

Student Representation and Modes of Institutional Stakeholder Interaction Platforms. Reconciling University Councils and their Student Stakeholders

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Abstract: *The stakeholder relationships between any university leadership and its university student clientele are important indicators of effective governance. In the post 1994, South African higher education dispensation, and of the 2015 the Rhodes must fall and fees must fall university students across the South African universities, the key symbolic characteristics of these stakeholder relationships between the stakeholder governed university councils and the university students has been the discourse of animosity, university protests, disruption of learning and destruction of university properties. Subsequently, in light of the 2015 fees must fall and Rhodes must fall university student movements, the role of the university councils in bringing effective governance as a result has come under heavy review. As a consequence, this paper examines the extent to which the relationship between university student representation in the university council and modes of institutional engagement platforms of the university council with its stakeholders are contributing to effective governance in the former historically black South African universities. This paper argues that there are strong stakeholder's influences on the kinds of institutional governance processes and procedures used to enhance or coordinate university student representation and engagement relationships between the university council and its different stakeholders in this case university students. As such to engage with these institutional contexts requires the university council to understand the relationship between modes of student representation in institutional governance and the ways of institutional engagement platforms between the university councils and its key stakeholders the different university student's formations across the university campuses. The paper used the concept of culture as a guiding framework to bring understanding of the ways the relationship between student representation and the modes of institutional engagement by stakeholder governed university councils can be used to improve governance practise. The data for this paper was collected from documentarily sources, interviews with the members of the university council and surveys of the university staff and students. The paper ends with a re-imagination of governance practises that enhance sustainable university student representation and suitable engagement avenues as enablers of good practise.*

Keywords: University councils, stakeholder governance, student representation, stakeholder communication, the former historically disadvantaged black universities.

Introduction

In the post 1994 South African former historically black universities, the key threats to effective governance in the era of decolonisation and transformation in these institutions continues to be the fragile relationships between the stakeholder governed university councils and its key stakeholder the university students (Council for Higher Education, 2004). The purpose of this paper is to examine extent to which the relationship between university student representation in the university council and the university council providing avenues to communicate with its stakeholders are contributing to effective governance within such institutional contexts. The kinds of prevailing stakeholder relationships between the university governing councils and their university student stakeholders showcases the kind of institutional governance culture in the university leadership. According to the Council of University Chairmen, (2000) for the university council to be able to exercise good governance they need to have mechanisms in place that speak to these institutional realities. Strategic stakeholder engagement and communication between the university governing council and its key stakeholders the university students are important because university councils as custodians of knowledge creators in the universities under their jurisdiction are expected to disseminate information to the public (Bennett,2002; Ehrenberg,2004; Kezar & Eckel,2004). The university councils as ecological organisations are accountable and have social responsibilities to the development of the societies the universities are located in terms of various platforms for knowledge transfers.

According the CHE, (2004), the university governing councils were commissioned by the state under the policy of cooperative governance to spearhead the transformation of the South African universities. The processes of implementation would demand that all different stakeholders come together under this policy in the universities under the jurisdiction of the university councils to bring about effective governance. The university councils were expected to innovate institutional governance structures, systems and cultures that enable all the different institutional stakeholders to be able to effectively participate in the governance of the universities at the level of the university councils. However, in the course of going these institutional processes and practises, the university councils experienced a series of institutional challenges.

According the independent assessor reports commissioned by the Department of Education on the Universities of the North, University of Kwazulu Natal, University Transkei, on the reasons for institutional governance dysfunctionality a major thread of challenges is due to the inabilities of the university councils to institute processes, values and procedures to counter instances of bad governance. In contrast, I claim that processes and procedures of communication between the university council and its university student stakeholders have been strongly influenced by stakeholder undertones. As a consequence, this study demonstrates that key problems and challenges to the transformation of university student representation across the communication platforms in the university council are mainly due to the increased stakeholder micro dynamics, coalitions and narratives within the university councils and at the level of the different stakeholder governance constituent structures that university student representatives have to navigate to get heard. Thus, for the university

council to be able to execute good governance in such contested institutional contexts, the relationship between the modes of student representation and modes of institutional communication spaces is critical to this process.

