

“YOU CAN’T GO TO THE ARMY AND EXPECT TO BE A VICE-CHANCELLOR”: THEY MUST BECOME GOOD SCHOLARS

I. Buccus

GenderJustice, Health and Human Development

Durban University of Technology

Durban, South Africa

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3455-5998>

ABSTRACT

This article is a study of a university vice chancellor (VC) and specifically the leadership qualities that articulate success. There is broad agreement across the higher education sector that good leadership is central to the performance of university vice chancellors (Cloete, Maassen, and Bailey 2015; Macfarlane 2012; Jansen 2017; Scott et al. 2010). University vice-chancellor’s performance are measured against a range of issues and include determining the institution’s strategic goals, academic standing and transformation agenda (Leibowitz 2012). To run a university there is need for university vice-chancellors to articulate particular skills, values and qualities that will enable them to achieve success in these wide-ranging and competing goals and agendas. In South Africa however with few exceptions (Swartz et al. 2019; Jansen 2017), fundamental questions remain about what these values and qualities are and they arise in university vice-chancellors own account of leadership. Although vice-chancellors occupy an eminent position in the country especially in the context of transforming higher education in the country (Cloete 2014), specific attention to the values and qualities that vice-chancellors articulate as vital for leadership has been understudied. This article is interested in the question: how do vice-chancellors shape leadership qualities are how do these arise? This question is explored empirically, through narrative enquiry by focusing on one vice-chancellor’s account of leadership qualities. Through a close-focus examination of the nuances associated with a university vice chancellor’s conceptualisation of leadership, this article provides insights into what qualities are relevant for effective leadership. As noted by Dewan and Myatt (2008) the successful performance of a leader is based on the question of which qualities are relevant for effective leadership. There remains a marginal consideration of university vice-chancellor’s perspectives on the issues of effective leadership and how they arise especially in the context of South Africa’s turbulent higher education environment.

Keywords: higher education, leadership

“Better universities are run by better researchers.” (Goodall 2006, 409).

CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY ON VICE-CHANCELLORS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South African universities have undergone significant transformation since the end of

apartheid. The post-1994 policy reform agenda was intended to shape new social justice agenda and address the fragmentation and inequalities produced by the legacies of apartheid. In this regard, the *White Paper: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (Department of Education 1997, 2) set in motion a transformation agenda which must "redress past inequalities, to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to new realities and opportunities". The transformation is ongoing and is a part of the broader process of democratisation. The Department of Education (2008) *Soudien Report* on the issue of social inequalities and racialisation of higher education brought renewed attention to the continued struggles for social justice and equality in higher education noting the stickiness of apartheid legacies and inequalities. Beyond considerations of equality in higher education, transformation as identified by Du Preez, Verhoef, and Simmonds (2016) is a focus on re-thinking knowledge systems that are based upon western ideologies and the denouncement of indigenous values, teaching and learning, curriculum and the emphasis on research and internationalisation. Teaching, learning and research together with the broader socio-political issues aggregate to produce a highly complex higher education environment that requires specific skills, strategies and values to enable redress and reformation. South African universities thus juggle and navigate competing goals and often have effects for the performance of universities where a research agenda can sometimes conflict with the socio-cultural realities, the legacies of race, gender and class in institutional inequalities. As such research-inducing university environment may be in conflict with the climate of a university environment and broader structures which limit the capacity to produce research (Mtshali and Sooryamoorthy 2019).

In South Africa there are a range of competing demands placed on university vice chancellors – "producing excellent research, preparing a labour force, or addressing societal inequalities" (Swartz et al. 2019, 567). In a country historically striated by race and class hierarchies, universities have been placed under the spotlight and in crisis in relation to funding, fees and the broader socio-economic conditions which have effects for marginalised students (Jansen 2017). The surrounding social contexts as well as the pressures inside universities have led to serious consideration about the main purpose or core business of universities and how best to lead them (Swartz et al. 2019).

Vice-chancellors are located within this crucible and their particular ideologies are shaped by the local parameters of their institutions. Indeed, as a direct consequence of the need for transformation, academic leadership too has been overhauled from the apartheid framing of leadership to changing demographics and new visions and values that can deal with the demand for greater accessibility to higher education based on social justice and equity (Council on

Higher Education 2016). A new leadership perspective, underlined by changing race and gender demographics was needed to drive the required transformational changes.

