

# Partnerships between Administrative and Academic Managers: How Deans and Faculty Managers Work Together

Maddy McMaster, Director, Academic Services (Student Systems), University of Melbourne

## Abstract

*Universities in Australia have been characterised by change over the past thirty years. As well as new roles for academic managers, this change has included the growth in recent years of a cohort of professional administrators whose role does not fit easily into romantic perceptions of universities as isolated guilds of scholars.*

*The role of faculty manager is one that has evolved in recent years as the responsibilities of deans have changed. The conference session will focus on the different ways that deans and faculty managers work together. It will expand on some of the ideas presented below about partnerships between these two roles. Questions for discussion include: Are such partnerships between administrative and academic managers influenced by the structure and values of the particular university? To what extent does the work culture of the faculty or the university affect what they do and how they do it? Or is it simply a matter of individual work styles?*

## Introduction

It is no news to any ATEM member that universities in Australia have changed over the past 10, 20, 30 ... 150 years. Recent change has brought new roles for academic managers such as vice-chancellors, DV-Cs and deans, and the rise of a cohort of professional administrators whose role does not fit easily into romantic perceptions of universities as isolated guilds of scholars.

There is little written about the role of administrative staff in universities but much of what is there focuses on perceived tensions between administrative and academic staff. Craig McInnis's 1998 study of attitudes of middle to senior general staff is one of the few national, empirical studies. He found that administrators have a negative view of their relationship with academics, and feel that their academic colleagues undervalue their skills and roles. McInnis also found tensions between administrative and academic staff regarding the need for accountability and regulation.

So what happens when staff from very different work cultures are asked to work in partnership? This paper is concerned with the "binary divide" (Dobson, 2000) between academic and administrative staff roles as it occurs at the level of faculty management.

## **Emergence of Specialist University Administrators**

Others have documented the rise of the professional university administrator in response to systemic change in Australian higher education. (See for example Conway, 1998; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999)

These changes have resulted in a huge amount of additional administrative work at all levels within the university, and the requirement for a wide range of specialist skills in areas such as marketing, HR management, management accounting, web development and instructional design. While a substantial volume of this additional workload has been added to that of academic staff, much of the new work has been managed by creating additional administrative staff positions to allow academic staff to get on with the job of teaching and research. Of particular interest for this paper is the transformation of some administrative support roles within academic units to management roles with wide responsibilities and working in partnership with senior academic heads.

The changing spread of general staff across classifications reflects this shift in responsibilities. At the University of Melbourne for example, the number of middle to senior level general staff (HEW 8 and above) rose by 38% (from 285 to 394) from 1994 to 2001. This compares with an overall staff growth of 18.5% (from 4569 to 5416) and a 15% increase of other general staff positions (at HEW 7 or lower) in the same period. (University of Melbourne, 2001: 4-6)

The literature relating to the role and impact of these professional administrator positions in universities is scant. Wieneke (1991) suggests that the lack of research on the role of administrative staff in universities is, in itself, an indication of the “underlying tension between academic and non-academic staff in higher education institutions.” (1991:53)

McLean’s 1996 survey of general staff women at the University of New South Wales found that respondents perceived a division between general staff and academic staff “who, they believe, neither understood nor valued the work they do, and who treated them like servants.” (McLean, 1996:23) She concluded that the difference in value attributed to general staff and academic staff roles is reflected in the difference in working conditions (such as promotion systems, flexibility of working hours, professional development opportunities) which in turn serve to perpetuate the perceived divisions.

## **Tensions between Collegial and Corporate Models of Universities**

The new administrative structures have required new roles for academic managers as well as the introduction of professional administrators. Lindsay argues that such moves have strengthened universities as institutions but have provided a rival source of power to academic authority. “The complementarity but also tension and rivalry between academics and administrators has been a long-standing feature of the university landscape.” (Lindsay, 1995:7)

The cultures of universities are in transition but they still retain elements of the intellectual non-conformity inherent in the collegium model, overlaid by a new management culture. Kogan (1999) argues that there is a fundamental tension between the two. These stances can be summarised as follows: academic work is underpinned by a disinterested search for truth while administrators are required to hold concern for public accountability as a key value. Thus most academic staff in faculties and departments do not give priority to processes that do not directly benefit their research or their teaching.