The data for this paper was collected from documentarily sources, interviews of the members of the university council and surveys of the university student population. As this paper is structured in the following sections. The first part of paper examines the challenges of stakeholder governed university councils in the post 1994 South African universities. The second part of the paper provides the conceptual framework for the paper, methods of data collection and analysis used for the paper. The last of this paper ends with a call for professionalization of stakeholder communication practises, processes and procedures between the university council and its different institutional stakeholders as urgency enablers to provide good governance in contested stakeholder governance spaces.

The challenges of university student governance in the post 1994 the South African Comprehensive universities

Across several higher education systems, university student populations have played significant roles in the transformation of universities. Thus forms of student governance becomes critical for effective university governance. In South Africa, ‘student governance’ has come to mean descriptively the participation of students as active agents in the governance of higher education (Luescher, 2005).

Defining Student governance

Studying student governance therefore involves taking account of the multiple levels of higher education governance - from the classroom level to institutional governance, and from policy-making at system level to the politics of international donor funding; it is concerned with the nature of the rule systems that govern the sector and students in particular; it studies the maze of formal arrangements and informal relations and dynamics that simultaneously enable and diffuse authority among the different role-players. Its study is “the web of governance” (Hall, Symes and Luescher, 2002), and how students locate themselves and are located within these constellations of power and authority (Luescher, 2005; Luescher-Mamashela, 2013).

For further clarification, it is also important to locate the concept student governance in relation to other concepts commonly used found in studies on student politics. Firstly, “student” means a person who is duly registered for a higher education qualification at a university or similar institution. The collective of students at a particular university is called the “student body”, and all student bodies of a country combined is called the “general student body” (Badat, 1999: 23). Literature on African higher education sometimes conceives of students as “beneficiaries” of (public) higher education as “clients” or “customers” to the university, or even “consumers” or “recipients” of higher education (Zuo and Ratsoy, 1999: 13-14). With respect to governance, students are sometimes called a “stakeholder” or a “constituency” in higher education (Otieno, 2004; NCHE, 1996).

University student struggles

During the Apartheid period, black students at historically black institutions created by the regime to produce and domesticate emerging black elites made higher education an important terrain of student mobilisation, ideological debate, and resistance (Reddy, 2004:6). At the same time, we should not to ignore other elements of protest within higher education: the resistance, less profound, but nevertheless present of black students at historically white universities, the activism of progressive white students and academics, the odd registering of protest of government policy by managerial elites at the English liberal campuses, and anti-government petitions presented by the leadership of the black universities themselves. All of this resistance, while not being decisive on their own, played an important role in eroding the legitimacy of the Apartheid social formation (Reddy, 2004:6).

The running battles between students and police, mass meetings, demonstrations, boycotts, passionate debates between students of different ideological camps, teargas infested lecture rooms – all expressive manifestations of student political struggle on the black and some white campuses – transgressed the confines of the universities and impacted upon other areas of civil society marking those spaces as terrains of social conflict and protest (Reddy, 2004:6). The resistance of black students from the 1970's, together with the strikes, boycotts and stay ways of workers, youth and working class communities involved in pitched battles with the police constituted the social forces that created the crisis of Apartheid rule in the 1980's (Reddy,2004:6). This broad spectrum of internal civil resistance, together with global, regional, and national factors, ushered the collapse of the Apartheid regime (Price, 1990 as cited in Reddy, 2004:10). Indeed, it is arguable whether South Africa's democratic regime change, following the crisis of Apartheid rule in the 1980's, would have occurred at all without the contribution of black students from the 1970's onwards (Reddy, 2004:7).

Instead of denying university education to blacks by relying on the admissions policies of the established white universities, the Apartheid state embarked on a determined policy to create universities for the variously state defined ethnically classified black groups (Reddy, 2004:10). These new universities, the “bush colleges,” were designed to serve as valuable instruments in the over-arching “grand Apartheid” political project based on the creation of pseudo independent states in the African “tribal” reserves. For Zulu and Swazi speakers the government created the University of Zululand. The University of the North was created for Sotho, Tswana, Venda, Tsonga speakers and the Transvaal Ndebele. The universities of the Western Cape and Durban-Westville were created for those classified Coloureds and Indians by the state (Horrell, 1968 as cited in Reddy, 2004:10). By the early 1970's universities were established in the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, and Venda Bantustans. These institutions were expected to legitimate, reproduce, and constitute, especially among the elites, identities and social relations of race and ethnicity. If successful, this project would divide the black majority 11 into many minorities, weakening both the physical majority and the political, moral argument for democratic majority rule in an undivided South Africa (Reddy, 2004:10).

