

Redefining Institutional Leadership in African Higher Education: Threats, Opportunities and Possibilities in a Globalized Era

By

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Abstract

This paper draws on the extant literature on higher education and leadership to outline approaches to building institutional leadership in Africa's rapidly changing higher education landscape. The paper submits that African institutions of higher education must proactively take charge of nurturing leadership so as to translate leadership competence into strategic assets. The pressure for change within the higher education sector has intensified with scarce resources and increased competitiveness and international choice for students and staff, making leadership capacity very critical. Adapting to the threats, opportunities and possibilities requires a leadership that is not only be visionary, but also has the unique ability to engage in strategic scanning, i.e. the capacity to recognize the behaviour of interconnected systems to make effective decisions under varying strategic and risk scenarios, and the transformation of knowledge. Hence, a leadership that is politically astute, economically savvy, business aware and uses its emotional intelligence to drive success. The paper concludes that while institutional, economic, political and funding constraints exist, higher education in Africa is uniquely positioned as a result of technological advances, private-public partnerships, open course-ware, and knowledge management to advance institutional leadership for transformative change.

Key words: Africa, higher education, globalization, institutional leadership, intellectual capital, world-class university

Introduction

The marketplace for higher education is changing rapidly with the advent of globalization, ICT, and a growing need for knowledge workersⁱ. As a result, there is a growing shift toward a global network organized around the value of knowledge, and the intellectual capital of people and institutions to employ technology wisely, effectively and efficiently. These ‘winds of change’ not only present new challenges for higher education institutions (HEIs), but also signify a clear mandate for change. Indeed, studies increasingly note that only those HEIs and stakeholders that are able to harness and leverage the tectonic shifts taking place across the higher education landscape, will be positioned to seize the opportunities of change (Staley and Trinkle 2011:25; see also Hanson and Léautier 2011; Hanna 2003).

The revised landscape of higher education has meant that many HEIs now have to invest heavily in the business acumen of leaders and develop tools to enhance emotionally perceptive leadership styles (Higgs 2002; Goleman and Boyatzis 2008). HEIs are also transforming structures, missions, processes and programmes to be flexible and responsive to emerging socio-economic and knowledge needs (Hanna 2003). More importantly, HEIs now have to engage a milieu in which global, national and local nodes relate freely within common networks (Marginson and Sawir 2006). Consequently, HEIs are progressively being compelled to pursue strategies for building global capacity and facilitating cross-border staff and student movement and research collaboration. This has been critical because, the revised landscape requires that scholars merge and remerge in teams based not on academic discipline or institutional affiliation or geographic location, but on the unique requirements of the problems they want to address (Staley and Trinkle 2011).

The global shift to a knowledge-economy has engendered new opportunities and possibilities for the leadership of institutions of higher education. Grasping these new opportunities and possibilities, however, requires a rethink of the role of higher education, and more specifically a thorough interrogation of the calibre and mandate of the leadership of institutions of higher education (Hanson and Léautier 2011). The change has also spurred a push toward a post-modern outlook in which context, collaboration, and knowledge creation have become invaluable skill sets. As a result, the leadership of HEIs is increasingly being held accountable, amongst others, for their support to growth and long-term success of dynamic learners (students and employees) and their ability to translate leadership competence into strategic assets (Hanson and Léautier 2011).

Clearly, globalization has provided a wake-up call to HEIs, signalling an urgent need to address critical issues such as structures, missions, processes, programmes and leadership. The change also provides an unparalleled opportunity for HEIs to compete in a global intellectual arena by drawing on the rich potential of diverse scholars, researchers and professionals in the educational pipeline (Held et al. 1999). As HEIs create a microcosm reflective of a larger global macrocosm, these efforts require intentional, systemic efforts to actualize the model of demography, diversity and democracy in campus environments through a framework of reciprocal empowerment (Held et al. 1999). Viewed from this perspective, the sweeping forces of globalization present new challenges for higher education but also — as alluded to earlier — represent a clear mandate for change (Marmolejo 2007).

As a result of these dynamic developments, the ivory tower perception of HEIs is fast becoming a relic of the past (Hanna 2003). The vision of knowledge transmission has similarly changed with the birth of concepts like ‘learning by doing’ (Cope and Watts 2000; Aldrich 2005), ‘X-teams’ (Ancona et

al. 2002; Ancona and Bresman 2007), and ‘Theory U’ (Scharmer 2007). Hanson and Léautier (2011) also note that the increasing focus on learning and knowledge signifies a shift away from an earlier discourse about the ‘information society’. This change in discourse has precipitated a rethink regarding of how HEIs and their leadership are perceived in terms of being proactive, visionary and current. Consequently, the previously held perception of an academic leader (provost, rector, president, chancellor, or principal) as a quiet scholar has been overtaken by that of an executive who is politically astute, economically savvy, business aware and emotionally intelligent. An executive who possess the: a) ability to function in environments with weak governance and high unpredictability; b) capacity to generate strategic maps of pressure points and risk scenarios; c) preparedness to lead in conditions of conflict and work with tools to function under diverse potential futures; and d) values and behaviours that serve as a guide in making choices in challenging environments (Léautier 2009a, 2009b).

