

# The Emperor and the New Clothes: Engaging the Frivolity of Ethical and Moral Leadership as Espoused Values Against the Values of use

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**Abstract:** University Education in South Africa has been a subject of transformation in systematic ways and over time. This has had to call upon the multi-dimensional approaches (about MLG Systems and Practices) due to the complexity of the subject. While remarkable progress has been made, and can be evidenced by empirical data, such developments remain elusive for some universities within the sector. Strangely, even the considerable highly ranked universities have not been spared from what can be argued as the complexity of power relations in the politics of knowledge and of being and becoming. This article is based on this issue about complexity in university education, which can play out more as the continuities than what should be the discontinuities from the old regimes of power and of truth. A Case study approach was applied as a methodology, with the actual methods about data management including organisational records, content analysis and critical discourse analysis, over time. Informing such an approach was the ideal of ensuring the theory-methodology-practical program aspects of a potentially credible scholarship project. As such the social realist theory, informed by the critical realist philosophy, served as the anchor of the study that this article is reporting on. The findings relate to what can become the enduring management, leadership and governance crisis in the case of university education, thus constituting the micro politics of being and becoming, despite what can be reported about the same case at macro level. Such cases call upon scholarly critiques if the practical alternatives might constitute the realms of new possibilities. The potential value of the study can be the enhanced dialogue and sustained conversations about the role of management, leadership and governance systems in university education, which have to be maintained and sustained by the idea of ethical and moral practices in pursuit of what ought to be the public and common good.

**Keywords:** Fees Must Fall Movement, Transformation, Ethical Leadership, Engaged University, Critical Realism

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## 1. Introduction

The year 2024 signals what can be regarded as the documented and compelling evidence about the maturity or immaturity of South African constitutional democracy as applied in the case of university education sector. The Report on The State of Transformation in South Africa's Public Universities (Luescher, Mncwango, Fongwa, Oppelt, Mthombeni and Paterson, 2023) portrays a picture about the transformation project which is delineated into four major typologies: the compliance and equity narratives which can be juxtaposed with the innovation and development narratives. Along this report, are the mushrooming institutional audit reports, in the aftermath of the quality assurance framework (CHE, 2021-a). The value about both the report and the framework, from which the institutional audit reports emerge, is that scholars of university education sector in South Africa are then allowed a space to subject these reports not just to the standards or good practices about university education, but, more importantly, about the relevant theories about such practices and thus be able to make scholarly arguments about the maturity or the yet to be mature democratic systems where university education ought to be the enabling mechanism. It is therefore against these observations that this article seeks to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the role of management, leadership and governance (MLG) systems, which can serve as the constraining or enabling mechanisms, or the variations thereof, in university education transformation. The article draws on the case of University of the North Eastern Cape (UNEC)-whose name has been changed in order to protect her identity-remains mired in the complexity of power relations and the politics of knowledge and being which still characterise the transformation project in South Africa. UNEC was established in 2005 as a result of a merger as part of transforming university education and training in South Africa.

The main feature and unique character about UNEC derived from its establishment. Post constitutional democracy of 1994, the previously disintegrated and racially structured university education sector had to be restructured through what would be a full, or partial merger system. While the merger, in general terms, would be conceptualised and implemented as the necessary transformation of the strong and weak, namely historical white and advantaged, and the black and disadvantaged, UNEC was constituted of three legacy institutions, which were all historically black and disadvantaged, two technikons/Polytechnique and traditional university. This arrangement would earn UNEC a strange label of the "marriage of the weak". At the time of the merger, the traditional university element was the most weak, on the verge of complete collapse and closure, while the relatively strong were Technikons. However, the latter elements did not enjoy the conventional status attributable to a traditional university (research and knowledge production). As a result, for the former

polytechnic staff, the masters and doctorate qualification was not a minimum requirement for an academic status, unlike for traditional university. After the merger of 2005, a master's qualification would then become the minimum requirement from 2012. Also, the matter of identity to define and elaborate on the comprehensive status (a combination of both Polytechnique and traditional university programs), would become a very politically contested issue which is yet to be finalised. It is therefore this issue about the politics of being and becoming that informs the idea about the Emperor and the New Clothes.

