

# Reflect

The Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership

Business Management Department



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The Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership aims to develop a new generation of responsible leaders, shaping local and international business practices and policies in support of social and environmental justice

## The Derick's message time-value of context

It's once again a pleasure to present to our readers the 5<sup>th</sup> Issue of our newsletter *Reflect*.

I chose the topic of my message carefully. It deals with my discontent on the disproportionate emphasis being placed on the value of future research outcomes if one considers the rallying cry for engaging with real-time issues that requires immediate attention, opinions and solutions. Its an issue that I have been thinking about for a while now and have always considered to put my thoughts on paper, so... here it is now. I hope you find meaning in my views.

As social scientists we aim to ground our views, opinions and assertions by referring to and relying on relevant and highly cited literature, in an attempt to prove to our readers that what we say has legitimacy and credibility. This approach is and will remain the default position that academics follow in their daily activities, especially when researching and publishing.

If, however, I deliberately move away from this default position by recognising the depth, richness and "messiness" of the current (leadership) context in South Africa (SA), I realise that legitimacy and credibility issues in academia are relative in the greater scheme of things. Legitimacy and credibility have a "time-value of context"; they have value now and of course value into the future. When adding time, to value determination, time

*"The current leadership context in SA justifies placing a significant emphasis on the time-value of current context"*

tends to have a moderating effect on the value. Consequently, I often find myself relying much more on current context and concomitantly how my views are being shaped "on the fly" by the, sometimes, brutal reality of the moment. So, my academic colleagues and scholars will probably shudder at the mere thought that as a social scientist, I allow these untested and unargued realities to shape my views and opinions. I am afraid it does. I just cannot ignore the richness and complexity of current reality and furthermore the time-



value of current context. It happens far too often that much of the richness gets lost in translation once we endeavour as academics to rigorously investigate a specific phenomenon – something that usually takes much longer purely due to the extensive requirements of research protocols. This is where the time-value of context is stretched to a point where I believe it loses currency if one considers real-time challenges and a search for quick solutions – and please note, with this I don't mean "quick fixes". I believe that the currency of context is short-term. My take on this is that in a specific space of time, a challenge often deserves immediate scientific intervention

## ***“I just cannot ignore the richness and complexity of current reality and the time-value of current context.”***

and concomitant solutions, which result in instant gratification. Instant gratification is something most academics would heavily guard against since it challenges rigor and methodological purity and logic. I believe the time-value of (current) context, i.e. its currency, warrants as much legitimacy and value as the currency for academic research, of which the intent and value is mostly achieved in the long-term.

In getting practical, let's consider the current leadership crisis facing SA. Suffice to say that leadership as an area of investigation and sense-making in SA at the moment is undoubtedly rich, complex and messy. I believe that many would agree with me that never before has the time-value of the leadership context been as high as it is today.

The current leadership context in SA justifies placing a significant emphasis on the time-value of current context – taking the risk of arguing in favour of a much higher present value than I would place on time-value of future scholarly benefits in leadership research, i.e. future value. These two approaches, present and future value, are however not mutually exclusive but it is necessary to draw attention to the time-value of context differences.

Let us just reflect for a moment on the complexity of the current leadership context in SA. Not only is it highly politicised, but also scattered with polarised views. It

points towards the complexity of how one should analyse leadership, which is something scholars have been writing about for decades. We need to ask questions around the current level of leadership analysis, i.e. is it an individual, institutional or collective context? What is the real-time evidence as we start analysing leadership and how can we, in real-time, benefit from our analysis without going into extensive analysis over extended periods of time? Then also, everyone has an opinion on the leadership context. You only have to switch on the radio or television, or follow social media and experience the level of engagement in the debate around leadership. These opinions vary from intellectual to



**“Considering the richness of the current context, we should capitalise on the time-value of context (present value) by providing opinions as it unfolds.”**

novice. Both these opinions bear testament to context and reality and both are equally relevant in my mind. It might, however, just be that the novice opinion carries a heavier time-value of context (present value) since it places emphasis and reflects on the here and now. The intellectual on the other side might place a higher value on time-value of future context (future value) through evidence-based research and its value to advancing knowledge.

So where do I find myself on this continuum? Of course you would probably expect me to find myself closer to that of the intellectual since this is where my bread and butter lie. Studying something such as leadership, which as I mentioned before is complex and messy and more importantly, something that is socially constructed, there is no way that I could ignore the time-value of current context, i.e. present value. I find myself increasingly in this position whom some would call the role of a public intellectual. The academic fraternity might however frown upon this role and often would go so far as referring to it as “pseudo intellectual”. I am however happy if this is bestowed upon me since I strongly believe in the time-value of context especially if we, as academics, can close the gap between the present and future value of research outputs. As much as I support evidence-based findings to challenges we are faced with, I often find myself grappling with the time-lapse between the actual identifying of the challenge and its academic and research value in future.

