

Governance and Leadership in Advancing Entrepreneurial Universities: Exploring Awareness and Change Dynamics in South Africa

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Abstract: This research explores the role of awareness, as framed by the ADKAR (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement) change management model, in driving the transformation of South African higher education institutions (HEIs) into Entrepreneurial Universities (EnU). The study focuses on the critical question of whether raising awareness of entrepreneurship among academics can catalyse transformative changes within universities, fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and practices across the institution. In the context of South Africa's socio-economic challenges, such as high unemployment and inequality, entrepreneurial universities are seen as key drivers of innovation and economic development. The research findings underscore that awareness, the foundational step of the ADKAR model, is essential for initiating the entrepreneurial shift within HEIs. Academics who are aware of the importance of entrepreneurship are more likely to engage in activities that promote innovation, student entrepreneurship, and industry collaboration. However, the study also highlights that awareness alone is insufficient for a full institutional transformation. Leadership commitment and active involvement are critical in moving beyond awareness to implement sustainable entrepreneurial initiatives. Without strong leadership that aligns institutional governance structures and policies with entrepreneurial objectives, the entrepreneurial agenda may struggle to gain traction. The research concludes that while raising awareness among academics is a necessary first step, leadership at universities must also be equipped with the skills and understanding to champion entrepreneurship at an institutional level. Comprehensive leadership training, continuous evaluation of entrepreneurial initiatives, and fostering cross-departmental and external collaborations are essential for sustaining momentum towards the full realisation of Entrepreneurial Universities in South Africa. This study contributes to the broader discourse on entrepreneurship in higher education by providing insights into the specific challenges and opportunities facing South African universities as they navigate the path towards becoming entrepreneurial institutions.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial University, ADKAR Change Model, Awareness, South Africa, Higher Education, Change Management

1. Introduction

The rapid evolution of knowledge-based societies has significantly transformed the role and function of higher education institutions, particularly universities (Baporikar, 2022). No longer are universities merely centres for the dissemination of knowledge, focusing solely on teaching and research. Instead, they are increasingly expected to play a pivotal role in national economic development, becoming essential actors in driving innovation and economic growth (Khoshhal, Yaghoubi, and Salarzahi, 2024). This shift reflects the broader understanding that universities are foundational to the progress of civilisation, with their education systems shaping the values, beliefs, and skills necessary for national development (Khoshhal, Yaghoubi, and Salarzahi, 2024). As a result, the concept of the *entrepreneurial university* has gained prominence, particularly within global education and innovation systems (Van der Westhuizen, 2023, 2024).

Unlike traditional universities, entrepreneurial universities are characterised by their adaptability, responsiveness to external environments, and ability to foster collaboration across disciplines and industries (Van der Westhuizen, 2023, 2024). They serve as incubators for entrepreneurial thinking and skill development, actively engaging both staff and students in managing innovative projects. Moreover, entrepreneurial universities are not solely reliant on government funding; they are proficient in generating income from diverse sources, which supports their capacity for sustained innovation (Van der Westhuizen, 2023, 2024). This paradigm shift reflects a growing recognition of the need for universities to contribute more directly to solving socio-economic challenges.

In the South African context, universities face additional pressures stemming from deep-rooted socio-economic challenges, historical legacies, and the ongoing effects of globalisation. High unemployment rates, particularly among youth, and socio-economic inequality necessitate a reimagining of the role of universities as drivers of social and economic change. To meet these demands, South African universities are increasingly encouraged to adopt entrepreneurial paradigms, positioning themselves as critical enablers of socio-economic development through innovation, job creation, and community engagement. However, this transformation is not automatic,

requiring deliberate and sustained efforts to raise awareness of entrepreneurship among academics. Building this awareness is particularly important in overcoming historical inertia and driving the necessary cultural shift towards entrepreneurship within these institutions.