Emergence of Comprehensive universities

Comprehensive universities are therefore those higher education institutions that were formerly historically disadvantaged institutions that existed in the former homeland areas of South Africa by the creation of the apartheid state (Council for Higher Education, (CHE), 2004b). However, by a series of different acts of the post-apartheid state they decided to covert these ailing institutions to comprehensive universities and some into universities of technology (Asmal, 2002). Comprehensive universities across the former different homeland areas now offer vocational and degree qualifications to the university students. Nevertheless, these state inspired policy conversions and integrations did not address certain projected stakeholder expectations and dreams (CHE, 2004a). Over the years these institutions have become stakeholder battle grounds and proxies involving mainly university students as foot soldiers with those stakeholders represented at different levels of institutional governance perceived as responsible for the 1994 stakeholder inexorable unfulfilled promises and expectations.

Implementation of cooperative governance

In the post-1994 the universities and the internal governance structures had to be transformed. The state policy of cooperative governance was used by the state to spearhead the transformation of the university councils and their internal governance structures (CHE, 2004a). The introduction of the state policy of cooperative governance by the state in post 1994 as part of the key means to spearhead transformation of higher education institutions has played a critical in the introduction of stakeholder dynamics internal governance of universities councils (National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE), 1997). A fundamental impact of the institutional state policy of cooperative governance has been the massive institutional stakeholder drive to become part of the leadership and governance of the universities which has had fundamental influence on how the universities are run at the level of the university councils (CHE, 2004a).

As a result, university councils to be inclusive, responsive and diverse in their vision and purpose could have to include various external and internal stakeholders in the governance of the universities (CHE, 2004a). External stakeholders included the state, business, special interest groups, community leaders, donors while internal stakeholders included various categories of university staff and students. However not these stakeholders would part of the different key committees of the university councils across the various universities. The university students, teaching and non-teaching staff, unionised labour and political organisations were excluded from participating and been represented in the certain key different committees of the university councils across the universities. The rationale for their exclusion was that these categories of institutional stakeholders were often too partisan such it was affecting their conduct and practise in the university councils.

The different Key drivers of this institutional policy, the council for higher education (CHE) in 2004 in transformational mode laid out the responsibilities of the university council senate and institutional forum in bringing about effective university governance. This tripod

governance system was supposed to work together but the university senate and institutional forum are to report to the university council. However, the CHE did not specify to the different university councils how this tripod university governance alliance is expected to work together to bring about the different processes of institutional transformation from the university council level. The CHE expected the different university governing bodies in conjunction with the other governance bodies in the tripod alliance in the different university contexts to figure this out.

In the post 1994 South Africa, this university governance process has been characterised by continuous conflicts and differences of different magnitudes at all levels of the university council, university senate, and institutional forum (CHE, 2004a). The consequences of this state of affairs can best understood under two aspects: firstly, the tensions around university student representation in the university council and the university council struggling to critically engage, communicate and negotiate with its different stakeholders in an environment of stakeholder civility.

Tensions around university student representation

The presence of the university students in the university councils as a result became contested. In spite of the rationale for the university students to be part of the university councils (NCHE, 1996) the university students have struggled to be clearly listened to. The lack of access to key information has made it difficult for the university students to clearly participate in the university councils. In addition, the assumptions that university students had little understanding of how the university councils operated has affected their performance in the university councils. Furthermore, the university student organisations were easily drawn into stakeholder alliances and became highly politicised. The politicisation of the university student's organisations and their alliances with external political parties made the university councils very restrictive of increased student numbers in the university councils. (Department on Education reports on university of Fort Hare, 1999; University of Transkei, 1998).

The strained stakeholder communication patterns

Another key result of the strained fragile stakeholder relationships between the university leadership and its key stakeholders the university students was the restricted and regulation of information and communication to the university student organisations and their constituents. The university student's leadership were subjected to restricted institutional information about the university on key matters of finance and governance. The restriction was that key institutional information was being used to cause institutional stakeholder tensions. The university councils would not trust the university student representatives. As a result, to lead and govern successfully the university governing bodies thought it wise to limited student representation in the university council and regulate their participation in key committees of the university councils (Dept. of education reports; on University of the North, 1997; University of Transkei, 1998).

