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### KNOWLEDGE, CULTURE & CHANGE MANAGEMENT

# Balancing Academic Advancement with Business Effectiveness?

The Dual Role for Senior University Leaders

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*Abstract: Competing pressures have served to make universities increasingly complex organisations. Universities worldwide have been required to rely less on a "knowledge for knowledge's sake" ethos to embrace a more "applied" or "user led" focus in an environment of mass education, decreased government funding and greater reliance upon collaboration with industry for funding of research and development. Concomitantly increasing administrative reporting and accreditation requirements see universities globally caught between the worlds of "Academe" and "business". The question is how do universities build and maintain academic rigour while managing increasing internal and external accountabilities? How will the institution span its different "worlds" in the "unknown future" of the 21st century? Moreover, how are prepared are universities and education/knowledge organisations for the unprecedented age-related attrition which might be anticipated over the next five to ten years? This paper reviews literature and some evidence from the practice relating to management and leadership in university and knowledge environments. It scans external factors which might influence succession planning in leadership at a time when building leadership strength and safeguarding knowledge appears to be vital. The paper notes researched trends from data on perceptions of the practice of leading and managing in university and education/knowledge organisations and suggests some ways to harness organisational complexity positively to plan for a buoyant future.*

Keywords: Universities, Academic, Succession Leadership, Feedback

## Background

OVER THE PAST decade, the effects of globalisation, wider access to higher education and increased diversity in sources of knowledge have dramatically changed the landscape of tertiary education. Ramsden (1998) writes, "Universities face an almost certain future of relentless variation in a more austere climate. Change in the environment – mass higher education, knowledge growth, reduced public funding, increased emphasis on employment skills, pressure for more accountability have been reflected in fundamental internal changes" (p. 347). Serving new and different markets, universities are seeing the lens of scrutiny turning on themselves. Greater interest of government and the public in the way universities operate has seen the "spread of audit culture into every nook and cranny of academic life" (Cohen, 2004) as government attempts to "steer the university into positive… engagement with its wider economic environment" (p. 9). As Ramsden (1998) notes: "The immense cost of mass higher education means that those who pay the piper – …mainly the taxpayers… - will want to call the tune", while academics are "under daily monitoring from very public and often critical audiences" (p.349).

At the same time, given the centrality of knowledge to contemporary economy, universities have perhaps an under-acknowledged role to preserve and extend knowledge and to contribute to the application of knowledge at the intersecting borders of their specialist domains. They are called upon to embrace new themes of vocational alignment, to partner in an environment less able to fund replication, and to innovate continuously in order to "do more with less". This paper examines the literature and practice in response to the research question: "What might be some of the strategic challenges at the "transpersonal" (organisational development) level for contemporary universities pursuing effective leadership and management?"

The prefix "trans" meaning "across" or "beyond", the term "trans*personal"* reflects the inevitable "people" factor inherent in the way in which organisations operate *across* their various units and *beyond* to the outside world. The paper draws from literature and practice and suggests from the analysis some implications for universities preparing themselves and their leaders for success in increasingly complex leadership roles.

## Balancing Academic Leadership and Business Efficiency

Universities today are vulnerable to risk and require a similar suite of governance and risk management strategies to those of their corporate neighbours. Typically, today's vice-chancellor or university president is answerable for performance quality to

the university senate or council which in turn has stringent responsibilities under legislation for governance. In the Australian setting, Coaldrake and Stedman (1998) noted some six years ago: "Universities are exposed to risk to the extent that they wish to expand their activities into..commercial fields, yet remain bound by practices that inhibit their flexibility" (pp. 56, 57). The Australian Federal Government, for example, expects that universities demonstrate "more focus on matters of output, accreditation and quality assessment", with the result that universities generally have "moved from a position dominated by features of the collegium and bureaucracy to one closer to the corporation or enterprise" (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999, pp. 53, 12). Cohen (2004) agrees that "post-modernism changed universities forever – from quasi-autonomous institutions of learning to fully fledged consumer enterprises" (p. 9). Meek and Wood (1997) note that "Questions of efficiency and effectiveness are prominent on higher education reform agendas everywhere along with the additional imperatives that the higher education sector be more relevant to national economic and social priorities" (p. 3). The shift spawns vastly increased accountability processes for conduct of all facets of university work. Hence, the ability to adapt and change emerges as a key capability in university leadership.