External accountabilities have required standardisation in the administration of academic disciplines, exemplified by processes such as performance management and league tables of universities receiving research funding. For many, these approaches directly circumscribe academic authority. (See Trow, 1994)

Similarly, the university administrator is likely to have a career across a number of departments and their primary loyalty may be directed to the university as a whole, not to a single discipline. A career path for an administrator requires them to compete for and move between positions in order to gain promotion.

Contrast this with academic staff whose career path may either allow them to be promoted within the one department (without necessarily any change of responsibilities) or to lead them from one university to another, even one country to another. In both cases the discipline remains a constant. Their first allegiance may be more to their discipline than to the individual university that employs them at the time. (See for example Lockwood, 1996; Millet, 1962 in Garvin, 1980)

The work patterns of academic and administrative staff are derived from very different cultures. The first universities (Bologna, Paris, and Oxford) developed from concentrations of scholars and their students, modelled on medieval guilds.

Two key values for academic endeavour were made explicit in the nineteenth century. Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1767 – 1835) was Minister for Public Instruction in the new German Confederation and established a dual system of universities and technical colleges. The universities were distinguished by the philosophy of learning for its own sake and not to meet external ends. They were characterised by freedom to learn and freedom to teach. (Radford et al, 1997; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998) Similarly, Cardinal Newman (1801 - 1890) published **The Idea of the University** in 1852 in which the aims of the university were described as the study of accumulated wisdom and the seeking of knowledge for its own sake.

Universities have always been managed: the guilds of scholars that made up the first universities were themselves hierarchies of authority. The main difference is that authority in current operational models of universities is seen to be related to managerial position and not to expertise within a discipline. (Lindsay, 1995) This has led to an “ambiguity of authority rights”. (Bess, 1988:6)

New forms of funding (both from government and self-generated) have led to unpredictability and uncertainty for universities, and for departments and faculties within them. Universities have sought to develop structures that emphasise flexibility

and adaptability to cater to the differences between areas, and the need to make rapid shifts to accommodate competitive interests without jeopardising core principles of university governance.

At the same time universities are both risk-averse organisations and increasingly regulated by the state. The combination of the two generates a need for a more varied range of administrative and management processes than if there were a single set of drivers. The new workload (on top of that generated by increased student numbers and more research) is administrative and technical, not academic work.

## **Parallel Hierarchies**

It is clear to anyone who has worked in higher education that most administrative and academic staff approach their work differently. The two groups come from different professional work cultures where underlying and espoused values and practices are often complementary, but equally often in conflict. In fact, universities as organisations are different from many others because they are built from at least two parallel (but not equal) hierarchies that can exist side by side and almost independently.

One of the key differences between the groups is their source of authority. For administrative staff, authority relates primarily to their work role. Even though a person in an assistant role may have personal qualities, networks and skills that give them influence, their position as assistant will mean that they have less power within the organisation than their manager. For an academic, this is not necessarily the case. Influence within a discipline relates particularly to peer evaluation of published work. In disciplines I'm familiar with, this can include finding holes in someone else's argument as a way of promoting your own. An emphasis on winning competitive grants is also a fact of life. So an element of competition is not uncommon in academic work, and victory in intellectual competition can be a means to increased status and influence. The notion of academic freedom similarly implies individual rather than collective achievement.

The role of administrative staff in universities is often to co-ordinate processes and to ensure that one activity articulates readily with the next. This requires individuals to work together to achieve common goals and deadlines both within and between departments. Thus the work environment rewards co-operation: it is impossible to get the job done if you don't fit in with others. By contrast, much of the work of an academic is done in isolation or within a small team (depending on discipline). While there is strong rhetoric about the need for academic staff to work collegially, it can be argued that the focus of academic work is on individual outcomes. Equally it can be said that administrative staff focus on collective outcomes to achieve their work goals.

Thus, administrative managers come to their roles from a culture of collaboration; academic managers emerge from roles from a culture of individual achievement.

