolding of the conversation processes. Throughout this time, we were also facilitating the annual cycle of EMANCO retreats for the senior leadership team. We were working with a range of Vision 2020 thematic areas, within which nested the necessary operational conversations. During every retreat, we introduced new social technologies to enable a “deepening of the conversations” in this space too. We offered pre-readings ahead of every retreat and attempted to make explicit and model our complexity-based approaches to organisational change and renewal, and our organisational practice. The qualitative shifts that happened in the EMANCO space from December 2012 to October 2014 were remarkable and it is hoped that this particular case study will still be written up and studied in a more formal way.





The full flowering of this transformation became even more apparent in November 2016 when I guest-facilitated the final EMANCO retreat of 2016, reflecting on the past year and on the turmoil and challenges of the #FeesMustFall events.

Fostering the organic unfolding of the ICEP project meant not working with a model of forced participation. The uptake of ICEP offerings in the university system was uneven and we worked explicitly with this as part of our “theory of change”. We relied partly on “enrolling” leaders into the conversations we facilitated, and partly on the initiative and commitment of the leaders themselves. Leaders would invite us into their domains either through their individual commitment to and recognition of the need for transformative organisational processes, or through peer pressure from colleagues. Some were even motivated by compliance due to the endorsement of these sessions by senior leaders in spaces such as the EMANCO structure.

In keeping with the “organic unfolding” of the process, we worked with whoever demonstrated readiness, interest in and commitment to the work we offered to the system.

In keeping with the “organic unfolding” of the process, we worked with whoever demonstrated readiness, interest in and commitment to the work we offered to the system. Where we sensed resistance, we would either increase our efforts at enrolling leaders into the conversations or wait for subtle shifts in the system, perhaps examples of “emergence”, where sometimes invisible conditions changed and new possibilities suddenly presented themselves. The metaphors of gardening or surfing or “dancing with systems”, introduced to us by Donella Meadows and others, accurately captured our orientation to the unfolding of this complexity-based intervention process.

In some instances, the uptake of ICEP offerings was initially helped by lower-middle managers of small teams, such as heads of departments, who “influenced upwards”. This then led to invitations from, for example, their more senior director of the school to convene much larger group conversations or even share our offerings with the deans for faculty-based conversations.

Sometimes the senior leaders took the initiative and created opportunities for an ICEP-inspired facilitated conversation by “managing downwards”. These were sometimes framed as strategic

planning sessions, and attendance and participation would typically be compulsory for their middle management team leaders, despite individual resistance or hostility.

In August 2014, as we approached the end of the first phase of the project, a small working group made up of members of the ICEP Reference Group went through a U-process reflection, a methodology inspired by the work of Otto Scharmer (2009). Ours was a reflective process aimed at inquiring into and uncovering the shape of the second phase of the ICEP process “that was coming toward us”, in the words of Scharmer. These reflections were also informed by the Vice-Chancellor’s views, as articulated during earlier MANCO conversations.

What emerged from the August session was the need to differentiate ICEP into “different dedicated streams of work”, while continuing to offer the original “Deepening the Conversations” sessions into the system.

The latter would be achieved with the help of a small team of external facilitators, who we brought into our ICEP process to create more facilitation capacity.

Throughout 2015 and 2016, we adjusted these streams of work in a continual “action/reflection” cycle during our quarterly Reference Group meetings, as new conditions and insights presented themselves on our journey. We continued to offer the “Deepening the Conversations” sessions to departments and faculties who invited us into their spaces, as an ongoing facilitation service and stream of work, throughout the duration of the project. As echoed later in these reflections, in many of the university domains, we often struggled with the tension between much-needed, more generic organisational development support, team cohesion sessions and conflict management (skills technically offered by an HR team), and the specific social and organisational justice mandate of ICEP which in and of itself, being an organisational change process, also contains a significant organisational development dimension. This dilemma is an important practice question which requires further reflection and sense-making and we continue to wrestle with it as we attempt to envision the transformation architecture of Nelson Mandela University beyond the lifespan of ICEP.

From staff to students

During early 2015, prior to the first #FeesMustFall events on our campus in October that same year, we started reaching out to include students in our conversations. During September 2015, we facilitated the first Teaching and Learning Retreat, which led to an

*You can borrow
a basket and a
sieve; you
cannot borrow a
face.*

Ovimbundu
Angolan proverb

“The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are made, not found, and the activity of making will change both the maker and the destination.”

additional stream of work in 2016 and 2017, namely the *Curriculum Renewal Journey*. In August 2015, we also convened a “Facilitators’ reflection and learning” session, attended by the facilitation team, members of the Reference Group and project management team, as well as an external developmental evaluator. The report from this session also guided our work streams for 2016.

After various thwarted attempts to convene towards the end of 2016, due to ongoing #FeesMustFall disruptions, the ICEP Reference Group finally met at the Bird Street Conservatoire in February 2017, to agree on the final ICEP Workplan for 2017.

The last year of the second phase of this five-year project would focus on consolidating the investments and strategic interventions that would embed the architecture and approaches for Nelson Mandela University’s ongoing transformation journey in the system, in the spirit of its vision to be a dynamic African university, recognised for its leadership in generating cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future.

In the words of Prof John Schaar (1981), from the University of California, Santa Cruz:

“The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are made, not found, and the activity of making will change both the maker and the destination.”

And in the words of poet Ben Okri (2000):

“For we are each one of us saviours, and co-makers of the world we live in.

But we should begin, now, here

Among one another

And in solitude.”



CHAPTER

02

*And because we have too much
information
And no clear direction
Too many facts
And not enough faith
Too many fears
And not enough light
I whisper to myself modest maxims
As thought-friends for a new age ...*

Ben Okri [extracts from the poem, "Mental Fight" (Okri 2000)]

Transformative INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

As stated in chapter 1, the mandate for the ICEP project came from *Key Strategic Priority Area 5* of the university's Vision 2020 Strategic Plan, which meant that we had to enter into our process through the conceptual door of "Institutional culture".

From the outset, there was a strong impulse and temptation, a yearning, to engage with this concept in an in-depth scholarly and academic way. It was one of the early moments in the journey where the tension between ICEP as a practice-based intervention and its complex interdisciplinary theoretical grounding, made it feel like we were pulling in two opposite directions. On the one hand, we had urgent work to do and conversations to facilitate that could not wait for an in-depth study of the contested understanding of what was, essentially, the lived experience of real people on a daily basis on our campus. On the other hand, by not exploring and deconstructing this concept from an academic and scholarly perspective, it felt as if we were in unknown waters, being tossed about by the institutional challenges we were facing, without proper mooring and sufficient navigational instruments.

The compromise we reached was to make use of the "official" statements and versions of the concept as it was being used in the strategic documents of other universities. We found a quote by academic John Higgins, attributed to a Higher Education South Africa document, which went as follows:

"It is simply the massive fact and bulk of institutional culture that may be the main obstacle in the way of the successful transformation of South Africa's higher education system" (HESA 2007: 97).

Another followed:

"... as many contemporary commentators have pointed out, for all its apparent significance and ubiquity, the idea of institutional culture is difficult to pin down."

(Higgins, 2007; Jansen, 2004; Ensor, 2002).

We also used quotes from a paper by Prof Louise Vincent, from

Reporting
*Sharing
Information*
Visual Clear Fun
*Telling an
interesting story*
Transforming

Office for Institutional
Planning June 2015

Enabling staff, students to reach their full potential

Transforming NMMU



For 18 months Institutional Culture Enlivening sessions have been hosted throughout NMMU in the form of gratitude rounds, cafe chats, courageous conversations and much grappling over questions about working at the university. But what's it all about and why? Ilze Olckers explains.

WHAT does it mean to be an African university?

Are black staff and students still experiencing racism at NMMU?

What exactly is a "humanising pedagogy"? What is the role of Professional and Academic Support Staff (PASS) in promoting the "academic heartland"? What do we mean by "white knowledge"? What does a sustainable future look like?

It is questions like these that require of us to look at our institution through the lens of "complexity" and think about NMMU as a "living system".

A new six-page fold-out pamphlet capturing the key foundational elements of Vision 2020 also asks these provocative questions. Ask for a copy from your department or faculty, or better still, get your department involved in "deepening the conversation" by inviting the Institutional Culture Enlivening team to support your leaders to convene sessions where you can get serious about the transformative institutional culture at NMMU.

But what is an institutional culture?

Put simply, institutional culture is the collective daily experience of life and work at NMMU. It's the atmosphere, the vibe, the official policies and procedures as well as the informal practices and processes. It also includes the way we conduct our classes, our research, our engagement activities, our meetings and ourselves.

It is whether you are feeling valued and recognised, excited and energised; whether you understand and are actively working toward the values and Vision 2020 daily in everything that you do. It's whether you feel you belong, that your voice matters, that you can make a difference, that you can co-create the future and that you are contributing to the "public good" purposes of NMMU and the trans-



GRAPPLING FOR ANSWERS ... In December about 40 staff from across the institution including Finance's Michael Monaghan and Ajai Ramji and Procurement's Thina Balakistnen, "disappeared" for four days to St Francis Bay for an "immersion training retreat" which forms part of NMMU's Institutional Culture Enlivening process.

formation of society.

In South Africa, 20 years after democracy, we have to commit – more than ever before - to right the wrongs of the past and create a joint sustainable and prosperous future.

At NMMU we use the word "enlivening" our institutional culture because we believe the spirit of the university's values and Vision 2020 is already within all of us. Sometimes it is simply the need to create the conditions and the environment in which our highest dreams for ourselves, each other and our university can be "enlivened", re-energised, activated, set free.

We hope to bring you news and information from this "enlivening" process, where we deepen conversations and democracy within NMMU, and live the values and Vision 2020, to enable staff and students to reach their full potential.

Sessions

Some of the groups who participated in an "enlivening" session during the first term:

- ▶ Mathematics and Applied Mathematics
- ▶ The Faculty of Law
- ▶ Department of Industrial Psychology and Human Resources Management
- ▶ Strategic planning session for CANRAD
- ▶ Dialogue between senior and mid-level academic leaders across NMMU
- ▶ Dialogue between the Deans Forum and the Missionvale Campus

If you would like to convene a session in your department or faculty, please contact Claire Dullisear for more details on 041 5044674.



NEW HOME ... The new teacher education building for foundation studies on Missionvale Campus forms part of the latest R236m worth of new buildings – funded by government and the university itself – which includes a new gym at George Campus, the Alumni House on South Campus, an engineering block for Mechatronics on North Campus (close to the present new one), a new Life Sciences building on South Campus, an art gallery within the historic Eendrag at Bird Street Campus, a bitumen lab for Civil Engineering on North Campus, and a further extension to InnoVenton close to the university's South Campus.



Rhodes University, that was delivered at a HESA gathering in 2013:

“At any given moment in any given institutional culture, there are ways of being that are dominant, hegemonic, powerful and influential & then there are those that are marginalised, subordinated and suppressed.” (Vincent 2013).

Laws, policies and institutional frameworks may change but “social and cultural structures, practices, habits of mind and heart, remain stable over time”. (Linde 2009: 8 in Vincent 2013).

For us, these elements constituted the afore-mentioned “minimum specs” with which we could meaningfully enter into conversation with each other. The elements were:

- The idea of the concept of institutional culture possibly being the “main obstacle to transformation”
- at the same time being “difficult to pin down”
- that it was constituted by “habits of mind and heart”
- and that some of these ways of being were “dominant and powerful” and that others were “marginalised and suppressed”
- that it was experienced by everyone as their everyday lived reality – the way in which it had been framed in the policy documents of both Rhodes and Wits universities.

All the participants of our processes needed was enough of a handle on the concept, for us to be able to formulate the potentially transformative questions we needed to pose to them to begin to “deepen the conversations”.

From the policy statements of Rhodes and Wits universities, we were working with phrases such as “the way things are done around here”, “the practices that are rewarded and supported”, “the lived experience by all who inhabit it”, “policies and practices – tangible and intangible”, and the daily and long-term experiences of those who share and pass through the university spaces.

We could work with that, despite the fact that we always felt a lingering feeling of “imposter syndrome” when it came to our scholarly knowledge of the concept of institutional culture.

This disjuncture or disconnect between an academic or scholarly understanding of something, and how to engage with it in real life, remains a conundrum which I hope, to echo the poet Rainer Maria Rilke’s words (1903), we will eventually live into one day. It is possible that it has a lot to do with the hegemony of the Western traditions of “objective” scholarly knowledge, the positivistic

Some definitions...



Institutional culture is said to be the ‘way things are done within an organisation specifically the traditions, customs, values, and shared understandings that underpin the decisions taken, the practices engaged in and those practices that are rewarded and supported’ (Rhodes University, in its Equity Policy (2004:4)).

More definitions...



‘Institutional culture is the lived experience of the university by all those who inhabit it, including students, academic staff, management, support staff, workers and members of the public who come into contact with the institution. Institutional culture should be understood to encompass the policies and practices (tangible and intangible) that mark the daily and long-term experiences of those who share and pass through the university’s spaces.’ (Wits Inst Culture Comm)

*Nothing is right that does
not work.*

*We have believed it all
improvement, progress
bigger better immediate
the whole Junk.*

*It was our essence that
never worked.*

*We hasten to eradicate
our selves.*

Alice Walker

“scientific” construction of knowledge that indigenous knowledge scholars such as Catherine Odora Hoppers and Manulani Aluli-Meyer and others have been challenging and deconstructing for many years.

As the poet Alice Walker (2004) says:

Nothing is right that does not work. / We have believed it all / improvement, progress / bigger better immediate / the whole Junk. / It was our essence that / never worked. / We hasten to eradicate / our selves.

By the time we started designing the first intensive immersion training retreat for potential change agents in our university towards mid-2013, we had also come across the masters thesis of Michael Barry, head of the Arts and Culture Unit at Nelson Mandela University.

Entitled “Establishing a Transformative Institutional Culture at a Comprehensive South African University: The Role of the Arts (2013)”, his thesis inquired into the role of the Arts and Culture Unit in contributing to establishing a transformative institutional culture at the university after the merger.

For us, his thesis was a quick condensed access-route, from a credible and local secondary source, to bring us sufficiently up-to-date with some of the academic and scholarly work in this field. Always, the temptation was there to dedicate more time towards deepening our own understanding of the concept that was at the heart of our project. And, always, we had to choose to work with what we had, to focus on navigating the politics and complexities of university life, and on arranging, designing, enrolling and convening our next conversation.

Institutional culture as “living curriculum”

At the end of his paper on “Competing Ideas of the Contemporary University: Re-thinking elements of the NMMU Academic System” (2011), Vice-Chancellor Prof Swartz put forward six propositions he hoped could form the foundational statements of the university’s academic domain (academy). The first proposition was as follows:

“The first proposition I would like to make is that for NMMU [as the university was then called] to successfully promote its defining Vision 2020 statement – ‘to be a dynamic African university, recognised for its leadership in generating cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future’ – it has to place the academic heartland at the very core of the university, around which every critical aspect of



university life has to be organised and put in support of.”

He went on to say:

“Although the university system encompasses more than the academy, the academy is the heart of the university, the source of its reproductive capabilities. All the other sub-systems – administrative, support, technical services, etc – are in support of this fundamental function, and must take the needs, special character and reproductive requirements of the academy as its central reference point.”



We therefore needed to ensure that we also placed the academic project at the heart of our ICEP work, and that as far as possible, we used language and metaphors resonant with the academic project in our work, even if at the same time our task would be to disrupt some of these in our project of “enlargement” and transformation.

Prior to his six propositions, the Vice-Chancellor spoke about “re-affirming” the traditions, ethos, governance structures and other organisational requirements that made up the academic paradigm at the university.

He warned, however, that re-affirmation was not meant to imply “restoration – an attempt at restoring reactionary and discredited past practices that were part of the academy such as sexism, racism, linguistic chauvinism and other social exclusions of those not traditionally associated with its constitutive origins”.

He went on to say that it was not to mean academic insularity and it could not be anti-transformational. “Instead we are talking about *re-affirming a new academic paradigm*”.

A *simultaneous* affirmation of academic leadership and its transformation to better reflect the vision of the university.

We needed to find ways of embedding this “simultaneity” into our work, an affirmation of the academic paradigm and at the same time, its re-imagination.

What then would be able to help us, in an academic environment, to talk about institutional culture, a concept that had its origin in the corporate world, in a way that both academics and professional staff, the whole “public” of the university could relate to?

What would represent this “gestalt” notion of institutional culture, the whole indivisible actual lived experience of everyone that forms part of the university community? What metaphor could

“Although the university system encompasses more than the academy, the academy is the heart of the university, the source of its reproductive capabilities.”

**You learn
how to
cut down trees
by cutting
them down**

Beteke proverb

capture the imaginations of everyone who worked at the university to take ownership for the transformation and renewal necessary in their institutional domain?

During the *Re-visioning Journey* with the Faculty of Education, we had spent some time talking about curriculum and Prof Shervani Pillay, a lecturer, had led me to the work of Prof Leslie Owen Wilson (2005) and her wondrous "curriculum index". At the same time, we were engaging in great depth with Prof Jonathan Jansen's book "Knowledge in the Blood" (2009) and from these two sources, we took the idea of the "learned" or "living" curriculum to encompass the whole of the developmental and interactional experience that made up life at the university.

The definition we took from Prof Wilson's curriculum index to use in many of our processes was as follows:

"Anything and everything that teaches a lesson, planned or otherwise. Humans are born learning, thus the learned curriculum actually encompasses a combination of all below ... the hidden, null, written, political and societal, etc ...

Since students learn all the time through exposure and modelled behaviours, this means that they learn important social and emotional lessons from everyone who inhabits a school [or university] from the janitorial staff, the secretary, the cafeteria workers, their peers, as well as from the department, conduct and attitudes expressed and modelled by their teachers.

Many educators are unaware of the strong lessons imparted to youth by these everyday contacts."

(We took this definition off the website that offered Prof Leslie Owen Wilson's "curriculum index" sometime during 2012/2013, but the site has since been re-organised and the original reference could not be found.)



IN DISCUSSION ... Institutional Culture Enlivening Process (ICEP)'s **Ilze Olckers** (from left) relaxes with ICT Services' **Steve Viljoen**, Academic Administration's **Thomas Kungu**, Legal Services' **Dennis Gondzo** and Infrastructure Project's **Graham Gouws**.

Institutional Support's journey from service to purpose



Creating a sense of community

A QUIET celebratory energy, a sense of community and authenticity and phrases like 'I think I am beginning to get it and 'I am learning to feel less guilty' and 'I want to be part of the change' and 'For the first time I am beginning to believe true transformation is possible' marked the end of the recent Institutional Support strategic planning session.

This is a long way from 2013 when Deputy Vice-Chancellor **Dr Sibongile Muthwa** on behalf of the Institutional Support (IS) Division invited the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process (ICEP) to facilitate their strategic planning session at Willows.

We decided to introduce two disruptive elements into this process which had not been part of any IS conversation before. The first was to invite **Prof Denise Zinn**, the then Dean of the Faculty of Education, to do a presentation on humanising pedagogies and the idea of the centrality of the 'academic project' in all our work at NMMU.

Not many participants were convinced at that time of the relevance of 'pedagogies' and talk of the 'academic project' for IS. The team, however, listened politely, graciously suspending their judgement about this being another one of those workshops which had very little to do with their actual work.

The second disruptive thing was to request participants to read Peggy Macintosh's seminal article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" and then to convene knee-

to-knee conversations about the ways in which, within Institutional Support, there was still blindness to white privilege and the experiences of black staff and students.

Not because of individual racist beliefs or behaviours among IS staff, but because of the invisible systems of privilege that are still active in many spaces in NMMU. The mood was gloomy and tense with participants struggling with the emotions this reading had evoked in them.

Staff struggled to both come to terms with articulating their pain to each other, as well as feelings of white guilt the article brought up, grappling

Institutional Support has travelled a fair distance since October 2013 when ICEP facilitated their strategic planning to arrive where they are today, excited and ready to co-own the academic project at NMMU, writes Ilze Olckers.

with the contradictions between a majority black government and public service, Employment Equity legislation and other measures for redress on the one hand; and the suggestion of entrenched white privilege on the other.

How could this be, if as 'white' NMMU staff, we did not *feel* privileged at all?

Some participants were openly hostile to the process, partly because they considered this all a waste of time and did not see how these conversations had anything to do with their daily tasks at NMMU.

Fast forward 18 months to the Running Waters Conference Centre on the

other side of PE for the 2015 IS Strategic Planning Retreat. The feeling is anticipatory, but warm, informal and engaging.

Two days earlier a participant who had struggled with the Macintosh reading 18 months earlier had already read the prescribed readings and was eager and excited to engage around the ideas of the 'post-colonised university' in the parking lot after the VC's Courageous Conversation.

In the interim Prof Zinn had become our DVC Teaching and Learning; a few Institutional Support staff had attended our Immersion Training Retreat and many are on the current

Courageous Conversation with the VC, belongs with the Institutional Support domain. This realisation is profound.

Not only is IS there to support the academic project, it forms an intrinsic part of the living or learned curriculum of NMMU. It is equally responsible for student success, for a transformative institutional culture. This time our readings are from "Putting an end to the causes of pain" by Dr Saleem Badat and "Global Apartheid and the decolonised campus" by Prof Achilles Mbembe from Wits.

At the end of Day 1, after robust conversations about de-colonising the university, there is an openness in the room. During lunch Dr Muthwa reminds us that when she took over this portfolio in 2011 the management team consisted of about 12 persons, some of whom did not even know each other.

Today we are a group of almost 50 leaders engaged in meaningful and intimate conversations about IS 'for tomorrow'.

From these emerge the need to be intentional in every domain of IS, intentional in how we use arts and culture, sport, health, legal services, admissions, ICT services, facilities and spaces to support student success and fulfil our core purpose and mission as contained in V2020.

Intentional in how we continue to deepen social cohesion and the ability to have difficult conversations within the IS team. Looking back, we have truly travelled some distance in the past months.

It did not seem to be too far a stretch, to suggest that this notion of a living or “learned curriculum” could provide a vital contextual understanding of our lived institutional culture.

So, the logic of the design of our initial entry conversations into the various domains of the university was as follows.

Invitation and gratitude rounds

We would position the sessions as reflecting on Vision 2020 and the particular domains’ alignment to the principles, values and vision contained therein, both in their core work as well as in the culture and climate of their divisions, departments, sections or faculties.

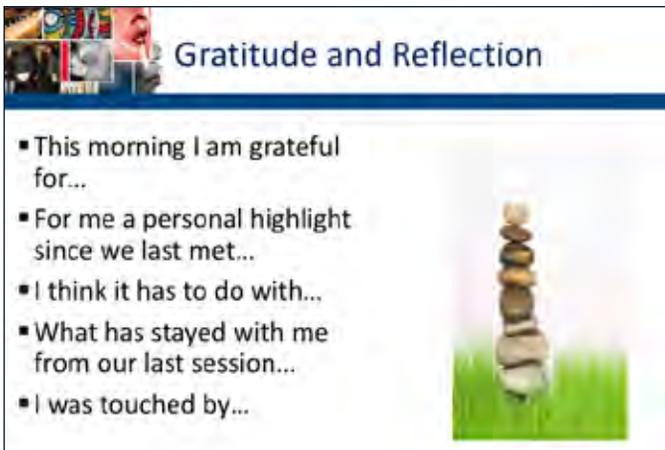
We started most of our processes with a ritual we called “the gratitude round”. This was part science, part ritual. It allowed us to immediately disrupt the “normal” way that meetings or training workshops are offered. Chairs would be placed in a circle with no tables in the way. The circle represented the intention of equality of the conversation space where each one’s voice mattered equally. It also signalled the reflective, relational and conversational orientation of the session.

The circle is also an indirect acknowledgement of indigenous processes which often happen in circular spaces – and it became an opportunity for team members to meet in an intimate space, to “face” one another, and “see” one another.

The research into the value of starting difficult conversations from a place of gratitude and gifts has grown over the years. The work of Peter Block and Nancy Kline has contributed to this, as well as spaces

like the Centre for Greater Good at the University of Berkeley and others. So has the neuro-science and positive organisational psychology movements. Peter Block, in his ground-breaking book “Community – the Structure of Belonging” (2008) talks about the five conversations that create a sense of “community”. One of them centres on gratitude and recognising our gifts. Indigenous people knew about the power of gratitude and blessing conversations.

These rounds were also often reflective in nature, asking questions about or reflecting back on a previous time or experience. They were also often geared towards learning or framed as a mini “appreciative inquiry” about recent highlights or peak experiences.



Gratitude and Reflection

- This morning I am grateful for...
- For me a personal highlight since we last met...
- I think it has to do with...
- What has stayed with me from our last session...
- I was touched by...



“Anything and everything that teaches a lesson, planned or otherwise. Humans are born learning, thus the learned curriculum actually encompasses a combination of all below ... the hidden, null, written, political and societal, etc ...”

In many of our sessions, these gratitude rounds were almost sacred hallowed moments as staff sometimes visibly had to “collect” themselves from their relentless operational pressures, take a step back and witness their own and their colleagues’ strivings, achievements, struggles and experiences. Most often, this round also had the unintended result of staff realising their interconnectivity and interdependence. It was workplace *Ubuntu*-in-action.

The idea of Nelson Mandela University

After the gratitude round, we started by using a quote from the Vice-Chancellor’s paper on “Competing ideas of the university” (2011) to make the point that universities are not a standard universal phenomenon, that they take different shapes and have different identities and orientations all over the world at different times in history, and then we posed the question:

What is the particular “idea” of Nelson Mandela University at this time? What does it uniquely stand for as a university? Why have you chosen to be part of this institution?

After some plenary conversations, we would answer these question by reminding the team about the key dimensions of section three of Vision 2020, read together with the “public good purposes” of the university as articulated by Prof Swartz in his paper. We would hand out our Vision 2020 pamphlet and allow the team time in groups to familiarise themselves with it, and discuss what struck them about this vision document.

Often, we would use this particular proverb to elicit a conversation about what the “face” of the university was. We wanted participants to recognise the distinction between tools, methods, protocols and policies on the one hand, and the essential character or experience of the institution on the other.

Later in the process, we would expand the focus of this question to the “face” of their department or faculty. Sometimes it led us into conversations about “losing face”, about “facing something”, about masks vs faces, authentic selves and the humanising approaches we are aspiring to. Many African languages greet in ways that acknowledge our human presence: “I see you” or *Namaste* “I see the divine in you”.

For many staff, this would be the first time that they engaged with Vision 2020 in any substantive way. They might

Reflecting on the Idea of NMMU



- It is important to recognize that there is no single, hegemonic *trans-historical* idea of the University that we can somehow retrieve in pristine form, as a template for shaping present-day universities. Throughout history, there have always been different, often contradictory and competing claims about the university and its purposes.



You can borrow a basket and a sieve; you cannot borrow a face.

Ovimbundu
Angolan proverb

Staff asked to explore and reflect on the way we do things at NMMU

What it means to be African?

LAST month NMMU hosted Africa Week, culminating with a celebratory concert on Africa Day on May 25 to commemorate the establishment of the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) in 1963.

How curious for us, as an African nation, to have to think, somewhat self-consciously, about bringing the concept of Africa to our collective consciousness, and especially so at NMMU with our vision to be a “dynamic African university”.

What does this mean for us as individuals and then at NMMU? Wherein do we find our African identity, if at all?

Is it purely a geographical marker – that we find ourselves at the Southern tip of the African continent? Is it because most of our students are considered black Africans that this makes NMMU an African university?

Is it because as our commitment to the “public good” are the commitments to promote social justice and transformation, to be in solidarity with the poor and marginalised, “to be committed to the production and dissemination of knowledge that can have a liberating effect on our world” (see Vision 2020 NMMU’s distinctive knowledge paradigm)?

Is it because we are committed to a humanising pedagogy in response to the dehumanisation of our past?

Is it this deliberate and intentional response to our continent’s inequalities and injustices, linked to the legacies of apartheid and colonialism that somehow constitutes our Africanness? Or will that root our identity in perpetual victimhood as Prof Achille Mbembe warns us in the book *Personal Growth Africa Style* by Barbara Nussbaum, Sudhansu Palsule and Velaphi Mkhize (Penguin 2010).

Or is it about a mindset, a set of values, a particular orientation to the world that is somehow distinctly African?

The authors also ask these questions in this powerful book and quote Prof Molefi Assante on the topic of Afrocentrism that “Africa’s philosophers have emphasised communalism, collectivism and cooperation, not because they are unfamiliar with individualism, but because in thousands of years

I am an African

To read former President Thabo Mbeki’s iconic speech *I am an African* go to <http://www.anc.org.za/show>.

Our vision is to be a “dynamic African university”. What does this mean for each of us individually and for all of us collectively at NMMU? Ilze Olckers explores the issue of being African as part of the on-going quest to transform our institutional culture.



Idea of a varsity

For an interesting overview of the historic development of universities across the ages and an expression of the desired “public good purposes” of NMMU, see Vice-Chancellor Prof Derrick Swartz’s paper on Competing Idea of the University. Email Elma.dekoker@nmmu.ac.za to source the article.

they have seen the value of the collective idea”.

So take a moment and reflect on what Africa means to you?

Do you think of civil wars and famine or do you think of the first examples of algorithms in the design of ancient African villages? Do you think of mad dictators or wise philosopher Kings like Moshoeshe as reflected on by Antjie Krog in her book *Begging to be Black* (Zebra Press 2009).

Do you think of the proverbial “dark continent” or do you think about some of the first thriving universities and libraries in the world?

Is there a tension for you between being “world-

class”, a “global leader” and our identity as African?

Do you think of Africa as foreign or do you think of it as home? Do you think of the citizens of our neighbouring countries in Southern Africa as our brothers and sisters; our cousins in West and East Africa and our distant relations beyond the Sahara?

What about some of the cultural practices and intolerances in our region? Is being gay somehow “unAfrican”? Is being Hindu or Buddhist “unAfrican”? Is having a very light skin not African enough?

So how then, is our African identity reflected and represented in our NMMU spaces, rituals, curricula and relationships?

Do we teach a science that is relevant and contextual and affirming of Africa’s scientific heritage? Do we imagine economics, enterprises, business and organisations that draw on the gifts and cultural resources of Africa? Do we think about ways of infusing African jurisprudence and restorative justice into our Law curriculum?

Do we infuse Western psychology with African practices of healing? Do we interrogate our unconscious individualist and Western approaches to our subjects and teaching practices?

Are we imagining and co-creating Africa anew, on our own campus, every day – and not just for one week during May?

Transformation sessions

During April and May, the institutional culture enlivening team had meaningful sessions with the Law Faculty, a large contingent of the Finance team; an E-Manco session exploring further our comprehensive and African identity as NMMU and a first session with Human Resources. Inquiries: Claire Dullisear on 041 5044674.

have been familiar with the six values, or they might have come across the short vision statement referring to being an “African university”, but the majority of staff would not have had an opportunity to reflect on, discuss or consider the relevance for their own work of the desired graduate attributes, knowledge paradigm or educational philosophy.

For the first time, they would come across terms like: “vibrant, stimulating, richly-diverse environment”, “global citizens” and “innovation culture”; as well as “transformational leadership”, “humanising pedagogies”, “diverse knowledge traditions” and “contribute to a multi-cultural society”; being “passionate about ecologically-diverse and sustainable natural environment” and “people-centred, caring, value-driven organisational cultures”; “knowledge that can have a liberating effect on our world”, “knowledge to advance social justice”, “liberating the human condition from all forms of discrimination and injustice” and “a commitment to ethical knowledge”, and so on.

What is the particular “idea” of Nelson Mandela University at this time? What does it uniquely stand for as a university? Why have you chosen to be part of this institution?

Vision 2020 pamphlet: ICEP’s guiding document

Part of the enlivening nature of this conversation, we believe, was the result of the creative presentation of the foundational vision and value statements in the Vision 2020 pamphlet (see Annexure 1).

We designed this pamphlet during the first year of the project, realising that at the time there was no accessible and compelling version of Vision 2020 available to staff. We intentionally designed it as having the core text running down the middle of the pages in a scroll-like fashion (taken verbatim from the official Vision 2020 document), with commentary and questions alongside, as if to mimic an active engagement with the text. We made sure we used a combination of statistics, quotes, proverbs, questions, poems and academic references to signify a diversity of knowledge sources; and we left space for notes. In some instances, we offered up contesting ideas to illustrate the “dialogical” nature of our process. We used doodles for icons and highlighted certain key concepts to which we wanted to pay specific attention. Throughout the ICEP journey, we received ongoing positive feedback about our Vision 2020 pamphlet and it was a standard hand-out for every participant at every session. For us, this pamphlet was our “value-rich vision story” as referred to by Sam Wells and Josie McLean (2013) in their article “One way forward to beat the Newtonian habit ...”. It was the “idea” of the university. It was our core curriculum. It was the framing document for all our conversations.

Vision 2020 – aspiration or lived experience?

At some stage, we would use the slides explaining the concept of institutional culture, as it was being thought of at Rhodes and Wits universities.

Often this part of our conversation would be followed by one of Australian cartoonist Michael Leunig's classic cartoons: "The way life is supposed to be" and "the way life actually is".



A participative plenary discussion on different interpretations of the cartoon usually provided rich conversations on the "aspirational" nature of Vision 2020 as it was captured in a perfect static document (the way life is supposed to be) and the reality of the daily lived lives in the institution – often broken and imperfect, contradictory, messy and improvised (the way life actually is).

This also provided an opportunity to begin to introduce to the participants the idea of a living systems approach

as opposed to a more mechanistic, predictable and control-orientated metaphor of organisational life and change processes. Real life is messy, contested and broken in many ways; but at the same time, there is resilience, creativity, innovation and striving.

This tension or disjunction between what we were aspiring to and how we were sometimes experiencing life at the university, further opened up the conversation about institutional culture, and how learned behaviours and underlying mental models, world views and value-systems created the actual lived experience in the institution rather than our stated desires and aspirational goals for ourselves and each other.

Active listening

This was sometimes followed by a more personal and relationship-building sharing in pairs around the questions: What does an African university mean to me? How am I in Africa? How is Africa in me? Share something about your upbringing that your colleague might not know. How might that have prepared you for the role you now have to play?

These pair conversations would often be framed as an active listening exercise where participants sat knee-to-knee and practised a focussed form of listening and feedback, intended to demon-

These pair conversations would often be framed as an active listening exercise where participants sat knee-to-knee and practised a focussed form of listening and feedback, intended to demonstrate the transformative power of deep listening and the humanising experience of truly being heard.



strate the transformative power of deep listening and the humanising experience of truly being heard.

Sometimes, at this stage in the conversation, we would introduce the idea of having to revisit the past in order to better understand the devastation of apartheid on all our humanities, and to liberate ourselves to be able to move together into the future. Our thanks to Zapiro for some of his cartoons which, over the years, enabled countless painful and meaningful conversations about what was still present from the past in all our lives and organisational spaces, and the work we still needed to do, individually and in groups.

Making the connection between participants' core work purposes and the living curriculum

From these more generic and personal conversations, we might then move to a more specific conversation focussing on the core work purpose of the specific team we were working with. We would formulate questions for them to grapple with, most often in café conversation settings, about how they were giving effect to Vision 2020 in their core work, how they could re-imagine their work to give greater effect to Vision 2020, and what might be needed in their own team to deepen relationships and create a greater sense of community where everyone's gifts and contributions could contribute to the overall work.

Often this last question would then lead us to the embedded racism and sexism in that team, the courageous conversations that might be needed and the more in-depth work we would have to do with that team around issues of organisational justice, internalised dominance and oppressions, unconscious white privilege and team cohesion.

At some stage, we would introduce the idea of the academic heartland or the centrality of the academic project for all our work and attempt to link back to the idea of the "learned" or "living" curriculum. This was especially important for the support and university administration divisions, but also to impress upon the academics that who they were and how they showed up in their teams and in the organisational spaces of their faculties, might be as important as what they were teaching in their classrooms.



The Chinese symbol for listening



PARTICIPANTS ... Among the George Campus staff attending sessions discussing institutional culture were (from left) ICT's **Lynette Williams**, Library's **Ndileka Mthizana**, Accounting Sciences **Jane Fountain**, Wood Technology's **Richard Muller** and Agricultural Management's **Maryna Lehmann-Maritz**.

Transforming NMMU culture

INSTITUTIONAL culture is the sum total of our collective daily experiences of life and work at NMMU and something that the university wants to transform to "live" more fully in our aspirations, set out in Vision 2020.

At the heart of this lived experience at NMMU and of its strategic plan, Vision 2020, is the very specific set of attributes with which students graduate and enter the world of work and service.

These attributes (see story below) have been agreed upon in Vision 2020. It is now the serious and meaningful task of the NMMU community – individually – to contribute to developing and deepening these attributes in ourselves and our students.

Some of the questions we have to ask ourselves especially as we reflect on our recent graduation and all the

There's a Nigerian proverb that says a straight tree doesn't last in the forest. What could this mean for us when thinking about a transformative institutional culture at NMMU? What does it say about "adaptive expertise" and "critical thinking" or "self-awareness" and "interdisciplinary knowledge," asks Ilze Olckers.

joy and pride that accompany this auspicious and culminating moment are:

- ▶ In what ways do our graduates reflect and embody the attributes identified by Vision 2020?
- ▶ What are the ways in which we, as staff, can role-model, encourage and develop these specific attributes in ourselves and in our students?

Our students are part of a complex country and a global village marked by growing inequalities, deepening poverty, intensifying conflicts, and social and environmental challenges our grandparents could not even have imagined.

Our world is a complex web of interconnection and interdependence. In some ways it can be compared to the ecosystems of an indigenous forest.

A straight tree, say the Akure people, doesn't last in a forest.

You might have a better chance in a plantation but a plantation is not a forest.

Are there ways in which we are still preparing students for life in a plantation when they have to survive and thrive as part of a complex, some-

times threatening, social ecosystem of a vibrant and robust forest?

- Are we still teaching and thinking in ways that assume sameness, homogeneity and one-size-fits-all?
- Are we expecting our students to think alike and along straight lines?
- Are we offering them diverse knowledge traditions and methodologies or are we aiming for a good "crop" and a kind of "monoculture of the mind" as scholar, author and activist Vandana Shiva asks in her ground-breaking book *Monocultures of the Mind: Biodiversity, Biotechnology and Agriculture*.

In his book, *Knowledge in the Blood*, Jonathan Jansen talks about how universities like the University of Pretoria were relied upon to generate "fraught

knowledge" and "loyal expertise" to sustain the system of apartheid.

He shares in the preface that "knowledge was, and still largely is 'white knowledge'."

"If transformation were going to happen at all, it would have to happen at the level of knowledge."

How are we doing in transforming the "knowledge" we are sharing and co-creating at NMMU?

How are we doing in graduating global citizens with self and social awareness in which to locate their in-depth disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge?

Are we seeing the forest for the trees?

During the past weeks the Institutional Cultural Enlivening team has held exciting sessions with the Dean and the directors of Schools in the Faculty of Business and Economic Sciences and with the leadership of George Campus as they envision a dynamic "sustainable future" for their campus.

Graduate attributes

NMMU students should possess the following attributes by the time they graduate:

- ▶ In-depth disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge
- ▶ Social awareness and responsible citizenry
- ▶ Adaptive expertise
- ▶ Creativity and innovation
- ▶ Critical thinking
- ▶ Self-awareness and
- ▶ Communication skills

Immersion retreat

A SECOND institutional culture immersion training retreat is being offered during the last week of the July recess. The July 14 to 18 retreat is your opportunity to participate in the process of "enlivening" our institutional culture in alignment with NMMU's values and Vision 2020. Inquiries: Claire Dullisear on 041 5044674

It was up to each of us, wherever we found ourselves in the institution, to figure out what our unique contribution was to “living into” Vision 2020 and, ultimately, to graduating students who embodied the attributes we desired for sustainable futures for all of us.

We would assert that as a university community, we were all, every one of us regardless of where we found ourselves in the system, and in the words of Prof Leslie Owen Wilson, “teaching a lesson”, all the time in everything we said and did.

Everyone who passed through our spaces would learn something from their encounter with us that would either contribute to realising our vision for the university, or undermine it. We were all collectively responsible for delivering on the promises contained in Vision 2020.

It was up to each of us, wherever we found ourselves in the institution, to figure out what our unique contribution was to “living into” Vision 2020 and, ultimately, to graduating students who embodied the attributes we desired for sustainable futures for all of us.

Throughout the ICEP project, whenever we referred to humanising pedagogies and even issues of curriculum renewal – the act and art of teaching and learning – we did not necessarily confine our conversations to the classroom. We worked with the notion of a “living curriculum”, which included all the different “embedded practices” that made up daily campus life, including but not exclusively, classroom practices.

We attempted to find ways to integrate our understanding of institutional culture with our understanding of teaching and learning. We attempted to take some of the key aspects of humanising pedagogies into other social and organisational processes of co-creation and co-investigation, working with context, cultural wealth, mutual vulnerabilities and social technologies that aimed to re-humanise our organisational spaces, critical consciousness, enlargement and re-thinking in everything we did, from classroom practices to National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) task teams to institutional planning.

Every interaction students and other members of the Nelson Mandela University community had within the university environment – from their experience in the lecture halls or with the university’s administration, to their experience of life in a residence, to meetings, senate, faculty management committees, societies, sports and co-curricular activities offered by the university: all of these engagements, we argued, could be seen as part of the living curriculum.