In conclusion, we have argued that tensions around university representation in the university council and strained stakeholder communications are some of the key challenges of the stakeholder governed university councils during the post 1994 higher education dispensation. These governance challenges are responsible for allegations of dysfunctional governance practises mostly experienced in the former historically black disadvantaged university councils. Understanding the relationship between these aspects is key in the improvement of governance practises in these institutional contexts.

Conceptual underpinning

This paper uses the concept of culture as an organizing framework from a multi-theoretical approach to explore the relationship between a culture of debate, tolerance and conditions which enable effective representation through stakeholders being able to select their own representatives. The notion of culture as organizing concept was developed from a unique form of a micro political framework drawn from the work of the following writers: Blasé, (1998) on micro politics, Bourdieu (1996) on species of social capital, Rousseau, (1987) on his notion of social contract, Foucault (1991) and his concept of “circuits of power” located within social critical sociological perspectives which foreground interests, power and power relations as mediators and sometimes drivers of human interactions (Cross & Naidoo, 2011:518).

These organizing concepts rooted in the conflict of social action are be used as analytical tools to argue that: Firstly, University councils within their particular institutional contexts each have a unique governance pact between different stakeholders represented at the university council to bring about improved university governance practises. The attributes of improved effective university governance are drawn from the White Paper of 1997 on the goals of higher education transformation (CHE, 2004). Drawing from Rousseau, (1987) on his notion of social contract, an institutional governance pact is a binding agreement stipulated within in institutional statue. These statues have terms and conditions that define the stakeholder governance behaviour and practises in the university council. However, the efficiency of these pacts depends on how it is interpreted within specific framework of norms and values that create condition for an atmosphere of civility, engagement, communication and representation into the university council. That is good governance is tied to creating atmosphere where stakeholders are to come together from different stakeholder constituents and debate their stakeholder issues under atmosphere of civility. Secondly good governance is tied to the democratic ways council representatives use to become part of the university council. To become part of the university council one must meet certain level of skills, competences and critical understanding of the university vision and purpose.

Secondly, University councils are composed of individuals or groups with different forms of social capital. Drawing from Bourdieu (1996) on his concept of social capital, social capital refers to the stakeholder networks of relationships with benefits like access to funding, power and influence. In this paper due to competing stakeholder expectations, the nature of work done by the university council does requires a specific group of individuals who are able

apply their independent minds to critical debate on key stakeholder issues facing the university a niche for improving governance practises.

Thirdly, this paper argues there are stakeholder networks within the university council which enable or disenable particular forms of stakeholder participation within the university governance processes. University councils have become political spaces where different stakeholder representatives through stakeholder caucuses or socialisation lobbying informal groupings engage to get their different constituent expectations/demands met by the university council (Foucault (1991). Thus, university students as key stakeholders in the university council to be able to effectively participate need to navigate or ally with these networks (Blasé, 1998).

According to Steyn & Van Zyl, (2001:20), institutional culture is the “sum total” effects of the values, attitudes, styles of interaction, collective memories - the “way of life” of the university, known by those who work and study in the university environment, through their lived experience. That is culture is referred to as the repeated specific goal oriented behavioural acts by an individual or groups of individuals at different oriented practices a perspective this paper adopts. Eckel (2003) suggest that culture shapes the governance process in profound ways and that cultural theory is important to understand governance.

There are three domains of university governance cultures as knowledge bases that are prevalent across higher education leadership and governance literature; the bureaucratic, collegial, and political models (Baldrige et al, 1977). However, emerging research on higher education governance has generally been focused on four major analytical models: bureaucratic–rational, collegial, political, and garbage can or symbolic model (Hardy, 1990; Bensimon & Neumann, 1989). As such university councils exist at the interface of such knowledge domains to affect institutional governance practise. This depending on the level and dimension of micro-politics going on within the university councils at institutional level, it will determine the type of governance culture as a model of governance practice the university council adopts to bring about good governance.

Key questions for the study

The purpose of this paper is to examine extent to which the relationship between university student representation in the university council and the university council providing avenues to communicate with its stakeholders are contributing to effective governance. To unpack this problem the study shall be guided by the following research questions:

1. How are the university students as key stakeholders in the university represented in the university governing council?
2. What forms of institutional governance communicational spaces has the university council put in place for the university students as its key stakeholders in the university to be able to communicate with the university council on any issue of concern?
3. What are the emerging relationships between how university students participate in the university governance processes and the available communication spaces?

4. What forms of best governance practises that are-fit-for purpose would be generated from these emerging relationships within such institutional contest?