Bearing in mind the time-lapse mentioned above, this is where the time-value of context does not lose its currency. Academics should stake their claim and legitimise their opinions beyond the obvious evidence-based assertions. In fact, I think this is the space that academics, especially those who are confronted with topics such as leadership, should spend a much bigger portion of their daily activities on. So again, let me make it real and practical in our current context. The underlying dynamics of events such as the collective action amongst most of the SA banking institutions on the Gupta saga is but one clear example. Questions begging to be answered in this particular case relate to leadership for what and at



# Reflect

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## Editor

Anthony Makeketa

## Contributors

Prof Derick de Jongh  
Dumisani Hlophe  
Mark Myatt  
Dr Willem Fourie

## Physical address

The Albert Luthuli Centre for  
Responsible Leadership  
Faculty of Economic and  
Management Sciences  
University of Pretoria  
Corner of Lynnwood Road  
and Roper Street  
Hatfield  
0083

## Postal address

The Albert Luthuli Centre for  
Responsible Leadership  
Faculty of Economic and  
Management Sciences  
University of Pretoria  
Private Bag X20  
Hatfield  
0028

## Contact

The Albert Luthuli Centre for  
Responsible Leadership  
Tel: +27 12 420 4271  
Fax: +27 86 546 9360

*"I often find myself grappling with the time-lapse between the actual identifying of the challenge and its academic and research value in future."*

what level? Is it leadership for the "good" of SA and is it leadership involving a group of role-players such as the Banking Industry (i.e. collective leadership)? So, you might rightfully argue that this is a case begging to be written up in proper academic style – something I would agree with. But then, if you apply the time-value of context (real-time), we will be missing out on a valuable opportunity to unpack and debate the dynamics of this case if the ultimate aim is only to get such a case written up in a text-book or as part of an MBA case or appearing in an academic journal. Present value is then compromised in favour of future value. Admittedly so, the question is how to reconcile facts, analysis, interpretations and findings with quick assessments and opinions. I guess it's a matter of finding the "sweet spot" between time-value of present context vs. time-value of future context, i.e. academic research and the advancement of knowledge.

Providing intellectual comment on the meaning of the Gupta saga as it plays itself out in real time, from a leadership point of view, would arguably place a high time-value on current context. Or, you can aim towards a deep investigation of the concept of leadership, the underlying dynamics, then operationalisation of the research by framing a research question (or problem); considering what the literature tells you on the topic (and related topics) and adopting a solid methodological approach to ensure that your conclusions and recommendations are grounded and generalisable. The latter obviously offering a solid case for time-value of future context. I believe both approaches have merit. My take, however, remains that considering the

richness of the current context – and as leadership scholars our legitimate voice – we should capitalise on the time-value of context (present value) by providing opinions as it unfolds. I think it is our duty and responsibility as academics.

We have already missed out on a number of such context-rich opportunities to offer viewpoints on contemporary leadership issues that matter today. I do believe that the accelerating and multiplying effect of time-value of context (present value) has potential beyond our imagination. Not only does it have the potential to bring solutions much closer to scientific progress but also allow public discourse to benefit from such real-time solutions to the challenges we are facing as humanity.

In conclusion, at the Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership, we agree that we are confronted with a rich current context presenting an abundance of leadership challenges. How do we then make sure that we do not lose out on real-time translations of these phenomena as they play themselves out in our daily lives? How do we ensure that the time-value of context (present value) is not ignored in the interest of rigor and academic development (future value)? When will we reach a point where as academics we do not feel inferior if indeed we support the time-value of context by offering interpretations of and opinions on matters without jumping into a long process of rigor and evidenced-based research? There is indeed a place for both. In fact, if you are interested in leadership as a phenomenon, there is no way you can pursue the luxury of long-term research at the expense of what I would argue is a very high time-value of present context. 

# WHO SHOULD BE A RESPONSIBLE LEADER?

Leadership is the latest buzzword used in just about any context. Leadership is often the word we fall back on – it is easy to blame leadership when things are going wrong, while it is just as simple to acknowledge when things are going well.

In these moments of accusation, however, is it not important to reflect on ourselves? Should we not take greater responsibility in situations before we seek to find a “bad guy” who can absorb the problem?

Since last year we have witnessed student protests in higher learning institutions across the country. We read about the slow growth of the economy and the increasing level of unemployment amongst the youth. We witnessed parliament turn into a screaming match. We also read about the displacement of refugees across Europe. Are all these negatives a result of leadership? Are we not partly to blame? Do the ordinary people of this world not have a responsibility to show leadership where there is none?

Again, I ask... is leadership always to be blamed? Just a month ago I was watching an exciting soccer match when an unruly spectator slipped through security personnel onto the pitch undetected. While the game had to be stopped, what really struck me were the TV commentator’s comments. “This is a pure lack of

leadership,” he moaned. Top people in this industry don’t know what they are doing, I knew it was coming”, the commentator went on to say. In this moment it dawned on me that leadership should become everyone’s responsibility.