This paper examines the role of awareness, as articulated in the ADKAR change management model, in fostering the development of Entrepreneurial Universities (EnU) in South Africa. The ADKAR model (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement) highlights awareness as the first step in enabling meaningful organisational change. Within the university context, increasing academics' awareness of the importance of entrepreneurship is a crucial element in cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset across the institution. By focusing on the current levels of awareness and their subsequent impact on entrepreneurial activities within South African universities, this study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on transforming higher education institutions into entrepreneurial universities. The objective of this research is to determine whether raising awareness of entrepreneurship among academics catalyses transformative change, enabling universities to better respond to national development needs through entrepreneurial practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Concept of Entrepreneurial Universities

There is no consistent definition of an entrepreneurial university. According to Hannon (2013), the entrepreneurial university can take on many different forms. There is no one definition for it because it is complex (Volpe, 2018). Due to the various needs of universities around the world, as well as the variations in how each country's cultures and socioeconomic situations have developed, establishing a global definition would not be suitable (Sultan, 2017). Entrepreneurial universities need to be explored in their context, however the journey from the traditional university to the entrepreneurial university is not an easy one and requires strategies and processes (Baporikar 2022). Four opportunities present itself for universities in Africa to be entrepreneurial according to the Economic Commission for Africa (2023) 1) Higher education in Africa is expanding at a rapid high rate, (2) Africa has a young population of which is likely to be more entrepreneurial in nature and drive demand for higher education, (3) the high unemployment rate in Africa puts pressure on universities to be entrepreneurial in nature (4) African research and development system are the developmental stage and higher education, and the public sector are the key stakeholders in development and research (5) the increase in demand for knowledge has positioned universities to be at the center of national innovation systems. (6) universities are crucial in solving global and national challenges.

In the South African context, developing entrepreneurial universities is essential to combat the country's high unemployment rates and socio-economic disparities.

Despite different definitions, entrepreneurial universities are defined by their ability to foster innovation, collaboration, and entrepreneurial mindsets among their staff and students.

The concept of an entrepreneurial university has gained traction globally, particularly as higher education institutions are increasingly expected to contribute to national economic development through innovation and entrepreneurship (Etzkowitz, 2008). In the South African context, the shift towards entrepreneurial universities is critical given the socio-economic challenges, including high youth unemployment and the need for new knowledge-driven economic growth (Mokoqama, 2024; Wangenge-Ouma & Tawana, 2020). South African universities must develop institutional capacities that foster entrepreneurial mindsets among staff and students to align with global trends of innovation and social impact (Mutanda, Lekhanya, & Moyo, 2018).

An entrepreneurial university in South Africa is characterised by its ability to balance traditional academic roles with the demand for industry collaboration, innovation, and student entrepreneurship (Van der Westhuizen, 2023). Van der Westhuizen's **Ecosystem Theory** highlights the importance of creating synergies between academic institutions, government, and industry to build supportive ecosystems that foster entrepreneurial thinking and practical application of entrepreneurial skills (Van der Westhuizen, 2023, 2024).

2.2 The ADKAR Change Model

ADKAR, a model for change management. The ADKAR model was developed for Prosci in 2004, and Hiatt later wrote a book on it in 2006 (Kiani & Sha, 2014). Hiatt, who spent several years in the field of change management, deliberately began to immerse himself in understanding why employees resist change. From this quest, he discovered that the most challenging problems dealt with people and not things (Hiatt, 2006). Thus, the catalyst

for the conception of the ADKAR model was a response to the several change management approaches developed by different authors and consultants (Hiatt, 2006). Furthermore, the approaches dwelt more on activities to manage change, such as communication, assessments and coaching (Hiatt, 2006), thus describing how the conception of ADKAR was brought to life because of wanting an approach more results orientated. The model is centred on the notion that the individual changes, not the organisation (Chen & Osei, 2018). However, these same principles can be applied in a group setting or the entire organisation (Calder, 2013). ADKAR is an acronym for awareness, desire, knowledge, ability and reinforcement (Calder, 2013). This model provides simple action-based steps to control change (Boca, 2013). Awareness is the foundation, as individuals and organisations cannot change if they are unaware of the need for change (Prosci, 2003). In the context of South African universities, raising awareness among academics is vital to initiating entrepreneurial transformation.

