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Roles, Stress and Coping Mechanisms among Middle-level Academic Leaders in Multi-campus Universities in Africa

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Abstract

Using a critical review of literature and existing data, this article explicates the roles of middle-level academics and the stress factors that hinder their efficient and effective delivery of academic and managerial roles in multi- campus universities in Africa. The article presents both plausible and actual coping mechanisms for middle-level academic leaders. It is noted that most middle-level academic leaders ascend to positions of responsibility without any formal training for these positions, which strengthens the call for the university to offer continuous training programmes for these leaders. The article argues that an effective identification and resolution of stress in the multi-campus system is key to winning and maintaining the morale and loyalty of staff at the university. This therefore calls for the adoption of appropriate theoretical paradigms of leadership in multi-campus universities for effective middle-level academic leadership. Recommendations are provided in the form of roles of the university in how to best enhance the productivity of this cadre of university leaders in achieving the functions of teaching, research, and community service.

Keywords: role, stress, coping, middle-level academic, leader, multi-campus university

Résumé

Utilisant une revue critique de la littérature et des données existantes, cet article explique les rôles des universitaires de niveau intermédiaire et les facteurs de stress qui entravent leur prestation efficace et effective des rôles académiques et de gestion dans les universités à campus multiples en Afrique. L'article présente à la

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fois des mécanismes d'adaptation plausibles et réels pour les leaders universitaires de niveau intermédiaire. Il est à noter que la plupart des leaders universitaires de niveau intermédiaire accèdent à des postes à responsabilité sans formation formelle pour ces postes, ce qui renforce l'appel aux universités de proposer des programmes de formation continue à ces leaders. Le document soutient qu'une identification et une résolution efficaces du stress dans le système à campus multiples sont essentielles pour gagner et maintenir le moral et la loyauté du personnel de l'université. Cela nécessite donc l'adoption de paradigmes théoriques appropriés de leadership dans les universités à campus multiples pour un leadership académique de niveau intermédiaire efficace. Des recommandations sont faites des rôles de l'université sur la meilleure manière d'améliorer la productivité de ce groupe de leaders universitaires dans l'accomplissement des fonctions d'enseignement, de recherche et de service communautaire.

Mots-clés : rôle, stress, adaptation, universitaire de niveau intermédiaire, leader, université à campus multiples

Introduction

Efficient and effective leadership is crucial for the smooth existence and success of any institution (Jooste, Frantz & Waggie 2018; Otara 2015). Such leadership functions to simplify a complex institutional environment through focusing and realigning individual and communal efforts for the achievement of the vision, mission, and goals of the institution. Institutional leadership is typically structured into top, middle, and bottom layers. University top leadership typically comprises the governing council; the Senate; and the team of top management made up of the chancellor who is often titular, the vice chancellor (or rector), deputy vice chancellors, academic registrar, university secretary, and university-wide directors, such as director of research. Middle-level leadership spans from programme leader or head of department level (Milburn 2010) to the level of deans of faculties, directors of institutes, and principals of institutes (da Motta & Bolan 2008). The bottom layer consists of personnel in charge of smaller units such as committees within a programme or department.

The cadre of middle-level academics is a critical human resource whose job is to ensure that the very reasons for the existence of the university – teaching, research and community service – are realised. Hence, the middle-level academic must exercise agency in teaching, conducting and supervising research, and ensuring that findings are disseminated to create awareness as well as positive transformation in the community. As posited by many scholars, including De Boer and Goedegebuure (2009), and Wolverton,

Gmelch, Montez and Nies (2001), middle-level academic leadership is the linchpin that holds a university together. This implies that the efficiency and effectiveness of the middle-level academic in achieving this agency is dependent upon the quality of leadership within his or her working space. Good leadership enhances achievement of the academic functions for which the middle-level academic is primarily recruited into the university service. Likewise, optimum teaching, research, and community service define a good quality leadership within the working space of the middle-level academic.

However, the work of providing leadership through administration and management, and the concurrent pursuit of scholarly endeavours often do not make good bedfellows (Gmelch *et al.* 1999). Effective undertaking of one usually tends to interfere with the quality of achievement in another. The strain of trying to be effective administrators on the one hand, and attempting to protect academic autonomy and independence on the other, is likely to result in burnout. As such, many would-be good leaders at the middle academic level experience so much stress that they choose not to offer themselves for leadership positions, while those who take up the roles do not progress swiftly up the rungs of the academic ladder. This, in my opinion, is likely to result in the deleterious effect of poor administration and management on the one hand, and poor teaching and research within the university and poor community engagement outcomes on the other.

The situation above is exacerbated by the fact that middle-level academics are rarely formally trained in leadership, administration and management (Seale 2015). Most leadership and management interventions traditionally target top management; the needs of middle-level leaders are less recognised (Fielden 1991; Sanyal 1991). The literature available suggests that, of the pockets of initiatives that have been undertaken in the development of middle-level staff, much emphasis has been placed on improving academic prowess as opposed to enhancing leadership and management skills among such staff (Schofield & Commonwealth Higher Education Support Scheme 1996; Seale 2015). Hence, when it comes to the actual performance of leadership as a middle-level academic, the leader experiences a mix-up of roles. The leader's roles as a facilitator of learning, researcher, and community transformation activist are muddled by the "crisis" nature of leadership in which subordinates present problems expecting immediate solutions for which the leader is often unprepared. Such a mix-up potentially leads to poor design and implementation of teaching, research, and community engagement roles of middle-level academic leaders, which could result in a dysfunctional university system.

Research suggests that training and mentoring schemes to enhance the capacity of middle level academics for academic leadership roles need to be prioritized (Akuno, Ondieki, Barasa, Otieno, Wamuyu & Amateshe 2017; Schofield & Commonwealth Higher Education Support Scheme 1996; Seale 2015). In the absence of a robust training programme for middle-level academics across universities in Africa, a greater understanding of how middle-level academics juggle these ambivalent roles is needed. According to Akuno et al. (2017), understanding how faculty members manage the stress of participating in leadership processes, and how they engage and are engaged in several aspects of university leadership, will contribute to an overall understanding of the processes through which academic and institutional leadership evolves in universities in Africa. This would generate plausible and actual strategies that can be structured into formal training programmes and processes within universities.