Addressing Rhodes University graduates, Dr Saleem Badat, the University Vice Chancellor said, “Leadership is pioneering in thought and action, being willing to take action to address the challenges we see around us, and using wisdom to change society for the better wherever we find ourselves.” Of course, leaders need committed but critical supporters (who also act as agents of change), strong institutions and a strong civil society. **Leadership, then, becomes everyone’s task and responsibility.** This is the real meaning of the slogan ‘power to the people’. If not this, I believe we will continue to suffocate under the yoke of the “big man” brand of leadership, with all its problems.

In this edition of *Reflect*, I interviewed the very interesting Lydia Hlongwane and Douglas Boavetura. As YALI graduates, these young leaders

have taken it upon themselves to help transform their communities, regardless of what their governments do. They have taken it upon themselves to make things happen in their lives and those of others. For them, leadership is about taking responsibility for your own course of destiny without making excuses.

Over the years we have witnessed communities taking to the streets to vent their frustrations over various issues. Do we really expect the government to provide us with basic necessities? Should we not learn from the likes of these two young leaders and get involved ourselves? Surely, they have demonstrated that everyone can make a choice by taking responsibility and leading their community.

I am not a leadership expert but I do have specific opinions on leadership like many people around

*“Society shouldn’t wait for things to happen before they act”*

me. I am, however, passionate to play a role in the work we do at the ALCRL and spread the word of taking responsibility as I have tried to argue in this editorial. Similarly, our Director, Prof. Derick de Jongh emphasises that people should demonstrate proactive attitudes rather than reactive ones. This means society shouldn’t wait for things to happen before they act, but rather take action and be responsible. This is an ideal which will prompt accountability and personal responsibility which will lead to greater action. We all have a responsibility to be leaders. The ALCRL advocates these key issues through its teachings and research interventions. [Re](#)

# Young leaders on the move

*Two YALI Graduates shared their experiences of the programme with us.*



## Tell me more about / CARE

It is a non-profit organisation serving the social needs of the poor in Hammanskraal. With the support of its sponsors, / CARE donates clothes to the poor, operates a feeding scheme, secures housing for the homeless and helps with securing bursaries for young people. "Soon we will be launching a teenage pregnancy prevention campaign by hosting workshops in schools around the Hammanskraal area. There are three full-time employees who run this organisation."

## Why she decided to form this organisation

Growing up in Hammanskraal, she was surrounded by poverty and desperation and decided to do something about it rather than wait

## Young African Leadership Initiative

The Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership (ALCRL) was invited to participate in the Young African Leadership Initiative (YALI) in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. YALI is a United States Agency For International Development (USAID) initiative and forms part of President Obama's drive towards developing leadership in Africa. The ALCRL developed and presented, as part of the bigger YALI programme, a module on responsible leadership. The module covered social and environmental challenges on the African continent with emphasis on the leadership implications thereof. The ultimate goal was transformational change on the African continent. Ben van der Merwe, Senior Researcher and lecturer at the ALCRL, is the YALI programme coordinator and was responsible for presenting the module on Responsible Leadership.

## 1. Lydia Hlongwane

The first cohort from this programme describes herself as "the servant of the people and the torch of the disadvantaged". Lydia is a Young African Leadership Initiative graduate and founder of the / CARE organisation. She is a 31-year-old woman born in an area called Mathibestand near Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria. Lydia studied Local Government Management at the Tshwane University of Technology.

for the government to intervene.

She has a passion for women and children and bringing about positive change in poor rural areas like the one she grew up in. Her mother was always involved with community upliftment projects in their community. She decided to follow in her footsteps and continue where she left off. Her mother was a huge influence on her career path.

## How did she get involved with YALI?

As a founding member of the / CARE organisation, she is always on the lookout for professional development programmes to enhance her leadership skills and help her connect with like-minded young African leaders across the continent. She came across this programme on Facebook, joined the network and was accepted.

## How did she experience the programme?

"It was an eye-opener and a wonderful learning experience. We were joined by other young leaders across the SADC who were also on a mission to transform their communities. Initially we felt a little overwhelmed, but our programme directors, Bento Mazula and Karen Haycock, warmly welcomed us and assured us that we were accepted because of our capabilities". Classes were designed to develop leadership skills and optimise their potential. Knowledgeable lecturers from reputable academic institutions, as well as business leaders from leading companies across South Africa presented classes, leadership seminars and workshops.

Growing up in a community where women are often regarded as second-class citizens, she became more aware of her leadership capabilities and the important opportunity to transform her community. This programme was very informative, well-structured and motivating. It was a thoroughly enjoyable experience and my only wish is that the one month programme lasted a bit longer.

