# Conceptualizing transformation in the post-merger and incorporation environment era: A case of the Durban University of…

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**Introduction**

The knowledge of transformation in higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa has been focused mostly on redressing racial and gender imbalances of the past apartheid government. This is supported by Seedat, Khoza-Shangase and Sullivan (2014: 69) that there is a tendency to limit transformation to racial and gender composition of students and staff in gauging whether the institution has transformed. These researchers argue that it actually comprises broad factors such as sexual orientation of the workforce to ensure equitable representation at all levels. Joubert and Martins (2013: 112) argue that institutions of higher education continue to grapple with transformation issues due to additional pressure from stakeholders, including students, the business community and donors. Joubert and Martins (2013: 112) argue that the transformation agenda in the University of South Africa (UNISA) covers the entire spectrum of the strategic planning process, including the vision, mission, values and institutional operations. While, Wangenge-Ouma (2010: 481) cites funding as an important instrument that has been utilised by the South African government to try to achieve some of the stated goals of transformation, especially expanded access for Black students. Against this backdrop, this study attempts to expand the limited knowledge on transformation in HEIs by investigating how transformation is understood, in the era post merged and incorporated institutions. While, De Lange and Olivier (2008) mention attitudes, perceptions, practices and structures as ways of building social cohesion. This study is informed by these discourses on transformation, but also expands on them by investigating whether restructuring, changes in society, redressing past injustices, partnership in governance and overcoming inefficiencies and ineffectiveness do actually define transformation.

The primary objective of this study is thus to investigate the knowledge of transformation by institutional leaders, post merger and incorporation. The DUT was chosen as the merged university, made up of the previously predominantly White and Indian Technikons, with totally different cultures. The next section critically reviews the literature transformation in South Africa and internationally followed by a section on the methodology employed in this study. Lastly, the results of the study are discussed followed by conclusions, recommendations, limitations of the study and future research opportunities.

**Conceptual framework**

The term "transformation" can assume multiple meanings and definitions dependent on the context from which it emerges (Seedat, Khoza-Shangase & Sullivan 2014: 69). Researchers

in South Africa have defined transformation in terms of race (Francis & Hemson 2010); efficiency (Ntshoe 2004; Seedat et al. 2014: 70); change (Meyer & Botha 2004; Ngara 2003) and change of organizational strategy and structure, systems and processes, measurements and controls, culture and expectations, costs and capabilities (Oloyede 2007). Ncayiyane and Hayward (2007: 23) indicate that transformation includes institutional funding, student financing, curricular reform, student access and success, academic research, institutional culture, as well as equity and gender issues. Transformation is one word that captures the social, economic and political imperatives and aspirations that followed the collapse of apartheid and the onset of democracy in South Africa (Wangenge-Ouma 2010: 481). For the purpose of this study, transformation is not seen as a total change, however, it is seen as linked changes brought by the interventions of change including restructuring. While this study acknowledges previous arguments by different researchers, it attempts to enrich the meaning of transformation in this turbulent current HEIs in South Africa.

**Theoretical framework**

The objective of this study is to provide a theory-grounded reinterpretation of institutional transformation in a higher education institution in South Africa by exploring the interplay between recent changes in higher education systems understood as organizational fields; particular organizational leadership features of higher education institution influencing the understanding of transformation. Scott (2001) defines institutions as multifaceted, durable social structures, made up of symbolic elements, social activities, and material resources. According to Kraft's Public Policy (2007), institutional theory is policy-making that emphasizes the formal and legal aspects of government structures. Institutional theory is a widely accepted theoretical posture that emphasizes rational myths, isomorphism, and legitimacy. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) brought a new dimension to the discussion of institutions by introducing isomorphism (structural similarity), while Meyer and Scott's (1983) study proposed that both technical and institutional forces shape organizations. The university leader's knowledge of transformation as referring to institutional structures in light of institutional theory is further explored.