Balancing the demands of constantly increasing administrative and reporting requirements with advancement of scholarship and knowledge, universities are caught between the two worlds of "academe" and "business". The remit for the university to maintain scholarship and operate as a successful corporation, presenting new challenges for university leadership, is noted by Hanna (2003) who claims that "higher education institutions must change – and, indeed, are changing – to meet future needs", and that they will need to address a number of strategic challenges as they "transform themselves to meet the demands of an increasingly complex and dynamic environment" (p. 26). As the clear bell of the ivory tower recedes, for some, to the sound of an unfamiliar cacophony of competing interests, the new milieu presents both a challenge and exciting opportunities. Amidst these challenges are ensuring a ready workforce for more changes ahead; one

which blends the best of longer standing experience and corporate knowledge retention with new and young "blood" as a vigorous and complementary organisational life force.

Jacobzone, Cambois, Chaplain and Robine (1998) note that Australia, for example, has one of the world's most rapidly ageing populations and in the next 50 years about a quarter of the country's population will be aged 65 and over. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) predicts that within the next ten years the population aged over 65 years will be growing at an annual rate of 4 per cent, considerably faster than the total population growth. It is anticipated that by 2021 over 20 per cent of the population will be older than 65 years. Hence, it is timely to re-think strategic organisational development issues to prepare and reinvigorate the workforce adequately for the increasingly complex academic leadership role. What are the dimensions of contemporary academic leadership challenges in typical academic leadership roles in order to steer development appropriately?

## Development Needs Informed by Research and Practice

Research was carried out in the university sector in Australia in the late 1990s to identify the key issues in leading and managing in the tertiary education context. The research, conducted at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Australia, led to the development of an item set and a 360 degree survey instrument tailored to leading and managing in university and other key knowledge organisations. The instrument, known as the Quality Leadership Profile (QLP), was refined and developed into accessible on-line form in 2000. The QLP factor structure (Drew and Kerr, 2003) identified four areas: staff motivation and involvement, operational and strategic management, client focus and community outreach, and (for relevant senior academic positions) academic leadership (Figure 1).

The QLP has been used since 2000 by a growing number of universities and key knowledge organisations predominantly in Australia, and in New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

**Figure 1: QLP Factors**

| Quality Leadership Profile (QLP) | |
|---|---|
| QLP areas comprising factor clusters | |
| QLP Area | QLP Factor |
| Staff Motivation and Involvement | Staff Development |
| | Consultative Management |
| | Building a Team Environment |
| Strategic & Operational Management | Implementing Systems and Pocesses |
| | Making Decisions |
| | Managing Change and Innovation |
| Client Service and Community | Demonstrating a Client Focus |
| | Demonstrating a Community Focus |
| Academic Leadership | Academic Leadership |

## Implications of the Complex Environment for University Academic Leaders

Enquiry into the governance, structure and management of higher education institutions across the globe has stimulated change to the legislative and policy frameworks within which universities operate. Academic staff, upon winning senior leadership roles in universities, typically on the basis of their academic achievements, may or may not be well prepared for undertaking the diverse responsibilities of the head of school/academic department role. Moreover, if the highly experienced academic spends less and less time on his/her scholarly work and more on administration and managing, the organisation stands to lose in ways that are rarely examined. The capabilities required successfully to inspire excellence, secure funding resources, handle people issues, communicate and consult appropriately, manage budgets, undertake strategic planning, navigate change with staff and to support staff in performance development are formidable. Paul Ramsden (1998, p. 16) observes, "if academic staff are stressed by the imposition of external demands for accountability and performance, they had better get used to it as quickly as possible" (Coaldrake & Stedman 1999, p. 10). Falling to an overly litigious, overly bureaucratic culture in order to manage accountability requirements, however, is unlikely to serve organisational culture well. It is said that an overly instrumental pattern of management which fails to recognise the contribution of employees "cripples the workers by disabling them" (Kanungo, 1992, p. 415). A number of commentators propound a leadership style that commits to personal learning amidst complexity, and which enables and empowers others.

