

## **Rethinking leadership profiles for collaborative and innovative activities in Higher Education Institutions in Zimbabwe**

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### **Abstract**

*In the context of Zimbabwe's evolving higher education landscape, rethinking leadership profiles is imperative for fostering collaborative and innovative activities. This paper argues that people who are in leadership positions are the catalysts for collaborative and innovative practices in higher education. The study interrogates requisite leadership profiles for steering higher education. Leadership that enhances collaboration and innovation seem to be the answer. The question remains whether it is in the veins of higher education leadership. The study sought to highlight the profiles required by leadership in higher education institutions for collaborative and innovative activities. The target population were universities and colleges in Zimbabwe. The sample included one vice chancellor, 6 deans, 8 departmental chairpersons, 10 programme coordinators and 15 lecturers from different universities and colleges, among others. The challenges brought in by the need to meet national development strategies for Zimbabwe demand for excellence among leadership to lay a strong foundation for collaborative and innovative activities. The study was qualitative and employed semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires to generate data. Purposive sampling was done to select lecturers from colleges and universities in Masvingo province. The study found out that there is need for leadership to lay emphasis on team building, creativity, and innovation, set trends, push benchmarks, pursue boundary management, be visionary, build networks and culture and empower employees to promote collaborative and innovative activities in higher education institutions. Leadership in higher education must create several committees like teaching and learning committee, materials development committee, resource mobilisation committee, programme and curriculum development committee, assessment committee, among others, to succeed.*

**Key terms:** innovation, collaboration, leadership, management, development, resource mobilisation, higher education institutions

## **Introduction**

Higher education institutions in Zimbabwe stand at a pivotal juncture to bring about innovation and collaboration for national development. People who are in decision-making positions are the focus of this study, which in this case, are referred to as leadership. Leadership plays a pivotal role in guiding institutions through turbulent waters and ensuring their survival and success (Waruwu et al, 2024). The urgency of this study was underscored by the need for higher education institutions to meet the requirements of National Development Strategy 1 (NDS 1 and 2) promulgated by the Zimbabwean government to ensure that Zimbabwe's economy reaches upper middleclass level by 2030. Realising this potential hinges profoundly on leadership profiles characterising Zimbabwe's higher education institutions. Before independence in Zimbabwe, those who got the chance to work in higher education institutions were not given leadership roles. This left a void when Zimbabwe attained independence because the institutions now required vibrant and effective leadership to man them. Keigwin (1924:19) argued "if we do not intend to admit Blacks be it now or by degrees to encroach on social equality, let us not put ideas into their heads nor encourage them to foster hopes of equality". Innovation and collaboration of all activities fell under the leadership of Whites (Maravanyika, 1990; Hone, 1909).

Leadership in higher education is considered as the pillar of efficiency and effectiveness (Skarbaliene, 2017; McLean, 2019) for the progress of institutions. This implies that higher education leadership must remove the masks to envision innovative and collaborative activities that can bring progress in the institutions and develop the economy. Leadership profiles and traits required by higher education personnel to effectively lead institutions in this era of increased efficiency and accountability continue to be the subject of considerable research and discussion (Avolio et al., 2004; Boyatzis et al., 2012; Cuddy et al., 2013). The need for an education of high standards is also emphasised by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education, Chapter 25:27, of 2006 which notes that the mandate of the Council is to promote, and co-

ordinate education provided by institutions of higher education and to act as a regulator in the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications, and research institutions of higher education.

Leadership in higher education faces complex, challenging and continually shifting social, political, and economic environment (Kezar & Holcombe, 2017), hence, they need profiles that enable them to proffer effective innovation and collaboration. To that end, higher education leaders must possess the profiles required for effectiveness in today's dynamic higher education industry (Selingo et al., 2017). Leadership in the higher education landscape must break out of the box to strengthen innovative and collaborative activities for development of their institutions. Within the rapidly changing world of higher education, links between universities, colleges, students, government, donors, among others, are key in bringing about learning and development in the institutions. For the links to be successful, the presence of leadership that instills innovation and collaboration is central. Higher education institutions that excel are a result of leadership with profiles that set them apart from others. The 21<sup>st</sup> century demands leadership that challenges emerging issues that call for innovation and collaboration. The characteristics of such leaders require that they have distinguishing qualities of internality, creativity, humility, values, and networking (Pareek, 2008).

“Leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles” (Kotter, 1996:25). It is argued that leaders who cannot invent and reinvent themselves must be content with borrowed postures, secondhand ideas, and ‘fitting in’ instead of ‘standing out’ (Klatt and Hiebert, 2001). A leader who shows concern for excellence, lay emphasis on creativity and innovation, set trends, push benchmarks, pursue boundary management, be a visionary, build network and culture, mentor and counsel and multiply employee excellence through empowerment, possesses the rightful profiles that make things happen in higher education (Halder, 2010).