**How did she incorporate this experience into her organisation?**

*I CARE* is going to develop young leaders from our community who

are going to shadow us and get exposed to our work. We are also going to launch a Pan African online radio station which will be targeting the youth across the continent. We will use images to tell transformational stories in our communities and countries and help each other to find lasting solutions to our problems. "I am confident in my ability to achieve these goals because of my talent and skills.

I aim to share the skills I have gained from the programme with my community". This will empower them and give them the insight

necessary to understand the risks and challenges of business. It will also motivate them to think not only of themselves, but their communities.

**Where does she see herself in 10 years?**

"I hope my community projects will spread across more parts of South Africa. I hope that through my projects, poor people living in rural communities will become self-sufficient and make use of the opportunities available to them. It is not going to be easy, but *I CARE* is prepared to work hard to make this achievable". [Re](#)



## 2. Douglas Boavetura

Douglas Boavetura is a young entrepreneur born in Mozambique. He is one of 800 students who attended the YALI programme and is also an aspiring accountant. During his difficult school years his interest in entrepreneurship was sparked. Douglas is a resilient, optimistic young business person, determined to achieve his dreams.

**Based in Mozambique, what brought him to UNISA?**

The economic disadvantages in Mozambique are much greater than in South Africa. Due to financial difficulties, he had to drop out of his studies in financial management and started to work for a governmental institution. It was while employed that he heard about YALI. Boavetura resigned from his job and moved to South Africa to attend the YALI programme.

**How was he made aware of this programme?**

The US embassy in Maputo is one of our main sources of information, getting access to the internet and a

library. While visiting the embassy, the former ambassador, Mr Douglas Griffiths, informed him of the Mandela Washington Fellowship. His application for this fellowship was successful, but he was advised to attend the YALI programme first.

**You are an aspiring entrepreneur, why did you choose this programme?**

"I dropped out of my studies and this programme afforded me an opportunity to enhance my entrepreneurial and leadership skills. It also offered me an opportunity to access leadership training from successful professionals and understand the business world better".

**Why entrepreneurship?**

Mozambique is not as developed as South Africa, particularly economically. As a result, access to basic needs can be a struggle. People are often forced to relocate to South Africa. Boavetura has a passion for entrepreneurship because it offers him an opportunity to contribute to the upliftment of his people and their economy.

**How is he going to approach this venture?**

He and his business partner (from Zambia whom he met on this programme) have identified two opportunities. Firstly, they have

successfully acquired a licence to lease business space. Secondly, they are in negotiations with the Mozambique government to supply business licences to aspiring entrepreneurs, especially the youth. They will run this venture in collaboration with the Ministry of Small Business Development.

**This venture requires a financial injection. How do you intend to raise money?**

They were fortunate that the government took a keen interest

in them and are sponsoring their venture. They have offered them an unused building to lease to potential entrepreneurs. They already have a few applicants and they hope to have their business up and running in coming months. They will pay their taxes to the government as per their agreement and invest in the youth.

**What has he learned from this YALI experience?**

“I have met and connected with like-minded youth from across the SADC region who shared my passion.

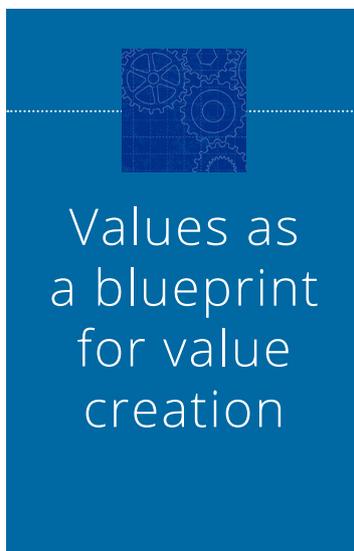
I have also been able to learn from their achievements and experiences. Lectures from business leaders have guided us on the basics of business practices which I am now able to apply to my ventures.” It taught him how to make effective business decisions and he is more aware of his strengths and weaknesses. Since returning home, he has applied most of what he learnt in the programme on his business ventures. He knows he still has so much to learn, but he realised that he can go as far as his determination can take him. [Re](#)

# Highlights of 2015/2016

## Defining the Concept of Value (Integrated Reporting)

In 2015, the Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership (ALCRL), in association with the British High Commission (Pretoria), PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), Old Mutual plc and the Institute for Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW), hosted a roundtable event at PwC’s Business School with the theme, ‘Values as a blueprint for value creation’. This was one of a series of events taking place in Johannesburg and in the UK (London, 2016), and forms part of a larger project to establish a Centre of Excellence in Integrated Reporting at the ALCRL.