Marshall, Adams, Cameron and Sullivan (2000) discuss the complexities of the blended role of academic leadership and the critical "people" and "systems" dimensions of managing human resource and administrative functions. They note that these functions typically did not form part of the experience of the academic leader. Ramsden (1998) suggests that heads of academic departments are expected to be "all-rounders who combine aspects of management and leadership in relation to both *people* and *tasks*", and that "at the heart of the combination is the leader's own capacity to learn" (pp. 365-7). Ramsden believes that providing supportive development for those in senior academic leadership roles is vital and that these challenges "have important implications for the training of future generations of academic managers at every level" (p. 367).

Barnett (2004) notes the inter-relating, contradictory and unforeseeable impacts of complexity upon the world and hence universities and their leaders. Barnett captures the leader's plight characterised by "competing claims on one's attention, and an overload of entities" where any effort to satisfy one set of claims "may lead to indeterminable effects elsewhere", leading to real stress (p. 249). The review of issues affecting organisational leadership development in university and key knowledge organisation settings suggests a series of action strategies at "transpersonal" level. The following is proposed: Aligning formal and informal systems with defined values and goals; Streamlining strategically coherent systems and processes; Building client-focused alliances for strong internal and external partnerships; and Developing senior leaders in synergy with desired organisational culture and goals.

## Aligning Formal and Informal Systems with Defined Values and Goals

Hanna (2003) notes that people and nations are relying on colleges and universities to help shape a positive future; and suggests that "to capture the advantage of this..central focus and role, higher education institutions will need to transform their structures, missions, processes, and programs in order to be both more flexible and more responsive to changing societal needs" (p. 25). Integrating identified organisational strategic goals within the organisation is a significant challenge for universities seeking to match "action" with the ambitions of their strategic plans. In an environment which values academic freedom and critical thinking, strategic synergy will not happen by "demanding greater output and imposing unilateral inspection and control on its staff" (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999, p. 13). However, "on the other hand, it is wishful thinking to expect that some invisible hand will guide the path of individual academics into a strategic direction, or that effective change can only come about by academic introspection and reflection" (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999, p. 13). In other words, an organisational culture of mutual respect and ethical conduct is something to be created and nurtured. It is not put in place by establishing a code of conduct and informing organisational members of its existence. The question is, how is alignment achieved so that "action matches the rhetoric" in organisations?

It might be agreed that culture will be created either purposely by consciously embedding desired practices at all levels, or it will occur in haphazard, capricious fashion based on behaviours which are experienced within the organisation. Dunphy and Stace (1995) suggest that culture consists of "values and artefacts that together express and reinforce a unity of spirit forged through those who share a community of fate" (p. 187). Behaviours that are modelled "from the top" profoundly impact organisational culture. Jordan (1999) offers that surrounding people with the right resources and mobilising talent and passion are critical, but it is the quality of the relationships between people as individuals interact over the various systems and processes of the organisation that are the most telling. An equipped and strategically connected staffing body is vital to a healthy "shadow" system marked by open communication and trust.

The importance of achieving coherent, well-understood values and goals for organisations is emphasised by Pratt, Margaritis and Coy (1999), Parcell and Bligh (2000), Carless (2001), Sauer (2002) and Drew and Bensley (2001). Further to seeking to embed desired behaviours within the organisation, this entails ensuring that the systems of the organisation align with and support organisational goals. For example, if the strategic intent of the university is to value partnering, the systems associated with funding distribution should work towards rather than against cross-faculty collaboration. If it is of strategic importance to the organisation to be able to appoint an outstanding person quickly, the organisation's systems should accommodate flexible recruitment strategies. Pratt, Margaritis and Coy (1999) note: "Management may have one view of the 'required' values but these may or may not happen in practice. Management's behaviour may, in fact, reinforce an entirely different set of beliefs from those they would wish to promote" (p. 46). A buoyant alignment matrix of appropriate governance and structure – in short, being business-like - has perhaps never been more essential for universities than in the current tertiary education environment. Moreover, in the university environment characterised globally as time-poor (Kinman, 1998, Sapstead, 2004), "doing more with less" entails overhauling university systems, top-down, to ensure that processes are relevant and streamlined.