Higher education transformation in South Africa is taking place in crisis times. Student demand for quality education, access to higher education and the need for implementing transformational goals have increased the complexity of leading universities. The broader socio-economic and political context shapes what is possible to and also sets limits to the achievement of transformational goals. In reflecting on the capacities of South African university leaders, Badsha (2016) points to these intersectional dynamics, the scale and complexity of leading against the backdrop of transformational goals and the need to increase higher education accessibility and equity. Leading universities is challenging. Badsha (2016) also suggests that poor leadership strategies and personal leadership attributes have compromised universities in the country with some institutions experiencing ongoing stress and in perpetual crisis, a few of which were placed under administration. The broader context combined with how leadership is conceptualised and acted upon within local institutions are becoming central points of engagement in order to create a more responsive higher education system that take heed of the needs, challenged and expected competences required for leading a university within a transforming society.

In this article, I focus on university leadership qualities and that of leading a university within the noted scale and complex domain of transformation unfolding within higher education through the lens of black VCs employed in public universities in South Africa. This research scope will, therefore contribute to unfolding discourses and debates on university leadership for a transforming society. To this end, the intent of this study is to identify factors that influence leadership qualities in people that lead public universities. Noting the current context where the majority of public universities are led by black VCs, and that this was part of the transformational agenda of higher education in South Africa, a specific focus on this demographic profile of university leaders are being delimited in this study. To this end, this study explores, through the narratives of one university black VCs account of the values, skills and qualities required in his experiences of leading a South African public university. These experiences may also a frame of references in developing competence amongst the black academic leaders who may aspire to become vice-chancellors of public universities.

The next part of this article deals with a synopsis of the methodology used in generating the data that is presented, followed by a focus on three intertwining elements in the qualities and values espoused by the VC under examination. The focus on good leadership is premised on being a good scholar, leading with ideas driven by a research-inducing strategy and finally these ideas infiltrate into the necessity for decolonised perspectives on knowledge and research which provides specificity in the experience and articulation of values necessary for a VC in

South Africa.

METHODS

Through a close-focus examination of the nuances associated with a university vice chancellor's conceptualisation of qualities required for effective leadership, this article is guided by Levi (2006) who suggests that the qualities of an organisation is dependent upon the quality of its leadership. Here my interest is in which qualities are demarcated as relevant within the changing South African higher education context. This study is based on a qualitative research design using narrative enquiry as a research method to make sense of the stories that unfolded during the research process that involved nine black VC in South Africa.

At the time of the study, 17 VC were black in South Africa. Since my focus was on black VCs, purposive sampling was undertaken. 9 of the 17 VCs agreed to participate in this study. As a narrative inquiry, I was not interested in breadth but the depth of experience and the rich thick constructions of meanings which meant that the small sample size was of little consideration. As Riessman (2007) notes, when the focus is on narrative inquiry, there is no need to be concerned about the large sample size. Thus, in this study I give attention to the thick data by focusing on one VC's narrative of leadership and the qualities through which he constructs success.

Following a narrative inquiry, it was important to create a research context that permitted university leaders to engage in rich and thick discussions as they described their experiences of being and becoming an academic leader. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that narrative inquiry involves a focus on the meaning that individuals give to their experiences. In this study, my concern was to ensure that the method allowed for university leaders' experiences to be foregrounded. As such scholars in the area of narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Connelly and Clandinin 1990) suggest that stories are most appropriate to meaning making and documenting rich experiences. These experiences are not simply about the individual as stories are always embedded within a larger social system. My intention was to ensure that university leaders were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences and the ways in which these experiences interacted with their social contexts. As noted by Polkinghorne (1988, 13), narrative inquiry is "the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite". In line with a focus on giving emphasis to participants' own experiences, the university vice chancellors told their stories of being and becoming a leader on their own terms and raised matters about what they thought was important in reflecting on their experience. Instead of a structured interview, narratives reflect what university leaders thought was eventful, meaningful and critical in their own