However, there is a paucity of research on the roles, stress, and coping mechanisms among middle-level academic leaders in multi-campus universities. Gmelch (2002) avers that "this species [of middle-level academics] may be the least studied and most misunderstood position anywhere in the world". Scott, Coates, and Anderson (2008) concur, pointing out that studies on how middle-level university leaders manage change in terms of their own learning and development are relatively rare. Seale (2015:3) laments that "even more worrying is that there is even less literature available on this area of research in a developing world context." As observed by Gewer (2010:24), "today, many colleges are still struggling with the challenges associated with multi-campus management, with varying management capacity across campuses and unequal resources." As similarly noted by Mgijima (2014), the merger of colleges into multi-campus universities has not allowed the university leadership in general, and middle-level academic leadership in particulars, to mature, stabilise, and become effective managers of the system.

This article, through a critical review of literature, exposes the challenging and stress-inducing nature of the roles of middle-level academic leaders. The coping strategies employed by leaders in these universities are appraised in a bid to negotiate their role performance at individual, family, institutional, and societal levels. The article further exposes the roles that university top management in multi-campus universities in Africa need to play in order to ease the role and ameliorate the stress concerns of middle-level academic leaders. The literature search and synthesis mainly centre on academic deans (and equivalents) and heads of departments or programmes in multi-campus universities in Africa. This phenomenon is relatively young in the

higher education landscape in Africa. The content scope is limited to the roles of the middle leadership cadre; the stresses they experience as a result of personal, social, institutional, and societal challenges in the course of discharging their roles; the strategies they can employ to cope with these stressors; and recommendations for university top management.

The point of focus in this article is that, as observed by other scholars (e.g., Bryman 2007; Detsky 2011; Gmelech 2013; Jooste *et al.* 2018; Pinheiro & Berg 2017; Seale 2015) in other contexts, little is known regarding the complexities and tensions of middle-level academic leadership and the possible mechanisms to handle multi-campus universities in Africa. This article therefore presents an understanding of the academic, managerial and work-life roles and stresses facing middle-level academic leaders in universities in Africa. The article further appraises the coping mechanisms these leaders personally (and also collectively) use to circumvent their challenges, in addition to presenting how the university setting can ameliorate these stressors for middle-level academic leaders in their pursuit of university goals. The author acknowledges, in agreement with Harman (2002), that the roles and therefore impact of middle-level leadership positions on these academics is as diverse as the personalities and levels of resilience of the academics. However, it is argued in the article that an effective identification and resolution of stress in the multi-campus system is key to winning and maintaining the morale and loyalty of staff in the university. This therefore calls for the adoption of appropriate theoretical paradigms to leadership in multi-campus universities for effective middle-level academic leadership. Before delving into the stress issues, it is important to understand the evolution of multi-campus universities, especially in Africa.

Evolution of Multi-Campus Universities in Africa

Multi-campus universities are higher education institutions with two or more campuses that are geographically separated from each other and yet exist under a single university system (Pinheiro & Berg 2017). Globally, the emergence of multi-campus universities is either from mergers involving legally independent and geographically separated higher education institutions (Pinheiro *et al.* 2016) or from new campuses initiated by a single-campus institution (Leihy & Salazar 2012; Pinheiro, Charles & Jones 2015). The main aims of instituting multi-campus universities include fostering diversity in terms of the number of programmes, specialisation in the programmes offered at each campus, and coordination through sharing institutional resources. Studies (e.g., Pinheiro & Berg 2017; Seale 2015) have indicated that multi-campus universities are not a new phenomenon

per se, but they have recently become an increasing feature of contemporary higher education systems outside the western world. They are more recent in Africa, with the majority of multi-campus universities on the continent located in South Africa (Kamsteeg 2008).

Multi-campus public universities in Africa are mainly born from a merger of former higher education institutions. The massification, marketisation, and systematisation of higher education worldwide, and in Africa in particular, has been the main driver of the creation of multi-campus universities. The campuses often vary in size and each usually has its own epistemological and social character and culture, contributing to a rich diversity within the university. The degree of academic diversity within the multi-campus university is often broad in terms of the variety of fields of expertise; inter-, multi-, and cross-disciplinary research focus; and internationalisation through links, partnerships, and staff and student mobility programmes.

The major objective of mergers has been to cut administrative costs while maximising academic gains. They are intended to bring together, under one leadership or administrative framework, a number of campuses of unique academic architecture reflecting a comprehensive range of learning programmes, leading to a variety of qualifications from vocational and traditional academic to professional and postgraduate programmes across the campuses. However, mergers have often created a shift from professional autonomy and collegiality to increasing managerial control and bureaucracy, with a growing role for professional experts who manage rather than lead the institution. Hence, the multi-campus model has resulted in a plethora of concerns for the leadership entrusted with the welfare of the university. As argued by Seale (2015:ii), "the contemporary university is a postmodern, neo-liberal, competitive, boundary-less knowledge conglomerate, a far cry from its historical traditional classical and collegial roots. Although remaining true to its primary mission of research, teaching and community engagement, its organisational form has changed significantly, with concomitant implications for governance, leadership and management." Harman (2002) observes that while some mergers work well, others do not. Those that work well are typically well managed by competent senior executives who establish, mentor and support integrative middle-level academic leadership structures that keep structural and cultural divisions to a minimum.

Jarvis (2018) posits that the whole scenario of shifting from professional autonomy and collegiality to increasing managerial control and bureaucracy in multi-campus universities has led to an increase in career-manager academics and a change in management style from a collegial to a hierar-

chical approach, referred to as managerialism. A study by Davis, Jansen van Rensburg and Venter (2016) on the impact of managerialism on the strategy work of university middle-level academic managers in a South African university suggests that middle-level academic leaders are constrained by the effects of managerialism. According to the authors, "managerialism has resulted in a tyranny of bureaucracy which translates into disempowered middle managers, a culture of conformance over collegiality, control at the cost of innovation and experimentation and an over-articulation of strategy which devalues the strategy" (p. 1480). Therefore, it is necessary to explore to a greater depth the context of middle-level academic leadership within the multi-campus university setting in Africa.

Context of Middle-level Academic Leadership in Multi-campus Universities in Africa

Research on leadership in organisations has continued to proliferate with no clear definitions or answers about what counts as effective and successful leadership. Various scholars have given definitions based on personal and contextual inclinations. Jones, George, and Hill (1998:403) view leadership as the "act of inspiring, motivating and directing people's activities to help achieve group or organisational goals." According to Lwakabamba (2008:2), "leadership is a set of attitudes and practices – a way of working with people and a way of looking at what it means to work effectively in an institution." Lwakabamba argues that leadership is distinct from taking command; instead, it is taking responsibility, sharing responsibility – being prepared to take decisions, building consensus, having trust relationships, and understanding that individuals in the organisation must grow together. In this sense, leadership respects the value of each individual's contribution to goal attainment, and individuals working together as a group, so as to achieve organisational goals. Muriisa (2014:73) summarises leadership as the process through which a leader "makes an impact on others by inducing them to behave in a certain way to attain certain organisational goals."

