Lessons from three Transformational Leaders in Ghana's Higher Education

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1

Introduction

There is no doubt that education is a necessary ingredient for socioeconomic development (Peercy and Svenson 2016; World Bank 2002: xvii). Recognising this value of education and their roles in it, many universities and tertiaries institutions around the world are constantly reviewing their contributions in order to ensure their continued relevance to knowledge development and to society as a whole. Unlike universities around the world, many African universities do not routinely overhaul their structures and processes in connection with their changing environments. For example, in Ghana, the traditional universities that were set up by the government in the 1960s have remained relatively untouched in structure—apart from mergingand unmerging departments. Traditional African pedagogy is often ignored, as are newer modes of instruction (Omolewa 2007) that have been found to be more effective. That is to say, African university education needs to be reformed to keep up with trends that ensure relevance and compatibility with emerging societal needs.

Many have long noted that African university education was in crisis and that universities were no longer relevant to African economies (e.g., Mugaju 1991). Significant funding gaps have led many of universities to embrace a neoliberal model of education with income generation a more important factor than the training of minds (Brock-Utne 2003; Mamdani 1993; Teferra 2013). Since the 1960s, universities have been slowly becoming market-driven at the expense of the foundational needs of their countries (Atteh 1996). As in many other parts of the world, this trend alienates stakeholders from the values, processes and identities that many believe define what universities are supposed to do (Fleming 2020). In Africa, the situation has caused significant inequalities in access to higher education and outcomes, in that affordability has become a challenge for those who are not so wealthy. Even so, the fact remains that Africa is the least developed

region globally when it comes to the number of universities and associated enrolments (e.g. Teferra and Altbach 2004). Perhaps more significantly, the nature and character of university programmes have been modified to a point where some (e.g., Kasozi 2003) identify African universities as glorified high schools. The universities' relationship and contribution to society is also in question.

Africa's deficit in university transformation is due in part to a leadership crisis, where those in charge have accepted the status quo to the extent that they are unwilling to change it evenwhen it has proven useless (Muriisa 2014). Challenges of education in general in sub-Saharan Africa include inadequate financial resources, together with unprecedented demand for access, the legacy of colonialism and socioeconomic crises. The African Union's (AU) Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2016–2025) (CESA) recognises these challenges and the need to stall, if not completely reverse, the deepening crisis.

The strategy seeks to re-orient:

> enrolments, post-graduate education, research and innovation linked to economic, social and industrial development [that] remain a challenge … Tertiary education inAfrica is also faced with an aging population of professors and trainers. A sizeable number of the most experienced and better trained faculties will be retiring soon. There is therefore an urgent need for renewal of the teaching force. The working and living conditions of both faculty and students also need to be improved in order to attract more young people. The mounting cost of tertiary education is also a key challenge. Continental and sub-regional integration schemes (e.g. harmonisation) combined with private sector involvement hold a key to expanding access and promoting relevance and advancing quality. We should never lose sight of the … education system as a whole and the end user of the product in order to reverse the growing trend in jobless graduates (Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016–2025, 19).

Transforming education towards this lofty mission calls for a complete reorganisation of African attitudes and experiences in education (Aina 2010). Transformational leadership in African tertiary education is necessary to marshal the relevant resources towards this end. This has been demonstrated by many examples of successful higher education leadership across Africa. The role of such leadership in the performance of African universities, however, has been overlooked (Muriisa 2014). In an attempt to fill this lacuna, we adopt the concept of transformational leadership as an organising framework to explore how successful African higher education leaders initiate and monitor innovative processes to address the challenges in African tertiary education. Studying such leadership examples can help

us understand the needs and processes for transforming attitudes, supporting the development of relevant infrastructure and building a strong suprastructure to advance the course of African tertiary education toward the CESA mission. In other words, there is the need to understand the isolated cases of successful leadership in African higher education in order to understand the practice of successful transformational leadership and related lessons to strengthen African universities.

Focusing on Ghana, we selected and interviewed three leaders of tertiary institutions who have excelled in pulling their universities up from humble beginnings into global renown. We then try to 'make sense' (Brown, Stacey and Nandhakumar 1988) of their stories. The exemplary leaders in this study were carefully chosen to represent the spectrum of resource and governance challenges associated with the management of higher educational institutions in Ghana. They are Professor Stephen Adei, former rector of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA); Professor Joshua Alabi, former vice-chancellor of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), and Patrick Awuah, President of Asheshi University. These leaders and their institutions have contributed immensely to the transformation of higher education in Ghana and have left significant 'personal imprint and influence on broad higher education policy issues, how the sector should be managed for contributing to deepening understanding of what would constitute a "philosophy" of higher education governance and leadership in Africa,' (CODESRIA 2019). We employ 'sense-making' to interpret the leaders' strategies for transformational leadership in African higher education, in our effort to document their collective wisdom for posterity.

Running a university in times of national or regional crisis cannot be easy, but each of these leaders persevered and excelled in making great strides towards improving their institutions. They exhibited transformational leadership in a variety of ways, including challenging traditional assumptions and practices in higher education. They accepted and embraced opportunities that motivated them and others to greatness. In less than a decade, each of these leaders transformed his institution into a nationally and/or globally recognised organisation, notwithstanding their prohibitive environments. We present these leaders and their experiences as exemplars for other leaders to take inspiration from, while gaining insight into the continent's stock of resources and opportunities in the education sector. Their stories afford us the opportunity to establish broad linkages and draw conclusions that can inform policy towards enhancing higher education in Africa. We begin with a brief history of tertiary education in Africa to set the tone for making sense of the stories of our three transformers in Ghana's university sector.

2

The Evolution of Education in Africa

Education in Pre/Colonial Times

Africa's story of education is particularly interesting because of the manner in which different stakeholders participated in its evolution. Many African societies have oral, non-literary traditions, and so learning occurred through an extensive variety of mean, including eyewitness accounts, idioms, legends, folklore, stories, proverbs and myths (Fasokun 2005; Oguejiofor 2006). White (1996) observed that precolonial African learning took place in a community setting, with no set time for instruction. Learning was organic and enshrined in wisdom, beliefs and the accumulated experiences of past generations that were shared through routine community tasks. Precolonial curricula recognised this traditional pedagogy in local games, storytelling, apprenticeship and initiation practices (Omolewa 2007). When the missionaries and colonisation arrived, the traditional form of study was replaced with Western-style education.

The first formal attempts at European schooling in Africa were made by Portuguese missionaries in the mid-sixteenth century. However, it was not until the nineteenth century that missionaries from the United Kingdom, France and later North America would entrench European education in Africa. Evangelical missions to Africa from Protestant Europe taught literacy and manual skills, whereas the Anglican and Catholic missions generally had a more academic focus (Cowan et al. 1965, 4). European contacts were largely along the coast and so Western education began mostly in settlements such as Cape Coast (Gold Coast/Ghana), Cape Town (South Africa), Freetown (Sierra Leone) and St. Louis (Senegal). Operating with considerable government support, colonial missionaries expanded across Africa, supported over time by the European-educated Africans who served

as teachers, catechists and auxiliaries (Bryant 2018). Colonial governments and missionaries used schools and related institutions to entrench their values and serve their political interests. Only a small number of students progressed to higher primary or secondary school, while standardised examinations ended the school careers of most (Bryant 2018). Colonial governments had no interest in making higher education widely available to the locals, partly for fear of creating an intellectual class who could challenge the colonial system.

Higher education in Africa can be traced back to the Church Mission Society (CMS), which established Fourah Bay College (West Africa's first university) in 1827. Several 'colleges' were later established but their initial formats and content suggested they were secondary schools with vocational/technical functions. By 1944, the entire continent had a total of thirty-one institutions of higher learning in thirteen countries: nine in South Africa, six in Egypt, four in Algeria, two each in Liberia and Morocco, and one each in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Tunisia and Uganda. (Zeleza 2016). Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone constituted the foundation of European-style higher education that emerged in West and East African colonies (Ajayi, Goma and Ampah Johnson 1996). Colonial higher education served a small elite, comprising mainly white males, which reflected how it reinforced other cleavages of colonial society, including racism (Zeleza 2016). This strategy for higher education persisted into the 1960s when many countries gained political independence.

Post-independence Africa to the Present

Many African countries focused significant efforts on education in the period immediately following their independence. That traditional pedagogy had been discredited and abandoned for the most part in the colonial era suggested that the primary foundation on which to build the new African vision was the Euro-American style of education. The African educational framework for higher education during the period was captured by the deliberations of the 1962 Tananarive Conference on the Development of Higher Education in Africa. The conference established targets in higher education and made recommendations for the overall planning, financing, curriculum and staffing of higher institutions towards the qualitative and quantitative educational changes necessary to meet the labour requirements of Africa. It also indicated the responsibility of higher educational institutions in the development of Africa and recommended a focus on science, technology and agriculture (Ojiambo 2018). The strategy successfully

expanded access to education, such that the first two decades after independence saw the rate of education outstrip the possibilities for employment that once existed for school-leavers; white-collar job creation proved difficult, became slow and expensive (Ojiambo 2018). The increasing taste for such jobs led to a considerable migration of young people from rural to urban areas of Africa.

But the educational systems inherited from the colonial regimes were not tailored to Africa's needs (Shanguhyia and Falola 2018). Sifuna and Sawamura (2010) noted that there was an urgent need for more diversity and innovation in Africa's educational programmes to enable them to address critical societal concerns. Some bemoaned the deterioration of African values due to the increasing Euro-Americanisation of education. Julius Nyerere, the first president of the Republic of Tanzania, was one of the champions of the localisation of African education. In his *Education for Self-Reliance*, Nyerere (1968) emphasised the need for education in Africa to stress local African values, for example, the sense of community, and to abandon Euro- American values that exhibited colonial tendencies. For the most part, this was ignored, as governance, leadership styles and curricula in African higher education were modelled on Euro-American standards. Indeed, it was not uncommon for students in African schools to be required to learn European but not African history. Local languages were not developed and so the best expression of being a learned person was through one's command of the relevant European language.

The situation got even worse in the 1980s, when efforts to modify Africa's educationalsystem was informed largely by the policies of the World Bank and IMF under a series of structural adjustment initiatives. Kallaway (2010) observed that:

> By the end of the 'eighties the milestone report of the World Bank on *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa* (1988) signaled a new phase in African education that was heavily influenced by neo-liberal policies of the West that flowed from major economic changes in the world system that attempted to steer away from the welfarism focus of education that had emanated from the post-War era towards an education that could meet the demands of the new emerging global economic order that was dominated and driven by the new market demands.

