



The UKZN Griot. Of New Math and Transformation

BY:

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Bunk Carter's Law states: 'At any given time there are more important people in the world than important jobs to contain them.' Just think, when last did you see your Dean? When last did you talk to any Dean? Bureaucracies expand constantly and work expands to fill the time available. Rarely now do Deans lead their Schools from the front, from the bottom-up, working with and through their constituencies located in the academic trenches. They're too busy generating data for Very Important People (VIPs) doing Very Important Jobs (VIJs) who drive Very Posh Cars (VPCs) and who occupy Very Remote Offices (VROs). Carter's Law comes into play when expanding bureaucracies mutate academics into managers who are rarely visible anymore except at statutory meetings.

But academics do consider Deans to be doing VIJs even as they whiz about in their VPCs and isolate themselves in their VROs. The problem is that with the neo-liberal inversion of "transformed" responsibility they are no longer in the trenches with academics, students, tear gas and classrooms. They are caught in a top-down glare that locates them as glaze-eyed flack catchers (G-EFCs) who are solely responsible to top management (the VIPs). Deans, in their own ways, like the rest of us, spend their long and frustrating days putting out fires. Problem is, the fire extinguishers don't work anymore.

Neither does the math. As one correspondent lamented, 'This new transformation math has me baffled. What cost-benefit analysis was done? Where are the axioms, and the rules of deduction?' Sherlock Holmes, where are you other than on TV? "Elementary" was not a term Holmes ever uttered, but little is elementary, or elegantly simple anymore. Thanks to the "V" condition identified above South African policy makers always devise the most complicated ways of solving simple problems.

Across the country, university enrolments are up, to the point of classes now being partly populated with functional illiterates. But the budgets are down. Security and cleaning staff get cut, fewer outsourced workers work fewer hours on less pay while exhausted and bewildered academics are working much longer hours, increasingly with reduced benefits. Who takes responsibility for

ensuring operational efficiency anymore? Performance Management (PM) theory assumes a stable and functioning environment. PM indicators are unable to discount chaos, confusion and operational meltdown, which daily characterises the conditions of those working in the trenches in so many institutions across the country.

In the New Transformation Math '1+1 = 3'. How do we find the logic in this addition? As someone mentioned on trying to make sense of transformation math: 'I think I'll return to something I understand such as trying to fit a square peg into a round hole.'

Now, I really don't think that this wag understands the notion of synergetic geometry. So let me kindly elucidate. Anyone who knows anything about synergy knows that 1 + 1 can indeed equal 3. This is how it works:

One circle plus another circle partially overlaid on each other results in three forms, even if the middle circle is less circular. See, 1+1 = 3. Or, one and one means: 11. This is known as exponential synergy.

So, if you have not seen your G-EFC recently ('cos s/he is always in meetings, anxiously tracking enrolment graphs, trying to make sense of targets, or being (ad)dressed down or up by top management, avoiding contact, exhausted, driving between centres, at planning retreats, or trying to comprehend transformation math, etc.), we should apply synergetic principles.

If we can synergise two Deans into three, then maybe we academics can claim the third Dean to work with us in the trenches. Then, we can apply the same principles and apply the New Math (or exponential synergy) to manufacture the necessary budgets to pay them. It's all funny money anyway. There is always a solution to any problem. Problem is, I am not sure about the medical ethics of cloning by synergy.

No-matter, synergy's the way to go. But for good measure we should engage the services of mathematician/comedian/pianist/singer Tom Lehrer's *New Math*, where he says: 'the important thing is not to get the answer right but to understand what one is doing!' (See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIKGV2cTgqA>).

When we all understand what we are doing with transformation (i.e. new) math we will also know where all the money that was sloshing about in 2012 went, that is, why was there so little around in 2013 and even less during 2014. As someone explained, and listen for the Lehrer-type piano rhythm, the 2013 budget, calculated by something called a RAM model, is based on 2011 data. The year 2012 is skipped, it got lost in transformation. But where did RAM2012 go? Good old Tom explains: 'Addition is commutative,' which is a logical mathematical operation that combines two objects at a time. So, if one plus one equals three, (i.e. years 2011+2013 = budget reduction) then the answer, if I understand what I am doing, is that less funding (because we had more in 2012) results in greater synergies – we do more with less because less is more. This is the New Math. Go figure.

The budgetary losses incurred in the flushness of 2012 are like losing a bit of DNA. This is known as transubstantiation, not to be confused with transformation. If we put two "trans's" together, we can start a department (oops, I mean 'programme') in Cloning. However, setting up a programme in Cloning will take a lot of time what with QPA assessments, SAQA registration, SGB/NQF/DNA assessment criteria, couriering documents to Pretoria, budgeting for the programme (applying

transformation math), and just finding an office to house it. My suggestion: employ one of those driver's licence counterfeiters who hang out outside testing centres to forge SAQA approval. That will be instantaneous and much cheaper.

My goodness, my story has lost sight of Deans. They're still lost in making sense of transformation/transubstantiation/translation math in the V environment. The answer is simple. In a study of over 100 Deans, John Randolph Willis observed that doubling of vacation periods enables Deans to work with maximum efficiency. If this is not possible, Father Damian Fandel, Dean at Dallas, formulated two rules for effective administration: a) Rule 1 – Hide!!!. Rule 2 – If they find you, lie!!!

* Keyan G Tomaselli has never been a Dean. So he does not have to hide or lie or do New Math, confusing as it is.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this column are the author's own.