The ADKAR model (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, and Reinforcement) is a widely recognised framework for managing change in organisations (Prosci, 2003). In higher education, especially in South Africa, the awareness component is crucial, as it lays the foundation for any transformative change towards entrepreneurship. Raising awareness among academics of the need for entrepreneurial initiatives is the first step in fostering a culture of innovation within universities (Nistler, 2014).

Research by Wangenge-Ouma and Tawana (2020) emphasises that many South African universities still operate under governance structures rooted in colonial and apartheid legacies, which can hinder transformation. Awareness campaigns are essential to dismantle these outdated structures and promote a modern, entrepreneurial mindset among both academics and leadership (Wangenge-Ouma & Tawana, 2020). This aligns with Van der Westhuizen's findings, which argue that ecosystem-based awareness strategies help build a collective understanding of the value of entrepreneurship within the academic community (Van der Westhuizen, 2023).

2.3 Governance and Leadership in Higher Education

Kotter (2007) says that when one thinks of change, one thinks of leaders, and unless the head of the organisation actively supports the change, it will not be possible. This aligns with Cameron and Green (2004) those who describe that leaders are at the center of these three outcomes: "outcomes: developing and delivering clear outcomes; Interests: mobilizing influence, authority, and power; and emotions: enabling people and culture to adapt."

Thus, leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering a culture of awareness within institutions. There has to be a level of commitment to the entrepreneurial agenda, and an indicator of commitment could be someone in leadership, such as the dean, who is tasked with being responsible for the entrepreneurial agenda (OECD, 2012). Higher education governance in South Africa, shaped by colonial legacies and modern socio-economic challenges, often requires significant shifts in leadership attitudes and strategic priorities to create conducive environments for entrepreneurship.

Leadership is a critical determinant in shaping the entrepreneurial orientation of universities (Clark, 1998). In the South African context, higher education governance is undergoing a transformation to meet the demands of a rapidly changing socio-economic environment (DHET, 2017). However, leadership in many institutions still lags behind in supporting entrepreneurship at the institutional level, which can impede progress towards becoming an entrepreneurial university (Mutanda et al., 2018).

Mokoqama (2024) argues that the effectiveness of governance and leadership in driving entrepreneurship in South African universities relies heavily on leaders' ability to embrace change management frameworks like ADKAR. The alignment between governance structures and entrepreneurial goals is essential for creating an environment where entrepreneurship can thrive. This includes institutional policies that support entrepreneurial research, teaching, and external partnerships (Van der Westhuizen, 2023)

Wangenge-Ouma and Tawana (2020) further highlight that leadership in higher education institutions must play an active role in fostering awareness, not just among academics, but across the entire governance structure. This ensures that entrepreneurial initiatives are sustained and that universities contribute meaningfully to economic and social development.

3. Methodology

This study employs a convergent mixed-methods approach to explore the role of awareness in shaping entrepreneurial universities. A combination of quantitative (survey of 353 academics from four South African universities) and qualitative (eight interviews with Deputy Vice-Chancellors of Research and Innovation and incubation leaders) data were collected. Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data was analysed thematically using NVivo 12.

South African universities into Entrepreneurial Universities (EnU). The quantitative component includes a survey of 353 academics from four universities, measuring levels of entrepreneurial awareness and engagement. The qualitative aspect comprises in-depth interviews with Deputy Vice-Chancellors of Research and Innovation and incubation leaders, providing insights into leadership perspectives on fostering entrepreneurial culture within universities. The convergent design enables a comprehensive understanding of both the prevalence of awareness among academics and the contextual insights from leadership, thus identifying the alignment (or gaps) between faculty and governance. The expected benefits of this approach are multifaceted: it provides actionable data on the awareness levels necessary to catalyse change, highlights leadership's role in institutional alignment, and offers a foundation for strategic frameworks that can be implemented to enhance the entrepreneurial orientation of universities across South Africa.