A related term that is often used interchangeably, but is different in meaning from leadership, is management. Kotter (1990) describes management as coping with complexity, while leadership deals with change. In this case, management serves as a tool of leadership to allocate or administer the institutional resources for fitness for purpose.

With specific reference to academic leadership, Wolverton and Gmelch (2002:35) define it as "the act of building a community of scholars to set direction and achieve common purposes through the empowerment of faculty and staff." Ramsden, cited in Smith (2007), states that academic

leaders are people with titles, such as Head of Department, who are tasked with formal leadership responsibilities, with a role in staff development. The context of middle-level academic leadership in multi-campus universities in Africa is currently changing.

Whereas middle-level academic leaders who served their universities before the World Bank declaration of privatisation of universities had a relatively better experience of transitioning between academic and administrative roles, the later breed are confronted with a rapid, mainly horizontal expansion of institutions and academic programmes. Bisbee (2007) and Heuer (2003) argue that universities are confronted by an increasing complexity of leadership in academe that discourages many from seeking administrative positions. These authors note that universities are cluttered with administrative roles that have become very stressful with high turnovers and a high burnout rate, with significant emphasis placed on accountability, internal change, and high-performance teamwork. All this has contributed to intensifying the role of middle-level academic leaders in the multi-campus university in Africa. From my personal observation, the context is further characterised by an aging population of senior academics ready for retirement and too tired to serve in these stressful positions.

Bisbee (2007) notes that the current university has several challenges of identifying people who are willing to accept the responsibility of leadership roles in universities because of the very nature of the faculty themselves. According to Wolverton and Gmelch (2002), most faculty join university service because they are looking for autonomy and independence so as to focus on their work, and so most will not be willing to take up leadership positions, fearing criticism and a perceived lack of power. Another challenge, according to Bisbee, is the culture of higher education, which discourages the younger and more able faculty from taking up leadership positions. The faculty are rewarded for academic prowess measured by teaching, research, and community engagement in their subjects of specialisation as opposed to excellence in leadership roles. Taking up the stressful middle-level academic leadership position is thus a sacrifice at the expense of personal academic progress.

It is worth noting that most multi-campus universities result from a merger of antagonistic and rivalling institutions and other selfish forces with opposing academic values. The merger often brings under one umbrella professionals from different disciplinary fields (Pinheiro & Berg 2017) such as teacher trainers, medical educators, engineering staff, and so on. Some fields are research intensive while others are more inclined to teaching. In this case the merger is set up for conflict. When decision-making involves

democratic procedures such as voting, staff from the more populous institution are apt to win, a situation which often causes considerable animosity. Harman (2002:107) posits that "most institutional mergers, apart from being wasteful of human and material resources, inflict pain and anxiety, are disruptive and can take years to settle down."

Some of the campuses that merge into multi-campus university do not have research as a primary goal. These campuses probably specialised in training skill-based personnel at certificate and diploma qualification levels for industry. A middle-level academic leader who heads a unit in such a situation must inculcate and develop a culture of research, but this is not easy to pursue. Research engagement is generally a problem, even among senior academics. Ensuring that staff from teaching-intensive institutions develop a reputable research capacity in the multi-campus university setting in order to compete favourably for grants and scholarships presents a stress factor to the leaders. This is coupled with deficiencies in staff capacity to handle postgraduate programmes and students, and infrastructure to support research. As observed by Muriisa (2014:79), some professors may "have no time to offer professional service because they are engaged in consultancy work; they are busy moonlighting." Such brain circulation could leave universities with very few, if any, skilled resource persons to confront the challenges facing African universities.

The merger often brings with it a number of contestations, contradictions, debates and intellectual conflicts. Staff from different institutions come into the merger with divided loyalties, role ambiguity, heterogeneity, anarchical tendencies, conflict and self-interest. As observed by Harman (2002), merging un-complementary institutional cultures into a coherent, viable multi-campus university system presents great challenges for the leaders of such a merger. The leaders often find themselves trying to bring together individuals whose main focus and loyalty is more to their disciplinary affiliations and learned societies than to the hierarchical university management structure by which they are often disenchanted. In this case, a merger stresses the leaders in the process of strengthening academic programmes, enhancing research profiles, and consolidating policies pertaining to professional development, recruitment and promotion in the midst of a divided staff. Other related stressors that come along with the merger include sagging morale (Leithwood, Steinbach & Jantzi 2002) especially during curriculum review processes that involve restructuring of academic programmes. This comes along with cultural, territorial and seniority-based conflicts. Coupled with anxiety and confusion (Harman 2002).

Another reality to grapple with in middle-level university leadership in Africa is the number of private universities, which far exceeds that of public universities. Coupled with this, the number of private students in public universities is disproportionately greater than that of government-sponsored students (Ishengoma 2018; Marcucci, Johnstone & Ngolovoi 2008). This implies that the university operates in a context where outcome expectations are placed on its leadership from a unique clientele that operates on profit-loss terms. The universities are mainly run on a business as opposed to a service model such that the students, parents and university proprietors will demand a pass and nothing else from the system. This compromises the ethical conduct of leadership within the universities. Further, the expansion is not equalled by a parallel expansion in academic and administrative leadership at the middle-level, in terms of staff training, induction, in-role support and financial reward. Generally, there seems to be a better economic return on taking up teaching positions in several universities than offering to be grounded in a middle-level academic leadership position in a context characterised by a stressful workload with little or conditional financial benefits.

Confronted with such contextual realities, many universities are faced with the challenge of where to source leaders – whether from within or from outside the institution. Though insider candidates would be preferred because of their familiarity with the culture and goals of the organisation and proven competences, many universities prefer leaders from outside the institution on grounds of bringing in someone who is already skilled rather than training an insider. According to Heur (2003), many university administrators look down on the capabilities of internal candidates in comparison to external candidates. In my opinion, given the striking differences in institutional cultures, the external candidate from the private world will face immense disadvantages in understanding and fitting into the culture of the public university, and functioning successfully within its norms and values.

The above scenario is true and even worse for the multi-campus model universities in Africa, where middle-level academic leaders serve their primary academic role of teaching in one or more campuses, but are required to traverse all the campuses when management and administrative calls are made. This makes them grapple with ambivalence in roles as academics and as administrators and managers. It is nearly certain that the majority would end up stressed. The paucity of documented evidence of this status quo enacts persistence and greater prevalence of a hidden, subtle problem that most likely engenders mediocrity in the university system. Therefore, this study partly uncovers the mystery of how middle-level academic leaders in

multi-campus universities in Africa cope with stress from various sources, in a bid to achieve their best in their academic and managerial roles.