One of the main objectives of the event was to provide some perspectives on the meaning of ‘value’ and the event started off with an address from Her Excellency, the British High Commissioner, Judith Macgregor. The High Commissioner emphasised the importance of reporting not only on financial results, but also on social and



environmental impacts. Pieter Conradie, Programme Director of Integrated Reporting at the ALCRL, set the scene for the discussions, saying that corporations like to talk about value and use the word extensively in their integrated reports, but it is very rarely clear what they actually mean when they use it. “Our exploration of the meaning of this word in an integrated reporting context was done by means of the Barrett Values Centre mapping exercise, where a survey was completed by

47 participants and the results were analysed,” Conradie explained. The roundtable discussions, which were grouped according to four disciplines (academic institutions, the public sector, the private sector, and accounting and consulting practices), dealt with the results of the Barrett assessment and how they relate to value creation from an integrated reporting perspective.

One of the participants described the evening’s events as “out of the box and out of my comfort zone,” but also highlighted the fact that “although South Africa is a world leader in the discipline of integrated reporting, proponents everywhere are increasingly running the risk of paying lip service to the idea.” <sup>Re</sup>

## The London Event

The follow-up event took place at the offices of the ICAEW in London. The purpose of these events was to critically interrogate the concept of value, and more specifically how the internal culture of organisations – determined by individual and organisational values – impact thinking about value creation. The event was structured into three distinct parts with the discussions at tables focusing mainly on three questions: what is organisational culture and how can it be changed through values; what are the challenges in changing organisational culture; and what would it take for an organisation to redefine the concept of value creation.

Part 1 of the event investigated the concept of organisational culture and how this culture can be measured through the Barrett Values Assessment tool. During Part 2, the Old Mutual case study and how Old Mutual has made use of the Barrett Values Survey to drive a culture of transformation in the



***What is organisational culture and how can it be changed through values; what are the challenges in changing organisational culture; and what would it take for an organisation to redefine the concept of value creation?***

organisation, was discussed. Part 3 of the event was presented by Pieter Conradie. He presented a case study on Unilever and based on this case, he posed the question of whether Unilever has succeeded in redefining the concept of value creation through its vision to double its revenue, to half its environmental impact and to have a positive social impact.

These discussions were designed to be interactive, exploring participants’ views on value creation. The discussions were very stimulating with diverging opinions. The general sentiment was that this approach to value creation creates a good potential platform for organisations to have constructive conversations about what value creation really means to the organisation, and how culture supports or inhibits it. The views of both the British and South African audiences were captured and are being analysed. A research report analysing and interpreting both these events was launched at the University of Pretoria on 17 March 2016. <sup>Re</sup>

## The Launch of the Report

The 17th of March 2016 marked the official launch of the Research Report, “Values as a Blueprint for Value Creation.” Authored by the ALCRL, this report was a culmination of a project sponsored by the British High Commission of Pretoria to advance the ALCRL’s work in the field of integrated reporting. The four overarching outcomes of this 11-month project were to:

- Grow qualifications in integrated reporting.
- Promote integrated reporting to international stakeholders.
- Advance rigorous academic research in integrated reporting.
- Unlock the potential of collaboration between the UK and SA.

Explaining the most important findings that emerged from this research, author Mr Pieter Conradie, said the research was an explorative study into understanding the relevance of organisational value systems and how organisations view value creation. It is also important for the growing field of integrated reporting as value creation is a central theme in this field.

The most important contribution of this work is that it can provide organisations with practical and constructive guidance in the way that they conceptualise value creation within their respective organisations. It did this by illustrating that sustainable value creation should include self-transcendent, as well as self-interested components to qualify as sustainable value creation. By using the heuristic of self-interest versus self-transcendence, organisations can better define their existing value creation activities and, given

the internal appetite for change, put steps in place to move towards a more self-transcendent mode of value creation.

It is anticipated that this work provides a novel perspective on the concept of value creation and makes a constructive contribution to the field of integrated reporting. <sup>Re</sup>

## We Collaborate with Copenhagen Business School

In 2016, the ALCRL entered into an agreement with the Copenhagen Business School (CBS) in Denmark, funded by the Danish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Higher Education. The broader purpose of this collaboration is to inform and promote responsible leadership and transformational change in business and society via the production of new research and new theory on the leadership dynamics of sustainable change in a development context. The intermediate step toward this goal consists of a set of activities designed to explore how these two culturally, intellectually and geographically diverse research institutions can leverage their resources and talents in tandem to develop new perspectives on the relationship between leadership and transformational change in a development context. The first step will be to organise an international network of scholars in leadership, including a jointly-authored theoretical research paper on the connections between responsible leadership, sustainability and transformational change. The paper



will draw on the diverse strengths and disciplinary perspectives of the two institutions and will be completed and submitted for publication by the end of 2016.