Our processes would typically make use of conversation rounds with “prompt” sentences, small group conversations sometimes in triads (groups of three sitting knee-to-knee), pair conversations (often framed as an active listening exercise, practising listening

Our processes would typically make use of conversation rounds with “prompt” sentences, small group conversations sometimes in triads (groups of three sitting knee-to-knee), pair conversations (often framed as an active listening exercise, practising listening on distinct levels and reflecting back to the speaker what was heard), and café conversations.

on distinct levels and reflecting back to the speaker what was heard), and café conversations.

In longer processes, we would also introduce journalling, rich pictures, open space, story-telling, mind-mapping, and creative writing exercises for reflection and integration. We would make use of cartoons, proverbs and other forms of projective techniques to facilitate individual learning and sense-making. We would always work with check-in and check-out rounds to contain our group processes and again affirm the value of each voice in the room.

Conversational spaces and reading materials

As we did during the Faculty of Education’s *Re-visioning Journey*, we would also experiment with the venues and spaces where we convened some of our processes.

One of our favourite venues in Port Elizabeth was the South End Museum, as it provided a rich and painful historical text against which to have conversations about social healing and creating different futures. The different campuses also each brought different dimensions into our conversations. The Business School in its “green building” on Second Avenue Campus evoked conversations about sustainability, different approaches to and models for doing business, and environmental stewardship.

Missionvale Campus and its surrounds reminded us of the unfinished economic transformation of our democracy and who, ultimately, all our collective work was for.

And more recently, Bird Street Campus, other than being the home of the university’s School of Music, Art and Design (SoMAD) and contributing to the renewal and reinvigoration of Central, was the perfect setting for an experiential encounter and inquiry into curriculum renewal and the layers upon layers of sometimes invisible histories and stories we needed to be able to work with in our enlarged knowledge offerings and innovative pedagogies.

As mentioned, all our processes had some preparatory readings prescribed to the team. These ranged from readings around the living systems paradigm in organisations, to transformational leadership, to issues of social and organisational justice and transformation relating specifically to the higher education sector, and also to discipline-specific texts that disrupted previously-dominant paradigms. Often, we would make a careful selection of readings to cover at least two or three of the main focus areas of the conversation. In this way, we aimed to model a “pedagogical” or “learning” orientation.



The readings were meant to disrupt and challenge dominant worldviews. We expected participants to struggle with some of the readings, and deepen their inquiries. We also wanted to create spaces for critical engagement with those texts and make space for dissent and disagreements. We wanted to break down the idea that it was only the academics who needed to read and reflect in our institution. We wanted to make the point that, as a knowledge-sector organisation, we were all expected to adopt an organisational learning stance. We all needed to understand the fundamentals of a humanising pedagogy, and the competing ideas of a university.

Organisational transformation begins with the transformation of the leadership group

A significant breakthrough for us was the proposal by the small ICEP project management team that the lead facilitator take on the task of “continuity facilitation” of the EMANCO structure in December 2012. This session took place at the Nelson Mandela University Clubhouse on 12 December 2012 and is still a vivid memory.

We had asked each participant to bring with them an object that, to them, held some symbolic value of the distinct spirit or practices of Africa, to lead us into our inquiries about what a “dynamic African university” meant to us. The then Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, Prof Thoko Mayekiso (who went on to become the Vice-Chancellor of the newly established University of Mpumalanga), brought with her a grass mat, which she set down in the centre of the room, and in the centre of our conversation circle.

She spoke about the symbolism of this woven grass mat in such a way that it was as if she were performing a ritual. She seemed to be invoking the blessing of the ancestors on our journey. She spoke about the qualities of humility and reverence, groundedness in context, sufficiency and creativity. Of course, the weaving of grass mats are also predominantly “women’s work” and this also affirmed the adoption of a more feminine and relational leadership and approach to our work.

The lead facilitator continued to design and facilitate the EMANCO retreats, in conjunction with Prof Heather Nel from the Office for Institutional Planning and Dr Laura Best, Special Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor, throughout 2013 and 2014. This part of our work was brought to a close on 14 and 15 October 2014 at the final EMANCO Retreat of 2014 at Cape St Francis Retreat Centre. During 2015 and 2016, I, as the lead facilitator, supported Prof Nel in her convening role at these retreats and intermittently contrib-

**He who
has not
travelled widely
thinks
his mother is
*the best cook.***

Lusaka, Zambia

uted to the EMANCO spaces to give feedback on ICEP processes or to facilitate certain discrete pieces of work, such as the August 2016 retreat, entitled “Sustainable ways of being, thinking and doing during times of volatility, uncertainty and complexity: Thriving in a new place/a new time”; and the November 2016 retreat focussing on harvesting insights, gifts and learnings from the university’s journey through the #FeesMustFall process.

A short summary of this final retreat of 2016 was produced by Dr Denver Webb, Acting CEO of the Nelson Mandela University Trust, and entitled “Golden Threads”: it stands as a record of the transformative journey this community of leaders had been on and the extraordinary leadership, courage, camaraderie, teamwork, innovation and adaptive expertise they embodied throughout the turbulence of 2016.

It is my sincere hope that the new work practices, the use of social technologies and other innovative methodologies to deepen learning and reflection; the focus on building relationships and keeping each other accountable through courageous conversations and a common vision for the future of Nelson Mandela University, introduced into this leadership space from that first workshop in December 2012; will continue to be nurtured and developed by the convenors of these spaces and will continue to grow and deepen into the future.

Immersion training retreats



In December 2013, we hosted our first immersion training retreat for 35 participants who had been nominated, based on certain criteria developed by our Reference Group, as a first round of potential change agents in the system. This in-depth extraordinary session was convened off-site in a lovely venue in Cape St Francis, over a period of almost a week (from Monday midday to Friday midday). This was the first opportunity to offer a more comprehensive “curriculum” around transformative institutional cultures; and to offer it by way of an “immersion” methodology designed to accelerate individual and group learning and transformation.

We offered a second immersion retreat during July 2014, followed by two more during the mid-year recess in 2015 and 2016. In total, 137 participants participated in the immersion retreats. Our participants were representative of the “whole system” of Nelson Mandela University. This was an important part of our “theory of change” and would constitute the “cross-pollination” required of conversational processes in living systems.

Sincere desire by staff to co-create a different future

On-going dialogue needed

EVERYONE'S unwavering dedication to the vision and mission of NMMU and a sincere desire to co-create a future different from our past is one of the gratifying discoveries participants have made during various meetings involving mixed groups of NMMU staff and students these past weeks.

From the Institutional Culture Enlivening Immersion Retreats (the last was held in July) and the subsequent Review and Refresher sessions, to exploratory sessions on humanising pedagogy and work with the newly-constituted NMMU Gender Forum – all groups with mixed representation across the different domains of NMMU – everyone is moved by the great passion, commitment, diversity and talent they encounter from their colleagues at NMMU.

Whether staff are in procurement, botany, marketing, literature, student counselling, exams, computer science or law, everyone is committed to NMMU and to co-creating a future different from our past, regardless of the multitude of different perspectives. Sometimes, for the first time, participants experience 'meeting' a sense of the 'whole NMMU' of which they form a small part.

How wonderful to see staff encountering and revelling in all our diversity. How meaningful for participants to have conversations that include students and staff. Hearing from students allows all of us to get a much deeper insight into some of the difficulties we face as an institution.

How good to be reminded that innovation and experimentation can be as scary to students as to staff. And that while there is a hunger for meaningful education spanning the whole spectrum of the NMMU desired graduate attributes, there is also what Paulo Freire called "the fear of freedom" for students who have been schooled in a spoon-fed banking (traditional) educational philosophy that

For renewal in our university, curricula and social life, we need to intentionally move out of our silos and separateness and connect with one another across a multitude of differences, writes Ilze Olckers.

never acknowledged or encouraged their strengths, agency or critical thinking.

It has also been rewarding to re-discover the joys of engaging across the different generations at NMMU – to hear some of the challenging stories of black academics returning from studying overseas, or of non-South African black staff and students; the "double-deficit" as one participant put it – "being black and being a foreign black" in the metro.

"NMMU might be a safe space for me, but when I leave the campus I lose all privileges."

To hear the gratitude of "the oppressor stories" of white males who courageously spoke about their life's journeys – recognising that while they were comfortably studying in UPE residences, some of their counterparts were completing their studies in prison for no reason other than their commitment to a free South Africa.

"Now that I have a better understanding of the path you have walked as a privileged person, I might

NMMU might be a safe space for me, but when I leave the campus I lose all privileges.

be able to understand the behaviours of some of your colleagues a bit better," said a participant.

Then again to hear the gratitude expressed for the men who are taking a lead in the establishment of the Gender Forum.

These acts of "crossing boundaries" give purpose, hope and resilience for the work ahead. It is deeply true that for renewal to come into our university spaces and curricula and social life we need to intentionally move out of our silos to



connect with one another across a multitude of differences.

There is a word of warning, however.

According to "contact theory" research, just throwing people of different backgrounds, histories and life experiences together might result in a hardening of the stereotypes we hold about each other. It might even further entrench our differences and prejudices.

Something more than just "contact" is needed everywhere we live and work together. Dialogue is necessary. Deep listening to one another with compassion and courage is necessary. Learning to withhold judgement is needed. Being open to and interested in one another's life stories is needed.

Talking about things that matter is needed – like the vision and mission of NMMU; like how far we have come in the last nine years; like our values and the complex reasons for when we fail to act in accordance with those values; like our responsibility to deal with the legacy of our past even when we desperately want to believe it is no longer necessary.

As we celebrate another year of blessings, seek out colleagues from a different section to yours, have a joint end-of-year celebration with another department and initiate conversations that matter.

Ask powerful questions of each other and let's re-discover our NMMU.

Who knows what else you may discover?



CULTURAL BLEND ...
Finance staff members (from left) Cheryl Jewnarain, Sanet Teubes, Rene van Wyk, Hentie van Eck, Salome Netnou, Hentie van der Merwe don traditional clothing at the department's diversity month event.



We also recognised that, in keeping with our “theory of change”, even a few committed change agents could make a significant difference wherever they found themselves in the system.

For every retreat, we attempted to have participation from academic staff from all seven faculties as well as all the main “support” divisions. This included participation from staff in areas as diverse as technical services, sports, student affairs, legal services, libraries, academic administration, finance, IT and so on, all together in one room. For many staff, this would be the first time they encountered such a broad cross-representation of the entire university community.

What we experienced in these sessions was truly transformational, in terms of recognising our interdependence, working creatively with the cross-pollination of ideas, breaking down stereotypes, transcending the artificial boundaries between academic and professional or administrative staff, having inter-generational conversations, encountering “the other”, understanding the social dimensions of learning together and “creating the future we desire in the room”.

Our intention was always to support the development of a more facilitative management and leadership style at the university, through our facilitation role-modelling and through our offerings and readings around transformational leadership in complex systems. We also recognised that, in keeping with our “theory of change”, even a few committed change agents could make a significant difference wherever they found themselves in the system.

One of the last streams of work in the second phase of the ICEP process in 2017 was to offer in-depth “facilitation skills” training to “graduates” of the immersion retreats to support them in further developing practical facilitation skills. By the end of 2017, about 50 participant change agents from a diverse range of levels and domains, would have received this opportunity to support the ongoing transformative processes at Nelson Mandela University, going forward into 2018 and beyond.

Phase II of the ICEP project

During August 2014 (and as mentioned in chapter 1), a small working group, delegated by the Reference Group, met to make sense of the first phase of the ICEP project and to plan and envision a second phase. During this time, my contract as lead facilitator was extended for another three-year period, until 2017.

The work done during the first phase of the ICEP project evolved into a subsequent stage of “differentiation”, as we entered the second phase of the project at the beginning of 2015.

From the initial two streams of work, the “Deepening the Conver-

sations” sessions and the immersion training retreats, a further five streams of work were identified during our planning conversations as requiring our strategic, focussed energy namely:

1. A *Transformational Leadership Journey* for mid-level leaders in the institution;
2. Working with the Office of Institutional Planning in the Vice-Chancellor’s office to reflect on ways of “Connecting the Gains” of our project and to explore developmental evaluation & planning frameworks for the university;
3. An initiative to begin to “Re-image Rituals and Lifecycles” at the university;
4. To expand the focus of the project to include student voices;
5. And, finally, to support the momentum for the establishment of a gender forum.

Of these five new streams of work identified at the beginning of the second phase of our project, two streams continued into 2016, namely the *Transformational Leadership Journey* for the mid-level leaders, and the “Connecting the Gains” work with the Office for Institutional Planning (OIP).

To this, we added another most significant stream of work from around September 2015, focussing on “re-positioning” the Teaching and Learning Project at Nelson Mandela University, and in particular supporting the deans and the faculty Teaching and Learning Committees in their curriculum transformation initiatives, which we named our *Curriculum Renewal Journey*.



Vision
Paradigm shift
Accountability, transparency, accessibility
The silenced voices echo
Purpose

Immersion 2016

Transformational leadership journey

At the beginning of 2015, we designed a year-long *Transformational Leadership Journey* for the mid-level leaders, which ran throughout 2015 and continued for a second iteration into 2016. The journey consisted of six workshop sessions spread over the

In service of society



THE concept of 'transformational leadership' is embedded as a key concept of Vision 2020, as part of the university's educational purpose and philosophy,

And this needs to happen through teaching and learning, research and engagement activities, and the development of the full potential of our staff and students.

In a world where there are as many as 150 different leadership theories, what do we, at NMMU, mean by this?

In January, NMMU launched a new action-learning "Transformational Leadership Journey" for the mid-level leaders within NMMU.

As DVC Teaching and Learning **Prof Denise Zinn** said in her introduction "Whether you are a new DVC like myself, or a new SRC member or a Head of Department HoD – quoting DVC Institutional Support **Dr Sibongile Mutwa** at the SRC Investiture ceremony "We are all learning leadership!"

At the final E-Manco Retreat of 2014, senior leadership of NMMU explored this theme, taking the four I's of transformational leadership (as identified by the authors Bass and Avolio) as a starting point. They are:

- ▶ Idealised influence and a clear vision and purpose
- ▶ Inspirational motivation and increasing positive energy in your team
- ▶ Intellectual stimulation by providing thought leadership, new ideas and ways of doing to your team and
- ▶ Individual consideration, paying attention to individual needs and potential, knowing and caring for your team members.

A big challenge for E-Manco was re-interpreting these four dimensions against our South African history, within the context of Higher Education and the realities of our own university community.

From the initial and exploratory small group and café conversations, four broad themes for transformational leadership emerged, namely:

- ▶ Co-creating socially engaged and integrated curriculum with community-based, problem-solving assignments in diverse multi-disciplinary teams
- ▶ Inculcating a holistic focus on the actual material conditions of differently situated students including exploring practical assistances/innovative partnerships to address these
- ▶ Listening campaigns with stakeholders in various spaces, media and multi-lingual settings and
- ▶ Enrolling staff into the spirit of V2020 through increased participation, making use of stimulating questions, social technologies and safe spaces for storytelling.

The purpose of the Transformational Leadership Journey for the mid-level leaders at NMMU has been captured:

- ▶ to collectively discover what transformational



*SHARING IDEAS ... Finance's **Shayne Hardiman**, Procurement's **Thina Balakistnen** and **Simone Cameron** and Law's **Prof Adriaan van der Walt** participated in the recent Transformational Leadership Journey workshop organised by the Institutional Culture Enlivening Project.*

- leadership means for us as mid-level leaders, specifically in the NMMU context in 2015 and beyond
- ▶ to discover the qualities, competencies and skills of transformational leadership we need to grow and develop in ourselves and our teams to achieve our core purpose
 - ▶ to provide an opportunity/space to create a community-of-practice where we can share insights, reflections and learnings of strategic experiments in transformational leadership and

Transformational leadership should ultimately be in 'service of society,' writes Ilze Olckers.

- ▶ to do so in a way that could also open up a space for praxis and a scholarly engagement with our leadership tasks.

One of the affirming aspects of the workshops so far has been the participation of both academic leaders and professional and administrative leaders in the same space. For the first time for many participants, the idea of the "academic project" as a shared and integrated challenge for all staff hit home.

We are interconnected and interdependent and everything we do affects and impacts each other and the student's experience and lifecycle at NMMU. We are collectively responsible for our core purpose namely to successfully graduate students who fulfil the graduate attributes identified in V2020.

We discovered that for every challenge in academic leadership there is a potential corollary in the professional and support divisions – humanising

pedagogies need to be supported by humanising practices; renewal needs to be supported by innovation in bureaucratic systems and policies.

We are sharing the challenges of differentiating what is urgent from what is important and working more consciously with those areas of our leadership tasks that are not necessarily urgent but that will ensure longer term renewal and giving life to V2020.

We also reflected on the "dual hat" appointments of academic leaders who have to continue their enlivening teaching and research while also stepping into their leadership roles. Much soul-searching is required from all of us about the ambivalence of many academic leaders to take on this challenge.

The first round of workshops also yielded some good data around on-going areas of frustration for mid-level leaders such as shortage of accommodation or the loss of lab assistants as well as the conversations around FRE.

This promises to be an exciting and truly transformative journey – learning leadership together!

Next retreat
The next Immersion Training Retreat will be held at Cape St Francis during the last week of the July recess. Please contact **Harsheila Riga** if you are interested in participating in this transformative four-day NMMU experience.

year, taking our Vision 2020 educational purpose and philosophy as our main framework and outline for our journey. The six themes for the six workshop sessions were as follows:

1. Transformational leadership
2. Humanising pedagogies and practices
3. Diverse knowledge traditions and practices
4. Ability to contribute to a multi-cultural society
5. Sustainability and ecological awareness
6. People-centred, caring, values-driven organisational culture

How to move forward with the mid-level leadership group remained unclear. On the one hand, we looked to their senior managers and deans to support them and role-model the kind of transformational leadership we have embraced as an institution, but this was not happening consistently. On the other hand, the university's Human Resources department offered ad hoc "management training", but this did not speak into the same paradigm and approaches put forward by the ICEP journey. A further development could be the establishment of a mid-level leader forum across faculties and departments where peer support and learning could continue to take place, as experimented with during the *Transformational Leadership Journey*. Mid-level leaders need both practical skills as well as paradigmatic and strategic dimensions to their leadership development, all within an organisational justice and pedagogical frame.

Our experience with the middle managers during the 2015 and 2016 processes was again uneven. Often, we would be left with the "converted" participants in the room, a much smaller group of committed and dedicated leaders. The tension between "operational pressures" and the reflective learning spaces we tried to create in our sessions, was cited as the most frequent apology for cancellations and non-attendance. We encountered a strange combination within these cohorts of people feeling overwhelmed, along with a kind of "lethargy" (in the words of one of our Deputy Vice-Chancellors) or learned helplessness syndrome. While the leading edge of institutional change might not be found primarily at this level in the institution, they do fulfil a crucial and often thankless role in coordinating academic programmes and setting a certain tone in their faculties and departments. Going forward, a re-imagined HR function within our institution would have to pay particular attention to the roles and needs of this level of leadership; and the tasks of senior managers and deans in supporting and developing their own leadership teams, need to be made much more explicit.

Connecting the Gains

The Institutional Culture Enlivening Process reported on interventions that have resulted in shifts and changes in our institution over time. As these institutional culture processes have unfolded over the last few years, some key questions have emerged, including: how do we make sense of these changes; how do we 'measure' them; 'evaluate' them; connect the renewal, innovations and changes to one another in such a large, complex organisation? Furthermore, how do we feed it back to the institution in a way that it can further inspire others to experiment with change, increase our sense of joy and hopefulness, and remind us that we are not alone in dealing with all the stresses of trying to figure out what transformation means?

The Office for Institutional Planning, under the leadership of Professor Heather Nel, is one of the critical domains for answering these questions. This Office is also pivotal in setting the tone for how the University complies with the regulations and requirements of the higher education sector, while ensuring an overall coherence and alignment of initiatives and innovations with the strategic imperatives outlined in Vision 2020.

One of the main aims of the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process is to awaken us to the idea of our university as a 'living system', made up of human beings, governed by the rules of 'complexity' in accordance with the 'new sciences'. One of our seminal readings is the *One Way Forward to Beat the Newtonian Habit* written by colleagues from the Business School in Australia. We believe that only by engaging with the university as a complex living system can we help transform it towards greater justice in the social, economic, pedagogic and epistemological dimensions. We assert that a complexity approach to our work will ultimately result in more humanising pedagogies, practices and experiences. So what does this mean for the Office for Institutional Planning?

During our workshops with the Office, this team has grappled with some very profound and challenging questions. We used the 'rich pictures' methodology, where participants drew images of what the future might look like as we begin to work within a new paradigm. Three powerful scenarios emerged from this exercise, namely: Listening Ear; Comrades Marathon; and the Mirror and the Cloud. What happens, the one group asked, if we only mirror back to the institution templates, surveys, graphs and tables, when the true lived experiences and strivings of everyone who makes up our institution sits in the dynamic, continuously changing, mysterious, life-giving cloud that surrounds us every day?

During the Connecting the Gains workshops with the Office, we explored new cutting-edge approaches to monitoring and evaluation, planning and information-flows in our university from a complexity perspective. This is the exciting part – there are almost no precedents, case studies, best practices or even much scholarship to help us. Already our understanding has moved from traditional evaluation practices to 'developmental evaluation' and further towards the notions of 'social impact management' as pre-

dicted by evaluation scholars. Many of the authors in the organisational development field suggest that the work of the Office for Institutional Planning forms as essential part of the energy fields within an organisation given the importance of feeding nourishing, rich information into complex, living systems as a precondition for evolution, adaptability and growth.

It is early days in the journey of the OIP and many staff are still wrestling with the almost impossible tensions and contradictions in their work, requiring profound personal reflections and awareness. As an important starting point, the workshops have generated a redefined and sharpened sense of purpose for the OIP, as well as novel processes and practices to enliven their strategically critical role in making information – in quantitative and qualitative forms – accessible to the institution for the purposes of direction setting, strategy implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. This can only bode well in propelling Nelson Mandela University forward on its transformation journey as it seeks to generate cutting-edge knowledge and life-changing educational opportunities for a sustainable future.

Talk, unpublished article



Connecting the gains

Our inquiry into the idea of “Connecting the Gains” started with our convening a first workshop with the Office of Institutional Planning (OIP) on 20 March 2015, and continued into 2016. The OIP, which has the primary responsibility for the strategic and academic planning, reporting, and information and data analytics of our institution, also had responsibility for “institutional research” as well as the “monitoring and evaluation” function.

It soon became clear, however, that the OIP did not have the capacity, both in terms of staff or scarce skills, to innovate and develop more cutting-edge processes for “Connecting the Gains” or tracking transformative change in the institution. The monitoring and evaluation function continued to be offered in a technical and compliance-driven way; and the institutional researcher continued to focus on discrete pieces of institutional research which were required as part of other strategic priorities.

Our transformation journey with the OIP did in the end yield an inspiring new understanding of their core purpose as an office, a compelling new vision for their office as well as experimental new work practices. It was an intense meaningful journey of grappling with the tensions between the compliance and regulatory environ-

Struggle
Grapple, Disrupt
Work, Dismantle, Construct
Rediscover, by uncovering new-self
RELEASE

Immersion 2016



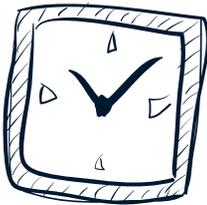
ment of the higher education sector and the new organisational paradigms with which the university was experimenting .

Going forward, the next phase of the transformation journey for the OIP will be to reflect on how they might have to re-structure their office to liberate more focussed creativity and innovation toward their new vision, to become more “fit for purpose”, and to be able to respond in cutting-edge ways to the strategic needs of the institution from a transformative complexity-based planning and information paradigm.

At the time of writing these reflections, we are still intending to

explore various opportunities, including an action-learning process for a small team, guided by a skilled developmental evaluator, to develop the capacity and competencies, the new skills-set, orientation and approach required to track complex transformative change in organisations. How this role is given meaning in the OIP; and how it will support ongoing transformative change together with other internal role-players such as the community liaison and communications division will constitute the next cycle of work, beyond the lifespan of the ICEP project.

Rituals and lifecycles at Nelson Mandela University



If the daily lived experiences of staff and students make up the institutional culture of Nelson Mandela University, then the annual university lifecycle and ritualised milestone events on the university calendar creates the container and sets the tone within which those experiences take place. This becomes the domain of the dominant aesthetics and “feel” of the institution, the artefacts and cultural expressions of our identity, the sensory memories and experiences of our spaces.

If the daily lived experiences of staff and students make up the institutional culture of Nelson Mandela University, then the annual university lifecycle and ritualised milestone events on the university calendar creates the container and sets the tone within which those experiences take place.

We experimented with this idea early on by working with the Archives and Exhibition Centre during 2014. Their annual “exhibition” on Second Avenue Campus was to take the shape of a photographic competition for staff and students and our contribution was to suggest a reference to Vision 2020 and, in particular, the values of the university as the topic of the competition. The competition produced stunning and evocative photographic images, each speaking to one of the university values. During the formal opening of the exhibition, the shortlisted photographs were acknowledged and a winner announced. This was our first attempt at foregrounding Vision 2020 and the university’s values in one of the annual events on the university calendar.

During 2015, we completed a review of the key rituals and events in the lifecycle of Nelson Mandela University and attempted to convene event-specific conversations with the staff responsible for those activities. Our initial attempts did not get any traction in the

It is likely that an entirely re-imagined graduation ceremony, with all the significance and symbolism it represents, will act as a catalyst and motivation for some of the other domains to re-think their own rituals and activities.



system. It became clear that our initiative was seen as interfering with the line functions of the responsible staff and that any re-imagination or renewal would have to be led and championed by the line managers themselves. As a result, the project to re-imagine rituals and lifecycles at the university was eventually devolved back to the relevant line managers, but sadly not in a coherent and sustained way. Our strategy and approach in this domain of work was not sufficiently grounded in the realities and constraints of the different and respective line functions themselves, and we overestimated the degree of readiness in the institution to take up this challenge to its fullest potential.

A few key university role players were responsible for the majority of these milestone events, in particular, Human Resources, Community and Stakeholder Liaison, Student Counselling and Student Affairs.

This was one of the areas where not having the transformation objectives clearly embedded in the key performance areas of senior leadership also compromised our efforts. Where staff were not convinced of the necessity of, or sufficiently motivated to, re-imagine and re-think their offerings, certain significant events remained in the same old outdated format for the duration of our project, despite all the efforts at creating a new enlivened "organisational field".

Among these domains, Student Counselling had done consistent work in re-imagining the student orientation process; and our graduation events convened by the Registrar's office developed a marginally more African flavour. At the time of writing these reflections, however, a much more substantive graduation transformation project was being convened.

It is likely that an entirely re-imagined graduation ceremony, with all the significance and symbolism it represents, will act as a catalyst and motivation for some of the other domains to re-think their own rituals and activities.

Other exciting events on the annual university calendar have acted as dynamic incubators for change and introduced the seedlings of a more African-centered and enlivened experience of university life. These include: the work of CANRAD in its multiple forms including its series of Difficult Dialogues, Africa Week and Diversity Month, the Critical Consciousness Colloquia and the subsequent Neville Alexander, Non-Racialism and the Pre-colonial Catalytic Conferences, among others; the institutional courageous conversations convened by Prof Swartz during 2015 and 2016; the Vice-Chancellor's annual Cultural Evenings which had become a

highlight of the re-imagined university; and, of course, absolutely everything organised and offered by the Arts and Culture Unit who, in the spirit of inclusivity and deep diversity, consistently pushed the boundaries of relevance and excellence.

In 2016, we celebrated the launch of the university's gallery on Bird Street Campus with a beautiful ceremony and a formidable praise singer. This Gallery has hosted one challenging and provocative exhibition after another. Many faculties host exciting and impactful community-based events and encounters; and there is a multitude of engagement projects and other "reasons to be proud", that go beyond the scope of these reflections.

However, the Holy Grail of the re-imagining of the rituals of Nelson Mandela University belongs to the elements of the "colonial administration", which continues to reproduce itself outside of the scope of our project. It is possible that we posed our questions too flippantly when we did, or that the system was not yet ready to respond to such a radical endeavour. An African proverb says: "Those who tell the truth are chased out of ten villages". With the ICEP project now ending, this might be the safest time to raise these issues.

*Those who
tell the truth
are chased out
of ten villages*

African Proverb

It is not clear why the committee meetings by which the university is governed and functions, have to, by necessity, take the formal and hierarchical structure and tone that they do. While this is a conversation that goes beyond the scope of these reflections, it's worth noting that Robert's Rules of Order [the system used to govern these meetings] were created to serve certain legitimate congressional purposes in the United States of America in 1876. These rules, along with other precedents on which our system is based, are surely due for some re-thinking and re-imagining in our current context, without compromising good governance. We know that how we gather together to grapple with complex problems, is at the heart of our transformation practice. So, why do all our meetings then continue to display rituals and rules from the 19th century US House of Representatives? We have powerful examples of African ways of gathering together to talk about important matters. We have demonstrated through the ICEP process, certain hybrid social technologies that undergird transformative change. We have explored the components of thinking environments and principles for effective meetings. How we "institutionalise" these different knowledges into our operational practices, while maintaining accountability, good governance and regulatory compliance, is a further threshold of our transformation journey.

Engaging with the student voice

ICEP spent the second and third terms in 2015 attempting to convene our first student leadership session. Initially the idea was to utilise the statutory Student Parliament format to host our conversations. Due to multiple reasons, these attempts did not come to fruition. Finally, with great excitement, we were able to convene a two-day comprehensive student leadership process for approximately 120 student leaders from the Student Representative Council (SRC), residences and societies, together with a facilitation team of seven radical young interns and young lecturers. This event was scheduled to take place exactly two days after the first #RhodesMustFall disruptions occurred in October 2015.

On the advice of our student convenors and with a heavy heart, we agreed to cancel this session at the last minute in favour of the momentum and integrity of our local student activists and burgeoning local student movement.

During 2016, due to the disruptions and contestations of the official SRC structures, and the volatile situation on campus where students rejected dialogical processes in favour of direct action, there were no meaningful spaces in which to re-engage with the student voice. We had lost our opportunity.

It was decided at our Reference Group that our task with the ICEP project, with regard to the Student Voice stream of work, would be to ensure that, as far as possible, we advocated for and included student participation into all the other institutional processes we were facilitating in faculties or other domains. This worked particularly well in the *Curriculum Renewal Journey*, a new stream of work in the second phase of the project initiated in 2016.

We also invited a select group of student leaders, some of whom were also leaders of the #FeesMustFall movement, to our July 2016 immersion retreat. Their participation in this retreat was disruptive to our formal workshop programme which eventually had to be abandoned in favour of a different format, and once again we lost the opportunity of demonstrating the transformative power of the immersion methodologies. However, it did lead to meaningful engagement and conversations during our time together on retreat, and it did provide an opportunity, for me as lead facilitator, to model adaptive expertise, flexibility, deep listening and a commitment to a reflective and dialogical orientation rather than pure one-sided advocacy, which is where many of the #FeesMustFall activists found themselves.

What was especially moving were the inter-generational conversa-

What was especially moving were the inter-generational conversations between young activists and older black academics who had spent a lifetime committed to opening up access to higher education for black students, only to be branded collaborators of the colonial system and to endure disrespect and, in some instances, outright abuse from the students during the #FeesMustFall protest actions.

Constituting a gender forum at NMMU 'Engender V2020'

WITHOUT critically reflecting on the gender distortions in the university's curriculum or liberating ourselves from pre-determined patriarchal "roles" that society allocates, we will not be able to realise the university's strategic plan of Vision 2020.

This is why a small group of NMMU staff and students, who have been meeting formally to constitute an NMMU Gender Forum for the past two years, have extended their discussions till the end of the year and are also expanding participation.

It is crucial that the process to "engender Vision 2020" is thorough.

Some of the themes that have emerged during consultations are:

- ▶ Violence against women on campus
- ▶ Workplace discrimination
- ▶ Gender in the curriculum

One of the first questions the Forum will have to attend to is its name.

It is not constituting a Women's Forum. What is the difference?

One way this question has often been answered is to say that "women" is a biological term whereas "gender" is a cultural construct. Our biology is decided in utero, but our different histories and cultures determine what is considered masculine or feminine.

Certain roles in society then became allegedly more suited to certain genders. Society also places different values – both culturally and materially – on the work and ways of being that are traditionally associated with women and men. These are then reinforced by our educational, legal and economic systems.

Now that the biological basis for thinking about different "races" has finally been exposed, we are also being challenged by brave people who, through choice or biology, do not define themselves as either wholly female or male. They operate with mixed or changing gender identities. The movement for recognising the transgender community is growing, also in South Africa; and their task is to help us deconstruct the ways we think about the issues of gender and sexuality.

Historically, gender has its origins in the emergence of patriarchy somewhere around 4000 BC (see *The Creation of Patriarchy* by Gerda Lerner 1987 Oxford University Press). There are many stories, myths and sufficient scientific research to imagine societies and communities pre-patriarchy. This can be a very important exercise in helping us re-imagine what a truly free and equal society might look like.

Often though, gender issues are equated with the predominantly white liberal feminism of the

Reflecting seriously on gender issues and seeking real solutions to difficult questions will further help us to realise Vision 2020, writes Ilze Olckers



ROLEPLAYERS ... At the first Gender Forum meeting were (from left) Missionvale Campus Director **Dr Phakama Ntshongwana**, Canrad's **Allan Zinn**, Science's **Lynette Roodt**, SRC's **Duncan Monks**, Canrad's **Sonwabo Stuurman**, VC's Office's **Ryan Pillay**, Canrad's **Boiketlo Mongoato**, Student Counselling's **Dr Hanna van Lingen**, Student Governance's **Karen Snyman** and VC's Office's **Laura Best**.

North, women fighting for equal rights to men in an otherwise unequal society, and leaving unchallenged all the ways in which our lives are governed by principles and processes that originate from a white, male, Western view of the world since long before Aristotle.

... "women" is a biological term whereas "gender" is a cultural construct. "

This is only one small part of the story, which we can trace from the emergence of patriarchy through the agricultural age and the mass extermination of women healers and leaders during the middle ages burnt as witches; through slavery and colonialism; the division of labour of the Industrial Age, right through to the liberal struggles for equal rights



in the 19th and 20th century. Then the story picks up with the struggles of black women and the global South to recognise the intersection of race and gender; to the eco-feminist movement that links women's and gender oppression with the exploitation of our natural resources and "mother earth"; to the heroic struggles of gays, lesbians and the transgender community.

So what is the relevance for us, at NMMU, of this thumbnail sketch of history?

Women, it is claimed, hold up half the sky.

The feminine principles of relatedness, making connections, cooperation and an ethic of care, are very familiar to most indigenous communities. It resonates powerfully with many African philosophies of humanism and with one of our core values of *ubuntu*. It is also closely aligned to the idea of a "holistic education" and the notions of "praxis", ensuring that your work makes a practical difference in the world.

It is central to the notions of "transformational leadership" and a transformative institutional culture. Both these aspects of V2020 require us to create more opportunities and spaces for meaningful participation and relationship-building in deeper conversations and dialogue with one another.

In short, without intentionally embracing traditionally feminine principles in our life and work at NMMU; without ensuring the safety and physical, emotional and sexual well-being of and between our young women and men on campus; without ensuring that our working conditions, promotions and remuneration structures are free from gender disadvantage and no longer predicated on a male model but also celebrates and accommodates family responsibility; without critically reflecting on the gender distortions in our curriculum and without liberating ourselves from the pre-determined patriarchal 'roles' society allocates to us (men make good engineers, women good teachers) we will not be able to realise V2020 and we will not fulfil the historic mission we have undertaken as NMMU.

We have to re-imagine our world. We have to remember it. Under our one whole beautiful African sky.

From the third term of 2015 onwards, the facilitative role ICEP had played in establishing the Gender Forum and convening a smaller team to draft the formal proposal, came to a natural end. It was now time to usher the proposal through the university decision-making structures. At this time, the momentum of the project was lost due to our inability to identify a high-level champion to incubate and accompany this proposal through its various institutional processes.

CANRAD had incubated the Gender Forum for some time and supported it up to that point, but it was time to find a more sustainable, institutional locus for this initiative in the university. But, throughout the remainder of 2015, we struggled to find a clear way forward.

On 17 March 2016, during the first-term Reference Group meeting, it was proposed that the Department of Transformation, Monitoring and Evaluation would take on the task of convening and incubating the next phase of this project. This was accepted and agreed upon during the second-term Reference Group meeting of 2016.

*Disruption
Conscious awareness
Dismantling what is
Creating what will be
Change*

Immersion 2016

Extending facilitation capacity for deep transformation

Another stream of work, running alongside our interventions in the system, was the need to identify, enrol and induct a small team of external facilitators that could support the work of ICEP, as the demand for facilitated processes exceeded the available contract time of the lead facilitator.

This process started by inviting a few hand-picked and personally-recommended facilitators or consultants in private practice with some experience of social justice and diversity work in organisations, to join us for the initial immersion retreat in December 2013. Three of the facilitators who joined us for that inaugural retreat

*The talk
coming out of
your mouth is not
something
you can carry on
your head.*

Cameroon

remained part of our facilitation team and, from the second phase of our project, conducted most of the ongoing “Deepening the Conversations” sessions in the system, while I, as lead facilitator, concentrated predominantly on the various new streams of work and the overall leading and unfolding of the process.

In addition to these three facilitators, Sharon Munyaka, Desiree Paulsen and Hanna Kotze, two other facilitators assisted us with ad hoc interventions, namely Gary Koekemoer and Zola Ntsimango.

During 2015 and 2016, we brought together our entire facilitation team on a few occasions, together with members of our Reference Group, for some group supervision, practice reflections and refresher sessions in orientating ourselves to the changing conditions and climate at the university.

We also invited a developmental evaluation consultant (Sue Soal) to attend one of these sessions to help us with the sense-making part of our processes and the containment of our facilitation team, and to bring more awareness and critical insight to potential issues within the “container” of the ICEP team itself and our orientation to our practice. Her report is attached as an annexure to these reflections.



Curriculum renewal

As mentioned earlier, an exciting new stream of work for 2016, initiated in September 2015 through a Teaching and Learning Retreat held at Cape St Francis and convened by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning (Prof Zinn), was our *Curriculum Renewal Journey*.

During 2016, we facilitated various workshop sessions inquiring into the questions around what we meant by “de-colonised” curricula and African-centred teaching and learning.

The purpose of the *Curriculum Renewal Journey* was set out as follows:

- To be a follow-on conversation from the first Teaching and Learning Retreat held in September 2015 at Cape St Francis, to further engage with and clarify our VISION to re-position teaching and learning at the university



- To further explore “decolonising education” and “humanising pedagogies” in line with our graduate attributes
- To together craft a Teaching and Learning Plan for 2016 and beyond, to guide, cohere and provide direction to the work of the Teaching and Learning Committees, initiatives and structures at the university.

One of the inspiring aspects of the *Curriculum Renewal Journey* was that for our initial workshops, we invited faculties to partner with each other to grapple with these questions in multi-disciplinary settings. The Faculty of Law elected to focus exclusively on their own curriculum, as a result of the national LLB Review process, which helped shape and guide their journey. The Faculty of Health Sciences proceeded on their own due to the lack of readiness of their partner, the Business and Economic Sciences Faculty.

But it was the combined sessions between the faculties of Education and of Engineering, the Built Environment and Information Technology (EBEIT); and Art and Science; that were very enriching, intense learning and conversational spaces, where student participants also contributed significantly to the conversations in courageous and constructive ways.

During June 2017, we helped design and facilitate a further step in our *Curriculum Renewal Journey*, where a large and diverse group of staff and students – representing all the faculties and faculty Teaching and Learning Committees, as well as members of the emerging academic cohort and others responsible for aspects of the Teaching and Learning Project at the university, including members of the Higher Education Access and Development Services (HEADS) team and the Disability Unit – came together at Bird Street Campus in the School of Music, Art and Design (SoMAD) drawing room, in an experiential encounter to begin to develop a framework for curriculum renewal and development for the university. A follow-on retreat is planned for the end of 2017 to produce the first iteration of such a framework, to guide, align and cohere the university’s teaching and learning efforts towards a common educational philosophy and paradigm.

The exit cycle of the ICEP

In preparation for the completion of the second phase of the ICEP project at the end of 2017, another reflection and planning session was convened with the Reference Group during February 2017, to collectively identify critical aspects of work in the final phase of the lifecycle of ICEP.

But it was the combined sessions between the faculties of Education and of Engineering, the Built Environment and Information Technology (EBEIT); and Art and Science; that were very enriching, intense learning and conversational spaces, where student participants also contributed significantly to the conversations in courageous and constructive ways.

The following eight aspects were identified as requiring attention, as part of the exit cycle of the ICEP project:

1. ICEP institutionalisation, finalising the university's transformation architecture for 2018 and beyond, including facilitation skills workshops for change agents
2. Re-working the Short Learning Programme (SLP), titled "Towards a transformative institutional culture", to focus more explicitly on the notion of transformational leadership
3. Capturing the ICEP story and reflecting on the unfinished work of "Connecting the Gains"
4. Supporting initiatives in the domain of student leadership
5. Supporting the ongoing transformation journey on George Campus
6. Supporting the faculty Teaching and Learning Committees and the *Curriculum Renewal Journey*
7. Assisting with the Vision Review, and the sustainability and fit-for-purpose conversations
8. Continuing with the "Deepening the Conversations" and social healing conversations, particularly in the "hot spot" areas of our university community, where high conflict situations have presented.