Dimaggio and Power (1983) identify three general mechanisms of isomorphism: Coercive isomorphism results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organisations by other organization which depend on and are informed by cultural expectations in the society within which they operate (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Organizations can receive these

pressures as force, persuasion or invitation to join in collusion (Meyer & Rowan 1977). Normative isomorphism refers to, 'relations between the management policies and the background of employees in terms of educational level, job experience and networks of professional associations' (Paauwe & Boselie 2003). It is associated with professionalisation, which is often interpreted as, 'the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define conditions and methods of their work, to control "the production of producers" , and to establish a cognitive base and legitimacy for their occupational autonomy' (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). The degree of professionalisation of employees affects the nature of the management control system (DiMaggio & Powell 1983) Norms and values that professionals develop through formal education and professional networks increase the similarity of the skills and knowledge of the total workforce in a given organizational field (Boon, Paauwe, Boselie & Den Hartog 2009). Mimetic isomorphism results from the organizational response to uncertainty. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), when organizational technologies are poorly understood, when goals are ambiguous, or when the environment creates symbolic uncertainty, organizations may model themselves on other organizations' in the organizational field, which are perceived to be successful and legitimate. Organizations may do so without being fully cognizant of the means-ends relationships that reside within the structures and processes' (Grewal & Dharwadkar 2002).

Institutional theory predicts that universities will respond to such coercion by engaging in visible activities, such as restructuring and streamlining operations. Restructuring plans at universities mimic many of the visible actions already taken by many businesses during the early part of the 1990's (Bealing, Riordan & Riordan 2011: 9). Institutional theory focuses on the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which structures, including schemes, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behaviour (Scott 2004). North (1990) argues that institutional theory itself originated from the combination of transaction costs and human behaviour theories. The author argues that the combination of both theories enables to understand the reasons for institution creation and their role in social life. Institutional theory predicts that organizations will reflect and conform to normative pressures in society so that they maintain legitimacy (Felstead, Jewson, Phizacklea & Walters 2002). Institutional theory asks questions about how social choices are shaped, mediated and channelled by the institutional environment (Wooten & Hoffman 2008). Different components of institutional theory explain how these elements are created, diffused, adopted, and adapted over space and time; and how they fall into

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decline and disuse. Institutional theory has been influential in improving people's understanding of contextual features that may support or impede development (Currie & Swanson 2009). This study is grounded in this theory as it tests perceptions of the university leaders on their understanding of transformation in this turmoil and turbulent period in South Africa, where people are living and experiencing constant changes that are essential to the social, cultural and educational transformation.

**Literature review**

**Transformation in HEIs: A South African Perspective**

Understanding transformation in an ever changing South African higher education context is not an easy task as it is influenced by multiple agendas which might be linked to historical inequities, huge cultural differences, as well as excessive interference and politicisation by council members who are mostly represented by external stakeholders. Section 1.7 of White Paper 3 (RSA 1997) indicates that the transformation of higher education is part of the broader process of South Africa's political, social and economic transition, which includes political democratisation, economic reconstruction and development, and redistributive social policies aimed at equity. Oloyede (2007) argues that transformation is the non-incremental and simultaneous change of an organization's strategy and structure, systems and processes, measurements and controls, culture and expectations, costs and capabilities. In 2002, the South African government approved the restructuring of higher education which resulted in the mergers and incorporations within the sector (BuaNews 2003). Singh (2001) argues that the restructuring of higher education is a worldwide phenomenon and it is possible to identify some common trends in the restructuring process as seen in many developed economies in the 1990s. Higher educational institutions are increasingly being required to demonstrate efficiency, accountability and productivity from various quarters, notably from the state which is usually the major source of funding for higher education, as well as diversifying their sources of funding (Lee 2004). This article attempts to add knowledge to the previous research studies by investigating institutional and external factors that could define the term *"transformation"* in higher education institutions in South Africa, post-merger and incorporation. This study is guided by discussions advanced by the researchers above, although it further investigate leaders' knowledge of and abilities relating to transformation as aligned to restructuring.

Hall, Symes and Luescher (2004: 28) argue that as a general qualification, it must be reiterated that the South African restructuring of higher education is unique, to the extent that it is driven by a political agenda of transformation, redress and equity which explicitly seeks to break the apartheid mold of higher education. However, there was strong opposition to the mergers and it was contended that the process was driven by government through a mixture of politics, legislation and persuasion (Jansen 2003). Schultz (2009) echoes the sentiment that mergers have been a major and highly contested theme in higher education in the past decade. In reference to the South African context, research shows that a political decision was made to change the higher education landscape. This has had the unintended effect of lower levels of organisational commitment and potentially lower employee job performance in the merger-bound higher education institutions as a result of the 'slap-dash' manner in which the restructuring occurred. While in other countries as Kinjanjui (2007) indicates, visionary and creative leadership is necessary for transformation of higher education in Kenya and notes that restructuring of leadership, governance and management systems of each institution should be a priority. Varghese (2004: 12) indicates that the process of institutional restructuring also implies the application of efficiency parameters and accountability measures practiced in the private and corporate sectors to public institutions. The researcher further argues that improving managerial efficiency is central to institutional restructuring. Although this study is informed by arguments advanced above, another form of transformation, including curriculum reform, is explored in this study.