The revised landscape — a direct result of globalization and a technology driven knowledge economy — is, thus, compelling HEIs to carve out niches that focus on intergenerational, cross disciplinary and societally-valuable learning and knowledge as well as rethink their specific role in civil society to transform societies and enhance transmittal of appropriate values (Hanson and Léautier 2011). HEIs no longer can afford academic insularity (ACBF 2005, 2007). To thrive, HEIs have to embark on strategic public-private partnerships and collaborative endeavours, which advance knowledge/experience sharing, peer-learning and leadership capacity development. HEIs also need to integrate learning technologies into their strategic planning and their setting of institutional priorities (Hanna 2003). Such integration needs to be inclusive and participatory if community buy-in and sustainability are to be achieved.

In the subsequent sections, this paper will: a) discuss some conceptual issues on institutional leadership and pathways to develop leadership capacity; b) map-out the threats, opportunities and possibilities African HEIs face in light of the revised landscape; c) examine the role of leadership in today's HEI; d) interrogate the new order of higher education and the rise of the World Class Higher Education Institution (WCHEI); and, e) prescribe a way forward, particularly for African institutions of higher education. The paper concludes that, despite the revised geo-political, socio-economic and technological landscape, African HEIs are uniquely placed as a result of strengthened private-public partnerships, advances in information and communication technology (ICT), a growing acceptance of open course-ware, amongst other development to enhance leadership capacity and bolster the drive toward the attainment of World Class Higher Education Institutions (WCHEIs).

Institutional Leadership – some conceptual issues

Leadership is a critical capacity in contemporary society. Leadership serves as the basis for strategic thinking and development initiatives. As a strategic asset, it enhances capacity to: a) formulate policies and programmes for development; b) implement development initiatives; and, c) recognize the behavior of interconnected systems to make effective decisions under varying strategic and risk scenarios (Hanson and Léautier 2011).

The dialogue on institutional leadership gained currency in the 1990s – starting with the private sector, and then spreading to the public sector. The growing interest was sparked, on the one hand, by the growing need to translate leadership capabilities into the strategic assets, and on the other hand, by the novel approaches to management which include concepts such as cascading leadership, intellectual capital, organizational learning, knowledge management and self-organizing systems (Kivipõld and Vadi 2008; Léautier 2009a, 2009b). The dialogue is conceptually tied to new and

emerging insights relating to the complexity of the decision environment — including policy and institutional environments — in which one’s governance systems and developmental efforts exist (Fitzgerald 2004).

Contemporary institutional leaders increasingly operate in very complex and interconnected environments. The degree of interconnectedness invariably shapes one’s decision-making processes as well as the outcomes of their decisions (see Léautier 2009a). To this end, understanding the dynamics of one’s interconnected environment is thus vital to: a) shaping strategy; b) developing effective risk management approaches; and c) selecting from a series of potential courses of action. Leaders, thus, need to be familiar with the behaviour of interconnected systems to make effective decisions under varying strategic risk scenarios. Leaders also need to be equipped with the right set of values and behaviours to be successful in a specific context (Léautier 2009a, 2009b). Interconnectedness further places a premium on the interaction between knowledge and culture.

Any attempt to leap-frog the development process requires institutional leadership capacity. For developing and emerging nations, particularly African countries, to do so will entail strategic leadership capabilities in HEIs – to augment transformative and implementation capacity. It equally calls for a systematic tapping into developing/emerging nations’ vast Diaspora knowledge and skills. Furthermore, it again requires leveraging the power of networks to connect actors, problems and solutions (Hanson and Léautier 2011). Successful leap-frogging requires that leaders undergo critical and transformational seismic shifts (see Watkins 2012:66-71). Leaders must evolve from being specialists to generalists; analysts to integrators; tacticians to strategists; bricklayers to architects; problem solvers to agenda setters; warriors to diplomats; and, supporting cast members to lead role. According to Watkins (2012), this calls for critical capacity shifts as detailed below:

- Specialist to Generalist:
 - Grasp the mental models, tools and terms used in key business functions and develop templates for evaluating the leaders of those functions;
- Analyst to Integrator:
 - Integrate the collective knowledge of cross-functional teams and make apt trade-offs to solve complex institutional problems;
- Tactician to Strategist:
 - Shift fluidly between the details and the big picture, perceive key patterns in complex environments, and anticipate and shape the reactions of vital players/stakeholders;
- Bricklayer to Architect:
 - Grasp how to analyze and design institutional systems so that strategy, structures, operating models, and skills bases fit together effectively and efficiently, and harness this understanding to make needed organizational changes;
- Problem Solver to Agenda Setter:
 - Define the problem the institution should focus on, and spot issues that don't fall neatly into any one function but are still important;
- Warrior to Diplomat:
 - Proactively shape the environment in which the institution operates by influencing key external constituencies, including government, CSOs, the media and investors;
and
- Supporting cast member to lead role:

- Exhibit the right behaviours as a role model for the institution and learn to communicate with and inspire large groups of people both directly and, increasingly indirectly.