Advancing deep transformation across the higher education sector

It is clear from many publications coming out of universities that the higher education sector is focusing on advancing transformation.

In 2014, Prof John Higgins from Wits University published a book titled “Academic Freedom in a Democratic South Africa: Essays and Interviews on Higher Education and the Humanities”, where he dedicates a chapter to exploring the history and complexities of the notion of institutional culture. This was a follow on from his seminal chapter in the 2007 Higher Education South Africa publication.

In “Being at Home: Race, Institutional Culture and Transformation at South African Higher Education Institutions” (2015), Sally Matthews from Rhodes University contributes a chapter on white privilege and institutional culture at South African higher education institutions.

In October 2015, in preparation for the second National Higher Education Transformation Summit in Durban, Prof Andre Keet (who I would later discover held a joint appointment with the University of the Free State and Nelson Mandela University) contributed a comprehensive and compelling paper on institutional cultures/environments (annexure 10 of the summit documents).

It has been said that the most urgent requirement for higher education institutions today is to create transformative environments that are designed to enable students to successfully graduate and achieve their full potential.

These students need to be equipped to play their part as skilled, confident, active citizens who can contribute to the deepening of our democracy and the sustainable futures of our world.

It was interesting to note that the official discussion document at the Higher Education Summit convened in Durban in October 2015 included aspects on the pedagogy of transformation processes themselves, also speaking to some of the “how” issues around the methodology and theories of change. When I inquired, it emerged that this document came from the Nelson Mandela University’s Vice-Chancellor Prof Derrick Swartz, with input from Prof Andre Keet, who at the time had a joint appointment with the University of the Free State and Nelson Mandela University’s CANRAD.

These students need to be equipped to play their part as skilled, confident, active citizens who can contribute to the deepening of our democracy and the sustainable futures of our world.



This was another significant moment on our journey, as it suggested that through its thought leadership, Nelson Mandela University was playing a significant role in leading transformation in the higher education sector.

What was particularly significant, from a “theory of change” and transformation praxis perspective, were the examples of “systems” and “complexity-based” language used throughout the document.

At our university, the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellors have wrestled with a complexity-based approach to organisational life and displayed a willingness to immerse themselves in literature, theory and conversation around this shift. Given the challenges facing the sector, we believe that the research and intellectual work that has gone into identifying “what” needs to be done, has not been adequately met by attention and investment into the vexing question of “how to create the conditions” that enable, catalyse, nurture and accompany the changes we have identified as ones we need to pioneer in the higher education sector.

This was another significant moment on our journey, as it suggested that through its thought leadership, Nelson Mandela University was playing a significant role in leading transformation in the higher education sector.

It seems that not only have there been paradigmatic tensions in the sector, but there have also been ideological and tactical differences in the different leadership styles and approaches adopted by the cohort of vice-chancellors and senior academic leaders in the sector.

There are many different versions of the African proverb, “you cannot dance well on one leg only”, including “two ants do not fail to pull one grasshopper” or from the Congo, “a single bracelet does not jingle”.

It seems imperative that we need to find the ways to demonstrate true praxis, living theory, and engaged scholarship. We need to invest in developing our transformation praxis and communities of transformation practitioners within the sector. Then we need to ensure that our experiences and lived theory inform our own academic curricula and that we dare to teach what our graduates, as organisational citizens and leaders, will need to learn to co-create sustainable futures for us all. If not, we will fall short of Nelson Mandela University’s new strap line of “changing the world”.

“Transformative post-colonial action”

We believe that there is also an inherent “de-colonial” impulse at the heart of this project. When Achilles Mbembe (2015) and others talk about decolonisation, they also talk about the divisions that the Eurocentric canon imposed on all of us, between mind and body, reason and nature, men and women, and theory and action in the world. The de- and post-colonial scholars talk about the fallacy of these so-called objective standards, and the fallacy of the objective observer.

Scholars such as Manulani Aluli-Meyers (2016) challenge us around our understanding of epistemology as disembodied knowledge in the realm of ideas only. Catherine Odora Hoppers and Howard Richards (2012) expose the “positivist illusion” in the powerful chapter “Science: From Alienation and Exclusion to a Restorative Paradigm” in their slim but life-changing book “Re-thinking Thinking” (UNISA 2012).

It reminds me of our feminist work in the 1980s and a book by historian and women’s studies pioneer, Gerda Lerner (1986), titled “The Creation of Patriarchy”, where she speaks about the term “Man”, and how it was engineered to subsume “Woman” in the systematic, collective dominance of women by men and erasure of women from what subsequently became the dominant discourses of all our productive endeavours. Women were “disappeared”. This is a systemic and hegemonic version of the “Danger of a Single Story” explained so powerfully by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) in her TED Talk of the same name. Only now are new narratives and pieces of research emerging re-claiming women’s roles in every domain of knowledge, but specifically in the STEM sector (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths). Stories like “Hidden Figures: The Story of the African-American Women Who Helped Win the Space Race” by Margot Lee Shetterly (2016), which was adapted as a feature film of the same name “Hidden Figures”, disrupt our understanding of the role of black women in relation to the development of mathematics and computer sciences, for example. Stories like Dr Hawa Abdi’s “Keeping Hope Alive: How One Somali Woman Changed 90,000 Lives” (2013) disrupt what we believe about health education,

Our entire curriculum and the ways in which we have organised ourselves at work, and in our academic practices have similar, and worse distortions built into them. We have to go even further back and re-examine the very origin of every discipline we take for granted.

*This prison wall
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universal truth when,
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have demonstrated,
it applies
predominantly
to the WEIRD:
Western, Educated,
Industrialised, Rich
and Developed.*

The dominant “truth” is therefore often a marginal WEIRD truth offered to us as the norm, in the process erasing the lived realities of the majority of earth’s populations, and in particular the South.

*Umbuzo
Conscious
Reflection
Search, Question,
Ponder
Amandla!
Knowledge is Power
uLwazi*

Immersion 2016



Catherine Odora Hoppers and Howard Richards (2012) show how flawed the entire epistemological foundation is of the key disciplines we teach. In the final chapter in their book, under the sub-heading “Where is the university in all of this?”, they refer to the work of Shiv Visvanathan and the notion of the “tight architectonic” woven together by the confluence of the ideologies of science, law, economics, development and modernity, which has, over time, created a “cognitive prison wall” sealing off the academic and policy communities.

She states: “It is very difficult for universities modeled on these toxic western precepts to break their paradigmatic umbilicus.”

This prison wall is reinforced when knowledge is presented as a universal truth when, as leading researchers from the University of British Columbia have demonstrated, it applies predominantly to the WEIRD: Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Developed.

“The over-sampling of American college students may be skewing our understanding of human behaviour, finds an analysis by researchers from the University of British Columbia. In an article (2010) in *Brain and Behavioural Sciences*, anthropologist Joe Henrich (PhD) and psychologists Steven Heine (PhD) and Ara Norenzayan (PhD) reviewed the available database of comparative social and behavioural science studies. They found that people from Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic (WEIRD) societies – who represent as much as 80 percent of study participants, but only 12 percent of the world’s population – are not only unrepresentative of humans as a species, but on many measures they’re outliers.”

The dominant “truth” is therefore often a marginal WEIRD truth offered to us as the norm, in the process erasing the lived realities of the majority of earth’s populations, and in particular the South.

Our task is to be vigilant about this all the time. We have to interrogate and contextualise everything we have accepted as normative and neutral. This constitutes the beginning of a critical consciousness. But we cannot only begin there. As Odora Hoppers

Our knowledge production and innovations have to be in service of social justice and sustainable futures and require a truly radical re-think to serve the people of our continent.

and other have reminded us, we have to go even further back.

About a decade ago, the Smithsonian Museum curated a series of exhibitions, the first of which, in 2007, was titled “Design for the other 90%”. It focused on design solutions that addressed the most basic needs of 90% of the world’s population of seven billion, who are not traditionally served by professional designers. A huge proportion of the 90% are unable to purchase even the most basic goods. This exhibition explored low-cost solutions, designed by engineers, students, academic researchers and architects from around the world to improve access to water, food, energy, education, healthcare, revenue-generating activities, and affordable transportation. Reflecting on the knowledge revolution needed in the higher education sector, we can think of it as “*Curricula for the benefit of the other 90%*”.

Our knowledge production and innovations have to be in service of social justice and sustainable futures and require a truly radical re-think to serve the people of our continent.

But our re-thinking also has to have what Odora Hoppers refers to as this “meta-methodological” element, of going back to the root of what we teach and how we do so; to expose the epistemological origins and distortions of Western-based knowledge, and to open up and enlarge our understanding of the world.

In another chapter in “Re-thinking Thinking”, she says: “If *Ubuntu*, for instance would have been part of the indicators, world ranking might look very different. The task for re-thinking thinking is therefore precisely this: to recognize the cultural asphyxiation of those numerous ‘others’ that has been the norm, and to work to bring other categories of self-definition, of dreaming, of acting, of loving, of living into the commons as a matter of universal concern.”

The values and foundational ideas of Nelson Mandela University were shared by activist and academic, the late Dr Neville Alexander, who envisaged a South Africa not driven by consumerism and greed. He espoused the principle of “sufficiency”, not excess, where “enough is as good as a feast”. He challenged the “Top Billing” lifestyle sold as desirable to the younger generation in place of the long walk to a more just and equal society. He challenged the lack of innovation in the Eurocentric educational system, where indigenous knowledge systems are discarded as at best inferior and at worst pure superstition.

Prof Quinton Johnson, campus principal at the university’s George Campus, once shared a story in one of ICEP’s EMANCO sessions explaining how, when he when he was a young academic and

Even if the colonial space is a comfortable space for you, even if it is how you were brought up or how you were educated and assimilated, it extracts a price from your humanity, on the wholeness of your being and the future of our planet.



lecturer studying his grandmother's indigenous medicinal plant-based remedies, he was shunned and shamed by his senior professors for what they termed his engagement with "duiwelsgoed" (things of the devil).

Research such as "Fractals at the Heart of African Design" by Ron Eglash (1999) share with us the startling truths about the algorithmic patterns embedded in African design from ancient times, and found only in African design, preceding Western "discovery" of these knowledges and modern computing by centuries.

And more than that, studies show that using everyday examples of African design, such as hair braiding patterns, when teaching maths to children of African descent, increases their academic performance significantly.

Even if the colonial space is a comfortable space for you, even if it is how you were brought up or how you were educated and assimilated, it extracts a price from your humanity, on the wholeness of your being and the future of our planet.

It is what the poet Wendell Berry calls "The Hidden Wound" in his remarkable long essay of the same name (1989).

To address this, Odora Hoppers (2012) invites all of us into what she terms "an ethical space". To her and to us, this "ethical space" is one of "contemplation of ethical and cultural jurisdictions; that space of mutual vulnerability; that space where a precarious and fragile window of opportunity exists for critical conversations about race, gender, class, freedom and community."

In this ethical space, what needs to happen, she says, is that we need to "go beyond the clutches of mere dissent or post-colonial critique, to transformative postcolonial action".

We attempted, through our underlying ideological orientation, our intentions, our methodologies and practice to create this "ethical space" in our workshops sessions. We attempted to role-model and inquire into what would constitute examples of "transformative post-colonial actions" in every domain of our university.

For us, all these different elements make up our approach to and understanding of a "transformative institutional culture".

Our challenge as academics, administrators, students and practitioners is to create, in the words of Peter Block (2002), an embodied experience of the future we desire, in the room. Every room. Classroom, workshop room, meeting room, cubicle, canteen. And when you are in the room, you encounter whole human

We are hurting in our organisational spaces.

If theory can be a location for healing, we need to add to it, from our experiences as practitioners and participants. We need to dance on both legs. We need to make a magnificent noise with our bangles.

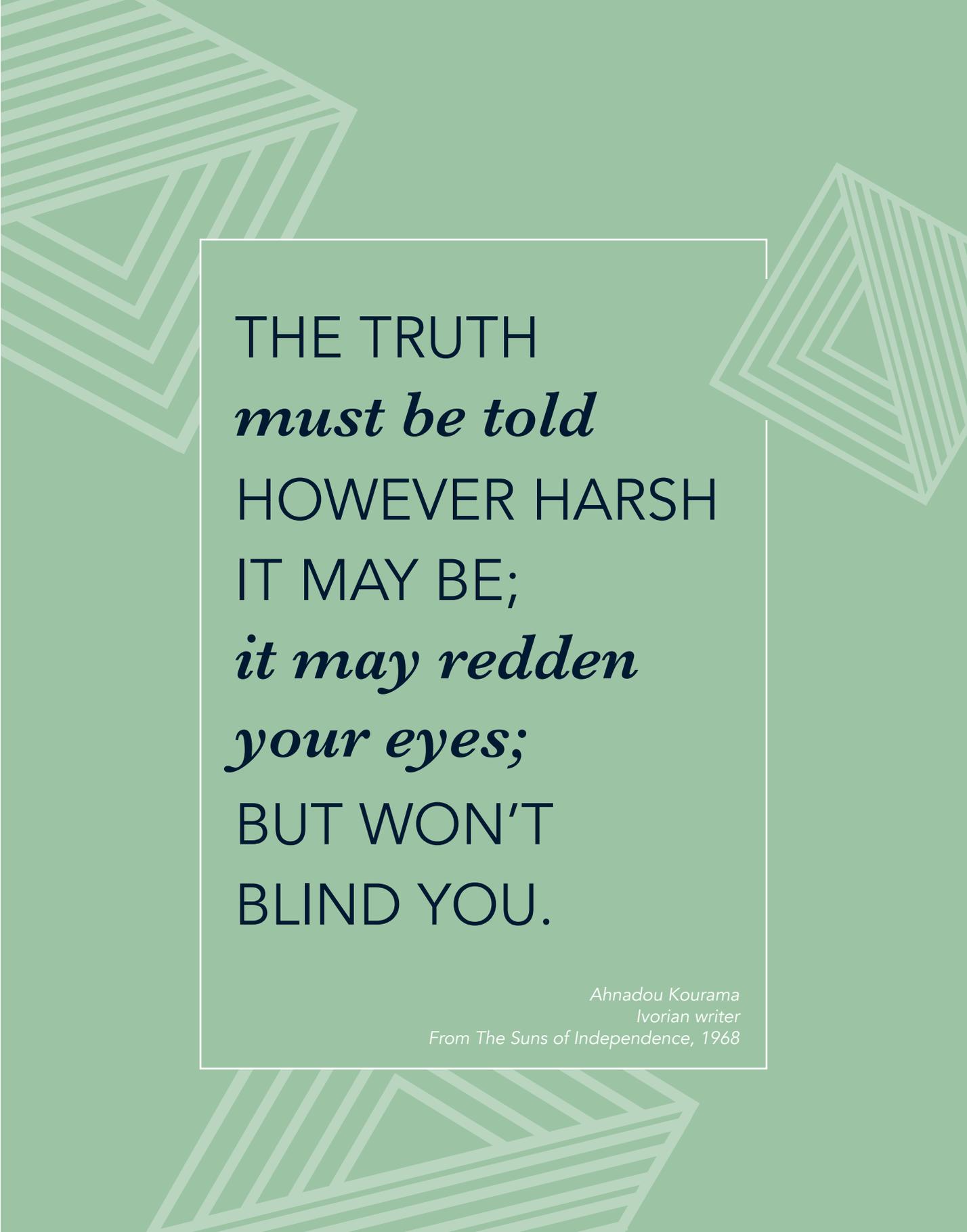
beings, whose lived experiences do not allow themselves to be divided into academic categories.

And yet, as bell hooks (lower case is the author's preference) says in "Teaching to Transgress – Education as the Practice of Freedom" (1994): "I came to theory because I was hurting – the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing." She goes on to say: "When our lived experience of theorising is fundamentally-linked to the process of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice. Indeed, what such experiences makes more evident is the bond between the two – that ultimately reciprocal process wherein one enables the other."

We are hurting in our organisational spaces. If theory can be a location for healing, we need to add to it, from our experiences as practitioners and participants. We need to dance on both legs. We need to make a magnificent noise with our bangles.

The challenge Odora Hoppers says "is how this moment gets translated into transformative pedagogy at a systems and institutional level".





THE TRUTH
must be told
HOWEVER HARSH
IT MAY BE;
it may redden
your eyes;
BUT WON'T
BLIND YOU.

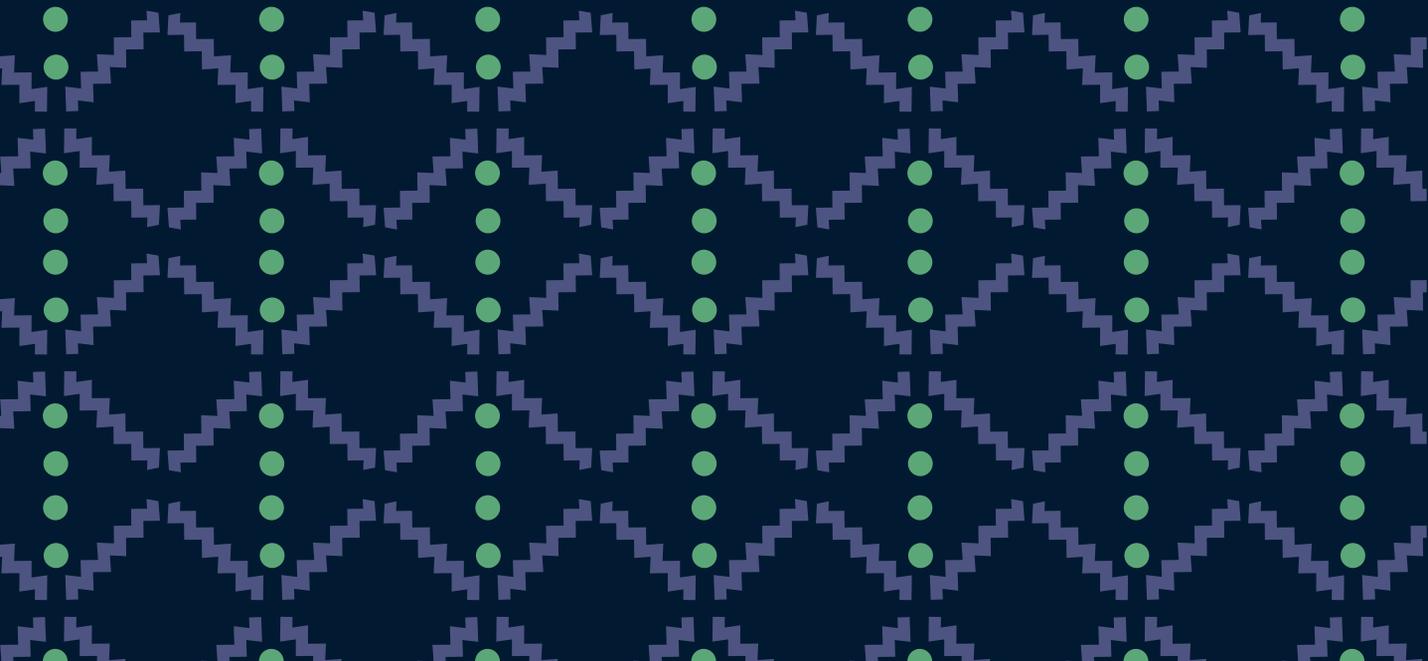
Ahmadou Kourama
Ivorian writer
From *The Suns of Independence*, 1968

CHAPTER

03

*Those who wake to the wonder
of this magic moment
Who wake to the possibilities of this
charged conjunction
Are the chosen ones who have chosen
To act, to free the future, to open
it up ...
Onto a more shining world*

Ben Okri [extracts from the poem, "Mental Fight" (Okri 2000)]



OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

A djembe is a goat skin-covered drum, shaped like a large goblet and meant to be played with bare hands. The djembe is said to contain three spirits. The spirit of the tree, the spirit of the animal of which the drum head is made and the spirit of the instrument maker.

The djembe is also known as the magical drum.

- World Wide Drums (WWD)

A foundational aspect of the ICEP social experiment was being very explicit about our “theory of change”. At the outset, the question about how we believed change, growth, renewal and transformation happened in organisations was central to our work. What we knew from cutting-edge complexity science research and literature, and from our own experience as transformation practitioners, was that “managing” or “driving change”, as if it were a mechanistic or linear process that could be project-managed in a conventional way, with predictable outcomes, would have little or no chance of success. We knew the time had come to experiment with the new paradigms for complex organisational change.

“Is there absolutely no other way to do this work than [to] start off by getting whites on the back foot?” This was an important question posed to me many years earlier in another context with another client. The impact of the question lay in the fact that this particular participant was not a hostile unconscious white person, but one of the few in his team committed to having the difficult unpopular race conversations that the majority of his team resisted. He intended the question as a sincere and genuine practice question. A question of methodology. A theoretical question. A question of tactics. To some extent, of course, also an existential question.

The question was succinct, direct, personal and wicked! It became a kind of voice in the back of my head.

The corollary of that question from many of our black participants could be something like: “Is there no other way to do this work than for us to have to continuously reveal our pain and powerlessness in these spaces, where we have fought so hard to contain our rage and present our most dignified, competent and excellent selves?”

We knew that starting any conversation from a place of deficit, a place of what’s wrong with a situation or a person, or in ways that reinforced certain stereotypes, or re-victimised some of the participants, would inevitably create resistance and defensive behav-

ours. It does not enable learning, much less create the conditions in which we could potentially make ourselves vulnerable enough to begin a process of social healing and transformation.

Just prior to the new contracting process, in the lull after completing the Faculty of Education’s *Re-visioning Journey* and preparing the proposal for the ICEP process, I came across a book called “Obliquity – why our goals are best achieved indirectly” by economist John Kay (2010). I found that the principle of obliquity could be the response to this troubling practice question I had been wrestling with for years. Kay based his book on the observation of Sir James Black, a pharmaceutical researcher, that companies often achieved their goals indirectly. In his book, he listed a range of reasons and conditions to support his argument. It resonated with me on an intuitive level.

Very few people spontaneously want to have difficult, race-based conversations right from the outset. Issues of social and organisational justice, in and of themselves, often generate anxiety and trepidation. This might have to do with these topics activating in many of us the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) through negative emotional attractors (NEAs), new findings coming out of the domain of neuro-sciences research.

For an interesting discussion on this topic, see chapter 5 “Cognitive Neuro-Science and its Relevance to Organisational Practices” in “Re-think – Growth and Learning through Coaching and Organisational Development”(Cunningham ed. 2014).

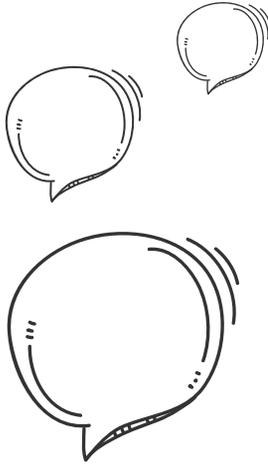
The table below is a quick reference to NEAs although this is beyond the scope of these reflections.

Very few people spontaneously want to have difficult, race-based conversations right from the outset. Issues of social and organisational justice, in and of themselves, often generate anxiety and trepidation.

Positive Emotional Attractors and Negative Emotional Attractors

Positive emotional attractors	Negative emotional attractors
PNS arousal	SNS arousal
Specific neural arousal	Specific neural arousal
Ideal self	Real self/Social self
Strengths	Gaps and weaknesses
Focus on the future	Focus on the past
Hope	Fear
Possibilities	Problems
Optimism	Pessimism
Learning agenda and goals	Performance improvement plan

“We need to be able to trust that something as simple as a clear core of values and vision, kept in motion through continuing dialogue, can lead to order.”



One of the challenges of our project would be how we framed our difficult conversations and our entire transformation journey *obliquely*, in order to enrol staff into the process in ways that would minimise their fight or flight responses when typically presented with these themes. I had a hunch that working explicitly with our “theory of change”, foregrounding the paradigmatic shift from a Newtonian understanding of organisations, towards a complex living system, made up of living human beings; and the quest to align all of our efforts towards our common Vision 2020, could create the oblique container in which we could begin to have the difficult conversations.

In the same way that one simple question by one of my workshop participants years prior to working at Nelson Mandela University opened up a journey of inquiry, another short statement, read years earlier, had been working relentlessly in my unconscious mind.

Margaret Wheatley’s seminal work “Leadership and the New Sciences – Learning about Organisation from an Orderly Universe” (1992) had become a go-to text ever since I wanted to re-skill myself as an organisational development practitioner in the early 2000s and a brilliant PhD student had dissuaded me from formal studies.

“All you have to do is read “Leadership and the New Sciences”, he had said. “Everything they are going to teach you will be outdated and a waste of time. Everything you need to know is in there.”

I devoured the book and was hooked. Ever since our science teacher at school casually told us that the table we were leaning on in our makeshift lab was not, in fact, a solid thing, but buzzing atoms consisting mostly of open space, I was captivated. At the time, it was clear that my path did not lie with science as such, but with social processes. To come to a place in my career where these two paths converged was, like Margaret Wheatley’s, a peak experience.

On the last page of the final chapter, entitled “The New Scientific Management”, she writes: “We need to be able to trust that

Situated

A life moulding

Identity experience
outcome

*We’re shaped by
life-events*

Positioning

COMMUNICATION AND
STAKEHOLDER LIAISON
August 2015

something as simple as a clear core of values and vision, kept in motion through continuing dialogue, can lead to order.”

Or to put it into a “found poem” format:

We need to be able to
trust
that something
as simple
as a clear core of values and vision
kept in motion
through continuing dialogue
can lead
to
order.

This was such a radical idea. It was literally radical, as in going to the very root of our inquiries about how organisational change and transformation interventions and processes could best be led and facilitated in large complex systems.

This was such a radical idea. It was literally radical, as in going to the very root of our inquiries about how organisational change and transformation interventions and processes could best be led and facilitated in large complex systems.

In another way, it was radical because it seemed so deceptively simple compared to the stages and tables and diagrams of many change theories that preceded it.

It was also radical because it invoked the edgy and some would say “unscientific” concept of trust as an *a priori* condition for working with this approach.

And how were we to read the term “order”? It was order in a radical sense also. Order, in this sense, was not to be confused with a hierarchical, linear form of orderliness, as we would commonly refer to it. Wheatley was referring to the internal alignment or coherence of all our efforts towards our goals. It was a higher form of order, dynamic and often emerging from what might seem like “chaos”, but was in effect the generative ground from which a higher state of organisation emerges.

Finally, the sentence leapt seemingly effortlessly from the idea of “dialogue” to that of “order”. What happened in between? How did a system go from the one to the other? What was the bridge between the two?



The bridge was of course the principle of self-organisation or self-referencing of living systems. Organisational justice and renewal was a complex process beyond anything we could cognitively understand, “manage”, “control”, and even probably “track”.

So in conceiving of our own “theory of change” for Nelson Mandela University, we hypothesised that our best chance would be to “trust” that if we followed the minimum specifications suggested by complexity theory, honoured the design elements of the initial fractal in all our work (as described in the acknowledgements section of these reflections), embedded the social and organisational justice questions into the original design, and liberated as much of the inherent energies of the system as possible, the system would self-organise into a greater state of justice; while allowing more of the potential of staff and students who live and work as part of the university community to be realised.

Wheatley says at the end of the chapter: “At the risk of sounding antiquatedly reductionistic, I want to make one more speculation. If management practice is ever to be simplified into one unifying principle, I believe it will be found in self-reference. It is not only the science I have read that gives me such assurance. When I look at the shape and meaning of my own life, how it has evolved with change, I understand the workings of the principle in intimate de-



COMMON VISION ... The Department of Social Development Professions (back from left) **Dr Aldene Luck, Natalie Mansvelt, Zukiswa Gwam, Amanda Calitz and Jo-Ann Coetzee** and (front) **Nevashnee Perumal, Busisiwe Lujabe**, department head **Dr Zoleka Soji** and **Dr Veonna Goliath** have worked together towards a shared, positive, future-orientated and inspiring vision and identity for themselves and their work. (absent **Razia Lagerdien**)

Success stories of departments with a common outlook

A vision for all



THERE is an old saying which goes – “if you don’t care where you’re going, any road will take you there”.

This is often true at NMMU where members of a department or departments in a school or faculty, all pull in different directions, having different priorities and goals, resulting in not only a lack of coherence in their programme offerings, but also a lack of alignment with V2020, and sadly often also in conflict among staff and stressful work environments.

These visionless, directionless spaces in our institution ultimately impact negatively on our student success and the extent to which we are able to fulfil our core purpose and mission.

After a two-day strategic reflection process in December, the Department of Social Development Professions gathered their key elements and captured them in an authentic, vibrant, meaningful and very real vision, mission, values statement and graduate attributes during a single day earlier this year.

During the initial workshop it emerged that the department had a history of struggling to find their voice and identity due to re-structuring and other factors in their faculty. They decided to change their second-class status as the “welfare department” of the Faculty of Health Sciences.

They engaged in courageous truth-telling and self-reflection and identified a sense of helplessness and powerlessness and the absence of a clear, shared, positive, future-orientated and inspiring vision and identity for themselves and their work.

And wow! What a transformation during the second session this year! What started in December came into full flowering as this diverse group of courageous and committed women rose to the occasion to define their own vision and mission; as well as a value-statement and their desired staff and

student attributes relevant and specific to their discipline.

Throughout the process, we worked with Vision 2020 as our guiding document; as well as an article by Sam Wells and Josie Maclean titled “One Way Forward to Beat the Newtonian Habit” (www.mdpi.com/2079-8954/1/4/66) to help us understand the visioning process from a complexity and living systems perspective. Their real and original values-statement is truly cutting-edge.

One of the NMMU success stories is that of the Department of Social Development Professions which has changed themselves into a fully functional team with a common vision and purpose for the future, writes Ilze Olckers.

It is still early days but a most exciting new chapter has begun for Social Development Professions at NMMU. With a common and compelling vision of who they are, what they stand for and their core mission, their other work around curriculum renewal and compliance with the Council of Higher Education and their professional body can be dealt with in an authentic, meaningful, empowered and coherent way.

They have also set the tone for what they expect of themselves and each other as a workplace community.

During 2015 all domains within NMMU have to come up with their own strategic plans for the next three- to five-year cycle. This is a powerful opportunity to engage in a visioning process with your colleagues or even in a re-visioning process.

As the authors says in the above-mentioned article, “It is not what the vision says, it is what the vision does”.

A vision is like the DNA of a living organism. It contains the critical information that shapes how that organism functions. Our strategic plan, Vision 2020, shapes our institution overall. Everything we do needs to align with it and be informed by it. But to give it real power and vitality, each domain has to articulate for themselves, their own purpose, their own passion, their own unique interpretation of it and contribution to it, from within their discipline or domain. No strategic plan will have any value if it is not informed by a powerful shared vision.

The Finance Department moved in that direction when they framed their new motto “Your effective resource partner”. The subsequent energy and commitment from the Finance Team was recognised and rewarded by the 2014 inaugural PASS Excellence Awards.

As NMMU, we care deeply where we are heading, and only a shared and compelling vision will get you there.

Next retreat

We are finalising our invitations for the next Institutional Culture Enlivening Immersion Training Retreat to be held at Cape St Francis during the last week of the July recess. Please contact Harsheila Riga at 041-504 3081 if you are interested in attending.

tail. For me, there is no choice but to take the paths new science has marked.”

Envisioning our futures

In 1996, scholar activists Ronnie Lessem and Barbara Nussbaum published a book called “Sawubona Africa: Embracing Four Worlds in South African Management”. They were pioneers in inquiring into and theorising transformative organisational processes for South African business organisations post apartheid. Their work focused on de-centering the northern and western paradigms in business by introducing eastern and southern paradigms. Hence the notion of “four worlds”. They might even have been some of the pioneers exploring the value of *Ubuntu* in the South African business context.

Whilst in retrospect, this might now seem quaint and part of a much earlier, maybe misguided “Rainbowism”, at the time these contributions were so novel and in their own way, in the words of Leigh Anne Naidoo, “opening a door to a different time”. This book made a great impression on me as a practitioner.

In the first chapter, entitled “Business in the 21st Century: Madiba Clothing Manufacturers”, Nussbaum writes an imaginative case study set five years forward, in March 2001, for a fictitious company she named Madiba’s Clothing Manufacturers. This inventive, original, imaginative and inspired tale/parable/account/fiction/story opened up a new world of possibility for how we could be together in organisations with our harrowing and troubled past and create something transformative together. We could, to paraphrase the words of Steve Biko “give the world of work a more human face”.

It was so clever, told so vividly, with such attention to detail, from the praise-singing to the story-telling, to the ancestral guidance through dreams, the words of the workplace choir, the induction rituals for the new staff, the transparent presentation of the quarterly financial figures, the honouring of the apartheid stories of both staff and managers who shared their respective

roles during the strikes and labour disputes of the ‘70s and ‘80s, to finally, the eating and feasting that followed .

This piece of writing impressed the importance of the role of ac-



Students unveil a giant Madiba Shirt statue on Nelson Mandela University's South Campus, during the final event of the CANRAD-led Beyers Naude Memorial Lecture Series, in October 2015.

This imagined a new reality; our articulated vision and values become the “strange attractor”, in Wheatley’s language, that helps bring that desired future into being, as long as we also meet the other systems requirements of ongoing dialogue and engagement.

tive imagination in organisational change processes. If we cannot practically imagine a different country, a different organisation, a new curriculum, it is unlikely we could bring it into being. As a familiar proverb says, “If you don’t know where you going, any road will take you there.”

Towards the end of 2013, we discovered an article by Sam Wells and Jose McLean from the Business School at the University of Adelaide, Australia which immediately became one of our guiding texts. It was entitled “One Way Forward to Beat the Newtonian Habit with a Complexity Perspective on Organisational Change”.

This article re-confirmed that the process of “envisioning”, imagining and agreeing on what we really wanted as a positive future state for our organisation, in some practical detail, was a critical step when working out of a complexity perspective. Other organisational approaches also worked with the idea of visions and missions. The difference with the approach taken by Wheatley, Wells and McLean and others was as follows:

“Visions, as they are understood in one way forward, are also values-rich stories, rather than the pithy one-sentence vision statements that have come to pervade the corporate world. They are stories, capable of reflecting complexity, that describe what we really want to experience, and because values are central to decision-making and behavior, vision of this kind also stirs energy within people and prompts the translation of energy into action. It is precisely because the vision is values-rich and idealistic that it moves people with a sense of divine discontent – compelling action and change. In this sense, we argue that idealistic shared visions are the most realistic and pragmatic way forward. As Peter Senge quotes Kazuo Inamori of Kyocera, ‘It’s not what the vision is, it’s what the vision does.’ (Wells & McLean 2013).

| It is not
| what the vision is
| It’s what the vision
| does

This imagined a new reality; our articulated vision and values become the “strange attractor”, in Wheatley’s language, that helps bring that desired future into being, as long as we also meet the other systems requirements of ongoing dialogue and engagement.



Complexity and systems thinking

Change, it turns out, resonant with some of Einstein and Jung's narratives around levels of consciousness and healing, or even the integrative health movement, does not happen so much by trying to fix what is broken.

It is "lovingly brought into being", in the words of Donella Meadows, by collectively envisioning and imagining a better future and then acting on those impulses according to certain rules for "dancing with systems". [Incidentally, Meadows was one of the most influential environmental thinkers of the twentieth century. After receiving a PhD in biophysics from Harvard, she joined a team at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), applying the relatively new tools of system dynamics to global problems.]

My own path had led me to a similar insight that Meadows had had in the '70s when, out of pure frustration, in a high-level meeting about the implications of the new trade agreements of the World Trade Organisation and how it was about to make the world a worse place, in a "boil over moment", she identified the so-called "leverage points" in a system, as follows:

PLACES TO INTERVENE IN A SYSTEM

(in increasing order of effectiveness)

9. Constants, parameters, numbers
(subsidies, taxes, standards)
8. Regulating negative feedback loops
7. Driving positive feedback loops
6. Material flows and nodes of material intersection
5. Information flows
4. The rules of the system
(incentives, punishments, constraints)
3. The distribution of power over the rules of the system
2. The goals of the system
1. The mindset or paradigm out of which the system –
its goals, power structure, rules, its culture – arises.

Once you are working with a living systems and complexity perspective for organisations, all the rules change.

It is important to state that, similar to the tension arising from deepening our scholarly understanding of concepts like institutional culture, our knowledge of systems and complexity theory also needed only to serve our purposes of being able to coherently, and in simple language, offer these new paradigms to our participants.

The forward-looking paradigm asks for radically-different kinds of behaviours and interventions, and a different kind of leadership that is more likely to bring about and enable deep transformation.

A significant amount of workshop and conversation time over the five years of the ICEP project was spent on introducing this leading-edge paradigm and attempting to accompany leaders and staff on a journey transitioning from a Newtonian mechanistic engineering approach to organisations, towards a complexity and living systems approach; and from a transactional leadership stance towards understanding the leader as “host” or “convener” of the social processes that lead to renewal and complex organizational change.

According to Wheatley and Deborah Frieze (2011), in their article “Leadership in an Age of Complexity – From Hero to Host” (in *Resurgence Magazine*), the tasks of the leader becomes to:

- provide conditions and good group processes for people to work together
- provide resources of time, the scarcest commodity of all
- insist that people and the system learn from experience, frequently
- offer unequivocal support – people know the leader is there for them
- keep the bureaucracy at bay, creating oases (or bunkers) where people are less encumbered by senseless demands for reports and “administrivia”
- play defense with other leaders who want to take back control, who are critical that people have been given too much freedom
- reflect back to people on a regular basis how they’re doing, what they’re accomplishing, and how far they’ve journeyed
- work with people to develop relevant measures of progress to make their achievements visible
- value conviviality and *esprit de corps* – not false rah-rah activities, but the spirit that arises in any group that accomplishes difficult work together

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Anxiety
 Guilty privilege
 Cross, saddened,
 confused
 It's not founded
Uncertainty

Immersion 2016

We had to know and have read enough to support our work in grounded ways and at the same time resist both the urge to get sucked into the field beyond what would serve our primary purpose and processes; as well as resist the urge to give in to “imposter syndrome” and not dare work with these paradigms at all due to our lack in formal complexity or systems training.

There is something very different about the existential reality of being a “practitioner” which can stand in contrast to the perceived “specialist knowledge” that often marks academia. As specialist expertise practitioners, we distil from many different disciplines and often decades of experience facilitating groups, as well as the deep personal work this path demands of us, which make us invaluable partners in the overall knowledge project of the university.

During the early stages of the project, within our very own Reference Group, there were contestations and paradigm clashes with certain members of the team, who were unable or unwilling to investigate and engage with these leading-edge paradigms. They were seeking the guarantees of linear processes and specific outcomes within certain timeframes and a standardised “roll-out” of our conversations and workshop offerings to all the domains in the institution.

At one stage, for example, there were different workshop offerings in the system around the university’s values, from diametrically-opposed paradigms. These leaders were uncomfortable about the unevenness in the system and the notion of autonomy

of the sub-systems which needed to unfold in their own time. They were concerned about the different entry points and individually-designed processes for the different domains, even though they were crafted around our core simple design elements. They were also focused on wanting to measure the impact and “success” of the intervention prematurely and without any reliable instruments to do so.

However, the majority of Reference Group members were willing to recognise and experiment with the organic unfolding and emergent aspects of the process and in due course, the members of the group who would not grasp the new paradigms found ways of excusing themselves from the Reference Group and

the process.

A few “minimum specifications” or simple design elements were distilled from various sources, to shape the individual sessions and the overall complex process of organisational renewal and change

Paradigm Shifts in our work and context

↳ Mechanistic	↳ Living
↳ Complicated	↳ Complex
↳ Linear	↳ Systems
↳ Neutral observer	↳ Participant observer
↳ Compliance	↳ Purposeful/ Enlivening
↳ Hierarchical	↳ Participatory
↳ Answers	↳ Questions
↳ Producing	↳ Becoming
↳ Colonial	↳ Humanising
↳ Causality	↳ Enabling /Influencing
↳ Products	↳ Relationships

As can be seen from both these lists, a complexity-based approach relies very much on the use of “social technologies”, which can be defined as participative group processes and methodologies that encourage ownership, belonging and creative work processes, and challenge power structures and unnecessary hierarchies.

across the university. Our sources included the work of Margaret Wheatley, the work of the Plexus Institute, the book by Kurt April et al on “Re-thinking Leadership” (2000), and others.

The simple design elements of all our processes were:

- Adopting an orientation of inquiry: Asking transformative questions which foregrounded our values and key elements of Vision 2020
- Working with the positive principles of appreciation/gratitude and gifts
- Providing relevant data, and our curriculum for change through thought leadership, carefully-selected inputs, information and readings
- Enhancing participation of all staff through social technologies
- Deepening relationships among staff through social technologies
- Allowing for unevenness in the system and for the autonomy of sub-systems to self-organise

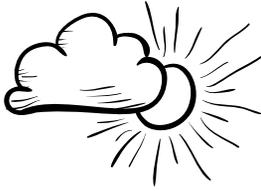
Wells and McLean (2013), in a subsequent short article, identified five essential elements for organisational change from a complexity perspective, that mirrors our initial simple design elements.