Subsequently, Associate Professor at CBS, Eric Guthey, visited the ALCRL as part of this collaboration. During his visit, Guthey had meetings with ALCRL staff where he exchanged knowledge and ideas, engaged with PhD Students and presented a Brown Bag lunch seminar and a public lecturer. During his public lectures, Guthey focused on what he calls “Leadership Land” and emphasised the importance of following a critical leadership theory approach, where emphasis is on collective rather than individual leadership. He was impressed by the work done by the ALCRL and believes this collaboration will help to build a working team and create academic and practical value for both institutions in years to come. <sup>Re</sup>



# OUR STAFF MEMBERS RECEIVE THEIR DEGREES



**Sarah Burford**, an Assistant Researcher at the Centre has graduated with a BA (Law) degree. Sarah joined the Centre in 2014 as part of the Integrated Reporting team. She is currently studying LLB III at the University of Pretoria. <sup>Re</sup>



**Carto Abrams-Swartz**, the Operations Manager, has graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in Public Administration. Carto is an integral part of the Centre’s daily operations and her contribution is highly appreciated. <sup>Re</sup>

# INTERNATIONAL VISITORS TO OUR CENTRE



**The ALCRL strives to attract researchers who have demonstrated outstanding talent in their respective fields. These senior researchers, in their capacity as research fellows at the ALCRL, add immense value towards sustaining a productive research culture by offering their expertise and co-authorship in the ALCRL's multiple research endeavours.**



## Prof. Eric Guthey

Prof. Eric Guthey, Associate Professor at the Copenhagen Business School (CBS) in Denmark, visited the ALCRL. His visit formed part of the collaborative agreement between the ALCRL and CBS, aimed at establishing an international network of leadership centres. This collaboration will inform and promote responsible leadership and transformational change in business

and society via the production of new research and new theory on the leadership dynamics of sustainable change in a development context. Prof. Guthey has written and co-authored numerous articles in the area of leadership, organisational behaviour and management trends and is co-author of *Demystifying Business Celebrity*. Since 2008, he has served as a board member of the International Leadership Association and the Academic Council of the Baltic Management Institute. [Re](#)



## Prof. Carol Adams

Prof. Carol Adams is an internationally recognised leader, researcher, author and adviser working to improve the relationship between organisations, society and the environment. She is from the Monash Sustainability Institute in Australia and has spent a month at the ALCRL teaching and offering advice on Integrated Reporting. She gave valuable insight into how the Postgraduate Diploma in Integrated Reporting (PGDIR) could be

improved and also interacted with our PhD students, academic staff and Integrated Reporting students. Prof. Adams has held senior management positions at several universities. She was involved with the International Integrated Reporting Council (IIRC) project team that developed the Capitals Background Paper for Integrated Reporting and has also written over 100 articles, many of which were published in top global accounting journals. Her insights and inputs also greatly enriched the Centre's PGDIR. [Re](#)

# Leaders shouldn't become the agenda

Leadership sets the agenda. It is not supposed to be an agenda in itself. When society gets preoccupied with discussing the leadership itself, rather than the agenda set by the leadership, then society suffers the poverty of leadership.

When Nelson Mandela became state president, he set the agenda on national reconciliation and nation building. Society debated his take on the Springbok rugby emblem, and his caution on how society dealt with apartheid statues – Mosiuoa Lekota, as Free State premier, can attest to this.

Society had to engage on the meaning of reconciliation and nation building. The leader, Nelson Mandela, had set the agenda. Society did not discuss Nelson Mandela. Rather, it discussed what Nelson Mandela's vision was for society at the time. Now, whether or not some people felt like Mandela went to the extreme to appease white people, or that "he sold out" black people at the negotiating table, the fact is, it is what he articulated during his leadership period that got people talking. His vision for the country, that society is preoccupied with. Now, that's a leadership agenda. Not the leadership becoming an agenda in itself.

Enter Thabo Mbeki.

His seminal speech "I am an African" set the society agenda on the meaning of Africans and the role of South Africa in Africa. Soon thereafter, he articulated himself on the "African Renaissance". Society

*"Mandela and Mbeki set the agenda, they did not become the agenda"*

debated the meaning of an African Renaissance, and the role that South Africa should play in it. Even F.W. de Klerk found himself saying that he was an African. Why? Because being an African was on the national agenda.

Placed by a leader – Thabo Mbeki. Whether individuals in society agreed with Mbeki on his conception of Africanness was immaterial. Fact is, society deliberated on an issue that a leader had placed on the table. He then set another agenda on the HIV issue. He earned the tag of being an AIDS denialist. Others hailed him for linking HIV/AIDS with poverty. Ultimately, he set the agenda on HIV/AIDS at an international stage; he was leading. He led in the aspects of vision, knowledge and African identity, and its role on the international stage. Society engaged his ideas, rather than him. Mbeki went on to raise a few controversial issues on the "ANC TODAY" blog every Friday, and it gave society many issues to discuss.



Whether individuals agreed with him or not is not the issue. Fact is, he set the agenda and people engaged on such issues.

Enter Jacob Zuma.

