Lingering effects of the past on a University merger process in post-apartheid South Africa

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This article is based on an exploratory case study of an institution that is currently undergoing merger under the directive of the Minister of Education in South Africa. The findings reported here illuminate perspectives of senior administrators at Settlers University, an historically White university (or historically advantaged university), regarding its merger with the historically Black (or disadvantaged) University of the Homeland. This article articulates perspectives of senior administrators regarding the impact of this merger on their students, staff, administrative structures, academic programs and institutional culture. In particular, the article highlights the intricate dynamics of a government-mandated process between two institutions with divergent legacies. Given the incongruent histories of the two merging institutions, what are the challenges and opportunities that confront merging institutions and how do these senior administrators envision a future of the new merged university?

Mergers, institutional transformation, South African higher education, organizational culture.

INTRODUCTION

[The merger] is not going to make a difference because we are going to remain as Settlers campus and Homeland campus. The deputy director general in the department of education made a statement that senior executives are going to be affected by the merger because there are not going to be any duplication. We are three vice-rectors here at Settlers and two in Homeland's group, that makes five. We have two Rectors and only one can serve; this means [after the merger] they are going to take one. The next possibility is redeployment or retrenchment. Because we are merging to become one institution, if there are people at Homeland, which is predominantly Black, who are excessive, they may come here. There will be those targeted senior positions that have to be filled and we will have to start internally first. But the fact is Settlers is going to remain the predominantly White campus and Homeland is going to remain mostly Black (A senior administrator at Settlers University, reflecting on the merger).

This article is based on an exploratory case study of an institution that is currently undergoing merger under the directive of the Minister. The findings reported in this work highlight perspectives of three senior administrators at Settlers University, an historically white university (also referred to historically advantaged university)[1], regarding their merger with the historically

[1] In this article, we use the terms historically white universities and historically advantaged universities interchangeably. Similarly, we interchange the terms historically White universities and historically advantaged universities Since the change of government in 1994, there has been a concerted effort to move away from the use of racially-constructed terms, in keeping with the ANC government's vision of creating an equitable society, a 'rainbow nation'.

Black (or disadvantaged) University of the Homeland (also referred to as Homeland). In this article we convey their insights about the effects of the merger on their students, staff, administrative structures, academic programs and institutional culture, and the complex dynamics of a mandated process between two institutions with disparate legacies. Given the incongruent history of the two merging institutions, what is the vision of these senior administrators and the role(s) they envisage for their constituents within the new (merged) university? What are the challenges that confront the merging institutions? How can these institutions effect change on their campuses?

The institutional context of the university where this merger is taking place is significant to the success of this process, particularly in light of the historical relationship this institution had with its merger partner. Settlers University was established in 1869 but it underwent several name and structural changes until 1951 when it acquired its most visible identity under policies established by the then newly-elected National Party Government. Like other Afrikaans-language universities, Settlers was perceived as loyal supporter of the former National Party Government and its discriminatory policies. Booysen (1989) contended that Afrikaans-language universities were used as instruments of political socialization where Afrikaner youth were indoctrinated with beliefs of Afrikaner racial superiority. While there were some voices of dissent, these were frequently subdued by the passive masses. Even during the 1980s when the political climate was particularly explosive and offered Afrikaner youth the opportunity to challenge repressive government policies, "the very nature of Afrikaner political culture, …precluded (current political) events from impinging on students' consciousness" (Booysen, 1989, p. 2). These institutions received a disproportionately high percentage of state financial support and boasted some of the best academic facilities in the country.

In contrast, its merger partner, Homeland was created in 1978 as a homeland university[2]. Like other historically Black universities created during the apartheid era, this institution was established as a teaching university whose responsibility was to prepare graduates who would be ready to enter the workforce after completion of their bachelor's degrees (Mabokela, 2000). In keeping with the activist tradition present at many of the historically Black universities, during the latter part of the 1980s Homeland students were engaged in active resistance against the increasingly repressive policies of the homeland government, which were directly influenced by the broader policies of apartheid. Emerging from these divergent social, political, educational pasts, how do these institutions negotiate the current political environment to create a feasible partnership?

The discussion to which we turn examines mergers in other countries that have experienced government- driven processes. This examination does not only offer possible lessons and insights, but helps us understand where the South African experience fits within a broader discourse around organizational change.