The notion about the empire refers to the idea about an ostensibly merged and unitary institution, but where power remains deeply contested in terms of the structural arrangements that constitute the institution. The idea about the empire, at least in the contest of this article, refers specifically to some forms of decision making by the management, leadership and governance systems, which can unwittingly and inadvertently expose the nakedness of the powerholder, the emperor! The emperor in this context refers to the case of a Vice Chancellor and Principal (VC-P) (2016-2020), who in his apparent attempts to effect the changes in the headship of a Centre of Excellence for Learning and Teaching Development (the Centre), by making a doctorate qualification as a minimum requirement, then, in the process, would be found to have undermined a university statute and breached university policies. As I argue elsewhere (Dwayi, 2021; 2022), such cases become of great significance in understanding the transformation project in the higher education and training in South Africa (HETSA) as reflecting the complexity of power relations in the politics of knowledge and of being and becoming! Complexity in university education can play out as more about the continuities, than what should be the discontinuities from the old regimes of power and of truth. The social realist understandings and explanations about such cases continue to constitute both the research goal and main objectives as applied in the research as reported in this article.

Subsequent to this brief introduction, the case about the frivolity of ethical and moral leadership values, as found out in the case, followed the normative structure about a scholarship/intellectualism project, the Reproduction-Understanding-Broadening-Advancement Logic, which is structured as follows in this article,

- a. Power dynamics about the transformation project in South Africa with a reference to the university education sector.
- b. The case of UNEC as the particular case of historically black and disadvantaged university where the example of the Emperor and the New Clothes could be discussed as the frivolity of ethical and moral values, when the required choices for such values can be more reproductive of the old regimes of power and of untruths than the opposite.
- c. On the basis of the UNEC case, the discussion of two points about the dangers of logocentrism and the need for engaging the latter in the sociology of learning and of knowledge-making as transformative agency.

## 2. Power Dynamics in the South African Transformation Project

By the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of constitutional democracy, South Africa was already grappling with the international discourses about the governance crisis which was confronting university education. Such a crisis would be captured, for example, in the form of the enduring questions, first by Primarashni Gower on 17th July 2007, *"Who should run varsities?"*, and later on by Tahir Kamran on 18 December 2016, *"Who should run the universities?"* Such questions would remain quite instructive about the unique challenges in South Africa, with the highlight thereof signalled by what would be later conceptualised as the *Rhodes Must Fall Movement of 2015*, morphing into the politically "correct" project of *#Fees Must Fall Movement* from 2016 to 2018. By these *Fallist Movements*, the crisis of corporate governance and leadership was no longer the main character of historically black and disadvantaged institutions, but had firmly gripped the hallowed walls of the historically white and advantaged ones. In recent times, and at abstract and conceptual level, such forms of governance, leadership and management crisis has been represented in the three major developments in the form of national institutional audits (CHE, 2021), the recent Research Report about the state of transformation in South Africa, and the work of great thinkers about the state of crisis besetting the university education sector, in the form of the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf) (Makoni, 2023).

Therefore, cross referencing these Reports with the scholarly conversations about the transformation project in the higher education and training in South Africa (to be alluded to as the HETSA, henceforth) revealed what remains, in my view, as the complexity of power relations, with the responsibility thereof falling squarely on the university institution's management, leadership and governance (MLG) systems. This was of great significance when in consideration of the need for public accountability, as identified by Professor Jonathan Jansen (Makoni,