Perhaps Zuma should be accredited with the notion of the "second transition", which is now in government plans as the quest for "radical socio-economic transformation". Perhaps he should be credited with the National Development Plan. However, those in the know will argue that the quest for a long-term plan precedes Zuma's presidency. Unfortunately, these are not the issues that define Zuma's leadership. These are not the issues that have the nation talking to itself. There are two particular reasons Zuma may not have set the agenda. One is that while he took over in 2009 as state president, he only introduced the notion of the "second transition" in 2012 at the African National Congress's (ANC) policy conference. His detractors within the party read "second transition" to mean he was lobbying for a "second term". Therefore, the idea was not given the necessary

# *“When the president becomes the agenda, it robs society of a progressive discourse”*

prominence due to internal leadership contestations.

Thus, while it found its way into the election manifesto and government documents, now as radical transformation, it has not assumed the centre stage of national discourse. At some level, Zuma has robbed himself of leadership agenda setting. Rather than his vision for society, it is personal issues that have gotten society talking. These include issues on Nkandla, the Guptas, and the spy tapes to name only a few. These are not leadership issues simply because they have nothing to do with Zuma’s leadership vision for society. These are issues that are discussed by society. However, they are not discussed on their visionary or intellectual worthiness. They are simply discussed as perceived behavioural issues on the part of the president. They are not the leadership ideas on the society’s agenda. They are simply Zuma being on the agenda of society. This robs society of a progressive discourse. Rather than discussing the great potential that is pregnant of this country, it is rather the president who is being discussed.

In newspaper columns, talk shows, and Parliament, it is the president’s involvement or not on matters such as Nkandla that dominate national discourse. The issue has even degenerated to ugly scenes in Parliament. At worst, it is beginning to tamper with the integrity of Parliament, and the constitutional standing of the Office of the Public Protector. It is even eroding the collective leadership fibre of the ANC itself. Increasingly, it is not the collective vision that the leadership articulates that informs national discourse. Rather, it is what the collective leadership around him does in the president’s defence – from the Security Cluster to the ad hoc Committee on Nkandla.

While the ANC collective leadership may provide a vision and strategic direction for society, unfortunately its predominant brand is that it is simply “closing ranks” around the president on matters that are mainly personal. Recently it was reported that the National Executive Committee (NEC) is considering means to “protect the president”. It would have been wiser if the NEC was more concerned with the protection and the preservation of the ANC as a whole.

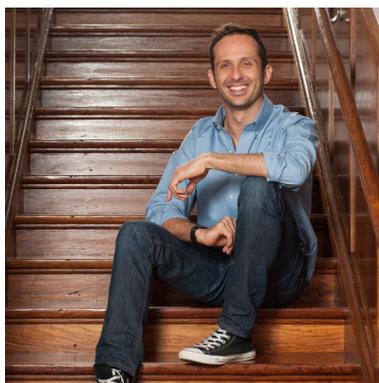
Zuma does have leadership qualities. It is for this reason that he is the president of the ANC. This is an organisation with a rich history. He has not been parachuted into the leadership position. He has grown through the ranks and earned himself the ANC’s presidency. He follows in the footsteps of great leaders such as O.R. Tambo, Albert Luthuli, Walter Sisulu, Mandela, and Mbeki, to mention a few. The Department Arts and Culture Minister, Nathi Mthethwa, once cautioned against comparing Zuma to his predecessors. He argued that the historical context and situation is different. Ironically, the general expectation is that current

leaders will do better than their predecessors. Current leaders are expected to have learnt from those that came ahead of them.

Interestingly, Zuma has worked with other prominent leaders such as Tambo, Mandela, and Mbeki. Therefore, it is correct to compare him to his predecessors. It is correct to expect him to elevate the ANC’s leadership bar. Like his predecessors, he can set the national agenda. He can lead the discourse on matters of second transition and its potential for radical socio-economic transformation. These are issues that should be on the agenda, and not the president himself. [Re](#)



*“It is increasingly the president’s involvement or not on matters such as Nkandla that dominate national discourse. At worst, it is beginning to tamper with the integrity of Parliament, and the constitutional standing of the Office of the Public Protector. It is even eroding the collective leadership fibre of the ANC itself”*



## Conversation with Willem

*In 2012, Dr Willem Fourie – the Leadership for Africa (LFA) programme director at the Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership (ALCRL) embarked on an inspirational train trip in partnership with the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) from Pretoria to Dar es Salaam as part of the Leadership for Africa research project. The aim of this trip was to document African expectations of leadership and throughout this journey, interviewees were asked to express their expectations in five words; these were delivered to heads of states. The LFA aims to identify the key enablers and disablers of top-level leadership in more than ten countries in Africa.*

We chat to Dr Fourie.