The aforementioned seismic shifts required of leaders leadership will need to be creatively carried out (Watkins 2012). And in doing so, leaders must be able to: a) make decisions that are essential for the business as a whole; and; b) evaluate the talent on their teams. For the leadership of HEIs, particularly in Africa, this will require that they ‘raise their game to stay in the game’ – by enhancing capacity for strategic scanning, notably the ability to map-out risks, threats and opportunities (Hanson and Léautier 2011; Léautier 2009a, 2009b).

As Astin and Astin (2000:8) argue, leadership ‘is a process that is ultimately concerned with fostering change. In contrast to the notion of “management”, which suggests preservation or maintenance, “leadership” implies a process where there is movement – from wherever we are now to some future place or condition that is different’. Viewed from this perspective, leadership is a purposive process which is inherently value-based. Leadership, it has been further argued, is an art requiring a mix of technical, conceptual and human talents (Hill nd: 28). Its three critical leadership functions are: i) establishing direction; ii) aligning people; and iii) motivating and inspiring others (Hill nd: 28). While some of the qualities of leadership are innate or acquired principally through prework socialization, much of leadership is learned (Watkins 2012; Kaplan and Mikes 2012; Hanson and Léautier 2011). That said, globalization, new technologies and changes in how institutions interact have also altered the very notion of leadership, and how institutional leaders function.

As a result of the aforementioned dynamics, research on leadership, regardless of whether they focus on the corporate world or the non-profit sector, today advocate a collaborative approach to leadership, as opposed to one based on power and authority (World Bank 2009a; Austin and Austin 2000). By the same token, a measure of organizational change (i.e. how to coach and develop talent; build and lead a diverse team; exercise influence without formal authority; negotiate and manage conflict with multiple stakeholders; and, envision and implement change) is necessary to build the leadership talent necessary if HEIs are to function meaningfully in a globalized world (Hill nd:29).

Scholars of higher education, further contend that the leadership of HEIs needs to take daring steps to encourage social innovation; leverage the power of networks to connect actors, problems and solutions in new ways; and, create enabling environments that advance exploration and experimentation (Bourgon 2009:15). Doing so is central to any efforts to get HEIs leadership to advance from a reactive to a proactive position (Hanson and Léautier 2011:396). HEIs need to invest in leadership development amongst others by: a) devoting time and attention to talent management; b) integrating ‘business’ and ‘human’ strategies; and, c) proactively offering learning opportunities and resources – providing the tools individuals need to capitalize on their on-the-job learning experiences (Hill nd).

Achieving the requisite leadership capacity desired in HEIs, in light of the revised landscape, requires that HEIs in general and Africa in particular, deliberately engage their environments to negotiate the hurdles facing them, while embracing the opportunities and possibilities.

Threats, Opportunities and Possibilities facing Higher Education in Africa

Threats

As alluded to earlier, HEIs today continue to face a number of challenges including, but not limited to: financing deficits (a direct result of state disengagement from social provisioning); rising student-teacher ratios; inadequate incentives; tensions between the need for consistency and change; resource constraints; intrusion of politics into academia; and a demographic bulge – an explosion in the numbers of students seeking enrolment in the few HEIs available. These developments have, amongst others, viciously impacted African HEIs’ abilities to deliver quality services, and their leadership’s contribution to their respective constituents. African HEIs are, as a consequence, grappling with a complex and change-oriented environment. HEIs here are faced with a host of challenges related to:

critical shortage of quality faculty; limited capacity of governance, leadership and management; inadequate financial support and problems of diversify funding; inadequate facilities and infrastructure; problems of quality and relevance of teaching and research; limited capacity of research, knowledge generation and adaptation capabilities; and problems in meeting increasing demand for equitable access (NASULGC 2008:1).

Simultaneously, they are compelled to seek a balance between the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ landscape, while at the same time striving to develop the requisite capacity critical to negotiate the dynamics of networked and interconnected spaces (Jegade 2012; CAPAM 2009; Sawyerr 2004). Indeed, as African HEIs struggle to become notable players on the global educational arena, they must grapple with a number of salient issues, including a rethink of what higher education means to Africa in the 21st century (Jegade 2012). Confronted with the dilemma of a huge unmet demand in higher education, governments’ inability and unwillingness to adequately fund higher education, and limited human and financial resources, HEI in Africa is at a critical crossroad.