4. Results

4.1 Quantitative Findings

The survey revealed a high percentage of academics in all four universities. A composite t-test was used to test all the composites to determine their agreement and whether it was significant at a scale of mean scale of 6. There was a significant agreement for awareness at the University of Johannesburg at 4.81, the University of KwaZulu-Natal at 4.65, Nelson Mandela University at 5.09, and Stellenbosch University at 4.36 indicated a strong awareness of entrepreneurship and its relevance to the university's mission. This awareness is positively correlated with an increase in entrepreneurship-related activities and initiatives.

- **Awareness of Entrepreneurship:** Academics reported a high level of awareness about the need for entrepreneurial initiatives within their universities. This awareness led to various entrepreneurship-related projects, from student start-up competitions to research commercialisation efforts.
- **Entrepreneurship Development:** Institutions with higher levels of academic awareness showed more tangible outcomes in terms of entrepreneurship programmes and partnerships with industry.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

The ADKAR change model highlights that for any change to occur, there is a need for individuals to be aware of the need for change. Interviews with Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs) and incubation leaders, however, indicated a gap in awareness among senior leadership and decision-makers, which could hinder broader institutional transformation. While academics are generally aware of the importance of entrepreneurship, there is a need for more robust communication strategies to align leadership with academic perspectives.

5. Discussion

5.1 The Role of Awareness in Entrepreneurial Development

Awareness is the critical first step in change management, as per the ADKAR model, and its importance cannot be understated. The action emphasizes the necessity of prepared communication and illustrates the reasons and thought that underlie a necessary change (Boca, 2013). Poor communication can foster uncertainty, a lack of vision and direction, and even a lack of faith in the change process (Chandler, 2013). According to research, communication is both the most important aspect and the most common reason why organizational change fails (Hasanaj & Manxhari, 2017). Theorists Kotter and Schlesinger have extensively studied communication in the context of the transformation process (Hasanaj & Manxhari, 2017). It is essential that staff are informed of the change's implementation timeline, timing, and motivational strategies throughout the communication phase. (Hasanaj & Manxhari, 2017). The results show that when academics are aware of the need for entrepreneurship, they are more likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities. However, awareness must be

followed by leadership support and institutional alignment to ensure that entrepreneurship is embedded into the university's structure.

There is a need to raise more awareness among universities about entrepreneurship and the need for universities to be more entrepreneurial. This could be in various ways and strategies, such as creating workshops for leaders such as academic leaders and faculty deans that will educate more on the need to accept entrepreneurship. There is also a need to create awareness among the university community, not just academics. If there is to be a significant change in the organisation, all the stakeholders must be involved. These stakeholders include students. There are several ways to raise awareness about entrepreneurial development, such as awareness campaigns. At this stage, the leadership's role is crucial in ensuring that the university community buys into this idea of change. The university is a large, diverse and complex institution that requires leaders who will be entrepreneurial champions to drive this agenda. The VCs and DVCs of research, faculty deans and HODs play a role in ensuring students and staff are aware of the need to change. It is not only business departments that must change but the various departments. Leaders can raise awareness by communicating the need to change through workshops and meetings. It is their responsibility to envision how they, as a department, can contextualise their need to change

5.2 Challenges in Implementing Awareness

For any higher education institution (HEI) to become an EnU requires first considering the first step, which is to be aware of the need to change into an EnU. Change management seeks to consider the individuals in the organisation in the change process. If the individuals in the organisation do not see the need to change, there will likely be resistance to change. Whenever there is organisational change, there is bound to be resistance to it (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). Resistance to change is common in organisations and academia. Resistance to change from individuals in the institution is due to the fear of altering tradition and losing meaning (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). Thus, successfully building awareness of the need to change at this stage means eradicating misconceptions, rumours, and different perspectives about the current situation (Nistler, 2014). This should happen to avoid any disagreement about the need to change (Nistler, 2014). During this phase, it is also an opportunity to eradicate resistance to change in the university setting. It is thus critical at this phase that academics across the university departments are aware that entrepreneurship development is a priority for the university.