- A paradigm shift towards living systems
- Adaptive “emergent” leadership
- A meaningful enlivened vision
- Liberate individual/collective passion and strengths
- Engage in “emergent” participative processes and use of “social technologies”

As can be seen from both these lists, a complexity-based approach relies very much on the use of “social technologies”, which can be defined as participative group processes and methodologies that encourage ownership, belonging and creative work processes, and challenge power structures and unnecessary hierarchies.

While our understanding of the notion of “social technologies” has deepened over the past 20 years, as the primary ways to convene the different processes required in terms of the complexity paradigms and approaches to organisational change, some pre-date the emergence of these new organisational paradigms and have their origins in other much older traditions, such as indige-

nous practices and critical educational pedagogies.



Most of the social technologies we currently use came into being in the late 1980s and 1990s, such as: the “Training for Transformation” processes, based on the work of Paulo Freire (these workshops started much earlier, but were finalised into workbooks later on); all the participative and experiential learning and community development methodologies pioneered in the 1980s and 1990s in fields as diverse as anti-racism and anti-sexism, active citizenship, human rights education, conflict resolution and development planning; the whole-brain training approaches; the Appreciative Inquiry approach; Future Search conferences; and later on, the developments in fields such as the Positive Organisational Scholarship movement. We also used the reflective journaling and free-writing activities; the various principles and conditions in Nancy Kline’s “Time to Think” movement; the “Open Space” and “World Café” methodologies and the development of the “U-process” by Otto Scharmer. From Glen Singleton and Beverly Tatum, we took social technologies that enable race-based courageous conversations. From Dewald Wing Sue, the concept of “Micro-aggres-

Data
Correct timeously
Volume, Outcome, Presentation
Deliver requests with vigour
Cloud

Office for Institutional Planning June 2015

sions” and the tables with dominant themes around which these conversations can be structured. From Peggy Macintosh, the concept of the “Invisible Knapsack” and the techniques for rendering visible unearned privileges. We also used the work of Peter Block and, in particular, his generic transformative questions, taken from his book “Community: The Structure of Belonging”. Interspersed with these different conversation constellations, working individually, in pairs, in triads, in small groups, in cafés, and in large group circles; we also attempted to use other creative processes such as rich pictures, pecha kuchas (a presentation style where 20 slides are shown for 20 seconds each) and poem forms. Always, we were mindful of bringing in elements that grounded us in our own context and acknowledged the oral, ritual and dialogical traditions of our own continent.

We were embarking on a “transformation process” which, in the language of South African organisations, referred to the legacy of apartheid and colonialism on all aspects of organisational life. In the context of higher education, this also referred to our core purpose, the academic project, and the epistemic and cognitive injustices and dehumanising pedagogies of the colonial and apartheid eras.

In 2014, the Plexus Institute published a book and launched their menu of 33 “Liberating Structures”, which they termed: “Simple rules that make it easy to include and unleash everyone in shaping the future”.

These 33 short-group process activities were specifically designed to unleash the creative potential of groups dealing with complex problems and over time, need to become part of our habitual daily workplace practices as leaders and convenors of organisational and learning processes.

Decentering dominant discourses and organisational justice

Moving on from the discussion on social technologies, a complexity-based transformation intervention furthermore asked of us to work meaningfully and skilfully with difference and diversity, recognising the dominant discourses and de-centering those. It required of us to deepen our workplace relationships in ways that enabled us to do our social healing and future co-creating work together.

We were not embarking on a neutral or generic process of organisational renewal; responding to new technologies, or changed external environments, or new competitors in our sector, or the result of mergers and acquisitions, or some of the other more traditional motivations for organisational development interventions in corporate settings.

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A complexity approach required of us to feed this information, and the organisation’s stated ideals, back to itself. It required the whole system to confront itself, connect to more parts of itself, render visible the conflicts and contestations alive within it and provide the time and safe structures in which to engage deeply with those generative elements.

Margaret Wheatley (1992) works with the analogy of food in one of her chapters in “Leadership and the New Sciences”. She says a living organisational system needs nourishing, rich information to grow, renew and transform itself, in the same way a human body



So what did we mean by “transformation” exactly; and what was our vision for a transforming Nelson Mandela University?

needs nutrient-rich food to grow optimally through different life stages. We needed to offer rich disruptive thought-leadership, a curriculum for change, and meaningful feedback loops into the system, to support its self-organising properties towards the transformation we sought.

So what did we mean by “transformation” exactly; and what was our vision for a transforming Nelson Mandela University?

As discussed before, our mandate came specifically from Vision 2020 and in particular from *Key Strategic Priority Area 5*, which had to do with transformative institutional culture.

For the purposes of our interventions then, Vision 2020, including the university’s values, knowledge paradigms, educational philosophy, and desired graduate attributes (essentially Section 3 of the overall Vision 2020 document), became our touchstone. This rich document was our vision-story, for the ICEP project. It contained multiple aspects of what a desired Nelson Mandela University would be like. It formed the basis for all our work. Everything we did, every conversation we hosted was in the spirit of inquiry of how we were giving effect to the aspirations of Vision 2020 in our work.

As mentioned before, one of the important early ICEP interventions was to create the Vision 2020 pamphlet. A six-page, Z-fold hand-out with the key aspects of Section 3 of Vision 2020 presented as a dynamic, interactive “living” document, with questions and comments in the side-bars to represent it as an “ongoing dialogue”.

To these foundational statements, the Vice-Chancellor added his list of the “public good” purposes of the university in his paper “Competing Ideas of the University” (2011):

“At its core, [the university’s] public purposes must entail a clear commitment to the promotion of:

- ‘Public good’ and public values;
- democratic norms, values and practices;
- non-discrimination (e.g. non-racialism, non-sexism);
- social justice;
- social equality;
- compassion;
- solidarity with the poor and marginalised;
- ecological justice;
- internationalism; and more broadly,
- social transformation.”

Together, these various principles and statements made up the “idea” of Nelson Mandela University, an integrated organisational and transformation vision to guide all our work.

Multiple levels of intention in design

We also had to work with at least three levels of intention in the design of our processes, namely the intra-personal dimension of change (working with the “self”), the inter-personal dimension (working with “the other” or “others”), and the institutional or organisation dimension (working within and across teams).

To this, we also added a further dimension of work, sometimes called the “trans-personal” or “inter-generational” dimension. This is also sometimes referred to as the “pain body” of an organisation. These inter-generational and trans-personal legacies are imprinted in almost all our organisational “fields” and landscapes as a result of the dehumanisation and injustices of the past.

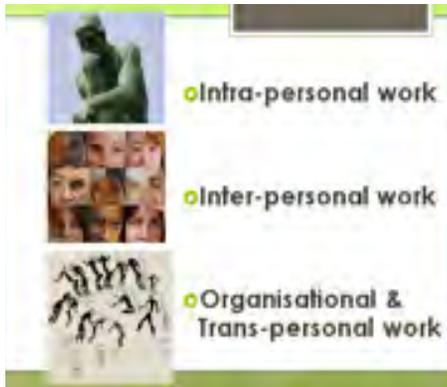
From work done prior to the ICEP project, as part of a consultancy delivering transformation interventions to organisations, a colleague Rejane Williams and I identified eight main domains of work for a meaningful “transformation journey”.

Curriculum for change

Our framework was crafted from years of experience in the field, and a range of academic disciplines, grounded in theory, and it was offered with an intentional set of social technologies and methodologies that supported transformative change. Later on, we added an explicit living systems and complexity-based “theory of change” dimension for large-scale institutional transformation.

The eight focus areas were:

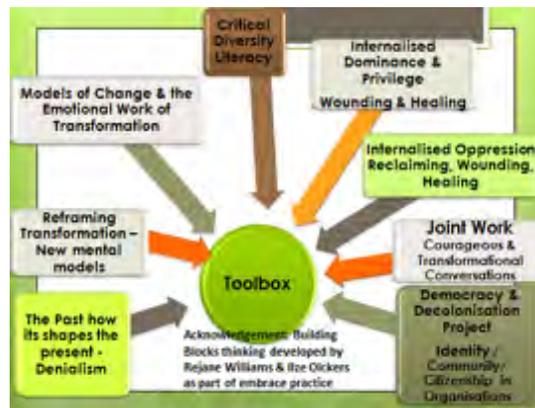
1. Attending to how the past is shaping the present – moving beyond denialism
2. Re-framing the term “transformation” – from a deficit approach (based on the idea of loss, losses of standards, opportunities, profits) or at times an empty signifier with no tangible meaning – into a grounded and aspirational vision
3. Doing the difficult emotional work of transformation
4. Developing critical diversity literacy – moving beyond a pluralistic understanding of diversity to explore issues of power (developed by Prof Melissa Steyn)
5. Confronting privileges and internalised dominance
6. Confronting internalised oppression and wounding



Our framework was crafted from years of experience in the field, and a range of academic disciplines, grounded in theory, and it was offered with an intentional set of social technologies and methodologies that supported transformative change.

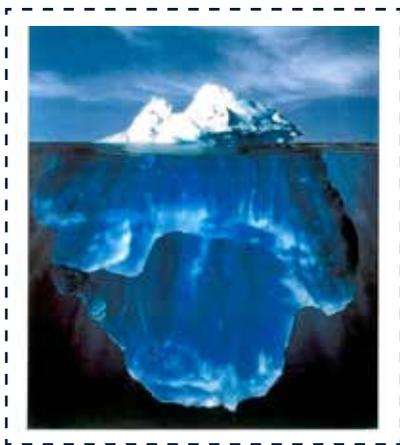
7. Doing the joint work of difficult radical race-based “courageous conversations”
8. The “deep democracy and decolonisation” project

Each of these eight areas of work required different considerations in the design of our processes and were best served by specifically selected workshop methodologies, group processes and social technologies. They also required skilful facilitation processes, working with a range of facilitation techniques and approaches.



These eight elements formed the foundational elements of our “curriculum for change”.

We would sometimes introduce the classic iceberg image to illustrate how most organisations had defaulted to work with a superficial, technical and mechanistic approach to transformation, and a tendency to focus only on the visible 10% of the classic iceberg image.



The 10% of structural issues protruding above the water could include issues of employment equity and racialised demographics and, in the context of higher education, other quantitative measurements such as research outputs and rated researchers and, of course, instruments such as BEE scorecards and other compliance-based transformation requirements.

However, the real underlying issues of alienating institutional culture, entrenched racism, sexism and other forms of exclusion and marginalisation, epistemological injustices and dehumanising pedagogies, made up the 90% that lies submerged in our organisations. To the list above, we can add our unconscious prejudices and ignorances, daily micro-aggressions, continued dominances and oppressions, victim behaviours, guilt and blame, rage and projections, fear of change, fear of loss of privilege, fear of the other, fear of freedom and so on.



In the end, the formal proposal for the ICEP project contained seven elements that together made up our overall approach to the project and our undergirding “theory of change”. The original proposal is attached as an annexure to these reflections (Annexure 5)

The seven elements were:

1. Understanding the reinforcing dynamic of personal and institutional change
2. Working with a living systems and complexity approach to organisational change, and using this paradigm shift as our obliquity principle for creating the conditions in which to do our difficult organisational justice work
3. Approaching the project primarily as a pedagogical one
4. Adopting a social justice and liberation lens in all our work
5. Recognising the role of facilitator as a unique catalyst for change
6. Acknowledging the role of institutional enablers in creating an environment that could contribute to the impact of the intervention
7. Identifying and designing a “curriculum for change” with relevant readings and “thought leadership” and the explicit use of a collection of social technologies that create the conditions to support complex change

The majority of our processes therefore required a facilitated intervention where the process enabled and, at times, compelled conversations about race, gender, belief systems and prejudice in the context of our core purpose, work and life at the university.

The importance of discomfort and disruption to open up “ethical spaces”

Our processes aimed to help conflicting views to come to the fore and to be engaged with, discussed, and challenged in safe and supportive conversational constellations. However, safe is not the same as comfortable. And that is perhaps at the heart of a transformation journey: To develop capacity and tolerance to work with the discomfort that transformation-related conversations inevita-

bly bring up. And as our workplaces are inevitably saturated with transformation-related issues, this then becomes a core workplace practice.



Through the range of social technologies we used such as listening activities, circle-rounds, café conversations, small group triad conversations, personal journaling and reflection, courageous conversations, open space and other liberating structures, we attempted to give voice to people who felt they had been silenced by the dominant institutional cultures at the university.

By their very nature, these processes required staff to grow in their willingness to become more conscious of themselves, to develop stamina for the discomfort and the difficult conversations at work, to uncover their own prejudices and world views, and to open up to the world views and lived experiences of others.

This was not an easy task and often multiple iterations and touchpoints were needed before shifts became possible in individuals and teams. We saw, as the project unfolded and certain staff members had multiple exposures to our processes, how impactful

This was not an easy task and often multiple iterations and touchpoints were needed before shifts became possible in individuals and teams.

this was. We might have encountered someone during an entry workshop. That person might have been nominated to come on the immersion retreat and then, as an HOD, might have joined us on the *Transformational Leadership Journey* or on the *Curriculum Renewal Journey*. We witnessed the way in which some staff were able to settle into the discomfort of the processes after attending two or three different sessions and how groups matured over time, to deal with increasingly challenging conversations.

Sometimes one tentative step forward would be followed by a retreat back into another form of comfort zone. In some instances, the change required was beyond the “zone of proximal development” of many staff and we had to focus on the 16% innovators and early adopters (in terms of the Innovation Adoption Curve, as cited in http://www.valuebasedmanagement.net/methods_rogers_innovation_adoption_curve.html) in the system to carry the energy of the future and to act as the change agents and catalysts wherever they found themselves in the system.

“THE ARC OF THE
MORAL UNIVERSE
IS LONG, BUT IT
BENDS TOWARD
JUSTICE”.

Theodore Parker

All our processes were accompanied by selected pre-readings to disrupt dominant narratives, stimulate conversations and bring more perspectives and voices into the room. We built up an extensive reading list as part of our “curriculum for change”. Despite an almost intractable resistance to embracing the culture of reading in preparation for workshop sessions, subtle shifts were achieved through this practice of fore-grounding the necessity to read and engage critically with different texts and thought leadership as part of ongoing renewal and relevance, over the period of the ICEP project.

One of the challenges of this work was that the conversational space itself was not an equal or safe space for certain voices. The whole process required a vigilance and alertness to the embedded privileges and marginalisations of dominant institutional cultures, and how staff voices were “structured” into these spaces.

This was one of the reasons why the role of experienced and skilful facilitators was made an explicit feature of our proposal. The facilitator’s task was, at all times, to disrupt the dominant discourses, to create what Catherine Odora Hoppers refers to as an “ethical space”, in which it becomes possible for the silenced voices to be heard, and to enable an “enlargement” of the conversation through the inclusion of multiple perspectives and life stories.

In this sense, the facilitator of transformation processes is never neutral, but always needing to create the conditions to bring silenced voices into the process. At times, she needs to assume certain voices and roles herself, when it is not safe enough for certain participants to speak out, or when certain voices and perspectives are not physically present in the room. As Theodore Parker, quoted by Martin Luther King, says: “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”.

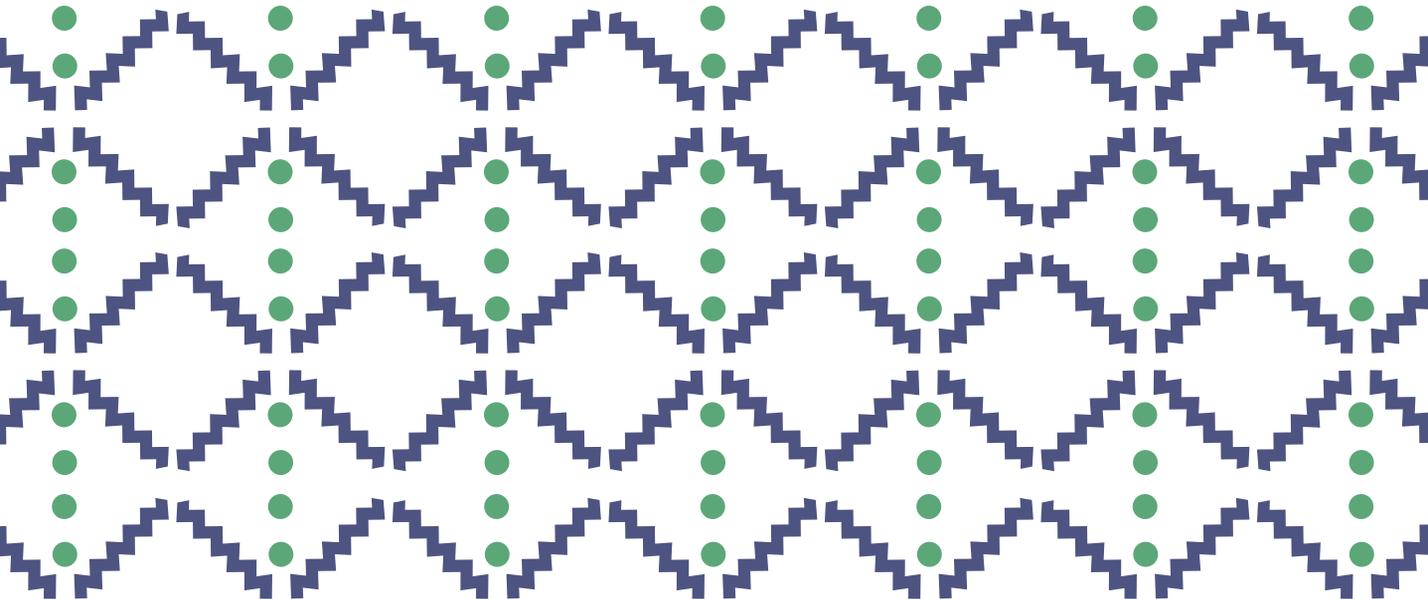
The task of the transformation practitioner is to lovingly “bend the process toward justice”. She needs to be able to sit in the fire of these processes, holding everything that is present in that space, both the despair and the hopefulness in each engagement, as well as the inevitable negative and sometimes overly-positive projections from participants. It is exacting work and without proper self-care and supervision, can lead to burn-out and forms of secondary traumatisation.

The core practices flowing from our “theory of change”

From the seven dimensions of the ICEP proposal, the three main intersecting mandalas that formed our core practice were:

- 1) working with issues of social, organisational and epistemological justice;
- 2) working with a living system, complexity paradigm of organisational development and accompaniment, and the social technologies that support that paradigm; and
- 3) in the context of higher education, doing so as a pedagogical or learning journey or project.

As the djembe drum is said to contain three spirits, these three spirits formed the distinctive container to sound our work, its purpose the same as drumbeats across African villages throughout the ages: To call people together, to talk together about difficult things, to wake-up together and act in alignment and support of each other and our community.



CHAPTER

04



*Everyone loves a spring cleaning
Let's have a humanity-cleaning
Open up history's chamber of horrors
And clear the skeletons behind the mirrors
Let's turn-around and face them
Let's make this clearing-out moment
A legendary material atonement*

Ben Okri [extracts from the poem, "Mental Fight" (Okri 2000)]

EMERGENCE & CULTIVATING READINESS

for #FeesMustFall

Understanding
Directing energy

Complicated
misunderstood
stereotype

*A journey worth
taking*

Renew

COMMUNICATION AND
STAKEHOLDER LIAISON
August 2015

As the intellectual, psychiatrist, philosopher and revolutionary, Frantz Fanon, said, every generation needs to find its purpose, and the purpose and voice discovered by the millennials in South Africa today – through movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall – call for an awakening to the unfinished work of the South African democracy project.

At Nelson Mandela University, a significant moment in this awakening might have been the CANRAD book launch on 19 August 2014 of “Memoirs of a Born Free” by Malaika Wa’ Azania, at the time a student at Rhodes University. The launch was the culmination of several events hosted during Diversity Month 2014, celebrating black female authors in our country.

Wa’ Azania’s book seemed to me to be the first clear, coherent, loud-enough and strident young voice to articulate the betrayal of the post-apartheid era from the perspective of the generation that was supposed to reap the benefits of their “born free” status. This was the first voice to break through the fog that had set in during the previous decade, after the initial euphoria of the late 1990s. She was one of the first published young authors to reject the false narrative of the “Rainbow Nation”, the betrayal of the youth by the ruling party, and the further disillusionment and disappointments of the sexism and expediency of her own comrades as she tried to find new ways of “speaking truth to power”.

A movement whose time had come

Six months later on 9 March 2015, Chumani Maxwele staged the first act of protest that would grow into the #FeesMustFall movement and usher in the most significant changes to our higher education sector since the structural adjustments of the 2004 merger period.

This awakening was happening within the context of previously-disadvantaged students’ lack of access to quality and relevant higher education and a strong, critical intellectual revolution against what was perceived to be colonial and Eurocentric curricula.

Fitting end to 10-year celebrations



WHAT a year it has been the transformation journey at our universities!

As the philosopher blogger Helen Douglas says "Right now, in this moment, these students are holding open a wormhole to an unknown dimension of our future. We don't know what will happen next, or how long it's going to take, but right now, in this moment, another future is possible ([#https://filosofille.wordpress.com/QA54](https://filosofille.wordpress.com/QA54). #What Rises?)

It all started during the first term with a small group of students literally dumping faeces on the head of an old dead white colonialist and industrialist on 9 March — a profoundly symbolic gesture — after reaching the end of their tether with the 'slow pace of transformation' at certain previously white universities (see Gillian Schutte Shit and Social Justice Thoughtleader.co.za).

This action led to the #RhodesmustFall movement which then spread to other universities including #openstellenbosch and the infamous Luister video, all of which sparked debate like never before in our democracy about the role of Higher Education, the 'institutionalised racisms' entrenched in our universities, the complex challenges of 'transformation', and in particular the idea of the

de-colonisation of the African University and the 'indigenisation' of university spaces and curricula including of course issues of language.

Throughout 2015 various VCs made statements and promises responding to the wave of activism at universities, last witnessed more than two decades ago.

Our own NMMU Courageous Conversation took place in May and illuminated many aspects of students lived lives which immediately became part of every transformative conversation and informed all our work and decisions since then.

Ironically a similar conversation was planned for George Campus on the very day the official shut down occurred, hence the VC being in George on the day.

Similarly, our own Institutional Culture two-day workshop on the Role of the Student Leadership in Living and Learning V2020 at NMMU, with over a hundred of the broad

student leadership of NMMU, had been scheduled months ahead, for the very Friday and Saturday following the official shutdown.

After consultation with the students during the week of the protests, it was decided to postpone this workshop for early 2016 and to co-create our process going forward with them.

The 2015 wave crested during the October #FeesmustFall national student protests and NMMU had its first taste of robust student activism in its short 10 years of existence.

David Whyte, an Irish poet says it this way "Sometimes it takes a great sky / to find that / first, bright / and indescribable / wedge of freedom / in your own heart".

It is fitting that we can end the celebrations of our first decade as NMMU with a newly energised and motivated student body who has discovered that first wedge of freedom in their own hearts and

We believe that like some other institutions, the quiet commitment that NMMU has shown over the past few years to consistently create spaces where we can reflect deeply on the themes of ubuntu and diversity, humanising pedagogies and what being an African University means to us, is what has made a critical difference and will continue to do so into 2016 and beyond writes Ilze Olckers.

who has assumed some agency in keeping us all accountable.

Accountable not only to the Freedom Charter and our national Constitution, but also to our own radical V2020 and the commitments we make therein about being a 'dynamic African University'; providing transformational leadership; adopting humanising pedagogies; and respecting diverse knowledge traditions.

In V2020 we also make a 'commitment to the application of knowledge to advance democracy, social justice, public good and liberating the human condition from all forms of discrimination and injustice.'

It is this very vision of what NMMU stands for that has drawn so many of us to want to be a part of the NMMU community.

The #Feesmustfall protests reminded us that we are not an isolated campus, but part of the broader system of Higher Education in South Africa and the

world.

We are vulnerable to and an intrinsic part of the macro and structural forces that impact our microcosm, our own NMMU. But there is a difference. We are not powerless and despairing in the face of these forces.

In the same way that every organism needs certain developmental thresholds to grow and strengthen; in the same way the human body's immune system grows stronger when engaging with challenges; in the same way natural systems, trees and forests can withstand great storms when rooted, flexible and resilient enough; we at NMMU have risen to this moment.

If the body is healthy when the fever burns, if the trees are not rigid and unyielding when the storm peaks, if young ones are cared for and accompanied on their rites of passage, all these potentially catastrophic events become growthful, transformative processes.

We believe that every single person at NMMU who have been willing to engage with the purpose and spirit of V2020 have contributed to the 'health' of our collective body.

These people have been prepared to 'Deepen their Conversations', to become more active and empathetic in their listening, have opened

themselves up to all the difficult readings, perspectives and challenging viewpoints that have formed part of our conversations, have been prepared to re-think their thinking, let go where letting go was required, grappled with the meaning and scope of the practice of transformation and confronted the thorny issues of privilege and the bitter challenges of the human condition over the past two years. Everyone who, during and in the wake of the protests, displayed adaptive expertise, creativity, social awareness and courage, allowed us all to be moved, awakened and enlivened by the storm, but not uprooted and damaged.

We need to include as many voices in conversations as are ready to be part of them, to learn and grow together; understanding that institutional culture is just another way of talking about the learned or living curriculum of the academic project that every NMMU citizen is collectively responsible for.



The demands from the students for “decolonisation”, and curricula and learning relevant to the African social context was, from an ICEP perspective, an overdue and powerful rupture of the status quo.



ula and pedagogies, institutional cultures and university practices.

The student awakening was also part of a much more global shift – including the activism of the “Occupy-movement”, the so-called Arab Spring, the resurgence of the Zapatista movement and other popular justice-driven social movements of the 21st century.

The demands from the students for “decolonisation”, and curricula and learning relevant to the African social context was, from an ICEP perspective, an overdue and powerful rupture of the status quo.

The three to five years we spent working in the system before the advent of #FeesMustFall, in retrospect, could have been seen as the tilling of the hard earth in preparation for this very historic moment.

The university’s transition from the pre-merger positivistic pedagogical tradition, akin to the stories about the University of Pretoria in Prof Jansen’s “Knowledge in the Blood” (2009), to the small green shoots of renewal following the adoption of Vision 2020 in 2008, together with processes that had begun to inquire into what was meant by being an African university with African-centred curricula, and all the collective work by the change agents in the system, contributed to the local conditions in which the student mobilisation took place.

From the perspective of the ICEP project, the #FeesMustFall movement created the momentum and the motivation to demand of academics and administrators to rethink, reflect and reposition themselves in relation to the needs and voice of the students, in ways that we had been advocating for over the previous three to five years, with much less impact and urgent engagement.

We had spent the years prior to #FeesMustFall engaging relentlessly around these very topics – transformation, humanising pedagogies, curriculum renewal and relevance to the African social context. The fact that the students were demanding to be part of the university’s decision-making and governance conversations, and the subsequent setting up of various task teams and faculty engagement platforms, was in one way the practical unfolding of the theory and principles of the humanising pedagogies and transformative institutional cultures which we had been advocating for as part of our conversations and processes.

#FeesMustFall demanded real-time responses and for direct immediate action to be taken. It revealed the sophis-

*Throughout this time,
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unborn children.*



tication of the students' analyses and their stunning intellectual powers; their dedication and commitment to a different social order; their solidarities across differences; and their ability to organise and outwit with the use of technology. It exposed the generation gaps, the different frontiers that they had entered as a "wired" and "connected" generation. Throughout this time, I saw in the students both vulnerable and enraged youth feeling let down and betrayed, as well as considered and thoughtful wise ones carrying the burden of the future on their shoulders, for their own as-yet-unborn children.

It is beyond the scope of these reflections to fully consider the more difficult performative aspects of the #FeesMustFall movement, such as the violence and abuse, the rejection of dialogical spaces, the damage to property, the gender violence, and the political interference in and manipulation of the movement to serve other, less noble agendas.

In the end, all we could do was act as "critical allies" in the words of Sisonke Msimang (2016) and acknowledge the constructs and sense-making coming out of the movement from scholars like Leigh-Anne Naidoo in her paper "Hallucinations", delivered as the 15th Ruth First Lecture at Wits University in August 2016.

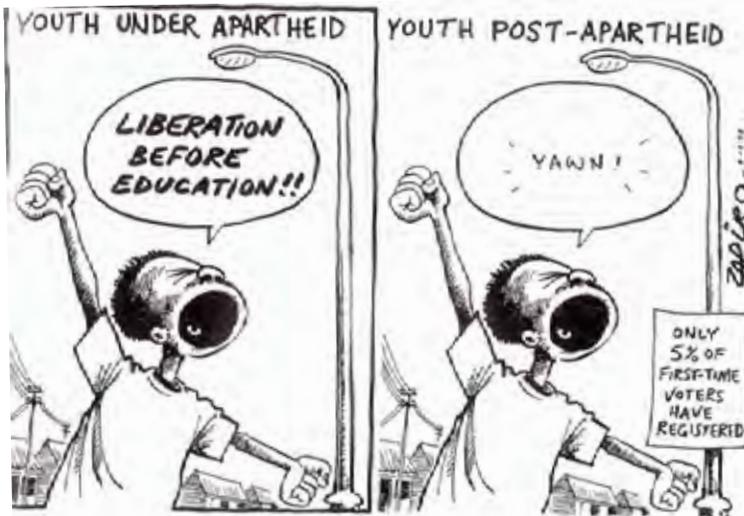
In her paper, Naidoo referred to the tasks or intentions of the #FeesMustFall movement as breaking through the denialism "to kill the fallacies of the moment", the false notion of the "rainbow nation"; secondly, "to arrest the present" creating an opening or a pause, a symbolic break through the national "shut down" processes; and then to "open the door to a different time".

To quote her directly:

"The first task in this hallucination has been to kill the fallacies of the present: to disavow, no to annihilate, the fantasy of the rainbow, the non-racial, the Commission (from the Truth and Reconciliation, to Marikana, and Heher...), even of liberation. The second task is to arrest the present. To stop it. To not allow it to continue to get away with itself for one more single moment. And when the status quo of the present is shut down the third task – and these have been the moments of greatest genius in student movement – is to open the door into another time ... It is difficult to work on the future while the present continues apace. There has to be a measure of shut down in whatever form, for the future to be called."

Overcoming the fear of freedom

Throughout the period of the disruptions at Nelson Mandela University, I was reminded of a small, exploratory working session we facilitated under the leadership of Prof Denise Zinn in September 2014 to begin to look at the possibility of a Short Learning Programme (SLP) on humanising pedagogies. One of the three postgraduate students who participated in the workshop of about eight people reminded us of the Freireian notion of “fear of freedom”. It was his part-response to our sense of confusion and frustration at the lack of greater activism and mobilisation among the students to assist with the process of transformation at the university. We used a cartoon by Dov Fedler to illustrate our point. In the cartoon, the student activism of the 1970s and 1980s is contrasted with the perceived apathy of the youth during the late '90s, possibly in preparation for the 1999 general elections.



“Fear of freedom”, in Freireian terms, refers to the fear of realising the full extent of one’s oppression and the subsequent fear of assuming full responsibility for one’s own liberation:

“The ‘fear of freedom’ which afflicts the oppressed, a fear which may equally well lead them to desire the role of oppressor or bind them to the role of oppressed, should be examined.

“The oppressed, having internalised the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to reject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift ... Freedom is not an ideal located outside of man; nor is it an idea which becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion.” (Freire 1993)

At the university’s graduation ceremony at the end of 2014, there was only one student – out of the entire Nelson Mandela University student community – who staged a silent and symbolic protest by placing a visible plaster over his mouth as he crossed the stage to collect his degree. According to Prof Zinn, many staff members were totally perplexed and confused at this gesture. They genuinely had no idea what he was trying to say.



Less than a year later, thousands of Nelson Mandela University students would be marching and toying from Embizweni down University Way.

Less than a year later, thousands of Nelson Mandela University students would be marching and toying from Embizweni down University Way.

As part of our September 2014 workshop with that small group of participants reflecting on the value of creating a Short Learning Program on humanising pedagogies, we shared the following quote from the diaries of Franz Kafka (1910):

“I can prove at any time that my education tried to make another

person out of me than the one I became. It is for the harm, therefore, that my educators could have done me in accordance with their intentions that I reproach them; I demand from their hands the person I now am, and since they cannot give him to me, I make of my reproach and laughter a drumbeat sounding in the world beyond.”

We were entering a time of reproach. The drumbeats were beginning to sound much more ominous.

Initial conditions

In evaluation processes working with a complexity lens, we had to work very differently with the concept of causation, as no single thing in a complex adaptive system generally “causes” another in a simple, direct and linear way.

There is the phenomenon of “mutual arising” in Buddhist terminology, or the correlations and “contributions to initial conditions” and other confounding concepts in complexity theory. It is worth quoting at length from the article “Identifying systems’ new initial conditions as influence points for the future”, by Mika Aaltonen and T. Irene Sanders (2006) in the journal “Foresight”:

“According to the new assumptions the whole is always more than the sum of its parts, and the future’s development cannot be predicted from the nature of its constituent parts. In fact, because of the system’s nonlinear dynamics and feedback loops, the future of the system cannot be predicted at all. It is, however, possible to develop foresight and influence the future development of the system by identifying and using



the new and emerging initial conditions as points of influence (Letiche 2000).

“The classic sand pile simulation (Bak & Chen 1991) serves as an illustration of how the concept of CAS [complex adaptive systems] creates a different basis of understanding on which the new set of methods might be built.

“‘An observer who studies a specific area of a pile can easily identify the mechanisms that cause sand to fall, and he or she can even predict whether avalanches will occur in the near future. To a local observer, large avalanches would remain unpredictable, however, because they are a consequence of the total history of the entire pile. The criticality is a global property of the sand pile.’ This quotation brings to our awareness the temporal and relational boundaries relevant for effective foresight. And furthermore, it makes us aware that change introduces plurality, and when emergence occurs the results are new, and nonlinear. Therefore, linear presentations of the future, extrapolations and business-as-usual scenarios, can be helpful, but in limited, stable circumstances or in combination with more dynamic methods.

“A lot of things evolve because of carefully laid out plans and visions; the change is designed; it is managed; it is reengineered. This article claims that there is another way to understand change based on a different understanding about how things emerge, and this understanding calls for the use of different methods. ‘Planned change’ is a popular approach to change management. But even planned change projects take place within a larger context characteri[s]ed by unpredictability and uncertainty. Emergence as a consequence of local interaction between the agents involved without any master plan is more the reality in complex adaptive systems. In these local settings, the agents act logically but according to their principles, rules and their own logic, not one ‘big’ logic imposed by a CEO or a president or a director.”

A curriculum-in-action

Everyone in our workshops seem to embrace that this time of turbulence and disruption is a great gift of an opportunity to accelerate and intensify our efforts to renew, revitalise, re-imagine and 'de-colonise' our university and to continue to transform and enliven our institutional culture, work practices and curricula writes Ilze Olckers.

THE gratitude rounds of our ICEP processes this year have been inspired by the FeesMustFall movement and the way NMMU as a university community has been responding to these events.

Without fail, almost every participant who attended the January NMMU Teaching and Learning Retreat as well as the new cohort of 35 department heads, school directors and directors during the two-day Transformational Leadership Journey have spoken about the sense of admiration they have felt for both the student activists as well as the NMMU leadership.

2015 ended with the historic and symbolic decision by the NMMU Council in favour of 'insourcing' after a ground-breaking Council session during which both student and outsourced worker representatives gave searing and moving testimony about their daily struggles.

The decision taken that day confirmed the fundamental 'idea' of NMMU as a university striving for greater social justice and for *living* its values and V2020.

It confirmed that we do not think of ourselves as a 'business' first, pre-occupied only with the bottom line; but as a human community, an institution for the public good, striving to make the morally right and difficult choices for sustainable futures in a macro-economic context over which we do not have much control.

What we do control is what we stand for, and how we *live* those values and attributes. Many staff members from Finance, Human Resources and other divisions had to work over the December recess period to begin the organisational processes to give effect to this courageous and precedent-setting decision; as did academic staff who had been supporting students in many ways.

Gratitude was expressed for the courage, restraint and endurance of the students and for the commitment, genuine concern, humility and maturity of the NMMU leadership.

Early in 2016 renewed student protests on multiple campuses emerged and it became clear that this is going to be a time of on-going instability and uncertainty.

Some protests escalated and the subsequent

violence and destruction has opened up another critical opportunity for very serious pedagogical conversations about the themes of responsibility, leadership, ownership, ethics, legitimacy, acceptable ways of protesting and engaging in 'direct action' and many other profound and universal themes of human engagement.

There are powerful scenes now embedded in our memories of students not only using faeces to make their point, but actually burning and destroying university infrastructure and artefacts.

A truly challenging and dynamic, real-time ethics, philosophy, history, sociology, politics, psychology and law curriculum – in-action!

Some of these scenes also ask questions about

“What we do control is what we stand for, and how we live those values and attributes”

who makes up legitimate university stakeholders as rugby spectators and political representatives from the entire political spectrum from Afriforum to the EFF and beyond – got involved in clashes on different campuses.

As various VCs consider court interventions by way of interdicts and criminal charges, progressive constitutional law activist and academic

Prof Pierre de Vos has grappled with the difficult questions about whether one can excuse and justify violent student actions. (Read more).

Other social commentators have written some powerful reflections on the different ways in which 'white violence' and 'black violence' have been represented. (Read more).

These times are rich with paradoxes and recurring questions about the human condition, about teaching and learning, and about the identity, role and purpose of our NMMU – questions and themes that will form part of our on-going ICEP conversations in 2016.

How do we listen to and engage with students when they become disruptive, abusive and even violent, and yet we empathetically understand their frustrations and impatience?

How can we act with clarity and conviction as teachers, leaders and managers from a place of eldership, stewardship and wisdom and at the same

time recognise that the students hold the key to the future that we as an older generation cannot grasp?

How do we honour the critical institutional, academic and pedagogic issues that students are forcing us to attend to, while helping them reflect on their orientation and language of 'demands' and 'ultimatums' towards a more generative and empowered place of collaboration, partnership and co-creation?

And what about the groupings on campus that are bewildered, disengaged, apathetic and even reactionary to the cause of their colleagues and fellow students and workers?

How can we engage each other in daily conversations and encounters so that the current climate and context at all our universities become our everyday classroom?

In her seminal article 'Dancing with Systems' Donella Meadows, a visionary scientist and academic in the field of sustainability, lists 14 aspects or elements of 'The Dance'. (Read more).

As she says in her article 'I have learned about dancing with great powers from white water rafting, from gardening, from playing music, from skiing.

'All those endeavours requires one to stay wide awake, pay close attention, participate flat out and respond to feedback.

'It had never occurred to me that those same requirements might apply to intellectual work, to management, to government, to getting along with people.'

And we can add – to move with the new energy and momentum that is sweeping through our campuses and our sector.

We need to stay wide awake, pay close attention, participate flat out, and respond to the feedback we get from one another.

This is about humanising pedagogies, a vibrant, stimulating and richly diverse environment, about diverse knowledge traditions, about transformational leadership, about ethical knowledge, about knowledge for the liberation of the human condition from all forms of discrimination and injustice.

This is about our NMMU, our V2020 for tomorrow, today.



As discussed in previous chapters, the formal ICEP mandate came from Vision 2020's Strategic Priority 5, which was to “develop and sustain a transformative institutional culture that optimises the full potential of staff and students”.

Cultivating readiness

When reflecting back over the years, one of the questions that arises might be the role that some of the ICEP-facilitated processes may have played indirectly, in the few spaces where we did engage with a select few interns or post-graduate students, in strengthening the resolve and impulse of some of these young intellectuals to step so fully into their own leadership.

As discussed in previous chapters, the formal ICEP mandate came from Vision 2020's *Key Strategic Priority Area 5*, which was to “develop and sustain a transformative institutional culture that optimises the full potential of staff and students”.

Secondly, *Key Strategic Priority Area 5* was one of the three apex priority areas of Nelson Mandela University, and according to a large degree of consensus, the most critical one for the sustainable future of the university.

After October 2015, however, another narrative emerged around the role and destiny of the ICEP process, namely the idea of “cultivating readiness” for the implications and challenges of the insourcing decisions and the #FeesMustFall protests and beyond.

During the time preceding #FeesMustFall, ICEP had introduced and offered into the university system:

- A new paradigm for engaging with organisations.
- New social technologies and ways of gathering and engaging that supported transformative institutional change, including developing greater tolerance for discomfort, the agreements for having courageous conversations; as well as some of the key elements of creating a thinking environment.
- Within the EMANCO space, we had introduced the “C’s” of complexity, circle work, conversation-based change approaches, different conversation constellations and developing a sense of workplace community.
- We had created our own Vision 2020 pamphlet as an accessible and compelling pedagogical tool for introducing conversations about the university's core purpose and identity as an institution.
- We had convened “whole system” conversations contributing to renewal and transformation across the different domains; and introduced a greater understanding of our systemic interdependence of one another, as well as practice sessions for

Conversations

A talk

**Informal
comfortable and
relaxed**

*Exchanging and
sharing ideas and
news*

Dialogue

Communication And
Stakeholder Liaison
August 2015

problem-solving across disciplinary boundaries and domains in the institution.

- Through the notion of a living curriculum / learned curriculum, we had worked with many domains at the university, including the Institutional Support division and different departments in that division; as well as with other critical professional, administrative and support functions such as the finance division around themes such as white privilege and humanising pedagogies.
- We had begun to create a culture of reading and reflection through our transformation-based “curriculum for change”, encouraging through our extensive reading lists a rigour for engaging with a range of thought leadership on critical topics.
- We had developed a small team of external support facilitators.
- We had supported and helped to develop: an awareness of “leadership as a convening role” as opposed to the traditional, masculine “leader as hero” paradigm; the “facilitative” orientation necessary for transformational change; and the necessity for focussed active listening in high conflict situations or when encountering “the other”.