Aside from the above, the changing audience and demographic for higher education — including adult professionals and more students who are working part-time to make ends meet — are making customization and convenience a prerequisite for all programmes and services (Hanna 2003:27). Equally, HEIs face the challenge of commercialization and academic capitalism (Tirronen 2009:220). These pressures within the higher education sector, and at individual HEIs, will only intensify with scarcer resources and greater competitive and international choice for the best students and faculty (Borysiewicz 2010:1).

Another key issue is the willingness to change. A number of studies have examined the issue of change in higher education (Kondakei and Van den Broeck 2009; Vaira 2004; Gumpert 2000). These studies explored the forces simultaneously vying for change, on the one hand, and opposing change, on the other. All these studies suggest the ‘mutual existence of inertial and adaptive forces in [the] higher education [realm]’ (Kondakei and Van den Broeck 2009:441). As Vaira (2004 cited in Kondakei and Van den Broeck 2009) argues, the fear of losing legitimacy because of the move away from the traditional historical way of doing things, may an inhibiting factor to change.

As Pettigrew, submits, change is ‘an “untidy cocktail” of quests for power, competing views, rational calculation and manipulation, combined with subtle processes of additively building up a momentum of support or change and then vigorously implementing change’ (1985:xviii).

African institutions of higher education are often subsumed in internal politicking when it comes to changing institutional leadership. Frequently it is about who, in a particular click, is ‘next to chop’, rather than where can we find a leader that can bring new ideas and move things forward. Western

institutions, on the other hand, are generally known for almost always going out of their campuses to recruit new talents — the ‘best brains out there’ — and leaders. Accordingly to Gumport (2001), this tendency reflects a conflict of ‘histories’ and ‘futures,’ and is what makes change in HEIs an interesting topical issue.

The aforementioned developments, call for new capacity, knowledge, skills and competencies. Negotiating the challenges and creating a context supportive of innovation, experimentation and learning presume committed, passionate, and visionary leadership (Hanson and Léautier, 2011). The situation mandates African HEIs to embrace a measure of organizational change to nurture leadership talent vital to negotiating the revised landscape and pushing toward the establishment of viable and sustainable HEIs. Again, African HEIs need to expose the next generation to significant experiences that transfer knowledge from the current generation to the next, enhance local buy-in, and identify possible future leaders at an early stage (The GREEN Resource 2008; see also Kahane 2004; Klijn 2008).

Paradoxically, while the significance of HEIs as key participants in knowledge generation is being emphasized, the indirect regulation and competition between HEIs (nationally, regionally and globally) appear to be increasing (Tirronen, 2009). And for a number of HEIs, especially across Africa, current operating systems appear insufficient to meet the tasks of engendering the requisite intellectual capital and leadership capacity needed for transformation, and the knowledge base vital to negotiating and/or transcending the revised landscape. This partly explains why only one African HEI (the University of Cape Town, South Africa) is ranked in the global top-200 world universities (Labo 2013). This notwithstanding, Hill (nd: 30) notes that a decisive and difficult step in surmounting the threats facing HEIs, is to foster a culture conducive to learning and leadership (see also Hanson

and Léautier 2011). Hill further submits that only HEIs that are calculating in identifying and investing in the next generation of leadership talent will be able to achieve and sustain success (Hill, nd: 30; see also Bloom, Canning and Chan, 2005). Doing so successfully means strategically scanning the environment, mapping out opportunities and possibilities, and seizing the moment – including forging strategic partnerships and collaborations with global HEIs to address the challenges of faculty development, curriculum development and quality and relevance assurance and enhancement (NASULGC 2008). These actions are crucial if African HEIs are to transcend the global winds of change (Hanson and Léautier 2011). As Bloom, Canning and Chan (2005: ii), equally note:

Tertiary education may improve technological catch-up and, in doing so, maximize African potential to achieve its greatest possible economic growth given current constraints, Investing in tertiary education in Africa may accelerate technological diffusion, which would decrease knowledge gaps and help reduce poverty in the region.

Opportunities and Possibilities

The risks of the revised landscape notwithstanding, Hanson and Léautier (2011: 296) argue that, there is generally a new vision and evolving strategy for HEIs, triggered in part by the opportunities and possibilities of globalization and technology. This position mirrors that of Marginson and Sawir (2006), who similarly note that in a global environment in which global, national and local nodes relate freely within common networks, all HEIs must pursue strategies for building global capacity and facilitating cross-border staff and student movement and research collaboration. As Marginson and Sawir put it, as a result of ‘global communications and flows, and the trend to more [independent HEIs, many institutions of higher education are more] open to global pressures and

forces. They are also affected by common global trends such as the facilitation of skilled migration ... and emphasis on international comparisons and international competitiveness' (2006:346).