Methods used in data collection and analysis

This study used a sequential exploratory mixed methods research paradigm (Creswell, Plano Clark et al., 2003) in the collection and analysis of the data in a case study (Yin, 2003) of one comprehensive university. The collection of data involved the use of document analysis (Payne & Payne, 2004), face-to-face in-depth interviews (O'Leary, 2005) and surveys (Groves et al, 2004). The analysis of data utilized a thematic analysis approach (Bailey 1994:194). The first stage of survey data analysis after the data entry using SPSS format, involved the use of descriptive statistics (Keith & Punch, 2009). It involved the use of frequency distributions, means and standard deviations (variations). The next stage of the data analysis involved the use of correlations to explore if there are any relationships within the data. Using a Pearson moment correlation coefficient (Keith & Punch, 2009; George & Mallery, 2003), all the theme items on the survey instruments were correlated against each other in this process. The emphasis was to see if there are emerging relationships, the strengths of these relationships and what this means as modes of effective governance.

A total of 331 useable survey forms were received from the students and staff from the university. The study had two separate survey instruments for the university students and the university members of staff. The survey included four major components (a) demographic information (b) University council structures (c) university council systems (d) university council cultures. On a 5-point Likert-type scales (Keith & Punch, 2009) of [5 for very strongly agree; 4 for strongly agree; 3 for neutral / disagree or agree; 2 for strongly disagree; 1 for very strongly disagree] the participants were asked to indicate their perceptions of university council structures and processes as contributing to effective university governance on the item scales. As part of the processes of working with its university student population stakeholder governed university councils need to consider the following aspects as critical to their reconceptualization:

Fundamental key stakeholder practises for good governance

The composition of the university council

The composition of the university councils is key to effective governance. According to the South African Higher Education Statue (1997, p26-27) the university councils have to be composed of a diversity of both internal and external stakeholders. The results of this study show that the university council is composed of different stakeholder representatives from different groupings within and outside the university. This composition is illustrated in table1. From this table of description, the university students as stakeholders have only two representatives to the university council. These stakeholder representations vary from institution to institution in the South African higher education landscape. There are motives for these kinds of stakeholder representation in the university councils. The different

stakeholder constituents have strong say on who represents them in the university council and its different committees.

Table: 1 showing the distribution of stakeholders in the university council

Stakeholder groupings	Number in the university council
The senior executive management	4
senate representatives	2
convocation	2
student representatives	2
academic employee	1
service employee	1
administrative employee	1
organised business/ private sector	6
Appointees of the Minister of Education	5
Donor representation	2
Resource persons	3
Provincial representative	1
Municipal representative	1

However, this diverse composition has become theatres of stakeholder tension and hostility. The diversity of the university council has several merits it brings to the university council namely opportunities for interactions between the different stakeholders through representation and communication:

a) The interactions between the university council and its different stakeholders

The university governing council communicates and engages with its key stakeholders like students and staff through the different institutional governance structures it created to facilitate these engagement processes. For example the SRC for the university students. The university council has little to no influence in the internal micro-dynamics with these stakeholder constituents. As a result, in the post 1994 higher education increasingly the university councils have become political spaces. The university councils are being composed of coalitions of powerful and less powerful stakeholders who use the university councils as platforms to drive their agenda through the higher education institutions. Increased politicisation of the university council has influenced how the university council communicates with its different stakeholders. The stakeholder governed university councils can be welcoming to other stakeholders and hostile to the groups of stakeholders who don't often agree with them in terms of ideology and perception. It is these forms of geopolitical institutional spaces at the level of governance that university student representatives have to manoeuvre to get heard.

The table 3: showing the frequency distribution for the university council providing avenues to communicate and negotiate with its different stakeholders.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	17	6.6	6.7	6.7
	Disagree	28	10.9	11.0	17.6
	Neither Agrees nor Disagrees	99	38.7	38.8	56.5
	Agree	85	33.2	33.3	89.8
	Strongly Agree	25	9.8	9.8	99.6
	No Selection	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	255	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
	Total	256	100.0		