2023). For example, the comparative analysis of the CHE Integrated Quality Framework (CHE, 2021) and the Transformation Report (Luescher et al, 2023) would surfaced not only the typologies and the quality dimensions about the transformation project, but the complexity of MLG systems as expressed at ASSAf (Makoni, 2023). These would be concerns, claims and issues which continued to characterise the HETSA project despite the advent of the KIV Code of Corporate Governance and Leadership (2016) as extensively discussed in the MLG literature (Dwayi, 2021; 2022). The contemporary scholarship about MLG systems, therefore, would have to provide credible explanations for such cases within what Prof Crain Soudien identifies as the dangers of logocentrism, and also within what Prof Saleem Badat challenges the academia about the sociology of learning and of knowledge-making. By logocentrism Prof Soudien refers to the ability to “confront the totalising impulses of modernity and its intention of centralising value in the European form ... the idea that Europe is a final signifier of who we are, what we might be”. Therefore, the institutional research, on which this paper emerged, had to make a critique about what can be the mainstream narratives of equity and compliance, in one case of a university institution, when juxtaposed with the quality imperatives or good practices, where MLG roles ought to constitute the strategic imperative. In the next section of this article, I discuss how the unproblematised narratives of equity and compliance can constitute the case of the Emperor and the New Clothes.

### 3. The Emperor and the New Clothes

At the core of the argument in this article, is when the principle of ethical culture (KIV Code of Corporate Governance and Leadership, 2016) can be undermined at the point of agency, and thus revealing more of the contradictions than the congruence, more of the inconsistencies than the consistencies, more of the tensions than the alignment, and more of the lacks than the capabilities of MLG systems.

#### 3.1 The Case of the University of the Eastern Cape

The history about the University of the Eastern Cape (UNEC)-whose name has been changed in order to protect her identity- was already introduced in the first section of this article. It is not immediately clear from Luecher et al (2023), which narratives predominantly applied at UNEC for such a sparsely distributed institution. One would have taken more than 1000 kilometres to cover all the four main campuses, as a result of the merger of the three relatively dysfunctional legacy institutions. However, with UNEC being a Comprehensive University (a combination of a traditional university and two former polytechnics), the report seemed to categorise this university more along the developmental narrative than any other. By 2023, UNEC was still a university in transition, from the previous regime whose vision was about *an Engaged University for Rural Development and Urban Renewal* (2015-2019/20), when the transformation reports were submitted and analysed, to the current regime of *an Impactful and Technology-infused African University* (2020-2024)! The following ratings indicate how UNEC self-evaluated on two quality standards/good practices (WSU, 2022, p.16; p.12-16) as part of the institutional audit framework (CHE, 2023, p. 8-11),

- Standard 3: UNEC Rating Functional (3); CHE Final Rating: Not functional (1);
- Standard 4: UNEC Rating Functional (3); CHE Final Rating: Needs substantial improvement (2);

In these two standards, there remained a glaring gap between UNEC self-ratings and those of the HEQC as the external assessor, which would therefore call for a social realist account, about the potentially powerful knowledge (the kind of knowledge that can withstand an immanent critique) than the knowledge of the powerful (self-aggrandising explanations about its MLG systems). The critical realist thinking about such a project, and further about the emerging social explanatory program, would have to examine both the synchronous and diachronous structural generative mechanisms about the case, that is, the events and processes both at the point of emergence (in time) and over time (morphogenesis/morphostasis). At the micro level of a MLG system, and of great interest for the discussion in this article, was the particular case as represented in the Dr Lunga Mantashe Report about the Case of NEHAWU-MR X and the University Management (to be referred to as The Report, henceforth), as extensively discussed elsewhere (Dwayi, 2022).