The Need to Focus on the Stressed Middle in Multi-campus Universities in Africa

Higher education in Africa has become enmeshed in student fee hikes and accompanying upheavals (e.g., #FeesMustFall in South Africa in 2016); increased international mobility with its financing challenges (International Association of Universities [IAU] 2017); widening accessibility, retention and completion gaps for the exceptional groups; and stiff competition between the institutions. This is coupled with technological and student demographic changes. There are also stressing employment terms such as contract employment for the staff; cost increases in student registrations and education; challenges of student accommodation due to unplanned massification; and the demand for more research outputs and publications among staff. Thus, it can be argued that the university in Africa has become an entrepreneurial entity caught between free education in countries like South Africa and stiff financial constraints in all African countries. This most likely requires a more business-like management and operational model with a focus on increased market share in the face of fierce competition and multiple income streams. These demands threaten and stress academic leaders – especially the Heads of Departments and Deans – who are the middle cadre at the frontline of handling these opposing forces. Seale (2015) acknowledges that the middle leaders of the current university in Africa are faced with the challenge of a more corporate-like approach to management characterised by performativity requirements and measures geared towards a more efficient and effective generation and provision of knowledge in a very complex internal and external environment.

According to Jooste *et al.* (2018), university leadership is different from leadership in other contexts, and demands additional competencies. Inman (2011) asserts that the nature of leadership for middle-level leaders in higher education is complex and demanding, and requires a combination of management and leadership skills. Generally, research indicates that most middle-level academic leaders acquire leadership skills and experience to lead on their own. Rumbley, van't Land and Becker (2018) as well as Seale (2015), for instance, note that middle-level academic leaders in Africa take up leadership positions "without appropriate training, adequate prior experience or a clear understanding of the ambiguity and complexity of their roles," and so they are faced with stressing challenges with which they struggle to cope. This implies that the multi-campus university system has made the

roles of these leaders more complex, which stresses them, but they have to cope in some way in order to address the continuous changes in the academic environment and to effectively act as change agents in order to lead others.

Theoretical Paradigm for Middle-level Academic Leadership in Multi-Campus Universities

The importance of theory in order to understand the dynamics of leadership among middle-level academics cannot be overemphasised. Several theories are in place to inform the roles leaders assume with various cadres within an organisation in order to best fit their personal and organisational functions. These include the Trait theories, Behavioural theories (Adair 1983), Contingency theories (Fielder 1997), Power and Influence theories, Transformational and Transactional theories, Cognition theories, Cultural and Symbolic theories, Complexity and Chaos theory, and Teams and Relational Leadership theory.

Trait theories focus on individual characteristics associated with successful leaders, with little or no attention on the context of leadership. Behavioural theories (Adair 1983) emphasise a shared governance environment in higher education in which the leader's role is taken to be that of guiding and directing activities, to achieve the institutional vision. Contingency theories advocate that an effective leader is one who recognises the context and situation, and adopts different styles of leadership in different settings. Power and influence theories focus on leadership as a social exchange process characterised by the acquisition, deployment and demonstration of power and its effect on tasks, relationships and the purpose of leadership. Transformational leadership, is where the leader acts to influence, inspire and motivate followers to achieve institutional objectives. Transactional leadership, on the other hand, refers to the process of social exchange where leaders elicit certain behaviours and performance in followers through offering resources such as information, funding, projects, promotions and other rewards. Cognition theories focus on the thought processes of leaders, in which case cognitive frameworks are employed in decision-making. Cultural and symbolic theories posit that the effectiveness of a leader is perceived on the basis of the leader's ability to negotiate the institutional culture (which may be collegial, political, bureaucratic, corporate and/or entrepreneurial) to attain institutional goals. Complexity and chaos theory states that organisations are complex and chaotic, with ambiguous goals and purposes and diffuse power relations so that leaders can only perform effectively if they develop networks, listen to people on the margins, gather additional data to make ethical, complex decisions, and use multiple cognitive lenses to address complexity in the

institution. Teams and relational leadership theory assert that leadership teams characterised by open communication, trust, a willingness to challenge, a lack of hierarchy, limited politics and effective decentralisation help to make more cognitively complex decisions.

However, this article aligns with the general three theoretical assumptions of Smith (2007), adapted from the conceptual academic leadership development framework of Ramsden (1998) on effective academic leadership in higher education. These are as follows:

1. An effective middle-level academic leader must demonstrate excellence in playing the roles of teaching, research, and community engagement among the peers.
2. The middle-level cadres need to develop different leadership and coping skills through adopting different theories, so as to effectively discharge their duties under different circumstances.
3. The multi-campus university environment needs to be refocused for excellence through collaborative and motivational leadership activities that require effective interpersonal skills among all cadres of university leaders from the top to the bottom layers.

This article notes that middle-level academic leaders are constrained by various stresses during the discharge of their roles, and how they cope depends on the institutional support afforded them by lower and higher cadres of leadership within the multi-campus university. The article further draws attention to the linking pin model (Likert 1967) of engagement of leaders within the multi-campus university system and Lazarus's theory of psychological stress.

According to the linking pin model, the middle-level academic leader in one campus of the multi-campus university is a member of a number of overlapping work units within the university. In this arrangement, the middle-level academic leader has the dual task of maintaining unity and creating a sense of belonging within the group he or she supervises, and of representing that group in meetings with superior and parallel management staff from other campuses. Therefore, middle-level academic leaders in the multi-campus university setting are the linking pins within the university and so they should be focused on for leadership development activities. How they juggle the labyrinth of such roles amidst tight stresses and strains is a major concern of this article.