“Effective leadership profiles that build a culture of excellence are central to the success of higher education institutions” (Arsenault, 2007:14; Jais, Yahaya & Ghani, 2020). The process of managing innovative and collaborative activities in higher education requires leaders who can make things happen. The argument advanced for this approach is that leaders who have

effective profiles can bring about the needed changes in higher education systems. It is argued that universities are definitively not immune to the need for effective leadership as they face similar challenges as any other organisations. However, the concept of leadership profiles in higher education is still an under-investigated field of research and application. The purpose of this study is to fill the void in current research by identifying the profiles required by leaders for effective innovation and collaboration. Leadership should take these elements as their currency to manage quality teaching and learning activities in their institutions. For innovation and collaboration to take place, higher education institutions need leadership which has vision and velocity of innovative and collaborative transactions and not the pedestrian type of leadership.

Playing a leadership role in higher education is not an easy thing, and this can be traced back to Plato, the philosopher, who heightened the need for training leaders to meet the challenges of the day. It is argued that as early as 386 BC, Plato initiated one of the first leadership training centres in the world, an institute he called the ‘Academy’, to create a new type of statesman, a person who would be able to withstand the unwieldy pressures of office. For Plato, the possession of the ‘wisdom’ of an ‘intellectual vision’ informing the principles of government, as it informs the principles of human conduct in general, distinguishes a leader from followers (Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse and Kouzimin, 2001).

Members in higher education institutions often operate in environments that have little supervision but have a powerful voice in significant institutional decisions (Smith & Wolverson, 2010). Therefore, the leaders in higher educational institutions need to ignite innovation and collaboration among members in the faculties and the departments, as well as other stakeholders such as students and government. For innovation and collaboration to take place, leadership requires profiles and “skills that contribute to superior performance” (Mohamad Rohana & Abdullah, 2017:1). The promotion of innovative and collaborative activities requires intellectual vision among leaders for ease of planning and implementation of activities. Burns (1978:46) concludes that “the ultimate test of ... leadership is its capacity to transcend the claims of the multiplicity of everyday needs and expectations, to respond to the higher levels of ... development and to relate leadership behaviour, its roles, choices, style and commitments, to a set of reasoned, relatively explicit, conscious values”. This is pointing to the need for leadership to demonstrate excellence, satisfy customer needs and requirements

daily by injecting and fueling innovative and collaborative activities that give the basis of development in institutions.

Collaborative and innovative strategies can be used in planning, translating, and reviewing the teaching and learning process to have a better product (Muhammad, Najma & Muhammad, 2011). Collaboration and innovation are considered as philosophies which enable people to work together on a common objective to exchange their opinions or jointly address a problem (Hron & Friedrich, 2003; Henneman, Lee & Cohen, 1995). Lecturers need to come up with new epistemological and pedagogical methods of teaching, share and cross pollinate ideas. Students need to share ideas among themselves and with lecturers and all this can be profitable if leadership sets the ground even for innovative and collaborative activities.

### **Statement of the problem**

Previous research has shed light on aspects of leadership and crisis management (Rameshan, 2024; Said, 2023). However, there is a dearth of studies that deal with the nature of leadership profiles that enhance innovation and collaboration in higher education. Against this backdrop, the smooth running of higher education institutions remains gloomy without leadership that carries effective profiles. Many elements of innovative and collaborative activities in higher education systems warrant leadership attention to bring about effective teaching and learning. Strengthening innovation requires effective leadership profiles. Leading collaborative activities are complex issues that do not require pedestrian type of leadership which fails to make necessary connections and changes in institutions but needs strategic leadership with relevant competences (Takawira et al, 2023). It is argued that the success of organisations cannot be possible if the individuals within the organisations cannot enmesh their various talents to work as a team (Nsoedo, 2016). Some institutions are excelling in international ranking while others lag. The question that remains is whether leadership is not the engine that propels innovation and collaboration in higher education institutions. Institutions therefore need to rethink leadership profiles for innovative and collaborative activities for effective teaching and learning. The problem can be stated as follows: **What kind of profiles are required by leaders to strengthen innovative and collaborative activities for effective teaching and learning in the higher education landscape in Zimbabwe?**

### **Research questions**

1. What leadership profiles are perceived as critical to strengthen innovative and collaborative activities in higher education institutions?
2. How do current leadership profiles hinder the pursuit of innovative and collaborative activities in the higher education landscape in Zimbabwe?