experiences. In this regard, the imposition of questions as evident in interview-based studies was avoided. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 17) states "it makes sense to study the world narratively" if we understand that the social world is narratively produced. Given the focus on stories, the interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. Throughout the study I use pseudonyms and confidentiality was ensured to all participants. In doing so the integrity of the research was maintained. Participants were also clear about their right to participate in the study and their right to withdraw at any stage of the study. All audio recordings of the interviews were carefully transcribed. These transcriptions formed the basis of all data and analysis. In this article I follow a thematic content analytical approach. In this process, all transcriptions were read several times in order to develop major themes. I read the transcripts individually and also with my field notes taken during the interview process and therefore followed a grounded approach (Freeman 1996) to data analysis. In reading the transcripts several times, I was deeply immersed in the rich narratives both at the individual level and collectively. With access to rich knowledge of participants' stories, I was able to construct initially some of the ideas about how to organise and analyse the data. All these ideas were named and coded in different colours. The varied colour coding system permitted the identification of key ideas through which themes could be developed. Ideas were refined further and produced initial themes. From the initial themes, further themes and sub-themes were developed and a final thematic analysis was produced and is used as a basis for the data presentation and analysis in this article

GOOD SCHOLARSHIP

In considering the qualities of successful leadership Gevers (2021) suggests that the hallmark of effective leadership is the emphasis placed on a university's position regarding academic and research excellence. A central message emerging from the analysis is that a qualities of a good VC rests in the ability to give eminence to good scholarship. This as the analysis will show is deeply weaved into the ideas and personal capacities of the VC. Thus, the ability to lead effectively requires the quality of research excellence at the personal level:

"You can't go to the army and expect to be a Vice-Chancellor. They must stay within, I mean they must look at what are the things that identifies a Vice-Chancellor, and as I said, they must become good scholars I think I am not an exception to that."

As Swartz et al. (2019) note while the core business of a university is fluid and fluctuates, research and research quality is a stamp of authentication for distinguishing a university from its competitors. Here there is firm expression of, an investment in, and personal celebration of scholarship. The identification as a "good scholars" is also an identification of effective

leadership and a marker of success. While high managerial skills also appear to be necessary in leading effectively (Goodall 2009), the participant here firmly roots his leadership role on his scholarly ability and with the expectation of being a VC. In describing how this quality arose the VC reached back to his childhood, his upbringing and the social and cultural norms through which he makes sense of scholarship qualities:

"I never aimed to become a Vice-Chancellor in my life. It was never the thing that, when I was thinking about career and so forth. My father was a school principal, that is the only sort of closest association one can say. So to arrive at where I am, it was by accident rather than by plan. My first love obviously was always science. I thought I would be a great scientist, which I think I am, so I don't have a problem with that. That was always my wish, to be the best that I could be in my chosen field. That is the first ... like all Vice-Chancellors, as I have said, I think they have got to be first and foremost good scholars. This is really to me, that is the foundation of the job. Having that as the rock bed or the core, you must then ask yourself, what are the complexities or the challenges that you face at a particular instance and how are you going to handle those complexities."

Evident in this narrative is the re-instantiation of and the priority given to personal ambition revolving around being a "great scientist", to "be the best" and this is foregrounded as the first element of quality that defines effective leadership. There was no considered plan and pathway to becoming a VC except a focus on academic respectability. In other words, the pathway to leadership rested on research and academic experience but more than that emphasis is placed on the legitimacy of a leader with credible research scholarship. In line with other scholars, the articulation between the personal narrative and the university ethos around research, the VC's credibility, power, status and eminence is directly related to being an expert in the field (Goodall 2009; Gevers 2021; Scott et al. 2010; Macfarlane 2012). As Goodall (2009) states being a scholar and a VC affords greater respect, legitimacy, credibility which extends the expression of power in shaping the direction of the university. A VC who is a "good scholar" also offers symbolic power to the institution's vision where research is prominent aspect of academic life. In clarifying how these leadership skills emerged, the VC mentioned family leaders and shared educational values as he critically reflected on the socio-cultural context in which he was raised. In doing so, the VC pointed to the significance of learning "off the job" (Inman 2009) while highlighting contextual and historical specificities:

"The second is, as I said I grew up in a family of leaders, so I understood leadership almost by socialisation. I didn't sort of learn for the first time to make decisions when I became a Vice-Chancellor. I saw my dad as a Principal do that all the time, I saw my grandfather do that as the local chief, and sometimes I was often asked to put my thoughts and how I would solve a problem, so I learnt the leadership skills from my family. And then when I went into school, whenever there were leadership challenges, I will be asked to give an opinion. From the time when I was in primary school, when I was in high school, and everywhere I have served in the world, that has

always been the case. I will be asked for an opinion, and I will give you just an example. I was once serving on a board of highly prominent people from outside the country and I asked them why do they need somebody [the VC] from so far away to come and be part of the Board. And they said to me, 'if you haven't said anything, nobody is happy'. So, I think my ability to give opinions of leadership has grown out of this background that permeates my life all the time."