**Higher Education Landscape: A Global Perspective**

Shattock (2013: 226) argues that restructuring has uniformly been imposed top down, often with only cursory consultation with grass-roots academic staff, has emphasised the distance that has grown between staff at the periphery and staff at the centre of the university. The author mentions that the last decade has seen an acceleration of change in the way British universities have been governed, led and managed. This has substantially been driven by the instability of the external environment, which has encouraged a greater centralisation of decision-making, leading to less governance and more management, but it is also a consequence of the growing convergence of the governance and management models of the pre- and post-1992 universities (Shattock 2013: 217). Munene (2008: 3) argues that the globalised political economy has had significant ramifications for higher education, and scholars have documented these consequences from both organisational as well as regional perspectives. Vaira (2004) has focused on the organisational consequences, arguing that the

entrepreneurial university is a local organisational adaptation to globalisation forces. Such universities, although with differing histories and structures, reveal a common and recognisable pattern of organisational restructuring of the entrepreneurial archetype. Vaira (2004) further avers that other scholars have paid attention to the relationship between the transformed universities and society. The alignment of public universities to the marketplace gives rise to new forms of institutional management aimed at internal efficiency, 'massification' of institutions with differentiated and competing access as a means of generating additional revenue, and privatisation of non-core functions to contain costs (Mondoh 2002 and Mwinzi 2002: 4). This study is partly aligned to the aspects highlighted by researchers above although, it extends by linking the understanding and knowledge of transformation of the university.

Among the most significant shifts is the transformation toward a public organisational model with accompanying changes in power and authority relations (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri & Arnal, 2008). These changes reflect the modern university as a corporate enterprise with management structures designed to respond to multiple demands that transform the institutions into well-developed systems (de Boer & Goedegebuure 2009; Marginson & Considine 2000). This corporatisation of universities poses a number of challenges for senior executives, including the need to encourage middle level leaders to bridge the divide between academic and managerial cultures efficiently and effectively (de Boer et al. 2000). Yet many academics, including those in Australian universities, have expressed scepticism about leadership and management, preferring to embrace the more scholarly roles of research and teaching (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales 2008). According to Shattock (2013: 218), when to this is added a small group of private university institutions and 13 UK university overseas campuses of varying legal status and local partnership arrangements, it is apparent that generalisations about governance in British higher education, if not about leadership and management, are no longer plausible in the way they were in 2003. Largely this is because the decade has witnessed a radical change in the structure of university finance in England and incorporates a whole new set of strategic and managerial incentives (Shattock 2013: 218). In 2005 the University of Minnesota created the Transformational Leadership Programme (TLP) to help develop its internal resources for leading strategic process improvement projects and improving performance results across the system (Laursen 2009: 34). The author claim that the TLP not only helps drive the success of particular strategic objectives but it also develops a new skills set, language, and energy that is critical in driving

cultural change at the university. The programme incorporates multiple change management; tools and techniques into the curriculum, providing participants an opportunity to improve their communication, critical thinking, and strategic management skills.

**Responsive curriculum and restructuring in HEIs in South Africa**

The curricula of South African higher education institutions has been seen as sluggish to the ever-changing societal demands, government requirements, drastic legislative reforms, industry needs and global pressures. Watson, Motala and Kotecha (2009: 26) suggest that caution needs to be exercised regarding curriculum 'standardization', which is frequently mentioned in policy documents, alongside the need for curriculum change or restructuring. Key trends which are bringing higher education in line with other social arrangements, designed to position national and regional economies for global success, include the increasing development of labour market responsive curriculum reforms intended to appeal to employers and students as 'customers' and 'clients'. A further justification for the shift towards programmes is the argument that curricula need to be responsive to the needs of society (Moore 2003: 304). Vaira (2004: 489) argues for the growing need to pursue, warrant and improve quality, effectiveness, efficiency and responsiveness in all the strategic higher education activities (didactic, research, curriculum innovation, staff and budgeting). Fiscal discipline, efficiency and cost-benefit optimization principles from the world of business, are seen as the key to the transformation of higher education in the direction of greater responsiveness to society (Singh 2001a: 9). Different researchers (Cross, Mungadi & Rouhani 2002; Singh 2001) perceive business re-engineering as a tool for redressing the effects of the apartheid system in higher education institutions. This study further interrogates whether overcoming inefficiencies and ineffectiveness post-merger and incorporations could be regarded as features of transformation. While this study is guided by business principles related to restructuring, an extension is made regarding their responsiveness to society, including students, civil society, government and business.

