

Strategies for Good Governance during Crisis in Higher Education

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Abstract : Over the last 23 years leaders in government, political parties and universities have been spending much time on identifying and discussing various gaps in the system that impact systematically on students especially those from historically Black communities. Equity and access to higher education were two critical aspects that featured in achieving the transformation goals together with a funding model for those previously disadvantaged. Free education was not a feasible option for the government. Institutional leaders in higher education face many demands on their time and resources. Often, the time for crisis management planning or consideration of being proactive and preventative is not a standing agenda item. With many issues being priority in academia, people become complacent and think that crisis may not affect them or they will cross the bridge when they get to it. Historically South Africa has proven to be a country of militancy, strikes and protests in most industries, some leading to disastrous outcomes. Higher education was not different between October 2015 and late 2016 when the #Rhodes Must Fall which morphed into the # Fees Must Fall protest challenged the establishment, changed the social fabric of universities, bringing the sector to a standstill. Some institutional leaders and administrators were better at handling unexpected, high-consequence situations than others. At most crisis leadership is viewed as a situation more than a style of leadership which is usually characterized by crisis management. The objective of this paper is to show how institutions managed catastrophes of disastrous proportions, down through unexpected incidents of 2015/2016. The content draws on the vast past crisis management experience of the presenter and includes the occurrences of the recent protests giving an event timeline. Using responses from interviews with institutional leaders and administrators as well as students will ensure first-hand information on their experiences and the outcomes. Students have tasted the power of organized action and they demand immediate change, if not the revolt will continue. This paper will examine the approaches that guided institutional leaders and their crisis teams and sector crisis response. It will further expand on whether the solutions effectively changed governance in higher education or has it minimized the need for more protests. The conclusion will give an insight into the future of higher education in South Africa from a leadership perspective.

Keywords : crisis, governance, intervention, leadership, strategies, protests

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