## Streamlining Strategically Coherent Systems and Processes

As Goethe once said, we should not sacrifice what matters most for what matters least. Research of Nohria, Joyce and Roberson (2003) into 200 companies found that it mattered little whether the organisation centralised or decentralised its business, as long as organisations paid attention to simplifying the way in which the business was structured and carried out its work (Nohria et al., 2003, p. 43). The research of Nohria et al. found that the key to achieving excellence for organisations…is "to be clear about what your strategy is and (to be) consistently communicating it" (pp. 45, 46). This suggests the value of identifying and communicating the "big picture" objectives and then devising efficient systems to achieve those objectives rather than allowing available technology, a historical structure or embedded practice to drive organisational activity. It behoves organisations, then, to align their systems with their strategic values and goals, and secondly to refine and streamline organisational processes so that each element of a process can be defended as adding value.

In an increasingly time-poor environment with ever expanding workloads reported in universities, inefficient systems cause frustration and potentially a divide between the organisation's executive and the faculties and divisions. Academic leaders focused predominantly on pursuing scholarly work resent administrative processes which appear inefficient

and repetitious; for example, calling for data for various kinds of reporting requirements in multiple forms. Listening to those responsible for particular services may yield valuable input to system improvement while fostering an inclusive, respectful culture. As Wick and Leon (1993) offer, a combination of strategic coherence and procedural efficiency works best when "learning permeates the processes used throughout the organization" (p. 126). As systems and processes, goals and ambitions are abstractions aside from the involvement of people, developing effective people leadership is the essential ingredient in supporting strategic and operational activity in organisations. Fostering a culture of feedback - listening to colleagues, clients and stakeholders – is vital to organisations dealing in knowledge and services.

Drew and Kerr (2003) note aggregate data of the Quality Leadership Profile (QLP) derived from the mean scores of self, staff, peer and supervisor respondents for academic managers undertaking the 360 degree feedback survey at one Australian university since 2000. This data, reflected also in national averages on the same factors, found that QLP Factors under the Area, "Staff Motivation and Involvement", which relate most to the quality of interactions between people, register higher development needs and yield slightly lower scores nationally than factors under the other areas, being "Strategic and Operational Management", "Client Service and Community Outreach" and "Academic Leadership"

At 2003 the following data reflects national average scores (Drew & Kerr 2003) (Figure 2 below):

### Quality Leadership Profile Aggregate Figures

**Figure 2: QLP Aggregate Figures at 2003**

| Quality Leadership Profile (QLP) Aggregate Figures for Academic Managers | |
|---|---|
| **QLP Factor** | **Institution Average 2003** |
| Staff Development | 3.47 |
| Consultative Management | 3.65 |
| Building a Team Environment | 3.54 |
| Implementing Systems and Processes | 3.76 |
| Making Decisions | 3.89 |
| Managing Change and Innovation | 3.82 |
| Demonstrating a Client Focus | 3.84 |
| Demonstrating a Community Focus | 4.18 |
| Academic Leadership | 3.91 |

It is noteworthy that for academic managers undertaking the QLP survey, the factors under "Academic Leadership" yield second highest aggregate scores reflecting national aggregate results (Drew & Kerr, 2003). The comparatively high scores in "Academic Leadership" would appear to reflect that though academic managers may be "doing more with less" they are not "doing less" in terms of providing academic leadership despite the increased administrative and reporting dimensions of their roles. This would seem to reflect the commitment that academics typically demonstrate to their discipline, in that despite increasing and conflicting demands of their roles, the academic leadership dimension tends not to be neglected. However, the competing demands give rise to issues of high workload and difficulty achieving balance in the current more complex environment for academic managers.

## Building Client- and Community-Focused Alliances for Strong Internal and External Partnerships

It is interesting to note from aggregate Quality Leadership Profile (360 degree survey) data in 2003 (Figure 2) that the highest aggregate scores (in other words, perceptions of strongest performance) for academic managers nationally were reported under the QLP area of "Community Outreach". Reported below (Figure 3) are the comparative figures for 2006.