#### 3.2 Good Intentions are not Enough

In the introduction section, I introduced the case of the changes in one Centre of Excellence at UNEC. The intentions about the changes in the Directorate for Learning and Teaching might have been good, from the point of an ostensibly good leader (the university Vice Chancellor and Principal), but such intentions seemed not to have been sufficient enough when in consideration of what would turn out to be the necessity for great leadership practices (the decision-making processes that the “leader” embarked upon). The following extract

from the UNEC Annual Report of 2018 indicates how this case had its roots upon the arrival of the VC-P (2016-2020), and how such an arrival ushered in the case of the Emperor and the New Clothes,

*“Learning and teaching at (UNEC) is primarily focused on academic development...The situation has necessitated a re-imagining of University’s teaching and learning endeavour to locate these activities within a principles and value-driven philosophical framework...The first steps towards this goal were undertaken in 2018 with the adoption of a new organisational and staffing structure which established a Learning and Teaching Division to be headed by an executive manager, a Senior Director, Learning and Teaching. (WSU, 2018, p.31),*

It is the position of this article that this case would become the best fit in terms of the two concepts of logocentrism (Prof Soudien, in Makoni, 2023) and about the sociology of learning and of knowledge-making (Prof Badat, in Makoni 2023). As I have already implied in the previous section of this article, elaborating on the latter by means of the two thinking tools of the Narrative-Analysis-Interpretation-Literacy Chain and of the Significance-Character-Trajectory-Dynamics Logic can be quite illustrative about the complexity of power dynamics in the politics of knowledge and Being/Becoming.

**Table 1: In pursuit of the synchronous and diachronous structural mechanisms, Part 1**

| <b>Labour Representations</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>The IF Findings, 30/03/2022</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Registrar Communication to EDHR, 06/06/2022</b>                                                                                                                            | <b>The Legal Opinion Findings, signed on 08/06/2022, upon receipt of EDHR communication on the matter, on 06/06/2022</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Declared dispute on the appointment of Executive Managers</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>Job Grading Policy, Clause 4.6, The university breached the <b>job grading policy</b> when Mr X did not become an automatic occupant of the SD: LTD.</p> <p>Recruitment, Selection and Placement Policy: Clause 8.2.1, The university also breached the Statute in that the short-listing committee for the SD: LTD was not chaired by an external Council person as the policy on Recruitment and Selection. The monetary reason, together with absence of a Council representative, is a bad excuse and cannot be used to flout policy.</p> | <p>Council would not comment on the submission made by the IF on the dispute involving Mr X and referred it to the Human Resource Committee of Council to advise Council.</p> | <p>In our view, X has no case against client.</p> <p>Client was entitled to upgrade the position and determine relevant criteria associated with that post. " While the failure to have an <b>external Council member chair the shortlisting process</b> may constitute a technical irregularity, unfairness would only be established if Mr X could prove that but for that irregularity, he would have been appointed to the post.</p> <p>Given that client was entitled to make a PhD degree a requirement for the SD: LT post, the failure to have an external Council member act as chairperson of the shortlisting committee did not result in unfairness.</p> <p><u>Even if the chairperson of the short-listing committee was an external Council member, he would not have been shortlisted because he did not meet the criteria.</u></p> |
| <p>NEHAWU and NTEU Letter to Executive Management, 26 September 2018, Dispute on the Appointment of Executive Managers,</p> <p>NEHAWU Letter to Council 15 May 2021, The issue has to do with ill-treatment and bullying of Executive and Senior Managers by the former Vice Chancellor (VC) and Principal which led to turnover and suffering in isolation by some. .... he was never the cause of the problem instead him too was a victim of corporate bullying by the then VC.</p> | <p><u>The University breached the job grading policy</u> when Mr X did not become an automatic occupant of the SD: LTD and advised that the University should compensate Mr X at Peromnes level 4 retrospectively, being in 2018 when the appointment on the position was made to date.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