## **At the Intersection**

These parallel hierarchies intersect frequently. A key point of intersection is at the level of faculty management. This level of management is a point in the majority of university structures where there is most overlap between university-wide planning, policy and administrative processes, and discipline-based programs. It is also where the work of managers is equally aligned to long-term organisational goals and the day-to-day realities of organising teaching and research. As one dean described it to me, there is a “rough analogy with a minister and a head of department”. From his perspective the dean and the faculty manager work together towards common goal and targets, but with different emphases. The dean saw his focus as policy development and building external relationships while the faculty manager focused on implementing policy and developing internal relationships.

A note on terminology: ‘faculty’ and ‘dean’ are commonly understood terms in Australian universities (even in institutions where they are called something else). The role I will call ‘faculty manager’ is variously named. Some examples are ‘faculty general manager’, ‘faculty executive officer’, ‘faculty registrar’, and ‘business manager’. The variation in nomenclature reflects the rapidly evolving nature of these positions.

## **How Deans and Faculty Managers Work Together**

One way to describe relationships between administrative and academic positions is to identify patterns in the way roles evolve in the partnership. From interviews with 38 deans and faculty managers (so far) in five Australian universities there appear to be three main ways in which these academic and administrative managers work together. In most cases, all three styles were used at different times and in different circumstances, but one was dominant. Surprisingly, there were instances where the dean and the faculty manager had quite different perceptions of their partnership and division of responsibility.

The notion of ‘partnership’ is based on the assumption that the two manager roles work to the same goals and targets, for the faculty as a whole. In all cases, the dean is formally and informally the senior partner. While many faculty manager roles evolved from ‘faculty registrar’ positions that had reported to a central senior administrator, all those interviewed were now directly accountable to their dean.

### ***Nested Partnership***

In a **nested partnership** the dean takes responsibility for all aspects of the management of the faculty, while the faculty manager and her or his team provide professional support for the dean in this work. The dean steers both the development of policy and its implementation.

In this model, the dean may take a ‘hands-on’ approach to managing the faculty and is likely to perceive their role as administrative rather than academic.

The role of the faculty manager can have one of two emphases. The first of these is a facilitating role, where the focus of the work is to smooth the way for the dean. Responsibilities include preparing reports, managing student-related matters, and monitoring compliance with university and external rules and requirements. The second is that of an expert advisor who “collects the evidence for decision-making” and “translates” university policy for the particular faculty and disciplines.

Two faculty managers (from separate institutions) spoke about the importance of “covert leadership”. This strategy was described as influencing the direction of the faculty and decisions of the dean, by circuitous or subtle means. As these positions had no direct authority they used the reports and drafts they prepared, indirect persuasion, and dropping of ideas to steer the dean in the preferred direction.

Others can inappropriately perceive the nested partnership as a servant-master relationship, rather than a partnership of two professional positions. This can be a major source of frustration for faculty managers. In one university a faculty manager reported advice from the vice-chancellor that “your job is to make your dean look good”: this is an example of overt under-valuing of the administrative role as described by respondents in McInnis’s study (1998).

### ***Contiguous Partnership***

The **contiguous partnership** describes the relationship between faculty managers and deans who work together on the full range of matters that constitute the leadership and management of the faculty. Generally the dean takes responsibility for setting directions and the faculty manager manages implementation of policy. Each focuses on a different dimension of the area of responsibility. For example, budget development was described similarly by the managers in three of these faculties: the dean sets out broad parameters for budget development for the following year, and the faculty manager works with other senior staff to develop a detailed budget proposal. This is usually taken back for approval by a faculty executive group rather than the dean.

Deans in a contiguous partnership are more likely to view their roles as academic leadership rather than administrative. Only three of the deans interviewed maintain an active scholarly role (by “doing no dean work” on one day a week) and each of these are considered to be in contiguous partnership with their faculty manager. In interview these deans were more likely to refer to the difference between management and leadership roles.

Faculty managers in contiguous partnerships describe their roles as “parallel but not equal”, “translating academic dreams into practice” or “administrative leadership in support of academic leadership”. They are likely to initiate projects for the faculty and to engage in debate on matters that are on the fringes of academic, such as student course evaluations and academic workload management. These faculty managers are more likely to be used by other staff in the faculty as the de facto deputy when the dean is away.