Lazarus's theory of psychological stress (Lazarus 1966; Lazarus & Folkman 1984) is based on the concept of cognitive appraisal, that regardless of the objective severity of the stressing situation, whether an individual experiences psychological stress depends upon the individual's evaluation of the situation

as threatening. Furthermore, when the threat is unclear, the individual's assessment rather than the characteristics of the situation per se – determine whether the circumstances are appraised as stressful or not (Roskies, Louis-Guerin & Fournier 1993). Thus, the dispositional traits of mid-level academic leaders can strongly influence the number and type of situations they perceive as stressful. Even after the evaluation of a situation as stressful, there are a number of different ways that the dispositional traits could influence the amount of distress experienced. Academics with low negative affectivity (and/or high positive affectivity) may have more resources (e.g., social support), or they may use different and more effective coping strategies.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) posit three strategies – that is, approach, avoidance and social support – that an individual could use to cope with stress. These coping strategies are defined as "conscious deliberate efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behaviour, physiology and the environment in response to stressful events or circumstances" (Compass, Saltzman & Wadsworth 2001:89). According to Lazarus and Folkman, approach coping strategy is a problem-focused strategy that refers to active and direct engagement to a stressor in an effort to change it. Avoidant coping strategy involves cognitive or behavioural attempts to escape or disengage from the stressful situation or environment (Olah 1995). It embraces strategies like denial, distraction, substance use and other self-destructive behaviours. Social support involves seeking supportive relationships, encouragement from teachers and school personnel, among other adults, and it has been found to be a significant social resource in the development of resilience among students (Bernard 1995). Making a choice as to which of the three coping strategies to use is dependent on the individual middle academic leader. Being able to cope positively with work-life stress will reciprocally influence the performance of the middle-level academic leaders in their academic and managerial roles. It is therefore important to identify the roles that come with stress for the middle-level academic leaders in multi-campus universities in Africa.

The Role of Middle-level Academic Leaders

Muriisa (2014:72) poses the question, "Is there a role for leadership in redefining the roles of the University?" Assie-Lumumba (2006) provides an answer to this question, asserting that universities – and hence university leaders – are the principal agents for the growth of scientific knowledge that serves as the dominant force through research and training, a character that sets universities apart from other higher institutions of learning. Lwakabamaba (2008) similarly asserts that the success and performance of the institution depends on leadership roles of motivating, encouraging,

planning, and empowering. Ramdass (2015:1112) notes that "[w]ithout effective [academic] leadership, the possibility of improvement in teaching and learning is limited." The next question to raise is, "Who is an academic leader?" Lwakabamba (2008) believes that every member of the university is valuable to the attainment of organisational goals and so every individual in the university has a leadership role to play. Therefore, leadership positions in universities span from the top through the middle to the bottom.

According to Jooste *et al.* (2018) and Otara (2015), middle-level academic leaders, such as heads of departments who happen to be the senior academics within universities, play a significant role in building programmes and a community of scholars to set the direction and achieve the expectations of stakeholders in the current challenging economic times. Jooste and colleagues (2018) note that it is the role of the middle-level academic leader to steer the unit (department, faculty, school or college) to perform its envisioned functions collaboratively with other leaders through motivational leadership traits. Drucker (2011) similarly emphasises that middle-level academic leaders have a role to play, using their interpersonal skills to enhance the joint performance of members of the organisation through effective strength mobilisation. All these call for effective interpersonal skills such as academic personnel management, internal productivity, personal scholarship and external and political relations.

Otara (2015) avers that it is the role of middle-level academic leaders to promote scholarship and health for all, protect higher learning from stagnation, and provide a sound basis for advancing the faculty and university at large in meeting the demands of the national economy. Being in the middle means their role is to manage both up and down as well as laterally across the university, to "do a balancing act." This "balancing" involves monitoring the budget, managing staff and students, conducting research, and interacting with senior management (Scott *et al.* 2008).

As academics, the deans of faculties and heads of departments are obliged to carry out teaching, research and community engagement, in addition to playing leadership roles. This means that they have to prepare for and conduct classroom instruction, constructing and scoring examinations, reading and grading papers, research and/or creative work, directing graduate theses and dissertations, providing professional services, engaging in guidance and counseling, administrative duties, professional reading, committee work, and participating in extra-curricular activities. With this breadth of roles, middle-level academic leaders are prone to stress.

A critical role of middle-level academic leaders has been identified by Muriisa (2014) as planning and initiating academic programmes, and

inspiring others to follow. In this role, the leader is expected to have the foresight to identify new research areas, and influence others to venture into those areas. In light of challenges facing universities in general and multi-campus universities in particular, middle-level academic leaders should be creative and innovative, having the requisite skills and commitment to expand and attune the roles of universities. The leaders should be senior academics with sound knowledge of university operations, so as to encourage and actively pursue institutional policies that foster conditions that develop and support quality teaching and research.

The leaders have a role of mobilising, creating, and maintaining institutional resources. This role involves student enrollment and throughput, staffing, staff publication output, community engagement and partnership development, staff development, academic planning, teaching and learning, budgeting and work allocation (University of Western Cape [UWC] 2016). This calls for entrepreneurial skills that the leaders can use to mobilise and allocate the resources in a manner that sustainably promotes the university vision, mission and goals.

Middle-level academic leaders play a crucial role to resist changes that may impact negatively on the university. The leaders are obliged to take a responsive role in adapting the organisation to the demands and constraints imposed by its environment. In this case, the leaders are expected to exercise control over the academic affairs of the unit, including managing the teaching and learning process; programme development and researcher formation; managing faculty and academic related matters; and ensuring equitable representation of the key stakeholders within the unit and beyond.

Middle-level academic leaders are responsible for the management of the academic administrative process of admissions, formative and summative assessments and moderation, practicals – as chief examiners – and the dissemination of information and policies (Ramdass 2015). Jarvis (2018:85) provides the following summary of the roles of middle-level academic leaders in multi-campus universities:

> writing (reports, policies), monitoring, chairing, speech – not meetings, running a breakfast club, attending meetings and committees, emailing, managing records, being bound to strategic goals, completing paperwork, allocating work, restructuring, giving news, cajoling, bargaining for resources, allocating resources, balancing the books, generating income, budgeting, appointing staff, making people realise they have to deliver, signing off, accepting faculty support, recruiting students, checking, setting goals, directing, overseeing, gaining respect, having disciplinary knowledge, auditing, knowing the right people, helping colleagues, having informal conversations, building relationships

> and networks, motivating, supporting, legitimising activities through public acknowledgement, schmoozing, giving confidence, seeking consensus, winning hearts and minds, knowing who to contact, drawing on research literature, holding privileged knowledge, supervising, reading the research papers, knowing day to day practice, articulating the vision, using the electronic workload system, mentoring, encouraging grant applications, agenda building, debriefing, mediating disputes, doing paperwork, enthusing, being a role model, using structures, working shoulder to shoulder, using data, shaping content and sequence of agenda, accessing funds.

This shows that as managers, their roles are very broad, including personal, institutional, family and societal responsibilities. This article argues that juggling these roles is a stressful venture that compromises the performance of middle-level leaders and, hence, that of the institution they serve. Below is a presentation of the broad array of actual and plausible stresses plaguing middle-level academic leaders, which are likely to be more severe in the multi-campus university setting in Africa.