Kulati and Moja (2007: 166) note confusion with the scope of responsibility of governance structures, with students often challenging the role of councils as the primary governance body, and seeking instead to establish institutional forums as alternate structures of governance authority to management. A survey conducted at 35 institutions reveals fairly widespread complaints amongst students, staffs and other constituencies that gaining access to governance structures had not led to empowerment, nor to effective participation (Cloete, 2007: 276). The Soudien Report (2008: 103) indicates that a precondition of the successful

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transformation of the higher education system is, as White Paper 3 argues, the "transformation of the structures, values and culture of governance" (White Paper 3: 3.1). Section 3.2 of the White Paper 3 indicates that the Ministry is well aware that governance in higher education institutions continues to be characterised by struggles for control, lack of consensus and even conflict over differing interpretations of higher education transformation. In South Africa, governance structures in higher education institutions have neglected national imperatives of accommodating people living with disabilities. The study conducted by Matshedisho (2007: 685) in 24 higher education institutions in South Africa concludes that the country seems to be moving along a contradictory path and that it should make a commitment to prioritize equal access to higher education for disabled students. Zide (2010) is also of the view that not enough has been or is being done to meet the different needs of disabled staff and students. This study is also informed by the previous researchers' arguments regarding people living with disabilities in universities. However, this study further examines the university leaders' knowledge of disability as a feature of transformation in higher education institutions.

**Research methodology**

A mixed-methods approach (Cresswell 2009) was employed with both a structured questionnaire that reached a large number of employees in leadership positions (junior to middle), enabling some quantification of findings, and qualitative in-depth interviews targeting university leaders in middle and senior management positions. The interviews were piloted on mid-level and senior leaders to gauge their knowledge and understanding of transformation, post-merger and incorporation at DUT. This was conducted before using a structured questionnaire to collect descriptive data. According to Brynard and Hanekom (2006), questionnaires provide respondents with an opportunity to carefully consider their responses to the various questions in the questionnaire. The study employed stratified random sampling of 191 respondents, ideal to test for the finding's reliability and validity, distributed equitably between academic and non-academic leaders. A host of researchers (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005 and De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2005) argue that a sample can only be described as representative if it has the same properties or characteristics as the population relevant to the research in question. This application of the stratified random sampling method is consistent with the assertions of De Vos *et al.* (2005). The quantitative survey targeted university leadership between Peromnes Grade 8 and 6 (junior and middle management) which were identified as the total population. A structured

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questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was developed with a range from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) undecided, to (4) agree and (5) strongly agree.

This study embraced the interpretivist perspective as prescribed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornill (2007: 103) as it is investigating the knowledgeability and understanding of transformation in the post-merger and incorporation era at a higher education institution. The preference for this methodological discourse was made as it was deemed relevant to help explore, analyse and investigate the views and perspectives of leaders in the case of management research, particularly in the field of organisational development. The qualitative aspect of this study also used a non-probability purposive sampling where 28 university leaders in middle and senior management positions were surveyed. In-depth interviews were conducted with 28 academic and non-academic leaders from Peromnes Grade 1 to 5, as well as key stakeholders including representatives from trade unions and the Student Representative Council (SRC). These included Vice Chancellor and Principal, 3 Deputy Chancellors: Academic, Research and Administration, 6 Faculty Deans, four Executive Management members, Registrar, Director: Human Resources and Finance, respectively. Furthermore, six academic Heads of Department, one Research Director and one Director for Quality Directorate and Marketing and Communication were interviewed. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with presidents (2) and secretaries of trade unions and two Student Representative Council (SRC) members, respectively.

**Research instrument**
The researcher acknowledged a number of instruments available in the literature that can be adopted, however, given the current turmoil regarding the transformation in HEIs in South Africa it was imperative to design an instrument that is responding to the current environment. As all participants were competent, they were capable of completing the questionnaires unassisted. Items in the structured questionnaire were based on ten leading statements testing the perceptions of the respondents on their knowledge of transformation. These statements were informed by a plethora of researchers such as on redressing the racial transformation (Francis & Hemson 2010); restructuring (Hall & Lueschen 2004; Seedat et al. 2014); moving from the comfort zone, changes in society, redressing past injustices and partnership in governance (Zide 2010). The variable on overcoming inefficiencies was aligned to Jobert and Martins (2013) and Ntshoe (2004). The items were measured using a

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five-point Likert scale which was developed with a range from (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree and (3) undecided to (4) agree and (5) strongly agree, testing the perceptions of the university leaders through leading statements. The qualitative question on the research participants' understanding of transformation was informed by a number of researchers including Hayward and Ncayiyane (2007); Seedat et al. (2014) and Wandenge-Ouma (2010).