Table 2: In pursuit of synchronous and diachronous structural mechanisms: Part II

| <i>UNEC Statutory Committee submissions and Meetings, October 2016 to Nov 2020</i>                                                                                                                                            | <i>UNEC Council, 20/11/2020 to October 2024</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>October, 2018, NEHAWU appeals the matter of SD LTD appointment, citing compliance with the Statute and Policies requirements.</i>                                                                                          | <i>The matter finds space on Council Agenda during the presentation of the VC-P about the appointment of Senior Directors. The Council calls for HRCC advice, while proceeding with appointment of SD LTD, a Contradiction in terms.</i>                |
| <i>March, 2021, NEHAWU still appeals the case by raising directly with the Chairperson of Council</i>                                                                                                                         | <i>During the time, EDHR, resource person at HRCC, has just assumed duties under the VC (2016-2020) who has had the previous EDHR leaving HET under questionable circumstances!</i>                                                                     |
| <i>March, 2022, The IF Report Findings:<br/>a) University undermined the university Statute by flouting the Recruitment Policy.<br/>b) The University breached the Job Upgrading Policy by not following the due process.</i> | <i>However, same Council, instead of acting decisively on the Report, still refers matter to HRCC. (New VC, 2021-2024, but same EDHR, 2018-2023)</i>                                                                                                    |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <i>EDHR, upon receipt of the Management Report from the University Registrar, on 06/06/2022, urgently refers the matter for a Legal Institution, which acknowledges receipt of the brief on 06/06/2022 and provides the Legal Opinion on 08/06/2022</i> |

Table 1 portrays the empirical data about the case in terms of the actors and the embedded events and processes as an illustration of the Emperor and the New Clothes (there seems to be more of the continuities than the continuities from the old regimes of power and of truth about the developmental narrative in the case of a university education institution). Despite the advent of constitutional democracy in South Africa, with new labour relations policies that regulate for equity and fairness, the sector is still characterised by power dynamics in the complexity of power relations and the politics of knowledge and of being/becoming. The idea about the synchronous and structural mechanisms is informed by what must have been the interplays of structure, culture and agency at the domain of reality (Dwayi, 2022, further to Archer, 1995, Bhaskar, 1989), which is not immediately analysable at the level of events and processes (domain of the actual) and of the experiences and observations (domain of the empirical reality).

Coincidentally, both Tables 1 and 2 portray how the case played out in the background of the UNEC submissions about her transformation project based on the 2018 and 2019 data. Parallel to these submissions, UNEC would submit her self-evaluation report as part of the current institutional audits (CHE, 2021; WSU, 2023), which covered the 2018-2021 data about the ideal of integrated quality management systems. Thus, the significance of the case would have to be understood and broadened in terms of the MLG oriented theories, especially along the dimensions of transformation narratives (equity, compliance, innovation, development), and of integrated quality management systems (Focus Area 1 and Standards 3 and 4). Table 2 can be understood in terms of the silences and superficialities on the part of Council decision making as the subsequent actions by executive management are being laid bare as contradicting what Luescher et al *ibid* would categorise UNEC (a comprehensive university) as an example of a developmental narrative. For example, while the Luescher et al would categorise UNEC (and all other Comprehensive Universities) as the developmental category, such a narrative could invite an explanatory critique, at least on the basis of the case as outlined in Tables 1 and 2, at the points which are even problematic about the declared equity and compliance narratives.

### 3.3 Role Delineation, the Systems That Keep on Backfiring

The MLG systems actors (Human Systems) in the case included four contested structures, rather, the main actors in the case: Labour Union, the Institutional Forum, Executive Management (Executive Director, Human Resources, the Registrar, the Vice Chancellor) and University Council,

- a. The Labour Union, namely NEHAWU, its main mandate is to be the vanguard of staff welfare within the human rights policies and other regulatory frameworks.
- b. About the Institutional Forum, Section 31 (1) of Act 101 of 1997 states “the Institutional Forum of a public higher education institution must –\
- c. advice the council on issues affecting the institution, including:
  - i. The selection of candidates for senior management positions.
  - ii. The fostering of an institutional culture which promotes tolerance and respect for fundamental human rights and creates an appropriate environment for teaching, research, and learning;

- a. The University Council has full responsibility for Corporate Governance and Leadership of the university, with the powers to devolve the functions to Executive Management and also to delegate the authority to the range of MLG systems.
- b. The Executive Managers: EDHR and the University Registrar play a significant role in this case, one as the implementor of the human resources policies (job upgrading; recruitment and section), and the other as the Secretary to Council, which is the ultimate custodian of all University Policies including the University Statute.