The narrative illuminates the contextual variation that intersects with race and class in providing a particular optic through which we can understand the development of leadership skills. The middle-class family of teachers, the VC's identity as the grandson of the chief in the local area manifested in a particular conceptualisation of power and leadership. Thus, the early manifestations of power provided legitimacy to the VC which was further consolidated operating in a web of relations that stretched from the family background, the chief, the father's role as principal, the validation from primary to high school and to the global academic world. The focus on international board membership serves to reify the global standing as a good scholar. In other words, the VC signals in this narrative his standing as a scholarly leader which permeates from the early stages of life pointing to cultural specificity while signalling his standing as an international scholar as a prestigious board member. As Goodall (2009) also suggests, the VC has consolidated his position as an "expert".

LEADERSHIP IS AN IDEAS THING: "LET'S BE A RESEARCH-LED UNIVERSITY"

In this section I focus on leadership qualities that revolve around ideas and strategic leadership rather than the "clutter of paper work" and the "bureaucracy". The participant here reifies ideas and strategies as key to transforming the institutional vision which is key to effective leadership. These ideas and strategic planning are in line with the broader organisational structures where research-led universities are key to transformation agendas in South Africa (Leibowitz 2012).

"... there is an exaggerated view outside there that being a Vice-Chancellor is a very busy job. No, it is not. I don't think you use even 1% of your brain to become a Vice-Chancellor, or maybe at most 5% of your brain capacity can get used to that. It is an ideas thing and it is what you want to do as a Vice-Chancellor that you must identify yourself with in order to have an impact, or in order to be able to cope. There is a lot of clutter in terms of paper work, the bureaucracy of sitting in meetings and so forth. But really that is separate from the strategic and leadership nature of the position. You know the clutter that you do every day that is physical. Of course, everybody has a component of that in their job, but the real need of how you balance that physical clutter with the leadership thing, it is the important balance that you must strike as a Vice-Chancellor. Do you want to sit at every meeting, do you want to delegate properly, do you want to create the structures that allow you to breathe and think or do you want to create the structures that make you always want to be there like Robert Mugabe. You know, you must be there so that you can dictate everything"

In this narrative a dichotomy is established between a Robert Mugabe style leadership position, based on dictatorial power and the position of strategic leadership which as is evident allows

for delegation of authority in order to work on strategic ideas and planning. The latter is part of the transformational leadership which in South Africa is also part of democratic change (Leibowitz 2012; Cloete 2014). A focus on ideas and strategic leadership confirms the critical role that VCs can play in ensuring that the university is well positioned to deal with the turbulent context by navigating their role in the "clutter" of everyday bureaucracy. There is recognition here of the importance of their roles in determining the institutions goals and mission (Inglesi and Pouris 2008) which is based on prioritising strategic ideas. In other words, effective leadership is premised upon ideas and these must be led by VC who can direct the institution towards its goals:

"It [Ideas] can do many things, and so forth. What did we identify? *Let's be a research-led university*. Simple, and I knew that there were going to be very few people who would argue against that. As I say, they may not like it, but there are very few people who can stand up and shout on top of the roof and say, we are the university but we don't want to do research. They would make fools of themselves. So the question is, if that is the simple principle, how do all the other people who were not seeing it, then come to the table and that is the dynamic of what other people can do in the rest of the executive. But this principle is so sacred, people can't challenge it, somebody has to bring it back and say, let's rally around this and ya, that is basically what I am trying to capture. Because somebody really had to identify that and said this is where I am going to nail my mast. People will complain, but at the end of the day, you know, it was actually a no-brainer because universities are meant to do research. People could argue, but they will know that they will be arguing, not because it is actually true but because they are trying to realise, look we are studying from a low base, but you know you have to realise that you can only start from somewhere, and that is all that you needed to do."