MERGERS IN GLOBAL CONTEXT

During the 1980s governments in Australia, the Netherlands, and Britain were very actively involved in the promotion of institutional merges to rationalize their higher education systems (Goedegebuure, 1992). There are two basic forms of mergers, federal and unitary structures, the former being popular in the United Kingdom and a number of Commonwealth countries for a number of decades. With the federal model, specific responsibilities remain with participating institutions or are delegated to particular units with the overarching or central body taking other responsibilities. Particular powers and administrative responsibilities of each unit or level are

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[2] In this article we will not provide a detailed discussion of the history of South African higher education system. For more detailed discussion see Mabokela (2000); Subotzky (19970; Nkomo (1991); Muller (1991).

clearly specified. This model is attractive to participating institutions with a substantial degree of autonomy, taking into account the different cultures and situations. However, it may limit the amount of course and administrative rationalization and can break down when member institutions differ markedly in size and strength. Federal mergers are losing popularity due to disappointing results (Kotecha and Harman, 2001). Unitary mergers on the other hand, allow a single governing body, a single CEO and a single set of structures for academic governance even with considerable administrative devolution of responsibility to major academic units. The most common model for merged institutions in Australia is a unitary structure without campus heads, campus budgets or campus academic boards. Funds for academic activities are internally allocated to cross-campus faculties, which in turn make allocations to schools on different campuses. A single academic board is responsible for academic governance (Kotecha and Harman, 2001). Kotecha and Harman (2001) further categorized mergers into different types: voluntary and involuntary, consolidations or take-overs, single sector and cross-sector, two-partner and multi-partner, similar and different academic profile mergers.

Researchers (Curtis, 2002; Kotecha and Harman, 2001; Reddy, unpublished; Woodward, 2001) have identified that mergers might be driven by five categories of factors: professional, academic, strategic, funding incentives and compulsory government mandates. The factors included similar commitments and student profile, geological proximity, institutional equity, new organizational cultures, cost control, enhancement of administrative efficiency, sustained investment in facilities, improved academic offerings and research, and even simply a matter of survival. The drivers were essential to propose a merger, but there were some conditions required to get a merger started well and on track**.** Thompson (1985) and Reddy (2000) identified essential conditions for mergers such as geographic proximity, previous cooperation, complementary instructional programs, an enhancement in the quality of academic programs, common political interest, decisive legislation and strong steering by government, and skillful and committed leadership. Besides these, Kotecha and Harman (2001) stressed culture as a significant variable in merger processes, as "a particular cultural challenge for higher education leaders is to manage the merging of divergent campus cultures into coherent educational communities that display high levels of cultural integration and loyalty to the new institution".

Merger practices in the United Kingdom and Australia had offered us lessons for future reference. In both countries, the government has tended to drive the restructuring with considerable initiative from individual institutions or groups of institutions (Kotecha and Harman, 2001). Their experience had shown that institutional mergers have achieved large, comprehensive institutions, and that these might have a competitive advantage in terms of size and scale, advantages for students in terms of academic offerings, infrastructure and services and quality of qualifications, and the potential for long-term economies of scale (Kotecha and Harman, 2001). However, among the intended benefits of mergers, Abbott (1997) examined change in average costs per student and student-staff ratios of a selection of Victorian Colleges of Advanced Education that were involved in the 1981/8 round of amalgamations. The results were compared to the average costs of some colleges that were not involved in amalgamations at this time. The findings revealed that (a) few financial gains were made from administrative economies and those did arise only did so after a number of years had elapsed. (Therefore, it is difficult to simply attribute these savings to the merger process); (b) the mergers' greatest contribution was in shifting resources out of the stagnant teacher education sector and into expanding fields such as business studies, and applied sciences; (c) the cost savings that did occur seemed to have arisen mainly because of the rise in the ratio of student to academic staff members. The main advantage of the amalgamations would seem to be in the creation of institutions that were adaptable enough to transfer resources out of contracting fields, and so ensuring that the institutions would use their facilities to their full capacity. In this way economies of size could be achieved.