The results of this study indicate that of the university students who took part 43.1% agree to the assertion that university council does provide avenues for the university students as its key stakeholders to communicate with the university council. 17.7% of the university students do not agree to the assertion that university councils does provide avenues for the university students as its key stakeholders to communicate with the university council. 38.8% are undecided of whether the university council does provide avenues for the university students as its key stakeholders to communicate with the university council. There are probable causes for the majority of the university students being undecided on these governance issues; for instance, from the documentarily analysis the strong evidence of animosity between the university councils and it student organisations and representatives to the university council show this reality. The numerous university student's needs for instance the increased fees, the lack of accommodation, the decolonisation of the university are some of the key burning expectations that university student feel the university council have let them down by not responding sufficiently (Dept. of Education reports; on University of the North, 1997; University of Transkei, 1998).

b) The university student representation

The way the university students are represented in the university governing councils shows how the university leadership cares about student involvement in the governance of student affairs. One of the new surprises of the post 1994 higher education era is the increase in

university student's interest in university governance in particular on issues of representation and participation.

The table 4: showing the frequency distribution for university student representation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly Disagree	36	14.1	14.1	14.1
	Disagree	42	16.4	16.5	30.6
	Neither Agrees nor Disagrees	69	27.0	27.1	57.6
	Agree	82	32.0	32.2	89.8
	Strongly Agree	25	9.8	9.8	99.6
	No Selection	1	.4	.4	100.0
	Total	255	99.6	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.4		
Total		256	100.0		

The results of this study indicate that of the university students who took part, 42% agree to the assertion that university council provides avenues for sustainable student representation in the university governing council in the university. 30.6% of the university students who took in this study disagree with the assertion that university councils do provide avenues for sustainable student representation in the university governing councils. 27.1% of the university students are undecided whether the university council does provide avenues for sustainable student representation in university governing council. On this aspect, the majority of the university student consent that university council does really make available avenues for university students as key stakeholders to strongly be represented in the university governance process at the level of the university governing body.

The table 5: showing the mean and standard deviation of the variables student representation and the university council providing avenues to communicate and negotiate with its different stakeholders

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Student Representation	255	1	6	3.08	1.216

Negotiations and Communications	255	1	6	3.30	1.026
Valid N (listwise)	255				

The mean and standard deviation of the scores for the two variables were used to add statistical meaning to the interpretation of the correlation between the two variables.

c) The relationship student representation and the university council providing avenues to communicate and negotiate with its different stakeholders

The results of this study show that at 0.05 level of significance there is a low linear relationship between university student representation ($m=3.08$, $SD=1.216$) and the university council providing opportunities for the university student population to communicate with the university council ($m=3.30$, $SD=1.026$) with $r=0.239 \geq p=0.05$, $n=255$ with $r^2=5.7\%$. This implies that 5.7% of the variance scores for effective governance in this study can be attributed to by the relationship between university student representation and the university council providing opportunities and avenues for its university student population to be equally represented in the university council. 94.3% of the variance scores for effective governance in this study can be attributed to other factors.

The table 6: showing the relationship student representation and the university council providing avenues to communicate and negotiate with its different stakeholders

		Student Representation	Negotiations & Communications
Student Representation	Pearson Correlation	1	.239**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	255	255
Negotiations & Communications	Pearson Correlation	.239**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	255	255

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There are several probable reasons for this kind of low linear relationship which are depicted from the documentarily sources in the data. Drawing from the independent assessor reports commissioned by the Department of Education, the interactions between the university management and university student representatives to the university councils has been characterised by patronage, hate animosity and the use of the university leadership to fight

against other university leaderships within the university (Department of Education reports on university of Fort Hare, 1999; University of Transkei, 1998). There are also instances where the university students were used to fight or ‘*make life hard*’ for other university leaders who did not agree the leaders in the university management. In spite of these circumstances, there are governance practises the university council could engage in to do to improve their relationships with the university student leadership as represented in the university council:

Stakeholder governance contract

In order to improve the stakeholder relationship between the university council and its key stakeholders the university students it’s important that the university council understand the nature of the governance contract they have with the university students as key stakeholders in the university. The governance contract is needed because several constituent representatives are deployed to the university council by their partisan governance structures with an ideological programmed mind-set to champion their parochial agenda. However, this not how the university council expects these council representatives possess this kind of thinking as they function or exercise governance (Moja & Hayward, 2000; NCHE, 1997). This constituent governance behaviour is responsible for delays in decision making as no council representative will consciously vote for decisions that will negatively affect their governance structures even though these kinds of decisions are critical for the university to achieve its institutional strategy, goals and ambitions. Thus in such circumstances, without a clear understanding of the governance contract it is impossible for the university council members to reconcile their constituent interests’ verses university interests.