Ironically, the matter of Senior Director, Learning and Teaching Development (SD LTD), about which NEHAWU would lodge a dispute against UNEC Executive Management, was well documented, and thus made a public record, when in scrutiny of the UNEC Institutional Annual Reports of 2018 and 2019. Upon the Labour Dispute about the case, the University Council of November 2018 took the following decision about the case, (WSU, 2019, p.12; p. 15), on Appointment of Senior Manager and on Labour Dispute on the recruitment of Senior Management, respectively,

*“Council referred the matter on the population of the organogram and the labour dispute back to the Human Resources Committee of Council (HRCC) to deliberate on and to come back to Council together with the relevant University policy for a decision to be made”*

*Council noted the matter raised regarding the subject and reiterated the position that the matter was with the Labour Court and hence it could not deliberate on it any further.*

Table 2 indicates how the role of the Law Firm can be a subject of a critique, when the Firm’s submission seemed to be partisan about what was at stake in the case, and in the process the idea of university education was thrown into a spin. Logically, one would have expected, at least from a critical realist perspective, that the simply answer by the HRCC of September 2022 should have surfaced the silences of November 2019, instead of reproducing the status quo, and thus revealing the superficialities of MLG systems actors, as the case would turn out to be. At practical level, this was the Case about how the reproductive outcomes in the idea of university education can be the case about frivolity in two ways.

- Firstly, the University Council sought for the HRCC advice on whether the policies had been followed in the appointment of the executive managers.
- Secondly, when the very HRCC, instead of acting on the Council Resolution, executive management/HRCC referred to the Legal Court process when, on the other hand, executive management had proceeded to finalise the appointment.

Meanwhile, NEHAWU, as the Labour Union, had declared a dispute about how unprocedural the process had been. After The Report served at the University Council of April 2022, the University Registrar communicated the Council Resolution as reflected in Table 1 (WSU, 2022). However, the letter by EDHR, to HRCC on 09/09/2022, signed by the VC-P (2021-2025), captured the following,

*“The resolution is that Council would not comment on the submission made by the IF on the dispute involving Mr X and refer it to the Human Resource Committee of the Council (HRCC) to advise Council. To assist the HRCC with its task, Management sought a legal opinion on the matter, which is now presented to the HRCC for their guidance in attending to the matter”.*

At face value, such a statement would be logical. However, the statement was rendered baseless due to the fact that the three Actors continued obfuscating about the case, which should have been finalised as the original submission by the HRCC of 2019. Such a report by the EDHR was complicated by the fact that the process was not only manipulated per the events/date as indicated in Table 1, but also by selecting two resolutions of the same Council on the matter, but also subjecting the other to another process of a Legal Opinion. The simply logic here was that the two resolutions arose out of the other one, in consideration of cause and effect relationships. The point of significance here, which was a quagmire on the MLG systems, and the need for public accountability, played out in two ways,

- Firstly, when the HRCC referred to the Labour Court process, on the matter when a dispute had already been declared against the process, but still continued to finalise the appointment process, a contradiction in terms.
- Secondly, when the case of the University Council, which did not go far enough in acting on its own resolution about whether the Statute had been undermined and the policies breached.