One result of this strategic thrust was that budgetary allocations to education in most African countries were simply too low to support effective education. Evidence for this was found in enrolment stagnation, poor-quality schooling, high drop-out rates and gender bias, among other educational challenges. A key element of African educational policy during this period was: 'a redefinition of the notion of equity in education that was marked with a dramatic shift from government

responsibility for delivery of quality equal education for all, to increasing emphasis on the responsibility of parents, community, and private control in the education sector' (Kallaway 2010).Herein, emphasis was placed on 'cost sharing' and the individual freedom to purchase quality education in the marketplace for those who could afford it, notwithstanding thefact that the Western entities pushing this agenda did not have to shed public funding for education in their home countries (Brock-Utne 2003). The overall effect was to make it increasingly difficult for the marginalised and vulnerable, such as the poor, rural youth and women, to access quality education, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels (Ojiambo 2018).

Contemporary Times

The World Bank in 1995 challenged the relevance of university education, suggesting that investing in university education had limited returns, and encouraged governments to divert investments into primary education. Universities had to find alternative funding sources. In the process, tertiary education was commoditised and made available on the open market. The potential for financial returns invited non-government investors who sought immediate returns on their investments. In many cases, these investors set the same financial returns expectations for universities as they would for corporate entities—universities were now businesses, and business was booming. The worldwide database on higher education indicates a global average growth rate of 5.83 per cent in higher education institutions between 1945 and 2015. Africa's average rate was a staggering 74.10 per cent. (see www.whed.net/home.ph). The bulk of contemporary Africa's 1,639 higher education institutions were established in 1980 or later, with over 39.5 per cent opened between 2000 and 2009 alone. This rapid growth called for new markets such as those who would otherwise not qualify to enter university. Special customised pathways were created for these students to earn university degrees, sometimes sacrificing quality to excite demand (see Jowi et al. 2013).

The legacy of the post-independence policy regimes remains strong, in that market-based models are currently predominant. Public universities in Ghana now, for instance, reserve the bulk of their available spaces each year to what they describe as 'fee-paying' students. Offerings are skewed in favour of professional degrees (for example, business, architecture, medicine, law) that generate income for the universities. Driven by the market, such education emphasises revenue, whereby quality may be compromised, more than intellectual development (Materu 2007).

Tertiary education in contemporary Africa is in dire need of reforms that will produce the skills the continent requires. This development is troubling, especially because good andeffective

> … higher education contributes to the formation and deployment of human capital, the cultural and social construction of values and meaning, and the capacity for individual and collective emancipation from ignorance and domination. Higher education further contributes to how the energies and products of science, technology, and the improvement of material conditions are mobilised for the well-being of individuals and groups. It provides a people with the tools and capacities for their collective and individual self-definition and empowerment, and for interpreting their relationships to themselves, to others, and to nature and their material and other environments. It provides the platform for the advanced study, dissemination, and utilisation of knowledge and its products for the benefit of society and its constituents. In today's modern world, where nationsand peoples seek to assert collective self-confidence and competitive advantage in all spheres, the absence of internal capacities within specific nations and regions to think responsibly and act for themselves often determines the extent ofsuch a people's collective well-being, both material and otherwise (Aina 2012, 23).

Aina continues that in spite of

> … over a half century of interventions, the terrain of African higher education continues to resemble a thick forest of institutions, systems, and practices lacking clear and distinct tracks, values, and goals, or a mission and vision that connect the institutions and systems sufficiently to the major challenges of their contexts (whether global or local). Yet the university in Africa and higher education in general remain a significant part of the overall social, economic, and cultural constitution of societies and nations.

In essence, the path for contemporary higher education in Africa is unclear, especially as it relates to good quality output. Universities are embedded in a global market system that employs the dynamics of demand and supply in their management. Many in Africa are not competitive because they suffer from inadequate resources, and have to compete aggressively for students who will pay fees. Many have succumbed to market pressures and will actively pursue students at the bottom of the barrel. The result includes the continued decline of quality in education and Africa's inability to compete effectively in the global market of ideas and innovations. This also suggests the production of poorly trained leaders, who themselves are the outcome of the ill-equipped contemporary university system. Unchecked, this situation will lead to a vicious cycle of poor-quality output that

will yield bigger problems in the broader development agenda of the continent. It is within this context that Atteh (1996, 36) declared:

> Africa is experiencing [a] crisis of unprecedented proportions in higher education. Having been hailed in the 1960s as agents of modernisation, social mobilisation, and economic growth, most African universities are now tumbling down under the pressures of diminishing financial resources. From all indications, Africa is lagging behind other developing regions in terms of public expenditures particularly on education, availability of educational facilities, equal access to education, adequate pools of qualified teachers, and sufficient numbers of professionals and skilled workers. Pertinent data show that most African governments in the 1960s and 1970s made comparable progressive accomplishments in higher education. However, these accomplishments steadily disappeared in the 1980s.

Many headlines tout an optimistic 'Africa Rising' narrative regarding the continent's seemingly inevitable socioeconomic rise and its potential as the centre of all things global in the next century (for example, Mahajan 2014). This has only recently been interjected with a few doses of pessimism (Chelwa 2015; Frankema and Van Waijenburg 2018). This dream is unlikely to be achieved if the educational foundation of the present remains as it is. Africa's political leaders recognise the need for the continent 'to come to terms with its education and training systems that are yet to fully shed the weight of its colonial legacy and its own tribulations as a relatively new political and economic entity and player in the world arena.' (AU 2016). Crafting the new 'African citizen who will be an effective change agent for the continent's sustainable development as envisioned by the AU and its 2063 Agenda [calls for a new kind of education and the development of the relevant educational leadership to tackle the challenge]' (AU 2016).

As Jowi et al. (2013, 6) observed, 'Higher education institutions still lack the required vision, resources, capacity, and leadership to embrace science technology and innovation as a guiding principle for their strategic planning and academic programs'. It is this crisis situation that calls for effective transformational leadership in the sector. Transformative leadership references an ethically based leadership model that integrates a commitment to values and outcomes by optimising the long-term interests of stakeholders and society, and honouring the moral duties owed by organisations to their stakeholders (Caldwell et al. 2012). Our purpose in this work was to identify transformational leadership exemplars in Ghana, and to draw on these examples to suggest the characteristics of good transformational examples worth emulating. We provide a brief sketch of transformational leadership before introducing our study.

3

Transformational Leadership

Successful leadership requires some level of transformation (Hill 2004), reflecting 'the capacity to translate intention into reality and sustain it by connecting to followers in a manner that grants the leader the requisite social capital to invite and utilise the followers' trust and commitment for the general good (Bennis and Nanus 2007, 16). Such leadership allows for ordinary individuals to achieve phenomenal results well beyond their own expectations (Bass 1985; Conger et al. 2000, 748), and it is exemplified in four main types of leadership behaviour that empower followers to take enthusiastic interest in the wellbeing of the organisation:

1. idealised influence
2. inspirational motivation
3. intellectual stimulation
4. individualised consideration (Avolio, Waldman and Einstein 1988).

Idealised influence is the degree to which the leader is admired, respected and trusted. Demonstrating the relevant behaviour grants the leader the moral authority to command respect. By showing optimism and enthusiasm for the collective goal and encouraging commitment to a well-articulated organisational vision, leaders show inspirational motivation (Bass and Riggio 2006). Intellectual stimulation derives from the leader's encouragement of challenges to the status quo and identifying alternatives, without fear of victimisation (Avolio and Bass 2002). Individualised consideration relates to the leader's understanding of individual followers' abilities and needs, and developing these capabilities (Antonakis and House, 2014; Avolio and Bass 2002).

Leaders of this ilk are charismatic, results-oriented and have a strong sense of self (Caldwell et al. 2012). They are able to create compelling morally based personal relationships that inspire and empower others in the pursuit of a noble

purpose (Choi 2006) towards relevant organisational change. These leaders passionately believe that they can make a difference by envisioning the ideal future for their organisation and communicating this future effectively to all relevant stakeholders (Kouzes and Posner 2007). That is to say that they are visionary and can see well beyond the present. They set and communicate clear goals/milestones, in addition to their own abilities to create personal connection and to exemplify moral principles. This behaviour meshes well with the transformative leadership's quest to help others to examine their lives and fulfill their potential. As (Caldwell et al. 2012) observed:

> The ethical principle which serves as the basis for charismatic leadership is its emphasis 'on a virtue-based ethical standard' (Caldwell et al. 2011, p. 479) that centers on striving to honor core principles and pursuing noble objectives to create productive change (Battilana et al. 2010). Senge (2006, p. 221) emphasised the importance of the leader creating high organisational commitment in generating 'energy'.

Researchers have explored the effectiveness of this leadership style. While it is not without problems (Lin, Scott and Matta 2019), transformational leadership seems to have universal appeal (Li et al. 2013) as exerting a highly positive influence on organisational and individual performance association (Wang et al. 2011), through changing employee attitudes (Abelha et al. 2018), and enhancing employee commitment to the organisation (Yang and Yeh 2018), which leads to overall organisational performance (Wang et al. 2011). Higher education institutions have embraced transformational leadership (Balwant, Stephan and Birdi 2014) to address the dynamism and complexity that characterise them.

In this context, Ross and Gray (2006) argue that transformational leadership contributes to the collective efficiency of lecturers, by setting feasible goals, clarifying standards, developing a collaborative school culture, and linking the actions of lecturers to student outcomes, and principal influences. Such leadership fosters continual development of faculty, staff, students and all other stakeholders, which improves the quality of output as well as the morale of everyone involved. It also improves the educational and research infrastructure, thereby improving the products of these efforts. Transformative leaders honour principles, model organisational values and recognise that effective leadership is ultimately the integration of both ends and means (Burns 1978).

Such leadership is what Africa needs to reverse the declining trend in higher education. Knowing that such leadership exists in Africa, the question is, how has it been manifested and how can its value be embraced by other leaders. We turn now to our study of exemplary leadership as embodied in the experiences of some leaders in Ghana's higher education sector.

4

Methodology

It is one thing for universities to have elaborate visions and impressive missions, but living up to these lofty ambitions requires efficient leadership. Focusing on Ghana, we note that there have been several leaders in higher education whose experiences can serve as significant sources of inspiration for current and future leaders. Resources would not allow us to study all the leaders, and so we sampled three of them. These exemplary leaders were carefully selected to represent the spectrum of resource and governance challenges associated with the management of higher educational institutions in contemporary Ghana. They are Professor Stephen Adei, former rector of the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), Professor Joshua Alabi, former vice-chancellor of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), and Patrick Awuah, President of Asheshi University. Each informant was told only that this was a study of exemplary tertiary education leadership in Africa.

