Chapter 15
The Current State of Dialogue in South African Universities: Change through Open Conversations and the Facilitating Role of ICTs

Kevin Allan Johnston
University of Cape Town, South Africa

Bane Nogemane
Standard Bank, South Africa

Salah Kabanda
University of Cape Town, South Africa

ABSTRACT
The current state of dialogue within certain South African universities was explored, and if and how dialogue can be used to address the issues of transformation and the lack of social cohesiveness. The role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in facilitating or inhibiting open conversations was examined. Through qualitative analysis of surveys administered to staff and students at universities, the researchers identified that power disparity, and the slow pace of transformation were prevalent and needed to be addressed. University management generally practice open conversations, and students and staff were willing to participate. Organisational structures were not conducive for open conversations. The ICT infrastructure used had no significant role to play, while Social Network Systems (SNSs) were perceived as enablers of open conversations. This chapter contributes to the existing body of knowledge about change management, and presents open conversations as a means of driving and realising organisational change.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8598-7.ch015
SUMMARY

This chapter explored the current state of dialogue within certain South African universities, and if and how dialogue can be used to address the issues of transformation and the lack of social cohesiveness. South Africa has a history of segregation, antipathy and violence between racial groups. South African universities are currently receiving greater diversity among their students and staff in terms of racial, socioeconomic background, and gender. It is a moral and civic responsibility of universities to undergo transformation and redress socioeconomic historical imbalances. However, transformation has been marred by the lack of institutional dialogue, and lack of openness. The role of ICTs in facilitating or inhibiting open conversations was examined.

The researchers identified that power disparity, and the slow pace of transformation were prevalent and needed to be addressed. University management generally practice open conversations, and students and staff were willing to participate. Organisational structures were not conducive for open conversations. The ICT infrastructure used had no significant role to play, while Social Network Systems (SNSs) were perceived as enablers of open conversations. The chapter contributes to the existing body of knowledge about change management, and presents open conversations as a means of driving and realising organisational change.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa is ‘a society torn by a long history of antipathy and violence between groups’ (Dixon et al 2010, 402). In the early nineties, racial segregation was officially disbanded to allow equal participation of Black people in public and economic life (Durrheim & Dixon, 2010). However, to undo centuries of segregation requires effort from all stakeholders involved, for example the government, people, and higher institutions of learning. Compared to previous years of segregation and unfair discrimination, South African higher institutions are currently receiving greater diversity among their students and staff in terms of racial, socioeconomic background, and gender. This diversification if not carefully monitored, has the potential of creating and fostering historical discrimination and inequality within higher learning institutions in South Africa. It is therefore a moral and civic responsibility of higher learning institutions to undergo transformation and redress socioeconomic historical imbalances that are as a result of the apartheid government (Ramdass, 2009). However, transformation has been marred by the lack of institutional dialogue, lack of openness and inactivity of institutional forums (Lewins, 2010; Soudien et al., 2008). These inhibitors call for the need for communication – a dialogue process for people to engage on issues of transformation. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been associated with bridging communication gaps between people, and could therefore potentially be a tool for facilitating institutional dialogue, enhancing institutional forum activities and openness within higher education institutions. Bull and Brown (2012) posit ICTs as an ideal medium for this participation to occur, as ICTs can cut geographical and organisational boundaries, allowing more people to get involved. Traditionally conversations happen face to face or in meetings, but with the advent of technology, conversations can take place via ICT mediums such as email. As open conversations are inclusive in their nature and seek to encourage the participation of all individuals, ICTs have been put forward as the ideal means of facilitating such conversations (Bull & Brown, 2012; Byrne & Sahay, 2007; Yang & Li, 2012). If properly implemented and contextualized, ICTs can increase communication operational efficiency, quality, and transparency (Zimmermann & Finger, 2005).
Related Content

Public Administration & ICT for Human Development in Turkey How to Remove Limitations
[www.igi-global.com/article/public-administration-ict-human-development/74060?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/public-administration-ict-human-development/74060?camid=4v1a)

Usability Study of Fingerprint and Palmvein Biometric Technologies at the ATM
[www.igi-global.com/article/usability-study-fingerprint-palmvein-biometric/76368?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/usability-study-fingerprint-palmvein-biometric/76368?camid=4v1a)

Foreseeing the Future Lifestyle with Digital Music: A Comparative Study Between Mobile Phone Ring Tones and Hard-Disk Music Players Like iPod
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/foreseeing-future-lifestyle-digital-music/22311?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/foreseeing-future-lifestyle-digital-music/22311?camid=4v1a)

Framing the Context of Use for Mobile HCI
[www.igi-global.com/article/framing-context-use-mobile-hci/47099?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/framing-context-use-mobile-hci/47099?camid=4v1a)