### **Conceptual framework**

The study was undergirded by the concept collaboration and innovation.

#### ***The concept collaboration***

Collaboration means to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort (Uchiyama & Radin, 2009:273). It is argued that the most comprehensive definition of collaboration refers to stakeholder interests or who is involved in the collaboration, describe common purpose and shared rules or norms and detail what is being pooled, financial capital, human resources, skills, or expertise (Kazer, 2005:833). Wood & Gray (1991:437) define collaboration as “a process in which a group of autonomous stakeholders of an issue domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures to act or decide on issues related to that domain”. This definition is quite relevant to the current study since it points to the need for high level interaction between members that want to collaborate.

A different conception of collaboration was ushered in by Eastwood (2020) who notes that the concept of collaboration in higher education emphasizes bridging the gap among various internal and external stakeholders. Within the institution, for example, a collaborative leader would view laboratory research and classroom teaching as complementing each other. Collaboration also means bringing departments together for opportunities to learn from each other, whether it is a better way to teach an online course or a more efficient way to clean a building. With regards to external stakeholders, collaboration involves mutually beneficial partnerships with local businesses and organizations. Collaboration initiatives include scholarship opportunities, internship job placement programmes, or ongoing conversations

with government policy makers about issues in higher education to avoid isolation as ivory towers (Eastwood, 2020).

Collaboration involves team building and developing integrated human service delivery mechanisms to improve outcomes for recipients of services. Collaboration is an important mechanism for advancing scientific knowledge creation. Collaboration stimulates intellectual creation by encouraging scholars to share their ideas; it integrates skills and resources necessary for fruitful analyses; and it allows solitary scholars to find enjoyable companionship in their often-lonely scientific journeys (Bozeman & Corley as cited in Ou, Varriale & Tsui, 2012). It is important to understand that literature points to the fact that there is internal (intra) and external (inter) collaboration. Internal collaboration includes areas such as cross-functional teams, interdisciplinary teaching/research, and student and academic affairs collaboration. External collaboration includes steering committees, university partnerships, community partnerships, and business and industry collaboration (Kezar, 2005:834). These two forms of collaborative activities are relevant to this study since they broaden the collaborative base of higher education institutions. It becomes imperative for leadership to possess profiles that can break through the glass ceilings to influence development through collaboration.

### ***Innovation***

Ramadani & Gerguri (2011:7) define innovation as a process of creating a new product or service, new technologic process, new organization, or enhancement of existing product or service, existing technologic process, and existing organization. UK Department of Trade and Industry (2003:18) defines innovation as the successful exploitation of new ideas and it is central to meeting this challenge, it involves investments in new products, processes, or services and in new ways of doing business. In higher education, innovation refers to the process of developing and implementing new ideas, methodologies, and technologies to improve educational outcomes, enhance student experiences, and increase institutional effectiveness. The introduction of new or significantly improved approaches, processes, products or services aimed at enhancing learning, research, societal impact, and institutional effectiveness.

### **Theoretical framework: The Resource-based model of collaboration**

This study employed the resource-based model of collaboration. Collaboration in higher education is an academic activity, and the resource-based view is regarded as a powerful explanatory mechanism to study academic collaboration. The resource-based view suggests that the success of joint ventures lies in the creation or acquisition of complementary resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, non-tradable, and non-substitutable (Das & Teng as cited in Ou, Varriale & Tsui, 2012). A leader is a very important resource and one's absence from the collaborative process hampers the success of collaborative activities. Joint ventures are thus required among pro-vice chancellors, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) directors, deans, chairpersons, programme coordinators, among others, to ensure excellence in teaching and learning.

### **Literature**

Leadership in higher education institutions needs a collaborative mindset. Jordaan (2018) conducted a study on leading organisations in turbulent times and found out that agility and collaboration help institutions to adapt quickly to changing circumstances for a competitive advantage. The study emphasises the need for a climate of trust and a collaborative mindset on common goals. The present study anchors competences or profiles by a leader that bring in innovation and collaboration to make higher education institutions tick to the expected standards. Collaboration has the potential to be a valuable apparatus for extending opportunities for success (Kezar as cited in Evan, Ortlieb, Patrick & Gina, 2010). Thus, it is gravely important that relationships and networks be cultivated before trying to participate in collaborative endeavours. The various stakeholders in higher education need to create relationships and transact on academic issues that improve the quality of student learning.