We began with informal visits to the three universities affiliated to our selected leaders. These visits were merely to help us see first-hand what these leaders had created and their legacies, asappropriate. This was followed by personal interviews, which took place at the offices of the informants. These were necessary to capture the thoughts that had guided the leaders' decisions and actions. While we had a prepared interview protocol to guide the interactions (Appendix 1), the interviews did not follow the guide strictly. All interviews began with 'grand tour'questions about the individual's biographical profile and how they were prepared to assume their leadership roles. Follow-up questions were drawn from their narratives and reflected the informants' views of leadership and its import in higher education management for African development.

The questions were intended to allow for outlining the processes/procedures of exemplary leadership in the context of resource scarcities and/or governance challenges. The informants were invited to offer any critical incidents to illustrate key philosophies behind their decisions, and decisions that: 1) they found most difficult to make and why; and 2) those key decisions that they wished they had not made. In essence, we used open-ended questions and reviewed all documents that the leaders made available to us for analysis. Each interview lasted well over an hour and was recorded. All interviews were conducted in English—laced with local languages at the discretion of the informant.

Ultimately, we gathered and analysed the retrospectively assembled narrative sensemaking constructions towards identifying patterns of transformational leadership. Such stories are fundamental to sensemaking in organisations, since 'most organisational realities are based on narration' (Weick 1995, 127).

Our informants' stories have no significance apart from the context within which they occurred. Thus, the stories were reviewed within the frame of the informants' background, African higher education crises and the need for transformational leadership. Each person and his experiences are presented in simple, honest language to ensure accessibility for all. Here are their stories.

5

Transformational Leaders in Ghana's Higher Education

Stephen Adei

Background

At the time of the interview, Professor Stephen Adei was seventy years old. He was born at Hwiremoase in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, where he attended Hwiremoase Methodist Primary School before proceeding to Brofoyedru United Middle School. He sought to attend secondary school, but even though he was admitted to some of Ghana's most prestigious secondary schools he was constrained financially and could not attend one. Seeking alternative routes to higher education, he asked his Form 4 teacher if he could attend university without ever having gone to secondary school. The teacher mentioned correspondence courses. With his middle school certificate, he had the opportunity to attend a four-year teacher training school at Sefwi Wiawso. He inquired about the correspondence courses and was told he could take courses in London. He stayed in school as a teacher-in-training and continued to study on his own towards university. He completed his teacher training and was able to pass the General Certificate of Education (GCE) courses at both Ordinary and Advanced levels, which made him eligible for university admission.

Once again, financial challenges meant that he had to find creative ways to pursue his education. His admission to the University of Ghana to study Economics and Geography coincided with the receipt of his teacher's salary, which had been delayed. His mother also supported with as much as she could mobilise. He left his teaching job and began studies at the University of Ghana in 1968. His first year was difficult because his unorthodox path to university had not provided him with the foundation he needed to keep up with his colleagues. At the time, first-

year students were required to write one examination at the end of the school year – the First University Examinations (FUE). These examinations constituted the litmus test to determine who remained and who would be asked to withdraw. Failing these examinations was not an option for Adei and he had to invest all his intellectual and other resources to ensure success at these examinations. He went home to Hwiremoase after the examinations and came back to school in October, confident that he had passed. He had passed well enough to be given the option to study Economics, Geography or Sociology. While he preferred Geography, he was counselled by his brother to go into Economics because it had a better promise of future earnings. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science, Honours, in 1971.

Stephen received a Commonwealth Scholarship to study for a Master's degree in Economics at the University of Strathclyde. Upon his completion of the degree in two years, he returned to Ghana to work at the Capital Investment Board, which is now the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC). He also taught part-time at the Economics Department at the University of Ghana. About five years later, he received another Commonwealth Scholarship, to the University of Sydney, Australia, to study for a PhD in Economics. He returned four years later to his old job at the Investment Board. He would later become the Deputy Director of Research for five years or so. Altogether, he worked for the Capital Investment Board for about twelve and a half years, including his study leave.

Following certain ideological disagreements with the government of the day, Adei resigned from his job. He was unemployed for a few months before going to work at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. Not knowing that he should have received clearance and sponsorship from the Ghanaian government, he started work without having gone through the formalities. His differences with the government made it difficult for him to secure the necessary papers, but eventually he did and he worked at the Secretariat for three years. He left after he applied for and was offered a position at the UNDP as a Senior Economist, based in Africa. He served in various capacities in South Africa and Namibia.

> Sometimes you can be promoted to jobs you don't like ... I was made the Chief of the Regional Bureau for Africa Administrative ... Then I was sent to South Africa during the transition, to be Head of the UN System in South Africa ... I didn't really like the diplomatic work and … from there to Namibia for four and a half years as UN Representative and Resident Coordinator. I decided that, you know, I want to do something else … So basically, I decided to come home ... not to GIMPA …

The move to Ghana and GIMPA – in his own words

I didn't consult anybody, why? Because to go and tell your people or anybody else that you're leaving a permanent job in the UN to come to Ghana? That time they called Ghana ... *ogyakrom*. You must be crazy! But, er ... I just called. When I was convinced and my wife was convinced now for us to come home, I was fifty-one years then. We called all our children together from around the world and we said this is the decision. The children says that, well, if that's what you want to do, we have no problem. And the reason why we wanted them to be part of the decision-making was that there's going to be a drastic change in their lifestyle ... an ambassador's child, everything else, so that's the reason why. And so one day, so it was after we'd taken that decision, then Alan Kyeremanteng, Alan Cash, was on a UNDP Project, Africa-wide, Empretec *inaudible* and he came to visit me as UN ambassador in Namibia and I told him that by the end of the year, 1999, I'll be back in Ghana. So he's the one who saw the GIMPA advert. So I was there one day and he called me that he'd seen an advert ... and would I be interested? These were my exact words, the exact words I used: '*Oh fa soo ho. M'aka se me pe edwuma ayo*? (Oh, go away. Have I told you I am looking for a job?)

At that time a Ghanaian mutual friend of ours … was sitting in front of my desk and … So this friend, Afful, just took the phone. Talked with Alan ... the last words he said (on the phone) were: 'You leave it for me'. Actually, literally, my application to GIMPA was written by my friend, said I had to sign. He took my CV and says, while you're making up your mind I'm taking it to Ghana. So he came and just dropped it in the Achimota ... he says that he went to Achimota, the closest to GIMPA Post Office, and dropped it in the postbox, posted it there. Two weeks' later, to my surprise, they said that, I got a call from GIMPA ... but please if you're interested in the job give us a detailed ... publications and everything else. So I told my Secretary ... er … Mrs. Brooke Cooker, can you just put together .er some … things together, lets … so we listed about twenty-six ... I'd, because I'd most times worked in research, I'd a lot of er … papers and other things. We sent it to them. Two weeks they said, 'Come for an interview.' What? These people are they serious? So, something you're not serious about, I said well if people will pay for me to go to Ghana ... and they sent me [flight tickets]. … as an ambassador, if you're leaving the country, you should write a note to the government. You can't leave the country without that … because you're the, you represent your country. This one '*kowa de kowa*', I didn't … because we're allowed to go to South Africa ... South Africa and Namibia are considered almost one territory so when you're going to South Africa you can go and shop. You can even go for three days, so why can't ... and to

... to come, you had to fly to South Africa and they won't let me do. I made as if anybody saw me they think that I'm going to South Africa. So I took the plane on a Wednesday to South Africa, flew South African Airways in the night to Accra. The following Thursday I had the interview, flew back on Friday … No Ghanaian apart from people in GIMPA knew that I'd come ... Because … even people in Namibia, apart from my family, they didn't know that I had come for the interview.

Because all this time it was almost like a dream. I hadn't even made up my mind ... I had to add a vision statement. I didn't read anything about GIMPA ... I didn't do anything. I just wrote three quarters of a page ... I'm coming to set up a tutorial college, Greenhill ... I'm going to do three Masters in governance. I'm going to make that institution financially autonomous and a world-class place. That's it and I attached. It's quite amazing. And I hadn't read anything about GIMPA … So within a month they have written to me that I was successful … Whoa! ... These Ghanaians! How can be that expeditious? Then I … It's there and then that I had to say [This thing is not a dream; I should decide immediately if I am going to take the job or not] So then I wrote back to them.

Unfortunately, I am a UN Ambassador. For me to leave my post, I require six months of notice. So this was about March … and in my plan, I'm not coming to Ghana until December. They wrote back to say, 'We'll wait for you'. So actually, we left the place for nine months. So then my predecessor finished, and they made the deputy act for three months … So that is how I ended up at GIMPA ... So it wasn't a matter of, you know, structuring and strategising. It was a matter of coming home ... this is the, but for me I believe that whenever you have something to do you must do it with all your might as serving the Lord.

Practicalities of leadership

At GIMPA I met with the Middle Level Staff supervisors every day for 180 days, and the Senior Management, every Monday continuously, all the time I was there ... but for the Junior Staff supervisors, you know, Head of Security, all of them, you know, pantry ... I met with them continuously every day for 180 days, because I wanted to impact ... because it's very difficult for people to understand the work style of some of us. You have to change them culturally, mentally and everything else. I was working with labourers, I was cleaning, welding, fixing broken chairs, we built the ... porter's lodge ourselves, I mean ... I was moving from top to bottom.

I was teaching undergraduate. I was teaching ... the Masters, because, for example, when I started the Masters, the first two subjects for both were Leadership and Public Administration, and then Business Administration. I taught all three

class together because at this moment, first of all, I must say that most of them, apart from one or two, the quality of the staff was not [where I wanted it to be]. To my surprise, I was expecting that there'd be maybe about fifteen applicants. There were sixty-five. So I got my money and I brought top-quality staff [from all over the world]. You must come if you're a top person from anywhere in the world, we would pay you for two weeks, before long we were known everywhere and I was teaching undergraduates I taught Economics, that became the Introduction to Economic Science.