In a contiguous partnership the faculty manager is likely to be the main channel of communication on behalf of the faculty with the rest of the university, while the dean

emphasises external communications and internal communication with other deans the V-C, and DV-Cs.

### **Segmented Partnership**

There were fewest instances of **segmented partnerships** in the sample of deans and faculty managers interviewed to date. In this model the dean and the faculty manager work together on some tasks, but have separate responsibility for others. For example, in one faculty the dean had no involvement in budget management, marketing, student matters and facilities management. The faculty manager did not participate in anything to do with strategic planning, course management or research administration.

The financial and other delegations are an indicator of segmented authority. In one faculty the faculty manager authorised a range of decisions that the dean was not authorised for (and vice versa).

This partnership style was evident only in faculties where there had been a lag in transition from traditional dean roles and from registrarial or support roles for faculty managers.

Table 1 summarises some of the key characteristics of the different partnership styles from interviews so far.

**Table 1: Characteristics of partnership styles in faculties**

	<b>Nested Partnership</b>	<b>Contiguous Partnership</b>	<b>Segmented Partnership</b>
Dean's role focus	Plans & decides on full range of matters	Jointly plans & decides full range of matters	Plans, decides, & implements narrower range of matters
Faculty Manager's (FM) role focus	Implements plans & decisions on advice from the dean	Jointly plans & implements full range of matters	Plans, decides, & implements defined range of matters
Communications	Dean communicates on behalf of the faculty (internal & external)	Dean focuses on external communications & networks; FM focuses on internal university communications & networks	Dean & FM focus on internal communications & networks according to areas of responsibility
Characteristics	Hands-on dean; dean sees role as administration	Usually strong executive team; dean retains academic focus	Financial & other delegations drive specialisation

## Conclusion

Change in higher education has brought new levels of accountability and management of large-scale programs and, as a result, has required deans to develop new ways of working. At the same time, the changes have triggered the development of a professional group of faculty managers.

This paper has attempted to describe how deans and faculty managers work together. This model of partnership styles is presented as a starting point for future exploration of the factors that affect the way dual hierarchies of administrative and academic staff interact, particularly at the level of faculty management.

## Bibliography

- BESS, J.L. (1988) *Collegiality and Bureaucracy in the Modern University: The Influence of Information and Power on Decision-Making Structures* New York: Teachers College Press
- COALDRAKE, P. & STEDMAN, L. (1998) *On the Brink: Australia's Universities Confronting their Future* St Lucia: University of Queensland Press
- CONWAY, M. (1999) "The Role of Administrators" Paper presented to the 23<sup>rd</sup> ATEM & 1999 AAPA Conference, Wellington: ATEM (<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/parchive/2000/S2000-Jun-30/www.atem.org.au/conference/main.htm>)
- DOBSON, I.R. (2000) "'Them and Us' - General and Non-General Staff in Higher Education" *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* Vol 22 No 2 November 2000 pp 203-210
- GARVIN, D.A. (1980) *The Economics of University Behavior* New York: Academic Press Inc.
- KOGAN, M. (1999) "Academic and Administrative Interface" in HENKEL, M. & LITTLE, B. (Eds) *Changing Relationships between Higher Education and the State* London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd
- LINDSAY, A. (1995) *Collegiality and Managerialism: What is the Place of Leadership in Higher Education?* Professorial Inaugural Lecture Sydney: Macquarie University
- LOCKWOOD, G. (1996) "Continuity and transition in University Management: The Role of the Professional Administrative Service" *Higher Education Management* 8, 2
- McINNIS, C. (1998) "Academics and Administrators in Australian Universities: Dissolving Boundaries and New Tensions" *Higher Education Management* 8, 2 pp161-173

McLEAN, J. (1996) "Hearing from the Forgotten Workforce: The Problems Faced by General Staff Women Working in Universities" *Australian Universities Review* 39 (2) pp 20-27

TROW, M. (1994) "Managerialism and the Academic Profession: The Case of England" *Quarterly Journal of the IAU* 7,2

UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE (2002) *Statistics 2001* Parkville: University of Melbourne

WIENEKE, C. (1991) "Through the Glass Ceiling Slowly: Senior Administrative Women in Higher Education" *Australian Feminist Studies* 13 (Autumn) pp 41-57