**Data collection**

The data were collected over a three month period from May to July 2013. Of the total of 191 questionnaires disseminated, 133 generated a 70% response rate. To maintain confidentiality, the questionnaires were distributed and collected by the researcher. The Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha values for individual dimensions were high and a reliability coefficient of 0.947 or higher was recorded.  A triangulation method was employed in this study for improving reliability of research or evaluation of the qualitative findings (Golafshami 2003: 7) as it interviewed leaders at different employment categories. Babie and Mouton (2001) method was applied to achieve credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Thus, reliability was achieved by triangulation, debriefing and purposive sampling. Qualitative research findings in this study were triangulated by the structured interviews directed to the research participants that were between junior and middle leadership levels. Furthermore, qualitative findings were also triangulated by different questions posed to different research participants who were at different leadership levels and different stakeholders.

**Data analysis**

The quantitative data collected from the respondents was analyzed using SPSS (version 12), for data capturing, presentation, analysis and interpretation. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis and interpretation. The NVivo software (version 10) was used for organizing, analysing and sharing data.

**Researchers' roles and recording of data**

Permission was requested and granted by the DUT Ethics Committee to conduct the study, and consent was formally obtained from the participants. At the same time the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was maintained and guaranteed at all times. This study undertook a pilot approach prior to engaging in the study full scale.

### Research findings

The research findings of this study indicate a considerable need for the university leaders to have an insight and knowledge of transformation, post-merger and incorporation. A qualitative and frequency analysis were undertaken to determine exact areas where change management interventions are needed.

**Table 1: Knowledgeability of transformation**

|  | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **At my university transformation refers to:** | | | | | |
| Racial transformation | 6 | 15 | 22 | 44 | 14 |
| The restructuring of the institution | 4 | 10 | 17 | 51 | 19 |
| Moving away from the comfort zone to the unknown condition | 6 | 13 | 26 | 44 | 11 |
| Reflecting on changes taking place in our society | 3 | 12 | 26 | 44 | 11 |
| Redressing past injustices | 3 | 12 | 24 | 45 | 16 |
| Institutional structures (Council, Senate, Senex, Committees, MANCO) as pillars of change | 5 | 8 | 29 | 42 | 17 |
| Partnership in governance (state, civil society and stakeholders) | 3 | 14 | 21 | 44 | 19 |
| Attracting quality employees | 8 | 13 | 37 | 43 | 18 |
| Overcoming inefficiencies | 7 | 15 | 21 | 39 | 18 |
| Overcoming ineffectiveness | 8 | 15 | 27 | 32 | 18 |

This study indicates that more than 56% of the 133 respondents had an understanding of transformation in the context of race. Only 21% of them had a different view. The research findings reveal nearly 70% of the respondents as understanding transformation in the context of restructuring of the institution. This is a much higher figure than the one relating to race above (at 56%) and all other variables of the study. Only 13% of the subjects had a declared disagreement with the latter finding. There was an equal percentage (71%) of the academic and administrative leaders had knowledge of transformation as referring to the restructuring of the institution with only 15% of the academic leaders and 11% of the administrative leaders having expressed opposing views.

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|  |  | Job categories | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | Academic | Academic support | Administration | Technical |
| Disagree | % within job categories | 15% | 9.1 | 11 | 20 |
| Undecided | % within job categories | 15% | 18.2 | 19 | 30 |
| Agree | % within job categories | 70 | 73 | 70.2 | 50 |

**Table 2: Cross-tabulation between "at my university transformation refers to the restructuring of the institution" and job categories"**

This study shows nearly 56% of subjects regarded transformation as referring to moving away from the comfort zone into the unknown. An equal percentage focused on race, above. Only 19% held an opposite opinion. Over 60% of the research subjects understood transformation as referring to changes taking place in our society. This dwarfs the observation on race, which stood at 56%. Only 15% had negative knowledge. The research findings on redressing past injustices, at nearly 60%, are closely equated to the statement on transformation as referring to reflecting the changes taking place in society. The research participants who were in disagreement were at 13%, which is also comparable to the statement that transformation refers to the restructuring of the institution.