For me the biggest advantage I had was that everybody was expecting a change. I mean it was so bad ... they felt so bad and demoralised, even though eventually they gave me a name … My first Christmas, I invited all directors and all pensioners of GIMPA. I gave the directors and senior people each a kente cloth and every retiree, even a conservancy labourer, a piece of cloth to say 'Thank you'. You know, because if you don't appreciate what your predecessors have done, it's almost like cursing yourself … then … the challenges: first there'd been a consistent leadership failure … when you see [certain things], it means that there was no leadership … and when people have gone through a long period of poor leadership, just even the confidence of the leader … Ghanaians also will allow things to go on and on … me. when things are in my court, I don't let it. So that had translated into demoralised and undisciplined staff. The faculty were using actually GIMPA as their personal facilities … Conditions of service were very, very, deplorable. I mean they were so miserable. Then they were overstaffed. Less than thirty Senior Members and over three hundred other staff. What were they doing? ... Low patronage of their programmes, poor logistics and archaic systems, financially challenged, and actually the government had pronounced so much so that the civil service no longer required GIMPA programmes ... as a requirement for promotion in the public service …

I was committed to creating a centre of excellence for Leadership, Management and Administration. That meant building a centre where the political leaders, the bureaucratic leaders, and business leaders would make their first point of call to build their capacity … I can say that by 2008, presidents, presidents' wives, all came there and sat at our feet. When Liberia … came out of their war their whole Parliament and Senate were sent to us for training … we put in a strategic plan, which you should get a copy at the library, to increase the number of quality faculty, to increase the number of classrooms to achieve a three-star restaurant and accommodation facility, to [improve customer satisfaction] to 75 per cent; when we were leaving it [was] about 95 per cent ... So we, we achieved every target we set to meet ... When I started Greenhill College I was expecting about hundred

students. When I opened my door, I had seven hundred, and it was there, we sustained it all throughout … To achieve these, we had to communicate the vision clearly to all the staff.

***I**: How did you do that, how did you get the staff to buy the vision?*

I will tell you. First of all the vision was very, very simplified. Initially they didn't er .. the ordinary staff didn't understand it, but I had to interpret it. We want to be urr ... to the lower level, that GIMPA is the cleanest, the most sought-after institution, the highest-paid university staff, and when I was leaving there, we were the highest paid in Ghana. Every lecturer in GIMPA received 50 per cent higher salary than Legon. So these things, they understood, that's number one – the vision was clear and attractive. Number two, I am not the type of leader … for example, I am the chairman of the commission. I've been sitting with these people, the other day you came I was there. I've been sitting with them for two weeks. I worked with them …. we clean the gutters together, we, we did everything else. I did, eyi ... the first module. I prepared mine, taught the teachers how to prepare modules. I taught how to teach the PowerPoint and everything else. So it was not, er ... they were used to ... me, I'm not that type of leader. That doesn't mean that when I have to take a leadership decision I won't, but I always work at two levels. As a human being, everybody and I are equal.

When we have party, you know the only person I dance with was only one woman labourer …[I would not dance with anybody else until I have danced with her].

***I:** So you were setting examples*

I was … I was with the people... you know the boo ... the plantains at the garage and other things, you know what I do, I'll give them twenty Ghana cedis or less, they'd go and buy koobi. I go and sit around the pot with them and we eat. If I eat one day with the senior staff, the next day I'll be with the middle level staff, the next day I'll be with the junior staff – so, everybody. Number two, maybe because of my background, I never use my privileges. In fact, I've been here for one and a half months as the commissioner. I'm still using my current petrol. I've not even gone to them to ask them what, what's the conditions of service? No.

When I came to GIMPA I had my own Benz but I never used it. Why? Because I saw how people were poor. I thought that using a brand-new Benz, not the Institute's but my own Benz [would send the wrong message]. … In fact, after three years we'd done, me and my wife had not done more than … three thousand kilometres on it and that's because we had to warm it so on Sundays … and go to church with it. I was using the old Musso that my predecessor …. He'd had an accident with it and

he'd gone with the Benz, so I had to ... I used the Musso ... We went to a council meeting and they said: 'Whether you like it or not, you're going to buy a car … here is seventy-two thousand dollars, you go get yourself a new car.' So I went out and got one for fifty- two. (I returned the twenty thousand) … So there was that… when people realise that it's about their welfare [they put in their best] … salary increase and that was all from our money. So, I mean, it's a leadership thing, giving vision, communicating clearly, being with the people, and then I was prepared to take the hard decisions that needed to be taken ... For example, the decision, when we were down, to say we're going to go financially autonomous. We will survive, let us do … And when we made it, I made them comfortable. Their salaries were good. It's only ... this was before single spine [single spine references a government salary restructuring programme that sought to improve the compensation packages of public sector workers], that one, the other universities got their salaries increased about three times without working for it. But GIMPA was way ahead …

So, but you aim at excellence and my aim was ... Legon [University of Ghana]. People were attacking me, but I wasn't competing with them … Why would I, as a small fry, compete with Legon? I was aiming at things which would distinguish me from Legon. Let them have their mass market. So this is the ... so ... that … so we ... and we managed ... it's a profile of excellence, we managed to really create a brand – the GIMPA brand … We became the first public university to have all its degrees accredited. Every degree is accredited, so when they, when was it, do you know, then … one day I said [to the Legon people] 'your degree is unaccredited'. We built up the best faculty in Business Administration, Public Administration and Leadership in Africa. That time we had some ninety people, adjunct and other things. You couldn't have them anywhere. I can't tell you the quality today.

***RB**- How did you manage to get the staff?*

T'was very, very simple. First of all, I was paying 50 per cent more than Legon. so anybody with er ... the first point of call was GIMPA. And if she couldn't get in there, then she would go somewhere else. Number two, the adjuncts … I would bring faculty from all the top universities around the world, especially for my graduate programme. That's why I put it at June, August and January, when both the southern universities and the northern universities were on holidays. I'll pay you three thousand [US dollars] for three weeks ... I'll pay your transport, full board and lodging, because I had my 3-star hotel … there were a few whites, but I targeted West Africans in the diaspora ... They want to come home ... so you have come home to see your mum and dad, I've paid you three thousand [US dollars]. Why would not put in your best? If you don't, you won't come again?

GIMPA was attracting the topmost. In fact, I'll not, even the HND, unless you got Second Class Upper, I won't accept you. I'm the first point of call … It's image! That's why Ashesi, we charge them more, but they go. If you don't work on your quality and your image, everything … is gone.

One day I was going to Nigeria. So about 4:30 I saw the Head of Grounds himself, at the entrance, watering some plants he'd planted the day before. Then I knew that I had succeeded. When the boss oo ... wakes up to water plants at 4:30 am, then I knew … that's the level of motivation. We had a big work ethic ... it was top ... anyway ... you ... uu ... if you didn't work, other person would come and tell you to get out of here ... yeah. Then conditions of service … When the money started flowing, Charlie! ... At one time, I bought ten Pajeros. Every head of department had a Pajero …

We were also willing to take risks and innovate. Ok let me say it. And then there was productive corruption management. Almost corruption was zero. By God's grace I didn't need any money, and even if I were poor I'll not steal a pesewa, and therefore if there was one leakage and I saw it, you're out. I'll sack you before you can take me to court and we'll follow the due process there. [That is one reason many people described me as crazy.] Then, so there was a prudential financial management. We used our money well, making sure value for money, we built at the cost of about 40 per cent the national average.]

Finally, what could have been done better?

I think I should have better anticipated the backlash. Because the backlash, that the people wanted somebody they can control. I think towards the end, I was getting tired. I bet I could have done better communication with the staff towards the end than I did. Probably I could have been less abrasive in my style, but err ... the question is, that would it have achieved the same results? ... I think that … even though we had good staff generally, I could still have been more rigorous in the recruitment of my staff in terms of attitude and other things ... I think that, so ... there were … about ... err ... ten staff we recruited without being thoroughly rigorous, and then … some of my board members warned me … and they would later say 'It serves you right.'

… I'd have done more infrastructure. Because I was capable … ah! any money I wanted I could get. There were many who could have been capable successors … except that I think at that time, you know, there'd been this backlash from the government … and some of the er ... board members, especially my chairman, thought that I was too difficult, he wants to control and that thing, so therefore your ability to then influence that one … they would reject everybody associated with you.

You see, in every leadership, you see the er … er… styles, there has been success story. I mean, for example, I am an extrovertish, charismatic, introvertish, other things. Ashesi is [the] choleric type of … er ... but what makes leaders, irrespective of these, has to do with clarity of vision, commitment, commitment to certain strategies, prepared to put everything into it. When I was in GIMPA, I'd do nothing, it is GIMPA, GIMPA, GIMPA. Finish. I'll make a mistake, I'll correct it, you know. Willingness to take decisions. Willingness to put in place things that'll motivate your staff.

Solving difficult problems – that is leadership. But the tendency is to link it to whether he's, you know, charismatic ... yeah ... if you're charismatic you have a little bit of advantage ... you ... you're able to sway people, but if eventually your charisma is not backed by deeds … discipline … know where [you are] going. If you go off, you'll be disciplined severely. I mean everybody knows that … so, er … and these are the type of things. So ... yes ...

Joshua Alabi

Professor Joshua Alabi is the recent past vice-chancellor of the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA). UPSA started as the Institute of Professional Studies (IPS), a private school, which offered professional qualifications in management disciplines (such as Accounting, Marketing, etc). Professor Alabi superintended the institute's transformation into a formidable university, which now competes extremely well with any other university in Ghana. Like the university that he built, Professor Alabi has very humble beginnings. He was born to a mechanic father and a petty trader mother, about sixty-one years ago [at the time of the interview]. He is the fifth of his mother's seven children and the fifth of his father's sixteen.

Joshua was the only one that his father seemed keen to educate. He started his education at St. John's Preparatory School in Accra. The school was mainly for the social elite, and it was partly for this reason that his father decided to enrol him. He had financial challenges and struggled to pay the school fees, but he managed to keep young Joshua at the school till completion. Joshua proceeded to Tamale Secondary School (Tamasco), from where he went to the Institute of Professional Studies (IPS) to pursue a course in professional accounting. After the Intermediate Level of the course, he returned to Tamale to teach Accounting at the Northern School of Business. A year or so later, he received a scholarship to the then Soviet Union, to pursue a Master's degree in Industrial Economics.