Central to the myriad possibilities and opportunities arising from globalization, and rapid technological enhancements, is the growth in catalytic partnerships and collaborations amongst HEIs (i.e. North-South, and South-South) – heightening the demand for new knowledge, and modes of knowledge production. The partnerships are also radically transforming the production, utilization, dissemination and recreation of knowledge (Tirronen 2010; World Bank 2009a, 2009b; NASULGC 2008); and engendering a dual structure in which HEIs in developing/emerging economies are supplemented by centres engaged in knowledge application, both locally and globally (Hanson and Léautier 2011).

Efforts to mobilize and utilize the African Diaspora are also critical. And partnership collaborations premised on transparent and well-designed initiatives, will stimulate performance, improve quality and encourage innovation (NASULGC 2008).

Yet another emerging development resulting from the revised landscape is the integration of various perspectives from the plethora of disciplines and approaches to learning. An excellent case in point is the growing number of self-directed learners who access distance education or open courseware. Clearly, the meteoric acceptance of e-learning – offering flexible access to learning and pedagogic innovation at reduced costs; and not constrained by training design and/or delivery mechanism – has been a game-changer! The possibility of delivering high-quality knowledge to learners regardless of geographic location, socio-economic or cultural background or disability, offers HEIs glimpses into the future of higher education (Hanson and Léautier 2011: 397-88), while at the same time paving the

way (from a policy and implementation standpoint) for others to follow suite (Watkins and Corry 2002).

The ‘shifting sands’ of the revised landscape have compelled HEIs to re-evaluate priorities and expectations. HEIs are also re-examining missions and mandates, largely the result of global flows of tertiary education resources — funding, ideas, students and staff (World Bank 2009b: ix). Also ensuing, it appears, is a global fixation with rankings — recognition that economic growth and competitiveness are driven by knowledge and intellectual capital; and that HEIs are critical. Two of the most respected rankings are that of the Times Higher Education Supplement (THES), and the Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) (World Bank 2009b). The increasing fixation with “rankings, reflect the general recognition that economic growth and global competitiveness are increasingly driven by knowledge and that [HEIs] play a key role in that context” (World Bank 2009b:1). As the World Bank further posits, with students seeking out the best possible tertiary institutions that they can afford – regardless of national borders, and government keen on maximizing the returns of their investments in HEIs, global standing is increasingly becoming a vital concern for HEIs around the globe (World Bank 2009b:4). In this milieu, an increasingly pressing priority of many countries — both in the north and south — is to make sure that their top higher education institutions are performing at the cutting edge of intellectual and scientific development (World Bank 2009b:3). African HEIs need to embrace this culture, if more of its HEI aside of the University of Cape Town, are to achieve a ranked status.

The solution to these developments will require leadership nationally, as well as within the HEIs (Borysiewicz 2010). That said, while structural synergies and changes in leadership and governance may be central pathways to achieving organizational strength, the true idea of a competitive HEI

relies on a viable and vibrant academic community. This is also the way to achieve academic excellence in these competitive times (Tirronen 2010:234).

The Role of Leadership in the Contemporary HEI

In the wake of the aforementioned developments, many African governments, HEIs and the international community are proactively taking on the task of fostering leadership capacity so as to translate competence into strategic assets. Such assets, Léautier (2009a) notes, are key to advancing intellectual capital and strategic scanning (i.e. the capacity to recognize the behavior of interconnected systems to make effective decisions under varying strategic and risk scenarios), and transformation of knowledge as a leveraging mechanism for the attainment of specified objectives and goals.

To succeed, however, African HEIs need to acknowledge their place as principal places of learning, and strive to become trailblazers in evolving pedagogical tools, and take a leadership role in research in this critical area. HEIs further need to develop strategic collaborations to strengthen programme content and delivery. Negotiating these strategic challenges is vital not only for the future of African HEIs, but more so for educational development in Africa in general (Hanson and Léautier 2011; World Bank 2009b; NASULGC 2008).

In fact, across the globe, increasing responsibility is being bestowed upon, and demanded of, the leadership of HEIs owing to the competing, interconnected and complex issues of institutional autonomy, globalization, and technological developments of today's knowledge society (ACBF 2005). And today, the time-honoured tools and frameworks that institutional leaders previously employed to make decisions now appear inadequate. HEIs across Africa therefore need a cadre of

leaders who possess dynamic leadership skills that empower them to navigate through the complexities and interconnectedness of 21st century knowledge society. The specific skills required include, but are not limited to, a) ability to function in environments with low predictability; b) preparedness to handle diverse potential futures; c) capacity to generate strategic maps of pressure points and risk scenarios; d) skills, set of values, and behaviours that guide them in making choices in challenging circumstances; and, e) capacity to identify patterns of change (shifts), extract important relationships (interactions), and select from a variety of approaches for handling challenges (Léautier 2009a, 2009b; see also World Bank 2009b). The strategic rethinking of the role of institutional leadership in African HEIs is thus unavoidable. In this regard, Hanson and Léautier (2011) submit that the dialogue should be articulated around issues of competitiveness, knowledge utilization, changing landscape, and paradigm shifts in the role of HEIs from one of control and regulation to one of facilitation and flexibility.