In addition to these more general contributions, some specific ICEP interventions might also, in retrospect, practically and qualitatively have contributed to cultivating readiness in the university system to respond creatively, in a humanising way, with adaptive expertise, solidarity and resilience to the challenges of in-sourcing and the period of the #FeesMustFall disruptions.

The period of the disruptions included, among others, the various protest actions on and around campus; the various informal negotiation sessions and more formally structured court-ordered mediations, the shutdowns as well as the informal “track two” processes between key staff and student leadership, the joint task teams created to bring student voice into important institutional processes, as well as the development of the subsequent “academic recovery plan” and beyond.

The main interventions that might have contributed to creating more favourable conditions to respond creatively and in humanising ways during these difficult times were as follows:

- A workshop process with the finance division during 2013/2014 that significantly shifted their orientation from a technical, auditing and compliance approach towards a resource and part-

nership-based approach in support of the university's core purpose, its academic project, in time for the challenges of #FeesMustFall.



- Strategic interventions with the Institutional Support division as a whole, as well as “Deepening the Conversations” sessions with various departments within that division, under the leadership of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Institutional Support, that supported the re-positioning of the Institutional Support division and helped re-orientate the team to reframing their role as part of the learned/living curriculum of the university; as well as underscoring the critical role of Institutional Support in the lived experiences of students and staff, just prior to the first student disruptions, and just after the Vice-Chancellor’s courageous conversations, that centred the role of Institutional Support in the transformation conversations.

*Quality
Continuous Improvement
Reflective, Engaged, Inclusive
Enhance shared learning experience
Excellence*

Office for Institutional Planning June 2015

- The introduction of the complexity paradigm and certain meta-skills, such as active listening and courageous conversations, within critical leadership spaces such as EMANCO and the Office of Institutional Planning in time for the arrival of the VUCA world (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Adaptability) on our doorstep with the advent of #FeesMustFall, where the senior leaders were called upon to display the very complexity-based leadership and adaptive expertise we had been talking about in our sessions.
- Developing reasonably authentic workplace relationships over time, a sense of solidarity and collegiality amongst the senior leadership and many of the EMANCO team members and thereby invoking the idea of a workplace community, which enabled a sufficient degree of trust in and support for each other on the unpredictable and harrowing journey of the entire period



- Meeting in “whole system” teams and building relationships and awareness across different domains and silos, creating readiness for a more integrated way of working, which included the era of the task teams, emergency teams and multi-stakeholder development of the academic recovery plan.
- Initial conversations around the university’s values with 150 Estates and Facility Management (EFM) staff (towards the end of 2015), which acknowledged the institutional challenges of “inducting” and “integrating” newly in-sourced staff and provided feedback to the EFM leadership teams about leadership styles and challenges in that division.
- Conversations around curriculum renewal and the “Africanisation” of our curricula prior to the call for “de-colonisation” as part of the #FeesMustFall movement, creating readiness for the “curriculum renewal journey” and for the student engagement processes in the different faculties.

Transformative leadership in action

The closing-out EMANCO Retreat in November 2016, held in the beautiful and serene nature setting of Lake De La Vie conference venue, the same venue where Prof Swartz was apparently interviewed for the position of Vice-Chancellor years back, was a quiet moment of commemoration. It allowed us to reflect on the incredible events of 2016, with classes and examinations still miraculously continuing at the Nelson Mandela Bay Soccer Stadium in corridors and make-shift spaces, an extraordinary experiment in whole-system adaptive expertise and innovative problem-solving.

It was a leadership team that had been pushed beyond what they thought they would ever have to deal with as university leaders and administrators, and who emerged from this task and this encounter, for the most part, with gratitude, grace, a sense of solidarity and purpose, optimism and a renewed understanding of their own potential and the potential of others.

While the spirit and atmosphere of this historic moment might not be vividly remembered by members of the EMANCO team in years to come, the “Golden Threads” summary of our conversations and organisational learning was captured for the record by Dr Denver Webb.

It would be tricky to speculate on how the university leadership team may have met the #FeesMustFall crisis differently had they not been on a prior transformation journey.

Some said ‘impossible’, but stadium turned into varsity



“It always seems impossible until it’s done”.

These words by Nelson Mandela inspired staff and students at NMMU when faced with the difficult challenge of completing last year’s academic year with limited access to our campuses.

Our academic completion plan involved a combination of digital learning and limited face-to-face teaching followed by final assessments and examinations.

While exploring off-campus venue options, the Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium popped up as an option in discussions with the mayor and the metro.

Could we complete our classes, some of our experiential and digital learning, and examinations in a soccer stadium?

Many responded with “impossible”.

Yet, given the university’s commitment to ensure that as many students as possible completed their academic year and went on to graduate, the impossible had to be



achieved.

It took just four days to create a mini-university in the stadium. With much “thinking without a box”, hard work and little sleep, teaching and learning spaces were crafted into being in the most unlikely ways and places.

Pride of place went to a 120-seater computer lab created from scratch for students from disciplines such as architecture, architectural technology, IT, maths and journalism to complete their practical work, as well as for students who needed to access digital learning materials.

Security in accessing the stadium was balanced by a calm, peaceful, relaxed atmosphere within.

Healthcare and counselling facilities were available, along with a recharge zone where students and staff could “chill”.

University staff and senior students volunteered as marshals to help students to find their way around the unfamiliar surroundings.

This enabled teaching, student learning and motivation to be reignited – which was very necessary after five weeks of protest action.

Once students adjusted to their new-found surroundings, they began to sense that they were making history as today few can claim to have written their examinations in a soccer stadium.

Many selfies were taken, capturing this historic moment in students’ lives.

Over a period of 12 days, 476 hours were spent concluding classes and tests in eight venues and three alcoves at the stadium.

More than 220 module codes, across 65 disciplines were covered.

More than 10 000 students accessed the stadium for teaching, learning and assessment purposes, along with 153 lecturers.

Developing a timetable to make all this possible took much ingenuity too.

Interesting spaces were repurposed for examinations.

For example, some long, wide corridors on the sides of the stadium

were able to seat between 200 and 350 students.

Students could choose to write in November or January.

This meant that developing exam schedules and guessing how many students might arrive and thus anticipating what size venue was needed for each paper. It seemed impossible. However, our examinations section rose to the occasion.

Consequently, more than 32 000 student entries were recorded to write about 1 000 papers in 24 days with two exam sessions daily. Did we achieve our goal? Success rates in our second semester modules are within 1% of previous years and above the Department of Higher Education and Train-

ing (DHET) benchmark of 80%.

This suggests that despite the impossibility of running a university in a soccer stadium, academic standards were maintained.

Given these success rates, a similar number of returning students relative to last year have enrolled to continue their studies this year.

Most impressive, however, is that 6 786 graduates will be capped this month – the highest number of graduates for NMMU’s autumn graduation.

How did the impossible happen?

It required courageous leadership to embark on this journey into the unknown and inspire everyone to believe that the impossible was possible.

Commitment was needed over a sustained period of three months, along with perseverance in navigating the varied challenges that regularly arose in completing the journey. It meant a personal sacrifice of time and energy.

Some, for example, gave up the comfort of an office to work in a scullery that doubled as a communal tearoom and the nerve centre of the university’s operations at the stadium.

Spaces that could be purposed for teaching and exams required creative thinking as did designing a student access system that involved developing software to scan students.

The glue that made it possible to remain courageous, committed and creative was that we shared a common goal of completing the academic year. It was a collaborative effort of working across silos and teaming up with stadium management and SAPS to ensure that things ran smoothly.

Having embarked on a journey to do the seemingly impossible to complete an academic year in a soccer stadium, we can now say with pride, “it has been done”. Graduation will provide a moment for the university, its graduates, stadium management and the metro to celebrate this achievement.

We hope that our impossible journey and the lessons learnt will inspire others when facing challenges that seem to be impossible.

Prof Cheryl Foxcroft is acting deputy vice-chancellor: teaching and learning at NMMU.

As we made our way through 2017, we also encountered the low morale and, in some instances, shattered trust, lingering fears, frustrations and betrayals experienced by many staff, who were not part of the senior management teams in our university.

The leadership style of our Acting Vice-Chancellor at the time, Dr Sibongile Muthwa, set the tone for a humanising, dialogical and collective approach that built trust among her team members rather than eroded it. We obviously also acknowledge the individual team members' life experiences as activists, leaders, managers and parents, their innate intelligence, values, characters and personalities. And we might also have to acknowledge the geo-political situation at Nelson Mandela University, which was somewhat removed from the high intensity contestations and critical traditions of some of the other universities.

How the university managed to complete the 2016 academic year successfully; how out of the estimated R1 billion worth of damage to property during the #FeesMustFall protests, Nelson Mandela University accounted for just R8 million; how it managed to emerge with a leadership team that had deepened their sense of cohesion and solidarity rather than been fragmented and torn apart by ideological and other contestations; how the university was able to prepare for a relatively successful 2017 period of registration and admissions; how it managed to create a workable hybrid student leadership structure for 2017 and so on, are questions for potential future reflection and study.

As we made our way through 2017, we also encountered the low morale and, in some instances, shattered trust, lingering fears, frustrations and betrayals experienced by many staff, who were



not part of the senior management teams in our university. We realised that the intensive transformational work done with the senior team over a period of time had been echoed in only some of the faculties and departments of the larger institution. Many leaders still struggled with the idea of transformational leadership and the challenge of attending to the diverse and complex social fabric of their teams, the ongoing relational and group work that was required of them to initiate the social healing processes in their teams, post #FeesMustFall. In addition, transformational

leadership also required hosting story-telling from multiple perspectives and the positive reframing of unsettling events, in a larger societal context, to be able to continue to forge ahead on our transformation journey. As I was reminded by Prof Heather Nel, as part of the original merger, our institution chose to work with an "executive dean" model rather than a "collegial dean" model. The team leadership responsibilities on our executive deans

However we might remember this time, Nelson Mandela University as a whole institution displayed great resilience and resourcefulness in responding to the events of 2015/2016, in ways that can be said to have strengthened the institution rather than weakened it.



and other senior leaders were therefore more pronounced than it might have been in a collegial model. This was not commonly understood among all the deans and senior leaders and requires further clarification in the next phase of institutionalising the university's transformation architecture and approach.

However we might remember this time, Nelson Mandela University as a whole institution displayed great resilience and resourcefulness in responding to the events of 2015/2016, in ways that can be said to have strengthened the institution rather than weakened it. It displayed the collective commitment and dedication of the overwhelming majority of staff and students. And from this experience, new emergent and transformative work and engagement practices are being cultivated and nurtured in the institution.

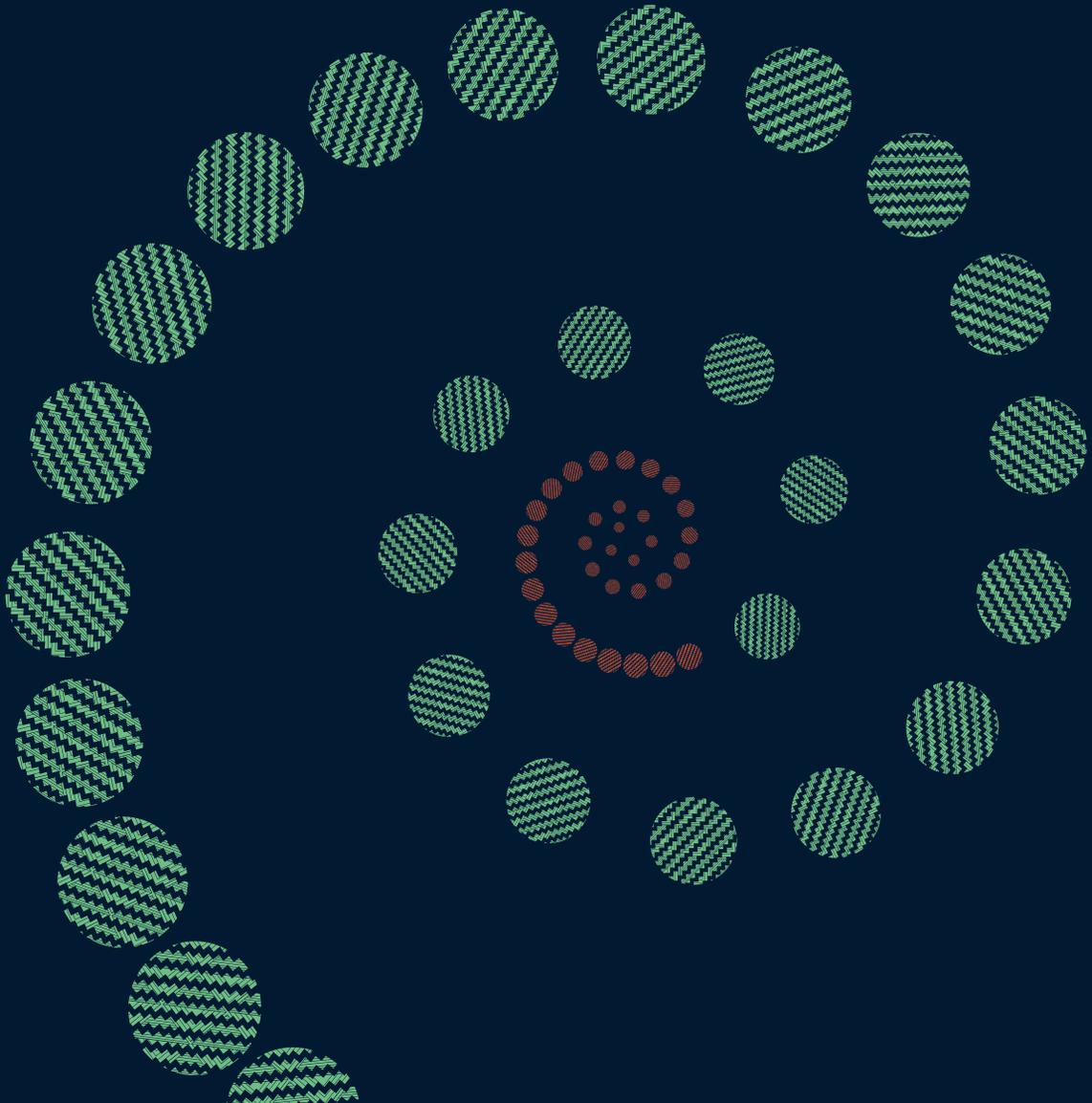
The university's task now is to pay sustained attention to the gifts and opportunities offered by the #FeesMustFall movement. This includes using the discomfort and rupture caused by the first two impulses of the movement, as articulated by Naidoo – the first being robustly and sometimes even violently breaking through the “denialism” of the past and the second, creating a pause through the symbolic “shut downs” – to help achieve the third, which is to walk through that now still opening door into a different time and future, alone and together.

CHAPTER

05

*Already, the future is
converging with the past ...
The diverse ways of the world
Will create wonderful new forms
Lovely cultural explosions
Already I sense future forms of art ...
It's rich tapestry of differences- ...
The distillation of all our different gifts*

Ben Okri [extracts from the poem, "Mental Fight" (Okri 2000)]



Tracking Change, EVALUATING IMPACT & Connecting the Gains

Change
*Wanting, Moving,
Creating*
Not comfortable, so
necessary
TRANSFORMATION

COMMUNICATION AND
STAKEHOLDER LIAISON
August 2015

One cosy Saturday afternoon in October 2015, in the artistic little cottage of one of my practice colleagues in my very own quirky neighbourhood of Muizenberg, Cape Town, I had the special privilege of participating in an informal practice conversation with two of the global leaders and internationally-recognised experts on monitoring and evaluation, Kate McKegg and Patricia Rogers.

New Zealand-based McKegg is a leading international expert on developmental evaluation and the founder director of the Knowledge Institute (at the time of writing these reflections, she had just co-launched another new initiative, entitled the Developmental Evaluation Institute), while Rogers is a Professor in Public Sector Evaluation and project director of BetterEvaluation at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australia. BetterEvaluation is an international collaboration which aims to improve evaluation across the world through sharing and creating knowledge about how to appropriately choose and use different evaluation methods and processes.

The two women were both in South Africa as keynote speakers at the International Monitoring and Evaluation Conference which was held in Johannesburg the following week. What was confirmed in the course of that conversation was that the process of evaluating innovative, multi-dimensional change initiatives in complex and dynamic environments, using a living systems and complexity approach, was a very new, still emerging, post-colonial transformative discipline with very few case studies to draw from.

The need for a developmental approach to evaluating the ICEP project

Ever since the very inception of the ICEP project, we had viewed the question of evaluation through a complexity lens, as a practice question. For years, we waited for guidance, prompting, someone or something to emerge from the field to help us respond meaningfully to this question. We referred to this issue explicitly in



INPUT FROM THE OUTSIDE ... External facilitators form part of the ICEP facilitation team and participated together with NMMU staff in a recent facilitators' reflection and learning session. Participants included back from left Fayruz Abrahams, Transformation Monitoring and Evaluation's **Dr Hilda Mafunga**, ICEP's **Ilze Olckers**, Gary Koekemoer, Sharon Munyaka, Canrad's **Allan Zinn**, the VC's Office's **Laura Best**, Hanna Kotze and Zola Ntsimango and (front) Desiree Paulsen, Institutional Planning's **Prof Heather Nel**, Sue Soal and DVC Teaching and Learning **Prof Denise Zinn**.

Co-creating the embodied reality of Vision 2020

Implementing transformation

IT WAS at the end of the first retreat of its kind initiated by Prof Denise Zinn, our DVC for Teaching and Learning, bringing together different stakeholders to re-think and re-position Teaching and Learning at NMMU.

Dr Muki Moeng, the Dean of Education, looked around the room where we had gathered for the past two days and said 'This IS an African University'. She went on:

'We are gathered here in a circle which is the way our ancestors have always gathered, no-one's voice more important than the other.

We are listening to each other deeply and intently, the way our ancestors have always listened to each other when they gathered to discuss important matters.

We are all Africans here – from the West, from the East and many of us from the South; we have

cried together and laughed together and more importantly we have told each other our stories.

We have read and learnt about and had many conversations about scholars and themes from Africa and the South and other people of colour, as well as our colleagues from the North and the West, to help us better understand the challenges that face us as teachers and students.

We are the young ones and the older ones gathered together – the passion and excitement of the youth and the wisdom and experience of the elders.

Together we are giving birth to the future. For many of us teaching and learning is not separate from life itself – which is the African way.'

One of the main issues we have been coming across in our ICEP (Institutional Culture Enlivening Process) work, are the questions about 'implementation' or 'institutionalisation' of our work.

This has echoed some of the 'binary divides' that often still forms part of our unconscious mechanistic (Newtonian) approach to the world. A living system cannot separate out the 'design' and 'implementation' aspects of its development and growth; the conversation and action aspects; or indeed it's teaching from its learning. As Peter Block reminds us, 'the conversation IS the action'.

After many months, workshops, interventions and events by various leaders and colleagues we realised that we had co-created in that very room, the *embodied reality* of our NMMU Vision.

A living system goes through various developmental stages but there is no point at which a garden begins to 'implement' its plans for growing; or a toddler begins to 'implement' its ability to walk, writes Ilze Olckers.

It also took many different and shared texts and readings, social technologies and many different constellations of conversation among various stakeholders at various levels at NMMU.

And unexpectedly we arrived at this critical moment in Cape St Francis in the Spring.

How, do you ask, do we 'institutionalise' this?

As with all complex adaptive systems the design elements of our transformation processes are often very simple and consistent:

- ▶ Figure out the most transformative questions relevant to your specific team or students that you can.
- ▶ 'What is our core purpose here at NMMU?'
- ▶ 'What do we need to do differently to make Vision 2020 a reality in our department or team or curriculum?'
- ▶ 'With whom do we need to be working more closely to be more effective in what we are trying to achieve?'

- ▶ Warmly invite as diverse a group of staff and students as possible to engage with these questions in any setting that you find yourself in, the monthly Faculty Management Committee, the regular Monday morning meeting or in the tearoom.
- ▶ Start with a gratitude and check-in round, formally or informally, and ensure that all the conversations allow for participation from everyone.
- ▶ Treat all participants equally and especially focus on deepening the relationships among

your colleagues through active listening or story telling or sharing some social time.

▶ Pay attention to how the legacy of the past has distorted our present.

▶ Look for some interesting readings that might disrupt how

we have been thinking about a particular issue and share these with your colleagues.

- ▶ And finally allow the creativity, innovation and community that are inherent in every one of us when we find ourselves in an enabling and affirming environment to flow.

This is transformation-in-action. You are busy tilling the soil or sowing the seeds, or doing some necessary pruning – as is the case with certain programmes or curricula or policies or attitudes that do not serve us anymore.

Allow for the cycle of life to unfold while you continue to tend the 'garden' with dedication, kindness and love every day in small actions that transform the micro-structures that make up our daily work.

And one day soon you will realise, with expected surprise, that there are new green shoots and nutritious indigenous fruits on the trees.



But we were still thinking of evaluation as something discrete and separate, time-bound, with a focus on assessing and adjudicating the value or worth of the intervention, rather than the deep developmental and transformative understanding that formed part of the very pedagogical paradigm we were adopting in all our other work.

our original proposal as falling outside of the scope of the project itself.

In retrospect, this was a mistake.

If we had been a little more courageous and a little more knowledgeable and convicted about the significance of the evaluation journey as an inherent component of the process itself; and of our opportunity to potentially forge new knowledges, approaches and methods, practically and theoretically, in experimenting with new ways of tracking change from a complexity perspective, we would not have renounced this aspect so easily.

At the time of contracting in late 2011 and early 2012, I was still unconsciously holding a more summative or formative understanding of evaluation in my consciousness. I knew this was an area where we would need an innovative pioneering process. I knew I didn't know enough about it to design it. I knew my contract didn't allow the time to both do the work, as well as the "evaluation" of the work. At the time, it also felt as if it would be "improper" – a conflict of interest or even unethical – to lead a process but then also design the tools for "evaluating" that very process. This was another idea left over from the previous era of summative and formative evaluations. But throughout the process, we did have a nagging worry that this was a significant and important part of the work, but that it was something we did not know enough about to even contract out, a kind of "consciousness incompetence".

But we were still thinking of evaluation as something discrete and separate, time-bound, with a focus on assessing and adjudicating the value or worth of the intervention, rather than the deep developmental and transformative understanding that formed part of the very pedagogical paradigm we were adopting in all our other work.

Our vindication was that, by the end of 2015, at the International Conference of Monitoring and Evaluation, where actual monitoring and evaluation professionals from all over the world gathered, even there and then, the notion of developmental evaluation and working with a complexity perspective, was still being seen as a cutting-edge and emerging approach with very few practitioners, globally, able to offer us the expertise we were looking for.

And so it was only through the deeper investigation into the field of developmental evaluation during the renewal journey with the Office for Institutional Planning, that it became clearer how we had missed an opportunity for ongoing learning and more effective feedback loops into the system.

Challenges in finding a way towards developmental evaluation

In one of our ICEP Reference Group sessions, working with an appreciative inquiry approach, and struggling to name what it was we were wrestling with, we came up with the term “Connecting the Gains”. At the time, the idea behind “Connecting the Gains” was to capture the positive shifts and small victories of our process, primarily as part of a communication strategy in the institution, maybe akin to the “reasons to be proud” promotions that got sent around the university community.

As the process continued to unfold, however, we realised the following:

- That there was as much (if not more) a need for capturing and tracking the setbacks and challenges of the process as there was the positive gains, if we wanted to learn more about and understand more deeply the intentionally-designed processes of organisational change from a justice perspective.
- That trying to separate out, in our reflections, the work of the ICEP project from all the other transformation initiatives and experiments in renewal in the institution, would not only be difficult, but possibly theoretically dissonant with the complexity perspective we were working with as our core theoretical frame.
- That the gap between the compliance-driven, reporting frameworks of the university's current Department for Transformation, Monitoring and Evaluation and what we were now asking from that domain in the institution was just too large; and that the capacity or willingness to re-imagine the work of that function did not exist, despite the commitment and leadership of Prof Heather Nel as the Director of the Office.
- That, as with many other transformation and organisational challenges at Nelson Mandela University, the academic and scholarly offerings of our institution, on the very topics we were wrestling with in our own internal organisational processes, were still based on previous and unhelpful frameworks and could not assist us with the work we had set out to do.
- That not only would the absence of an evaluation learning journey deprive us of the narratives and stories with which to record, understand and to some extent, justify our work and the investment in the ICEP project, but more importantly, it would deprive us of the all-important theoretical dimension of feedback loops of information back into the system to sup-





At the time, the idea behind “Connecting the Gains” was to capture the positive shifts and small victories of our process, primarily as part of a communication strategy in the institution.

port, enable and compel ongoing change as part of a systems approach.

- That, through our quest to reflect meaningfully and creatively on our processes and attempt to learn from and evaluate impact with new approaches and lenses, we could also have helped to shape new disciplines and practices in the field of monitoring and evaluation itself.
- That our perceived “trade-off” to direct funds towards doing the actual work rather than investing in the sense-making and knowledge-producing aspects of the work, was, in a way, playing into the old colonial binaries of theory and practice and not grasping the opportunity to transcend those in an innovative project of engaged scholarship and praxis.

If we had understood the importance of tracking the process and the change, iteratively and on an ongoing basis as we went along, as well as the theoretical importance of having the evaluation journey embedded much more intimately into the process itself as one of the core elements of the complexity perspective, we might have been able to offer something of great value to the field as we brought this project to a close.

We might have been able to offer a more scholarly sense-making and provide new insights in the fields of organisational change and transformation, organisational justice and other related disciplines.

We might, through this project, have been able to advocate for a new discipline in organisational studies, and even offer a curriculum to do with Transformation Practice.

We might also have contributed to the case studies of good praxis in our institution – the indivisible need in the world to have a meaningful practical application component based on, and further informing, the theoretical underpinnings of what we do.

We might have been able to make a more significant contribution to the transformation challenges of the higher education sector as a whole; to contribute towards establishing communities of transformation practice to support the work that the entire sector will have to continue to do in the years to come.

We might even have been able to make a significant scholarly and practice contribution to the field of monitoring and evaluation itself, gaining knowledge and providing insights and methods into the complex process of tracking transformative change in South African institutions.

Possibilities and thwarted plans

At one stage, we got quite excited when, through email contact with Sam Wells and Josie McLean from the Adelaide Business School, whose article “One way forward to beat the Newtonian habit ...” (2013) had become one of our core readings, we discovered that McLean was busy writing up a case study that might have been able to assist us with an approach and a set of practices. This case study subsequently turned into a thesis that took much longer to complete than initially thought, and so we were back to zero.

Under the auspices of the Cape Town-based Community Development Resource Agency, some training was being offered in developmental evaluation, but according to some of our practice colleagues in the field, these would not meet our needs.

Early in 2016, we met with Port Elizabeth-based consultant and colleague, Candice Morkel, who was specialising in new monitoring and evaluation approaches for the public sector. We were extremely excited and invited her to our immersion retreat in June 2016 by way of inducting her into our process, and with the in-

*The egg
shows the hen
where to
hatch.*

African Proverb

tention of working with her to begin to craft our own evaluation journey. Shortly after the retreat, however, she accepted a contract with another university in another centre and this idea was also still-born.

Throughout the months of wrestling with this issue, it also felt as if it would not be appropriate for someone to assist us with this part of the project unless they also deeply understood the social and organisational justice and decolonisation aspects of our work. While an international consultant could potentially bring international credibility and exposure to our work, we could also lose “ownership” of the evaluation journey, the knowledge-making and research, as well as the groundedness of the evaluation in our South African context.

A further consideration was that a developmental evaluation approach would require someone to be available to us on an ongoing basis, over a period of time, to accompany us on this journey, and overseas travel for an international consultant would have made this financially prohibitive.

It also felt as if it was important for someone of colour to lead this process as the “whiteness” of our institutional spaces had become synonymous with the aspects of our institutional culture that required dismantling and renewal. This added an additional demographic requirement to a capability that was already extremely scarce in the Southern African organisational development landscape.



During the second semester of 2016, we compromised and agreed on working with one of South Africa’s most well-respected and cutting-edge developmental evaluation practitioners in the development sector, Sue Soal, a white woman after all, and one of only a handful of practitioners that had been experimenting with these new paradigms, in a small action learning pilot project.

We framed her intervention as an action learning journey with a small team of potential internal evaluation practitioners at Nelson Mandela University.

Her brief would be to conduct a developmental evaluation of the transformation journey of the Office for Institutional Planning as an initial case study, and to do so in a manner that would also constitute an action learning experience for internal staff.

This time, we were hit by the second wave of #FeesMustFall protests and these events, amongst other urgent competing priorities for the Office of Institutional Planning, meant that yet again, our plans were thwarted.

What a developmental evaluation approach might have looked like

The first book on developmental evaluation, titled “Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innova-

tion and use”, was published in 2010 by the pioneer in this field, Michael Quinn Patton.

An overview of methodologies for developmental evaluation was published five years later in a second book, titled “Developmental Evaluation Exemplars: Principles in Practice” (2015), edited by Patton, Kate McKegg and Nan Wehipeihana.

Patton (2010) said:

“Over the last few years, I have found increasing demand for innovative evaluation approaches to evaluate innovations. In other words, social innovators and funders of innovative initiatives want and need an evaluation approach that they perceive to be a good match with the nature and scope of innovations they are attempting. Out of working with these social innovators emerged an approach I’ve called developmental evaluation that applies complexity concepts to enhance innovation and support evaluation use.

Complex situations challenge traditional evaluation practices.

Complexity can be defined as situations in which how to achieve desired results is not known (high uncertainty), key stakeholders disagree about what to do and how to do it, and many factors are interacting in a dynamic environment that undermine efforts at control, making predictions and static models problematic.

Complexity concepts include nonlinearity (small actions can produce large reactions), emergence (patterns emerge from self-organi[s]ation among interacting agents), and dynamic adaptations (interacting elements and agents respond and adapt to each other).

Developmental evaluation aims to meet the needs of social innovators by applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use.”

Some of the elements of a developmental evaluation approach are:

- Goals are emergent and changing
- Time is fluid and forward-looking
- Purpose is learning, innovation and change
- Non-linear causality



John Garnagi (2015) in his Evalblog entitled, "The future of evaluation: 10 Predictions", suggests the following:

- (1) Most evaluations will become internal.
- (2) Evaluation reports will become obsolete.
- (3) Evaluations will abandon data collection in favour of data mining.
- (4) A national registry of evaluations will be created.
- (5) Evaluations will be conducted in more open ways.
- (6) The RFP [Request for Proposal] will RIP.
- (7) Evaluation theories (plural) will disappear.
- (8) The demand for evaluators will continue to grow.
- (9) The number of training programmes in evaluation will increase.
- (10) The term evaluation will go out of favour.

He suggests that:

"The term evaluation sets the process of understanding a program[me] apart from the process of managing a program[me]. Good evaluators have always worked to improve understanding and management. When they do, they have sometimes been criticized for doing more than determining the merit of a program[me]. To more accurately describe what good evaluators do, evaluation will become known by a new name, such as 'social impact management'."

Sensing the social impact of complex change

This notion of "social impact management" seems much more resonant with our understanding of the role that "evaluation" needs to play in change processes.

The term "management", however, still sticks in the throat, as it implies that complex process evaluations can be "managed" as linear processes. It is not a term that sits easily and naturally with a complexity paradigm. From our perspective, we would prefer to work with terms such as "social impact sensing" or "influencing social impact" or even "social impact facilitation".

Some of the questions "social impact sensing" would ask would be:

Who all will be doing this observing? What kind of "seeing", "naming" and "sensing" is required to be able to do justice to what is only just emerging? How do we notice what is disintegrating and dissolving? What is no longer resonant with the system

This notion of "social impact management" seems much more resonant with our understanding of the role that "evaluation" needs to play in change processes.

Finding common humanity through immersion

Shared human experience

IT WAS relatively easy to find our common humanity in the group – the things we all share as humans.

And oh, how we yearn for it, to be able to move beyond the boxes of race and gender and other categories.

We want to be known and seen for who we truly are as individual people in all our hybridity and complexity and contradictions.

We do not want to be seen firstly as ‘black’ or ‘white’ or especially not ‘coloured’ or any other category of persons.

We all want to live in that truly non-racial non-sexist community where the colour of your skin or the sound of your accent, or your sexual orientation does not determine your dignity and potential. We all want to be free.

But that freedom is not for free. And our society or our university is not yet there. The systemic privileges and marginalisations that come with certain group identities still structure and govern our world and our organisations, whether we want to admit to that horrible truth or not.

During the last week of the July recess a group of 34 diverse NMMU staff gathered in Cape St Francis to experience the third Institutional Culture Immersion Training Retreat.

Outside it was bitterly cold, but the warmth of coming together to explore ways of being change catalysts in the on-going process to enliven and transform our NMMU institutional culture, sustained and nourished us all.

During the Monday orientation session most participants were still feeling a bit unsure and uncertain – even apprehensive.

There were many new faces and many of us didn’t know each other at all.

By Friday morning we were a close-knit community – almost family – as one participant put it. There were no more divides based on levels or age or between academic and PASS staff.

We joked about a ‘snot en trane’ farewell – and many of us felt deep emotion as the week came to an end. It felt as if anything was possible for us at NMMU.

As one participant observed ‘we had been to the mountain top’.

During the check-out round many participants spoke about coming to understand the concept of ‘immersion’. ‘You went into something and came out different on the other side’.

This has to do with the social technologies and design of the Retreat programme. Participants start every day with a journaling exercise and straight after breakfast they meet in their smaller process groups which is their ‘support group’ for the duration of the Retreat.

We want to be known and seen for who we truly are as individual people in all our hybridity and complexity and contradictions, writes Ilze Olckers.



*VARIETY ... Staff from all over the university attended the third Institutional Culture Immersion Training Retreat in July including Library's **Robert Pearce** (from left), Canrad's **Samantha Beynon**, Committee Services' **Coreen Lategan**, the VC's Office's **Babalwa Shushu** and the NMMU Trust's **Buyiswa Yaya**.*

We end every evening with a film and often a discussion afterwards. Workshop time and social time becomes integrated into one whole experience. Every evening there are more readings for the next day and for most participants the experience becomes quite intense.

Everyone agrees however that these two factors, the willingness to be uncomfortable, to feel a sense of being overwhelmed and to allow oneself to enter fully into the process; and secondly the willingness to do the painful emotional work of transformation, are the two critical components of the process.

As another participant observed during the closing round ‘the wounds have been opened, but it is good’.

‘The cure for the pain is in the pain’ says one of the characters in the movie the Colour of Fear.

The challenge is to accept that we are each of us unique complex people with a common human experience of hopes and fears; and at the same time part of invisible systems of privilege, based on

group identities that we did not necessarily choose or do not necessarily want.

If you are able-bodied or heterosexual or Christian, you have an invisible knapsack on your back filled with goodies that continue to advantage you even as you want to reject or disown that unfair advantage.

Our role is to become more and more conscious of our own invisible privileges and marginalisations and in the words of Dewald Wing Sue ‘render those visible’.

Chimamanda Adichie warns us about the ‘Danger of the Single Story’ in her powerful TED talk.

Our hope as NMMU is to reject the single story of any one member of staff or student in our family, as either just a member of a social category (stereotype) or just an independent individual.

We are both, and we have to learn to live with this paradox, discomfort and pain if we want to live ourselves into the future we dream of.



*FROM ALL OVER... Among the staff attending the third Institutional Culture Immersion Training Retreat in July were Sport Bureau's **Zanele Mdadana** (from left), School of ICT's **Karen Church**, Marketing Management's **Andrew Marriott** and Student Housing's **Moeketsi Setebe**.*



and therefore releasing? What would constitute “complex seeing” in the words of Elena Olmedo (2012) in her wonderful article “The Future of Leadership: The New Complex Leaders’ Skills”? What would constitute “complex acting” – how do we act on behalf of the wholeness of the organisation? And “complex trusting” – how do we take advantage of the creative potential of the current chaos? What about what Wells and McLean (2013) call the “unapologetic subjective nature” of these narratives? How do we track and account for the principles of self-organisation in the system? What about the Jungian notion of “synchronicities” as they present in organisational and learning spaces? What about the indigenous ideas of correlations or analogies between distinct external events? What about transpersonal concepts such as ancestral pain or legacy issues that block future progress? What about organisational field theory? What about notions such as the assertion by Kurt April et al (2000) that the internal conditions of the leader determine what is possible in the organisational space?

Part of the legacy of western knowledge systems has been to dismiss or dishonour so-called coincidences or synchronicities when they appear in our lives and in our work.

In addition, some of the questions that Hoppers, Wells and McLean, Wheatley, Meadows, Scharmer and others ask of us are:

- What surprises can we expect?
- How can we influence outcomes?
- What are we willing to unlearn?
- How do we create an organisational field of our common vision?
- What do we anticipate that we will observe as we bring our shared vision into being?
- How will we account for everything that is happening that we cannot as yet observe and name?
- How do we meet the future that is coming toward us?

Fault-lines and obstacles encountered through the ICEP process

The points below list some of the fault-lines that were woven through the ICEP process, some almost from its inception. They remained present in spite of our attempts to proactively neutralise some of them through our pre-negotiated stated list of “institutional enablers” and other interventions. The institutional en-

ablers could perhaps also have been used to “re-contract” with the institution from time to time, around some of the persistent difficulties we encountered. We did attempt this from time to time with a few of the challenges we encountered. We had to remind ourselves also, that our project was happening in real time, in spaces with competing priorities, where everyone was doing the best they could at the time.

The fault lines were:



***Fault
Lines***

- The hostile position of the Executive Director: Human Resources toward the ICEP project and the resultant distancing of the HR portfolio from all ICEP initiatives and processes resulted in an ongoing “paradigm clash” in the organisation between 2012 and 2016. This lost us great opportunities for aligning and “institutionalising” transformative institutional cultures at Nelson Mandela University.
- The concomitant weakness of the Human Resources portfolio with regards to various overlapping dimensions of the ICEP process, such as issues of team cohesion and team conflict; employment equity; leadership initiatives; induction processes; relationships with the unions; and performance-based and accountability conversations, including guidance on disciplinary-related matters, especially as they related to transformation-related workplace behaviours and practices.
- Our mandate, until 2015, to focus exclusively on staff was a drawback. Once our brief changed, we encountered weak organisation within the Student Affairs Department, resulting in various unsuccessful attempts to convene sessions with students throughout 2015. Finally, the first formal large-scale ICEP student process, to have been held on 20 and 21 October 2015, ended up converging with the pinnacle days of the first student protests, leading to the subsequent last-minute cancellation of these conversations. After October 2015, we struggled for a while with the framing of ICEP as a “management” initiative from the perspective of some of the more radical students and staff representatives. As a result, we had to work carefully in terms of how we convened sessions. Our strategy in convening students into institutional transformation conversations changed towards enrolling student voice and participation in all our other institutional processes wherever possible and appropriate, relying on formal structures, faculty-based societies and structures, as well as the more organic student leadership to have emerged since #FeesMust-Fall.

- Our mandate also committed us to focus on participants as free individuals throughout the process and to intentionally not take a “stakeholder” or “representative” approach. As a result, we never engaged directly with the unions or any other more formal stakeholder groupings in the system. Post #FeesMustFall and given the political upheavals and contestations in the country, the role of the two opposing unions became very complex and problematic and ICEP missed an opportunity to impact on the quality and tone of these engagements. One of our final engagements had been to facilitate a courageous conversation between union representatives, the employee engagement function of Human Resources, and the line managers of one of the divisions where a total breakdown in trust and functionality had developed, due to the poor dynamics between the three stakeholder groups and the ineffectual role of Human Resources.



- We encountered uneven readiness and uptake on the part of senior leadership in convening ICEP-type processes in their domains and in embracing transformational leadership approaches. The absence of consistent institutional accountability meant that there were no consequences for not utilising the ICEP infrastructure and facilitation offerings, or engaging in other depth transformation processes.



- This resulted in ICEP staff having to play an “enrolling role” to attempt to convince leaders to convene these sessions and processes in certain departments and faculties and on some campuses of the institution. Inevitably, the lack of sincere and authentic championing of the processes from the relevant leadership, undermined the impact and ownership of some of these processes; and also took up significant time and other resources from the ICEP project staff.

- The leadership contestations and challenges on George Campus, together with the complex governance structure of that campus, created unreceptive and unfavourable conditions in which minimal ICEP interventions could take place. This was the case despite the formidable and broad range of transformation challenges on that campus. Our role on George Campus therefore became more of an informal one, attempting to bring issues to the surface through various meetings and engagements over the years, and contributing to the potential readiness of George Campus to embark on its own re-visioning and renewal journey when the conditions become sufficiently conducive.