Both researchers and practitioners expressed their concerns about potential problems in the institutional merging process. Curtis (2002) warned against hasty pace in the process and job losses as a result. Thompson (1985) argued that a lot of issues needed to be taken into consideration when a merger was planned to occur: governance and administrative structure, personnel and institutional policies, finances and property, students, legal ramifications, informing publics, and timing. Kotecha and Harman (2001) pointed out that mergers might compromise diversity within organizations. When exploring the significance of mergers in the reconstruction efforts within the South African higher education system, Humphrey (2003) contended proponents anticipated that mergers would not produce successful transformation of institutions without interventions at the root of organizational behaviour or affecting institutional culture.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Data Collection

The findings in this article are based on intensive open-ended interviews with three senior administrators at Settlers University. Within the context of this study, senior administrators include individuals who occupy executive-level positions within this university. At the time of these interviews this university was engaged in intensive deliberations with its merger partner to disentangle the intricate details of an amalgamation that would take effect in less than six months on January 1, 2004. Therefore, the perspectives reflected here were in many ways indicative of the heightened urgency to resolve very serious issues before the looming January 1st deadline arrived. These interviews varied in duration from 1 to 2 hours. The interviews aimed to capture the administrator's insights about the effects of the merger process on their students, staff, administrative structures, academic programs and institutional culture. Given the disparate histories of the two merging institutions, I was particularly interested in the vision of these senior administrators and the role(s) they envisaged for their constituents within the new university. Each interview was tape-recorded and later transcribed. The data were coded for emergent themes that are discussed in detail. In addition the interview data were supported by various government reports including *The Size and Shape of Higher Education Report* (2000), *A Framework for Transformation Report: A Final Report* (1996), as well as institutional reports, newsletters, websites related to this process.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data employed practices associated with the constant comparative method (Merriam, 1998; Strauss, 1987) to identify recurring themes within and across data sources. The constant comparative process led to a single-case level of analysis where the findings were aggregated to incorporate a thematic approach. The process allowed important themes and categories to emerge inductively from the data across cases. The discussion that follows captures and conveys issues, concerns, and the vision of the senior administrators at the Settlers University.

PERSPECTIVES OF SETTLERS UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATORS

The merger between Settlers University and the University of the Homeland was mandated by the government. As articulated in the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (2001), the government envisioned a new higher education system with increased access, quality educational functions, and new institutional identities that would be characterized by both diversity and equity. The perspectives expressed by the senior administrators at Settlers highlight the tension between the government goal of attaining access, diversity and equity and organizational objectives of maintaining institutional identity, quality and high academic standards. The

concerns and issues identified by the senior administrators centred around four central themes: (a) faculty recruitment and retention issues; (b) student access issues especially for the historically marginalized Black students; (c) lack of coordination in transformation strategies; and (d) lack of attention to the so-called 'soft' side of the merger process.

Faculty Recruitment and Retention Issues

The senior administrators in this study expressed concern about the lack of qualified faculty at this institution to maintain a high standard of education. They raised specific concern about the lack of Black academics relative to the number required to meet the diversity and equity objectives of the merger. The administrators further highlighted the institution's geographic location as a particular hindrance to attracting and retaining high-quality academics. Given that Settlers was located in a semi-rural area, there were limited professional opportunities for spouses of faculty being recruited. As Professor Venter explained, "Even when we have some people who would be willing to consider a career here at Settlers, they hesitate when they realize that job opportunities for their spouse are very limited".

The geographic location also had implications for salaries, a factor that influenced some academics' decision to accept or decline employment offers. That is, compared to institutions that were located in or near urban and other major industrial areas, faculty salaries tended to be lower and opportunities to consult and participate actively in the industry sector were limited. As Professor Venter further noted, "It is just normal that people (come to Settlers) to obtain qualifications and gather some experience and then they turn to more lucrative opportunities in more city-like environments and private sectors".

Quality of life issues are of particular concern to Black academics who may face problems securing adequate housing near the campus, or obtain proper educational facilities and schools for their children. Emerging form the legacy of apartheid, Settlers University was located in a small town where the residential areas closest to the university campus were reserved exclusively for white residents. While in theory residential segregation had been outlawed since the ascent of the ANC government in 1994, the reality of segregation still loomed large. Therefore, Black academics have to contend with discriminatory attitudes and practices both on- and off-campus. Professor Zodwa, a senior ranking African academic at Settlers University succinctly conveyed the dual pressures of life for Black academics in this environment.