As dynamic institutions, HEIs generally do not function effectively if constituent members do not have the right combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes, or have a structured system in place for the regulation of interactions. Accordingly, while HEI leadership capacity enhancement is both desirable and necessary, especially in this revised environment, it entails investments in time and resources, and a dedication to rethink old ways and develop new ones. This will not be achieved without an investment in change and meeting the costs that come with that change (Léautier 2009a, 2009b). One potential hurdle in this regard, is how African HEIs maximize the number of faculty, students, administrators, and staff who become committed and effective agents of positive social change (Austin and Austin 2000).

In fact, as argued in a recent publication of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2008), HEIs must organize their resources for increased responsiveness to, and engagement with, society's core challenges in the century ahead. In doing so, HEIs have primary responsibilities to help ensure the continued well-being of society: a) to provide graduates and society at large with the skills desirable to be effective in a global, increasingly competitive economy; and, b) to close the achievement gap — educationally, culturally and economically — between advantaged and disadvantaged students (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2008: 2-3). This is clearly a step that all HEIs across Africa need to take.

African HEIs also need to optimize learning by setting forward-looking expectations. Doing so, will require HEIs to take responsibility for learning, and substantially raise the number of those who persist and succeed in programmes of education. It means closing the gaps in achievement without lowering the bar for results. In many cases succeeding in this challenge will entail rethinking the nature and content of degrees as well as their timing and mode of delivery (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education 2008: 3; see also NASULGC 2008).

Invariably, all attempts to enhance the institutional leadership of African HEIs will need to occur in tandem with capacity development efforts aimed at uncovering and designing creative learning tools and practices, while simultaneously absorbing and effectively utilizing new trends, knowledge and educational learning tool kits and techniques. The enhancement of HEIs leadership capabilities should be conceptualized as a purposive process which is inherently value-based and one that is designed and implemented as an integral and critical part of the HEI experience. To this end, HEIs need to transcend their current 'modern' system of education to a post-modern perspective, which recognizes context, collaboration and knowledge as valued skills and assets (Hanson and Léautier

2011:393). While the aforementioned is not being put forth as a panacea to the issue of weak institutional leadership across African HEIs, there are a number of strategic actions that this paper recommends to enhance institutional leadership:

- Strengthened partnerships with southern (Asian, African and Latin American) and northern global knowledge centres;
- Institutionalized leadership mentoring and coaching;
- Establishment of recognition programmes to develop exemplary leadership;
- Development of a forum to engage in continuing dialogue on issues of leadership;
- Establishment of networks/Community of practices (CoPs);
- Promotion of a work environment supportive of leadership learning culture, and that attracts and retains good leaders;
- Pursuance of innovation-oriented policies aimed at increased flexibility, economic efficiency, productivity and quality of services;
- Sustained philanthropy and a capacity to attract funding now and in the future;
- Promotion of Open Access/Open Courseware; and
- Fostering an enabling environment for entrepreneurship and learning in HEI.

In addition to the aforementioned strategic actions, there is the need to systematically build the behavioural skills of the current African HEI leadership and focus on self-improvement; a need for skill development for managing under different risk scenarios; and, to promote research on effective pedagogy. Held et al. (1999), in their seminal study on *Global Transformations*, identified the following six guiding values as vital for talent management in HEIs to help mitigate the currents of globalization, dwindling resources and heightened competition:

- 1) A detailed approach to talent management that facilitates the attainment of diversity;
- 2) Diverse talent that brings in knowledge, intelligence, creativity and innovation;
- 3) Recruitment and retention of talented and diverse faculty and staff that is continuous;
- 4) The focus on talent that is prospective rather than retrospective and models the values of democracy in a global society;
- 5) Organizational compassion approach that enhances institutional awareness and sensitivity;
and
- 6) A strategic approach to talent management that necessarily encompasses attention to the future evolution of workplace culture to be welcoming, inclusive and reflective of demographic diversity.

The strategic imperatives outlined in the preceding sections, should be viewed as starting points to transform leadership capacity across African HEIs. To this end, they are essential if African HEIs are to proactively anticipate, innovate and adapt. Embracing these suggestions, will assist African HEIs to ease the scale and frequency of crises, mitigate negative impacts, seize opportunities and thrive in an era of a new order of higher education (Hanson and Léautier 2011; Bourgon 2009; Miller 2005). As Miller (2005) further notes, it is equally imperative to empower, challenge and motivate HEI leaders to be visionaries, initiators, effective communicators and decision-makers, capable of responding proactively to the realities of today's society. Developing their capacity to detect emerging trends and anticipate key changes by a few years or even months, will give such HEIs priceless comparative advantage. It will empower them to proactively prevent, pre-empt or alter the course of potentially negative events toward more favourable outcomes (Bourgon 2009).