***Fault
Lines***

- Despite there being significantly fewer transformation challenges at our Missionvale Campus, the lack of momentum in envisioning a dynamic new future role for that campus in living more fully into Vision 2020 and the university's new identity as Nelson Mandela University, might have been a missed opportunity for the institution as a whole.
- The challenges and pressures of the university calendar, teaching loads and operational pressures and the constraints of the annual university lifecycle, left us continuously competing for institutional time for sustained conversational-based activities with whole teams.
- The inherently disruptive nature of ICEP's work meant that, in some instances, our paradigms and social technologies were just too far removed from current realities in the institution, ventured too far beyond the "zone of proximal development" and couldn't find a fit or be accommodated in "normal" everyday work practices and systems. This also applied to formal institutional committees and faculty management committees or other governance mechanisms. We were never invited and never attempted to work with the Senate or the Council structures and this might also have been a strategic mistake, creating dissonance in the system around the transformative institutional culture we were attempting to cultivate.
- We encountered ongoing ambivalence and/or scepticism among many of the senior leadership around our complexity and living systems offerings, manifesting as a lack of serious engagement with the challenges of organisational change and renewal in those domains. This contributed to a lack of alignment and often created further dissonances in the system.
- Interest in and consciousness around the idea of "theories of change" was limited, resulting in reluctance to engage in ongoing reflective learning and resisting prescribed reading material as part of reflective organisational learning practices.
- There were contestations around the conceptualisation of the university along corporatist or more academic lines, between the notion of the "academic heartland" and recognising the university as an "organisation of a special type" requiring both generic elements of well-run large organisations with effective organisational work practices, skilled people management, accountability and good governance; as well as certain elements of peer review, consensus decision-making, co-creation, community-building and meaningful leading of



deep curriculum renewal as part of transformative pedagogical practices as well as transformational leadership of teams.

- There were limited meaningful and ongoing formal sense-making and feedback spaces and opportunities throughout the process. Our Reference Group sessions were limited to two and a half hours every quarter and our reporting into MANCO had to comply with a formal format not conducive to the kind of deliberations, ponderings and sense-making required of a complex process of organisational change. As a result, it fell to many informal meetings and engagements to do much of the sound-boarding, feedback and strategising, connecting the system to itself, and figuring out ways of moving forward. Monthly check-ins with Allan Zinn, our Project Manager and thinking-partner, assisted in this process.

The core project team members, which included Prof Heather Nel and Dr Laura Best, also played an important role in this regard, as did Prof Denise Zinn, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Teaching and Learning, as the original leader of the Faculty of Education's *Re-visioning Journey* and one of the ongoing champions of ICEP throughout its lifecycle.

There was limited access to Vice-Chancellor Prof Derrick Swartz himself as the primary champion of the process, creating an enabling environment for autonomy and freedom of experimentation, but also leaving important feedback loops under-utilised and a degree of insecurity and uncertainty as to our responsibility for, and accountability to, his personal vision for the project.

As feedback and sense-making is a key component of organisational learning, this is an important practice question that needs further consideration for ongoing institutional learning and transformation.

- Despite various ways of grappling with the issue, and multiple attempts to make something happen, we had been unable to meaningfully "Connect the Gains" of our interventions.

On the one hand, in keeping with the principle of "obliquity", we did not want the process to have its own branded profile as it was intended as an incubator for systemic transformative change in the institution and not as "a thing unto itself". On the other hand, we wanted to acknowledge, share and celebrate instances of renewal and courage, social experiments and actual "evidence" of change and transformation in the institution. We wanted to do this in part to justify and promote

the work and offerings of the project, in part to acknowledge staff who did take leadership around transformation-related initiatives, and in part, to compel ongoing change through the self-referencing and self-organising principles of a living system.

We learnt that “Connecting the Gains” had to be an integral organisational capacity that lives within the institution. It requires a very specific skill set and a very creative orientation to qualitative information gathering, sense-making and dissemination. Much depends on what Olmedo (2012) refers to in her complexity leadership approach as “complex seeing”.

We do believe it is possible to do some of this work retrospectively and part of the legacy of the ICEP project will be a rich archive of our journey for further reflection in the future.

Unfinished work

Some of the urgent themes for the ongoing work of creating a transformative institutional culture at Nelson Mandela University will be the process of invigorating and re-imagining effective disciplinary processes and accountability conversations with regards to anti-transformation related behaviours.

This theme continues to be one of the ongoing and unmet demands from the student groupings, as well as a significant missing dimension of our organisational transformation practice.

Given the currently ineffective outsourcing of the university's Ombud function, and the challenges in re-building our Human Resources division's competencies to deal creatively and in jurisprudentially innovative ways with these challenges, it is suggested that this issue be given its own focus and mandate going forward.

One of the main tensions and important paradoxes we had to hold and sit with throughout the duration of the project, was the gap between our projected ideal of what the project could have been capable of achieving, on the one hand, and the sobering reality of the constraints in the system's ability to respond, given its human resource capacity, intellectual and imaginative capacities and institutional time availability. To this, we have to add our own limitations as facilitators, our own blind spots, backgrounds and weaknesses. Due to the persistent time and resource considerations throughout the project lifecycle, we also failed in sufficiently honouring the work and the “container” of the extended facilitation team.



***“The master’s tools
will not dismantle
the master’s house”***

Audre Lorde

**Isn't it funny
that day by day
nothing changes,
but when you
look back,
everything is
different.**

C.S. Lewis

In a meeting with Dr Sibongile Muthwa at the end of 2016, when she was Acting Vice-Chancellor, I offered some remarks, which seem a good way of closing this chapter.

Firstly, we knew all along, thanks to Prof Derrick Bell (2010) in his book "Ethical Ambition", that for those of us working towards social or organisational justice, "failure is inevitable".

Prof Bell was the first African-American tenured professor of Law at Harvard University and one of the fathers of Critical Race Theory, who gave it all up, at a critical time in his own personal life, due to the lack of diversity and, in particular, of hiring black women, at the law school.

Our very best efforts are unlikely, in the short to medium term at least, to be able to substantially ameliorate the structural and deep systemic inequalities, indignities and injustices in our organisations. At times it does feel, like Don Quixote, as if we are tilting at windmills, in our case, those massive alien wind turbines on the N2 around Cape St Francis.

Yet, as C. S. Lewis said: "Isn't it funny that day by day nothing changes, but when you look back, everything is different." It is only in the looking back, with an innovative scholarly lens, and in a spirit of appreciative inquiry, that we might be able to make more sense of what we did or did not achieve over the last five years of this wild journey of institutional transformation.

Audre Lorde's iconic phrase, "The master's tools will not dismantle the master's house" (1984), had set us a challenge which we attempted to honour in the consistent use of disruptive methodologies and processes that attempted to disturb the status quo and create the future we were desiring in the room. It was always unlikely that we would have managed, in these five years, to discharge the whole task originally identified by the Vice-Chancellor as a 10-year project.

We had clearly not yet achieved our aspiration of sufficiently "re-structuring" the "invisible fields" of behaviour and work practices at Nelson Mandela University, so that the explicitly-stated behaviours and promises in our vision, values and other foundational statements had become the dominant institutional culture. We were, after all, only half way.

If therefore, the effort and investment demonstrated through the ICEP project, were to be sustained, and ongoing disruptive transformative questions and processes carried forward into the work practices and processes of the university, working mindfully with



the approaches, insights and learnings of the ICEP project, as part of our vision for the ongoing transformation journey at our institution, who knows what kind of exponential curve of renewal and transformation might be lovingly brought into being and what a surprisingly enlivened young indigenous forest we might expect to grow here in another five years' time?

If not, it is likely that the provisional and preliminary gains and insights of the ICEP project would, in biblical terms, have fallen onto hard ground and, as a result, produced a few small temporary green shoots, but on the whole, over time, they might wither away to make space for a different kind of ecology.

I would like to invite you to end with me, using one of our gratitude prompt rounds with which we open our sessions. Just complete the following sentences in your own words ...

"For me, having read these reflections, a living example of a transformative institutional culture at Nelson Mandela University, for which I am grateful, is ...

"For me, what contributed to making this happen ...

"I think it had to do with ...



Practice Journal: March 2017

Who's left in the room doing the work?

During the past two years of the Fallist movement and, most recently, following on from the collapse of the Higher Education National Convention and Jonathan Jansen's contribution "A long night of disruption" (2017), predicting a long period of disruption, discontent and despair in the higher education sector, we as facilitators of transformation processes in organisations and in particular in the higher education sector have been grappling with the core questions of our practice more than ever.

Can facilitated and structured conversational and dialogical processes, framed as reflection and learning journeys, bring about any form of radical and meaningful change which will result in greater social, organisational and "cognitive" or epistemological justice in our land and the world?

Will the "social technologies" that we so fervently advocate for in organisations, truly, timeously and substantively enable the living systems that are our organisations and our universities to actively transform, reimagine themselves and physically embody those liberated forms, structures and practices in a way that meets the urgency of that need? Will we get to a point where enough of us believe in them and the mental models and paradigms they belong to; and a critical mass of people adopt and use them in their daily organisational practices to allow the self-organising principle of complex living systems to do its work?*

Is it worth our energies to be engaging with the contested concept of "institutional culture" and the different "economies" it represents (Keet 2015) as something that we can

in fact impact and influence; and that can ultimately realign to come closer toward our stated ideals as captured in our various values and vision statements? Dare we think that our collective efforts might result in less hostile organisational and learning spaces with more choices available for the majority that live and learn in them?

Do "change agents" or "change catalysts" – an almost quaint term now in the face of the radical and performative stance of many of the Fallist activists – still matter in organisations? Or are they, in collusion with us, the facilitators of these processes, misguided agents of the "neo-liberal regime", entrenching and attempting to legitimise the status quo, existing power relationships and structures in organisations? Are we at best, naively – or at worst, deliberately and intentionally – brandishing the master's tools, knowing it will not bring down his house? Is the only legitimate, meaningful and effective way, now that some of us have reached a certain tipping point of impatience and rage, others of guilt and denial, to refuse any engagement, leave the room, reject the conversation, intimidate other participants, and

undermine the leaders or facilitators or mediators? Do we believe we can truly effect radical complex change through a simple demand or edict or just the desperate wanting of it? I am reminded of a poem from my own youth by a collective of feminist poets called "In the Pink" (1983):

"I want a women's revolution like a lover. / I lust for it, I want so much this freedom, / this end of struggle and fears and lies / we all exhale, that I could die just / with the passionate uttering of that desire." (Excerpt from "Monster" by Robin Morgan)

Do we believe that the hegemony of the structural forces of exclusion, oppression and violence is such an overwhelming impenetrable unmovable force that all of our attempts at doing other, more personal, interpersonal and collective work, is useless and futile and of no consequence? Are the courageous actions of attempting to own the agency that we do have, in the sphere of our own influence and control, including the framing of the transformation or "de-colonisation project" with dimensions of personal, inter-personal and collective reflection and learning processes, just a proverbial "pissing against the wind"?

And what about the critical curriculum for change we believe each and every South African needs to confront? And if not at institutions of higher education, then where? What about all the anti-bias work we need to do as a nation, confronting and understanding our history and the legacy of slavery, colonialism and apartheid; learning about concepts of privilege, power, internalised dominance and oppression, micro-aggressions, in-group-out-group biases, the bystander syndrome, inter-generational knowledge and pain bodies, social healing, citizenship and deep democra-

cy - from each other and from our own lived experiences and stories? Is this still of any use to us during these urgent times or is it already too late? Can we, dare we, still do this work - "alone and together" - as Ben Okri (2000) encourages us in his magnificent poem "Mental Fight"? Or might we give it all up and only participate in manipulative political processes, mindless mass actions? Will it only be the end of white capitalist monopolies, or large disruptive social movements that can bring us any meaningful change? And will that change, actually, be meaningful and evolutionary and transformative and bring greater good into the world for all, if it is not also accompanied by an enlarged sense of humanity, my own and others?

And then, are we buying into yet another dominant framework from the North, when we keep advocating around "theories of change", complexity and living systems? Is there any relevance, while universities are burning, to be asking the question: "What is the metaphor for organisations you are working with?" How do we actually believe radical, lasting positive change can practically occur in our organisations and in our educational systems? To us as practitioners, complexity and living systems is another "new/old" paradigm, an indigenous and holistic understanding of organisational and social life repackaged (some might say appropriated) for the 21st century - this time with the so-called "legitimacy" of Western science behind it.

And so then, what would "de-colonised" organisational development and organisational practices look like? It is something glimpsed every now and then at the institution where I worked, Nelson Mandela University; but mostly, it is still to be birthed, by us, in vibrant spaces of co-investigation of critical

questions, in ways that draw on our fullest humanity and diversity of thinking and being, grounded in our actual African realities. And for this, there are already many helpful methodologies and way enough imagination. As Monique Wittig (1969) said "Remember there was a time when you were not a slave ... remember; or failing that, invent."

And what of this whole inter-disciplinary field of transformation praxis for greater social and organisational justice is being taught at our universities? In our Business Schools or other academic departments? Who exactly will be the ones leading or facilitating the overdue complex transformative change processes needed in all the organisational spaces across our country and the world that our graduates so hope to enter - and while anyone is still willing and in the room?

At Nelson Mandela University, we have for the past five to eight years, in small and more ambitious ways, been trying to do this organisational work in all its complexity. In our work, we have aligned ourselves to thinkers and activists like Paulo Freire and Catherine Odora Hoppers, who believe in the "ethical spaces" in which meaningful conversations can re-humanise us all and co-create the future.

We have seen how our institutional efforts have been buoyed and carried forward by the #FeesMustFall movement in unimaginably powerful ways. We have also seen the deadlock and despair when the rigorous and fierce conversations that could contribute to the transformation project are summarily rejected or are entered into inauthentically and dishonestly. And this while we acknowledge,

with Leigh-Ann Naidoo in her Ruth First lecture (2016), the pre-condition of "annihilating the fantasy of the rainbow nation", the power in some instances of "arresting the present" - and then also the importance of "opening a door to a different time".

We know radical structural and economic changes are needed to address the legacy of inequality. We dream of an entirely different world order. And at the same time, we believe we have to remain continuously committed to conjuring that "different time" in our institutions with whoever is left in the room, with an open heart and an open mind, in small intentional actions, every day.

leze

* PLEASE NOTE: "Social technologies" is a term some of us practitioners use to refer to a broad range of methodologies or conversation constellations or structures for meaningful engagement that would best enable and support those critical conversations, and the human relationships and interactions required to co-create our futures. These methodologies are both "new/old" (to borrow a phrase from Indigenous Scholar Prof Manulani Aluli-Meyer from the University of Hawaii, as well as "new/new" participative processes simulating the complex adaptive living social systems that we are. These technologies start with the revolutionary and rigorous practice of "active listening" and the "talking stick" and include "open space"; "appreciative inquiry"; world café conversations; Peter Block's community: the structure of belonging; the guidelines for setting up "thinking environments" and many other practices, many of them inspired by our own notions of indabas, legotlas, the Native American councils and other processes of indigenous peoples for coming together in groups and having conversations that matter.

ANNEXURES

- 1* Vision 2020 Pamphlets
- 2* Diagrammatic Representation of Interventions
- 3* Selection of 21 Immersion Pantoum Poems
- 4* "Exploring evaluation, connecting the gains, extending capacity for learning and renewal." (A report by Sue Soal, Developmental Evaluator)
- 5* 2012 ICEP Proposal
- 6* ICEP Recommended Reading List
- 7* Bibliography



You can borrow a basket and a sieve, you cannot borrow a face

Ovimbundu Angolan proverb



"It is important to recognize that there is no single, hegemonic trans-historical idea of the University that we can somehow retrieve in pristine form, as a template for shaping present-day universities. Throughout history, there have always been different, often contradictory and competing claims about the University and its purposes."

Perrick Swartz NMMU VC



"Beyond their academic functions universities also perform other roles - as employers, cultural, economic, social and even political entities."

Perrick Swartz NMMU VC

Our **VISION** is to be a
dynamic
African university,
recognised for its leadership
in generating
cutting-edge
knowledge
for a
sustainable
future.

Dinamies / lewenskragtig / dryfkragtig

Umbono wethu kukuba liziko lemfundo ephukamileyo entlangothi ziligela

... scholarship-on-the-move / testing new ways / experimental/ cutting edge of new frontiers in generating knowledge that addresses social challenges ...



How am I in Africa? How is Africa in me? What is my story? Is it a place, a mindset, a way of being? What makes a university African?

"The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths to it are made, not found."

Philip Adam

What are some of the features of a sustainable future?



OUR MISSION

Did you know?

- ▶ NMMU is the 5th leading cited university in the world in ecological and environmental sciences?
- ▶ The Eastern Cape has only 3 doctors for every 100 000 people?
- ▶ In SA more than a quarter of all children under 5 are so malnourished their growth is stunted?



What are the full implications of this?

"We have to change radically the inherited linguistic habits into which English is the only feasible language of high status – the only language of science, mathematics, technology and business."

Neville Alexander



"Since students learn all the time through exposure and modelled behaviours, this means that they learn important social and emotional lessons from everyone who inhabits a school [or university] from the janitorial staff, the secretary, the cafeteria workers, their peers, as well as from the department, conduct and attitudes expressed and modelled by their teachers."

Leslie Owen Wilson



Our mission is to offer a **diverse range** of quality educational opportunities that will make a critical and constructive contribution to **regional, national and global sustainability**.

To achieve our vision and mission, we will ensure that:

- ▶ Our values inform and define our **institutional ethos** and distinctive educational purpose and philosophy.
- ▶ We are committed to promoting **equity of access and opportunities** so as to give students the best chance of success in their pursuit of lifelong learning and diverse educational goals.
- ▶ We provide a **vibrant, stimulating and richly diverse environment** that enables staff and students to reach their full potential.
- ▶ We develop graduates and diplomates to be responsible global citizens capable of critical reasoning, innovation, and adaptability.
- ▶ We create and sustain an environment that encourages and supports a vibrant research, scholarship and **innovation culture**.
- ▶ We engage in mutually beneficial partnerships: locally, nationally and globally to enhance social, economic, and ecological sustainability.

Notes:



"What is our unique identity as 1 of 6 'comprehensive universities' in SA?"



"When the morning breaks, we want to fix it."

Ben Zeelie, Faculty of Science

"I think therefore I am".

Descartes

"We must become the change we wish to see in the world".

Gandhi



The nest

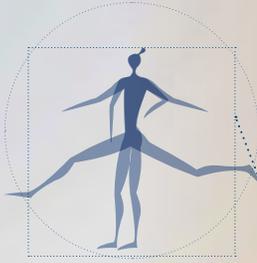
Like a bird,
that picks up a blade of grass,
takes it to a branch,
comes back,
picks up another one,
I will make a nest.
A home,
unbreakable, moveable,
to keep my blood flowing,
a building, a place?
Perhaps inside me,
perhaps inside you.

Epiphania Mukasano



When last did I try something new at work?

OUR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSE & PHILOSOPHY



We provide **transformational leadership** in the service of society through our teaching, learning, research and engagement activities. To achieve this we are committed to developing the human potential of our staff and students in **the full spectrum of its cognitive, economic, social, cultural, aesthetic and personal dimensions in the pursuit of democratic citizenship.**

We adopt a **humanising pedagogical approach** that respects and acknowledges **diverse knowledge traditions** and engages them in critical dialogue in order to nurture a participative approach to problem-posing and -solving, and the **ability to contribute to a multi-cultural society.**

We inspire our stakeholders to be passionate about and **respectful** of an **ecologically diverse** and **sustainable** natural environment.

We will be known for our **people-centred, caring, value-driven organisational culture** that will encourage all members of the university community to contribute optimally to its life.

"The problem before us is therefore that the Academy has not adapted to its natural context, or it has resisted adaptation epistemologically, cosmologically and culturally - with immense cognitive injustice to boot!"
Catherine Odora Hoppers



"Transforming the curriculum in a manner that celebrates diverse paradigms and embraces knowledge forms emanating from different locations and perspectives, including indigenous knowledge."
Vezozzi:17

Notes:



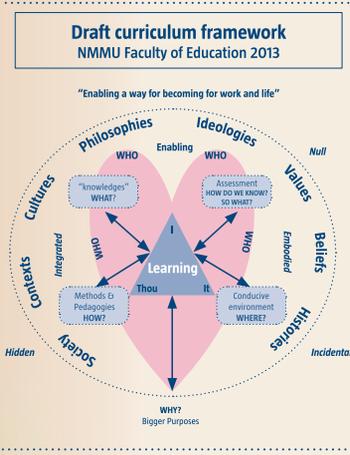
*What does this mean to me?
What does this ask of me?*



Pedagogy = the art of teaching

"The only effective instrument in the process of rehumanisation is a humanising pedagogy."
Paulo Freire

"Humanisation is the process of becoming more fully human as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons, who participate in and with the world."
Maria del Carmen Salazar 2015



OUR DISTINCTIVE KNOWLEDGE PARADIGM



"No single person, no body of opinion, no political doctrine, no religious doctrine can claim a monopoly on truth."

Nelson Mandela

"... between disciplines, across different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines."

V2020:17



Multi - like salad: additive
Inter - like stew: interactive
Trans - like cake: holistic

Choi and Pék COM:2006

Disciplinary



Multi-disciplinary



Inter-disciplinary



Trans-disciplinary



In responding to the opportunities that arise from being a comprehensive university, NMMU will adopt a distinctive knowledge paradigm characterised by the following principles:

▶ **An open-ended, discursive paradigm** based on critical thinking, open-endedness, the primacy of rational discourse in the disputation and scrutiny of all ideas, and the provisional nature of all truth claims.

▶ The idea of the University as an **'open society' of scholars** committed to the production and dissemination of knowledge that can have **a liberating effect on our world.**

▶ A commitment to the application of knowledge to **advance democracy, social justice, public good and liberation of the human condition** from all forms of discrimination and injustice.

▶ Freedom of expression and thought in speech, writing and all art forms.

▶ Advancement of strong disciplinary knowledge whilst aspiring **to foster trans-disciplinary thinking** in our scholars and students.

▶ A commitment to **ethical knowledge**, neither harmful to the natural nor the social environment, such that it promotes a sustainable future for our planet and all its inhabitants.

Notes:



"You must develop the habit of skepticism, not swallow every piece of superstition you are told by witch-doctors and professors."

Chinua Achebe

"It is not enough to know, one must act to humanise the world."

Prof Molefi Asante



"I discovered that one's quest for life and liberation is an enduring journey."

Peyfers Naude



"The function of freedom is to free someone else."

Toni Morrison



OUR VALUES

"Most often, diversity is used as a de-politicised kind of cultural pluralism which avoids addressing the more difficult topics of racism and oppression directly."

Patti De Rosa

"Our differences are our strength as a species and as a world community."

Nelson Mandela

"We can be both one and different in dynamic ways."

Neville Alexander



"As I have said, the first thing is to be honest with yourself."

Nelson Mandela

"What does responsibility mean? It means not blaming anyone for your situation, including yourself."

"Having accepted this circumstance, this event, this problem, responsibility then means the ABILITY to have a creative RESPONSE to the situation as it is now."

Deepak Chopra



We are not all to blame, but we are all responsible.

Respect for diversity

- ▶ We reflect and serve diverse regional, national and global communities.
- ▶ We promote an open society where critical scholarship and the expression of a multiplicity of opinions and experiences are actively encouraged.
- ▶ We foster an environment in which diversity is appreciated, respected and celebrated.
- ▶ We are committed to accessibility, inclusivity and social justice.

Excellence

- ▶ We promote, recognise and reward excellence in our teaching, learning, research and engagement.
- ▶ We promote, recognise and reward excellent service delivery to all our stakeholders.
- ▶ We provide a supportive and affirming environment that enables students and staff to reach their full potential.
- ▶ We adopt innovative approaches to promote excellence in our institutional policies, structures, processes and systems.

Ubuntu

- ▶ We are a people-centred university.
- ▶ We respect the dignity of others.
- ▶ We recognise our mutual interdependence.
- ▶ We promote compassionate and responsible citizenship.

Integrity

- ▶ We commit ourselves to the highest standards of personal honesty and exemplary moral character.
- ▶ We behave in an ethical and professional manner.
- ▶ We conduct our activities in an accountable and transparent manner.
- ▶ We ensure the integrity of our information, systems & processes.

Respect for the natural environment

- ▶ We care about the environment and recognise our responsibility to conserve, protect and properly manage natural resources for ourselves and future generations.
- ▶ We promote the integration of sustainability principles into our academic practices, institutional operations and design of physical infrastructure.
- ▶ We encourage mutually beneficial and sustainable approaches to community service and engagement.
- ▶ We inspire students and staff to embrace environmentally friendly practices.

Taking responsibility

- ▶ We acknowledge our personal responsibility for ethical behaviour towards others.
- ▶ We assume responsibility for the achievement of personal and institutional goals.
- ▶ We accept responsibility for our actions and the consequences thereof.
- ▶ We provide an environment that encourages students and staff to take responsibility for their academic and professional endeavours.

1400-50, late Middle English excellen
< Latin excellere, to rise high, tower

Uhsan (Arabic, inner faith (iman) and showing it in deed and action, social responsibility.

Uxugwesa?

Ukuzibalula?



Excellence is a habit - Aristotle

"It is not difficult to hurt, but it is difficult to repair."

South African proverb

"A single word that most eloquently captures the essence of connecting."

Mark Gerzon



Am I living this value in my everyday life on campus?



OUR DESIRED GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES

"Knowledge is like a baobab tree, no one person can embrace it."

Akan and Ewe proverb
Acora, Ghana



"A straight tree never lasts in the forest."

Akure, Nigeria



How can we develop these graduate attributes in our students if we as staff do not serve as role models for them?



Through benefitting from a life-changing educational experience, NMMU graduates and diplomates will be known for demonstrating:

In-depth disciplinary/interdisciplinary knowledge

- ▶ The ability to engage in the expanding knowledge base of their disciplines/professions.
- ▶ Excellence in both the art and science of their disciplines/professions.
- ▶ Awareness of the latest advances in and technical competencies required by their disciplines/professions.
- ▶ Leadership in the production of new knowledge and understanding through inquiry, critique and synthesis.
- ▶ An appreciation of the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge that combines breadth and depth of understanding.
- ▶ An awareness of the global context of their disciplines/professions.

Social awareness and responsible citizenship

- ▶ Commitment to ethical conduct, social awareness and responsible citizenship.
- ▶ An acknowledgment of and respect for constitutional principles and values such as equality, equity, quality, humanity, diversity and social justice.
- ▶ Respect for and awareness of the environment in all its manifestations.
- ▶ A commitment to improving local, national and global environmental sustainability.

Adaptive expertise

- ▶ The ability to apply knowledge and skills in a range of contextual and conceptual frameworks.
- ▶ Ability to anticipate and accommodate change, ambiguity and differing views.
- ▶ Self-management including the ability to work autonomously, exercise initiative, and apply time management and organisational skills.
- ▶ The capacity to sustain intellectual curiosity and a willingness to improve personal performance through self-reflection, the pursuit of lifelong learning, and building networks.

Creativity and innovation

- ▶ Ability to think creatively and to generate a range of innovative ideas that are appropriate to the particular context.
- ▶ Innovation in their approach to and solution of complex problems.
- ▶ Commitment to innovative thinking to advance scholarly excellence.

Critical thinking

- ▶ Openness to new ideas.
- ▶ The ability to understand, interrogate and apply a variety of theoretical and philosophical positions and objectively assess the merits of competing and alternative perspectives.
- ▶ The capacity for critical reflection.
- ▶ Intra- and interpersonal skills.

Self-awareness.

- ▶ The ability to relate to and collaborate with others, individually or in teams, to exchange views and ideas and to achieve desired outcomes.
- ▶ The ability to function in a multicultural and multilingual context.

Communication skills

- ▶ The ability to articulate ideas and information confidently and coherently in visual, verbal, written and electronic forms to audiences of different sizes in a range of situations.
- ▶ Respect for the multitude of voices, stories, perspectives and knowledge systems.



"The case for the use and development of African languages in tertiary education can be made into a five-dimensional argument: diversity, development, democracy, dignity and didactics."

Neville Alexander

UMBONO

Kukuba **yidyunivesithi**
equezayo yaseAfrika,
nezibonakalisa ngobuntshatsheli
ekuphembeleni **ulwazi**
olungundoqo
wekamva
laphakade.

ISIMISELO



Kukuvula amathuba axananazileyo naxakathileyo emfundo ekwizinga eliphezulu, nayakwenza umqela negalelo elinomvuka nomvuzo kuphuhliso olungadendiyo kwingingqi, elizweni lethu nakumazwe ngamazwe.

IZINTO ESIZIXABISILEYO



Intlonipho ngokungafani

- ▶ Ukufihlonipha ukungafani kwethu kwingqiqi, kwilizwe nakumhlaba ngokubanzi.
- ▶ Siphakamisa uluntu olungafihli nto apho kukhuthazwa ngamandla Imfundo engundoqo nokubonakaliswa kwezimvo namava ahlukileyo.
- ▶ Sikhuthaza ubume bemeko apho ukungafani kuyinto ekabisekileyo, ehloniphekileyo nebhityanisiwayo.
- ▶ Siyabophelela kufikeleleko, uqoko nobulumgisa entlalweni.



Ukugqwesa

- ▶ Siphakamisa, siqaphela kwaye siyakunyuza ukugqwesa ekufundiseni, ekufundeni, kuphando nentsebenziswano yethu.
- ▶ Siphakamisa, siwaqaphela, kwaye siluvuza uhanjiso weenkono olugqwesileyo kwesibambene nabo ngentsebenziswano.
- ▶ Sibonelela ngobume bemeko ehasayo neqinisekiso eyenza abafundi nabasebenzi bakwazi ukufikelela ngokupheleleyo kwezo zinto banokukwazi ukuba babe tizo.
- ▶ Samkela iindlela ezintsha zokuphakamisa ukugqwesa kwimigaqo-inkqubo, izisekelo, inkqubo nezixokelelwano zeziko lethu.



Ubuntu

- ▶ Siyayunivesithi ejolise ebantwini.
- ▶ Sihlonipha isidima sabanye.
- ▶ Sikholelwa ekuthini ingulowo uxhomekeko komnye.
- ▶ Siphakamisa ukuba ngabemi abanyelelwano ninkathalo.



Imfezeko ntembeko

- ▶ Sizibophelele kweyona migangatho iphakamileyo yokuthembeka kamntu nokuba ngumzekelo ngesimva.
- ▶ Siziphatha ngendlela afanelekileyo nesesikweni.
- ▶ Siyenza yonke imisebenzi yethu ngendlela eselubala nenokunika impendulo ezicacileyo.
- ▶ Siqinisekisa ngemfezeko ntembeko yeenkukatha zolwazi, inkqubo-misebenzi kunye nochwangwiso-misebenzi eyenziwayo.



Intlonipho ngendalo engqongileyo

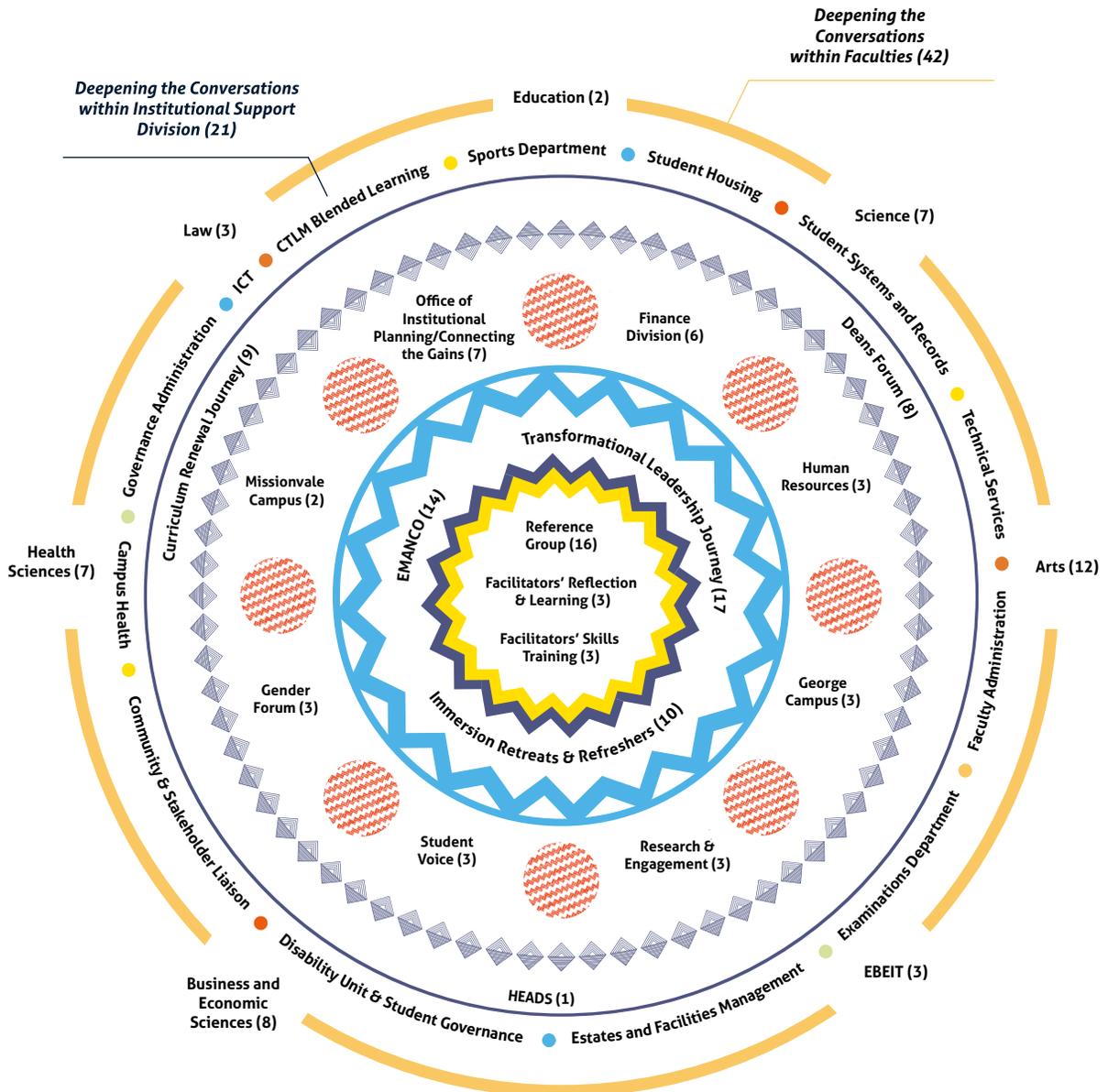
- ▶ Sikhathalela okusingqongileyo yaye siyawugaphela umsebenzi wethu wokulondolozo, ukukhusela nokuphatha ngokufanelekileyo ubutyebi bemvelo sisenza thina nezokulwana ezitayo.
- ▶ Siphakamisa umanyano lweengobo zozinzo kwiindlela zethu zokufunda, imisebenzi yeziko noyilo lwamasiko ezinto ezayenziwayo.
- ▶ Sikhuthaza iindlela ezintsha nezinoleyo kwinkono nemfanelo yoluntu.
- ▶ Sikhuthaza abafundi nabasebenzi ukuba bamkele iindlela zokwenza umto ezingeyongqi kwiindalo engqongileyo.



Ukuthwala uxanduva

- ▶ Siyayamkela into yokuba sinoxanduva loku ngokubaphatha ngokufanelekileyo abanye.
- ▶ Sizithwala uxanduva ngokufezekiswa kweenjongo zomntu ngamnye nezeyunivesithi.
- ▶ Siyayamkela into yokuba sinoxanduva ngezemo zethu nezophumo ezibangelwe zizenzo zethu.
- ▶ Sibonelela ngobume bemeko ekhuthaza abafundi nabasebenzi ukuba bazithwalise uxanduva ngemizamo yabo yemfundo nobungcali.

"Deepening the Conversations" Workshops at Nelson Mandela University



A "Deepening the Conversations" 'session' varied from a half-day to a five-day workshop process, and could have anything from 12 to 55 participants and, on some occasions, even more participants for the large group events. This diagram represents workshop sessions only and excludes all other forms of meetings and engagements.

Selection of 21 Immersion Pantoum Poems

An anthology of pantoum poems, created during the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process (ICEP) immersion retreats for staff and students

The pantoum poem is derived from Malayan poetry called Pantun Berkait, which, in turn, began as improvisational oral poetry. By far, the most important and alluring feature of a pantoum is the intricate pattern of line repetitions.

Each line is used twice: lines 2 and 4 of the first four-line stanza become lines 1 and 3 of the second stanza, and so on until the last stanza. The final quatrain of a pantoum consists entirely of repeated lines: lines 1 and 3 repeat the preceding stanza's lines 2 and 4, while lines 2 and 4 reach right back to the first stanza, repeating that stanza's lines 3 and 1, in that order.

Each time a line is repeated, it stands next to a new line, creating a novel – often unexpected – shift in context and meaning. At the same time, the repetition brings an echo of familiarity, linking the new meaning back to what has already been said. So, the poem constantly circles back and in the final stanza, circles all the way back to its beginning, with a deepened understanding.

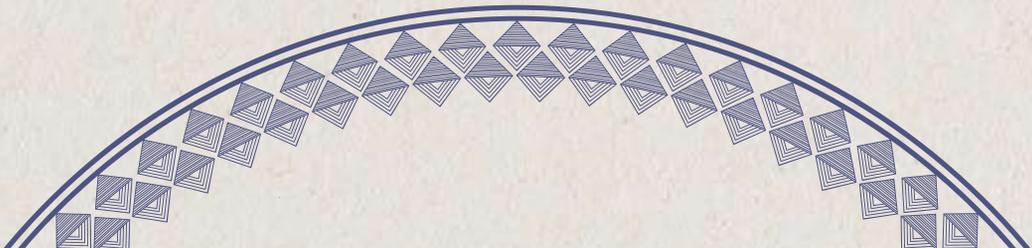
We chose this poem form as it again represents the spiral metaphor so central to the ICEP process; and also provides a deeply personal way of integrating the learning experiences of the immersion retreats. Participants were asked to read through all their journal entries for the duration of their retreat, and underline phrases that stood out for them. We used slips of paper on which they transcribed these phrases and then, using either pure chance or a degree of curation, the lines were placed and repeated, using a pantoum poem hand-out sheet. We ended the retreat by sharing pantoums intermittently throughout the final day of our process.

Enjoy a selection of our immersion pantoums.

I am anxious, oh, what to expect?

In a retreat, in an enclose of nature
With stronger, fellow travellers - friends
Listening, interrogating, sharing
In a retreat, in an enclose of nature
In triads, in cafes, knee to knee
Listening, interrogating, sharing
Advocate for change, agent for change
In triads, in cafes, knee to knee
Confronting the hard questions ... uncomfortable
Listening, interrogating, sharing
Piercing the veil, shattering the earth
Listening, interrogating, sharing
With stronger, fellow travellers - friends
Piercing the veil, shattering the earth
I am anxious, oh, what to expect?

Immersion 2014



Discomforting truth of privilege

4 days wasted on the transformation? NO

Ask the difficult questions

Scary

4 days wasted on the transformation? NO

I am not frustrated – why?

Scary

Disadvantage, advantage, struggling, not

I am not frustrated – why?

My 30 years under apartheid?

Disadvantage, advantage, struggling, not

I wish people knew me better

My 30 years under apartheid?

Ask the difficult questions

I wish people knew me better

Discomforting truth of privilege

Immersion 2015

Typical white behaviour

So choose

The way life is supposed to be: for which we have the bible as foundation blueprint

Actually they didn't know shit what we went through

So choose

Anything is achievable, even the impossible

Actually they didn't know shit what we went through

No fancy words, no pretence, real words, real experiences that speak the truth

Anything is achievable, even the impossible

Love is the most powerful weapon

No fancy words, no pretence, real words, real experiences that speak the truth

But they won't break my spirit

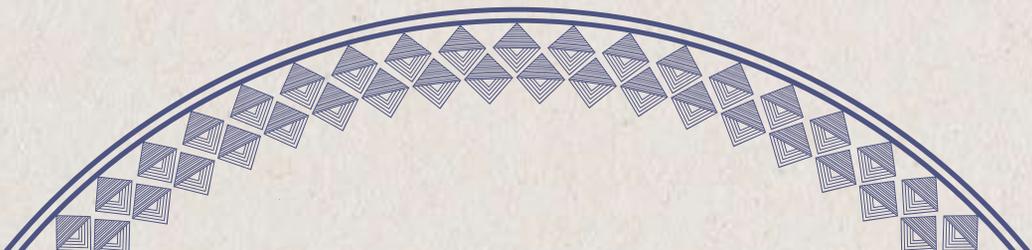
Love is the most powerful weapon

The way life is supposed to be: for which we have the bible as foundation blueprint

But they won't break my spiritcha

Typical white behaviour

Immersion 2014



Teach what you need to also learn

What you hear is shaped by your perceptual reality

The biggest risk is to risk nothing

Live without fear

What you hear is shaped by your perceptual reality

Teach to disrupt

Love without fear

Listen actively

Teach to disrupt

Do not judge before you listen

Listen actively

See those wars that are fought everyday

Do not judge before you listen

The biggest risk is to risk nothing

See those wars that are fought everyday

Teach what you need to also learn

Immersion 2015

Change starts with you

Open wounds that never heal

This is personal journey and everyone has stories to tell

Human Pedagogy

Open wounds that never heal

Allow space for conversation

Human Pedagogy

Need to let go

Allow space for conversation

Pruning process can be painful

Need to let go

Deepen your understanding

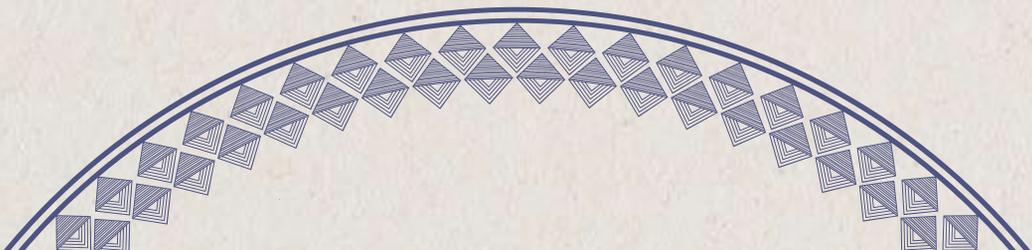
Pruning process can be painful

This is a personal journey and everyone has stories to tell

Deepen your understanding

Change starts with you

Immersion 2015



Lingering thoughts that question

Anticipated mind shift

Zooming in zooming out

I see a fuzzy horizon

Anticipated mind shift

Profound process Emotions

I see a fuzzy horizon

Do I know what I do not know?