Ideas and principles that have global appeal that underpin the very basis of a university's core business is key to good leadership. These ideas coalesce with a local institutional vision that profoundly shapes the culture of higher education-research. The principle of a "research-led university" and the need to lead through eliciting the support of the wider university community is part of the VCs philosophical understanding of how ideas, change and strategic planning come together in pursuing the vision. Noting the need to address the challenges that may arise the VC also points to the consolidation of this research-led vision through the support of the executive. Indeed, the strength of this vision and its indisputable argument suggests how these principles "raise the bar" of a university's standing. However, these bar raising standards emerge directly from the VC's own personal narrative of what is the standard of respectability in research. There is thus a continuum in personal research standing and the vision that is to be pursued in relation to being a "research-led" university. In transforming the university to a research-led institution and leading this strategic direction is key to successful leadership. This has resonance in global parameters of the purpose of a university. He is able to do this by ensuring that this transformative agenda is supported by the university community suggesting

as Dewar (2020) and Quimbo and Sulabo (2014) do that a collaborative and strategic ideas and planning have potential to build organisational productivity. In this regard, strategic leadership based on directing the research-led vision has the potential to transform the university. Becoming a leader and leading effectively is thus about separating the bureaucracy from the need to develop big ideas and act on it. Furthermore, this VC also separated these big ideas which are framed through his narrative on being a "great scientist" from the leadership courses which he believed cannot in itself support quality leadership:

"... my simple view is if you are a leader or you want to become a leader, I think choose one course and attend it and then ask yourself how does it actually tally with what you understand. Because lots of people do actually understand their own self-confidence, their own leadership abilities Anybody who attends more than one course for leadership, I think they should go away. They should actually drop out of leadership, you don't need that kind of stuff"

Leadership here is based on being a credible leader (Goodall 2006; 2009). The legitimacy of an effective leader is one who as has acquired respect through his research standing. It is this standing that provide the impetus for "self-confidence" and "own leadership" abilities described above. Leadership courses in this regard cannot compensate for this basic premise of leading, that is being a top scholar "provides a leader with a deep understanding or expert knowledge about the core business of universities" (Goodall 2009, 1089). In differentiating big ideas with quality, the VC drew attention to the consequences of leading without research respectability:

"If you have people who are almost at Senior Lecturer level leading big institutions that are supposed to actually deal with big issues, what it is telling you is you have got a bunch of people that do not have the leadership base that they need to guide change. It is a sad thing to say, but it is the truth. And that is why, even when they lead, they still remain subservient and they feel inferior."

The foundational premise of good leadership is research and it is this approach to leadership that informs the VCs view on being a good leader and his strategic priorities (Cloete, Bunting, Maassen 2015). Leading by example (as a "great scientist") in the vision to be a "research-led" institution and having the skills, capabilities and values around research separates confidence and leadership abilities from subservience and poor leadership.

TWIN PRINCIPLES: GLOBAL KNOWLEDGE AND DECOLONISING KNOWLEDGE

In the final part of the analysis I focus on the qualities of a VC that point to leading by recognising the social and cultural specificity of the institution and its historical patterns and processes which has direct relevance for the kind of research being produced. Scholars have

suggested knowledge systems in African universities rely on western epistemological foundations while marginalising local knowledge systems (Ndofirepi and Gwaravanda 2018; Johnson and Mbah 2021; Themane 2021). Ndofirepi and Gwaravanda (2018) suggest that universities must embark on decolonising thinking while ensuring that local knowledge systems shape African university's purpose and relevance. In this regard the VC recognised both the need for thinking de-coloniality while recognising the global flow of knowledge and the university's place within an international setting. As illustrated by Swartz et al. (2019) these twin principles of contextual specificity and international resonance marked his vision:

"We are not French, we are not German, we are not Indians, we are not Chinese. And you ask yourself, you can have the same thing put in front of you but you have got to interpret it in a particular way because you come from a particular history. ... people don't deny the universality of knowledge, of information or culture but when they have observed it, they often have to step back and say, 'but who are we, how do we filter this culture into our society, how do we filter this knowledge into our society, how does this knowledge actually relate to us as we are faced with challenges of development, of educating and bringing up our own children in South Africa', and regrettably I ask myself, 'what actually is going on in South Africa?' And the conclusion I came to, it may be crude, but it is this, that in South Africa we did not filter any information ... but you have got to interpret it in a particular way and we were not doing that in South Africa. And the education system was the worst. All it did was to ape, to imitate, to want to see that everything that comes from there, it is correct, and lets just do it that way. And you know I couldn't relate to that, I thought, this is a very sad society that does not understand its identity in the world and try and use this identity to interpret knowledge and also to gain insights into knowledge that other societies don't have ... there was no academic leadership at universities. It was a colonial leadership that always believed that the big ideas come from the motherland, and when they come here, they don't have to be debated, they must be translated."