The research findings indicate 62% of the research participants as understanding transformation in the context of institutional structures as pillars of change. This total is much higher than the statement advanced above that transformation reflects the changes taking place in society (61%) and is lower than the percentage of respondents who understand

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transformation as referring to restructuring, at 70%. Only 17% of the respondents were in disagreement with the latter statement. The findings reveal that half of the study respondents (50%) were divided regarding the statement that transformation refers to partnerships in governance. The statement referring to the fact that transformation refers to partnership in governance had the highest respondents who were undecided (43%), as compared to other variables of the study.

| | | Discipline | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Business Studies Unit | Faculty of Accounting and Informatics | Faculty of Applied Sciences | Faculty of Arts and Design | Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment | Faculty of Health Sciences | Faculty of Management Sciences |
| Disagree | % within job categories | 22 | 64 | 27.3 | 7.1 | 36 | 36 | 36 |
| Undecided | % within job categories | 33.3 | 3.2 | 36.4 | 21.4 | 25 | 24 | 23.8 |
| Agree | % within job categories | 44.4 | 90.3 | 36.4 | 71.4 | 38 | 40.4 | 40.4 |

**Table 3: Cross-tabulation between "at my university transformation refers to overcoming inefficiencies" and job categories**

The study findings record the total percentage of 61% of the respondents who referred to transformation as attracting quality employees. This finding equates with the knowledge of transformation as referring to reflecting the changes taking place in society (61%), as presented above. There were only 17% who did not share the same view with the latter statement. The total percentage of 57% regarded the finding that transformation refers to overcoming inefficiencies as being correct. This is comparable with the perception of transformation moving from the comfort zone into the unknown, as shown above.

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There was an almost similar percentage (54%) of both academic and administrative leaders having knowledge that transformation refers to overcoming inefficiencies, with 29% of the academic leaders and 16% of the administrative leaders having opposite knowledge.

Knowledge of transformation referring to overcoming inefficiencies had a significant relationship with job categories (p<0.015).

**Table 4: cross-tabulation between "at my university transformation refers to overcoming inefficiencies" and discipline**

**Chi-Square Tests**

|  | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 50.335a | 28 | .006 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 56.805 | 28 | .001 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 8.073 | 1 | .004 |
| N of Valid Cases | 127 |  |  |

a. 32 cells (80.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .14.

The cross-tabulation findings reveal the high percentage of 90% of the Faculty of Accounting and Informatics who had knowledge that transformation refers to overcoming inefficiencies, followed by 71% of the Faculty of Arts and Design respondents. An almost equal percentage of 36% for both the Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment and Faculty of Management Sciences had opposite knowledge. Knowledge of transformation as referring to overcoming inefficiencies had a significant and practical relationship with discipline (<0.006). The study findings reflect that 50% of the respondents had an understanding of

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transformation as overcoming ineffectiveness. This is comparable between the latter sub-dimension and transformation, referring to the partnership in governance. Nearly a quarter (23%) of the respondents did not concur with the latter statement.

**Major findings of the study**

The prevalence of views on transformation were fairly dominantly focused on restructuring the institution, which stood at 70% with an almost equal percentage (71%) of both academic and administrative leaders having the same knowledge. The study findings indicate that this variable was more prevalent than even the most commonly anticipated ones such as race (56%) and redressing past injustices (59%). Other perceived elements of transformation were also high: changes taking place in society at 61% and institutional structures as pillars of bringing change at 62%.

The qualitative observations on the understanding of transformation within DUT were categorized into three nodes or themes, which are internal, external (factors) and those based on operational activities. The findings indicate the total coverage of the research participants understanding transformation as being based on internal factors, which include: transforming the curriculum and the creation of a research culture; changed student attitudes and behaviour; staff demographics; conducive management systems; programme specialization; and increased numbers of women graduates in scarce skills qualifications such as Engineering. This has been confirmed by the following observation advanced by a member of the senior management team within the university, that:

*"Transformation is a broad term looking at the way you respond to the current needs of society, in terms of curriculum and how responsive the curriculum is and how it takes care of the experiences of students as customers. It also refers to the management systems creating an enabling environment so that people can do things and how it impacts on student experience. Transformation refers to improving the research culture where it was and where it should be".*

The respondents referred to their understanding of transformation as being based on the external factors at DUT with the total coverage of: responding to current societal needs; experiences of students on campus; legislative reforms; changes in government, industry,

South African demographics across the globe. Concurrent with the previous passage, the member of the senior management team pointed out that:

*"Transformation is kind of self-inflicting and is dependent on the external environment. Government policy and procedures force university to change. For example, transformation in curricula in universities should not have changed by its initiatives but have been forced by government because of changes in the sector, industry and changes in leadership. Transformation is influenced by external forces, legislative reforms and curriculum renewal and it has been forced by the DoHE, government, industry, sector and internal management".*

Certain participants based transformation on redressing past imbalances such as: staff; undergraduate and postgraduate student representation; management; demographic changes; the move from apartheid into democratic government; people living with disabilities redressing the institutional structures; and better balance in terms of racial composition. According to the Head of Department (non-academic):

*"Transformation has to do with the participation of the previously disadvantaged groups e.g. women and people living with disabilities. Transformation means moving from apartheid to democracy. Transformation refers to the participation from all stakeholders in university structures. Transformation refers to what needs to be done to redress the imbalances of the demographics of staff, students and postgraduates".*

The research participants' revelation of their understanding of transformation has been based on operational activities. The respondents cited: restructuring or realignment; teaching and learning; retention of students; access; streamlining of functions; focus on key goals; culture; and mind-set changes. In reference to this, some of the following observations were made by a senior member of the university:

*"I have restructured the faculty to allow realignment of the faculty between the core function and the following committees were established:*

o    *Teaching and learning, assessments, access and retention of students*

o    *Research and higher degrees*

o    *Health and safety*

*I've also streamlined our functions which allow for capacity building".*

Furthermore, the participants indicated clear communication, definition of roles and responsibilities and inclusive recruitment and selection processes as features of transformation within the university. Concurrent to the latter statement, the trade union indicated that:

*"Transformation refers to clear communication, roles and responsibilities to be clearly defined. Recruitment and selection in HR was operating without policies with timeframes and the HR interview scoring system was poor".*

The research results, as gleaned from the in-depth interview findings, reveal that the term "transformation" in a higher education institution is multifaceted and has multi-perspectival connotations. The research findings show internal and external factors such as redressing past imbalances with mainstreamed operational activities, responding to students, employees, society, industry or business, government and global needs as the main cornerstones of transformation in higher education institutions.

The research findings also reveal a multiplicity of factors shaping institutional transformational agenda. The transformational agenda has been seen as being influenced by both internal and external factors. The internal factors have been identified as influencing transformation, which include: student access and retention; change in attitude and behaviour; and streamlined functions and business processes with the aim of aiding efficiencies. Another of the central elements shaping the transformation agenda in higher education institutions include core factors (internal) which are the cornerstones of universities' existence. These factors include: curriculum reform; research productivity; quality learning and teaching; staff and student demographics reflecting provincial and national statistics; funding; equity of input (women in the Engineering field which has been previously dominated by males in South Africa); and equity of output and improvement of qualifications. This study suggests that core factors (internal) are influenced or shaped by external factors (including rapid legislative reforms, changes in government, industry, funding, South African demographics, global changes and societal needs) in order for the transformation agenda to be realised. This study further suggests that higher education institutions and the national transformation agenda can be influenced by internal (operational and core) and external factors. Operational factors focus on achieving the set goals of the university with the aim of improving the

effectiveness, programme specialization, restructuring and change of culture and mind-set as pillars influencing the transformation agenda of the university.

**Discussion of the results**

The primary objective of this study was to investigate university leaders' knowledge and understanding of transformation at DUT post-merger and incorporation. The study findings are aligned with mimitic isomorphosim as one of the dimensions of the institutional theory. The mimitic isomorphism as per DiMaggio and Powell (1983) was followed to respond to uncertainties and poorly understood concept of transformation in this university. The university leaders' knowledge of transformation as based on restructuring (with the largest percentage of 70% as compared to the lowest other variables of the study and backed by qualitative findings), has been echoed by a plethora of researchers. This includes Lee (2004) who states that HEIs are under pressure to restructure where this restructuring is driven by a political agenda (Hall & Lueschen 2004) and improving managerial efficiency (Seedat et al. 2014: 70; Varghese 2004). While Shattock (2013) indicate that in Britain restructuring was imposed down to departments by university leaders. This finding was also supported by an equal percentage of both academic and administrative leaders. The previous researchers' point of view on transformation as referring to the academic restructuring which is limited to the curriculum.