Joshua was one of about a thousand Ghanaian students in the USSR who organised themselves into a group, which he led. He was later elected President

of the National Union of Ghanaian Students in Europe (NUGS, Europe), a body comprising Ghanaian students across Europe. This was part of the foundation for his future political life. He returned to Ghana in 1986 and went to teach at IPS after completing his National Service. After teaching for some time, Joshua received a British Council scholarship to study International Marketing at the University of Strathclyde, Scotland. He returned to IPS upon completion of his studies. IPS, at the time, was not the preferred choice of students because it was perceived as a destination of last resort for post-secondary students. However, Joshua preferred to work here and to help the school improve its future fortunes.

The situation also gave him time and opportunity to enter football politics. He became Director of Accra Great Olympics Football Club. He represented the Ghana League Club Association (GHALCA) at the Olympics and would later become General Secretary. Ghana's national football team, the Black Stars, went to Tunisia in 1994 with disastrous results. Joshua saw this as an opportunity to reform football management in Ghana. In spite of political resistance from the then government, his proposal was accepted. He and one other were elected to the Ghana Football Association (GFA) – the highest governing body of Ghana football. He was directly responsible for the Black Stars, handling the Black Stars during their Africa Cup Qualifying Series to South Africa. The Stars qualified for the tournament in South Africa and made it to the semi-finals. All this while, Joshua remained a lecturer at IPS. Football had made him popular and so he decided to enter national politics.

He contested the primaries of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) – one of the two main political parties in Ghana – for a parliamentary seat and defeated the incumbent Member of Parliament (MP). When he was elected MP, he converted his job at IPS into a part-time position. He later became Minister for Greater Accra, Northern Regional Minister and then Greater Accra Regional Minister. He had a lot of challenges in the North because of the Dagbon crisis. One of the things that people in the North will always remember about Joshua was his resolve to tar the Tamale-Damango road. Previous leaders had not touched the road because there was a shrine in the path and they were afraid the shrine would kill them if they destroyed it. He ignored the superstition and got the road paved. This made him somewhat of a superhero and established his reputation as a 'firm and decisive' person.

The philosophical journey from IPS to UPSA – in his own words

… [a challenge in] higher education in Ghana ... The mismatch between what we turn out and the requirements of industry. And it has to do with the perception and thinking of those in charge of higher education in this country … You have a lot of

professors … who were, let me put it, theoretically very brilliant. There are people who, in secondary school were As … So they think everybody is like that, they think everybody is like that. So all their thinking is that you must be able to memorise things and pass exams … no. If we don't reorganise this thinking, we'll continue to have this problem ... So, I find a chartered accountant ... who has been in practice for many years to come and teach … the NAB [National Accreditation Board] … will say that he does not have a doctorate … Now, somebody who does 'O' level straight, he didn't fail, so straight to sixth form, he didn't fail, straight to university first class, straight to Masters then straight to PhD, he comes and they say he can teach ... This is what people are asking for and that is why we have products like that on the market. And it's a big challenge … Go to industry there are a lot who can teach and they'll teach exactly what they need, not what you have learnt from the books.

Another challenge, another challenge. We are too theory-oriented, to the extent that we're toying with the lives of the youth. You know, let's look at it this way, to read law, or communication, do you seriously require mathematics? Now, you see, they say every course that you have to do in this country you should pass maths. Now, people don't like maths at all, but we are blocking them from access to university education. And so, these people, if their parents are well-to-do, they find themselves outside the country. They go and they come back, and we'll employ them first. We have told the world that with, with this qualification we cannot turn you round to be a lawyer. The world outside is telling you that, they can turn you round. When they turn you round [we are the first to pick you ahead of all others].

I'm telling you! I have a friend, when we were going to Russia, he applied to read Pharmacy. Russia, with two Es. The first year the Russians didn't take him and that was when I went. The second year, he applied to Russia again, with the same two Es. This time Medicine. They took him. He's one of the best neurosurgeons in the country today. He's one of the best. Two Es.

Ghana here, Medicine, two Es, who'll take you? (**RB:** Practical orientation). Yes. One of the best neurosurgeons in the country today. People come all over from [different part of the sub-region to see him] … Development has a stage for everybody. So these are some of the challenges, and until our professors who go to sit at the NCTE, who were brilliant from …. they had ... note that not everybody, like them, they'd appreciate that there are some people who also start their development at a later age.

At UPSA, I was a lecturer, senior lecturer, head of department, dean of faculty, pro-rector, rector and vice- chancellor. Erm ... there's a saying that, erm ... a leader must be ready for every new task. If it is not your time, and you go and sit there,

you'll mess up. So I must say I was ready for my turn. I was also a former student so I knew the problems. And I remember, when I was a young lecturer in UPSA, I told my director, that I'll sit in the chair and transform the school. I was then in my 30s. He laughed at me. It's true. So when I took up [the leadership of the school], I pictured exactly what I wanted to do. So, the staff, academically were not very good, and university standards, we had the professionals only teaching. We needed a blend. So I needed to find ways and means of making some of them [train further].

At that time too the government was not prepared to give us more staff. So I went to the NAB to … and they gave me [university name deleted]. It is written, that it's a good university. I said good, so my staff can start and, and teach. So I was surprised when people started comparing our image … and that's when NAB stood behind me because they knew that we had all the documentation from them … right. So I've to upgrade them. Some of them too, I brought them to GIMPA to do Masters. Some of them to [university name deleted], and all these things, the US, where you go and come, because if you all go and NAB will also, if you don't go too, they will tell me, your people are not up to … and they were just about fourteen teachers. Now how do I increase, expand the school with fourteen teachers? Right. That was the challenge. Those days when people came and saw the university, they just went away. Those days I had friends at GIMPA who laughed at UPSA. GIMPA was somewhere up there.

So I used a lot of part-time lecturers with the time available, created the weekend school, evening school to make more money , to plough the money into development, because er, there's a saying that, er ... when you eat gari with pepper in the morning, and you move out and wear suit, nobody knows what you have eaten … package yourself well. But if you did all the best of these things and you wear some wretched shirt, they'd think that you've not eaten. So the environment is very important. So I had to tackle the environment because people didn't want to teach in the school because of the environment. There were no offices for the academic staff and the heads of departments. They were operating from their car boots.

Lecturers would come, and within one year they would go to other universities. It was a major challenge. So I started tackling the infrastructure, while also developing the capacity of the staff, all this with the, our internally generated funds, it was a challenge. Sometimes, when you say it this way, people may not know what I had to [deal with]. IPS at that time had not even one computer for students, let alone ICT infrastructure. I tell people that beyond the physical infrastructure, what went underground, the unseen ones, are even more. So we started with this challenge. Heads of institutions would be travelling and I'm supposed to go with them. I will tell them that, oh, I have something doing … It is money, just to squeeze money.

I: *… you were prepared to sacrifice for the development of the school.*

… when the students [and other stakeholders] realised that I had a vision, because I communicated my vision very well, it was accepted. So there was collective ownership and that is about 40 per cent of the work done. When you communicate your idea, your vision to them and they accept and they own it, with you, you're done. But if they don't understand you, there'd be resistance and there was some resistance, I must admit because people are used to what they have. You are trying to [take] risk and they don't know what the outcome will be, so there'll be resistance. But you see, resistance, the way you also see resistance is important, when you see resistance as an enemy, you'll fail. But resistance is just energy which is driven in a different direction … so you have to bring it back, we have to bring it back. So the person has energy, he doesn't understand it, she's moving here, you want to move here, full of energy, turn it. So use, what we call … I'm a relationship manager. [I will] call you, have tea with you in the office, chat, by the time you leave [we have mutual agreement] … to make a disciple, you don't use force, it will fail … So that's how I got my staff and workers to fall in line.

RB: *Good, good. yeah so, Prof, in all these, what would you say was your fondest memory?*

… a particular [incident] had to do with when we were affiliated to Legon, erm ... they had to vet your examination questions before you print them and there were times where a day to the exam they've not done that, so I have to drive, as the head, with the questions to Legon, meet the lecturer concerned and beg him. There were times, I reported even some of the lecturers to the then vice-chancellor … Then one day I told myself I'm going to move this school out of here, I don't want somebody's negligence to be my failure. So I started applying for our Presidential Charter. So the day I got it, I said 'Bye bye' to Legon. I was excited … for me it was good, it was good.

… the perception that people had about IPS at that time was a challenge. It was a glorified commercial school. It was a challenge. Turn that around. Building confidence in our students … it was a challenge. My students, go for NUGS meetings … and they back with positions like financial secretary and treasurer. Never, do they go for 'president'. When they come and introduce themselves to me and I get mad. So there was a day … I asked them: 'The students at Legon, are they better than you?' They say 'no' … obviously, they'll say 'no'. 'So why do they go for president and you go for financial secretary?' So I drew a plan with them that I want to see the NUGS president at my school. You see, when you are able to get

that they can build confidence within themselves ... [there are] about 70 something universities in Ghana. If we are to rotate the presidency …[each] university will get it in seventy something years, isn't so? But with the plan that I drew with them, by the time I left UPSA, eight years as the head, I'd produced three NUGS presidents.

I: *Prof. you were that detailed even to the level of getting your students to become visionary leaders.*

Yes. NUGS president, three years … and then the General Secretary of the All African Students Union, the immediate past and the current one are all from my school … So when they are going for the NUGS Congress, I give them bus, I give them money, and I give them the boys who'll go and make noise. I have my phones, monitoring the ground in my office … so they started becoming confident, they started becoming confident that yes, they can match up to …

I: *So Prof, this exercise is to make it possible for other leaders to also learn what made you a credible transformational leader. So, what are some of the critical attributes or characteristics that leaders, especially in the higher education sector in Africa or Ghana, should have, the critical ones?*

You know we are developing capacity for the country. So we need to understand the people you are developing. If you pretend you understand them, you may not be giving them exactly what is, what they need. So you need to understand them. Erm … for example, my students used to tell me that … our progammes are too tough … and that we are overburdening them. Then I told them, at that time, Legon required aggregate 6 or 7 for Admin and we have taken you at 18. It means I have to turn you three times to be able to compete with them on the job market … people came with 18, some even 19. So the raw material, you have to work more so that when you go out, you can compete with them and they sit and look at me and they know it's true. So you need to know the people and know what you have to do with them. That is one …

And then as much as possible, do not be a tyrant, be more of a relationship manager. Cultivate your people. When they understand you they'll move with you. When you force them, they will respect but they will not move with so, so that, that is another thing. And then, define your vision properly, communicate it and let's give it quality reward. It's important. Be accessible. Yes, be accessible.

You mentor people but as to whether they will do what you gave them … But mentorship … the current vice-chancellor, I mentored him, the pro-vice-chancellor, I mentored him, er ... er ... there are some deans I mentored. They were all under

me, but as to whether they will go by that and not take it that now that they are on the seat they are on their own, it's a different thing. So you can mentor people, but now, when they take the chair, its. They, they ...