During the awareness phase, it is important that there is a general sense in the university to become entrepreneurial. Remaining in a comfort zone will not change the universities. The ADKAR theory and Kotter's theory encourage the need to communicate the strategy and vision across the organisation to create employee awareness and acceptance (Ramasamy, 2018). The literature shows that building awareness of the need to change is more than just effective communication but includes several factors such as the persons' views of the current state, how a person perceives problems, the credibility of the sender, circulation of misinformation or rumors and contestability of the reasons for change (Hiatt, 2006).



Figure 1: Factors influencing awareness of the need for change

Source: (Hiatt, 2006)

Despite the high levels of awareness among academics, qualitative findings show that awareness alone is insufficient to foster a fully entrepreneurial university. The gap between academic awareness and leadership action presents a significant barrier to holistic transformation. Leadership must not only endorse entrepreneurial initiatives but also participate actively in awareness campaigns and support strategic entrepreneurship goals.

5.3 The Importance of Leadership in Fostering Entrepreneurship

Leadership within higher education institutions plays a critical role in advancing entrepreneurial development, particularly in the South African context. The ADKAR model underscores the importance of leadership in not only guiding but also inspiring change within organisations (Hiatt, 2006). However, research suggests that many university leaders in South Africa have yet to fully grasp the strategic value of entrepreneurship (Wangenge-Ouma & Tawana, 2020). Despite progress made through initiatives like the EDHE (Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education) programme, which convenes Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVCs) to discuss entrepreneurship, more is needed to embed this understanding institution-wide. The EDHE programme illustrates the potential of leadership to drive entrepreneurial agendas, but its scope should be broadened to include ongoing, structured leadership development programmes that empower leaders to act as entrepreneurial champions (DHET, 2017).

For entrepreneurial initiatives to thrive, university leadership must align governance structures and institutional policies with entrepreneurial goals. This alignment can incentivise entrepreneurial behaviour among academics, who are key to embedding entrepreneurship in curricula, research, and community outreach. Mokoqama (2024) argues that South African universities must establish clear policies that promote entrepreneurship, supported by resources that enable faculty to pursue innovative, entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, leadership should be proactive in creating environments where entrepreneurial initiatives are not only endorsed but actively supported by providing infrastructure such as incubation centres and innovation hubs (Mutanda et al., 2018). Without such leadership commitment, the transition towards entrepreneurial universities will remain incomplete.

5.4 Sustaining Entrepreneurial Momentum Through Collaboration and Continuous Evaluation

The long-term success of entrepreneurial transformation in South African universities relies heavily on fostering collaboration across various stakeholders, both within and outside the institution. As Van der Westhuizen (2023) posits, strong synergies between academia, leadership, government, and industry are vital to nurturing an ecosystem that supports entrepreneurial thinking. Internally, fostering cross-departmental collaboration ensures that entrepreneurial initiatives permeate different academic disciplines, encouraging a broader uptake of entrepreneurial mindsets. This multidisciplinary approach allows for diverse entrepreneurial solutions that align with the socio-economic needs of South Africa, such as addressing youth unemployment and socio-economic inequality (Wangenge-Ouma & Tawana, 2020).

Externally, collaboration with industry and government can unlock resources and opportunities, including funding for start-ups and internships for students. The involvement of external stakeholders ensures that entrepreneurial initiatives remain practical and responsive to real-world challenges. However, to ensure the effectiveness of these collaborations, universities must establish robust systems for continuous monitoring and evaluation. These systems should assess the impact of entrepreneurial activities, such as the number of successful start-ups, partnerships with industry, and contributions to local communities (Mokoqama, 2024). By integrating evaluation mechanisms into their strategic plans, universities can ensure sustained entrepreneurial momentum and adapt their strategies to meet evolving socio-economic challenges. Furthermore, these evaluations should align with South Africa's broader developmental objectives, ensuring that universities contribute meaningfully to national goals such as job creation and innovation-led economic growth (DHET, 2017).