### **What is your background?**

I did my undergraduate studies at Stellenbosch University; I started in Theology specialising in ethics. I eventually completed my PhD in social ethics in Germany at Universität Tübingen. I also had an opportunity to do research at a number of institutions including University of Bamberg and Humboldt University of Berlin both in Germany. My research focus is on Ethics, Leadership and Development. In 2011, I joined the University of Pretoria where I teach Ethics in the Faculty of Theology.

### **What expertise do you bring to the ALCRL?**

The ALCRL is a multidisciplinary centre and I am bringing a Humanities and Social Sciences perspective.

### **Tell me about the LFA project.**

The Leadership for Africa project is based on the premise that leadership is a capacity of fundamental importance for transforming Africa’s potential to equitable and sustainable realities. We started with the Tanzania Pilot project, in partnership with NEPAD, where the research methodologies were tested and refined. Part of this project was to set up a chain of networks around Africa looking at transformational stories.

### **How much progress did you make on this project?**

Unfortunately our funds dried up but we managed to publish the first review of 60 years of research on leadership in Africa and we cemented a great relationship with NEPAD. We are in the process of developing the African Transformation Programme. The African Transformation Programme will be a continuation of our research mission.

### **What is your African agenda?**

My passion is to highlight and document positive leadership stories from inspirational leaders across the continent, as well as promoting good governance. There is a continued need to improve the lives in Africa and I believe my on-going researches will promote that.

### **Did you reach your objectives?**

Yes, apart from publishing our findings, we have cemented a great relationship with NEPAD and UNDP. We are also partnering on our latest project called African Transformation Programme.

### **How do you wind down?**

I find a weekend retreat to nature very relaxing. I also like travelling; it can be local or abroad, experiencing new things, trying new foods, new languages and meeting new people. 

# Leadership and choice

Mark Myatt

## Choice

It's a simple, yet critical aspect of leadership. Academics and business theorists often gloss over the basics of leadership preferring to trivialize their importance. It's far too easy for those with an elitist approach to leadership to dismiss simple as sophomoric, and obvious as irrelevant – nothing could be further from reality. Leadership has little to do with complex theory, but everything to do with understanding the subtleties of human behaviour. Just as you must choose whether or not to lead, it's your choice whether or not to read on – choose wisely.

At its essence, leadership isn't a job – it's a choice. Everything about leadership begins with a choice – even accepting a leadership role. Whether leaders are elected, appointed, anointed, or self-proclaimed, and regardless of whether it is by design or default, at some level you make a choice to be a leader. Once you make that choice, you then must choose whether or not to lead well.

It's often said that leaders succeed or fail based upon the decisions they make. While the aforementioned statement is true to an extent, it glosses over a fundamental element of the decision process– choice. All decisions are the result of several seemingly insignificant choices. By the way, these choices are only insignificant to the arrogant, naive or inexperienced. It's also important to keep in mind, rationalisations and justifications are choices too.

It's not uncommon for leaders to feel forced into making certain decisions

due to personal, professional, positional, cultural, or political circumstances. That said, leaders are never forced into anything – they make a choice. Leadership is also not a matter of chance; it's a matter of choice. While flawed and/or failed leaders often blame happenstance as the reason for poor outcomes, it's their choices that deserve scrutiny when searching for the root cause of calamity. There is an art to choice, and smart leaders always place themselves in a position to create and preserve options; not limit them.

The best leaders I've worked with have a framework for developing priorities, which in turn, allows them to make outstanding choices. They have a clear understanding of who they are, what they value, and where they will or won't compromise. This affords them tremendous clarity of purpose. It also gives them the ability to align vision with talent and allow important decision-making to be pushed to the edges of the enterprise. They recognise it's quite possible to be very focused, without becoming rigid. Great leaders understand

there is more to be gained through flexibility and collaboration than by edict or mandate. They simply make wise choices.

The choices leaders must make are seemingly endless. Leaders choose to control or collaborate, to lead change or to embrace the status quo. It's a choice to value being right over seeking the right outcome. Leaders choose to be aloof or to be engaged. It's a choice to be self-serving or to place service above self. A leader always has the choice to take credit or to give credit. Leaders can choose to create culture by default or design, and perhaps most of all, a leader must choose to care.

Leadership shouldn't ever be complex, but the reality is it's often very difficult. Leaders must choose to display the character and integrity required to make hard choices, personal sacrifices and to do the right thing even when it's not the popular thing. <sup>Re</sup>

Thoughts?

<http://www.n2growth.com/blog/tag/making-choices/>

## REFLECTIONS

**Cloud Gate** – the iconic, public artwork nicknamed The Bean in Chicago's Millennium Park. It's intention is to evoke the feeling of hope, divinity and possibility.

### Editor's personal reflection on the image...

Reflections help us to develop our understanding more deeply and make our intuitive knowledge shareable with others



Source: [Wikipedia.org/cloud Gate](http://Wikipedia.org/cloud Gate)

Jason Mrachina