Central to this position on decolonising knowledge is the recognition of the rootedness of the university within a local setting in South Africa. These principles around African-centred knowledge within the postcolonial/post-apartheid university context is a key dimension of the VC's strategic thinking in directing the university towards refusing a model that suggests that the "African university is a colonial satellite of the Western academy" (Dei 2014, 169). The VC points out that the South African university cannot be a repository of western knowledge without interpreting its unique contribution to knowledge within its local setting. Critiquing the structures of power and inequalities between the west and South Africa, the VC suggests that universities can no longer perpetuate these inequalities. A warranted objection is offered to South African education and knowledge as imitation. This optic towards a decolonised thinking emerges from the VC's own narrative about the histories of apartheid and colonialism which subjugated knowledge systems and created dependencies which have direct effects for the kind of research being produced. As Johnson and Mbah (2021) note research is not value-free and the ways in which research is fostered has effects for how the knowledge inequalities are

reinforced. As these authors state about the need for local appreciation of research in Africa:

"Research ... can provide an avenue by which to develop relevant solutions to social problems by honoring the voices, artifacts, histories, traditions, and knowledges of ... indigenous communities."

Decolonisation requires a re-thinking about whose knowledge is represented in research and the process through which knowledge is produced (Miller and Pointer 2019). In destabilising the status quo, the VC proffered a meaning of academic leadership where big ideas can no longer be sustained by dependency and reliance on western hegemonic frameworks. In doing so the role of the VC in this regard was to direct knowledge and research in ways that promoted African-centred knowledge systems but these systems of knowledge were reframed by twin principles of global and local recognition:

"Then you have your own other peers, as I was just saying to you. I have got my colleagues that I know at Oxford, Cambridge or Imperial College or the NIH or you name it, Harvard. These are people that would have been either contemporaries somewhere and now they are also holding important positions. You know the *Wellcome Trust* you name it, you will find somebody you will know there and there is something you need to do. And that also becomes another resource for you for ideas and for debate and sometimes for refining your own thoughts."

In honing back to the VC's own research standing, the notion of the global and the local become more apparent. Research endeavours must be situated within this nexus. The emphasis placed on international Ivy league and Russell grouping of outstanding universities and his linkages to this point to the twin principle of local and global while simultaneously emphasising the core argument in this article that the qualities and vales of a VC require expert knowledge and global research standing which then makes his connection with the global network of high standing authorities in the field possible.

CONCLUSION

Mainstream higher education research in South Africa often overlooks the role of the VC in leadership. VCs in South Africa are navigating a myriad of competing demands that have local manifestations in the social, cultural and political milieu. The transformation agenda demands attention to redressing the apartheid and colonial past that has shaped the university climate in the country. The role of the VC in directing universities towards this transformative agenda was highlighted in this article. In this regard the leadership strategies, ideas, values and the position taken by a VC towards this agenda can enable a changing climate in line with the policy direction in higher education (Department of Education 1997). Through a narrative enquiry based on the experiences of one black VC, this article highlights two central components in the qualities that demarcate effective leadership.

In the first instance, the research standing of the VC is an important measure of quality and guides how the VC understands leadership. The expert knowledge that translates into big ideas and vision, a focus on research as the basis and purpose of the university and the need to work within decolonised knowledge system while acknowledging the situatedness of knowledge within the global knowledge production system. Simply put, a "great scientist", and an academic of high standing scholarship, as the VC testified to, has greater expertise, can harness ideas about what is valuable for the purpose of the university which informs his role as a leader (Goodall 2009). Being a reputable scholar in the position of a VC permits an expansion of power, self-confidence, esteem (both within and outside the university) that makes international linkages possible and that permits the VC to pursue a research-led agenda while raising the bar and the standards of the university. Being a VC underlined by research expertise and standing raises the status of the university, makes it possible for the VC to lead where similar values of research are being reinforced while expanding the ability of the VC to pursue this research direction because as he noted "there are very few people who can stand up and shout on top of the roof and say, we are the university but we don't want to do research".