These were the contradictions to which the findings of The Report became adverse for the MLG systems actors, and thus revealing the challenges of corporate governance and leadership. This is what can be argued as the case of the Emperor and the New Clothes, as the frivolity of ethical and moral leadership values as more espoused than enacted. The Report of March 2022 had brought back to attention the previous matter of the University Council Resolution of November 2018 about the compliance to statute and policy, for the university dispensation which ought to promote and monitor for staff equity. Had the HRCC acted objectively according to the Resolution, such an act would have given a fair and just expression about the idea of university education for the public good. This would have been the case of a developmental university that is able to apply and defend the equity imperative about talent management instead of the apparent blind pursuit of a compliance narrative (in this case, in reference the minimum requirement for the advertised position, instead of the compliance to policy and statute requirements). The VC-P of 2016-2020 undermined the university statute and breached the university policy in order to fulfil what must have been his narrow and personal agenda about the Centre, and in the process, rendering the University Council toothless about its fiduciary functions. The HRCC acted unethically and frivolously about such a significant Resolution about the compliance to university statute and policy, and in the process, caused too much damage not only to the affected party, but to the institutional culture of public accountability of which the policies ought to be the representations of (at effect)! Quite strangely, both the EDHR, and the University Registrar, were the resource persons, instead of full members to the HRCC, but, as indicated in Tables 1 and 2, it is apparent that they undermined their membership status, thus resulting to what turned out to be the silences and superficialities of decision making in corporate governance and leadership practices. As clearly indicated in Table 2, the Legal Firm did not advise, as expected, on the matter of university statute and policies (Corporate Governance and Leadership), but selectively addressed the matter of shortlisting for the interviews (an effect), and in the process obfuscating the matter of materialist interest in service of political patronage (at effect). Therefore, the MLG actors behaved in an illogical manner about The Report, rendering as power contested the role of MLG systems (logocentrism), and also revealing what can be the challenges to MLG systems when they can be the subject of an immanent critique (the sociology of learning and of knowledge-making).

The Case, as it were, provided the platform for what can be the social realist account about the MLG systems and practices, and thus the advancement of knowledge in context-specific and actor driven ways. According to the discussion thus far, the UNEC MLG system were not properly integrated in ways that both the management systems and governance structures could provide the required quality of decision making for academic leadership, which therefore created a disjuncture between the espoused values (wisdom, integrity and excellence) as actually enacted. As it were, and by drawing both from logic about the social realist explanations, the management of The Report could provide the opportunity for powerful explanations about whether the transformative outcomes might constitute the new reality in advancing the transformation project in the UNEC case. In such scholarly accounts, the generalizability principle becomes pertinent due to the call for more context-specific and actor-driven ways about the MLG systems, as those could be inferred from the discussion thus far. Towards the latter, the matter of actor-driven social systems called for the last and final section in the discussion, especially given that globally universities are always constrained in the required capacity to manage their transformation projects in more context-specific ways.

#### **4. Transformative Agency and Being Serious about a University in Pursuit of Excellence**

About UNEC, the mandate of the Institutional Forum, which has to advise Council about the appointment of executive managers, is well regulated and is explicit. The fact that the UNEC Council still referred The Report findings and recommendations back to the HRCC therefore led the researcher not only to engage in completion and confirmation exercises about the case, but also to engage in retroductive reasoning (the 3<sup>rd</sup> step of triangulation in critical realist terms) towards what could be the transcendental arguments. As it were, the Council disregard of The Report Findings, by calling on the advice of the HRCC, the same Committee which had obfuscated on the issue in November 2019, could be equated to the analogy of asking the jackal to constitute a delegation to a conference whose main agenda would be about the plight of the sheep! As already identified by ASSAF (Makoni, 2023), the MLG crisis in the HETSA context derives from the death of the cultural capital on the part of the actors. As Jansen (2023) clearly explains, such are the results of poor levels of accountability by these public institutions, with the UNEC as the case in point. From the social realist perspective, such can be the unintended consequences in the interplays of structure, culture and agency, when MLG agency (choices and projects), at the points of university statute and policies (structural arrangements), and of the cultural system (beliefs, values, norms and standards) thereof, can remain reproductive of the systems of domination and control (the case of the Emperor and the New Clothes). Complexity therefore arises at the points of collusion

and complicity by the systems actors along political patronage, whose source is the power abuse due to the misuse of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and the lack of public accountability!