To succeed in transforming the African HEI landscape to develop world class HEIs, will require that the leadership, key stakeholders and partners of HEIs across Africa build the requisite consensus among African policy makers, scholars and collaborating partners outside of Africa. Continental and regional players such as the Association of African Universities (AAU); Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARAU); Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA); the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC); the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) and similar bodies and institutions equally need to actively engaged and involved to attain the paradigm shift needed for success.

The New Order of Higher Education and the Quest for World Class Universities

The new order of higher education resulting from globalization is unique. It has seven key characteristics: a) borderless (shaping thought processes at the global level and aimed at social wellbeing); b) premised on collaborative learning; c) technology enabled; d) inclusive; e) fosters employability; f) innovative; and g) entrepreneurial. HEIs thriving in this revised setting are viewed primarily as key for producing knowledge and workforce for the needs of modern society. Such HEIs are considered tools of social and economic change (Tirronen 2009), and expected to play a central part in the innovation system, economic development, knowledge-based economy and the competitiveness of nation-states (Tirronen 2009:1).

The networked paradigm represented by the new borderless HEI — global in scope, managed through self-organization and emergent behavior — reflects a knowledge-organization method very different from that of the top-down, hierarchical, command-and-control multiversity that operates much like a corporation (Staley and Trinkle 2011:24). These emerging ecosystems of learning and knowledge coexist alongside — and compete with — today's HEIs. In this new order, the research

environment and the production of knowledge are also changing and collaboration with industry and the private sector has increased dramatically. Further, the shifting relationship between the state and HEIs in this setting, presumes strong leadership and management, adequate institutional and financial autonomy, clear institutional mission and strategic self-steering of HEIs (Tirronen 2009:220).

As Marginson and Sawir (2006) also note, in a global environment in which local, national and global nodes relate freely within common networks, HEIs must pursue strategies for building global capacity and facilitating cross-border staff and student movement and research collaboration. Again, because of global communications and flows, and the trend to more autonomy, HEIs are more open to global pressures and forces. They are also affected by common global trends such as the facilitation of skilled migration, downward pressures on public taxation and spending, and emphasis on international comparisons and international competitiveness (Marginson and Sawir 2006:346).

In this current higher education milieu, nations are integral to global capacity. While the capacity of HEIs is partly determined by themselves, it is also nation bound. To this end, not only is present university capacity an accumulated product of past government strategies of nation building; but also HEIs remain central to the policies of government (Marginson and Sawir 2006:349). Additionally, variations in the global power of the nation condition variations in the global potential of HEIs. The leadership of HEIs has also become increasingly aware of both the miracle and the mirage globalization presents in defining the HEIs' role (Hanson and Léautier 2011; Held et al. 1999).

As the global dynamics of higher education have expanded and grown in complexity, stakeholders in the sector are re-evaluating their priorities and expectations (World Bank 2009b: ix). The dynamics have also led to the emergence of phenomenon that scholars are calling the World-Class University

(also called Flagship University, World-Class Higher Education Institution) – institutions that transcend culture and education. They are ‘points of pride and comparison among nations that view their own status in relation to other nations’ (World Bank 2009b: x). An in-depth discussion of the World-Class University is neither the focus nor within the scope of this paper. This notwithstanding, its centrality to developments taking place in the higher education sector globally cannot be ignored.

With the global economy evolving toward an international network organized around the value of knowledge (Hanson and Léautier 2011, Borysiewicz 2010; Tirronen 2009; Hanna 2003); and students ‘seeking to attend the most prestigious tertiary institutions that they can afford ... global standing is becoming an increasingly significant concern for institutions around the world’ (Williams and Van Dyke 2007 cited in World Bank 2009b:4). However, achieving the status of the world-class higher education institution (WCHEI) is not via self-declaration; ‘rather, elite status is conferred by the outside world on the basis of international recognition’ (World Bank 2009b:4).

WCHEIs, according to the World Bank (2009b:5), ‘produce well-qualified graduates who are in high demand on the [global] labor market; conduct [cutting-edge] research published in top scientific journals; and ... contribute to technological innovations through patents and licenses’ (World Bank 2009b:5). However, as Tirronen (2009) notes, being a premier WCHEI, ‘carries with it responsibility as well as opportunity...A [WCHEI’s] global standing will be challenged both internationally and locally; standing still is not an option and one must continue to adapt and develop’ (2009:3-4). Tirronen further submits that research distinction is one of the defining features of the WCHEI. It is integral to fulfilling WCHEIs’ mission and plays a vital part in grounding a WCHEI’s international status. This reputation, in turn, is what attracts exceptional faculty and students (2009:3).