### Quality Leadership Profile Aggregate Figures

**Figure 3: QLP Aggregate Figures at 2006**

| Quality Leadership Profile (QLP) Aggregate Figures for Academic Managers | |
|---|---|
| **QLP Factor** | **Institution Average 2006** |
| Staff Development | 3.57 |
| Consultative Management | 3.77 |
| Building a Team Environment | 3.71 |
| Implementing Systems and Processes | 3.82 |
| Making Decisions | 3.97 |
| Managing Change and Innovation | 3.92 |
| Demonstrating a Client Focus | 3.91 |
| Demonstrating a Community Focus | 4.28 |
| Academic Leadership | 3.95 |

The trend for "Community Outreach" to yield highest scores might reflect the increased attention that universities are paying to partnering to link with industry, commerce and the professions to obtain research funding and undertake "user-inspired" research. It might be agreed that mass higher education alone has seen a re-positioning of universities to broach somewhat experimentally new relationships with business, the professions and the community.

In an era of full fee paying students, changed expectations regarding university access, and the effect of market demands, the community becomes the "client" for universities in unprecedented ways. Forming partnerships may seem to be the lifeblood of the contemporary university. However, the patterns of academic work, ideals of academic autonomy and self-led career paths largely make for solo work. It might be suggested that gaining a doctoral qualification, developing a research and publication niche and pursuing academic promotion based on solo achievement do not encourage a partnering ethos. Delahaye (2000) describes knowledge partnerships, ideally, as "managing the knowledge creation process of externalisation, combination, internalisation and socialisation" (pp. 395). However, the challenges of collaborative ventures across organisational units and organisational boundaries are real. Coaldrake and Stedman (1999) observe that academic staff "feel burdened by the increasing weight of expectations placed upon them, in contrast to [academics'] ideal of determining the parameters of their own working lives" (p. 9). These authors note that "inevitably, ..academic values, and the work practices they reflect, have come into conflict with the demands of an external world on which universities have become more reliant" (1999, p. 9). Coaldrake and Stedman (1999) observe that a trend towards more entrepreneurial styles of university operation,

including increased collaboration, has significant implications for university culture and policy, particularly for academic staffing policy. The key would appear to be establishing shared understanding for innovative partnering ventures and promoting frank discussion on underlying values and competing interests (Stiles 2004, p. 158).

## Developing Senior Leaders in Synergy with Desired Culture and Goals

Writing of the "learning organisation", Byrne (2001) argues, an organisation of motivated and loyal individuals, devoted to principles of continuous learning and the "reciprocity of knowledge-sharing" is the basis of the "knowledge organisation". Developing leaders in keeping with desired culture and goals is vital (Brown, 2001). Yet in universities, staff all too frequently arrive at senior positions on the basis of their specialist expertise with little support or familiarisation provided to prepare them for demanding multi-faceted roles. Executive leadership literature and practice suggest that a concerted and integrated approach to leadership development based on fostering effective partnering and communication of vision pays dividends.

Researching the development needs of New Zealand universities, Mead, Morgan and Heath (1999) report the work of one New Zealand university which found that opportunities and threats posed by a rapidly changing internal and external environment required that the traditional characteristics of a good Head of (academic) Department, namely scholarship and academic leadership, be augmented by additional attributes such as vision, leadership, strategic planning, staff management and organisational skills.

The principle that successful partnering occurs through the vitality of genuinely shared goals and mutual benefit concurs with the findings of Healy,

Ehrich, Hansford and Stewart (2001) in a study observing a District Director of school principals in rural Queensland, Australia. The study observed that the successful leader placed emphasis on building strong relationships with the school principals in her region. The District Director valued the principals not only as professionals but also as persons. In so doing, the leader created a partnership where honest feedback and discussion promoted the conditions to effect learning and growth, to the benefit of the principals and the staff and students in their schools. The study found that individual success, for the District Director, also depended upon the extent to which various principals availed themselves of the conducive conditions created by the leader.

