

Ana Martins



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Acting dean and head of the Graduate School of Business and Leadership (GSB&L) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

PROF ANA MARTINS is the acting dean and head of the Graduate School of Business and Leadership at UKZN, which she believes is the current highlight of her professional career.

Martins' professional journey has encompassed a mosaic of experiences. She has been fortunate to have worked for over two decades in higher education institutions located in a range of countries with diverse cultures across the globalised world.

Her academic career has followed a traditional model where she started on the career ladder as a part-time tutor, moving to junior lecturer, senior lecturer and associate professor with a multiple collection of roles, ranging from lecturer, researcher, personal tutor, to academic leader.

In order to handle change and deal with expectations, Martins regards constant personal development, as a must. This is particularly relevant to keep up with the latest trends in her field of speciality in order to achieve success.

"I embrace the motto of lifelong learning wholeheartedly in order to keep abreast with the changes that are constantly evident in the academia and industry. Moreover, I have my unique skill set, which is embraced by my interests and values," Martins explains.

Her strengths encompass a strong work ethic, being enthusiastic, persistent and conscientious and being open to experience. "I'm very organised and pay attention to detail as well as being reflexive. I focus on encouraging harmony and work to achieve the common good of all."

In addition, she explains that it is important to know the purpose of the organisation in order to stay focused on its values and roots.

Martins has a strong focus on humanising leadership, which is centred on both people and values. She believes that emotional awareness contributes to agile leadership principles and competencies.

"I focus on doing away with the disconnect that

prevails in business schools wherein leaders are detached from their fellow academics and students, perpetrating a defensive dehumanising commercial focused mindset."

"Moreover, learning as becoming relies on nurturing a leadership style wherein colleagues and students endeavour to ask and answer existential questions; namely, 'Who am I?', 'What do I care about?', 'What does success look like?' as well as 'What does it take to lead well?'"

By keeping the human touch and embracing a student-centric approach, such conversations provide a valuable tone on the standpoint of the organisation. In addition, Martins holds to the necessity to innovate in ways that meet the changing needs of students.

Some challenges that Martins has experienced in the past and which have provided her with a rich learning curve, include (un)conscious bias; lack of support and cooperation; lack of organisational and flexibility and mindfulness; lack of encouragement to take the first step on embarking on journey towards a senior management role.

With this learning, Martins has experienced growth in that she has had to learn how to define success and has experimented with her career by taking several risks.

"I am appreciative of the authentic vision for inclusion and diversity in the workplace which has played a fundamental unbiased role in reaching the current position I hold," Martins explains.

The uncertainties associated with the academic career have arisen due to the paradigm shift from elite to mass higher education. This shift is evident in the perception of academic careers which have moved from the ladder to more recent academic career maps, wherein transdisciplinary themes dominate, allowing one's area of expertise to be supported by a range of subject areas.

In the future, Martins would like to write a book narrating how the various countries she has lived in have shaped her experiences on learning and teaching.

In her free time, Martins is a musicophile and cinephile. "I'm passionate about cooking and sumptuous baking, and I try my hand in painting thus indulging my creativity."