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BUILDING LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CAPACITY FOR DEANS IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

A thesis submitted to the School of Education of the Faculty of Humanities in fulfilment for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The contemporary university is a postmodern, neo-liberal, competitive, boundary-less knowledge conglomerate, a far cry from its historical traditional classical and collegial roots. Although remaining true to its primary mission of research, teaching and community engagement, its organisational form has changed significantly, with concomitant implications for governance, leadership and management. Simply put, the traditional methods of governance, leadership and management as practised in universities nowadays have been surpassed by more corporate-like approaches, characterised by performativity requirements and measures, intent on a more efficient and effective generation and provision of knowledge, in a very challenging internal and external environment. As witnessed elsewhere, the emergence of the entrepreneurial university locally illustrates a shift to a more business-like management and operational model with its focus on increased market share, fierce competition and multiple income streams. Deanship in the contemporary university is complex and challenging. It is even more so in South African universities where balancing global and perhaps unique local environmental drivers are key. It appears that deans in local universities take up their positions without appropriate training, adequate prior executive experience or a clear understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of their roles, and that they are not coping. The evidence presented in this thesis points to inadequate preparation and inappropriate levels of support for deans in the universities participating in this study. It identifies the need for a more strategic, integrated approach to leadership development as a means of achieving success in their critical roles and enabling effective performance. This thesis advances an approach to leadership development for deans, grounded in their contextual realities, cognisant of individual capabilities and the provision of relevant opportunities for reflection and learning on the job. To this end it demonstrates that: (i) the global and local context of higher education has changed dramatically with its concomitant added levels of complexity; (ii) this environment has implications for the conception and practice of leadership and management in universities; (iii) institutional contexts determine leadership and management behaviour in South African universities; and (iv) this setting provides the backdrop for leadership development for deans in South Africa.

Key words

contemporary university
academic leadership
executive management
corporatisation
managerialism
performativity
deanship
executive deanship
leadership development
leadership context
leadership capacity
leadership capital