The students that we train are the leaders of tomorrow, so I don't see the students as students and I don't see them as customers. I see them as partners who within a short time will be leading the development of the country. What you don't do as leaders, the next day you'll be sitting, negotiating your salary with the student that you produced. So the way we handle them on campus, the attention we give them, will determine what we'll get from them when we are out there. We must treat them as partners in developing education in Africa and not the boys and girls thing that we take them for the past years.

The boys, the people in government, a lot of the young boys, maybe you taught some of them I don't know … tomorrow, if they GIMPA presidents, you are going to negotiate so you'll be sitting there, you were a wicked teacher … because of your face alone that will not get what you want.

Patrick Awuah

Born in Ghana in 1965 to an engineer father and a mother who worked as a nurse, Patrick Awuah is the President of Ashesi University in Accra, Ghana. His parents would later become entrepreneurs, with his mother moving into wholesale trading and his father into private consultancy. Patrick attended Chapel Hill School in Takoradi, Association International in Accra, and then Achimota School, before proceeding to Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, USA, where he graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Engineering and Economics. He later obtained a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at University of California, Berkeley's Haas School of Business.

Patrick notes the major difference in the approach to teaching and learning that he knew in Ghana and what he experienced at Swarthmore College. The liberal arts grounding at Swarthmore taught him to reason and assess problems for unique solutions, in contrast to the rote memorisation that characterises learning in Ghana. Identifying this major shortcoming in Ghana's education system, he considered how he could transform the education system in Ghana.

It was after the birth of his first child that he started to think seriously about the kind of world that the child would inherit. This was the time of the Somali crises, Rwanda genocide and other sad events in Africa. He felt the need to go back and make a contribution to Africa's recovery from its past into a glorious future.

He had argued in the past that Africa's challenges were due in significant part to poor leadership, noting in a speech elsewhere that the elite in Ghanaian society had a stronger sense of entitlement than responsibility. This he believes was grounded in the kind of leaders African institutions were producing. His motivation, then, was to redefine the training regime for leaders in Africa and their understanding of their civic responsibilities. This has been at the heart of his efforts regarding Asheshi and the pragmatic approaches to ethical leadership that he has adopted in his own practice and the training of the future leaders there.

Patrick worked as a software engineer and program manager for Microsoft, from 1989 to 1997. He left Microsoft with the goal of returning to Ghana to educate the next generation of African leaders. In 1999, he returned to Ghana to establish Ashesi University. The university opened its doors to students in 2002 and currently offers Bachelor's degrees in Business Administration, Management Information Systems, Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Computer Engineering and Mechanical Engineering. Ashesi has become the leader in liberal arts education in the country, with the goal of shaping the minds of a new generation of leaders for Ghana and Africa. The university's rapid growth and transformational effect on the broader society has earned Patrick significant respect and recognition as an excellent leader in Ghana and Africa.

The way to Ashesi – in his own words

The first step was, I set up a foundation in Seattle, donated money into it, asked some of my colleagues from Microsoft, my former colleagues from Microsoft to donate into it, and then once we had that, some funding in place, urm, and also one of my classmates of Business School became a co-founder, then we started the work of doing curricula development. And we got faculty from three universities in the US to do curriculum development for us, based on data that we'd gathered in Ghana. So we'd come to Ghana and done initial focus groups and surveys and brought that data and said, this is what Ghanaian … ur … leaders think we need to do, let's design a curriculum for that.

> … and once we had accreditation, we could recruit students and we initially wanted to recruit sixty students for the first class. Urm … we had a hundred and fifty applicants and sixty of them would qualify but the bottom thirty would not have been as strong and so we decided to only enrol thirty students for that first year. It was, you know, we figured it was, we were learning as we go, let's learn with the smaller group, let's not take too many risks, urm, in that regard. We were already taking a big risk starting a university ... and so we started with thirty students.

When we put out ads for faculty jobs, we got no applications from Ghanaian faculty, and this was very interesting, right? No one applied from Ghana. And so the first faculty we had were actually four people, two people we recruited out of the UK and two people who came from Microsoft. They took a sabbatical from Microsoft to come and teach. That was the first four people. I'd met Prof. Nana Apt, who was at the University of Ghana at the time, and she was an advisor to us ... she joined us full time a couple of years later when she retired from Legon. So that was, yes, that's how we started. And, you know, we rented a house in Labone – the roof had fallen in, we had to patch up the roof, change the electrical wiring, all of that.

[The teachers from Microsoft liked our mission]. They liked the mission. They were interested in, it'll soon be a good experience for them right? ... And I think the two of them had never been to Africa, and so this is an opportunity for them to come to Africa …[and] they knew me. The first donors for Ashesi were Microsoft people. And the people who gave money, gave for two reasons … urm, one was that they wanted to help me be successful, so they liked me and they were really supporting Patrick. The second was, they liked the mission and they liked the business plan that we'd put together around the mission. So we had this idea that we would build an institution that would be accessible to a wide range of people, socially, economically, but will also be self-sustaining at some point. And so they could see they'd need a lot of work put into it.

One of my first donors, errm, was asked in an interview, Why did you put money behind this? This is such a big risk. And he said, well, because I know Patrick and I know that he's gonna make it happen or he's gonna die trying. So they … I had this reputation at the company of being somebody who worked very hard to get things done, right? Like, if it's a really difficult problem, I didn't give up, and so that was part of why people came along ... It's credibility, urm, it was integrity, right? So they knew that I was going to use the money for what I said I was going to use it for. They knew that I was going to really try to achieve what I said we were gonna try and achieve, and they also liked the idea, they liked the mission of saying let's go, er, educate future leaders for Africa. Let's help improve education. They liked the fact that I was taking this risk myself to go back home and they wanted to be supporters of that.

Leadership as a lifestyle?

I think if you're a leader, you're sort of inspiring people to move in a particular direction to get some particular work done and to get them to really put in their best effort, they have to have complete trust in you. People don't follow people if

they don't trust, or if they're following then they're sort of half-hearted … the way you build trust is integrity, right? You need to have integrity and credibility and people need to know that you're not … somebody who just … changes direction all the time. I think that's really important. For me, I've also really tried to personally nurture the qualities of ambition and humility at the same time, right?

So, if you're running a university or you're heading a company or heading a country, urm, and you really want that institution to be great, you must have great ambition for that institution and for yourself and for the people who work for you. But you also must have great humility, because without humility you don't learn. Without humility you're not able to connect with people as, as effectively. You're not able to acknowledge mistakes when they occur, and because you're unable to acknowledge those mistakes, you don't learn from them and you don't improve, right? So, urm, great ambition but also great humility is really important in a leader.

So, what we've done is we've been very clear about the values of the organisation, right? We've got this three: scholarship, leadership, citizenship. Scholarship, if I'm to summarise, is that we're all students and we're all teachers, every one of us. Leadership is about helping others to be more successful, and helping to move the need of actually helping us get to the next, helping us to be more excellent, helping others to be more excellent. And citizenship is about, urm, getting along with people, having fun, looking out for the common good, right? ... We're very clear about that … So, and we try to live according to those values, right? So you know, we've had, there was a time when, you know, you have somebody who's on the faculty or the administration who is really not committed, who is really affecting the, er, the team in a negative way, right? There's a lot of unhappiness around this person, the performance might be good or okay, but there've been situations, like, that … and people see that. People see that we're actually living our values, urm, and we also celebrate those who are exhibiting the values that we're … that we're looking for. They respect other people, urm, you know, who really live by our values.

Urm, people come here and they say, er, you know, your security guards seem to really care about this place, right? You talk, there's a sense of pride, and, and, and ask me how did you do that? And my answer is, well, I share my values, the values of the organisation with them and then live it.

And then recently, somebody, a senior executive, joined the team, and they were planning graduation, and they were sort of setting up. A security guard made a comment. He said: 'Excuse me, where you are putting this thing? It's going to cause the following problem.' He was talking from a security standpoint, you have to be accurate, whatever. And I literally stopped and listened to him. I said: 'Ok, tell us

more,' and so he described what it is that ... his issue was. And I said: 'Ok that's a really good point, we should make this shift.' The change happened, and this senior executive who'd just joined us approached me, saying: 'Patrick, that was incredible. I've never seen, like, a CEO stop to listen to the security guard and actually have the guard override more senior people, right? And it was just, but it was something that happened, I wasn't thinking about it, it was just, that's just how we are … and it is throughout. You might be a junior faculty member with a really good idea or a senior faculty member with a really good idea – it's really all about the idea, it's not about the positions and this sort of thing. It's about what's the best thing for all of us. And I think if you live that consistently, then you'd actually have a very good team.

[About] succession, what we're doing is, we need to sort of deepen the team and broaden the capability of the team. So, we've built a team that's very complementary, ur, that's very capable. I delegate a lot to the team, so, urm, including all the decision-making, so, ur, and you know, this is the thing that its sometimes difficult for a leader – at least when I first started – to recognise that I needed to delegate more. One of the fears is that they gonna make mistakes. They gonna make a mistake that you made, and learned from, but that's key right? You also make mistakes. It's not like I was, I always got it right. I eventually got it right because somebody let me make the same mistake. Because I was the founder. I didn't have a choice. So, I have to give decision rights to other people and let them make those decisions.

First of all, we've hired competent people. So that's one thing. The second thing is … professional development for everyone. As we sit here, if you look at all full-time faculty within the next four years, over 90 per cent of our faculty would have PhDs. We're just looking at how many already have PhDs, how many are currently enrolled? So there … and so we've put funding behind getting faculty who have MPhils enrol in PhD programmes and upgrading, right.

This is all part of our succession planning. Getting the faculty to do more research to advance their scholarship academically, and doing the same thing with the administrative side, so that when the day comes, you know, we have a succession plan we're executing. The Board knows there's a, there's a process by which the next president will be selected, and that process will not only look at internal candidates, it'll look at external candidates as well. But it will have internal candidates if we do our job right in terms of professional development. That's what I'm doing about it.

Africa really needs to have a network of very strong universities, sort of like the Ivy Leagues are in the US or in the UK. You have, you know, Oxford, Cambridge, the London Schools and then Warwick, right? ... Networks that are very strong. And when you have that very strong network, it acts as a beacon for everybody else.