Academics often suffer the pain of dismemberment. On the surface, this is the pain of people who thought they were joining a community of scholars but find themselves in distant, competitive, and uncaring relationships with colleagues (Palmer as cited in Uchiyama and Radin, 2009:272). Leaders have the responsibility to connect and engage academics in innovative and collaborative activities to avoid the pain. The U.S. Department of Labour (1991) established skills and competencies for the workplace and two of these elements, sociability, and interpersonal skills, directly relate to norms of innovation and collaboration. Sociability is

defined as “demonstrating understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy, and politeness in group settings” (U.S. Department of Labor 1991:x). Interpersonal skills are defined as “participating as a member of a team, contributing to group efforts, negotiation, working towards agreement, and resolving divergent interests” (U.S. Department of Labour, 1991: xi). In higher education institutions, these skills are useful among leadership for enabling the innovative and collaborative process to take off.

In a national study, it was shown that effective innovative and collaborative leaders exhibit profiles such as self-awareness, current knowledge, competence, and the ability to influence success in higher education (Scott et al., 2008). In the same vein, Bryman (2007:697) analysed international literature and identified 13 forms of leader behaviour associated with departmental effectiveness and concluded that leaders should focus on “vision, integrity, consideration and the use of direction”. Individuals in leadership positions who are effective demonstrate emotional intelligence and an innovative, consultative, and collaborative style that supports academics to perform effectively (Bryman, 2007; 2009; Parrish, 2013).

Higher education institutions are realising the importance of enabling internal and external innovative and collaborative work, e.g., interdisciplinary research or community partnerships. Researchers have documented the benefits of organisational collaboration including greater efficiency, effectiveness, and perhaps most important for higher education institutions, it can enhance student learning (Kanter, 1994; Senge, 1990). To come up with development, innovation and collaboration should not only be limited between institutions of higher learning but should extend to diverse stakeholders in society. It is argued that accreditors, foundations, business and industry and government agencies have been espousing the importance and value of innovation and collaboration for knowledge creation and research, for student learning and improved organisational functioning (Ramaley, 2001). For external collaboration some universities and colleges partner with local businesses to increase their teaching pool and internship potential and provide needed labs and materials for conducting research. Internal innovation and collaboration hinge on the formation of cross-disciplinary learning communities that bring faculty and students together to study an issue, capitalising on intellectual capacities throughout the institution for teaching (Kezar, 2005).

In the higher education setting some unique features were identified as enabling effective innovation and collaboration. These include, among others, mission; integrating structures; campus networks; rewards; a sense of priority from people in senior positions; external pressure; values; and learning (Kezar, 2005). Literature is filling a gap in our knowledge by describing factors that foster both internal and external forms of innovation and collaboration in the higher education arena. In addition to identifying the contextual elements that enable innovation and collaboration, another gap in the literature is that it aids our understanding of the developmental process or how the process of creating such a context unfolds.

### **Research Methodology**

The study was qualitative informed by the interpretivist paradigm. (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative research enables the exploration and interpretation of complex phenomena, allowing for an in-depth understanding (Flick, 2018) of leadership practices during times of crisis. For this study, the interpretivist paradigm was employed because the central endeavour of the paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This approach tries to ‘get into the head of the subjects being studied’ so to speak, and to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning s/he is making of the context (Saunders et al, 2019). For data generation, open-ended questions and semi-structured interviews were used. Those who answered open -ended questions were not part of the interviewees.

### ***Open-ended Questionnaire***

Open ended questions enabled participants to write free responses in their own terms, to explain and qualify their responses and avoid the limitations of pre-set categories of response. Although it is argued that the responses are difficult to code and to classify, the issue for researchers is one of ‘fitness for purpose’. The open-ended question was a very attractive device for smaller scale research and for those sections of a questionnaire that invited an honest, personal comment from the participants. I structured the questionnaire in such a way that there were the open-ended questions at the top and underneath I left a space for free responses. It is the open-ended responses that might contain the ‘gems’ of information that otherwise might not be caught when using other data generation tools. The advantage of using the open-ended question

was that it caught the authenticity, richness, depth of response, honesty and candor which are the hallmarks of qualitative data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Cohen et al, 2017).

### ***The Semi-structured Interview***

The semi-structured interview was also used as a data generation tool (Flick, 2018). Borg & Gall (1989:452) say that the semi-structured interview has the advantage of being reasonably objective “while still permitting a more thorough understanding of the respondent’s opinions.” They further argue that the semi-structured interview is generally most appropriate for interview studies in education. It provides a desirable combination of objectivity and depth and often permits gathering valuable data that could not be successfully obtained by any other approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The sampled higher education practitioners were subjected to this type of interview while the interviewer and interviewee’s words were recorded on a phone.