Secondly, the study has highlighted the need to address how leadership is articulated in/through life histories, family, and emerges from the particular experience of the VC. In other words, there is no one size fits all – what we need to understand is that VC's have their own trajectories which shape how they "do" leadership. In this study, the black VC emerges from a family background where race, class and gender manifested to produce particular possibilities. As the grandson of a chief, the son of a black school principal produced particular potentials and legitimation of power. His role within the socio-cultural context where male power in particular was legitimised offered possibilities to engage in the family, in primary school, high school and these parameters of leadership stretched into academic life. In these narratives, the emergence of leadership is produced within a socio-cultural and political setting where research excellence weaves through in powerful ways. In other words, the VC's narrative directs attention to both research credibility and socio-cultural positioning which permits particular understanding of leadership. Both components have effects for understanding leadership.

These issues highlight the ongoing significance of examining how university VCs frame their strategies in relation to the broader political environment and the need to transform South African higher education. The significance of research and the historical processes through which VCs make and shape decisions and the need for decolonised knowledge systems, are important in a local-oriented leadership framework that support transformation of knowledge, transformation of research climates within university institutions while articulating a vision that has global resonance.

Finally, there is some merit in thinking about leadership at the VC level in South Africa. The narrative study starts the process of understanding how the research standing of a VC has effects for what is possible to do, the ideas, strategic vision, and the ability to make decisions are entwined with the legitimacy of the VC as great scientist. This has effects for the overall vision and purpose of the university and the direction that it takes. Leadership is experienced in/through this research trajectory. It is experienced through reflections on the past narratives which include family upbringing and the socio-cultural norms through which leadership is learnt. It is learnt through the trajectory of being and becoming a researcher. In this study, leadership courses may be valuable. However, leadership skills are acquired in/through becoming a solid researcher. Thus, what VC's do and how they do leadership as well as their own personal narratives and life histories must be embedded within any leadership course if it is to address real life experiences of leadership and to be meaningful and relevant. As Inman (2009) states, the challenge is to ensure that the thick and rich testimonies of leadership experiences are brought into professional development.

Finally, an aspect of leadership which I have highlighted in this article which is at the bedrock of quality in universities is the research profile of the VC. If universities are to sustain their research agendas, they need effective leaders who have expertise and legitimacy as researchers themselves. As Goodall (2009, 13) notes, "experts, not managers, make the best leaders".

REFERENCES

- Badsha, Nasima. 2016. *Reflections of South African university leaders – 1981 to 2014*. Cape Town: African Minds and Council on Higher Education.
- Clandinin, D. Jean and F. Michael Connelly. 2000. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cloete, Nico. 2014. "The South African higher education system: Performance and policy." *Studies in Higher Education* 39(8) (October): 1355–1368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.949533>.
- Cloete, Nico, Ian Bunting, and Peter Maassen. 2015. "Research universities in Africa: An empirical overview of eight flagship universities." In *Knowledge production and contradictory functions in African higher education I*, ed. Nico Cloete, Peter Maassen, and Tracy Bailey, 18–31. Cape Town: African Minds.
- Cloete, Nico, Peter Maassen, and Tracy Bailey. (Ed.). 2015. *Knowledge Production and Contradictory Functions in African Higher Education*. Cape Town: African Minds.
- Connelly, F. Michael and D. Jean Clandinin. 1990. "Stories of experience and narrative inquiry." *Educational Researcher* 19(5) (June): 2–14. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002>.
- Council on Higher Education. 2016. *Reflections of South African university leaders 1951–2014*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.
- Dei, George J. Sefa. 2014. "Indigenizing the curriculum: The case of the African university." In *African indigenous knowledge and the disciplines*, ed. Gloria Emeagwali and George J. Sefa Dei, 165–