And what happens is all their universities will be aspiring to become like that and so you end up with, er, constant growth across the board, right? So what I hope will happen with university leadership, in Africa, is that we learn to collaborate more, right? So one of the things that I could say in Ghana, what needs to happen is that, you know, the vice-chancellors of Legon, KNUST, me and others, we should really know each other very well. We should be friends, we should be collaborating, we should be directing our organisations to learn from each other, right? If we did that, the change that would happen would be tremendous.

I'll give you an example. Now, the way Ashesi recruits students, like, when we're making decisions on who to admit, we don't only look at the WASSCE grades. We look at the WASSCE grade, we look at the extra curricula, what activities do they do after the classroom, what activities do they do at home, ur, when they're on vacation and so on, urm. And all that factors into whether we'd admit somebody or not. Now, if Legon, KNUST, UCC were to have the same criteria, this would have a massive effect on the secondary school system. What would happen is, suddenly sports would become more important? Military service would become more important? When students, you know, you're a secondary school student whose father is a carpenter, right? When he's on vacation, he would go work in the carpentry shop, and then apply all the geometry and physics he learned in that shop and he would build certain skills because he'd want to be able to write about that in a credible way on his college application.

Suddenly, what will happen is, a whole generation coming out from high school would be different. They'd just be more rounded, right? So it's, it's a kind of thing that, and similarly, you know, we're young, urm, we are now really trying to get into research, right? When we started we were focused on pedagogy. Now we're adding research to that. Legon has institutes that are really good at research, like technology, right, so we can learn a lot from them. They could sort of mentor us in this way, but it requires the leadership of the universities to be intentional about this, right?

I would say that the most radical decision that we've taken so far was the decision to stop invigilating exams here. That was a pretty radical decision because, you know, we have had our students really engage in a conversation about ethics, integrity and taking ownership for that, a culture of ethics on campus. And you know they had, urm, you know, they had sort of debated this for a year and a half. And after a year and half, we said, look, just vote whether you'd want to take charge of this. And if you say you're going to take ownership for this, then we will step back and give you ownership for the culture of integrity.

The reason it was a radical decision was that by doing so we gave them the power to be one or two things. If they lived up to their word, then they would, they'd create a truly excellent institution, because suddenly nobody would have permission to cheat and so, so like when the students themselves say, if you cheat, I'd turn you in, then, when the students themselves say that, right, then it's actually a lot harder to cheat. Because in the invig … in a room, you don't have one invigilator, they're fifty (**RB**: Yes, exactly). Right. So, so that's excellent, is one.

The other option is that they'd take the advantage and say, ok, it's free for all and let's cheat all the time because there's no invigilators. And what will happen is, they'd do that, and after four years they'd graduate, and it'll be apparent that a lot of them don't know anything – the ones who were copying from others – and the Ashesi certificate would be nothing. Ashesi brand will be ... So, basically, we're giving the option to either be excellent or to destroy their alma mater. This is a very radical decision, right? I mean there're some people on the faculty who'd say: 'Patrick you're giving all this power to twenty-year-olds!'

[But the outcome has been] excellent, like they chose. The thing is, when you have the choice between excellence and destruction, destruction is not fun, right? And you can see that, right? And so, you know, urm, you know, the first couple of semesters students cheated and their colleagues turned them in. Then it happens less and less, you know, and every time someone cheats, people turn him in, and this becomes part of the culture of the place. But it was, you know, a pretty radical decision to make.

I think that the responsibility that we have is tremendous. This is a continent of 1.2 billion people. In the next thirty years, it's going to be 2.5 billion people, right? We've seen that kind of growth happen in Asia, urrm, from the 70s to 2000. In the case of Asia, things improved even as the population pressure was happening … [due to] two factors – productive work force and effective leadership, right? Now, both of those things are created by the educational system. You know, you want a productive people, they have to be well educated. Effective leaders, typically, are the ones who've gone through tertiary education. So the tertiary education system is strong, we gonna have stronger leaders.

That's really the challenge. That's the responsibility that we have. And we know that in the next thirty to fifty years this is a dynamic, we're preparing students of today who'll be living in that world, so we need to act with urgency. The current state of play is not sufficient for the task, so something has to change, and we need to make that change with a real sense of urgency. And, and we need to collaborate with each other in order to do that because standing alone we can't do it.

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You're asking if I had any regrets … Ok, so, what are my biggest regrets? Urm, let me just say that I think the people who work with you are extremely important. It's really important that you have good people. Urm, good people in terms of their character, in terms of their professional ability, and so on, right? Urrm, and their performance, and you know, there've been a number of situations where there've been people on my team that really shouldn't have been here, or should have been in different roles, and I hesitated … in taking tough actions that I needed to take, right?

Let me back up a bit and say that there's some situation, where somebody maybe is not performing so well, and that low performance may be because they're in the wrong position, right? They'd do great in another position. It could be that there's something going on with them personally, in their family, that's affecting their performance, urm, or they just don't really realise that their performance is low, right? And you just need to be very candid with them about what you want to see … giving them the direct feedback and giving them the time and also figuring out what they need to improve in terms of any extra training and so on. So that's fine.

But there are times when the, ur, the problem, is character, ok. And when the problem is character you should not delay. You should not, at least I feel, I've learned, I have had regret about people that I was trying to get them to change their posture, they're too egocentric, they, they don't listen … they end up leaving anyway. They become unbearable, naturally, and by the time they're leaving, a lot of damage has been caused [that], you have to fix—clean up, after all. So, that'll be the thing that I will do differently. Give direct feedback more quickly and take action more quickly without agonising … I shouldn't have sleepless nights over [this].

6

Key Emergent Themes

Our three exemplary leaders in higher education, through their stories, present several key elements of leadership that underpin their successes. Together, they suggest at least six main practices of transformational leadership that lead to effective results. They converge on these principles, in spite of the difference in their personalities and approaches to leadership. That is to say that, regardless of the debate on leadership, their effective transformational leadership results from the following six practices.

Developing and Sharing an Inspirational Vision

The informants noted the need for a clear vision and communicating this vision very well to stakeholders. These leaders know that without the support of others they could achieve nothing. Their primary role then was to craft a viable future for their institutions and 'sell' this vision to all stakeholders. According to Joshua, stakeholder ownership of the vision solves about 40 per cent of the leader's problems, as he is transformed into a 'tour guide' towards the vision. The destination is important, and people should see progress in this direction, along the way. It was for this reason that Stephen told his managers that he needed to transform GIMPA into a unique tertiary institution that served the employees and the nation. He gave the managers various rewards along the way to let them know their activities were yielding the expected positive results. He shared this vision with his managers through constant meetings and trying to help them see the future.

Patrick's vision was clear to his benefactors before he started Ashesi University. Current students and employees are also well informed about the vision and they are sanctioned when they deviate repeatedly from this path. Clarity of vision and

the effective mobilisation of the relevant stakeholders around it is essential for leadership success.

If the people you are leading do not share your vision, they will resist. Perhaps this was the reason why Joshua would work on specific individuals who seemed to oppose his vision. He embraced resistance as necessary for leadership success because it forced him to evaluate and re-evaluate his vision as he sought to present it in a manner that made sense to every stakeholder. In that sense, resistance to transformation—a natural aspect of human existence—should be viewed not as a challenge but as a form of energy that needs to be rechannelled into productive ventures. Thus, rather than engage in unncessary banter regarding policy, the leader should focus on educating resistors about the need for change and the future that such change will bring. Our exemplary leaders recognise that application of force for change does not always work. Stephen had constant meetings with his management team and interacted informally with many of the staff. This afforded him the opportunity to share his vision, softly. He noted, however, that in some areas where he was a bit too forceful, he would be less so if he had the opportunity to deal with those challenges again. Joshua and Patrick shared the same view, noting that moral suasion grounded in logical arguments and explanations yielded better results, even though force was necessary sometimes. All concurred that a clear vision, carefully articulated, softly, is fundamental to transforming higher education in Africa. Such transformational leadership will have a positive influence if there is an inspirational vision that motivates employees and to which they can align their efforts (Bass 1985).

Leaders are People who Need People

The enormity of the job as head of a university is such that no one person can do it alone. Translating any leader's vision into action depends on the people who work with him or her. Apart from aligning their own goals and vision with the leader, managers and other stakeholders should have the capacity to do what is expected of them. Consider Patrick's careful choice of staff and his current focus on research leadership. He supports staff recruitment and training in alignment with Ashesi's vision. Recognising his role as a guide, shepherding others through a minefield, Patrick emphasises the need for effective mine-sweepers. He lamented his difficulty in letting toxic people go too late, after they had contaminated the good people. Swift action to eliminate all toxic staff is necessary, and the transformational leader should have little difficulty doing this. Patrick also identified one major problem in African leadership – relinquishing authority to subordinates and allowing them

to make non-fatal mistakes. Leadership is about learning – learning from one's own mistakes and the mistakes of others. Lessons from one's own mistakes are likely to remain with us. That no leader is perfect calls for encouraging others on the leader's team to take full responsibility for specific issues and to experiment with new ideas. Responsibility increases with trust. This is an effective means of leadership and capacity development.

Joshua and Stephen demonstrate the careful investment that should go into talent identification and development. Both leaders noted the inadequacy of the staff when they took the helm at their universities, and the effective efforts to bring them to par with the required minimum standards. Joshua's creative way of arranging doctoral training for his faculty would later come back to haunt the school, but it was his way of ensuring that the staff was upgraded to meet national minimum requirements. Stephen's design of GIMPA's diaspora programme that brought talent from abroad was also innovative in addressing his immediate capacity challenges. For the medium term, he sought new full-time faculty and sent some of the existing ones to train abroad. Some of these sponsored staff would later come back and support progress towards Stephen's goals. Those who are thus sponsored develop a certain kind of loyalty and trust for the leadership and know that their individual welfare is of importance to the leader. This elicits a unique willingness to engage in activities that support the achievement of the articulated vision.

Transformational leaders recognise that they cannot do the job alone and thus mobilise effective support through recruitment and continual training. Joshua and Stephen lamented the lack of succession planning that caused things to decline since their departure from their universities. Both recognise effective succession planning as a necessary part of leadership in African universities, especially because a clearly defined mission that has been accepted by the institution should have some continuity. Of course, a new leader may employ different methods or may face different environmental changes that such continuity may be meaningless. Still, a clearly defined vision along with effective succession planning can contribute immensely to dealing with storms that emerge after the leader leaves the school. This is especially so because research shows that transformational leadership style is trainable, with the results of such training being quite substantial (Barling, Weber and Kelloway 1996).