There are three defining characteristics of the WCHEI according to the World Bank (2009b:6-7). First, a high concentration of talent (internationalized faculty and students – who undertake excellent research and teaching); second, abundant resources (from public budget resources, private endowments, tuition fees and research grants) – to offer a rich learning environment and to conduct advanced research); and third, a favourable governance structure – (supportive regulatory framework, autonomy/academic freedom, and a leadership team) that encourages strategic vision, innovation, and flexibility and that enables the institution to make decisions and manage resources without being bogged down in bureaucracy.

Different countries have adopted and adapted different pathways in their quest to set up such flagship universities. That said, three primary strategies appear to dominate this quest: a) upgrading a select number of existing HEIs that have potential of excelling (picking winners); b) encouraging a number of existing HEIs to merge and evolve into a new university (hybrid formula); and, c) creating a new WCHEI from scratch (clean-slate approach) (World Bank 2009b:43-49). All three models have their merits, demerits, and accompanying challenges – fiscal, institutional and socio-cultural.

The above strategic approaches notwithstanding, there is no universal recipe or magic formula. National contexts and institutional models vary. As a result, studies (World Bank 2009b; Tirronen 2009; Marginson and van der Wende 2007a), recommend that the countries proceed based on their national strengths, vision and resources. In so doing, attention needs to be paid to: a) country's overall socio-economic development strategy; b) ongoing changes and plans for lower level education system; and, c) broader plans to create integrated system of teaching, research and tech-oriented institutions. After all, the generic approaches are not mutually exclusive and countries may pursue a combination of strategies based on permutations of the models (World Bank 2009b:48).

Conclusions and Way Forward

This paper has sought to highlight the critical imperatives for leadership in contemporary higher education sector. The paper contends that the challenges African HEIs face today, including the shift toward a knowledge-based society, and from a national to a global economy, call for creative solutions and a new leadership. A leadership that is conversant with the behaviour of complex adaptive systems and able to make effective decisions under different strategic and risk scenarios. A leadership that is vested with strong interpersonal skills; which is dynamic; innovative; politically astute; economically savvy; business aware; and, which employs its emotional intelligence to lead African HEIs into the future (Hanson and Léautier 2011; see also Higgs 2002; Goleman and Boyatzis 2008; NASLUGC 2008; Sankar 2003). African HEIs with this cadre of leaders, will reposition themselves as the repositories of new ideas and exchange of knowledge such that the quiet force of their collective efforts unleash the spring of new approaches to sustainable development, good governance, and innovation.

In revitalizing Africa's HEIs as centres for leadership development, research and innovation (i.e. world-class higher education institutions), the paper further submits that all three levels of capacity are critical: individual (skills and knowledge); institutional (faculty development, library facilities, lecture facilities, modern teaching aids — e-learning, distance learning — and ICT innovations); and, organizational (strategic leadership).

Linked to the above, African institutions must strive to put their institutions ahead of petty internal politicking where only 'old boys/girls' are destined to be leaders of such institutions. Such 'inbreeding' is unlikely to drive African HEIs to new levels. To this end, the focus should not only be in recruiting talent and diverse faculty, but they should be bold enough to cast their nets wider to

recruit new leaders as well. Rwanda is commended for taking bold steps in this regard. A case in point being the former President of the University of Western Ontario, Paul Davenport, serving on the Rwandan Government's National Education Advisory Board as an advisory to the Minister of Education (Davenport 2013). Indeed, as Marginson and van der Wende (2007b: 325) note, diversity is 'as important as autonomy to widen access and improve quality [in HEIs] ... to make diversity useful, it needs to be [better] understood, by publicly defining the missions and characters of HEIs'.

The paper further acknowledges that higher education sector is a dynamic global enterprise and the strategic impact of its facilities is becoming increasingly complex. Accordingly, to leap-frog Africa's HEIs into the 21st Century requires commitment at all levels — reaffirmation of government support; private sector support; innovative thinking and innovative capacity — especially of related stakeholders (talented graduate students and faculty); and transformative leadership, both political leadership and organizational leadership. At the national level, key policy options should include, but not be limited to: a) establishment of policy free from restrictions so as to encourage investments in higher education; b) development of education infrastructure; c) development of scholarship programmes to attract the best and brightest – locally and internationally; d) investments in technology; e) sustained philanthropic resource mobilization drives; and, f) recognition programmes to develop leadership (Hanson and Léautier 2011; World Bank 2009b; Hanna 2003). Effectively implementing these policy initiatives will enable HEIs in general, and WCHEIs in particular, to produce future generations of transformative leaders who will devise more valuable solutions to society's pressing issues (Marmolejo 2007; Austin and Austin 2000). As a way forward, African governments and HEIs must re-organize their resources for enhanced responsiveness to, and engagement with, society's core challenges. Only doing so, and strengthening the requisite capacities along entire higher educational value-chain, will success be guaranteed.

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Endnotes

ⁱ Following Held et al. (1999:2), globalization is defined here as the widening, deepening and speeding up of all forms of world-wide interconnectedness.