### ***Sampling***

This research used purposeful sampling to get participants to answer open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interview questions. Purposeful sampling was done to select information rich cases to participate in the research. This is the process of “selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (Patton, 1990:169). The information rich participants who were selected were knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher was investigating. The sample included one vice chancellor, 6 deans, 8 department chairpersons, 10 programme coordinators and 15 lecturers from different universities and colleges based on their long serving experience in their institutions. Purposive sampling allowed selection of participants with specific characteristics crucial for understanding leadership profiles in higher education systems.

### **Findings and discussion**

This section presents the findings from the study, featuring insights from several participants. Data analysis is done at the same time as data is presented. The voices of the participants are at the heart of this study. Below are representative quotes from the participants. When coding in qualitative research, abbreviations are used to refer to participants. In this study,

abbreviations of P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P9, P10, among others, were used to maintain anonymity and to protect the identities of participants.

***Leadership needs the ability to create teamwork and team building***

The issue of creating teams that work together to come up with innovations was raised as a key facet for effective teaching and learning that meets the current requirements of the philosophy of Education 5.0 in Zimbabwe. Education 5.0 is a philosophy adopted by Zimbabwe's government focusing on harnessing local resources for innovation, emphasising problem solving, value creation and industrialisation (Ahmad et al, 2023). Participants raised the need for leaders to have team building skills. They had this to say:

*P1: People in leadership must create effective innovation and collaboration of learners to improve their thinking, acting, and skills in ways that promote individual learning and the learning of others. Learners can work on book writing or even coming up with research on Indigenous Knowledge Systems that are being lost in society. They can thus build the lost tradition.*

*P2: In the higher education context, the use of teams often occurs in the form of project teams used to accomplish major assignments through learner-learner and tutor-tutor interactions.*

Collaboration and innovation involve team building and developing integrated service delivery mechanisms to improve outcomes for students (Davoli & Fine, 2004). If given the chance, teams can produce quality products.

*P3: Team building is a very important aspect for goal accomplishment, and this can be well achieved if members work together. Leadership should possess that profile of team building. Several teams are important for smooth running of the institutions. Information Communication Technology teams that deal with creation of portals for students and the lecturers' teaching and learning methods are needed. We also need research teams on teaching and learning as well as contemporary issues that affect society.*

*P7: Institutions need to be team based.*

The issue of leaders with profiles that can come up with teams and build teams is coming out clearly. These findings are consistent with what literature says as regards team building.

Literature points to the idea that the move to innovate and collaborate requires team-based, and boundary less organisational structures evolving and accelerating development in organisations (Callanan, 2004). Leaders possessing teamwork are the warp and woof of the dynamic fabric of organisations (Sohmen, 2013). To that end, one cannot exist without the other. The paradox of teamwork is that it relies on individual skills of those sharing responsibility (Lake, Baerg & Paslawski, 2015:11). Effective teamwork runs with energy and enthusiasm of leaders and individuals performing hard work (Tripathy, 2018).

### **Possession of creativity and innovation**

It is important to note that higher education leadership should possess creative and innovative skills. Participants raised the need for leaders to be creative and innovative to lead innovative and collaborative activities in higher education easily. In the interviews, they lamented:

*P1: ICT directors should show creativity and innovation and come up with technological models of teaching at a distance. Lecturing staff thus must be trained on such. Creativity is the driver of the generation of new ideas and new ideas are needed constantly to come up with innovative ideas. Without such skills, creativity is not realised. Research Hubs that we see in universities are a result of innovative and collaborative efforts by lecturers from various faculties.*

*P4: Creativity enables the leader to discover new relationships with other institutions for such purposes. University (X) was the only distance teaching and learning institution which applied distance education pedagogies in Zimbabwe. Most of the universities employ face-to-face teaching methods.*

*P 10: No doubt, convectional institutions really need to take a leaf on distance education pedagogies from distance universities to cater for today's students who can be confronted by work commitments, pandemics, among other challenges.*

Possession of creative and innovative ideas is central in making useful connections with various people in other institutions. Problems arise in situations where leadership may not possess the “rare combination of profiles and skills that enable them to be strong, creative, innovative, transactional and operational leaders as well as more visionary” (Pelletier, 2016:31) hence the need for innovative and collaborative activities.

### **Employing culture building**

Leadership requires profiles of culture building for innovation and collaboration to take place. Participants raised the need for leadership to have skills in building culture as a basic profile for such activities. They raised the following issues:

*P1: There seems to be lack of culture building, yet it is an important profile for leaders.*

*We need robust research culture in institutions of higher learning. Some institutions have developed quite a lot in research, and it is good to learn from them.*

*P2: We want a culture in the organisation in which lecturers breathe without trouble, see innovative ways of doing work, freely exchange ideas, view positive aspects, learn from experiences, among other things.*

*P3: There is an apparent lack of moral responsibility by leaders to develop an enabling and empowering culture that makes innovation and collaboration possible.*

Developing a culture of research work is key to improving teaching and learning in higher education. Universities are also ranked by the quantity and quality of research publications they produce. To come up with quality research, lecturers learn from other institutions through collaboration. It is argued that the success of teaching and learning in higher education depends on strong leadership (Radwan, Razak & Ghavifekr, 2020) with the ability to build a culture of innovation and collaboration.