Transformational leaders then expand the power and responsibilities of the people around them by identifying and training people for higher university management with the goal of making these people transformational leaders too. This is especially important because university leaders tend to emerge from

the faculty ranks and many have no formal training in management. African universities' need for skilled leadership calls for a conscious effort to develop talent, and transformational leadership should prioritise this.

Fair, Inclusive and Firm by Example [Idealised?]

Whether by design or accident, the leader is a role model for the people he or she leads (Waldman and Yammarino 1999). It is likely then that managers and other stakeholders will try to emulate some of the leader's actions. Stephen was in the trenches with his foot soldiers – cleaning the campus, eating and playing with them as needed. However, he was able to employ objectivity in his dealings with them on the job. The staff saw him as approachable but they revered him enough that they would not cross certain lines with him. They all understood that there was a job to be done and it had to be done, regardless of the relationship with the leader. Stephen would apply sanctions as fairly and firmly to all. Staff understanding of this expectation encouraged them to seek a separation between their professional and social lives, just like the leader did. Stephen knew he was being observed by the staff and other stakeholders, so he made sure not to cross certain lines in order to maintain his moral authority as leader. He needed to be principled, and he was.

While acknowledging his difficulty with firing people, Patrick demonstrated firmness andhumility, recognising the value of any member of his body corporate, even the seemingly lowest denominator, like a security guard. He walks around the campus like any other person, and is often in queues with staff and students for food at the cafeteria. He seeks always to be as ordinary as any other person on campus and makes no conscious attempt to place himself above any other. This utter respect for all, regardless of rank, inures well to the rank and file. Faculty staff and other relations on the Ashesi campus are informed by this leadership example, even if subtly. In spite of this closeness to the students and staff, his leadership responsibilities are not compromised. He still fires people as needed, even if with difficulty. That job must be done. The leader must be willing to take the bold decisions that are necessary for the benefit of the commons.

In each of these instances, the leaders motivated their staff to see the vision and aspire to touch the stars. They also made sure that the staff could identify with them but knew that a job had to be done towards the vision. By closely to them with the imaginary line of authority and responsibilities drawn, employees knew the clear boundaries within which to operate. As they are rewarded for their contributions to the common good of the university, they will seek to do more to

support the leader and the institutions. Each person in the organisation is deemed important and capable of becoming the leader in the future. Staff and students are well motivated to follow the example of the leader because she or he does not offer motivation in rhetoric only, but by action. The lesson here for future leaders is the need for humility and the recognition of each member of the institution as a vital point of success.

In the African university setting, leaders tend to set themselves apart as primus inter pares, building imaginary barriers that keep the rest of the institution away from them. Such an approach communicates distance and non-inclusion. While seeking to avoid this by existing close to all, leaders should be firm in making decisions towards the pursuit of the institution's mission, and they should be seen to be doing so. They should not be swayed by a populist agenda that could incarcerate the vision. Leading by example calls for letting stakeholders know that the leader is not above anyone else, and that when he or she asks a person to do something, it is not because she or he cannot do it, but that it is out of respect for and the betterment of the individual. Effective leadership therefore calls for leaders to be 'with the people' while being above them at the same time.

Distinctiveness

resources to entrench GIMPA's reputation as the leader is public administration education. On this success, he started training executives in the private sector. The Institute later became the preferred choice of many chief executives in the sub-region. Stephen's creative use of diasporan faculty to solve his staff problems gave him the added benefit of tapping into his target market's seeming for access to Western cultural capital. GIMPA had become different from existing universities by focusing on postgraduate and executive training, and by adopting several innnovative measures to address its challenges.

A similar observation can be made regarding Joshua and Patrick. Joshua lamented the state of facilities at UPSA before he assumed leadership. He needed innovative ways to improve quality and generate funds to support his vision, knowing that he would need to fill the infrastructure gap to attract students. This was because funds from the government were not forthcoming as required. He negotiated with third parties for concessions and engaged in a major infrastructural development exercise. Consider also his creative approach to improving his workforce by negotiating with a foreign university to enrol them in doctoral programmes. Indeed, it was a controversial move – as he noted in his interview – but it was a unique approach that no school in Ghana had

tried. Joshua also used his historical experience as a NUGS leader to motivate his students to apply for higher positions within the national body as a way of encouraging them to feel 'equal', if not superior, to other university students in the country. His way of motivating students to explore unique opportunities was grounded in his experience. The point is that he had a unique way of dealing with challenges that came his way as a leader, as the known ways would not work under the circumstances.

Patrick was clear on his vision for Ashesi University even before he started – it was to be a liberal arts school that trained students from a holistic perspective, and turned them into good citizens. Since the typical mode of learning in Ghana and many parts of Africa is rote memorisation, a holistic perspective might have struggled to sustain itself in the country. He endured the challenges and this uniqueness is still unmatched in Ghana and many parts of Africa. While embracing the American model of higher education, he has been able to customise it carefully to the needs of the local students and stakeholders. His 'brand', then, is one of complete excellence in every aspect of the student's life. This appeals to a particular kind of student. Patrick's distinctive approach relies on empowering others to support him in this venture. In the end, these leaders teach us that transformational leaders seek innovative ways to address challenges. They seek distinctiveness that may reinvent the wheel along the way. A good leader needs to pursue uniqueness and innovation to enhance the quality of African higher education. In essence, transformational leaders in higher education in Africa should seek to improve quality and set the school apart, focusing on its distinctive qualities.

Continual reflection and learning

Reflection has been found to be an essential aspect of effective leadership as it facilitateslearning and may help avoid the escalation of commitment to a course of action (Staw 1981). Our informants noted this and indicated how they often reflected on their job and the actions they had taken.

Through effective strategy design and implementation, a leader sets specific milestones and constantly monitors the results. Continual monitoring and reflection on actions taken allows them to make adjustments as needed. As per Winchert (2018) in the 23 July 2018 issue of *HR Magazine*, 'Reflection' is:

> a structured process aimed at increasing our insights and learning. It's about taking a step back to systematically review past events. To get the most value from our reflections we must ensure we move beyond the surface level of what happened.

Such reflection can be difficult for many African leaders, especially because the broader environment tends to venerate their leaders to the point of rendering them superhuman in every sense of the word. Thus, the leader is expected to be all knowing and the situation can sometimes make it difficult for the leader to admit vulnerabilities (Lin, Scott and Matta 2019). Ita was, therefore, interesting to hear the informants acknowledge their weaknesses and reflect on how they would have done certain things differently, if the opportunity presented itself. A process of reflection can encourage leaders to think through their actions and consider opportunities for adjustments. The process of reflection includes an analysis of the situation and making sense of it to inform future actions.

Having gone through a process of reflection, the leader is better able to situate any action in the broader context of the university's operations. She or he is then able to reframe challenges, correct earlier errors and take calculated risks for the betterment of the institution. It is in this context that the leader can be innovative. Good reflections should lead to better decisions and performance outcomes (Li, Scott and Matta 2019). African higher education leadership should adopt reflection as a routine part of their activities for the simple reason that it allows for an honest and careful evaluation of one's actions that can lead to corrections as needed. Our informants alluded to this process and indicated that they would sometimes invite others to offer input into their reflections. Stephen, for instance, noted how he would share some of his thoughts with his managers for feedback. Here, he had the benefit of reflection and the opportunity to include his management team in the search for a solution. He was able to build solidarity as well as empower his team to be bold enough to overcome the social expectation of the indefatigability of leaders.

7

Concluding Remarks

African higher education faces several challenges, including those around leadership. This project was intended to identify some transformational leaders and harness their experiences for the purposes of outlining some lessons that current leaders in African higher education can learn. Our observations suggest at least five lessons. University leadership in Africa must:

1. Develop and share inspirational visions with their colleagues and support staff;
2. Recognise the value of others and empower them to do a good job now and in the future;
3. Be fair, firm and inclusive;
4. Seek distinctiveness;
5. Continuously reflect on actions, and adjust as needed.

All in all, the university top leadership must focus on strategic rather than operational issues. In this sense, the leaders must seek to create the best conditions to achieve targets and lead others to perform the day-to-day tasks required for such performance output.

Leaders considering these lessons are bound to make an impact on African higher education. It would seem that learning these lessons is our responsibility as leaders in African higher education. It was in relation to this point that Aina (2010) observed:

> The time has come for leaders and stakeholders in African nations to collectively and autonomously own their universities and the higher education sector, and to make them work in their national interests and for the benefit of their countries and their peoples in inclusive and democratic ways. No outsider can do this for African countries; no donors can do this for them either. African governments, businesses, and interest groups must determine whether they genuinely need

> universities and higher education institutions that express excellence and equity, and they must mobilise the necessary resources needed for such a transformation.It is my belief that transformation is possible. It is real and achievable. But it requires that we engage in an analysis of how enduring change happens…

We subscribe to this view that we can do it ourselves and that it is possible. African university leadership needs to abandon the dependency syndrome that characterises our current approaches and consider looking to ourselves for solutions to our leadership challenges. Strengthening leadership development and effectiveness in the African higher education sector calls for collaboration among our institutions across the continent. Well-managed leadership development initiatives can create significant local resources that can serve to create a strong human resource base for transformational leadership. Institutions across Africa ten to see themselves as competitors and not as potential collaborators for the good of the commonwealth of Africa. Efforts should be made to support each other in learning the lessons derived from this study. With such an effort, the future is bright for leadership in African higher education.

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CODESRIA Working Paper Series

Lessons from three Transformational Leaders in Ghana's Higher Education

Unlike universities around the world, many African universities do not routinely overhaul their structures and processes in connection with their changing environments. Challenges of education in general in sub-Saharan Africa include inadequate financial resources, together with unprecedented demand for access, the legacy of colonialism and socioeconomic crises. In an attempt to fill the lacuna, the concept of transformational leadership is adopted as an organising framework to explore how successful African higher education leaders initiate and monitor innovative processes to address the challenges in African tertiary education. There is the need to understand the isolated cases of successful leadership in African higher education in order to understand the practice of successful transformational leadership and related lessons to strengthen African universities. Focusing on Ghana, three leaders of tertiary institutions who have excelled in pulling their universities up from humble beginnings into global renown are interviewed. Running a university in times of national or regional crisis cannot be easy, but each of these leaders persevered and excelled in making great strides towards improving their institutions. Their stories afford us the opportunity to establish broad linkages and draw conclusions that can inform policy towards enhancing higher education in Africa.

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