

Ideologies of managing duality: cultures and identities (0186)

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Introduction

The phenomenon of combining further and higher education in an institutional setting is referred to as duality in this paper. Dual sector institutions can evolve as a result of a merger between a university and an FE college; re-designation of an FE college to a HE college; mixed economy FE colleges (KPMG LLP, 2003), and as networked institutions.

Two in-depth case studies were conducted to illuminate experiences of duality in two institutions. One of the case studies explores duality in a university that had merged with an FE college and the other study focused on experiences of duality in the re-designated college which is formally a part of the HE sector.

Ideologies of managing duality: cultures and identities

A majority of recommendations for duality made by the respondents of the two institutions focussed on the appropriateness of hybrid cultures and mixed identity of FE and HE. Figure 1 depicts a matrix that depicts a set of ideologies pertaining to separate or combined culture and identity in FE and HE at four intra-institutional levels: institution, faculty, individual and student.

Although these quadrants are not completely discreet, each quadrant links aspects of separate or combined culture to aspects of separate or combined identity in FE and HE. Institutional staff and managers of the two institutions did not necessarily support the same ideology at all the four levels identified. For instance, an individual may support separation at an individual level while recommend alignment at a student level. These ideologies are explained as under.

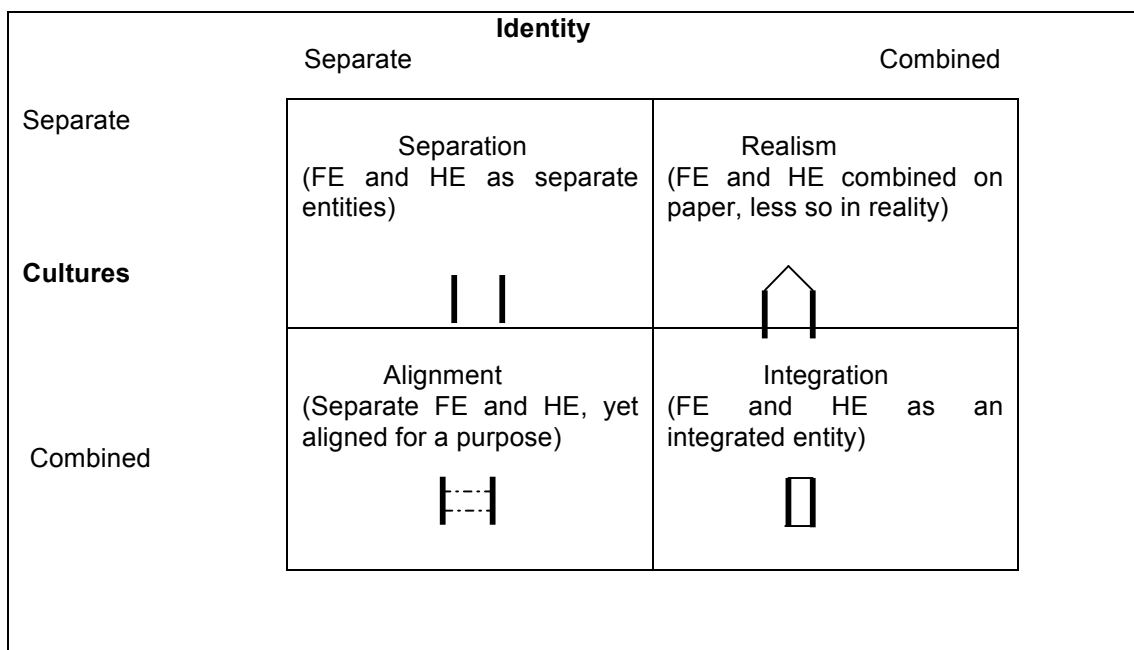


Figure 1. Culture and identity of FE and HE in dual sector institutions

Separation

‘Separation’ refers to an ideology of maintaining separate cultures and identities for FE and HE. This ideology of FE and HE as distinct entities corresponds with the long held sectoral divide between FE and HE, as well as, the perceptions that they are culturally too different to hold a combined identity. This can be viewed as two independent pillars of FE and HE parallel to each other.