Therefore, to finally answer the enduring questions about *“Who should run varsities”* the answer would come from Terence Kealey, in Times Higher Education, on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2021, that *“Only academic can run varsities effectively”*. The implications of such an answer is whether one can claim an academic identity when his decision making can position himself to be antithetical to the institutional values of wisdom, integrity and excellence as clearly transpired from the discussion in this article. Such an academic would have to be the embodiment of a transformative cultural capital. Such an academic, from which the management systems and governance structures would emerge, and over time, would mean having such cases of social ills, as evidenced at UNEC, as ameliorated, and, at best, as abolished. Towards the latter, not only the capacity building workshops (Recommendation 4.1), and not even just the Recruitment and Section Strategy (Recommendation 3.1) , as suggested by the HEQC (CHE, 2023), but the need for a full range of the Ability-Capacity-Capabilities Logic (Dwayi, 2003) in the following two related ways,

- a. The Equity and Development Narrative about UNEC need to be grounded in the intellectual project which can draw on the idea of MLG systems as deep ontology, stratification, causal efficacy and emergence.
- b. The Innovation and Compliance Narratives about UNEC have to emerge from the first narratives in programmatic ways, which can institutionalise the principles of Corporate Governance and Leadership. The case of the headship of Centre, as introduced in the first section of this article, needed to be addressed within the conventions of scholarship, ideally as the theory-practice nexus, but more significantly, as research and development, as strategy and leadership, as policy and implementation, but definitely beyond the glaring acts of bullying, pretence and political posturing. Only when MLG scholarship and practices can be brutally honest about the academic project that both the ideal of ethical and moral leadership, on one hand, and the realms of new possibilities (the idea of being and becoming), on the other, might be mutually constitutive.

As already identified during the ASSAf conversations (Makoni, 2023), the only defence for the academic project is when the intellectuals, including the highest offices in university education, including the range of their executive managers, can ‘wield their power and deal with the brutal culture by just being intellectuals’. As it were, the CHE Recommendations (CHE, 2023) about the UNEC case point to the need for the quality of an intellectual project, which can ensure that the social ills of the HETSA Transformation Project can be abolished, or at least to be ameliorated, by means of more iterative cycles of research, if the MLG systems and practices are to finally serve as the ethical and moral leadership values in in the idea of university education as the public and common good.

## 5. Reflections and Conclusion

This article discussed what can be the frivolity about the claims for ethical and moral leadership values, when such values can be more about window dressing, than actually having them as enacted! Such is normally the case of the Emperor and the New Clothes, when the choices and projects by the powerholders can render as useless the value of university education more as the private than the public and common good. By the New Clothes the article refers to the state of reproductive outcomes about the misuse of power as gleaned from the case. This refers to what could have been more about a transformative state about the use of power in university education, but the case became more self-reproductive due to how the MLG incumbents acted on the case, characteristic of the dynamic interplays of structure, culture and agency. MLG systems, as the discursive spaces, surfaced the ideological position of the actors, which promoted hegemony, the Otherness, and in the process, the reproductive outcomes. This was the case about the social dimensions about the Case which were not even ameliorative but reproductive of the historical and structural disadvantage under the guise of Institutional Development. University education is not only knowledge constitutive but ought to be enacted by means of moral and ethical leadership through organizational learning. Such forms of systemic learning need to be grounded on the value about a cultural capital; they need to be quite explicit as forms of academic leadership, before such forms can emerge at levels of management systems and of governance structures, over time. Taking the context-specific and the actor-driven driven approach about such an observation, ethical and moral leadership, while necessary, become inadequate, and thus frivolous, when the MLG actors’ choices and projects (agency) can be found to be incoherent, dysfunctional, unresponsive and meaninglessly structured in the relation to the ideals of governance and leadership principles. Failure in abiding by such principles is not an

option nor an excuse, as that would be tantamount to hegemony, whose results is always about obfuscation about the issues and the objectification of the other.

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