> Historically [Settlers University] policies were designed for White students and White personnel, so for a person from another racial group to feel comfortable there a number of issues that need to be addressed. The first issue is language. Secondly, the general culture where you feel marginalized because you belong to the minority culture. You always experience a kind of tolerance, that is, you are just being tolerated and it's very uncomfortable. To me it looks like we are busy moving apart. Integration is becoming very difficult. This does not only have to do with politics, it has to do with a number of issues. And some of these issues are still prevalent at the formerly White universities.

The issue of faculty recruitment and retention became particularly complex within the context of the merger. The academic staff and administrators at Settler's merger partner were predominantly Black, while the staff at Settlers was overwhelmingly White. This scenario might present an ideal opportunity to desegregate the merged university; however, it also raised a number of critical issues given the disparate histories of these institutions. For example, Homeland was primarily a teaching university, while Settlers was a research institution. Given this difference, how would faculty from Homeland understand expectations around research and similarly, what value would Settlers faculty place on teaching excellence?

Student Access

Closely related to issues of faculty recruitment and retention was the challenge of making Settlers University more accessible to Black students in the post-merger period. Like other historically white universities under apartheid, Black students were legally prohibited from attending this university, except with permission from the Minister of Education. Frequently, such permission was denied. Given this legacy, there was concern among the traditional White constituents of this university that increasing access to Black students would lower academic standards at this university. As Professor Zodwa explained, the implementation of alternative admissions criteria that took into account the poor educational preparation of Black students in high school, were perceived as compromising the quality of this institution.

> I don't want to discount the possibility that people still associate it (a lowering of standards) with the intelligence of Black people per se. The problem arises out of the type of education that these students get, particularly students from rural areas. Rural schools are still far behind. We have received emails from certain academics who said that we have to do a lot for Black students to bring them up to standard. Some of them are well-meaning, but some are very condescending.

Professor Zodwa further noted that it was in very exceptional cases that excellent Black students choose to enrol at Settlers. That is, they preferred universities that were perceived as academically superior to Settlers. Facing such competition, it became imperative for Settlers to explore alternative strategies to attract Black students. The implementation of alternative admissions strategies would not necessarily harm the academic reputation of this institution.

Settlers University has been regarded as a conservative university in the sense that it has served one segment of the population, White Afrikaners. Historically Settlers' policies were designed for White students and White personnel. With various efforts, merger as one of them, to include students from other racial groups, particularly Blacks, these students would bring with them values that were culturally significant to them. The challenge of how to make the diversified student population comfortable involves a profound change in its historical culture and values of this institution.

Similar to Black faculty, quality of life issues were a serious concern for Black students at Settlers. Historically, the very few Black students on this campus were not allowed to reside in the residence halls. They had to commute to campus from the nearby Black township, the majority using public transportation that was not always ideal and in some case unsafe. As Professor Zodwa lamented,

> [Settlers University] is a very conservative community. We are having difficulties finding accommodation for our students. If Black students can't find accommodation in the hostels, they have to live in the townships. If a Black students calls looking for a place they say it's rented, but if my (White) secretary calls, then the place is available. Black student were not feeling very welcome and supported. There was a lot of dissatisfaction, a lot of frustration on the part of Black students. These are the realities that South Africa is facing. Whether we will ever reach that goal where we can all live in free society is another question.

While residence halls were theoretically open to all students the time of this Professor Zodwa expressed concerns about the conflicts between White students and the few Black students who resided in the halls. In his assessment, Black students perceived their presence in the residence halls as a tokenism, that is, something the university was obliged to do, rather than valuing them for their positive contributions. The intersection of academic and social pressures created a particularly challenging set of experiences for Black students at Settlers.

> My daughter attended [an historically White university]. During her first and second year I always got via friends that even though she was doing very well in her courses, she was very frustrated. She was always the only Black in class, feeling very isolated. The social pressures, not the academics were getting to her. Other students here [at Settlers] have similar experiences. You find that there is one [Black] student in the faculty of commerce. That student will sit alone in class, does not have friends. This can be very strenuous. So as you can see, there is still a lot that has to be done. Yes, there are a few things that have been done to accommodate Black students, but more is necessary. For example, students in the faculty of engineering raised a concern. They requested the exam paper in English. You know what the lecturer said, "you go and ask Mugabe." I said to the students, how is the university going to address these kinds of issues if you don't disclose them. The students said, "we are not going to disclose them because we fear victimization".