Profound process Emotions

When and what is good enough

Do I know what I do not know?

Labels and boxes continue to remain

When and what is good enough

Zooming in zooming out

Labels and boxes continue to remain

Lingering thoughts that question

Immersion 2015

Living human beings

Saying one thing and doing another creates dissonance

The behaviours of members of a group

Expect and accept non closure

Saying one thing and doing another creates dissonance

Self-reflection and transformation

Expect and accept non closure

Learning process begins with experience

Self-reflection and transformation

Wishing away my dark skin

Learning process begins with experience

Open mindedness is not blind acceptance of all ideas

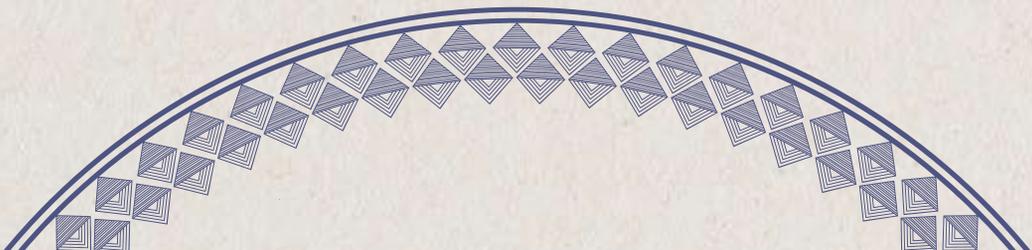
Wishing away my dark skin

The behaviours of members of a group

Open mindedness is not blind acceptance of all ideas

Living human beings

Immersion 2015



Why are people so cruel to each other?

People get silenced and broken down

So broken we cannot find the pieces

Why does it matter anyway?

People get silenced and broken down

We live in fear daily

Why does it matter anyway?

Why are we so afraid?

We live in fear daily

Slow down and know who you are

Why are we so afraid?

None of us is coming out of this alive

Slow down and know who you are

So broken we cannot find the pieces

None of us is coming out of this alive

Why are people so cruel to each other?

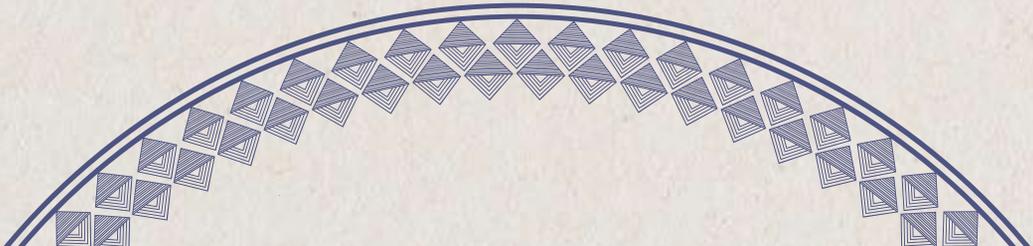
Immersion 2016

I see you...

Taking tough decisions
Inactivity through fear
Sincerity in pain of reality
Taking tough decisions
Negative assumptions
Sincerity in pain of reality
Liberated from paradigms
Negative assumptions
10 000 joys and sorrows
Liberated from paradigms
Self-fulfilling prophecy
10 000 joys and sorrows
Inactivity through fear
Self-fulfilling prophecy

I see you...

Immersion 2016



Listen and grow

From anger to tolerance to understanding to love

Proud of who I am

Believe in others/believe in yourself

From anger to tolerance to understanding to love

I am empowered

Believe in others/believe in yourself

Uplifting students in their passion

I am empowered

I am humbled

Uplifting students in their passion

We are born to love – hatred is learned

I am humbled

Proud of who I am

We are born to love – hatred is learned

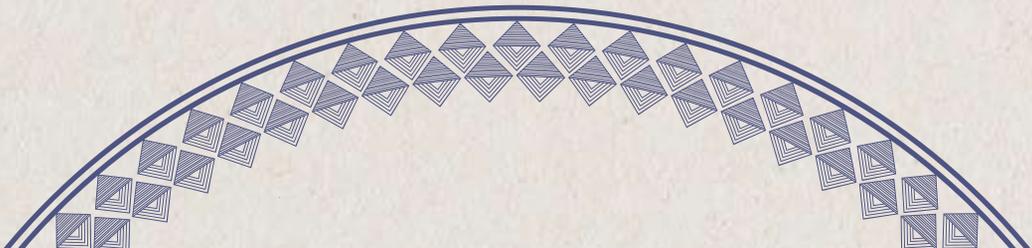
Listen and grow

Immersion 2016

Transformation is my social responsibility

Humanising pedagogy
Pedagogy of hope and discomfort
Rethinking thinking
Humanising pedagogy
Willingness to engage
Rethinking thinking
Self-awareness/relationship building
Willingness to engage
Interconnectedness – living systems
Self-awareness/relationship building
White privilege
Interconnectedness – living systems
Pedagogy of hope and discomfort
White privilege
Transformation is my social responsibility

Immersion 2015



Inclusive transformation process – staff and students

Social Technologies that support change – complex system

Opportunity to socialise and network

Strategies on humanising education

Social Technologies that support change – complex system

Discussions on decolonising the curriculum

Strategies on humanising education

Readings on courageous conversations on racism and discrimination

Discussions on decolonising the curriculum

Dangers of a single story

Readings on courageous conversations on racism and discrimination

NMMU – multiple cultures with dominating cultures

Dangers of a single story

Opportunity to socialise and network

NMMU – multiple cultures with dominating cultures

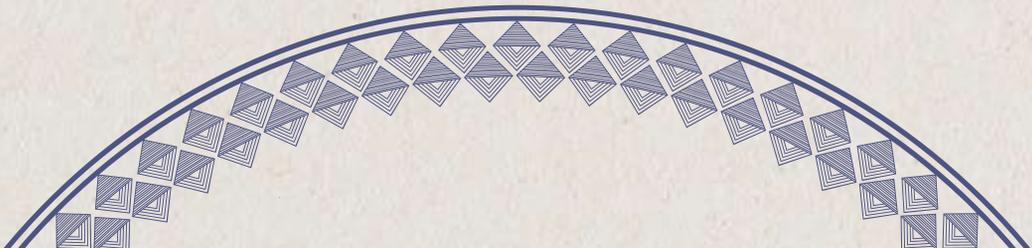
Inclusive transformation process – staff and students

Immersion 2016

How does change happen? Not sure but I feel it

Misrecognition of each other
Reflection, reflexivity and resistance
Our system is alive but is it living?
Misrecognition of each other
Taking the time to really listen to change
Our system is alive but is it living?
Conversation needs courage
Taking the time to really listen to change
Speaking your truth
Conversation needs courage
Talking about poverty privilege isn't easy
Speaking your truth
Reflection, reflexivity and resistance
Talking about poverty privilege isn't easy
How does change happen? Not sure but I feel it

Immersion 2016 _



*We can see the behaviour that results,
but we cannot see the forces underneath
that cause certain kinds of behaviour*

Organisations "living systems" become, they are made up of living beings!

The quality of everything we do depends on the thinking we do first!

Laws, policies, institutional frameworks may change but social and cultural structures produce habits of mind and heart, remain stable overtime

Organisations "living systems" become, they are made up of living beings!

Your comfort zone versus where the magic happens

Laws, policies, institutional frameworks may change but social and cultural structures produce habits of mind and heart, remain stable overtime

What we lose when we fail to create consistent messages, when we fail to walk and talk, is not just personal integrity. We lose partnership of a field – rich spaces that can help bring form and order to the organisation

Your comfort zone versus where the magic happens

The way life actually is

What we lose when we fail to create consistent messages, when we fail to walk and talk, is not just personal integrity. We lose partnership of a field – rich spaces that can help bring form and order to the organisation

It is simply the massive fact and bulk of institutional culture that may be the main obstacle in the way of successful transformation of South Africa's higher education system

The way life actually is

The quality of everything we do depends on the thinking we do first!

It is simply the massive fact and bulk of institutional culture that may be the main obstacle in the way of successful transformation of South Africa's higher education system

We can see the behaviour that results, but we cannot see the forces underneath that cause certain kinds of behaviour

Dangers of a single story

Without dissent, authentic conversations are not possible

Male privilege

Institutional Culture versus Institutional Memory

Without dissent, authentic conversations are not possible

Stereotypes are incomplete stories

Institutional Culture versus Institutional Memory

Disturbed and unlearn to move forward

Stereotypes are incomplete stories

Struggle for self-determination

Disturbed and unlearn to move forward

The face of NMMU is hope

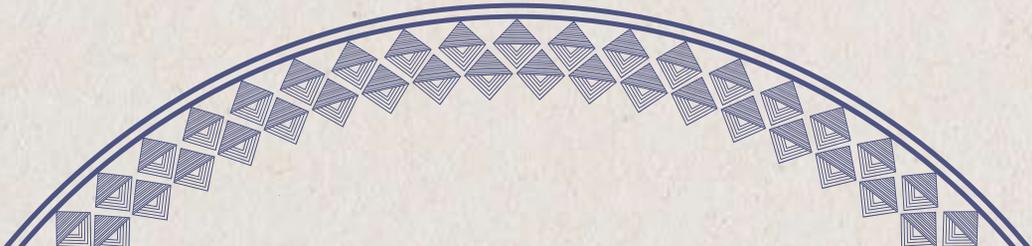
Struggle for self-determination

Male privilege

The face of NMMU is hope

Dangers of a single story

Immersion 2016



The dangers of a single story

An African University can be realised once an African epistemology
is infiltrated in each and every department

There is knowledge in the blood

People tend to be uncomfortable with familiar contexts

An African University can be realised once an African epistemology
is infiltrated in each and every department

Spaces

People tend to be uncomfortable with familiar contexts

uMbuzo, uMhlaba, uLwazi

Spaces

Language and colonisation

uMbuzo, uMhlaba, uLwazi

Who are we?

Language and colonisation

There is knowledge in the blood

Who are we?

The dangers of a single story

Immersion 2016

Umhlaba (Land)

Our Land

Our Land, must return
From western capitalists

Our Land

Siyafuna, uzobuya ngenkani

From western capitalists

Noba besidubula, ngowethu

Siyafuna, uzobuya ngenkani

Our land must fund our Education

Noba besidubula, ngowethu

Azania yethu, Yeyethu alone.

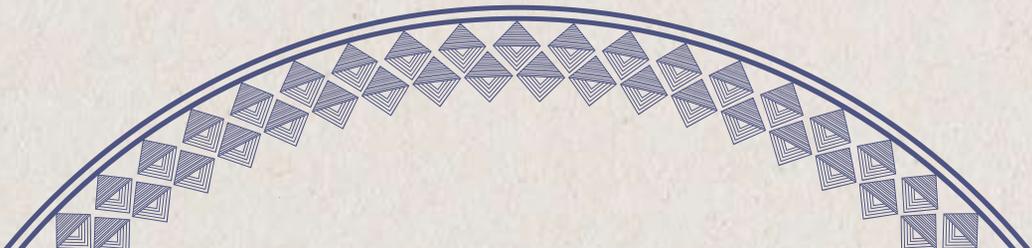
Our Land

Our Land, must return

Azania yethu, Yeyethu alone.

Umhlaba (Land)

Immersion 2016



Freedom writers

I am African

Humanising pedagogies

Experience discomfort

I am African

Critical theory

Experience discomfort

The way life actually is

Critical theory

People-centered theory

The way life actually is

Dehumanising pedagogy

People-centered theory

Humanising pedagogies

Dehumanising pedagogy

Freedom writers

Immersion 2016

NMMU needs to transform its culture

Transformation is a journey better walked together

Dehumanising in the workplace demotivates

Management needs to connect with staff and students

Transformation is a journey better walked together

Transformation needs to extend into the curriculum

Management needs to connect with staff and students

Vision 2020 is a dream

Transformation needs to extend into the curriculum

Questions are more powerful than answers

Vision 2020 is a dream

White privilege slows down progress of transformation

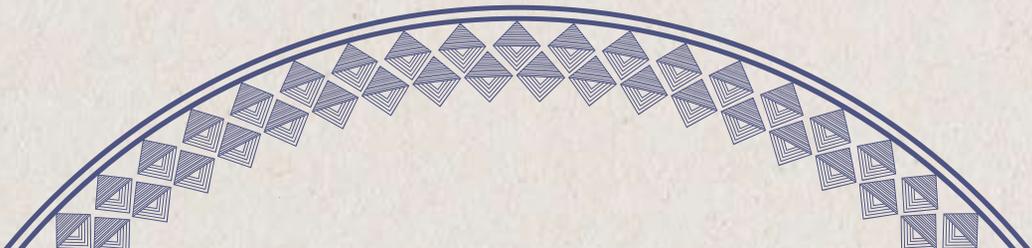
Questions are more powerful than answers

Dehumanising in the workplace demotivates

White privilege slows down progress of transformation

NMMU needs to transform its culture

Immersion 2016



Seeing you is fully humanising

Not an employee but a thought-leader, intellectual and revolutionary

The task is to bring the gifts of those on the margins into the centre

The face of NMMU is young, dynamic African people

Not an employee but a thought-leader, intellectual and revolutionary

Rebuild with a new consciousness

The face of NMMU is young, dynamic African people

Coming into being, learning, living & life after a death of mind

Rebuild with a new consciousness

A paradigm shift, a new possibility

Coming into being, learning, living & life after a death of mind

"Now" is the future that we really want as it exists in us at this moment

A paradigm shift, a new possibility

The task is to bring the gifts of those on the margins into the centre

"Now" is the future that we really want as it exists in us at this moment

Seeing you is fully humanising

Immersion 2016

Become fully aware

Focus and calm down

Decide to be present

Let go of the need to respond

Focus and calm down

Give up control

Let go of the need to respond

Need to trust my voice

Give up control

I will become aware of those who occupy the space around me

Need to trust my voice

Intimate Revolt/Protest

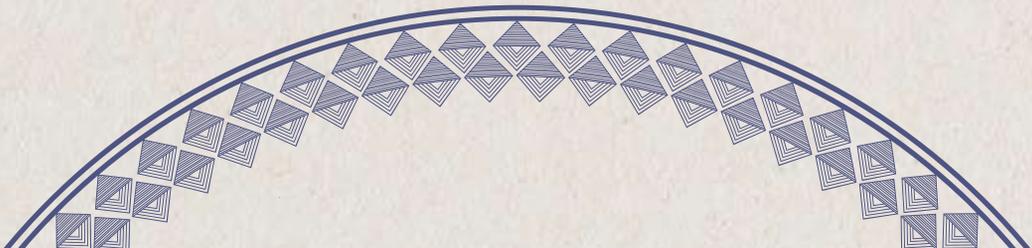
I will become aware of those who occupy the space around me

Decide to be present

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Become fully aware

Immersion 2016



Humanely towards others

Cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future

Unique social institution

Today it feels good to be African

Cutting-edge knowledge for a sustainable future

Much richer portrait of the universe

Today it feels good to be African

One way forward

Much richer portrait of the universe

New view of institutional leadership

One way forward

Fundamental to the exercise of leadership is awareness

New view of institutional leadership

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Humanely towards others

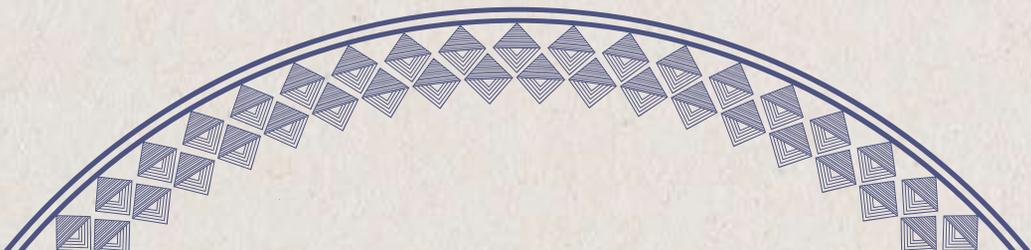
Immersion 2015

Africa without you – I am lost

Even if I must be from somewhere in the world
To discover that my home is not Africa will be very painful
Of what part of Africa can my soul find joy and happiness
Which side of the equator can the beat of my heart find harmony
Which rivers and mountains can provide tranquil waters and resting shadows
Even if I were to be exhausted and my legs wobble
And my spirit despairingly crushed
I will never forget my home – Africa

Even if the city lights can turn the night into a glamorous Disney land
If there's a casino, a cinema and a shopping mall
Even if the ecstasy of the city life can fill the void in my life
Grant us the sunny days and beautiful beaches of the Caribbean Islands
Across the Mediterranean seas where colourful fun-filled exotic dancers can dance
the night away
Each minute, each hour and each day passes by
My soul is yearning for the rituals and blessings of the ancestral spirits
Each week, each month and each year that passes by
My feet and body are yearning for the long walks
in the quiet dense bushes of Africa
I will never forget my home – Africa

Zola Ntsimango – Immersion 2015



even if I must change my thoughts
to discover a new future
of what education is
towards a dynamic African university
which caters for all
even if I don't know exactly what that is
and I fight with others
I will change the affairs to accommodate all
even if it takes time
If there's obstacles in the way
even if it is difficult, it
grants us all peace
across all boundaries
I will try to include and develop
each student
even if it's difficult
between lectures and students
beneath the ideals of both
If the past helps in anyway
even if the admin fails in a way
till the resources are finally approached
I will continue to try
Even with the obstacles in the way
by nights and by days
even with negativity
by the world's obstacles
even when they double
I will continue the course
even if I must walk barefoot on rocky slopes

to discover the extremes of Africa
of what makes it beautiful and painful
towards red dawns and fiery sunsets
which soothes and scorches my restless soul.

Even if I hurt and rage

And laugh and dance possessed

I will listen to the beat of Africa

Even if you see me or not

If there's violence or silence between us.

Even if we give our hearts and bare souls –

Grant us hope to keep searching

Across the rocks, savannahs and shores of Africa

I will keep moving to the drum of my soul

Each hurt and fear

Each kindness and rage safe in the body that is me

Even if I am not what you want

Between religion and colour

Beneath the eyes of my forefathers

If the past is my shame and now is my loyalty

Even if you are you and I am me

Till the rocks grind to dust and solidifies Africa

I will hope for unity, a "we" and "ours"

Even with fences that divide us

By nights healing slumber faith quietly breathes

Even with discord and motion and raging silence

By the world's human race

Even when nothing is forgiven and "belonging" exclusive

I will walk barefoot on rocky slopes to find forgiveness and claim my Africa

“To be awake and to be alive are deeds, not states.”

Rilke

NMMU, Institutional Culture En-livening Process (ICEP) –

Exploring evaluation, connecting the gains, extending capacity for learning and renewal.

Sue Soal

September 2015

1. The lead-up

The NMMU Institutional Culture En-livening Process (ICEP) has for three years been engaging staff across the university in sustained, institution-wide conversation and learning. This initiative is aimed at transforming culture and practices to ‘enliven, give shape to, embody and institutionalise the values and vision’ of the university’s Vision 2020.

It works with ‘a living systems approach’ – anticipating complexity and unpredictability in the system being worked with, and in the outcomes of its own work, and nurtures a sensibility for this in its participants.

ICEP has six dimensions¹ -

1. Personal Change and Institutional Change
2. Living Systems approach to Organisational Change including insights from Complexity Theory and principle of Obliquity
3. Pedagogical project
4. Social Justice and Liberation approach
5. Facilitator as unique catalyst for change
6. Institutional Enablers

As it has unfolded - partly as planned, partly in response to its context and partly in response to its own earlier outcomes - ICEP has generated forms and ways of being in institutional life. Participants have begun to experience social process, their work environment, and one another, in different ways. There are new practices beginning to emerge; there is a changed discourse.

Three years into the initiative, it is possible to make these claims with some certainty. Those ‘holding’ ICEP, both internally and externally, know intuitively and anecdotally that something is shifting. Much is shifting. Yet this has not been fully observed and articulated, and therefore, there is not yet a unified account of the very transformation that ICEP was established to support – neither as an outcome of this

¹ From “‘**Deepening the conversations**’ Institutional Culture Enlivening Process – Living the Values and Vision 2020” – Concept Proposal, Ilze Olckers, May 2012

very particular initiative; nor as an embedded institutional capability for observing and articulating NMMU's own ongoing transformation.

Until now, this has been tolerated. ICEP has involved, of necessity, immersion, intensive learning and experiential 'taking on' of new ways of seeing, speaking and being. It might be said that the pedagogical dimension of the initiative has been prominent. Early on in the process, it would not have been helpful to look too reflectively at what was yet to be created. Too early, and the gaze of critical reflection and enquiry might have withered, or stunted, what was yet to come to life.

Now, it is time for ICEP and indeed the institutional capacity within NMMU to invest in developing its self-awareness further and, through observing its 'streaming' through people, practices and structures, to develop this into an account of *what* has been done and what contribution this has made to changing *how* things are done at NMMU. Such an exercise will provide an account of ICEP, the emergent changes and transformations within NMMU; and also give insight into what NMMU could do to further to strengthen its capacity for self-awareness, adaptation and ongoing transformation.

This report offers an account of the thinking around these questions and ideas for how they might be taken forward.

2. Early questions and rationale

At a facilitator's reflection and learning workshop, on 11 and 12 August 2015 – a rare gathering of some of those holding ICEP from both inside and outside of the university – questions about evaluation, learning and how best to embed ICEP into ordinary institutional functioning, began to be surfaced.

At the check-in at the start of the second day's work, the emphasis was most decidedly evaluative –

- *how to bring coherence to this?*
- *I am looking for concrete results – we can't be running a race without knowing if we are winning or losing*
- *we need to focus on the write up and share what we are doing*
- *I need a sense of feedback, evidence that it is alive.*
- *is there an incident? Decisions I can attribute to this process?*
- *how to capture and name the shifts? How to ground them in action patterns – to say, this is how we do this at this institution?*
- *there is courage. This institution that is about measuring is tolerating the anxiety [of not-knowing]. Maybe it is possible to name things now.*
- *we might not be linear, but can we see change over time?*
- *in a management session, people were able to express exactly how they feel – and not just make something up in the moment. I realised that these sessions work.*
- *what procedure or policy might have come out of this process?*

I was left with the impression that while different participants have different needs of evaluation, there is an overall urge to develop ICEP's '**account-ability**.' This should support it to offer a coherent and

accessible account of itself, one that is true to its approach and what is coming to life through that, and also one that is legible even to those who have not been a part of it.

Further, while accounts of impact are needed for external reasons: to justify, defend and explain ICEP, an internal need is also being expressed. It is hard to sustain momentum and focus when feedback is not clear, or bound into recognisable accounts of impact and difference.

In this sense, impact unaccounted for becomes impact lost or, put another way, we *make impact* to the extent that we can *name* it, and so seeking impact (or account-ability, or evaluation) is an integral part of doing the core work of ICEP. The systems we work in are not machines that respond to preplanned inputs with predictable outputs. Therefore, we can seek to identify the contribution that our efforts have made to bringing about change, and hone our abilities to perceive this difference. In this way, being able to *see* the difference that we make, is a necessary element of *making* the difference, and this is especially so over time, and as things develop a history of their own².

Seen in this way, and as with vision in an emergent approach, **evaluation is a container** of complex interventions, especially those pursued over extended time and at scale. In this way, evaluation contributes to thickening and extending a field, rather than simply observing and measuring it.

Finally, and linked to the development of history and identity, including of ICEP itself, is the element of **change over time**. Working with living systems and seeking to apprehend what emerges out of this way of working, including what could not have been predicted, requires a different relationship to both planning and evaluation³.

In a living systems approach, strong vision and intention holds initiatives, rather than mechanistic planning, and the system develops and grows responsively, through regular iterations of learning. In this approach, evaluation-as-learning is an integral part of the system's development, supporting it to hold focus and intention, even while plans might change. At the same time, and while it is impossible to predict with any certainty what *will be*, it is essential to identify and reflect on *what was* as it is this fidelity to experience; to what has actually happened that enables accountability, practical learning and knowledge creation. To meet this need requires an eye for chronology and mapping movement over time.

² Wells and McLean put it this way - "Indicators ... monitor what is unfolding—they *lead* outcomes. They tell us how much progress we are making—whether we are on track. They focus on what we will observe in the tangible world as our vision is coming into being ... [indicators] are observable, and the group is able to review whether they are seeing more of this particular indicator as they act to bring their vision into being." From **One Way Forward to Beat the Newtonian Habit with a Complexity Perspective on Organisational Change**. Sam Wells and Josie McLean, p77

³ Wells and Mclean: "Because we cannot predetermine or dictate outcomes, each *next step* is an experiment to learn what works within the context of our current experience of the complex system. The process is an iterative cycle of *action and learning*. The learning phase is a critical reflection upon what has eventuated as a result of the action, with reference to the shared vision, its core values and the indicators of progress (recognizing that long feedback loops may constrain a complete appreciation of the outcomes)." p79

3. Going further: an account of impact and discussion about what it all means

“When I open the space then I think the staff will complain and I ask myself why did I open this space. But what I see with this - after the training - is my staff are asking, ‘what can we do?’ They were extremely reluctant to go. I had to force them. But at the end of it, they are saying it is good that we went. They said every member of this university has a good story to tell, and a bad story, and something in between ... I can tell you now, there are 35 people I made contact with and when I meet them in the corridors, I will have a conversation.

“So the facilitator may pick up conflicts [in paradigm, or approach] because they are being said. But because they are being said – that is the beginning of those conversations. That is the change. It is very good they are coming up.

“What we have done: we have put some of the transformational issues into our performance contracts, so then there is that intentionality. For example, the manager in one of my departments also starts with check-ins, talking about general transformational issues within the institution. That doesn’t come from knowing, it comes from the process they go through every time. No. They are starting to put them into practice in their departments. That’s the only way ... that we can achieve the ultimate goal.”

Wells and McLean, on indicators, say “In undertaking any action, it is natural to seek to understand if what you have done has moved you towards your desired future or not.”⁴ And in identifying what “they might observe if the vision were being realised in the here and now” a group’s seeking of indicators also builds “a bridge between vision and action.”⁵

In the example above, an interesting indicator of change is raised: is ICEP seeking full understanding in its participants, before moving to action, or is it seeking the actions and behaviours, from which fuller understanding will result? Of course, there is a dialectic between the two, and it is likely that the answer is given by the realities of any specific situation. But still, do we just leave it at that, or is there more work to be done in phrasing the indicator that will show us that things are changing?

As ICEP shifts from its early educative and ‘awakening’ function into an approach that might be seen as more expressive of ‘normal’ institutional functioning, what we ask of it - in its indicators and in its actions - might shift⁶.

Perhaps it is that ICEP’s drivers, its core team, need to ‘get it;’ to buy fully into the theory of change underlying the whole initiative, while participants further out are can be led into the change without necessarily experiencing the pedagogical dimension quite so strongly. After all, if a continuously awake – enlivened – and socially just, permanently transforming institutional culture is the new ‘normal,’ what does, or would, ‘normal’ institutional functioning look like? Perhaps it really is as simple, and complex,

⁴ Wells and McLean, p77

⁵ Wells and McLean, p78

⁶ Wells and McLean put it like this, “In an ongoing iterative cycle, the action taken informs future strategic experiments, and is also likely to feed back into the vision, which evolves as more is learned—the model is dynamic and the vision is never final. The process of iteration is an important one as, in the non-linear world, it allows the system to fold back upon itself, amplifying novel ideas and unsettling the status quo.”

as having check-ins that keep everyone's eye on 'how we are doing' at transformation; greeting and relating in fully human ways, being permanently open, and enquiring?

And if that is the case, then what is the 'doing' that is sought, beyond the immersions? Is there a programme of action, or is it intended that the qualitative shifts of the immersion will be pursued more spontaneously in further interactions? And either way, how do we trace what has happened?

In conversation this nascent question was grappled with -

- *we need to help people see that the agency does lie with them. Start to experiment with own approaches.*
- *maybe we can use this with other things, for example, performance management, strategic planning – look at these things using transformation. The HOW part must always be infused with these*
- *it's not just other spaces, like the immersion – but it's about immersing the 'other NMMU' with these practices.*
- *It's in the texture of transformation. Yes, we can come to [specific] contracts, but you don't see it there ... yes, you have to come to a meeting ... but it doesn't lie in the fact of the meeting, that has to happen. It's about how it happens.*
- *For example, at a faculty management meeting ... someone said, 'this feels different' – the nature of the interactions between people are different.*

4. Questions and edges

"We need to be able to trust that something as simple as a clear core of a values and vision – kept in motion through continuing dialogue can lead to order" – Margaret Wheatley.

The two days' work revealed edges - thresholds or key moments of choice - that the team is grappling with. One concerns ICEP's task of working with **social justice and liberation**, the political project underpinning the initiative, which comes out of the particular historical time and place in which it occurs.

How does ICEP ensure that its team – including both internal and external role players – remains awake and alive to this historical and political task? How does it use moments of discord to further the task of transformation? When ICEP at work is challenged "that we are spending too much time in the past" how does it deal with this? And how does it deal with this should it meet this same challenge from within its own team?

Another edge concerns the **buy-in to and understanding of a living systems view** by key role-players in this process. This grappling with the living systems approach (by those who work out of it as well as those who are more sceptical of it) offers a potentially useful 'crisis moment' as ICEP meets a crossroads in the work of embedding its approach and task into the ordinary functioning of the university.

How to take the carefully incubated understanding and sense of common quest - of vision and concept and value - and subject it to the more blunted rigours of policy, procedure and protocol (in this case especially around HR, but also OD, and the persistent question of where and how the ICEP intention will be homed when it is fully internalised).

How does ICEP - indeed, how does Vision 2020 - institutionalise itself? In any large institution, bureaucracy and standardisation is a necessity of scale, and some loss of finesse, and even that sense of common cause, is unavoidable. Yet, in order to do this in a way that is true to the reality of living process and the enormity of the transformation vision, certain qualitative and conceptual minimum requirements – of systems, of processes and of people – should be in place. What are these? And what does this ask of those leading and caring for this vision and approach, even while it is shared more broadly?

On both of these edges around social justice and living systems, a question emerges: if ICEP is currently the main container and catalyst for NMMU's transformation work, how to develop its own container, and make it strong and safe? What happens to us when it is undone, or challenged? Or when we as practitioners are 'undone' or 'challenged' by the demanding nature of this work? What happens when it is continuously changing through welcoming new people by its own development, expansion and attrition? And how to do this in a context of reluctance to spend more on 'us' when delivering 'out there' in the broader university system is already so costly?

- *we will always be faced with challenges. Especially where the majority of the people underneath have attitudes and prejudices that might derail the project. That is my fear. I see that as a challenge. How do we reveal those that are lying under there? Reveal in the sense of transform them so that the institution can transform.*
- *I am drawn to the tension the most. Input/output thinking. Making me feel it. I don't have a way out yet.*
- *it struck me – how much has been done; what still needs to be done. I am also excited that we have external facilitators coming in to assist us going forward. Which tends to a concern: are the facilitators themselves comprehending or understanding the ultimate objective of the process? If that understanding is missed, the tensions you are talking about are going to come out.*
- *I am concerned about the process post Ilze Olckers. Right now, it feels like you are the custodian. Within NMMU. Who drives it from within? If you were to step out – what happens?*
- *the issue of ensuring consistency between language and behaviour – it's something I appreciate very much in the TOC. The need for us to walk the talk. People can hear what you are saying ... but will be observing you. I am picking up this is very serious. We must pay attention to it.*
- *tension between old and new. The old paradigm. Modernist approach to knowledge. Also, UPE/NMMU. Aware of the stretch. What pushes me out, into a place that is quite exciting – wonderment – vision as a holding environment. If we use that, we can trust that something sustainable will come out of it.*
- *without conflict, a living system dies. Conflict is healthy. The iceberg is an iconic image – below is not necessarily dark, wrong or bad. It's just hidden. Key part of transformation is to make us aware. But we can't change the shape of the iceberg. Can never have the bottom on top, else it will topple. So can't always expose the hidden.*
- *living systems as a concept and principled way of approaching change. NMMU as particular place. So, what about NMMU is a particular type of living system? How to work with what is alive in NMMU? What are the conditions that are necessary? How do we think about it? what kind of change? And how change can happen there?*
- *where to find the entry point that will be receptive? Comes in unexpected places.*
- *what would a healthy ecology look like in this system?*

5. Institutional spaces and drivers – and the question of evaluation

Various departments will be increasingly instrumental in supporting the work of ICEP to be, and remain, a living process within the university system. These include Finance, HR, OD, Policy and Planning. Each has its own character and content, and each is entrusted with performing its traditional role in the institution. A question that recurred throughout the day concerned how ICEP, or the work of ICEP, becomes more integrated into ‘ordinary’ functioning without losing its transformatory potential?

On this, the potential for evaluation emerges. While traditional institutional life separates planning and evaluation from implementation, ICEP’s holistic approach pursues integration, and requires evaluation that is integrated into ongoing ‘implementation.’

How can the evaluation function be performed in such a way that transformation work continues and is strengthened? How does one ‘connect the gains’ while simultaneously pursuing and extending them? In the same way that ICEP’s work is institution-wide work, so too is evaluation, when it is conceived as a process of continuous reflection, harvesting, accounting, and (re)-planning. Seen in this way, evaluation-as-learning could be one way of providing for NMMU to be permanently, and continuously, enlivened.

- There is *more work [for ICEP] in that core area of teaching and learning, but ironically, in this overall process, it is but one dimension. What’s happening in residences is AS important as curriculum.*
- *Where do we see it landing/turning up? Is it in a policy, or where? The point is about how people are enrolling to the idea of the academic heartland. We are ‘silo-istic’ and it is starting to break down through this process of us coming together to talk about academic heartland, in different spaces ...*
We are recognizing the importance of the infrastructure to the core work of the academic heartland, for example, shuttle, food etc. PASS staff are not peripheral! They are central. We are starting to see that, for example finances, they help us understand, see the constraints. The nature of engagements across the sectors is where we are starting to see it land. We need to take cognisance of how this impact is helping make this system one that is alive and well. Look for living system indicators – where parts are starting to work together to make life.
- *This brings us back to the rendering visible, observing and capturing. The time has come.*

6. Deepening the themes through conversation

In the afternoon, the process broke into smaller group discussions, on some of the themes that had been present throughout the day. These offered further insight into these, and also some practical ideas for the way forward.

6.1 Going forward: Structure, organisation, administration. ICEP/OD and the ongoing transformation project at NMMU.

In this round of conversation, I heard a story of impact that was also not specifically about ICEP, where an ICEP facilitator became involved in helping to resolve an HR-related conflict. In this story, the facilitator was invited into an existing line function’s task to bring a certain sensibility and skill to a difficult, transformation-related situation. This story suggested a possible indicator of impact: that ICEP is succeeding when others seek it out in their processes and also suggested that perhaps the work of

ICEP is at its most effective when it is indivisible, indistinguishable from the broader system it seeks to transform. When it is so inside of the system so as to be almost invisible.

- *Where should it live? And who owns it – if one place, then others abdicate. Or decentralise? Or have one owner, with it being decentralised?*
- *how do we get an Ilze internally? That person could be the point of contact for the external facilitators*
- *how to handle the reporting – I need information in order to report meaningfully on this project, but then there is a danger of it becoming a compliance thing.*
- *There are legal and labour implications, so it is important for HR to be there.*

6.2 Vision 2020, curriculum, readings and social technologies

In this round, it emerged that more work is needed in translating the underlying approach, and tools, of change agents into an institutional style of working. There is a need for spaces and resources to help the institution in its ordinary everyday life to digest and metabolise the concepts and approaches of ICEP, to support it further in making them its own. One idea is that alongside an ‘internal Ilze’ who can move, connect and cross-pollinate, accessible resources, even a resource manual, might be produced.

And further, even these resources would need to be constantly replenished, and facilitators engaged in remembering and reconnecting with the driving intention, vision and values of the work. This continuous re-enlivening of the concepts, people and methods of the transformation project itself is essential to avoid it becoming formulaic, compliance-driven and procedural.

- *the brochure is really useful, and these processes help people to have these conversations. A platform to bring people together around a common purpose*
- *a question of application? Maybe we need to be more intentional/practical in what we are doing.*
- *the pressure of time – easily we revert to mechanistic ways*
- *how to make it attractive to people to do it, without it being compliance?*
- *I find it [this approach] exhausting – got to be actively participating, alert. It forces responsibility on you, whereas with other meetings, you can do emails, look involved and do other stuff!*
- *readings: Wheatley strongly relied on – skeptics voice: ‘is this the only authority?’ So, we have to reflect the system back to itself. Academics like lots of sources.*
- *even with ToCs – is there only one, or are there a few. Else risk coming to be seen as selling a gospel.*
- *why is this not treated more as active research?*
- *immersion workshops; some implication that people would be used as some kind of change agents – but no follow up.*
- *then the issue – trying to transfer to OD. But are they interested? Also, HR are struggling.*
- *can we make sure this actually changes lives?*
- *do readings get adapted?*

6.3 Stories from our processes and practice – reflecting and tracing our journey

Coming out of this round is the idea that this work might be held, in the future, as a kind of in-house consultancy service. Such a facility could work out of the approach that ICEP has incubated, with

practitioners who work across the system, both proactively, as ICEP does, and also in response to requests and issues.

Such a facility, or institutional capacity, would enable facilitators to share with each other, learning and developing the approach as they go along, keeping the work relevant to the needs in the system, while still driving it in keeping with its transformatory purpose.

- *we have these, but haven't been systematic*
- *also, stories are different – some are really running with it, others less so.*
- *entering into a process, people are not always sure why they are there – feeling conned. “Why didn't you say upfront?”. These are advertised as a strategic planning and review. General invitation sent out about any work on Vision 2020, strategic planning, institutional culture – then discussion looks at how and what. Even the methodology can be a bit jarring, even, for example, desks [to sit at] vs open circle.*
- *processes require a level of trust, and managing of strong voices. People who don't like the rounds, though I am happy to say that by the end of the process, people get it.*
- *one thing that would be nice, is the mix of facilitators, e.g. black/white and gender. It would be nice if the team was big enough to get that diversity.*
- *capturing and tracking – I don't have a good sense of what's happening in the processes. Facilitators could surface and capture – this gives the system a chance to deal with the feedback loop.*
- *issue of capacity also – I can't always meet the needs as they emerge.*
- *maybe create an online presence for ICEP, building stories, rolling accounts ... almost like case studies that are accessible for everybody.*

7. Harvesting the thoughts on evaluation and way forward with this

The two days surfaced questions ideas and needs, all of which will inform ICEP's immediate next steps in its ongoing work; as well as hopefully guide the stream of work within ICEP focusing on developing more meaningful, transformational evaluative capacity within the system itself, through the Connecting the Gains theme.

In closing, some of the comments referred to this -

- *things are happening and not necessarily at the top, they can happen anywhere. Still a question - but what IS happening?*
- *will we be able to measure the results?*
- *lots of questions about institutionalizing – that's the chasm/gap. Could kill it – maybe needs a facilitator, rather than a department.*
- *how ephemeral this is. Yet so much work done already.*
- *qualitative monitoring - HOW to deal with this?*
- *connecting the gains is where we need to go forward. Need to be more intentional in how we tell those stories. Need to think through the capacity questions quite carefully. Good to have heard facilitator stories.*
- *very, very helpful to have had inside lens looking out; outside lens looking in.*

8. Suggestions for a way forward for evaluation

ICEP has established a visionary approach to institutional culture change, and resourced it well. The need to develop a clear account of what ICEP as a project has done; as well as mapping the emergent changes in the institution is clear and strongly articulated. So much is in place, and with some small innovations, this need could be easily met from within what ICEP already has in place.

This will require –

- harvesting the August 2015 workshop outcomes thoroughly for programming ideas and turning these into practice steps and, where further resources are required, into concrete proposals.
- seeking reflective accounts of change as it has emerged over time. Simple story telling, done across the institution will yield a wealth of feedback, insight and direction for next steps.
- more time for the internal and external teams to receive and work with these accounts of ICEP’s work and impact, synthesising these into accounts of ICEP’s impact, as well as using these to adjust the initiative’s work for the future.

Practically, these last two steps might involve establishing a series of story-telling and/or writing processes in which accounts of impact are generated. This exercise could be externally held and facilitated, in close collaboration with the internal functions already with an interest in such a process (both the Office of Institutional Planning and CANRAD come to mind).

Such a contained exercise could also support NMMU to develop - conceptually and structurally - its approach to long term capacity for continuous reflection, self-awareness and adaptation inside of its institutional life.

