Adapting kgotla to internal quality assurance:
Moving from compliance to collaborative enhancement

Professor Kirti Menon, University of Johannesburg
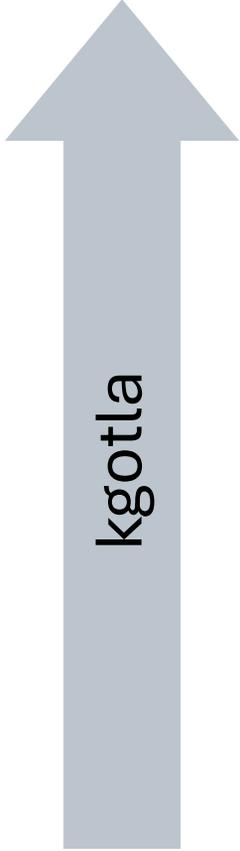Dr Gloria Castrillón, University of Johannesburg

What is kgotla?

Tshekedi Khama (right, on chair) and Seretse Khama (standing) in Kgotla, Botswana, 1949

- Model of participatory governance
- Premised on ubuntu – a person is a person because of other people.
- Dialogic, inclusive, and developmental emphasis on shared responsibility and collective ownership
- Restitutive

Botswana
Kingdom of Lesotho
Eswatini (Swaziland)
South Africa

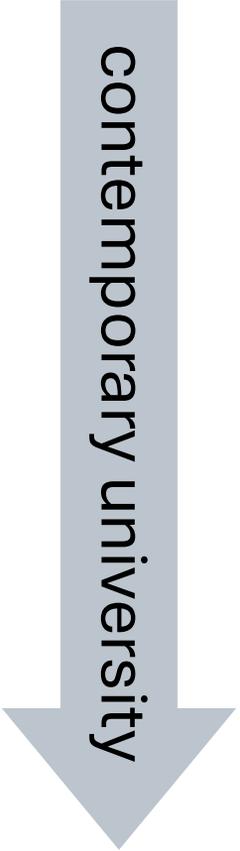kgotla

'Everyone has the right to voice their opinion'

'A chief is a chief by the grace of the people'

Setswana sayings

Market-oriented practices, commodification of education, focus on managerial efficiency

"corporate colonisation recalibrates the purposes of a university towards the needs of the industrialised state and its neoliberal benefactors"

(Hlatshwayo 2022: 4)

contemporary university

Paradoxes and problems

- Compliance versus substantive review

- Reluctance versus participatory, inclusive dialogue

- Authoritarian versus process premised on trust, everyone speaks

- Managerialism versus wisdom in decision-making based on the values and principles of the collective's responsibility (horizontal power relations)

- Abandoning accountability versus academic ownership and authority

Mini-kgotla: In groups of 2 / 3:

- In one word, how do academics at your institution typically describe programme review processes?
- What percentage of your programme review documentation is read meaningfully vs. filed? (0-100%)
- What primarily drives quality conversations at your institution?
- On a scale of 1-10, how much do academics trust your internal QA processes?

Task

You're about to encounter three real attempts to implement this philosophy in very different institutional contexts

Each institution faced specific challenges:

- regulatory frameworks
- institutional hierarchies
- resource limitations

Your task is not to admire these cases ☺ but to wrestle with their tensions and generate potential solutions

On a post-it

Using the "Kgotla Principles Quick Reference" card, write down:

- One kgotla principle I will experiment with in the next 3 months

- One conversation I will initiate at my institution

- One resource/connection I need to do this work

Turn to the person next to you and share what you wrote with each other.

Community take-aways

01 Today has seen kgotla in action - collective problem-solving across differences

02 Kgotla work may be slow, difficult, often frustrating but it's important for alignment and commitment to decisions

03 The alternative that quality assurance mechanisms erode the academic project is intolerable

04 We are all each other's resources - exchange contacts, stay in conversation

References

Hlatshwayo, M.N., 2022. The rise of the neoliberal university in South Africa: Some implications for curriculum imagination(s). *Education as Change*, *26*(1), pp.1-21.