### **Skills of networking**

Participants highlighted the need for networking profiles among leadership. They had this to say:

*P1: Leaders in higher education institutions must break through the picture frame and work to create more opportunities for colleagues to connect both professionally and informally and emphasise the importance for faculties to form relations between each other.*

*P2: Lecturers should be given support to attend conferences at other institutions so that they build on experiences from others.*

*P4: Tutors need information on programmes that are offered by other institutions and how effective the programmes are for societal development. It is good that Zimbabwe*

*Council for Higher Education has come up with Minimum Bodies of Knowledge (MBKs) for programmes that are offered in Zimbabwe.*

*P5: Leaders must facilitate networking of such programmes as in the fight against drug and substance abuse, leadership should facilitate collaboration with the police, health personnel, lawyers, among others.*

The issue of building bridges through networking is coming out clearly. Networks form the basis of collaborative activities. In line with this thinking, Wehman as cited in Stowitschek, Lovitt and Rodriguez (2001) points out that the shared resource approach seems to distinguish effective programmes from those that are mediocre or fragmented. Poor networking results in ineffective teaching and learning using ICT. Collaboration is needed for information sharing, in which tutors/lecturers communicate with each other regarding programme alternatives and responsibility transfer. It is also important to engage in contract with community service agencies for transition services; and interagency collaboration, whereby participants share staff and other resources to jointly carry out educational or other transition services. The sharing of information has consistently been identified as one of the more critical functions of collaboration, with building staff awareness of programme activities as a particularly important process. Joint participation in programme activities like course development for minimum bodies of knowledge has been identified as one of the most substantive indicators of collaborative success. Execution of such activities requires leadership profiles that are a torch light for the institution.

### **Ability to empower employees**

It was raised by the participants that employee empowerment is a critical element leaders must possess to facilitate collaborative activities. They raised the following ideas:

*P1: There is high demand for lecturers to teach students online without any support in terms of data bundles. Lecturers should be given adequate resources like internet, laptops among others, to try new methods of teaching using ICT. There is need for leaders to have skills of empowering employees.*

*P2: Employees should be given tasks to work with members in other institutions.*

*P3: Co-supervision of projects and thesis with members in other universities could improve the quality of teaching and learning.*

Critical issues being raised by the participants are that employee empowerment is important in that it passes authority and responsibility to individual lecturers and all those at lower levels in the organisational hierarchy. Empowerment ensures a greater degree of involvement and a higher degree of responsibility. At its core, empowerment means that organisational leaders must have complete trust in their subordinates to work collaboratively, to be task-oriented in completing their mission, and to make decisions that are correct and consistent with the direction of the organisation (Callanan, 2004).

### **Putting people first**

Participants raised the need for the leader to know what human resources appreciate. This is the kind of person possessing the necessary profiles.

*P1: There are some people who are highly knowledgeable, and they are really an asset to the institutions. Leaders should be able to guard the walking out every day of the core corporate assets of the organisation, which is human resources.*

*P2: It is the duty of leadership to make sure that these asserts return the next morning, mentally and physically enthusiastic and energetic.*

*P3: Leaders seem not to be directing a sharper focus on searching, recruiting, retaining, and developing talent. The quality of the lecturer is the quality of the student.*

*P4: Leaders must constantly expend their energy to energise the employees and gain opportunities to gain sharp edge.*

It is argued that self-sacrifice indicates a person's willingness to suffer the loss of types of things to maintain personal beliefs and values and it has been noted to be a common behaviour of great leaders (Burns, 1978). The concept of self-sacrifice indicates that the leader is willing to engage in personal risky behaviour to serve the goals and mission of the group or organisation (Conger and Kanungo, 1987). If a leader is perceived to be self-sacrificing, perceptions of effectiveness and ratings of cooperation are positively influenced (Choi and Mai-Dalton, 1999).