‘Separation’ corresponded with the beliefs of some interviewees who recommended a de-merger of the university to overcome duality. At a faculty level, ‘separatist’ attitudes were guided by the geographical separation as well as leadership of faculties by those who had no understanding of FE. Likewise, at an individual level, it emerged that individuals had expertise of working either in FE or in HE. A few individuals held strong views that the dual responsibilities could not be comfortably held by one individual. At a student level, it was argued that universities are viewed as spaces for HE and not for FE. Students and their parents are accustomed to considering FE colleges for FE level studies and HEIs for HE.

Realism

‘Realism’ refers to a set of ideas where a blended identity of FE and HE is supported in an institution, while allowing aspects of the cultures to remain distinct. This set of ideas emerged as a few respondents argued that duality is more meaningful in theory than in practice. This ideology can be viewed as two parallel pillars that are connected at the top end.

At an institutional level, this set of attitudes related to the perceived potential benefits of a distinctive institutional identity as a provider of education ranging from basic skills to PhD. 'Realism' is likely to occur where FE and HE are offered at geographically distant sites with a common institutional title but distinctive local cultures. At a faculty level, 'realism' may be observed in structures where faculties can be merged at the top end, but in practice, all the FE responsibilities may be exclusively delegated to sub-ordinate FE managers, owing to the differences in the requirements of external quality audit regimes and little knowledge of FE amongst HE managers. At an individual level, 'Realists' classed themselves simply as 'teachers', and in theory, their identity as an FE teacher or an HE academic was of lesser significance, however, they felt research and teaching cultures of HE should remain distinctive from FE ethos. At a student level, a joint HE identity was believed, a 'privilege' and a matter of 'prestige' for FE students to study at an HEI or a university, although different learning cultures were put forward to support them.

Alignment

'Alignment' refers to those set of beliefs that support separate identities but blended cultures of FE and HE in dual sector institutions. 'Aligners' believe that FE and HE ethos require a degree of separation yet some aspects can be shared or aligned for a common purpose, that is, bridging the gaps where possible. This can be viewed as parallel pillars joined up with connectors.

At an overarching institutional level, value was placed in incorporating some shared practices of FE and HE, such as, pastoral support for HE students and shared FE practical facilities. Alignment is more likely to exist when FE and HE are housed in separate buildings at the same campus. Separation of buildings and sites for FE and HE with a distinctive name for FE building, use of separate marketing and promotional tools, such as, websites and prospectuses, were recommended to portray a separate identity for FE and HE. At a faculty level, separate faculties for FE and HE were believed to offer distinctiveness although they could be aligned to increase student progression through joint working and increased interaction between FE and HE staff. At an individual level, separate staff contracts and separate identity for HE staff was deemed to be important but importing some of the FE teaching styles, open access to staff for students, was recommended in order to better support the 'non-traditional' HE students. At a student level, restricted access to HE spaces but use of some shared practical facilities was suggested to offer FE students 'something to aspire to'.

Integration

Lastly, contrary to separation, a set of ideas emerged for a case of common culture and common identity for FE and HE, which has been grouped under 'integration'. A complete blending is challenged with a number of issues yet it is supported in subject areas that are more vocational or 'hands-on' in nature. This can be viewed as the two pillars joined up as one entity.

In certain respects, little support was shown to a complete blending of culture and identity of FE and HE in a dual sector scenario at an overarching institutional level. However, in terms of its strategic plans and mission statements, the merged university made explicit claims about being a dual sector institution. At a faculty level, more specifically at sub-faculty or subject levels there was evidence to suggest that there are virtually no distinctions between FE and HE in subject areas, such as, hospitality, and technology at the university. At a faculty level, integrated structures for FE and HE and dual responsibilities for faculty managers are believed to help meet the objectives of duality. At an individual level, 'Integration' of staff cultures and identities was primarily challenged with elitism of HE and differences pertaining to the expected staff salaries and employment conditions in HE. Integration was 'anti-separationist' at a student level where separate spaces for students were viewed to be discriminatory for FE students.

Dominance of ideologies

Instances of the four ideologies are likely to be noted at each intra-institutional level within dual sector institutions. There can be a notable mismatch between the ideologies at the institutional level and at an individual level. Furthermore, some of the ideologies can be more of an aspiration than reality. For instance, 'integration' at an institutional level may not necessarily translate into preferred ideologies at an institutional level. Capturing the preferred ideologies can be a useful exercise for ascertaining any mismatch between ideologies of duality within an institution.

References

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