Uncoordinated Transformation Strategies

The merger process across most South African universities was coupled with wide-scale transformation of the entire system of higher education. The merger of Settlers and Homeland was reflective of the broader social and political issues that were still unresolved in post-apartheid South Africa. At the time of this study, the Vice-Chancellor (comparable to a university President in the US system) of Settlers identified what he called "deal-breakers" in the merger negotiation, namely, the administrative seats of the merged campus; the composition of the council (comparable to a board of trustees in the US context); the name of the new merged university; language; and values. The first three issues were resolved before the merger when into effect on January 1, 2005, however, language and values were most contentious. As Professor Erik explained, part of the challenge with the merger was the divergent understanding that the partners entered this process with. Therefore, a common understanding needed to be established. As he explained,

> I think what we need is to clarify the common understanding of transformation. If the basis of the partnership is based on misconceptions, somewhere in the future we are going to have serious problems. When you merge, it's like you are getting married. You have two partners understanding each other, trusting each other because you have to play open cards. In the particular case of this merger, the idea of transformation requires further clarification, so that we [know we] are departing from the same set of expectations. I don't get a sense that these issues have been clarified across both parties and I don't get the sense that we are all operating from the same set of expectations.

Professor Zodwa echoed concerns about the varied pace of change between the merging partners. As he noted, Settlers University implemented institutional changes, for example consolidation of some academic department and units, implementation of a peer-review process, prior to the announcement of the merger.

> The negotiation between [Settlers] and the [Homeland] is complicated. From the side of the Homeland it's the transformation agenda. Whenever we get from our Rector who has been charged with leading our team in the negotiation process, the question that we ask is, what sort of transformation is taking place at home, because charity begins at home? Hence, from the side of [Settlers], we started a transformation process a long time ago, when there were restructured faculties, condensed them into schools or focus areas. We started the process of peer-reviews. We invited internationally reputed scholars to come and review our scholars and they meet international standards. Hence our end product, our students receive high quality education from this university.

Many if these initiatives have not yet been addressed by their merger partner, nor are they priorities. These divergent priorities present one example of the challenge of what the merging partners consider critical and in need of immediate attention in the post-merger period.

Unattended 'Soft' Side of Merger

The senior administrators at Settlers identified what they considered the most testing aspect of the merger process, that is, the 'soft' side as Professor Erik termed it. All the administrators lamented the fact that significant effort has been placed on addressing structural dimension of the merger, while little attention had been devoted to the people, theirs fears and uncertainties and the institutional culture. Professor Venter's position conveys this anxiety:

> I have that experience and it is also well documented in the literature that … in terms of restructuring, the danger put forth is that a lot of attention is being given to the structural dimensions. The organizational charts and the names of the structures and things like that. Too little attention is being paid to the soft side, to the people side, to the culture, the thoughts, the perceptions, [and] the fears of the people. I can only hope that is this process that we are in. As soon as things are settled on the macro level in terms of the strategic, political level, we can really start to attend to the structural as well as the cultural in a balanced way.

The employees' perception of change and their fear of the unknown created resistance to the merger process. Therefore, it was a significant challenge to

> modify or encourage behaviors among people that will create a culture that is more tolerant, that is more inclusive of those who have been marginalized

in the historically White institution. In some ways, the lack of attention to this fear of the unknown reinforced stereotypes and pushed the Settlers constituents further into the protective zone of resistance. Professor Zodwa cited a sad recent incident that occurred at the graduation ceremony to illustrate this lack of understanding and conflict between the values of the White constituents of Settlers and the Blacks:

> [When the Black family started ululating] some people decided to leave because they saw this as being rude. An [intense] internet discussion arose from this matter; the journalist interviewed a variety of people on campus including the Rector, people in human resources and student relations. I said, there is a lot that needs to be done at this university. People keep talking about reflecting Christian character, it's a good thing for marketing the university but the issue of Christianity should be in the hearts of people. Such intolerance does not reflect Christianity. However, because we come from divergent groups and the fact that we were divided in the past there needs to be honest soul-searching, introspection by everybody. Reality is that we are going to face these challenges. We are not staying on an island that is far off from the reality of race relations and life in South Africa… Someone made a remark that seemed very offensive and said, "Blacks have to ululate because they are entering the civilized Western world." This statement came from a whole professor. And I said you don't understand how offensive it is to make such remarks because people will ululate when there is success, when they are happy. In fact when [Blacks] enter the so-called Western civilization, we lose a bit of ourselves. It is more painful than they would ever think.

The merger, as one of the various efforts to include students from other racial groups, particularly Blacks, brought with it values that were culturally significant to that of the Whites. Professor Zodwa realized the significance of a profound change in its historical culture to make the diversified student population comfortable on campus, "Settlers should now transform completely

in terms of the students, the culture. I think it's almost like Africanization". Professor Zodwa cited another incident where a student program, African night, intended for all students was presented, but only the Blacks attended the event.

> I remember in 1994 we were described as the "Rainbow Nation of God" by Bishop Desmond Tutu. The question I want ask is, have we moved to become that Nation of God? To me it looks like we are busy moving apart; integration is becoming very difficult…When we had an African art exhibit, an event planned for the whole campus, only the Black students attended. White students have an attitude. I think Black students are putting forth an effort, especially on the cultural front.

Language was another contentious issue in the merger process. Within the broader political history of South Africa, the struggle around language dated back to the early days of colonialism and the conflict between the British, Dutch and the local African groups (See Mabokela, 2000; Mmusi, 1987 for amore detailed discussion of this issue). Historically many Africans viewed Afrikaans as the language of the oppressor, particularly after its imposition in Black schools which triggered massive opposition. It was through the massive 1976 Soweto infamous student riots (by Black students) that the apartheid government's Afrikaans language curriculum resulted in a national state of emergency thus subsequently this proposal was overturned. As Professor Zodwa explained:

> Last year we received a petition that (Black) student took to the Minister of Education complaining about the language issue. They said specifically that we are not going to feel accepted until the language issue is addressed. At this stage, an arrangement has been that non-Afrikaans speaking students should attend evening classes. And the feeling of those students who only have command of English is that they type of service they receive in the evening classes is inferior. The lecturer does not show the same level of enthusiasm. It's a form of secondary service they are getting.

Professor Erik's assessment of the language issue captured the broader sentiment of the traditional White) constituents of Settlers university, who viewed the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction directly connected of their culture and sense of identity. Therefore, any effort to introduce English might be interpreted as a direct assault on Afrikaner culture. As Professor Erik explained, "The use of simultaneous [Afrikaans/English] translation was a major concession", particularly among the constituent who were seriously concerned about the institutions loss of identity.

The language issue was intricately linked to identity of the traditional constituents of Settlers University. Professor Erik indicated vehement opposition from alumni who were concerned about the institutions loss of identity, specifically about the institutions name and its Christian identity. In the eyes of the alumni who were said to be the strongest within South Africa, compromising these values was akin to abandoning the very soul and essence of Settlers University.

Emerging from these very contentious issues raised by senior administrators at Settlers University, what lessons have been learned? More importantly, how did this experience inform broader discourse around institutional mergers?

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recruitment and Retention Strategies

As we consider lessons learned from the insights shared by the senior administrators at Settlers, we have to bear in mind that the merger between these two institutions was mandated by the Government. In some ways, part of the complexity of this process arises from the reality that these are reluctant partners

One of the major challenges facing Settlers in the post-merger period is its ability to recruit and retain a racially diverse workforce. Most importantly, Settlers needs to be able to meet the government mandate to create an accessible and equitable institution of higher education. The recruitment and retention of diverse administrative and academic staff at Settlers University requires a conscious effort given its legacy as a symbol of apartheid education. At the time of this study, the racial composition of the staff at Settlers was overwhelmingly White (more than 95%). The question becomes how does Settlers successfully merge with Homeland, and optimize the opportunity with to diversify its staff and respond to the government mandate?