6. Recommendations

6.1 Strengthening Awareness Campaigns

South African universities must develop robust and context-specific communication strategies aimed at both academic staff and institutional leadership. These strategies should highlight the importance of entrepreneurship not only as a tool for economic empowerment but also as a means to address persistent socio-economic issues, such as unemployment and inequality. Campaigns should draw on examples of successful

entrepreneurial initiatives both locally and globally, underscoring their relevance to national development goals. Furthermore, awareness-building efforts must be continuous and evolve with the changing dynamics of higher education and industry partnerships.

6.2 Leadership Training on Entrepreneurship

It is essential that higher education leadership, including Vice-Chancellors, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and Deans, receive targeted training to better understand the pivotal role entrepreneurship plays in shaping modern universities. In South Africa, the EDHE (Entrepreneurship Development in Higher Education) programme offers an annual forum for university leadership to discuss strategies for fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems. Expanding the scope and reach of such programmes, while incorporating specific South African case studies, will ensure that leaders are equipped to implement strategic frameworks that prioritise entrepreneurial development at their institutions.

6.3 Collaboration Between Academics and Leadership

For entrepreneurial initiatives to be fully embedded within university structures, there must be stronger collaboration between academic departments and leadership. South African universities often operate in silos, which can stifle cross-disciplinary innovation. A culture of collaboration should be fostered, where academic staff are actively engaged in strategic conversations about entrepreneurship and encouraged to incorporate entrepreneurial thinking into curricula, research, and community outreach. Such collaborations will enable more cohesive, institution-wide entrepreneurship strategies that are responsive to local and regional needs.

6.4 Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation

Universities must establish and implement metrics to regularly assess the effectiveness of awareness campaigns and entrepreneurial initiatives. These evaluations should not only focus on the immediate outcomes, such as the number of start-ups or partnerships with industry but also measure long-term impacts like job creation, societal benefit, and sustainability of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. By aligning evaluation frameworks with the specific socio-economic context of South Africa, institutions can ensure that their entrepreneurial activities are contributing meaningfully to national development priorities.

6.5 Enhancing Entrepreneurial Education and Curriculum Integration

Entrepreneurial thinking should be embedded within the broader academic curriculum across all disciplines, not just within business schools or entrepreneurship programmes. South African universities should prioritise the development of entrepreneurial mindsets among students and staff by integrating entrepreneurship into a wide range of courses, from engineering to social sciences. This can be achieved through curriculum reforms that encourage project-based learning, internships with start-ups, and industry partnerships. Furthermore, a focus on social entrepreneurship, which aligns with South Africa's pressing developmental needs, should be emphasised (Nyamunda and Van der Westhuizen, 2020).

6.6 Building Stronger External Partnerships and Funding Opportunities

Universities should actively seek to establish and strengthen partnerships with external stakeholders, including industry, government, and international organisations. These partnerships can provide not only financial resources but also opportunities for knowledge exchange, research collaboration, and real-world entrepreneurial experience for students and staff. In the South African context, universities must also explore alternative funding models to support entrepreneurial ventures, especially given the limited public funding available for higher education. Establishing innovation hubs, incubators, and accelerators in partnership with the private sector can enhance the entrepreneurial ecosystem within universities.

7. Conclusion

The outcome from the study showed that awareness must be raised in the university community about the need for the university to change with the times and be more entrepreneurial. As much as the world is constantly evolving and changing, this has affected higher education as an institution. If the awareness of change is not communicated, then it will be a costly assumption to think the university community knows they need to change. This study also highlights the critical role of awareness in fostering the development of entrepreneurial

universities in South Africa. While awareness among academics is generally high, there remains a need for more strategic efforts to align this awareness with leadership priorities. Effective governance and leadership are key to ensuring that universities can navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship development and contribute meaningfully to socio-economic growth.

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