Stress among Middle-level Academic Leaders in the Multi-campus Academe

In the course of discharging their roles, middle-level academic leaders are faced with the reality that university education is in crisis and in a state of stagnation and irrelevance (AAU 2004); and that African universities are no longer relevant to the African economies. This is in regard to the nature of programmes offered, the nature of graduates produced, and the relationship between universities and society. The situation is even more complex in multi-campus universities that are plagued by inadequate numbers of academic staff. Various explanations have been given for the low performance of universities in Africa: high staff turnover, poor government funding, commercialisation and privatisation of higher education, increased consultancy work and massification (Kasozi 2009; Mamdani 2007; Muriisa 2014; Musisi 2003). This article observes that the plight of the academic leaders, regarding these challenges, have not been given due attention; to the effect that the middle-level academic leaders in particular are faced with mounting and unacknowledged levels of stress. Left unaddressed, the situation may degenerate into irrecoverable quality downturn which could critically undermine the purpose for which these institutions were established.

Seale (2015), with reference to the plight of the academic deans in multi-campus universities in South Africa, asserts that middle-level academic leadership in the contemporary university is complex and challenging. Similarly, Hlengwa (2014) notes that there are several leadership challenges

for the middle-level academic leaders, including issues such as lack of leadership and strategic direction from the top, diverse cultures, incomplete merger of campuses, isolation of the faculty or department, and inequitable distribution of resources among the units. This implies that multi-campus universities face the challenges of inconsistency across the campuses, with some campuses being less attractive to staff and students as they do not offer as wide a range of facilities, courses and opportunities as others. Seale (2015) notes that some campuses are remote, marginalised, forgotten, exploited, characterised by fragmentation, duplication, inconsistency and inequity. Faculty in the "better" campuses are likely to down rate and disrespect the staff and academic activities at the less attractive campuses. In addition, some campuses – especially satellite campuses – are usually vulnerable in times of university turbulence and cost-cutting strategies, and display a lower status to that of the main campus. All this presents a potential source of stress to the marginalised campus leaders who often happen to be middle-level academic leaders. The stress facing the leaders is presented in the following thematic subsections.

Stress Resulting from the Research and Teaching Roles of Middle-level Academic Leaders

Administrative demands made on the middle-level academic leaders in multi-campus universities compromise their teaching and research roles. Given that their vertical ascent to higher academic rungs mainly hinges on teaching and research (Inman 2007), the affected leaders are stressed by failing to perform in their primary roles, aware that their followers are looking up to them to draw an example to emulate. As argued by Muriisa (2014:77), inspiration of followers "comes with what the leader does." A leader cannot inspire others to conduct research unless one also conducts research. This, I argue, is one of the main stress factors for middle-level academic leaders.

Parson (2000) is concerned that middle-level academic leaders in multi-campus universities with limited staff capacity usually take up a full teaching load in addition to the management and administrative roles. Muriisa (2014) notes that most universities in Africa have a very small fraction of their teaching staff positions filled – especially at the senior positions of senior lecturer, associate professor and full professor, purportedly due to funding shortfalls. Moreover, the same funding devil results in most of the universities being plagued by shortages of library and other essential teaching and learning resources, and the deteriorating conditions of many buildings. Under such circumstances, middle-level academic leaders are

obliged to sacrifice their time to teach as well. This results in deteriorating conditions of work and hence increased work-related stress for the few senior staff available. Their morale eventually sags.

With such a heavy load, the leaders' effectiveness and efficiency is seriously undermined. This results in quality and performance concerns in teaching, student assessment, research supervision, staff mentorship, research publications and research grants. Moreover, the student population is usually so large in certain disciplines that assessment presents an additional task for leaders. Such additional load is not adequately rewarded; the available reward systems are not designed to support the additional time that faculty need in order to incorporate assessment and continuous improvement into the classroom. In this case, most staff in the affected unit lose morale and prefer to withhold their effort, forcing the leader of the unit to shoulder the extra burden. This is very stressful. Parson argues that it is unreasonable to expect academic staff who are overworked to be able to do much about improving the quality of their teaching without reducing their workload.

Stress Resulting from the Management Role of Middle-level Academic Leaders

One of the key roles of middle-level academics is to undertake quality checks and performance management procedures. Generally, performance management is an arduous process requiring a lot of finer details for documentation and reporting. Moreover, the process often places the middle-level academic leader in an awkward, resentful position of judging colleagues, and so a vulnerable reporter to top management. As noted by Ramdass (2015:1116), middle-level leaders "have challenging academics to deal with and the communication from top management. Often this leads to tension within the department and poor human relations." Colleagues may treat the leader with suspicion and fear. The leader is under immense pressure and stress from all sides to be more productive, more accountable and more responsive to the demands of a technologically advancing society. This is a very stressful role they have to perform.

A serious managerial stress factor for middle-level academic leaders in multi-campus universities in Africa is the lack of clearly defined responsibilities and expectations of the various leadership positions (Bisbee 2007). In such cases, it is not uncommon for a head of department to take up a responsibility of a dean of faculty. Scott, Coates and Anderson (2008) observe that such confusion may strain inter-leadership relationships between the middle-level academic leaders themselves; for instance, between the head and dean.

The fact that most middle-level academic leaders join office without any prior training in management poses another serious stress factor for them. Rumbley, van't Land and Becker (2018) lament that the training of higher education leaders and managers stands out as a "growth industry" which are mainly on offer in the world's wealthier countries, or are delivered (or otherwise made possible) by providers, funders and/or partners who largely hail from the Global North. The leaders in multi-campus universities in Africa often apply their personal attributes to leadership roles, in which case they end up using trial and error approaches which result in a host of mistakes for which the leaders are often castigated. Institutions without clearly defined systems, positions, and terms of reference therefore present a stressful time to the leaders.

Leadership positions in some universities are highly politicised. As noted by Hanson and Léautier (2011), most leaders of universities in Africa are appointed and/or seconded or confirmed by government. Sometimes, students, faculty and even university premises are used for political purposes, to settle political conflicts and serve political interests. Academic and administrative issues are sometimes turned to serve political ends. So, the general political climate of the society has a decisive impact upon the appointment practices of the middle-level academic leaders. This seriously compromises their academic freedom. Some staff are appointed to leadership positions without the requisite experience in lower ranks of leadership. For instance, Wolverton and Gmelch (2002) found that only sixty percent of college deans had been department heads, and approximately only forty percent of college deans had been associate deans. Most of these appointments are politically motivated. The leaders who are not inclined to the reigning political situation are usually put in the spotlight until they feel too insecure to perform at their best, for which they are further blamed and threatened with suspensions and firing. Such situations subject the concerned leaders to unwarranted levels of stress.