180. Rotterdam: Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-6209-770-4>.
- Department of Education. 1997. *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. Pretoria: Department of Education. https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/18207gen11960.pdf.
- Department of Education. 2008. *Report of the Higher Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Education Institutions (Final report)*. Pretoria: Department of Education. http://us-cdn.creamermedia.co.za/assets/articles/attachments/21831_racismreport.pdf.
- Dewan, Torun and David P. Myatt. 2018. “The Qualities of Leadership: Direction, Communication, and Obfuscation.” *American Political Science Review* 102(3) (August): 351–368. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055408080234>.
- Dewar, John. 2020. “The role of universities in times of crisis: A vice-chancellor’s perspective.” *Qualitative Research Journal* 20(4) (August): 405–410. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-06-2020-0072>.
- Du Preez, Petro, Anné H. Verhoef, and Shan Simmonds. 2016. “Rethinking and researching transformation in higher education: A meta-study of South African trends.” *Transformation in Higher Education* 1(1) (February): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v1i1.2>.
- Freeman, Donald. 1996. “The ‘unstudied problem’: Research on teacher learning in language teaching.” In *Teacher learning in language teaching*, ed. Donald Freeman and Jack C. Richards, 351–378. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gevers, Wieland. 2021. “Stuart J. Saunders (1931–2021): Mover and shaker, mostly behind the scenes, and key South African vice-chancellor of his time.” *South African Journal of Science* 117(3–4) (April): 1–2. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2021/9739>.
- Goodall, Amanda H. 2006. “Should top universities be led by top researchers and are they? A citations analysis.” *Journal of Documentation* 62(3) (May): 388–411. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00220410610666529>.
- Goodall, Amanda H. 2009. *Socrates in the Boardroom: Why Research Universities Should Be Led by Top Scholars*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Inglesi, Roula and Anastassios Pouris. 2008. “Where are our universities going? A review, twenty years later.” *South African Journal of Science* 104(9) (September): 345–348. <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC96841>.
- Inman, Margaret. 2009. “Learning to lead: Development for middle-level leaders in higher education in England and Wales.” *Professional Development in Education* 35(3) (July): 417–432. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674580802532654>.
- Jansen, Jonathan. 2017. *As by Fire: The End of the South African University*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Johnson, Ane Turner and Marcellus Forh Mbah. 2021. “(Un)subjugating indigenous knowledge for sustainable development: Considerations for community-based research in African higher education.” *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* 13(Summer): 43–64. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jcihe.v13iSummer.3707>.
- Leibowitz, Brenda. (Ed.). 2012. *Higher Education for the Public Good: Views from the South*. Stellenbosch: Sun Media.
- Levi, Margaret. 2006. “Why we need a new theory of government.” *Perspectives on Politics* 4(1) (February): 5–19. <http://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592706060038>.
- Macfarlane, Bruce. 2012. *Intellectual leadership in higher education: Renewing the role of the university professor*. *Research into Higher Education*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203817490>.
- Miller, Darlene and Rebecca Pointer. 2019. “Decolonising South African universities: Challenging the Anthropocene and re-centring indigeneity.” *South African Review of Sociology* 50(3–4) (March): 22–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2020.1734480>.

- Mtshali, Mduduzi Nkosinathi Gladwin and Radhamany Sooryamoorthy. 2019. “A research-inducing environment at a University of Technology in South Africa: Challenges and future prospects.” *Futures* 111(June): 194–204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2018.06.017>.
- Ndofirepi, Amasa Philip and Ephraim Taurai Gwaravanda. 2018 “Epistemic (in)justice in African universities: A perspective of the politics of knowledge.” *Educational Review* 71(5) (April): 581–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1459477>.
- Polkinghorne, Donald E. 1988. *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Quimbo, Maria Ana T. and Evangeline C. Sulabo. 2014. “Research productivity and its policy implications in higher education institutions.” *Studies in Higher Education* 39(10) (August): 1955–1971. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2013.818639>.
- Riessman, Catherine Kohler. 2007. *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. LA, California: Sage.
- Scott, Geoff, Sharon Bell, Hamish Coates, and Leonid Grebennikov. 2010. “Australian higher education leaders in times of change: the role of Pro Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor.” *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 32(4) (July): 401–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2010.491113>.
- Swartz, Rebecca., Mariya Ivancheva, Laura Czerniewicz, and Neil P. Morris. 2019. “Between a rock and a hard place: Dilemmas regarding the purpose of public universities in South Africa.” *Higher Education* 77(4) (June): 567–583. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-018-0291-9>.
- Themane, Mahlapahlapana J. 2021. “Drivers and inhibitors of diversity and social justice in the South African higher education sector: Reflections on a decolonised curriculum.” *South African Journal of Higher Education* 35(1) (March): 70–81. <https://doi.org/10.20853/35-1-4409>.