Valuing stakeholder contribution

One of the major successes of the state project on transformation of the higher education systems has the increased participation of the newly empowered institutional stakeholders into the different levels of the university governance processes. The basis for achievement is associated with the governance opportunities for change made possible by the cooperative governance institutional framework (CHE, 2004a; White paper, 1997). University governing bodies now have room to creatively craft models of participation that are fit for purpose within their institutional contexts and benchmark these in relation to the demands of the white paper of 1997 (Kulati, 2000; Hall and Symes, 2005). That is university councils have governance options to choose whom to work have with and not to work for the sake of achieving effective governance within their particular institutional contexts. This process encourages stakeholder trust, belonging, faith accountability, transparency and engagement along as you seat on the council and anger in case of exclusion.

As a result, in trying to avoid unnecessary stakeholder contestations some university councils have limited participation of certain institutional stakeholders deemed hostile to university leadership (CHE, 2004a). This aspect is not new as research indicates stakeholder participation in the different university governance processes is fluid due to institutional

complexities (Kiel, 2010; Olssen, 2007; Maassen & Cloete, 2002). On the other hand, having the right board composition under this kind of institutional framework is a formidable task as governing bodies have to be on alert often against stakeholder maneuvering for legitimization of dominate stakeholder interest. To make ‘hay while the sun shines’, it is vital for these forms stakeholder contested participations to balance the interests firstly of, the universities and then its stakeholders.

The committees of council and the stakeholder groups

The interactions between the different committees of council and the different stakeholder groups represented in the university council demonstrate the institutional spaces available for communication between the university and the different stakeholders. It is at this level that the different stakeholders need to make their case strong in documentation for council deliberation. This is because the university council is positioned in its role to respond to what is presented to it from its committees of council because it’s well investigated since the feeder points never engage with them at the council meetings. However, this governance ‘site’ and ‘driver’ is not readily used and understood by the different stakeholders.

The chairpersons of the different institutional governance structures should take advantage of the unplanned breaks, moments and intervals during the university council meetings to productively engage with the heads of the different committees of council and the external stakeholders represented at the university council to understand how decisions affecting them are prepared. The different committees of council are there to assist the different institutional stakeholders get heard through the right procedures of the university council. However, they cannot act and prepare for the university council to provide oversight on what they are sure of or not well informed. Therefore, as good university governance practise the chairpersons of the different institutional constituent structures and of the different of committees of council should keep abreast of each other symbolic expectations and try to build these aspects into the institutional strategy of the institution as way of bringing about institutional effectiveness over time.

An atmosphere of stakeholder civility and respect

The central threats to effective stakeholder governance have been instances of stakeholder patronage and increased sectoral practises. The persistence of these practises is due to unfulfilled stakeholder expectations. It is possible to drive for the realisation of these post1994 transformation promises through an environment of civility and respect. Epistemologies of civility in governance practises strives for engagement with mutual respect. The rise in the destruction of university infrastructure across universities as expression of the demand for change makes sustainable governance to achieve.

Conclusions

This paper examined extent to which the relationship between university student representation in the university council and the university council providing avenues to

communicate with its stakeholders are contributing to effective governance. The results of this study have shown there is low linear relationship between the university student representation and the university council providing avenues to communicate with its stakeholders is critical to this process. These results have the following implications for effective governance by university governing bodies in comprehensive university contexts: firstly, the university council need to understand the nature of the governance contract they have with the university students as key stakeholders in the university. A clear understanding of the stakeholder governance contract ensures mutual stakeholder commitment to govern. Secondly, the university councils need to choose whom to work have with and not to work for the sake of achieving effective governance within their particular institutional contexts. Thirdly, the university councils need to ensure there exists productive and friendly interactions between the different committees of council and the different stakeholder groups represented in the university council. The committees of the university council are the key direct stakeholder access to the university council. Unfortunately, this is often not preferred by most stakeholders who prefer to talk to the university council directly a practise university governing councils do not subscribe to. This has bred animosity and mistrust a source of governance dysfunctionality in contested stakeholder governed university councils. In such contexts where there no-size-fits-all as effective governance, the university councils need to strive for the epistemologies of civility in governance which focuses on critical stakeholder engagement with mutual respect. Lastly, this kind of institutional context and the atypical stakeholder relationships involved in leadership creates more room for research into ways of how to bring about workable governance practises within such unstable institutional environments.

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