About an equal number of the respondents agreed that the transformation of this university refers to race and redressing racial imbalances. This is in accordance with Francis and Hemson (2010) who also defined transformation as referring to race. However, the findings are disputed by other researchers who referred to transformation as bringing efficiency in financial terms (Ntshoe 2004); radical change (Ngara 2003) and change of organisation strategy, structure, systems and processes (Meyer & Botha 2004; Joubert & Martins 2013: 112). However, the disputes on the knowledge of transformation as referring to race and other variables of the study by researchers is not closely linked as their research studies were conducted in traditional universities that have not merged, which are totally different to the case of the merged and incorporated DUT of predominantly White and Indian Technikons, where race issues were rampant.

The highest percentage of the respondents who understood transformation as pertaining to changes in the country's demographics which was also confirmed by the in-depth interview

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findings with a higher total coverage is synonymous with Chalufu's assertion (2002) that at DUT, racial composition of staff reflects the demographics of the original institutions of ML Sultan (Indians) and Natal Technikon (Whites). One of the notable findings advanced by the respondents in terms of the knowledgeability of transformation as redressing institutional structures is not consistent or inconsistent with any published material on leadership and transformation discourse. Furthermore, there was no literature found on legislative reforms and changes in government and industry, as raised by the research participants as being linked to transformation. The highest agreement of the respondents's knowledge of transformation as central to restructuring follows the institutional theory which predicts that universities will respond to coercion by engaging in visible activities such as restructuring and streamlining operations (Bealing Jr et al. 2011: 9).

The study conducted by Singh (2001) cites efficiency and cost-benefit optimization principles from the private sector as seen as the key to the transformation of higher education which is similar to the respondents who have agreed that transformation at DUT refers to overcoming inefficiencies. These researchers do not specify whether the inferences are based on traditional, comprehensive or universities of technologies. Also, the relevance of the above researchers concurring with the research findings of this study were not conducted on the merged and incorporated institutions of higher learning.

The knowledgeability of transformation in this university has also been based on responding to the needs of the people living with disabilities, wherein, Matshedisho (2007) paints a dark picture on the study conducted at 24 higher education institutions which concluded that South Africa is moving along a contradictory path for prioritizing access to higher education for people living with disabilities. This has been supported by Zide (2010) who points out that not much has been done by institutions of higher learning for people living with disabilities. The arguments advanced above by the researchers on the state of the needs of people living with disabilities do not provide any empirical findings which might be used to triangulate these qualitative findings on the understanding of transformation in this university. The research findings on the perception that transformation is related to global changes is in accordance with the study conducted by Vaira (2004) who argues that universities adapt to global forces.

**Conclusion**

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This study concludes to analyse the data generated by using isophormism as one of the dimensions of the institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). This study observed that technical and institutional forces as proposed by Meyer and Scott (1983) influences transformation in the case of this study. The coercive isomorphism or mechanism related to transformation includes the influence of social partners, including trade unions, government, legislation, industry and councils as proposed by Najeeb (2014: 27). This article observes that transformation in higher education institutions in South Africa is not solely understood as referring to race and redressing past injustices, as evidently shown by the high percentage of the respondents who referred to transformation as restructuring of the institution (70%). Also, the research findings reveal that transformation refers to restructuring taking place in society and to institutional structures as pillars of bringing change. This study finding is aligned to the institutional theory (Bealing et al. 2011) that an institution creates the illusion of change to outside constituents in order to gain legitimacy. This article reveals that transformation in HEIs is influenced by the three interconnected factors (operations and core/internal and external factors) that directly and indirectly influence the institutional and national transformation agenda. This article concludes that internal factors that define transformation include student access and retention and achieving the set university goals. Furthermore, the internal factors which include curriculum reform, research productivity and quality learning and teaching are regarded as the cornerstones of transformation in this university. This article further concludes that external factors including legislative reforms, societal and ever-changing global needs directly influence transformation in this university.

The major limitation of the study was on the unavailability of the empirical studies on the knowledgeability of the university leaders on transformation in HEIs. The only available published data is qualitative and anecdotal which limit the researcher to use empirical previous research to his judgement. It is suggested that future research should be extended to other merged and incorporated HEIs in South Africa. Therefore, this study came to the conclusion that in order for the leaders to improve the knowledge of transformation, the following recommendations should be taken into consideration:

- The university leaders should embark on the realignment or restructuring of faculties and departments with clear outcomes and outputs in order for the transformation agenda to be realised.

- The university leaders should ensure that all university leaders share the same knowledge on transformation which could be earned by sensitizing the university leaders and interventions of change conducted.

- The university should define what transformation means to the university stakeholders and all university leaders should have transformation as a Key Performance Area in their performance contracts.

- The university leaders should ensure that institutional structures are deliberating on transformation issues and take measurable decisions and resolutions aimed at bringing about radical changes.

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