

## STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION:

# PROMOTING LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

### BACKGROUND

The Higher Education Reform Experts South Africa (HERESA) is a European Commission-funded project overseen by the Technology Higher Education Network South Africa (THENSA) and OBREAL Global. This collaborative project involves the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), six public higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa, and five European HEIs.

The HERESA project focuses specifically on developing novel approaches to entrepreneurship education, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), competency-based learning and teaching (CBLT), competencies for the 4IR/ 5IR, and the leadership to drive the changes needed.

The HERESA project has developed higher education reform capacity in the HERESA network, through mutual practice-sharing activities, that include events, technical assistance, and shared platforms. One of these activities, the outcomes of which are reported here, was a *Leadership for Change* workshop that was hosted by one of the HERESA partners, the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, in March this year. This communication is designed to share the major learning that emerged from the workshop that involved participants from six South African HEIs.

### LEADERSHIP FOR CHANGE

The workshop aimed to encourage leadership for change in HEIs, seeking to empower champions for transformation in response to South Africa's post-pandemic socio-economic recovery, rapid technological advances, unemployment, and the urgent need to develop and enhance learning-and-work pathways in a climate of hope. The most recent leadership workshop yielded a number of key learnings in terms of how this should be approached; these include the following:

#### 1. Models of good leadership practice

There is a need to identify and popularise models of good leadership which include situational leadership and transformational leadership. It is clear that leaders are ordinary people trying to do their best in complex situations, trying to do the good/ right thing for people they are leading, in highly ethical ways. Sometimes the route for the 'right' way forward is inspirational, sometimes it is transformational, sometimes, situational – or combinations of these.

## 2. Good leadership practices

It seems that good leadership, in addition to the leaders *striving to 'do the right thing'* by their communities of practice, is characterized by: (a) leaders being knowledgeable and experienced (credible) in relation to things they are leading in; (b) leaders who are genuinely kind/ care about/ love the people in the communities they are leading, and work on their relationships with people; (c) leaders have insight and courage to follow their insights/ the best path, however difficult – their actions are authentic, and they think short/ medium and long-term; (d) leaders that make efforts to understand and engage diverse people and situations; (e) leaders that give people around them a sense of hope.

## 3. Learning interventions

Leadership needs to be developed through structured interventions when one or more of the following is the case: (a) Leaders lack knowledge/ experience in the area being led or hold different ideological views (need to bridge ideological views; (b) Leaders care more about their own prestige/ success/ image, than about those/ initiatives they lead – and are distant; (c) Leaders are not self-aware, nor aware of the impact of their behaviours/ actions on others; (d) Leaders think in the short/ medium term; (e) Leaders rule through making people fearful.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Since 2021, multiple engagements with HERESA partners, and most importantly the recent workshop, have identified a need for: (1) training on leadership for change in South Africa, (2) a resource book on the topic, and (3) related guidelines with toolkits. Furthermore, HERESA recognises the need to extend these leadership capacity-building interventions to a wider range of Post-School Education and Training (PSET) entities.

It is, therefore, proposed that HERESA together with strategically selected partners host a series of leadership events, kick-started with a conference, where the papers could be used to develop the country's approach to leadership in PSET institutions. Furthermore, the conference would serve to establish the scope of the proposed resource book and the associated guidelines and toolkits. Subsequent events could be used to workshop the book, guidelines, and toolkits.

Resource topics include and are not necessarily limited to the following.

- Understanding leadership;
- Roles and responsibilities of leaders (Student Leadership, Academic Leadership, HEI Council Leadership, Union Leadership, Leadership of the Convocation, Leadership in the broader PSET system);

- Leadership competences;
- Leadership and governance;
- Leadership and management;
- Leadership culture;
- Authentic Leadership;
- Ethical leadership;
- Leadership and decision-making;
- Leadership and embracing diversity;
- Leadership strategies (Physical, Mental, Emotional, Cultural);
- Innovative leadership;
- Leadership and technology;
- Leadership for innovation and commercialization;
- Inter-disciplinary leadership: Away with silos.

These recommendations can only be accomplished through a collaborative effort. In this regard, the HERESA leaders note the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) mandate to develop and oversee the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) and quality assurance within it, which includes aligning it with values in the South African Constitution. The Quality Councils for occupational and general qualifications play this role in their National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Sub-Framework contexts.

HERESA leaders also note the role of Universities South Africa (USAf) in working with the leadership of the public HEIs in the country, towards promoting and facilitating environments in which HEIs can contribute effectively and efficiently, to social, cultural, economic, technical, and environmental wellbeing in South Africa and beyond. Further coordinating bodies in PSET can also play this role.

As such, the HERESA community calls on the CHE and the other Quality Councils, USAf, other Higher Education consortia such as the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) and the PSET sector at large to support its initiatives on 'Leadership for Change'.

*Please contact us at [info1@thensa.co.za](mailto:info1@thensa.co.za), should you wish to work with HERESA in realising any of the initiatives proposed in this communication.*

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