Ramsden (1998) asks, "How can we improve the environment? Certainly not by protesting abut the intrusion of managerialism and lamenting the loss of a golden age…" (p. 362) Ramsden views knowledge-sharing and inspirational approaches to leadership as a solution: "We need new ways of inspiring academics to work both independently and collaboratively; and new ways to help them through change" by focusing on building "more effective leadership" (p. 362). Ramsden asserts: "Higher education is about transforming what is here and now into what will be. Tomorrow's university will survive if it can establish an independent and distinctive means of accomplishing this purpose" (pp. 368, 369). It is suggested this condition will not be arrived at by accident. A specific and tailored leadership development plan is required. Various development program models noted in this study revealed that successful leadership ultimately depends on people exercising an array of personal qualities (Mead, Morgan & Heath, 1999) and that, to be successful, performance development initiatives must enjoy the imprimatur of the organisation's executive (Brown, 2001). It was noted that the best leadership development models recognise the independency of affective relationship-building skills alongside functional capabilities linked to identified organisational goals, and that sustainable benefit will occur only as a learning attitude permeates the whole organisation. Learning is a process which denies completion, as, ongoing, "the learning experience benefits both the organization and the learner" (Fulmer, Gibbs & Goldsmith 2000, p. 54).

There is evidence in the university sector, as for the corporate sector borne out in the literature and practice, that given the pace of change, leaders must be adaptable, able to learn continuously, and to apply that learning for better solutions and outcomes (Hanna, 2003). Establishing a culture of seeking and responding to feedback is vital to remaining in touch in an ever-changing scene, as it is to continuous learning and growth at organisational and individual levels. Investing in well-facilitated tools such as 360 degree surveys promote reflection on leadership behaviours which tend to have a positive effect on on-job learning (Seibert, 1999; Tornow & London, 1998). Also, by "learn[ing] how others perceive them", leaders may discover what specific skills they need to develop, or which behaviours that they might adjust or modify in order to be more effective (Lepsinger & Lucia 1997, p. 22).

Universities are in the privileged position to both inform and be informed by their global communities, demonstrating erudition, critical analysis and synthesis, asking questions and creating knowledge on new ways of thinking and working. Commitment to developing the organisation as well as the organisation's environment becomes a reciprocal framework for learning and is the hallmark of the "learning organisation", as defined by Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1997) and others in the post-1990s literature. As Pedler et al. assert: "A Learning Company is an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and *consciously* transforms itself *and its context*" (p. 3).

This paper suggests that engaged individuals in an organisation allow the organisation to become adept at adapting as they interact with each other and the organisation's external community, and that the community of the university will see a coherent face in the measure to which strategic vision and client focus is communicated for all staff. Current expectations for increased communication and transparency by university stakeholders test ultimately the credibility of the organisation, "blending…"core business" rigour with the contemporary understandings attendant to communication modes and contexts" (Drew & Bensley, 2001, pp. 61, 68). Finally it is argued from the literature that the interdependency of quality relationships and quality processes is critical. This is one which brings together the seemingly disparate efforts of the "legitimate" system (the part of the organisation that is "operating close to certainty") and the "shadow" system (the way in which day-to-day activities are managed) (Delahaye, 2000, p. 394) in order to produce a congruent face to the university's external world.

## Conclusion

Some key triggers for "transpersonal" effectiveness, in particular for universities, have been suggested in this paper. This review has looked at some implications for today's universities which are transferable to other knowledge settings. It has suggested some key challenges from the literature and from practice via aggregate results of 360 degree surveying within the Australian tertiary and key

knowledge environment through the Quality Leadership Profile. Some key questions for contemporary universities, arising from the review, are offered as a "checklist" for contemporary universities or knowledge organisations seeking to be well prepared in a constantly changing environment:

- Are systems and processes strategically aligned with the organisation's vision and objectives, and are those processes streamlined and effective for people in performing their roles?
- Is the organisation "listening" to its stakeholders and key audiences or clients? Is it feedback-oriented, investing in productive partnerships internally and externally?
- Is the university preparing itself for leadership readiness with succession planning and is it systematically developing leadership talent in keeping with increased role complexity for contemporary academic leaders.
- Is the university complementing its scholarship with accountable, ethical governance? Is there a means in place of assessing the degree of alignment between that which is "espoused" and "practiced" in terms of desired organisational culture, values and goals?

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