### **Having a vision and internality**

Participants raised the need for leadership to have a high sense of internality to enhance collaborative activities. Internality comprises a grand vision, internality, optimism, and

professional will. From the grand vision, the leader can devise strategies and prioritise. Participants raised the following issues as regards the matter:

*P11: 'Professional growth of lecturers cannot be a one-man band. They need exposure to continuous professional development. Leadership seems not to be creating a unified vision out of various groups, departments, faculties in the institutions. Leaders seem not to clearly articulate faculty visions like taking teaching practice with the seriousness it deserves and ultimately translating it into reality'-Vice Chancellor.*

*P2: Good leaders have that kind of internality which is a profile that can make people do what they want them to do. Lack of such a profile brings chaos in the institution. As such, leadership should not fail to make things happen the way they want them to happen. We need that kind of leadership with optimism in their visions so that teaching and learning are done effectively in all spheres of work life.*

*P5: We want leaders with strong professional grounding so that they become effective.*

The issue of leaders with a vision and internality is being raised as an area of concern for collaborative activities to take place. Leaders must take responsibility for the quality of teaching enhanced through collaborative activities. Parker Palmer (1994) has asserted that:

a leader must take special responsibility for what's going on inside his or her own self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership creates more harm than good... I suggest that the challenge is to examine our consciousness for those ways in which we leaders may project more shadow than light (Parker Palmer, 1994:25-6).

### **Ability to set targets and possession of skills for synergy building**

Participants highlighted the need for leadership to have a high sense of synergy building. They had this to say:

*P1: You know institutions emphasise the idea of publishing or perishing. What surprises is that there are no faculty journals in some institutions where lecturers can publish their articles. There are no provisions to pay for article publication in other journals nor to write and publish books. This gives lecturers some kinds of problems.*

*P9: Lecturers need to be given the opportunity for synergy building in their different groups and departments. Leadership must create an environment for synergy building in which groups set targets for collaborative activities.*

*P2: Synergy implies that the total is greater than the sum of its parts. In that scenario, effective leaders encourage working through teams.*

Without setting targets, lecturers would not know how much they will have to achieve. They need to be stimulated to achieve high expectations. Synergy is a positive force in groups that occurs when group members stimulate new solutions to problems through the process of mutual influence and encouragement in the group. Leaders must encourage that to pursue the goal of collaboration in ODL. Leaders have long been seen as key factors in organisational effectiveness (Muijs, 2011).

### **Heavy reliance on customer orientation**

Participants raised the need for leadership to be customer oriented in a bid to enhance collaborative activities. They had this to say:

*P1: Leaders must worry about the quality of products or services in the institution. Customer satisfaction surveys need to be conducted to see whether customers see quality and relevance in what universities are offering. The issue of quality is considered as the fulcrum of offering programmes. Quality is meeting customer demands and fulfilling them.*

*P4: Waiting for face-to-face lectures without blending with distance education pedagogies does not work in today's world. Platforms that infuse these two must be employed and customers must be oriented and inducted in their use. The services need to be understood by the users and customers. Several innovative and collaborative activities are required to make students aware of various methods of learning.*

Customer oriented institutions win by translating customer needs and expectations, called 'voices', into actions through design parameters and delivering products and services in accordance with customer specified needs. It is argued that customer focus is the most vital quality management principle (Halder, 2010).

### **Ability to create functional committees**

Participants highlighted that committees are crucial in the pursuance of collaborative activities. They raised the following ideas:

*P1: Leaders in higher education institutions can create several committees that investigate important processes like teaching and learning committee, materials development committee, resource mobilisation committee, programme and curriculum development committee, assessment committee, among others.*

*P2: Leaders in some institutions seem not to realise that they are facing stiff competition from other colleges and universities and take a lackadaisically oriented approach to building vibrant and vigorous marketing committees, resource mobilisation committees, assessment of online lectures, among others.*

*P3: Committees can investigate how to counter such competition and come up with competitive strategies.*

*P4: Leaders should possess profiles that enable tutors/lecturers to share with colleagues in other institutions on how they attract students, how best to assess students during online teaching and the like. Collaborative work can help capacitate lecturers with strategies of assessment of online participation of students.*

Collaboration and innovation are part of a continuum, ranging from offering temporary direct consulting services among tutors or learners, to participants working cooperatively to effect changes in learners at the other end. The committees are there to sharpen the product services. This is the kind of leadership profile that is useful for strengthening innovative and collaborative activities. Leadership is about getting people to work together to make things happen that otherwise would not have occurred. It is about preventing things from happening that ordinarily would take place (Omeltchenka and Armitage, 2006:317).

