



# A year of change, challenge, and achievement

## Prof Fulu Netswera sets off on a new path at Durban University of Technology

In January 2020, Prof Fulu Netswera left the North-West University (NWU) Business School, and took up a new role, as an executive dean of the Faculty of Management Sciences at Durban University of Technology (DUT). In a new city, and in what is arguably one of the strangest years in living memory brought about by coronavirus (COVID-19), Netswera is tasked with establishing a new business school for the DUT within his faculty and make it operational by 2021.



Some history to this project, he explains: “Our MBA Programme is already accredited by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). We have thus far commissioned the development of the various MBA modules and have mobilised expertise from across the continent and beyond in order to make sure that our students are exposed to a business curriculum that is internationalised. We are currently working on finalising logistics associated with branding and marketing plans, among others.”

“It’s a challenge, yes, but a fascinating one, an opportunity to create something new and fresh. The physical infrastructure will, likely, be situated in north of the city, closer to King Shaka International Airport and not far from Durban’s most buzzing business hub – Umhlanga.”

## Achievement is not always accidental

The lay of the business education topography may be changing rapidly, but luckily Netswera has already proven that he is adept at navigating the unknown. He is also a man with a wide range of interests and experiences. How would he characterise his career to date? In a word, “Exciting.”

“I am personally excited about how my entire career has unfolded. It’s difficult to say whether or not it was planned this way. A lot of things seem to have just happened somehow. **Opportunities do come to meet coincidences at times in a fascinating way** – the readiness to adapt and reach at times ultimately determines the path.”

That’s a very humble way to describe it though.

Netswera grew up in Limpopo, “...at my royal family of Tswera, hence Netswera as my family name”, he says. In Venda he completed his basic and secondary education, before earning his first degree from the University of Venda. Thereafter he added senior degrees culminating with his doctoral qualification at the Universities of the Western Cape and

Stellenbosch. Thereafter he entered an international emerging leadership fellows programme at the City University in New York where he sunk his teeth into philanthropy.

**“My career has mainly been of full-time research and research management,”** he says. Over the years he’s chalked up time at the Institute for Democracy (IDASA), the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the National Research Foundation, and the South African BRICS Think Tank. He’s

also put in the time at UNISA, the Cape Peninsular University of Technology, University of Limpopo, and Tshwane University of Technology, before NWU and DUT.

**“In my career I’ve had to draw inspiration from very successful academics in South Africa.** Johann Mouton, at Stellenbosch University, was my masters supervisor and he is somebody who has inspired me quite tremendously.



## African solutions

These days he also gives his time in many other ways, supervising and mentoring postgraduate students and young academics, as well as serving on various boards. He is currently co-vice chair on the South African Business Schools Association (SABSA) board of directors.

In this capacity, he and the board are part of a vital leadership function in a body that advocates for the sector, academics and students, as well as helping to strengthen ties between business schools and business practice in South Africa.

Additionally, he believes it is critical that we build up a body of local and regional business case studies. “Almost 90% of the case studies that we read and engage with are European and American. This looks as if nothing is happening in Africa, but we have very interesting challenges and innovative solutions to our problems that we need to start sharing with the world.”

## Where next?



Netswera sees his future in academia, “maybe even running my own university”. It would be, he says, so satisfying to support a university in becoming a highly research-intensive institution, getting international rankings, and “shaping their direction to become one of the top universities in the world”.

This is firmly in line with his optimistic nature: “I really don’t

have regrets with my career. I’ve had a lot of fun. I wouldn’t change anything if I was to start afresh. I’ve travelled the world, met people and made great friendships. I’ve got a network that stretches from Canada to China and from Finland to Cape Town. Only the academic sector can give you such a wonderful life experience.”

## Quick-fire questions

**Q. What are you reading at the moment?**

**A.** I recently finished *The Secret Society: Cecil John Rhodes’s Plan for a New World Order* by Robin Brown. Also, *Gangster State: Unravelling Ace Magashule’s Web of Capture* by Pieter-Louis Myburgh. I love biographies and political history books.

**Q. What book has had the greatest impact on you?**

**A.** The autobiography of Hugh Masekela, *Still Grazing*. Not only did I enjoy it, but it made me resonate with his music.

**Q. Who is your personal hero?**

**A.** I don’t think I’ve got heroes anymore.

*Unfortunately, they faded away over the last few years. Reading and exposure has shown how fallible we all are and that there is no single person that one can make a hero. I pick and choose from great personalities.*

**Q. Where will I find you on a typical Saturday morning?**

**A.** *Watching my son play soccer, jogging by the beach or sitting in front of my computer writing. I am a devout writer of our people’s histories these days. Who knows, maybe in a few months you might find me at the golf course. I used to be a great caddie at JCC during my youth and golf is in my blood.*

# Life in a time of corona



and we have suffered the death of one staff member and one student, despite all the measures. We can never know if their exposure happened on or off campus,” Netswera explains.

Ironically, or perhaps fittingly, education institutions have been grappling with how to facilitate remote learning for a while. This has been an even bigger concern for business schools because this category of students is generally working and studying at the same time, and finding time for on-campus studies has always been a challenge. Moving to online learning platforms is something that Netswera has been keen to implement for a while. At the NWU Business School, for example, they moved online with the Postgraduate Diploma in 2019 with huge success.

On top of the complexities of establishing a new programme and a new school, Netswera and his peers – like all of us around the world – are grappling with the ‘new normal’ that the coronavirus pandemic has ushered in.

“Our university like all others is fully impacted by Covid-19,” he says. “Since 17 March everyone has been off

campus, both students and staff alike. This has forced us to move swiftly towards adopting online and multimodal learning methods which otherwise could have taken much longer to adopt. We currently teach our students using platforms like Moodle, WhatsApp, emailed slides and voice-overs.”

“We have a staggered

path back to reopening face-to-face tuition which kicked off in June with the advanced diploma, BTech, and postgraduate students who have returned to campus. We do this under strict safety protocols in order to ensure that our students and staff are not exposed unnecessarily to Covid-19. To date, we have had a total of 107 covid-19 infections (57 students and 50 staff)

“Our students are generally people who work, managers in their various organisations. We know that they can access material online. They can also be subscribed to online libraries and therefore able to do their assignments and assessments online,” he adds.