This longer-term project of evaluation-as-learning, and as a continuous and internal function, offers a whole universe of possibility for continued institutional transformation. An approach to evaluation that is tied closely to organisational learning and continuous programme development⁷ would support NMMU, over the long term, to off-set the risks of bureaucratisation and compliance, resourcing an ongoing enlivening of vision and permanent change.

Such an undertaking would pose new challenges to programming for the next phase of the work that has been pursued by ICEP. It suggests that existing, traditional institutional functions be brought into engaging with institutional change, not only at the level of thinking and behaviours of individuals within departments, but also in the structures and functioning of those departments, and the positions and roles of individuals. It suggests takes work into the nuts and bolts of the institution. This is the territory of traditional Organisation Development, and it raises the question of how to do it in a way that strengthens and sustains the ‘whole’ work of ICEP, even while embedding, and making it visible in the institutional ‘parts.’

⁷ Developmental Evaluation, as formulated by Michael Quinn Patton and presented in “**Developmental Evaluation. Applying Complexity Concepts to Enhance Innovation and Use**” offers a well-articulated and practical approach to this that can also be adapted to the needs of any particular situation. See Appendix for further detail on the approach.

While raising new questions and challenges, the task of evaluation also opens opportunities to meet some of the needs expressed and initiatives already emerging:

- As with the driving of ICEP’s core purpose, creating an evaluation approach that generates institutional learning and adaptation would require resourcing, or re-purposing an in-house role or function, with a mandate to be cross-cutting and mobile. The evaluation function would hold the tasks of reflection, data capture and strategic integration. This role would have both institutional functions as well as scholarly potential.
- Depending on the timing, and degree of internal resources available for this exercise, academic departments could be invited to play a role as guidance or as researchers. Evaluation is a key issue in many disciplines and it has massive potential to enhance the trans-disciplinary project. Management, anthropology, psychology, sociology, education and history – all of these, and others too, might have a real interest in evaluation-as-learning and as an institution-wide project.
- The idea of developing an on-line presence for the transformation work, if pursued, could also provide a receptacle for ongoing story-collection
- The idea of generating more accessible and context-specific curriculum and social technologies could be well-served by such an evaluation function.

Tackling evaluation in this way would involve careful programming and consideration about the institutional and professional implications of introducing such a function into NMMU. While this raises the prospect of further change, further expense and further investment of human resources and energy, it may well offer a means of addressing some of the dilemmas of institutionalisation that are emerging so clearly.

Whatever the outcome, it has become clear that this offers a useful and enabling next turn in NMMU’s ongoing conversation about its own transformation. Where it leads to remains to be seen.

Appendix Developmental Evaluation⁸

Developmental Evaluation is an evaluation approach that can assist innovators develop social change initiatives in complex or uncertain environments. This facilitates real-time, or close to real-time, feedback to programme drivers and implementers, facilitating a continuous development loop.

Michael Quinn Patton, the author of this approach says “Developmental Evaluation supports innovation development to guide adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments. Innovations can take the form of new projects, programmes, products, organisational changes, policy reforms, and system interventions. A complex system is characterized by a large number of interacting and interdependent elements in which there is no central control. Patterns of change emerge from rapid, real time interactions that generate learning, evolution, and development – if one is paying attention and knows how to observe and capture the important and emergent patterns. Complex environments for social interventions and innovations are those in which what to do to solve problems is uncertain and key stakeholders are in conflict about how to proceed.”

Developmental Evaluation (DE) overturns many of the assumptions of more traditional approaches; it is embedded rather than detached, continuous rather than episodic, and most importantly—it has as its goal learning, not judgement.

Developmental Evaluation emerged in response to the need to support real-time learning in complex and emergent situations. Traditional forms of evaluation work well in situations where the progression from problem to solution can be laid out in a relatively clear sequence of steps. However, initiatives with multiple stakeholders, high levels of innovation, fast paced decision-making, and areas of uncertainty require more flexible approaches. This is where developmental evaluation comes in.

Developmental evaluation differs from traditional forms of evaluation in several key ways:

- The primary focus is on adaptive learning rather than accountability to an external authority.
- The purpose is to provide real-time feedback and generate learning to inform development.
- The evaluator is embedded in the initiative as a member of the team.
- The DE role extends well beyond data collection and analysis; the evaluator actively intervenes to shape the course of development, helping to inform decision-making and facilitate learning.
- The evaluation is designed to capture system dynamics and surface innovative strategies and ideas.
- The approach is flexible, with new measures and monitoring mechanisms evolving as understanding of the situation deepens and the initiative’s goals emerge.

Developmental evaluation is suited to situations that are:

- Highly emergent and volatile (e.g. the environment is always changing)
- Difficult to plan or predict because the variables are interdependent and non-linear
- Socially complex, requiring collaboration among stakeholders from different organizations,

⁸ Adapted from **DE 201: A Practitioner’s Guide to Developmental Evaluation**, Elizabeth Dozois, Marc Langlois, Natasha Blanchet-Cohen; The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and the International Institute for Child Rights and Development.

systems, and/or sectors

- Innovative, requiring real- time learning and development
- It is suited for interventions which are clearer on their goals than on the means to attain them, and which involve all the stakeholders
- In an intense learning process.

When deciding on whether it is appropriate to take on the role of DE, the following questions should be asked:

- Fit: Is the situation complex and emergent? Does the group want to test new approaches?
- Readiness: Do current conditions support learning (or could they be shifted to support learning)?



'DEEPENING THE CONVERSATIONS'
INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE ENLIVENING PROCESS –
Living the Values and Vision 2020



CONCEPT PROPOSAL

Submitted by Ilze Olckers



In association with **embrace**
(www.embrace-org.co.za)

TO CANRAD

CENTRE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF NON-RACIALISM
AND DEMOCRACY

Attention Director: Allan Zinn

May 2012

A. *Introduction*

1. Personal Change and Institutional Change
2. Living Systems approach to Organisational Change
including insights from Complexity Theory and principle of
Obliquity
3. Pedagogical project
4. Social Justice and Liberation approach
5. Facilitator as unique catalyst for change
6. Institutional Enablers

“Values are a deeper statement of what really matters to us. They are also what most profoundly connect us to one another and to the world we have created. They come from our own experience with life, especially our woundedness.

What is interesting about values is that they are all true and noble. There is nothing to argue about here. I have never heard a human value that I didn't like.

B. *Scope and Design*

1. Summary of Waves
2. Provisional Time Frames
3. Curriculum and Social Technologies
4. Provisional Scoping of Costs

The challenge of values is not to negotiate the importance of one over another, but to act on them. The quality of feeling alive comes when we act on our values, and find a way to bring our own model or strategy for better organizations and communities into the world.”

Peter Block

C. *Graphic Representation of Design*

INTRODUCTION

“Getting the question right might be the most important thing we do. We define our dialogue and in a sense of future through the questions we choose to address.” Peter Block

Izize Olickers, working in association with an organisational development and transformation consultancy embrace, has been approached by the Director of CANRAD who in turn had been mandated by the Vice-Chancellor of the institution, to prepare some design thoughts and ideas for a large scale, long term institutional culture enlivening and alignment process at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University has over the past few years been deeply engaged in developing a coherent compelling and strategic Vision for the institution in order to continue its journey from an Apartheid-era university to a transformational node of critical and constructive scholarship and sustainability within the region.

This process culminated in the comprehensive and holistic Strategy Document V2020.

It has now become apparent, through various narratives within the institution, that the next phase of work, to enliven, give shape to, embody and institutionalise the values and vision of this strategy process, is due.

Culture change processes typically belong within the broad category of Organisational Development and Transformation. Warren Bennis, a global expert on OD and Leadership has referred to these kind of processes as ***a complex educational strategy, intended to change the beliefs, attitudes, values, and structure of an organization.***

This fundamentally ‘pedagogic’ approach is even more imperative in the context of a Higher Education Institution and needs to guide all our deliberations and interventions along the journey.

The following dimensions form part of our approach to the work:

- 1. Personal Change and Institutional Change**
- 2. Living Systems approach to Organisational Change including insights from Complexity Theory and principle of Obliquity**
- 3. Pedagogical project**
- 4. Social Justice and Liberation approach**
- 5. Facilitator as unique catalyst for change**
- 6. Institutional Enablers**

1. Personal Change and Institutional Change

For we are each one of us saviours
 And co-makers of the world we live in
 But we should begin now, here
 Among one another
 And in solitude.

Ben Okri

It is not truly known to us how change happens. We do know that change might start with an individual response and then result in organizational change due to a critical mass of changed individuals; and or that changes in a group changes the 'field' of an organization which then impacts the other individuals in that organizational field. In any change process, a profound engagement is necessary at an **individual level, at a group or functional team level, as well as with the 'whole' of the institution; including the embedding of value driven behaviors into the policies and practices of the institution.**

Paine argues strongly for the active integration of values into an organisation. She suggests that values are not just a management

tool or a special type of management system that runs parallel to other systems. She says:

"When we speak of company "values" and "value systems" we are talking about the beliefs, aims, and assumptions that undergird the enterprise and guide its management in developing strategies, structures, processes, and policies. **They constitute an organisational "infrastructure" that gives a company its distinctive character and ethos—its moral personality.**" (Paine 2003: 193)

In a sense each individual in an institution therefore constitutes the 'whole' of the institution, reminiscent of notions of a 'living curriculum' in which the behaviours of each individual in an educational setting embody the ethos and orientation of 'what is being taught and what is being learnt'. As Okri so eloquently says, we have to do this work alone and together. An institutional values journey will have to contain elements of a personal journey as well as doing the work in different group constellations; with a final operational component of re-evaluating and re-orientating policies and practices in alignment with the stated values and vision.

2. Living Systems Approach

We need to be able to trust that something as simple as a clear core of values and vision, kept in motion through continuing dialogue, can lead to order. (coherence, optimum functionality). Margaret Wheatley

A further dimension of our Model of Change is a **living systems approach** to change. One of our guiding texts in this regard has been Margaret Wheatley's Leadership and the New Sciences (Berrett Koehler 1994). She identifies six new orientations required for large scale organizational change namely

- 1) A new relationship with discovery, experimentation and delight
- 2) Very strong emphasis on participation which is reliant on new social technologies
- 3) Within the context of participation a very strong focus on relationships and relational practices (including the complex and contested notions of working with race and diversity which in turn is reliant on a curriculum of social skills and competencies such as personal mastery, group dynamics, understanding difference and dominance

- 4) A new orientation to information as the generative, living building blocks of nature/organization
- 5) An understanding and encouragement of the autonomy of sub-systems (once certain preconditions are met) and
- 6) Embracing and relying on the mysterious principle of self-reference among sub-systems.

All these elements are predicated on a strong and compelling organizational Vision and values; and rely on the practice of deep dialogue for its activation and effectiveness.

Throughout the process, our work, agreements, methodologies, expectations and outcomes have to be informed and guided by, and evaluated against, this systemic approach.

In Weaving Complexity and Business (Texere 2001) Lewin and Regine states it as follows: " In complex adaptive systems, agents interact, and when they have a mutual effect on one another something novel emerges. **Anything that enhances these interactions will enhance the creativity and adaptability of the**

system... We can see that management practice guided by complexity science leads us to a very human orientation. It is only now, for the first time, that there is a science behind this way of thinking that gives legitimacy to the whole realm of human-centered management.”

Another aspect that forms part of both a living systems and a complexity approach is the phenomenon of obliquity.

John Kay (2010) states it this way: “ In business, in politics, and in our personal lives, we do not often solve problems directly. “ As a result we have to make sure that we frame our intervention in an oblique, indirect, and compelling way.

He goes on to say “The objectives we manage are multiple, incommensurable and partly incompatible. The consequences of what we do depend on responses, both natural and human, that we cannot predict. The systems we try to manage are too complex for us to fully understand. We never have the information about the problem, or the future, we face that we might wish for.”

As a result often a much more innovative and qualitative approach to evaluations and measurement is required when embracing a living systems approach to change. We also need to be clear about the difference between a research project and the intervention. The questions around capturing the institutional journey, measuring impact, evaluation and monitoring needs to form part of the inquiry and part of the learning conversations, especially in the context of a knowledge-producing institution.

3. Pedagogical Project

Knowledge was and still largely is, white knowledge. There has never been, at an institutional level, an engagement about the meaning of received knowledge. Institutional knowledge has not been rendered problematic in the course of South Africa's otherwise remarkable transition. If transformation were going to happen at all, it would have to happen at the level of knowledge.

Jonathan Jansen

The pedagogical nature of the project is important at different levels. It is pedagogical firstly in the sense that Warren Bennis refers to above, quoted in the Introduction. He refers to the entire organizational intervention as a 'a complex educational strategy'.

Secondly, it is educational in the sense that the journey needs to be accompanied, guided and provoked by complex and challenging texts, narratives and experiences that can both provide a common language and engagement among participants, as well as disrupt

their received knowledge; while simultaneously being relevant to their core work.

Thirdly, it is a pedagogical intervention in that particular attention has to be paid to the social technologies and methodologies used during the process. It has to be a whole person engagement with the issues, including stimulating intellectual activity, encouraging a feeling response to develop greater self-awareness and empathetic abilities. This is particularly important in our historical context, as some of the common symptoms of post-conflict societies is the psychic numbing of perpetrators and by-standers on the one hand; and the minimization or repression of trauma and suffering by the 'victims' of oppression on the other; resulting in defensive strategies, depression, rage or other debilitating psychological and physical symptoms.

Finally, the project is in service of the larger institutional project of re-circulation. In that sense it needs to embody a different kind of curriculum and role-model different humanising pedagogies.

4. Social Justice or Liberation Approach

“How is education possible if there is a body in the middle of the room?” Freema Elbaz Luwisch (quoted by Jonathan Jansen)

While the content of these concepts need further unpacking and engagement, it is stated upfront that this project, and all organizational change and development processes in South Africa, is not a neutral process of organizational renewal. It is a contextual process in response to the legacy of Apartheid on the psyches and institutional landscapes of our country, and a response to the marginalization of the South and African peoples and knowledge-systems in the world.

Our processes will work with these meta-principles of social justice and liberation throughout. It needs to form part of both the theoretical and methodological offerings and technologies we use and share. As well as form part of the larger transformation project of the Higher Education Sector; and continue the conversations with other institutions and partners engaging in the same.

5. Leaders and Facilitators as unique Catalysts for Change

“The cure for the pain is in the pain”. From The Color of Fear

The role of the leader and facilitator in these processes requires high levels of self-awareness. It is a unique one of being able to both act as a ‘transitional subject’ – a witness and mirror - for all the differently situated participants to the process; and at the same time to be able to disrupt the received knowledge of the participants. It is someone who embodies both a sense of their own brokenness and vulnerability; as well as a sense of resilience, optimism and hopefulness. To act as a representative of what is possible in the future that is coming towards us – the tomorrow that we intend to guide.

Together with these qualities there also needs to be a theoretical understanding of the related disciplines that form part of this work.

Dissonance between the 'being' of the leaders and of the facilitators, and the work at hand, is one of the most serious flaws and fault lines in an institutional change process.

Similarly, the relationships between leaders, co-facilitators and among members of a facilitation team need to be able to embody and role-play the authenticity of true community and deep collegiality.

It is recommended that a team of internal facilitators be invited, enrolled and supported to accompany and partner the external facilitators and the rest of the leadership along the second and subsequent iterations of the journey.

The third iteration of the process, in particular, will be dependent on the embracing and championing of the journey by the Dean's and other Directors in the Institution. During this iteration they will have to initiate and host the processes within their own Faculties and Departments. It is accepted as part of the process that this iteration will be a particularly uneven one as different Faculties and

Departments grapple with different levels of commitment, leadership and legacy than others. It is also recommended that the Courageous Conversation around the need to step up into this transformative leadership role; and the institutional requirement of performance managing this leadership aspect, will have to be convened toward the end of the second iteration.

As we continue to focus the process on the three levels of personal, group and institutional change, the on-going project of re-aligning policies and practices towards the Values and Vision 2020 will also have to be supported and monitored. It is recommended that the Unit responsible for Transformation in the institution be tasked with this responsibility as a form of an on-going oversight role.

Finally, as has been mentioned before, the culture change journey has to be seen as critically relevant to the core being and work of everyone in the institution; and has to inform and support the Curriculum Renewal process. It will be imperative to enroll the leadership into this integrated understanding of the process.

6. Contracting and Institutional Enablers

In order to embark on this journey in the most mutually enabling way the project will require:

- **Comprehensive and dedicated administrative support through-out the process**
- Regular meetings with a **Reference group** to de-brief and the outcomes and guide the iterations of the interventions
- Support of the **Internal communications infrastructure** to re-enforce messaging
- Regular feedback to and interaction with the **Vice Chancellor** and his willingness to communicate on behalf of and champion the project through-out

In addition to the above:

- If the institution has a particular interest in documenting the process it is recommended that an **archivist/rapporteur** be nominated to ensure the collection of all relevant artefacts and materials

- If the institution has a particular interest in **researching** any aspect of the intervention it is recommended that a specific conversation be convened to explore this dimension

The success of the process will also depend on:

- Scoping and positioning of the process in accordance with **core work and performance requirements** of staff instead of an add-on
- Making provision and allocating **sufficient institutional time** to the project to enable the different participants at different stages of the process to participate fully in the journey. A minimum number of workshops and contact time with each of the different groupings are to be agreed upon up front. Every effort is to be made to ensure that this process is considered an **institutional priority**, given all the competing demands of the academic environment
- Furthermore as the journey has a developmental and cumulative nature it is important to ensure that some form

of momentum is maintained and that unreasonable delays are prevented

- Freedom and trust in choice of co-facilitators and the composition of a Facilitation Team
- In keeping with the requirements for an optimum thinking environment as well as the historical and contextual significances of a sense of place, it is recommended that special attention be given to the kind of venues and spaces that are used throughout the process
- Consideration with regards to issues of consequence management in the event it becomes necessary

B. Scope and Design elements of the process

The institutional journey has been designed with an Entry and Exit process; and with 4 different iterations along the way. There will therefore be 6 different impulses or waves of the intervention over a period of two years; commencing in June 2012 and completing in June/July 2014.

Instead of a linear approach, the spiral is offered as the core symbol, or shape of the intervention and the different waves of the intervention; and finally as a dynamic picture of the 'whole' intervention. During each iteration the spiral evolves in different ways and constellations to mimic the idea of fractals, and their repeat patterns at ever-increasing dimensions of complexity.

While the design involves different process in different domains, and will use a common curriculum and similar processes, it is not thought of as a 'roll-out'; but as this ever complexifying repeat pattern of fractals. The simplicity inherent to complexity is, in our change process, to be found in the foundational design of the curriculum, the chosen texts, and the social technologies and

methodologies we use. These continue to feed back on itself in each domain, to create the large scale institutional change.

1. Summary of Waves

First Wave : *Entry into the Institution* – First Round of orientation and scoping of the Process with 6 Key Internal Stakeholder Groups

Second Wave : *1st Iteration* : 3 Rounds of Foundational Work with 6 Key Internal Leadership and Stakeholder Groups

Third Wave : *2nd Iteration* : Separate Faculty/Departmental Processes also involving three rounds of Foundational Work with 7 Faculties (and selected Departments)

Fourth Wave: *3rd Iteration* : Mixed Whole Institution Conversations

Fifth Wave : *4th Iteration* : Inter/Multi- disciplinary conversations including engagement with External Stakeholders

Sixth Wave : *Exit round* with 6 Key Internal Stakeholders and the Project Manager

Throughout the process the Lead facilitator will be working closely with the Project Manager and the Reference Group to the process. After each wave a specific Review and Reflection meeting will be convened with the Project Manager.

The Lead facilitator will be assisted by a Facilitation team as from the Second Wave/ 1st iteration. She will conduct the entry phase of the process on her own.

It is intended that during the Exit Iteration a scope of work will be identified for CANRAD, in conjunction with the Internal Leaders, Facilitators and Stakeholders to take the process forward to complete a Five-Year investment in the journey.

2. Provisional Timelines

In keeping with the principles of living systems and complexity, it is unlikely that the processes will follow a linear and pre-determined order as set out above. Some of the waves may overlap and some processes may develop a momentum of their own. We have the example of the Faculty of Education that has already embarked on

aspects of the journey intended for the Third Wave of the process. It is also likely that certain external factors and events may expedite some of the processes (such as specific incidents of alleged racism or conflict); or that other external factors propel the process into a slightly different direction; or order or priority. Within the spirit of the above the following is a guideline for the intended timeframes for the journey.

First Wave June 2012 – August/September 2012

Second Wave September 2012 – January 2012

Third Wave December/January 2012 – August/September 2013

Fourth Wave April 2013 – October 2013

(with a specific Focus on Relevant Public Holidays such as Human Rights Day; Freedom Day; Workers Day; Youth Day; Womens Day; Heritage Day)

Fifth Wave October/November 2013 – February/March 2014

Sixth Wave March/April 2014 – June/July 2014

3. Curriculum and Social Technologies

During the Entry into the organisation it will become clear which aspects of a Curriculum for Change will be most appropriate to the institution.

This curriculum will contain both a theoretical as well as an experiential component; will be created according to 'whole person' methodologies, and will be delivered through the use of a set of social technologies which supports the curriculum and the process as a whole.

Each of the substantive interventions has been designed to have three rounds of work. While this is not sufficient to ensure definite shifts in the systems, it is hoped that the cumulative effect of the work that is being done through-out the institution will augment and support on-going work in each of the sub-systems.

It is still unknown how the system will create the time and spaces needed to deliver the interventions. For the purposes of this proposal each 'intervention' or 'contact' can be a coaching session, a workshop or a working session of between 2- 4 hours; and 2

days, depending on various factors. Please refer to the section on Institutional Enablers for further dimensions around this point.

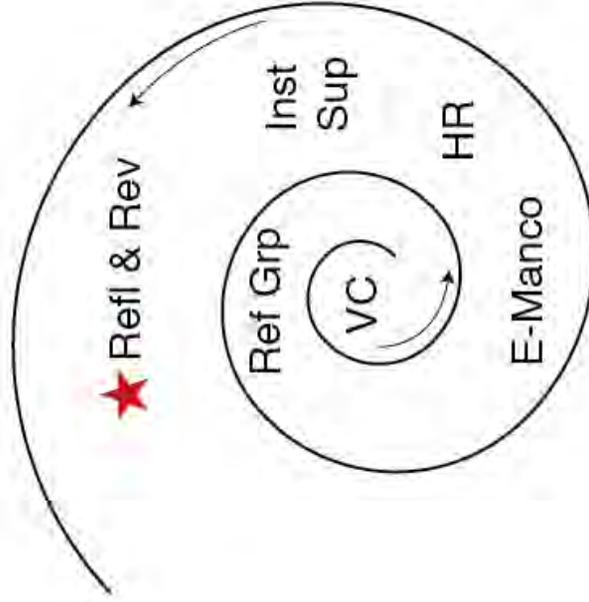
A rough estimate of the current design results in approximately 50 (fifty) contact events/workshops/working sessions over the twenty four month period. From a consultancy/facilitation perspective it is customary to work with at least one to two project days per contact day.

With the current design there is sufficient flexibility to allow for additional contact events not included in the primary design, such as training for the internal facilitation team, and ad hoc supervision for Internal Stakeholders and Leaders should it become necessary.

Organizational Entry

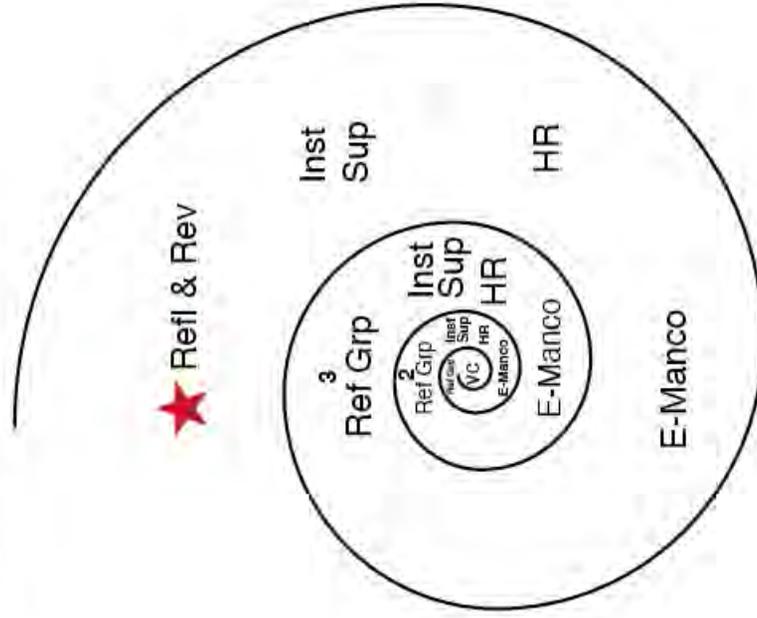
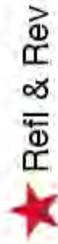
C. Graphic Representation of Design.

The Entry process will involve a first round of engaging with, orientating to and scoping the work with the above-listed Key Internal Stakeholders. Appropriate aspects of the journey will be shared with the Stakeholders; and conversations will be geared to alignment of purpose and intention.



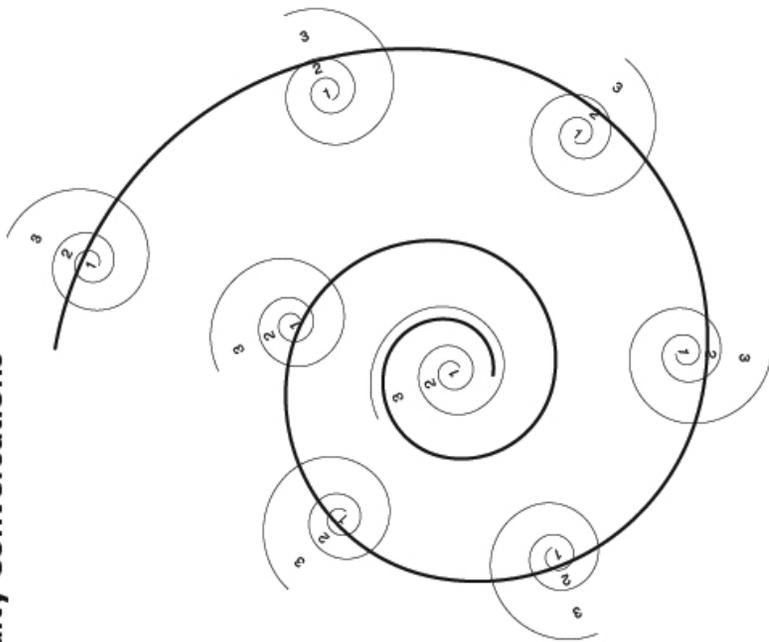
First Iteration - 3 Conversations

First Iteration will consist of three consecutive rounds of work with each of the Key Internal Stakeholders. Each process will be designed appropriately to the operational context of each group. All effort will be made to work with a similar curriculum across the different operational areas; and to introduce similar social technologies into the system.



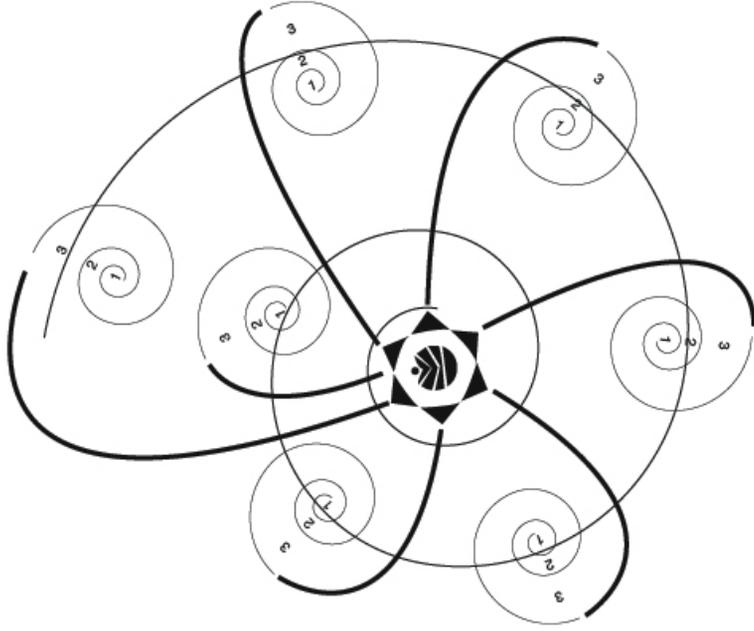
Second Iteration - Faculty Conversations

Second Iteration will follow the first in the different domains of the Faculties and the Departments. Each process will be context-specific and custom-designed to the realities of each domain. Once again all effort will be made to work with a similar curriculum across the different domains; and to introduce similar social technologies into the sub-systems.



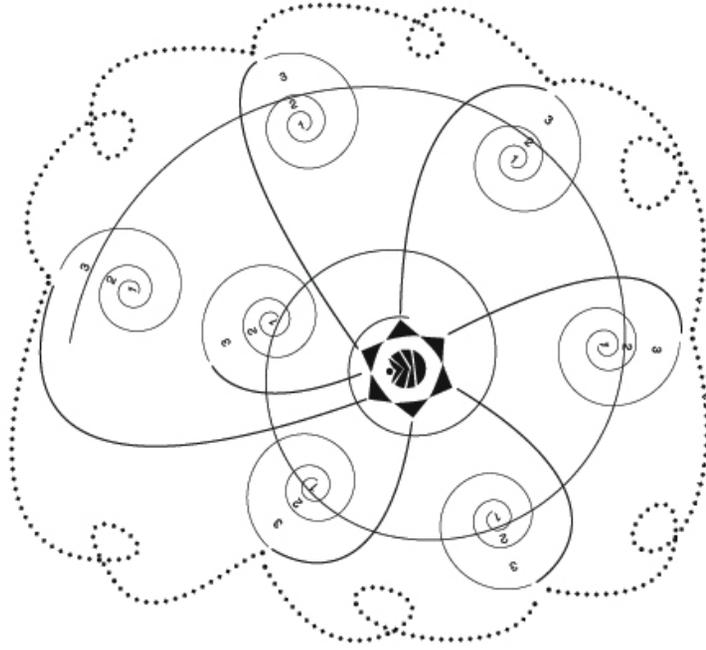
Third Iteration - Mixed Conversations: Whole Organization

Third Iteration is intended as 'whole institution' conversations. These conversations need to be a cross-pollination between Faculties, Departments, domains and levels in the institution. It is provisionally suggested to link these conversations to the specific public holidays in 2013. Alternative, more appropriate symbolic containers for the conversations may emerge.



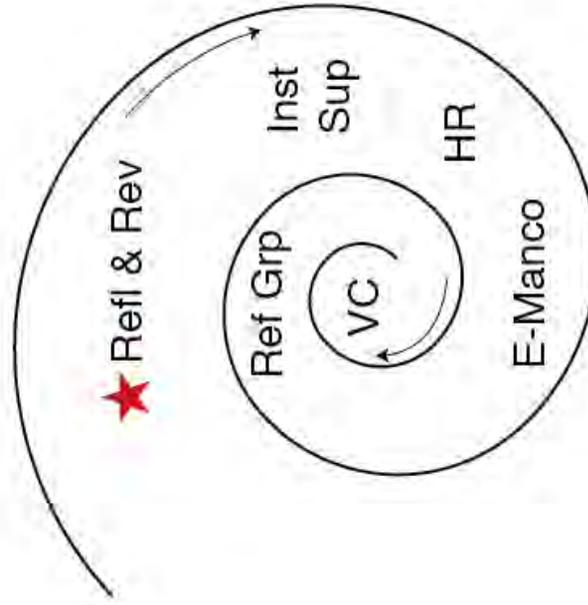
Fourth Iteration - Interdisciplinary Conversations including External Stakeholders

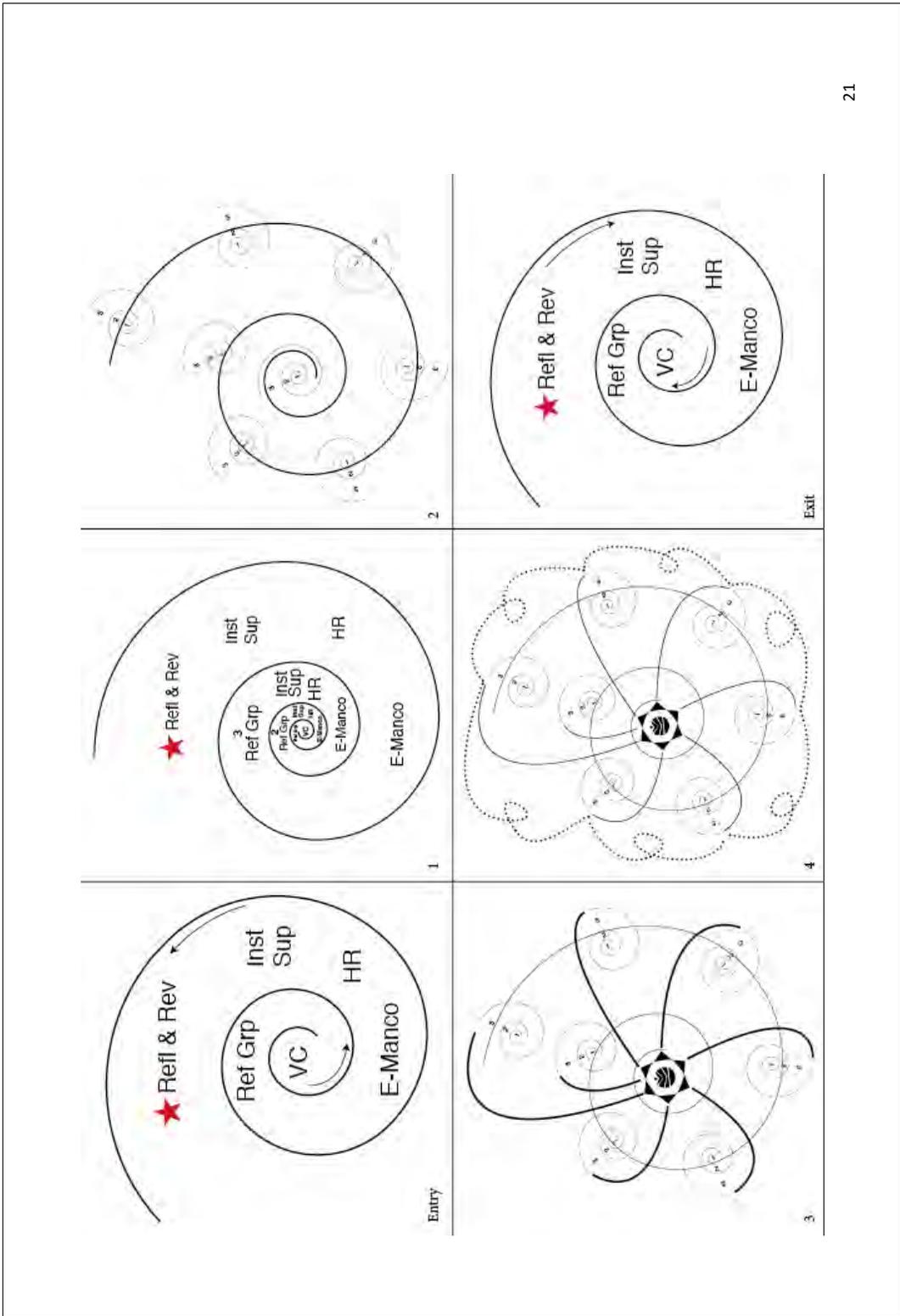
Fourth Iteration will be driven by the changes already taking place within the institution. At this stage it is intended to take the conversations to an even deeper level and begin to address specific questions around curriculum renewal, relevant research and engagement in the institution. It is envisaged that external stakeholders and friends of the institution may be invited to these conversations.



Organizational Exit

The Exit from the institution will involve reflection and learning sessions with the original Key Internal Stakeholder and Leadership groupings; scoping the next phase of work; and possibly concluding the journey with some ritualised events.





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In addition to the above, the **ICEP Recommended Reading List** (Annexure 6) and the following additional texts contributed to these Reflections:

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A quick guide to some of the terms used frequently in this book

Complexity:

“Complexity can be defined as situations in which how to achieve desired results is not known (high uncertainty), key stakeholders disagree about what to do and how to do it, and many factors are interacting in a dynamic environment that undermine efforts at control, making predictions and static models problematic. Complexity concepts include nonlinearity (small actions can produce large reactions), emergence (patterns emerge from self-organis[ation] among interacting agents), and dynamic adaptations (interacting elements and agents respond and adapt to each other).” (Patton 2010)

Complexity theory: An inter-disciplinary theory that examines uncertainty and non-linearity. It focuses on interactions and resulting feedback loops that constantly change systems. This type of theory is used to help organisations adapt to changing environments and cope with conditions of uncertainty.

EMANCO: This is the acronym for Nelson Mandela University’s Extended Management Committee, which includes about 25 members of senior management, including the executive Management Committee (MANCO – see definition below), as well as all deans, campus principals, and senior directors.

Fractal: Patterns that occur in nature (e.g. a snowflake, the repeated patterns on a snake’s skin).

Humanising pedagogies: Humanising pedagogies reject dominant educational practices in which an educated elite hands down theories and approaches to knowledge that are completely disconnected from the lived lives of students. Instead, educators recognise each other and their students as human beings who bring vastly different lived realities and diverse cultural, social and intellectual values into the university spaces and lecture rooms. The students and educators become partners in the journey of mutual learning and “becoming”; as well as promoting a more fully human world. Humanising pedagogies are based on the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire.

Living Systems approach: Real-life organisational systems (like universities) and change processes do not run like “machines”. They are open, self-organising living things that interact with their environment, which makes them fluid, unpredictable and “messy”, but also creative, innovative and resilient.

MANCO: The high-level Management Committee (MANCO) structure of Nelson Mandela University. MANCO meets monthly and is the body with delegated authority to make formal university decisions. It consists of the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Executive Directors of Human Resources and Finance, and the Senior Director of Institutional Planning.

Praxis: When, through ongoing learning and reflection cycles, theory is put into practice and becomes action-orientated change in the world.

Reference Group: A group of key stakeholders at Nelson Mandela University who met quarterly during the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process, to support and guide the process. The group consisted of the following people (the group changed over the five years of the ICEP project, as staff appointments changed).

- The university's three Deputy Vice-Chancellors: Prof Denise Zinn, Prof Andrew Leitch, Dr Sibongile Muthwa. Prof Zinn was initially on the Reference Group as Dean of Education before her appointment as Deputy Vice-Chancellor, so her participation was consistent throughout the five-year period. (Two former Deputy Vice-Chancellors – Prof Thoko Mayekiso and Prof Piet Naude – were also included, prior to their leaving the institution).
- The Dean of Teaching and Learning, Prof Cheryl Foxcroft
- The Senior Director: Office of Institutional Planning, Prof Heather Nel
- The Dean of Students, Luthando Jack (and prior to his appointment, the Acting Dean Mxolisi Ncapayi and former Dean Khaya Matiso).
- The Executive Director: Human Resources, Ntoza Bam (and prior to her appointment, Organisational Development Director, Loshni Govender).
- Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Laura Best
- Director of the Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD), Allan Zinn.
- Director of the university's Department for Transformation, Monitoring and Evaluation, Dr Ruby Ann Levendal
- Director of Communications and Stakeholder Liaison, Lebogang Hashatse
- ICEP Lead Facilitator, Ilze Olckers

Social technologies: A broad range of methodologies or conversation constellations or structures for meaningful engagement that would best enable and support critical conversations, and the human relationships and interactions required to co-create our futures.

“Theory of change”: When we refer to a “theory of change” in the book, we are not referring to the formal “theory of change approach” developed in the monitoring and evaluation community in the late 1990s and early 2000s, which is a specific type of methodology for planning, participation, and evaluation that is used to promote social change. In the ICEP context, we use the term much more broadly, both as a mode of inquiry into how systemic change toward greater organisational justice actually happens; as well as linking it to the the paradigms of complexity and living systems in organisational change. ICEP articulated its own “theory of change” for Nelson Mandela University.

Deepening the Conversations: Practice Reflections on the Institutional Culture Enlivening Process at Nelson Mandela University is a creative undertaking to capture the institutional memory, theoretical underpinnings and practice reflections of a five-year transformation journey at Nelson Mandela University, written by the lead facilitator of the project, Ilze Olckers.

This social experiment in large-scale organisational change and transformation in the Higher Education sector explores a complexity and living systems approach infused with social and cognitive justice imperatives. This publication practically illustrates, celebrates and contributes to deepening our understanding of the multi- and transdisciplinary dimensions of Transformation Praxis.



The Centre for the Advancement of Non-Racialism and Democracy (CANRAD) was launched in 2010, as a response to the grave concern that racism, its alternatives and associated impact on development, had not been given sufficient scholarly attention in South Africa.

Through CANRAD, Nelson Mandela University promotes non-racial and democratic activism within communities of practice, thereby promoting a transformative and lasting culture institutionally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

CANRAD's vision is to: "To lead the advancement of non-racialism and democracy within the University and broader society."

CANRAD's sub-themes include "Race", Democracy and Human Rights Education; African Scholarship; Cultural Studies; and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

CANRAD OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION SERIES

This is the third publication in the CANRAD Occasional Publications Series. It follows "Dr Beyers Naude: Afrikaner Turned Freedom Fighter" (published March 2017) and "Steve Bantu Biko Lives: The Quest for a Human Face" (published September 2017). The fourth publication will commemorate the life of George Botha.

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