The senior administrators shared insights about a staff diversification process they referred to as "growing our own timber". This refers to the process whereby the university identifies postgraduate students with high motivation, supports and encourages them to pursue further academic degrees, and eventually grooms them to assume academic and administrative positions on campus. According to Professor Venter, Settlers has established a special budget for target hires of talented scholars from historically excluded groups (that is, Blacks). It is interesting to note that the senior administrators do not express much enthusiasm to recruit a racially diverse academic and administrative staff from their merger partner, Homeland, despite the fact that the staff at this institution is overwhelmingly (more than 90%) Black. Conversations with senior administrators suggest that there are areas of duplication after the merger in academic programs and administrative positions, thus necessitating staff reductions in some cases. Given this scenario, it seems reasonable to explore the option of employing staff from the merger partner.

Retention becomes imperative once ideal candidates from marginalized groups are hired. The administrators at Settlers envision implementation of retention strategies at two levels in the post-merger period. At the individual level, the institution can provide both intrinsic (work environment) and extrinsic (monetary) rewards to retain qualified academics and thus respond to the national agenda to promote access and equity in higher education. At the institutional level, it is critical to address issues that relate to the culture of the organization. The latter may present more significant challenges because it relates to those factors Professor Erik identified as "deal-breakers," that is, the issue of language and institutional identity.

Federal or Unitary Post-Merger Structure?

There are some contradictions regarding the structural organization of the post-merger institution as articulated by the senior administrators. The following statements shared by the current president of Settlers demonstrate this confusion. On the one hand, Professor Erik argued for the creation of a single post-merger institution, stating, "This [post-merger] institution will merge and become one institution…we will negotiate on creating unitary management, this is not a federation. While the post–merger institution will have a single University President and governing board," characteristics usually associated with unitary mergers (Kotecha and Harman, 2001). Other insights shared by the Professor Erik imply a federal structure for the new university. As he asserted,

> [After the merger] we want this campus to maintain its institutional identity, not so much in its name, but in its essence. Eighty-five percent (85%) of our students are Afrikaans-speaking, not only White Afrikaans, but Colored Afrikaans –speakers as well. To maintain our students, we have to say that this campus can still be called Settlers. This is the first condition and a very important one.

The above statement embodies characteristics of a federal merger (Kotecha and Harman, 2001) where each campus retains autonomy and operates independently. Evidence from the literature cautions that federal mergers while initially attractive to institutions with markedly different conditions such as Settlers and Homeland, may limit the amount of administrative rationalization

and eventually breakdown. The ideal merger needs to reflect a delicate balance between unity and diversity, with shared goals for creating an equitable, inclusive institution.

Cultural Integration with Mutual Respect for Difference

This merger on a surface and quantifiable level is about the demographics. However, given that the people involved in the process come from divergent groups and were divided in the past, the merger must go beyond numerical representation. In Professor Venter's words, "There needs to be honest soul-searching, introspection by everybody." But how do administrators and staff in the post-merger university promote integration of groups of different races and cultures on campus? Professor Zodwa emphasized the importance of moving beyond the idea of tolerance, to truly embrace and appreciate difference within the post-merger university. As he clarified,

> People use this term [tolerance] on a number of occasions but they don't know what the implications of its use are. If people show that attitude, that they only tolerate you for particular purposes, if you are a self-respecting person, then you will definitely feel very marginalized. There needs to be respect for one's culture, not tolerance. One doesn't necessarily imply that cultures are going to be forced to be one; the so-called "melting pot syndrome" where all cultures are forced to become one. This doesn't work. There needs to be a type of mutual respect for different cultures. When Black people come have to feel respected and they in turn will respect their White colleagues.

While senior administrators at Settlers have been engaged in deliberations about the merger process, and have been compelled to confront and perhaps resolve some of their apprehensions, other constituents on campus are still challenged and there are pockets of resistance among students, academic and administrative staff, and alumni.

The Road Ahead…

This exploratory study sheds light on a single case of a government-mandated merger, "a forced marriage" between partners that prefer to remain autonomous. The response of these institutions to this government mandate is further complicated by the broader social-political climate to desegregate South African universities and to create accessible, equitable institutions. While the findings of this exploratory study reflect only the perspectives of senior administrators, they reveal important issues that if unattended have the potential to compromise the success of this process.

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