Neumann and Larkin (2011) note that there is a disconnect between the top and middle management levels within universities. Top management often underfunds faculties and departments, especially those in satellite campuses, while taking unilateral decisions. There is more inclination toward corporate bureaucratic, as opposed to traditional collegial, governance. To illustrate this situation, a study by Smith (2007) reveals that departmental heads (middle-level leaders) felt threatened from top management; some of them reported receiving emails that threatened punishment for non-compliance. Such fear-instilling experiences cause stress for the affected middle-level leaders.

Scott *et al.* (2008) express a strong concern about the changing context and expectations of middle-level academic leaders, which they note to be fraught with complexities and tensions. These leaders are expected to manage their area of responsibility precisely, in addition to knowing how to develop their department and university's capacity to constantly review and improve performance. Unfortunately, as noted by Hlengwa (2014:117), the satellite campuses where this takes place "tend to be second choice for both staff and students [and they] … feel dislocated and operate 'without the underlying rubric' of the top management." Moreover, it "takes time to get feedback from main campus" regarding requests generated for running the university at the middle level. This ultimately results in poor understanding of strategic direction, discrepancies in infrastructural provision, and hence demotivated staff. The middle-level leaders end up frustrated and stressed.

The unionisation of students and staff presents another stress factor for middle-level academic leaders in multi-campus universities. In the event of discord between the unions and the top management, the middle-level leaders are expected to be a channel of redress; the unions expect these leaders to approach the top management to attend to their grievances whereas the top management expects them to quiet the unions. This often places middle-level academic leaders in awkward positions, as they feel alienated and pressured between the warring factions.

With specific reference to multi-campus universities in South Africa, Hlengwa (2014) posits that there are key challenges related to staff and student equity and development. It is observed that the universities are predominantly white and male in their leadership and professoriate. Post-graduate programmes, particularly in certain faculties and disciplines, remain male-dominated and disproportionately white. Efforts to upscale the ratios of other races (especially Blacks, who form South Africa's majority) and women are not yielding results, given the complex historical and contextual circumstances surrounding the access, retention and completion of these other races and genders in higher education. The pressure then rests on the middle-level academic leaders, heads and deans, to even out the racial distribution, which is a very stressful venture.

Stress Resulting from the Community Engagement Role of Middle-level Academic Leaders

The community provides the lever about which the relevance of the university is gauged. With the aid of mass media, parents, communities and local authorities depict whether they feel the university leadership is doing a good job in impacting lives outside the campuses (James *et al.*

2007). The community plays a significant role in validating the authority of programme leaders through overt support and provision of resources and additional leadership from the community (Perry 2014). In the current upsurge of student numbers in universities, it takes cooperation between the campus and community leaderships to offer accommodation, security, feeding and other social services at affordable rates to the students. It takes effort on the part of the campus leadership, often provided by middle-level academic leaders – deans and heads of departments – to source for and negotiate the cost of these services. However, there could be moments when the relationship between the university and the immediate community sours as a result of misunderstandings between members of the university and the community. It would take sacrifice on the part of campus middle-level leadership and community leadership to settle these differences. Such misunderstandings are a source of stress for the middle-level academic leaders who must provide a workable solution to both the community and to the university, as well as inform the top management of the developments.

The customs of the community sometimes do not tally with those of the university. For instance, where the university may be emphasising liberal gender and racial equality and equity, the community might have a more rigid traditional take on such issues. This implies that middle-level leaders have the obligation to collect relevant information from the community so as to engender a value system that is consistent with the requirements of the community. Such clashes in values are potential sources of conflict between the university and community, which is also a potential source of stress to the middle-level academic leadership.

Family-life Conflict as a Cause of Stress among Middle-level Academic Leaders

Leadership responsibilities have been reported to impact negatively on the personal, family and social lives of the leaders. In order to be efficient and effective on the job, many of the leaders have to sacrifice other areas of their lives. They end up not having enough time for family, leisure and relaxation, which results in job stress, fatigue and anxiety. Conover (2009) observes that as leaders advance in responsibility, there is more difficulty separating work from personal time. Inman (2007) observes that leaders who are approaching retirement lack the ambition to serve at their best. They do not have the inclination to move up and lack the commitment required to serve. All this raises issues of work-life balance which affect the physical and psychological health of the leader negatively.

For women, the lack of social facilities such as child-care at their workplace or in the community is a source of stress. Most campuses and communities around the campus do not offer such facilities. Therefore, women who have access to education are prevented from high professional and academic achievement because of problems of childbearing and rearing. In addition, traditional and stereotypical tendencies in some settings cause discrimination by male counterparts. Inman (2007) notes that the process of managing the roles and responsibilities of wife, mother and career woman is both daunting and demanding. Other stress factors for the female leaders include sexual harassment at work, their innate and psychological habits of taking second place (due to the socialisation of negative self-image and deference for women), lack of understanding from husbands, having to outperform in their duty so as to get the respect of male counterparts, and societal pressures on single women which distract them from professional pursuits.

Coping with Stress among Middle-level Academic Leaders

According to Harman (2002), conflict is an inherent characteristic of all healthy higher education institutions, but compromises have to be made in order to achieve institutional goals. Poor leadership can arise as a result of various factors, including stress, and leads to poor coordination of programmes in departments and thus poor service delivery in universities. Jooste *et al.* (2018) observe that heads of departments hold a pivotal role in universities in ensuring that strategic imperatives are translated into action rather than being rhetorical ambitions, in order to implement changes and outcomes of plans envisaged by the institution.

If the middle-level academic leaders get stressed, then chances are very thin that the departmental, faculty and university goals will be achieved. Therefore, heads should work closely with their deans to establish powerful partnerships that can bring about real change in universities. In this section, I present the strategies that middle-evel academic leaders can employ to cope with the academic and managerial challenges they face in their positions within the multi-campus university. Specifically, these strategies can help leaders cope with stress emanating from the teaching and researchchallenges, management challenges, community engagement challenges, and family and social life challenges. As posited by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the strategies are mainly positive coping (approach and social support) strategies. The article largely excludes

negative (avoidance) coping mechanisms. The strategies include the following:

- Effective time management;
- Collaboration through partnerships or networks to develop, enhance, and sustain teamwork and cooperation;
- Planning and budgeting finances effectively to avoid shortfalls;
- Organising fundraising to increase resources for the campus;
- Managing conflict and stress effectively and timely, to prevent escalation;
- Working with legislators more effectively;
- Delegation of responsibilities to colleagues, to reduce work overload;
- Effective political relationships, to convince legislators to support the campus;
- Effective communication, to champion shared mission, vision and values to internal and external audiences;
- Professionalism in managing stress through self-care, balance, adaptability, flexibility and humour;
- Building new innovative programmes;
- Intensifying efforts to achieve equity in the appointment, election and promotion of interest groups, such as women to posts in different areas, thus ensuring their participation in the decision-making and policy-making processes;
- Promoting social awareness of women's legal rights to study, work and participate in all aspects of development at all levels;
- Using mass media to change attitudes, with special attention given to campaigns for different social groups (students, parents, workers, decision-makers, employers, etc.) to eliminate sexist stereotypes and preconceived ideas.