### **Showing integrity and ethical behaviour**

Participants raised the need for integrity and ethical behaviour among leaders. They had this to share:

*P1: We do not seem to see high level of integrity and ethical behaviour among some leaders. There is need for high levels of integrity and ethical behaviour among leaders so that collaboration can take place. To attain the agenda for Education 5.0 in Zimbabwe, there is need for leadership with integrity. Issues to do with research, teaching, community service, innovation and industrialisation have been made part and*

*parcel of the milieu in higher education. To meet the goal, there is need for leadership with such profiles.*

*P2: You know ethical behaviour is a necessary virtue in the life of true leadership. It places trust among co-workers and partners.*

*P3: Integrity and ethical behaviour are at the core of long-term successful leadership.*

*P4: Personal integrity of leaders is the source and foundation of organisational integrity and ethics.*

*P5: Integrity boils down to being authentic with yourself, being authentic with others and doing what you say you will do.*

What one does in the absence of being observed should reflect the true character of oneself. It is being raised from the study that leadership should not require laws to be effective. It is argued that in transcending purely moral considerations, ethical leadership makes good business sense because leadership virtues such as commitment, technical expertise and industriousness can be soon rendered ineffective by such leadership vices as arrogance, insensitivity, and untrustworthiness. Therefore, in the words of Mendonca & Kanungo (2007:6), “there is an absolute and urgent need for moral leadership in organisations”.

### **The need to set benchmarks**

Participants raised the need to push benchmarks by leadership. They had this to say:

*P1: Institutions of higher education need effective leaders who have the ability and skills to push benchmarks in all spheres of the institution. Providing students feedback online is a worrisome activity to most lecturers today. They have been used to marking hard copies of assignments. Knowledge of how best to mark online can be obtained through organised collaborative virtual workshops.*

*P2: For effective performance of activities in the units and departments, there is need for leadership to have benchmarks that guide performance.*

*P3: Benchmarks on tutorials, assignment marking, research project and dissertation guidelines can be raised.*

*P5: When writing modules, for example, tutors can collaborate with specialists in the area who are in other universities.*

Feedback is crucial for remediation to work that has not been done well. If students get feedback too late, then it is of no help. Leaders are therefore tasked with the responsibility to organise workshops on how marking online is best done so that students get feedback in time. It is argued that one of the most important aspects of supporting student learning is the feedback that students receive on their work (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall, 2009). This can only happen if there is leadership with the ability to push benchmarks. Leaders are seen as the source of influence that take followers beyond their self-interest and motivate them to internalise values and goals of the larger collective (Bass, 1995; Burns, 1978). It is argued that:

The vehicle for achieving excellence in leadership is total quality management. It covers the entire organisation, all the people and all the functions, including external organisation and suppliers (Oakland, 2003:39).

### **Curriculum mapping**

Participants raised the need for leadership to have a vision in curriculum mapping. They had this to say:

*P1: Innovation and collaboration can be done on curriculum mapping if leadership has that vision. This becomes a tool for improving the curriculum for all courses and that will attract many students to such programmes.*

*P2: A curriculum which has been done through combined effort improves the content, students' learning experiences and the learning outcomes. Leadership should have skills to innovate and collaborate in such activities.*

*P3: We need to remember that keeping the curriculum modern and relevant through shared participation increases tutors' interest and engagement in teaching and learning as well as updating disciplinary knowledge and meeting students' needs.*

*P4: Such a combined effort improves the professional knowledge and expertise of tutors, and this can be enhanced if leadership has that vision.*

It is argued that curriculum mapping can best be done through collaboration in higher education. It improves the development of courses and brings about innovation in higher education (Uchiyama and Radin, 2009). Curriculum mapping shatters the glass ceiling of teaching in isolation. It moves us towards clear communication, meaningful connections, and understanding the power of professional collaboration that truly makes a difference

(Chapman as cited in Jacobs, 2004:79). Bennis and Nanus (1985) popularised the concept that leaders are people who “do the right thing” by forming a vision of the future, communicating effectively, evoking trust, and self-deployment through learning. They further note that vision is a tool to motivate employees, create long-term partnerships, to produce the appropriate resources, and enable the organisation to change over time.

### **Conclusions**

The study concludes that leadership should play a functional role for collaborative and innovative activities to take place in higher education institutions. Higher education leaders comprising vice chancellors, deans, chairpersons, programme leaders, among others, are not collaborating effectively to teach students. There are several missing links and loose ends that make teaching and learning ineffective in the Zimbabwean higher education system.

### **Recommendations**

In the light of the above findings, it is recommended that people in leadership must create several committees like teaching and learning committee, materials development committee, resource mobilisation committee, programme and curriculum development committee, assessment committee, among others that can collaborate with other institutions in Zimbabwe. There is need for leaders to lay emphasis on team building, creativity, and innovation, set trends, push benchmarks, pursue boundary management, be visionary, build networks and culture and empower employees to promote collaborative activities in higher education institutions.

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