The strategies above have been offered to avert and cope with stress arising from research and teaching, management, community engagement, and family and social life challenges among middle-level academic leaders in multi-campus universities in Africa. Jooste et al (2018) advise that in order to succeed simultaneously at teaching, research, social, and leadership tasks, development of senior academics in headship positions is very essential. Ramdass (2015) similarly notes that managers need professional development in management and leadership qualities in academia in order to improve relationships. In this regard, the university has a role to play, as presented in the section below.

The Role of the University in Enhancing Middle-level Academic Leaders in the Multi-campus University Setting in Africa

Harman (2002) asserts that effective leadership and management from the top are the most important factors in assuring the success of a merger of institutions to form a multi-campus university. According to Muriisa (2014), it is the role of the top leadership of the university to define organisational goals and give a sense of direction for others to follow. The leaders at all levels therefore need to possess certain traits and behave in a certain manner in order to inspire others. In line with this, Seale (2015) argues that university top management must ensure that academics who take on middle-level academic leadership positions are supported to attain the necessary leadership and management skills to deal with the difficulties of the job, such as time management and extensive paperwork.

Given that the success of the university is measured in terms of quality research and publications, quality teaching and quality community service, all of which are realisable at the faculty and departmental levels under the leadership of middle-level academics, then there is a clear need to consistently provide refresher courses for this cadre of leaders. Bisbee (2007) states that "one way to help ensure there are trained leaders in academe is to identify potential leaders and provide them with support, training and encouragement to take on leadership roles."

Hlengwa (2014:115) advocates for "equitable distribution of resources across all campuses irrespective of size and location" in order to enhance a holistic development of the university. Funding for academic programmes should be devolved from the centre to faculties in order to ease service acquisition and delivery. A university-wide cost centre should be established so as to minimise inter-campus rivalry and guard against discrimination and disintegration.

With specific reference to developing research capacity and ensuring quality, Harman (2002) posits that there is dire need to provide support in the form of mentoring programmes and workshops on grant writing and writing for publication in the new campuses. The university needs to provide opportunity for staff to upgrade their academic qualifications, provide funds for seeding grants, offer sabbatical leave, support staff for conferences, offer individual support such as teaching fellows and research assistants, and monitor the effectiveness of these at regular intervals.

The university should enact policies on workload such that middle-level leaders are given some time for research, teaching and social life, in addition to their leadership roles. If possible, leadership should count for promotion to associate professor and professor positions as much as teaching and research.

In addition, the teaching and learning facilities should be upgraded in order to enhance effective delivery. Staff need to be supported through workshops and trainings to adopt more economical modes of delivery which enhance student autonomy in learning such as resource-based teaching, distance learning and delivery on the internet. These modes can relieve the middle-level leaders of the burden of having to drudge in teaching in addition to undertaking managerial roles.

Harman (2002) emphasises that in successful mergers, leadership in the early stages should be strongly directive; but as the institution changes over time, the style of leadership needs to change from being controlling from the top to building morale and developing loyalty. According to Harman (2002), the survival of the merger in the face of the ever-changing, hostile political and economic environment depends on a culture of loyalty and a sense of community. Old local loyalties need to be broken down and redirected to the newly created institution. As advanced by Kamsteeg (2008), policy measures must be taken to transform the university system to do away with segregation, and instead develop an efficient and internationally recognised system that provides equal chances for all ethnic and other interest groups.

Mathebula and de Beer (2010) further suggest that even though there could be characteristic differences between the main campus and its satellite campuses, the management infrastructure of the latter should maintain common features with those of the main campus. Management should exercise consistency and equivalence across campuses, and try to provide for campus-specific and cross-campus needs that enhance a sense of belonging to the bigger university. The curriculum quality and standards and semblance of support services and facilities should be uniform across campuses. As is the case in some multi-campus universities of South Africa, new management structures should be formed so that the middle-level academics and programmes have space in all campuses. Transport should be availed for students and staff to transit between the various campuses to attend lectures and other programmes.

In general, the university should focus closely on its management approach, service delivery strategy, organisation, service delivery capabilities, performance management, human resource management and technological advancement. A university culture that allows for participatory management and innovation, reinforced by exemplary managers, should be developed to achieve university goals. Service delivery should be marked by continuous improvement, with regular examination of the university strategies to keep abreast of the latest developments. The organisational structure of the university should be more

horizontal to enhance effective communication with all stakeholders who need to have a voice in every critical decision for the good of the university. Service delivery should be tagged to the needs of the customers, ensuring that harm to the environment is minimised. Customer satisfaction should be regularly measured to assure the quality of services. The achievement of all the strategic goals and objectives of the university hinges on the organisational commitment of the employees and leaders, implying that all employees need to be empowered to assume ownership of the institution. The university environment should be conducive to maximum performance among the workforce. In the face of rapid technological changes and escalating student numbers, university top management should strategise towards technological advancement, upgrading the existing infrastructure to meet the current needs for competitiveness.

Conclusion

Middle-level academic leadership can enable or constrain the successful achievement of the vision, mission and goals of a university since it is this cadre of leaders that actualise and link the university's vision, mission values and strategic goals to transformation. Middle-level leaders are responsible for the recruitment of staff and selection of students. However, most individuals who are entrusted with leadership responsibilities in universities, while highly skilled in a discipline, are talented amateurs in leadership and management. Moreover, multi-campus universities in Africa are becoming increasingly complex such that middle-level leaders face many challenges in the course of performing their roles. These challenges result in stress which the leaders must cope with in order to be effective in their various roles and responsibilities. These leaders often learn to cope on the job without any formal training. Given the complex and often contradictory expectations and demands of peers, the institution, and society, these leaders need to be taken through an in-depth and a broader knowledge base than can be provided by learning on the job. Therefore, universities should provide a formal leadership training programme for middle-level academic leaders. In addition, the university environment on the various campuses should be a semblance of the environment in the main campus where the top management sits, such that inter-campus rivalry is avoided while cross-campus communication and cooperation is enhanced. This will boost the performance of middle-level academic leaders, as they will use positive strategies of approach and social support to cope with stress.

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